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Removing the 'Cloak of Invisibility':

New Zealand Directors Discuss Theatre Directing Praxis

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of

Doctor of Philosophy

in
English

at
The University of Waikato

by
VANESSA BYRNES



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2015

Abstract

This thesis reveals central thematic concerns relating to directing text-based professional theatre in New Zealand. How does a select cohort of professional New Zealand theatre directors bring texts dynamically to life? How have they directed actors through texts? What are the origins and contours of these praxes? What and who have been the key influences? And how do they view the role and function of a director and of theatre?

The thesis analyses the praxis of ten contemporary New Zealand theatre directors whose work is typically generated from classic and contemporary play scripts. It does this through the creation of an original archive of semi-structured interviews. The thesis focuses on five key themes: constraints, freedoms, key methodological influences, working with actors in rehearsal, and working with actors towards revelation.

Taking a case study approach, the thesis seeks points of similarity and difference between these directors' praxis, arguing that principal findings are characteristic of professional New Zealand theatre directing in general. The thesis contends that this representation of text-based theatre directing in New Zealand exhibits distinctive characteristics. These include a variety of 'actor-centric' techniques. British director Mike Alfreds has made a particular contribution to contemporary New Zealand theatre directing practice, especially since his masterclass with directors and actors, held in 1989, and this work is considered in depth.

The thesis concludes that while the trope of interpretive directing in New Zealand is varied and nuanced, there are common threads that together weave a 'cloak of invisibility'. In revealing the fabric and shape of this cloak, it argues that these New Zealand theatre directors

have a distinct voice and are engaged in constructing a distinctive post-colonial praxis, while at the same time making a significant contribution to the evolving discourse of international theatre directing and performance practice.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of both my paternal and maternal grandparents; Peter and Margaret Byrnes, and William and Kathleen McConkey. They all cultivated literal and metaphorical fields in their lifetimes, and as a result, I have been given a solid foundation for learning and growth.

Acknowledgements

There's an Irish proverb that says: 'You'll never plough a field by turning it over in your mind.' This thesis and its accompanying doctoral journey has been an attempt to work out the answers to a few questions in outward, practical forms. However since I could not have tilled this turf alone, thanks must be paid.

I am indebted to my Supervisors, Dr. Mark Houlahan and Professor David McKie for their honest and steadfast support throughout this journey. Your constant good humour and attention to detail – while understanding the need to have peripheral vision – have been essential to this project. Thank you.

I am deeply appreciative of the time, skill, expertise and sheer goodwill of each and every director interviewed for this project. You have given me an honest and connected account of your working process. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and experience. This project could not have been possible without your willingness and unfettered generosity.

I must pay gratitude to mentors who include Tim Carroll, Robin Payne, Professor David Carnegie and Dr. John Jowett. Colleagues include Tom McCrory, Sylvia Rands, Rawiri Paratene, KC Kelly, Rangimoana Taylor, Kerry Palmer, Viv Quinn, Lyndee-Jane Rutherford, Michele Hine, and Deborah Balmer. These practitioners have worked with me on different projects over the years and my doctoral conversation is richer for knowing they might read this.

Thank you to Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School for the platform you gave me as a student, then as a teacher and director. The Actors' Program in Auckland has been a valuable touchstone. I am

appreciative of the generous nature of sharing and reciprocity that both places exhibit.

Thank you to the University of Waikato Library and English Programme staff for their support. I am also indebted to the University of Waikato Doctoral Scholarship fund and the Federation of Graduate Women (Waikato Branch) for providing financial support to see this journey through. Thank you to Catherine Thompson for your expert transcribing skills.

Fond thanks to my sister Professor Giselle Byrnes and brother-in-law Dr. Stephen Hamilton for their encouragement and superb feedback. My parents, Jim and Sandra Byrnes, have been a great help over the years and throughout this doctoral journey in practical and strategic ways. Thank you for consistently advocating the power of education, and for keeping me on track so I could plough this turf. Thanks to my parents-in-law Rosemary and Raymond Tully for helping out to make this possible.

Lastly, since no production can ever happen alone, I must say thank you to my immediate family. My daughters Imogen and Scarlett; you have been supportive, patient and wonderfully co-operative. Thank you for allowing me to devote time and energy to this project when I could have given that to you. And lastly huge thanks to Warren, who has kept me going in so many ways over the past few years. You have given me time and resources to achieve this goal. Thank you for supporting me through a journey that was not mine alone, but like the best trips, a shared experience that our whole family has been part of.

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Chapter One: A Practical, Unseen Art?

This thesis explores directing methods and practice in professional text-based¹ contemporary New Zealand theatre, as seen from the perspective of a cohort of leading New Zealand theatre directors from the late 1980s to the present.² It uses an ethnographic research method based on a series of original semi-structured interviews conducted with ten mid-career, professional New Zealand theatre directors, plus London-based director Mike Alfreds, who has influenced certain aspects of the directing domain.³ The praxis – practice, methodology and theory – of each director is considered both individually and as part of a larger New Zealand and international community.

The thesis takes inspiration and provocation from Peter Brook's statement that: 'There is a need to recognise that every director with their individual differences, approach and style – every one of which can be true and totally legitimate – belongs to a shared, international fraternity.'⁴ This original archive of semi-structured conversations with directors is the

¹ I am aware that the term 'text' is controversial in terms of contemporary theory and practice. In this thesis I am referring to a play text as a pre-formed play script of certain quality. It may be a classic, contemporary, or 'post-dramatic' script. It may have been performed many times before or in its first production. It may be published or not. In either case, 'play text' covers all dramatic scripts, adapted or original in source, that are intended for theatre performance. Here I draw upon Patrice Pavis' definition of a dramatic text(s): 'the verbal script which is read or heard in performance ... texts written prior to performance, not those written or rewritten after rehearsals, improvisations or performances.' See Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, trans. by L. Kruger (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1991), p. 31.

² Directing is defined as 'the process of governing preparation for a theatrical performance'. See *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Dennis Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 171.

³ I conducted these interviews over a one year period between September 2011 and September 2012 in New Zealand and London. See Appendix A for the full transcripts.

⁴ Peter Brook, edited extracts of a talk given to the Directors' Guild of Great Britain, 1996, reprinted in *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, ed. by Gabriella Luckhurst and Mary Giannachi (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. xii.

first major study to present a collection of voices about directing in New Zealand.⁵ Taken as a whole, the findings synthesised here are innovative in that they speak to common themes; although they speak individually, by virtue of this project these theatre directors are now part of a community of practice and praxis in the wider directing realm. Although the necessarily limited sample of directors cannot speak for the entire text-based directing profession in New Zealand, these subjects are a representative group with shared characteristics. The archive and its subsequent analysis therefore significantly add to the ongoing debate of national identity through the arts, and in particular, the character of contemporary directing that is exemplified by these directors.

This thesis argues that theatre directing is not just instinctive, nor is it simply derivative; rather, it is an activity that can be described and deconstructed as the subject of scholarly scrutiny and analysis. It also seeks to show how its key findings have practical resonance on the stage and within the rehearsal space. All the directors interviewed for this study have directed both classic (specifically, Shakespearean) as well as contemporary play texts for New Zealand audiences. They are what Raymond Williams might call 'dominant' practitioners, since they have expressly contributed to the ways in which we currently conceptualize professional text-based theatre in New Zealand.⁶ Shakespeare – although not performed in professional theatre as often now as in previous decades – was a point of entry to this research before the study moved to wider

⁵ The interviews with theatre directors constructed as a part of this study are hereafter collectively referred to as 'the archive'. For permission to gain electronic access to a pdf file of the archive, please contact the author at ykb2@students.waikato.ac.nz or Dr. Mark Houlahan at the University of Waikato: maph@waikato.ac.nz.

⁶ See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). Williams asserts that methodology in literature or culture belongs to a moving continuum that includes 'dominant, residual, and emergent'. Within Williams' framework I am prescribing a 'dominant' characteristic to the selected interview subjects, since they work largely in mainstream, text-based theatre. See pp. 121-7.

issues of directing praxis. All interview subjects engage with questions of directing Shakespeare, but rather than engaging with that as a central focal point, this remains an underlying character that is present throughout the archive and study.

My focus in this study is on subjects whose work is generally recognised and is held in high regard for its quality and rigour. This research places emphasis on the cohort of living directors working in the wake of their forebears.⁷ The selected research subjects – arguably illustrative of the wider cadre of present-day New Zealand professional theatre directors in their community – have looked to Europe and further afield for inspiration, while simultaneously asserting a distinct ‘New Zealand’ sensibility in their craft. David O’Donnell’s description of Colin McColl – whom I suggest is the country’s leading contemporary practitioner – as a director who is ‘self-reflexive about the isolation and smallness of New Zealand society, seeking synthesis of New Zealand influences and themes with the European tradition’, is symptomatic of other New Zealand directors’ working methodologies.⁸ Such observations invite further investigation into contemporary directing practices and their predominant approaches. An element of reflexive awareness and a desire to strive for ‘new’ approaches is important to these directors, as they reconstruct a narrative about their own successful directing experiences in the interviews.

How does a select cohort of contemporary professional theatre directors in New Zealand bring texts to life? How have they directed actors through texts? What are the origins and contours of these praxes?

⁷ Namely: Ngaio Marsh, Nola Millar, Elric Hooper, George Webby, Bruce Mason, Mervyn Thompson, Tony Taylor, Sunny Amey and Raymond Hawthorne.

⁸ David O’Donnell, ‘Redirecting National Identity: The Theatre of Colin McColl’, unpublished conference paper, *Australasian Universities’ Language and Literature Association Conference: Knowledge and Nation* (Wellington, February 2003), pp.1-18 (p. 2).

What and who have been the key influences? How do they view the role and function of a director and of theatre? In responding to these questions, the thesis argues that the principal thematic concerns arising from the interviews constitute distinguishing attributes towards a New Zealand theatre directing aesthetic, style and sensibility that sits in an international arena. The study draws on the practitioner interview data to examine both conventional and innovative directing practices. Through a qualitative narrative analysis of that data and other relevant literature, it traces the key stylistic, methodological, and technical influences on these directors, both from overseas and from within New Zealand. In addition, it briefly considers the ways in which the work of these directors has affected theatre practice more generally, in both international and domestic contexts. The archive of interviews and its subsequent analysis are complemented and supplemented by an interview with renowned British director Mike Alfreds, whose methods continue to influence the local directing profession.

The thesis also draws extensively upon my own experience as a working theatre director in New Zealand. From this 'threshold'⁹ position as participant-observer I foreground what are often considered 'unseen' elements of effective text directing guidelines. This study therefore opens up new territory in New Zealand theatre performance research in that it is based on original fieldwork in the form of oral interviews, and marries that fieldwork with an analysis of contemporary international literature on the theory and practice of contemporary theatre directing. In doing so, the thesis proposes a number of conclusions about the conditions of

⁹ I am referring to Victor Turner's notion of threshold analysis; specifically, 'ritual liminality' that affords me, as a practitioner/researcher, the ability to occupy the space of the insider-outsider researcher perspective, who, through temporary separation from the professional culture, is able to challenge existing assumptions while simultaneously relying on a deep understanding of them. See his: *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, 2nd edn (New Jersey, NY: Aldine, repr. 1995).

production and the nature of contemporary text-based New Zealand theatre directing.

The question of the visibility/invisibility of theatre directing is addressed in two key ways. Primarily, this is the first scholarly study to systematically record and prioritise a sample of New Zealand theatre directors' voices, methods and approaches to text-based theatre directing in such a way as to make their profession 'visible' to and available for critical analysis. In this way, the thesis charts the course for future studies towards what might be termed distinctive 'New Zealand' theatre practice. Second, the thesis contends that New Zealand directors have been largely invisible in the documented theatre making process. They often see themselves as executing an imperceptible and behind-the-scenes craft. For example, McColl contends that an unnoticeable hand is crucial in good directing: 'A cloak of invisibility is needed to be a director.'¹⁰ McColl argues, somewhat self-effacingly, that an effective theatre director should know how to make his or her role almost indiscernible and 'let the actors, designers, lighting and sound technicians get on with the job'.¹¹

While accepting that indiscernibility can be part of good leadership, the thesis foregrounds directing methods from the directors' own perspectives. It reveals the substance beneath that cloak of invisibility and makes visible hitherto undocumented approaches to theatre directing; in so doing, it elevates this cloak from the status of invisible garment to that of a treasured 'korowai'.¹² While some recent postmodern performance scholarship has challenged the view of the invisible director by making

¹⁰ Colin McColl, 'Cloak of Invisibility Needed to be a Director', *Hawke's Bay Today*, Monday 20 September 2010, p. 4.

¹¹ Colin McColl, 'Visible/Invisible: The Director's Dilemma', Lecture in association with Creative Hawke's Bay, 21 September 2010, Century Theatre, Napier.

¹² Also known as 'kahu huruhuru', the word 'korowai' is often the name used to describe Māori feather cloaks. Korowai are highly prized of traditional Māori garments given to those with 'mana' or status, and are regarded as tribal/family and personal heirlooms. They are considered 'taonga', or highly treasured items.

visible the working processes of individual directors, such expository processes have not been widely documented or critiqued in the New Zealand context.¹³ This thesis therefore aims to address this lacuna, make the profession 'more visible' and thus shed light on the New Zealand theatre directors' praxis by consulting the key primary sources in this field – the theatre directors themselves.

Speaking the unsaid: instinct, analysis and framing

First and foremost, this thesis offers a rare opportunity to access a director's reflections on their work. As the interviews reveal, the directors' innovations in practice arise, at least in part, out of necessity, since the creative process leading to performance in theatre is protean and frequently unseen. As New Zealand playwright Michelanne Forster has suggested, the process of making a play is often a covert and hidden process. Forster comments: 'The 'how' of any creative work is always a mystery. Where does that spark of an idea come from, and what skills are needed to fan that little glimmer into a fully-fledged work of art?'¹⁴ Yet theatre directors, who are the instigators and refiners of complex works on stage, rarely have the opportunity to reflect on and articulate the nature of their practice.

In New Zealand there is a dearth of documented material addressing the characteristics of text-based theatre directing as shaped by this particular geographical, cultural and professional domain. The development of professional text-based theatre directing approaches in New Zealand therefore not only invites, but demands further exploration.

¹³ For examples of where directors have been discussed elsewhere, see J. Robert Wills; Luckhurst and Giannachi; and Maria M. Delgado and Paul Heritage, *In Contact with the Gods? Directors Talk Theatre* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Michelanne Forster, 'Preface' in Michaelanne Forster and Vivienne Plumb, *Twenty New Zealand Playwrights* (Wellington: Playmarket, 2013), p. 9.

Interestingly, the notion of ‘instinct’ (intangible and highly subjective) is frequently offered as the explanatory driving force for a director. Indeed, directors speak of ‘having a feel for what works’ and ‘following the rhythm of a moment’. This poses difficulties for an academic exposition and analysis. How can highly personalised ‘instincts’ be explained? The thesis argues instead for a more grounded approach; indeed, it goes further to suggest that specific tenets of good directing can be identified, articulated and scrutinised.

Directors are practical artists, regardless of their geographical location. They are the arbiters of both creative taste and resource management in the complex threading together of different disciplines towards a common end product.¹⁵ However, directing also requires the pursuit of a certain focus or individual vision; ironically, it is often referred to as ‘the loneliest game in one of the most social of playgrounds’. Irrespective of its social nature, effective directing is often considered a ‘practical art’.

This is captured in the description of directors given by Toi Whakaari’s website for the Master of Theatre Arts (MTA) in Directing. It conjures up images of directors being part-theatre makers, part-magicians; here theatre directing is represented as a portmanteau for what might be ‘theatricians’:

Directors are artists. They interpret plays and initiate new work. Directing is a process of distillation, part science and part instinct. As the cultural landscape of this country unfolds, directors have a unique opportunity to guide, stimulate, provoke and question.¹⁶

¹⁵ Resources include (but are not limited to) space, people, space, time, money, publicity and technology.

¹⁶ Te Kura Toi Whakaari O Aotearoa: New Zealand Drama School website, ‘MTA in Directing: Celebrating Collaboration and Individual Ambition’, <<http://www.toiwhakaari.ac.nz/study-at-toi-whakaari/directing>> [accessed 25 November 2012].

Directing is described as a ‘process of distillation’, implying that experimentation and selection are involved, and that it is a craft that is capable of definition and explanation. The provocation inherent in the active verbs driving this statement (‘guide, stimulate, provoke and question’) also suggest that directing is a purposeful activity that can be linked to a wider social purpose, and this is a strand that runs through the thesis.

This practical characteristic is echoed by the directors in the archive of interviews. Colin McColl asserts the importance of practicality in directing when he says, ‘I’m speaking just as a practical man of the theatre.’¹⁷ Alongside instinctive responses to a play, McColl stresses the amount of preparation and decision-making in relation to the text that must be made before day one of rehearsals begins, and the generative possibilities therein: ‘I liken it [directing] to being a gardener. You’re really a creator of possibilities. A gardener puts a seedling in the ground and hopes it will flower and a director does the same.’¹⁸ Directing is a ‘practical art’. This thesis therefore follows Katie Mitchell’s notion that directing is based on both instinct and craft¹⁹ and bears in mind the central conditions of time, place and suspension of disbelief so fundamental to effective theatre practice. Murray Edmond further notes that the process of theatre making is a time-based art form when he says, ‘A team descends, uplifts the script and makes it become something ‘present’ in time and space.’²⁰ This sense of dynamic elevation – of a moment, a gesture, or an entire play – propels the central question at the heart of this project; how do professional New Zealand theatre directors bring text dynamically to life?

¹⁷ Colin McColl, interview with the author (Auckland: 15 May 2011), Appendix A.

¹⁸ McColl, ‘Cloak of Invisibility Needed to be a Director’.

¹⁹ See Katie Mitchell, *The Director’s Craft: A Handbook For The Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Katie Normington, ‘Little Acts of Faith: Katie Mitchell’s *The Mysteries*’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 14, (1998), 99-110.

²⁰ Murray Edmond, Introduction in Forster and Plumb, p. 12.

The New Zealand Experience

A rich tradition of touring and locally-produced theatre prefaces this investigation of praxis, and this historical locale of theatre production provides essential context. New Zealand – geographically isolated but inventive and confidently forging its identity in the arts – finds beginnings of western narrative theatre practice in market-driven work where entrepreneurs must court risk and present work that would sell. This stems from an early appetite for populist work mostly from abroad; sporting entertainment could sit cheek by jowl with music hall, melodrama, and Shakespeare. As Lisa Warrington points out, professional productions of text-based drama can be traced back to one year after the signing of Te Tiriti O Waitangi/ The Treaty of Waitangi: ‘The North Island – and in particular Auckland and Wellington – had been relatively well served by visiting theatre companies and individuals since as early as 1841.’²¹ Indeed, she notes elsewhere that Shakespeare was regularly produced on the colonial stage. One ‘very creditable’ production of *Othello* was performed by the Amateur Society in provincial Wanganui in July, 1871; presumably to much success given it was delivered to a ‘crowded’ house.²²

Commentators including Peter Harcourt, Howard McNaughton and Christopher Balme have also traversed this territory of New Zealand theatre history to track the output of key actor-managers or theatre

²¹ Lisa Warrington, ‘We Are Amused: Theatre Comes to Dunedin December 1861 - April 1862’, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 62 (June 2013), 41-54 (p. 41).

²² Lisa Warrington, ‘Acting the Moor: Critical Response to Performances of *Othello* in Australia and New Zealand 1834-1866’, *Australian Studies*, 6 (2014), 1-27 (p. 12) <<http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/australian-studies/issue/current>> [accessed 22 December 2014].

'producers', as directors were called until the 1950s.²³ These include W.H. Foley and his wife Mrs. Foley's self-started company, 'The New Zealand Company' formed c.1857, Richard and Edith Champion's touring company The New Zealand Players founded in 1953, and Nola Millar's 1950s involvement with Wellington's Unity Theatre which was formed in 1942. Millar's left-wing work was exemplified in productions such as Gorky's *The Lower Depths* (1951). In 1942, Christchurch-based Ngaio Marsh produced a modern-dress *Hamlet* for the Canterbury University College Drama Society, the first of many Shakespeare productions with the Society until 1969. In Wellington in 1964, Downstage Theatre founders Peter Bland, Tim Elliott and Martyn Sanderson²⁴ were the first of sixteen artistic directors of the company, while in Dunedin, Patric and Rosalie Carey founded the pioneering Globe Theatre. This was established by the Careys in their 104 London St home in 1961, and fostered a generation of writers, directors, actors and writers, including James K. Baxter.²⁵ Auckland's Mercury Theatre, established in 1966 by Professor John C Reid, ran from 1968 to 1991. This company cultivated the work of directors such as Ian Mune, Roger McGill, Raymond Hawthorne and Jonathan Hardy.²⁶ There are numerous examples in existing scholarship of the connection between theatre productions and personnel.

Tracing features of professional theatre directing *praxis* in New Zealand is a notably more concealed phenomenon. This perceived

²³ See Howard McNaughton, *New Zealand Drama* (Boston: Twayne, 1981); Peter Harcourt, *A Dramatic Appearance: New Zealand Theatre 1920-1970* (Wellington: Methuen, 1978); Christopher Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-colonial Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁴ Notably, they were all actors who turned to producing and directing.

²⁵ See Rosalie Carey, *A Theatre in the House: The Careys' Globe* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999); David Carnegie, 'Dunedin's Globe Theatre: the Carey Years', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 3.1 (October 1984), 15-21.

²⁶ See Nicholas Tarling, *Wit, Eloquence and Commerce: A History of Auckland's Mercury Theatre* (Auckland: Connacht Books, 2006).

invisibility is accentuated by the fact that theatre directors in this country remain without a guild or representation by agents. Moreover it is only fourteen years since industry training courses in directing were first offered at Unitec in Auckland, and twelve years since the first candidates for professional director training started at Te Kura Toi Whakaari O Aotearoa: New Zealand Drama School.²⁷ In their article 'Teaching the Unteachable: A Dialogue in Director Training', David O'Donnell and Lisa Warrington acknowledge the prevalent director-training methodologies in New Zealand that follow principles of practice-led research espoused by Brad Haseman.²⁸ He notes the particularly subjective and participant-led nature of such reflexive methods in director training that centre around the individual. These training methods challenge traditional pedagogical norms, thereby making the practice and discourse of directing seem even more 'hidden':

Rather than contribute to the intellectual or conceptual architecture of a discipline, these research enterprises are concerned with the improvement of practice, and new epistemologies of practice distilled *from the insider's understandings of action in context* [my emphasis].²⁹

Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' is notably apt for this professional environment, since there is a sense of nationality amongst this group of directors but often little visibility.³⁰ Without organised representation or ways of interacting at regular intervals, the research suggests these directors are, and have become, an 'imagined

²⁷ Hereafter referred to as 'Toi Whakaari'. The two-year Master of Theatre Arts (MTA) in Theatre Directing co-taught by Toi Whakaari and Victoria University of Wellington was first offered in 2002.

²⁸ David O'Donnell and Lisa Warrington, 'Teaching the Unteachable: A Dialogue in Director Training', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 57 (October 2010), 129-47.

²⁹ Brad Haseman, 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, 118 (February 2006) 98-106 (p. 3).

³⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

community'; a socially-constructed group with specific traits in common. According to Anderson's definition, they are 'imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship [original emphasis]'.³¹ In other words, despite their imperceptibility, this cohort of directors represents a self-identified professional group of interest. The notion of consciously presenting an 'imagined community' directly relates to the central intention to make visible the working processes of directors.

While influenced by an eclectic and diverse set of methodologies both imported and 'indigenous' to New Zealand, the working processes employed by directors navigating these waters still remain relatively unknown. My purpose in this thesis is to bring to the fore the working methods of selected leading professional New Zealand theatre directors. In doing so, I reveal the core elements of these directors' predominant working techniques to provide a framework for understanding the work of performance practitioners in New Zealand and beyond. It should be noted that the subjects of 'nationality', 'national identity', and 'nationhood' are large ones. I am not trying to define a narrative or character of New Zealand directing *per se*; nor is this a comparative study between nations or cultures. Rather, these directors represent distinct voices of 'dominant' practitioners whose praxis exhibit certain traits and methodologies. Having explained the purpose and rationale for this study, the following section more closely orients and contextualises the thesis.

³¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p.7.

Interpretive, deconstructive and reconstructive approaches

New Zealand theatre directing in text-based theatre can be characterized by three predominant methodological approaches; reconstructive, interpretive and deconstructive. Broadly speaking, 'reconstruction' refers to the presentation of work on stage in a way considered to be faithful to the author's intention. This may include specifics such as the context in which the play is set, and adhering to limitations on the potential liberties that a contemporary director may be tempted to take with actors and set. By contrast, 'deconstruction' is a method that relies heavily on directorial vision since it considers the play text as the basis for possible new theatre forms, often radically different from the original script. Finally, 'interpretation' is the translation and reshaping of a work in such a way as to make it relevant for and immediately accessible to a contemporary audience. In this case, the director endeavours to uncover (to varying degrees) the playwright's 'intention' while still creating theatre that renders it fresh and, perhaps, recognisable as that director's distinctive work. Most contemporary New Zealand theatre directors like McColl epitomize the work of the interpretive director.

Indeed, the best of McColl's work, as O'Donnell notes, relies on radical interpretation in which the director 'disorients the spectator, re-locating the narrative in a foreign context, and creating thematic links which have particular resonance in the post-colonial situation'.³² For instance, in a review of McColl's production of *The Visit* (1996) at Downstage Theatre, Laurie Atkinson wrote that 'A new word has entered New Zealand English. It is to "McCollonise", which means "to transpose a European dramatic masterpiece to a New Zealand setting with flair, wit

³² O'Donnell, 'Redirecting National Identity: The Theatre of Colin McColl', p.3.

and intelligence and without distorting the play's essential spirit and thrust."³³

McColl himself sums up the interpretive approach when he states that the director's role is to be 'an arbiter of taste'.³⁴ This directly connects to Michel Saint-Denis' notion of the director creating 'the reality of style', which, in his view, is principally composed of three elements:

Of construction and composition. Composition in musical terms. Construction considered in all its different parts and the way in which they are connected. ... Of rhythm. Relationship between the different rhythms first taken in big chunks [and] ... of the tone and colour of the language, and how the text goes from one tone to another.³⁵

'Style' in Saint-Denis' terms – comprised of 'construction/composition, rhythm and tone' – is intrinsically linked to 'meaning' or the 'psychological construction' of a theatre production; or, as he says, 'the one contains the other'.³⁶ Style is the incorporation of all theatre elements towards a goal, from which 'meaning' can be formed.

I first encountered this concept of style determining denotation when designer Raymond Boyce wrote to me after seeing a production of *Twelfth Night* (2007)³⁷ I had directed that featured a very strong interpretive aesthetic. I had taken huge interpretive risks with this well-known piece, staging the play in an unspecified South Indian setting and splitting the characters so that there were, for example, three Festes and two Marias. This was no conventional Illyria; rather, the setting allowed director, cast, and crew enormous interpretive freedom to 'discover' and

³³ Laurie Atkinson, *Evening Post*, 22 July 1996, qtd in O'Donnell, 'Redirecting National Identity: The Theatre of Colin McColl', p. 1.

³⁴ McColl, interview.

³⁵ Michel Saint-Denis, 'Style in Acting, Directing, and Designing', in *Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style and Other Writings*, ed. by Jane Baldwin (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), pp. 68-81 (p. 75).

³⁶ Saint-Denis, p. 75.

³⁷ *Twelfth Night*, dir. by Vanessa Byrnes (Toi Whakaari, Wellington, 2007).

highlight what I saw as the fundamental concerns of the play, while the conventional rules of text were still respected. As if to validate this, Boyce wrote: 'My mentor Michel Saint-Denis has said "style is truth", and your production had style.'³⁸ I consider this strand of 'style' and interpretation throughout the thesis as an underlying precept that can define a production's coherence, and shape a director's approach towards creating it. In fact, the notion of style is both implicitly and explicitly referenced by most of the interview subjects as a major characteristic of their craft.

Only a handful of theatre directors in New Zealand personify auteur or authorial directors and typically they employ a deconstructive approach. According to this rubric a director imposes his or her own intentions on the work, using the text simply as a point of departure. Christian Penny is one such director.³⁹ Penny will coach *around* the text, working with the actor in dialogue about character meaning, subtext and situation. He invokes situations from their own experience germane to the play, and will encourage actors to enact them, and then return immediately to the scene from the play text.

There are strong echoes of psychologically-driven processes at work here that permeate late twentieth-century theatre practice. Penny asserts that rather than trying to construct a recognisable version of the 'literature' of a play, in the role of director he is 'trying to get the *absolute essence* of each scene', so that aspects of deconstructionism cross over into the interpretive space.⁴⁰ In this way textual fidelity is not important; what is crucial is that the director is chasing the 'nugget' of what they regard the play is fundamentally about.

³⁸ Raymond Boyce, letter to the author, Wellington, September 2007.

³⁹ As evidenced in Penny's work with Anna Marbrook with their company of Theatre at Large, and in recent times on his own.

⁴⁰ Christian Penny, interview with the author (Wellington: 28 June, 2012), Appendix A.

An even smaller minority of New Zealand theatre directors bring reconstructive approaches to realise the text, faithfully recreating the 'playwright's intention' as marked in the text or assumed to be lying latent in its construction. In New Zealand, Raymond Hawthorne is perhaps the best example of a highly experienced director who works in the British-influenced mode of remaining faithful to the original intent that was most prevalent in previous generations. In 1999 Michele Hine noted of Hawthorne:

He emphasises articulation of the playwright's ideas and vision, the interior world of the play, relating, focus, fluidity of action and visual presentation. He doesn't like actors 'playing the emotion' only the actions. [He] will not tolerate change of blocking once in performance.⁴¹

On the rare occasions it is used now, the reconstructive approach is typically brought to bear on the works of writers such as Pinter, Beckett and Miller. In each of those, the writer's deliberately prescriptive conditions of performance are strictly wedded to the issuing of performing rights. For example, the executors of Miller's estate will not give permission for women to play men's roles, and vice versa. Beckett's estate will not allow the author's plays to be performed in a set that digresses from the tightly prescribed setting. Such restrictions force more reconstructive approaches out of licensing necessity, and foreground how theatre practice is always subject to certain constraints. Of the three approaches described above, however, it is however interpretive directing, a style that arguably allows for vast creative license within parameters, that features most strongly in this study.

⁴¹ Michele Hine, 'The Director in the Rehearsal of Scripted Plays; Rehearsal Practice in Contemporary New Zealand Theatre' (unpublished master's thesis, Charles Sturt University, 1999), p. 14.

Contouring conditions, or theatrical 'frames'

In addition to directorial style, specific and often highly practical conditions affect how we understand the contours of the New Zealand theatre landscape. Processes that drive the staging of dramatic texts in New Zealand theatre have largely been shaped by three key conditions; funding structures, market forces, and the existing theatrical frames of reference. The last of these can be seen as the reflection of the tastes and attitudes of an audience. In *Drama in Performance*, Raymond Williams outlines the conditions under which plays have been put on over the years, and how changes in staging practice have also paralleled developments in society.⁴² In this context there is a clear argument for a small cast and a product-driven narrative theatre we most often see today in professional theatre spaces. This is as much a reflection of the expectations of a transient and commercialised culture as a product of funding conditions. In the world of social media and instant gratification, plays longer than two hours and featuring casts of more than eight players are rare, with Shakespeare or 'political' theatre considered box office risks.

Howard McNaughton historicises plays too, arguing that 'the realisation of the text in theatre is ... an expression of audience values, attitudes and norms'.⁴³ Thus, directing praxis in New Zealand has been shaped by its political, cultural, and artistic climate along with contemporary audience expectations as to what constitutes 'theatre'. Although this is not unique to New Zealand, it has become a distinguishing feature of the domain since the late 1980s when a developing national identity and changing social perspectives – coupled

⁴² Raymond Williams, *Drama in Performance* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).

⁴³ Howard McNaughton, 'Drama', in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. by Terry Sturm, 2nd edn (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 321-393 (p. 321).

with a willingness to engage with these notions on stage – have gathered momentum. ‘Realism’, for example, is one conventional theatre form that has been manipulated in countless New Zealand plays like *Niu Sila* (2005).

The developing solo theatre tradition has also challenged the audience’s role in the construction of theatre, breaking the ‘fourth wall’ and frequently employing symbolism, ‘physical theatre’, narrative and naturalism in the confines of a single performance.⁴⁴ This fluid engagement with ‘presentational’⁴⁵ forms of theatre alongside the ‘representational’⁴⁶ has further challenged audience frames of reference. McNaughton had earlier pointed to what he called the prevailing condition of ‘a New Zealand mainstream theatre, unashamedly middle-class and cautiously intelligent’.⁴⁷ He foreshadowed the development of professional theatre in New Zealand throughout the next three decades. In 1981 McNaughton noted: ‘Only now that that area [of middle-class theatre] has been defined may New Zealand drama await its next chapter, in which the interrupted demoralization of the middle class and splitting of the intelligentsia may be continued.’⁴⁸

⁴⁴ See, for example, Jacob Rajan’s *Krishnan’s Dairy* (1994-now) that uses mask, multiple characters, and distortions of realism as narrative devices. The show has been performed to more than 50,000 people.

⁴⁵ ‘Presentational’ theatre usually eliminates the ‘fourth wall’ between audience and actor, and acknowledges the actor-audience relationship. Shakespeare’s soliloquies and many contemporary solo performances are examples of this, although the acknowledgement of the audience may also be more covert and less ‘direct-address’. Design in presentational theatre can be naturalistic or symbolic, but in recent times it has edged towards the symbolic or abstract. Devices such as the aside have ‘metadramatic’ and ‘metatheatrical’ functions, since, as Keir Elam notes, they ‘bring attention to bear on the fictional status of the characters, on the very theatrical transaction’. See Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 90.

⁴⁶ ‘Representational’ theatre strives to create a sense of ‘realism’ through the fourth wall being firmly in place, with the actor engaged in a sustained performance as the character. Verisimilitude and continuity are highlighted. Real objects and set pieces are typically employed on stage, but not always. Stanislavski-driven acting is considered representational in style.

⁴⁷ Howard McNaughton, *New Zealand Drama* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), p. 149.

⁴⁸ McNaughton, *New Zealand Drama*, p. 149.

As McNaughton and Williams both suggest, theatrical expectations of what constitute 'successful' theatre within social groups change over time. Jon Whitmore similarly argues that any audience brings a set of assumptions or 'horizon of expectations' to an event where 'the multiple physical and psychological experiences surrounding the actual viewing' will 'influence the reading of a performance'.⁴⁹ These 'theatrical frames' include known or established horizons of expectations in which a 'paradigm can be reinforced, shattered, stretched or reshaped'.⁵⁰ Like sport, these spectator perspectives in theatre affect how a work is created. Directors must be aware of these evolving frames of reference. In *The Director at Work*, Robert L. Benedetti centrally posits Tyrone Guthrie's remark that the core function of the theatre director is to be 'an ideal audience of one'.⁵¹ Di Trevis takes this further to suggest: 'Allow audiences to teach you and your actors about the play.'⁵² Using Whitmore's notion of the 'horizon of expectations', while at the same time giving Trevis' advice some credence, the director is free to employ either an imagined substitution of an assumed (collective) audience response, or an anticipated universal reaction via the specific, experiential response of one, the director. In a low-level subsidy funding environment sustained largely by the economics of the box-office, New Zealand directors are extremely conscious of this. In 2014, the spectre of this 'tightrope' perhaps cautions even the most innovative of directors more than ever against taking huge creative risks.

Nevertheless, in the wake of McNaughton's 'interrupted demoralization', contemporary theatregoers in New Zealand have

⁴⁹ Jon Whitmore, *Directing Postmodern Theater: Shaping Signification in Performance* (Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1994), p. 32.

⁵⁰ Whitmore, p. 32.

⁵¹ Robert L. Benedetti, *The Director at Work* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 9.

⁵² Di Trevis, *Being A Director* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 128.

witnessed (and to some extent have driven) a more fragmented, yet increasingly urbane theatre culture. Audience tastes and appetites for risk have, along with directorial flair and creativity, changed over time. There were, for example, the 'alternative' theatre traditions from the 1970s exemplified by groups such as Red Mole and Amamus that Murray Edmond and Paul Maunder have written about.⁵³ These traditions have done much to shake up the physical, vocal and imagistic frames of mainstream theatre. Significantly, more Māori, Pacific Island and Asian voices have emerged in the past three decades. Hone Kouka and Judith Dale have charted the rise of a local post-colonial theatre culture that queries then integrates indigenous viewpoints and repackages these for mainstream theatre-going audiences.⁵⁴ This has occurred alongside the development of specifically indigenous theatre forms and subject matter⁵⁵ Charles Royal has written about.⁵⁶ Whether assimilated into the dominant culture or presented as stand-alone 'culturally authentic' pieces, these 'new' and 'othered' traditions have challenged the expectations and appetites of populist Pākehā theatre audiences.⁵⁷

⁵³ Murray Edmond, 'Lighting Out for Paradise: New Zealand Theatre and the 'Other' Tradition', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 18 (April 1991), 183-206; Paul Maunder, 'Thoughts on Popular Theatre', *Illusions*, 6 (November 1987), 18-20; Paul Maunder, *Rebellious Mirrors* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2013).

⁵⁴ Hone Kouka, 'Re-Colonising the Natives: The State of Contemporary Māori Theatre', in Marc Maufort and David O'Donnell, *Performing Aotearoa: New Zealand Theatre and Drama in an Age of Transition*, Dramaturgies, No. 22 (Bruxelles; New York: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 237-245; Judith Dale, 'Performing Identity: Engendering Post-Coloniality on Stage', *Illusions*, 25 (Winter 1996), 36-43; and Judith Dale, "'On the Beach": Questions of Identity in Recent Maori Drama', *Illusions*, 26 (Winter 1997), 39-42.

⁵⁵ For example, Roma Potiki, John Anderson and the group He Ara Hou's collaborative production *Whatungarongaro* (1990), which was constructed from the company's real-life narratives. This production spearheaded a movement that was concerned with telling Māori stories in 'Māori' theatre forms.

⁵⁶ See Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, 'Orotokare: Towards a New Model for Indigenous Theatre and Performing Arts' in Maufort and O'Donnell, pp. 193-208.

