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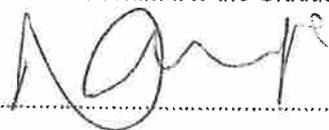
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TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF DEVISED THEATRE PRAXIS

Nic Fryer

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Theatre, Performance and Cultural Policy Studies

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And thanks to Fen, for being a constant support and inspiration.

DECLARATION

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Extracts from this thesis, particularly Chapters Three, Six and Seven, were previously published in my article 'From Reproduction to Creativity and the Aesthetic: Towards An Ontological Approach to the Assessment of Devised Performance', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 15:4, pp.547-562.

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to develop a pedagogy for devised theatre conceived of as a praxis.

Part One explores the status and history of both devised theatre and theatre pedagogy, particularly in the UK but also in other contexts. In doing so, it attempts to demonstrate the multitude of ways in which both devised theatre and the pedagogy of drama, theatre and performance have been conceived.

Part Two goes on to look at three frames through which devised theatre might be conceptualised: contemporary theories of language, creativity and social practice. With a particular focus on the theories of Jacques Rancière, I suggest that each of these offers a potential vision of art as a realm which can exist at a remove from everyday life, whilst still functioning within structures that indicate its social basis. The frames each contain a focus on process rather than only focusing on a finished artistic product. They also each suggest simultaneous reflection and action.

In the final part of the thesis I map these three notions, particularly that of social practice, onto theories of praxis. I suggest that the notion of praxis offers a vision of what a pedagogy for devised theatre might look like, recognising the importance of process as well as product; reflection as well as action. Finally I use the Chicago based performance company Goat Island, who made work between 1987 and 2009, as a case study of what devised theatre praxis might look like through a discussion of their process, performance and pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis arises from my work as both a schoolteacher and as a university lecturer in the UK. Although it is primarily written to address this context, I aim to draw conclusions that will have a more general relevance to the teaching of drama, theatre and performance.

During my time teaching in UK schools between 1994 and 2007, I saw an increasingly prescriptive curriculum classify and quantify drama, theatre and performance. At this time, as Philip Taylor argued in 1996, the “pedagogical climate [was] constructed by a conventional scientific paradigm which promotes outcomes, controls behaviour, and permits individual reflective turning within foreseen categories and codes”.¹ This was despite the fact that many involved in the education of drama, theatre and performance argued for a more fluid, open model which allowed for greater flexibility and experiment. For example, Jonathan Neelands suggested in 1991 when discussing the school curriculum, “We certainly cannot assess theatre-art in a manner which is consistent with the testing of skills in science and maths”.² And Steve Dixon stated in 2000 that teachers of Theatre Studies in Higher Education were “using an inappropriately rational, objective, quasi-scientific model to assess a largely irrational, spontaneous and subjective art”.³

Since my time spent teaching in schools, the arts and particularly theatre have been marginalised from school curricula. Drama is absent as a discrete subject from the National Curriculum and from the English Baccalaureate, the new GCSE performance measure. According to the *Guardian* in 2012 this resulted in uproar from the arts community, and resulted in a 6.3% reduction in students taking GCSE Drama.⁴ At the same time, however, devised theatre has come to

¹ Taylor, p.3

² Neelands, J (2010) ‘The Meaning of Drama’, in O’Connor (ed.), p.70

³ See Dixon

⁴ Higgins, p.11

form a major component of A level and even GCSE curricula: at the time of writing, the two major examination boards for schools incorporate the teaching of devised theatre into both their GCSE and A level specifications. Companies considered experimental, or at least innovative, are part of this. For example, Frantic Assembly, who pride themselves on attracting “new and young audiences” with their “unique physical style”,⁵ form an example of GCSE practice on the Edexcel website,⁶ and Forced Entertainment, described in the *Guardian* as Britain’s “most brilliant experimental theatre company”,⁷ are cited as a potential area of study on the AQA A level syllabus.⁸

In my time teaching theatre in UK universities since 2006, I have seen a similar trend. As Harvie and Lavender notice, devising has shifted from “a fairly marginal position in the 1970s to one of significant disciplinary and institutional orthodoxy in the first decade of the twenty-first century”.⁹ Just after this decade, the Conservative-led coalition government introduced tuition fees for undergraduate students of up to £9000 per annum. As Claire Bishop notes, this has “turned students to consumers”, with education “increasingly a financial investment, rather than a creative discovery; a career move, rather than a place of epistemological inquiry for its own sake”.¹⁰ Students have responded to this financial climate in particular ways: according to the *Sunday Times* in June 2013, “Hundreds of university courses are being axed as students [...] increasingly choose vocational courses that they think will give them the best chance of securing a job”.¹¹ In response university courses in drama, theatre and performance are moved to have to justify themselves in terms of the employable skills they will offer students, and since devising companies such as Kneehigh,

⁵ <http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/what-is-frantic/> [Accessed 2/12/12]

⁶ <http://www.edexcel.com/subjects/Performing-Arts/Pages/default.aspx> [Accessed 2/12/12]

⁷ Cited in Kingston

⁸ <http://store.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/pdf/AQA-2240-W-SP.PDF> [Accessed 2/12/12]

⁹ Quoted in Mermikides and Smart (eds.), p.4

¹⁰ Bishop (2012), pp. 268-9. Throughout the thesis square brackets indicate my additions or deletions.

¹¹ Griffiths and Lawson, p.15

Shunt, Frantic Assembly, Complicite and Forced Entertainment can now be seen in mainstream subsidised theatres and in some cases even London's West End it is hardly surprising that in many cases devising, alongside more conventional acting and directing skills, form part of such a supposed 'skills set'. In both schools and universities, then, devised theatre has grown in status whilst the arts more broadly have become both increasingly marginalised, and quantified in terms of assessment.

Accompanying the growth in the status of devised theatre is a growing body of British literature on devising theatre. When Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre* was published in 1994, she stated that the main reason for writing the book was "a lack of information on the subject of devising theatre".¹² Ten years later, according to Heddon and Milling's *Devising Performance*, "it [was] apparent that very little had changed".¹³ Since then, however, in addition to the books cited in a footnote to Heddon and Milling's claim (such as Gill Lamden's *Devising: A Handbook for Drama and Theatre Students* and Tina Bicat and Chris Baldwin's *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*) several other books have appeared: for example, Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart's edited collection of articles on devising companies *Devising in Process*, Anna Furse's anthology of play texts which have arisen from a devising process *Theatre in Pieces*, and Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett's *Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*.

Heddon and Milling suggest in their footnote that the texts that exist tend to be "practical manuals or workbooks for educational purposes".¹⁴ Looking at the books mentioned above, one might add documentation of devised theatre processes, as well as performances, to that list. Since the term 'devised' itself explicitly foregrounds how the work is made rather than what it looks like, this is perhaps hardly surprising: in the very notion of the performance being 'devised',

¹² Cited in Heddon and Milling, p.1

¹³ Heddon and Milling, p.1

¹⁴ Ibid, footnote, p.232

conventional categories and hierarchies of director/writer/performer can be seen to be opened up, allowing a variety of different processes to be explored.

So how is current educational literature articulating this relationship? I am going to begin by considering two recent pedagogical texts which attempt an overview of devised theatre (which may fit into the description of ‘workbooks for educational purposes’) that have made a significant impact in their fields. One, *Making a Performance* by Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, is aimed at undergraduates and seeks to “trace innovations in devised performance from early theatrical experiments in the twentieth century to the radical performances of the twenty-first century”.¹⁵ The other, *Advanced Drama and Theatre Studies* by Jonothan Neelands and Warwick Dobson, is aimed at supporting the “new A level specifications for 2008” and “is a practical book which is designed to provide students with the information they need to make and study theatre”.¹⁶ These two books might be interesting to compare and contrast, therefore, since they choose to emphasise different aspects of devised performance in their approaches. *Advanced Drama and Theatre Studies* seeks to provide information pertaining to making theatre as a first priority over studying theatre, whilst *Making a Performance*, despite its title, seeks as its priority an overview of professional devised performances themselves. The books also address different audiences – a subject to which I will return later when looking at approaches to devising in schools and universities. For now, though, whilst looking at only two books offers an inevitably limited perspective, I will argue that the different focuses of the books serve to illustrate some of the varied conceptual frameworks within which devised work is often perceived and constrained. Specifically, I will contend that the books illuminate what I will argue is a tendency

¹⁵ Govan et al, back cover

¹⁶ Neelands and Dobson, back cover

to see devised performance either in processual terms or in terms of a product, but not often in a way that incorporates the relationship *between* these two things.

The authors of *Making a Performance* state at the outset that they seek to “offer [...] an investigation into the practices, processes and principles of devising performance”.¹⁷ Yet despite this statement their discussion is less commonly focused on these elements, the ‘making’ of the title, and more often focused on the underlying principles of the work and the practice of the work itself. For example, the main mention of creative process in Chapter Two, ‘But Is It Art?’ occurs in the discussion of chance as a method of creative decision making in the work of John Cage. The authors recognise that “chance problematises the idea that great art is dependent on the skill of the artist”.¹⁸ This process is mentioned principally because it deliberately challenges conventional notions of the need for a process. As the chapter continues, however, process begins to disappear from focus. For example, when discussing Kaprow’s work, the performances themselves are outlined but how decisions were made, what the actual creative process was, is not mentioned.

In Chapter Three, focusing on ‘The Creative Performer’, the process of the performer is foregrounded more explicitly. The work of Grotowski and Chaikin is analysed in terms of how the performers were incorporated into a creative process. Even here, though, there is an interesting absence of process at points where one might expect discussion of process to be foregrounded. We are told that “Living Theatre extended its desire for personal liberation by inviting members of the public to take part in performance events [...] [P]erformers and public were to be given the taste of freedom’ through ‘improvisation unchained’”.¹⁹ Some description of the process to which the public were invited follows, but as the authors move to talking about the final performance of *Paradise Now* (1968) there

¹⁷ Govan et al, p.1

¹⁸ Ibid, p.22

¹⁹ Govan et al, p.35 citing J. Beck (1986) *The Life of the Theatre* (New York: Limelight), p. 83

is a slippage, as if the rehearsal was the same as the final performance. We are told that “audience members were encouraged to ‘speak out about sexual taboos, to undress, and to join the “body pile”, a gathering of onstage actors and audience groping for each other”.²⁰ There is clearly a distinction between audience and actor here, so the event is not totally random, but how the creative decision was reached about when this encouragement would happen, who would do it, and how, is not discussed. This focus on performance may be understandable since it is arguably easier to research the performance than the process, witnessed as it is by many more people and documented more fully through reviews. However, by doing so, the authors do not reflect their own stated awareness of the importance of ‘making’ devised work.

In the fourth chapter of *Making a Performance, ‘Art, Politics and Activism’*, process is again discussed. Given the fact that in the authors’ own words “one of the legacies of socially committed theatre of the twentieth century is the democratisation of processes of working”,²¹ however, it is notable that process is not really mentioned until five and a half pages into the chapter. There is then detailed description of the importance of collective creation and of improvisation techniques in Theatre Workshop’s work and how these were linked to the socialist principles of the company, but how these working processes were linked to an aesthetic outcome is not clear. The description of the Blue Blouses’ work, which “used forms such as popular songs, acrobatics, burlesque and vaudeville” precedes the description of their process which was “built from the players’ experiences of industrial life”,²² but again how these experiences contributed to the theatrical style previously described is not clear.

²⁰ Tytell, J (1997) *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage* (London: Methuen) p.228 quoted in Govan et al, p.36

²¹ Govan et al, p.47

²² Ibid, p.44

What I am trying to trace in these examples is that although process is addressed, its link to the aesthetic product is not fully explored. And ultimately *how* the *making* of devised theatre might create a different type of aesthetic product from work that is made through a relationship with a published play, for example, is not discussed. For example, we are told that “the processes of devising also allow for the kind of collective and collaborative action that has the potential to create a renewed sense of belonging in the participants and in audiences”.²³ But there is a conflation here between the ‘belonging’ in participants’ processes, which take place over a considerable time, and the ‘belonging’ created for an audience who watch an aesthetic product on one night. This conflation fails to explore the transition from what happens in the rehearsal room to what happens in the performance space. If the ‘making’ is important, as they initially claim, they do not always address it fully.

In contrast, *Advanced Drama and Theatre Studies*’ chapter on devising addresses process almost immediately, listing six aspects that the devising process will demand from students. A historical context for devised theatre follows which emphasises the ways in which the contemporary concept of devised theatre can be related to historical genres such as Greek theatre and Commedia dell’Arte.²⁴ The focus is on how these genres incorporated improvised elements, shifting away from an initial focus on process to performance. As in Govan et al’s book, however, the *link* between process and product is not clear. There is a shift from one to the other but not a clear articulation of their interconnection.

However, there is an articulation of the link between devising process and artistic product in the description of a “coming together of diverse performance skills in the search for new forms of performance”²⁵ as a central tenet of devised theatre: the process of bringing these diverse skills together is linked to the artistic

²³ Ibid, p.195

²⁴ Neelands and Dobson, p.162-3

²⁵ Ibid, p.164

form of the performance itself. And shortly after this, the authors discuss how the working methods of Joint Stock led to the actors' "personal politics and their relationships with other members of the collective"²⁶ becoming aspects of the process that would then be seen in the performance itself, most notably in the production of David Hare's 1975 play *Fanshen*. One could extend the link between process and product still further here since the content matter of *Fanshen*, where peasants "stood up... [and] gained land, stock, implements and houses"²⁷ in a threat to the authority of the landlord, could be argued to have influenced the process, with the collaborative devising process challenging the authority of the director and playwright. Whilst the idea that devised theatre will necessarily be collaborative has been disputed,²⁸ in these moments the book does suggest the possibility of starting to explore how a devising process might lead to a performance product.

However, when the book turns to devising's intersection with physical theatre, the processes of the companies covered becomes less clearly articulated. The performances themselves are discussed more than the processes. So whereas Govan, Nicholson and Normington discuss how Grotowski's process "raises questions about the significance of collaboration and the role of the director within devised performance",²⁹ Neelands and Dobson focus on a description of the performances themselves.³⁰ Since this section of the book is relatively brief it is not perhaps surprising, as in the case of Govan et al's description of Living Theatre, that the product, more widely seen and discussed than the process, is discussed. Later in the chapter, though, three case studies place process back at the centre. The socio-economic basis of the analysis makes clear the focus of the authors. The first case study clearly discusses how

²⁶ Ibid, p.169

²⁷ Hare, D (1986) 'Fanshen', *The Asian Plays* (London: Faber), p.5

²⁸ See Govan et al, p.6; Heddon and Milling, p.5

²⁹ Govan et al, p.32

³⁰ Neelands and Dobson, p.172

the way the work developed linked to the outcome. Activities involving Omar Rivabella's novel *Requiem for a Woman's Soul* are discussed. An activity coming from a real event involving one of the actors' own mealtimes functions as a springboard for an improvisation. And although this is stated implicitly rather than explicitly, there are clearly traces of the process in the description of the final performance: the rehearsal question "what is in the box that comes from the place where people are tortured?"³¹ shows up in the final performance which "begins with the arrival [...] of a box that has been smuggled out of the nearby prison".³² According to Neelands and Dobson participants "used their work as a way of coming to an understanding of some of the major political issues of the day".³³ How this translates into material that communicates directly or indirectly to an audience is less clear, however.

In the subsequent two case studies, the performance slips still further away from view. In the case of *Puppets Against Caste* this is perhaps inevitable, since the piece was an example of applied theatre where the focus was on children learning through devising, with children exploring a theme which formed the basis of them creating plays based on their explorations. There is detailed description of the process and the making of the piece. We learn, for example, that "the facilitators began the project by asking the participants to draw pictures collectively [...] From this initial drawing activity a number of issues were identified [...] Eventually, these key issues formed the content of three plays".³⁴ However, the aesthetic choices the children made when selecting from their research to develop the piece which they presented, and the final performance itself, is not really described at all.

³¹ Ibid, p.186

³² Ibid, p.187

³³ Ibid, p.187

³⁴ Ibid, p.189

Similarly the third case study, *Common Wealth*, is discussed in terms of its existence as a community project. We are given considerable information about the community itself (“it is a logging community, but the area is also home to the Sauk-Suiattle Native American Community [...]the population of the town is fewer than 1,200”) and of how the process was initiated (“Weigler [the practitioner who initiated the project] invited elders, adults and children from the town and the reservation to relate stories and share local songs that they felt expressed their sense of identity and defined who they were”).³⁵ Yet only a tiny percentage of the case study is given over to the final performance – we are told briefly about the content (“the theme of connection is clearly perceptible in the play’s desire to link the present-day Darrington and Sauk-Suiattle communities”) and its form (“an original theatre script, with music and song”), but the bulk of the writing is given to a description of the process and the performance conditions of the piece.

What is interesting, in comparing these two books, is how in Govan et al’s there is a clear focus on the performance outcome together with some description of the process, while in Neelands and Dobson’s book there is a clear focus on the process together with some description of the performance outcome, but in neither is the link between the making, the devising process, and the aesthetic strategies employed in the final performance clear. I will, however, argue that this link is crucial: that in devised theatre there is a relationship between making and showing, and furthermore that this relationship exists both within and beyond the social frame.

One of this thesis’ aims is to rearticulate the importance of process in devised theatre. It attempts to argue that far from devised theatre being solely about a finished artistic outcome, process is integral to how devised theatre works, both artistically and socially. On the one hand the performers engage in the *process* of creating a work of art which can be seen as a practice, a social act,

³⁵ Ibid, p.191

which leads to a *performance* to others, also a social act. Through the act of performing *and* the process of making the performers explore and embody, through their own bodies and their own consciousness, ways of behaving and speaking in the world. They play, explore forms, try out words and actions as they make, improvising possibilities. On the other hand, since it is marked as an aesthetic process it cannot be wholly contained within conceptions of practice that are solely social. And this notion is furthered when one considers that the performance is removed further from everyday life since it is watched consciously as aesthetic practice by an audience.

Like all theatre, devised theatre literally invents ‘sensory experiences’, ways of embodying physically and vocally which exist beyond the performers’ everyday life. But in its emphasis on its making in its practice (and its terminology), it might also be particularly well positioned to invent new social processes. The “new form of individual and collective life” that the philosopher Jacques Rancière sees as being present in some aesthetic forms can be glimpsed, not only in what he calls the “autonomy” of the art work itself, but also in the processes that bring such an alternative perspective into being.³⁶

To return to the start of this Introduction, in this thesis I therefore seek to challenge the notion that the value of teaching devised performance might be seen solely in terms of making students aware of the canon of devising or as a practical skill leading to employment in a supposed devised theatre sector. I want to rather argue for devised theatre as an activity which is valuable in itself in a myriad of ways that may, as Dixon and Neelands suggest, go beyond what is easily quantifiable. I want to argue for a model of devised theatre which is not only about something or which leads to something, but which rather *is* something; which sees the social as linked to the aesthetic and not separate from it, which sees people creating their own performances as potentially significant social and

³⁶ Rancière (2004), p.32

political acts which suggest a plethora of possibilities for how life might be lived. To quote Claire Colebrook, “when we ask what art or philosophy are for we tend to feel they should serve some everyday function: making us better managers or communicators. We fail to see that the purpose or force of art or philosophy goes beyond what life *is* to what it might become”.³⁷ I will also argue that this is only possible because of the paradox that devised theatre and indeed art generally function in a frame distinct from the everyday. This frame provides an ability to stand outside, see anew, and reflect in a range of ways. Indeed, it is this duality, I argue, that gives it such significance, and I thus suggest that it has much to offer its curricula at all levels for the future.

In the thesis I want to suggest that in this collapsing of binaries – process and product, social and aesthetic - devised theatre practice might also be seen as a *praxis* - a “unity of theory and practice”.³⁸ In a conception of devised theatre which embraces its *aesthetic* autonomy alongside its importance as a *social* activity, a conception which sees the practice of *creating* art as inseparable from a *theoretical context*, devised theatre invokes the potential of a flow of thinking and making for its makers, where the discovery of moments in a creative process is considered as having a connection to a wider social context. There is also, I argue, the potential of a praxis for an audience who engage with it and then apply it to their own lives. This praxis can thus situate itself theoretically as a *socio-aesthetic creative praxis*.

I also wish to outline how this notion of praxis, this synthesis of theory and practice, might be applied to a pedagogy for devised theatre. In pedagogical praxis, artistic discoveries in a pedagogical process feed into the personal and social development of the student as they reflect on their own practice, which then feed again into their artistic practice. In such a model teaching can be seen as

³⁷ Colebrook, pp.13-14. Original emphasis.

³⁸ Bullock et al (eds.), p.676

more than just being about helping students in the production of artworks, but can also suggest an ongoing process of engagement with, and development of, the world.

In Part One of the thesis, I seek to unpick and justify the terms 'devising' and 'theatre' in order to justify their use throughout the thesis. In Chapter One I attempt to illustrate that devised theatre, far from being a quantifiable skills set, is in fact a term which has meant many different things in different contexts. Examples of devised theatre, I will argue, are variously collaborative or hierarchical, text based or visually based, improvised or planned, and original or traditional. If the notion of devised theatre suggests anything, I will suggest that it is in its opening up of conceptual limitations about what theatre can and should be.

In Chapter Two, I attempt to look at some key approaches to the teaching of drama, theatre and performance in schools and universities, particularly but not exclusively focusing on the UK. Within the school context I look at debates around process drama and the teaching of drama as part of a wider conception of cultural heritage. To chime with my notion of praxis, I argue that it is essential for any understanding of drama, theatre and performance pedagogy to conceive of the subject as moving beyond the learning of skills or dramatic literature in isolation to a more holistic understanding of developing the whole child. In the university context the debates are connected but different. There are again debates about the function of drama, theatre and performance education, including whether or not the subject should be studied as an autonomous art form or as connected to literature; and whether or not it should be engaged with as a vocation or as an academic discipline. Here, I argue, across varied historical and geographical contexts which emphasise differing aspects of the subject, there has often been a failure to consider the subject as a praxis: how process and

performance might link, how theoretical elements might inform practice, or how practice might inform understanding in a wider context than the theatre itself.

What I hope to illustrate through this chapter, as with the history of devised theatre in the rest of Part One, is that the disciplines discussed are multifarious and not fixed, but open to redefinition. This notion of definition continues at the end of the second chapter, where I discuss the debate within the university context around the terms 'drama', 'theatre' and 'performance'. Ultimately I argue that theatre is the most useful of the three terms for a notion such as praxis, because it foregrounds the art work's simultaneous existence as an event in the moment and as a process, a process that exists both within culture itself and as something which exists at a partial remove from the everyday.

Part Two of the thesis attempts to look at three frames through which devised theatre might be conceptualised: contemporary theories of language, creativity and social practice. With a particular focus on the theories of Jacques Rancière, I seek to develop the idea from Part One that art exists as a realm at a remove from everyday life, whilst still functioning within structures that indicate its social basis. The frames each contain a focus on process rather than only focusing on a finished artistic product. They also each suggest simultaneous reflection and action, thus linking to the notion of praxis articulated above. In Chapter Three I intend to suggest that through an understanding of how language and creativity work, it is possible to conceive of art as a human activity that situates itself in a space both within and beyond social constraints. I aim to suggest that whilst language is a pervasive structure which pre-exists us, it is also a process which we can creatively participate in; that whilst language constrains it can simultaneously liberate. In Chapter Four, I similarly suggest that whilst creativity is often seen as an opportunity to escape from social norms, it is important to remember that it is also significantly limited by and influenced by social context. It is my argument that this conception of language and creativity

allows for an understanding of the simultaneously creative yet socially bounded space in which culture and art is created. This leads to the final chapter of Part Two, Chapter Five, where I will explore some key ideas around social practice and art. Through an engagement with Kant, Bourdieu and finally Rancière, I argue that whilst art generally and devised theatre specifically exist within social structures, they can also offer an opportunity for people to work creatively within these structures. Moreover, they function as what Rancière calls a “third thing that is owned by no one”,³⁹ a ‘thing’ that exists between people as a means of discussion and debate, a thing which is irreducible and which thus creates a space for discussion where no one person has sole purchase on what it is. In theatre particularly, I argue, which exists in the moment between performer and audience, art can be imagined as a potentially subversive space for dialogue, offering the opportunity for new ideas and possibilities for life to be imagined through individuals’ and groups’ engagement with it.

In Part Three, I move to discuss the notion of praxis in more detail. Drawing on Aristotle’s notion of praxis, I use a range of theorists including Bourdieu, Freire and Rancière to develop a pedagogy of praxis where students think and create simultaneously. I am particularly interested here in the role of the teacher as someone who is facilitating a process for the student, rather than teaching them knowledge. I then move into considering how such a pedagogy might be applied to devised theatre in particular. I suggest that the key to this is conceiving of devised theatre as a process in which theory and practice inform each other; where the creation of art is a vehicle to new understanding, but where the creation of that art is itself the result of a considered set of conceptual and theoretical decisions. In the final chapter, I apply these ideas to the work of the Chicago based company Goat Island who made work between 1987 and 2009, and suggest that their performance pedagogy, process and performance can be

³⁹ Rancière (2009a), p.15

seen as an example of devised theatre that functioned as praxis. In their work, I argue, their process created a space where those involved could learn and grow. Their performances, I argue, similarly created a space where the spectator could find new perspectives on her life through the unique articulation of disparate elements in a new whole. And in their pedagogy, students engaged with each other and with a creative process of learning which saw all elements work in reciprocity to develop an ongoing praxis of growth for those involved. In this work, I suggest, lay possibilities for what a pedagogy for devised theatre praxis might be like.

**PART ONE –
TRADITIONS
AND
HISTORIES**

CHAPTER ONE – TRADITIONS AND HISTORIES OF DEVISED THEATRE

Before offering my own vision of devised theatre, it is important to understand the traditions and histories of devising, and of drama, theatre and performance in universities and schools. As throughout this thesis, I will be primarily referring to a UK context, although I hope that the conclusions that I draw will have relevance for other contexts. Indeed, by looking at these traditions and histories I hope to illuminate and question assumptions that are often made about these two areas in order to be able to articulate alternative ways in which they can be conceived, both independently and ultimately together.

Although in some senses, as Neelands and Dobson identify, elements of devised theatre can be seen in the Western traditions of Greek theatre and Commedia dell'Arte,¹ according to Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling “many of the common conceptions and/or myths of devising that we have inherited arise from the specific political and cultural conditions of the 1950s and 1960s in the West”.² Although originally a UK term, they trace a history which sees devised theatre as part of a wider Western counter-cultural movement, as a challenge to dominant theatre. For example, Heddon and Milling quote Sainer’s *The New Radical Theatre Notebook* in relation to devised theatre and performance: “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”.³

However, the assumptions coming into play here are interesting. It could perhaps be argued that devised theatre is in a particularly strong position to

¹ Neelands and Dobson, p.163

² Heddon and Milling, p.13

³ Sainer, A (1997) *The New Radical Theatre Notebook* (New York: Applause), p.12, quoted in Heddon and Milling, p.13

‘provide relevance’ because the performers’ involvement in what is spoken and done on stage can respond to daily events more immediately than a play written several months previously, or that devised theatre can question the function of the playwright since work is ‘written’ by the performers (to varying degrees), or that the role of the performer may become problematised when they are also creating the work. However, there is no clear argument articulated as to why there is anything specific to devised theatre that would inherently link to Sainer’s vision of ‘radical theatre’; that would question the place of the audience, or the structure or existence of the playhouse. As Heddon and Milling state when discussing a later period,

[t]he rhetoric employed within the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s was also applied to ideal (and idealised) models of devising [...] A number of key terms or ideas that belong to the political rhetoric of this period, and which subsequently have an impact on concepts and practices of devising, include ‘individual and collective rights’, ‘self-determination’, ‘community’, ‘participation’ and ‘equality’.⁴

Yet the process of performers being involved in the making of the work is not intrinsically aligned with progressive politics - it could be aligned with them being over burdened with tasks from a lazy director, for example. And even if it was ever possible to wholly align it with the counter-culture and subversion that Heddon and Milling chart in discussions of its development, devised theatre can hardly be seen as a radical new ‘genre’ or term today: indeed, they note that “devising companies have been absorbed into mainstream culture and defended by government subsidy”, most noticeably for them in the case of Complicite who are now regularly seen on the stages of the National Theatre and the Barbican.

Such assumptions about devised theatre, according to Heddon and Milling themselves, can be misplaced. In a long list they state that devised theatre is variously seen as “a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of

⁴ Heddon and Milling, p.15

cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration”,⁵ and a variety of other things. Yet they go on to state that “it is more than possible to take to task many of the ideals embodied in the above”⁶, since the term encompasses a huge variety of practices including companies such as Forced Entertainment who use a director and often a writer. Heddon and Milling identify here, then, histories rather than an ontology of devised theatre. As Alison Oddey has said, there is a “uniqueness of process and product for every group concerned”⁷ which means that generalising about such a broad range of practices is difficult. Therefore, as I continue to discuss devised theatre, rather than trying to identify common features that underpin all devised theatre, I am going to discuss various *tendencies* in devised theatre and consider key areas within which individual examples may be considered. This allows for the possibility of recognising key areas of concern whilst recognising the plurality of practices evident in devised work.

However, perhaps it is possible to define devised theatre through this plurality: through seeing it as an openly impure form which challenges definition. Heddon and Milling’s linking of it to political and aesthetic shifts in the 60s and 70s reflect the ways in which devised theatre can be seen as a loosening of previous certainties. As I will go on to argue, devised theatre does not fit easily into neat definitions based on conventional binaries of process/product, between collective/individual, between spontaneous/planned, between original/traditional. Ultimately I will argue in this thesis that this blurring reflects a productive blurring between art and life itself, which can point to devised theatre as a model of social praxis.

⁵ Ibid, p.4

⁶ Ibid, pp.4-5

⁷ Oddey, p.2

Devised Theatre, Language and Physicality

One key aspect often discussed in devised theatre and mentioned above is a shift away from the notion of the playtext being the starting point for a theatre work.

For example, according to Oddey, “[D]evised theatre is an alternative to the dominant literary theatre tradition, which is the conventionally accepted form of theatre dominated by the often patriarchal, hierarchical relationship of playwright and director [...] Devised work challenges the prevailing ideology of one person’s text under another person’s direction”.⁸ Bicat and Baldwin similarly suggest that “in a devising process the starting point is not necessarily, indeed not usually, a script”.⁹ Text starts to share significance with other creative elements. Moving away from the primacy of the pre-existing written word of plays also suggests a move towards interest in the performer: *how* something is said, the context in which language might originate for a performer, and its coexistence with other elements – set, costume, music etc. Bearing in mind de Saussure’s structuralist notion that “far from reflecting an already given social reality, [language] constitutes social reality for us”,¹⁰ language can be seen as something which creates a human being’s conceptual parameters. And it is something which does so unconsciously: it defines the limits of what is sayable. This shift thus reflects an increasing sense of the performer as creator and not just interpreter or re-creator, as well as an interest in an increasing range of aesthetic aspects of the work.

Artaud was a key thinker in the development of a notion of theatre existing beyond the spoken word. For Artaud, theatre’s ability to move away from words to a “concrete language”¹¹ of the stage, incorporating a full range of theatrical elements, meant a shift towards appealing “to the senses, instead of being

⁸ Ibid, p.4

⁹ Bicat and Baldwin, p.8

¹⁰ Cited in Weedon, p.22

¹¹ Artaud, p.27

addressed primarily to the mind”.¹² Such a move is, for Artaud, moving away from the supposed rationality of language towards an acknowledgement of a subjective experience for the spectator experienced through their senses. Similarly for Helen Freshwater, citing Ana Sanchez-Colberg, a shift towards the body can be seen to represent a “devaluation of language” in a social context where “language can be used to control and constrain”, and that from this perspective “moving ‘beyond words’ often seems to imply challenging the imposition of authoritarian power”.¹³ If language constitutes our reality, finding subjectivity is difficult. Moving towards other locations of consciousness, like the body, might seem to offer greater opportunity for the individual to locate his or her own subjectivity.

Moreover, since devised theatre often enables the language spoken to be embodied in its creator on stage, a shift to the body might also be seen as a shift towards embodied subjectivity. Embodiment as outlined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty shifts from a sense of objective truth and rather acknowledges the individual’s contribution to the making of meaning – the way the “world appears to the embodied consciousness and the way in which the world is changed by the projections of embodied consciousness”.¹⁴ This view of greater subjectivity being present through a focus on the body can be seen in Peggy Phelan’s notion that

[i]n moving from the grammar of words to the grammar of the body, one moves from the realm of metaphor to the realm of metonymy [...]
Metaphor works to secure a vertical hierarchy of value and is reproductive; it works by erasing dissimilarity and erasing difference; it turns two into one. Metonymy is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contiguity and displacement.¹⁵

In this analysis the metaphorical nature of language, which substitutes an experience for a word, is replaced by something which is irreducibly itself. For Merleau-Ponty this experience is liberating: “by thus remaking contact with the

¹² Ibid, p.27

¹³ Freshwater, H (2010), ‘*Delirium: In Rehearsal with theatre O*’, in Mermikides and Smart (eds.), p.129

¹⁴ Bullock et al (eds.), p.265

¹⁵ Phelan (1993), p.150

body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourselves, since perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception".¹⁶

However, I would suggest seeing any shift in emphasis from words to the body as unquestionably positive needs to be viewed critically. In Part Two of this thesis I will suggest ways in which language can be seen as a more fluid system than is outlined here. Furthermore, whilst there is an emphasis on personal liberation, there is not necessarily an awareness of how such a shift to the body might result in any kind of social liberation. And Foucault's suggestion in *Discipline and Punish* that "the body is... directly involved in a political field: power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs"¹⁷ would challenge any notion that shifting to a focus on the body inherently shifts towards a space that is beyond culture. For example, Slavoj Žižek points out how a focus on the body can be aligned with either a notion of 'proto-Fascism' or as "a genuine working class ideology of youngsters whose only means of success [is...] the disciplinary training of their only possession, their bodies".¹⁸ The body is in culture as the word is in culture.

Furthermore, a shift towards a focus on the body and away from language is not an *abolition* of language. Mermikides and Smart point out that "Artaud, Grotowski and Meyerhold, while each espousing the belief that the body was the locus of a deeper, more primal truth than language, all worked with playtexts. What they rejected was the authority of the word and, by extension, of the playwright".¹⁹ In such work the playwright still has a role to play, even if he is no longer the main authority. The textual cannot be simply opposed to the physical,

¹⁶ Govan et al, p.159, citing M. Merleau-Ponty (2002) *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. C. Smith) (Oxford/New York: Routledge), p.239

¹⁷ Foucault, M (1991) *Discipline and Punish* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) (trans. A. Sheridan), p.26, quoted in Govan et al, p.168

¹⁸ Žižek, S (2004) 'Afterword' to Rancière (2004), p.78

¹⁹ Mermikides and Smart (eds.), p.9

or to devising. This is also foregrounded in John O'Toole's description of students in schools' playmaking as "playwriting and acting"²⁰. Viewed from O'Toole's perspective, playwriting is part of a devising process, even if it is not written down. Text may also still be influential on the development of a devised piece: Gerry Harris outlines how performance text used as a starting point for two different devising processes, and which took up less than a third of the piece in both cases, nonetheless led to work that was in some ways similar.²¹ And Alison Oddey outlines the way in which Caryl Churchill worked with Joint Stock on *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, where the actors' contributions to workshops were vital but ultimately led to a play that was not improvised and that was clearly written by Churchill²² (and which has since been performed by other actors in a more conventional context). One should be mindful of Heddon and Milling's point that any generalisation of what devised theatre is must be aware that it does not apply to *all* work made under this broad term. There may be a shift in emphasis, a tendency, but there is not a complete reversal. Seeing devised theatre as a physical theatre functioning in a purely binary and oppositional relationship to the text based theatre that preceded it is over simplistic.

What this outlines, however, is that despite these qualifications, devised theatre opens up the possibility of other theatrical modes potentially loosening the grip of the word as the main source of meaning. Oddey states that "devised theatre often uses music, dance or art in an integrated form, or in a new relationship [...] this kind of performance theatre enables a performer to engage in the creation of a visual or physical language, which is not present in conventional theatre based on words",²³ and indeed in recent devised work there has arguably been a general shift towards embracing more visual and interdisciplinary

²⁰ O'Toole et al, p.137

²¹ Harris, p.6

²² Oddey, p.50

²³ Ibid, p.19

approaches:²⁴ the work of Complicite, DV8 and Frantic Assembly, to list a few current high profile examples in the UK, reflects this. All these companies use text, but work with the body intensively in rehearsal and performance and their productions often feature sequences in which physicality takes centre stage. Language is simply one mode of communication and does not take inherent precedence.

Devised Theatre and the Collaborative Process

Like the concept of a binary division between language and physicality, I will argue that the concept of devised theatre inherently prioritising process more than other theatre forms is also a limited way of understanding devised theatre. However, I would argue that the increased awareness of process as part of what theatre is (explicitly foregrounded in the word devised) suggests theatre becoming recognised as something which is not just an event in isolation, but as something which is crucially linked to its process. Heddon and Milling problematise any notion that this increased awareness of process necessarily leads to a democratisation of the creative process, since historically for some “it led to an increased professionalization of the artist, championing and scrutinising the aesthetics of the labour of the creative artist, rather than simply the product”.²⁵ However, they do suggest that the growth in the 1950s and 1960s of devised theatre led to a shift in understanding of what performances might be. In recent times the trend towards ‘work-in-progress’ showings which “hope [...] to summon a new kind of viewing from the audience”²⁶ can be seen as part of this trend of managing to “blur the distinction between process and performance”.²⁷ (I will discuss this further in the thesis conclusion). So rather than needing to present

²⁴ See for example, Kaye p.1; Oddey p.19

²⁵ Heddon and Milling, p.21

²⁶ Ibid, p.21

²⁷ Stanier, P (2010), ‘The Distance Covered: Third Angel’s *9 Billion Miles from Home*’, in Mermikides and Smart (eds.), p.116

‘finished’ works, in devised theatre there is often a willingness to present work “that was ‘unfinished’, expecting and ready to integrate and reflect audience response”.²⁸ As in the example of the Living Theatre’s *Paradise Now* previously cited, the notion of the audience influencing the ongoing creation of the work also starts to blur the binary between performer/audience.

Similarly, the shift away from a director/author having sole responsibility for the piece and towards performers being involved is frequently discussed by writers on devised theatre. The binary division between performers and production team begins to blur. For some writers, such as Chris Baldwin and Tina Bicat, in this model “neither the director nor the producer are at the top of a hierarchical power pyramid but rather at the fulcrum of a very particular process”.²⁹ However, as already stated Heddon and Milling take issue with a simplistic notion of devised theatre as “a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration”, and Alison Oddey’s book *Devising Theatre* also shows an awareness of the complexity of the relationship between devised theatre and collaboration. She states that “[i]n the 1970s devising companies chose artistic democracy in favour of the hierarchical structures of power linked to text-based theatre, and yet within the last twenty years or so there has been a move from this standpoint to more hierarchical structures”.³⁰ An example from more recent times is the company Red Room, whose director Topher Campbell states that the company has “a mission to use performance to state the case for left-wing politics”,³¹ and who uses what Gareth White suggests is an “enlightened hierarchy”.³² Here Topher Campbell’s style is “essentially autocratic”, but that for him this is the “best way to

²⁸ Heddon and Milling, p.21

²⁹ Baldwin and Bicat, p.151

³⁰ Oddey, p.9

³¹ White, G (2010), ‘Devising and Advocacy: The Red Room’s *Unstated*’, in Mermikides and Smart (eds.), p.95

³² *Ibid*, p.96

do political work: to maintain coherence of thought and to be responsive and decisive".³³

An interesting example of how the collaborative process influences artistic outcome is outlined in Heddon and Milling's, and Oddey's, discussions of the process of Forced Entertainment. Oddey states that the knowledge the company members have of each other, following working together for a long period of time, means that they "have developed a full awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, and how they can contribute to each other".³⁴ For example, she quotes Tim Etchells, the (clearly delineated) director of the company, as saying that in the devising process, "If you're pleased with an idea you'll take it to Robin (Arthur), because he'll generally pull it apart, which is good. You make sure you don't see Robin until you want that to happen to your idea. You make sure you do see him when it's vital that it happens".³⁵ For Etchells the idea of Arthur's voice being heard in the piece as well as his own directorial one reflects his vision "of theatre or performance as a space in which different visions, different sensibilities, different intentions could collide".³⁶ Indeed, this idea of different voices in a process being able to yield a multi-layered text is identified by Heddon and Milling: "[A] group devising process is more likely to engender a performance that has multiple perspectives, that does not promote one, authoritative, 'version' or interpretation". Importantly, however, they add, "We are not arguing, however, that a single author could not, definitively, produce such performances; just that a collaborative model makes this outcome more likely, if not inevitable, given the multiplicity of voices being added to the pot (assuming that all voices are heard)".³⁷

Indeed, Nicolas Whybrow suggests that often in devising processes

the involvement of several people – and the obvious need to communicate – leads to decisions being made as a product of (rational) discussion, prior

³³ Ibid, p.97

³⁴ Oddey, p.44

³⁵ Ibid, p.44

³⁶ Etchells (1999), p.55 quoted in Heddon and Milling, p.192

³⁷ Heddon and Milling, p.192

to finding artistic forms of expression. This comes about as a consequence of failing, or hesitating to recognise the conventions of the art form in themselves as the primary media for instituting discoveries, or communicating, within the group process.³⁸

For Whybrow the need to discuss through collaboration can mean that the potential of art to articulate something that lies *beyond* rational discussion, that “may not yet have surfaced fully in the common consciousness”,³⁹ is eschewed in favour of a more rational but less aesthetically interesting product. In Forced Entertainment’s case, however, Whybrow’s fear is not realised. The collaborative process is not aiming to reach a rational consensus. A multiplicity of voices with different intentions and perspectives is embraced in the process and the product; the art form is the means through which group discoveries and communications occur, and the process is often shown in the performances themselves: what Etchells describes as “a messier world – of competing actions, approaches and intentions”.⁴⁰

In her essay ‘Solo Solo Solo’, Rebecca Schneider defends solo performance work – work that does not involve collaboration as it has been discussed so far - as in a relationship with other works, not discrete from them. The metaphor of jazz is utilised as she states that for her “an artist makes a call and another responds and another responds to that response”.⁴¹ For her this “citational quality” of performance means that ‘solo’ can be conceptualised as “becoming ensemble” as much as any other work of art when it recognises its relation to other performances and acts.⁴² Similarly, Alex Mermikides outlines how the work of Shunt Lounge combines individual collaborators’ work as a whole in performance, resulting in “creative friction between disparate elements and views

³⁸ Whybrow, p.284

³⁹ Ibid, p.284

⁴⁰ Etchells (1999), p.55 quoted in Heddon and Milling, p.192

⁴¹ Schneider, p.37

⁴² Ibid, p.40

to spark innovation and novelty”.⁴³ From this perspective it is possible to consider that it is not working with others in a devising process per se that will produce collaborative work, but rather the approach to process itself and even how the work is presented that can dictate a sense of collaboration. One is always in a relationship to other artists, moments, people – the question is how this is explored and how much dialogue is invited within the process and the performance. If there is a *tendency* in devised work towards conversation as a group of performers discuss what might end up in the piece, this cannot be generalised as an ontological feature of *all* devised performance. There are different histories, some in which process embraces Etchells’ ‘messiness’ of the ‘competing’ voices of collaboration (as in the case of Forced Entertainment), and some in which process doesn’t (as in the case of Red Room).

It is interesting that in White’s characterisation of Campbell’s viewpoint on collaboration it might lead to a lack of clarity, whereas in Whybrow’s characterisation of collaboration there can be clarity at the expense of artistic vision. In this debate there is again a recognition of the plurality of devising practices, where collaboration can lead to multiple or singular authorial voices; to a didactic political agenda or a messy world where agendas are confused. Furthermore, Schneider would argue that in her case individual practice is focused on collaboration. In all three cases, though, despite their differences, there is recognition that the process influences the performance. The dominance of performance as the primary focus of interest and enquiry is loosened.

Devised Theatre, Originality and Tradition

For Bicât and Baldwin, too, the link between process and performance, and the difficulty of separating them, is clear: “The sequences of decision-making,

⁴³ Mermikides, A (2010) ‘Clash and Consensus in Shunt’s ‘Big Shows’ and the *Lounge*’, in Mermikides and Smart (eds.), p.154

and the discoveries that are made in rehearsal, can lead to unexpected outcomes in performance”.⁴⁴ This idea of embracing the unexpected is another frequent trope of writing on devised theatre. Liz LeCompte of the Wooster Group sees chance as a crucial element in devised work, stating that a chance occurrence in a process “*is the text* [...] It’s an action-text that may have nothing to do with any thematic thing we’re working on. I cannot alter it”.⁴⁵ Robin Arthur and Terry O’Connor of Forced Entertainment similarly see the “accidents” in a devising process as offering opportunities that rational logic cannot offer – “accidents are the occurrences that give rise to leaps of logic”, and “Like windows they give you the opportunity to see something that you wouldn’t have thought of yourself”.⁴⁶ Such an approach avoids Whybrow’s criticism of some devised work’s rational discussion being a potential hindrance to genuinely innovative creative work. Indeed, another aspect of devised theatre frequently discussed is its use of improvisation, both in rehearsal and in performance, with improvisation suggesting at least some elements are open to change and thus the planning process is loosened. Julian Beck of the Living Theatre uses the importance of improvisation in jazz music again as a metaphor for his work, saying “Jazz is the hero [...Charlie Parker] showed us that by becoming engaged and then letting go the great flight of the bird could happen”.⁴⁷

Again, any simplistic binary division between the freedom of the devised text and the rigid structure of text based theatre can be questioned, however. Heddon and Milling develop the jazz metaphor but, citing Henry Gates, point out that jazz improvisation “is ‘nothing more’ than repetition and revision”, and for them “a structured set of givens, rules of games can limit and contain the

⁴⁴ Bicat and Baldwin, p.9

⁴⁵ Quoted in Savran, D (1988) *Breaking the Rules: the Wooster Group* (New York: Theatre Communications Group), p.51, cited in Heddon and Milling, p.198. My emphasis.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Heddon and Milling, p.198

⁴⁷ Cited in Govan et al, pp.49-50

‘spontaneous’ input of the performer”.⁴⁸ Such ‘limitation’ and ‘containment’ need not necessarily be seen as inhibiting: rather, from such a perspective, structure can be seen as necessary and as providing boundaries within which performers can play. Govan, Nicholson and Normington similarly discuss Clive Barker’s comparison of Theatre Workshop with “a jazz combo”, but with this jazz requiring more “rigorous investigation of form, structure and style than playing in a symphony orchestra”.⁴⁹ In other words, if devised theatre often utilises improvisation techniques in either rehearsal or performance, structure and rules may still exist – indeed, in Barker’s example some elements may be more rigidly controlled in an improvised work than in a pre-written piece of music. And in the case of script-based theatre, one could apply this notion to the structure of the text providing the security for the creators to improvise, or make the text come alive in a variety of ways. Improvisation does not preclude rules or structures.