⁵⁷ See Christopher B. Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Smaller ‘fringe’ spaces such as BATS (Wellington) and The Basement Theatre (Auckland) regularly programme more experimental works. These venues and their works have successfully stretched the parameters of audience expectations and experience, yet these productions still play to a cohort who can recognise and position the experience as ‘theatre’. As Norman Holland says, ‘A reader responds to a literary work by assimilating it to his own psychological processes, that is, to his search for successful solutions *within his identity theme* to the multiple demands, both inner and outer, *on his ego* [my emphasis].’⁵⁸ Whitmore’s assertion is that: ‘To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it.’⁵⁹ In this sense, directors are readers of a text with ‘theatrical frames’, too. They bring their own assumptions and expectations, plus that of the audience and actors, to the experience of creating the performance. This tension exists between the ‘author’ (playwright, director or actor) and ‘interpreter’ (director, actor or audience) of a theatrical text. Context and social frames of reference are further complicated by the role of directors who operate as readers/interpreters, and ‘authors’ of texts.

The ten interview subjects featured in this thesis inhabit both of these spaces; the authorial role as director and the role of reader/interpreter of the play text. Further, they all continue the tradition of making professional theatre in a geographically isolated environment where established – but fluid – frames of reference exist. In this domain, directors are also exemplars of practitioners who have learnt from their peers and forebears, as much as those overseas, what constitutes ‘successful’ theatre. These influences are both international and local as

⁵⁸ Norman Holland, ctd in Whitmore, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Whitmore, p.18.

directors are, by nature, outward in their focus, always active ‘professional developers’, to use a contemporary way of describing assimilation and adaptation of craft.

This lineage can also be traced in terms of a professional genealogy. For example, I learnt (acting) text methodology at Toi Whakaari from Murray Lynch, who in turn had been taught the ‘Mike Alfreds Technique’ from Michele Hine. Hine was a participant in Alfreds’ 1989 two week masterclass and later she wrote about directing methods from a Rehearsal Studies point of view.⁶⁰ Lynch had earlier derived directing tools from the likes of John Fernold at Centrepoint Theatre. Consequently, there are several different approaches to directing text that exist on a continuum, and these have roots in practitioners of the previous and current generations both in New Zealand and overseas.

Tradition: influence and iterations

Elia Kazan's maxim that ‘Directing finally consists of turning psychology into behavior’ perhaps cuts right to the heart of professional approaches to directing that have characterised Western theatre practices over the last century.⁶¹ This applies to broader theatre concepts as well as the unique personal history of each director as they navigate their own journeys in, and through, the profession. Despite its relatively recent history, New Zealand theatre directing has traversed this domain, too. At various points directors have become interested in collective memory, behavioural

⁶⁰ Hine. Hine observes or interviews seven directors from different schools of thought to find and then to identify ‘ways of directing which enrich the rehearsal process for both actor and director’. (p. 23). She then applies some of these techniques to a play text and assesses their perceived merits and shortcomings. However the work does not interview subjects in depth for a deep investigation of practice, but prefers instead to observe, survey, briefly interview, explain and summarize findings.

⁶¹ Elia Kazan, ‘Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire’, in *Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theater*, ed. by Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, 2nd edn (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), pp. 364-379 (p. 364).

psychology, the unconscious, ethnography, emotional science, semiotic nuance and rigid textual clues as pathways to augment effective direction. Within the framework of what Edward Braun describes as ‘the triple impulses of Naturalism, Symbolism and the Grotesque,’ and the panacea of the most notable formative directors of the past century – Stanislavski, Reinhardt, Craig, Meyerhold, Piscator, Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski, Brook, Mnouchkine, Lepage – each director has also changed the tradition that came before them.⁶²

Tradition, while modified and re-contextualised, continues to resonate in New Zealand theatre directing practice. In other words, most New Zealand theatre directors are seeking a definitive individual or New Zealand voice, while also being part of an international conversation. McColl and Downes worked closely with Nola Millar, for example. Their subsequent practices evidence her influence, and in particular Millar’s determination to place investigative and situational process at the heart of directing. Raymond Hawthorne, Elric Hooper, Sunny Amey and Anthony (‘Tony’) Taylor brought different and ‘Eurocentric’ approaches to the professional rehearsal room. Their techniques were informed by the hegemony of their own predecessors in Europe and – to a lesser degree – New Zealand. O’Donnell has observed that from the 1970s to the late 1990s, directing in New Zealand was ‘dominated by two major figures, Elric Hooper and Raymond Hawthorne’.⁶³ Both directors maintained ‘a largely Eurocentric approach to directing and programming in their companies’.⁶⁴ In the last three decades, however, directors have clearly attempted to assert an individual, distinctive post-colonial voice that, while connected with tradition, adapts to a strong sense of time and place.

⁶² Edward Braun, *The Director and the Stage* (London: Methuen, 2003).

⁶³ O’Donnell, ‘Redirecting National Identity: The Theatre of Colin McColl’, p.1.

⁶⁴ O’Donnell, ‘Redirecting National Identity: The Theatre of Colin McColl’, p.2.

The contradiction inherent in breaking from tradition is eternally challenging for any artist, and this is neither new nor culturally distinct in theatre directing. This tension is acknowledged by influential Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) director Anatoly Efros, who explained after a meeting with Chekhov's collaborator Nemirovich-Danchenko: 'On one hand, they [artists] eternally break it to make way for something new. On the other hand, without it they lose their foundation.'⁶⁵ In reference to a conversation with Nemirovich-Danchenko before a production at MAT, Efros repeats his mentor's instruction to:

Start from your own perception of the play, because only then will the simplest things suddenly open up that escaped previous directors ... Tradition frequently blinds you, and then you do not see the simplest connections, the simplest original causes.⁶⁶

This is a perennial paradox for directors; it governs the post-colonial dilemma in New Zealand as directing practice strives ahead while remaining connected to the past. This post-colonial 'hybridity' resonates throughout the archive as directors speak of 'borrowing' from other forms or frameworks, and selecting 'what works'.

In New Zealand directors' attempts to push ahead, some traditions have been tackled by a generation of actors and directors as the 'next big thing'. Certain British and European techniques have taken on new, heightened significance when imported to the geographically isolated New Zealand context. For instance, in the early 1990s Jacques Lecoq's highly physical sense of textual play through Bouffon, mask and improvisation made its way to New Zealand via Christian Penny and Anna Marbrook's 'Theatre at Large' work.

⁶⁵ Anatoly Efros, *The Joy of Rehearsal: Reflections on Interpretation and Practice*, trans. by James Thomes (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 74.

⁶⁶ Efros, p. 74.

By way of further example, we still refer to the 'Mike Alfreds Technique' nearly thirty years after this British director demonstrated his highly systematic text directing praxis here in a seminal two-week workshop held in Wellington in January 1989. While Alfreds himself rejects any one 'system' of directing, many New Zealand directors and actors still regard this extended masterclass as the key event in providing a pivotal demarcation between instinct and craft, as evidenced in the archive. The impact of this masterclass cannot be underestimated. Almost overnight the industry had a shared language of 'beats, actions, lists, given circumstances and objectives' to bring to bear on the work. Generations of drama school students and working professionals alike could deploy a common, internationally-sanctioned approach to text, character and play. Stanislavski now had an intermediary, and – conveniently for translation and style – he was English. My own actor training in the early 1990s renders it impossible for me to be immune from Alfreds' legacy in New Zealand. Like other artists who are a product of their time and place, I am predisposed to this methodology. Even so, the archive evidences the importance of this approach for many other directors, too. The Alfreds toolkit and its direct and long-term effects on New Zealand directors and actors – who accept, reject, or assimilate this practice – is a central feature of the dominant discourse.

There are post-colonial tensions here; the Mike Alfreds approach has been adhered to, interrogated, and disrupted by many. We now have a 'post-Alfreds' relationship with this technique, by which I mean the prevailing culture contains elements of the Alfreds technique, but some have rejected or extended on the practice. Most directors have a relationship with (and departing from) the Alfreds methodology. Alfreds' own methods have evolved, too, a perspective he himself acknowledges. This points to the tension of organic evolution and devolution of

techniques over time; nothing stays the same. This interaction with Alfreds' methodology is the subject of chapter five.

Notably, other non-Western directing methodologies have played a significant role in shaping New Zealand theatre practice. These include Pacific, Māori, Asian and Eastern European influences. Most have been imported to New Zealand through practitioner assimilation. Anne Bogart's 'Viewpoints' via Annie Ruth, Lecoq's 'Bouffon' via Christian Penny, Anna Marbrook and Tom McCrory, Jeremiah Comey's 'FLASH' camera acting work via Vicky Yiannoutsos and Suzuki's 'Grid Work' via Annie Ruth and others, are a few notable examples. Māori forms of performance have been particularly important in recent decades, especially as we learn more about traditional forms of theatre such as Te Whare Tapere as Charles Royal has identified in recent scholarship.⁶⁷ Accordingly, there are now a wide range of traditional, conventional and experimental methods that New Zealand directors employ.

In summary, New Zealand theatre directing has been largely text-based in its origins, and strongly influenced by Euro-American conventions. It predominantly follows an interpretive vein and is both constrained and liberated by fiscal and temporal parameters.

'Nomadism' and practice

'Nomadism' or the state of constant movement is a key feature of the freelance professional theatre-directing domain, both internationally and in New Zealand. Until the late 1980s, New Zealand directors were heavily influenced by European and American methods, which had roots in Stanislavski's psychological realism. Many New Zealand directors have had a keen appetite for developing methods as they have been imported,

⁶⁷ Royal, 'Te Whare Tapere: Towards a Model for Māori Performance Art'.

either in deliberately organised or more spontaneous ways. In addition, the peripatetic nature of freelance directing means that directors must be able to traverse screen, radio and theatre media as well as cater to 'high' and 'low' culture expectations and appetite, often in different roles.⁶⁸ Directors must be able to criss-cross styles and genres with confidence and ease in an analogous vein to McColl's description of actors in Frank Carstorf's *Endstation Amerika* (Volksbühne, Berlin, 2000), who with fluidity went from 'hyper, hyper naturalism like we don't even know [...] and they can go like that in a split second from that to incredible expressionism'.⁶⁹

As O'Donnell has noted, the nomadic tendency of freelance directors summons Deleuze and Guattari's proposition that itinerancy is the ideal for artists; in this state, 'questions of orientation, location and linkage enter into play in the most famous works of nomad art'.⁷⁰ This implies that the ability to glide from one theatre form to another, and sometimes from one role to another (for example, director to actor to producer), affords a fresh perspective on form and content. It enables style and interpretation to be delivered without sustained affiliation to preordained structures. This is substantiated by practice in New Zealand theatre directing. When asked by Lyn Freeman how he approaches New Zealand plays, McColl admitted: 'I approach everything as if it's new'.⁷¹ This kind of manifold viewpoint is a notable feature of the domain.

⁶⁸ Michael Hurst is a clear example; in 2013-14 he worked as a director, actor (*No Holds Bard*, Edinburgh Festival 2013 and touring New Zealand) and fight choreographer in theatre (*Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre*, Auckland University Summer Shakespeare, February – March 2014; *Macbeth*, Young Auckland Shakespeare Company, Auckland: TAPAC, February 2014) and as a director on television series *Step Dave*, prod. by Mark Beesley, South Pacific Pictures (Auckland, 2013).

⁶⁹ McColl, interview.

⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), ctd in O'Donnell, 'Redirecting National Identity: The Theatre of Colin McColl', p. 3.

⁷¹ Cited in O'Donnell, 'Redirecting National Identity: The Theatre of Colin McColl', p. 3.

Individuality and commonality

There currently exists no 'meta-analysis' of professional theatre directing in New Zealand; in particular, there is no comprehensive critique examining the characteristics and distinctive features of New Zealand director practice. Consequently, there is a need to examine how New Zealand directors' work and their directing principles have evolved, and what their characteristic hallmarks are. This absence begs the question: in terms of New Zealand directing practice, where are we and how did we get here? This thesis takes this central question as its key problematic and in doing so fills a major gap in our scholarly understandings of local director practice. The multiple perspectives captured in the individual interview narratives undertaken for this study provide rich material on each director's practice, methodology and theory. Moreover, they allow scope for both close and broad analysis to illuminate the underlying and common themes as well as highlight individual traits, preferences and innovations.

There is no extant archive on the work of New Zealand theatre directors that foregrounds and investigates their voices. The practicalities of *doing* theatre work – especially with its economic fragility – render self-assessment and self-critique as luxuries most theatre directors simply cannot afford. It is somewhat ironic that despite the broader educative potential of their work, professional directors rarely have time to reflect on their own practice. This is particularly acute in a low-level subsidy economic environment such as New Zealand where arts funding and sponsorship must compete with a range of other priorities, including sporting activities. As a result, directors rarely have the opportunity to speak in depth about their work.

The developing critical and reflexive culture in New Zealand also points to gaps in the domain. While performances are now regularly documented – either visually or online – public and especially *published* discourse between and by directors is scarce. This raises some questions. How and why should a community of seemingly disparate practitioners come together? How is quality directing evaluated? Who is equipped to lead such endeavours while maintaining practitioner ‘safety’ and trust? In framing this project I have had to establish bases for designing my archive around central questions that keep the reasons for this project – visibility and enhanced reflexive discourse – firmly in sight. My text-based point of departure concerning ‘dynamic’ theatre, for example, allows scope for other hidden concerns to surface in the interviews.

In analyzing the archive, there is a strong and consistent thematic concern that while directing is an art form, there are rubrics and techniques that can be applied and learnt. It follows that scrutinizing these findings will provide platforms to further understand the key principles of local theatre directing. This exercise is not designed to reduce directing to a codified set of rules, nor is it an attempt to remove it from the realm of creativity and spontaneity; rather, it is an effort to make theatre directing more transparent and therefore more accessible. This ‘unmasking’ of directing practices is best undertaken by someone who understands the complexities of the profession and who may be considered an ‘insider’ practitioner.

New Zealand perspectives on Director Studies

The limited corpus of local critical material on director practice in New Zealand may be partly explained by the relative youth of professional theatre director training in this country, coupled with the challenges (lack

of time, money and access to publication) for practitioners to reflect on their craft. A further crucial consideration is the possible reluctance by some practitioners to give away their 'trade secrets', a legitimate concern in a small and highly competitive industry. As Peter Snow says in his 'insider' article about making a performance of *Metamorphoses*: 'There is a lot more that could be said about the process of making the work, but the practitioner in me is mindful of giving away too many secrets.'⁷² Published research and scholarship on New Zealand theatre directing and its development remains a relatively uncharted arena, despite the field of Rehearsal Studies developing nearby in Australia. Yet accounts of *how* directors work remain invaluable. As Gay McAuley says, 'the value of ... "insider" accounts is inestimable and those that have been published are rapidly coming to constitute the canon of classic texts in the developing discipline of rehearsal studies'.⁷³

Ruth Harley's "'Divine Gossip": Interviews with Six New Zealand Directors' (1984) is one of the few pieces of scholarship using the semi-structured interview format to attempt an understanding of directing as a developing profession in this country.⁷⁴ Harley⁷⁵ – at that time heavily involved in the implementation of funding policy – interviewed six artistic directors of five theatre companies.⁷⁶ Given their roles as managers, Harley centres her question, 'Are we necessary?' firmly on funding parameters of

⁷² Peter Snow, 'Ovid in the Torres Strait: Making a Performance from the *Metamorphoses*', *About Performance*, 6 (2006), 39-53 (p. 46).

⁷³ Gay McAuley, 'The Emerging Field of Rehearsal Studies', (p.9).

⁷⁴ Ruth Harley, "'Divine Gossip": Interviews with Six New Zealand Theatre Directors', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 3.1 (October 1984), 91-110.

⁷⁵ Harley was an academic but later moved into management in the film and television sector, initially at TVNZ in the 1980s, then as the first Executive Director of the newly formed funding body NZ On Air.

⁷⁶ Harley interviews Jonathan Hardy (Mercury Theatre: Auckland), Stuart Devenie (Centrepoint Theatre: Palmerston North), Elric Hooper (Court Theatre: Christchurch), Tony Taylor (Downstage Theatre: Wellington), John Banas (Downstage Theatre) and Roger McGill (Theatre Corporate: Auckland).

the six main theatre companies at that time in 1984, rather than on the working methodologies of each director. Philosophy and technique sneak into the analysis, but these concerns are subservient to questions of state funding.

Notwithstanding this, in Harley's study it is Mercury Theatre Director Jonathan Hardy who draws attention to theatre directing as an evolving creative activity influenced by outside forces, and which could in turn shape others. Hardy says, 'I try to find influences which affect me. Then maybe I can come up with some form which will be relevant for its time ... it is a constant state of becoming.'⁷⁷ Hardy threw down the gauntlet for many practitioners when he said, 'Maybe we need new techniques – techniques that support the pulse of the blood in New Zealand.'⁷⁸ Little did he know how much these methods within the profession would change in the following few decades; his statement is a strong provocation for further research.

Most literature on the subject of directing in New Zealand assumes the form of biography or autobiography that positions directing as a developing profession, albeit one with heritage links to England, USA or predecessors that remain intact. Clear examples are Sarah Gaitanos' *Nola Millar: A Theatrical Life*;⁷⁹ George Webby's *Just Who Does He Think He Is?: A Theatrical Life*;⁸⁰ Mervyn Thompson's *All My Lives*⁸¹ and Ian Mune's *Mune: An Autobiography*.⁸² Thompson's published volumes of play scripts are peppered with insights into his processes. The introduction to *Children of the Poor* sees Thompson confessing the hodge-podge of influences that is

⁷⁷ Hardy in Harley, (p. 95).

⁷⁸ Hardy in Harley, (p. 93).

⁷⁹ Sarah Gaitanos, *Nola Millar: A Theatrical Life* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ George Webby, *Just Who Does He Think He Is? George Webby That's Who!* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2006).

⁸¹ Mervyn Thompson, *All My Lives* (Christchurch, N.Z.; London: Whitcoulls, 1980).

⁸² Ian Mune, *Mune: An Autobiography* (Nelson: Craig Potton, 2011).

typical of many New Zealand directors. These are close and far, dead and alive. He mentions: 'Brecht ... Artaud, *The Marat/Sade*, Story Theatre, improvisational workshops, contemporary film, my own *O! Temperance!* and, perhaps above all, the Royal Shakespeare Company's presentation of *Nicholas Nickleby* [...] Sean O'Casey and John A. Lee ... whose life mirrors my own.'⁸³ Ngaio Marsh's *Black Beech and Honeydew*⁸⁴ offers autobiographical expression to her approaches to directing, while her painterly construction of the text is echoed in Marsh's 1946 publication *A Play Toward: A Note on Play Production*.⁸⁵ In this, she outlines a basic template of how to direct a play that, while assuming a visual aesthetic above any other, is not altogether out of step with current practice.

A few populist publications – largely magazines and newspapers – breezily cover directing in relation to New Zealand productions of Shakespeare. Brief articles like Karyn Henger's somewhat scant 'Roll over, Shakespeare' relays her talk to director Penni Bousfield about staging the Auckland Summer Shakespeare 2000 production, *The Taming of the Shrew*.⁸⁶ David Lawrence, founder of the theatre company 'The Bacchanals' and a director interviewed for this project, is profiled in the *Otago Daily Times* while directing *King Lear* at Te Whaea Theatre, Wellington, in 2007, and Fortune Theatre, Dunedin in late 2007.⁸⁷ Martin Howells is also interviewed in the *Otago Daily Times* by Charmian Smith, who questions the Dunedin-based director about his approach to staging *Macbeth* at the

⁸³ Mervyn Thompson, *Children of the Poor* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1990).

⁸⁴ Ngaio Marsh, *Black Beech and Honeydew* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).

⁸⁵ Ngaio Marsh, *A Play Toward: A Note on Play Production* (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1946).

⁸⁶ Karyn Henger, 'Roll Over, Shakespeare', *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, 6 March 2000, p. 39.

⁸⁷ Nigel Benson, 'The Dark Brilliance of the Bard', *Otago Daily Times*, 19 July 2007, pp. 37-38.

Fortune Theatre.⁸⁸ The article highlights his interest in the play's concern with psychological darkness and superstition, but little about his actual working methods. Bernadette Rae's 'Shakespeare on a Shoestring Seems to Work like a Dream', features talks with Ben Crowder and Vanessa Chapple, directors of the Auckland University Summer Shakespeare production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1999).⁸⁹ Margo White's *Metro* article 'Shakespeare Korero' details her conversation with (now-deceased) director Don Selwyn and actor Waihoroi Shortland about the feature film *The Māori Merchant of Venice*.⁹⁰

More recently, a growing academic literature has addressed the question of the choices available to directors when presented with dramatic text. Some have written about directing choice in action, such as O'Donnell's 'Cross-Cultural Shakespeare, Warrior Women and the Eternal Present: Directing the *Henry VI* Trilogy'.⁹¹ O'Donnell's reflective investigation offers an important and rare 'insider' glimpse into his methodology of staging Shakespeare's *Henry VI* trilogy of plays, and their relevance to today's audiences. The article invites further exploration into O'Donnell's process. Mark Houlahan's 'Shakespeare in the Settlers' House'⁹² deftly examines the role of Shakespeare performances on the development of New Zealand identity. Although the work serves as an important contextualising argument for performing Shakespeare or classic text in this country, Houlahan does not focus on directing praxis.

⁸⁸ Charmian Smith, 'Shakespeare's Message Given a Modern Twist', *Otago Daily Times*, 26 September 2002, p. 29.

⁸⁹ Bernadette Rae, 'Shakespeare on a Shoestring Seems to Work like a Dream', *New Zealand Herald*, 8 February 1999

<<http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article>>[accessed 12 November 2012].

⁹⁰ Margo White, 'Shakespeare Korero', *Metro* (Auckland: March 2002), pp. 114-115.

⁹¹ David O'Donnell, 'Cross-Cultural Shakespeare, Warrior Women and the Eternal Present: Directing the *Henry VI* Trilogy', *Illusions*, 40 (July 2008), (37-41).

⁹² JNZL: *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 20 (2002), 112-24.

There are now short form interviews on websites dedicated to theatre reviewing such as www.theatreview.org.nz and www.theatrescenes.co.nz, augmented by Lisa Warrington's 'Theatre Aotearoa' database, an archive of stage productions in New Zealand.⁹³ John Smythe's *Downstage Upfront*⁹⁴ and Bill Guest's *Transitions: Four Decades of Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School*⁹⁵ provide essential context for this research, in chronicling performances in key Wellington venues. However none of these publications or resources gets close to the kind of detailed scholarship about directing practice and methodology that this thesis seeks to examine.

There are a few relevant examples of theses in other locations that have used interview to consider theatre praxis. Pablo Pakula's doctoral thesis 'Jerzy Grotowski's Influence on British Theatre 1966-1980: Histories, Perspectives, Recollections', investigates Grotowski's influence on British theatre from a historical point of view.⁹⁶ The methodology adopted here is based on archival research, field work, and extensive interviews with key individuals. Pakula offers an examination of a series of case studies between 1966 and 1980 which represent instances of both direct and indirect connections with the Teatr Laboratorium, and which exemplify how Grotowski's practice and ideas have been adapted, borrowed, misunderstood, and used as a catalyst by different British theatre artists.

Rebecca Daniels Adams', 'Perceptions of Women Stage Directors Regarding the Influence of Gender in their Work' also uses interviews.⁹⁷ It brings a self-reflexive approach to consider how this group of practitioners

⁹³ See <<http://tadb.otago.ac.nz/Theatre1/Login/Index>> [accessed 10 January 2014].

⁹⁴ John Smythe, *Downstage Upfront* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004).

⁹⁵ Bill Guest, *Transitions: Four Decades of Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2012).

⁹⁶ Pablo Pakula, 'Jerzy Grotowski's Influence on British Theatre 1966-1980: Histories, Perspectives, Recollections' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Kent, 2011).

⁹⁷ Rebecca Daniels, 'Perceptions of Women Stage Directors Regarding the Influence of Gender in their Work' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oregon, 1992).

see the effect of gender on their practice, and builds on the earlier work of Shirlee Hennigan who positioned women directors as a community.⁹⁸ Lastly, Dominic Glynn's 'Recalibrating Ancient Mythology for Contemporary Performance: the Mises en Scène of *The Mahabharata* by Peter Brook and *Les Atrides* by Ariane Mnouchkine', while light on interview material, brings comparative analysis to bear on directing praxis.⁹⁹ It offers an in-depth study of commonalities in practice via analysis of two productions. These successful, parallel methodologies are used by each to 'adapt and render present an Ancient Sanskrit epic on the one hand (Brook), and Ancient Greek drama on the other (Mnouchkine)'.¹⁰⁰ The following section outlines the methods adopted in the present study.

Interview platforms

The interviews in this thesis take place with selected directors who fit particular criteria. Interview subjects are middle to late-career professional directors who have significantly contributed to the professional theatre canon in the last thirty years. The following chapter devotes more attention to why and how they were selected. Research subjects in chronological order of the interview were: Catherine ('Cathy') Downes, Michael Hurst, Miranda Harcourt, David Lawrence, David O'Donnell, Murray Lynch, Simon Bennett, Colin McColl, Christian Penny and Jonathon Hendry. Mike Alfreds was interviewed after the cohort of ten.

⁹⁸ Shirlee Hennigan, 'The Woman Director in the Contemporary Professional Theatre', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Washington State University, 1983).

⁹⁹ Dominic Glynn, 'Recalibrating Ancient Mythology for Contemporary Performance: the Mises en Scène of *The Mahabharata* by Peter Brook and *Les Atrides* by Ariane Mnouchkine' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Glynn, abstract.

Interviews have consistently been used as an ethnographic method to understand agents and their motivations. In order to provide a justification of this genre in relation to directors, it is necessary to conduct a brief overview of the literature. International perspectives provide a useful framework for how such a study might be tackled. In a recent article challenging the perceived status of 'auteur' directors, Michael Billington writes, 'The best directors, especially where the classics are concerned, are those who offer radical new insights while releasing the energy of the actors.'¹⁰¹ This view of directing as a dynamic activity that releases energy is a predominant way of thinking about directing practice. Brook, Lepage and Grotowski have similarly asserted the centrality of text and acting in dynamic performance, and the potential for either to propel vital theatre that resonates with its audience. As Grotowski wrote in 1968, 'The author's text is a sort of scalpel enabling us to open ourselves, to transcend ourselves, to find out what is hidden within us and make the act of encountering the other; in other words to transcend our solitude.'¹⁰²

Using this approach, text directing technique is a concern that permeates much existing scholarship on the practice of directing. Among the numerous perspectives on how theatre directors work, there is a rich tradition of international literature that seeks to understand the directing process through the genre of the interview format. As noted, material featuring New Zealand theatre directors in this form of inquiry is however rare. The following section necessarily orients the discussion of the existing literature in an international context.

¹⁰¹ Michael Billington, 'D is for Director's Theatre', *Guardian*, 3 January 2012, <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jan/03/d-director-s-theatre-modern-drama>> [accessed 12 March 2014].

¹⁰² Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 218.

International Perspectives: Interviews and Director Studies

In 1968 director Jerzy Grotowski was interviewed by Richard Schechner. This conversation, coupled with interviews in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, became essential in understanding the nature of Grotowski's craft. As Schechner theorised, Grotowski worked in a way that explained and mystified all at once. For example, 'a search for discipline and structure is as inevitable as a search for spontaneity ... one cannot achieve spontaneity in art without the structuring of a detail'.¹⁰³ This was innately theatrical; philosophical, perplexing, immediate and stimulating. The dichotomies present in Grotowski's dialogue cut to the essence of drama; conflict. For directors, the semi-structured interview had arrived.

This interview followed the more accessible format offered by Kenneth Tynan in his 1966 interview with Laurence Olivier, in which acting was the driving focus.¹⁰⁴ Some years later, Ralph Berry's *On Directing Shakespeare: Interviews with Contemporary Directors* solidified the view of the 'dominant', mainstream text director as interpreter of the text.¹⁰⁵ It also consolidated interview inquiry as a robust form of research and subsequent analysis, and merit was given to *how* directors spoke, as much as *what* was said. It viewed the director as a harbinger of method, since it suggested there is a way of working that can be explained and compared within chosen paradigms, both by and between directors. This text became a springboard for further debate about praxis; from these interviews Berry concludes that 'the director has to re-create meaning, to re-activate the decaying, amorphous words of the text'.¹⁰⁶ This echoed

¹⁰³ Grotowski, p. 45.

¹⁰⁴ Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Tynan, 'The Actor: Tynan Interviews Olivier', *The Tulane Drama Review*, 11.2 (Winter 1966), 71-101 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1125187>> [accessed 10 March 2014].

¹⁰⁵ Ralph Berry, *On Directing Shakespeare: Interviews with Contemporary Directors* (London; New York: Croom Helm, 1977).

¹⁰⁶ Berry, p.15.

what Paul Baker had purported twelve years before when he wrote that the play text contained latent dynamics waiting to be released: 'A play is a bundle of energy, and it is our task as directors to see that this energy gets across to the audience.'¹⁰⁷ It is important to remember that Berry was writing at a time of powerful consolidation of Western theatre styles, censorship, and methodology following a period of performance experimentation during the 1960s and early 1970s, not unlike the recent history in New Zealand theatre practice.

Interviews are commonly used as tools for outsiders to gain access to a director's methods in several noteworthy publications.¹⁰⁸ Adrian Kiernander's *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil* brings to the fore Mnouchkine's central concern; her relationship with the actors and the narrative.¹⁰⁹ As she tells Kiernander, 'as I go on, my interest is more and more and more directed towards the actors and the stories that we are telling, and less and less and less am I interested by what is called *mise en scène*'.¹¹⁰ In this format, the notoriously silent Mnouchkine was able to offer simple, accessible insights at the heart of her practice.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Baker and New Zealand Drama Council, 'Advertisement for New Drama for Producers New to Drama' or "'Beginners, Please'", *New Zealand Theatre*, 142 (April 1965), 2-3 (p. 3).

¹⁰⁸ Other useful interview-based literature includes Kathleen Cioffi, Andrzej Ceynowa and Lech Raczak, 'An Interview with Director Lech Raczak', *The Drama Review: TDR*, 30.3 (Autumn, 1986), 81-90 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145751>> [accessed 11 March 2014]; Richard Schechner and Richard Foreman, "'We Still Have to Dance and Sing": An Interview with Richard Foreman' *The Drama Review*, 46.2 (Summer, 2002), 110-121; Paul Meier and Kenneth Branagh 'Kenneth Branagh: With Utter Clarity. An Interview', *The Drama Review*, 41.2 (Summer 1997), 82-89; Peter J. Chelkowski and Mohammad Ghaffari, 'Mohammad B. Ghaffari: Ta'ziyeh Director', *The Drama Review*, 49.4 (Winter, 2005), 113-129; Richard J. King, "'Dialogue with a Maestro": An Interview with Eric Ting Adapter and Director of a Production of the *The Old Man and The Sea*', *The Hemingway Review*, 29.1 (Fall 2009), 152-156; Michael E. Foster, 'The Praxis of Theatre Directing: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Directorial Paradigms and Radical Group Theatre in Australia Since 1975' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Griffith University, 2003).

¹⁰⁹ Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, Directors in Perspective (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹¹⁰ Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p. 144.

Maria M. Delgado and Paul Heritage's *In Contact with the Gods? Directors Talk Theatre* (1996) offers another perspective on the process that a director encounters.¹¹¹ Through edited-interview encounters, eighteen professional directors grapple with different ways of telling a story on stage; so, too, do each subject's capacity to make explicit hitherto covert connections, in the semi-structured interview process. As Lepage notes: 'I'm not saying that one medium is better than the other, I'm just saying that there are some stories that are better told in a vertical way and others in a horizontal way.'¹¹² Structured interviews do not allow interviewer and subject to glide so easily between topics, but the semi-structured approach allows more levity and spontaneity while retaining an anchor.

Acknowledging that the text is not paramount for all directors – while it is a binding pre-requisite for the selection of my interview subjects – I have tried to allow similar scope for directors to disclose the many ways theatre can be constructed. Delgado and Heritage's book also confronts the question of theatre lineage, which arises in my interviews with directors. The central interrogation in this text is, 'Who were your masters? And in what ways did they influence you?'¹¹³ When asked this, Giorgio Strehler¹¹⁴ replies with a nod to extended 'whakapapa'¹¹⁵ by direct association that his 'masters were both many and few'.¹¹⁶ He specifies; 'my most direct and essential apprenticeship I owe to Jacques Copeau (and through him, to Saint-Denis) Brecht was my last true master in art and

¹¹¹ Delgado and Heritage.

¹¹² Robert Lepage, 'Robert Lepage in Conversation with Alison Mcalpine, at Le Café Du Monde, Quebec City, 17 February 1995', in Delgado and Heritage, pp.133-157 (p.144).

¹¹³ Maria M. Delgado and Paul Heritage, 'Giorgio Strehler-in Response to Questions Put to Him by the Editors and Eli Malke, 4 October 1995', in Delgado and Heritage, pp. 260-276 (p. 268).

¹¹⁴ Director and Italian founder of the Théâtre de l'Europe in Paris.

¹¹⁵ In Māori, 'lineage', ancestry or a paradigm of cultural discourse.

¹¹⁶ Delgado and Heritage, p. 268.

in life'.¹¹⁷ It is clear in this compendium of interviews that there is an easily traceable line of philosophy and technique in the profession, and the New Zealand lineage connects directly with that of international practitioners. These influences are diverse, and this emerges in the interviews when directors refer to their teachers and role models. Simon Bennett, for example, references the impact of Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* next to his own father Robert Bennett's mime practice on his (Simon's) developing technique and philosophy. Delgado and Heritage's book is a challenging consideration of the role of the director and the craft of directing that asks for a New Zealand counterpoint; the line of questioning in this thesis follows similar tracks.

An example of the kind of scholarship that this thesis directly engages with is Giannachi and Luckhurst's *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*.¹¹⁸ As an 'articulation of what it is to be a director', the book locates twenty-one key British theatre directors within the diverse pantheon of twentieth-century theatre practice.¹¹⁹ Giannachi and Luckhurst define the key directing practices as from 'Stanislavski, Antoine, Otto Brahm, Vsevolod Meyerhold' through to 'Appia ... Julian Beck and Judith Malina; the Wooster Group', and link current directors with these lineages.¹²⁰ This study likewise assumes that influences can be alive or dead; near or far; local or international.

On Directing also asserts that – in Britain, as with New Zealand – the written play text has 'remained privileged above the visual, physical, and spatial elements in theatre'.¹²¹ The authors have an overriding interest in how directors bring any text to life, yet they tailor the interview questions

¹¹⁷ Delgado and Heritage, pp. 268-69.

¹¹⁸ Giannachi and Luckhurst.

¹¹⁹ Giannachi and Luckhurst, p. xvi.

¹²⁰ Giannachi and Luckhurst, pp. xiii-xiv.

¹²¹ Giannachi and Luckhurst, p. xiv.

according to each practitioner's area of expertise rather than elucidating the obvious. For example, text-based director Declan Donnellan is asked: 'What is your starting-point as a director? ... How do you work in a rehearsal room? ... What is a director? ... Who and what have influenced your work as a director?'¹²² Such a text provides both inspiration and intellectual substance for this current project.

While the interviews only 'scratch the surface' in terms of the depth of material contained in the archive, it is significant to note that it yet lacks a counterpart in the New Zealand theatre practice canon. This thesis overtly accepts the invitation extended by the authors in their introduction to address this omission: 'This book scratches the surface of a subject which urgently needs attention. We hope many more books will follow, thus celebrating the diversity of directing approaches which this book can only signal.'¹²³

Maria Shevtsova and Christopher Innes' *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre* offers theatre scholars and practitioners an evocative collection of conversations with nine prominent European and North American directors.¹²⁴ Each 'conversation' conducted between 2004 and mid-2007 is framed by a detailed introduction to the work of that director and the legacy they have already carved out. The book is replete with pertinent and valuable insights on the nature of directing and how to create dynamic theatre, such as Declan Donnellan's explanation of his Stanislavski-driven approach to directing *Twelfth Night*:

In the rehearsal room ... we had to really experience what Malvolio has to experience ... What would it be like to be incredibly, deeply in love with somebody? What would it be

¹²² Giannachi and Luckhurst, pp. 19-22.

¹²³ Giannachi and Luckhurst, p. xvi.

¹²⁴ Shevtsova and Innes, *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre*.

like to receive a letter from them saying that they were completely in love with you?¹²⁵

Directors/Directing also throws into stark relief a reassessment of the philosophy and practice of many of these mid-career directors. There is an underlying narrative about re-evaluating known techniques. For example, Declan Donnellan explains his current interest in the domain of text:

In real life text and action are not equal. Actions always speak louder than words ... So it's the situation, it's the *story* that really matters because a text can mean one thing, or something else ... The context changes everything. What Hamlet says is important, but it matters less than what he does.¹²⁶

I have relied on this rich tradition of work to inform this thesis, and have therefore deliberately framed the interview questions to allow directors the scope to be practical, philosophical, or both.

Both Arthur Bartow's *The Director's Voice: Twenty-One Interviews*¹²⁷ and its recent successor *The Director's Voice, Volume 2* (edited by Jason Loewith)¹²⁸ employ semi-structured interview format to cross-examine prominent American directors. The latter charts how much has changed in the twenty years since the first volume was published, and questions how central the legacy of influence continues to be. As Bartow notes of *Volume 2*, 'Institution-building is out for these directors; creating a distinctive voice from a multiplicity of influences is in.'¹²⁹ This points to the significance of the interview as a cultural signpost, as well as a documentation of living history that can provide an understanding of how craft develops over time. In a place and period, how a director views their

¹²⁵ Shevtsova and Innes, p. 74.

¹²⁶ Shevtsova and Innes, p. 75.

¹²⁷ Arthur Bartow, *The Director's Voice: Twenty-One Interviews* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988).

¹²⁸ *The Director's Voice, Volume 2*, ed. by Jason Loewith (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013).

¹²⁹ Loewith, back cover.

craft within the conditions of production reflects understandings pertinent to and of that context. In advancing Director Studies discourse in New Zealand, future research will rely on being able to look back. This archive may serve such a purpose.

Closer to New Zealand, Adam Macauley's *Don't Tell Me, Show Me* offers another perspective on the link between training, scholarship and the profession and its connection with the industry.¹³⁰ His book of interviews with twelve Australian directors is based around the two questions, 'From your point of view what makes an actor good?' and, 'What skills and attitudes make an actor good to work with?' Although Macauley frames the conversation firmly around acting, inevitably these directors refer to methodologies associated with directing theatre. However, the verbatim format is highly conversational and steers away from the critical scholarly analysis I am seeking.

Finally, the recent publication of Innes and Shevtsova's sophisticated *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*¹³¹ and Duška Radosavljević's *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers*,¹³² – the latter based on ensemble theatre – bring together multiple viewpoints on directing practice and theory that would not have been conventional nearly fifty years ago when Schechner and Grotowski met. The domain has advanced quickly, in multiple directions, and in different places over the past half-century with inspiring results, but it lacks a New Zealand counterpart.

In summary, while the literature in the field of director praxis provides preliminary scaffolding for analysis and discussion and some

¹³⁰ Adam Macauley, *Don't Tell Me, Show Me: Directors Talk About Acting* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2003).

¹³¹ Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova, *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*, Cambridge Introductions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹³² Duška Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers* (London: Routledge, 2013).

exemplars for the semi-structured interview model, there remains a distinct gap in New Zealand scholarship on directing practice, philosophy and methodologies used by practitioners to bring texts to life in the theatre. In other words, while the internationally scholarly domain on theatre directing praxis has advanced quickly and in diverse directions over the past half-century, this literature still lacks a robust New Zealand contribution. This thesis addresses this absence by presenting an examination of directing practice through the select semi-structured interview methodology. Furthermore, it seeks to expand and so develop the existing body of critical work through the examination of selected New Zealand approaches to directing text in professional theatre.

Narrative, subjectivity and quest

My own narrative, experience and personal subjectivity also drive this quest to understand the inner workings of New Zealand theatre. I am a theatre director, actor and performance teacher who came to directing in my late-twenties, having trained and worked as an actor. In the rehearsal room I had a desire to unlock or discover the ‘secrets’ of directing.¹³³ I believed that, like acting, directing was part art, and part craft. It could be taught and it was possible to learn.¹³⁴ So, like most directors in New Zealand prior to advanced training models that have appeared only recently, I applied the tools of analysis and linguistic ‘frames’ that were familiar to me as an actor. I explored several different approaches to bringing text to life through training actors at Toi Whakaari where I taught

¹³³ Peter Brook has famously asserted ‘There are no secrets’ – examined in his book of the same title – yet directors are notoriously private about their methods.

¹³⁴ For a clear outline of director training propositions see O'Donnell and Warrington, ‘Teaching the Unteachable: A Dialogue in Director Training’; Simon Shepherd, ‘What is it Directors Do?’, in Simon Shepherd, *Direction: Readings in Theatre Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 19-35.

acting and directed productions for eleven years alongside freelance work (1997-2008). I continued to develop a Stanislavski-derived directing methodology and language that proved successful with actors in text-driven plays and performances. I also applied techniques from Laban Efforts, through Alfreds to 'physical' theatre. I identify with John Davies who writes about his 'restless search for a personally authentic technique with which to express [his] cultural perspective'¹³⁵ and the desire 'to articulate an indigenous Pākehā voice'.¹³⁶ With hindsight and the benefit of experience and research, this narrative echoes the experiences of other directors in New Zealand who also began their working careers on the stage as actors.

In 2000 I was invited to assistant-direct at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, assigned to director Tim Carroll and The Red Company working on *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. This watershed experience connected me with a wider community of professional theatre makers interested in reflective theatre practice. This reinforced the viewpoint that textual fidelity coupled with highly inventive solutions to staging the drama, can produce exciting results. It was as if Grotowski's principles for 'poor' theatre, Brook's notion of 'immediate' theatre, Alfreds' seeming spontaneity in every performance and Barba's notion of 'evocative dramaturgy'¹³⁷ could all equally intersect in this space.

The Globe's theatre performances also challenged my perceived notions of playmaking more than ever before as they fed my desire for a sense of immediacy in the theatrical experience. From the Globe, the driving qualifier became, 'the work has to move me or connect with me

¹³⁵ John Davies, 'The Audience are Stones', in Maufort and O'Donnell, pp. 391-403 (p. 391).

¹³⁶ Davies eventually found his place (amongst many forms) in a variant of Noh theatre after several years touring with Red Mole.

¹³⁷ See Eugenio Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 10.

(and therefore, presumably others) *truthfully*. It has to be ‘dynamic’ (perceived to be alive and present), vital and authentic. I wanted to feel connected to its inherent ‘truth’. It has to be innately ‘theatrical’ and hold my attention or shift something inside me or between the actor(s) and audience.’¹³⁸

For the purposes of this study, my experiences in London strongly shaped how I define the ‘dynamic’ in theatre. I interpret dynamic as ‘a force that is characterized by constant change, activity, or progress, and by its communicative nature, is capable of invoking that change or action in others’. This description is echoed in a recent exchange concerning critical practice and effective theatre with Sam Sneddon (Manager at Auckland’s Basement Theatre), who says that he also looks for something to change within the viewer: ‘Did it move me? Not intellectually, [but] emotionally. Did something stir or change within me as a result of what I saw, be it anger, laughter, tears, because if it didn’t, then what was the point?’¹³⁹ Taking this definition of ‘dynamic’, I looked inwards and outwards for inspiration and clues.

The director’s visibility?

As a consequence of looking at others’ work over many years, however, a major problem emerged. Too often I saw the results of creating work of a professional standard. The *product* was there but I had little way of understanding the *process*. How had the director structured this piecing together of the drama? A few heavily edited programme notes didn’t suffice. After opening night the work became public. The actors and crew

¹³⁸ Theatre is a live medium that demands present attention. I would argue that, unlike screen, theatre’s transient, evanescent and fleeting qualities mean it has to be dynamic to be effectively remembered in the hearts and minds of its audience once the experience has vanished. Verisimilitude is not essential to this, so I use ‘truth’ as a relative construct.

¹³⁹ Sam Sneddon, email to the author, 5 March 2014.

would be present, but the director was largely invisible as (typically) they hovered in the corner of foyers at first night opening events, fulfilled their public relations duties, or disappeared altogether to another job or another play. This seemed to me a significant omission since the director is a crucial lynchpin in the entire creative process. I expected that opening night was the ideal time to engage the director about their processes for bringing the play text to life. Once again, the metaphor of the cloak of invisibility seems relevant to the work of the theatre director.

For the past twenty years I have, as a practitioner, played a role in the developing performance landscape in New Zealand. I acknowledge that those multifarious perspectives inevitably affect the 'insider' perspective I bring to this thesis. I recognise my subjectivity and position the inquiry from the point of view of a practitioner who is eager to learn more from other experienced and senior colleagues working in the profession. Given that my experience in the profession allows me an 'insider' perspective that provides access to participants and a grounded understanding of terminology and context, my place as a researcher demands an 'outsider' perspective.

I call this position a 'threshold' one, in that I am both inside and outside the enquiry. I am deliberately occupying the in-between or interstitial space while each subject brings a strong 'emic' perspective to bear on their own practice.¹⁴⁰ At times I speak with my own voice as I situate the analysis in relation to my field of experience. At other times I locate my voice in a more objective perspective in relation to the qualitative data analysis within that research domain. I aim to articulate from this body of evidence a range of conventional and unfamiliar

¹⁴⁰ A description or belief coming from a person within that perceived culture as opposed to 'etic', which studies one characteristic across many cultures, as proposed by Kenneth Lee Pike. See *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of Structure of Human Behavior*, ed. by Kenneth Lee Pike, 2nd edn (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1967), p. 365.

guidelines for making connected, dynamic, text-based performance in New Zealand today.

Principal findings and overview of chapters

Throughout the thesis there are eight key findings that are explored in a broader thematic arrangement. Firstly, the archive shows that there is deep and wide understanding of philosophy about theatre and performance praxis, plus a willingness to work with 'tradition', and against it. These traditions include largely British and American techniques that have affected the practice of previous generations, and of the current generation. This philosophical dimension reflects both the mid-career stage of each participant's status and an expansion of theatrical 'contours' or frames of reference. It means that Mike Alfreds' techniques have now evolved to the point that they can be considered in a post-colonial context. The freedom with which directors happily employ this 'Stanislavski-Alfreds-eclecticism-fusion' points to a post-Alfreds confidence that is active.

Secondly, isolation from Europe, America, and within the community is both a perceived constraint and a practical element that affords enormous freedoms. Interviewed directors are aware of their isolation from international trends, but ensure that they stay connected to major developments. This constant 'seeking-out' of larger developments causes these directors to be characteristically reflexive, self-effacing, and practical according to the resources at hand.

A third finding is that of nomadism and its associated 'line of flight' from one territory to another. This means this reflexivity is acute in a small industry and country; it is common for directors to move from low to high

culture, or from directing to acting to producing back to directing, in theatre and other forms. This constant 'line of flight' means that the 'director' self is reframed into a new territory or 'reterritorialized', to invoke Deleuze and Guattari.¹⁴¹ This shift in roles results in directors who are highly proficient multi-taskers capable of adaptation and change, and understanding from different points of view, with little allegiance to any one system or dogma. It does, however, deny directors forging one identity or 'voice' unless they are ensconced as the artistic director of a larger commercial theatre company.

Added to this, directing methodology as exemplified by the interview subjects is extremely actor-centric in its process and outcome. This is largely due to the fact that most directors have emerged from acting backgrounds, but is also connected to the actor-centric points of inquiry in theatre making in New Zealand. Most educational and theatre frames have existed around actor training models that have fed into director discourse. These were (and remain) derived from Stanislavskian models, rather than, say, postdramatic ones that favour the directorial vision.

A fifth finding is the absence of authoritarian flavour in directing; rather, it can be considered to be collaborative with an authoritarian touch. This directly relates to the quality of self-effacement that most (but not all) directors exhibit.

A sixth finding is a huge capacity for risk-taking, where possible, especially in smaller venues. This is prevalent with directors who work on large cast pieces like Shakespeare, and this seems to be an accepted feature of the domain; there is very little 'hierarchy' and mobility/ accessibility are features of the profession.

¹⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Interpretive confidence is high as directors seek to understand play texts in present-day contexts. This is concentrated in a low-level subsidy environment like New Zealand; 'will it sell?' is the overriding imperative, yet all interview subjects stress the need for theatre's relevance to contemporary concerns and behaviours in a post-colonial context.

Finally, the cross-pollination of methods and techniques apposite to the work, or 'magpie-ism' is commonplace. What I refer to as 'post-colonial hybridity' or the active employment of a plurality of techniques is present.

According to this, five distinct topics emerge as common themes from the interview data that forms the basis of this study. These are (1) constraints, (2) freedoms, (3) influences, (4) working with actors to frame and shape engagement, and (5) working with actors towards revelation. These themes guide the structure of the thesis and shape the chapters that follow. The thesis is principally concerned with questions of text directing techniques, formative influences, subjective narrative inquiry, an understanding of how to manage actors in the creative process, and points of similarity or difference between practitioners.

Chapters one to four fall under the umbrella notion of 'conditions of production', since these are so fundamental to understanding the New Zealand situation. They consider the five common tropes to emerge from the directors' engagement with text, context and interpretation. Chapter two examines the study's research methodology and surveys the merits of approaching the topic in this particular manner. The notion of constraints shapes the discussion in chapter three, since the study of directing play texts must consider the philosophical and fiscal contexts within which works are made. Chapter four continues the discussion around the concept of freedom, since the environment in which play texts are directed in New Zealand is inevitably shaped by conditioning factors such as short

rehearsal periods, limited funding, rituals, 'wairua'¹⁴² and the design of a process of engagement with cast and crew. These can equally be liberating forces for directors.

Chapter five delves deeper into the New Zealand interpretive mode of work as it considers key influences on directing methods. It also spotlights Mike Alfreds as a prominent influence on New Zealand theatre directing, while highlighting relevant theory and techniques derived from practitioners such as Konstantin Stanislavski and Rudolf Laban. Alfreds' work and a selection of his techniques are considered in some depth. His influence is perceived as immediate and long-lasting. This is by virtue of his highly successful two-week masterclass held in New Zealand during 1989 and a reflective view of it is further informed by an interview I conducted with him in 2012, in London.

Chapter six devotes attention to working with actors and process in a rehearsal room. This part of the thesis addresses the importance of framing pathways for engagement with actors. It considers distinct practices that appreciate the director's role, the place of democracy or autocracy in the rehearsal room, the importance of casting, and techniques that can effectively manage the creative process. It also considers strategies for effective communication and interaction between directors and actors that include building trust, dealing with fear, giving effective notes and the nature of this creative relationship. It considers direct engagement, encountering the play and the possible application of 'concept'.

Chapter seven then considers how theatre directors engage with acting towards revelation, a particular view of performance that foregrounds Stanislavski-based methods and positions the actor at the

¹⁴² In Māori culture, considered to be an intrinsic, spiritual lifeblood or essence of a person or thing.

centre of the theatre experience. It looks at the place of imagination and techniques such as 'Text – No Text – Text', Laban Efforts, and others as available conduits for realising the essential action of a scene, presence and emotion. It also studies dynamic acting as a measure of highly effective performance that is constructed between director and actor, but ultimately, executed by the actor.

Finally, chapter eight considers the last category of 'walking the tightrope', the fabric of directing well in a relatively small society. This theme relates the data to the ongoing evolution of directing. This chapter is underpinned by the discussion of a directing vision for the future that appreciates the plurality of developing New Zealand directing voices.

It is important to signal here that the interviews of the archive represent a collection of distinct yet harmonious voices that speak to both difference and commonality. In the scope of this thesis it is impossible to make explicit all the thematic connections. My goal here is to synthesize where these voices intersect, align and 'sing in harmony'. Attention is also given to where they differ.

Moreover, the interview findings confirm that directing in New Zealand as seen from these directors' perspectives is an organic praxis; it continues to evolve in reaction to both the macro conditions of production, and micro individual ethos. Directing is, after all, a highly pragmatic profession. Its central tenets are developed in relation to how individual directors work with and within the available resources. This research offers a reading towards future debates that further define artistic and 'cultural' capital and methodological character in New Zealand. Most significantly, this study claims prominence for the work of New Zealand directors in the Director Studies domain. Finally, by removing the 'cloak of invisibility', it offers a new paradigm for local theatre study and

analysis and suggests new ways of understanding the previously invisible working processes of selected theatre directors in this unique domain.

Chapter Two: 'Shared Experience'[s]

Mutuality is a concept that underwrites all good performance; theatrical productions need an actor and an observer to reciprocally construct the contours of the drama. Peter Brook infamously refined this when he said:

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.¹

Indeed, the quality of theatre relies on this exchange between actor and observer. As Colin McColl has said: 'The experience [of theatre] is really, really important. It's a place of reflection and a place of argument and philosophy and where performers and audience all share this together.'² McColl's allusion to the 'shared experience' at the heart of dynamic theatre is a concept that buttresses this chapter, and offers how the thesis might be read. The mutual contract between audience (individually or collectively) and actor(s) has frequently been employed as a device to explain effective theatre by many theatre directors, including Mike Alfreds who, in 1975, aptly named his company 'Shared Experience' after this phenomenon.³

McColl describes the mutual theatre experience as 'so intangible but when it works you can feel that electricity in the air between actors

¹ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 7.

² Colin McColl, 'Acts of Faith': *Auckland Theatre Company 2014 Brochure* (Auckland, 2013), p. 28.

³ Shared Experience's current website proclaims that, 'At the heart of the company's work is the power and excitement of the actor's physical presence and the collaboration between actor and audience - a shared experience'.

See <<http://www.sharedexperience.org.uk>> [accessed 18 February 2014].

and audience. That's what we all do it for. The air is alive!'⁴ In a parallel vein, this chapter considers the semi-structured interview as a shared communal act through which practitioner self-narratives are constructed. This study privileges the method of Appreciative Inquiry-style interview format, in an attempt to identify and define what constitutes 'successful practice' in the theatre in a positive fashion. Appreciative Inquiry ('AI') is a method that focuses on living systems working at their best. It typically looks into high-peak experiences.⁵ It avoids problems to concentrate on what works well and how to make it work better. For this reason I wanted to consider what worked well for each director, and from that, extract potential for how to make it work even better. This method positions the interview as a cogent vehicle for the expression and reflection of 'best practice' experience. In this case, I consider it in the theatre director's praxis.

This chapter views the research interview itself as a shared act. Like McColl's ideal of 'alive' theatre, the interview also becomes a site of 'reflection and a place of argument and philosophy' through which narrative is constructed and then read. Further, one-on-one interviews allow these directors a platform from which to simultaneously pinpoint specific observations while also reflecting more generally on how they view their careers and their place in the wider directing community. Accordingly, this chapter presents the thesis' research methodology and examines the merits of approaching the topic through the interview format. It includes the rationale for adopting a qualitative research design; the information required to conduct the study; an overview of the project's

⁴ McColl, 'Acts of Faith', p. 28.

⁵ See Gervase Bushe, 'Appreciative Inquiry: Theory and Critique' in *The Routledge Companion To Organizational Change*, ed. by D. Boje, B. Burnes and J. Hassard (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), pp. 87-103; Gervase Busch, 'The Appreciative Inquiry Model' in *The Encyclopedia of Management Theory*, ed. by Eric H. Kessler (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), pp. 42-45.

research design and data collection methods; the methods of data analysis; ethical considerations; limitations of the study; and, finally, a summary of the methodology in the context of text-based professional New Zealand directing.

My hypothesis is that a fuller understanding of text directing practices can be derived from the semi-structured interview narratives of 'successful' professional directors. My goals are threefold: first, to identify the praxis of selected professional New Zealand theatre directors in relation to realising text and working with actors; second, to examine the key influences of these working methods; and third, to evaluate the effectiveness of these directing methods in relation to key elements of 'dynamic' theatre, such as working with actors, text, context, time, conflict, style, movement and space.

To provide the project with clear parameters, I focus on elements of drama that relate to text-driven practice when working with actors, and do not ask questions concerning many of the other considerations that good direction involves. For example, I am not concerned with examining design, devising skills, the use of space, how to organise time, technical elements or budgetary decisions. These issues, while important 'best practice' matters, nonetheless lie outside the scope of the study. This leads back to the central question at the heart of this project; how does a select cohort of professional New Zealand theatre directors bring text dynamically to life?

The New Zealand Context

The New Zealand context informs how this study was designed, and how the interview archive may be read, analysed and interpreted. Professional theatre practice continues to display both disparate and analogous approaches to directing text in theatre; there are common approaches and many different methods employed to create dynamic performance. Yet finding its roots in mid-twentieth century dramatic traditions – which are in turn derived from what Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova call ‘the complex fragmentation and multiple rejection of tradition’⁶ – directing in the New Zealand geographical domain is still a relatively new profession. Techniques, like eras, are not neatly divided and there is interplay between schools of thought. These observations are not new or novel and have been made by Howard McNaughton in his chapter ‘Drama’ in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*⁷ where he sets out to uncover theatrical context. Elsewhere in ‘The Epic and the Intimate: Directing *Albert Speer*’, O’Donnell explains the variety of methods he used in this compelling production:

Inspired by the work of Robert Lepage ... my aim was to use a variety of theatrical approaches to create the landscapes of the play. These included physical acting approaches, chorus work, live music and sound and the use of video projection. I began with a naturalistic framework derived from the methods of Konstantin Stanislavski ... seeking to vary the rhythms and let the blocking grow naturally out of the characters’ objectives.⁸

⁶ Innes and Shevtsova, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*, p. 28.

⁷ McNaughton, ‘Drama’, pp. 321-93.

⁸ O’Donnell, ‘The Epic and the Intimate: Directing *Albert Speer*’, *Illusions*, 37 (Winter 2005), 30-33 (p. 31).

Meanwhile in “‘Everything is Family’”: David O’Donnell Interviews Nathaniel Lees’,⁹ director and actor Lees points to a wider truth. This is that, although singular and often fragmented, we are all connected through the single investigative practice of directing. Although not visibly connected, the community is relatively small. ‘Everything is family’, says Lees.¹⁰ Directing is therefore a community that provides a lens through which all other theatrical practices may be seen.

Professional theatre directing in New Zealand

There are a number of contextual conditions for the practice of professional directing in contemporary New Zealand professional theatre that inform how this current study was conceptualised and designed. The fundamental constraints of limited resources – time and money – make the director’s job a particularly many-headed beast. For instance, to save costs, a director will often also perform the function of stage manager in rehearsals right through until production week, and sometimes, beyond. Time is also scarce. Directors working with text, actors and crew will usually have only three to four weeks’ rehearsal time before opening night. Compared with their international counterparts, New Zealand directors do not have the scope for many weeks of experimentation or even audience previews and test-runs. Opening night is often the first time the work has a public audience, an occasionally testing consideration when the audience is such a crucial part of the shared theatre experience.

This is important in that in New Zealand the ‘feedback loop’ from audiences is therefore not possible for all theatre practice. Directing text in professional theatre in this location has increasingly become a product-

⁹ David O’Donnell, “‘Everything is Family’”: David O’Donnell Interviews Nathaniel Lees’ in Maufort and O’Donnell, pp. 331-47.

¹⁰ O’Donnell, “‘Everything is Family’”, (p. 343).

focussed activity for an imagined reception and response. Directors have had to develop their craft well in order to deliver product to a paying audience on opening night in an unusually short space of time, while also keeping an eye on the experimental component. This is not unique to theatre practice, but it has been particularly significant in New Zealand over the past two decades as rehearsal times have become more truncated, and public funding and corporate sponsorship increasingly limited.

The great German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht, traversing in modern theatre the two currents of Naturalism and Expressionism, suggested that the ideal conditions for rehearsal included adequate (and sometimes long) rehearsal time. For example, Edward Braun points out that Brecht's version of *Edward the Second* (1924) at the Kammerspiele took eight weeks to rehearse.¹¹ This tradition maintains its place in the interpretive directing canon, most notably in economic and social contexts that accept and support rehearsal itself as a creative process. This is possible elsewhere. Peter Brook continues to experiment at the Bouffes du Nord with up to six months' rehearsal time; Robert Lepage has a repertoire of work that is frequently revisited and reworked according to the necessary process at hand. It is not unusual for Lepage to spend four months creating a work that will then be tested in front of an audience before being developed again. Ariane Mnouchkine's masterfully crafted work with Le Théâtre du Soleil is typically refined over six months.

Although these are perhaps extreme examples of well-known directors who can command support, they stand in stark contrast to New Zealand working conditions. The scarcity of time in New Zealand

¹¹ This longer than usual period was probably due to rewrites, but also to Brecht's insistence on 'concreteness and narrative clarity'. It became a benchmark for longer rehearsal times in post-repertory theatre, and offered a re-envisioning of the potential of a rehearsal process. See Braun, *The Director and the Stage*, pp. 164-5.

rehearsal practice – and (until recently) the lack of focussed training for directors – has resulted in directors honing their craft on the rehearsal floor as actors first, or as directors finding their way by jumping into the deep end. This is a key structural condition in the New Zealand theatre directing domain.

Cross-pollination

The transfer of methods from director to actor to director also deserves to be acknowledged. The current New Zealand theatre context is a result of both the acceptance and rejection of conventional methods learnt through direct application. For example, Miranda Harcourt won a Chapman-Tripp theatre award for best actress in 1993 for her role as Nora in McColl's production of *A Doll's House* at Circa Theatre. I saw the performance and recall its emotional strength in period costume, though to me it also felt very contemporary with reference to how the relational psychology was performed. In McColl's hands, gestures were naturalistic, feeling was displayed above social mannerisms, and the revelation of inner turmoil was the method of presentation in this version of Ibsen's play.

Harcourt has been influenced by McColl's highly interpretive directing style. She says, 'I love the aesthetic of Colin's work. I would walk a million miles to go and see something directed by Colin.'¹² Harcourt cites examples of McColl's work to aspire to: 'All of the Ibsens that he did were all great ... *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with Robyn [Malcolm] and Stephen [Lovatt] at Downstage which I personally loved ... he's just an absolute genius.'¹³ She attributes this aesthetic in part to the partnership with one of McColl's long-time collaborators, the designer Tony Rabbit. She says, 'it's

¹² Miranda Harcourt, interview with the author (Wellington: 30 November, 2011), Appendix A.

¹³ Harcourt.

the collaboration between Colin and Tony Rabbit that I've really always loved'.¹⁴ Other directors openly cite McColl as a strong influence, further underscoring this sense of cross-pollination of methods. In such a small industry it is important that practitioners can learn from one another, and that peers can openly and honestly acknowledge each other's work.

Influences are sometimes more than first hand experiences, too. Jonathon Hendry is typical of directors who simultaneously cite the close and distant influences that have shaped their toolkits. This ranges from sharing a rehearsal room, to seeing a production, through to reading a book of the practitioners' work:

I like the eclecticism of people like Alfreds or Declan Donnellan, or another influence for me was a workshop that Brett did, who's in the building now [teaching directing at Toi Whakaari], and Murray [Lynch] did ... the Georgian director, Robert Struhua and his 'way in' with Shakespeare drawn from his culture was – it had a sense of eclecticism, very Brechtian.¹⁵

This thesis accepts the notion that boundaries between practitioners can be both immediate and distant; deliberate or subconscious, and osmotic. Cross-pollination repeatedly occurs. Nothing is entirely original and all ideas are recycled. Michael Hurst acknowledges this when he says, 'people did it [experimentation with form] before us in the sixties, thirties, twenties, with the Dada-ists and all that. "Nothing new under the sun" [he credits not to Shakespeare, but *The Bible*].'¹⁶ In his post-structuralist essay 'The Death of the Author', Roland Barthes recognised that complete originality is impossible for a creator of a work to attain, since 'the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.¹⁷ For

¹⁴ Harcourt.

¹⁵ Jonathon Hendry, interview with the author (Wellington: 28 June, 2012), Appendix A.

¹⁶ Michael Hurst, interview with the author (Auckland, 19 June 2011), Appendix A.

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', trans. by Geoff Bennington in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (New York: Longman, 1988), pp. 166-172 (p. 170).

Barthes, characters themselves are ‘eternal copyists’, while the writer ‘can only imitate a gesture that is anterior, never original’.¹⁸

He might just as well have been speaking about a theatre rehearsal room and its incumbent methodologies when he wrote that ‘a text ... is a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’.¹⁹ Moreover, because theatre happens in a public domain, directors are constantly exposed to each other’s work. Using Barthes’ framework, directors, actors, and audiences are all ‘readers’ for whom the essential meaning of a work depends on the impressions of the reader, rather than the ‘passions’ or ‘tastes’ of the writer. As Barthes claims, ‘a text’s unity lies not in its origins’, or its creator (or interpreter, the director), ‘but in its destination’, or its audience.²⁰ Bearing in mind the postmodern assumptions of intertextuality and the subjective construction of meaning that ‘good theatre’ is reliant upon, the following section outlines the study’s particular research design and methodology.

Shaping Dynamic Conversations

Rationale: grounded in lived experience

In order to address the key research questions posed by this study, information was sourced from ten participants (eight men and two women) in a series of individual semi-structured interviews. Participants were engaged through deliberate selection according to strict criteria. Each case study was then analysed separately and considered as a corpus for the inter-related refrains. Participants are from both Pākehā²¹ and Māori²²

¹⁸ Barthes, p. 170.

¹⁹ Barthes, p. 170.

²⁰ Barthes, p. 171.

²¹ Persons of European (non-Māori) descent.

ethnic backgrounds, although since the aim was to look at best practice rather than being representative of particular 'sub-groups', an even cultural or gender mix was not paramount for this study

Long form, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection for this project. This follows a tradition of interviewing in New Zealand that places immense value on the spoken word. As Judith Binney and Gillian Chaplin explain in *Ngā Mōrehu: The Survivors – The Life Histories Eight Māori Women*, through the format of in-depth interview, a 'living oral history' can be captured and the qualities intrinsic to that cultural group can be retained.²³ Binney says: 'The essential purposes of Māori oral history are retained: to establish the mana²⁴ and authority of the individual and the family.'²⁵ When *Nga Mōrehu* was first published in 1986, its authors asserted the interview format as a central and individual method that allowed the subject's connection to an inverted-triangle shaped, wider community. 'Whakapapa – genealogy – is the backbone of Māori history; whānau, the extended family, and hapū, the tribe, are essential concerns of that history. The whānau gives particular identity to the individual; the course of its mana and ancestors.'²⁶

Similarly, Nepia Mahuika has recently examined the differences and similarities between the studies of oral history and oral tradition in his doctoral thesis, "'Kōrero Tuku Iho": Reconfiguring Oral History and Oral Tradition'.²⁷ In drawing on the life narratives of four generations of Ngati

²² Section 2 of 'The Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975' states that a Māori is 'a person of the Māori race of New Zealand, and includes any descendent of such a person'.

²³ Judith Binney and Gillian Chaplin, *Ngā Mōrehu: The Survivors – The Life Histories Eight Māori Women* 4th edn (Wellington: Bridget Williams, 2011).

²⁴ 'Mana' is defined as authority, control, influence, prestige or power held by a person or entity. It also relates to the concept of honour.

²⁵ Binney and Chaplin, p.4.

²⁶ Binney and Chaplin, p.3.

²⁷ Nepia Mahuika, "'Kōrero Tuku Iho": Reconfiguring Oral History and Oral Tradition' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Waikato, 2012).

Porou descendants, Mahuika's research offers a commentary on the form and nature of oral traditions and histories from an indigenous perspective. It explores the ways in which these traditions and histories 'converge and depart from 'international' understandings', and validates a broader definition of oral history and oral tradition.²⁸

Taking inspiration from these frameworks, and being aware of the need to respect living practitioners' narratives, I chose to undertake an investigation of theatre practice that is analogous to unearthing living oral history within the broader theatre culture. Those who 'live it' and practice it are best equipped to speak about it. If theatre is a 'shared experience', as this chapter contends, then the actor-audience relationship can be transferred to that of subject-interviewer. Theatre is a transient, time-based art form, yet the stories that surround performance practice remain alive in the memory of those who created or witnessed it. Directors are storytellers, so it was important for me to honour this narrative attribute and enter into dialogue with those who make the tales come to life.

The semi-structured format assumes that the research subject is the most valid tool for reflective discourse. This is not a new observation as ethnographers have long asserted the interview's place as a valid qualitative research tool. Further, the over-arching rubric of qualitative research is essentially pragmatic and interpretive, or as Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe assert, 'grounded', since it is 'grounded in people's lived experiences', as opposed to theoretical frameworks.²⁹ Aligning with these preferences, I chose the long-form, semi-structured narrative interview as the most effective research device through which to

²⁸ Mahuika, 'Abstract', p.2.

²⁹ Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map From Beginning to End* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2012), p. 30.

understand the three legs comprising the 'stool' of theatre praxis: practice, methodology and philosophy.

Qualitative research is also concerned with interactive findings, so is flexible enough to analyse the descriptive, the comparative and the connected. Moreover, thematic analysis of findings makes relative connections possible. As a research design tool, thematic analysis allows the researcher to seek a range and variation in findings while still delving into the 'essence' of a topic.³⁰ As Grant McCracken has noted, the purpose of the extended interview is primarily to form a narrative from the subject's point of view:

The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world.³¹

Drawing from this, I positioned the interviews according to the singular narrative that allows for individuality, rather than try to construct a generic understanding of practice that might be called for in, say, a focus group setting. The singular narrative approach finds validation in the writings of historian and philosopher John Pocock, who – at the beginning of his extensive correspondence with Bruce Mason – cited performance as a 'personal' business that necessitates a consideration of what he 'personally value[s] in the theatre'.³² He wrote:

The theatre is so intensely personal a business that I don't see any way to begin my side of the correspondence except by stating what it is that I personally value in the theatre. To do that properly I shall have to lapse into autobiography ...³³

³⁰ For a fuller explanation see, for example, Bloomberg and Volpe, pp. 36-7.

³¹ Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview: Qualitative Research Methods*, Series 13 (London: Sage, 1988), p. 17.

³² John Pocock in Bruce Mason and John Pocock, *Theatre in Danger: A Correspondence Between Bruce Mason and John Pocock* (Wellington: Wright and Carman, 1957), p. 5.

³³ Pocock in Mason and Pocock, p. 5.

Since personal narrative opens up an entry point to a discussion revealing praxis, the inclusion of an autobiographic perspective was likewise central to the study's research methodology.

Finding connections in disparate narratives

Another advantage of qualitative research for this topic is its description as an investigative tool that seeks connections in and between seemingly disparate narratives. Pranee Liamputtong and Douglas Ezzy call it a device that 'aims to elicit the contextualised nature of experience and action, and attempts to generate analyses that are detailed, "thick", and integrative (in the sense of the relation of individual events and interpretations to larger meaning systems and patterns)'.³⁴ The interpretative and flexible nature of the qualitative research approach is ideal for studying disparate directing methods since it endeavours to particularise different techniques, while also looking for common ground. Furthermore, historical, reflective and autobiographical narratives are crucial means by which directors can recount protracted examples of their working methods.

My threshold position as an 'insider/outsider' also adds to the way the research finds connections. As a director/actor who is perceived to be 'from' and 'of' the community of theatre practitioners, this perspective allows me to bring an 'emic' approach.³⁵ Anthropologist J. Lett explains that 'emic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful

³⁴ Pranee Liamputtong and Douglas Ezzy, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 2nd edn (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

³⁵ See J. Lett, 'Emics and Etics: Notes on the Epistemology of Anthropology', in *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* *Frontiers of Anthropology*, ed. by T.N. Headland, K.L. Pike, and M. Harris, vol. 7. (Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 127-142 (p. 130).

and appropriate by the native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviors are being studied'.³⁶ This 'insider' position is the point of entry to the research that shapes 'categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate', and it also affords me a unique kind of access to directors.³⁷ However, this cannot be a true 'emic' approach since the data had questions and points of entry – constructs – to begin with, and it is not my narrative under scrutiny.

I acknowledge that my position as a researcher means I also bring elements of an 'etic' approach. Etic approaches are 'accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers'.³⁸ These 'outsider' perspectives include suppositions about the area of directing that allow me to take a more cross-cultural line of inquiry, and to find connections in disparate narratives. In her Introduction to *Redemption Songs*, Judith Binney questions her authority as a Pākehā woman living in modern times to construct an 'interpretive biography'³⁹ of the founder of the Māori faith known as Ringatu, Te Kooti. She argues that the central issue is not one of 'belonging', saying; 'the debate must be about the ability to understand the issues involved, and the strength of the ideas developed in the writing', rather than inclusion in a cultural group.⁴⁰ Her 'outsider' status still carries subjective overtones: 'Every historian brings individual perceptions and judgements to bear, including their selection of what is important from the myriad of data.'⁴¹ So, too, I bring a subjective point of view to constructing the present

³⁶ Lett, p. 130.

³⁷ Lett, p. 130.

³⁸ Lett, p. 130.

³⁹ Judith Binney, *Redemption Songs: A Life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012), p. 1.

⁴⁰ Binney, *Redemption Songs*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Binney, *Redemption Songs*, p. 5.

narrative. While the 'emic' affords 'insider' knowledge, the 'etic' allows the data to be read comparatively and thematically. This project lives in the healthy 'threshold' tension between the 'emic' and 'etic' approaches.

Rationale for semi-structured interviews

As noted above, this study prioritises individual, semi-structured interviews as a research method. Anthropologists Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth note the particular elasticity of these in-depth discussions as 'flexible':

An interview guide, usually including both closed-ended and open-ended questions, is prepared; but in the course of the interview, the interviewer has a certain amount of room to adjust the sequence of the questions to be asked and to add questions based on the context of the participants' responses.⁴²

Such flexibility is crucial to reveal information that may never have come to light, particularly with subjects who may not have been previously interviewed. This elasticity places the semi-structured interview in-between the relative tightness of structured, and freedom of unstructured interview formats.

Zhang and Wildemuth have described that posing 'close-ended' and 'open-ended' questions before the interview is a way of maximising the semi-structured approach. These questions are designed to provoke both detailed responses and unexpected answers. In keeping with this desire to allow for flexibility in the discussion, a list of fifteen questions was included with the first approach letter.⁴³ This list of questions was framed

⁴² Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth, 'Unstructured Interviews', in *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*, ed. by Barbara M. Wildemuth (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2009), pp. 222-231 (p. 222).

⁴³ See Appendix B for Approach Letter and Interview Questions.

as 'a stimulus for discussion' and on the day of the interview these questions were tabled as a means of keeping the discussion on track.

Adhering to the Appreciative Inquiry notion that considers how to enhance successful working methods, the first question deliberately put best practice at the forefront as it asked, 'What has been the most satisfying directing experience of your career? Can you say what made it so satisfying?' This was important since I wanted to know what the directors viewed as successful *from their point of view*. Subsequent questions covered principal mediums, influences, approaches to directing text, techniques for engendering connection between actors, audience and text. Specific questions followed on working with Shakespeare, methods borrowed from other forums such as psychology, art or music and fundamental directing texts.

Flexibility and preparation were crucial considerations for the present study. With a range of questions sent in advance of the discussion, subjects could prepare informed responses that maximise the interview experience. Through its established format and the advance sharing of questions with interview subjects, the semi-structured interview provides clear signposts, without an exact demarcation of where or how the interview should travel. It is largely navigated by the subject's responses and the interviewer's ability to pick up on signals that open up deeper discussion. This relies on interviewer and subject being complicit, aware and both parties understanding the interview as a shared experience.

Directors are usually good communicators who talk readily about their experiences – good and bad – if the conditions are right. Good conditions include one-on-one, in-depth interviews where an existing element of trust is present. In this case, my background as a practitioner who has a track record of working with the interview subjects was an important factor in creating confidence. Given this level of trust, there was

an implicit expectation that as the 'insider' interviewer I would not deliberately misrepresent the subjects' points of view. Written surveys will not elicit the same stories; nor will they give the researcher the opportunity to intervene and seek clarification or further explanation on particular points. However, semi-structured or in-depth interviews allow the researcher to discover and clarify the meaning of particular experiences. Since in-depth interviews can condense a wide range of information in a relatively short time frame, they are also appropriate to the needs of busy freelancers.

Martyn Hammersley has argued that the qualitative research interview can also be used as a tool to 'document the world from the point of view of the people studied ... rather than presenting it from the perspective of the researcher'.⁴⁴ With this in mind, and being aware of the unavoidable threshold tensions, in-depth, semi-structured recorded interviews with subjects have a legitimate basis as the scaffolding for this study. These interviews are also a form of research methodology that allows interview subjects to be positioned as the expert. This research method is particularly apposite for characterising a range of directing praxes that link philosophy, methodology and practice; there is crossover that is often discovered throughout the course of the interview. Liamputtong and Ezzy have referred to the 'inductive and deductive' nature of qualitative interviews in which 'it is assumed that all relevant questions are not known prior to the research', thereby allowing questions to be formed as the interview takes shape.⁴⁵ Coupled with questions sent in advance, this was a partial solution to the problem of how to deal with

⁴⁴ Martyn Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography?: Methodological Explorations* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 42.