So devised theatre, even when emanating from or incorporating improvisation, may not be purely ‘spontaneous’ but may in fact exist within structures. Therefore, although Oddey claims that devised theatre is “a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an *original* product that directly emanates from assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals’ contradictory experiences of the world”,⁵⁰ it is possible to question any assumption that because the work is not originating from a playtext it is inherently original, or indeed that it is the expression of unfettered collaborative spontaneity on the part of the devisors or the performers.

However, the second part of Oddey’s sentence – that devising entails an interrogation of, and expression of, experience – might offer a way of

⁴⁸ Heddon and Milling p.9, citing H. Gates (1988) *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford), pp.63-4

⁴⁹ Barker, C (2000) ‘Joan Littlewood’ in A. Hodge (ed.) *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (London: Routledge), p.114, cited in Govan et al, p.49

⁵⁰ Oddey, p.1. My emphasis.

understanding how devisors and performers can contribute through structured improvisations and other devising processes. To start with, one creates from a context. Heddon and Milling point out, via Foucault, that

intuition functions paradoxically within the improvisation in the devising process. An element of material generated by improvisation is recognised by company members as a performance solution and intuition authenticates that moment as original and a creative revelation. Yet, improvisation is always already conditioned by the mannerisms, physical abilities and training, horizons of expectation and knowledge, patterns of learned behaviour of the performers – their *habitus*, to use Bourdieu's phrase.⁵¹

In other words, seeing a moment in a performance, for example, as *creative*, understands its relation to other practices, whether aesthetic and social. Such an approach is distinct from seeing something as being *original*. I will discuss this later in my chapter on creativity, but it is worth at this point recognising that pure originality is a problematic concept. Even if a thought seems radical and new it will contain within it links to previous ideas and the limitations and experiences of the originator. A concept of pure originality can be contrasted with Margaret A. Boden's notion of creativity, which is related to a "generative system"⁵² and involves "exploration, and perhaps tweaking, of a conceptual space, rather than radical transformation of it".⁵³ Something may therefore be embraced as creative but may not be wholly original – to be recognised as a creative contribution to a discourse it must have some relation to what has gone before, even if it radically transforms aspects of it.

It is this concept of a development of styles and methodologies in devised theatre practice, rather than that of total originality, that Heddon and Milling chart in their book: "The tradition we explore finds links and coherence in modes of devising work. The devising practitioners examined here saw each other's work, heard about performances or processes they were not part of, participated in

⁵¹ Heddon and Milling, p.10

⁵² Boden, p.78

⁵³ Ibid, p.114

workshops, learnt about work in formal education contexts, influenced each other”.⁵⁴ They further quote Simon McBurney of Complicite accepting a level of quotation/borrowing/copying: “the pleasure of theatre is impurity, it’s the magpie quality of people stealing from everyone else”.⁵⁵ As with any other history, there is a sense of how one thing leads to another. One can variously see aesthetic, formal or conceptual links between futurism and Dada; between the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment; or between LeCoq and Complicite. And yet each of these latter examples can be considered creative, if not wholly original. This approach is embraced in the impossibility of pure self-expression described by Tim Etchells: “They were always tempted to think about writing (or even speaking) as a kind of trying on of other peoples’ clothes – a borrowing of power. [...] A writing that’s more like sampling. Mixing, matching, cutting, pasting. Conscious, strategic and sometimes unconscious, out of control. I’m quoting and I don’t even know it”.⁵⁶

Gerry Harris distinguishes between different concepts of re-using and copying. Via Derrida’s concept of iteration she outlines the possibility of devised work knowingly using an image or idea, understanding where it comes from and thinking carefully about how it might be perceived differently in its recontextualisation. In this an image or any other signifying convention can have the same status as ‘text’ in a more conventional playtext, and should be interrogated in the same way:

The failure to understand this can lead to a quoting or paraphrasing that is either unaware of, or fails to acknowledge and therefore to question, its sources, and the reproduction of images and ideas [...] have the appearance of clichés, because the imprints of the histories that they carry have not been analysed and interrogated, let alone ‘deconstructed’.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Heddon and Milling, p.22

⁵⁵ Quoted in Heddon and Milling, p.24

⁵⁶ Etchells (1999), p.101

⁵⁷ Harris, p.19

For an art form that, as I have argued, has a range of histories, this is a useful distinction. It embraces devised theatre's capacity to creatively reuse and recontextualise images, language and experiences (as Heddon and Milling point out, anything else is impossible) whilst sounding a warning note that doing so may not always be understood and carefully considered.

The need for tradition as well as innovation, or at least an understanding of the lineage of an art form, is mentioned by cultural critics from a variety of backgrounds. In his preface to the book *Living Powers: The Arts in Education*, Peter Fuller states that "The contributors to this volume [...] acknowledge that aesthetic education ought to involve fostering of intuition and imagination, cultivation of the disinterested skills of the particular arts, *and* a sense of continuity with tradition, and with nature".⁵⁸ Whilst Fuller's notion of using "intuition and imagination" comes from a very different political and aesthetic place to Etchells' eschewing of pure originality, it is worth noting that the book, whilst often openly conservative in outlook, here similarly values innovation as well as tradition. And although Fuller might find it difficult to acknowledge, intuition and imagination may well not only develop and understand but ultimately destabilise the certainties of tradition.

What Heddon and Milling suggest above is that there is a need for a knowledge of tradition if one is to make work that understands how it will be received and understood by an audience, or for that matter fellow devisors, even if one's intention is to subvert that tradition. Here it is thus possible to question the binary of original being seen as oppositional to traditional, or even as them being separated. Rather, any desire to preserve a need for originality or tradition in aspic is overturned in favour of a creativity that recognises that everything 'new' or 'original' is in relation to 'traditions' or what already exists. Devised theatre offers the possibility of a dialogue that keeps both in mind. Both can be seen as being

⁵⁸ In Abbs (ed.), p.xii. Original emphasis.

important as the artist seeks to understand his work's social place whilst articulating something unique. As Brecht said, "Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must change. Nothing comes of nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new".⁵⁹ Brecht's 'new methods' understand their context and history. They come from 'new problems', they come from the old. They do not exist in a vacuum.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to chart a web of concerns around which devised theatre can be considered, whilst not trying to reduce its complexity or its variety. As devised theatre has developed it, like any art form or discourse, has shifted and changed. The initial newness has itself given way to a new phase. As with Boden's tweaking of a conceptual space, Govan et al suggest that innovation is taken on an 'adoption curve' through which "the ideas of the innovators or inventors are initially taken up by 'early adopters', and subsequently find a more widespread forum as their value becomes recognised and the ideas better known".⁶⁰ I have tried to suggest that the plurality of histories of practice that come under the umbrella term 'devised theatre' make it difficult to define or pin down, make orthodoxies hard to create. The tradition of devised theatre can still innovate, and have the potential to change conventions and shift ideas. It is a fluid form that can contain a multiplicity of elements. Devised theatre is an inclusive term. Devised theatre may not only be collaborative, spontaneous, original, physical or radical, but can also be individual, planned, traditional, verbal and conservative. As such, it threatens attempts to create monolithic and clearly defined notions of theatre, such as those of 'improvised theatre', 'scripted theatre',

⁵⁹ Brecht, B (1974) 'Against Georg Lukacs', *New Left Review* 84 (trans. S. Hood), p.51 quoted in Govan et al, p.43

⁶⁰ Govan et al, p.192

or 'physical theatre'. Devised theatre can embrace aspects of all of these elements within itself. And if devised theatre is slippery in the sense of it containing a multiplicity of potential features, perhaps there are ways in which *all* theatre can be said to have elements of devising. Conceptually, this notion of devised theatre which eludes definition chimes with Claire Colebrook's characterisation of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, for whom "art is the very opposite of method; art is not a form we impose on experience. Art is allowing the anarchy of experience to free itself from form and methods".⁶¹ As in the notion of praxis I outlined above, with its 'unity of theory and practice', conventional terminology proves insufficient. Devised theatre is not reducible to a simple definition, it stands as itself in a myriad of guises.

For example, Oddey notes an artistic shift "away from devising issue-based or politically orientated work as in the 1970s to theatre that is more visually, physically, or performance based".⁶² I would contend that this shift can be seen not only as devised theatre losing its oppositional edge, but also as a reflection of the complexity of this shifting art form. This is an art form which articulates itself anew as society changes, an art form which is difficult to define and clearly delineate from other artistic practices, an art form which creates an ongoing stream of work which engages with society and culture in a myriad of fascinating and important, if not necessarily always explicit or even desirable, ways.

A further social significance can be elicited from Schneider's essay discussed above. She considers how theatre, or performance, relates to other performances, but I would suggest that one could extend this to how they relate to the wider world as well – in a dialogue. Like the metaphor of jazz which is used by three different writers on devised theatre above, an artist responds to and initiates; one creates a dialogue with other individuals and with groups. In devised theatre

⁶¹ Colebrook, p.46

⁶² Oddey, p.19

this dialogue is not abstracted from the artist but is embodied in live performers. In this sense the work of art functions within a social context and as a social process – a process in both the making and the showing of the work. In both the making and the showing activities are undertaken which relate to, and which can be placed in, a ‘real world’ context. If devised theatre blurs boundaries between planned and spontaneous, between process and product, it thus also blurs boundaries between art and life. As this thesis continues I wish to consider how one might understand devised theatre’s relation to this wider context: what its significance is and what it might be.

CHAPTER TWO – TRADITIONS AND HISTORIES OF THE PEDAGOGY OF DRAMA, THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

In this chapter I am going to outline some key areas of historical debate in the pedagogy of drama, theatre and performance, particularly as it pertains to devising, in both schools and universities. I will principally be focusing on the UK context, although I will occasionally be referring to other countries' traditions as well in order to explore other paradigms. By doing so I hope to outline some of the assumptions that underpin the terminologies employed in different educational contexts as well as outlining some key debates around the epistemology of the subject(s). I seek to justify my choice of the term 'theatre' as the focus of my thesis over the original term used in schools, 'drama', and the increasingly popular term (particularly in universities) of 'performance', illustrated by publications such as Harding and Rosenthal's edited collection *The Rise of Performance Studies*.¹

PEDAGOGY OF DRAMA, THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOLS

Having stated my intention to ultimately use the term 'theatre' to describe the discipline I am discussing, in this section I am going to use the broad term 'drama' at the outset to include 'process drama' as well as more conventional notions of 'theatre' teaching, before moving to a discussion of theatre specifically. 'Drama' is also historically the term most often used in writing about drama/theatre/performance in schools. Furthermore, it is my contention that the shift towards recognising process as a vital component of the devising process means that 'process drama', and indeed the term drama itself, as well as the more contemporary 'performance', have much light to shed on how devised theatre might be conceived.

¹ Harding, J.M. and Rosenthal, C (eds.) (2011) *The Rise of Performance Studies: Rethinking Richard Schechner's Broad Spectrum* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan)

Drama and Play

As I will suggest has been the case in universities, drama in schools has been through a vast range of historical shifts. As John O'Toole states, "when drama and theatre do make an appearance in schools, it is for a bewilderingly knotty diversity of purposes, knotty because some of these threads of purpose blend into each other, while others appear contradictory".² However, he suggests that the relationship between drama and education "is probably at its richest, most universal and least noticed in dramatic play".³

From playing early games with a parent, "the child builds [...] structures of dramatic play of increasing sophistication and artistry".⁴ O'Toole states that "From the moment when a child plays 'peekaboo' with its parent or another adult, three of the foundations of drama are being laid: the (1) *shared agreement* to (2) *pretend* that produces (3) *pleasure*".⁵ The link to the 'pretending' of acting is clear. Piaget discussed how play could help develop a child's understanding of symbols, rules and social structures, and Vygotsky wrote extensively about how play can help children to develop language.⁶ (I will discuss the significance of language development further in both Chapter Three, when I explore language as a system, and in Chapter Six when I discuss the significance of language development in the work of Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*). Notions of play have been developed further by writers such as Clifford Geertz and Richard Schechner into a discussion of adult behaviour in 'deep play' and 'dark play'. For example, Schechner states that "Both child and adult play involve exploration, learning and risk with a payoff in the pleasurable experience of "flow" or total involvement in the

² O'Toole et al, p.4

³ Ibid, p.11

⁴ Ibid, p.11

⁵ Ibid, p.11. Original emphasis.

⁶ Cited in O'Toole et al, p.12

activity for its own sake”.⁷ The ‘learning’ here suggests the possibility of education through play.

Since play has been linked with drama and education it is hardly surprising that it has been of interest to drama educationalists. In the UK Peter Slade was a leading exponent of this, and articulated it in his 1954 book *Child Drama*. He “focused attention on children as they engaged in spontaneous dramatic play and saw this as a natural way of discovery”.⁸ For example, he asked his children’s company to act in the round as a means of ensuring that student ‘performers’ had “a quality of expression and creation which the child seems to me to do naturally”⁹, and this ‘natural’ quality would mean that they would be “expressing themes from their collective unconscious”.¹⁰ Here, for Slade, drama exists to reflect what happens within ordinary child development; furthermore, Slade here seems to invoke an ahistorical paradigm where ‘natural’ is seen as a free expression rather than as varying in different historical contexts. He developed a “kind of loose performative pedagogy, based on dramatic play, dance drama and what he called ‘polished improvisation’”.¹¹ The links to devised theatre as I have discussed it above are apparent here. Improvisation, often an element of devised theatre, is evident. The performers create the work, and do so at least partly from their own experiences. The process is intrinsically linked to, indeed often *is*, the performance.

Another key aspect often discussed in drama in schools is its ability to support language development. Improvisation is again specifically mentioned in the Bullock Report of 1975, which states that “drama has an obvious and substantial contribution to make to the development of children’s language [...]t is improvisation [...] which seems to us to have particular value for language

⁷ Schechner, p.92

⁸ Havell, p.166

⁹ Slade, J (1966) *Child Drama and Its Value in Education (Birmingham: Educational Drama Association)*, p.3, quoted in O’Toole et al, p.74

¹⁰ Ibid, p.74

¹¹ Ibid, p.75

development”.¹² The learning that occurs through such an improvisation, as students select words in their drama making, is reflected in Chomsky’s argument that “the normal use of language is innovative”.¹³ And it is deepened further by Neelands’ proposal of a “view of language learning which goes beyond the superficial acquisition of skills and linguistic conventions and terminology to consider the context of learning and thought, language and social context and language and identity”, concluding that such a view “recognises the centrality of language to all human activity”.¹⁴ Here the concept of language learning is not about learning language in itself, but learning the ability to use it in a variety of contexts: for example, how language might limit or liberate a person (or character in a drama), or how speech might be used in a variety of ways by different people.

However, O’Toole states that as a result of such language focused work sometimes “the concentration of the students became directed to negotiating the dramatic action and meaning; meaning took precedence over action; in experiential role-play, meaning was mainly made manifest in words”¹⁵ – indeed, in his own definition of child playmaking as “playwriting and acting”¹⁶ it is notable that playwriting is the first term used. To focus children on remembering the importance of physicality and movement when they are negotiating a structure as vital and as consuming as language might therefore require intervention from the teacher. Indeed, in such school drama, as with devised theatre, according to some there was a need for structure to be brought to this work: O’Toole for example claims that “the classroom often descended within minutes into mayhem. Children were as unused to this kind of freedom as their teachers”.¹⁷ One way in which such structure was brought to this ‘child-centred’ approach was by the use

¹² Bullock, A (ed.) *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O.), p.156-8 quoted in O’Toole et al, pp.57-8

¹³ Chomsky, N (1968) *Language and Mind* (London: Harcourt, Bracer & Ward) quoted in Bullock, A (ed.), *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O.), p.158, quoted in O’Toole et al, p.58

¹⁴ Neelands, J (2010) ‘Learning Through Imagined Experience’ in O’Connor (ed.), pp.41-2

¹⁵ O’Toole et al, p.89

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.137

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.75

of teacher-in-role, pioneered by Dorothy Heathcote. Teachers could provide structure to children's work by being in role with them, but could also stop their improvisation, provide opportunities for reflection, and suggest dramatic forms for their work. The task for the teacher would be to maintain Slade's eliciting of the students' creativity but to also "sense the collective meaning that was emerging from the drama"¹⁸ and, as Gavin Bolton put it, to "help [...] focus meaning for the children".¹⁹ Drama here can do what Slade's notion of supporting 'natural' child development couldn't: reflect on what is supposedly natural, and enable the students to reflect upon what they have done.

Drama, Art and Power

At this point of school drama's historical development the terminology started to shift towards 'process drama' – indicating a shift towards the importance of *making* the work rather than performing a finished product. As I outlined in my Introduction, this shift is also reflected in much writing about devised theatre. In such work there was an enthusiasm for embracing students' contributions. According to David Hornbrook "the unwillingness of teachers to make judgements about students' work [...] helped to foster the impression that students in drama have more control over their learning than in other lessons".²⁰ However for Hornbrook this was a chimera: the power relationships endemic in any teaching situation render this view naïve and inaccurate. Furthermore, quoting Helen Nicholson, Hornbrook states that by putting the teacher at the centre of the work through devices such as teacher-in-role "drama becomes not about empowerment but about power; [...] it is ethically problematic if the main aim is not to explore

¹⁸ Havell, p.172

¹⁹ Bolton, G (1980) 'Theatre Form in Drama Training' in K. Robinson (ed.) *Exploring Theatre and Education*, p.72, quoted in Havell, p.174

²⁰ Hornbrook, p.93

different cultural, artistic or historical practices, but to colonise the wisdom of the practitioner”.²¹

For Hornbrook the drawing out of the *existing* beliefs of students rather than of drawing their attention to *new* styles, concepts and ideas meant that far from being an empowering methodology drama-in-education “denied itself access to culturally endowed systems of judgement, and thus to the means whereby this strictly local experience may be held up against other wisdoms”.²² Such ‘other wisdoms’ might, for Hornbrook, offer illumination for the student. By not encouraging students to consider a range of perspectives, his argument goes, lessons appeared to be, but were not really, creative. Hornbrook goes on to propose the now relatively commonplace concept of “dramatic literacy”²³, of developing a curriculum that is not focused on a nebulous concept of students developing themselves but rather on celebrating the vast historical, international and multicultural dimensions of theatre. He describes how the “‘moment of significance’ which was previously born ‘spontaneously’ from hours of workshop preparation, can now be turned to in the cultural lexicon”²⁴, citing powerful moments from *The Cherry Orchard* and *Romeo and Juliet* that can be analysed, discussed and “re-created”, and he is dismissive of what he sees as the desire of some teachers to not allow students access to the rich treasure trove of theatre history. (He cites the example of teachers seeing *Hamlet* at the Royal National Theatre whilst students “must be content with role-playing and improvisation”).²⁵ Role-playing is of course part of ‘re-creating’ Chekhov and Shakespeare, but what Hornbrook is meaning here is roles determined by the student and teacher themselves. This shift, along with the dismissive attitude to improvisation, echoes

²¹ Nicholson, H (1995) ‘Performative Acts: Drama, Education and Gender’, *The NADIE Journal* (Australia) 19(1), p.31 quoted in Hornbrook, p.94

²² Hornbrook, p.97

²³ *Ibid*, p.112

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.112

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.98

an attempt to shift away from the areas of concern of devised theatre I have outlined above.

This shift away from drama being about the participant's personal or social development and more about the art form of theatre is reflected in the writing of Peter Abbs. He suggests that

[t]he word 'self-expression' [came...] to falsely characterise the quintessential purpose of the aesthetic curriculum. Yet art is embodied *symbolic*-expression and demands knowledge and skill, a formal context and a continuous culture and, while having certain structural similarities with play, has a variety of other functions that childhood play does not possess. Above all, art belongs to a cultural continuum and a public world; it simultaneously includes and transcends the creative play of the growing child.²⁶

For Abbs and Hornbrook then, there is a need to recognise the history of an art form as having educational potential. For Hornbrook all students deserved to be introduced to quality art. In contrast, Abbs claims, educational drama is "devoid of art, devoid of the practices of theatre".²⁷ Helen Nicholson points out an interesting contestation of the radical ground here. For Hornbrook, she suggests,

generations of young people were culturally disenfranchised. Hornbrook's argument was based on a cultural materialist analysis of society and drew heavily on Marxist social theory, but it is interesting that, in the educational climate of the time, his work was read as endorsing the elitism of mainstream theatre and encouraging politically conservative teaching methods.²⁸

This reflects the complexity of the debate and reflects again a contestation of binary thinking. Radical, student-led and non-canonical as opposed to conservative, teacher-led and canonical is too simplistic here. Hornbrook's idea of using a canon to radically empower students through an understanding of the diversity of artistic heritage rethinks such a binary. Yet he himself does not question what is in the 'cultural lexicon' - who authorises what is artistically valued? To quote Jonathan Neelands, "When critics of educational drama talk of

²⁶ Abbs (ed.), p.44

²⁷ Abbs, P. (1991) Introduction to D. Hornbrook, *Education in Drama* (Brighton: Falmer), quoted in J. Neelands (2010) 'Theatre Without Walls', in O'Connor (ed.), p.81

²⁸ Nicholson, p.39

‘commonly-held views of theatre’ we need to ask by *whom* are these views commonly held? When they talk of ‘aesthetics’ we need to ask *whose* aesthetics?”²⁹ Artistic value-judgements are not neutral: as Bourdieu suggests in *Distinction*, a refined sense of an ‘aesthetic disposition’ is “constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises or the contemplation of works of art”.³⁰ For Bourdieu this is an activity distanced from the everyday concerns of the working class, and is thus far distanced from an unproblematised ‘Marxist’ desire to promote inclusivity.

Similarly in *The Politics of Performance*, Baz Kershaw outlines a debate in the mid 1980s in the UK between the “democratization of culture” and “cultural democracy”.³¹ According to Owen Kelly, he says, the notion of the democratisation of culture which brings ‘high art’ to ‘working people’ is actually a “legitimising an “agreed hierarchy of values [...an] imposition, on society at large, of the values of one particularly powerful group [...which] is poisonous”.³² In contrast, Kershaw outlines cultural democracy, which according to Roy Shaw involves “encouraging working people to develop their own creativity”,³³ and to Kelly is “an idea which revolves around the notion of plurality, and around equality of access to the means of cultural production and distribution”.³⁴ Whilst Kershaw describes the accounts of Kelly and Shaw’s notion of ‘cultural democracy’ as being “couched in entirely different language”,³⁵ in both these quotations there is a sense of moving away from a canon defined by others and towards self-

²⁹ Neelands, J (2010), ‘Theatre Without Walls’ in O’Connor (ed.), p.83

³⁰ Bourdieu (1984), p.54

³¹ Kershaw, pp.183-5

³² Kelly, O (1984) *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels* (London: Comedia), pp.100-101, quoted in Kershaw, p.184

³³ Shaw, R (1987) *The Arts and the People* (London: Jonathan Cape), p.133 quoted in Kershaw pp.184-5

³⁴ Kelly, O (1984) *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels* (London: Comedia) p.101, cited in Kershaw, p.185

³⁵ Kershaw, p.185

determination and realisation of a broader range of art than can be supplied in Hornbrook's limited canon.

Neelands identifies the ways in which Hornbrook's supposedly 'Marxist' ideas were taken up by the Right because of their promise of learning that can be more easily assessed than the vagaries and varieties of process drama - an "economic needs" curriculum over a "child-centred" curriculum.³⁶ From such a viewpoint, observing a 'cultural lexicon' might ensure that the hegemony of teaching practice and limited learning and assessment outcomes are not diverged from, but not be particularly useful for teaching and learning practices seeking to emphasise creativity or independent thinking. The term 'child-centred learning' has itself been criticised by Andy Kempe, since "To be at the centre of something suggests a stationary position. Things happen around you and to you. You might well be transformed in some ways [...] but you'd still be in the same place after the experience".³⁷ Nonetheless, the notion of child-centred learning does allow for the possibility of individual teachers and students negotiating their own relationships and curriculum in a way which can *respond* to specific circumstances rather than *impose* specific aims on them.

An interesting point arises when Hornbrook quotes Bernstein to shore up his argument. Bernstein distinguishes between a focus on classification and a focus on frame in teaching: "Classification...refers to the degree of boundary maintenance between contents... 'frame' refers to the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organization, pacing and timing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship".³⁸ He goes on,

Strong frames reduce the power of the pupil over what, when and how he receives knowledge, and increases the teacher's power in the pedagogical relationship. However, strong *classification* reduces the power of the

³⁶ Neelands, J (2010) 'The Meaning of Drama' in O'Connor (ed.), p.73

³⁷ Kempe, p.42

³⁸ Bernstein, pp.88-9, cited in Hornbrook, p.133

teacher over what he transmits, as he may not overstep the boundary between contents, and strong classification reduces the power of the teacher vis-à-vis the boundary maintainers.³⁹

Hornbrook uses this to defend a strong classification/weak frame teaching style, sensing a pejorative tone to Bernstein's comment that "strong frames reduce the power of the pupil". But this is not clearly implied in the context of Bernstein's comment. And it could be argued, as Bolton does above, that there are instances in the pedagogical process where it is appropriate for a teacher to assume control, to provide structure. Indeed, a teacher keen to take on Hornbrook's ideas and introduce a text from the canon might need to assume power in order to impart knowledge in a clear and direct way.

The second part of this quotation about classification is tellingly not quoted by Hornbrook, but reveals the truth of a strong classification/weak frame teaching style – that the teacher "may not overstep the boundary between contents", that the possibility of playing with the classification between contents, of creatively exploring the edges of the discipline, is ignored. Indeed, teaching the 'cultural lexicon' during this period often meant, O'Toole suggests, "dull learning, sterile and fascistic directing, demeaning or incomprehensible scripts and coarse acting practice".⁴⁰ To "overstep the boundary between contents" in the manner that Slade and Heathcote required, O'Toole claims, "entailed *both* mastering a new pedagogy *and* inventing a new kind of artistry".⁴¹ There is an interesting similarity here with the fusion of process and product which I discussed in Chapter One. In both cases, process and product are thought of as constituent parts of the whole: the performance is more than just the presentation to an audience.

O'Toole further wryly notes, "It is no wonder that Hornbrook's swashbuckling call to arms ironically provided a refuge for many teachers who had tried drama process and found that they could not make it work for them, and

³⁹ Bernstein, p.90. Original emphasis.

⁴⁰ O'Toole et al, p.118

⁴¹ Ibid, p.123. Original emphasis.

many more who had only seen it used ineffectually”.⁴² This drama process required students to devise – thinking from another’s perspective, making their own creative responses to a given stimulus, a text, a news story, or indeed their own experiences – but it also required their teachers to incorporate flexibility into their teaching since it embraced an organic rather than a prescriptive approach to tuition.

However, O’Toole suggests that there was also bad teaching practice in the tradition of Slade and Heathcote – “crass, mindless, limp, trivial and disorganised exercises and process work were no less evident as teachers lacking the mastery, organisational flair, child-centred generosity and charisma of Slade, Way or Heathcote struggled to master these new activities and relationships that were so different from the curriculum they were used to”.⁴³ Such teaching notably fails to address what Heathcote and Bolton recognised: the need for structure and to “focus meaning”. In their work, forms and structures are created that move students beyond the merely mimetic towards the symbolic: in fact, they create what could be widely recognised as an artistic practice that can reflect on the world it is made in, whether directly or indirectly. As such, their work allowed for a shift towards neither the child-centred learning of Slade nor the knowledge-centred learning of Hornbrook, but rather society-centred learning: learning which is understood as taking place in a social context.

Drama as Art and Reflection

This creation of symbolic action through a social process is articulated by Jonathan Neelands, who uses Darko Suvin’s paper ‘The Mirror and the Dynamo’ to argue for a Brechtian approach which “penetrates Nature’s possibilities, which finds out the ‘co-variant’ laws of its processes and makes it possible for critical

⁴² Ibid, p.123

⁴³ O’Toole et al, p.118-9

understanding to intervene into them”.⁴⁴ Rather than a mirror which merely reflects a particular construction of the surface of life, drama can provide structures which help to provide a “reflection *on*, not *of*, nature”.⁴⁵ Such a reflection for Neelands can function as a dynamo which helps to develop understanding of the world in order to build towards a new future. Neelands extends Suvin’s metaphor to suggest the notion of drama as a lens: if a mirror is a means of reflecting reality, and a dynamo a means of investigating reality in order to discover it, a lens is “a window for looking into ‘nature’”.⁴⁶ The inverted commas around ‘nature’ are key here. Drama is the means through which what is perceived as natural can be viewed anew, and reappraised as a contingent version of reality. It can be an active process through which students devise outcomes that help them to think about the world, and this can be extended to a wider view of the role of theatre. Similarly, O’Toole notes the influence of Brecht on Heathcote, “particularly in her use of distancing and framing techniques”.⁴⁷ Here it is possible to distinguish between the mere doing and the doing with reflection, reflection not in the ‘mirror’ sense but in a deeper, illuminating sense such as Neelands sees in Brecht’s reflection *on* ‘nature’. Peter O’Connor notes the importance in Neelands’ own practice of “slow[ing] the drama down”.⁴⁸ Techniques which allow the teacher to interrupt the process of action for its own sake can encourage thought about and reflection on the connection between the aesthetic creation and the world it exists in.

This is where Hornbrook’s idea that students of process drama do not have an opportunity for their “local experience [to...] be held up against other wisdoms”⁴⁹ can be challenged. In the supply of structures and conventions the teacher can mould the creative process in a way that does not merely encourage

⁴⁴ Neelands, J (2010) ‘Mirror, Dynamo or Lens?’ in O’Connor (ed.), p.150. Original capitalisation.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.150

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.152

⁴⁷ O’Toole et al, p.102

⁴⁸ O’Connor (ed.), p.2

⁴⁹ Hornbrook, p.97

the student to repeat what they already think, but to challenge it. As O'Toole puts it, practitioners such as Heathcote and Bolton started to ask "What is the artistry in drama process and can process drama be considered a genre of the art form?"⁵⁰ Indeed, as he earlier notes, both stressed their "theatrical roots" and Heathcote's teaching was not in opposition to theatre but was rather "consciously theatrical".⁵¹ In this their work is a development from Slade's work, a shift identified by Christopher Havell (even though he is writing in Abbs' edited book *Living Powers* which largely promotes a Hornbrookian line): "In neither of them do we find a consistent emphasis on the aesthetic medium of drama in an arts context but we do find a great shift from self-expression to structural meaning, from individual to communal significance, from symptomatic action to symbolic form".⁵² There is a shift towards recognising that drama does more than just develop the individual. In the process of working with others, including the teacher, social understandings are developed and Hornbrook's call for "strictly local experience [to...] be held up against other wisdoms"⁵³ is addressed.

Hornbrook's notion that process drama is devoid of artistic tradition is also challenged by Neelands. In 'Theatre Without Walls' he "maintains that educational drama has its genesis in an alternative, globalised, aesthetic performance tradition".⁵⁴ He cites as evidence companies such as La Mama, Squat, the Performance Group, and directors such as Brook and Marowitz: practitioners who saw their practice as having various theoretical, and sometimes ideological, underpinnings.⁵⁵ In such work practice and theory were not distinct, but were interdependent. In such work, even when director led, the doing of the performance was about more than an aesthetic experience for an audience. The

⁵⁰ O'Toole et al, p.124

⁵¹ Ibid, p.120

⁵² Havell, p.176

⁵³ Hornbrook, p.97

⁵⁴ Neelands, J (2010) 'Theatre Without Walls' in O'Connor (ed.), p.64

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.83

‘process’ of process drama can be seen as being as important as it was in some forms of experimental theatre.

Despite such challenges to Hornbrook et al’s attempt to focus on the “cultural lexicon”, the tradition of process drama has struggled with recent shifts in British educational policy. O’Connor argues that

[t]he received wisdom of recent years is that the war ended with both sides agreeing that mistakes were made and that process drama now took on theatre forms more deliberately. It wasn’t that simple. The Hornbrook devotees had enormous influence over curriculums around the globe. In reality, most classrooms around the world reverted to teaching drama skills, to preparing actors for the stage, [and...] students now learn individual decontextualised conventions as the content of drama lessons.⁵⁶

In O’Connor’s view, whilst the structures and frames outlined by Bolton, Heathcote and specifically Neelands have become widely accepted, the wider context of their application and their centrality to the students both having freedom to create, or devise, and to teachers providing structure in a flexible way which responds to individual groups of students, has been largely forgotten. The introduction of the National Curriculum in the UK in 1988 places drama as a subject within English; GCSE and other syllabi seek clarity in their assessment regimes in order to comply with curriculum-wide approaches to assessment. The simplicity of a dramatic curriculum such as that proposed by Hornbrook may be easier to quantify than the “induction into society through cultural involvement”⁵⁷ proposed by writers such as Neelands. As Whitehead states, “the practising teacher with his eye upon the children rather than upon the mark-sheets will know well enough that the benefits which accrue from drama lessons are by no means marginal, even if they are not always readily or accurately measurable”.⁵⁸ Such lessons are also illustrated in O’Connor’s statement that “All drama education involves people learning how to act. It would be a very limited view of drama education to suggest

⁵⁶ O’Connor (ed.), p.xxv

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 37

⁵⁸ Whitehead, F (1996) *The Disappearing Dais: A Study of the Principles and Practice of English Teaching* (London: Chatto and Windus), p.122, quoted in O’Toole et al, p.57

this was only about acting on the stage. A wider view is that in drama in education students learn how to be actors in and for the real world".⁵⁹

As such, the need for a notion of students making theatre as a praxis returns again. The activity of making meaning through devising can be conceived as part of a social activity that can impact on the world. This notion of the link between drama and society is one that I will return to in Part Two when I consider devised theatre as social practice, and in Part Three when I discuss the notion of praxis in more detail and how it might impact upon pedagogy.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.xxiii

PEDAGOGY OF DRAMA, THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE IN UNIVERSITIES

In my writing on drama in schools, I have mostly focused on the debate around process drama as a means of drawing out some key issues around devised theatre. Devised theatre itself, however, as I alluded to in my last section, is now widely taught in schools and universities. In universities the term devising is particularly common, at least in the UK: indeed, for Heddon and Milling the growth of devised theatre has come about partly as a result of the support from universities: “The hidden patronage of the university sector is one that we can also trace in the UK and Australia through the provision of spaces, venues, audiences and technical support, the commissioning of residencies and workshops, and the marketing, discussion and dissemination of many devising companies’ performances”.⁶⁰

If the focus within the school curriculum has been a shift towards seeing theatre as a product without a corresponding focus on process drama, and that process is limited to being seen as a stage towards a (more important) finished product, such as I have suggested above, Heddon and Milling claim a similar shift in the conceptualisation of devised theatre. They furthermore see universities as partly responsible: a “key component in the introduction of devising practices into mainstream culture, and the professionalisation of alternative devised theatre into a commercially viable sphere of work, has been the intervention of the universities and colleges”.⁶¹ Such a shift can be seen in Gill Lamden’s *Devising: A Handbook for Drama and Theatre Students*, aimed at students below university level, which studies artistic directors under the heading ‘Devising as a profession’.⁶² This suggests a shift away from drama/theatre/performance education being seen as useful in itself, such as is actually proposed by both sides in the Hornbrook debate

⁶⁰ Heddon and Milling, p.20

⁶¹ Ibid, p.226

⁶² Cited in Heddon and Milling, p.6

I mentioned above. Indeed, within the school curriculum in the UK at present the GCSE subject 'Drama' leads at A level to 'Drama and Theatre Studies' or in BTEC to 'Performing Arts': in both cases indicating a shift away from a focus on process towards an art form as a distinct realm, bringing the discipline more clearly into line with a vocational and commercial perspective. As Heddon and Milling ask, "As processes of devising are now so firmly embedded in our training and educational institutions, can we really continue to claim for devising any 'marginal' or 'alternative' status? And why should we wish to do so?"⁶³

Devised theatre is a discourse and is thus open to manipulation and development over time (as discussed, for example, with the discourse of the body mentioned in Chapter One). However I do wish to claim a status for a specific model of devising away from such a shift towards commercialism and vocationality, and will propose that the process drama model can offer something valuable to the teaching of devised theatre at university level. Before doing so, however, I will consider how the academy and academics have conceptualised the field of drama, theatre and performance.

In her book *Professing Performance*, which attempts a history of the teaching of drama, theatre and performance, primarily in the American academy, Shannon Jackson suggests that as with devised theatre and drama in schools, drama, theatre and performance have been seen in many different ways. She summarises thus:

In sum, performance is about doing and it is about seeing; it is about image, embodiment, space, collectivity, and/or orality; it makes community and it breaks community; it repeats endlessly and it never repeats; it is intentional and unintentional, innovative and derivative, more fake and more real. Performance's many connotations and its varied intellectual kinships ensure that an interdisciplinary conversation about this interdisciplinary site rarely will be neat and straightforward. Perhaps it is time to stop assuming that it should.⁶⁴

⁶³ Heddon and Milling, p.6

⁶⁴ Jackson (2004), p.15

With such a variety of views, I will aim here to once more avoid generalisations in favour of an historical awareness of how the discourse has changed over time in relation to what I have termed devised theatre.

Such an historical approach is Jackson's own aim. She states

Our understanding of disciplinary and interdisciplinary operations should shift with historical perspective and institutional location, a slipperiness that might in turn unsettle easy alliances and convenient oppositions in our current ways of talking about ourselves. The challenge is to make the harder alliances and to devise new types of self-description.⁶⁵

The notion of discipline itself is a historically and culturally specific one. Jon McKenzie notes, for example, the distinction between the "Eastern" and "Midwestern" strains of performance studies in the USA.⁶⁶ And Bruce Kuklick states, again in relation to the American context, that

during the late nineteenth century the university as we understand it, the social organisation defining the modern professoriate – came into existence [...] Various areas of study hived off from older and vaguer 'departments' of inquiry, and scholarly disciplines were established as limited fields of knowledge in the university, distinguished by special techniques and an accepted set of doctrines.⁶⁷

There is immediately an interesting connection with the narrow concept of devising conceived of in contemporary curricula I outlined above. From Kuklick's perspective the notion of teaching any subject as a distinct phenomenon from any wider social significance is not a natural state of affairs but a specific socio-historical construction aligned with developments elsewhere.

The British Context

In terms of the UK, Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis similarly note links between the shifting nature of drama, theatre and performance to wider social factors. They outline how in the seventeenth century Dryden saw the poetic nature of tragedy, because tragedy "is the representation of nature, but 'tis nature

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.38

⁶⁶ Mackenzie, p.47, cited in Jackson (2004), p.8

⁶⁷ Kuklick, B (1990) 'The Emergence of the Humanities', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89:1, pp.205-6, quoted in Jackson (2004), p.17

wrought up to a higher pitch”.⁶⁸ As Shepherd and Wallis suggest, for Dryden this formulation is paradoxical: “being like nature by being set above it”. For Dryden, the poetic heightening evident in tragedy is seen as a beneficial lens through which to view nature: “the process of looking has a range of distortions in it [...] The statue will not look like nature from below if you make it like nature”.⁶⁹ The heightening is justified as a means of more accurately portraying reality.

In the puritanical period initiated by the Protestant revolution of 1694, however, Samuel Johnson criticised tragedy’s formalism, seeing it as becoming “crush’d by Rules, and weaken’d as refin’d”.⁷⁰ The job of drama was now to return to reality and not to distract itself with unnecessary dilettantism. The subversive nature of theatre, recognised by the closing of the theatre after the Jacobean period, was best controlled by an adherence to reality.

Despite such an interest in the purpose of drama, Shepherd and Wallis note the relatively late emergence of drama as a discipline in itself in UK universities. For them, this is partly due to the focus in the UK on play texts over theatrical productions. Any notion of theatre as an art form separate from its status as literature, let alone devising, was conspicuously absent. Indeed, they suggest that when drama “emerged as a university subject it was in tension with the textual analysis that was then fashionable in English departments and with the training done in acting schools”.⁷¹ Drama sat uncomfortably between stools, being clearly concerned with issues of performance as well of the text itself. This duality was evident in the formation of the first undergraduate degree at Bristol in 1947. Its first professor Glynne Wickham said that the subject was to be studied “not only as literature but also in terms of the arts, architecture and social conditions, of the theatre”. Another thing was clear in the formation of the degree, however: a

⁶⁸ Dryden, J (1968) *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays* (ed. Watson, G.) (London: Dent), p.87, quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.18

⁶⁹ Shepherd and Wallis, p.18

⁷⁰ Johnson, S (1971) *Dr Johnson on Shakespeare* (ed. W.K. Wimsatt) (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 81, quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.19

⁷¹ Shepherd and Wallis, p.40

commitment to drama as a social art form: “to tackle social problems created by rapid developments in popular dramatic entertainment”.⁷² For Shepherd and Wallis this, like the previous conceptions of drama outlined above, could be clearly mapped on to social factors: “there was a sense that, in the mid-1940s, drama was something on a larger social agenda, and the formation of a university department was meeting a social need”.⁷³ As with process drama and devised theatre, there was a sense of theatre as both an art form in itself and as something that would and could be analysed and carefully considered in relation to a wider social perspective.

In 1951 Neville Coghill attempted to formulate a view of drama that placed it more clearly within university conventions. He stated that the study of drama must “involve a greater number of subjective judgements not amenable to the discipline of thought in any convincing way” and that it provides “a less rigorous training than literature”.⁷⁴ It is interesting to consider the similarities between this perspective and that of David Hornbrook outlined in the previous sections. The canon of dramatic literature is again seen as the key to the subject, rather than any kind of analysis of performance or non-linguistic factors. This is because the text is seen to be more closely aligned to rationality and thought than the physical, in a similar philosophy to that offered by Artaud, as I outlined in the previous chapter.

What Glynne Wickham saw Bristol as offering, however, was a duality of both the practical and the theoretical, of text and performance. And the social was key to this. Rather than attempting to focus on producing either practitioners or academics, he said, “we are meeting face to face that fragmentation of knowledge, that artificial divorcing of one aspect of a subject from another, implicit

⁷² Quoted in James, D.G. (ed.) (1952) *The Universities and the Theatre* (London: Allen and Unwin), pp.106-7, quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.7

⁷³ Shepherd and Wallis, p.8

⁷⁴ Quoted in James, D.G. (ed.) (1952) *The Universities and the Theatre* (London: Allen and Unwin), pp.41-3, quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.10

in specialisation, that division of a society against itself that results in anarchy”.⁷⁵

Here Wickham sees drama as part of a wider educational project, a project that educates the whole person. Drama is the key to an exploration of a range of issues and concepts, and it is explored both in terms of its literature and its artistry. This has links to the notions of process drama, where the whole person is educated through drama in schools, and of devised theatre where participants are active in developing culture which reflects experiences. In all three cases art is seen as functioning within a social context.

The American Context

Shannon Jackson’s history of the American academy similarly notes an intriguing range of perspectives to the journey of drama, theatre and performance as a discipline that finds connections with social trends beyond both the academy and the theatre. One strand, before the creation of discipline as Kuklick defines it, is a rhetorical one. Such a tradition “drew from a classical tradition in oral poetry to argue for the role of performance in the analysis and dissemination of cultural texts”.⁷⁶ This approach sat alongside a desire to preserve existing art forms but nonetheless to celebrate the aesthetic skill of speech. Yet in 1884 James Morgan Hart, displaying no little rhetorical skill himself, criticised the notion of rhetoric: “[R]hetoric always savours to me of the school bench... It is little more than verbal jugglery... Rhetoric exercises are, of course, useful. So are the parallel bars and the dumb-bells of a gymnasium”.⁷⁷ In such a move, Jackson argues, Hart equates performance in education with “the vocational, the technical, and even with the manual”,⁷⁸ dismissing its power in terms which distance it from the academy. She

⁷⁵ Wickham, G (1962) *Drama in a World of Science and Three Other Lectures* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) p.48, quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.11

⁷⁶ Jackson (2004), p.9

⁷⁷ Hart, J.M. (1884-5) ‘The College Course in English Literature, How it May Be Improved’, *PMLA*, reprinted in G. Graff and M. Warner (1985) (eds.) *The Origins of Literary Studies in America* (London: Routledge), pp.34-7, quoted in Jackson (2004), p.58

⁷⁸ Jackson (2004), p.58

also notes its associations with the feminine in more recent criticism of the period, where rhetoric is equated with “a pretty way of talking” or the rhetorician as a “belletrist”.⁷⁹ For her such “associations with the feminine, the primitive, and the commercial [...] threatened the profession of literature’s redefined story about itself as a masculine, hard science”.⁸⁰ What the tradition of rhetoric recognises, however, is similar to that which was recognised in process drama: the importance of learning how to speak, and the importance of language in constructing a reality. It also recognises the ‘devising’ implicit as the speaker constructs a speech, considering not just the words but emphasis, climax, volume, and other extra-linguistic features.

Counteracting such a view, Brander Matthews in 1903 attempted to secure a space for theatre which fitted with turn of the century “conventions of historical singularity and progressive continuity” in order to “give the same kind of spine, unity, categorisation, and evolution to drama that their departmental colleagues were doing in literature”.⁸¹ For such professors, the origins of theatre anthropology could be identified – locating and specifying theatre’s place in the world and thus simultaneously justifying its existence as a discipline. It is interesting to note how this shift echoes the attempt of Hornbrook and Abbs in the UK schools context to move from the unpredictable nature of process drama or rhetoric to the more secure territory of a prescribed curriculum, a curriculum that knows itself and its subject, a curriculum that knows its “cultural lexicon”,⁸² to use Hornbrook’s phrase once more. In such a conception there is not a focus on creating original material in the way that the ‘rhetorical’ strand could offer.

The economic reality of the contemporary world of this period, though, intruded into these conceptions. For all the creative process implicit within the

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.53

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.51

⁸¹ Ibid, p.60

⁸² Hornbrook, p.112

teaching of rhetoric, it “could be construed as a training ground for professional competence in law and business, [whereas] theatre’s model of ‘practice’ did not come with the clear capitalist promise of economic advancement”.⁸³ And nor did Matthews’ vision with its focus on discipline but not vocation. According to Anne Berkeley, there was a shift from justifying the subject in aesthetic terms in the first decade of the twentieth century (in opposition to the “crass, materialist democratisation of industrial society”)⁸⁴ to a skills based approach in the second decade. This shift towards a market-oriented curriculum was in line with social developments and a more highly marketised society. According to Berkeley there was a struggle between these two positions right through to the 1970s. There was a perhaps inevitable tension with “practical production [...spawning] a fettered and cumbersome method of knowledge making, one that did not match the pure and ascetic conventions of scholarly research”.⁸⁵

Interestingly, in Germany between 1780 and 1860, however, the economic context dictated a different conceptualisation of the discipline. State funding which emphasised the research career of the professors led to “a resolutely anti-professional pedagogy. Preprofessional studies were ridiculed as *Brotstudium* (literally, bread studies). The professors executed their assault on professionalism with vigour”.⁸⁶ By doing so, by separating their work from technical or skills based work, the German approach created a sense of their difference from and superiority over the technical. As Bourdieu argues in *Homo Academicus*, such an approach helps to provide security for the elite academic, however much they may feel outside the economic base of mainstream society:

[U]niversity professors are situated rather on the side of the subordinate pole of the field of power and are clearly opposed in this respect to the managers of industry and business. But, as holders of an institutionalised

⁸³ Jackson (2004), p.21

⁸⁴ Berkeley, p.214

⁸⁵ Jackson (2004), p.21

⁸⁶ Abbott, A (1988) *Systems of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (University of Chicago press), p.197, quoted in Jackson (2004), p.18

form of cultural capital, which guarantees them a bureaucratic career and a regular income, they are opposed to writers and artists.⁸⁷

In contrast the American system's strand of study which needed to supply a market with labour resulted in an attempt to justify itself economically, distinguishing itself from an academic curriculum. In both cases the conception of the subject justified itself by becoming clearly delineated, easier to define, and thus having a clearer sense of its own identity. Jackson argues that the subject has often manifested such tensions between the academic and the artist, with the artist caricatured as crude, unintellectual and compromised by the market; the academic caricatured as living in an ivory tower blissfully ignorant of the realities of the art form which s/he purports to teach.