⁴⁵ Liamputtong and Ezzy, p. 57.

new information that might come to light throughout the course of an interview. Interviews do, after all, have an ‘exploratory purpose’.⁴⁶

This thesis is also heavily influenced by ‘AI’ practitioner narrative methods. Sue Annis Hammond says, ‘Appreciative Inquiry suggests we look for what works in an organisation; that we appreciate it ... Because the statements are grounded in real experience and history, people know how to repeat their success.’⁴⁷ Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros concur that AI is a ‘transformational inquiry that selectively seeks to ‘locate, highlight and illuminate the “life-giving” forces of an organisation’s existence’.⁴⁸ In this sense, therefore, AI is not just aspirational but a way to understand the ‘dynamic’. As theatre director Simon Bennett says, ‘You can only aspire to things that you see that you cherish and uphold.’⁴⁹

There are good reasons to conduct this research according to qualitative and AI methods that are analogous to effective directing. First, theatre directors work in a live medium that most often demands preparation. This assumes they are proficient at accepting provocations and questions and letting the answers percolate in readiness for an intense ‘discussion’ at a later date. The interview itself is a kind of truth-telling performance whose own process, like rehearsal, demands trust. Yet this assumption also goes hand-in-hand with the reality that directors are time-poor. It takes a lot for a director to give an afternoon of their time to an interviewer. For this reason the interviews had to be framed around

⁴⁶ Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, ‘Interviewing: The Art of Science’, in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 361-376 (p. 365).

⁴⁷ Sue Annis Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, 3rd edn (Bend, OR: Thin Book, 2013), p. 20.

⁴⁸ David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney and Jacqueline M. Stavros, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*, (Bedford Heights, OH: Lakeshore Communications, 2003), p. xiii. See also David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005).

⁴⁹ Simon Bennett, interview with the author (Auckland: 22 March 2012), Appendix A.

participants' availability. Interviews were requested as a single engagement rather than a series of meetings over a protracted period of time, as this allowed the interview to create an intense thinking space where the discussion was a mutual commitment between subject and interviewer. Like a performance itself, the interview had finite limits; a present-centered focus with an appointed time frame. In addition, I wanted to provide consistency in the research design by using the same questions for each discussion. This provided a level entry point for each interview as well as clearly established practical parameters.

Invoking other models

The decision to interview my selected subjects in semi-structured dialogue also invokes a training model frequently used elsewhere; the role of apprentice or assistant director. These posts are rarely created in New Zealand theatre, largely due to funding and cost considerations. Yet in my experience of assistant directing at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, I found that some of the most valuable lessons can be learnt in structured discussion with the director. The rehearsal room is a delicate ecosystem and is often a particularly fractious space within which to observe and understand methodology. This is not the time or place to ask, for example, 'Why did you encourage that actor to physicalize the text, rather than use clear objectives?' Actors are sensitive to observers, frequently becoming guarded in the presence of researchers. In addition, by the time that the work is ready to be seen, the foundational directing and acting choices have already been made. To obtain a full understanding of the key directing methods employed in any production, the researcher would need to attend many rehearsals of several different play texts, and then differentiate between the interactions of each play. Not only would such

an approach take years to complete; it would still not necessarily allow for a practitioner-led, Appreciative Inquiry narrative to emerge.

Further, the choice of the extended interview format was also shaped by the lack of information in existing literature. My research seeks to find points of difference and similarity between selected professional directors. Through the examination of chosen samples of directors' experiential history and their understanding of it, the research aims to trace key influences within individuals' experience of the New Zealand directing profession. The project draws on all three common interview models of documentary, civic and interpretive oral. It uses verbatim recorded interviews, which are then edited and interpreted for the purpose of (and extracting guidelines for) effective directing praxis.

Overseas perspectives: tensions between Rehearsal Studies and Director Studies

The genre of Rehearsal Studies offers additional and useful ways of framing the methodology of this thesis. When he wrote *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream: An Eye-Witness Account of Peter Brook's Production from First Rehearsal to First Night*, David Selbourne employed a close 'outsider' observation of his subject in a manner that legitimised directing as a craft understood through observation.⁵⁰ It was also peppered with verbatim quotes from Brook.

However, this also begs the question of the validity of 'outsider' accounts. Brook's directing process was charted in chronological fashion and Selbourne's work examined Brook as he directed the rehearsal journey of the play in 1970. Selbourne 'documented' and interpreted the directing process with a barbed tongue that undermined Brook's

⁵⁰ David Selbourne, *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream: An Eye-Witness Account of Peter Brook's Production from First Rehearsal to First Night* (London: Methuen, 1982).

assertions. For example, 'Ironically it is the text, not the theatre, which is holy',⁵¹ and, 'The 'empty space' is in fact pre-filled with words.'⁵² Selbourne's text, although controversial and important, was published twelve years after the production and did more to disrupt Brook's process than clarify it. Brook was clearly scarred by this experience; he is now renowned for not allowing observers into his rehearsals. In a recent (2012) documentary made by his son under strictly controlled conditions, Brook says:

Over the years people have been plaguing me with requests. First of all to come to a rehearsal and then, when I say "no", they say, "Well I'll be like a fly on the wall." I say, "Well, that's even worse, for flies are *really* irritating".⁵³

Selbourne's authorial voice threatened to overshadow the director's process itself. Moreover, Selbourne's text alerted the reader to the unreliability of filtered 'outsider' accounts. This draws attention to the delicate tension between the text creator and text user; or researcher and subject that 'outsider' accounts offer. Susan Letzler Cole's *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* offered an observational analysis of American directing that gave credence to a more 'fly-on-the-wall' approach.⁵⁴ Cole's detailed investigation placed emphasis on the differences and similarities between directors as they rehearsed play scripts, though it lacked the heavy verbatim input from the directors themselves.

Sitting next to this, Shomit Mitter's *Systems of Rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook* developed notions of comparative directing analysis and the correlation of technique, but again, this was primarily through existing scholarship and observation of rehearsals, rather than

⁵¹ Selbourne, p. 65.

⁵² Selbourne, p. 66.

⁵³ *Peter Brook: The Tighrope*, dir. by Simon Brook, (Brook Productions, 2012).

⁵⁴ Susan Letzler Cole, *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992).

interviews.⁵⁵ Mitter's central thesis had a three-pronged focus that advanced approaches to directing in the professional domain. First, he located rehearsal and directing exercises 'within the larger patterns of which they are products', linking them to over-arching schools of thought.⁵⁶ Secondly, he attempted to 'model these [theatrical] experiments so that it becomes easier to relate them to the theories they are designed to realize'.⁵⁷ Thirdly, he structured the book as a series of comparisons to 'redress the balance by having each position comment critically on every other'.⁵⁸ In this way, directors were given comparative and situational attention as lineage situated the analysis.

However, while Mitter's text provides a thorough comparison of four key directors' methodologies, it continually asserts the status of physical approaches to text above narrative analysis, or vice versa. At times it makes the assumption that the text alone is not enough. This is revealed in such statements as, 'naturalism squanders its inevitably limited supply of semiotic energy by reiterating rather than replacing information'.⁵⁹ Elsewhere it questions 'non-naturalistic theatre' that 'does not merely present with greater cohesion truths that are available in naturalism.'⁶⁰ The book contains an ever-present tension between text-driven and non-narrative motivated approaches to theatre.

Despite the addition to scholarship in directing praxis that Mitter offers, the text does not address *how* directors bring texts to life. It sidesteps the question with broad statements such as: 'He believed that the only directing method to give results was a fusion of several different

⁵⁵ Shomit Mitter, *Systems of Rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁵⁶ Mitter, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Mitter, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Mitter, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Mitter, p. 62.

⁶⁰ Mitter, p. 62.

methods.’⁶¹ This thesis argues, based on the interview archive, that the text has equal status along with physical and non-naturalistic approaches. Numerous publications such as Jim Hiley’s *Theatre at Work: The Story of the National Theatre’s Production of Brecht’s “Galileo”* apply similar frames to the rehearsal room. However, writing at the request of the theatre company underlines that such accounts are limited in other ways.⁶² They can become inadvertent marketing tools for a theatre company, thereby avoiding the ‘unsayable’, as interviews can do.

More comprehensively, John Russell Brown’s *Routledge Companion to Directors’ Shakespeare* focused on directorial method in Shakespearean works.⁶³ Thirty-one accounts of international directors’ approaches to directing Shakespeare – peppered with existing interview material – provided a solid platform to develop the ‘outsider’ framed conversations. The book is structured according to a chronological analysis of key productions and approaches undertaken by each selected director. Close and detailed accounts of leading international theatre directors demonstrated ‘how varied productions of Shakespeare have been and how theatre has met the challenges of new times and new technology’.⁶⁴

J. Robert Wills’ *The Director in a Changing Theatre* (1976) extended the image of the director as creative interpreter of the text, although it offered ‘insider’ perspectives.⁶⁵ This collection of writings from practitioners and theorists provided a confessional-like setting for an eclectic range of approaches to directing. For instance, Richard Schechner’s contribution, ‘The Director’ describes his own evolving

⁶¹ JC Trewin on Brook, quoted in Mitter, p.1.

⁶² Jim Hiley, *Theatre at Work: The Story of the National Theatre’s Production of Brecht’s “Galileo”* (London: Routledge, 1981).

⁶³ John Russell Brown, *The Routledge Companion to Directors’ Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁶⁴ Russell Brown, p. ix.

⁶⁵ J. Robert Wills, p. 320.

directing process. Arguably, it is one that involves considerable improvisation and far less directorial control than advocated by many others. Schechner's methods are highly subjective and obtuse. His descriptions lack the theoretical framework that subsequent work in the wider field of Performance Studies provided. He confided:

I know when I direct a play, I get totally absorbed in its web of themes, moods, actions, and people. And that writing about directing is the hardest thing for me to do because I know that everything I say is subjective. My theories bend like light around a strong gravitational source – the play I am directing.⁶⁶

However, technique in relation to text is often too vague to be directly applicable. Schechner talks of the 'seven steps to creating a mise en scène' ['placing on stage' or visual theme]⁶⁷ and how a 'text takes shape, scenes make sense, a sequence of events – scenic and/or textual – is agreed on, the environment built'.⁶⁸ This is hard to translate into actual strategies that other directors might use. Later, more practical, text-specific self-narratives written by practitioners such as Mike Alfreds, Cicely Berry, Max Stafford-Clark, Di Trevis and Katie Mitchell offer such schemes.⁶⁹

While practitioner self-narratives or 'insider' accounts of directing exist, they are fraught with issues related to privacy of method. Max Stafford-Clark's *Letters to George: The Account of a Rehearsal* takes the form of an edited 'insider' chronological journey through the rehearsal

⁶⁶ Richard Schechner, 'The Director', in *The Director in a Changing Theatre*, ed. by J. Robert Wills, (Los Angeles: Mayfield Publishing, 1976), pp. 144-53 (p. 145).

⁶⁷ Schechner, p. 146.

⁶⁸ Schechner, p. 148.

⁶⁹ See Mike Alfreds, *Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor* (London: Nick Hern, 2007); Mike Alfreds, *Then What Happens? Storytelling and Adapting for the Theatre* (London: Nick Hern, 2013); Max Stafford-Clark, *Letters to George: The Account of a Rehearsal* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1989); Di Trevis, *Being A Director* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012); Katie Mitchell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook For The Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

process.⁷⁰ It invites the reader to construct their own conclusion, and eliminates many of the background issues that inform this director's selected approach. At times it seems Stafford-Clark excludes vital explanations of technique, and, while exploratory of his process, the book precludes analysis of other work in his directing repertoire.

As Peter Snow observes in 'Ovid in the Torres Strait: Making a Performance from the Metamorphoses', insider accounts limit disclosure: 'There is a lot more that could be said about the process of making the work.'⁷¹ Acknowledging these omissions, Snow's article restricts the discussion of practice to an edited view of a rehearsal process and slides over essential parts of the practice. Anthropologists James Clifford and George Marcus have suggested that insider accounts of process are 'empowered and restricted in unique ways'.⁷² Gay McAuley⁷³ offers an explanation as to why 'insider' and 'outsider' accounts offer contexts where different conclusions may be drawn.⁷⁴ She points to inadequacies, saying, '[a]s the published literature on rehearsal grows in quantity and scope, including both "insider" and "outsider" accounts, so the possibility grows for deeper and more insightful theoretical reflections'.⁷⁵

Most recently, Duška Radosavljević's *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers* provides a comparative analysis of the

⁷⁰ Stafford-Clark.

⁷¹ Peter Snow, 'Ovid in the Torres Strait: Making a Performance from the Metamorphoses', *About Performance*, 6 (2006), 39-53 (46).

⁷² James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p.9

⁷³ See also Gay McAuley, *Not Magic But Work: An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Process* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) where McAuley follows director Neil Armfield over the six weeks he directs *Toy Symphony* (2007) for Company B at Belvoir Street Theatre.

⁷⁴ Gay McAuley, 'The Emerging Field of Rehearsal Studies', *About Performance*, 6 (2006), 7-13.

⁷⁵ McAuley, 'The Emerging Field of Rehearsal Studies', (10).

interview findings in its introduction.⁷⁶ Radosavljevic is an academic-practitioner so is able to hold a solid ‘insider-outsider’ position in the research. New Zealand has few examples of this type of scholarship. In their edited compendium of twenty-eight essays on New Zealand theatre practice, Marc Maufort and David O'Donnell's *Performing Aotearoa: New Zealand Theatre and Drama in an Age of Transition*, included eight interviews with theatre practitioners (writers, directors, actors).⁷⁷ This pointed to a growing trend towards ‘insider’ accounts accessed through interview format. It followed other accounts such as Lisa Warrington's 1991 interview many years earlier with local playwright Renée.⁷⁸ This ‘threshold’ conversation and its analysis sat next to Roma Potiki's ‘insider’ perspective on Māori theatre that urged for ‘a kind of objective truth’.⁷⁹ Potiki's call for understanding of a Māori ‘point of view’ in theatre could be describing the insider-outsider shared experience of interview: ‘Answers are seldom found in only one thing or the other, but most often in the answers “both” or “everything at the same time”.’⁸⁰

Overview of research design including ethical considerations

After a review of literature in the field, I formulated the central research questions. Formal ethics approval was then received from the University of Waikato Ethics Committee. Three important ethical considerations were the ability to ensure subjects’ anonymity (if this was their preference), management of the storage and access to interviews by both researcher

⁷⁶ Radosavljevic.

⁷⁷ Maufort and O'Donnell.

⁷⁸ Lisa Warrington, ‘A Life Long affair: Renée's writing for the theatre. Commentary/ interview’, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 18 (April 1991), 70-90.

⁷⁹ Roma Potiki, ‘A Māori Point of View: the Journey from Anxiety to Confidence’, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 18 (April 1991), 57-63 (p. 62).

⁸⁰ Potiki, (pp. 62-3).

and subject, and the ability for each director to omit anything they wished following the interview. These parameters were explained clearly to participants both verbally and in writing. Before the interview, each director signed two copies of a consent form agreeing to the conditions. All were content to do so. I kept one copy and they each retained the other.

Of the many New Zealand directors surveyed in this discipline I initially chose to approach sixteen. Potential research subjects were contacted and those who agreed to participate were contacted again to organise a time and place for the interview. Some did not respond to the initial request for quite some time due to work commitments, but none declined to take part. To retain privacy and ensure genuine autonomy in each individual subject's responses, none of the interview subjects were told who the other participants were in this first approach. This was intended to protect the integrity of the interviews and prevent any cross-contamination of data. Subjects were told who the other directors were if they asked or if it arose in the course of the interview process, since this allowed participants to see the calibre of directors they were being grouped with. However it was not a common concern as very few directors asked. Questions were sent out with the initial letter of approach to disclose the interview territory. Interview subjects were approached in order of their availability and capacity to reflect on large pieces of work.⁸¹

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each interview subject and recorded by myself. Interviews were recorded as audio (MP3) files onto compact disc. Two copies of each interview were made; one for each subject and one retained by myself in a locked safe in

⁸¹ It would have been fruitless to interview a director who was in the middle of making a large work (and reflection time after a production closes is essential), so sensitivity towards their schedules was vital.

my home. As agreed, the directors were permitted to keep this unedited audio file for their own use, but as arranged, not before the thesis is deposited. The former was done within two months of the interview being conducted so that the conversation was still relatively fresh. Interviews were then transcribed, edited and checked for accuracy by the researcher. A written copy and a compact disc audio version of the interview were sent to each interview subject for accuracy and omissions, and they were given the chance to edit accordingly over several weeks.

By virtue of the fact that all interview subjects are alive and still working in the industry there are further key ethical considerations in this study. Primarily they concern the right to privacy and the right to edit the interview afterwards when it is transcribed into written format. The latter is particularly important when having frank discussions. This method proved efficient and some were extremely vigilant in editing the transcripts, with often minimal changes. The interview subject should feel at ease to talk freely about the subject matter at hand without reproach or fear of professional damage. Therefore the ability to edit afterwards helped mitigate the pressure of having to capture everything at once. From a perspective of style, it was important not to intervene too heavily in this editing process. For example, the *way* a subject speaks reveals so much about their resistance to a question or, conversely, their passion for a method. When performing texts, practitioners often refer to 'the spaces between the words', as if it is possible to imagine from both a text and its omissions *how* something is being said. I wanted to keep this sense of tone in the personal delivery of each subject.

The data was organised according to recurrent themes and structures, and conclusions were drawn with current and emerging literature clearly in mind. In the process of combing the interviews for common themes, I acknowledge my own bias. Fontana and Frey describe

the 'reflexive, problematic, and, at times, contradictory nature of data and with the tremendous, if unspoken, influence of the researcher as an author'.⁸² This ongoing interplay of my own dual roles – academic-practitioner and researcher-writer – reinforces the notion of shared experience.

How interviews were conducted

Information needed for the study

In my quest to understand the directing methods and techniques of ten selected mid-career directors, a series of questions were provided at least two weeks prior to the interview. These questions related to eight categories concerned with directing praxis that covered: Appreciative Inquiry narratives; principle text directing techniques; key influences from New Zealand and overseas; strategies for engendering connection and dynamism; how to approach Shakespeare; the current role of directing; emerging practices; and techniques for managing the team and process.

Data collection methods

With the research parameters clearly in mind, the following questions were sent to interview subjects as the starting point for semi-structured interviews:

1. What has been the most satisfying directing experience of your career? Can you say what made it so satisfying?
2. What is your principal medium, and is there a reason for that?
3. How would you describe your approach to directing text? Eg. What characterizes your methodology and rehearsal processes? How do you explore the world of the play?

⁸² Fontana and Frey, p. 372.

4. Who has significantly inspired your own praxis? Are there influences or accepted wisdom from New Zealand practitioners or thinkers – or from further afield – who have shaped your own thinking and practice? What impact did Nola Millar make on your work as an emerging director?
5. Is there a New Zealand voice in the theatre that you aspire to have a conversation with, either nationally or internationally?
6. What techniques have you come to understand are most effective for engendering connection and dynamism between actors, text, and each other?
7. How do you create connection or dynamic between actors? What do you think is important to impart to actors relating to physical dynamic, spatiality, corporeality, tension, emotion, choral elements and truthfulness? What about presence?
8. What, to you, is directing about? What skills and approaches make for the most effective directing practice?
9. How do you view the practice of directing at this point in time and place? What do you believe are the particular challenges facing theatre between now and 2020? What is the role of text in theatre now?
10. Are there any methods or approaches that you have successfully borrowed from other forums for the rehearsal room? (Eg. Psychology, Management, Art, Music, etc).
11. Is successful theatre directing the same as good leadership? Does democracy have a place in the rehearsal room? What about managing ego and fear? Tension and freedom?
12. When directing Shakespeare, are there fundamental rules of textual form (metre, rhythm, typographical layout, etc) or feeling (subjective exploration, suggestion, imagery) that you observe? If so, what would you stress as important? What is superfluous? Why?

13. What do you find most difficult about directing Shakespeare? What solutions have you found?
14. What are you currently most excited about in either your own professional work, or that of another practitioner, and why?
15. What are your five key acting or directing texts?⁸³

Issues of trustworthiness

In qualitative research, issues of trustworthiness replace the traditional and core quantitative concepts of reliability and validity. As Bloomberg and Volpe note, trustworthiness in qualitative research includes notions of credibility, dependability, 'confirmability' and transferability.⁸⁴ Integrity was crucial to this study and my relationship with the interview subjects proved essential to gaining direct access to participants. I have worked closely with five of the selected directors, and barely with the other half, although they know of my work. All participants were provided with a copy of my Curriculum Vitae with the first approach letter to validate my professional credibility. This set the expectations for an advanced level of discussion.

In this context I saw it as crucial to position myself as a participant in the interview, to 'share the experience'. Implicit here, too, is the understanding that the interviewer (who stands in a similar professional space as the subject) will respect the boundaries of personal and professional history. British director Di Trevis draws attention to the personal when she says: 'The best directing will always be about who you are, not what you do.'⁸⁵ However, Mnouchkine passionately cautions against blurring the two areas of the personal-self and professional-self;

⁸³ See Appendix B for Approach letter and Interview Questions.

⁸⁴ see Bloomberg and Volpe, p. 124.

⁸⁵ Trevis, *Being a Director*, p. xvi.

certain aspects of a subject's life are separate to their work. When asked by Adrian Kiernander why she has been reluctant to speak about her own personal history in relation to work, Mnouchkine replies that her unique perspective cannot be replicated:

Of course it's important to my work but it can be of no use to the work of anybody else because that's the only thing I can't share. Certainly I think it's very useful for the work of a young actor or a young director to know how I do things or I don't do them, or how I wonder or I doubt or the difficulty I had, but ... it's not of any use to anybody to know what study I did, or how my mother is, how my father is. That's my problem, first of all, and then also it's part of the way of the media ... I don't like that.⁸⁶

Lastly, coding systems and categories for thematic analysis of data were checked as consistent for dependability. I was mindful of reading the interviews many times over, with different points of inquiry driving the analysis. In starting this project I was aware of the privileged access I had been given to these directors. I am reminded here that McColl's recent description of the contract between actors and audience as 'an act of faith' applies equally to researcher and subject. McColl says, 'Both acknowledge the potential for a shared experience in the theatre space that celebrates all the joys, terrors, delights, fears and possibilities of being human.'⁸⁷ The expectation must be set that the interviewer is unobtrusive yet able to intervene and help shape the discussion. Like the audience, they are an essential party in the dialogue.

⁸⁶ Adrian Kiernander, 'Interview with Ariane Mnouchkine at the Cartoucherie, 27 January 1988', in Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, Directors in Perspective* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 143.

⁸⁷ McColl, *Acts of Faith*, p.1.

Limitations of the study

This study contains certain limitations that are common to all qualitative research. The investigation does not (and cannot) present an entirely objective perspective, especially given my professional and personal subjectivity. This lends bias both to the interview subjects and the line of inquiry, and this is a double-edged sword. While my subjectivity provides access to the interview subject, it also risked imparting a certain preconception towards particular directing methods. To avoid this bias, it was important not to name any particular methods in the preliminary questions. These questions were deliberately open-ended to provide territory for in-depth discussion rather than cut and dried answers. For example, question 4 asked: 'Who has significantly inspired your own praxis? Are there influences or accepted wisdom from New Zealand practitioners or thinkers – or from further afield – who have shaped your own thinking and practice?' These questions unearthed a wealth of material.

The selected research sample group also presents some limitations. It is restricted to ten subjects, rather than including, for example, all professional text directors in a particular age bracket, city, gender, or style (or other limiting condition). This would have taken years to survey. The thesis therefore omits the potential capture of data about (for example) Tikanga Māori⁸⁸ or Feminist processes. However there is rich scope for future researchers to explore similar terrain with these specific groups, through the archive or otherwise.

Of the ten subjects, eight are men and two are women. There is therefore an implicit gender bias to be acknowledged. Most professional directors are men, a fact acknowledged by Rebecca Daniels' *Women Stage*

⁸⁸ Behaviours, guidelines or protocols for living according to Māori values.

*Directors Speak*⁸⁹ and Helen Manfull's *In Other Words: Women Directors Speak*.⁹⁰ Manfull's text lends a feminist voice to a conversation that has often positioned a patriarchal tone around its leadership domain. She frames her book as 'a celebration of the craft of women theatre directors working in Great Britain', ostensibly aligning gender with her inquiry.⁹¹

There is currently no New Zealand equivalent focusing on the work of local women theatre directors. Manfull's exploration of the practice of fourteen female British theatre directors is based on interviews with each of the research subjects she describes. Recurring topics are gender, class, access to education, technique and instinct. An overall value for the collaborative process emerges as a strong matrix for the female directors in this study, and these questions similarly emerged in my interviews with both women directors. For them, however, when asked about it, gender was not seen as a quality that substantially demarcated their practice.

Selection of research subjects: criteria

Criteria for selection include a text directing canon of depth and breadth to ensure some degree of breadth plus a minimum of ten text-based works in their directing repertoire. In addition, all directors must have directed Shakespeare, since this is arguably a benchmark challenge for text-based directors.

This latter pre-requisite begs the question: why Shakespeare? I argue that directing Shakespeare effectively requires a strong sense of one's own craft. Big casts, interpretive staging decisions, approaches to

⁸⁹ Rebecca Daniels, *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 1996).

⁹⁰ Helen Manfull, *In Other Words: Women Directors Speak* (New York: Smith and Kraus, 1997).

⁹¹ Manfull, p. x.

text using 'form' or 'feeling' (or both), and harnessing energy needed to sustain the pulse of a dynamic production are just some of the considerations presented when directing a Shakespearean text. In *The Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare*⁹², John Russell Brown alerts us to some of the challenges directors face in this with Shakespeare: '[Directors] look for suggestions and implications in a text as well as its explicit meanings, for implied movement, action, tension, emphasis, for variations of tempo, rhythm and mood, for the building of expectation and development of feelings and understanding.'⁹³

Meanwhile, in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Harold Bloom suggests that analysis and approaches to staging these plays openly reflects on a director's own point of view:

Shakespeare perspectivizes his drama so that, measure for measure, we are judged even as we attempt to judge. If your Falstaff is a roistering coward, a wastrel confidence man, an uncourted jester to Prince Hal, well, then, we know something of you ... Hamlet's players hold the mirror up to nature, but Shakespeare's is a mirror within a mirror, and both mirrors are mirrors with many voices.⁹⁴

Bloom is correct when he proposes that Shakespeare's texts require directors to meet performance decisions amongst a seemingly infinite array of interpretive possibilities: 'An art virtually unlimited, Shakespearean representation offers us neither nature nor a second nature, neither cosmos nor heterocosm. "The art itself is nature" (*The Winter's Tale*) is a wonderfully ambiguous declaration.'⁹⁵ Next to this, classic and modern texts require the application of different and variegated techniques needed to bring diverse genres of play texts to life. The

⁹² Russell Brown.

⁹³ Russell Brown, p. x.

⁹⁴ Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998), p. 15.

⁹⁵ Bloom, p. 15.

question of how directors engage with Shakespeare was an initial point of entry that in due course became a qualifier: Shakespeare is a constant since all the directors have worked with his texts, but this element is not absolutely central to the research. In summary, for this present study I wanted to ensure that the inquiry of text directing praxis involved directors who had engaged with a robust range of performance texts, styles and techniques.

Further criteria were that all interview subjects had to be living, to be available to be interviewed and to self-identify as theatre directors.⁹⁶ Some had spent their careers freelancing in several other mediums or been artistic directors for companies alongside theatre directing. All had a driving interest in developing acting and directing techniques to create work of the highest possible quality. By virtue of taking part in this project they displayed a willingness to engage with dialogue about effective praxis. Some had worked or travelled overseas where they had been exposed to other ways of working, although a peripatetic tendency was not an essential condition of selection. Nearly all the selected directors are based in Auckland or Wellington in the North Island, although some of their work has taken place in South Island environments such as Christchurch's Court Theatre or Dunedin's Fortune Theatre. There is certainly scope for further interviews with directors south of the Cook Strait; Lisa Warrington, Rangimoana Taylor and Hilary Halba are clear examples of such practitioners.

Risk is an essential component of the theatre medium, so I was constantly mindful of including subjects who have deliberately used both established directing methods and experimented with more 'daring' approaches. All research subjects had to have been professionally

⁹⁶ This does not preclude also working as actors or writers, for example, since this is a given in a relatively small profession.

reviewed and previously documented as mainstream, commercial theatre directors with text-based work of high quality.

A further consideration in the selection of interview subjects was that they needed to have directed classic or modern ('contemporary' as opposed to 'post-dramatic') texts that have been reviewed in a publically acknowledged format. In addition, they are still considered actively working in their field. This was essential to maintain an enthusiasm for the craft and to maintain reflexivity from the perspective of a practitioner who is still in touch with theatre and performance evolution. Finally, all subjects must have worked in at least one other medium such as film, television or radio as a director, actor, writer, producer or teacher. This lends some degree of external perspective to their autobiographic narrative. The research subjects in chronological order of the interview were:

- Catherine 'Cathy' Downes (Waiheke Island, Auckland)⁹⁷
- Michael Hurst (Auckland)
- Miranda Harcourt (Wellington)
- David Lawrence (Wellington)
- David O'Donnell (Wellington)
- Murray Lynch (Wellington)
- Simon Bennett (Auckland)
- Colin McColl (Auckland)
- Christian Penny (Wellington)
- Jonathon Hendry (Wellington)

Timeframes

The interviews with theatre directors took place over a nine month period from late September 2011 through to late June 2012. The Mike Alfreds interview occurred three months later on 11 September 2012, in London. The timing of this latter interview allowed me to speak with Alfreds after

⁹⁷ A large island off the north coast of Auckland in the Hauraki Gulf, about a thirty-five minute ferry ride from the central city.

all other interview subjects had spoken. It was also a fitting coda to the archive since many of the directors acknowledged his influence on their own work. The interview itself was designed to take 'no more than an hour and a half' to minimise the inconvenience for interview subjects, although this fluctuated according to the flow of the interview and the needs of each particular interview subject. Some talked for much longer if that suited their situation and narrative. As it happened, some directors had more time available than others; each interview therefore reflects a conversational pace that matches both their available time and their natural, conversational manner. Cathy Downes spoke for nearly three hours; at first slightly tentatively, then warming up as the discussion gathered pace. This slower, more considered pace chimes with aspects of her directing method.

Others were keen to jump on the available window of time in their hectic schedules, and the resulting interview that was conducted reflects a more concentrated form of analysis about their craft. Michael Hurst, for example, had a one and a half-hour space after shooting television show *Spartacus* during the day and performing as Mark Rothko in Auckland Theatre Company's production of John Logan's two-hander, *Red*, that evening.⁹⁸ My interview with Hurst took place in his Maidment Theatre dressing room as he was getting ready for the show that night; shaving his head, applying makeup, and 'warming up' to the character. This inevitably shaped the brevity of thought that exists in his very potent conversation. It is also very direct, rather like elements of Hurst's own directing methods. Given the finite window of time available and the underlying action, Hurst's interview can be read as a concentrated extension of theatre practice in action.

⁹⁸ *Red*, dir. by Oliver Driver (Auckland: Maidment Theatre, June 2011).

For all interview subjects, the act of setting aside time and devoting attention to be interviewed on their praxis was significant. All have contemplated their working methods not just between first approach and the interview, but continuously over the years of building their careers. Conducted at this point in their professional lives, the interviews capture pithy observations about praxis that are the result of many years' appreciative learning.

Location: 'Where am I?'

The interviews were conducted in a range of environments as diverse as the subjects themselves. These situations include the research subject's home, a theatre dressing room, around the dining room in my Auckland home, a Waiheke Island café, a theatre board room, a quiet University office, a deserted theatre foyer, a minimalist drama school office and a Toi Whakaari meeting room weary with the patina of many years of motion (and emotion) imprinted on its walls.

All interviews were conducted in environments that best suited the interview subjects, in the quietest possible conditions to capture a recording free of exterior noise and distractions. This posed particular challenges, since freelancers rarely have a permanent space to reside in, and when they do, those locations are rife with distractions. All took place in the participants' own home cities to avoid travel or dislocation on their part.

Location is the first rule of improvisation. 'Where am I?' determines the player's active decisions from that point of definition. It was equally important to the quality of data since it determined the degree of concentration, recording ability and capacity for privacy or public intervention in the discussion. It shaped how intense the discussion

became, since all subjects viewed this as a chance to devote attention to crystallised viewpoints. Situation also lent a palpable historic context to many of the interviews. A few subjects chose their work environments as the interview setting if that was conducive to an uninterrupted discussion. O'Donnell agreed on setting the location in his office at Victoria University, a quiet haven in Theatre Studies that contains production memorabilia and countless books to refer to. This was enormously useful since it gave him reference points to underline the narrative. McColl chose the private meeting room at Auckland Theatre Company (ATC) premises on Dominion Road for our discussion. This minimised the impact on his time and gave the discussion solid reference points as he referred to research material and showed me around the site after the interview.⁹⁹ It also 'professionalised' the interview as a countertop dialogue across the board room table.

Harcourt agreed on the more relaxed, plush, upstairs foyer of the Embassy Theatre for her interview, since it afforded both privacy and quiet away from the distractions of her home office. Right in the heart of Wellington's performance district, the situational context was potent; with its rich history of performing arts the Embassy is at the apex of the triangle that includes Downstage Theatre and PlayMarket – both touchstones for Harcourt and her parents, Peter and Kate – across opposite sides of Courtenay Place. The echoes of former directors such as Tony Taylor (to whom she referred as an influence) and Sunny Amey were palpable.

Lynch was surrounded by a plethora of New Zealand plays in a corner of his workspace at PlayMarket, an open-plan office overlooking the aforementioned performing arts precinct in Wellington. Inevitably, in this setting, Lynch was situated as both director and vanguard for New

⁹⁹ McColl's process is now strongly linked to ATC; he has been the Artistic Director there since July 2003.

Zealand drama. This location meant he straddled the spaces of text-director and text-promoter. Likewise, Penny and Hendry chose Toi Whakaari where they both teach and direct. In this locale their different perspectives are characterised by a contemplative manner of reflection and a fervent regard for learning more, respectively. Penny's interview took place in his very calm office without interruption. Hendry's was in a worn out meeting room. Lawrence also chose another, more isolated meeting room at Toi Whakaari for his interview. As a visiting director he was afforded more anonymity in this setting than Hendry or Penny. This setting serves as a metaphor for his practice as a director; individual, unique, a slightly 'fringe' voice in the dominant directing discourse. Location is a silent character in the archive.

Other directors were content with a more domestic setting to establish the tone for a private, concentrated discussion about their praxis. As the interviews went along this became more relaxed as I, too, found a tone that most allowed these directors to talk openly. Downes met me at the Ferry Terminal on Waiheke Island, whereupon we found a local café with extraordinary views over the open sea. Although this expansive view was a fitting metaphor for the possibilities of creative endeavour, the setting became noisy as the lunch rush started. This concentrated our discussion further – we had to listen very hard to each other and that further enhanced the clarity of the discussion – but made transcription very hard. From this experience I learnt that for accuracy in transcription, as well as sustained focus, quiet is essential in a chosen interview setting.

Bennett agreed to meet at my home in Point Chevalier on a very hot February afternoon. He took the interview very seriously, methodically documenting his process with severe honesty as if he'd been given much-awaited permission to speak in a well thought-out fashion. There was a palpable sense of scrupulousness about this conversation that in hindsight

I realised also reflected his directing process. This interview was surrounded by a slightly surreal sense of a visiting expert popping into my home to talk intently for three hours about his process, then vanishing into the humid Auckland air. Such is the freelance way.

Alfreds' interview – the last one, as a sort of ending and completion to the main body of interviews – took place in the most relaxed, quiet setting at his home in Hyde Park. I had made contact with Alfreds before leaving New Zealand but was only given the actual address while in London through his publisher at Nick Hern Books. I found my way to Alfreds' Hyde Park home via the Tube on 11 September 2012. Given that this was the eleventh anniversary of the World Trade Center collapse, there was air of heightened awareness this particular day, especially on the London Underground. Police presence was noticeably higher than usual. I was relieved to get to Alfreds' home, and in this setting, afforded such hospitality that I felt as though I had been invited into another's private world to share wisdom with one of the 'greats'. There was a tangible sense of authentic generosity married with attention to detail about this particular interview, and both these qualities are central to Alfreds' directing process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter explains how the working processes of theatre directors have become fundamental to understanding the making of dynamic theatre in the New Zealand context. Given that directing is a profession that demands both a solitary focus and collaborative expertise and goodwill, it is a challenging craft to deconstruct. Nonetheless, the semi-structured, in-depth interview is a method by which to better understand these working processes. Certain questions frame the

narrative inquiry and the interviews draw on assumed, unified (and sometimes codified) rules of performance. The methodology of this study is also influenced by a personal narrative (my own), framed by a semi-structured interview format. This is a highly effective tool with which to investigate strategies for directing texts for performance. As with McColl's and Alfreds' suggestions that directing theatre is a 'shared experience', so too is the process and practice of interviewing.

New Zealand text directing praxis predominantly follows an interpretive vein and is highly constrained by fiscal and temporal parameters, and other practical considerations. As a means of providing multiple perspectives on part of this professional genealogy, the following chapters examine directing methods in relation to interview narratives that explicate aspects of each director's practice, methodology and theory according to a predominant theme. Returning to the central purpose of this study – to provide a clear voice amongst a cacophony of voices on directing practice – the thesis next offers a detailed consideration of the interconnected and overriding thematic concerns that emerge from the research interview archive.

Chapter Three: Constraints

This chapter examines the constraints that shape and underscore text-based directing in contemporary New Zealand theatre practice, a major theme to arise from the interviews. Specifically, it asks: what are conditions that bear upon New Zealand directing praxis, and according to the archive of interviews, how do selected directors react to, accept or deflect these constraints? While subsequent chapters survey techniques for working with individuals and groups in rehearsal process that rely on notions of freedom, this chapter confines its examination of directing technique to the restrictive formative conditions influencing the work of both directors and actors.

According to Mervyn Thompson, director Ngaio Marsh had 'limits [she] had set' upon herself, the play and her collaborators.¹ In an analogous vein, I suggest that various constraints have profoundly forged the text directing praxis canon in New Zealand, just as they have shaped our approaches to making art. As artist and fabric maker Ali Davies suggests, geographical remoteness is one limiting factor that has forced artists to engage with the concept of a functional aesthetic:

Because of our physical isolation New Zealanders are required to innovate with limited resources. Practicality and imagination linked together is a significant aspect of the New Zealand character; it comes from the Polynesian and European who travelled so far to build a new world, it comes from engaging with a dynamic environment.²

¹ Mervyn Thompson, 'Death in the Family, 1982, Dame Ngaio Marsh' in Mervyn Thompson, *Passing Through and Other Plays* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992), p. 162.