However, as I have attempted to outline above, such characterisations are actually part of a bigger social picture and have shifted over time. Cultural and political contexts have influenced conceptualisations of the subject. In the Hornbrook debate in schools, both sides created a sense of an opposition to the academic for different reasons. Hornbrook positioned himself as a radical attempting to oppose any intellectual attempt to socially engineer art; Slade, Heathcote and Bolton positioned themselves as progressives attempting to oppose any intellectual project that would limit opening up the aesthetic and social opportunities that were available to children. And the shift towards the perspective offered by Heathcote and Bolton was itself in line with wider social shifts: in the late twentieth century the humanities shifted to be part of, Jackson suggests, an "acculturating curriculum [which] was responsible for exposing students to a realm of philosophical, imaginative and moral reflection",⁸⁸ which for her is linked to "the increasingly radical decade of the 1960s".⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Bourdieu, P (1988) *Homo Academicus* (trans. P. Collier) (Cambridge: Polity), p.36 quoted in Jackson (2004), pp.27-8

⁸⁸ Jackson (2004), p.25, citing J. Guillory (1993) *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)

⁸⁹ Jackson (2004), p.26

As such, a notion of the intellectual and the practical as being in an inherent binary opposition can be challenged. Rather, it is possible to see both as different perspectives on the subject significantly influenced by economic and political contexts. The importance of theoretical discussion (in the English and the German case where the academic has greater social import), or of practical creation (in the American case where the professional is key) is variously paramount. The notion of praxis, where the two co-exist, is ignored in favour of an approach which prioritises what is historically expedient. Instead, as I outlined in the Introduction and at the end of the section on schools, the separation of the two elements from being thought together, of developing a sense in which theory and practice can be conceived of as two sides of the same coin, is missing. What is missing in the vocational model is a sense of how the activity of drama or theatre can be considered as a social activity to be thought about; or in the academic model how the theory involved in literature studies might find a practical outlet. In both, what is missing is what Wickham visualised back in 1961: education as being about creating thinking students who are developing a holistic practice, or where what they do is analysed in relation to its wider social significance.

Drama, Theatre or Performance?

In tracing this varied history I have tried to outline a materialist approach that acknowledges the importance of historical context in influencing how subjects are conceptualised and how disciplines shift over time. Such an approach will also reflect the importance of the title used for the subject itself at any specific time as it seeks to articulate itself in different social contexts. As I have already suggested, following the work of Richard Schechner in particular, in academia there is currently a shift towards the term 'Performance' and 'Performance Studies' over 'Theatre Studies' and, even more markedly, 'Drama'. Jackson

summarises a teleological view of this shift from drama to theatre to performance thus: “The plot begins with “drama” as a discrete literary text, posits “theatre” as a larger production event, and defines performance as an even larger event of culture”.⁹⁰ From such a perspective the term ‘performance’ is seen as being broader and more inclusive than the specific ‘theatre’, which requires (at least for the vast majority of work considered under this term) conscious performers and audience: Richard Schechner, who was primary in introducing this new term, sees theatre as a “very small piece of the performance pie”.⁹¹ For Schechner, in contrast, “anything and everything can be studied ‘as’ performance”⁹² and with similar boldness he claims that “Before performance studies, Western thinkers believed they knew exactly what was and what was not ‘performance’. But in fact, there is no historically or culturally fixable limit to what is or is not performance”.⁹³ Performance Studies is framed here as a new and unique perspective, a prism through which a range of events can be analysed in order to reveal how they function culturally. It positions itself radically, as being able to challenge existing notions (things have changed since its invention, Schechner is claiming). He is aligning the field with cultural studies, anthropology and sociology in its ability to reflect on not just art but also how people live and indeed society itself,⁹⁴ meaning that the discourse is therefore pitched well to respond to any claim of it naturalising itself as a discourse since ‘Performance Studies’ can embrace self-reflexivity through studying itself as performance.

The broad perspective that Performance Studies appears to offer might, therefore, seem in line with my argument for a conception of devised theatre rooted in praxis, where theatre is part of a social picture. And like the term

⁹⁰ Jackson (2004), p.80

⁹¹ Schechner, R, no reference given, quoted in Jackson (2004), p.80

⁹² Schechner, p.1

⁹³ Ibid, p.2

⁹⁴ Jackson (2004), p.80

‘performance’, devised theatre has grown in popularity in the last twenty years.⁹⁵ And the link can be mapped further: Alison Oddey’s book, published in 1994, is titled *Devising Theatre*; Heddon and Milling’s book, published in 2006, is titled *Devising Performance*. Janelle Reinelt discusses how ‘performance’ has often been conceptualised as an opposition to ‘theatre’, as part of “a general history of the avant-garde or of anti-theatre, taking its meanings from a rejection of aspects of traditional theatre practice that emphasised plot, character and referentiality”,⁹⁶ and as I have indicated above such a history has been aligned with devised theatre. To quote Govan et al,

In this [Reinelt’s] conceptualisation, devised performance shows practitioners’ interest in exploring physicality before textuality, and in experimental ways of working that emphasise the creative freedom and spontaneity of both performers and spectators. This approach draws attention to the actual experiences of performers and audiences in the moment of performance where conventional boundaries between them are broken down. Theatre, by contrast, is concerned with representational space rather than everyday places, in creating imaginary characters and fictional worlds.⁹⁷

However, the notion of Performance Studies as inherently allowing for a fuller, more materialist analysis can, I will argue, be viewed in other ways. If, as Jackson asserts, there is a move to align Performance Studies with “the marginal, with the anti-canonical, and with disciplinary multiplicity”⁹⁸ whilst ‘drama’ and ‘theatre’ are posited in binary opposition to these terms, such moves “conveniently ignore the fact that oral interpretation and dramatic literature have had marginal canonical status in the humanities [and] effectively treat [...] a relatively subordinate field as dominant”.⁹⁹ She goes on to cite an example of an African playwright (from a theatrical tradition) who is far from being in any canonical position. She also notes the irony, as Bourdieu does in the quotation above, of Performance Studies

⁹⁵ See, for example, Govan et al, pp.3-4; Heddon and Milling, p.21

⁹⁶ Reinelt, p.202

⁹⁷ Govan et al, p.8

⁹⁸ Jackson (2004), p.24

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.24

professors who seek to define themselves as subversive within a university institution but enjoy professional security.¹⁰⁰

For both Shannon Jackson, and for Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis in their book *Drama/Theatre/Performance*, there is a more complex history to be written than one which posits Performance Studies as the ultimate endgame of the discipline, the term which is broadest in scope. Jackson notes how Francis Fergusson integrated anthropology into his early writings on Drama, seeing how it could be linked to ritual.¹⁰¹ Drama for Fergusson is not merely about text but also about a social activity. Both books also note the importance of the British cultural critic Raymond Williams in articulating drama as a discourse. His notion of “structures of feeling” was crucial to his work. It is defined in his book on *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* as follows:

It is as firm and definite as ‘structure’ suggests, yet it is based in the deepest and least tangible elements of our experience. It is a way of responding to a particular world which in practice is not... a ‘conscious’ way – but is, in experience, the only way possible. Its means, its elements are not propositions or techniques, they are embodied, related feelings.¹⁰²

For Fred Inglis the concept of structures of feeling could “grasp a cultural history as experience; that is to say, to interpret the movement of change caught and held in the peculiar lenses of art”.¹⁰³ There is a clear link here to Schechner’s Performance Studies project which seeks to explore the intersection between a performance and its culture. Far from the simplistic notion of drama as merely being ‘text’ that Jackson identifies, drama is here seen as a term rooted in social analysis. In this sense it can be linked to process drama in schools – human behaviour being explored through drama in complex ways. Making meanings through drama is a human activity that enables humans to reflect on their world.

¹⁰⁰ See above, pp.65-6. See Jackson (2004) p.9 and p.30 for further discussion of this paradox.

¹⁰¹ Fergusson, F (1949) *The Idea of the Theater: The Art of Drama in Changing Perspective* (Princeton University Press), cited in Jackson (2004), p.95

¹⁰² Williams, R (1973) *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p.10 quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.32

¹⁰³ Inglis, F (1995) *Raymond Williams* (London/New York: Verso), p.233 quoted in Jackson (2004), p.98

And it is also about the future: as the historical HMI document *Drama 5-16* quoted by Neelands suggests, “Through drama we recreate and examine people’s actions, including our own, and see both how they might have come about and *where they might lead*”.¹⁰⁴ If initially challenging, in time this drama can chime with its audience as, in Williams’ words, “offered meanings [become. . .] composed into new common meanings”.¹⁰⁵

‘Theatre’, like ‘drama’, can be seen in a light other than that of it being a subset of the larger ‘performance pie’ of ‘performance’. According to Carlson, the kind of avant-garde activities often described as ‘performance’ also have a lineage from theatre “cognate with performances in ‘the marketplace, the fairground, the circus’ or ‘private court entertainments, aristocratic salons and soirees”.¹⁰⁶ For Jackson, this link can be lost in the admiration of experimental tropes of performance art that are linked to the theoretical approaches espoused by Schechner and others, and it is lost because of a valorising of theory over practice which is similar to criticisms of Drama :

Some performance studies scholars might associate a “literary” method with an elite, textualist, anti-materialist study of modern drama. However, when some of the same performance studies scholars engage in de-contextualised analyses of the tropes of avant-garde performance art, it is not entirely clear who is being less materialist, which analyses are more text-based, or which performance forms are actually less “high”.¹⁰⁷

Bottoms notes that playwrights can and often do contribute more than just words on a page: theatre is “a three-dimensional event in which [...] language is one component part”.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the notion of a ‘text’ being present in a broader sense in both the terms ‘drama’ and ‘performance’ is taken up by Vanden Heuvel. He suggests that although ‘performance’ claims to move away from the text to a broader perspective which takes into account all aspects of the performance,

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Neelands, J (2010) ‘Learning Through Imagined Experience’, in O’Connor (ed.), p.36. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁵ Williams, p.49

¹⁰⁶ Carlson, M (1996) *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, pp.80-2, cited in Shepherd and Wallis, p.86

¹⁰⁷ Jackson (2004), p.82

¹⁰⁸ Bottoms (2011), p.26

when it “privileges ‘the spontaneous and physical activity of performing as an autonomous form of artistic expression’, it merely ‘substitutes one authoritarian locus of power for its opposite’. The Presence of the author is simply replaced by that of the performer”.¹⁰⁹ The prism of ‘performance’ may appear to offer a broader perspective, but in its focus on the event/performer itself, it may actually reinforce the centrality of the artist/author over the audience.

It is necessary, Vanden Heuvel seems to be suggesting, to recognise the need to see beyond both the written text and the performance event itself. Schechner seems to do this when he states that “[p]erformance isn’t “in” anything, but “between”, and he continues, “To treat any object, work, or product “as” performance [...] means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings”.¹¹⁰ In this he would seem to recognise the importance of the spectator in any analysis of the performance process. Yet this is perhaps even more explicitly foregrounded in the term ‘theatre’, which is usually defined in terms of the co-existence of conscious performers and conscious spectators. Indeed, it was this focus on the audience that caused Michael Fried to use the term “theatrical” to criticise contemporary (1960s) minimalist art. For Fried such art “introduced the concept of *presence*”¹¹¹ to an analysis of art, whereas modernist art, conceived by Greenberg as “self-legitimizing, totally self-contained and timeless, independent of the circumstances of it being witnessed”,¹¹² had value in itself. Minimalist art as conceived by Fried, on the other hand, only came into being when it was given presence, requiring a “special complicity” which is “extort[ed] from the beholder”.¹¹³ Such work for Fried lost its sense of relation to other artworks, depending instead on the specific

¹⁰⁹ Shepherd and Wallis, p.158, quoting M. Vanden Heuvel (1991) *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance: Alternative Theater and the Dramatic Text* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp.11-12. Original capitalisation.

¹¹⁰ Schechner, p.30

¹¹¹ Carlson, p.139. Original emphasis.

¹¹² Cited in Shepherd and Wallis, p.136

¹¹³ Fried, p.127, quoted in Carlson, p.139

relationship between the spectator's look at the artwork and the artwork itself. The necessity for the spectator's complicity in the art was for Fried a sign that the art had lost its intrinsic quality, and meant for him, in a now notorious statement, that "art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre".¹¹⁴ If theatricality is viewed as a degeneration of art, it is also refused the status of being a proper art form in itself: Fried states that "what lies *between* the arts is theatre".¹¹⁵

For Josette Féral, "theatricality can therefore be seen as composed of two different parts: one highlights performance and is made up of the realities of the imaginary; and the other highlights the theatrical and is made up of specific symbolic structures [...] Theatricality arises from the play between these two realities".¹¹⁶ She suggests that while both 'performance' and 'theatre' "deal with the imaginary, theatre freezes its objects because it is tied to the symbolic order", and instead suggests a form of performance which "sets them into play".¹¹⁷ For her theatre "was built upon the semiotic, built of representation, of signs of an absent grounding reality, while performance deconstructed the semiotic codes of theatre, creating a dynamic of "flows of desire" operating in a living present".¹¹⁸ Theatre here is seen as conventional, aligned with hegemony. Yet for Fried theatricality was a symbol of art moving away from convention; from quality art towards trite sensationalism. Whilst there is a distinction here between theatre and theatricality, the former being tied to a specific socio-historical conception of an art form and the latter an enactment, a quality, present in aspects of human behaviour in various ways, there is nonetheless an interesting contrast arising between these views of theatre and theatre-like behaviour. Philip Auslander comments on these different uses of the term as being discipline-specific:

That the term 'theatre' can function as a figure for an emerging postmodernism for Fried and as a figure of desiccated modernism for Féral

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.137

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.136. Original emphasis.

¹¹⁶ Féral (1982), p.178

¹¹⁷ Shepherd and Wallis, p.230. Original capitalisation.

¹¹⁸ Carlson, p.57 citing Féral (1982), p.178

is symptomatic of the medium-specificity of both arguments. In the context of the visual arts, Fried's theatricality is a postmodernism threatening to an established modernism; in the context of performance, theatricality is the modernism against which an emergent postmodernism defines itself.¹¹⁹

However, beyond discipline specificity the theatrical, for Jackson, has often been used as a term of criticism: "When being representational had been a bad thing in Western intellectual thought, it was theatrical. When being representational became a good thing, it was pictorial and textual – anything *but* theatrical".¹²⁰ Or, as Bottoms outlines in his essay 'The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid', there has been a "repulsion from theatre [...which] goes at least as far back as Plato".¹²¹ As Jackson says, "We might want to ask what we can learn about the fact that theatrical performance so often ends up on the negative side of a critical paradigm".¹²²

For Bottoms, this is partly because the 'fakeness' inherent in theatre is aligned with a lack of efficacy. It is seen as an unhelpful distraction from reality. Theatre generally knows where its walls are, and that what happens within its walls are "for show".¹²³ Schechner's vision, on the other hand, emphasises the dynamic, efficacious qualities of 'performance', as Jon Mackenzie echoes in his book *Perform or Else* (the title reflecting the use of the word 'perform' as an imperative in contemporary culture). Despite its inherent 'fakeness', if you can 'perform' on stage, just as if you can perform in the bedroom or in the boardroom, you are doing it "for real", not "for show". The term suggests an ability to achieve in reality. In comparison, the notion of 'theatre', which foregrounds the fictional rather than the actual qualities of the enactment, can be portrayed as impotent.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Auslander, P (1997) *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism* (London/New York: Routledge) p.56, quoted in Jackson (2004), p.143

¹²⁰ Jackson (2004), p.126

¹²¹ Bottoms (2003), p.174

¹²² Jackson (2004), p.144

¹²³ Bottoms (2003), p.174

¹²⁴ See Bottoms (2003), p.178

Sometimes even theatre artists themselves are reluctant to embrace the term. For example, in an interview Julian Maynard Smith from Station House Opera describes them as “*nearly* a theatre company. We definitely wanted to make a distinction between what we were doing and theatre as we perceived it”¹²⁵ – he later states “theatre has always been very conservative”.¹²⁶ And yet conversely he rejects the term ‘performance art’: “A lot of performance art does not really accept that as soon as you stand up as a performer in front of an audience, you’re kind of acting. It doesn’t really deal with the fakeness of it”.¹²⁷ In this Maynard Smith identifies a discomfort with any notion of ‘pure’ theatre or ‘pure’ performance (or performance art, to use his terminology), suggesting that there is an inherent theatricality in all performance.

Janelle Reinelt also sees the two as closely linked. She discusses how the concept of performance “makes visible the micro-processes of iteration and the non-commensurability of repetition [...] in order that we might stage theatricality”.¹²⁸ In other words, she suggests that the concept of performance embraces a self-consciousness, but that this self-consciousness is fused with the suspension of disbelief implicit in the theatrical attempt to represent a signified with a live signifier that is unerasable, irreducible. Referring to Derrida’s concept of iteration, she notes that a repetition is never a pure copy but is also unique, itself, physically present.¹²⁹ Reinelt is, however, wary of dismissing theatricality. And Féral states that theatricality serves a useful function “whereby the artist uses rhetoric (signs, codes, conventions, processes) that is then identified by the spectator. This perspective calls for a critical and analytical dimension, a certain distance from the object analysed, which allows for the processes of ostension,

¹²⁵ Quoted in Kaye, p.193. Original emphasis.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.202

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.203

¹²⁸ Reinelt, p.213

¹²⁹ Outlined in Harris, pp.13-16.

foregrounding, etc.”¹³⁰ This process of identification for the spectator is done through three “cleavages”, as Féral puts it: the spectator’s gaze which separates the event from the everyday, the presence of a real body with the fictional nature of what that body is doing, and the co-presence of the actor and the role.¹³¹ It is the ambiguous relation of theatre to reality that means it can reflect on it and allow the spectator to see the familiar through new eyes, acknowledging its “fakeness”, to quote Maynard Smith. However, the focus in ‘performance’ on a “physical present”-ness simultaneously suggests a recognition and embracing of each performance as an irreducible and unrepeatable event, an unrepeatability a considerable distance away from the contemporary trend towards West End shows which continue their runs for many years and franchise themselves across continents.

Both theatre and performance, then, are useful terms and both co-exist within the performance/theatrical event. To quote Féral,

Theatricality does not exist as a pure form, nor does performativity. If “pure theatricality” existed, it would be a repetitive, dead form of art, where all signs would be identifiable, decidable and meaningful [...] On the other hand, a performance based on performativity alone would be carried away by the action itself, without any possibility for the spectator to understand it as a meaningful process linked to signs, codes and references.¹³²

As with the distinction I mention above between theatre and theatricality, performativity is a complex term that, as Elin Diamond has pointed out, is not the same as performance.¹³³ The term ‘performative’ has roots in J.L. Austin’s *How to Do Things With Words*, which discussed performative speech as a dynamic utterance “to refer to the act-like character of language”,¹³⁴ as opposed to the ‘constative’ nature of most language based on statements. For Austin, performative speech *did* something, was efficacious: it “does not simply make a

¹³⁰ Féral (2002), p.8

¹³¹ Ibid. pp.10-12

¹³² Ibid, p.8

¹³³ Diamond, E. (ed.) (1996) *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge), cited in Shepherd and Wallis, p.222-3

¹³⁴ von Hantelmann, p.17

statement [...] but also performs an action”.¹³⁵ Despite his use of the word ‘act-like’, Austin quite explicitly excludes speeches in staged performances from this, because they are “hollow or void”,¹³⁶ containing no efficacy in reality. However, after Judith Butler’s definition of a ‘performative act’ as one which “produces reality not by virtue of will or intention, but precisely because it derives from conventions that it repeats and actualises”,¹³⁷ performative acts which exist wholly outside the theatrical frame can be seen as *only* rooted in reality – as lacking the subversive potential of an act created in the slippery space of theatrical frame, beyond the limitations of the frame of everyday social meaning. As von Hantelmann puts it, “While Performance Art, at least in its own constitutive self-understanding, was linked to the individual performer and the singular, autonomous act; performativity (in Butler’s sense) refers to a non-autonomous and non-subjectivist idea of acting”.¹³⁸ Theatricality is able to celebrate its fakeness, but in doing so it remains bounded within its theatrical frame.

In this debate one can see the limitations of both theatricality and performativity as concepts. Féral’s quotation on the ‘impurity’ of both is also useful in understanding both the potential and frustrations of work tending towards a pure notion of ‘theatre’ or ‘performance’ – the need for both signification and an awareness of the inevitable failure of the signification, the need to avoid the dull play repeated night after night without a sense of its unique ‘event-ness’, or of the performance that lacks contextualisation or a ‘way in’ for a spectator. It also helps to theorise Maynard Smith’s discomfort with being described as a company who make either theatre or performance art.

A similar ambiguity to Maynard Smith’s of the term ‘theatre’ can be noted in Tim Etchells’ description of Forced Entertainment’s work:

¹³⁵ Carlson, p.61

¹³⁶ Austin, p.181

¹³⁷ von Hantelmann, p.19 citing J. Butler (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge) and J. Butler (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge)

¹³⁸ von Hantelmann, p.19

We were, in the start of things, what is called a theatre company. But we were not very willing actors, stage-struck, or especially glad of centre stage.

You might say that we accepted the burden of liveness with some reluctance, or even with embarrassment, since liveness always seemed to involve some aspect of exposure. We accepted the burden of liveness – submitting to its economy of humiliations – its signs, its labels, its gazes, its routines and expectations [...]

We abandoned the rhetorical power of the stage, refusing the shelter afforded by theatre, preferring simply to be there, under the gaze.¹³⁹

What I think is interesting here is both the attraction to theatre and the desire to question it. Interestingly, this ambiguity reflects the frequent moving between the terms theatre and performance in Etchells' own writing (the company were originally called a theatre company, the subtitle to his book *Certain Fragments* on the company's work is "Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment", he uses both terms at different times in the book). Etchells' writing acknowledges theatre as being at the root of the company's work ("being centre stage", "exposure", "under the gaze") through an acknowledgement of the co-presence of the audience, despite resisting other aspects of it, particularly of the conventions of acting ("not willing actors", "abandoned the rhetorical power of the stage"). This centrality of the audience is what Fried resists in his writing about art ("the work extorts from the beholder") but in it dialogue is created between performer, audience and indeed amongst other audience members. This does not necessarily require interaction in a direct sense: as the artist Thomas Hirschhorn states "I do not want to do an interactive work. I want to do an active work. To me the most important activity that an art work can provoke is the activity of thinking".¹⁴⁰ (I shall discuss this further in Chapter Five, when I discuss Jacques Rancière's essay 'The Emancipated Spectator').

¹³⁹ Etchells (2004), p.211

¹⁴⁰ Hirschhorn, T quoted in J. Morgan (2003) *Common Wealth* (no publisher cited) p.63, quoted in Bishop (2004), p.76

This emphasis on the 'between' may make the theatre seem less 'pure' compared to other art forms, hence Fried's "What lies *between* the arts is theatre".¹⁴¹ Yet it is notable that Fried does not say that theatre lies *beyond* the arts, but *between*. The criticism is of theatre's transitory nature which lacks a clear identity, which shifts from one reality to another, which combines other purer forms within itself. Shepherd and Wallace write, discussing Féral's work, that 'performance' "lays bare theatricality", which is characterised as "an endless play of positions and desire".¹⁴² Like the term 'devising', which I explored in the previous chapter, theatricality here is seen as a fluid, shifting form. It is both real – really there in front of you, happening in real time - and not real. A similar notion is outlined in Laura Cull's introduction to *Deleuze and Performance*. She slips from the term 'performance' to 'theatre' within three pages without clearly signalling the shift. In doing so, she identifies links between each to the Deleuzian real (where the human is involved in an ongoing quest to "expand the notion of experience").¹⁴³ She sees Schechner's shift "from thinking in terms of discrete objects and subjects, towards a concern with processes, relations and happenings"¹⁴⁴ in both performance and in theatrical presence's live encounter, which allows for a possibility of "apprehend[ing] *ontological* presence as becoming".¹⁴⁵ Theatre is never quite one thing or the other. It is representational, staging the attempt to become real, but also 'really' there in front of the spectator. Even Schechner recognises a distinction between the performances of everyday life ("restored behaviour") from conscious performances ("restored restored behaviour", to use his terminology).¹⁴⁶

Shepherd and Wallis state that

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Shepherd and Wallis, p.136

¹⁴² Shepherd and Wallis, p.230

¹⁴³ Colebrook, p.81

¹⁴⁴ Cull, p.3

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p.5. Original emphasis.

¹⁴⁶ Schechner, p.35

[t]here is a distinction between ‘drama’ as art – aesthetic drama - and the performance of social interactions in everyday life. But the distinction tends to get blurred. When it happens, the slippage between aesthetic drama and social performance creates a sense that drama is important and powerful because it can express the ‘make-up of our species’.¹⁴⁷

The co-existence of theatre and performance is also acknowledged in Sara Jane Bailes’ use of the term ‘performance theatre’ to indicate a sphere “which demonstrates an intrinsic concern with presence [...] whilst acknowledging its parallels within a theatre tradition”.¹⁴⁸ I would argue that what is being discussed here is theatre – to cite Shepherd and Wallis, aesthetic drama – and the ways in which it both lives within and beyond everyday life. This is what Baz Kershaw, citing Victor Turner, describes as a “liminal role” for the participant who is “‘betwixt and between’ more permanent roles and modes of awareness” and the spectator who is allowed to “accept that the events of the production are both real and not real. Hence it is a ludic role (or frame of mind) in the sense that it enables the spectator to participate in playing around with the norms, customs, regulations, laws, which govern her life in society”.¹⁴⁹ Both ‘liminal’ and ‘ludic’ roles contain ambivalences and ambiguities that allow for reflection on one’s own sense of personal and social reality.

But the frame of ‘theatre’, rather than the more all-encompassing ‘performance’, enables this to be foregrounded as the event can be perceived as distinct from social behaviour; as part of social reality but not a full account of all reality, as *the* ‘real’. Theatre knows it is not reality, that it is ‘for show’. (I will discuss the distinction between the ‘real’ and reality further in Chapter Three). And the frame of devised theatre allows further for just such a distinction, whilst also offering the possibility of performers engaging in a process of creating their own roles and redefining the possibilities of what their body does, what words they might speak, how they might behave. Such a possibility cannot help but be

¹⁴⁷ Shepherd and Wallis, p.60

¹⁴⁸ Bailes, p.21

¹⁴⁹ Kershaw, p.24 quoted in Whybrow, p.285

political. Via a circuitous route it is also here that both process drama and devised theatre can be glimpsed again, an approach in which both process and product are important; where participants can be both inside and outside the fiction of the work, where they could be variously engaged in, to cite Neelands and Goode, “reflective action” or “context-building action”, “narrative action” or “poetic action”.

In theatre some people do and others watch. It tends towards a collective experience, like the classroom in process drama. As students in process drama shift from discussion to performer to spectator in a classroom, they are negotiating meanings through theatre, taking on both the role of performer and spectator, and exploring the “between-ness” that I have tried to articulate as a specific feature of theatre. It is also here that devised theatre rears its head in its ambiguous relation towards ownership; where the performers might seem to have created the work but have only done so within a history and a tradition; where an understanding of the work needs to understand both the process and the performance event.

Performers create perspectives that will inevitably be based on their own experiences and embody them in performance, but these are nonetheless framed as not real through the theatrical frame. As participants in devised theatre develop a performance, they develop work in which they are more likely to have a stake than in conventional notions of theatre where their role is reduced to a singular activity: actor, director, writer. In devised theatre boundaries between process and the performance start to dissolve, there is more likely to be the opportunity to define roles, language and physicalities than in more formalised models, and participants can explore the boundaries between the life they participate in and the art they participate in.

If, ultimately however, it may seem that I am still holding on to the ‘drama’ of process drama and the awareness of the performance event in ‘performance’, then it is because I, like Féral and Reinelt discussing theatre and performance, do not believe that it is an either/or between these three terms. I have tried in this

section to illustrate how each term can contribute to an understanding of what happens when human beings do something that we might call consciously perform. In the rest of this thesis I will seek to define my own model of theatre, a model which I believe can maintain both artistic integrity and a social function. I will try to articulate how this model can be conceived of as praxis, a human practice that is intrinsically linked to a theoretical perspective.

Conclusion – Part One

In Part One I have tried to unpick some of the assumptions about the discourses of devised theatre and theatre pedagogy through an overview of their traditions and histories, in order to demonstrate that the concepts of both are not fixed but fluid, and have shown considerable shifts over time. This shifting reflects the contingent nature of the discourses and suggests the possibility of articulating a variety of pedagogies for devised theatre. I further attempted to suggest that devised theatre is a discourse that particularly resists definition, being able to incorporate a huge range of practices under its umbrella.

As such, I want to propose that pedagogy and devised theatre are open to a wider range of conceptualisation than is often considered. In Part Two I will explore three frames through which to conceptualise devised theatre: language, creativity, and finally as a social practice.

PART TWO –

FRAMES

FOR

CONCEPTUALISING

DEvised

THEATRE

CHAPTER THREE - LANGUAGE AND ART

In Part Two I aim to consider three perspectives through which artistic practice, including devised theatre, might fruitfully be viewed: language, creativity, and finally as a social practice. Although I will attempt to link these to devised theatre practice in the chapters, I will often situate devised theatre within a more general conception of artistic creation. By doing so I hope to question and illustrate potential conceptions of the purpose and function of art. In the final section of the third chapter in particular, however, I aim to demonstrate why I believe devised theatre to be an artistic frame where the perspectives offered in this part of the thesis can be explored particularly fruitfully.

Language As Structure, Language As Liberation

Many contemporary critics from a range of differing perspectives agree that language is central to the experience of being alive. Lacan suggests that “our language ‘stands in’ for objects: all language is in a way ‘metaphorical’, in that it substitutes itself for some direct, wordless possession of the object itself” in “an endless process of difference and absence”.¹ This substitution was also noted by Hegel, who said that language “has the divine nature of directly reversing the meaning of what is said, of making it into something else, and thus not letting what is meant get *into words* at all”.² Language cannot grasp the thing itself. It is how humans try to express and evoke things and concepts, but it can never be totalising. According to Terry Eagleton, this means that for Lacan “we can never mean precisely what we say and never say precisely what we mean”.³ In this ambiguity, according to Derrida, language offers “an endless deferral of meaning,

¹ Eagleton (1983), p.166-7

² Hegel, G.W.F. (1977) *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. A. V. Miller) (Oxford: University Press) quoted in Belsey, p.27. Original emphasis.

³ Eagleton (1983), p.169

and any search for an essential, absolutely stable meaning must therefore be considered metaphysical".⁴

This deferral of meaning is developed further when one considers that in language the speaker is not the sole creator of meaning: the listener also bears part of the responsibility. If this shifts the emphasis away from the idea of the speaker being able to always be understood, then it also suggests, as Roland Barthes' famous essay argues, that 'The Death of the Author' offers "the birth of the reader".⁵ As Stanley Fish suggested, "what the text does to us [...] is actually a matter of what we do to it, a question of interpretation".⁶ From such a perspective language is a process of communication between two people, and sometimes between a person and themselves, which is trying to make sense of the world. This means that, to quote Toril Moi's discussion of Julia Kristeva, language "is a complex signifying *process* rather than a monolithic *system*":⁷ like Derrida's "endless deferral of meaning", it is never finite but constantly open to negotiation. Lacan's idea of language 'standing in' is similarly premised on the difference between the word and the object, but it also reflects an inherent ambiguity in language, where the word represents different things to different people.

The sorts of definitions that prevail in any given climate are thus open to change and challenge. Chris Weedon summarises a range of poststructuralist critics by saying that language "is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested".⁸ And de Saussure's suggestion that "far from reflecting an already given social reality, [language] constitutes social reality for us"⁹ importantly suggests the centrality of language to how we perceive. If it is not a

⁴ Moi, p.9

⁵ Barthes (1988), p.172

⁶ Quoted in Eagleton (1983), p.85

⁷ Moi, p.152. Original emphasis.

⁸ Weedon, p.21

⁹ Cited in Weedon, p.22

neutral signifying system but something which at least partly constructs a human being's perception, changing it will change how we understand. From this perspective language has a dual nature: it both pre-exists us and is also used by us. Language can be seen as a creative act, creating concrete words for objects and also more abstract concepts such as emotions, which thus creates our reality/realities. Heidegger outlined this conception of language doing more than just deal with objects and things when he stated that "while it indicates what is sayable, language also brings the unsayable into the world".¹⁰ In a different context (a book aimed at organisational development *The Three Laws of Performance*), Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan summarise this: "Language is the means through which your future is already written. It is also the means through which it can be rewritten".¹¹ Like de Saussure, they recognise that the way language is used can determine the reality of the world experienced by those who speak and those who listen. What they call "descriptive language" – "using language to depict or represent things as they are or have been"¹² is "what binds and constrains us".¹³ They contrast this with "future based language" or "generative language",¹⁴ the "most fundamental" example of which "is a declaration, which brings a possible future into existence. A declared future is not a dream of a hope, but a future to which you commit yourself".¹⁵ For Zaffron and Logan the act of declaring is an act that does something, like Austin's notion of a "performative" utterance outlined in the previous chapter, which "does not simply make a statement [...] but also performs an action".¹⁶ Through such utterances language does not just create meaning but can also make things happen.

¹⁰ Belsey, p.xii, citing M.Heidegger (1971) *Poetry, Language, Thought* (trans. A. Hofstadter) (New York: Harper & Rowe), p.74

¹¹ Zaffron and Logan, p.38

¹² Ibid, p.68

¹³ Ibid, p.74

¹⁴ Ibid, p.69

¹⁵ Ibid, p.81

¹⁶ Carlson, p.61

For the speaker who is trying to make herself understood or the listener who is trying to understand, such a view has the attraction of offering agency. As Chris Weedon puts it, the subject “speaks or thinks as if she were in control of meaning. She ‘imagines’ that she is indeed the type of subject which humanism proposes – rational, unified, the source rather than the effect of language”.¹⁷ For this subject “experience is what [she] think[s] and feel[s] in any particular situation and it is expressed in language”.¹⁸ Yet as de Saussure realised, language also constrains. Words exist before us and if we are trying to communicate we have to use words that are already in currency. We speak to express our subjectivity and yet simultaneously participate in a language process which precedes us. As Catherine Belsey puts it, from this perspective “participating in culture as we do, we lose our individuality in a form of cultural determinism that has in the end, no way of accounting for dissent”.¹⁹

Language, then, limits us and yet it is how we express ourselves. This paradox, or at least duality, is illustrated in Derrida’s discussion of the work of Antonin Artaud. In Artaud’s work, particularly *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud seeks to theorise a theatre that moves away from language. In Derrida’s understanding of Artaud, Artaud “sought a theatre that was no longer governed by speech in the discursive sense, seeking instead a metaphysical brand of speaking”.²⁰ For Artaud, like Belsey above, “language, discursive thought, and indeed traditional symbolic systems in general” function “as structures of repetition deriving their power and authority ultimately from some originary essence or event”.²¹ This ‘repetitive’ nature of language (similar to Derrida’s notion of the “endless deferral of meaning” in language) is something Artaud resists and in contrast he, according to Derrida, posits a Theatre of Cruelty which is “life itself, in

¹⁷ Weedon, p.31

¹⁸ Ibid, p.85

¹⁹ Belsey, p.28

²⁰ Jackson (2004), p.119

²¹ Carlson, p.149

the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of a representation ... Theatrical art should be the primordial and privileged site of this destruction of imitation”.²² According to Shepherd and Wallis he calls “for a theatre of pure presence to defeat representation”,²³ shifting from the abstraction of language to the presence of bodies. In doing so, however, Derrida illustrates a problem: that Artaud here assumes that there is something which lies beyond language. Artaud’s desire for the stage to show the present, “the principle of immediacy [which] is aligned with Life”,²⁴ itself assumes an origin, a time before language.

However Derrida recognises, according to Marvin Carlson, that “escape from repetition (and thus theatre) is impossible, that consciousness itself is always already involved in repetition”.²⁵ For Derrida, language functions through a process of iterability. Each time a word is spoken it repeats previous articulations of that word, it references its history. At the same time, however, it is a unique iteration. Every repetition is different. In this uniqueness, a “power to act, however small, presents itself”.²⁶ We act and perceive in relation to previous experience, by distinguishing one event or thing from another. There is no such thing as original speech: language is a structure that precedes us. At the same time, however, it is a structure in a constant process of negotiation, as Moi recognises above. This notion is taken further by Judith Butler. Recognising the structuring of experience through not only language but through other signifying systems such as the performance of gender, Butler “extends this model to action in general”.²⁷ All aspects of human behaviour and interaction are involved in iterative processes that both potentially constrain and liberate. As von Hantelmann writes, “In view of the individual ability to act, the necessity of the

²² Jackson (2004), p.118

²³ Shepherd and Wallis, p.227

²⁴ Ibid, p.228

²⁵ Carlson, p.149

²⁶ von Hantelmann, p.104

²⁷ Ibid, p.104

repetition of, and integration into, particular conventional structures is both restrictive and constitutive here".²⁸

Artaud's notion of language as being different to other signifying systems is challenged here. As noted in the previous chapter, the body is in culture just as language is in culture. And language, like the body, can function as a creative act as well as a limiting one.

Language As Creative Act

The paradox of language as both constricting and creative is illustrated in Artaud's own practice. Although Artaud is articulating the possibility of a theatre beyond language as it is conventionally understood, he articulates this possibility *in* language. And ironically, his own practice was at best partially successful²⁹ and he is best known for his abstract theories which are constructed in language, albeit theories which are difficult to pin down. Artaud's own ideas exist as a challenge to language within language; they illustrate language as a site of contestation whilst also being a site of imprisonment. And this struggle is clear in Artaud's own poems where language is stretched to its poetic limits and at least partly used for its sound qualities rather than to convey meaning in a direct way.³⁰

A notion of language as a creative act is foregrounded by several writers. The playwright and theatre theorist Howard Barker, for example, writes about "the performer grinding on the complexity of text",³¹ suggesting that an actor coming into collision with a character's speech in a playtext can find ways of articulating and discovering the self. He gives the example of the actor Nigel Terry who when performing in Barker's *The Bite of the Night*

contended with the most complex motivations that were not always explicit in the text. He found these by excavating himself, by going deeper into

²⁸ Ibid, p.104

²⁹ See for example Bermel, pp.80-1; Esslin, p.88

³⁰ See for example N. Greene, p.155-7

³¹ Barker, p.24

self than actors are required to go [...] He controlled the language without being controlled by it [...]he] showed the character Savage employing rhetoric as part of his own creative and imaginative world.³²

For Barker, in this example the actor is liberated by the language he is given: it offers the actor an opportunity to explore the self, and to attempt to create the world around him. The actor Ian McDiarmid explains this thus: “In [Barker’s] work, each word is an action. He writes with performance energy at the forefront of his consciousness”.³³ Here Austin’s notion of a performative utterance on stage as an “etiolation”³⁴ of language is challenged. The words do something: their poetry enables the actor to explore through performance rather than reproduce, to bring something into being.

For the French theorist Jacques Rancière, speech acts such as “political statements and literary locutions [...] take hold of bodies and divert them from their end or purpose [...] they introduce lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies”.³⁵ In his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* Rancière gives another example of creative language offering something – in his words, the possibility of “emancipation”.³⁶ He outlines the work of Joseph Jacotot, a French teacher who had to teach Flemish students who spoke no French the novel *Télémaque*. Jacotot’s own ignorance of Flemish meant that his ability to do this was limited, but he discovered that the students taught themselves a complex text despite these handicaps because of their *will* to learn. For Rancière the “intelligence of the book [...] was also the thing in common, the egalitarian intellectual link between master and student”.³⁷ Exploring and trying to understand the book, Rancière suggests, “seal[ed] a new relation between two ignorant people who recognise each other from that point on as intelligent beings”.³⁸ The

³² Ibid, p.64

³³ McDiarmid, p.96

³⁴ Austin, p.181

³⁵ Rancière (2004), p.39

³⁶ Rancière (1991), p.13

³⁷ Ibid, p.13

³⁸ Ibid, p.38

conventional hierarchical relationship of teacher and student was reconceived as an emancipatory mutual journey of discovery where “a pure relationship of will to will had been established between master and student”.³⁹ The student’s will to go on this journey was aroused because of their desire, to use Barker’s words, to “grind on the complexity of the text”.

For Rancière this equality is not something to be achieved; rather it is an assumption, a point of departure. Rancière himself uses language here to create something – not a truth, but an opinion. He says, “We grant you that an opinion is not a truth [...] The only mistake would be to take our opinion for the truth. Admittedly, this happens all the time. But this is precisely the one way that we want to distinguish ourselves (we others, the followers of the madman): we think that our opinions are opinions and nothing more”.⁴⁰ Reminding his reader that languages are an “arbitrary”⁴¹ attempt to communicate experience that can never tell the truth, he states that truth “exists independently from us and does not submit itself to our piecemeal sentences”.⁴² In this sense all communicative language is an act of translation from one person’s experience to another person’s understanding: “the relation between two ignorant people confronting the book they don’t know how to read is simply a radical form of the effort one brings every minute to translating and counter-translating thoughts into words and words into thoughts”.⁴³ Any human’s ability to communicate experience is partial, and bears no relation to the quality of the ideas or feelings the communication springs from. Indeed, Rancière gives the example of a mother whose son returns from a war whose complexity and depth of emotion is exactly what makes the experience difficult to communicate.⁴⁴ It is in such situations that one is most present to both the richness of human experience and the equality of intelligence implicit in the

³⁹ Ibid, p.13

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.45

⁴¹ Ibid, p.60

⁴² Ibid, p.58

⁴³ Ibid, p.63

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.68

universal impossibility of full comprehension of another: he states that “one must learn near those who have worked in the gap between feeling and expression, between the silent language of emotion and the arbitrariness of the spoken tongue, near those who have tried to give voice to the silent dialogue the soul has with itself, who have gambled all their credibility on the bet of the similarity of minds”.⁴⁵ In such an approach the limitations of language are embraced in an understanding of language as a process. The subject attempts to apprehend the universe, both what is perceivable and often what is not, but recognises the limited tools at their disposal. According to Terry Eagleton, “[t]o enter language is to be severed from what Lacan calls the ‘real’, that inaccessible realm which is always beyond the reach of signification, always outside the symbolic order”.⁴⁶ This concept of the ‘real’ is to be distinguished from ‘reality’: what we see around us every day which is a subjective and contingent reality limited to our perceptions. Belsey puts it thus: “[T]he real is there, but precisely *not*-there-for-a-subject, not accessible to human beings who are *subject* to the intervention of language”.⁴⁷ And Zaffron and Logan pithily state that “We are not saying that there is nothing “out there” beyond our language. But whatever is beyond our language is not accessible to us”.⁴⁸ Like Artaud, one might attempt to access it, but this can never be fully possible. This notion of the real “is not nature [...] nor a fact [...], still less is it a truth [...] On the contrary, the real is a question, not an answer”.⁴⁹ There is always something in the real that the subject cannot know, even when attempting to use language to understand something, since language itself cannot fully contain the real.

Language, in fact, does not really contain anything, but is a signifying system. It is

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.68

⁴⁶ Eagleton (1983), p.168

⁴⁷ Belsey, p.5

⁴⁸ Zaffron and Logan, p.193

⁴⁹ Belsey, p.14

'empty' because it is just an endless process of difference and absence: instead of being able to possess anything in its fullness, the child [or indeed adult] will now simply move from one signifier to another, along a linguistic chain which is potentially infinite [...] This potentially endless movement from one signifier to another is what Lacan means by desire. All desire springs from a lack, which it strives continuously to fill.⁵⁰

We will sometimes sense a lack of ability to say what we mean or to understand what we perceive, but in the attempt to speak or understand lives desire. For Belsey, "When the little human animal becomes a symbolising subject, something is left out of what language permits it to say. Its demands, in other words, belong to the alien language not to the organism, and the gap between the two constitutes the location of unconscious desire".⁵¹ Like Rancière's notion of the importance of will for the student confronting *Télémaque*, this desire is productive; the desire creates a need to address the gap, what is lacked, even if the nature of that lack is not clear.

For Belsey this gap of desire is filled with "human culture" – it is "the only hope of a rapprochement between the symbolic and the real".⁵² It is in the desire to grasp the real – which as I shall discuss later is doomed to fail - that human beings create culture, to try and understand, master it: in Belsey's concise comment, "make things".⁵³ She states, "We might even want to say that the absence of the real is the motive for culture",⁵⁴ noting examples such as Freud's renowned notion of civilised discontent. In the struggle to recover the real lies the possibility of agency for the subject – even though any agency is within the constraints of the signifying systems that exist. The poet Robert Frost describes the genesis of art thus: "A poem begins as a lump in the throat, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It finds the thought and the thought finds the words".⁵⁵ This "lump in the throat" can be seen as a symptom of the desire Belsey is discussing – the

⁵⁰ Eagleton (1983), p.167

⁵¹ Belsey, p.13

⁵² Ibid, p.147

⁵³ Ibid, 148

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp.18-19

⁵⁵ Quoted in Abbs (ed.), p.55

sense of not being able to fully express oneself. Yet in the desire to express themselves the poet forges a poetic attempt, an attempt which paradoxically conveys their agency through the difficulty of expressing themselves clearly through the limited language available to them.

Language As Social Act

Another artist who sought to find creative ways of engaging with this gap was Brecht. He sought to both embrace the reality (in the broadest sense) of human existence, whilst recognising the need to creatively explore modes of representation in order to avoid reproducing, or as Artaud might have put it, repeating, what already culturally exists: “We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources to render reality to men in a form they can master”.⁵⁶ The desire to understand reality is channelled into art. For Brecht this was a political mission – part of his ‘scientific’ project which “tr[ies] to understand [...] tries to bring [something] into some relationship with the other things that he has seen” as a precursor to political change.⁵⁷ For Brecht artistic abstraction is not a shift away from reality but a means of understanding reality:

If art reflects life it does so with special mirrors. Art does not become unrealistic by changing the proportions but by changing them in such a way that if the audience took its representations as a practical guide to insights and impulses it would go astray in real life. It is of course essential that stylization should not remove the natural element but should heighten it.⁵⁸

By exploring new possibilities of communication, art fills the inevitable gap which exists as a result of the impossibility of grasping the ‘real’, and by doing so reflects on what can be known in ways that can bring new understanding. The experience for the participants – maker or viewer – can be significant. To quote Kate Love,

⁵⁶ Brecht, B (2007) ‘Against Georg Lukács’, in Adorno et al, p.81

⁵⁷ Brecht (1974), p.27

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.204

art can offer an experience which is akin to a “negotiation *with* language”,⁵⁹ again emphasising language as a process. If one accepts Bakhtin’s definition of language as “a field of ideological contention” where indeed there is “no language which [is] not caught up in definite social relationships, and that these social relationships were in turn part of broader political, ideological and economic systems”,⁶⁰ this process can be seen as a political act, an act that functions as a creation of new possible meanings. From this perspective, creating culture or art in the gap between what can and can’t be said, developing and creating new ways of behaving and speaking and making, can develop new ways of understanding and thinking about what is currently not known. As I have already suggested, devised theatre may be a particularly potent vehicle for such a creation, offering as it does not just the creation of objects (as in painting or sculpture) or the speaking of someone else’s words (as in a conventional playscript) but rather a tendency towards an embodied articulation of possibilities by human beings of moving, speaking and relating to others in ways beyond current signifying systems.

When a work of art cannot be readily explained in existing linguistic terms, it may then be difficult to comprehend. As Susan Sontag suggests in *Against Interpretation*, there may be a distinction between manifest content on the surface and the latent content which lies beneath - “the true meaning”.⁶¹ For Sontag this meaning is subjective and for her, as for Barker, “art is a problem of understanding”⁶² rather than a journey to understanding. The role is not to decode and understand, but “to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more”. For Sontag this means that “in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art”.⁶³ In this ‘erotic recovery’ lies a process of shifting existing

⁵⁹ Love, p.169. Original emphases.

⁶⁰ Eagleton (1983), p.117

⁶¹ Sontag, p.7

⁶² Barker, p.71

⁶³ Sontag, p.14

limits of what is understood, felt and sensed. A process is undertaken which doesn't have a clear end. Like Belsey's notion of culture in which the real is attempted to be reached, there is no end point. The endlessness of desire inherent in the endless inability to comprehend the real is embraced. Similarly, Lyotard invokes Kant's term "sublime" to propose art that does not seek to tell us something about the world (Sontag's 'manifest' content) but "instead asks, 'Is it happening?'"⁶⁴ For Lyotard this is the question that totalitarian regimes seek to avert, and for him sublime art which provokes reactions, and works on what it is not possible to currently speak in language, is socially important.⁶⁵

For Raymond Williams, a critic from a different social context, the artist's role is also crucial for society. He states that "the special nature of the artist's work is his use of a learned skill in a particular kind of transmission of experience".⁶⁶ The arts function as "developments from general communication"⁶⁷ as the artist channels responses to contemporary experience into artistic media with a "substantial number of the offered meanings [becoming...] composed into new common meanings, though after initial disturbance and with a time-lag that again makes us conscious of the fact of change".⁶⁸ Here the artist's new creative act which "develops [...] general communication", which expands existing possibilities of what it is possible to say, is seen as being in the vanguard of the creation of new meanings and potential methods of social organisation. Although at first there may be a time when the artist's work is not part of "common meanings", it may become that over time after, to use Williams' words, a "time-lag" and even "disturbance".

⁶⁴ Belsey, p.126

⁶⁵ This can also be connected to Roland Barthes' notion of the text of *jouissance*, or bliss, which "imposes a state of loss' and 'brings to a crisis' the reader's 'relation with language'" (quoted in Belsey, p.121). This "blissful" text can open up new possibilities for the reader.

⁶⁶ Williams, p.42

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.40

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.49

It is important, however, to consider the possibility of art working on the unconscious in a way that is not progressive, or of creating meanings and potential methods of organisation that are not healthy, socially benevolent or democratic. Terry Eagleton outlines, for example, the ways in which the poet T.S.Eliot's "bypass[ing] the deadly abstractions of rationalist thought" resulted in the poem going "stealthily to work on [the reader] in more physical and unconscious ways". His attempt to "select words with 'a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires'"⁶⁹ would, for Eagleton, engage with mythology at the expense of a materialistic awareness of historical reality. Whilst I personally find Eliot's poetry an evocative and haunting depiction of a broken world which functions as a call to arms to create a more purposeful existence, it is essential to be aware that the ambiguities which I am suggesting may exist in art will be perceived differently by different people; to consider how it is communicating, to whom, and in what context. As with language, interpreting art can be seen as a process. As Sandra Kemp notes, citing Walter Benjamin, "the art-object [is] a temporal matter, a becoming-object rather than a being-object. Interpretation is always a process of bringing-into-being".⁷⁰ She points out that music and dance problematise a notion of art as being about "finding the meaning": "[N]either music nor dance is in any simple way a language; neither is necessarily about anything' neither clearly 'represents' or 'imitates'. In the making of musical or dance meaning the immediate 'mystified' response of the viewer/listener is the reader response that matters".⁷¹ I would however suggest that if music and dance are not in a "simple" way a language, they can be seen as a *form* of language: for Jack Mezirow, "Art, dance and music are alternative languages".⁷² They employ signs, but signs which are less easily decoded than

⁶⁹ Eagleton (1983), pp.40-1

⁷⁰ Kemp, p.155

⁷¹ Ibid, p.155

⁷² Mezirow, p.6

words; signs that are inherently ambiguous. Their abstraction may be what can engage more closely with what it is difficult to say – Belsey's 'real'. In the same way that Eliot can be perceived differently by different people in different social contexts, that *Télémaque* causes the student and the master to struggle to understand, or that Artaud's poetry or Barker's language explore what it is possible to say, they exist as objects or products in the gap between the subject and the real that Belsey characterises as culture, but are experienced as part of a process. As I suggested in the previous chapter, process and product might not be separate but something to examine together. The work of art and the process of perception, like the word and the way it is perceived, both need to be taken into account when attempting to understand what is happening in any example of communication.

Theatre, the subject of this thesis, is inherently temporary and difficult to construct as a "being-object" precisely because it is never still; there is no tangible object. It is perhaps easier to imagine theatre as a "becoming-object", where it exists in a constantly becoming moment between performer and audience. Theatre, then, might be an art form particularly well suited to reflecting the slippery process of language where meaning is never totalising, and where both speaker and listener are foregrounded in an awareness of the importance of process.

In this chapter I have tried to suggest that art exists in the gap of desire created through the impossibility of language ever being able to fully contain the real. I have outlined language as both a structure and as a creative process within which lies a potential for creative agency that is potentially socially significant. In the next section I will discuss creativity itself as reflecting, like language, that human beings both exist in structures and have the opportunity for agency within those structures. I will attempt to explore how human beings might create within the limitations available to them.

CHAPTER FOUR - CREATIVITY AND ART

Definitions

In the previous chapter, I explored how language can offer a prism through which art can be understood. I suggested that art is created in the human desire to grasp the real, in the creative attempt to communicate with other human beings and to understand the self. In this chapter I attempt to explore creativity itself. As in the previous chapter with language, I will explore theories pertaining to creativity generally before applying these theories more specifically to art. I also want to problematise assumptions that are often made about the term, and seek to outline and justify the approaches that I find most convincing and useful for my thesis. I will then go on to discuss the significance of concepts of creativity for art and theatre more specifically.

If, as I outlined in Chapter One, Catherine Belsey suggests we “lose our individuality” as we “participat[e] in culture”¹, then this participation is nonetheless a creative act: “creativity is the project of culture”², she claims. She points out that the Cartesian notion that “I think therefore I am” is a paradox: the self may be “free to have personal opinions, make choices, follow its own logic”, but it can only do so within the “prison”³ of the self which cannot know everything that exists. Creative acts for her, then, are not purely liberational but also limited, caught as all human behaviour is within what it is possible to see and say in any particular society. Indeed, a central idea underpinning this chapter is that creativity is not something that happens in a vacuum, but something that exists within social structures. Nonetheless, how people participate in language and in culture, however limited it may be, *is* still something about which they are “free to have personal opinions, make choices, follow [their] own logic”.⁴ Creativity, like

¹ Belsey, p.28

² Ibid, p.71

³ Ibid, p.21

⁴ Ibid, p.21

language, is a complex concept involving both individual and society, freedom and constraint.

The term creativity is currently of great interest, with critics from a variety of traditions staking claims to the term. According to the publication *Rhetorics of Creativity*, these

emerge from different theories of learning, different contexts (artistic, bureaucratic, pedagogic, political), different artistic traditions (fine arts, popular arts, different art forms, commercial art), different academic or quasi-academic traditions (liberal-humanist literary theory; aesthetics; philosophy; psychology; communication and media studies; cultural studies) and different policy contexts (social inclusion; vocational education; gifted and talented).⁵

This range of perspectives brings Banaji et al to a deliberate choice of the term “*Rhetorics of Creativity*”. For them “creativity is to be seen more productively through these rhetorics than through narrow and unchanging characterisations that seek to endorse particular definitions [and which make] different stances more entrenched and more difficult to reconcile and debate”.⁶ Seeing creativity as a rhetoric confirms the term as being “mobilised, or ready to be mobilised, in the interests of intervention in practice or policy”:⁷ like any concept, it is open to redefinition by different people in different contexts. Coupled with Raymond Williams’ warning that “the width of the reference [‘creative’] involves not only difficulties of meaning, but also, through habit, a kind of unthinking repetition which at times makes the word seem useless”⁸ leads me to want to be precise about how I wish to “mobilise” the term in my own writing.

Rhetorics of Creativity states that it aims to consider four key questions as a means of exploring the term ‘creativity’:

whether creativity is an internal cognitive function or an external cultural phenomenon; whether it is a ubiquitous human activity or a special faculty; whether it is inevitably ‘pro-social’ (oriented towards social conformity

⁵ Banaji et al, p.5

⁶ Ibid, p.5

⁷ Ibid, p.6

⁸ Williams, p.19

and/or culturally specific, accepted definitions of collective well-being) or can be dissident or even anti-social; and what the implications are for a creative model of teaching and learning.⁹

It is worth considering at the outset how assumptions about creativity are implicit even in the formulation of these questions. Banaji et al imply that they propose to discover, in three out of four of these questions, where to place creativity between two opposing binaries. In contrast, Paul Kleiman's definition of creativity as "a creative product produced by a creative person engaged in a creative process within a creative environment"¹⁰, whilst being a highly partial definition,¹¹ is interesting in that it re-imagines Banaji et al's conception of a binary opposition between individual/social context. It also re-imagines the oft-cited opposition, or at least distinction, between process/product (which I will return to later), instead seeing all four aspects as part of the creative process.¹²

I will seek to address these first three questions within this chapter, particularly focusing on the link between the social and the individual. I will also pay particular attention to the interface between process and product, and between the arts and creativity. In Chapter One of this thesis I suggested that devised theatre is an art form in which both a performance event and creative process can be seen as vital determinants of the final work. These aspects therefore seem particularly pertinent. The implications of these theoretical discussions on devised theatre and pedagogy I will address at length in the next chapter when I explore art as a social practice.

In her essay 'What Is Creativity?' Margaret A. Boden distinguishes between first-time novelty and radical originality. She states, "a merely novel idea is one that can be described and/or produced by the same generative rules as are

⁹ Banaji et al, p.4

¹⁰ Kleiman (2005), p.5.

¹¹ For example, if no product is produced does this really mean creativity is not happening?

¹² This way of approaching the subject could be argued to suggest a capacity for divergent thinking, outlined as one of the principal factors of creative individuals by Csikszentmihalyi ("[Creativity] involves flexibility, or the ability to switch from one perspective to another; and originality in picking unusual associations of ideas" (p.60)

other, familiar, ideas. A genuinely original or radically creative idea is one that cannot".¹³ In this she emphasises the significance of creativity being something that significantly transforms existing concepts beyond existing conceptions of what is likely or possible. This relates to her distinction between 'H' and 'P' creativity, 'H' being something historically recognised as creative, 'P' being something that is new and creative for the person who has had the potentially creative idea or done the potentially creative act, but would not be considered creative from a broader cultural perspective.¹⁴

In both these ideas she emphasises the significance of creativity challenging existing norms; in her 'H and P' concept she emphasises the significance of challenging norms from a social and a personal perspective respectively. For Boden, then, something may be creative for the individual that is doing it, but for it to be widely recognised as creative – or to be radically original - it will have to be recognised as such by others.

In this analysis creativity is a universal concept accessible to all, at least as conceived by 'P-creativity'. Someone thinks of something in a way that challenges their existing rationality, discovers something that is new to them, thinks of a new way of doing something or sees something in a new way. However, for something to be widely recognised as creative it must not challenge just one's own existing understanding but also that of others: to quote Jonathan Neelands et al, "the further away in space and time the creative act moves from its locus of production and reception the more difficult and exceptional it becomes to establish 'newness', 'originality', 'value' and 'significance' unless you are exceptionally gifted and knowledgeable".¹⁵ This move away in time and space means that knowledge of the specific context of a creative act, which focuses on the individual having the idea, shifts to a broader assessment by experts of whether the idea is creative

¹³ Boden, M.A. (1996) 'What Is Creativity' in Boden (ed.), p.78

¹⁴ Boden, p.5

¹⁵ Neelands et al, p.32

when placed against an increasing number of other ideas, thus making the judgement as to whether the act is truly creative increasingly stringent.

The idea that creativity can be experienced by everyone existing within a social context is also set out by Raymond Williams. He states

We see in certain ways [...] But these ways – these rules and interpretations – are, as a whole, neither fixed nor constant. We can learn new rules and new interpretations, as a result of which we shall literally see in new ways. There are thus two senses in which we can speak of this activity as ‘creative’. [...] In each individual, the learning of these rules, through inheritance and culture, is a kind of creation, in that the distinctively human world, the ordinary ‘reality’ that his culture defines, forms only as the rules are learned [...] But, further, there is not only variation between cultures, but the individuals who bear these particular cultural rules are capable of altering and extending them, bringing in new or modified rules by which an extended or different reality can be experienced.¹⁶

Williams’ first type of creativity links to Boden’s ‘P’ creativity in being specific to the individual. The second more developed form of creativity requires the individual to do something that works on a larger social level – which can perhaps be mapped on to Boden’s ‘H’ creativity. What is interesting here is that even the first type identifies the individual negotiating between herself and her own experiences and her culture in a process that can be described as potentially creative – creating a new way of connecting the two, a new way of seeing or acting, a shifting of conceptual boundaries. In this Williams identifies an active mental processing as being at the heart of creativity.

Many of the definitions of creativity outline that a social perspective is crucial: that creativity does not exist in a personal vacuum but within a social context. In the conception of creativity outlined in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s book *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, creativity is dependent on a negotiation between both the individual and their society:

“creativity does not happen inside people’s heads, but in the interaction between a

¹⁶ Williams, p.34

person's thoughts and a sociocultural context".¹⁷ Whilst it may appear to the individual who has a creative thought that they are operating from a subconscious impulse, that the idea has "just come to them", the truth is that this is still in relation to a broader social and cultural context: "even in the unconscious the symbol system and the social environment play important roles [...] Even though subconscious thinking may not follow rational lines, it still follows patterns that were established during conscious learning".¹⁸

However, although everyone has the capacity for creativity, this is not to say that everyone is capable of being equally creative. To put it another way, if everyone is capable of 'P'-creativity, the opportunity to be 'H'-creative is dependent on many factors, including knowing what others will consider creative, and not everyone has access to this wider context of knowledge. Whilst there may be an attraction to the idea that all have the capacity to do something that is widely recognised as creative, the truth is that it is impossible to ignore the benefits offered to those brought up in a particular educational system, to those who have the luxury of certain securities. For example, Csikszentmihalyi suggests that "such centres of creativity as Greece in the fifth century B.C., Florence in the fifteenth century and Paris in the nineteenth century tended to be places where wealth allowed individuals to learn and to experiment above and beyond what was necessary for survival".¹⁹ Conversely, Rancière outlines how for Plato artisans "do *not have the time* to devote themselves to anything other than their work".²⁰ Whilst it is possible to accept that for some people limitations may provide their own creative opportunity, as I outlined with the need for structure in improvised art in Chapter One, it is important to recognise the importance of social context in determining who has the time and opportunity to be creative. Security, health and

¹⁷ Csikszentmihalyi, p.23

¹⁸ Ibid, p.102

¹⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, p.8

²⁰ Rancière (2004), p.12. Original emphasis.

time can all offer the creator the ability to focus on the act in hand. For example, to ignore the significance of social background which underlies knowledge, to quote Neelands et al, “whilst being eminently egalitarian actually works against the interests of highly intelligent young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by reinforcing the idea that the social gifts which distinguished [...] high achievers are in fact natural gifts”.²¹ This is not to say that one has to be affluent to be creative, but, to quote Csikszentmihalyi,

It does no good to be extremely intelligent and curious if I cannot learn what it takes to operate in a given symbolic system. The ownership of [...] “cultural capital” is a great resource. Those who have it provide their children with the advantage of an environment full of interesting books, stimulating conversation, expectations for educational advancement, role models, tutors, useful connections, and so on.²²

In this, the question as formulated by Banaji et al as to whether creativity “is a ubiquitous human activity or a special faculty” is addressed. It is, in this analysis, a ubiquitous human activity - but it is not equally available to all.

Csikszentmihalyi further addresses the significance as to why certain historical periods or places may be considered particularly creative when he states “centres of creativity tend to be at the intersection of different cultures, where beliefs, lifestyles, and knowledge mingle and allow individuals to see new combinations of ideas with greater ease”.²³ In this conceptualisation, colliding a variety of thoughts that come from different traditions allows for a crossing of conventional conceptual boundaries, a development of new approaches that may be described as creative.

All of the points above suggest that it is logical to conceive of creativity as a culturally specific construction.²⁴ In this sense, Arthur Cropley’s comment that

²¹ Neelands et al, p.15

²² Csikszentmihalyi, p.53

²³ Csikszentmihalyi, pp.8-9

²⁴ Neelands et al, p.4

“creativity is that which creativity tests test”²⁵ is not a flippant aside but a recognition that those who are socially sanctioned to do so, in this case who are given the power to set tests, determine what is or is not perceived as creative. As Csikszentmihalyi suggests, “even in Einstein’s case, the broader society had a voice in deciding that his work deserved a central place in our culture”.²⁶ However, this voice may come from a variety of perspectives and, for Boden, “whether an idea survives, whether it is lost for a while and resurfaces later, and whether historians at a given point in time happen to have evidence of it, depend on a wide variety of unrelated factors. These include fashion, rivalries, illness, trade patterns, economics, war, flood, and fire”.²⁷ It may be difficult to predict in advance what will be socially defined as ‘creative’, and as Csikszentmihalyi suggests in the case of Van Gogh, it may not happen until some time after the original act.²⁸

It is important to be aware of the value judgements that come into play in each context. Neelands et al outline the different ways in which different societies have valued different modes of creativity, Eastern philosophies seeing “creation [as] more concerned with redistribution than origination, a bringing of order to chaos [...] a fragmentary rather than a sequential process [where] man is part of its outcome, not the culmination of it” whereas “at the heart of the Western construction of creativity is the idea that through human agency we can outwit both gods and nature”.²⁹ Creativity is here, as elsewhere, open to redefinition in different contexts.

²⁵ Cropley, A (2001) *Creativity in Education and Learning: A Guide for Teachers and Educators* (London: Kogan Page), p.97, quoted in Bananji et al, p.39

²⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, p.43

²⁷ Boden, M.A. (1996) ‘What Is Creativity’ in Boden (ed.), p.77

²⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, p.31

²⁹ Neelands et al, p.13

Individual, Field and Domain

In the definitions above, despite their different emphases, there is recognition that all creativity contains both an individual and a social element. In terms of creativity consistent with Boden's 'H' creativity, Csikszentmihalyi is interested in those acts that fit with "what the term [creativity] originally was supposed to mean – namely, to bring into existence something genuinely new that is valued enough to be added to the culture".³⁰ He suggests that such creativity "results from the interaction of a system composed of three elements: a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain, and a field of experts who recognise and validate the innovation. All three are necessary for a creative idea, product or discovery to take place".³¹ Later he states that

Creativity is any act, idea or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it.³²

This analysis, which has proved influential in writings on creativity, also emphasises the importance of social factors in creativity. The individual's act, influenced by social factors, must be sanctioned by the social factor of a field of experts. The domain, too, is a symbolic realm inextricably linked to social factors – for example, what would constitute creativity in any field three hundred years ago would differ from now. Furthermore, access to both a field and a domain for the individual is essential, and this access is not equally open to all. The time to study in a domain, the money to travel to places where the domain is particularly

³⁰ Csikszentmihalyi, p.25

³¹ *Ibid*, p.6

³² *Ibid*, p.28

vibrant, the knowledge of who the people in the field to contact are, and the ability to make contact with them are all more available to some than to others.³³

In stressing the significance of the domain as well as the field, Csikszentmihalyi suggests that a field's definition of something as creative is not arbitrary, but rather is the result of linking that idea or act to similar ones. This can be related to Boden's notion of creativity as a "generative system"³⁴ - a system that is being generated can, by definition, change and shift its boundaries. In addition, her statement that creativity involves "exploration, and perhaps tweaking, of a conceptual space, rather than radical transformation of it"³⁵ can be linked to Csikszentmihalyi's argument. Her 'generative system' cannot be ignored, like the domain. It has a set of rules and constraints; these constraints "make creativity possible. To throw away all constraints would be to destroy the capacity for creative thinking".³⁶ Like the improviser in Chapter One who needs structure, or Belsey's notion of the self outlined in Chapter Three who is simultaneously liberated through language whilst being constrained by its parameters, the person who creates in a particular domain does so within its constraints. For something to be embraced as creative rather than merely aberrant, it must have some relation to what has gone before, even if it transforms aspects of it. This idea chimes with Colin Martindale's argument that poets who introduce radical style will regress in terms of the radicalism of their content, so that the work is not so novel that it appears incomprehensible: "an audience should find aversive not only works of art with too little arousal potential but also those with too much arousal potential".³⁷ To gain the approval of the field, the creative act must still contain enough familiar elements to be recognisable within its domain.

³³ Ibid, pp.53-55

³⁴ Boden, M (1996) 'What is Creativity?' in Boden (ed.), p.78

³⁵ Ibid, p. 114

³⁶ Ibid, p.79

³⁷ Martindale, C (1996) 'How Can We Measure a Society's Creativity?' in Boden (ed), p.162

The importance of knowing the domain in which a creative act operates is crucial. Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi states, “a quantifiable domain with sharp boundaries and well-defined rules is taken more seriously”.³⁸ If one knows the context within which the creative act operates, it is easier to have some understanding of how the act functions in relation to it. He suggests further that “novelty is more obvious in domains that are often relatively trivial but easy to measure”,³⁹ whereas discussing creativity in fundamental but loosely defined domains such as wisdom or nurturing is very difficult.

In this analysis the domain is crucial. It allows the creative act or idea to be placed in a context. Since legitimisation of an idea as creative can only occur from the field that controls the domain, there is a necessity for the individual who seeks to be approved of on a ‘H-creativity’ level to familiarise herself with the domain in which her idea functions. This may explain why Avril Loveless identifies how children who worked on a digital media project wanted their finished pieces to “not look like ‘children’s work’, [so that they ...] would hence be taken more seriously by adults evaluating and appreciating them”.⁴⁰ Children who know they are in the early stages of expertise in a particular medium feel the necessity for wider approval of their mastery of the basic rules of the domain before they can be comfortable with starting to bend them.

This challenges the notion that rules are oppositional to being creative, a notion based on the assumption that the creative individual is principally out to break new ground. In fact, the importance of knowing the structure of a domain, of understanding its rules and its history, is emphasised by several writers on creativity. Csikszentmihalyi utilises the idea of “memes, or units of information

³⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, p.40

³⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, p.29

⁴⁰ Loveless, A (1999), ‘A Digital Big Breakfast: the Glebe School Project’, in J. Sefton-Green (ed.) *Young People, Creativity and New Technologies: The Challenge of Digital Arts* (London/New York: Routledge) p.39, cited in Banaji et al, p.47.

that we must learn if culture is to continue” in his writing.⁴¹ It is these memes, he argues, that a creative person changes, but they “must be learned before they can be changed: a musician must learn the musical tradition, the notation system, the way instruments are played before she can think of writing a new song; before an inventor can improve on airplane design he has to learn physics, aerodynamics, and why birds don’t fall from the sky”.⁴² Another way of looking at this is David Best’s point that “to count as creative an achievement must go beyond simply following rules or conventional practices, yet it cannot be merely subjective: it is not sufficient only to be divergent or different in any way whatsoever”. He goes on to give the example of a figure drawn in his book that could be interpreted in several ways, as either a duck or a rabbit, for example, but for someone to see it as the Eiffel Tower “cannot count as creative since it goes beyond the limits of intelligibility”.⁴³

Taylor also emphasises the importance of initial training, proposing five levels of creative engagement, starting with primitive and intuitive expression, moving to skills at an academic and technical level, followed by an inventive level where experimentation happens and boundaries are pushed, moving to an innovative level where boundaries are broken, before finally moving to the level of genius – where ideas defy explanation.⁴⁴ It is essential, however, that the first four stages are gone through first: the domain must be understood before it can be transformed. Csikszentmihalyi is convinced that this is the case in any discipline.⁴⁵

This challenges cultural conservatives in any sphere who see radical changes as being potentially damaging to the traditions of a domain, and who want to maintain the domain as it is. If one accepts, as I have tried to illustrate

⁴¹ Csikszentmihalyi, p.7

⁴² Csikszentmihalyi, p.8

⁴³ Best, pp.78-9

⁴⁴ Cited in Jackson, N and C. Sinclair (2006), ‘Developing Students’ Creativity’ in Jackson et al (eds.), p.122

⁴⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, p.47

above, that creativity is intrinsically linked to social factors, a cultural shift within a domain over time is inevitable as society and culture changes. At the same time, the domain will not allow for any change to be valued as creative unless it shows a grasp of the domain in which it is working. To quote Banaji et al, “progressive’ commentators [and conservative commentators...] often share an emphasis on tradition, conventions and rules, as well as on originality and novelty”.⁴⁶ The significance of this is expressed in Neelands et al’s point that the NESTA definition of creativity as “seeing what no-one else has seen, thinking what no-one else has thought and doing what no-one else has dared” does not imply a “scorched earth” approach to what has gone before, because “you cannot see what no-one else has seen unless you know what everyone else has already seen; you cannot think what no-one else has thought unless you have knowledge of what has already been thought”.⁴⁷

However, creative breakthroughs can also occur in dialogue *between* domains. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that “some of the most creative breakthroughs occur when an idea that works well in one domain gets grafted to another and revitalises it”, citing the example of applying “physics’ quantum theory to neighbouring disciplines like chemistry and astronomy”.⁴⁸ An established domain that has a complexity of ideas and perspectives may be able to shed new light on another, and Csikszentmihalyi further documents the number of creative individuals who are proficient in more than one domain, with their knowledge cross-fertilising in a highly productive way.⁴⁹ Banaji et al characterise this by saying that “it is in crossing such divisions [...] that children (and adults) stand the greatest chance of being independently creative”.⁵⁰ Being able to see the conceptual boundaries not just of one domain but of others too enables the

⁴⁶ Banaji et al, p.11

⁴⁷ Neelands et al, p.31

⁴⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, p.88. A discussion of quantum theory’s relation to theatre and performance is discussed by Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked*.

⁴⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, p.329

⁵⁰ Banaji et al, p.51

individual to see more objectively what a domain may take for granted, and to be able to identify ways in which it can be altered.

A key concept which follows from this emphasis on the social basis of creativity is the notion of creativity as a process. It is not a thing that happens only in the making of creative objects, but is rather part of a broader historical journey as domains change. This emphasis on process is emphasised throughout this thesis and will be discussed further below in the section on creativity and social context, as well as in Chapter Six when I explore the notion of creative praxis.

The Creative Individual

If the above suggests an emphasis on creativity as an “external cultural phenomenon” rather than an “internal cognitive function”, to reference Banaji et al’s question, this does not necessarily mean that there are not internal factors to consider when discussing creativity. Indeed, these are, as I have tried to suggest above, linked: I would rather adopt Kleiman’s formulation of a creative product being produced by “*a creative person engaged in a creative process within a creative environment*”, in an approach which validates both aspects. Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi’s formulation of the creative process sees the importance of both, since it contains not only the field and the domain but also the individual - who is, of course, influenced by his society just as society is made up of individuals.

In terms of the skills employed by creative individuals, Norman Jackson and Christine Sinclair suggest “being imaginative [...] being original [...] exploring, experimenting and taking risks [...] skills in creative thinking and synthesis [...] and communication”.⁵¹ The QCA states that creativity involves “questioning and challenging; making connections, seeing relationships; envisaging what might be; exploring ideas and keeping options open; reflecting critically on ideas, actions

⁵¹ Jackson, N and C. Sinclair (2006), ‘Developing Students’ Creativity’, in Jackson et al (eds.), p.119

and outcomes”.⁵² In both these lists we can see a focus on being confident enough not to fear failure, being able to see in new ways which stretch the conceptual boundaries of the domain, being able to connect ideas and discoveries, and being able to express oneself in language so that others may legitimise the idea, action or product.

However, these lists do not help to break down what would characterise an individual who has these tools, essential if one is to try to identify and/or develop such traits. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that what characterises creative personalities is complexity, “by which I mean that they show tendencies of thoughts and actions that in most people are segregated. They contain contradictory extremes – instead of being an “individual”, each of them is a “multitude””.⁵³ For him this multitude has developed through flexibility and a variety of perspectives that allows for thinking the previously unthinkable. He outlines a series of binary oppositions which he suggests are *both* often present in creative individuals, co-existing in a state of productive tension: energy/ability to rest, intelligence/naivety, discipline/playfulness, the capacity for imagination and fantasy/a rooted sense of reality, extroversion/introversion, pride in themselves/humility, masculine/feminine traits, tradition/rebellion, passion/objectivity, a capacity for enjoyment/a resilience to and capacity to endure pain.⁵⁴

For my ultimate desire to suggest a pedagogy that embraces the creative act of devising theatre, this is a much more useful list than that outlined by the QCA or Sinclair and Jackson because it is more specific, and rather than trying to identify and push a student in the vague direction such as to “be more original”, it outlines the possibility of developing a variety of skills and traits that are useful in developing creative individuals. It develops a flexibility that eschews any notion

⁵² Ibid, p.119

⁵³ Csikszentmihalyi, p.57

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 58-76

of being at a point between two binary opposites. Instead, it emphasises the ability to keep things in co-existence, to keep a balance; for example, a balance between what might be interesting to oneself and what might be interesting to others, a balance between what might be perceived as a ridiculous idea and what might be a convincing one. The co-presence of two alternating perspectives also allows for a constant process of self-evaluation necessary for someone who is working at the edge of a field – as Csikszentmihalyi says, “Those individuals who keep doing creative work are those who succeed in internalising the field’s criteria of judgement to the extent that they can give feedback to themselves, without having to hear from experts”.⁵⁵ Jackson and Sinclair also support this idea when they state “the creative individual uses analytic ability to work out the implications of a creative idea and to test it”.⁵⁶

Alongside this idea is something fundamental for Csikszentmihalyi that is instrumental in developing any dynamic individual. The concept of ‘flow’ which he outlined in his book of the same title which preceded *Creativity* is, he claims, pertinent here. For him flow is a description of “optimal experience” – an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness”.⁵⁷ This is dependent on a high level of motivation that can be seen in professional musicians or sportspeople – people who are so immersed in an activity that for its duration it pushes other concerns aside so that the activity becomes “autotelic”.

Csikszentmihalyi’s formulation of flow, which he suggests can exist across a range of human activities, again stresses a co-existence of what might often be seen as oppositional - or at least self-contradictory – features. (My comments are in italics):

- There are clear goals every step of the way - *despite the not-knowing that is inherently at the heart of creativity*

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.116

⁵⁶ Jackson, N and C. Sinclair (2006), ‘Developing Students’ Creativity’, in Jackson et al (eds.), p.124

⁵⁷ Csikszentmihalyi, p.110

- There is immediate feedback to one's actions - *that tempers ideas on an instinctive and ongoing basis despite their constant generation, ensuring that original ideas are both constantly generated and able to be thought about*
- There is a balance between challenge and skills - *both are kept in a balance that enable both stimulation and a feeling of control/competence*
- Action and awareness are merged - *in a constant process as discussed in "immediate feedback" above*
- Distractions are excluded from consciousness
- There is no worry of failure – *despite the presence of risk; failure is embraced as part of the process*
- Self-consciousness disappears
- The sense of time becomes distorted
- The activity becomes autotelic⁵⁸

The importance of motivation here has an important lesson to teach those that are keen to promote creative theatre devisors. If a truly flourishing creative culture is to be developed, the devisors must see what they are doing not just as an end in itself but as something that feeds them and which will impact on their own lives. It must not just be a product, but a process which impacts on the lives of those participating in it. And this must be borne in mind by those who teach such theatre makers. Indeed, the importance of motivation is emphasised throughout writings on creativity and education. For example, Covey writes "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In the space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In those choices lie our growth and happiness".⁵⁹ And Barnett and Coate write:

We resort unashamedly to a language that is barely heard in higher education. It is a language of 'self' and 'becoming'... It is a language that speaks to a students' developing inner self; a self that has to be developed if students are going to acquire durable capacities for flourishing in a world that is, to a significant degree, unknowable.⁶⁰

Csikszentmihalyi suggests further that "it seems perfectly reasonable that at least some people should enjoy discovering and creating above all else" because for

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp.111-113

⁵⁹ S. Covey (2004), *The 8th Habit: from Effectiveness to Greatness* (London/New York: Simon and Schuster) p.4, quoted in Jackson et al (eds.), p.9

⁶⁰ Barnett, R and K. Coate (2005), *Engaging the Curriculum in Higher Education* (Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press) p.63, quoted in Jackson et al (eds.), p.206

our species to have coped with change through history the Darwinian process would favour those most able to cope with it.⁶¹ In these analyses creativity is something which often goes hand in hand with personal fulfilment, happiness and joy. Furthermore, when one considers the importance of both being aware of and sensitive to the field, let alone the need for the complexity characterised by Csikszentmihalyi, the “stereotype of the tortured genius”⁶² separated from society and angst-ridden by his creativity is revealed as just that. Rather, flexibility and a self-critical attitude as well as imagination and a willingness to embrace risk are crucial in the creative individual; happiness and self-actualisation can often be found through creativity.

Neelands et al characterise this stereotype as follows:

the eccentric scientist, never out of his white coat, working alone in his laboratory, puzzling over and solving chemical problems well beyond the understanding or capacities of common humanity is a powerful cultural icon, as is the emotionally unstable artist, eking out a lonely existence and suffering in order to realise some deep, artistic truth.

They suggest that this is a “socio-cultural construct that has its origins in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and still powerfully influences educational assumptions today”.⁶³ For example, Colin Martindale states, “To maximize creativity, a society must also maximize psychoticism, individualism, or egotism [...] The abhorrence of creative people for rules, control and inhibition suggests that the creative society must minimize rules and control and maximize freedom and individuality”.⁶⁴ He further proposes that

‘lawless’ individualism could be confined to the upper and middle classes – this producing a social Darwinist’s utopia or an egalitarian’s nightmare – as well as a creative society. Of course, egotism and disregard – or absence – of laws and rules could not be carried too far or the society would collapse into a “war of all against all” - hardly conducive to creativity.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Csikszentmihalyi, p.108

⁶² Ibid, p.19

⁶³ Neelands et al, p.14

⁶⁴ Martindale, C (1996) ‘How Can We Measure a Society’s Creativity?’, in Boden (ed), p.193

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.193

It is difficult to be clear about the level of Martindale's irony here, but he does identify a social perspective to the myth of the creative individual. A fear of creativity's ability to challenge social norms may ensure that creativity remains in the hands of the few, and is, as Pierre Bourdieu has suggested, actually about perpetuating the restricted taste of a particular bourgeois social class.⁶⁶ (Although (Although Bourdieu is talking principally about art, one could equally apply the formulation to scientific developments – which scientific ideas are followed up are arguably socially determined decisions just as artistic decisions are).

There is a further political edge here. To quote Adam Smith, "Our senses never did and never can carry us beyond our own persons and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are the other's sensations".⁶⁷ Creativity may help the individual to understand others more clearly. Neelands et al suggest that the individual creative act can be theorised in Marxist terms as "inherent to social justice".⁶⁸ As I have attempted to demonstrate demonstrate in this thesis so far, cultural activity is intrinsically linked to and influenced by its social context. Yet through the powerful fusion of understanding situations and oneself through the imagination, of creativity's ability to expand existing domains, shift existing boundaries, collapse existing binaries and discover new possibilities in oneself, others and one's society, Martindale's awareness that creativity offers the potential for change may be justified. However, whilst Martindale appears to fear its subversive potential, through creative acts influenced by and taking place in the social conditions of the present it may be possible to glimpse change for the good of all.

⁶⁶ Banaji et al, p.7

⁶⁷ Quoted in Eagleton (1990), p.39

⁶⁸ Neelands et al, p.22

Creativity and Social Context

However, much contemporary usage of the term creativity invokes the word in capitalistic terms. Seltzer and Bentley's harnessing of the term 'creativity' in *The Creative Age* can arguably be linked to this shift. For them creativity is a means to deal with what they have termed a "weightless economy" in which "intangible resources such as information, organisational networks and human capital have become the primary sources of productivity and competitiveness". For them, creativity is a means for workers to deal with a "more fluid and unstable organizational environment"; the cost of not doing so is joining the "new patterns of marginalisation among those who lack the means or motivation to acquire marketable knowledge. Developing new kinds of skills are central to their future prospects".⁶⁹ This type of approach to creativity is indicative of the approach from policy analysts such as Charles Leadbeater, cited by Seltzer and Bentley, who see "the engine of growth [as] the process through which an economy creates, applies and extracts value from knowledge".⁷⁰

Seltzer and Bentley's "weightless" and "fluid" are tellingly linguistically similar to the "liquid" modernity which Bauman characterises as that which

ought to be a (possibly unending) series of new beginnings, yet precisely for that reason it is full of worries about swift and painless endings [...and is] "haunted" by [...] fears of being caught napping, of failing to catch up with fast moving events, of overlooking the 'use by' dates and being saddled with worthless possessions, of missing the moment calling for a change of tack and being left behind.⁷¹

In this one can see the way in which creativity might create a stressful pressure for the individual to innovate, or to keep up with other innovations. Such a notion of creativity as a potentially negative force is rare: Raymond Williams suggests that "no word in English carries a more positive reference than 'creative'". However,

⁶⁹ Seltzer and Bentley, p.1

⁷⁰ Cited in Seltzer and Bentley, p.1

⁷¹ Bauman, Z (2005), *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity), no page reference given, quoted in Neelands et al, p.9

his subsequent warning that this involves “a kind of unthinking repetition that at times makes the word seem useless”⁷² emphasizes the need to interrogate carefully any assumptions about the term. Whether creativity is “inevitably pro-social [...] or can also be dissident or even anti-social”,⁷³ to quote Banaji et al, is open to debate. And whether ‘dissident’ creativity is helpful or unhelpful for a society is in turn open to debate and demands an interrogation of each specific example. As Neelands et al suggest, “just as the imagination is the cradle of creative invention – all new ideas begin in imaginative activity – so also in its empathetic sensibility it can be the necessary check on the kinds of creativity that resulted in the horrors of slavery, environmental destruction and the worst excesses of colonialism”.⁷⁴ Anna Craft states that

[t]he creativity we are experiencing [at present] is *marketised* [...] Wants are substituted for needs, convenience lifestyles and image are increasingly seen as significant and form part of a ‘throw-away’ culture where make-do-and-mend are old speak, and short shelf-life and built-in obsolescence is seen to be positive. The drive to innovate further becomes an end in itself.⁷⁵

Homer-Dixon suggests that “the people who succeed in this technologically hyper-charged environment [of contemporary society] make up a narrow elite that thrives on constant stimulus... they don’t usually think a lot about who they are, about what their ultimate aims are, or about the wider consequences of what they are doing”.⁷⁶ A similar point is identified by Neelands et al’s analysis of the creativity evident in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, whose creativity allowed him to rise to the challenges of the new world whilst culminating in him making a fortune from his cargo of opium and of subjugating Man Friday: both highly creative acts which were, nonetheless, acts that might now be viewed very negatively. The need to

⁷² Williams, p.19

⁷³ Banaji et al, p.4

⁷⁴ Neelands et al, p.8

⁷⁵ Craft, A (2006), ‘Creativity in Schools’, in Jackson et al (eds.), p.27.

⁷⁶ Homer-Dixon, T (2000), *The Ingenuity Gap* (Canada: Vintage) p.102, quoted in C. Bailie (2005) ‘Enhancing Students’ Creativity Through Creative-Thinking Techniques’ in Jackson et al (eds.), p.142

consider the consequences of a creative act from as critical a perspective as possible is further emphasised by both Anna Craft's comment that "[t]he human imagination is capable of immense destruction as well as infinitely constructive possibilities"⁷⁷ and Csikszentmihalyi's point that "the main threats to our survival as a species, the very problems we hope creativity will solve, were brought about by yesterday's creative solutions".⁷⁸

Csikszentmihalyi suggests that neither a field nor the market can necessarily be expected to operate in the interests of the greater good. Both are motivated to work to their own interests, to maintaining the field and the market, and it is possible that any creative act may shift the boundaries of either to an extent that renders it fundamentally changed, compromised or irrelevant.⁷⁹ Instead, Norman Jackson's notion of the need for "creativity in an ethical framework"⁸⁰ or Neelands et al's description of "enterprise tempered by criticality, humanity and ethicality"⁸¹ might be more useful, emphasising the need to evaluate each specific example of creativity carefully in relation to its social and ethical context. An obvious example would be to evaluate the environmental damage caused by it, for example.

However I would suggest that a formulation of "creativity in an ethical framework" would not only need to define whose ethics are being considered, but would also again suggest the need for a focus on elements of the creative process as well as the product, a focus often marginalised in the capitalistic notion of creativity mentioned above. In the Introduction of this thesis I similarly outlined the extent to which analyses of devised theatre often focus on the product that is easier to document and define than the ephemeral, subjective nature of process; and that when process is discussed it is often separated from product. To quote

⁷⁷ Craft, A (2006) 'Creativity in Schools', in Jackson et al (eds.), p.28.

⁷⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, p.318

⁷⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, p.322-3

⁸⁰ Jackson, N (2006), 'Imagining a Different World' in Jackson et al (eds.), p.9

⁸¹ Neelands et al, p.36

Banaji et al, “in some formulations, process and product are set up as being in opposition to each other, rather than as interdependent”.⁸² I suggested further that that this opposition could run the risk of overlooking the potential for process and product to co-exist, to influence each other. As mentioned above, Kleiman postulates the co-existence of the two concepts. Indeed, this interdependence has often been recognised in descriptions of the creative process. The NACCCE report into creativity *All Our Futures* describes “a *process* of generating something original”,⁸³ in a comment that simultaneously emphasises the object of creativity and the generative process leading to that object. Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi suggests that creativity has traditionally been seen as a five-step process: preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation and elaboration.⁸⁴ This elaboration recognises exploration – preparation and incubation before insight, evaluation of this insight before elaboration – as crucial. Such notions of ‘incubation’ and ‘evaluation’ allow for ethical reflection in a way that a pure focus on creating product cannot.

This process of exploration is a tricky one, both in terms of how one assesses it and in terms of its variety and complexity. According to John Cowan, however, it is vital:

[t]hat which appears a brilliantly original and creative product may simply (and quite legitimately) be something which was recycled (not plagiarised) from a piece of prior creativity generated either by this person, or by someone else [...] To make a considered and comprehensive judgement of the extent to which a product is creative, the judge of that potential creativity surely needs some awareness of how the innovatory product was conceived.⁸⁵

The need for this process to be exploratory, allowing for blind alleys and mistakes is emphasised by several commentators on creativity: “Creativity isn’t a street that

⁸² Banaji et al, p.54

⁸³ Cited in Banaji et al, p.24. My emphasis.

⁸⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, pp.79-80

⁸⁵ Cowan, J (2006) ‘How Should I Assess Creatively?’, in Jackson et al (eds.), p.158

is bramble-free”,⁸⁶ “By perceiving mistakes as opportunities for, and proof of, learning instead of failure, we begin to change the paradigm to one that is more enabling and valuing of creative effort”,⁸⁷ “creativity has to be a profoundly wasteful process”,⁸⁸ “the ability to take risks without fear of failure is one of the cornerstones of creative endeavour”.⁸⁹

Despite the attempt to harness creativity for capitalism, to embrace process as part of creativity as I have posited it requires a willingness to embrace that which may not fit with current capitalistic conceptions of what work is: as Banaji et al ask, “Would time for playful testing of ideas be built into the working days of ‘knowledge workers’ or would they have to accommodate such necessary, but peripheral, business in their own personal time by giving up leisure?”⁹⁰ A world that sees play as the opposite to work may find an embracing of play within work as being challenging. Neelands et al suggest that

play is socially and psychically ‘bracketed off’ from everyday activity – it is useless in itself but closely associated with the kinds of intelligent exploration of new alternatives, which are ‘creative’ [...A]rguing for the importance of forms of play which may not lead to any outcome or immediately effect standards is pragmatically awkward.⁹¹

This may particularly be the case within an economic model which posits production and its profit as its primary aim (although an entrepreneurial model might embrace such activity as part of a journey towards new thought and ideas). Whilst it may be easier to “identif[y...] a thought process as creative [by...] the fruit of that process – a product or response”,⁹² the process itself has its own significance and the creative product is not all that can be taken into account when considering the significance, relevance or effect of any example of creativity. How

⁸⁶ Dineen, R (2006), ‘Views From the Chalk Face’, in Jackson et al (eds.), p.114

⁸⁷ Jackson, N (2006), ‘Making Sense of Creativity in Higher Education’, in Jackson et al (eds.), p.197

⁸⁸ Quoted in Csikszentmihalyi, p.99

⁸⁹ Beetlestone, F (1998) *Creative Children, Imaginative Teaching* (Buckingham: Open University Press) cited in Banaji et al, p.52

⁹⁰ Banaji et al, p.33

⁹¹ Neelands et al, p.11

⁹² Balchin, T., cited in J. Cowan (2006), ‘How Should I Assess Creatively?’, in Jackson et al (eds.), p.171

it was arrived at, and what it has created for those people involved can also be part of an analysis. In the making of art generally, or devised theatre specifically, which sees the activity of making art as valuable in itself, as a way of exploring the ‘real’ outlined in Chapter Three, this may be easier to imagine.

Creativity and the Arts

Csikszentmihalyi’s interviews with creative individuals cover the arts but also “the sciences [...], business, government, or human well-being in general”.⁹³ Indeed, Seltzer and Bentley claim that “the most common misconception about creativity is that it involves artistic sensibility”.⁹⁴ The National Curriculum has defined creativity as “a cross-curricular thinking skill”⁹⁵ and Anna Craft has defined it as “possibility thinking”.⁹⁶ Although the distinction between cultural and creative learning identified by Banaji et al emphasises both that creativity can be identified in any domain and that cultural learning – in the arts, for example - can be uncreative,⁹⁷ the arts arguably have a particular relevance to creativity. In Raymond Williams’ ‘The Creative Mind’, mentioned in the previous chapter, Williams agrees that creativity is not the sole preserve of artists but is undertaken by everyone.⁹⁸ He does, however, see something unique about the arts, which he defines as “*developments* from general communication”.⁹⁹ In this analysis, the arts function at a slight remove from everyday life, have the capacity to *develop* conventional ideas, and therefore have a unique opportunity to be at the vanguard of new ideas and social meanings. This has obvious links to Csikszentmihalyi’s notion of a domain in which creativity exists, but whose boundaries it shifts.