² Ali Davies, *Ali Davies: Everlasting Design from the Fabric Queen*, Auckland, <<http://www.alidavies.co.nz/about-us>> [accessed 12 March 2014].

This isolation from Europe, America, and within the community is both a perceived constraint and a practical element that affords enormous freedoms. The archive confirms that directors are aware of their isolation from international trends, and the subsequent need to ensure that they stay connected to major developments. This constant 'seeking-out' of burgeoning trends causes directors to be characteristically reflexive, self-effacing, and practical according to the resources at hand.

Underlying this isolation is a confidence that has emerged in recent decades to stand as 'New Zealand' artists, and while it cannot surmise a definitive style germane to this country, this thesis contributes to this expanding area of interest in national identity. This move away from 'cultural cringe' – or what Teresia Teaiwa and Sean Mallon call 'an embarrassment at highlighting Kiwi idiosyncrasies' that existed well into the 1980s – points to a growing confidence in cultural capital in theatre.³ Teiawa and Mallon note: 'After a century of close identification with British culture, New Zealand underwent overlapping periods of nationalist assertion in its various arts. Today, the distinctiveness of 'New Zealand' culture is feted'.⁴

This chapter also examines how these constraints are reflected in relation to staging play scripts. Characteristically inventive and highly interpretive, the selected New Zealand directors are adept at applying aspects of other techniques while putting their 'spin' on these. Dynamic directing requires the deployment of approaches apposite to the needs of the particular group and play script at a given time and place. It is often said that 'structure gives freedom'; this chapter seeks to illustrate how constraints, structural and otherwise, can breathe life to theatre.

³ Teresia Teaiwa and Sean Mallon, 'Ambivalent Kinship? Pacific People in New Zealand', in *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*, ed. by James H. Liu and others (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 207-229.

⁴ Teaiwa and Mallon, 'Ambivalent Kinship? Pacific People in New Zealand', p. 218.

The notion of constraints

In 2002, director Eugenio Barba asserted that restrictions are commonplace in theatre practice when he noted that ‘all forms of theatre ... are subject to constraints: time, money, space, and quantity or quality of collaborators’.⁵ Barba offers a useful paradigm through which directors can view strictures of working with human, spatial, fiscal and practical resources. It is also a characteristic that befits the New Zealand situation and may be translated into this context, since, as Barba says, ‘[t]hese constraints decide the rules of the game and mark the boundaries of what is possible’.⁶ With a population of just 4.4 million, we understand that the parameters of working in a small nation – audience, funding, pool of available or experienced actors, number of theatre spaces, ticket buyers and relative geographical isolation – are necessary and real considerations.

The categories of form applied to theatre are another kind of overarching constraint, since the parameters of language indicate a perceived performance structure or ‘style’. This can quickly become shorthand for what an audience expects. In a low-level subsidy theatre economy such as New Zealand’s, marketing and publicity rely heavily on being able to classify what genre of product befits the theatre production on offer to a paying audience.⁷ A ‘Roger Hall comedy’, a ‘modern dress Shakespeare’, a ‘period Tennessee Williams’ – described as such or depicted on publicity images – all suggest clear packaging designed to meet audience expectations. This has not simplified how work is created, framed and delivered; if anything, the market-driven approach has resulted in work

⁵ Eugenio Barba, ‘The Essence of Theatre’, *The Drama Review*, 46.3 (Autumn, 2002), 12-30, (p. 12).

⁶ Barba, (p. 13).

⁷ My own experience as a Board Member on Downstage Theatre’s Executive Board (2004-2007) reinforced this observation. At that point, Downstage was ‘on notice’ to meet targets from funding provider Creative New Zealand. In reality, there was such a low financial buffer that every show put the company at risk of closure if box office targets were not met. In this situation theatres are wary of risk and usually play to populist taste.

that is too frequently considered popular merchandise the market demands, rather than 'art' that might challenge expectations.

The questions of 'relevance' and the 'value' of theatre as a product worthy of state funding continue to be debated. The discourse of 'national creativity' as an export product was promoted in the early 2000s, as Veronica Kelly analyses.⁸ In 2001, she argued that New Zealand had potential to be an international supplier of theatre products saying, 'advanced live theatre deals with enviable depth and thoughtfulness with issues of Māoritanga, Pacific Islander presences and indigenous-Pākehā historical relations, though women's theatre is also a vital force'.⁹

This matter of selection and packaging for the market is an age-old concern for theatre producers and managers.¹⁰ However, when comparing current work with that on offer in the early-1980s, I identify a clear change. The present features more expressly populist work programmed by large theatres that will predictably sell, compared with works more experimental in form and content during the earlier period. In 2007, Hone Kouka observed a predominant theatre culture in New Zealand; this was one that had shifted from an open position to a more conservative one. 'The openness to engage and the generosity of thought that was prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s is gone,' he noted, 'replaced with a pointed cynicism and an obvious disdain toward Māori and our work.'¹¹ While this is not a new condition, it is a clear indication of the express challenge that directors face when work is not heavily subsidised. In 1979 Peter Harcourt compared this developing, market-led condition at Downstage

⁸ See Veronica Kelly, 'The Globalized and the Local: Theatre in Australia and Aotearoa/ New Zealand Enters the New Millennium', *Theatre Research International*, 26.1 (2001), 1-14.

⁹ Kelly, (p. 2).

¹⁰ Throughout history, countless theatres in low or non-existent subsidy cultures – including those housing Shakespeare's and Moliere's companies – were well attuned to market forces, and regularly performed populist work that would sell.

¹¹ Hone, Kouka, 'Re-Colonising the Natives: The State of Contemporary Māori Theatre', in Maufort and O'Donnell, pp. 237-245 (p. 238).

to like ‘walking a tightrope’.¹² In arts management there exists a long-standing debate about whether the creation of art or perceived audience demand for product should come first. Directors everywhere face this dilemma at some stage in their careers. The directors I interviewed are acutely aware of the market-led appetite for work and the importance of the question; will it sell? To some extent this could reflect their mid-to late career position, which brings the assumption that they have paid their dues with smaller, experimental works. However, it is an ever-present constraint facing New Zealand directors.

Formative Constraints

Directors starting as actors

Directing methodology in New Zealand is distinctly actor-centric in its process and outcome. All the selected directors – perhaps typical of their generation and strata – are particularly conversant with acting process. This is in part due to the actor-centric points of inquiry in theatre making that exist in this locale; most training and theatre frames have existed around actor training models that have fed into director discourse. These were – and continue to be – derived from Stanislavskian models, rather than, say, postdramatic ones that primarily favour the directorial vision. A more potent explanation substantiated from the archive is the fact that most directors have emerged from acting backgrounds, and this remains a key formative constraint.

Hurst depicts acting as the primary performance activity that he returns to when he says, ‘I’ve always felt onstage, acting, that I have come

¹² Peter Harcourt, *A Centre of Attraction: The Story of Downstage Theatre* (Wellington: John Milne and Downstage Theatre, 1979), p. 11.

back to it like a moth to the flame.’¹³ He foregrounds the need to study the consequence of being in a nation that has many directors who started – and in some cases continue – as actors. This is a constraint that has tilted approaches toward a particular style of directing concerned slightly more with dynamic acting than, say, directorial concept. It follows a historical trend in New Zealand where directors of previous generations started and continued as actors. These include Elric Hooper, Nola Millar, Raymond Hawthorne and Ngaio Marsh.¹⁴ Mervyn Thompson recollects the aspirational threshold between acting and directing as he described working with Ngaio Marsh on *Henry IV, Part One* in 1963:

Watching all this is the actor Ngaio has cast as Worcester. I’ll never be a performer, she’s made that abundantly clear. But now for the first time I begin to wonder: could I possibly be – a Director? “Don’t get up yourself, Proc. Who the hell do you think you are?”¹⁵

Thompson’s hopeful vision of himself as a ‘Director’ is admonished as a fancy beyond his mettle. Yet like so many current directors, acting provided the pathway into a prolific directing, writing and performing career. He went on to influence future directors such as Downes,¹⁶ who recalls that in Christchurch:

Mervyn was a fantastic influence on me. He was one of the first directors I worked with when I left Drama School and I

¹³ Hurst.

¹⁴ I acknowledge that this has been a central part of theatre practice throughout history; David Garrick and Stanislavski are prime examples of actors who later became directors. In New Zealand, though, many directors will still work as actors, so it is a symbiotic relationship. Such mutability is considered common practice in a small industry. See, for example, Hurst, Downes, Harcourt and Lawrence. The latter was one of two artistic fellows in Acting from New Zealand to participate in the programme at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in 2013.

¹⁵ Thompson, p. 143.

¹⁶ Downes worked with Thompson ‘first on *Awatea*, Bruce Mason’s play – then *First Return*’. She says, ‘I was in the first production. He was very encouraging’. See Catherine Downes, interview with the author (Waiheke Island, Auckland, 26 September 2011), Appendix A.

really enjoyed the collaborative way he worked. He wanted everyone's ideas and he encouraged our ideas.¹⁷

She warmly remembers Thompson – a sometimes controversial voice of blue-collar concerns¹⁸ – as an ‘an immensely generous and celebratory director’ with strong ideas about theatre, who influenced the collaborative aspects of her directing skillset: ‘He had a vision about what good theatre was about ... He had a strong, passionate concept about what theatre should be which I agreed with, actually. And then we would put on a show *together* [original emphasis].’¹⁹ Raymond Hawthorne also influenced the early work of Lynch and Hurst at Theatre Corporate in Auckland and McColl, likewise in Auckland. Hurst says, ‘Raymond taught me about [the] flow of a piece.’²⁰ Meanwhile, McColl attributes Hawthorne’s Mercury Theatre opera productions as providing him with a theatrical vista of ‘stage pictures’ where the actors ‘all seemed so luxurious in the kind of Elizabethan sense of the word, you know, the characters at this table’.²¹ Sometimes these methods were practical, borne from Hawthorne’s own acting background, as McColl promptly explains:

I remember saying to him, “How did you get it so beautiful and so sort of ... luxurious?” ... And he said, “Well I just told them not to talk to the person *next* to them but to reach across and talk to someone *across*” ... so simple.²²

Directors starting their careers as actors has been universally and historically accepted as a legitimate way to enter the profession. In his book *On Directing*, Harold Clurman echoed earlier Russian directors such

¹⁷ Downes.

¹⁸ Viv Aitken has covered the attack on Thompson and the ensuing scandal in Auckland (1984) from the perspective of ‘theatrical disruption’ in her doctoral thesis. See Vivienne Aitken, ‘Riot’, ‘Revolution’ and ‘Rape’: The Theatre Relationship and Performance Breakdown’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Waikato, 2005).

¹⁹ Downes.

²⁰ Hurst.

²¹ McColl, interview.

²² McColl, interview.

as Evgeny Vakhtangov when he stated, 'most directors acquire their technique by having first worked in the theatre as an actor, stage manager, scene designer, producer or playwright'.²³ Yet in most countries it is not the only way into the profession. In the twenty-first century this pathway is common to the New Zealand directing experience and characterizes directing in New Zealand. Most directors have started their careers as actors, thereby bringing an acute awareness of acting process to the centre of the rehearsal room. This is endorsed by Rose Beauchamp, Anne Forbes and David Carnegie's observation in the *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre's* that most New Zealand directors 'have started as actors and have learned their craft by experience ... they tend, with a few notable exceptions, to be actor-centred'.²⁴

Eight of the ten directors interviewed for this thesis had their beginnings as actors. For half, this was as trained actors emerging from the New Zealand Drama School (for example, Hendry, Harcourt, O'Donnell, Downes and Bennett). Hurst had some training at Theatre Corporate in Auckland, while Lawrence studied theatre and film at Victoria University of Wellington. Others received their initial actor training 'on the job'. In McColl's case this was primarily in Wellington with directors Nola Millar (The New Theatre) and Sunny Amey (Downstage Theatre). This apprenticeship model was necessary because, at that time, there was no formal director training on offer in New Zealand.

Because so many New Zealand directors have started their professional careers as actors, this can be considered a formative constraint in directing praxis. Firstly, it establishes the primacy of the

²³ Evgeny Vakhtangov in Harold Clurman, *On Directing* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. x.

²⁴ Rose Beauchamp, Anne Forbes and David Carnegie, 'New Zealand', in *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre, Vol 5: Asia/Pacific*, ed. by Katherine Brisbane et al. (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 333-53 (p. 433).

acting experience as a shared commodity. Directors who have also performed understand the intimate challenges of acting and the precarious nature of driving a play night after night, beyond its opening. They have a shared language derived from the empathy of experiential 'knowingness'. Using Karl Maton's model of 'knower' and 'knowledge' modes, acting is the central 'legitimate language' that determines directing choice. In theatre language, both knowledge mode (reference to procedures appropriate to that discipline) and knower mode (personal characteristics of the subject or author) focus on acting.²⁵ 'I've been where you are, therefore I will only ask you to do what I myself would have been prepared to do', is the assumed language between a director with performance experience and their actors. The distance between actors and directors in a New Zealand rehearsal room is not, therefore, great. This differs from the European model where directors are usually trained or have developed their skills as directors without an initial, experiential acting platform. In this European model, there is a distance between actor and audience that has allowed 'postdramatic' theatre to develop and flourish beyond the norms of conventional dramatic theatre.²⁶

Secondly, the actor-to-director conduit or model elevates actor-centric language as the primary method of communication. 'Actions', 'beats', 'through-lines' and 'character super-objectives' are more prevalent phrases in most New Zealand rehearsal rooms than 'director's vision', 'multiple narrative construction' or 'playing to the genre', as might be present in a postdramatic rehearsal room. Stanislavski's central ideas

²⁵ Karl Maton, 'Languages of Legitimation: The Structuring Significance for Intellectual Fields of Strategic Knowledge Claims', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21.2 (2000), 147-67.

²⁶ 'Postdramatic', as coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann and exemplified by directors like Heiner Müller or Frank Carstorf, whose work McColl mentions. 'Postdramatic' theatre strives to produce an effect amongst the spectators rather than remain true to the text. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby (Oxford: Routledge, 2006).

about acting, most potently phrased as questions – ‘What do I want?’ and ‘Who am I?’ – are at the heart of most professional theatrical presentations of play scripts. Thirdly, it underlines the directing process as one of direct emotional engagement with the actor’s experience. New Zealand directors are regularly looking for ‘a moment’ (and, presumably, strings of ‘moments’) where the performance comes alive, and this is reiterated in the interviews. This concern with Stanislavski-based principles is a consistent conditioning factor that is shared with mainstream Western and English-speaking theatres in the USA and London, and sits firmly at the centre of New Zealand theatre directing praxis.

Hurst describes directing as an instinctive experience: ‘Sometimes when I’m directing, something will happen that really works and it can be something really tragic, really sad on stage, and my response is, “Oooh, ooh!” [rubs hands gleefully].’²⁷ Hurst says that this idea of the director being ‘the audience’s advocate’ as Nagle Jackson has suggested,²⁸ or ‘an ideal audience of one,’ as advocated by Tyrone Guthrie, is fundamental to good directing.²⁹ Hurst asserts that ‘as a director that’s all you’ve got, and you trust that if it works for me, it’ll work for them [the audience]’.³⁰ In his interview, Alfreds mentions the word ‘actor’ 185 times compared to ‘directing’, which is only mentioned forty-five times, indicating an actor-centric view.³¹ He confirms this interpretation: ‘the actor is absolutely the essence of theatre, and all you need to do theatre is [to] have actors with a story to tell’.³² The evidence shows that this is a view shared by most if not

²⁷ Hurst.

²⁸ Nagle Jackson in Robert L. Benedetti, *The Director at Work* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 10.

²⁹ Tyrone Guthrie in Benedetti, p. 9.

³⁰ Hurst.

³¹ It must be conceded that a certain bias exists in both the interview structure and my own perspective as an actor-director. Nevertheless, this is still worth noting as it suggests that acting is firmly at the centre of Alfreds’ directorial process.

³² Mike Alfreds, interview with the author (London: 11 September 2012), Appendix A.

all leading contemporary New Zealand directors, particularly those who have received their own formative training through acting.

Actor-centric quality and 'Nomadism'

Bennett echoes this actor-centric quality when he reveals that he first trained as an actor, since (at that time) this was the optimal path to becoming a director. He says this afforded him empathy as a director:

I went to Drama School to train as an actor because I wanted to be a better director. So I never wanted to be an actor. And I think I learnt a lot of mainly negative (but valuable) lessons because I went through every hell that actors can go through. So I actually understand blocks, I understand problems, I understand when your ego can get in the way, and I can speak a language that actors understand.³³

Bennett categorises himself as 'a performer's director' in that he is primarily interested in the acting experience driving the heart of the theatre.³⁴ Harcourt also describes herself as 'an actor's director' when she says, 'I want my primary relationship to be with the actor so that I go, "Oh, yay. That's really interesting."' ³⁵ She pinpoints that the genesis of her directing technique can be found in acting principles, saying, 'That's where my interest in directing really has always been. I've always been interested in directing actors.'³⁶

This actor-centric perspective is more than an emotional or intellectual fascination with the acting process; it is a distinguishing feature of New Zealand directing *per se*. Acting is a centrifugal force around which many directors have developed and honed their craft, and one to which they regularly return. Many directors, like Hurst, Downes,

³³ Bennett.

³⁴ Bennett.

³⁵ Harcourt.

³⁶ Harcourt.

Harcourt, or Hendry, still work as professional actors or teachers alongside directing work. It is accepted as common practice that, for example, acting feeds directing, directing feeds teaching, and vice versa. For most director-actors, these are not mutually exclusive careers; there is no problem with shifting from one medium to the other or working in both simultaneously.

I would suggest this interdisciplinary movement is a kind of 'nomadism' that Deleuze and Guattari have referred to as a philosophical and artistic ideal.³⁷ It allows directors to reflect on their role from a 'reframed' perspective. The theatre experience is looked at from different frames of reference depending on where that practitioner is employed and in what capacity. For Deleuze and Guattari, nomadism affords the ability for 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization'; in other words, constant redefinition of one's craft and the association to it without allegiance to any one particular structure or dogma. Nomadism brings about what they call a 'line of flight', by which Deleuze and Guattari mean the individual escapes from a definition or 'territorialisation' and finds allegiance with 'multiplicities' outside the original territory.³⁸ Often this 'deterritorialization' is momentary and perhaps inconsequential, yet this transience means the director's knowledge has shifted by the time they come back to that role. The previous position after 'reterritorialisation' exists in a new patterning.³⁹

This restriction is perhaps a very liberating feature of the domain and is a notable underlying finding to emerge from the interviews. Nomadism and its associated 'line of flight' from one territory to another means that reflexivity is acute in a relatively small industry. It is common

³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 9.

³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 9.

for directors to move from low to high culture, or from directing to acting to producing back to directing, in theatre and other forms. This constant re-navigation means that their 'director' self is 'reterritorialized' or reframed into a new territory. The archive confirms that this shift in roles results in directors who are highly proficient multi-taskers capable of adaptation and change and understanding from different points of view, with little allegiance to any one system. It does, however, deny directors forging one identity or 'voice' unless they ensconced as the artistic director of a larger commercial theatre company.

Dramatic 'process'

Penny defies the pedagogical pattern described above, in which directors start as actors. Like his counterparts, he began as an actor – 'I had my sights set on acting' – but with an emphasis on dramatic process rather than text.⁴⁰ Working in Sydney in 1984 with Francis Batten and Bridget Brandon at the Drama Action Centre, Penny encountered 'process'. He says, 'My training was without the text.'⁴¹ This teaching-performance method has roots in the work of Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton. As part of this method, teachers and students often work in and out of role, creating a performance around a problem or provocation and reflecting as they work towards a performance structure. Among other skills it requires a solid understanding of relational psychology.

This approach contrasted with the British model of training on offer in New Zealand at the time, where play texts were performed and according to Penny, 'people sort of gossiped and bitched and moaned and fell in love and so on'.⁴² With Batten and Brandon, Penny found that '[text]

⁴⁰ Penny.

⁴¹ Penny.

⁴² Penny.

was sort of considered the meat of the work as well', but 'we'd do all our work and then we'd sit down and talk about it'.⁴³ Within this framework Penny found a haven:

Maybe the most important thing about that for me was I felt so safe. I'd never felt that safe ever in a theatre ... I sort of felt like I'd come home. I'm very relational by nature, so that really made sense to me.⁴⁴

Penny's journey of a process-oriented training gave him cultural belonging in a wider sense, too. He says it afforded 'sort of a Māori setting before I'd ever been in a Māori setting (because I didn't discover my Māoritanga until I went back to University in 1987 to start that journey)'.⁴⁵ It also allowed him to learn through techniques for directing through observation while 'watching good teachers critique work'.⁴⁶ This was coupled with constant showings of work that enabled experimentation; 'the other bit was making work every week, so just sort of getting comfortable with failure'.⁴⁷

Penny's interest in 'process drama' continued with further training in Europe.⁴⁸ In 1993 he was awarded an Arts Council grant to study with Philippe Gaulier in London where; 'I did a month of *Le Jeu* with him and then two years later I did Bouffon directing a play in Sydney for another

⁴³ Penny.

⁴⁴ Penny.

⁴⁵ Penny.

⁴⁶ Penny.

⁴⁷ Penny.

⁴⁸ 'Process drama' is a method of teaching and learning drama where both the students and teacher are working in and out of role. It developed primarily from the work of Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton. Pamela Bowell and Brian Heap say: 'Often called drama in education or 'living through' drama or 'experiential drama' or 'applied drama, it is the sort of work that is created not for a watching audience, but for the benefit of the participants, themselves.' See Pamela Bowell and Brian S. Heap, *Planning Process Drama: Enriching, Teaching and Learning*, 2nd edn (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), p. xi.

month.⁴⁹ Penny credits Gaulier with significantly advancing Penny's previous practice by affording him a directing language:

It was really [through] Gaulier that I really kind of developed a vocabulary. Up until that point I think I was just trying shit out pretty randomly. And you know some of it worked but in terms of directing actors it was basic.⁵⁰

This was a method that has not always sat well or been easily understood by practitioners in New Zealand. Perhaps this is because process work requires great care, familiarity with the terms of reference and most importantly, significant time. Or perhaps there has been unequal reverence for the text and the place of 'authorial intent' in New Zealand drama. Maybe Gaulier's methods of admonishment and scant praise are too tightly embedded with his own personality to model as another person's vernacular. I would suggest that this is an example of the method of delivery being evaluated by participants as much as the method itself. As Marshall McLuhan has suggested, 'the medium is the message'.⁵¹ In this instance the nature of Gaulier's methods were embedded in the often harsh feedback messages, and the linguistic frames that reinforced hierarchical roles of 'knower' and 'apprentice'. Penny admits that his approaches (which I would argue rely heavily on psychology, emotion and the supremacy of the director) have not always resulted in happy experiences with actors. He acknowledges that his work has sometimes been vilified by actors and critics alike⁵² and he admits, 'I was definitely out of the box in the *way* of what I asked people to bring.'⁵³

⁴⁹ Penny.

⁵⁰ Penny.

⁵¹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Mentor, 1964), p. 9.

⁵² See, for example, the *King Lear* documentary to which Penny refers in his extended interview: *In the Shadow of King Lear*, dir. by Warwick 'Waka' Attewell, prod. by Caterina De Nave (TVNZ and Valhalla Productions, 1996).

⁵³ Penny.

Cultural clash of 'new' techniques

Occasionally, when 'new' or less conventional techniques that challenge existing norms of practice have come into the theatre domain, a cultural clash can occur. Directors then typically extract parts of that method apposite to their own preferred approach. The constraint then becomes a formative condition that shapes new pathways, since the hybrid result is developed in perceived opposition to 'familiar' approaches. A case in point is Theatre at Large's production of *King Lear* (1996), first produced at Point Chevalier's now-abandoned Ambassador Theatre on Great North Road.⁵⁴

Waka Attewell's infamous documentary charting Ian Mune's journey as the degenerating King, *In the Shadow of King Lear*,⁵⁵ depicts selected elements of Penny's directorial method. At the time, Penny challenged expected notions of classical and contemporary scripted theatre making practice.⁵⁶ The production's 'unorthodox' approach predicated future work directed by Penny. Stating that he and Marbrook were trying to get away from the presentation of 'literature on stage' in favour of dynamic storytelling through depiction of character and interplay, Penny delineates the chosen approach:

Traditionally in the theatre you begin rehearsal by sitting down and reading the text. We don't work like that. We want to explore a new technique; we wanted to have the actors to tell Anna and I the story every day, and in that manner discover both character and build the connection between

⁵⁴ *King Lear*, dir. by Christian Penny and Anna Marbrook (Theatre at Large, Auckland: 1996).

⁵⁵ *In the Shadow of King Lear*.

⁵⁶ The blurb to this documentary overtly positioned this unconventional approach accordingly: 'The unorthodox approach of Theatre At Large directors, Christian Penny and Anna Marbrook seems to err on the side of playfulness. But viewers are shown there is a method to their madness, when telling sections of the bard's drama are enacted in beautifully lit tableaux'. *In the Shadow of King Lear*.

them. We experiment, we make it up as we go, we play children's games.⁵⁷

This 'new technique' was approached with excitement and caution and had wary and supportive pundits alike. An interview with James Littlewood in *Quote Unquote* lingers on the perceived 'danger' of Penny's method as described by actor Rachel House; 'I was really terrified by them [Penny and Marbrook] at first, because of what they make actors do. It was very dangerous.'⁵⁸ Yet she adds, 'That's how I like to work, right at the edge ... that's how I know I'm making good theatre.'⁵⁹ Penny counteracts with, 'I don't like the use of the word "danger". Things should be exciting, but the challenge lies in realising the human potential in each scene. We're trying to find real people, but this [*Lear*] is very heightened.'⁶⁰

In the documentary, Mune begins the rehearsal journey of creating his 'real' king in extraordinary circumstances with cautious enthusiasm with regard to learning a new approach to performing Shakespeare. Declaring his existing skillset as a foil to his obvious trepidation, he states to camera:

I use the actor's skills of finding out the author's intention by analysing the text. If playing games helps to understand the text, fine. I may have to be an old dog learning new tricks. It could be interesting to see how I bark.⁶¹

And bark, he did. In the *New Zealand Herald* Mune initially called the collaborative process 'very exciting' and added, 'we're not sure what part of the coastline we're going to land on but wherever it lands, we're all

⁵⁷ Penny, *In the Shadow of King Lear*.

⁵⁸ James Littlewood, 'Danger: Actors at Work', *Quote/ Unquote*, 38 (August 1996), p. 6.

⁵⁹ Littlewood, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Littlewood, p. 6.

⁶¹ *In the Shadow of King Lear*.

responsible'.⁶² Several weeks later, however, Attewell's documentary captures an actor in distress: 'What little we have done of the text is going very much for the emotional behaviour at the heart of the thing', Mune states halfway through the rehearsal process.⁶³ This escalates further as Penny and Marbrook apparently devote almost no time to verse and metre, leaving this to the actors to pursue at their own behest. Two hours before the preview Mune becomes stuck in an early scene and accuses Penny of constantly eroding the actors' confidence. 'Go with it, Ian, it's great', Penny commands over and over from the stalls to the stage.⁶⁴ Mune angrily retorts:

Don't stand there and shout at me ... you may destabilise your actors to a certain point, but when we're coming up to a performance and you follow a policy of destabilizing your actors then you will be the one that's f[-ed] up the job ... I'm finding it extremely difficult and I'm trying to tell you so.⁶⁵

In Penny's defence, he does point out that the presence of a documentary camera crew affected the quality and output of the work; 'every time the camera crews came to rehearsal – they shot "[one] week on, [one] week off" – the actors all stopped inventing'.⁶⁶ Yet there was palpable fear amongst the cast that did little to bolster the company's attempt to stage an unconventional, contemporary version of *Lear*.⁶⁷ The production toured nationally and was seen by over 17,000 people. Some actors still refer to this process as a severely testing experience whereby the means did not justify the end product; others relished the challenge and its 'newness'.

⁶² Jennifer Little, 'Cinema Elder now King of the Stage', *Sunday Star Times*, 11 August 1996, Section F, p. 3.

⁶³ Mune, *In the Shadow of King Lear*.

⁶⁴ Penny, *In the Shadow of King Lear*.

⁶⁵ Mune, *In the Shadow of King Lear*.

⁶⁶ Penny, *In the Shadow of King Lear*.

⁶⁷ The setting elevated sleek design and a kabuki-inspired aesthetic over textual and metrical form.

Nonetheless, Penny's work with Theatre at Large and beyond has displayed a determination to create lively theatre that rejects regular shortcuts to find the essential life blood of the drama within the constraints of the connection between characters. Of his early work as a director, he says, 'I think I was looking for liveliness and scale, basically ... sort of the principles of the Commedia.'⁶⁸ According to Penny:

In a play everybody onstage knows what's happening next, where it's going. In a bad play, the audience get a sense of that, sometimes a very clear sense. The French group Théâtre de Complicité refer to a play's under-rhythm or underneath. In a lot of theatre, the under-rhythm is boredom.⁶⁹

He outlines his vision of good theatre as a seamless experience of engagement that has direct connection with the audience; 'You forget it's a play then you remember something about yourself, then you cry a little or laugh, then you realise it's over.'⁷⁰ Theatre at Large's production of *Lear* consolidated Penny's reputation for taking risks with conventional rehearsal confines. It still stands out as a watershed (if polarising) experiment in directing process that won friends and foes alike. The production dared other directors to present work of equal boldness and vision and challenge processes, even if it ignored the traditional rubrics of text and metre that ample directors hold close.

Absence of company structures

The particular condition of directing actors in a New Zealand context brings another constraint to bear. A principle observation of O'Donnell is the erosion of company structures in the New Zealand theatre landscape and the collapse of the year-long funding models of theatre companies as

⁶⁸ Penny.

⁶⁹ Littlewood, p. 6.

⁷⁰ Little, Section F, p. 3.

they moved to the Recurrently Funded Organisation model.⁷¹ This has placed huge pressure on time, resources and craft. O'Donnell cites Mnouchkine's advice to Bogart as a reflection of our current situation:

Ann Bogart says in one of her books that when she started directing, Ariane Mnouchkine said, "Well, have you got a company?" And she said, "No". Mnouchkine said, "Well you've got to have a company; you can't be a director without a company." And I think, well, what does that mean in New Zealand? Because our companies are not companies in the way that they once were in the 1980s.⁷²

Take the case of Downstage Theatre which developed the eponymous, trademark reputation for presenting politically engaging work connected closely with its perceived audience. Bruce Mason – reviewing *Deathtrap* (1979) for the *Dominion* – called Downstage 'prodigious' in its development as a theatre company.⁷³ It certainly established a strong company structure that enabled directors to take risks with form and content.⁷⁴ The same year, Peter Harcourt's *A Centre of Attraction: The Case of Downstage Theatre* listed the following employed personnel; four directors, two assistant directors, fifteen actors (associate and apprentice), three front of house; ten production staff; four administration staff, and an unpaid board of ten.⁷⁵ That equates to thirty-eight paid staff.

In late 2013 just prior to its closure, Downstage was a venue for hire that employed seven staff plus up to twenty part-time crew on a casual basis, and an unpaid board of nine. The company theatre model

⁷¹ Recurrently Funded Organisations ('RFOs') are professional organisations that receive one, two or three-year funding contracts for a range of activities agreed upon with Creative New Zealand.

⁷² David O'Donnell, interview with the author (Wellington: 1 December 2011), Appendix A.

⁷³ Bruce Mason, *Dominion*, 17 November 1979, qtd in Smythe, *Downstage Upfront*, p.212.

⁷⁴ See Smythe, *Downstage Upfront*.

⁷⁵ Peter Harcourt, *A Centre of Attraction*, p. 30.

had gone and Downstage aimed to foster the work of disparate visiting artists on a show-by-show basis. Productions were bought or co-partnered in on a singular arrangement, and the hallmarks of company longevity had disappeared.⁷⁶ ‘Our business model aims to shelter our creative risk-takers from financial pressures’, its website claimed, in well-fashioned corporate language.⁷⁷ In place of traditional theatre company roles were titles that reflected an overtly commercial structure. The Artistic Director was now ‘Director/CEO’. There was a ‘Manager of Fundraising and Stakeholder Relations’ and an ‘Associate Producer of Logistics’. This recent, eventually unsuccessful, model saw more than two thirds of Downstage’s funding derived from box office, bar sales and fundraising.⁷⁸

Visiting the theatre in late 2012, I found this was not the more heavily subsidized, politically left-leaning Downstage that I remembered from the 1980s and 1990s. Company photos had gone, the wardrobe had been sold off, and the back-alley Blair Street rehearsal studio had long since disappeared. Productions were bought in on a singular basis, and the vestiges of a ‘company’ had disappeared. In recent times the meaning of ‘theatre company’ has shifted to depict a commercial entity, not a group

⁷⁶ On 17 September 2013 Downstage announced its closure, with Chair of the Downstage Theatre Trust, Allan Freeth, citing the funding model as a failure. He said, ‘In recent years the theatre has pursued a new model – based on partnerships with artistic companies, taking risks on new works, and creating a supportive environment for artists. It is not possible to continue this work without adequate and stable funding.’ See ‘Downstage Theatre to Close’ <<http://www.downstage.co.nz/2013/09/downstage-theatre-to-close>> [accessed 28 February 2014].

⁷⁷ Downstage Theatre website <<http://www.downstage.co.nz/about-us>> [accessed 11 June 2013].

⁷⁸ See *Downstage Theatre Annual Report* (2012), <http://www.downstage.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Downstage-Theatre-Trust-Annual-Report-2012_FINAL.pdf> [accessed 11 June 2013].

of theatre makers pursuing work on a regular basis or with similar artistic focus.⁷⁹

Funding is critical to the notion of longevity in companies, and this has affected directors' capacity to develop their praxis.⁸⁰ Those without premises or with infrastructural overheads to sustain similarly illustrate this well. Theatre at Large – lauded as 'one of New Zealand's leading arts groups' when it closed in 1997 – survived a relatively short seven years after its explosive first production.⁸¹ The company depicted itself as 'a victim of underfunding for the arts'.⁸² 'Fatigue from battling for the company's financial survival is the primary reason for the decision to close', the company said in a joint statement issued by founders Penny, Marbrook and Heather Lee.⁸³ 'It is difficult to see how one can prosper and survive in the arts when the values of a market-driven economy are so dominant', the statement continued.⁸⁴ The *New Zealand Herald* article reflects Theatre at Large's disappointment of losing their \$172,000 Creative New Zealand Grant: 'The directors said arts practitioners would continue to be hampered while Governments "see the arts as a luxury in our culture and not a necessity"'.⁸⁵

By way of contrast, Théâtre du Soleil, the company Penny and other directors admire as a model of excellence in output, creative process and

⁷⁹ The best examples of company models we know of belong to actor-driven entities involving Shakespeare and Molière. Prodigious in their output, commercially successful and respected to the extent that Shakespeare was posthumously published and Molière was buried in a consecrated graveyard, they captured the benefit of extensive periods of work together as well as the genius of the actors.

⁸⁰ In 1999 Downstage was in need of a 'council funding boost to survive after the resignation of artistic director Ellie Smith'. See Pete Barnao, 'Funding boost urged for theatre', *Dominion*, 21 December 1999, p. 7.

⁸¹ Peter Calder calls Theatre at Large's work 'dazzlingly inventive', citing *The Butcher's Wife* and *Henry 8*. See Peter Calder, 'Prince of Darkness', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 May 2003, Section E, p. 2.

⁸² 'Theatre Group Admits Defeat', *New Zealand Herald*, 31 October 1997, Section B, p. 6.

⁸³ 'Theatre Group Admits Defeat', p. 6.

⁸⁴ 'Theatre Group Admits Defeat', p. 6.

⁸⁵ 'Theatre Group Admits Defeat', p. 6.

company structures, has been described by Kiernander as ‘one of the most heavily funded private companies in France’.⁸⁶ Accordingly, we must take note of this as an exemplary and, arguably, extraordinary condition. While New Zealand will never have the funding resources of France or larger economies, there is truth in the reality of the fiscal and other limitations forced on directors in a cultural context where sport is valued more highly in terms of investment than the performing arts.

The rebranding of the ‘Arts Council’ to ‘Creative New Zealand’ (‘CNZ’) in 1994 signalled a particular change towards a market-driven ideology nationwide in theatre. John Smythe notes the close connections when he says, ‘Claudia Scott (chair of the first CNZ Arts Board) was the wife of the head of Treasury (driving the ‘Rogernomics’/ Ruth Richardson market forces agenda)’.⁸⁷ Smythe suggests that with New Zealand’s major theatres, the change towards business models rather than company structures ‘probably began at Downstage, given their severe financial problems and somewhat in the light of the different Circa model’.⁸⁸ While economic imperatives would have encouraged Artistic Directors – likely at the behest of their boards – to hire actors for more than one play in succession so they could rehearse by day and perform at night for the same wage as actors doing just one or the other, in reality this did not often happen. Theatres became reluctant to hire actors on long-term contracts and cast numbers dwindled. Plays with three to five actors became sought after, while large casts of ten or more were – and still are – considered risky ventures.

⁸⁶ Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p. 4.

⁸⁷ John Smythe, email to the author, 12 April 2013.

⁸⁸ Smythe, 12 April 2013. Smythe also notes the complexity when he states: ‘I don’t think it happened as a QEII / CNZ directive. My feeling is the change in approach came from within the companies, and may have reflected a change that was happening throughout the English-speaking world.’

Craft and language

What does this tight environment mean for New Zealand directors? The first casualty is consistency of craft and language. This can only be obtained through an ensemble of some kind where regularity of practice is possible. O'Donnell makes the point clearly when he states that lack of opportunities to steadily work with a group of actors is severely limiting, compared to some European models:

I feel really frustrated in some ways working in New Zealand, because almost every time I do a play I'm working with completely different people. I was very fortunate last year I got to see the latest play by the Théâtre du Soleil ... they had rehearsed that for nine months.⁸⁹

McColl concurs when he mentions the ideal of a long company rehearsal process embodied by director Ivo van Hove, who runs Toneelgroep in Amsterdam. McColl favours the approach that eschews the typical 'crazy' four weeks' rehearsal time in New Zealand productions. For him, the Dutch company are 'a wonderful, wonderful company and an ensemble that have been together for a long time'.⁹⁰ McColl distinguishes this as a 'European' convention: 'That's what you find in a lot of those European companies ... they have ensembles that have been there for many, many years working together, [with the] same actors.'⁹¹ McColl suggests that such companies 'develop a shorthand [way] of working with each other, which is lovely', although he cautions against the sluggishness that can be a disadvantage of the continuous ensemble 'if you've got lazy actors'.⁹² Despite wishing for it, he suggests that the ensemble model is not likely to

⁸⁹ O'Donnell, interview.