⁹³ Csikszentmihalyi, p.12

⁹⁴ Seltzer and Bentley, p.18

⁹⁵ Cited in Banaji et al, p.19

⁹⁶ Quoted in Banaji et al, p.20

⁹⁷ Banaji et al, p.26

⁹⁸ Williams, p.40

⁹⁹ Williams, p.40. My emphasis.

Indeed, for Neelands et al, “the arts are the most obvious, popular and attractive way of both stimulating and nurturing creative imaginations”.¹⁰⁰ Everyone can experience the creativity of painting, singing and dancing, within their own limitations, and this creativity may be seen in terms that go beyond a notion of “the cultural industries”. Rather, they are seen as an ongoing activity, part of everyday life whilst simultaneously being distinguished from it,¹⁰¹ which nourishes society on an ongoing basis. This approach links to the Eastern notion of creativity mentioned earlier, where “creation [is] more concerned with redistribution than origination, a bringing of order to chaos [...] a fragmentary rather than a sequential process [where] man is part of its outcome, not the culmination of it”.¹⁰² Here the arts function as a creative redistribution of the domain of experience, and in doing so “can be seen as a necessary irritant to the creative conscience and as the pro-social counter-balance in a social-market paradigm of creativity”.¹⁰³ They can offer a model of creativity that embraces process as well as product, an inspiring process for the individual that can simultaneously feed society.

Discussing theatre specifically, Neelands discusses the difference between craft and art. For him, writers such as Hornbrook cited in Chapter Two focus on learning the craft of theatre (“the skills, knowledge and techniques used in the making and appreciation of theatre”)¹⁰⁴ rather than the art, which is “the effective application of craft in order to realise meanings”.¹⁰⁵ The creativity is seen as an end in itself rather than as something that is embedded in a social context, that is a process of communication. For him, the arts allow all children “to apply symbolic form to those areas of curricular, cultural and social content which have

¹⁰⁰ Neelands et al, p.30

¹⁰¹ For a development of this idea see, for example, Williams, p.54 and Neelands et al, p.29

¹⁰² Neelands et al, p.13

¹⁰³ Neelands et al, p.10

¹⁰⁴ Neelands, J (2010) ‘The Meaning of Drama’ in O’Connor (ed.), p.69

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.69

significance for them”.¹⁰⁶ In this conception, the creative process of the arts has a content, whether latent or explicit, that can be overlooked in the rush to focus on aesthetic creativity. There is a need, then, for Neelands, for creativity to apply to thinking about content as well as how that content is expressed, and solely focusing on the craft “avoids the issue of content”.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly Hornbrook himself, despite his own criticism of drama in education for putting the exploration of issues in a creative process at its centre, is also critical of “aesthetic awareness as unconscious and de-contextualised consumption”, stating that “we can only meaningfully create within the critical parameters of a culture”.¹⁰⁸ In their different ways both writers are arguing for the creative process to be recognised as a social as well as an individual activity.

As well as something that can influence society it is important to recognise that the form of arts practised, as in any domain, is subject to social influence. For example, Paul Willis claims that in Britain the “institutions and practices, genres and terms of ‘high’ art are currently categories of exclusion more than of inclusion. [...] They may encourage some artistic specialisations but they certainly discourage much wider and more symbolic creativity”.¹⁰⁹ From this perspective there is a danger that some forms of the arts will alienate many people. The larger domain of the arts contains subsets of different domains; art forms and styles that differ in their relevance to different people. Furthermore, Willis suggests that, for some, creativity lies outside the arts. If Banaji et al note that not all culture is equally creative, it follows that not all art is equally creative.

It is, however, possible to encourage people to work in forms that do express their experiences, and I have tried to suggest throughout this thesis that devised theatre is a form particularly suited to this. This need not mean slavish

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.69

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.69

¹⁰⁸ Hornbrook, p.104

¹⁰⁹ Willis, P (1990) *Common Culture* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press) p.1, quoted in Banaji et al, p.12

adherence to the most obvious references to peoples' experience, or with the most obvious commercial aspects of popular culture. It can mean a creative engagement with popular forms in a way that reinvigorates them, shifting the boundaries of their domain. It can bring out the contradictions identified by Andrew Ross: "Popular culture is far from being a straightforward or unified expression of popular interests. It contains elements of disrespect and even opposition to structures of authority, but it also contains "explanations" [...] for the maintenance of respect for those structures of authority".¹¹⁰ In addition, whilst noting Willis' points about 'high' culture, it is not contradictory to suggest that its history may have some valuable lessons for those seeking to express themselves, since it is a highly sophisticated domain that can reflect on the ways in which individuals and groups engage with their social context and their own subjectivities. Art can "embody known as well as new experiences [...and] much of what we recognise as great art has done exactly that".¹¹¹

As I have outlined above creative thinkers, by definition, both work within a domain and attempt to shift the domain. They can collapse binary oppositions that structure existing wisdom in a way that can be considered potentially subversive.

Thomson et al set out an illuminating artistic example of this:

When a successful primary school engaged a writer to work with children on an arts project, they thought that the result would be a lively, publishable project. When the writer worked with the children, he thought that he should use the children's experiences and ideas as a basis for meaningful and engaged composition. However, the result was a text which the headteacher and her staff felt was inappropriate. They were concerned that it could bring disapproval from parents and possible adverse publicity. The head refused to publish but continues to worry about the decision. The writer describes the project as censored.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ross, p.3

¹¹¹ Neelands et al, p.24

¹¹² Thomson, P. et al (2006), 'An Arts Project Failed, Censored or...? A Critical Incident Approach to Artist-School Partnerships', *Changing English* 13(1), quoted in Banaji et al, p.16

Whatever the relative merits of this case, what is clear is that the creative process caused a subversive stir in the school. Indeed, I suggest that the arts are posed well to mount such a subversive challenge.

Jacques Rancière outlines a notion of the aesthetic regime of art that “strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres”.¹¹³ The arts collapse the binary between something within and outside everyday life, existing in both at the same time. They have the potential to imagine – to quote Maxine Greene, “the cognitive capacity that summons up the ‘as-if’, the possible, the what is not and yet might be”¹¹⁴ - and to reflect. It is this duality that provides both its escape from a utilitarian link to life and its mirror up to it, allowing it to shift perception, offer new possibilities of expression, and create change.

Indeed, the notion of creativity, like the notion of language outlined in the previous chapter, suggests an ongoing process for the human subject in which change is inevitable. Such a process allows for a view of what Neelands describes as “human becomings” rather than “human beings”.¹¹⁵ Shannon Jackson’s notion of performance as linguistically coming from the Greek root meaning “bringing into being”¹¹⁶ is intriguingly similar. In both there is an implicit notion of process that suggests that creating art, including devised theatre, can function as a means of furthering the potential of the human being, both individually and collectively.

In the final chapter of Part Two I seek to further this discussion, considering ways in which the notions of language and creativity outlined in the first two chapters might link with theories of art as a social practice. I will specifically focus on devised theatre as a means of developing this notion.

¹¹³ Rancière (2004), p.23

¹¹⁴ Greene, M (1987) ‘Creating, Experiencing, Sense Making: Art Worlds in Schools’, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 21:4 (Winter), quoted in J. Neelands (2010) ‘The Art of Togetherness’ in O’Connor (ed.), p.138

¹¹⁵ Neelands (2004), p.53

¹¹⁶ Jackson (2004), p.13

CHAPTER FIVE – SOCIAL PRACTICE, ART AND THEATRE

In this chapter I am going to consider the concept of art as a social practice before going on to look more specifically at theatre. Issues around the notion of art making as a social practice have inevitably reared their head in the first two chapters of Part Two. Here, however, I aim to focus specifically on debates around the relationship between art and society, considering how making art might function as a practice within a society. This is an ongoing debate which I cannot hope to outline in full. Rather, I will discuss a range of theories which consider contrasting notions of art, particularly focusing on different views as to where art sits on a continuum between being an autonomous realm and as being subsumed within the culture of a society. In particular, I will use Kant's ideas on aesthetics, Bourdieu's challenging of Kant's approach, and ultimately the theories of Jacques Rancière to offer both a fruitful and convincing argument for how the relationship between art and society might be conceived.

Kant and Aesthetics

I am going to begin this chapter by looking at the arguments Kant advanced in his *Critique of Judgement*. Although Kant discussed both nature and art, for him nature was the epitome of beauty and supersedes what any human being can comprehend or create: in “the immeasurableness of nature and the inadequacy of our faculty for adopting a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its *realm*, we found our own limitation”.¹ But in this realm of nature, according to Scruton, Kant thought that “we recognize that our own ends might be realised there”.² For Kant, when an artist tries to create something, the most beautiful thing she can try to do is to imitate this beauty, and her aim is to do so by erasing any sign of the human construction of the work:

¹ Kant (2007), p.91. Original emphasis.

² Scruton, p.108

“intentional though it be, [it] must not have the appearance of being intentional; i.e. we must be able to look upon fine art as nature”.³ Human activity in fields such as art making is thus seen as a human attempt to equal the essence of nature, with nature posited as an aesthetic truth that is irreducibly itself.

Indeed, for Kant the beauty of nature is open to all; it is universal, transcending boundaries of culture and experience, and “a person who can feel neither the solemnity nor the awesomeness of nature lacks in our eyes the necessary sense of his own limitations”.⁴ It is, therefore, not subjective but objective: based on judgements all should feel; rooted in rationality. The Kantian attempt to define “judgements of taste”⁵ is thus ultimately an attempt to define “*universal* judgements of taste”.⁶ Kant, however, was more complex than this might seem to at first suggest. He also recognised that whilst the subject finding beauty did so by reference to what seems like objective rationality, in the moment of recognition she is also expressing what feels to be “an expression of subjective experience”.⁷ The pleasure is immediate and instinctive. It is not possible to make someone else sense beauty through reference to objective truths. At the same time, it is only possible to grasp it (or, indeed, anything else) through reference to other things. The comment “Look at the beautiful colour of the sky” requires an understanding that the colour looked at is a colour that is beautiful as opposed to a colour that is not. There is, therefore, a Kantian antinomy in aesthetic appreciation. It is simultaneously objective and subjective. It occurs to the viewer or listener as true, but it cannot be proven as true. Kant uses the term “subjective universality” to define this paradox.⁸

³ Kant (2007), p.136

⁴ Kant, E. (1900) *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften) p.314, quoted in Scruton, p.108

⁵ Kant (2007), pp.35-74

⁶ Ibid, p.25

⁷ Scruton, p.100

⁸ Kant (2007), p.43

There are several distinctions made by Kant about aesthetics. He distinguishes between sensory and contemplative pleasures. For Kant, the pure judgement of taste combines “delight or aversion *apart from any interest*”.⁹ In addition to the pleasure afforded, there is space to acknowledge the object for what it is in itself. Scruton suggests that this means, for example, that for Kant “[a]esthetic pleasures must therefore be distinguished from the purely sensuous pleasures of food and drink”.¹⁰ After Burke, Kant distinguishes further between the beautiful and the sublime in aesthetic appreciation: “In beauty we discover the purposiveness of nature; in the sublime we have intimations of its transcendental origins”.¹¹ The distinction posits the beauty as the delight of the object, and the sublime as pointing to the part of the aesthetic that is beyond what is conceivable: God. For Kant they fuse in nature. In cases of both beauty and the sublime, man is the recipient of the subject of appreciation. Even when he is the producer, the work takes on its own life when it is perceived. It is a transcendent object true to itself rather than its maker. This leads Rancière to state that

[f]rom Kant's viewpoint, the very idea of an art of the sublime would seem contradictory. With Kant, the sublime does not designate the products of artistic practice [...T]he feeling of the sublime does not point either to the work of Michelangelo or to that of an Egyptian architect. It simply translates the incapacity of the imagination to grasp the monument as a totality.¹²

In the moment of perception, the subject is the one to designate something as beautiful or sublime. The thing perceived cannot be understood in an everyday way. It supersedes utility. The subjectivity is evident when Kant acknowledges that it is possible that some may not appreciate the aesthetically beautiful/sublime object (if they do not have a “necessary sense of their own limitations”),¹³ but the divine origin of aesthetics still posits a universality – it is potentially available to all.

⁹ Ibid, p.42. Original emphasis.

¹⁰ Scruton. p.103

¹¹ Ibid, p.110

¹² Rancière (2009b), p.89

¹³ Scruton, p.110

Kant's ideas may initially seem to have little relevance to a contemporary world. His teleological certainty in the idea of God is at least called into question by the plurality of viewpoints in contemporary culture. And it may be difficult to propose a clear distinction between nature and culture when the pervasiveness of culture in all aspects of life is evident: it is difficult to look at a park or even a shoreline today and not be able to find ways in which economics and politics have influenced its geography and appearance. Nonetheless, Kant's ideas about the aesthetic are still frequently discussed¹⁴ and have been taken up by some contemporary thinkers. A key development, as mentioned in Chapter Three, is Lyotard's late 20th century notion of the sublime which takes up Kant's ideas and applies them to postmodern culture. Here, though, I am going to focus on the way in which Kant's ideas were challenged by Pierre Bourdieu in his 1979 book *Distinction*, and the ways in which Bourdieu's ideas in turn were challenged by Jacques Rancière.

Pierre Bourdieu and *Distinction*

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu suggests that despite Kant's pretence of equality, the type of aesthetic appreciation he is talking about has a class origin. Bourdieu says "Kant strove to distinguish [...] disinterestedness", which "may take the form of moral agnosticism",¹⁵ from "the interest of reason" which drives the working-class approach to evaluating culture. He claims that the working class, whose popular aesthetic "appears as the negative opposite of the Kantian aesthetic",¹⁶ expect "every image to explicitly perform a function" and that the working class' "appreciation always has an ethical basis".¹⁷ He also notes that Kant's prioritising

¹⁴ The inside flap of Scruton's book on Kant describes him as "arguably the most influential modern philosopher"; his ideas are discussed in Eagleton (1990), Winston and Haseman, and Neelands et al, amongst others.

¹⁵ Bourdieu (1984), p.5

¹⁶ Ibid, p.41

¹⁷ Ibid, p.5

of contemplative over sensational pleasures means that Kant is arguing for a “pleasure purified of pleasure”.¹⁸

For Bourdieu this approach is linked to the status of bourgeois art, which consists of moving beyond the purely sensational to something more supposedly cultivated. So whilst the working class are stuck with pleasure for its own sake, having neither the education nor the time necessary to enjoy it, the privileged classes are able to transcend this limitation to find an appreciation of apparently greater profundity. (The choice of Bourdieu’s language, emphasising the “ethical” basis of working class appreciation, suggests where his own sympathies lie). This distinction is reproduced throughout society; for example, “to the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts [...] corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers”.¹⁹ These hierarchies are linked in turn to social status, involving “practices which emphasise and exhibit cultural distinctions and differences which are a crucial feature of *all* social stratification”.²⁰ For Bourdieu, aesthetics as imagined by Kant are thus part of the construction of a culture predicated on class distinctions:

[T]he privileged classes of bourgeois society replace the difference between two cultures, products of history reproduced by education, with the basic difference between two natures, one nature naturally cultivated, and, another nature naturally natural ... Thus the sanctification of culture and art ... fulfils a vital function by contributing to the consecration of the social order.²¹

The aesthetic “‘eye’ is a product of history reproduced by [formal and informal] education [...T]he aesthetic disposition, the capacity to consider in and for themselves, as form rather than function, [applies to] not only the works designed for such apprehension, i.e. legitimate works of art, but everything in the world”.²²

Yet it passes itself off as having its own independent criteria, beyond class

¹⁸ Cited in Eagleton (1990), p.196

¹⁹ Bourdieu (1984), p.1

²⁰ Jenkins, p.130. My emphasis.

²¹ Bourdieu, P., A. Darbel with D. Schnapper (1991) *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public* (Cambridge: Polity), p.111 quoted in Jenkins, pp.133-4

²² Bourdieu (1984), p.3

stratification and thus appears neutral – hence Rancière characterises Bourdieu’s conception of aesthetic’s “denegation of the social”.²³

Bourdieu further argues that the power relations in this structure mean that the status of the art work dominates the spectator, since to grasp the art work properly from a Kantian perspective requires the spectator to be in thrall to it and to be able to appreciate its beauty. The bourgeois spectator who has acquired such “cultural competence” can be pitted against the “naive [working class] spectator [...] who cannot attain a specific grasp of works of art which only have meaning – or value – in relation to the specific history of an artistic tradition”.²⁴ For Bourdieu, in the tradition of aesthetic art the image or art work’s relation to reality is unclear. (The supposedly ‘open’ work is, for him, one example of such a tradition).²⁵ It posits itself in its own terms – as independent from social influence and as only relatable to its own field. Learning how to appreciate aesthetically therefore requires knowledge of the field of aesthetics, enables the viewer to demonstrate the cultural capital of understanding, and legitimises itself through an ongoing cyclical process of education in aesthetics and subsequent appreciation of them. Understanding art thus associates the spectator with the dominating power of the bourgeoisie and simultaneously reinforces a notion of the inferiority of the working class who are unable to appreciate the unique discourse of art.

Whilst Bourdieu’s argument is supported by his research, a survey conducted in France which proved a strong correspondence between class and artistic taste (at least during the period he wrote in), I want to contend that his arguments fail to grasp a full understanding of how art relates to society. For example, his assumption of form and function as two poles of a binary are undermined by his own point about representation for the bourgeois classes. He states that “the most frequent and most spectacular way to shock the bourgeois

²³ Rancière (2009b), p.1

²⁴ Bourdieu (1984), p.4

²⁵ Ibid, p.3

[...] is to *transgress* ever more radically the ethical censorships (e.g. in matters of sex) which the other classes accept even within the area which the dominant disposition defines as aesthetic".²⁶ Here, in outlining that the content of an art work can mount a challenge to bourgeois limits on what can and cannot be represented, he suggests a potential link between bourgeois attitudes within life itself and bourgeois attitudes within art. This therefore contradicts any argument that the aesthetic will inevitably exist at a remove from reality. The notion that reality is not represented in aesthetic art is also problematic. The concepts of reality and art are not constant but shift. (To once more quote Brecht, "Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change").²⁷ And advances in technology, for example, shift how reality can be shown through art. Whilst reality and art may appear to exist as two independent realms, there must be times when the two interconnect – even if this is not what the artist or the spectator or the culture wants. Bourgeois (and indeed non-bourgeois) art may sometimes fail to fit neatly into its own field, and slip into a space beyond it. As Richard Jenkins says, "In Bourdieu's scheme of things it is difficult to understand the relatively modest innovation of Seurat, let alone the subsequent pace and profundity of change represented, say, by Cézanne or Picasso [...] There is something profoundly social going on here".²⁸ One could also suggest a similar problem with Bourdieu's analysis in relation to the effect of the mid-1970s UK punk movement, for example, which had a huge impact on society but which was born from Malcolm McLaren's art school beginnings, moving from what Bourdieu might characterise as the bourgeois world of art education into a broader cultural phenomenon.²⁹

²⁶ Bourdieu (1984), p.47. Original emphasis.

²⁷ Brecht, B (2007) 'Against Georg Lukács' in Adorno et al, p.82

²⁸ Jenkins, p.136

²⁹ See Savage, J (2005) *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (London: Faber) p.266 and passim

Indeed, music is an art form which illustrates several key problems with Bourdieu's argument and where it is possible to find a surprising alliance with Kant. For Bourdieu, music is the art form which is most susceptible to bourgeois appropriation because it is the form least allied to a notion of 'reality': "Music represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art".³⁰ He states that the "least inadequate evocations of musical pleasure are those which can replicate the peculiar forms of an experience as deeply rooted in the body and in primitive bodily experiences as the tastes of food"³¹ because the ontology of music makes it "the most corporeal"³² of the arts. In saying this Bourdieu is seeing some music as more 'real' because it is more 'corporeal'. Yet, to revisit Chapter One, the body is culturally marked just as language is culturally marked. And, to revisit Belsey's distinction from Chapter Three, the 'real' is beyond what the human being can perceive within her limited grasp of the world as 'reality'. Because 'corporeal music' can be located in the body, it is considered "less inadequate" to Bourdieu. But, to refer to Belsey's notion of the 'real' outlined in Chapter Three, it may be possible to argue that music which cannot be easily located within everyday sensations in fact gets closer to the ungraspable 'real'.

Interestingly, Kant agreed that music "plays merely with sensations",³³ for him making it the least valued of the arts.³⁴ Whilst agreeing on the ontological features of music, and on the relative merit of music as an art form (the double negative of Bourdieu's "least inadequate" arguably reflects his underlying attitude), they disagree about the potential threat it might cause. For Kant it threatens 'proper' art which is appreciated through the rationality of the 'pure judgement of

³⁰ Bourdieu (1984), p.19

³¹ *Ibid*, p.80

³² *Ibid*, p.80

³³ Scruton, p.106

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.106

taste', for Bourdieu it supports 'proper' art and its bourgeois trappings because it can so easily be channelled into art removed from the reality present in the working class and life itself.

What is interesting here, I think, is the fear for both that the aesthetic brings. It threatens the security of their intellectual argument, being located in an abstract world. There is at least part of music that cannot be explained in social terms. In fact, the kinds of categorisations attempted by Bourdieu become difficult in the varied world of the arts. Rave music may sit more easily in the "function" rather than the "form" pole of Bourdieu's binary (music for dancing), but easy listening, another popular art form, would sit less comfortably in this pole and might be seen as prioritising its formal characteristics in such an analysis. Bourdieu is keen to present working class entertainments as eschewing aesthetic distance, because "being less formalised [...] and less euphemised, they offer more direct, more immediate satisfactions".³⁵ However, many contemporary cultural theorists, such as Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*, show how popular entertainment can actually be seen as a highly formalised entertainment, dependent on a range of rules and symbols for its success.³⁶ In contrast, whilst Bourdieu may claim that art sees itself as being above the profane,³⁷ Bakhtin's dissection of Rabelais (a writer who he suggests has been compared to Shakespeare and Voltaire)³⁸ sees profanity as a crucial component of Rabelais' art³⁹ (and indeed many others, including Shakespeare).⁴⁰ Ultimately, then, I want to suggest that any notion of art as being influenced by the social needs to also grasp the way in which art is able to challenge the social from its own unique place.

³⁵ Bourdieu (1984), p.34

³⁶ See Barthes (1973), pp. 15-26

³⁷ Bourdieu (1984), p.7

³⁸ Bakhtin, p.1

³⁹ Ibid, p.17

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.11

Rancière and Art

A different approach which seeks to value rather than fear the heterogeneity of art can be seen in the work of Jacques Rancière. However, Rancière does not exist in a simplistic binary opposition to Bourdieu's work. Rancière recognises, as Bourdieu does, the ways in which society can influence art. In a phrase that chimes with the description of Bourdieu's argument above, Gabriel Rockhill states that Rancière "thwarted the artifice at work in the discourses [such as art, which were] founded on the singularity of the other by revealing the ways in which they are ultimately predicated on keeping the other in its place".⁴¹ Like Bourdieu's notion that the working class are not really interested in aesthetics, wanting "every image to explicitly perform a function",⁴² Rancière notes that ancient Greek society did not see art as being for its artisans, since they "do not have the time to devote themselves to anything other than their work"⁴³. And in his description of the "ethical" regime of art which "fit[s] in with the distribution of the city's occupations"⁴⁴ and the "poetic" regime which "renders the arts autonomous [but is] also what links this autonomy to a general order of occupations and ways of doing and making",⁴⁵ Rancière articulates a view of art that sees it as inextricably linked to social movements and hierarchies.

However, there are many other ways in which Rancière challenges some of the notions underpinning Bourdieu's arguments in *Distinction*. Kristin Ross outlines Rancière's critique of Bourdieu thus:

Rancière [...] attacked Bourdieu and the new sociology as the latest and most influential form of a discourse deriving its authority from the presumed naïveté or ignorance of its objects of study [...] Rancière uncovered a logic whereby the social critic gains by showing democracy losing. It was, for example, all too obvious, he wrote, to say that working –class youth are almost entirely excluded from the university system, and that their cultural inferiority is a result of their economic inferiority.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Rockhill, G., Introduction to Rancière (2004), p.2

⁴² Bourdieu (1984), p.5

⁴³ Rancière (2004), p.12

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.21

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.22

⁴⁶ Ross, K., Introduction to Rancière (1991), p.xi

There may be a logical connection between levels of access to art and power more generally, but this is hardly surprising. What is debilitating about Bourdieu's analysis is that from his perception of the misfortune of working class youth above (and, in the case of *Distinction*, the working class generally), he develops a theory in which the working class themselves have no space within which to see their situation. They are trapped in an inescapable circular logic from which there is no escape. As Richard Jenkins suggests, this can lead to the criticism that "the superficiality of his treatment of the working class is matched only by its condescension".⁴⁷

In another challenge to Bourdieu's *Distinction*, Rancière sees art as being able to transcend social colonisation. In addition to the ethical and the poetic regime, he proposes the notion of the 'aesthetic' regime of art which

strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres. Yet it does so by destroying the mimetic barrier that distinguished ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other ways of doing and making, a barrier that separated its rules from the order of social occupations. The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and at the same time destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity.⁴⁸

For Rancière, the aesthetic's 'singularity' does not separate it from a social function, since via the avant-garde it can invent "sensible forms and material structures for a life to come",⁴⁹ moving beyond the technique of the representative and the 'sensible' nature of the mimetic into territory beyond mainstream discourse, territory that cannot easily be talked about within language. The aesthetic regime defined by Rancière allows for a celebration of aspects of art that are not reducible, not wholly quantifiable, and not able to be mapped on to something else.

⁴⁷ Jenkins, p.148

⁴⁸ Rancière (2004), p.23

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.29

Such a notion articulates the possibility discussed by Terry Eagleton that aesthetics might not just reproduce but also question social norms:

The category of the aesthetic assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of [...] other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony [...] But my argument is also that the aesthetic, understood in a certain sense, provides an unusually powerful challenge and alternative to these dominant ideological forms, and is in this sense an eminently contradictory phenomenon.⁵⁰

Here Eagleton does not dispute the power of social factors in influencing the aesthetic, but he does not see the aesthetic in a wholly subordinate position to the social. Rather, he adopts a Gramscian position which introduces the idea of hegemony: acknowledging the dominance of class structures whilst seeing any set of practices as a contradictory body whose position is “always contested, always trying to secure itself, always in ‘process’”.⁵¹ Furthermore, the aesthetic, existing as it does at a remove from the everyday, has a unique opportunity to challenge hegemonic relations. As Rancière suggests, art “is political because of the very distance it takes”.⁵² Like any discourse, the aesthetic consists of a range of heterogeneous elements which can be contradictory. It is obvious to say that aesthetics reflect social relations, but this does not mean that they *only* reflect them. It is also possible for the social to reflect the aesthetic, as he suggests happened when “modern literature contributed to a general reconfiguration of the sensible order”,⁵³ or when Schiller’s “aesthetic state” became the “aesthetic programme of German romanticism [...] The failure of political revolution was later conceived of as the failure of its ontologico-aesthetic model”.⁵⁴ Art became the scapegoat for social failure, but the link was nonetheless acknowledged. It can influence the social because in Rancière’s aesthetic regime “the future of art, its

⁵⁰ Eagleton (1990), p.3

⁵¹ Hall, p.7

⁵² Rancière (2009b), p.23

⁵³ Rockhill, G., Introduction to Rancière (2004), p.5

⁵⁴ Rancière (2004), p.27

separation from the present of non-art, incessantly restages the past”.⁵⁵ Art is posed as having the potential to point to the future, and when it does stage the past, it is a *restaging*, an opportunity to reimagine what seems familiar.

According to Jenkins, Bourdieu ends up as “no less reductionist” than Kant: “[c]ulture and taste are, for Bourdieu, wholly arbitrary: history and social construction are all”.⁵⁶ In fact, according to Rancière, Kant allows for what Bourdieu does not: the possibility for the aesthetic to “suspend [...] the power relations which usually structure the experience of the knowing, acting and desiring subject”.⁵⁷ Whilst a Bourdieu perspective suggests that at the moment of apprehending the art work, the spectator is able to imagine that he can understand or decode it, for Kant there is a tension (or to cite Kant, an antinomy) at this moment between the subjective and the objective. The spectator simultaneously has their own response (subjective) whilst relating this response to socially codified reasons and responses (objective, at least in appearance). In this antinomy, I would argue, after Rancière, that the spectator is caught in a moment where normal power relations are called into question. For Rancière such a moment allows for an egalitarian space where all are able to engage with the work presented. This space is not socially neutral, but neither can it be entirely socially controlled since its status as art means that it functions at a remove from everyday social relations. For Rancière, Bourdieu reduces the art work to being *only* a social phenomenon, with its aesthetic nature ignored: “Questions about music without music, fictitious questions of aesthetics about photographs when they are not perceived as aesthetic, all these produce inevitably what is required by the sociologist: the suppression of intermediaries, of points of meeting and exchange between the people of reproduction and the elite of distinction”.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.24

⁵⁶ Jenkins, p.149

⁵⁷ Rancière (2009b), p.97

⁵⁸ Rancière, J (2003), *The Philosopher and His Poor* (Durham: NC and London: Duke University Press), p.189, quoted in Bishop (2012), p.38

However, despite Rancière's claim, Bourdieu's suggestion in *Distinction* that "it is the aesthetic point of view that creates the aesthetic object"⁵⁹ does, perhaps subconsciously, recognise the contingency of art and aesthetics: that the aesthetic point of view is neither simply a naturally occurring phenomenon nor a culturally imposed phenomenon, but a shifting concept. Rancière seems to chime with Bourdieu when he states that "[f]or art to exist, what is required is a specific gaze and form of thought to identify it".⁶⁰ Kant would of course disagree: for him the aesthetic would mark itself as such with its beauty, aligned with nature rather than culture, separate from the everyday. What is interesting about this, I think, is that despite differences it is again possible to find agreement: all three view art not as solely embedded within the everyday, but as an at least partially distinct realm. Even Bourdieu, who sees art as largely a social construction, agrees, albeit grudgingly, that "the product of an 'art' [...] always contains also something ineffable, not through excess, as the celebrants would have it, but by default".⁶¹ It is this 'excess' that creates its independence, offering what Terry Eagleton calls "an alternative to thought".⁶²

Despite Rancière's enthusiasm for the avant-garde, which he saw as the epitome of his aesthetic regime, he is keen to not map any one form of aesthetics to a specific politics. He states "there are no criterion for establishing a correspondence between aesthetic virtue and political virtue".⁶³ He also notes the way in which Futurism and Constructivism was related not only to social change, but also to advertising.⁶⁴ However, he notes that "there are politics of art that are perfectly identifiable".⁶⁵ Where his ideas differ from conventional notions of political art, however, is where he suggests that "[i]f this politics coincides with an

⁵⁹ Bourdieu (1984), p.29

⁶⁰ Rancière (2009b), p.6

⁶¹ Bourdieu (1984), p.80

⁶² Eagleton (1990), p.347

⁶³ Rancière (2004), p.61

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.25

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.62

act of constructing political dissensus, that is something that the art in question does not control”.⁶⁶ For Rancière, art may or may not chime with political events; that is not something that can be directly mapped without a full understanding of the complexities of each social and political situation. The notion I have outlined above is again pertinent: that of two independent discourses which nonetheless may sometimes interconnect.

For Rancière, seeing either art as being in the service of politics or politics as being in the service of art may dampen the radical potential of each. It is important that art and politics do not attempt to fuse, since “to want to make politics and art disappear as singular processes, is to miss the singular effects that they can bring about and to return them to the logic of consensus”.⁶⁷ It is aesthetics and politics’ very separation from the everyday that gives them their unique power. They have the potential to imagine what might be possible, rather than what is; to “set up a tension (or contradiction) between reality – the way we live – and the felt capacities of human beings”.⁶⁸ But to attempt to mix them would be for them to return to the everyday, making them serve each other, losing their potential to articulate a unique space. In this Rancière’s attitude is similar to Adorno’s view that “the notion of a ‘message’ in art, even when politically radical, already contains an accommodation to the world”.⁶⁹

Rancière is not, however, arguing that art has no relation to social life, just that it exists in its own autonomous realm alongside social life. How this realm is characterised differs from critic to critic. For Adorno, art “holds fast to the idea of reconciliation in an antagonistic world”.⁷⁰ For Rancière, on the other hand, rather than creating consensus it can create dissensus (like other potentially “dissensual” behaviours such as politics) because it can “involve forms of innovation that tear

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.62

⁶⁷ Corcoran, S., Introduction to Rancière (2010a), p.3

⁶⁸ Whybrow, p.280

⁶⁹ Adorno, T (2007) ‘Commitment’ in Adorno et al, p.193

⁷⁰ Eagleton (1990), p.354

bodies from their assigned places and free speech and expression from all reduction to functionality”.⁷¹ For him “through the ‘free play’ of aestheticization” the “field of experience [is] severed from its traditional reference points”.⁷² Conventions, including conventions of thought and behaviour, are challenged. And for Bourdieu, there is often a conflict “between the *intrinsic necessity of the work of art* which demands that it be continued, improved and completed, and *social pressures* which direct the work from outside”.⁷³ Again, the differences are striking, but so are the similarities. For all three, art holds up the promise of a different world.

Rancière attempts to articulate how this might happen. For him, the suspension of ordinary relations in art and politics is potentially an egalitarian one, since it suggests a space where anyone can speak or listen (or sing, listen, paint or look).⁷⁴ This equality is not something to be striven towards, but a point of departure. This is to say that whilst access to making or looking at the arts (or, for that matter, political speech) may not be egalitarian right now, influenced as it inevitably will be by social factors, there is an egalitarian *potential* in the principles of both discourses: discourses which are theoretically open to everyone. Here, then, he slips away from Bourdieu’s determinism⁷⁵ to suggest the possibility of change. Ultimately, he boldly and rhetorically proposes that this can initiate a “generative principle for a world without domination”.⁷⁶

For Rancière the work of art, like the discourses of aesthetics and politics, stands as “self-sufficient”. The “simple solitude of the work” is a solitude which “authorizes [...] the purity of internal contradiction, [...] the dissonance by which the work testifies to the non-reconciled world”.⁷⁷ These contradictions are held within

⁷¹ Corcoran, S., Introduction to Rancière (2010a), p.1

⁷² Rancière (2010a), p.16

⁷³ Cited in Jenkins, p.135. Original emphasis.

⁷⁴ Rancière (2010a), p.2

⁷⁵ Jenkins, p.147

⁷⁶ Rancière (2009b), p.36-7

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.41

the work which cannot resolve them, held in “tension between contraries”.⁷⁸ It is this “aesthetic strangeness” that cannot be fully colonised by the social, a strangeness that can “carry the promise of a new sensible world”,⁷⁹ a world where “testimony and fiction come under the same regime of meaning”⁸⁰ and therefore what is known as experience and what can be imagined through art are given equal weight. This is not some kind of manifesto for making a contradictory art work, however. It is about allowing responses to, and aspects of, the work to exist in tension; a tension that has to be resolved beyond the structures of everyday life in the psyche of the subject. Rancière gives the example of Adorno’s linking of diminished seventh chords with “the salons of the nineteenth century”. Rather than eliminating them as part of a politically correct project, however, he suggests that “[o]ne day, however, we really must face up to the obvious fact that we can still hear them”.⁸¹ If the nineteenth century is evoked by diminished seventh chords, music cannot be reduced to this. It contains these chords amongst other heterogeneous elements.

Ethics, Artistic Antinomy and Artistic Autonomy

This notion of the aesthetic as a heterogeneous force, living next to but not within the social, means that Rancière is wary of what he terms “the ethical turn” in artistic practice. This ‘turn’ focuses on what he calls the desire to “restore lost meaning to a common world or repair the cracks in the social bond”.⁸² For Rancière, this social restoration is viewed as necessary because of horrific events

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.42

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.101

⁸⁰ Rancière (2004), p.37

⁸¹ Rancière (2009b), p.41

⁸² Ibid, p.122

such as the Holocaust. Adorno's "it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz"⁸³ is one such starting point: the type of approach which is outlined by Žižek thus:

[T]he reference to the Holocaust as the ultimate, unthinkable, apolitical crime, as the Evil so radical that it cannot be politicized (accounted for by a political dynamic), serves as the operator which allows us to depoliticize the social sphere, to warn against the presumption of politicization. The Holocaust is the name for the unthinkable apolitical excess of politics itself: it compels us to subordinate politics to some more fundamental ethics.⁸⁴

The contemporary "war on terror" is another such event calling for a nebulous concept of consensus, a 'coming together in difficult times' to overcome a totalised evil. There is a public malaise in response to such horror for which, Rancière suggests, George W. Bush's controversial desire for "infinite justice" was "only too fitting";⁸⁵ a boundless and totalising term which means that "[w]ar against terror and infinite justice then fall into a state of indistinction, occasioned by a preventative justice which attacks anything that is sure, or at least likely, to trigger terror, anything that threatens the social bond holding the community together".⁸⁶ In such an 'ethical' dimension the search for an ideology that can restore security to the social body brings about what Steven Corcoran has characterised as an "ethical attitude of infinite respect for otherness".⁸⁷ Political dissensus thus becomes associated with the criminal or deviant, and the hope for change becomes sublimated into a desire for consensus.

The consequence for aesthetics, Rancière argues, is that theories such as Lyotard's rewriting of Kant's sublime, in their desire to eschew totalitarianism, become poised to deliver ethically appropriate art. In doing so, Rancière suggests, the heterogeneity of art and its dissensual complexity is displaced by unifying theory, blunting art's dissensual potential. He gives the example of the shift in Godard's films, where "what was once a clash of images [in the 60s]

⁸³ Adorno, T (2011), cited in Reznikoff, C (2012) 'How Can Poetry Be Written After Auschwitz', *Guardian* (11 January) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2011/jan/11/poetry-after-auschwitz> [Accessed 20/6/13]

⁸⁴ Žižek, S., Afterword to Rancière (2004), p.73

⁸⁵ Rancière (2009b), p.111

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.114

⁸⁷ Corcoran, S., Introduction to Rancière (2010a), p.10

became a fusion [in the 80s]”.⁸⁸ In such an attempt to assimilate disparate elements of an art work Rancière detects a “fantasy of [...] purity”⁸⁹ which can be aligned with the ethical turn, which can ultimately be linked with the desire for ‘infinite justice’. For Bush, this can mean justice at any price, even the atrocities in Abu Ghraib, and even, in the famous words of George Bush’s supposed political opponent Madeleine Albright, “the price [of half a million dead children as a result of US sanctions in Iraq] is worth it”.⁹⁰ In addition, the danger of focusing on “ultimate, unthinkable, apolitical crimes” is that, as Eagleton puts it, that “the abandonment of utopia”⁹¹ occurs, with humanity losing the capacity to imagine that things can be different, replacing politics with a desire for the ethical.

Politically, Rancière’s project of dissensus chimes with Chantal Mouffe’s *The Democratic Paradox*. In it, she argues that the ethical approaches can “either avoid or do not emphasise enough the need to put some limits to pluralism, and they do not acknowledge the hegemonic nature of every possible consensus and the ineradicable violence that this implies”.⁹² However, she notes, unlike Rancière, that ethics can be “conducive to apprehending the limits of reason and to conceptualising the plurality of values”⁹³ in a democracy. The need for change in the political sphere, she suggests, can be contrasted with the rights for all to have a voice in the ethical sphere. Mouffe suggests that it is not possible to resolve elements into a unified whole where all members of a democracy are always addressed. Instead, she argues for the possibility of discarding “the illusion of a possible reconciliation of ethics and politics and to come to terms with the never ending interrogation of the political by the ethical”.⁹⁴ These two discourses are to be kept in tension and not subsumed into a binary in the way

⁸⁸ Rancière (2009b), p.122

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.132

⁹⁰ Quoted at Mahajan, R (2011), ‘We Think The Price is Worth It’, (1 November) at <http://fair.org/extra-online-articles/we-think-the-price-is-worth-it/> [Accessed 20/6/13]

⁹¹ Eagleton (1990), p.357

⁹² Mouffe, p.134

⁹³ Ibid, p.134

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.140

they are in Rancière's conception of the ethical. This tension is developed throughout the book as the notion of "agonistic pluralism", which holds "tension between its constitutive elements [...] to harness it in a productive way".⁹⁵ Like Rancière on aesthetics, she suggests that the tension is productive and ultimately politically significant; avoiding any attempt to subsume differences and erase different individuals or groups' needs. Indeed, for her this agonistic pluralism, rather than attempting to resolve elements within it, can suggest the possibility of a truly liberal democracy: "by warning us against the illusion that a fully achieved democracy could ever be instantiated, it forces us to keep the democratic contestation alive".⁹⁶ For Mouffe, this 'agonism' is to be distinguished from the notion of "antagonism", a state that can also be strategically important and for which she argued in her earlier book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (co-authored with Ernest Laclau). In 'antagonism', tension exists between "enemies [...] who have no common symbolic space", whereas agonism suggests rather "friendly enemies".⁹⁷ In both cases, though, Mouffe is keen to sustain rather than ameliorate tension.

Mouffe's call informs Claire Bishop's call for "antagonist" art practices rather than "art practices that seek to create a harmonious space of inter-subjective encounter [...which] risk neutralising the capacity of critical reflection".⁹⁸

Bishop also cites Rancière as an influence, noting that his argument for the aesthetic regime

is predicated precisely on a confusion between art's autonomy (its position at one remove from instrumental rationality) and heteronomy (its blurring of art and life). Untangling this knot – or ignoring it by seeking more concrete ends for art – is slightly to miss the point, since the aesthetic is, according to Rancière, the ability to think contradiction.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.9

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.105

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.13

⁹⁸ Jackson (2011), p.2

⁹⁹ Bishop (2006), p.182

For Bishop, “[t]he best collaborative practices of the past ten years address this contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, and reflect on this antinomy both in the structure of the work and in the conditions of its reception”.¹⁰⁰ Bishop sees a tendency in contemporary art makers to compromise their artistic practice in a desire to ‘do good’, “foreground[ing] the extent to which “ethical judgements” and a “generalised set of moral precepts” govern the goals and analysis of such work in lieu of aesthetic criteria”.¹⁰¹ Bishop posits Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick as such artists, and instead suggests artists such as Santiago Sierra, Thomas Hirschhorn, Francis Alÿs and Alessandra Mir as artists who support her requirement for antinomy.¹⁰² However, Shannon Jackson points out that Bishop thus starts to undo her own antinomy, since she herself starts to label art as “good” or “bad” depending on its adherence to her set of principles. For Jackson, “clarity about whether or not something is legible or illegible, feel-good or antagonistic, committed or uncommitted is erroneous at best”.¹⁰³ Jackson argues that Bishop becomes over-simplistic and over-dependent on binary oppositions, ultimately falling into the trap identified by Rancière of wanting to colonise what the art is, and missing out the “knot” of “contradiction” which she herself argues for.

However, her choice of the Kantian term “antinomy” which holds contradictory elements together is interesting in the light of this chapter which has tried to suggest the connections as well as the differences between writers from different periods and traditions. To continue this ‘antinomic’ approach, Raymond Williams’ essay ‘The Creative Mind’ might initially seem to see art in different terms from Rancière. However, I wish to suggest that it is possible to find connections as well as differences between these two writers from different

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.183

¹⁰¹ Jackson (2011), p.48

¹⁰² See Jackson’s (2011) discussion of this on p.47

¹⁰³ Jackson (2006), p.117

periods and contexts. For Williams, art does not exist in a vacuum but as part of a social context. He states that “communication is at the crux of art”¹⁰⁴ and that “nobody can see (not understand, but see) the artist’s actual work unless he and the artist can come to share the complex details and means of a learned communication system”.¹⁰⁵ He would therefore seem to see a shared understanding as being essential between art and life, as well as artist and audience, with meaning passing directly between the two. Moreover, in stating that when the concept of art as ‘creative’ was “extended to a contrast between art and life, between art and ordinary experience, the consequences were very damaging”,¹⁰⁶ he seems to be suggesting that the idea of art moving too far away from life as being potentially problematic. This would appear to be an attitude far removed from the concept of the aesthetic that I have argued Rancière and, in their different ways, Bourdieu and Kant, are talking about, which sees art as an autonomous realm.

However, on closer inspection one can begin to find useful connections between their writings. Williams is clear that whilst art is linked to experience, it is not experience itself: “The *special nature* of the artist’s work is his use of a *learned skill* in a *particular kind of transmission* of experience”.¹⁰⁷ The arts function as “*developments* from general communication”¹⁰⁸ as the artist channels responses to contemporary experience into artistic media with a “substantial number of the offered meanings [becoming...] composed into new common meanings”.¹⁰⁹ Rancière is actually articulating a similar view of the artist’s relation to society in his articulation of the aesthetic regime, since he indicates the aesthetic’s radical difference from everyday life as being its ability to comment on it. His notion of the aesthetic offers new ways of imagining, of work that understands its social

¹⁰⁴ Williams, p.46

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.41

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.53

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.42. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.40. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p.49

necessity but which defines its own rules, of work at the vanguard of creation. He does not argue that all art does this: his notion of the “ethical” or “poetic” regimes of art described above, for example, are conceptually limited by contemporary understanding, doomed to remain in a reproduction of it – albeit in an altered, artistic form. The aesthetic regime, on the other hand, is paradoxically both inside and outside the existing order. It lies beyond everyday existence, but this separation from the everyday is what gives it its social charge. For both Rancière and Williams, then, social relations are at the centre of art. And yet for neither is this about *subsuming* art to a purely social function. To quote Bishop, “for Rancière the aesthetic doesn’t need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, as it already contains this ameliorative promise”.¹¹⁰ Rather, it is about recognising art as a social function in itself that creates its own parameters.

Indeed, even Marx did not see art as something to be ultimately subordinated to politics. For Marx “art is a form of creative surplus” which “contrasts with enforced labour”,¹¹¹ something to be striven towards. This surplus comes from the “excessive subjectivity of the worker”, which “remains outside capital as capital’s own negation and as the worker’s possibility of transcendence and freedom”.¹¹² Therefore as the worker becomes increasingly emancipated, there is an increasing possibility for leisure activities (including art) that engage the worker with his own potential. For Marx this might be a post-revolutionary fantasy, but Rancière gives the example of two workers in the seventeenth century describing a day in the countryside in the most detailed aesthetic way: the “leisure of aesthetes who enjoy the landscape’s forms and light and shade”.¹¹³ For Rancière then, aesthetic enjoyment is available to all and is not, as Bourdieu

¹¹⁰ Bishop (2006), p.182

¹¹¹ Eagleton (1990), p.204

¹¹² Gulli, c.10

¹¹³ Rancière (2009a), p.19

claims, exclusive to some. Rather, as Marx suggests, it is the worker's relation to leisure time that limits her from participating in aesthetic activities more fully.

In contemporary culture where the internet may offer a wealth of leisure activities which are influenced by a range of agendas, including commercial and politically dubious ones, it may seem hard to argue for leisure as being inherently progressive. But, Marx is articulating something else here: not just the worker as a consumer of art but also as a maker of art. For Rancière it was precisely this double nature of the actor which so threatened the Platonic republic:

[T]he mimetician is, by definition, a double being. He does two things at once, whereas the principle of a well-organised community is that each person only does the one thing that they were destined to do by their 'nature' [...] He sets up a stage for what is common to the community with what should determine the confinement of each person to his or her place [...] It removes the artisan from 'his' place, the domestic sphere of work, and gives him 'time' to occupy the space of public discussions and take on the identity of a deliberative citizen. The mimetic act of splitting in two, which is at work in theatrical space, consecrates this duality and makes it visible.¹¹⁴

Indeed, art is not something that only happens in arts centres or in ways sanctioned by the Arts Council. Clifford Geertz argues that Western societies are unique in positing a difference between art and the wider social context, and that in other cultures it is an integral part of everyday life in the form of ritual or celebratory events, for instance.¹¹⁵ Human beings create, as part of life, moments that can be considered artistic. We can create plates of food that have great visual beauty (and regardless of Kant's opinion, isn't the taste a kind of aesthetic experience too?). When describing Brecht's street accident the witness can reveal an unerring awareness of the driver's arrogance.¹¹⁶ The song sung during work can bring tears to a listener's eye. All of these contain an element beyond their immediate utilitarian function, of something that lies beyond the everyday. They do not, either, fit with a consciously poetic reflection of the everyday. Such

¹¹⁴ Rancière (2004), pp.42-43

¹¹⁵ See Geertz

¹¹⁶ See Brecht (1974), pp.121-129

elements *do* fit with Rancière's definition of a "destr[uction of] the mimetic barrier that distinguished ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other ways of doing and making".¹¹⁷ They do more than just reproduce the expectation of such a moment, producing rather a moment that is difficult to comprehend in any realm other than the aesthetic realm of art.

This conception of art sees as false any division between the notion of art as either being subsumed to a social function or being consigned, in the Kantian model, to being "removed from the scope of common and community life",¹¹⁸ or as being part of a bourgeois "aesthetic disposition" in the Bourdieu model.¹¹⁹ Rather, it suggests that because art "breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle",¹²⁰ new possibilities of life can be imagined for both makers and viewers alike. And it suggests that this is possible for all. To quote Jonothan Neelands, "Every member of the group is seen as a potential producer – a potential artist".¹²¹

Rancière, Social Practice and Theatre

In their different ways, I have tried to propose that Kant, Bourdieu, Rancière and Williams all see art, via the notion of the aesthetic, as potentially important for both holding society in place and for imagining new futures. However, I have also outlined ways in which Rancière, along with writers such as Mouffe and Bishop, suggest that art, like politics and other discourses, contain a range of heterogeneous elements that cannot be easily resolved and which sit in a state of productive tension within the work. I now wish to turn to the issue of theatre itself, and to consider how these issues that can be applied to a range of

¹¹⁷ Rancière (2004), p.23

¹¹⁸ Dewey, J (1934), p.6, cited in M. Greene (1995), p.146

¹¹⁹ Bourdieu (1984), p.3

¹²⁰ Marcuse, H (1977) *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon), p.72, cited in M. Greene, p.138

¹²¹ Neelands, J (2010) 'Mirror, Dynamo or Lens?' in O'Connor (ed.), p.155

art forms might be of particular relevance for theatre. In particular, since I have argued that they are particularly interesting for my thesis, I want to consider how Rancière's theories can be applied to theatre.

Despite Rancière's anxiety to maintain independence between the discourses of aesthetics and politics, he nonetheless asserts "the plurality of ways in which they are linked. On the one hand, politics [...] has its own specific aesthetics [...] On the other, aesthetics has its own specific politics".¹²² He suggests that aesthetics is political in the sense that it both asserts itself as an independent discourse, but also because it offers the social possibility of life being different. In terms of theatre, according to Hallward, for Rancière

political performance [...] takes place in the gap between two extremes, and ends when the performers identify with either pole. On the one hand, there are the actors themselves, action in its direct and unmediated state [...] On the other hand, there is the role to be played, pure play uncontaminated by the grubby complexities of context or personality [...] The only place they can occupy is the one between themselves and their role – between Rousseau's sincerity and Diderot's technique. Politics is extinguished when the distance between actor and role collapses into a paranoid and definitive immediacy.¹²³

The stage actor is thus a political actor. As Hallward notes, this uncertainty embedded in the process of acting can cause a fear of theatre that dates back to Plato: "If Plato is especially hostile to theatre it is because those who speak on the stage do not speak in their own name and do not identify with or authenticate what they say".¹²⁴ It opens up a dissensual space such as that articulated by Rancière, a space that cannot be reduced to either role or actor. In this liminal space, Marvin Carlson discusses, citing Victor Turner and reminiscent of the views of Richard Schechner outlined in Chapter Two, "not so much the "set-apartness of performance but its "in-betweenness", its function as transition between two states of more settled or more conventional cultural activity".¹²⁵ Not only does

¹²² Rancière (2009b), p.46

¹²³ Hallward, pp.121-2

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.116

¹²⁵ Carlson, p.16

performance often blur the boundaries between truth and illusion, but there is also an inherent duality in the simultaneous reality of the live performative event alongside its existence as “restored behaviour”, or, to use Schechner’s terminology more precisely in the case of theatre, as “restored restored behaviour”.¹²⁶ Carlson similarly states that “objects and actions in performance are neither totally “real” nor totally “illusory”, but share aspects of each”.¹²⁷ Theatre is simultaneously both unreal and a representational staging that, in order to be understood, can be held against what is known.

In addition to the kinds of politics posited by aesthetics, the aesthetics provided by politics are also important: politics “has its own modes of dissensual invention of scenes and of characters of demonstrations and statements, which distinguish it from, and sometimes even oppose it to, the invention of art”.¹²⁸ For Rancière “politics is about the establishment of a theatrical and artificial sphere”.¹²⁹ The theatrical language of both these quotations is notable. Indeed, Peter Hallward goes so far as to suggest that Rancière proposes a “theatrocracy”.¹³⁰ The metaphor of theatre is utilised to suggest that political moments such as “the East German crowds crying “we are the people” against their statist incorporation”¹³¹ introduce “a supplementary speech that is irreducible to the constraints of social place”.¹³² This “supplementary” speech, like the “excessive” subjectivity of Marx’s worker, suggests the articulation of a different possibility for a society. To quote Hallward, “mimesis confounds the order of function and place”.¹³³ In contrast, Rancière suggests the police’s “Move along! There’s

¹²⁶ Schechner, p.22

¹²⁷ Carlson, p.49

¹²⁸ Rancière (2009b), p.46

¹²⁹ Hallward, p.111

¹³⁰ Hallward, *passim*

¹³¹ Corcoran, S., Introduction to Rancière (2010a), p.5

¹³² *Ibid*, p.6

¹³³ Hallward, p.113

nothing to see here!”¹³⁴ as doing the opposite: refusing the potential for politics to appear, refusing the possibility of a rearticulation of social behaviour.

In both cases, there is an awareness of the social significance of what might be termed theatrical acts, and of the theatrical significance of what might be termed social acts. As Nicholas Ridout recognises, “theatre is a social art form. It tends to represent people in social relationships with one another, rather than in isolation”.¹³⁵ Such awareness can be traced back to the Greeks. As outlined above, for Plato theatre was socially dangerous since watching and hearing characters of an unsavoury nature could have an unhealthy effect on its spectator, who would “begin to excuse his own vices [...]herefore let us put an end to such tales, lest they engender laxity of morals in the young”.¹³⁶ In this Plato assumes a passive spectator manipulated by an active performer. Furthermore, the imitation offered by acting would potentially fragment the performer and the spectator’s identity as he loses his grip on his true self, a situation “unsuitable for Our State, in which human nature is not twofold or manifold, for one man plays one part only”.¹³⁷ The stage thus is seen as “disturb[ing] the clear partition of identities, activities, and spaces”.¹³⁸ As Joe Kelleher summarises, for Plato “actorly representation, or *mimesis*, which involves the actor in a division between himself and the character he is imitating or inventing, is a sign of human weakness. It is also a means of provoking weakness in others, and hence a threat to or an infection of the body politic”.¹³⁹ John O’Toole suggests that Plato “confused fiction with untruth”,¹⁴⁰ as not recognising the fact that dramatic art is clearly framed as fictional, as nonetheless existing as a reflection on real life, and that this is understood by both spectator and performer. However, O’Toole goes on to make

¹³⁴ Rancière (2010a), p.37

¹³⁵ Ridout, p.13

¹³⁶ O’Toole et al, p.15

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.16

¹³⁸ Rancière (2004), p.13

¹³⁹ Kelleher, p.48

¹⁴⁰ O’Toole et al, p.16

a telling comment: “In his imaginary perfect Republic, human nature might not be manifold, contradictory and ambiguous, but in any real world it assuredly is”.¹⁴¹ In this O’Toole, perhaps unknowingly, makes a comparison between the process of acting and the socialised individual who is engaged in a variety of contrasting roles or performances within his life. Acting, or fiction, is thus paradoxically ‘truthful’, since it reflects the way in which the individual behaves in the social body. And in devised theatre, to return to the subject of this thesis, the act of acting may be particularly socially significant since it suggests a tendency for the individual to participate in the creation of such roles, as she does in her own life. In differing ways for both Plato and O’Toole’s critique of Plato, then, acting has an inherent social significance, suggesting a danger of how society might operate for Plato and how it actually does operate for O’Toole. And although O’Toole may disagree with Plato’s fear of theatre, he is actually in agreement with him about the presence of a vital link between theatre and life.

Plato’s conception of theatre can be contrasted with Aristotle’s, which provided the recipe, according to Brecht, for the drama of his time,¹⁴² and arguably still does. Aristotle does not see theatre as threatening in the same way – at least, not in all cases. For Aristotle, theatre can improve the harmony of a society by offering an “artwork which takes on its own independent and separate life”¹⁴³ from the everyday, meaning it is possible that what Jonothan Neelands has called “something more perfect through the representative”¹⁴⁴ can be created. For Aristotle, however, the apparently autonomous work of art actually conceals that what can be represented and what the potential response should (and can) be is highly controlled:

It should imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation. It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.17

¹⁴² Brecht, p.87

¹⁴³ Neelands, J (2010), ‘Theatre Without Walls’ in O’Connor (ed.), p.87

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p.87

of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear.¹⁴⁵

Augusto Boal describes Aristotle's notion of "exciting pity and fear" in the spectator, through catharsis, as "a powerful system of coercion",¹⁴⁶ and instead argues (via Brecht) for the spectator to be turned into a spect-actor, a participant instead of a passive observer. In conventional theatre the passive observer, the argument goes, stays passive and sees himself as unable to change things. The possibility of *acting* is left to the *actors* but is not open to everyone. And any possibility of change, the argument goes, is ultimately dissipated in a theatre form that reinforces the passivity of the majority.

In turn, Rancière challenges this notion. For him, any assumption that there is an opposition between activity/passivity is a particular "distribution of the sensible".¹⁴⁷ For Rancière, according to Gabriel Rockhill, there are many such distributions which function as "an implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed".¹⁴⁸ Such a distribution appears invisible since it is normalised within society and the individuals within it, and usually functions to disempower the individual. In *The Emancipated Spectator* he argues that in twentieth century theatre makers keen to overcome this passivity and effect social change, such as he sees in practitioners as diverse as Brecht and Artaud, there is an assumption of inequality between the performer and the spectator that needs to be effaced. Rancière links this to his work on education in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, where he suggested that most teachers assume an inequality between themselves and their pupil. Even when

¹⁴⁵ Aristotle (c.330 B.C.) *The Poetics* c.13, quoted in O'Toole et al, p.17

¹⁴⁶ Boal, A (1979), *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto) quoted in O'Toole et al, p.17

¹⁴⁷ Rancière (2009a), p.12

¹⁴⁸ Rancière (2004), p.85

keen to challenge this relationship, he suggests “[I]s it not precisely the desire to abolish the distance that creates it?”¹⁴⁹ For Rancière the well-meaning theatre maker such as Boal, Brecht or Artaud, anxious to redress his abuse of power as a theatre producer, is recast as someone who perpetuates his power as he disavows it.

For Rancière, this assumption of seated spectator as passive, or an equation of passivity in the theatre with passivity outside the theatre, is far too simplistic. Instead, Rancière suggests, equality could be a presupposition of what is possible in the suspension of normal relations offered by art. Rancière proposes seeing spectators themselves as artists: “spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem, as, in their way, do actors or playwrights, directors, dancers or performers”.¹⁵⁰ For him there is nothing wrong with distance between people: it “is not an evil to be abolished, but the normal condition of any communication”.¹⁵¹ Again, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* makes a similar point: “People are united because they are people, that is to say, *distant* beings. Language doesn’t unite them. On the contrary, it is the arbitrariness of language that makes them try to communicate by forcing them to translate – but also puts them in a community of intelligence”.¹⁵² In the process of communication, as discussed in Chapter Three, two or more people are communicating and *all* are essential to the process. Rancière says, “Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story”.¹⁵³ Both enter into a relationship of communication, and listening/spectating is as valuable as speaking/performing in that moment. This is not, of course, to deny the importance of speech to those disenfranchised

¹⁴⁹ Rancière (2009a), p.12

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.13

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.10

¹⁵² Ibid, p.58. Original emphasis.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p.17

politically. But politics is not aesthetics, is not art, and has its own discursive features. It is the distance in aesthetics that allows for freedom of thought.

The notion of distance created by art is similar to the distance created by the political eruptions Rancière characterises as theatrical, where “an untutored expression of the people [...is put] at a maximum distance from the community’s sense of itself”.¹⁵⁴ This distance allows it to see itself and creates a space to think. This space is what he sees in the notion of the statue outlined by Schiller in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which is “closed on itself”,¹⁵⁵ meaning that it has a “free appearance”.¹⁵⁶ In a neo-Kantian formulation, the spectator is given space by the autonomy of the work to contemplate it. Again like Kant, it is a “resistant volume”¹⁵⁷ which the viewer can only keep a distance from. Unlike Kant, he formulates a theory which includes not just the observer and the thing, but also “a third thing” between the two “that is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, and identity of cause and effect”.¹⁵⁸ This ‘third thing’ is unpredictable and therefore impossible to limit, since it exists in the individual response.

Despite opposing the authoritarian basis of Plato’s argument, for Rancière Plato is therefore right in recognising the subversive power of theatre to offer a unique space of perception for the viewer, meaning, to quote Hallward, that “it is Aristotle, rather than Plato, who is Rancière’s most significant adversary”.¹⁵⁹ Aristotle’s attempt to control theatre is doomed to fail. Instead, Rancière reformulates Plato’s conception of an audience, which Rancière characterises as the notion of a group of “ignoramuses [who] are invited to see people suffering”,¹⁶⁰ into the political possibility of an individual spectator able to interact with the

¹⁵⁴ Hallward, p.116

¹⁵⁵ Rancière (2009b), p.34

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p.29

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p.34

¹⁵⁸ Rancière (2009a), p.15

¹⁵⁹ Hallward, p.124

¹⁶⁰ Rancière (2009a), p.3

performance in her own way. The actor is specifically a 'man of action' who is able to participate in creating his own stories, and he hears others' stories as he works on his own. This story takes on a life of its own and is witnessed by the spectator as it becomes an aesthetic work. The spectator similarly views this creation of stories and develops her own relation to them and to her own stories, stories which she continuously creates and acts out in her life. This link between theatre and life, with the spectator simultaneously a performer and the performer simultaneously a spectator, can be particularly related to the notion of devising theatre, where the deviser's creation of roles, stories, images and other theatrical material is conceived of as part of a process. A spectator himself can be seen as a deviser, as he develops his own creative response to the work he sees. As such devised performance can be conceived of as political in its social nature. It can be related to everyday life but is also clearly separated from it. Like O'Toole's suggestion that Plato mistakenly connects "fiction" and "untruth" mentioned above, devised theatre has the potential to sit both within and beyond life for both makers and watchers.

In the theatrical co-presence of a performer and a spectator (and for Rancière "there is no theatre without a spectator"),¹⁶¹ the principal feature of theatre, or what Alan Read calls a "'face to face' relation",¹⁶² the self is made to encounter an 'other' that exists between the viewer and the art work. This 'other' is a complex phenomenon: for Read, not a bipartite but a tripartite relationship: "There is, in the act of theatre, the performer, the audience and you [...] This relationship, three as a crowd, maintains the essence of 'difference'.¹⁶³ Read invokes here the notion of theatre as offering something that cannot be reduced to either the self or the other. Lesley Wade Soule suggests a slightly different

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.2

¹⁶² Read, p.91

¹⁶³ Read, p.94

threesome of “performer, spectator and character”.¹⁶⁴ To conflate the two, one might suggest the co-presence of an external dialogue between spectator/audience and performer/character, but also an internal dialogue *within* the spectator/audience and performer/character, as each negotiates the role assigned to them by the theatrical event. This multiplicity of perspectives is one element of Hallward’s notion of Rancière’s theatocracy. He claims, “Rancière privileges multiplicity over unity. A theocratic democracy is never monological for the simple reason that “there is no voice of the people. There are scattered voices and polemics which in each instance divide the identity that they stage”.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion – Part Two

For Žižek, Rancière’s writings are “one of the consistent conceptualisations of how we are to continue to resist”.¹⁶⁶ Ultimately Rancière is, however, vague about the ways in which his ideas can be applied by those who want to facilitate change in a specific social situation. Indeed, in the case of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he points out ways in which attempts to include his ideas of universal teaching in the school system failed.¹⁶⁷ Instead, his focus is more on creating a dissensual space which may yield change, it may not. For Hallward, this dissensual disruption of boundaries, or what he calls “innovative blurring” of boundaries between the theatrical and the non-theatrical, “can only continue, in the domain of both politics and art, if it is illuminated by a decisive commitment that is itself organised, unequivocal, categorical and combative”.¹⁶⁸ I am also mindful of Shannon Jackson’s point that “when a political art discourse too often celebrates social disruption at the expense of social coordination, we lose a more complex sense of how art practices contribute to inter-dependent social

¹⁶⁴ Wade Soule, L. (1998) ‘Performing Identities (Empowering Performers and Spectators)’ in McCullough (ed.), p.41

¹⁶⁵ Hallward, p.118

¹⁶⁶ Žižek, S., Afterword to Rancière (2004), p.79. Original emphasis removed.

¹⁶⁷ Rancière (1991), p.115

¹⁶⁸ Hallward, p.129

imagining".¹⁶⁹ My purpose in this thesis is ultimately to articulate such social imagining, to propose a vision of devised theatre that can be fused with an appropriate pedagogy.

In the final part of this thesis, then, I am going to attempt to suggest ways in which the ideas in Part Two of the thesis can be applied to a pedagogical praxis. In the models of language, creativity and social practice I have outlined, I want to suggest three common features to these frames through which art can be perceived.

First, all three contain *structures* that exist and which the student and teacher as speakers, creators and social beings come into contact with. Through art the human subject collides with ways in which people speak, create and socially function and finds herself in a dialogue with these structures. The human agent is not able to articulate herself wholly freely in response to these structures, but neither is she unable to articulate any kind of response. She is both inside and outside the structures, which constrain her but also provide a way to speak, create and socially function.

Second, all three frames engage with aspects of an *artistic process*: of speaking, creating and socially being. As such, they function not just as a means to an artistic end but as an end in themselves where what the person does achieves something in the moment: as an act of speech, an act of creation, and as a social act.

The enactment is not only a practical thing, but something of wider significance. In its unique iteration, it offers reflection on existing perspectives. This leads to the third common feature. They all offer the possibility of *simultaneous action and reflection – praxis*. In acts of speech, creativity and social practice lie not only opportunities for creation, but also for reflection. In the

¹⁶⁹ Jackson (2011), p.14

doing and understanding of human activities such as language, creativity and social practice concepts are debated and created in an ongoing dialogue.

I will use these three features to inform a pedagogical approach appropriate to devised theatre in Part Three of the thesis. In particular I will argue that the notion of praxis is particularly useful to understanding what both pedagogy and devised theatre can be. In praxis, the act is important in itself and is not a means to an end. It opens up a space for debate. It harnesses fluidity and process over a prescriptive set of demands. It suggests the possibility of both devised theatre and pedagogy as an ongoing process of reflection and creation.

**PART
THREE –
TOWARDS A
PEDAGOGY
OF DEVISED
THEATRE
PRAXIS**

CHAPTER SIX – PRAXIS AND PEDAGOGY

In the last chapter, I outlined my interest in the work of Jacques Rancière, and suggested that his notion of art as a dissensual realm, which can paradoxically obtain its greatest social import by situating itself outside the everyday, is of particular use for my thesis. However, I also outlined that Rancière himself is reluctant to align himself to direct practice, and that his work is more interested in proposing the possibility of a dissensual realm than conceiving what this might actually look like. This approach is strategic for Rancière, allowing him to avoid prescribing specifics that might harden into a concrete approach. For him such an approach might limit the possibilities which a dissensual realm might take, and mean that it becomes channelled into a prescriptive “distribution of the sensible”¹ rather than retaining autonomy through its multiplicity of possible articulations.

However, since my aim in this thesis is to consider devised theatre in relation to making and teaching, I do wish to propose some specific suggestions. Throughout the thesis I have used the term praxis to suggest how devised theatre might be conceptualised. In the Introduction I defined praxis as a “unity of theory and practice”. In this chapter I seek to propose a pedagogic approach to devised theatre which harnesses a notion of praxis. I wish to propose devised theatre as an activity which is thought about and created in tandem; an activity which offers a social opportunity for the creativity of individual students, audiences and performers to be connected in a plethora of profound ways. Such creation is more likely to be owned by a range of participants than in traditional theatrical models, such as that where the playwright or director is seen as omniscient. I would suggest that such creativity is not only a practical activity centred on the creation of theatre but also involves creative theorising, developing ways in which art might be imagined and how it might interrelate with life.

¹ This is discussed more fully in the previous chapter on page 157.

In Chapter Two I outlined Jonathan Neelands' notion of theatre as a lens that is "a window for looking into 'nature'".² It is the means through which the familiar can be viewed anew. It can be an active process through which students devise outcomes that help them to think about the world. However, the social creation of devised theatre is also the creation of a work of art which exists at a remove from the everyday world. It is a creation developed through the lens of the theatrical frame, a lens which may variously distance, refract, dazzle and even obscure. The practice is simultaneously providing a space for the possibility of dissensus from social convention and a space for imagination; a space within which one can articulate alternative ways of moving, speaking and imagining. In such an art form there is a particular opportunity for the conventional separation of process and product, of social and aesthetic, to be eschewed in favour of a social space where all these aspects co-exist. The activity in itself allows for a space in which human beings come together to express, debate and create possibilities for their world.

In this chapter I will seek to define praxis, and to consider how this has been conceived by various writers. I will then apply some of these ideas to pedagogy, before going on to discuss pedagogy for devised theatre specifically.

Praxis

The term praxis was used by Aristotle in both *The Politics* and *Nichomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle, human activity could be divided into three aspects: praxis (used to describe action in itself), poiesis (production) and theoria (thinking, or contemplation).³ According to Bottomore this tripartite distinction was ultimately elided into a binary distinction between the theoretical and the practical within Aristotle's own school, a move which continued into medieval scholastic

² Neelands, J. (2010) 'Mirror, Dynamo or Lens?' in O'Connor (ed.), p.152

³ See Smith, Bottomore (ed.), p.435 and Backman, *passim*.

philosophy and to the present day.⁴ However, Aristotle's initial separation of practice into poiesis and praxis is significant for my thesis, since it suggests the possibility of practice that does not only aim for an outcome but which exists for itself. Aristotle recognises here a separation between action that is rooted in an intended end point (what might be termed production), and action that is activity for its own sake: in his words, "good action itself is its end".⁵ His own prioritisation of the latter is also evident when he states "Life is action [*praxis*] and not production [*poiesis*]".⁶ Indeed, according to Smith, for Aristotle "praxis is guided by a moral disposition to act truly and rightly [called *phronesis* by Aristotle]; a concern to further human well being and the good life".⁷ This is because it cannot be compromised by the needs of production; rather, it has no intention other than to be true to itself.

According to Backman, for Aristotle this "implies that what decides the quality of an individual life is the way in which it is lived, not what is achieved in that life".⁸ And how the life is lived, in terms of praxis, is always in the moment: Backman goes on to say that "*praxis* [...] is an activity considered in terms of what is *enacted or performed during* the action itself, and of the way in which this is done; its outcome, if any, is extraneous to the action itself".⁹ The theatrical language of this is notable, and brings to mind Peggy Phelan's notion that performance's "only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance".¹⁰ It is in the moment of action, the 'now' of that moment, that performance takes place. From this perspective the process of devising theatre

⁴ Bottomore, p.435

⁵ Aristotle (1998b), p.143

⁶ Aristotle (1998a), p.14

⁷ See Smith.

⁸ Backman, p.35

⁹ Backman, p.30. Some emphases added.

¹⁰ Phelan (1993), p.146. Original emphasis.

could also be conceptualised as praxis, not only in terms of it being a means to an end but as an end in itself; as an engagement in a creative activity where the focus is not only on the end point of a performance to an audience but also on the creative process of the group and the individual concerned.

However it also suggests a potential political charge to praxis. Hannah Arendt goes so far as to invoke praxis as an alternative to the Nazis' Final Solution. Focusing on the moment rather than an end point resists "the murderous consequences inherent in a line of thought that forces one to admit that all means, provided that they are efficient, are permissible and justified to pursue something defined as an end".¹¹ Praxis was also politically significant for Marx. According to Bottomore, for Marx praxis "became the central concept of a new philosophy which does not want to remain philosophy, but to transcend itself both in a new meta-philosophical thinking and in the revolutionary transformation of the world".¹² The German word for practice in a more conventional sense is also praxis, so the word is translated variously as either practice or praxis. Nonetheless, in his 'Theses on Feuerbach', for example, Marx's intimation of an Aristotelian notion of praxis is clear when he emphasises the importance of his theory being coupled with action, stating that "All social life is essentially practical" and "the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways, the point is to *change* it".¹³

The term was taken up by Gramsci in particular, who referred to Marxism itself as a "philosophy of praxis". He said it was "the crowning point of this entire movement of intellectual and moral reformation",¹⁴ and suggested, according to Bruno Gulli, that "the point is moving toward a conception of labour that brings

¹¹ Arendt, H. (1998) *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University Press) p.229, quoted in Backman, p.44

¹² Bottomore, p.437

¹³ Marx, p.93. Original emphasis.

¹⁴ Gramsci, p.395

together production and creation”.¹⁵ This labour, as praxis, emphasises the possibility of the worker’s capacity for “creative activity” beyond her diversion into capitalism’s projects. Such a conception of labour would fuse activity and production with theory, as the worker fulfils her capacity for thought, action and production. Aristotle’s distinction between production and action is reconfigured here in economic terms. Capitalism’s diversion of the worker’s creativity onto its projects does not realise the worker’s full potential for creative action, but the notion of praxis, defined by Kitching as “conscious creative activity”,¹⁶ holds forth the promise of such a possibility. This possibility always exists, according to Gulli, because “capital cannot avoid creating a mass of superfluous labour, which is still living, yet cannot become productive”.¹⁷ This superfluity exists in the creativity not satisfied by unfulfilling labour. In a similar vein Jack Mezirow suggests that praxis offers the potential for “a dialectic in which understanding and action interact to produce an altered state of living”.¹⁸

There is an emphasis in all these writers on the agency of the subject in determining their action. Rather than taking action as a habit, or because someone has been told to, action is an end in itself. It is not done as a theoretical imperative, but it is a theoretical position. It insists on the possibility of transforming what is taken for granted. In the transformational concept of praxis then, as in the model of devised theatre I outlined in Chapter One, conceptual divisions elide: according to Smith, citing Gadamer, the process of praxis “involves interpretation, understanding and application in ‘one unified process’”.¹⁹ Indeed, for Zygmunt Bauman, “human praxis, viewed in its most universal and general features, consists in turning chaos into order, or substituting one order for

¹⁵ Gulli, c.15

¹⁶ Kitching, p.26

¹⁷ Gulli, c.12

¹⁸ Mezirow et al, p.xii

¹⁹ Smith, citing Gadamer, H-G. (1979) *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward), p.275

another”.²⁰ In this transformational process the conventional divisions between terms and concepts normally considered distinct start to loosen, and what Bauman calls “sliminess”²¹ is generated. This “sliminess” for Bauman suggests the creation of new meanings that are socially significant for the individual and the society. As I outlined through theoretical models of language, creativity and social practice in Part Two, praxis offers a model of theory leading to human activity and of human activity being seen as potentially theoretical: as a model which leads to liberating action, and as an activity which offers the theoretical possibility of agency through what it does. And devised theatre, an art form which I have suggested is similarly resistant to definition, an art form which envisions the possibility of art as a process as well as a finished object, and which has a tendency towards being an ephemeral form that is in process and able to be shaped by its participants, can be seen as a highly appropriate vehicle for this conception of praxis.

Pedagogy and Praxis

But what of education? How have educational models attempted to explore the notion of praxis? Education is of course taught as a theoretical and a practical subject. Yet this does not necessarily mean that it offers the opportunity for its participants to simultaneously reflect as they do an activity, or to see their activity as having a wider significance. If truly functioning as a praxis, it should develop the kind of ‘sliminess’ Bauman discusses which starts to blur previously distinct conceptual boundaries, allowing its participants – both teachers and students – to see what they do as an holistic practice which offers the opportunity of Mezirow’s “altered state of living”. For Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, however, much educational practice does the opposite. In

²⁰ Bauman, p.96

²¹ Ibid, p.113

Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture they discuss the ‘symbolic violence’ of the education system. Systems of symbolization and meaning are imposed on groups or classes of people in a way that “renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder”.²² Pedagogic actions reproduce the values of the teacher, whether in a family or an institution, and are given legitimacy through the discourse of education. This reproduction of cultural values through education is what they call the ‘cultural arbitrary’ – it passes itself off as the natural order of things rather than as the arbitrary socio-historical construct that it is.

For Bourdieu and Passeron, those being taught are also in a system that focuses on being able to manipulate and reproduce culture rather than *make* it or seek to change it (in their terms ‘symbolic mastery’ is favoured over ‘practical mastery’). This reproduces a method of education that suits the teacher, someone who has already mastered the academic discourse around the subject, rather than one that suits someone who seeks to creatively expand the subject, to explore what the academic discourse might be, or to reflect on how their practice might function in a broader context. In a reproductive system such as this, the students of such a teacher are not encouraged to do these things either. For those involved in teaching the arts this is reflected in the ‘heritage’ attitude of someone such as Peter Abbs, who emphasises in his book *Living Powers* the value of “inherited culture and a personal sense of cultural solidarity, of belonging to an historical past which gives depth and meaning to the present”.²³ For Bourdieu, writing six years before *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, this educational system, like his outlining of the artistic system in *Distinction* (discussed in Chapter Five), is part of a wider “cultural unconscious” where “attitudes, aptitudes, knowledge, themes and problems, in short the whole system

²² Bourdieu and Passeron, p.5

²³ Abbs (ed.), p.3. Original emphasis removed.

of categories of perception and thought” are “organised” by the school.²⁴ Such an unconscious will inevitably shift over time. For example, Lyotard suggests that positivist certainties have recently given way to a more market-driven notion of the purpose of education: “The transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding the nation towards its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions”,²⁵ reflecting a social shift in priority from “Is it true?” to “What use is it?”.²⁶

From this perspective it might appear that Bourdieu is arguing that teaching is doomed to reproduce social phenomena: teachers are subject to social pressures, education reproduces, and the ‘habitus’ (a “structured and structuring structure”²⁷ of education) structures its subjects, meaning that they lack agency in a system which controls them. Yet the very fact that the cultural unconscious changes over time means that there is another story behind what might appear on the surface to be Bourdieu’s resignation. Bourdieu notes that “[h]abitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in such a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures”.²⁸ And in his later essay ‘Understanding’, Bourdieu proposes a sense of habitus not as solely controlling its subjects but actually as a “regulated improvisation”,²⁹ according to Bridget Fowler. The practice of life is a socially conditioned performance.³⁰ The subject is caught within a structure, but within this structure there is nonetheless the opportunity for moments of choice, self-

²⁴ Quoted in Jenkins, p.136

²⁵ Lyotard, p.48

²⁶ Ibid, p.51

²⁷ Jenkins, p.141

²⁸ Bourdieu, P and L.J.D. Wacquant (1992), *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University Press), p.133. Original emphasis.

²⁹ Fowler, p.10

³⁰ This notion is similar to Judith Butler’s notion of gender where the subject and her/his body is structured by social factors. See Butler, J (2007) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge).

discovery and insight which offer the potential of leading to change. Like the models of language, creativity and hegemony outlined in Chapters Three, Four and Five respectively, structure is present but is not all controlling. Even if their choices are socially circumscribed, the subject is still able at moments to recognise their habitus, reflect on their behaviour and to make choices.

This notion leads Bourdieu to outline a notion of “reflex reflexivity”, where the sociologist interviewing a subject (in his case) “monitor[s] *on the spot* [...] the effects of the social structure within which it is taking place”.³¹ In this model, theory enables the person in power to examine their behaviour and to critically reflect on it as they do it. The theory modifies the action, but the action is crucial since it is what allows for the possibility of discovery. The theory in itself would remain abstract without the *practice* of the practitioner. Through reflex reflexivity the practitioner can see what they are doing and what is happening between them and their interviewee.

However, what is missing from Bourdieu’s essay is a discussion of the person who is not in power. What remains is a sense of the power differential which needs to be corrected by the sociologist, but which is actually reproduced in the moment of the interview. So on the surface it may at first appear that what is happening here is praxis, theory and practice working together and leading to Aristotle’s *phronesis*, a course of morally right and prudent action. But what actually happens in the moment of enactment does not offer a different power dynamic. The sociologist stands outside, able to analyse and understand and now even self-critically reflect through his superior insight.

I will discuss Rancière as offering an alternative model to this later in this chapter. In the meantime, I want to suggest that what Bourdieu does point towards is an interest towards action that can be reflective, towards action that can be theoretically and morally justified, towards Aristotle’s *phronesis*, which was

³¹ Bourdieu (1996), p.18

part of the Greeks' "establishment of rationality as a dominant system of thought".³² For Bourdieu however, such rationality is not fixed but is negotiated in an ongoing process of reflection aimed at understanding better what is happening between and within people at any given moment. Such an approach shifts from the positivistic notion that truth can be 'proved' in an empirical way towards recognising the ways in which phronesis is a shifting concept. According to Carr and Kemmis, in the early twentieth century such a positivist discourse dominated in the form of science, which developed into a "conformity with established ways of thinking", and ossified into orthodoxy, meaning that "questions of the values underlying these courses of action were believed to be beyond the scope of science and were therefore left unexamined".³³ Carr and Kemmis map this approach onto Habermas' notion of the "technical interest", which focuses on the human acquiring control over objects. The politics and morality of such an act are ignored in favour of the priority of controlling through the overarching discourse of science.

The 'technical interest' is part of Habermas' broader theory of "knowledge-constitutive interests", which

rejects any idea that knowledge is produced by some sort of 'pure' intellectual act in which the knowing subject is himself 'disinterested'. Knowledge is never the outcome of a 'mind' that is detached from everyday concerns. On the contrary, it is always constituted on the basis of interests that have developed out of the natural needs of the human species and that have been shaped by historical and social conditions.³⁴

Habermas, according to Carr and Kemmis, outlines three such interests which constitute human knowledge. In addition to the technical interest, Habermas suggests a practical interest, linked to an "interpretive" approach, where the focus is on interpreting the practical specifics of each subjective human act of communication. However, this is limited too, since it "fails to recognise that the

³² Schechner, p.106

³³ Carr & Kemmis, p.132

³⁴ Ibid, p.134

subjective meanings that characterise social life are themselves conditioned by an objective [social, cultural and political] context that limits both the scope of individuals' intention and the possibility of their realisation".³⁵ Habermas' third 'interest', the 'emancipatory interest', however, understands the bigger context within which individual acts occur, and considers how the individual and the social context might interact, thus allowing for the possibility of "acquir[ing] an emancipatory knowledge of the objective framework within which communication and social action occur".³⁶ Such an interest, the one which Habermas is most committed to, allows for a "critical social science" that "goes beyond critique to critical praxis".³⁷ The supposed objectivity of the technical interest, focused solely on mastery of supposedly scientific 'objective' truths, is called into question by the subjective practical interest of specific human acts. And the subjective experience is in turn influenced by social structures. Again, as with Bourdieu, there is a sense that the individual is both trapped within social structures, but is able to gain awareness of these structures as part of a process of transforming them. This transformation is not to be gained through theory in itself, but through praxis; through "an integration of theory and practice as reflective and practical moments in a dialectical process of reflection, enlightenment and political struggle carried out by groups for the process of their own emancipation".³⁸

Freire and *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed*

A similar desire to develop emancipation from oppression, where human beings are engaged in reflecting on their lives as a means to improve it, spurred Paulo Freire to develop his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Working in Brazil, a country where many peasants were illiterate and furthermore had little interest in

³⁵ Ibid, p. 135

³⁶ Ibid, p. 136

³⁷ Ibid, p. 144

³⁸ Ibid, p. 144

education, considering it irrelevant to their lives, Freire demonstrated to them that their notion of education was culturally and historically specific, seeking to support them in “[t]heir struggle to become free subjects and to participate in the transformation of their society” through education.³⁹ For Freire, education was suffering from “narration sickness”,⁴⁰ where the teacher-student relationship was focused on “a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)”.⁴¹ In this model the teacher’s task is “to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give the significance”.⁴² This idea of “filling” the students led Freire to a notion of the current pedagogical system as a “‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits”.⁴³ The student is seen as passive, but adapting to this approach is beneficial to the student: “the more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is”.⁴⁴ There is a pay-off for the student who works hard in this ‘banking’ system: the ability to participate in the world as it is currently conceived, which ultimately brings the financial reward of deposits in the bank as a result of the deposits in the head. Education conceived thus is prescribed, focused and measurable: “verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the methods for evaluating ‘knowledge’, the distance between the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion”⁴⁵ are all made clear. However, according to Freire, “everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking”.⁴⁶ In this model, enquiry is dulled and the student’s agency limited, and

³⁹ Shaull, R., Foreword to Freire (1996), p.11

⁴⁰ Freire (1996), p.52

⁴¹ Ibid, p.52

⁴² Ibid, p.52

⁴³ Ibid, p.53

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.54

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.57

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.57

as with Bourdieu and Passeron's notion of reproduction, the education serves to perpetuate rather than improve society.

In opposition to this, Freire invokes what Grundy terms a "critical pedagogy" which "goes beyond situating the learning experience within the experience of the learner: it is a process which takes both the experiences of both the learner and the teacher, and through dialogue and negotiation, recognises them both as problematic".⁴⁷ Such a pedagogy opens up a process of debate where meanings and possibilities are opened up to challenge and redefinition. Freire proposes this as a *problem-posing* approach to education:

The banking concept [...] distinguishes two stages in the action of the educator. During the first, he cognizes a cognizable object while he prepares his lessons in his study or his laboratory; during the second, he expounds to his students about that object. [...] The problem-posing method does not dichotomise the activity of the teacher-student; she is not "cognitive" at one point and "narrative" at another. She is always "cognitive", whether preparing a project or engaging in dialogue with the students. He does not regard cognizable objects as his private property, but as the object of reflection by himself and his students.⁴⁸

In the 'banking' concept knowledge is reduced to a commodity – something to be passed on as part of the transaction of education. In the problem-posing approach, however, he refuses a concept, or even a stage, of education which is solely about passing on what has already been understood by the teacher. Rather, education is seen as an opportunity to explore what that understanding might be. Education is not just a practice, a skill to be passed on, but something happening in the here and now between teacher and student: a process. He goes on

The students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with their teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own [...] Whereas banking education anaesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain

⁴⁷ Grundy, p.103

⁴⁸ Freire (1996), p.61

the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality.⁴⁹

For Freire, then, problem-posing education is emancipatory in a Habermasian mode. It is also notable here that the process benefits both teacher and student. Habermas' comment on enlightenment is relevant here: "The vindicating superiority of those who do the enlightening over those who are to be enlightened is theoretically unavoidable, but at the same time it is fictive and requires self-correction: in a process of enlightenment there can only be participants".⁵⁰ And this collective process of problem-posing is a praxis. Like Habermas, Freire states that breaking free from oppression "can only be done by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it".⁵¹ Freire states in a later book *Pedagogy of Freedom* that "one of the radical differences between education as a domesticating and dehumanising task and education as a humanistic and liberating task is that the former is a pure act of transference of knowledge whereas the latter is an *act of knowledge*".⁵² In this notion of reflection and action working simultaneously, or of knowledge and action working simultaneously, one can see praxis clearly articulated.

Indeed, for Grundy, exploring the development of a curriculum based on the ideas of both Freire and Habermas, "[p]raxis is the form of action which is the expression of the emancipatory interest".⁵³ She suggests five features of praxis in Freire's work: action and reflection, existing in a real as opposed to a hypothetical world, existing in a real world that is a world of social and cultural interaction, existing in a socially constructed as opposed to a natural world, and a process of meaning-making that recognises meaning as being socially constructed.⁵⁴

Looking across these features it is possible, as with Habermas' notion of

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.62

⁵⁰ Habermas, J. (1974) *Theory and Practice* (trans. J. Viertel) (London: Heinemann) p.40, quoted in Carr & Kemmis, p.149

⁵¹ Freire (1996), p.33

⁵² Freire, P. (1998) *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield), p.115. My emphasis.

⁵³ Grundy, p.104

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.104-5, p.115-116

knowledge-constitutive interests, to see a sense of a socially constructed view of the world as being crucial to the content and form of pedagogy. What both offer is a socially constructed view of the world in which the individual is trapped in a web of meanings and influences which s/he cannot escape, but a view where fatalism is eschewed in favour of recognition of the possibility of human agency in response. In this model, it is not inherently wrong to teach students facts. The problem is, to quote Freire, that in the 'banking' model "[t]he teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised, and predictable".⁵⁵ Knowledge is predetermined, and however entertaining or enjoyable the teacher makes the lesson, the content is ultimately limited. Rather, what is essential for Freire is a full dialogue between teacher and student so that the pedagogical process is a praxis: students exploring and trying out the relevance and significance of ideas and models to their own lives, reflecting on their own lives and practices, and then in turn adjusting their own activities. It is possible however to also reverse this: students trying out practices which then inform theoretical models; going on to participate in activities in a new way which again revise models. Neither theory nor practice are prioritised in this model, each informs the other and is inherently interconnected.

However, in the writings of Freire and of Carr and Kemmis, whilst the importance of theory as part of the process of praxis is made clear, the importance of practice to theory is not always so clearly articulated. Freire states that praxis "requires theory to illuminate it",⁵⁶ and that failure to do so runs the risk of activism – "action for action's sake".⁵⁷ For him, "reflection – true reflection – leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of

⁵⁵ Freire (1996), p.52

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.106

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.69

critical reflection”.⁵⁸ For Carr and Kemmis, critical theory enables the possibility of praxis, with the theory providing a critical frame within which truth can be revealed.⁵⁹ In these examples the writers are anxious to avow the presence of theory in the practice, and that theory is informing practice. But the need for practice to inform theory, and for theory to be influenced by practice, is not articulated as emphatically. There seems to be a sense of academic teleology here, similar to that noted by Shannon Jackson’s notion, when discussing the recent move towards practice-as-research and performance-as-research, of “initiatives that seek to align *research* with another activity that has been heretofore understood as *not research*”, with research being seen as a “condition to which the former term aspires”.⁶⁰

Whilst in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire does mention the importance of theory to practice more than the importance of practice to theory, he is aware of the latter’s importance. He states that “[w]hen a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter”.⁶¹ A praxis where the theoretical components are informed by practice is outlined by Deborah Britzman, who argues that educational theorising is situated within “the lived lives of teachers, in the values, beliefs, and deep convictions enacted in practice, in the social context that encloses such practice, and in the social relationships that enliven the teaching encounter”.⁶² In such an approach it could be said that understanding, or theorising, is going on even as the actor does the activity, in a manner similar to Bourdieu’s reflex reflexivity mentioned above.

Such an approach of understanding through practice is undertaken by Donald A. Schön in his books *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. The title of the former

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.48

⁵⁹ Carr and Kemmis, p. 132

⁶⁰ Jackson (2009), p.157. Original emphasis.

⁶¹ Freire (1996), p.68

⁶² Britzman, D (1991) *Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach* (Albany: State University of New York Press) p.50, quoted in Taylor (ed.), p.5

book suggests that an action can contain thought, even if subconsciously, and it is this idea that motivates Schön. He suggests that “inherent in the practice of the professionals we recognise as unusually competent is a core of artistry”, and that this “artistry is an exercise of intelligence, a kind of knowing”.⁶³ Indeed, he coins the term “reflection in action” to describe the activity of professional practitioners. In doing so he is keen to challenge what he calls “positivist doctrines”, where “practice appeared as a puzzling anomaly”⁶⁴ to a culture of professionals and educators who found the “phenomena” of reflective practice “disturbing”.⁶⁵ For Schön, this disturbance is because conventional, ‘scientific’ knowledge, or what he terms “Technical Rationality”, is seen as sufficient to solve practical problems. Yet in practice, he argues, practitioners reveal “artful competence”⁶⁶ which reflects a complex level of understanding that goes beyond what someone who only theorises can achieve. The skilled practitioner presents a challenge to the hegemony of positivist academic knowledge and thought by demonstrating “a kind of knowing which does not stem from a prior intellectual operation”.⁶⁷ In this conceptualisation practice and theory are not separated: citing Gilbert Ryle, he states “‘thinking what I am doing’ does not connote ‘both thinking what to do and doing it’. When I do something intelligently... I am doing one thing and not two”.⁶⁸ In reflective practice, theory and practice are not divided but co-exist, in a manner which suggests that Schön is actually outlining a theory similar to that of praxis. All praxis, where action is part of thought and thought part of action, continuously incorporates reflection and practice. There is here a subtle but telling distinction from the model of action research outlined by Kurt Lewin, which consists of a process of “planning, fact-finding and execution”.⁶⁹ This process is a movement

⁶³ Schön (1987), p.13

⁶⁴ Schön (1983), p.33

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.19

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.19

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.51

⁶⁸ Schön (1983) p.51, quoting Ryle, G (1949) *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hucheson) p.32.

⁶⁹ Carr & Kemmis, p.162

between theory and practice with an end point: to quote Phillip Taylor, “whereas action researchers tend to emphasise evaluation, rather than ongoing reflection, as a culminating activity, [...] reflective practitioner researchers are concerned with documenting and understanding the tacit and known knowledge base which enables reflection-in-action to occur”.⁷⁰

In terms of teaching, Schön suggests a model of coaching rather than teaching. Quoting John Dewey, he notes that the student “has to see on his own behalf and in his own way [...] Nobody else can see for him”.⁷¹ In this vision of dialogue between teacher and student one can see a vision reminiscent of Freire’s notion of dialogue between teacher and student. The truth is not there to be passed from teacher to student, but something to be worked on together as a process. One can also hear an echo of Freire’s notion of education as an emancipatory space, where meanings are open to negotiation and redefinition. As Schön suggests, “In a school supportive of reflective teaching, teachers would challenge the prevailing knowledge structure. Their on-the-spot experiments would affect not only the routines of teaching practice but the central values and principles of the institution. Conflicts and dilemmas would surface and move to centre stage”.⁷² This may not sit neatly with a prescriptive curriculum such as currently exists in the UK, but it does sit well with a curriculum which seeks to make its students understand the practical components of the discipline and how they fit into a broader social perspective.