⁹⁰ McColl, interview.

⁹¹ McColl, interview.

⁹² Both positive and negative effects of the theatre ensemble can be seen in the amateur domain, where actors often work for many years in the same hermetically sealed performance community without having to compete for roles, often replicating different versions of the same performance language and expectations. They also develop a shorthand way of understanding one another.

be part of the New Zealand professional theatre fabric: 'I don't think we're ever going to have that [model] here; it's [now] not the nature of making theatre in this country.'⁹³

O'Donnell extrapolates further that – although it is an extreme ideal – with long rehearsals over many productions, Mnouchkine's ensemble company Le Théâtre du Soleil is able to refine a performance language that is relatively devoid of ego. He remarks, 'The older actors, they'd be in their fifties or something; fantastic, powerful actors, but they were equally at times just in the chorus doing what a twenty-year-old might be doing.'⁹⁴ Hendry talks about lack of ego as a highly admired feature that can be attained through consistency of practice:

I think that's really something that the Alfreds work when I've worked with the best, is that we somehow get away from [ego]. So like Stanislavski, like what those guys did way back in Russia when they sat for hours and the manifesto of the Group Theatre, is that there aren't stars.⁹⁵

Without the long-term commitment of working together, however, it is very hard to maintain a co-operative working method that is devoid of 'stars' and directors have to reinforce this in their rehearsal methods, or at least encounter it.⁹⁶

The other fatality of eroding the practice of hiring actors on a recurrent basis is a shared working language.⁹⁷ This is a particular constraint that has forged fast ways of working with actors who are

⁹³ McColl, interview.

⁹⁴ O'Donnell, p. 9.

⁹⁵ Hendry.

⁹⁶ Take, for example, the press release for Thomas Sainsbury's 2013 play *Cat and Mouse* at Auckland's Basement Theatre, which describes its two actors in direct relation to screen work; 'Cast: Elizabeth McGlenn (TV3's *Hounds*, *Ding Dong*, *Bollocks*) and Roberto Nascimento (*The Somnambulist*, *Chub*, *Terror Planet*).'

⁹⁷ Actors are now typically hired by theatre companies on a play-by-play basis, compared to the practice of employing them for more than one play. The latter would see actors rehearsing by day and performing by night. Although challenging, this provided continuity of practice.

familiar with processes or working languages such as ‘action’ and ‘objectives’. Most directors speak of the immense value of having a ‘shorthand’ language with particular actors. It is worth noting that familiar concepts – ‘beats’, ‘through-lines’ – exist amongst actors and directors who have trained or regularly worked together.

Lynch explains that there is huge benefit in finding common ground when he says, ‘if I’m working with an actor I haven’t worked with before then I like to meet with them and have a conversation with them about the process that I work in.’⁹⁸ Lynch refers to a particular occasion when he encountered this head-on while putting together a season of plays at Downstage Theatre to be performed over six months in the early 1990s. Two of the four shows were to be directed by him, and after meeting with a particular actor and discussing his process, she ‘turned down the six months’ work’,⁹⁹ which is nevertheless a decision Lynch applauds:

I really valued that. I certainly never held it against her because I mean, what’s the point? If she’s not enjoying the way that I’m working then she’s much better off working with somebody else, you know? And then she’s not struggling in the rehearsal room or speaking behind my back or anything because she’s been quite clear about what she does think and I admired that, it’s great.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, David Lawrence observes that small theatres have their down-sides, too, as the economy of scale with small theatres is challenging:

I reached I think a very frustrated point a few years back where I realised I’m never going to earn any more money than what I’m presently earning doing this, I can’t make better work than what I’m making because I don’t have the financial

⁹⁸ Murray Lynch, interview with the author (Wellington: 2 December 2011), Appendix A.

⁹⁹ Lynch.

¹⁰⁰ Lynch.

resource so yeah, there's a finite amount that you can do with a three week season at BATS.¹⁰¹

Actors multi-tasking

Like directors, actors in New Zealand have often been compelled to multi-task in many different mediums in order to sustain an income. This includes radio, television, theatre, film, and sometimes teaching as well. In contrast to Europe or the United States there is no classical theatre circuit to maintain a performing specialty in a particular field of drama. Therefore it is likely that an actor who encounters a Shakespeare text might have not performed verse for some time if they have come from a contemporary radio play, television commercial or Theatre in Education '(TIE)' touring group.

This can be immensely challenging for both actor and director to maintain a level of proficiency with particular styles of work, let alone the 'shorthand' vocabulary that comes from consistency of practice in singular modes. For example, directors working on Shakespeare might be working with seasoned actors who have not worked with classical text for months or, occasionally, years. Voice coaches, like dramaturges, are not standard positions in contemporary theatre companies so the responsibility to 'up skill' the actors in these areas will likely befall a director. Vocal and physical demands of working in large theatres are very different to those required to work in radio or on film shoot locations. Some actors in New Zealand counterpoint acting with other activities that employ aspects of their performance skills; teaching, directing, writing or producing, but theatrical fitness is likely to suffer if continuity of practice is not possible.

¹⁰¹ David Lawrence, interview with the author (Wellington: 1 December 2011), Appendix A.

Veteran actor Simon Prast who trained at Theatre Corporate in Auckland (graduating in 1984) is a case in point. In a recent interview, Prast happily refers to his many other professional roles over the years; lawyer, talent agent, director of a theatre company, arts festival director, mayoral candidate, with the latest being a marriage celebrant.¹⁰² This plurality of roles is not uncommon in New Zealand as actors transfer their performance skills to other complementary fields. 'I do think that actors can have another role to play', Prast qualifies, 'and I can talk and I have a sense of occasion, if you like, and perspective.'¹⁰³

Unless employed on a long-running television production such as *Shortland Street*,¹⁰⁴ such multi-tasking between projects and mediums is common. Many actors see this diversity as a way of staying in the profession, even on a part-time basis. This often means that actors are unable to commit all of their time to a project unless it has significant or upfront funding. Other work frequently has to supplement the theatre wage or anticipated co-operative pay cheque. Directors who work on a co-operative share basis with cast and crew are all too familiar with having to put actors' availability before a pre-planned rehearsal design and schedule. Whatever the preferred performance language at work in the rehearsal room, this quality of multi-tasking between acting, directing, writing, producing and teaching is not considered an anomaly in New

¹⁰² The programme notes for *Anne Boleyn* list Prast's credentials as many and varied, from his legal and acting training through to running 'as a candidate for Mayor in Auckland's first Supercity election'. See '*Anne Boleyn* programme', Auckland Theatre Company, 2 July 2013, p.9.

¹⁰³ Simon Prast in Michele Hewitson, 'Michele Hewitson Interview: Simon Prast', *New Zealand Herald Online*, Saturday 8 June 2013
<http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10889088>
[accessed 11 June 2013].

¹⁰⁴ *Shortland Street*, prod. by John Barnett, Chris Bailey and Simon Bennett (South Pacific Pictures, Auckland, 1992-).

Zealand. It is instead the reality of having a career in the performing arts in a small country.

This plurality of disciplines can mean actors are sometimes not 'match-fit' in a singular medium, thereby forcing the director to be voice coach, movement specialist and director. This is an important by-product of constraints. It can also have unexpected benefits since one position can offer an enhanced understanding of the role from another viewpoint. Directing has forced my own process as an actor to be clearer from moment to moment, while understanding the elements of dramatic structure and the weight of what's *not* said in writing, has made my own directing more economical, and the narrative analysis clearer.

Other directors speak of this correlation between the disciplines. Hurst refers to good theatre as an act that is 'like a ritual ... it's a communion, a true sharing of in-the-momentness' that everything must head towards'.¹⁰⁵ This implies a direct understanding of the dynamic and immediate nature of the actor-audience relationship. Harcourt is similarly focussed on acting to the extent that as a director and coach, she is overtly working with acting technique:

At the moment I've stripped back; I've gone, "What is it about directing that really, *really* interests me?" And it is performance. I've stripped back to just directing performance. So in terms of directing performance, I do that through my teaching and my coaching work [original emphasis].¹⁰⁶

Working in small spaces

Small performance spaces are a common limitation in the New Zealand context. These have often led to the creation of specific techniques. Larger performance spaces such as the Maidment Theatre, ASB Theatre or Q

¹⁰⁵ Hurst.

¹⁰⁶ Harcourt.

Theatre in Auckland are expensive to hire; hence, many directors will create work in other spaces with close proximity to audiences. Directors have found the virtue of working small spaces. Hurst highlights the crucible effect of smaller theatres when he says, 'I love the bubble and energy of working in tiny spaces like The Basement.'¹⁰⁷ BATS (Wellington) and The Basement (Auckland) frequently see experienced directors working cheek by jowl with new recruits to the profession.

This has had some unforeseen consequences resulting in theatre that is compelling for an audience in close vicinity. Hendry pinpoints the 100-seat BATS theatre with providing 'an environment where you've got a close proximity to an audience'.¹⁰⁸ He cites his production of *Laughing Wild* (1999) as an example of BATS' small size affording the work with a particular connection to story and situation, stating, '[t]he way that the actors found the story-telling and realised the world of the play in that close proximity was good'.¹⁰⁹ Added to that, the closeness of the audience forged a performance that had 'if not the true authenticity you have with New Zealand work, it had authenticity and it had investment'.¹¹⁰ Bennett also cites the intimate ninety-two seat BATS Theatre (which he co-founded) as a place of 'exhilarating' performances.¹¹¹ Bennett says that his production of *Blue Sky Boys* (1991) 'had a fantastic, raw energy to it' that was in part due to the spatial limitations of the venue: 'I think the acting was really good, the musical performances were dynamic and in BATS Theatre which is only a ninety-two-seat little space it was very in your

¹⁰⁷ Hurst.

¹⁰⁸ Hendry.

¹⁰⁹ Hendry.

¹¹⁰ Hendry.

¹¹¹ BATS founders Simon Bennett and Simon Elsom had an over-arching policy for the venue which was 'to rekindle the popularity and accessibility of theatre for young people and to provide a venue, a training ground and a way in for young people struggling to forge careers in the difficult world of professional theatre'. See BATS Theatre website, <<http://bats.co.nz/shows/history>> [accessed 11 July 2013].

face. It was quite an exhilarating experience for audiences.’¹¹² The commercial success that followed this production was in direct relation to the intimate style developed by the venue, as they discovered after it was transferred to a larger venue:

We sold out ... so we transferred to the St James in Wellington and we went straight from ninety-two seats at BATS to 1500-odd at the St James. I think we did three or four performances there. We didn’t fill the St James but we played to about eight or nine hundred a night, and the experience of doing that was really exciting for all of us.¹¹³

This is a programming pattern related to economics that is still practised in Wellington. In recent years, if a show does particularly well at BATS it is usually able to transfer across the road to Downstage Theatre or another larger venue. While this minimises box office risk, it also gives the production more room to ‘breathe’ in a 240-seat (or bigger) auditorium.

Short rehearsal times

As previously mentioned, the typical rehearsal time in New Zealand professional theatres is four weeks. This includes production time of up to one week, which is a very tight time frame for crafting work of a high professional standard. Inevitably, this leaves little time for experimentation with process and as McColl says, ‘Four weeks’ rehearsal. It’s crazy (laughs).’¹¹⁴ The resulting emphasis on *product* rather than *process* has created a condition where the overriding accent is on commercial production.

As Simon Bennett notes, ‘The big problem I’ve found with theatre [in New Zealand] is that it’s just so under-resourced financially, you don’t have the time and you don’t have the people needed to make things

¹¹² Bennett.

¹¹³ Bennett.

¹¹⁴ McColl, interview.

happen.’¹¹⁵ As rehearsal periods have got shorter and shorter, a move towards focusing on the end product has become a necessity. Bennett says:

I actually think that a lot of the play and freedom that can happen in the best theatre; it’s [economics] a contributing factor to it not happening. Short rehearsal periods mean that actors are much more afraid to take risks and fall over. They go for the easy choices because they have to, because they’re on in three weeks. So you end up with an evening that is made up of much more obvious and safe choices.¹¹⁶

This is a characteristic restriction in New Zealand where, despite the desire for exploration, the environment so often dictates a narrower approach. Bennett explains:

I don’t think in this country with the levels of funding as they are anyone can actually afford to fail. So everyone has to play it safe in what they programme, they have to spend as little as possible in getting something up, and it’s all a vicious circle of pragmatic compromise that leads to work that often, usually I think, is bland and safe ... end result, product. And it’s not to do with the creative talents of the people involved because there are some fantastic people who are still working in the industry. It’s just simply it’s the way in which the work’s done which is dictated by money.¹¹⁷

Epic plays that demand large casts or longer rehearsal times are a luxury and are seldom performed by professional theatres. In the programme notes to ATC’s 2013 production of *Anne Boleyn* (with its cast of thirteen experienced and debut actors) McColl states that the production is ‘our 21st birthday treat to ourselves. Big cast, big ideas, big-hearted meaty theatre’.¹¹⁸ Large cast plays have also become an anomaly in the professional domain. In 2014, New Zealand audiences are well attuned to seeing three to six actors in a show playing single or multiple roles,

¹¹⁵ Bennett.

¹¹⁶ Bennett.

¹¹⁷ Bennett.

¹¹⁸ Colin McColl, ‘*Anne Boleyn* Programme’, p. 3.

whereas the task of mounting large scale works is often left to drama school or performing arts programmes. They are more able to employ their large student cohort to populate the play in a slightly longer rehearsal time frame.

Shakespeare is an exception to this rule, perhaps because of the interpretive challenge that is always potent. However, it must be noted that every professional company who mounts a Shakespeare considers it an extravagance, and a potential box office risk, rather than a necessary part of the contemporary theatre company's canon. As a result, directors are most usually working with relatively small casts, so the inter-relational personal and character dynamics are arguably more concentrated. Even with the strong networking, education, performance and development opportunities put in place by the Shakespeare Globe Centre New Zealand, fewer than ever full scale professional Shakespeare productions are now performed in New Zealand.

Style of production: signification as the result of economy

Limited resources have shaped the need for theatre directors (and designers) to be increasingly selective with materials on stage in New Zealand. This constraint has developed an aesthetic that is often particularly pared-back and minimal, a feature of the directing practice voiced in the archive. Harcourt says she embraces 'cheapness' as a constraint that limits choice to unify the production and signify meaning. Implicit, signified denotation is a characteristic of both her acting and directing style.

She recalls the tarnished aesthetic and pared-back set of *Verbatim* (1993), which was essentially about the sullied repercussions of making

the 'wrong' or 'right' choice in life. By taking the principle of damaged bodies presented through more than thirty interviews with convicted murderers, their families and the families of murder victims that construct the piece, Harcourt explains, 'we got Marilyn Tweedy [a high-end fashion designer] to design *Verbatim* which had that shitty, white look to it'.¹¹⁹ The audience were led through a worn, monochrome, almost Brechtian visual scheme that depicted a tarnished but sparse world. In this manner the visual backdrop became the interface to construct meaning from the contrasting verbatim accounts in the piece. This design underlined a naked, tarnished, honest theatre experience between Harcourt's characters and the audience.

Similarly, Harcourt cites *Short Sharp Shakes* (2002, 2003), the first-year Toi Whakaari production of Shakespeare scenes which she produced and directed.¹²⁰ The constraints of small budget and no set plus minimal props, determined the aesthetic:

At Toi Whakaari, remember when we were doing those Shakespeares [scenes]? We'd go, "Okay, this year everyone has to be red. You can wear whatever you want but this year it has to be red." And everyone had to wear bare feet and red, it would be in traverse and you were allowed one prop or something. I think that those constraints can be really interesting and they're really interesting to watch, because then you go, "well, I know that I'm watching a *set* of something".¹²¹

Harcourt articulates a feature present in the work of many other directors when she says, 'I'm watching twenty-two young actors who are constrained by the unity of the challenge but who are all doing something completely different. There has to be some kind of unifying [factor]'.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Harcourt.

¹²⁰ I was one of the directors.

¹²¹ Harcourt.

¹²² Harcourt.

Her fondness for unity and economy of design was present in another production, *Much Ado About Nothing* (1999) at Downstage Theatre. The set contained a huge macrocarpa tree that towered over the actors and became a symbol of familial connections, fecundity and the interconnectedness of a community. She says the polymorphic meanings of the tree resonated strongly: '*Much Ado* just had that tree. I just loved that; that the tree meant so much. Obviously trees mean lots of little different things to people.'¹²³

Harcourt explains that the process of installing the actual tree in the theatre – although challenging – contained a certain grace that filtered through the rest of the production:

We negotiated with the Council – and even the process of negotiation was elegant because Andrew Thomas designed it and he's really elegant. He negotiated with the Council, they gave him the tree – we came up here, we cut it into sixteen bits, transported down the hill to Downstage, carried it up the stairs and bolted it together with these big bolts, sixteen pieces, re-bolted the tree together.¹²⁴

She describes the effect of the tree as a 'magical' surprise for the audience:

Everyone knows that Downstage is on the second floor and so we replanted this tree with the bolus of the tree, it was sandy earthiness underneath it that was the playing area and people would come up the stairs and go, "Oh my God, there's a tree growing on the second floor of this building".¹²⁵

This quality of what Harcourt calls 'surprisingness' – of usurping expectations of theatrical 'tricks' – reveals a touchstone of her directing style; that of direct association with reality. Where possible she wants to present actual 'reality', and through that, allow the audience to see an

¹²³ Harcourt.

¹²⁴ Harcourt.

¹²⁵ Harcourt.

articulation of truth that is uncluttered and refined. In the case of *Much Ado*, she explains how the ‘transplanted’ real tree on stage provided:

that dislocation between what you know is two storeys above the earth but you see a tree, a macrocarpa tree whose roots appear to be growing out of the stage really appeals to me ... a *real* tree. It wasn’t an expertly rendered version of a tree which is what you expect to see when you go to the theatre.¹²⁶

This style of production is summed up by Harcourt’s assertion that, ‘I don’t want to see, “Gosh that’s a good tree”. I want people to go, “that’s a tree and it’s a *real* tree!”’¹²⁷

McColl’s work is similarly very pared back to the essential elements of set and costume in order to signify certain aspects of the text, or to encourage audience engagement with the construction of meaning. This is not necessarily determined by fiscal constraints, but an aesthetic belief in the possibility of audience engagement with the performance. The programme notes for ATC’s production of *The Pohutukawa Tree* (2009) clearly state that ‘director Colin McColl wants to focus on the value of the text rather than providing “an oil painting of the 1950s”’.¹²⁸ This, it reports, ‘means the production is not naturalistic in its approach’.¹²⁹ It continues with an explicit invitation to the audience to shadow the actors’ inter-textual readings of the play, and engage with the present-day potential of this classic New Zealand drama. This contains a semi-Brechtian offer to impart some distance between themselves and the drama:

The actors are very emotionally engaged and at the same time they’re examining the text, so that audiences today can look at the play and see that this is a fantastic piece of New Zealand writing from the 1950s ... they can laugh at bits of it if they

¹²⁶ Harcourt.

¹²⁷ Harcourt.

¹²⁸ Colin McColl, ‘*The Pohutukawa Tree* programme notes’, Auckland Theatre Company online <http://www.atc.co.nz/media/121564/2009_pohutukawatree> [accessed 8 July 2013], p. 12.

¹²⁹ McColl, ‘*The Pohutukawa Tree* programme notes’, p. 12.

want to, whatever, so that we just give ourselves a bit of distance from it ... We're not saying to the audience "get lost in the world of this play", we're just saying "look at what's going on between these characters, look at the way the story's unfolding."¹³⁰

This approach is married with a desire 'to encourage the audience to engage imaginatively with the play'.¹³¹ McColl aimed for a fairly minimalist approach to the setting:

We thought it as important to put some air around it, so that we could all bring our imaginations to work on it, but we could also bring our questioning minds to ask "Have things changed? How have they changed? Have they changed that much, really?" Hopefully the production will set that sort of furious debate going amongst the audience at the end.¹³²

This was augmented by an explanation of a production and performance style that happily embraced an economic mode of storytelling that focussed explicitly on narrative, energy and focus. The programme states, 'Colin's approach is to eliminate most of what he calls the "embellishments" of theatre.'¹³³ McColl explains that:

We talked a lot about how we all create work, and we liked the idea of that moment in the rehearsal room, when you're just in the final runs of the play and everyone's imaginations are at work. It's absolutely electrifying. And then in the theatre it gets complicated by costumes and all the paraphernalia of putting the thing on stage – stage lighting, and all of that. We wanted to get that feeling of when the play is pure, and everyone in the room is contributing all their energy and focus and concentration on the work – on telling the story. That is what we want to try and create in the way that we present this production, so it's clean and clear. When you're doing a run of the play in rehearsals, everyone is very respectful of what's going on on the floor. There's a parallel there with the marae.

¹³⁰ McColl, 'The Pohutukawa Tree programme notes', p. 12.

¹³¹ McColl, 'The Pohutukawa Tree programme notes', p. 12.

¹³² McColl, 'The Pohutukawa Tree programme notes', p. 12.

¹³³ McColl, programme notes, p. 13

There's a protocol there, and there's a protocol in the rehearsal room, we all like to think. You're very respectful of the speakers or the people who are doing the scene.¹³⁴

This emphasis on 'telling the story' has developed through a long association between McColl and theatre designer Tony Rabbit. Rabbit understands the constraints of resources and, from that, works to create the most effective platform within which the narrative can take place. McColl has commented to Lynn Freeman that through his partnership with Rabbit, he is 'interested in making the ugly and asymmetrical, trying to find beauty in that'.¹³⁵ In 1989, McColl described Rabbit as 'an idealist and a romantic – the perfect balance to my more cautious, pragmatic approach'.¹³⁶

By McColl's own admission, his first major undertaking with Rabbit was 'somewhat of a controversy'.¹³⁷ With the poolside *Romeo and Juliet* (1987), the duo 'deliberately took a strong conceptual line on the production' with the express aim of 'making the script particularly accessible to audiences approaching a production of Shakespeare for the first time'.¹³⁸ McColl adds wryly: 'The fact that the purists hated it gave the public's positive response an added touch of satisfaction.'¹³⁹ This relationship has been enduring and successful, despite McColl's admission to their 'legendary fights'.¹⁴⁰ Rabbit has brought an essential

¹³⁴ McColl, programme notes, p. 13.

¹³⁵ Lynn Freeman, 'Colin McColl raw interview with Lynn Freeman' (Radio New Zealand), 2002 [CD].

¹³⁶ Wellington, Alexander Turnbull Library, Downstage Theatre Key personnel file – Colin McColl, Reference MS-Papers-8874-24, 'Colin's Contribution: Farewell Speech to Downstage Theatre', 2 August 1989, p. 8

¹³⁷ Reference MS-Papers-8874-24, 'Colin's Contribution: Farewell Speech to Downstage Theatre', 2 August 1989, p. 8.

¹³⁸ Reference MS-Papers-8874-24, 'Colin's Contribution: Farewell Speech to Downstage Theatre', 2 August 1989, p. 8.

¹³⁹ Reference MS-Papers-8874-24, 'Colin's Contribution: Farewell Speech to Downstage Theatre', 2 August 1989, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ McColl, interview.

component to McColl's interpretive style; for example, the pile of red scoria in *The Master Builder* (1995) that Laurie Atkinson called a 'great raw wound'.¹⁴¹ Susan Budd noted: 'Tony Rabbit's set, with a huge pile of scoria tumbling from a high funnel shape on to the stage ... is powerfully and unashamedly symbolic'.¹⁴²

McColl and Rabbit's working relationship has developed into a sophisticated method that McColl calls 'a kind of shorthand, which is great'.¹⁴³ It allows interpretive risk to thrive. As O'Donnell notes, McColl 'used the tactile quality of the material to heighten the physicality of the acting, as in Hilde's entrance. Rather than knocking on the front door, as in the script, she bursts down the scoria slope, returning from a journey into the bush'.¹⁴⁴

This 'shorthand' surely includes a shared understanding of what constitutes the most effective signification in the play. McColl explains that while designing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2012), Rabbit suggested a completely minimal set. He thought this would reflect the potential for the audience to bring their imaginations to bear on the performance, while elevating the emotional muscularity of Shakespeare's text:

Rabbit kept on saying, "You don't need a set; it doesn't need a set". And, "Give me an empty space"... That's all you need. It's also a purist kind of way to do it or as Dominic Dromgoole would say, "Ninety per cent of Shakespeare productions in the UK in the last twenty years have all been on plain stages and, God, can't we have decoration somewhere in Shakespeare?"¹⁴⁵

The style of production in McColl's *Dream* eschewed decoration. Rabbit's stage with bright red wooden slats made up a giant, undulating bench seat reminiscent of a Salvador Dali dreamscape at dusk. This

¹⁴¹ Ctd in O'Donnell, 'Redirecting National Identity', p. 4.

¹⁴² Susan Budd, 'McColl provides new insights on Ibsen', *Dominion*, 12 April 1995, p. 9.

¹⁴³ McColl, interview.

¹⁴⁴ O'Donnell, 'Redirecting National Identity', pp. 4-5.

¹⁴⁵ McColl, interview.

structure covered the entire space, rising on a rake and folding over before disappearing upstage.¹⁴⁶ Scarlet red silks draped the playing area above and at each side, while guitar music strummed. Into this environment, Puck appears; naked chest, black jacket, black trousers, silver belt buckle, all snarling attitude and seventy-six years old. He winks at the audience, mischievously tags his moniker with spray paint on the side of the stage and flits off. Into this arena come Theseus and Hippolyta; he is dressed like a David Duchovny silver fox, while she is a South Pacific Queen Latifah.

The text is crisp and fast, sometimes too glibly delivered but rhythmically accompanied by a live guitarist or done as rap. An eclectic assortment of actors dressed in tightly sculptured couture of black and white pepper this Athens, and we as audience constantly negotiate the challenging, tumbling red landscape before us. Here, the 'rude mechanicals/That work for bread upon Athenian stalls' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.2, ll.9-10)¹⁴⁷ are the wedding caterers, palace workmen, rat exterminators and tradesmen. The four lovers are rich kids with too many trinkets and too much time on their hands, and the audience is expected to construct the real landscape of this *Dream*. It highlighted McColl's growing interest in minimalism. As he told me, 'I understand why Beckett got down to just the mouth on stage because you want to distil and distil and you don't want any crap, you don't want any decoration.'¹⁴⁸ Ultimately, McColl follows a growing tradition that favours a 'less is

¹⁴⁶ At the post-show forum of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* designer Tony Rabbit described the set as 'Jungian; undulating deep like an unconscious thing that appears in a dream and drives all of us.' Auckland Theatre Company post-show forum, the Maidment Theatre, 7 May 2012.

¹⁴⁷ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.2, ll.9-10, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 311-333 (p. 322). All references to Shakespeare, unless otherwise noted, will be from this edition and cited parenthetically.

¹⁴⁸ McColl, interview.

more' approach to performance. This is an aesthetic necessitated both by fiscal constraints and finding the essential elements of a drama. It can also ascribe to the audience a role of partner in the construction of meaning.

The Australian playwright Andrew Bovell has drawn attention to the connective nature of theatre, saying that he goes to cinema 'to escape ... to take me out of my own life,'¹⁴⁹ whereas he suggests that theatre affords the audience an opportunity to connect at deeper levels of meaning related to making sense of life:

In theatre I often go to it hoping that it will illuminate my life, if that makes sense ... I do think there is an expectation for tradition, for history, [and] for theatre to address the big questions of the day. That's the kind of theatre I respond to; I like theatre that has a political sensibility to it.¹⁵⁰

Downes has also frequently suggested that theatre offers the chance 'to escape from life or make sense of it'.¹⁵¹ The latter definition is one echoed by Hurst when he speaks of the classical tradition we have inherited in contemporary theatre that is a 'transformative medium' with immense 'power'.¹⁵² Hurst explains that theatre is essentially about making sense through connection when he says, '[Good theatre] is like a ritual... It's about a communion, a true sharing of 'in-the-momentness' and all of that stuff. So everything must head towards that'.¹⁵³ McColl also alludes to this when he says that the contemporary theatre has potential to be something vital:

I don't know if this is the essence but theatre's function has sort of changed. I mean of course there's the entertainment

¹⁴⁹ *Andrew Bovell: plays and screens*, prod. by Mark Cubey, 'Saturday Morning with Kim Hill' (Radio New Zealand National, Saturday 17 August 2013).(15:17).

¹⁵⁰ Bovell, (15:37).

¹⁵¹ See Smythe, 'Downstage Becomes Downes' Stage: Leading Director Returns to Take Over Her Home Town', *National Business Review*, 24 September 2005 <<http://m.nbr.co.nz/article/downstage-becomes-downes-stage>> [accessed 10 March 2011].

¹⁵² Hurst.

¹⁵³ Hurst.

value but it's almost replaced the church now as a place for contemplation where you can sit and contemplate the lives of others and predicaments, moral or otherwise, or argument ... So at its finest and purist, I think that's what it is.¹⁵⁴

In 1989, McColl had a vision for Downstage as 'a theatre that is open, unpretentious, vigorous and in tune with its audience'.¹⁵⁵ This description still applies to interpretive directing at its finest, and theatre at its most dynamic.

In the pursuit of contemporary dynamic theatre in New Zealand, constraints have paradoxically also elicited freedoms. As this chapter has argued, notable restrictions evidenced by the interviewees include directors commencing their theatre careers as actors; short rehearsal times; the emphasis on dramatic 'process' as opposed to text; the absence of company structures to provide support and continuity; and finally style of production. Directors also note fiscal constraints and their own nomadism as conditions that have an impact upon their craft. Mike Alfreds suggests that he tells actors, 'whatever the limitations, you can still have enough skill and knowledge to steer your way through a bad situation'.¹⁵⁶ This is true of directors too, who have sustained and extended their praxis in, because of, and in reaction to, constraints. For New Zealand theatre directors then, clearly less is more. The following chapter continues this theme to investigate the freedoms inherent in the New Zealand directing context.

¹⁵⁴ McColl, interview.

¹⁵⁵ Reference MS-Papers-8874-24, 'Colin's Contribution: Farewell Speech to Downstage Theatre', 2 August 1989, p. 17.

¹⁵⁶ Alfreds, interview.

Chapter Four: Freedoms

High Country Weather

Alone we are born
 And die alone;
 Yet see the red-gold cirrus
 Over snow-mountain shine.

Upon the upland road
 Ride easy, stranger:
 Surrender to the sky
 Your heart of anger.¹

James K. Baxter's dramatic, poetic exhortation to transcend the domestic and inhabit the epic through a journey might be viewed as the anthem of many New Zealand artists. It is especially fitting for contemporary New Zealand theatre directors. Creating as it does moments or hours of fleeting verisimilitude, theatre is a time-based art form that has the capacity to connect its audience with imaginative, humanistic landscapes: a larger, experiential sky. Baxter – also a playwright – understood that the epic in life was inherently dramatic and able to connect with numerous and shared sensations. Like a dangerous, potent play, the landscape of 'High Country Weather' is wild and dynamic. Read another way, this poem captures the solitary path taken by directors who – through their relative isolation – also encounter enormous freedoms in this evolving craft. In the New Zealand landscape, directors are at the heart of constructing this experience, and they know only too well the challenges of making work through which an audience of 'strangers' can connect with or surrender to, a larger vista.

¹ James K. Baxter, 'High Country Weather' in *James K. Baxter, Poems: Selected & Introduced by Sam Hunt* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), p. 9.

This chapter addresses significant concerns related to the unique situational factors facing the majority of directors in New Zealand, and the subsequent opportunities that arise in this context. While the previous chapter has argued that certain limitations govern the theatre domain, this chapter suggests these parameters have also afforded the development of enormous freedoms in directing. For example, directors have regularly expedited selected techniques because of the restraints of money and time. Artistic risk, genuine exploration, cooperative effort, a melding of techniques and creative proximity to each other have been found to be liberating factors for these New Zealand directors in their quest for dynamic performance. This chapter considers settings, and the quality of risk and techniques used to address the potential freedoms of making theatre in an isolated landscape that is still refashioning techniques and shaping its identity. The paradox at the heart of this chapter is that structure is the constraint that gives freedom, and ultimately, dynamism between actors; the 'spark', of which McColl says, 'one's looking for that connection all the time'.²

Settings

Theatre directors in New Zealand work in a profession that is often solitary. Baxter's observation of loneliness is apposite for them; unlike actors, there is currently no agent, guild, or dedicated centre for theatre directors in this country. A letter from McColl to past Downstage artistic director Sunny Amey drew attention to this when he wrote of this solitude:

Really is a very lonely occupation being a director isn't it. No perhaps lonely isn't the right word – a distanced occupation –

² McColl, interview.

the way one has to distance oneself from actors, production workers etc, etc – so you can get a perspective – an overview. Nature of the job I suppose – eyes and ears of the audience, and all that.³

Yet the isolation McColl refers to – from, amongst others, Europe and America, parts of the industry, cast and crew, and playwrights dead or alive – also affords directors the springboard for enormous freedoms. These liberties have borne witness to certain techniques made possible by this segregation. In this relatively solo occupation they may be ‘born alone’, but through the work directors seek unity; with a company of actors and technicians, with an audience, with a wider international fraternity or with the very ritual of theatre itself that pursues communality through specificity.

One degree of separation: access and ethos

New Zealand is a highly accessible society within which freelancers can quickly reach people with extensive experience. Class structures are not nearly as entrenched (or visible) as those in, say, England, and the promise of social mobility, together with a lack of deeply ingrained social conventions, mean that directors have immense freedom to harness talent across the social spectrum. Bennett suggests that New Zealand creativity is vibrant and mobile when he says, ‘this country actually spits out people with great talent,’ and he is right.⁴

The idea of egalitarianism treasured by most (but by no means all) New Zealanders means that unfettered access to almost everyone in the industry is practically a phone call away. This is possibly also a function of size and living in one time zone, as much as egalitarianism. It is feasible to

³ Wellington, Archives New Zealand, Sunny Amey Collection, Colin McColl Correspondence re Downstage, Reference R2617467, Box 4, McColl to Amey, 1985.

⁴ Bennett.

establish contact and make work with almost anyone in the industry, even without a proven track record. This has resulted in exciting collaborations between directors and performers who can move with relative ease laterally and horizontally in the profession, a situation sometimes made more pronounced with the constraints of time and funding that are so prevalent.

A case in point is Hurst's solo show *No Holds Bard* (2011-2014), originally devised in 2011 with two recent graduates of Toi Whakaari whom Hurst believed could give the show some 'edge' and honestly expose its weak points. The show is still being developed and performed, and observers who interrogate the artefact track its progress as an example of energy and dynamic risk-taking in performance.⁵ Hurst embraced the fresh thinking and honesty of the two young practitioners, saying:

I'm enjoying working with these young people, because they give me wisdom ... I asked Natalie Medlock and Daniel Musgrove to write it with me, and for Natalie to direct me, because I want people to tell me if they don't believe me.⁶

This irreverent, vibrant work continued to flourish in its development and garnered five-star reviews at the 2013 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The *Edinburgh Spotlight* effusively called it 'a tsunami of a performance ... A breath of fresh Shakespeare air and a comedic head-

⁵ Of the 2012 production, Mark Houlahan writes, 'Michael Hurst's first solo show is terrific ... It is the most entertaining and refreshing solo piece since the very first run of Jacob Rajan's *Krishnan's Dairy* in the 1990s. Hurst is a great theatre actor, but his propulsive energy can seem baffled and thwarted by mainstream roles.' See 'Thrilling Collision of Characters: *Frequently Asked Questions: To Be or Not to Be*', *Theatreview*, 6 July 2012 <<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=4955>> [accessed 10 March 2014].

In late 2013 when the show had changed its name, Johnny Givins writes, 'This is a one man inferno of energy blown through the prism of Shakespeare and forged with the skill of a craftsman ... Physically this is the most demanding performance I have ever seen in a one man show. Hurst does not hesitate to go further than anyone before.' See 'Hilarious, Awe-Inspiring Great Fun: *No Holds Bard*', *Theatreview*, 5 June 2013 <<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=5998>> [accessed 6 June 2013].

⁶ Hurst, interview.

bashing all in one!⁷ Central to this accessibility – and the possible collaborations that can result – is cooperative effort.

Cooperative effort

The power of cooperative effort underlines directing process as a liberating force worth noting. In recent times we have come to refer to this practice as ‘collaboration’, which most often means a form of interdisciplinary theatre that requires directors devote utmost attention to narrative structure and how the various elements intersect.⁸ However, this in part springs from a highly democratic arrangement of theatre production, that of the cooperative.

‘Co-ops’ are the favoured production model for most small-scale works. Members of a production take a collective risk on the creative and financial rewards or spoils of the work, meaning that up-front funding is not necessary. The expectations of a cooperative are a more stringent form of the collective model employed in an on-going theatre company where the group is responsible for the level of artistic and financial outcomes. Being able to make work with people from all corners of the industry has undoubtedly forged a collaborative mentality with most directors, not to mention a capacity to multi-task. As noted earlier, many directors have had to take on the role of dramaturge, stage manager or producer alongside that of director. This is common practice even in regular ensembles such as Lawrence’s *The Bacchanals*.

⁷ Danielle Farrow, ‘Fringe Review: *No Holds Bard*’, *Edinburgh Spotlight*, 2 August 2013 <<http://www.edinburghspotlight.com/2013/08/fringe-review-no-holds-bard/>> [accessed 10 December 2013].

⁸ For example, *My Bed My Universe* (Auckland Town Hall, 2 April 2014) which was billed as ‘A huge collaboration between some of New Zealand’s most dynamic performers in their field...Massive Company join forces with NZ Trio, playwright Gary Henderson and musician Chris O’Connor in the multi-faceted *My Bed My Universe*’. See <<http://www.eventfinder.co.nz/2014/my-bed-my-universe/auckland>> [accessed 2 April 2014].