In a similar vein Jonathan Neelands suggests the notion of reflexivity-in-practice, a development of Schön’s model for teaching and learning which “stresses an active commitment to articulating and making visible the essential dialectic within teaching and learning processes and within/between the

⁷⁰ Taylor, P (1996) ‘Doing Reflective Practitioner Research in Arts Education’ in Taylor (ed.), p.28

⁷¹ Schön (1987), p. 17 quoting Dewey, J (1974) *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University Press), p.11. Original emphasis removed.

⁷² Schön (1983), p.31

experiences of teachers and learners and others who are directly or indirectly effected by these experiences".⁷³ In such a model "both teachers and learners are made aware of knowledge as an interactive process which is selective, produced and constructed between teachers and learners rather than as the mechanical transference of naturalised and un-contestable facts and figures".⁷⁴ There is a dialogue between participants in the educational process where what is learned is open to negotiation in the moment. For Neelands, part of this critical praxis is the way in which critical theory is brought to bear on activity, where what appears 'instinctive' to the reflective practitioner is brought under the microscope through the critical frame. This critical frame is crucial, and in this he identifies a problem with Schön's notion of reflective practice, since Schön's practitioner's reflection

may tell us more about how effectively a teacher has been socialised and institutionalised into accepting, and therefore practicing, particular dominant values and pedagogical and epistemological selections, rather than providing an insight into how the emancipated or fully conscious, practitioner might work if they were free to determine their own practice.⁷⁵

If Freire and Carr and Kemmis prioritise theory over practice, then for Neelands perhaps Schön prioritises practice over theory. Here Neelands articulates an understanding of how within praxis, notwithstanding Gilbert Ryle's notion of "doing one thing and not two" mentioned above, theoretical elements can be important in informing and supporting practice.

Yet as I have already intimated, I am also keen to consider how practical understanding might inform theoretical understanding within the frame of pedagogical praxis. Freire's notion of students as "critical co-investigators in dialogue with their teacher"⁷⁶ offers the possibility of the classroom functioning as a model for a wider social democratic model. Indeed, for Richard Shaull, Freire believes that

⁷³ Neelands (2006), p.19

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.21

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.26

⁷⁶ Freire (1996), p.62

every human being, no matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence' he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at her world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it.⁷⁷

There is, however, another perspective to Freire's work illustrated by Shaull's point. In this model, the student needs to be "provided with the proper tools", and this needs the teacher to supply the educational frame. When Freire starts to outline practically how his ideas will work, the egalitarian basis of his theory starts to soften. Freire outlines that "[o]nce the investigators have determined the area in which they will work and have acquired a preliminary acquaintance with the area through secondary sources, they initiate the first stage of the investigation".⁷⁸ There is no mention here of the people with whom they work determining the content they will be working on. The educators determine the people who need their help and in what way help is needed. The investigators do, however, "call for volunteers among the participants to serve as assistants".⁷⁹ We are reminded here that the participants are not paid and are there to assist the better trained educators. The investigators, however, "observe certain *moments* of the life of the area [...] and register everything in their notebooks".⁸⁰ The area under investigation becomes an exotic other to be analysed and supported through a paternalistic model. Ultimately, after their work, educators present their findings to the people in "systematized and amplified form".⁸¹ Presumably Freire assumes that the people need this "amplification" to enable them to grasp the findings, which would otherwise be too complex for them.

In this model the notion of students emancipating *themselves* is absent. As Bingham and Biesta assert, in Freire's model "one must be *led* to emancipation, that the one who emancipates knows more than the one who is

⁷⁷ Shaull, R., Introduction to Freire (1996), p.14

⁷⁸ Freire (1996), p.91

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.91

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.92. Original emphasis.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.104

emancipated, and that the experiences of the one who is emancipated are not to be trusted".⁸² Freire himself appears aware of the problem when he states that many well-intentioned professionals

do not listen to the people, but instead plan to teach them how to 'cast off the laziness which creates underdevelopment.' To these professionals, it seems absurd to consider the necessity of respecting the 'view of the world' held by the people. The professionals are the ones with a 'world view'. They regard as equally absurd the affirmation that one must necessarily consult the people when organising the program content of educational action. They feel that the ignorance of the people is so complete that they are unfit for anything except to receive the teachings of the professionals.

Yet Freire's own guidance on how to provide a pedagogy for the oppressed seems to contain just such an approach. The specific context of Freire's desire to pass on literacy to those who did not possess it as part of a process of empowerment makes the need for him to pass on knowledge rather than just 'pose problems' wholly understandable. But despite his own interest in the term praxis, his description of activity cannot be seen to be an example of theory and practice working together simultaneously.

How has this slippage occurred? In Freire's model, educational practice will *later* lead to an understanding, or ability to theorise, the situation which in turn leads to greater understanding. But as with Bourdieu's sociologist, in its enactment *in the present* it reproduces the very power relations which it seeks to dissolve. To quote Rancière discussing socialist reformers' work on education, it "reproduces an approach that confirms present inequality in the name of an equality to come".⁸³ Freire is posed with a problem in the present – inequality – which needs to be erased in the future. Emancipated theory leads to unemancipated practice in order to reach its future goal.

I want to propose that the notion of praxis offers a way of understanding and moving on from this. In praxis, as already noted, theory and practice must be

⁸² Bingham and Biesta, p.63. Original emphasis.

⁸³ Rancière (2010b), p.11

intertwined, and praxis exists in the present for itself, with no practical outcome needed. Whilst I note Neelands' outlining of the potential absence of theory informing practice in Schön's model, it does at least allow the student to learn for herself through her own practice; indeed, it allows for the possibility of practice as a form of learning in itself. In this sense, despite its lack of social contextualisation, Schön's model is in some ways closer to praxis than Freire's.

Rancière and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

Yet this lack of social contextualisation is key. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Andy Kempe has suggested that a move towards what might be seen as 'child-centred' learning, can lead to a sense of a child as "stationary",⁸⁴ and that instead a teacher might play a vital part in 'moving' the child into new areas of understanding. I want to once more use the theory of Rancière to suggest some ways in which Freire's notion of emancipatory education rooted in praxis might be reimaged, with the child moving into new territory without such a move being perceived as manipulation from within a hierarchical relationship with a teacher. I will suggest that Rancière's notion of universal teaching outlined in his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* offers a vehicle for this.

Rancière suggests that most education follows a duplicitous process, where education appears to be benevolent but where the student is rendered passive and the teacher active. Rancière terms such education "explicatory", with the teacher passing on knowledge to the student. For Jacotot, Rancière's inspiration in this book, such "explication is the myth of pedagogy".⁸⁵ The myth is sustained because for the student

the more intelligent he becomes, the more he can peer down from on high at those he has surpassed [...] This is the genius of the explicators: they attach the creature they have rendered inferior with the strongest chains in the land of stultification – the child's consciousness of his own superiority.

⁸⁴ Kempe, p.42

⁸⁵ Cited in Rancière (1991), p.xix

This consciousness, moreover, doesn't kill off good feelings. The little educated child will perhaps be moved by the ignorance of the common people and will want to work at instructing them.⁸⁶

However well intentioned, such a concept of education rooted in Freire's 'banking' model or Rancière's notion of 'explication' "supposes a radical distinction between two types of intelligences [...] For children and common minds there are stories, for rational beings there are reasons".⁸⁷ In this distinction lies a logic which keeps people in their place. And this logic perpetuates itself: the fortunate teacher or student who has accrued knowledge then wants to pass it on. But in doing so Rancière's description echoes Freire's well intentioned 'investigators', looking to help the impoverished community they are working with from what is ultimately a superior and patronising position. As such, it spurs into action a reproductive logic which can never be satisfied: "at each stage the abyss of ignorance is dug again; the professional fills it in before digging another".⁸⁸ Knowledge is infinite and so an attempt to educate through only passing on knowledge is doomed to constantly reinforce not only what is known but the things that are not known. Education is confused with knowledge.

The aim of such a logic is to "lift [...] a veil off the obscurity of things".⁸⁹ Yet in this model the veil remains; indeed education is only there until the veil is lifted. Once the veil has disappeared, education becomes unnecessary. The educator will have done his job. To quote Bingham and Biesta, "If the child is free, then there remains no role for the pedagogy of the oppressed".⁹⁰ The possibility of education for its own sake as an *ongoing* participation in the world, as a *process* of developing understanding, as a *praxis* of self discovery and social engagement, is absent.

⁸⁶ Rancière (1991), p.22

⁸⁷ Rancière (2010b),p.4

⁸⁸ Rancière (1991), p.21

⁸⁹ Rancière (2010b), p.4

⁹⁰ Bingham and Biesta, pp.69-70

Rancière's project in the book is to imagine what a different educational process might be. To do this, Rancière looks at things the other way round. Rather than accepting the "axioms" of ordinary pedagogical logic, where inequalities of knowledge are presupposed, and a knowledge of inequality leads to insight and a subsequent lessening of that inequality in the *future* rather than the present,⁹¹ he suggests presupposing equality between all parties involved. In the words of Kristin Ross, Rancière asked, "What would it mean to make equality a *presupposition* rather than a goal, a *practice* rather than a reward situated firmly in some distant future so as to all the better explain its present infeasibility"?⁹² His starting point is the teacher Joseph Jacotot, a French teacher who had to teach his Flemish students the book *Télémaque* without a common language. For Rancière, this situation offered the possibility of mutual discovery; of an emancipatory opportunity. It reflected the "reality" of a "basic equality"⁹³ between human beings which exists in the "equality of speaking beings that comes before the relation of inequality".⁹⁴

This process, he suggests, begins before school by all human beings with the learning of the mother tongue. He says, "They hear and retain, imitate and repeat, make mistakes and correct themselves, succeed by chance and begin again methodically, and, at too young an age for explicators to begin instructing them, they are almost all – regardless of gender, social relation, and skin colour – able to understand and speak the language of their parents".⁹⁵ Indeed, the process of learning to speak offers Rancière a starting point to assume an *equality of intelligence* amongst people. All people learn to speak, and language is an incredibly complex system that requires considerable intelligence. The child adapts and learns in relation to circumstances, as adults do later in life. The child

⁹¹ Rancière (2010b) p.4; Bingham and Biesta, p.30

⁹² Ross, K., Introduction to Rancière (1991), p.xix. Original emphasis.

⁹³ Rancière (2010b), p.5

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.5

⁹⁵ Rancière (1991), p.5

is already exhibiting an ability to be a reflective practitioner. It is thus “useless to discuss whether their [the ‘common people’s] “lesser” intelligence is an effect of nature or an effect of society: they develop the intelligence that the needs and circumstances of their existence demand of them”.⁹⁶ Their intelligence has already proved itself – and before any formal education.

Rancière’s notion of the student and teacher recognising each other as intelligent beings is not merely a liberal agenda of everyone listening to each other as a democratic project. Rather, for Rancière the activity of speech itself is deeply political. As outlined in Chapter Three, for Rancière the ability to attempt to communicate with each other offers the potential for a radically egalitarian space, an ongoing process in which *all* subjects seek to understand and be understood. Bingham and Biesta characterise a difference between Freire and Rancière as centring on the figure of the child. Freire’s child “does not speak”,⁹⁷ is waiting to learn how to speak through the pedagogical process. For Rancière, however, the child or student “is already political even as she is acquiring her first language. That is, she is political even before she goes to school to become autonomous and emancipated”.⁹⁸ They state that according to Rancière “the child must force his or her will onto another in order to be understood in a way that reconfigures the distribution of the sensible”.⁹⁹ Because language is “arbitrary”, a means of “fragmenting truth”,¹⁰⁰ a space for debating truth, it actually functions as a space for *translation* between different dialects, different subjectivities. And Jacotot’s teaching of a text without a common language opened up such a space: “the relation between two ignorant people confronting the book they don’t know how to read is simply a radical form of the effort one brings every minute to translating

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.51

⁹⁷ Bingham and Biesta, p.69

⁹⁸ Ibid, p.57

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.59

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.60

and counter-translating thoughts into words and words into thoughts”.¹⁰¹ One of the roles of the teacher in this model is thus to draw the student’s attention to this act of translation and to refute any notion that truth is wholly graspable through language. Instead, truth is something to be contested, and any educational slippage from working through something with the child to passing on supposed ‘truth’ is avoided.

What happens in education is thus a potential space of exploratory communication that is essentially egalitarian and hence political. Bingham and Biesta contrast the politicised nature of the child/student in Rancière with the “psychological figure”¹⁰² of the child/student in Freire, with Freire mapping out a set of binaries where the child is led from oppression to liberation, from ignorance to knowledge. Whilst they recognise that in Freire’s model “it may indeed be the case that one side of the binary is a more agentive state, and that one is less agentive”,¹⁰³ this is ultimately for them a psychological rather than a political model where “an imbalanced psychic equation of teacher-over-student will change into a state of psychic balance between teacher and student”.¹⁰⁴ I suspect that Freire would challenge this and claim that his process can ultimately lead to political change. And as I have suggested above, the specific context of his consciousness raising and literacy programmes might make such an approach understandable. But what is noticeable is that his description of an educational process does not *in itself* create an egalitarian space in the way that Rancière’s conceptualisation offers.

In relation to the debate around praxis I am exploring, I am interested in the way in which Rancière’s description of Jacotot’s experience outlines an active pedagogical practice analysed in theoretical terms. But I am also interested in the

¹⁰¹ Rancière (1991), p.63

¹⁰² Bingham and Biesta, p.69

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.69

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.69

way in which the practice enables what could never be achieved through the theory in isolation. The ‘doing’ of pedagogy is what creates the egalitarian space, and as such functions as praxis: bringing something into being through its very action in a manner that fits praxis’ desire for phronesis without being focused on it as an end point. It is a process in itself between two people that is liberational for them *in that moment at that time*. In what Rancière calls ‘Jacotist pedagogy’, “the circle of emancipation must be *begun*”.¹⁰⁵ Emancipation should not be a future goal, but should exist in the praxis of teaching now.

So what then is the function of the teacher in Rancière’s work? It is to make “each man becom[e] conscious of his nature as an intellectual subject”,¹⁰⁶ it is to reverse Descartes’ thought to say “I am a man, therefore I think”.¹⁰⁷ Because students and children learn anyway, the role of the educator is to “remind her students that they can *already* speak”, to be a “teacher who refuses her students the satisfaction of admitting that they are incapable of speaking”.¹⁰⁸ The position of being incapable of speech may be disempowering but nonetheless reassuringly predictable, and encouraging students to recognise their intelligence may require effort. The aim though is not to move *towards* this position, but to *exhibit in the teacher’s emancipatory praxis* a belief and a demonstration of that capacity. For Rancière, “whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies. And whoever emancipates doesn’t have to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will learn what he wants. Nothing maybe”.¹⁰⁹ The pressure of passing on deposits, to invoke Freire’s term, or of explicating knowledge, to invoke Rancière’s, is overturned in favour of providing an emancipatory space. This can be achieved through focusing on the two fundamental jobs for the teacher: “He *interrogates*, he demands speech, that is to say, the manifestation of an

¹⁰⁵ Rancière (1991), p.16. Original emphasis.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.35

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.36

¹⁰⁸ Bingham and Biesta, p.154. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ Rancière (1991), p.18

intelligence that wasn't aware of itself or that had given up. And he *verifies* that the work of the intelligence is done with attention".¹¹⁰

What Rancière asserts here as needing to be at the centre of emancipatory educational praxis is work on the student's will. He suggests that "man is a will served by an intelligence".¹¹¹ The intelligence is already there, it is evident in the learning of language, yet most education works on a relationship between teacher and student focused on the relationship of one intelligence to another intelligence. What if, Rancière asks, education was to focus on "a pure relationship of will to will?"¹¹² Education could then function as a microcosm of emancipation, with students working alongside teachers and teachers alongside students, to understand, question and debate through speech. Through this process students might gain a sense of self-worth and of their own potential power.

The importance of speech and of language within an emancipatory educational praxis is noted by Grundy: "The emancipatory interest is identifiable in the intentionality of the act of speech".¹¹³ However, speech in itself is not enough to offer empowerment: for McCarthy, free communication can happen only when "there is an effective equality of chances to assume dialogue roles. In particular, all participants must have the same chance to initiate and perpetuate discourse".¹¹⁴ The importance of speech is also supported by Habermas, who stated that "all speech, even intentional deception, is oriented towards the definition of truth".¹¹⁵ Freire, too, recognises the power of words when he claims that "There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis".¹¹⁶ However,

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p.29. Original emphasis.

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp.51-2

¹¹² Ibid, p.13

¹¹³ Grundy, p.141

¹¹⁴ McCarthy, T (1975) *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press), p.xvii, quoted in Carr and Kemmis, p.143

¹¹⁵ Habermas, J (1970) 'Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence', *Inquiry* (13), p.372, quoted in Carr and Kemmis, p.142

¹¹⁶ Freire (1996), p.68

Habermas and Freire differ from Rancière in two important ways. Firstly, Rancière would challenge the idea that there is a ‘truth’ that can be uncovered through language. He rather suggests, as I have outlined in Chapter Three alongside Belsey’s distinction between reality and the real, that the real can only be explored through language, never mastered. Secondly, the potential of the word is something that will happen now, rather than something that will happen in the future. Freire may invoke language as praxis, but his notion of a ‘true’ word is found through an educational practice that I have argued lies in the future rather than the present. Rancière’s praxis, on the other hand, exists through practice and theory co-imagined in the present.

Pedagogical Praxis and Devised Theatre

I have documented a shift in educational philosophy and practice from knowledge centred education, through child centred learning, towards socially centred learning. In the latter praxis reflects the way in which education in theatre, or indeed in any subject, functions simultaneously as an emancipatory social practice. In the educational act as articulated by Rancière, the assumption of equality and the creation of a space to think and explore disrupts the hierarchy of normal social relations, and articulates the possibility of a space of growth.

If for Rancière the teacher’s job is to articulate a role of will to will between teacher and student, though, is he not substituting one locus of power difference – knowledge – for another – will? How might one create an educational space where both teacher and student not only exist in a state of mutual recognition of each other’s innate potential intelligence but of each other’s innate potential will? Furthermore, how does one deal with the problem Rancière himself outlines happened with Jacotot’s method: that when his philosophy was institutionalised it lost its oppositional edge and became an orthodoxy to be learned as part of a mythology of Progress, “the pedagogical fiction built into the fiction of the society

as a whole”¹¹⁷ which is always located in the future, rather than the present of praxis?

Here I again want to return to Chapter Three, where I outlined the importance for Rancière of the novel Jacotot and his students were working on together. For Rancière, the “intelligence of the book [...] was also the thing in common, the egalitarian intellectual link between master and student”.¹¹⁸ Rancière suggests the importance of the art work in creating an emancipatory educational space. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, however, he also applies this idea to the relationship between the performer and the spectator. He says that in

the logic of emancipation, between the ignorant schoolmaster and the emancipated novice there is always a third thing – a book or some other piece of writing – alien to both and to which they can refer to verify in common what the pupil has seen, what she says about it and what she thinks of it. The same applies to performance. It is not the transmission of the artist’s knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them.¹¹⁹

In this analysis the ‘third thing’ of performance, or theatre, does not exist to move *towards* an abstract notion of progress, but it contains a space *in the moment of performance* that *may* allow for individual and social progress. I stress the *may*: this is not a given, since as I have suggested throughout this thesis, art and performance exist in a space that lies at least partly beyond the everyday, a space which resists colonisation and easy definitions. It may also be racist, politically conservative, intellectually limited. An abstract notion of progress cannot be assured in the ambiguous state of art. But art, performance or theatre can provide the focus through which student and teacher, spectator and performer, come together to engage their mutual will and intelligence.

I therefore want to suggest the possibility of moving from socially centred education in the sense of trying to create social change, to art centred education

¹¹⁷ Rancière (1991), p.119

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.13

¹¹⁹ Rancière (2009a), pp.14-15

focused on trying to create art. In this shift teacher and student co-create, devise and discuss works of art. In doing so the art is still socially focused, but is socially focused because of its celebration of itself as art. And in works of devised theatre specifically, participants embody physicalities and speak words that fit particularly well with Corcoran's depiction of art as "tearing bodies from their assigned places and free speech and expression from all reduction to functionality".¹²⁰ As a drama student quoted by Gavin Bolton says, "our job wasn't just to find out stuff that was already there, but to *make* stuff – to find out how it felt and to show other people".¹²¹ The student's existing social role is challenged as he "finds out how it felt" for someone else. Such an act of conceptual understanding is possible through the practical act of 'making stuff'. The student also recognises here that understanding happens in the presentation that is part of theatre: the process can be engaged with by others as audiences interact with it.

An emphasis on both the pedagogical process and performance is present in *Performing Pedagogy*, where Charles R. Garoian claims that "performance art represents the praxis of postmodern theories in art and education".¹²² For Garoian, performance *re*-presents; quoting Elin Diamond, he states that performance is defined "in terms of the prefix *re*". Diamond states that to

reembody, reinscribe, reconfigure, resignify acknowledges the pre-existing discursive field, the repetition – and the desire to repeat – within the performative present, while 'embody', 'configure,' 'inscribe,' 'signify,' assert the possibility of materialising something that exceeds our knowledge that alters the shape of sites and imagines other as yet unsuspected modes of being.¹²³

Like Corcoran's eschewing of functionality, for Garoian postmodern performance is the praxis of postmodernism because "as compared to the hegemonic discourse and practices of modernist art, the function of subjectivity and agency for postmodern performance artists is the production of critical citizenship, civic

¹²⁰ Corcoran, S., Introduction to Rancière (2010a), p.1

¹²¹ Quoted in Taylor (ed.), p.192. Original emphasis.

¹²² Garoian, p.1

¹²³ Diamond, E (ed.) (1996) *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge), p.2, quoted in Garoian, pp.5-6. Original emphasis.

responsibility, and radical democracy”.¹²⁴ Whilst many writers on postmodernism such as David Harvey would dispute such a characterisation as being innately or even typically postmodern and therefore counter-hegemonic,¹²⁵ Garoian is arguing, as I have, that in a contemporary context performing can offer human beings the ability to articulate new possibilities for themselves and their lives, and that such an activity has social significance since it opens up the possibility for alternative social realities to be created and imagined. Working through the personal as students devise “from the perspective of their personal memories and cultural histories”¹²⁶ (and Garoian assumes devising in his book as the method of performance making), their personal experience takes on social significance through the process of making art.

Garoian suggests his performance art pedagogy is founded on three attributes: performance, performativity, and performance art. In his model, performance behaviours that are socially familiar are reproduced, and this includes, “[w]ithin the context of educational practice, [...] the teacher’s pedagogy, the students’ interaction with that pedagogy, and their mutual involvement in school”.¹²⁷ As I have outlined in this thesis, Bourdieu, Rancière and Friere variously suggest that educational institutions contain within them an innate politics as a result of their history and political context. Through what Garoian calls performativity, students articulate a subjective response to these “dominant cultural paradigms from the perspective of personal memories and cultural histories”.¹²⁸ In the third stage this is developed further as students create performance art in a “liminal space, an aesthetic dimension, wherein socially and historically constructed ideas, images, myths and utopias can be contested and new ones constructed as they pertain to students’ experiences of reality and their

¹²⁴ Garoian, p.9

¹²⁵ Harvey, D (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell)

¹²⁶ Garoian, p.1

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.8

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.8

desires to transform that reality”.¹²⁹ Social reality is understood in the dimension of performance, and then transformed through the pedagogical process into performativity and finally performance art.

Garoian’s aim is to prove that “teaching is an art form just as art is a form of teaching”,¹³⁰ hoping that his own artistic practices could be replicated in the classroom to “produce a similar agency, curiosity, and desire for art praxis in [his] students”.¹³¹ His vision of a creative space where new possibilities to art and life are articulated means a “pedagogical method [which] seeks a diversity of images, ideas, perspectives, and interpretations”.¹³² However, what I find interesting as I read Garoian’s documentation of his practice in the book is the lack of diversity of interpretations of the art he makes. Describing his performance *Dialogue with an Object of Conversation*, he states that his students “gagged, hog-tied and dragged my body before a white package tied with string”¹³³ to reflect his parents’ limited opportunities when they emigrated to America. When the package is unwrapped and reveals “a large cow’s tongue purchased from the local butcher”,¹³⁴ he attempts to move towards the severed tongue and speak about art, but he is inaudible, with his “loud nonsense sounds and mumbles [...] ironically juxtaposed with the severed tongue on the floor”.¹³⁵ Garoian knows what he is trying to ‘say’ through this piece, since the juxtaposition is knowingly ‘ironic’. He decodes this in a singular way: “My movement suggested attempts to retrieve my tongue”.¹³⁶ Similarly, his description of student work where the student walks on a treadmill, with “the visual image of her ‘going nowhere’ and the monotonous sound of the treadmill’s rollers provid[ing] a basis from which to experience futility directly” imposes meaning on the work. The performance is led by conceptual

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.10

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.3

¹³¹ Ibid, p.3

¹³² Ibid, p.29

¹³³ Ibid, p.7

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.7

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.7

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.7

understanding here, meaning that it ultimately remains a commodity beyond praxis; a commodity designed to say a particular thing rather than a process which leads to its own outcome which is impossible to predict in advance. The student is not involved in creating a process of theory and practice simultaneously, but works out what she wants to say and then finds a practical means of doing so. The notion of art being able to open up understanding, or to think something previously unthought, remains elusive.

Garoian later states that he will “refer to ‘artist/teacher’ and ‘spectator/student’ as parallel roles to convey the similarities between artists and teachers as cultural agents and spectators and students as cultural depositories”.¹³⁷ Apart from wondering how his students might feel about being described as cultural depositories rather than agents, what is missing here is the possibility of the art functioning as an egalitarian space, as having the possibility to suggest something new where both teacher and student learn together such as is articulated by Rancière. What is also missing is any possibility that within the pedagogical process, the student will make art that the teacher might learn from, or which might provide the starting point for a conversation. It appears that however much the work which is produced in Garoian’s classroom is experimental, postmodern or challenging conventional roles, the teacher is still very much defining what happens in the classroom.

In suggesting that the spectator is a cultural depository, like the theatre practitioners discussed by Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator* which I outlined in Chapter Five, Garoian assumes that the spectator is by default passive. In contrast he invokes Allen Kaprow and Artaud amongst others to argue for an active spectator, where “the traditional role of art spectator and audience is shifted to that of participant”.¹³⁸ But unless the audience has been involved in the

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.39

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.23

process of the work, there is inevitably a distinction between spectator and performer; the question is, to invoke Rancière, whether this is inherently a disempowering thing, or whether such a notion is based on an ultimately rather patronising presumption that the spectator is not able to think for themselves about what they are seeing. Indeed, with the reductive meanings that Garoian puts on his performance, I am tempted to suggest that there is not very much space for Garoian's spectator to think at all. What is missing here is a notion that spectating as well as making can be understood as a praxis – as a mentally creative engagement with both aesthetic and philosophical concepts for the individual perceiving it through the 'third thing' articulated by Rancière: the work of art.

Indeed, the arts have often seen theory and practice as separate rather than thought together, as praxis. Terry Eagleton states that “[a]esthetics is born as a discourse of the body”.¹³⁹ According to Eagleton, aesthetics were contrasted to “the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought”,¹⁴⁰ and were mapped on to the materiality of what can be perceived through human senses, as opposed to the immateriality of ideas and thoughts. From such a viewpoint, art with its roots in aesthetics and its tendency to be experienced through sensation is linked more to practice than to abstract theorising. A contrasting view is outlined by David Hornbrook, who outlines a need for theory to lead practice in art: “formulating theories is the way we make sense of our experience by giving ourselves meaningful structures within which it may be explained”.¹⁴¹ In doing so, according to Philip Taylor, Hornbrook limits the power of practitioners in favour of theorists: “the practitioners are not the authorities because they have seemingly avoided a theoretical framework”.¹⁴² In contrast, Taylor outlines the understanding of a

¹³⁹ Eagleton (1990), p.13

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p.13

¹⁴¹ Hornbrook, D (1989) *Education and Dramatic Art* (Oxford: Blackwell), p.3, cited in Taylor (ed.), p.5

¹⁴² Taylor (ed.), p.5

teacher who builds up the confidence of 5-year old Frank through their relationship in process drama. This was a relationship built up over a period of time that was rooted in praxis: a simultaneous engagement with both theory and practice, where the artistic process in lessons was embedded in decision making but also where decision making in lessons were embedded in the artistic process. Discussing such process drama, Hornbrook suggests that “[i]t is by no means obvious to most people that the slim – at times invisible – outcomes of these experimental encounters are worth the hours of role-playing that precede them”.¹⁴³ The local, practical knowledge of the teacher working with Frank is considered unimportant; theoretical understanding is superior. The irony of Hornbrook’s own case is that he himself is clearly party to just such a knowledge when he describes a school production where

over two hundred children from all parts of a large comprehensive had researched, written and performed a play with songs, about their locality and its old mining tradition. Almost all their parents, and many of their grandparents, had been involved in one way or another [...] the atmosphere was electric. Anyone who has experienced the massive outpouring of energy and enthusiasm harnessed by a successful community play of this kind will know what rich and unforgettable festivals they can be.¹⁴⁴

As Taylor suggests, in this passionate description lies a recognition of understanding being created in the moment of art, in the moment of the practical work being shared, that cannot be reduced to theory alone. The art itself provides a vehicle for understanding, an experience that “is no different from the one that 5-year old Frank and his teacher encountered, who at a moment in time found that through the drama they could transcend the boundaries of their real existence and discover some new mode of being within the imaginary world”.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Hornbrook, D (1995) ‘Mr. Gargery’s Challenge-Reflections on *NADIE Journal: International Research Issue*’, *NADIE Journal* (A Publication of the National Association for Drama in Education, Brisbane, Australia), 19:1, p.86, quoted in Taylor (ed.), p.12.

¹⁴⁴ Hornbrook, D (1989) *Education and Dramatic Art* (Oxford: Blackwell), p.137, quoted in Taylor (ed.), p.15

¹⁴⁵ Taylor (ed.), p.16

This call for reflection within the artistic process is supported by Maxine Greene's suggestion that in aesthetic experiences "[t]here must be attending; there must be noticing, at once, there must be a reflective turning back to the stream of consciousness".¹⁴⁶ In such a reflection, as in praxis, the "end-in-view cannot be predetermined".¹⁴⁷ Pedagogically this chimes with Rancière's notion of the teacher and student working not with knowledge as an end point, but as an activity useful in itself for self-reflection and learning.

This emphasis on process, which emanates from a notion of praxis where the activity is important in itself and not just as an outcome, chimes with my conclusion to Part Two of this thesis. I suggested that the three frames explored therein (creativity, language and social practice) contained at least three common features. One was that they were all conceived in a way which was compatible with the notion of praxis. Another was that they shared an emphasis on process as well as outcome. For Taylor, explorations of drama and theatre pedagogy similarly need to not just focus on the outcome of the 'game' but on "how the game is played".¹⁴⁸ Discussing creativity, one of the three frames explored in Part Two, Ruth Dineen quotes a teacher who states that "Creativity isn't a street which is bramble-free... we need to allow students to actually get stuck in the brambles a bit more in order to find their own creativity and their own particular voice".¹⁴⁹ The process of exploration, even when difficult and not bound up with progress, is important in itself. And ultimately this may be important, because as the teacher Dineen quotes states, "You won't be doing the students any good if you just teach them to make fascinating objects if they haven't got the mechanisms of creativity that took them there".¹⁵⁰ Such mechanisms cannot necessarily be learned in a

¹⁴⁶ Greene, M (1978) 'The Artistic-Aesthetic and Curriculum' in M. Greene (ed.) *The Symbolic Order* (London: Falmer), p.182, quoted in Taylor (ed.), p.2

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 2

¹⁴⁸ Taylor (ed.), p.xii, citing E. Eisner (1985) *The Art of Educational Evaluation* (London: Falmer), p.141

¹⁴⁹ Dineen, R (2006), 'Views From the Chalk Face', in Jackson et al (eds.), p.114

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.116

schematic way, but are rather learned through the dialogue created through the artistic process itself.

For both Freire and Rancière, in their different ways, such a dialogue occurs in the dynamic relationship between teacher and student. In terms of my own study, this focus on fluidity and dialogue seems to be echoed by many writers contemplating the pedagogic process in drama and theatre. For example, John Carroll states that drama is “a non-reproducible experience. The participants within a drama in education session or series of sessions create a unique set of social relationships that becomes a single unit of experience capable of analysis and study. Because of the complexity of the interactions, the whole creative sequence needs to be studied and not just aspects of variables within it”.¹⁵¹ Andy Kempe proposes, quoting Helen Nicholson, seeing drama as a “process of transportation [where] the outcomes are clearly focused but not fixed, and change may take place gradually, a collaborative and sustained process between participants and often in partnership with other supportive agencies”.¹⁵² Amanda Stuart Fisher cites Badiou’s philosophy as being about the emergence of a “truth process”, and states that for Badiou “it is our encounter with this *emerging* truth that can ultimately force us towards an ethical confrontation or *choice*: the recognition of the truth of an event ‘compels us to decide a new way of being’”. The concept of ‘truth’ here is not a fixed, immutable truth but the truth of a work of art emerging that is never attainable: it is in process.

Anne Berkeley proposes a similar model. Via Habermas, she suggests a need for a move towards a “critical dialectic where action follows from critical reflection”,¹⁵³ or, a shift from “curriculum-as-product to curriculum-as-conversation”.¹⁵⁴ This would incorporate “the theory, practice and history of

¹⁵¹ Taylor (ed.), p.77

¹⁵² Kempe, p.42

¹⁵³ Berkeley, p.217

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p.220.

theatre”, but such an incorporation could “be launched from the aesthetic enthusiasm of students”.¹⁵⁵ This means that teachers and students can innovate and explore new possibilities whilst also showing a grasp of their discipline’s history. Such an approach is also outlined by Peter Abbs when discussing the teaching methods of Caldwell Cook:

What we see in action here is neither obviously progressive nor in any way simply traditional, but a model which envisages the teaching of art as complex aesthetic practice; as dynamic and dialectical; as constantly moving from the teacher to the pupil, from the pupil back to the teacher, and constantly moving, also, from the cultural heritage to the expressive act of the pupil and from the expressive act of the pupil back to the heritage.¹⁵⁶

This need for understanding a discourse such as devised theatre through an engagement with it practically, whilst practising it with a theoretical and cultural contextualisation of it, might help alleviate the problem identified by Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment, who has bemoaned students who are taught about their work and then proceed to make their own but have “understood a set of formal codes, of stylistic options, but have not understood anything else”.¹⁵⁷ For such students understanding is limited to knowledge-concepts of stylistic features, but has not come from working through theatrical material practically in a sustained and engaged way.

The act of theatre itself can, I would argue, also be seen as a process. There is a dynamic interaction between spectator and performer which exists in the live moment of theatre. Even at its most conventionally representational, the spectator is witnessing something physically and temporally present and is witness to a live event that takes place over time, as a process. Indeed the notion of ‘witnessing’, identified by several writers on contemporary theatre and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p.221.

¹⁵⁶ Abbs (ed.), p.52

¹⁵⁷ Cited in Heddon and Milling, p.217

performance,¹⁵⁸ foregrounds spectating as an active process, like Rancière's emancipated spectator.

The third common feature running through the three frames of language, creativity and social practice in Part Two and which are identified in my conclusion is the importance of structures as a means of containing artistic exploration. As I outlined in Chapter One, the importance of structure is noted by many writers discussing devised theatre in performance. And the importance of understanding the structures one is working in is common to Berkeley, Abbs and Etchells' comments above.

It is also echoed in Schön's work on reflective practice, where he discusses the benefits of frame analysis. For Schön, applying a (theoretical) framework from the arts (he uses the example of literature) to a practical design task means that "as students become aware of conflicting frames and appreciative systems, they acquire a new basis for interest in studies that reveal how human beings experience and cope with the sorts of dilemmas that arise when frames come into conflict".¹⁵⁹ Schön does not provide an example, but he states elsewhere that the frame is important since by applying an (unfamiliar) theoretical frame, the (familiar) subconscious frames the practitioner might use can be foregrounded: "Once practitioners notice that they actively construct the reality of their practice and become aware of the variety of frames available to them, they begin to see the need to reflect-in-action on their previously tacit frames".¹⁶⁰ Structuring practice can open up new areas of perception. Such an approach is at the core of several pedagogical texts on drama and theatre. For example, John Carroll suggests that

drama can be seen as a deliberately structured activity [...] bracketed off from the usual world of everyday classroom interaction by the art process

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Phelan (2007), p.85; Etchells (1999), pp.17-18; K. Christopher in Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.51

¹⁵⁹ Schön (1987), pp.325-6

¹⁶⁰ Schön (1983), p.311

[...] The framed nature of drama encourages analysis [...] Because drama occurs in a negotiated reality it throws the taken-for-granted structural limitations of the school social context into high relief.¹⁶¹

Similarly, in *Structuring Drama Work* Jonathan Neelands suggests 71 dramatic conventions,¹⁶² all of which “disrupt realism and make strange”.¹⁶³ Like Schön’s frames, the conventions enable what is taken for granted to be illuminated. Each convention will emphasise different elements of the drama. Neelands arranges the conventions into Context-Building Action (which is useful for setting the scene and adding information), Narrative Action (which emphasises the ‘story’ dimensions of the drama), Poetic Action (which emphasises the symbolic potential of the drama) and Reflective Action (which emphasises reflection).¹⁶⁴ Within each of these four groups, different conventions will in turn focus on different aspects of drama.

What is key to Schön, Carroll and Neelands’ points is that the theoretical concept of the structure, frame or convention only functions through practical exploration. What each emphasises is praxis: theory which only exists in practice, and practice which exists through its incorporation of theory.

Two Examples of Pedagogical Art Praxis

I will now engage with two brief examples of ‘third things’, to cite Rancière – two artistic processes that might be seen as examples of pedagogical art praxis. Each articulates a process that is important, and each also sees practice and theory as working together: with practice informing theorisation, as well as theory informing practice.

In her book *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop outlines the work of Paul Chan, who staged Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans as part of a wider art

¹⁶¹ Carroll, J (2004), ‘Escaping the Information Abattoir: Critical and Transformative Research in Drama Classrooms’ in Taylor (ed.), p.72

¹⁶² See Neelands and Goode, passim

¹⁶³ Neelands, J., quoted in O’Connor (ed.), p.4.

¹⁶⁴ Neelands and Goode, p.6

project in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The aim however was not only to stage the play:

To imagine that the play was the thing is to miss the thing. We didn't simply want to stage a site-specific performance of *Godot*. We wanted to create, in the process of staging the play, an image of art as a form of reason. What I mean is that we wanted to use the idea of doing the play as the departure point for inaugurating a series of causes and effects that would bind the artists, the people in New Orleans, and the city together in a relationship that would make each responsible for the other. The project, in other words, was an experiment in using art to organise a new image of life in the city two years after the storm.¹⁶⁵

The similarity between this and process drama is striking. Despite starting from a conventional playtext in this case, in both processes a group of people artistically explore a stimulus, whilst simultaneously considering and debating potential responses to it. In both processes, what happens before the performance is as important as what happens during it.

Despite such positive intentions, Chan had to engage with an initially resistant community, who “were sick of being a backdrop to catastrophe tourism. They didn't want art, but concrete help”.¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, as a result of working with key activists and organisers Chan encouraged the community to see themselves as mattering to the creative process, demonstrating his own commitment to a process as well as a performance through running workshops and setting up a fund for the rebuilding the city . Although the documentation of the process is mostly focused on the performance itself, Bishop points out that no actual official footage of the performance exists either.¹⁶⁷ The event principally existed in the moment, with the practice of doing theatre linked to a broader range of activities that clearly went beyond the mere performance of ‘doing a play’. Instead, a playtext was used as a springboard to develop various artistic activities within the local community. The play was the starting point for the debate; it was

¹⁶⁵ Chan, P (2008) ‘Next Day, Same Place: After *Godot* in New Orleans’, *TDR* (Winter) p.3, quoted in Bishop (2012), p.251

¹⁶⁶ Bishop (2012), p.252

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.252

an example of Rancière's 'third thing' that served as a focal point for participants to engage in dialogue.

A second example is offered by Garoian in *Performing Pedagogy*: Robbie McCauley's 'talk-about workshop' following a performance of *Fragments* she gave at the Performance Art, Culture, Pedagogy symposium at Penn State University in 1996. *Fragments* explored issues of race and identity pertinent to McCauley and her family's own history as African-Americans across several generations in America.¹⁶⁸ The workshop involved students in an embodied experience that drew on psychoanalytic theory, "enabl[ing] hitherto subconscious ideas to surface and enter into discourse".¹⁶⁹ The practice of participating in the workshop led participants to discuss and consider their own attitudes to identity, including race, class and gender.

McCauley started by asking students to consider where they have placed themselves in the room, and to reflect on why they are there. She then asked students to move around the space and to discuss their movements, considering how they felt about their movements. This then started a series of conversations about being looked at: "What does it feel like being looked at? Is it more comfortable being the looker?"¹⁷⁰ From this, participants who saw McCauley's performance started to engage with questions about race and class related to looking: for example, about who did and didn't feel comfortable being watched, and when. They also related their questions to those raised by McCauley's own performance. After more conversation McCauley asked students to physically respond to a provocation from Rachel Rosenthal that "race means nothing any more. It is a [culturally constructed] concept that is passé, no longer supported by scientific fact".¹⁷¹ Students developed a physical vocabulary which some

¹⁶⁸ Garoian, p.99

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p.115

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.118

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.121

participants then stepped out to watch and discuss, considering what they saw in the abstracted physical responses to Rosenthal.

What is interesting here, when considering the rest of this chapter, is that rather than continue a discussion, where familiar positions and opinions are played out, McCauley abstracted the debate into what might be called art, an abstracted aestheticised movement, which then offered the potential for unfamiliar responses. The physical response was held next to the debate on race within the workshop and functioned like Rancière's 'third thing'. McCauley's own performance also functioned as a stimulus for debate and discussion: another 'third thing'. Art led to the possibility of new understanding beyond what was previously known. Art birthed new ways of thinking.

In my final chapter I will discuss devised theatre in relation to the work of Goat Island, a Chicago-based company who made work between 1987 and 2009. I will discuss how their processes, performances and pedagogy interrelated, with their work functioning as praxis, offering a creative opportunity for performers, spectators and workshop participants to engage in a liminal space where new possibilities could be imagined. In their approach to devising performance which enshrined a set of theoretical tenets in their practice, as well as letting practice inform their own and their audiences' understanding, I will argue that their work offered a model of how devised theatre might function as pedagogical praxis: learning happening through practice and theory combined.

CHAPTER SEVEN – GOAT ISLAND: A CASE STUDY OF DEvised THEATRE PRAXIS

In this chapter I want to suggest some ways in which Goat Island's work between 1987 and 2009 realised devised theatre in a social context as part of a social vision that extended beyond either socially engaged content or socially engaged practice. I will argue that their work functioned as praxis: working simultaneously as both an activity and as a set of theoretical concerns. I will argue further that Goat Island did this through both their processes and in their performances. I would also argue that their work intersects with debates about pedagogy and teaching in a way that offers a useful antidote to the trends noted in my Introduction: that UK education in devised theatre is increasingly seen in terms of focusing on a finished product rather than a holistic understanding of the work. Whilst all educational practices exist within specific social contexts (and the American based company Goat Island's own practice existed primarily in American academies), I hope however to draw conclusions that can also be applied beyond the UK context in ultimately suggesting a vision of a pedagogy for devised theatre praxis that can be used anywhere in the world.

Although the company no longer exists, I will sometimes be referring to them in the present tense. This is because much of the literature, particularly when quoting company members speaking at the time of their existence or when outlining conceptual ideas brought up by the pieces which could exist beyond the duration of the work itself, exists in the present tense. Changing between tenses is grammatically problematic and sometimes confusing, and I am keen to preserve the original quotations as far as possible. I am also keen, though, to present the company's description of their methodology and praxis as an example that could be taken on today: in their own words, using the present tense, "We end Goat

Island in order to make a space for the unknown that will follow”.¹ Their work not only has its own legacy, but also the company continue to work as performers and/or teachers today.² Their work also lives on, as Laura Cull identifies, in the work of companies such as Uninvited Guests and Cupola Bobber, many of whom also worked with the company as part of Goat Island’s commitment to pedagogy.³ Indeed, I believe that Goat Island’s ideas have much to contribute to ongoing conversations about the creative and critical context of contemporary devised theatre and are still very much alive and in the present.

Goat Island and Process

Process was immensely important to the company, as signalled in their creation of “schoolbooks” and the 64 pages on process in *Small Acts of Repair* (a book about their work edited by company member Matthew Goulish and academic Steve Bottoms). When making work, they sought to create new ways of working that challenged conventional notions of performance as commodity, seeing it rather as a process or, indeed, a praxis. Shows started from various seeds of enquiry, in the case of *It’s an Earthquake in My Heart*, with nothing other than “an idea to study cloud formations, which evolved into ideas about paths and chases, which evolved into research into cars and traffic patterns and then into hand gestures and the circulatory system. Like a system of roots underground the sources of material fan out in several directions with many forks and diversions along the way”.⁴ Steve Bottoms compares this “forking out” to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome, which makes lateral and associative, rather than

¹ Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.223.

² At the time of writing director Lin Hixson and Matthew Goulish are running the company Every House Has A Door (www.everyhousehasadoor.com), Karen Christopher runs Haranczak/Navarre Performance Projects (www.karenchristopher.co.uk), Lito Walkey continues to teach and make work (lito.klingt.org/), Mark Jeffery makes pieces with Judd Morrissey (www.markjefferyartist.org), and Bryan Saner is “currently collaborating with [his] son Jake on an oral history film about activism in Chicago” (www.xing.com/profile/Bryan_Saner) [All accessed 13/6/13]

³ Goulish and Cull, p.133

⁴ Christopher, K (2007), quoted in Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.13

linear and logical, connections. In these connections appropriated fragments are “treated less as fragments (deconstructed originals) than as constituent components in a new structure, a new ecology of interconnected points”.⁵ Drawing on David Graver’s distinction between montage and collage, Bottoms suggests that Goat Island’s processes are an example of the former: that they held distinct elements in productive tension rather than attempting to synthesise them or use them to comment on each other in a self-reflexive way.⁶ Thus, their work developed an approach that is “(re)constructive rather than deconstructive”.⁷ According to director Lin Hixson, “We have all these disparate things, and as we keep looking at them, and trying different things around them, putting things next to each other, the piece starts getting bigger than us. This thing starts getting bigger, and we have to start responding to *it*... And we start looking very specifically for sources that correspond to this thing”.⁸ The ‘thing’ was not a commentary on the disparate elements, or the elements themselves, but a new ‘third thing’, to invoke Rancière from the previous chapter, made up of heterogeneous elements.