Noting it as a 'profound' part of the New Zealand directing domain, Downes admits that multi-tasking is a necessary part of a director's skill set. She says: 'It's a similar thing to collaborating with other people rather than just holding on to one single thing which is your idea, which is power and control. Multi-tasking involves talking to people and a more lateral approach.'⁹ Downes mentions Australian director Aubrey Mellor, who she worked with at Nimrod Theatre Company (Sydney). Mellor's work was often praised for the strength of its collaborative acting, as was the case with his *Three Sisters* (1981) in which Downes played a 'moody, disappointed Masha', one part of a 'triumphant trinity' of sisters.¹⁰ Harry Robinson described the performances that Mellor 'coaxed out of his cast' in this 'fine production' as 'dazzling'.¹¹ The incisive direction that created work where 'characters are established with rapidity and certainty,' had an impact on Downes.¹² She says, 'I learned most of my directing techniques from Aubrey.'¹³ She describes Mellor's directing strategies built on mutuality between actor and director that elicited great freedom:

He let you go, let you go, and then when he saw where you were going he'd just start 'skilling' you in terms of how you could go on your journey more marvellously, and that's what he did. And I looked at how he did that with me and that's the kind of confidence and skill that I try to impart to my actors. Essentially letting them do what they want to do until I see where they're all trying to go and where the framework of this collaboration we are creating is trying to go, and then as they start to tune where they're going, then my tuning comes in to focus as well.¹⁴

⁹ Downes.

¹⁰ Harry Robinson, 'The Groom Pierced by Brilliance', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 March 1981, p. 45.

¹¹ Robinson, p. 45.

¹² Robinson, p. 45.

¹³ Downes.

¹⁴ Downes.

This capacity and desire for collaboration is a quality that comes through with most of the directors interviewed. Downes references Shane Boshier's 2010 Silo Theatre production of *When the Rain Stops Falling* as an example of excellence with collaboration; a 'production [that] lifted the play off the page excellently'.¹⁵ For Downes, the production was a good example of what drove her directing sensibilities 'in both form and content'¹⁶:

Its form is an installation design piece married with a text-based piece married again with improvised, no text-based, expressionist, semi-dance movement. So it's almost multi-disciplinary – which I think is a pretty potent way to go in creating work – to work with other disciplines.¹⁷

Downes, like several directors, acknowledges Robert Lepage's work as a multi-disciplinary model to aspire to. She says his technically innovative theatre (several of his productions have toured to New Zealand) offers 'the most exciting form of multi-tasking theatre, collaborating in terms of form and its content is looking at serious questions that we face as a universe, globally'.¹⁸

On closer inspection it would seem that there is inherent connection between New Zealand directors and Lepage's post-colonial concern with 'décalage' or 'jetlag'. James R. Bunzli suggests that Lepage 'uses the term 'décalage' figuratively as the 'physical and psychological discomfort that can result from travelling to another country'.¹⁹ Bronwyn Tweddle has noted this 'displacement or disorientation' in Lepage's work as a prominent feature that is borne out by the creative tensions between

¹⁵ Downes.

¹⁶ Downes.

¹⁷ Downes.

¹⁸ Downes.

¹⁹ James R. Bunzli, 'The Geography of Creation: Décalage as Impulse, Process, and Outcome in the Theatre of Robert Lepage', *The Drama Review*, 43.1 (1999), 79-103 (p. 90).

French and English cultures.²⁰

I suggest there are parallels between Lepage's multifarious, interdisciplinary and questioning theatre that seeks to reinvent modes of cultural perception, and the concerns of the directors interviewed for this project. There exists a post-colonial interrogation of ideas exploring displacement, and the identity of belonging to somewhere or something. This is particularly evident as these New Zealand directors negotiate how to stage 'classics' in a way that renders them accessible for contemporary audiences. Robust interpretive directing requires a certain confident stance to be present and 'awake' to the concerns of its audience, while being faithful to the essence of a play. This brings to the fore another duality that directors constantly oscillate between; the micro and macro.

Detail/big picture dichotomy

Dichotomy is central to the essence of theatre, since at its core it is built on the notion of conflict. New Zealand text-based theatre frequently displays a fascination with either detail or broad strokes, and sometimes, both. Head of Directing at Toi Whakaari, Brett Adam, noticed this in claiming that New Zealand script-based theatre was 'either too focussed on every moment, or too concerned with the broad strokes of the narrative, but rarely a combination of both'.²¹ While this view is a valid, when these two elements come together the resulting work can be exciting. English director Katie Mitchell stresses the co-existence of imagination (at the macro level) and clarity (at the micro level) in the successful directing

²⁰ Bronwyn Tweddle, 'Robert Lepage and *Far Side of the Moon* in Context', *Illusions*, 34 (Winter 2002), 28-33 (p. 29).

²¹ Brett Adam, conversation with the author, Toi Whakaari, Wellington, 2012.

process.²² This dichotomous perspective affords directors with enormous freedoms to fluctuate between, for example, the minute detail of a moment or an action, and the more peripheral view of a play text's overall driving 'through-line'.

Bennett is aware of this necessary contrast when he suggests that the clash between close detail and wide perspective is rooted in theatre's spatial and visual arrangement that is a 'three dimensional space and a perpetual wide shot', in which 'you are directing audience focus through how the actors move and exist within that space'.²³ Compared to screen where, 'you're dealing with [a] two dimensional, artificial impression of three dimensional space and you're telling the story through selective focus', he suggests that in theatre, directors are 'showing the audience where to look through your shot selection'.²⁴ Lepage has also noted the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' ways of telling a story on stage.²⁵ For many directors this choice comes about by narrative deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of the text. Bennett says: 'Part of my job as director is to break the text down into units which are I guess narrative beats – that's how I like to think of them, anyway.'²⁶

Bennett credits detailed analysis of the text to the overall lucidity that resides in his work, and this is emblematic of how other directors

²² Outlined in Katie Mitchell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2009).

²³ Bennett.

²⁴ Bennett.

²⁵ Lepage says: 'There are two ways of telling a story: there's a metaphorical way and there's a metonymical way of telling a story. Metonymy is more a horizontal thing: beginning, middle, end – things happen in a certain order. Metaphorical storytelling is when you've seen a piece of theatre and you say, "There was this going on, but at the same time there was another level that's going on, then there's this other level and things seem to be connected in a vertical way: things are piled up." ...I'm not saying that one medium is better than the other, I'm just saying that there are some stories that are better told in a vertical way and others in a horizontal way.' Robert Lepage, 'Robert Lepage in Conversation with Alison Mcalpine at Le Café Du Monde, Quebec City, 17 February 1995', in Delgado and Heritage, pp. 133-157 (p. 144).

²⁶ Bennett.

work. He says that combing through the script in detail can trigger different responses to how ‘layered’ moments can most effectively be played:

It’s really all about layers and the thing about the kind of rehearsal process that Mike Alfreds outlined was that you’re never trying to attempt too many things at any one time. You’re concentrating on just one thing, one aspect of what you’re doing and you’re just doing it many, many times, each time concentrating on a different aspect.²⁷

This, he suggests, is a creatively liberating process:

For me directing ideally is like that, in that you are continually going over and over and over a work, but each time you go through it you’re concentrating on a different facet. A different part of your imagination or mind is coming to play.²⁸

Bennett juxtaposes detail with continuity, saying that sharp analysis of the text is key to shaping the overall narrative direction. He says, ‘I think all my Shakespeare productions have been very clear because it’s about illuminating the play; and because we break everything down in such minute parts it can really, really sing and fly.’²⁹ He credits successful directing experiences to ‘story continuity ... a lot of freedom and a lot of play’.³⁰ In an approach similar to O’Donnell and Lynch, Bennett tributes action-playing as a fundamental building block; ‘the more active the verb the better, because the next step of the process is for the actors to actually get up and physicalize that verb’.³¹ He explains:

For instance, “To be or not to be” might be expressed as, “I weigh up to be or not to be”. It’s finding an action verb that

²⁷ Bennett.

²⁸ Bennett.

²⁹ Bennett.

³⁰ Bennett.

³¹ Bennett.

can describe what it is that the character is doing from moment to moment to moment to moment.³²

As a logical consequence of this detailed analysis, Bennett finds that 'a lot of physical contact between the actors' is 'an improvisation process'.³³ This is where the 'broad-stroke dynamics of the piece [start] emerging very, very, strongly and clearly'.³⁴ A dichotomous view relates to how directors reflect on both the component parts and overall structure, as he explains:

I think it's really important to constantly as a director to be able to keep referring to that. "This is what this moment is about, am I honouring that? Is this moment still alive?" Because you have to keep that right through to the end, or the story becomes unclear.³⁵

For Bennett, beats are essential components that provide 'the way for me of understanding how the story works'.³⁶ In an Alfreds-inspired manner, he will title them and allow that description to drive the unfolding narrative of the play. Various things can 'determine when a new beat starts; it might be a new character enters, it might be a new piece of information, it might be a new impulse from a particular character', says Bennett.³⁷ Logic sits alongside intuition here, as he suggests that 'you can always feel it, it's like music, there's a shift where a new unit starts'.³⁸ He will then title each beat, being explicit that the purpose is to 'impose that structure on the cast and on the piece'.³⁹

³² Bennett.

³³ Bennett.

³⁴ Bennett.

³⁵ Bennett.

³⁶ Bennett.

³⁷ Bennett.

³⁸ Bennett.

³⁹ Bennett.

Genuine exploration

Underlying the symbiotic approaches of logic and intuition – and despite the ever-present resource constraints – the interviews show a candid desire for genuine exploration in the rehearsal process. This is surely inherent to dynamic theatre, in which there is an honest attempt to engage with a journey rather than ‘end-gaming’ a result. In 1998, Charles Marowitz described this as a radical act that runs counter culture to everyday experience when he wrote: ‘The actor’s journey must be the antithesis of the commuter’s. There should be dialogue, discussion, and the vigorous interchange of ideas all along the way. Every bit of landscape needs to be assimilated; every passing observation analysed and disputed.’⁴⁰

In this frame, the rehearsal process is seen as an opportunity to explore and then refine the narrative and sub-textual components of the play without knowing what the outcome will be. Hendry summons Stanislavski and Alfreds when he suggests that ‘the idea of constantly discovering a play rather than thinking you have something to find and then present’, is crucial to dynamic directing.⁴¹ From Alfreds, Hendry learned the ‘ideal’ that, ‘every night you have a recipe and you re-cook the meal rather than re-heating it in the oven, and then presenting it to the audience. So therefore it will be different; there will be difference’.⁴²

Bennett also upholds the aspiration of genuine engagement with an organic process of discovery where, ‘the concept has grown out of the rehearsal process. Every aspect of it, costume, design, set, everything, I would prefer to grow out of the rehearsal process’.⁴³ In an Appreciative

⁴⁰ Charles Marowitz, ‘Otherness: the Director and the Discovery of the Actor, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 14 (1998), 3-8 (p. 8).

⁴¹ Hendry.

⁴² Hendry.

⁴³ Bennett.

vein he explains that: 'My ideal would be to actually start the rehearsals with a blank piece of paper and a designer in the room. That's my dream. I've done it on a couple of occasions and it's worked really well.'⁴⁴ Structure will provide the framework for this discovery. Bennett explains that the map he relies on is derived from Alfreds, and says: '[I]f you divide the rehearsal process into three strands which is character, text and world of the play or world of the piece, then that still underpins the approach to the play.'⁴⁵ This approach is heavily dependent on the element of time; as already proposed, this limitation is one condition that forces a focus on the end-product. This conflict between a desire to engage with investigation and the ability to do so is a constant tension. Nevertheless, directors are keen to genuinely explore the play and its theatrical potential.

This has direct roots in the Stanislavski-Alfreds-derived approach to directing. Alfreds explained that unchartered investigation both affords freedom and is itself creatively liberating when he says, 'with my process of opening things up, allowing people to explore and giving them great freedom ... it's been utterly joyful'.⁴⁶ A specific example is his production of *Private Lives* (1996), for which Alfreds and his cast of four had 'a long, long time to rehearse', adding somewhat wryly that, 'nobody thinks you should give that amount of time'.⁴⁷ He adds, 'because we dug into it and it was totally free, (and we didn't aim for laughs and explored the characters truthfully) that was a wonderful rehearsal process as well as a very good production'.⁴⁸ Time is a factor that Bennett reminds us can help or heed this kind of approach. He qualifies long and detailed exploration as a

⁴⁴ Bennett.

⁴⁵ Bennett.

⁴⁶ Alfreds.

⁴⁷ Alfreds.

⁴⁸ Alfreds.

process that will build detailed playing and, perhaps of equal significance, 'trust':

I mean this approach – and another reason why I don't do it so often, fully – and why rehearsal processes need to be long enough for it to really work, is that it requires actors to trust each other completely. If you get actors who are closed rather than open or who are frightened or are making sad choices it can be quite terrifying for them.⁴⁹

Lynch learned early on in his career the liberating benefits of not knowing the performance outcome of a stable text. He explains:

I found it quite freeing to start exploring more with the actors rather than defining the moves; taking them into the rehearsal room and adjusting and doing all that, but being completely in this instance, now, not defined. And so that helped free up from that point on.⁵⁰

Although very different in her approach to directing text, Harcourt likewise stresses the importance of investigation that is mapped, but not fully plotted in its execution. She says, 'I think you genuinely have to have the spirit to enter into exploration with the particular actor you're working with, and to go, "Yeah, it's an amazing discovery."' ⁵¹ She attributes this to her tendency to 'think very fast', so that often her preparation is 'fast and light'.⁵² The result is a present-moment process that relies primarily on the actor-director relationship, free of totally preconceived formulations of how the performance will be constructed. She states that, 'it's not until I actually get into relationship [with the actor] that things drop down to be slow and heavy in terms of the way that you can debone something and then re-articulate it'.⁵³

⁴⁹ Bennett.

⁵⁰ Lynch.

⁵¹ Harcourt.

⁵² Harcourt.

⁵³ Harcourt.

Bennett concedes that there is an inherent risk in categorically engaging with process, rather than outcome, particularly when time is short. He suggests this means working 'from the inside-out', saying, 'a lot of people work from the outside [-in] and never get very far in; that's the problem'.⁵⁴ However he advocates it's a gamble worth taking to create a rich performance experience, stating, 'You always run the risk if you don't know what you're going to end up with of falling flat on your face, but it makes it an adventure, a journey.'⁵⁵

Memories of how a text was brought to life in past or concurrent productions cannot always be completely blocked out, either, as Bennett articulates: 'If you've done a production of the play it's very hard to completely shut out memories of that production and start from a blank slate again.'⁵⁶ With Shakespeare this can be particularly tricky, since 'the depth in that work is huge and you never stop discovering things'.⁵⁷ However, as we are exposed to less work in New Zealand than many other countries, it is arguably easier for directors here to be fresh in their interpretive stance of a text. The spirit of adventure that drives most dynamic work is constantly pioneering, looking for a new way to understand old stories. Hendry underlines the interpretive approach that means a classic text feels as if was written yesterday. A contemporary edge to the work was successful in his 2006 production of 1968 'queer classic', *Boys in the Band*:

That was extremely satisfying, particularly for Auckland to do that at the Silo with that team of actors and for people who really "poo-pooed" me doing it suddenly going, "It feels like it was written today." And I love that when you as a director can [get that response], so that's a mark of success, if you're taking

⁵⁴ Bennett.

⁵⁵ Bennett.

⁵⁶ Bennett.

⁵⁷ Bennett.

what is deemed to be a play out of date, then that's a mark of success.⁵⁸

Risk can also mean genuine, organic interaction with the process of mounting a play where the outcome is unmapped.

Risk

Michel Saint-Denis has said that to express something effectively in theatre one needs two things: substance, and the means to articulate it.⁵⁹ As might be predicted, methods of expression or transposition vary between directors, but those interviewed for this study all knowingly engage with the concept of creative risk. This is particularly evident when working with smaller scale productions, although risk does not necessarily diminish with larger works since the elements at play are on a different scale, but essentially the same. Furthermore, risk is a quality that relates to dynamism in theatre and how directors encourage the audience to be readers who construct the performance between actor and audience. It is also evident when there is very little ingrained hierarchy, and mobility/accessibility are characteristic of the profession. Risk, then, is a prominent freedom of the domain.

Potential danger bites into the core element of live theatre. Grotowski offered theatre frames that were 'risky, often marginal, highly-charged, risk-taking'.⁶⁰ In mainstream theatre these principles can also apply. If an audience senses the work is predictable – and arguably too 'safe' – then

⁵⁸ Hendry.

⁵⁹ Saint-Denis, p. 72.

⁶⁰ Richard Schechner, 'Exoduction', in *The Grotowski Sourcebook Worlds of Performance*, ed. by Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 462-494 (p. 464).

what Hurst calls the 'looking at the watch syndrome' can dispel audience attention:

I have this real mission to fight the "looking at the watch syndrome" – you know, "Oh, is that the time?" If you're watching a show and for any reason the power of it drops and you look at your watch...that's why I'm always on the lookout for that when I'm directing my shows. I don't want anyone to look at their watches at any point.⁶¹

Bennett reinforces this view of active engagement when he warns that avoiding risk can itself be a trap; 'a lot of theatre is so careful it doesn't want to create, it doesn't want to be too strongly flavoured in case the audience is put off'.⁶² Bennett advocates uncompromising elements, too when he says: 'I think theatre should be strongly flavoured ... It should be visceral; it should really take people on a journey.'⁶³ This desire to 'build in big surprises' drives the philosophy of calculated danger that has 'always been at the heart' of his praxis.⁶⁴ Bennett describes this individualism as a particular trait of his directing work, saying, 'Someone wrote once that my plays were always iconoclastic, fiercely physical and always centred on the text, which I take as a compliment, but that's how I'd like my work to be seen.'⁶⁵ Such a unique combination in a small industry is itself precarious.

Penny also recognises that risk is essential for work to be dynamic. In the case of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (2009), he stresses that instinct for character came before form, stating that instinct was all he had to rely on. Like Brook's 'formless hunch' – 'A certain powerful yet shadowy intuition that indicates the basic shape, the source from which the play is calling'⁶⁶ –

⁶¹ Hurst.

⁶² Bennett.

⁶³ Bennett.

⁶⁴ Bennett.

⁶⁵ Bennett.

⁶⁶ Peter Brook, *There Are No Secrets* (London: Methuen, 1993), p. 119.

Penny says, 'all I've got – I had three hunches, those hunches about the kid,' and, 'it [the play] didn't cohere until really late'.⁶⁷

Risk might involve direct engagement with the notion of change, where the only constant seems to be mutability as the work is reworked and refined. Hurst explains that change is a necessary part of his process that gives exciting results, as evidenced in the 'complicated' 2001 production of *As You Like It*:

You come back to the fifth act and you go, "Right, well, now it's all different. I'm going to change this and I don't apologise for that." I tell actors all the time, "I may change things." You just go with it and don't get irritated. Because change – movement – is really important.⁶⁸

Lynch concurs that transformation is crucial to exploration, saying, 'in the rehearsal room you learn more about the play; that means you would have made changes if you could, or you do make changes'.⁶⁹ He points out that change is frequently, however, 'a victim of the short run-in time or the long run-in time if you're dealing with a larger company where you have to have the plans to workshop two months before you start rehearsals'.⁷⁰ Bennett also stresses mutability, which he attributes to answering the need at hand. He will not 'dictate a particular rigid approach' because 'everything has to be tailored for the piece that you're doing and the cast that you're working with, the group of people that you're working with'.⁷¹ He states: 'So I can't be rigid. I have to have a fluidity.'⁷²

⁶⁷ Penny.

⁶⁸ Hurst.

⁶⁹ Lynch.

⁷⁰ Lynch.

⁷¹ Bennett.

⁷² Bennett.

Proximity to Audience: Theatre Sites

Occasionally, directors have taken risks with rehearsal conditions such as location, and proximity to the audience is a notable freedom of directing in New Zealand.⁷³ If dynamic theatre lies between the actor and audience, then in a small space it can become even more potent. O'Donnell explored this when working on *Richard the Third* (1992), and found that the coastal environment lent other elements to the production that a rehearsal room alone could not:

We had a weekend away, a sort of retreat in Kapiti. We performed it on the beach, we performed it in a room. There were about fifty people in it like in the lounge room of this house where we were staying. And I thought those are just wonderful; I love the idea of performing a play in lots of different places.⁷⁴

O'Donnell describes 'one of his greatest experiences' as an actor experimenting with location in Dunedin while doing *Larnach Castle of Lies* (1994) at Larnach Castle.⁷⁵ This took place in the imposing nineteenth-century stone hilltop mansion a few days before the show opened at the Fortune Theatre:

[T]he season in the theatre always felt like a bit of a downer after having done this really 'fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants' performance where suddenly instead of being on an end stage or in traverse you have to always be standing, because the audience can't see you. There was a gale blowing and all the smoke blew into the room so people were coughing and

⁷³ This approach has full maturity in site-specific work such as Paul McLaughlin's *Hotel* (2007, Museum Hotel, Wellington) set in a hotel room; *Salon*, dir. Paul McLaughlin (February 2010, Grace Hair Salon, Wellington), a naturalistic hairdressing drama set in a working salon after hours; and *Adrift*, dir. Kerry Palmer (A Site-Specific theatre piece at Seatoun Beach, Wellington, October 2012). For commentary on site-specific theatre, see Lisa Warrington, 'Performance as Palimpsest: Leaving a Trace Memory in Site-Specific Performance', in *Scrapbooks, Snapshots and Memorabilia: Hidden Archives of Performance*, ed. by Glen McGillivray (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 207-228.

⁷⁴ Bennett.

⁷⁵ *Larnach Castle of Lies*, dir. by Lisa Warrington (Dunedin, 1994).

wheezing, and it was so alive and dynamic and all the actors were charged and energised; it was such a memorable night.⁷⁶

For Penny, performing *The Crucible* in a school environment gave the work lucidity and connection:

[T]wo great things happened. One, was it was crystal clear when they were acting because the kids would just start talking to each other, and when the characters were real or they'd all revealed, so when Tausili [Mose] came on as the mother in the second act she walked around and she had this beautiful thing where she walked around because they were all sitting in a circle, she walked around and walked past the girl, past a girl, to a boy and go ... she got the thing of the mother and the son out of that room, and we all knew it. That was a mother of sons because she ignored these girls ... Prior to that we'd been running the first scene and it was sort of going nowhere.⁷⁷

Hurst's work is characteristically energetic and muscular, and he will often get involved in the work to drive up the dynamic. (A Facebook post and accompanying photo by Auckland Theatre Company stated, 'Michael Hurst is a bold, passionate and visionary director. Here he is in action at yesterday's Vodafone season of *Chicago* [2013] rehearsal - love how involved he gets with the action on the floor.')⁷⁸ Hurst confesses that a lot of New Zealand theatre he sees is 'tidy ... by that I mean theatre that has a cool, neat design, that overlays passion'.⁷⁹ However, he also cautions that: 'You cannot take it for granted that you are good or interesting.'⁸⁰ Hurst's solution to this is to take risk with the concept of each work, rethinking it anew each time as with his productions of *Cabaret* (2010) and

⁷⁶ O'Donnell.

⁷⁷ Penny.

⁷⁸ ATC 'Facebook' feed for *Chicago*, 16 October 2013.

⁷⁹ Hurst. I acknowledge that there is a market for this kind of polished theatre production that sits well with what the subscribers are seeking; however, that is not what I am predominantly interested in researching.

⁸⁰ Hurst.

The Threepenny Opera (2008). He describes *Cabaret* as ‘a wonderful experience, because everybody just ... went for it’.⁸¹ His *Threepenny Opera* ‘was marvellous to direct, too, because we just really went for this incredibly Brechtian thing, and I did not take any prisoners’.⁸² While Hurst describes his uncompromising vision as ‘so clear’, he still ‘felt scared most of the time, [asking] “is it going to come together?”’.⁸³ This fear was not due to being ‘scared of the piece’, because he was familiar with the shape of it. Rather, he wondered if the ‘concept’ would ‘actually sell’.⁸⁴ Hurst’s initial interpretive confidence only returned once he could see the whole piece coming together: ‘And then I saw it coming together in the theatre and I thought, “Oh, God, this is so amazingly Brechtian.”’⁸⁵

‘Evocative Dramaturgy’ and ‘Studium’/ ‘Punctum’

In contrast, Hendry is attracted to plays ‘that work myth and memory and imagination ... that meld truth and reality or play with perceptions or viewpoints that constantly shift’.⁸⁶ This kind of theatre that isn’t neatly ‘packaged’ or finite in its presentation of meaning is risky, since it abandons any finite interpretation, or potentially, a collective audience response. Contemporary theatre is edging towards a more active engagement with this flavour of direction and performance.

This instantly brings to the fore Barba’s notion of ‘evocative dramaturgy’ that works towards dynamic energy on stage. It is also perhaps the ultimate aim of effective drama, since it is ‘the faculty of the performance to produce intimate resonance within the spectator’.⁸⁷ For

⁸¹ Hurst.

⁸² Hurst.

⁸³ Hurst.

⁸⁴ Hurst.

⁸⁵ Hurst.

⁸⁶ Hendry.

⁸⁷ Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy*, p. 10.

Barba, organic or dynamic dramaturgy is 'the performance's nervous system', the narrative is its 'dramatic cortex' and evocative energy is 'that part of us which lives in exile within us'.⁸⁸ Hendry speaks of working to 'allow the audience to read difference so that the audience isn't seeing necessarily the same story, that a story can carry different narratives'.⁸⁹ *The Pitchfork Disney* (1999) 'came quite close to [his] strongest work [in this regard]' since it presented no one 'finite thing,' but 'a metaphor that has fluidity'.⁹⁰ This resonates with Hendry, Hurst, Downes and McColl – and to some extent even Harcourt, who ironically eschews the imagination in favour of the experiential, yet advocates shared understanding through particular detail.

Drama that uses myth/memory in narrative forms is risky. It brings to mind Shakespeare's audience with their diverse collective and individual evolving frames of reference, and for whom drama would have resided in the complicit understanding that audience and actor construct the meaning of the drama in the space between. This is the ultimate risk for the director; creating drama where understanding is partly reliant on signs, systems and social constructs of myth or storytelling, and partly in the impact of personal resonance. This is perilous since myth is both collective and personal. Like a true shared experience, it can be at once mythic, culturally specific, direct and personal. From one performance to the next, no director can clearly predict audience response.

Hendry suggests that too much transference of meaning through particular setting can limit the layers of reception. Here he refers to Brook's notion of 'theatricality': 'Of course it's not real but the great game

⁸⁸ Barba, p. 10.

⁸⁹ Hendry.

⁹⁰ Hendry.

is we buy into it.’⁹¹ Sometimes, Hendry says, the application of too many representational frames of reference – as opposed to presentational – can diminish the effect:

[I]f we try to make it too real when we’re dealing with Elizabethan dramaturgy, say, which isn’t about putting an event historically, truthfully on stage, it’s about exploring mythology, if we try to do that I think we lessen the impact.⁹²

Hendry offers that when he works with all plays (and ‘definitely in Shakespeare’), he is interested in ‘how the relationship with the audience can open up worlds, and open up the ideas and the experience and allow the audience then to read what they read’.⁹³ The most important thing to work towards here, he suggests, is to give *theatrical possibilities* that allow an audience to construct meaning through narrative. By way of explanation he refers to ‘what we know of [Shakespeare’s] audience’ who were ‘looking for story and listening for story’ as a prime example of dynamic interaction with the audience.⁹⁴ This ‘listening for story’ had direct bearing on how the audience would be made to appropriate meaning from the play and ‘how it affected them’.⁹⁵ In other words; evocative dramaturgy. He continues: ‘You know that thing that Alan Howard says in the *Playing Shakespeare* videos where he talks about the notion of apprehension, not comprehension, but how the Elizabethan sensibility was to apprehend, to “sense understand”.’⁹⁶

Barba’s notion of evocative dramaturgy also has parallels with Roland Barthes’ two concepts of ‘studium’ and ‘punctum’ that he

⁹¹ Hendry.

⁹² Hendry

⁹³ Hendry.

⁹⁴ Hendry.

⁹⁵ Hendry.

⁹⁶ Hendry.

advances in *Camera Lucida*.⁹⁷ The book – cited by Harcourt as a text she repeatedly returns to for inspiration – investigates how a photographic image can have an effect on the spectator. Harcourt’s reading of Barthes’ text stems from an interest in the particular view of having dialogue with a reader, or audience through signs and systems (‘studium’), and its particular resonance with individual or collective audience members (‘punctum’). Her strongest work such as *Romeo and Juliet* (2004) exhibits an evocative setting (usually contemporary), informed by clear aesthetics. In this way the text, like the locale, is considered to be one element of the primary pathway of connection between actors that drives her work.

I suggest the analogies are clearly visible in relation to how we might construct and read a dynamic play’s effect on an audience member. ‘Studium’ denotes the ‘cultural, linguistic, and political interpretation of a photograph,’ while Barthes suggests ‘punctum’ is ‘the wounding, personally touching detail which establishes a direct relationship with the object or person within it’.⁹⁸ In this sense theatre can be seen as a kind of living photograph, where symbols denoting cultural meanings and values are used. The mechanics of composition are the components here that take Barthes’ semiotic reflections on symbolism and its signification one step further to personal importance; ‘punctum’. The punctum is the liberating aspect. This is the personal and significant image that hits home; the punch line which creates the story and connects it to another level of significance for the viewer.

Harcourt’s work is rooted in specific, personal storytelling, and she recurrently talks about ‘universality through specificity’. *Flowers From My*

⁹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 26-8.

⁹⁸ Barthes, p. 28.

Mother's Garden, *Voiceover*, *Verbatim* and even *Kaz: A Working Girl*⁹⁹ contain personally significant stories which rely on punctum to signify meaning for its audience. The most recent production of *Flowers* (2012) has been described by John Smythe as 'a prime example of how universal the particular can be'.¹⁰⁰ This dimension, while always risky, is a profound feature of the landscape in New Zealand that renders directors enormous freedom to affect the audience as individuals.

Encountering Theatrical Naïvety

Some directors speak about meeting audience theatrical naïvety in the staging of work as an inherent peril that can be seen as a certain freedom in New Zealand. This can be traced back to the impression of early colonial and touring directors, although categorisation and expectations have broadened over time. Bruce Mason spoke of a more acute form of this theatrical naïvety working in his favour in 1959-62 during the nationwide New Zealand tour of his solo piece, *The End of the Golden Weather*.¹⁰¹ Mason wrote, produced, directed, performed and toured the biographic narrative show to audiences who had allegedly never encountered professional theatre in their home region before. He noted that rural audiences were 'more responsive and alert than city ones. They seemed genuinely grateful that you'd come their way'.¹⁰² The play – which

⁹⁹ *Kaz: A Working Girl*, dir. by Lisa Warrington (National Library Auditorium, Wellington, 1990).

¹⁰⁰ John Smythe, 'A Wonderfully Rewarding Sharing of Experience: *Flowers From My Mother's Garden* at Downstage Theatre', 8 September 2012, [Theatreview.org.nz](http://www.theatreview.org.nz) <<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=5109>> [accessed 18 October 2013].

¹⁰¹ The play was actually performed by Mason more than 1,000 times between 1959 and 1978 in theatres, school halls, church halls and community halls throughout New Zealand. Mason also performed it at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1963.

¹⁰² Bruce Mason, *The End of the Golden Weather: A Voyage into a New Zealand Childhood*, 2nd edn (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1962: 1970), p. 19.

became an important precursor to a strong modern memoir-based solo theatre tradition in New Zealand – was actually created in reaction to the fact he saw ‘no solid theatrical framework here’ through which to create work.¹⁰³ Like so many other directors before and after him, Mason’s imperative driving force was a practical, solution-focussed approach that saw him employ enormous liberties in reaction to the prevailing conditions:

We’re at our best in a corner: good improvisers, bad experts, as an American critic once said of us. No theatrical framework? Right, then, I would create my own. Touring a play is expensive? Then cut to the minimum, table and chair. Scenery is costly to make and cumbersome to cart around? Do it all with words: appeal directly to the audience’s imagination. Casts are expensive? Be your own. Do all forty parts. Play anywhere, in any circumstances, to any audience.¹⁰⁴

Being inventive and upsetting audience expectations of what a work is ‘supposed’ to be like is a cornerstone for Bennett, who states: ‘The thing I like most about theatre both as an audience member and as a practitioner is pulling the rug out of audience’s expectations continually, taking people by surprise.’¹⁰⁵ The disruption of expectation is key to this, as he says ‘when I think theatre’s been most successful’ is ‘if I’d been surprised and slapped around by the play and been on the edge of my seat and made to want to cry and want to laugh within quick succession of each other’.¹⁰⁶ He adds that ‘watching a play should never be a passive activity. I think the audience should always be made to stay engaged’.¹⁰⁷

A specific example is his touring production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2000) with the New Zealand Actors’ Company in which: ‘We’d go

¹⁰³ Mason, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Mason, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Bennett.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett.

¹⁰⁷ Bennett.

into town and we'd bust the expectations of pretentiousness out of the water as far as whatever communities we were playing in go.'¹⁰⁸ A driving imperative was for the work to be 'vigorous and rambunctious and fun, not precious, precocious or arty.'¹⁰⁹ Bennett's vision of a 'strongly flavoured' theatre company 'that had the same kind of impact as rock and roll' was realised with this production.¹¹⁰ (This work was the precursor to *A Way of Life* in 2001 and the notorious final Actors' Company production of *Leah* in 2002. Both were directed by Bennett.) Critic Susan Budd called Bennett's *Dream* a 'tight' production where 'not a single dull patch or clumsy seam is evident'.¹¹¹ She noted this *Dream's* vitality: 'It may not please the Shakespearian purists, but is certain to bore no one ... It zings with life, energy and laughs.'¹¹²

Lawrence has also experimented with more exposed staging decisions that dismantle total conjecture. He describes that 'the more magical, rewarding experiences were when we would go to places where people had never been to live theatre before. And so they didn't know the rules'.¹¹³ This naïvety can allow for genuine discovery of narrative, as he explains in relation to *Romeo and Juliet* (2004) and *Hamlet* (2002; 2006):

This sounds ridiculous, but performing *Romeo & Juliet* in Raetihi where not only had half the audience never seen a live play before but many of them didn't know how it was going to end if such a thing is possible. I've done two productions of *Hamlet* and in both cases there have been nights where the Queen has said "The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet" and an audience member has gone, "F[-]." It seems ridiculous

¹⁰⁸ Bennett.

¹⁰⁹ Bennett.

¹¹⁰ Bennett.

¹¹¹ Susan Budd, 'Performance: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *New Zealand Herald*, 6 September 2000

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=150371 [accessed 2 January 2015].

¹¹² Budd, 'Performance: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'.

¹¹³ Lawrence.

to me. I'm going: "How can you not know how *Hamlet* ends?"¹¹⁴

Lawrence's 'minimalist' staging of Shakespeare came about after meeting this narrative innocence, and affected other work such as *Slouching Toward Bethlehem: A Life Story of Robert Muldoon* (2011). In this work he finally had 'the courage to do the things that for years that [he'd] wanted to do technically which was just to go, "F[-] it, I'm going to just leave the lights on."¹¹⁵ Peter Brook was heavily criticised for the recent, very minimal staging of *11 and 12* (2010; 2011), yet perhaps this says more about the expectations of the audience than the production itself. A more simplistic approach can be easier to engage with when the audience does not hold sophisticated beliefs about how plays are most commonly staged.

In a similar vein, Lynch refers to disruption of audience expectations as a quality to hold in high regard. He says: 'Colin [McColl] is the director I admire most in this country ... because of that very thing of challenging our expectations.'¹¹⁶ Lynch continues:

I remember right back seeing his stuff at Downstage when he was doing things like *Female Transport* and *The Two Tigers* and then through things like his production of *Threepenny Opera*, *Hedda Gabler*, those sort of – some of those key works in his canon that have excited me. And I haven't always *liked* his work but he's the only director whose work I've consistently admired.¹¹⁷

Some directors refer to 'political energy' driving a piece as a particular freedom that challenges theatrical frames of reference. It can also give a play a certain dynamic relevant to its time and place. Lynch describes this phenomenon at work in *Torch Song Trilogy* (1985), starring a

¹¹⁴ Lawrence .

¹¹⁵ Lawrence.

¹¹⁶ Lynch.

¹¹⁷ Lynch.

young Hurst as Arnold Beckoff for Theatre Corporate. Describing it as 'one of the most exciting theatre directing experiences I have had', Lynch points to the direct connection to political events at that time:¹¹⁸

That was during the homosexual law reform and during that season there were 10,000 people walked up Queen St and all of that. So the timing of it was absolutely ideal and a lot of the time obviously we were playing to, you know preaching to the converted, but there were quite a number of people who were affected by it to think a little differently. And so that's the best [outcome] absolutely, to entertain and to some degree provoke or challenge.¹¹⁹

Hendry asserts similar joy in revealing previously disguised information about current day issues through theatre. He says:

I suppose what I love is that when a play is, like with *Hollow Men*, people said, "Why are you going to do that? It's just emails and stuff, how's that going to be theatrical?" I love a challenge like that. And although *Hollow Men* in a way wasn't particularly sophisticated in how it worked, it had an arc of a Shakespeare; you know 'a man who would be king' type scenario ... I love the way that people actually found it both entertaining and completely stimulating and revelatory, you know it revealed so much that they thought they understood and didn't know.¹²⁰

Interpretive Confidence

Disruption of expectations corresponds with how a play is interpreted and then realised in performance. In the case of New Zealand directors, I would argue that the predominant interpretive approach has allowed for questions to be released from the performance, rather than the director

¹¹⁸ Vanya Shaw wrote: '*Torchsong Trilogy* [sic] is a four-hour marathon and a triumph for actor Michael Hurst ... Director Murray Lynch has given us a well-paced production ... Certainly it's a timely play and an antidote to the rampant bigotry surrounding the Homosexual Law Reform Bill.' See Vanya Shaw, 'Four-hour triumph for Hurst', *Auckland Star*, 13 April 1985, Section B, p. 19.

¹¹⁹ Lynch.

¹²⁰ Hendry.

place a reductive resolution upon it. This is always a risk. Interpretive confidence has grown over the past forty years to the point that concept is frequently – but not always – able to liberate the inherent and multifarious meanings of a play text. With this growing self-assurance, however, there are still remnants of a post-colonial awareness that we are constructing a unique identity in New Zealand.