I am interested here in the way in which Hixson articulates the importance of trust in the doing, the process, in a similar way to the notion of praxis I set out in the previous chapter. The making of the work creates what theory cannot. The work is not there to reflect a particular viewpoint or perspective. Rather, it *creates* a new world as its process develops in space and time. In this model intuition is not something to be feared, but as Bottoms suggests, something that “opens up to the possibility of making leaps across conceptual boundaries”.⁹ The creative process develops new ways of thinking, seeing and feeling. An example of this is the ‘impossible task’ set as a workshop exercise in Goat island’s *Schoolbook 2*,

⁵ Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.65

⁶ Bottoms (1998), p.431

⁷ Ibid, p.432

⁸ Hixson, L (1996), untitled lecture, quoted in Bottoms (1998), p.439. Original emphasis.

⁹ Bottoms (1998), p.435

where students were set the exercise of coming up with “impossible tasks” which were then turned into performative moments. For example, “Fly. Draw the world (actual size). Dissolve my body”.¹⁰ As Sara Jane Bailes states, one of the boundaries that collapses in moments such as these is the boundary between creativity and criticism, since conventional approaches to either are insufficient. Instead what she calls “doing thinking”¹¹ begins. Again, Bailes’ term is noticeably similar to the notion of praxis I outlined in the previous chapter where thinking and action are not conceived of as two separate things but as combined through the activity itself.

Part of what characterises the Goat Island process is a clear sense of structuring material. As I have suggested in Chapter One and throughout Part Two of this thesis, structures underpin a range of human activities such as devised theatre, speaking language and creativity. The extreme open-endedness of tasks such as those above is fused with strict rules during a Goat Island creative process. For example, in one workshop task outlined in *Small Acts of Repair*, the process of tearing sheets in two and then in two again is outlined in detail, with specific rules governing how these pieces are then passed on, and to whom in the room.¹² In another, a task has to be performed for exactly 54 seconds.¹³ However, these rules are not there to restrict, but to liberate. As with Carroll’s notion of “negotiated reality” in school drama mentioned in the previous chapter,¹⁴ the structure creates a safe space within which to play. The often arbitrary nature of these decisions allows an escape from normal reality, creating the possibility of unfamiliar behaviours within new safe limits. Taking away such rules may paradoxically limit the deviser’s freedom to be intuitive since they are otherwise engaged in other decisions, like how long to perform for, or to whom to

¹⁰ Goat Island (2000), pp.12-13

¹¹ Bailes, p.111

¹² Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.197

¹³ Ibid, p.203

¹⁴ See above, p.205

pass the paper. In such a moment the conscious mind may resurface and the opportunity to be intuitive may diminish. Again, as with the notion of praxis outlined in the previous chapter, the importance of the activity itself as an unconscious as well as conscious process of learning is emphasised over a purely conscious attempt to decode, justify or understand something.

The process of bringing together disparate elements was for Goat Island a collaborative one. The montage effect Bottoms identifies, for Bailes, is the result of a collaborative process that allowed for multiple perspectives “grounded in the compositional directories of multiplicity and dissonance”.¹⁵ Performative material was developed “through associative methods that are able to refract the diverse political, cultural, artistic and social contexts and concerns that each member experiences and brings to the creation of new material”.¹⁶ There was no attempt to homogenise the different makers’ experiences. Rather, the work stood as a testament to the different voices of the makers. In *Schoolbook 2* the company suggested that “each contribution has its place. More than once [...] we have used the small fragment of a poorly articulated idea to its highest potential. With this vision it is possible for all things to have new life, including human beings”.¹⁷ This could even include moments considered as failure: when failure occurs it could be embraced as a necessary part of an unpredictable creative process and restaged with commitment. As Matthew Goulish puts it, “We seek truth, we encounter error. It is obvious, like truth”.¹⁸ Company performer Karen Christopher notes, “The key thing about both failure and impossibility is the dynamic of constantly moving toward but never arriving. Process rather than goal is emphasised”.¹⁹ So, for example, in their work Goat Island deliberately staged moments or movement sequences where the human body’s frailty is exposed or

¹⁵ Bailes, p.126

¹⁶ Ibid, p.129

¹⁷ Goat Island, p.52

¹⁸ Goulish, p.261

¹⁹ Christopher, K (2008), email exchange with Sara Jane Bailes, quoted in Bailes, p. 111

struggles to complete a task, such as Litó Walkey standing on one leg for extended periods of time in *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy*. For the company, the task was to explore the human being trying and often failing to do things; to not present an integrated human being that knows itself but rather a human becoming, something in process.

This shift towards an ongoing process of becoming is in sharp contrast to much current UK educational practice, such as that outlined in the Introduction, which is focused on attaining measurable skills or knowledge. Instead, it suggests a possibility of valuing the journey as well as the destination; of seeing a process as important in itself as part of a wider conception of personal and social growth. Indeed, the importance of process was enmeshed in all aspects of Goat Island's work. Their process was slow; deliberately so. According to Bailes "the protracted periods of development applied throughout the group's working process – an average of four years for each show from conception through to final performances – are preserved in the experience of the shows and their reception".²⁰ For Bottoms even the end point of their process, a performance, can be conceived of as related to the process philosophy of the early twentieth century where the human is seen as being "submerged (mind and body) within a world of flow and perpetual becoming".²¹ In Goat Island's praxis, everything was in process: making a performance and performing it. The different voices of the participants were heard in the process, and the spectator came into contact with this privileging of multiple perspectives present in the process through the performances. To return to the contemporary conception of devised theatre outlined in my Introduction, devised theatre is here far from being seen as a means to teach a skills set or a stylistic choice. It is a philosophical and political choice, a process, a praxis. It is theory and practice working together, and it is

²⁰ Bailes, p.119

²¹ In Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.56.

also process and performance working together. In terms of pedagogy, it suggests the importance for teachers of not just engaging in short term projects, but of developing a practice; a practice that has a philosophical underpinning that can be thought about and changed as part of an ongoing process of growth for all involved.

In this journey of growth, not only is the process of particular importance, but the end cannot be known. Comparing the “economically oriented model” of traditional theatre with Goat Island’s practice where they “are out to discover something we can’t imagine at the point at which we start”, Christopher uses as a metaphor the “rigid controlling hand” of mono-crops with the complexity of attention needed in an eco-system to “creatures and minerals and soil and air and water”,²² stating that “[i]n taking our time, we have created an abundance of material that feeds the development process [...] Eventually the work begins to make itself; the accumulation of material begins to suggest certain directions. This method is not at all efficient in an economic sense, and yet no part of it is superfluous”.²³ Such a view could be seen as contrasting the reproductive logic of mono-crops with the creative logic of a holistic ecology. This creative logic does not posit creation as an end in itself, but rather accepts its failures as part of a productive process which allows it to redefine its goals. It sees itself as seeping into all areas of life. It creates microcosms of effective praxis.

The ongoing process of working together every week, despite all the company having other jobs, was crucial. Company performer Mark Jeffery said

We meet three times a week for three hours each meeting. Here we exchange ideas in all weather seasons and respond to ideas given to us. A structure of living, of meeting three times a week, becomes engrained and gives us focus. We are not doing anything radical, and yet living within a hyper-capitalist world where structure and value are seen as individual commodities, we are making investments towards a non-capital market or language.²⁴

²² Ibid, p.119

²³ Ibid, p.120

²⁴ Ibid, p.115

As in their workshops, in this exchange it was “understood that once the idea was being explored by the group, it would change and no longer be ‘yours’”.²⁵ A Goat Island show was the result of a communal experience amongst the performers, a recognition that the potential of art may lie in the liminal space of devising theatre as an individual within a social group. As such the process of devising theatre functions as artistic praxis. The exchange mentioned provides a debate around which the wider world might be understood. But the exchange is itself the product of a particular philosophy. This is an ongoing praxis that lives beyond the duration of the performance as it outlines new possibilities for understanding and imagining human behaviour.

This praxis is intriguingly both seen as important – Bryan Saner from the company is quoted in *Small Acts of Repair* as saying “I believe that the work Goat Island is doing right now is going to stop the world from destroying itself”²⁶ – and as part of labour in a broader sense: Saner states, “All of the members of Goat Island have day jobs [...] it’s tempting to think that one kind of work is more important than another. When I have a healthy attitude (and it takes daily maintenance to stay healthy) I see artists’ work as a holistic endeavour [...] It’s important to find meaningful day jobs”.²⁷ Spectators were important in this creative exploration and rearticulation of elements of life, but the company’s praxis was more than a commodity for them. Nicholas Ridout goes so far as to describe it as a “work-as-life process to which the spectators have briefly been admitted”.²⁸ Their art, abstracted from representation, was nonetheless not something that sat totally outside everyday life. The work of the company offered perspectives on that life and indeed was *part* of that life. As Saner states, “the work precedes the

²⁵ Ibid, p.116

²⁶ Ibid, p.25

²⁷ Ibid, p.118

²⁸ Ridout, p.63

vision, creates the vision".²⁹ The company existed through its praxis: through its work and simultaneously through its philosophy.

Goat Island and Performance

Inevitably for a company for whom process and performance were intimately linked, I have already begun to talk about performance in the process section. However, I want to now tease out a little more explicitly the spectator's relationship to their work and consider how this, as well as the creation of the work, might be considered as a praxis.

As already discussed, the shows were made up of many different heterogeneous and contradictory elements. In a Goat Island show one might find movements originating from fragments of material from a workshop. These movements might have presented themselves slowed down, or speeded up. Particularly in their early work, the company would perform intense physical sequences that would be exhausting for the performers to do and for the audience to watch. *Can't Take Johnny to The Funeral*, for example, started with what Christopher describes as "15 minutes [...of] a series of moves and jumps and falls to the floor and a lot of huffing and puffing and all this for no apparent reason" which ended with all four performers "flat on the floor heaving for breath and drenched in sweat".³⁰ In *How Dear to Me The Hour when Daylight Dies*, the performers "roll, convulse, thrust, and drag on the floor, shaking, twisting onto and around each other".³¹ These moments of intense physicality were not a display of perfection, but they were a display of will. Like Walkey's attempt to stand on one leg, the body which fails to perform a highly charged physical sequence fully in *Can't Take Johnny to The Funeral*, or Mark Jeffery's attempt to perform Larry Grayson performing St Francis in *The Lastmaker*, Goat Island present difficult or

²⁹ In Bottoms and Goulish, p.168

³⁰ Ibid, pp.51-2

³¹ Garoian, p.80

impossible moments that reflect in their enactment what Bailes calls "the fragility of the task at hand".³² In these moments which were doomed to fail or at least be a struggle, the sequences drew attention to the process of trying to do something the performers found difficult (as Bottoms notes, "Hixson is untrained as a choreographer, and the four performers [at the time of writing] untrained as dancers").³³ In moments like these, Becker suggests, the spectators "become committed to their excessive action... we are willing to suspend analysis of its symbolic meaning while we give ourselves over to its unravelling".³⁴ For Becker, the spectator's conscious analysis gives way to a more instinctive response based on compassion for the performer, of what Garoian describes as a "forced empathy".³⁵

In addition to such frantic movement sequences there were also many moments of slowness, stillness and silence. Hixson sees such moments in the company's work as reparative, offering a space for reflection and regeneration, and sees this as a challenge to the prioritisation of activity in contemporary culture: "For someone who is ill, or doesn't have money, or is not in motion in this capitalistic way: those people are cut off the chart now in terms of being even considered a part of our culture".³⁶ These moments, and the moments of failure or struggle described above, present a philosophical challenge to the smoothness and slickness of much contemporary devised theatre, such as I outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, which is developed through a successful adherence to a skills set. However, they present this challenge not only theoretically, but in the moment of being witnessed by the spectator. In other words, they function as

³² Bailes, p.111

³³ Bottoms (1998), p.425

³⁴ Becker, p.63, also quoted in Garoian, p.80

³⁵ Garoian, p.78

³⁶ Hixson, L (2006) in Goat Island, 'Part 1 – Reflections on the Process: Goat Island's *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy, Frakcija* (32), quoted in Goulish and Cull, p.141

praxis for the spectator: as working simultaneously as philosophical and physical material; as philosophical material experienced viscerally.

In all these examples, the activity is presented as being important in itself, even if what it represents has been abstracted away from its original meaning. In all these moments the body would take on unfamiliar physicalities and ways of moving that, whilst reminiscent of and partly inspired by dance, were a long way from its conventions. In a Goat Island show one performer might speak text into microphones whilst another might undertake an action repetitively and obsessively. For Bottoms, the plethora of material collected is reflected in the plethora of theatrical forms utilised: discussing *How Dear to Me The Hour When Daylight Dies* he states that it “presents a bewilderingly diverse array of performance activities”.³⁷ The mood was hypnotic and could sometimes feel frustrating. But in the watching of the work time felt different and the spectator could free associate, finding rhizomatic connections between different moments and different elements. The work refused the security of conventional theatre which might provide meaning or clearly defined pleasure, potentially causing, according to Heathfield, the spectator to ask “I have paid for this. Where is the pleasure? Where is its meaning, its utility?”³⁸ However, what was created brought the spectator face to face with a new, artificial world being created from the fragments of reality in front of the spectator’s eyes. According to Christopher, this was about “pull[ing] spectators away from wherever they have been, mentally, during the day, and to bring them into this space, now”.³⁹

This was partly achieved through physical arrangement: Lin Hixson expressed her desire to work with no more than three rows of risers around the stage.⁴⁰ It was also partly achieved through a configuration where the audience

³⁷ Bottoms (1998), p.422

³⁸ In Bottoms and Goulsh (eds.), p.50

³⁹ Ibid, p.51

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.35

are introduced as a performative element,⁴¹ with each piece having its own audience configuration.⁴² However, whatever the figuration was, it always had members of the audience able to see each other as well as the action, ensuring a level of intimacy missing in proscenium arch theatres.⁴³ As well as the intensity provided by the spatial relationship, however, spectators were “brought into the space” by witnessing a world where material was presented in unfamiliar ways: intensely slow or manically physical for example; a speech from Lenny Bruce juxtaposed with an abstract movement sequence, as in *The Lastmaker*; a world where meaning was open, allowing the spectator to reflect on the strange yet familiar world in front of them in relation to their own world. For example, Christopher outlines how in *Can't Take Johnny to The Funeral*, when

I hold my first finger pointing straight up and it describes a circle in the air, my hand swivelling at the wrist, I am thinking of a woman I once knew who had to leave her children in the custody of the state [...] One woman told me that when she saw this gesture in the performance, she saw a woman waiting for her husband to come home from the war. Another saw her two year old winding up to wreak havoc. These things were really seen by these women, and other people saw their own images too.⁴⁴

For myself watching this show, it was a moving depiction of time persistently passing whilst the horrors of physical violence were incessantly inflicted (violence that was depicted in surrounding scenes through the performers breaking the heads off the plastic dolls in the piece, and scooping out and eating the yoghurt which was placed inside their heads). I, like the women Christopher describes, was creating what Bottoms calls “rationalisations of an experience which defies rationalisation, but [...] nonetheless revealing: in effect Goat Island’s work becomes a kind of psychic funhouse mirror for each spectator, functioning to open up a meditative space in which one is enabled obliquely to confront and process deeply personal questions and ‘traumatic realities’”.⁴⁵ The subjective

⁴¹ Tsatsos, p.70, also cited in Garoian, p.77

⁴² In Bottoms and Goulsh (eds.), p.40

⁴³ Ibid, p.35 and p.38

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.60

⁴⁵ Bottoms (1998), pp.444-5

space opened up by this artificial world, this ‘third thing’ that is neither the spectator nor the performer (to invoke Rancière), enabled reflection that a representative world could not. This was functioning for the spectator as a praxis: it was creating meaning simultaneously through its presence, through its enactment. Its meaning could not be reduced to theory or language, since its experience exceeded language. I and the other spectators struggled to understand it. It had to ultimately exist in its enactment in the present, between the spectator and the performance.

Educationally, this suggests the creation of a space in which the spectator is using theatre as a means to look at their own life; in which the student can engage with the performance not as something to be understood or decoded in a singular way, but as a means to a new understanding of both the self and the world. The theatrical event can function as a kind of mirror back to the spectator who is intimately involved with the performance. It is important to note, however, that the subjective spaces opened up through Goat Island’s performances were carefully and meticulously structured. As I have noted throughout this thesis (including in my comments above about Goat Island’s process), structure is conducive to and not in confrontation with creativity. This can include the ability of the spectator to creatively respond to a work. Goulish makes the following comment about Goat Island’s performances:

The structure appears as a second intelligence at work, shaping and forming and modulating the performance experience [...T]he performance is a series of parts that have been measured, metered sequenced, balanced, and unbalanced, patterned and ruptured – according to an intelligence distinct from the intelligence of the parts themselves, and located in relation to the parts both internally and externally.⁴⁶

This structuring might help the spectator find connections and provide a framework within which to watch the piece, reflecting that the work’s heterogeneity was the result of careful consideration and creation, rather than random

⁴⁶ In Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.66

improvisation. However it was still open for the spectator, since it did not make clear what the intended links between disparate elements were: Goulsh continues, “[W]e suggest a particular route, although you are free to stray from that route if you choose. The limits grant permission to stray. The straying is the act of creative response”.⁴⁷ Without the limits of the structure, straying might appear frightening and a journey into confusion. However the clear sense of sections, patterns and repetitions that ran throughout Goat Island’s performances, whilst not clearly suggesting a specific link between disparate performance elements, helped to create the “meditative space” Bottoms articulates where the spectator can drift into the unfamiliar world of Goat Island’s work, as they interpret what they experience in relation to their own lives.

This idea is reflected in Mark Jeffery’s (a performer in the company) comment that “artifice gives us another way of looking, another way of connecting to and working with both the fake and the real”.⁴⁸ And Bottoms suggests, via Guattari, that the company’s work offers the spectator a “*deterritorialization* of the mind – opening out time and headspace to facilitate a more personal intuitive *process* of response than is normally experienced”.⁴⁹ Through the lens of Rancière’s theories, one might map these conceptions of artifice and deterritorialization onto the dissensual articulation of a new territory within the individual spectator. In this new reality it may be difficult to find the logic, but in the search to make sense of the juxtapositions the spectator is liberated to see things anew; to have a new experience in a manner similar to Kate Love’s comment that

when I’ve said “I’ve had an experience” [...] I realise that I have probably used the word because I want to register the precise feeling that *that* which I have just lived through was something like an approach to the world which I *both* recognised, and yet didn’t *quite* recognise, a space which was

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.66

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.46

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.55. Original emphasis.

both in language but yet not *quite* in language, at the limit of language but unequivocally not *beyond*.

Such an experience is for Love a “negotiation *with* language”,⁵⁰ and if one accepts the poststructuralist notion that language “is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested”,⁵¹ one can see this negotiation as a political act, an act that functions as a creation of new possible meanings. In its exploration of meaning and creation of new worlds, such work may have more political efficacy than a performance that attempts to confront an “issue” head on but fails to offer any imaginative perspective on it. The spectator quoted in *Small Acts of Repair* by Karen Christopher is interesting here:

[A]t first I was very frustrated, and then I thought these people are crazy and I didn't get it, and then I felt bored into anger. But then I felt a decision coming. I realised I could just check out and reject this performance or I could relax and not worry about understanding it and just accept it. [...] I chose to relax and suddenly I started getting all these ideas and began to have all sorts of associations with the movements and gestures I was seeing. It was because I was able to make this decision to accept the performance without understanding it.⁵²

In such a process, for Christopher and CJ Mitchell, “[t]he audience begins to hear itself”,⁵³ and in the ‘hearing’ of oneself a process of discovery is initiated. There is a process here of what Bottoms calls “unlearning”.⁵⁴ a subjective pedagogical process of challenging what one thinks one knows and finding new ways of understanding the world and the self that allow what is taken for granted to be opened up anew.

A key component of this hearing involves acknowledging rather than attempting to eliminate instability and failure. Citing Bloch's notion of hope existing in the possibility to imagine both possibilities and supposed impossibilities, Bailes sees the imagining present in Goat Island's work as being

⁵⁰ Love, p.169. Original emphasis.

⁵¹ Weedon, p.21

⁵² In Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.53

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.67

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.55

hopeful: what she calls “mov[ing] forwards with the inclusion of vulnerability and weakness as functioning constitutive principles”.⁵⁵ As Tim Etchells, director of Forced Entertainment and an occasional collaborator with Matthew Goulish, states about Forced Entertainment’s work, “a group of performers or perhaps characters [...] try to do something; they try to create order [...] Whether they succeed or not is another matter, the important thing to us has always been the trying”.⁵⁶ In Goat Island’s work one might take this further and suggest that in not succeeding but trying, the hope provided by the will to succeed is what matters. One might link this back to Rancière’s emphasis on the importance of the will in the pedagogical relationship outlined in Chapter Six. In such a conception what is important is the activity in the present, not an intended end point. Pedagogy and performance are important as processes that have the potential to create *in their enactment*, not in some future time, a space of creation where hierarchies between performer and spectator, or between teacher and student, can subside.

Christopher notes that

In discussing the idea of a broken performance we realised that whatever we chose to perform would appear whole as performed. The moment material is performed it *is* the performance. Therefore the attempt to show a broken performance is impossible, just as a mistake in a performance is only a mistake in reference to other “perfect” performances but it *is the performance* to the audience who only saw it once.⁵⁷

In the moment of its enactment the imperfections, impossibilities, silences, stillnesses and strangenesses of a Goat Island performance present themselves with commitment as there to be seen and to be valued as a new and strange whole. Goat Island’s work functioned as an example of praxis for the spectator, allowing her to engage in a process of discovery and reflection that was both immediate and reflective; instinctive and conceptual.

⁵⁵ Bailes, p.125

⁵⁶ Etchells (1991), pp.2-3

⁵⁷ Quoted in Bailes, pp.112-3. Original emphasis.

Goat Island and Pedagogy

In the previous section I have argued that Goat Island's performances carried a clear trace of their process. In this section I will try to demonstrate that their performances and processes were also clearly linked to their pedagogy. For Garoian this is crucial to understanding the company's work: he states that there is a "dialectical relationship between the collective's performance art making and performance art teaching [...] It is the resonance between the two that is essential to Goat Island's performance art pedagogy".⁵⁸ Indeed, for Bailes, pedagogy is foregrounded in the aesthetics of the performances:

The practical demonstration of pedagogy is indexed by the inclusion in the performance of a movement that appears as if it is being recalled or still learned, or in the discovery of how to accommodate an impediment or weakness (structural, physical, in the materials used, or in the task to be completed); learning how to deal with damage and the restoration it might call for; or by seeking ways to perform the efforts required to imagine and push the body to work beyond its given limits. The learning that each performance shares with its audience offers an inquisitive way to examine material and to draw attention to smaller inconsequential objectives and behaviours.⁵⁹

Pedagogically, this is distinct from most educative practices, such as Freire's criticisms of the 'banking' approach to education, or Rancière's critique of an 'explicative' approach to education outlined in the previous chapter, where the student's ability to reproduce what they have been told as fully and as competently as possible would demonstrate learning. For Bailes, Goat Island's performance was valued as an "inconclusive end in itself",⁶⁰ a *learning in process* which had an ability to generate new possibilities. The performers learned during the process, the spectators witnessed learning in performance, and similarly students in Goat Island's workshops experienced learning new concepts, new ways of moving and speaking for themselves and new ways of interacting with other human beings that went beyond what was possible in everyday life.

⁵⁸ Garoian, p.75

⁵⁹ Bailes, p.119

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.119

Whilst Bailes suggests that “[t]raining is an essential part of the process”,⁶¹ Hixson stated in a ‘workshop introduction’ that “you do not need any specific training to participate in this workshop”.⁶² Training was essential to anyone participating in Goat Island’s work, but the training occurred within the workshop itself, not prior. Workshops were accessible to all, the learning happened in the process. This emphasis on activity allowed for learning to follow from a position of not knowing that included the company themselves learning. To quote the company on collaborative methods, “Do not expect to understand everything intellectually or rationally while creating or performing. There are many forms of understanding. Also, if you work from a position of *not knowing*, you may find understanding will come later”.⁶³ Learning is emphasised over knowledge. It is seen as an important activity in itself. And, indeed, to cite Bottoms’ term again, ‘unlearning’ what is taken for granted may be part of a powerful pedagogical journey

The focus on ‘not knowing’ over rational or intellectual understanding is achieved in several ways. In Hixson’s workshop introduction she emphasises “doing and experiencing rather than [...] talking and discussing”.⁶⁴ And Garoian outlines how in a Goat Island workshop such doing of tasks such as the ‘impossible task’ exercise mentioned above made the body ‘explicit’, creating a new kind of knowledge as the body as currently known shifts into new unknown territory through abstraction.⁶⁵ Another example is documented by Garoian, where he outlines Matthew Goulish asking students to write in detail their “first encounter with failure”.⁶⁶ Goulish then gave each student an envelope with images which students then had to incorporate into their writing, and asked them to think of a sound which came from this experience. Students then had to think

⁶¹ Ibid, p.119

⁶² In Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.193

⁶³ Ibid, p.207. Original emphasis.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.193

⁶⁵ Garoian, p.87

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.90

about how to use what was in the room to perform the sound. Later in the workshop these elements were combined in an inevitably multilayered performance. The structures provided shape for the art making, and provided a frame which moved away from representation to abstraction. In this process the frame provided held up a lens through which the student could gain greater understanding and new perspectives. For Garoian, “the inclusion of students’ cultural identities as educational content [...] enables students to ‘de-realise’ the social markings inscribed on their bodies by the body politic and to create new aesthetic and political codes significant to their lives”.⁶⁷ Practice informed understanding, it brought about a new possibility for the body and the subject. And it was possible through the production of a ‘third thing’: the devising of theatre.

The collaboration evident in the previous example was typical of Goat Island’s educational praxis: citing Irene Tsatsos, Garoian outlines their use of students ‘trading’: passing material on to another workshop member rather than holding on to it themselves; where “by performing another person’s task, [students] were able to learn from each other, to observe and critique their own performances from a distance, and to develop camaraderie”.⁶⁸ The interactions with others in the workshop through collectively developing material made the body exist in a social relationship with other bodies rather than in a self-contained unit, encouraging the body to move in ways with which it may not be familiar. Interestingly, the company stated that “If you think you have no connection to someone else’s material and are having trouble performing it, try to allow your vision and yourself to expand to include that person’s material, and to learn from it”.⁶⁹ Even when the mind precludes a rational understanding of the material, the material may allow for an expansion of the participant’s vision. This notion of

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.73

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.87, citing Tsatsos, p.68

⁶⁹ In Bottoms and Goulis (eds.), p.207

‘trading’ is then further abstracted through a process Garoian calls ‘collage’ (though it is worth noting Bottoms’ distinction between collage and Goat Island’s ‘montage’ mentioned above) where different elements are brought together.⁷⁰ For example, Garoian outlines a group performing “the impossible task of building a skyscraper in a day with the sound of pushing down with fists on leather car seats”.⁷¹ Whilst this example may at first seem insignificant, it functions as a process of learning where participants are engaged in a social process of learning from each other and of considering, within the frame of performing, how elements may co-exist without being homogenised or hierarchised. This task attempts to maintain difference, like Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome. The root of the performance forks out in many disparate ways that do not need to come together, but which stay distinct and in tension. And through the task, it attains commitment and focus on the part of the participants, their ‘will’ (to recall Rancière’s use of the term in Chapter Six).

When I participated in Goat Island workshops I found such letting go of my own material and allowing it to synthesise or be placed against the ideas of others challenging, since I had worked hard on the material. However it also encouraged me to consider how I might work with others both within the rehearsal room, and ultimately how I might engage with collaboration generally in my life beyond the rehearsal room. Here the pedagogical process was one which encouraged collective generosity and acceptance, with the artistic process functioning simultaneously as a means for the community of students to work together to reach a common goal. To quote Mark Jeffery, a performer in the company, “this idea of [collective] ownership becomes a wider participation, and one of interaction, circulation, and creativity”.⁷²

⁷⁰ Garoian, p.87

⁷¹ Ibid, p.93

⁷² In Bottoms and Goulis (eds.), p.219

The emphasis on process is clear when Hixson outlines the importance of “the least interesting moment in your performance”, suggesting that students “Pull it out. Expand this moment into a full performance piece”.⁷³ In Goat Island’s vision, everything in the creative process can be valued as part of a pedagogical process of growth. Activity is a process of learning that is important in itself. This is not an abolition of thought and analysis. The company usually engage and encourage students to discuss after working practically; after all, the company’s extensive writing on their own practice reflects a high level of intellectual and philosophical engagement. But as suggested above, the link between the critical and the creative can be rethought as “doing thinking”,⁷⁴ meaning that the critical can be reconceptualised. As Matthew Goulish suggests,

If we think of critical as negative [...] then problems become the object of our creative mind masquerading as a critical mind. We then start to see problems everywhere... For now we will try an experiment. We will engage the critical mind to observe the moments in the work we are looking at that seem to us the most exceptional and inspiring – the miraculous moments. Maybe this approach will allow us to keep the creative mind deliberately engaged as we engage the critical mind. Maybe we will start to see miraculous moments everywhere.⁷⁵

This creative criticality, as it might be termed, is present in Goulish’s comment on questions: “Compose responses that do not annihilate the question’s delicate ecology; avoid the answer that kills it, and seek the response that disarms and multiplies it [...] A question does not express a lack, but a creative force: propose, disarm, multiply”.⁷⁶ Unlike Rancière and Freire’s criticism of much teaching, the teacher’s role is to avoid ‘killing’ questions with answers that close down the question, but to rather provide answers that ‘disarm and multiply’ the question, to cite Goulish, continually ensuring the presence of Rancièrian will in the moment of the process of praxis.

⁷³ Ibid, p.141

⁷⁴ Bailes, p.111

⁷⁵ In Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), pp.210-211

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.133

In terms of the student, this space of praxis can offer “liminal, contingent and ephemeral conditions”⁷⁷ for a space of reflection and growth. And writing about Goat Island’s work, Peggy Phelan discusses the relationship between teacher and student as an endless stream of questions to which all the answers can never be given. For Phelan, “the facts [the teacher] proffers do not and cannot fulfil the student’s desire, because the student wants a response that cannot be given by the other”.⁷⁸ For both Goulsh and Phelan the process of being a student is not here figured as a lack. Rather, in the process of asking, of looking for answers, the student is looking within herself and is demonstrating her will to grow and develop. Like the spectator who has an ‘experience’ discussed above, devised theatre pedagogy offers a means through which the student who asks questions can enter a new realm of possibilities. So: to end with a quotation from Goat Island, writing to a hypothetical young practitioner, perhaps devised theatre pedagogy can

allow the act of creation to understand who you are.
 Understand who you could be.
 Understand the gap between the two.
 Sometimes, close the gap.
 Become who you might be for a moment.
 What if we call that moment: ‘the classroom’?⁷⁹

Conclusion

Earlier in this chapter I quoted Bryan Saner from Goat Island as saying “I believe that the work Goat Island is doing right now is going to stop the world from destroying itself”,⁸⁰ Mark Jeffery as saying that the company “are making investments towards a non-capital market or language”,⁸¹ and director Lin Hixson

⁷⁷ Garoian, p.97

⁷⁸ In Bottoms and Goulsh (eds.), p.188

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.219

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.25

⁸¹ In Bottoms and Goulsh, p.115

as saying that Goat Island's work is a challenge to capitalism.⁸² It is notable that Goat Island, a company known for making complex, abstract and what was often perceived as "difficult" work that was by their own request only going to be performed to a small audience, had such concern for its social impact. I would suggest that this reflects the possibility that their "small acts of repair" were the enactment of Rancière's "ameliorative promise"⁸³ of the aesthetic; that their work attained a vital social charge through conceiving performance specifically (and the arts generally) as existing *as a process in the moment* that could be described as pedagogical: as a means of learning and thinking about the world and the self. As well as the company's emphasis on praxis through the focus on the activities of making and performing, I have tried to suggest that their work existed both within the everyday aspects of work and life, as well as in a distinct space clearly demarcated as beyond the everyday. It created a social engagement by insisting on existing outside the economy of everyday life in order to be able to create "small acts of repair" which could function as possibilities for the future. To quote Bailes, "one aspect that defines Goat Island's praxis is its deep commitment to the impact of small and incremental daily objectives in the belief that the accumulation of such deeds can effect change".⁸⁴

In my Introduction I suggested that the contemporary UK educational context of both universities and schools increasingly embraces devised theatre, but sees it as a skills set to learn rather than a process that might be valuable in itself. In the work of Goat Island however, something else was realised, something that the UK context could learn from but which arguably has something to contribute to curricula across the world. In their practice devised theatre involved the creation of a community that could explore possibilities for

⁸² Hixson, L (2006) in Goat Island (2006), 'Part 1 – Reflections on the Process: Goat Island's *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy*, *Frakcija* (32), quoted in Goulish and Cull, p.141

⁸³ Bishop (2006), p.182

⁸⁴ Bailes, p.145

themselves and their world, a community which could exist at some degree of separation from the world around it through their work in the frame of art. In this pedagogical frame everyone is learning through the creative process, teacher and student. In this frame artistic creation is a consequence of philosophical principles, but it also creates new understandings through its juxtapositions and through abstraction. Goat Island's work was a method of learning and thinking, a pedagogy of devised theatre praxis.

CONCLUSION

In his essay 'Diverse Assembly: Some Trends in Recent Performance', Tim Etchells, director of Forced Entertainment, suggests that "in all the work I care about [there is] an engagement with a particular landscape (literal, literary, cultural, mythic, even personal) which seems to give it heart, and hate, and, in the case of Britain perhaps, a certain kind of smallness and of melancholy". He counterposes this to work "that looks like it was born on the floor of some nameless, placeless Euro-Novotel". He goes on, "There is a need and desire by artists like Keith Khan to rewrite the landscape from a black viewpoint, and the need for Bobby Baker, Annie Griffin and Neil Bartlett to remake the landscape for themselves and their communities, and the need by groups like ourselves [...] to work out and work through and work against the landscape of our cities, our sexualities, and our selves".¹ In emphasising 'working out, working through and working against', he emphasises the importance of process in this creation: that it is not only in the final performance that such a dialogue and articulation happens, but through the process of devising theatre itself. Etchells sees here the creation of an aesthetic theatrical form through the process of devising as deeply social, where through the process of making theatre the individual and the community engage in a dialogue with the various landscapes around them and ultimately begin to articulate their own responses to them.

However, in the same essay he states his desire to "put in a vote for transcendence, for escape into fiction".² For Etchells it is the artistic frame that offers a distinction between the 'fictional' context and the everyday, which allows for such social imagining. Etchells' holding of these two notions of art in tension, art socially engaged with the everyday through its process whilst being intrinsically distinguished from the everyday through its artistic form, is similar to the viewpoint

¹ Etchells (1994), pp.120-121

² Ibid, p.121

that this thesis proposes. This thesis has attempted to outline how such an attitude might be understood theoretically, and how it might be practically articulated in a pedagogical form. In this model, which I have also attempted to map onto a notion of pedagogical praxis where thinking and doing inform each other, the process of both devising theatre and of teaching devised theatre is not a means to an end (the enlightenment of performer, spectator or student to predetermined knowledge) but is rather part of an ongoing conversation which can facilitate growth.

This sense of a holistic inter-relatedness of elements can be linked to the notion of theatre as an ecological system, noted in Bottoms and Goulish's subtitle to their book *Small Acts of Repair* 'Performance, Ecology and Goat Island'. In such a notion, creative, personal and social elements connect to each other: to quote Bottoms, "There are finite resources in any ecosystem (man-made systems included), and the inhabitants of a given system are mutually dependent on each others' activities for the distribution of those resources".³ Any analysis of such a system cannot only measure specific elements at a specific moment, but rather needs to understand the interconnections of all elements, the whole of which have a legacy through time. Understanding devised theatre as ecological recognises it as socially embedded within the constituent parts of the ecology of the society, personally embedded within the constituent parts of the ecology of the individual, and any performance created as part of the devised theatre process as part of a wider ongoing journey of human activity, a journey of which an analysis of any individual performance can only ever be a small part.

The paradox at work here is that the interconnectedness between makers, audiences, and a wider social practice that exists through time in Goat Island's work is possible *because* of, not in spite of, the abstract nature of their work. Exactly because of the 'escape into fiction' that their strange world offers, because

³ Bottoms and Goulish (eds.), p.7

of the 'working out, working through and working against' the world beyond, because of the insistence on a working method which stands outside everyday capitalist notions of work, the work outlines the possibility of art generally and devised theatre specifically to offer a potential space of creation and exploration. It develops what Rancière calls a 'third thing' that is neither performer nor audience, neither spectator nor performer, but a something *between* which can function as a space of social reflection and engagement. This space is an ongoing one, as artists and spectators, teachers and students, engage in an ongoing dialogue made possible through the existence of the art.

But how might this theoretical thesis be applied to the existing UK performance context? Most of the full list of devised companies and artists cited in Etchells' 1994 essay were arguably making experimental and exploratory work which pushed boundaries of aesthetic expression, but no longer exist. And since then (as I argued in the Introduction), devised theatre has increasingly been assimilated into the mainstream. However, I think there have recently been some interesting developments that could suggest a notion of devised theatre as praxis, as having a wider sense of its own ecology. In the last ten years in the UK, many venues have started to host 'scratch' nights, which host the showing of incomplete fragments of work in progress, usually of devised theatre companies. These incomplete fragments gain a regular audience, leading theatre critic Lyn Gardner to suggest that "there's a growing audience out there [...] that is becoming increasingly fascinated more with process than product".⁴ Philip Stanier sees it slightly differently, saying that work in progress showings "blur the distinction between process and performance".⁵ In either case, though, it is clear that the companies and audiences see the conventional boundaries between artistic roles starting to loosen. In 'scratch' performances and work in progress showings the

⁴ Cited in Mermikides and Smart (eds.), p.27

⁵ Stanier, P (2010), 'The Distance Covered: Third Angel's *9 Billion Miles from Home*', in Mermikides and Smart (eds.), p.116

work of art functions as a centre for people to come together and discuss performances not as a finished commodity, but rather as fluid and in process. In such a process, the work can function as the springboard for a discussion of representation and communication, how art interacts with its community, and how it might be developed. It is in flux, there to be opened up to inspection and consideration and engagement and development. Peter Brook said “a play is play”,⁶ but in this conceptualisation a ‘play’ is not *just* play. It is a form of work, a channelling of the body and of resources which requires thought and engagement. Such an understanding is not specific to a contemporary UK context, but can be applied to other contexts too. As Neelands states,

In local communities in my society and in many traditional societies, the arts still serve the important civic and community functions that ritual and art making once provided for us all. In the so-called golden ages of Athenian and Elizabethan drama, going to the theatre was an important and integral part of the public life of the citizen. The theatre still offers communities a public forum for debating, affirming and challenging culture and community ties. In this community model, the arts are seen as important ‘means’ of representing and commenting on the cultural life and beliefs of the community, in turn the communal participation of the whole community in art-making strengthens their cultural bonds. Every member of the groups is seen as a potential producer – a potential artist. In this model, theatre is produced on the basis of a social agreement between members of a group who come together to make something that will be of importance to them; something that will signify their lives.⁷

In a similar vein, the playwright Howard Barker envisioned that “[o]ne day a play will be written for which men and women will miss a day’s work. It is likely this play will itself be experienced as work”.⁸ Although Barker’s rhetoric sees a written play rather than devised theatre as the focus of this praxis, there may be a particular link for devised theatre to this conception. As I outlined in Chapter One, devised theatre is a particularly fluid form that is hard to define. It is variously scripted and unscripted, spontaneous and planned, product and process, original and derivative, physical and linguistic. But in the work of companies like Goat

⁶ Brook, p.157

⁷ Neelands, J (2010) ‘Mirror, Dynamo or Lens?’ in O’Connor (ed.), p.155

⁸ Barker, p.24

Island it fits with my outlining of a socio-aesthetic creative praxis: existing as a creative realm where theory and practice fuse or at least exist in tension, rather than as two discrete realms. It is framed as separate from life, yet it is portrayed by living bodies for whom participation in it is an expression of their own ideas, feelings, opinions and speculations.

In terms of pedagogy, I have suggested above that such a conceptualisation suggests the possibility of a shift from socially centred education to art centred education. Doing so, I have attempted to suggest, is not a move away from social engagement, but is rather a recognition that art is a place where what is taken for granted can be seen anew, reconsidered, reimagined. (This would not only include social elements of human activity, but also personal ones too). Such a shift can be seen in the recent move in academic circles towards practice-as-research,⁹ with PhDs in theatre and performance increasingly incorporating an element of making work. This notion in many ways seems to chime with the definition of praxis, where making is seen as something which has theoretical implications, and theory is seen to exist within practice. In this space, Shannon Jackson's notion of "artist-as-academic",¹⁰ rather than one or the other, can begin to be realised. (I am aware of the paradoxical nature of this argument being created within a solely academic thesis: my future research will explore praxis as a model, incorporating practice more directly).

Key determinants of how devised theatre is taught are arguably curricula and assessment. Recent political debates regarding what is on curricula illustrate the perceived importance of them both.¹¹ The notion of curriculum, which seeks to prescribe what will be learned at any particular time, might seem contradictory to a

⁹ See, for example, Kershaw, B and H. Nicholson (2011) *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh: University Press); Barrett, E and B. Bolt (2010) *Practice as Research* (London: Tauris); Riley, S. R. and L. Hunter (eds.) (2009) *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); Nelson, R (2013) *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan)

¹⁰ Jackson (2004), p.219

¹¹ See, for example, Higgins and Adams.

notion of educational praxis where outcomes cannot be predicted in advance but rather develop organically through an ongoing process of action and reflection. Similarly assessment, which seeks to quantify aspects of activity at a given moment, might seem contradictory to a notion of holistic praxis which unfolds over time. Yet any attempt to intervene in current Western educational contexts must engage with assessment and curricula, since they are central to all current education structures.

As I outlined at the very start of the Introduction, assessment has often been perceived as being aligned with a scientific paradigm which does not fit the more fluid nature of the arts. Within arts pedagogy there has therefore often been what Steve Dixon calls a “nervousness” around assessment:¹² for example, Paul Kleiman has given the advice, in his “Rough Guide to Assessment”, to “assess as little as possible, but as much as necessary”.¹³ This ‘nervousness’ has, according to Dixon, citing the research of Paul Bridges, resulted in discipline related marking behaviour where teachers of arts and the humanities in British universities “rarely mark outside the 40 - 70% range”. Bridges suggests that this is due to the perception that “the extremities of the percentage scale are insecure territory for assessors of qualitative subject matter”. (These contrast, he says, with science subjects such as mathematics and computing where the whole percentile range is used).¹⁴

Perhaps this ‘nervousness’ is reflected in the fact that although process has formed components of many assessment regimes, such regimes have rarely found ways of engaging with an ecological model which sees practice as praxis: as something which is not just production, but as simultaneous action and reflection and as something which has a wider sense of its own significance

¹² See Dixon.

¹³ See Kleiman (2007).

¹⁴ Paul Bridges et al (1999), ‘Discipline-Related Marking Behaviour Using Percentages: A Potential Cause of Inequity in Assessment’, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 24 (3), pp. 285 - 300, quoted in Dixon

beyond the theatre. For example, in the UK the current AQA A level Unit 4 assessment insists on separating process marks into three categories focused on dramatic intentions, creative cooperation and inventiveness, and skill development.¹⁵ What is missing here is any sense of how these elements interrelate. There is also little sense of how process and the piece of theatre produced link to a wider social context, such as that identified in Neelands' examples of companies in the tradition of process drama as well as in the example of Brecht in Chapter Two. In other words, what is missing here is praxis, defined implicitly in John Dewey's notion of the arts' ability "to integrate children's thoughts and feelings with their actions - a process that [...] brings together the child's internal subjectivity and the external world of objects".¹⁶

However, perhaps it is possible to develop a model where assessment is considered to be something more than a solely numerical evaluation of a given activity or product, and to rather be reconceptualised as reflection. Similarly, if curricula were reconceptualised as activity, praxis could develop as assessment (reflection) leads to a shift in curriculum (activity) in a continuous cyclical ecology which functions as a model for a pedagogical notion of praxis.

Such a praxis could be taught and assessed in various ways. An essential feature of such an educational approach would be to note the need identified in Chapter Six for any educational model truly rooted in the simultaneous action and reflection of praxis to be linked to a non-hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, similar to that identified by Rancière as a "pure relationship of will to will".¹⁷ In such a model, teachers could create an activity (a curriculum) of work with students which focuses on developing a new response to a known situation, recontextualising it and enabling new perspectives on it to be created. Students and teachers could then reflect on (assess) their response to that. Teachers could

¹⁵ <http://store.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/pdf/AQA-2240-W-SP.PDF> p.22 [Accessed 2/12/12]

¹⁶ Dewey, J (1934), *Art as Experience*, cited in Nicholson, p.15

¹⁷ Rancière (1991), p.13

set students the activity (or curriculum) of asking students to engage with the limitations of representation, asking them to explore beyond what is already known or imaginable (such as in Goat Island's "impossible tasks" outlined in Chapter Seven). The student could be encouraged to think about the limits of representation and how to move beyond it. It would not be possible to assess the success of a student's response to this task by comparing their work with any preordained outcome. Rather, the student and teacher could reflect on (assess) their ability to use skills such as imagination and creativity, or on their attempts to understand the world and to explore the frontiers of representation. Teachers could ensure that student activities (or curriculum) include a consideration of social interaction, recognising that a student's devising practice will have ramifications both within and beyond the rehearsal room. Teachers could develop activities which encourages students to explore bravely, accepting the inevitable failures along the way as being an essential part of any truly exploratory process. Teachers could encourage students to see such failure as an opening to new understanding, and ensure that they embrace failure in themselves as part of their own process of praxis. In this type of dynamic ecology, assessment is grounded as reflection that follows the curriculum of activity.

However, to allow exploration, it may be essential to rethink the amount of *summative* reflection, or assessment, of students. When students and teachers are focused on hitting specific assessment criteria, or are concerned about the marks which they obtain (which may affect job prospects or future academic opportunities) there may inevitably be a fear of failure, and there may be more likely to be a prescriptive aspect to the work. Such an approach may not be conducive to the cyclical model of praxis, where activity leads to reflection which then feeds back into revised action, meaning that outcomes cannot be predicted in advance. Similarly, whilst some kind of structure is necessary, in such a model it would be important that the action (curriculum) can be changed as the

pedagogical process develops. In this sense I have some sympathy with Kleiman's notion to "assess as little as possible, but as much as necessary",¹⁸ but being clear that this is about summative, rather than formative, assessment. Formative assessment, indeed, is an essential part of the cyclical ecology of praxis.

In the same paper, Kleiman outlines the notion of a negotiated assessment regime, where students and teachers come together to discuss what summative assessment criteria might be. By involving students in this process, their learning (action) can feed into their assessment (reflection), and similarly such reflection can influence what action (or curriculum) is undertaken. An ecology develops here where people work together to a common goal of growth and development.

In the kind of pedagogy articulated above, teachers engage in a dialogue with students which is rooted in a premise of equality. But such a pedagogy has a wider significance. It encourages students to see their devising of theatre as an ecology. It encourages them to see their work as a praxis that interacts with and impacts on, albeit in a small way, the world. Yet this approach is only possible because the student sees their creation as being able to step beyond notions of commodity; as being able to move beyond the everyday into the speculative. The making of art is seen as being important because it enables the student to step beyond what is currently known and to reflect on what is currently known. Like the notion of scratch performances where a performance is always there to be developed, it is a temporary thing that cannot be completed; it is part of an ongoing process of making and reflecting. It is praxis: a unity of theory and practice.

¹⁸ Kleiman (2007)

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