Different directors illustrate this in different ways. Bennett describes the interpretive stance as ‘applying our own contemporary imaginations to a piece of work and treating it as if it had never been performed before ... That’s what interests me’.¹²¹ He states that he does not want ‘to be influenced by other famous productions of this, that and the other’,¹²² but would rather create something fresh that affords a contemporaneity:

I want to create this thing with this group of people in this room with this text, fresh and new and something that, because the imaginations of this group of people have been applied to it, it will be contemporary whenever it was written and it will be ‘New Zealand’, wherever it was written.¹²³

Hendry notes that current practice in tune with its audience relies on how directors choose to frame work, citing McColl as the best local exactor of this: ‘When you deal with classic plays and you look at them in a new light; and obviously Colin McColl was ... a world class example of someone who can reinvigorate and refresh our vision of the canon.’¹²⁴ McColl says that, for him, concept will develop; ‘after combing the text ... words can be clues to sparking off something’.¹²⁵ One example is McColl’s acclaimed *Hedda Gabler* (1990), relocated to a repressive 1950s upper-middle-class New Zealand setting. In it, Hedda (Catherine Wilkin) –

¹²¹ Bennett.

¹²² Bennett.

¹²³ Bennett.

¹²⁴ Hendry.

¹²⁵ McColl, interview.

fiercely in love with a Māori Lovborg (Jim Moriarty) – utterly contravened acceptable social norms. McColl acknowledges it as a landmark production, calling it, ‘such a brave, outrageous interpretation of the character that just blew people away; like to have the *Guardian* ... saying “*Hedda* of a lifetime, go through hell and high water to see it.” That was pretty special’.¹²⁶

This text-driven approach allowed for his *Hedda* to retain allegiance with the text but radicalise the location. McColl set the play in a recent New Zealand time and place that the audience could easily recognise:

We relocated it to Wellington in the 1950s. We changed hardly any Ibsen text; now I wouldn’t care about changing the text, I would just change it. Because it just fitted perfectly that they live in the ex-Prime Minister’s house. Well that’s not strange to anyone in Wellington; you know, if you were upper middle-class kiwis that you might be moving to a house where an ex-Prime Minister had lived, that’s not outside the bounds of reason. But we conceived it in a particular kind of way like as a sort of black comedy.¹²⁷

This interpretive confidence has brought many reinvigorated classics to the New Zealand stage. In a 1995 article, McColl stated that various Ibsen plays were ‘easily identifiable with today’s topics’.¹²⁸ He said: ‘A lot of things will connect with the audience in a subliminal way, particularly the intimate feelings and psychology of the characters.’¹²⁹ The rich subtext, isolation and symbolism characteristic of Ibsen’s Nordic plays transfer particularly well to the New Zealand domain.

A handful of New Zealand directors such as Penny personify auteur or authorial directors, who can employ a deconstructive approach. Under this rubric, a director imposes their own intentions on the work,

¹²⁶ McColl, interview.

¹²⁷ McColl, interview.

¹²⁸ Greg Stuchbury, ‘McColl returns to Circa for his yearly does of Ibsen’, *Dominion*, 10 April 1995, p.10.

¹²⁹ Stuchbury, p.10.

using the text simply as a point of departure. Penny's production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (2009) at Toi Whakaari was a clear example of this. The work used Brecht's text as a springboard for a play that presented a world based on 'what the offer [from the play] is'.¹³⁰ He says, 'We defined the world that we had to portray about a world that was brutal, chaotic, maybe moral'.¹³¹ He adds, 'once I had those three things I'd just run them as a checklist on each scene and I'd go, "every scene should do it"... I made the actors make up the scenes; I didn't really direct them much'.¹³² Clearly, this approach can be liberating for actors as well.

A broader conceptual stance will arguably provoke or stimulate wider questions, too. Conceptual stance on a play text is a widespread feature of praxis in the interviews. Downes favours 'strong concept' to hold the work: 'One is expected to have a vision'.¹³³ For her, concept provides 'a point of excitement' that cast and crew can use to access the play.¹³⁴ One such success was an Oscar Wilde that she set in earlier decades to make sense of the strong moral code at work in the play. She says:

Lady Windermere's Fan [1997] which I set in 1950s New Zealand, a strong situational [concept] plus gender swapping. It was quite an expressionist production in a way as it exposed the play in a local setting in a period that's close to ourselves. The play's about hypocrisy and people not being who they say they are, so by gender swapping it became extremely clear that people were duplicitous.¹³⁵

Downes observes that her work offers 'locality' rather than a setting to liberate the play's central concerns, saying, 'I suppose when I reflect on

¹³⁰ Penny, interview.

¹³¹ Penny, interview.

¹³² Penny, interview.

¹³³ Downes.

¹³⁴ Downes.

¹³⁵ Downes.

my work I'm usually relating all material to a locality – an emotional or physical playing field that I can relate to.¹³⁶ The point of this is to transmit the text to current conditions a New Zealand audience will relate to. She says 'it's bringing it home to New Zealand, to our culture' and asking:

[H]ow can that play relate to my culture? And me in it? So if it's an outside play I will always see how it relates to my culture, to our experience as New Zealanders, to my experience. Sometimes that will result in making it into a play about New Zealanders, sometime sit will result in dropping the accents like in *W;t*, an American play, so that it's a play my audience can relate to, rather than a play that about somebody else 'out there' somewhere. So, yes, I am always wanting to bring it home.¹³⁷

Hurst has repeatedly used bold conceptual frameworks to hold his work. He cites *The Threepenny Opera* (1990) as his 'best' work for the liberties he took with its setting, alongside *Cabaret* (1992; 2010). Hurst's *Macbeth* (2004) was set in the Crimean War and *The Merchant of Venice* (1991) set in the Hollywood Studio era of the 1920s. The latter brought its audience closer to a western understanding of Jewish capitalism:

I loved this concept. It was set in the Hollywood film studios in the 1920s which were run by Jews. And the first thing people ask about *The Merchant of Venice* is, "How are you going to treat the Jewish question?"¹³⁸

He admits to mining the text in the context of now, particularly with Shakespeare. Hurst deliberately looks for an 'essence' to build this concept around: 'Admittedly, *my* essence'.¹³⁹ For him, Shakespeare is 'wonderfully interpretative' but the challenge is 'to bring Shakespeare to now'.¹⁴⁰ For this reason, Hurst's Shakespeare productions eschew period detail: 'I

¹³⁶ Downes.

¹³⁷ Downes.

¹³⁸ Hurst.

¹³⁹ Hurst.

¹⁴⁰ Hurst.

think doing Shakespeare in a historical context is a waste of time, because it puts the audience at a distance. You don't want that. You want the audience to be *here*.'¹⁴¹ In his article covering *Hamlet* (2003), Peter Calder noted that Hurst's techniques as an actor and director are borne out of the twin concepts of discovery and construction, and of interpretive confidence:

Hurst, unquestionably our finest and most versatile actor, has established himself as one of the most adventurous and exciting directors of Shakespeare. And to watch him at work is to see instinct and intellect combine in a way which makes effort seem effortless. He may look like one who's making it up as he goes along – in a sense he is – but his invention is underpinned by a sure sense of stagecraft and driven by a love for the grandly theatrical.¹⁴²

Other directors offer variants on how they view the interpretive stance, but it is a category that underlines all the interviews as a stance and style that affords enormous freedoms. O'Donnell talks about 'concept'¹⁴³ while David Lawrence's often bare setting will invoke the 'form' of play rather than a singular 'concept'.¹⁴⁴ Lynch says, 'I have an image but it's not a fixed one', although he gets 'the 'click' from the play', and from that point of entry, will often frame the setting or context around it.¹⁴⁵ Penny, who probably most strongly identifies as an 'auteur' director, suggests that his Gaulier-inspired vocabulary means, 'you connect around the *game* not the *meaning*'.¹⁴⁶ Despite this, he also states, 'to me the most exciting part of directing is working out the proposition',¹⁴⁷ so interpretation still comprehensively underpins the work.

¹⁴¹ Hurst.

¹⁴² Calder, 'Prince of Darkness', *New Zealand Herald*, Section E, p .2.

¹⁴³ O'Donnell, interview.

¹⁴⁴ Lawrence.

¹⁴⁵ Lynch.

¹⁴⁶ Penny.

¹⁴⁷ Penny.

For Bennett, interpretation is a liberating condition that can most successfully come about if worked organically through the rehearsal process. He will 'always think visually', and used to design as well.¹⁴⁸ He explains that he 'used to start rehearsals without a set and the design would come together through rehearsals, and by the end of the rehearsal process in an ideal world, the set would also be there'.¹⁴⁹ This is intrinsic to the 'process-based way of working which, in an ideal world, [he] would [always] like to do'.¹⁵⁰ Bennett underlines that too much concept is restrictive:

I find that the imposition of a director's concept and the necessity to design the set and costumes and all those elements before the cast come on board, are limiting structure[s]. It means you are making decisions before the play has even reached the rehearsal room and exploration has begun, basically.¹⁵¹

When asked how he reconciles this with a short rehearsal period, Bennett states the prevailing limitations: 'You can't. As rehearsal periods have got shorter and shorter it's become a necessity.'¹⁵²

Despite the lack of time, this growing interpretive confidence brings to mind Saint-Denis' statement that 'style is truth'.¹⁵³ Interpretation is a principal concern throughout the archive; indeed, it can define a production's coherence and shape a director's approach towards creating it. The notion of style as conveyed by the interpretation of a play text is both implicitly and explicitly referenced by the subjects as a major characteristic of their craft.

¹⁴⁸ Bennett.

¹⁴⁹ Bennett.

¹⁵⁰ Bennett.

¹⁵¹ Bennett.

¹⁵² Bennett.

¹⁵³ Cited in Boyce, letter to the author.

Techniques

Melding of techniques; 'Magpie-ism'

O'Donnell's assertion of the importance of technique in relation to acting is analogous to directing. When he says that 'from technique comes freedom',¹⁵⁴ he extrapolates further:

You can just look at a concert pianist or a great dancer who learns absolutely perfectly and rigorously and painstakingly the piece, and then somehow the thing that makes them great is the fact that they can somehow [infuse] their own personality and their own ... they have a sort of freedom or an ease with it that, an expertise that transcends and builds on what the work is. And so I do kind of agree with that.¹⁵⁵

The archive shows that methods are frequently blended or interspersed, and this 'decolonisation' of traditional rubrics has resulted in exciting new 'post-colonial' formulas. The close proximity of practitioners to each other, the hunger to continually improve their toolkit, and the lack of formal training opportunities have resulted in a spirit of inventiveness and cross-pollination of techniques. This alone is not unique, but the experimentation with methods in mainstream theatre is a prevailing freedom to emerge in the New Zealand theatre context that is noteworthy.

This group of 'dominant' directors evidence that practicality, invention and adaptation can sit easily alongside philosophical depth in their praxis. All interviewed directors typically show concrete, inventive, and solution-based approaches that are aligned with the resources at hand. They are not bound to comply with pre-existing methodological approaches, thereby reinforcing the notion of nomadism. When asked what methods or approaches they have successfully borrowed from other

¹⁵⁴ O'Donnell, interview.

¹⁵⁵ O'Donnell, interview.

forums, all directors admit to a 'magpie' gathering of methods whereby they openly collect and discard methods.¹⁵⁶ As O'Donnell remarks; 'I'm a bit of a magpie in that I take things that I like and reject the things that I don't.'¹⁵⁷

In fact, 'magpie-ism' appears as a feature of the surveyed domain. Lawrence openly admits to being 'a bit of a magpie' when he says:

I take things that I like and reject the things that I don't. So for a long time people said 'Poor Theatre' before I'd read Grotowski and when I read Grotowski I went, 'Oh a lot of that isn't actually what I'd thought that it meant but I like some of the ideas.'¹⁵⁸

Bennett provides a snapshot of this post-Alfreds eclectic methodology when he says that (what I would call) 'solutioneering' is commonplace: 'I make stuff up. Basically I identify a problem and try and find a way of solving that problem.'¹⁵⁹ Meanwhile, he adapts known techniques according to the needs of the play at hand: 'that Mike Alfreds stuff I've adapted, and I will use aspects of it depending on how much time I've got and depending on how receptive I think the particular cast are going to be'.¹⁶⁰ This is a highly practical manner of creativity at work.

It is telling that Bennett refers to music duo The Front Lawn¹⁶¹ as an early influence, saying, 'I loved The Front Lawn. [I] saw everything they did.'¹⁶² He cites their irreverent wit, broad accent, and particular 'number

¹⁵⁶ A 'magpie' is someone who likes to collect different kinds of objects or styles and, occasionally, refashion them for another purpose.

¹⁵⁷ O'Donnell.

¹⁵⁸ Lawrence.

¹⁵⁹ Bennett.

¹⁶⁰ Bennett.

¹⁶¹ Popular musical/theatrical duo 'The Front Lawn' was founded by Don McGlashan and Harry Sinclair in 1985. From 1989-90, they were joined by Jennifer Ward-Lealand. The Front Lawn was known for their live performances that had narratives attached to the songs, and toured extensively in New Zealand, Australia, Europe and America. They released two albums and made three short films.

¹⁶² Bennett.

eight wire' style driving the theatrical experience, where multiple instruments were employed to tell syncopated story based on usurped cultural stereotypes through song. He says, 'I loved the casual "Kiwi-ness" of it but also the inventiveness, theatricality, and the way they used music and rhythm.'¹⁶³ Slightly cheeky, always ironic, heartfelt storytellers, The Front Lawn exemplified the best of inventiveness in New Zealand performance that is cooperatively created.¹⁶⁴

In 2013, Paul Simey-Barton's review of Jacob Rajan's *Kiss the Fish* in the *New Zealand Herald* (with the overtly nationalistic by-line; 'Indian Ink's magical new show embodies qualities that make us proud to be Kiwis') applies the same observation to a practical, collaborative New Zealand mentality in the arts through his comparison with sport:

It is a bit of a stretch to compare Indian Ink with Emirates Team New Zealand, but in their own ways both embody qualities that make us proud to be Kiwis: a down-to earth practicality, global ambitions, boundless optimism and a deep appreciation of the power of co-operative effort.¹⁶⁵

When asked what methods and approaches he has successfully borrowed from other forums, McColl says, 'I'd say, "outrageously steal from them. Theatre's a bastard art."¹⁶⁶ He is quick to distinguish technique from product though, saying, 'I've been scrupulous about never copying a production.'¹⁶⁷ O'Donnell received a similar reply from McColl in an interview he undertook some years before mine. He says, 'I once interviewed Colin McColl and I said, "Do you have a methodology?" and he said, "No." He said he just uses whatever methodology is appropriate

¹⁶³ Bennett.

¹⁶⁴ 'Folk duo' 'Flight of the Conchords' are the most recent exponent to capitalise on this tradition.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Simey-Barton, 'Theatre review: *Kiss the Fish*, Q Theatre', *New Zealand Herald*, 16 September 2013 [accessed online 16 September 2013].

¹⁶⁶ McColl, interview.

¹⁶⁷ McColl, interview.

for the play.¹⁶⁸ McColl adds, 'I'm a great one for "horses for courses." I'll change my kind of methods of approaching a text and the methodology for bringing that text to life on stage depending on what the project is.'¹⁶⁹ O'Donnell states, 'I feel a bit the same ... using whatever technique is most useful.'¹⁷⁰ This fluidity or 'magpie' approach is not unusual in New Zealand creative arts, yet it appears prevalent in directing.

Both of these directors bring a matter-of-fact approach to directing that is coupled with a deep investigation of the play text. McColl, who calls himself 'just a practical man of the theatre', prefers to eschew 'a whole lot of theories' in favour of the 'pragmatic' act of exploration through direction.¹⁷¹ He says that 'the joy of it is that you discover whole new worlds with each project you do and you become a bit of a mini expert'.¹⁷² As examples, he cites 'sixteenth-century politics when you're doing *Mary Stuart* and the whole sort of Catholic/Protestant kind of issues in England at the time, [with] all its complexities'.¹⁷³ McColl says it's necessary to 'drill down into that world for three months' after which, 'it's all forgotten, well it's not all forgotten; you retain some of that'.¹⁷⁴ McColl explains that his investigation is twofold: 'I'm reading it for the world of the play, and at the same time I'm reading around the play'.¹⁷⁵ This prolific research into a play's environment – coined in translation by Stanislavski's followers as the 'given circumstances' or 'incontrovertible facts' – elicits forays into previously unknown territory.

¹⁶⁸ O'Donnell, interview.

¹⁶⁹ McColl, interview.

¹⁷⁰ O'Donnell, interview.

¹⁷¹ McColl, interview.

¹⁷² McColl, interview.

¹⁷³ McColl, interview.

¹⁷⁴ McColl, interview.

¹⁷⁵ McColl, interview.

To illustrate, McColl showed me his extensive scrapbook of images, clippings and ideas for his 2007 production of *The Crucible* that had direct resonance with contemporary politics:

I'm getting images that I can find and pulling things off the [inter]net about witchcraft, things that appeal to me. I was very interested in any newspaper articles about, there was this whole thing about the Exclusive Brethren and how they were backing the National Government and their fight against homosexuality, so I thought that was all interesting. It was all kind of feeding in in this serendipitous way to where I wanted to kind of go with the play.¹⁷⁶

He qualifies this interest in exploration through direction with a diverse book collection: 'If you looked at my collection of books at home ... it's completely sort of eclectic.'¹⁷⁷ Despite McColl's claim that he is a practitioner who eschews theory, he also brings extensive research informed by philosophical and social frames of reference to each production.¹⁷⁸ This suggests there are actually deliberate and cohesive strategies at work in his eclectic directing method.

Harcourt is similarly drawn to finding a deep understanding of the context, and the analogous situations, of a play. She says, 'Most of what Colin will talk about does work for me', referring to McColl's use of analogy and experiential understandings of a situation.¹⁷⁹ Harcourt's declared concern with 'directing performance' ('My skill is finding a way to take stuff on a page and translating it into something which is meaningful and impactful in three dimensions'), coupled with 'a good feel for design',¹⁸⁰ is an 'interest in the whole zone of the play, the world of the

¹⁷⁶ McColl, interview.

¹⁷⁷ McColl, interview.

¹⁷⁸ McColl, interview.

¹⁷⁹ Harcourt.

¹⁸⁰ Harcourt notes, 'My first job out of Drama School was as a designer at the Fortune Theatre.' See Harcourt, interview.

play'.¹⁸¹ This, together with a fundamental belief in experience rather than imagination – 'I don't believe in imagination' – has forged her unique methodology based on four precepts.¹⁸² These are 'connection, white space, internal landscape and vista'.¹⁸³ She explains that when coaching actors, '[t]hey're the four areas that I look at and they're all connected to design and the world of the play as well, but they're really mostly connected to performance'.¹⁸⁴ Harcourt explains that the precepts are designed to afford the actor 'ownership and uniqueness, and from that point of ownership then you begin to develop characterisation'.¹⁸⁵

At the heart of this research lies the question of dynamism between actors; the 'spark' that McColl seeks, while Harcourt describes 'connection' as the genuine, essential link that is one of the most important factors.¹⁸⁶ Connection is the (perceived as) real, established relationship that happens between actors who are genuinely and actively looking for their performance in the other person. She says, 'There's some indefinable magic that is happening – not in you – but between us ... it's not emotional connection with my own emotions, it's not connection with anything to do with my internal world, it's connection with you'.¹⁸⁷ This is linked to the Stanislavskian objective drive, 'I want you to...' and 'white space', which is the 'white space on the page ... the white space in between the words'.¹⁸⁸

Harcourt shows me an image of a [New Zealand artist] Peter Siddell painting that suggests an unfolding story in its gaps. The painting depicts an exterior perspective on the interior view of a wooden house

¹⁸¹ Harcourt.

¹⁸² Harcourt.

¹⁸³ Harcourt.

¹⁸⁴ Harcourt.

¹⁸⁵ Harcourt.

¹⁸⁶ Harcourt.

¹⁸⁷ Harcourt.

¹⁸⁸ Harcourt.

with windows; in another version, the interior detail is gone. The two images are used to explain her idea of ‘internal landscape’ to the actor. She posits:

If we imagine that the face is like this picture here, so here’s the face, here are the eyes, the windows to the soul, and if you look at that and you go, “okay, well let’s look behind the eyes of this”, right behind the eyes of this painting here, what can you see?¹⁸⁹

The ‘simplicity of what’s happening’ on the surface in Siddell’s painting is in direct contrast to ‘the richness of what is happening behind the eyes [of the actor as text] and the internal landscape of what the actor is thinking, which we don’t see here’.¹⁹⁰ This juxtaposition between surface detail and ‘hidden’ aspects provides clues: ‘So what we see here – because we can’t see this clearly, the internal landscape – our attention comes here and we go, “Oh, something is a bit off”’.¹⁹¹ Harcourt explains that she wants the artwork to trigger points of connection for the actor, with and ‘under’ the text, saying: ‘I want the actors that I work with to activate the same switch when they look at a page of script, a page of text.’¹⁹² She clarifies:

[N]ormally we’ll look at a page of text and we’ll go the meaning, the story, the characterisation, the relationships and everything are carried by the black marks on the page, just as they’re carried by the black marks on the page here [in the painting].¹⁹³

This approach contravenes a vast amount of established methodology, as it asks the actor to find ‘the connection [that] is carried in the white spaces around the black marks on the page’.¹⁹⁴ For Harcourt, the ‘story, the

¹⁸⁹ Harcourt.

¹⁹⁰ Harcourt.

¹⁹¹ Harcourt.

¹⁹² Harcourt.

¹⁹³ Harcourt.

¹⁹⁴ Harcourt.

relationship, everything, is totally in the pauses in between the words'.¹⁹⁵ The gaps are where one of an actor's most potent choices lie: 'So when I work with actors what I'm saying is "I don't give a f[] about the words", (learn them, obviously) ... but, "Let's work on the white space in between the words".'¹⁹⁶

'Internal landscape' can further be explained as the process of summoning feelings and sensations associated with an analogous experience, or, 'what is happening behind the eyes and the internal landscape of what the actor is thinking'.¹⁹⁷ She says this is 'like Stanislavski's affective memory,' rooted in actual experience:

I work through analogy. Instead of working through "as if", I work through "when I was". So rather than Vanessa thinking it's as if my husband had just killed Duncan and finding a way to imagine that, I'm going, "Well, when was an occasion when you wanted your actual husband to kill his f...ing boss because he was driving him nuts?"¹⁹⁸

Vista is 'where [her] interest in Laban kicks in', since it is a way to let the 'imaginative vista impact on a performance'. She explains its direct connection to destination and objective correlative, the physical manifestation of something that relates to an actor's objective:

If I say to you, "Well I can be here, so here's my actions, my choreography, I can be here for an hour and a half because my son Peter's doing a debate up the road at St Mark's [School] and so I'm meant to be there to see him rebutting", or whatever (looks away). So what I did then was I go, "Well I can be here", but obviously I'm referring to something in my vista which is my watch, but more interestingly than that, I know where St Mark's is, it's just up the road there, so my body, my fingertip and even my head to some extent and then through my eyes and my glance are magnetised towards

¹⁹⁵ Harcourt.

¹⁹⁶ Harcourt.

¹⁹⁷ Harcourt.

¹⁹⁸ Harcourt.

where I know I'm going. And what often people will do in performance is they'll go I can be here for an hour and a half, but my son Peter is in a debate up the road [looks straight at the interviewer]. And it's really hard for me not to let myself be magnetised to where I know St Mark's is. But that's what actors usually do because they're not allowing the imaginative vista to impact on a performance.¹⁹⁹

Details that liberate larger meanings

Directors often look for 'clues' in the text, and in New Zealand this has produced an identifiable practice. McColl frequently combs the text for details that liberate larger meanings in the play, sometimes relying on a word or stage direction as a clue to the larger narrative. An example is McColl's *Hedda Gabler*. The Norwegian translation of the titular character's name provided a doorway into the character and the tone of the play, as he explains:

She's usually translated into English as a "cold beauty". But the word in Norwegian is "*apparently* cold beauty", so she *seems* cold. And that was just like a revelation to me when I found that *apparently* cold beauty I thought, "Ah!" And when you read his, say his draft, not the final published version but where he was going with the draft developing that character. "Oh my God, yes, I can see that she doesn't have to be played as a cold beauty. She could be played as someone extremely passionate and quite wild." And so you kind of get little clues like that, you know. And once I sort of hooked onto that, then you go through all the plays and you think, "Ah, yes, I can see, that there are naughty little clues that he's put in there for all the characters."²⁰⁰

Penny also refers to the dance of opposition between detail and expanse in directing. Conversely, though, rather than construct the piece from small components, he will occasionally create theatrical scaffolding and then edit it down to the essential components. With the confidence of

¹⁹⁹ Harcourt.

²⁰⁰ McColl, interview.

more experience he now allows the shape of a piece to build far and wide, then will work to constantly rein it in, saying:

[F]rom experience if I've got more, I trust myself more so I'll sail out way further than other people will in order to get that new thing ... I'm always trying to draw it in to make it make sense.²⁰¹

Non-theatrical material and its influence

All the directors I interviewed favour non-theatrical material from other disciplines to shape the work, and find enormous liberating possibilities in taking such an approach. Psychology is a predominant alternative-form influence for directors. Lynch states that 'psychological theory has been a big influence in terms of thinking about human nature and how we behave like we do'.²⁰² For Penny, psychology unlocked ways to manage group behaviour. He says, '[p]sycho-dramatic training had a big effect on how I understand that a group works and that really helped a lot'.²⁰³ In particular, Jacob L. Moreno's relational psychology notion of 'warming up' afforded a structure for Penny to understand how individuals approach creative effort and new tasks:

It helped me understand how people, the big ideas from a psychodrama is warm-up. Moreno's notion is that you're never, not in a state; you're always warming up to something. So when you sit down with me you warm me up to being with you around this area that you're interested in. That you know I know, and have experiences in. You warm me up and then now I'm warmed up and then I'll go home and I'll have to warm up to being a father and warm up to this gig I've got to do on Friday. So that really helped me work out how to work, you know that I was coming in too hard sometimes and that was killing the warm-up. Or I needed to do more things.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Penny.

²⁰² Lynch.

²⁰³ Penny.

²⁰⁴ Penny.

Harcourt similarly refers to writings on psychology and behaviour that include Gladwell and Jung:

Blink, The Tipping Point ... because Malcolm Gladwell is a social commentator and has got a great kind of turn for phrasing story, so I love reading about contemporary psychology. I'd [also] say Jung's *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. Malcolm Gladwell's books because they're really interesting about the way people think and the way people behave.²⁰⁵

Added to this are ways of understanding cultural movements, which are assumptions by most of the directors but articulated as influences by a few. Lynch refers to 'movements like all the gender things, feminism; and socialism, those things that kind of have shaped the world we're living in now, they're an influence'.²⁰⁶

Film has significantly shaped many directors' practice, either in early formative, or later aesthetic and practical ways. Lynch states:

When I was little I was, I had a big piece of soft-board stuff that I would pin up pictures of Charlie Chaplin [on] and sort of create posters for movies and stuff. I wanted to go and see the movies every Saturday sort of thing. I absolutely adored the movies. And watching the matinee films on TV and the late night black and whites and *Fractured Flickers*, and all those sort of things.

Most of all, Lynch cites the narrative force present in silent films that gave way to the imaginative scope of inventive cinema:

I loved the silent movies, the telling of stories in sort of shorthand in some way. But in my teen years watching Polanski and others, I started to be made aware of Bergman and foreign movies, it opened my mind to that sort of stuff. I've never been a major reader of literature. I've been obsessed with reading plays since I was quite little.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Harcourt.

²⁰⁶ Lynch.

²⁰⁷ Lynch.

Bennett cites animated Japanese films of Hayao Miyazaki and others as strong influences. He says:

I think the imagination at work and the iconoclasm within them, the worlds he creates touch a chord with me, and I love those films. *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, *My Neighbour Totoro*, *Ponyo* are the latest ones. I've got them all on DVD and the kids have watched them many times. And I never tire of watching those films, they're fantastic.²⁰⁸

Watching high quality drama on screen is crucial for Bennett, who will seek out forceful performances from other places to feed his imagination. He confesses, 'I watch a lot of DVD sets of TV series, really good ones like *Treme* and *The Wire*. I think there's some fantastic TV coming out of the [United] States these days.'²⁰⁹

Music is also a stimulus for Bennett, who played the violin in the Youth Orchestra when he was younger. 'Music is always a big influence', he states, adding, 'I've always tried to stay current with what's happening musically', and he regularly attends rock concerts for inspiration.²¹⁰ The benefit of this is that he 'can read a score and understand it on that level as well as a text level', but it also affords him a clear understanding of both the importance of strong technique driving an art form, and the rhythms of language. Penny conjures up a musical analogy when he states that tempo between actors is a concept his mentors enforced, saying, 'So that's very in keeping with Gaulier or Lecoq; "you're playing that note, I play this note".'²¹¹

At the same time, for Lawrence, reading about other areas of scientific inquiry is important. This has reinforced a strictly humanist view of existence that infiltrates all his work. He explains that he has been

²⁰⁸ Bennett.

²⁰⁹ Bennett.

²¹⁰ Bennett.

²¹¹ Penny, interview.

reading a range of material to challenge ‘and expand my understanding of the world a wee bit, rather than staying in my narrow box where all I know about is theatre’.²¹² This includes Dava Sobel’s *The Planets*, which Lawrence describes as ‘mind-blowing. It’s the book that made me go ... on the one hand it proves that there isn’t a god, but it also puts forward such an amazing case for intelligent design’.²¹³

Finally, visual art is a significant stimulus for many directors. Downes states that her own art-making is connected to spatial arrangement that comes instinctively as a director. She remarks: ‘It’s very interesting that because currently I’m doing some painting and art classes which is very closely connected when you think of composition. And I’ve been told that I’ve got a very good eye for contrast, colours and composition.’²¹⁴ Harcourt cites visual imagery throughout her interview, ranging from Peter Siddell to Rita Angus to ‘books about photography, and to Nan Goldin’s *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* and Sally Mann’s *Family of Mann*’.²¹⁵ She says:

I was always an aesthete and I’ve always been a designer but it wasn’t until I married Stuart McKenzie that I became aware of contemporary New Zealand art and I use a lot of that in my teaching and directing.²¹⁶

Photography equally provides a direct pathway to the representation of an emotional state. For Harcourt, the images provide powerful shortcuts to a play’s central concerns. For example, she uses art to unpack the moral dilemma of a certain play and to ‘translate that into the world of the play

²¹² Lawrence.

²¹³ Lawrence.

²¹⁴ Downes.

²¹⁵ Harcourt.

²¹⁶ Harcourt.

and make it much more morally complex than otherwise it might have been'.²¹⁷

So when I was directing *Collected Stories* with Danielle Mason and Irene Wood – then before that I directed the same thing with Sarah Wiseman and Liz McRae in Auckland – we looked at the photography of Sally Mann, because that photography is very rich in terms of, “Have I done the right thing?” And the moral question at the heart of that play is this girl is stealing the story of the elder woman; does she have the right to do that? Sally Mann is a contemporary photographer who stole the visual stories of her children; did she have the right to do that? And by considering those issues we could unpack issues of ownership and then translate how we’d come to think about that.²¹⁸

For Hurst, art can also give direct access to a play’s central concerns. This implies a direct understanding of the actor-audience relationship that he compares to the active engagement with visual art:

And then also as a director, I find the bargain that you strike with the audience to make that work, to make that thing happen, it’s like [Mark] Rothko’s paintings; the audience have to come along a little bit, they make a bargain, they’ve got to be sensitive to it.²¹⁹

Points of concentration

In the pursuit of a dynamic performance, directors demonstrate a blend of techniques. ‘Points of concentration’ is one method that Alfreds employs to deliberately activate change on stage during a performance, and this technique has permeated the directing vocabulary throughout New Zealand. He explains that this way of altering the focus of every performance forces actors to adjust in response to the different offers in

²¹⁷ Harcourt.

²¹⁸ Harcourt.

²¹⁹ Hurst.

pursuit of free, truthful, and genuinely fresh performances:

The points of concentration coming towards the end of the process was the greatest, most freeing technique for me as a director and for them as actors, because they're exploring the text in so many different ways. There are so many possibilities that you say, 'Well, why choose one?'²²⁰

Alfreds explains that the great benefit of altering focus – on an object, a given circumstance, or an overriding need, for example – in every performance means emphasis is placed on that mantra of genuine adjustment, 'acting is reacting'²²¹:

Because they've changed then you will also have to change to do that, and therefore they will be changing to deal with your change. Then the whole thing starts to shift. Sometimes the changes are very delicate and sometimes they're huge. But they're truthful, and all I'm asking for is a truthful performance that I could sit and watch and *believe*.²²²

Bennett similarly describes how, for him, a point of concentration is 'something which is a fact that the actors can take on board, explore, think about, and then apply':

For instance it might be that it's winter. Which does colour how people are if you're in a draughty old house and you can play a scene just keeping that point of concentration at the forefront of your mind and exploring all the ways that aspect of the scene colours the scene. Then you forget about it and move onto something else which might be your character's physical centre. Play the scene just concentrating on that particular aspect, and each time you go through the actors will find something which adds richness to what they're doing and I'll point that out to them as well.²²³

²²⁰ Alfreds.

²²¹ Alfreds says this is a method that liberates possibilities, saying, 'You go on stage, you play to your partner and then you must respond to what your partner does. If your partner's a little more aggressive tonight or a little more off-hand with you, then you must deal with that in terms of what you want from them.' See Alfreds, interview.

²²² Alfreds.

²²³ Bennett.

He continues that, if applied correctly, a point of concentration can liberate a scene: 'If something's just feeling repetitive and has lost its spark then you can give an actor a point of concentration and it can come alive, because it informs every aspect of the scene.'²²⁴ Actors will 'know if a certain something is worth hanging on to', but he cautions that a point of concentration has to be something 'which is true to the scene, or it starts distorting'.²²⁵ This process, coupled with starting from scratch every time a play is approached, afforded freedoms to his *Twelfth Night* (1989) at BATS Theatre. Each performance the actors had different points of concentration in an 'empty space' where the cast were 'completely free as far as movement goes'.²²⁶ This resulted in a 'really happy' experience that could not be replicated three years later in 1992: 'I tried remounting *Twelfth Night* at the Watershed in Auckland and it wasn't nearly as good and it wasn't nearly as happy.'²²⁷ Despite not 'blocking' the actors, Bennett will consciously 'pattern' stage movement principles into the rehearsal process as a point of focus, saying:

It's something I will work with as part of the rehearsal process. I'll come up with exercises and make it a point of concentration and I will point out if things have worked really well or if things are less successful.²²⁸

With Ken Duncum's *Jism* (1989) – which the author describes as part of a 'subversive' performance oeuvre where 'we did a lot of fun things and did whatever we liked, which was very liberating'²²⁹ – Bennett thoroughly experimented with points of concentration in a dynamic process that he

²²⁴ Bennett.

²²⁵ Bennett.

²²⁶ Bennett.

²²⁷ Bennett.

²²⁸ Bennett.

²²⁹ David O'Donnell, "'Theatre is the Lightning Rod': Interview with Ken Duncum', in Maufort and O'Donnell, pp. 147-162 (p. 151).

calls 'exciting':

I went through the process of applying different points of concentration. So I'd give the actors a point of concentration in an envelope before a performance; this is once the show is in production, it was up and running. In order to keep performances fresh, to keep the actors continuing to explore an aspect of the story or their character or the situation, and also because the actors never knew where each other was going to be from moment to moment, they had to exist in the moment and there was always a sense of spontaneity and freshness. And a high level of energy in what they were doing, which was exciting. *Jism* was a big success in Wellington at the time; for me it felt like, "I've arrived and here I am and this is what I can do", and not just me but my friends and colleagues.²³⁰

Lynch also frequently brings this approach to bear on texts, although he was initially introduced to the concept not via Mike Alfreds, but through David Hare's lens of political awareness. While directing *Fanshen* (1985) at Theatre Corporate, Lynch discovered 'the political point of a scene'.²³¹ Proposed by Hare, these were 'ways and vocabularies that made lots of sense' to Lynch.²³² As a result ('although I don't think we talked about it in quite that way'), the whole premise of 'approaching a scene and discussing what the given circumstances are and a sort of point of focus on particular things' came to the foreground.²³³ These approaches all display a post-colonial confidence in the directors to play with and question techniques.

²³⁰ Bennett.

²³¹ Lynch.

²³² Lynch.

²³³ Lynch.

'Feeding-in'

'Feeding-in' is another technique that has been derived from many practitioners, and there are different applications of it. Bennett describes it as a process where:

The cast will mark each other, so that for every actor that's in a scene, there's another actor off-set feeding-in the lines and impulse or an action at a time, and the actor suspends – receives – plays; suspends – receives – plays. And it's painstaking but it's a fantastic way of actually fully committing to each objective and playing moment by moment by moment with each other without thinking, "What's my next line?" It's staying in the moment, that's the key thing.²³⁴

Bennett employed this technique when directing his first Sondheim, *Into the Woods* (1994) at the now-defunct Watershed Theatre. Bennett uses it in a similar fashion to why other directors use techniques such as 'Text – No Text', saying: 'Basically it means you can get actors off the books really quickly and they can start playing with each other without having a big part of their brain thinking, "What's my next line?"'.²³⁵ This places the emphasis on justified action, not memory:

[I]n an ideal world – and I've seen this – there is no process where the actors have to cram lines. Because you go through it so many different times and different ways that by the time you're actually running chunks, the lines (which are the tip of the iceberg of the actor's process) are there because they're the most obvious thing to say at that particular moment with that particular objective.²³⁶

The benefit of this method, he says, is that it focuses the actor's attention away from the rote nature of text and towards 'learning the impulse behind the line and understanding it'.²³⁷

²³⁴ Bennett.

²³⁵ Bennett.

²³⁶ Bennett.

²³⁷ Bennett.

Harcourt refers to 'dropping-in', where 'you lie on the floor and just the words drop in'.²³⁸ She discloses:

I kind of do use dropping-in a different way where I think that every single word you have to take the time and have the courage to break up ... to rehearse it very, very slowly and to have heaps of "white space", because I think only by really pulling it apart, getting the beads off the necklace and then restringing the necklace, can you truly know the text.²³⁹

Summary

There exists enormous independence in New Zealand theatre directing, brought about by conditions and circumstance and driven by the attitude, aptitude and capabilities of theatre directors. Fundamentally – although a solitary figure like Baxter's 'stranger' – the New Zealand director is finely poised to engage both with freedoms that work within constraints to invite a collective response as well as challenge existing notions of how work is made. In a developing performing arts economy, there is enormous potential to engage with these freedoms; to reach out and make the performing arts an essential part of how we live. The capacity to transcend the domestic and inhabit the epic is surely theatre's currency, and as Jo Randerson writes, directors are at a point in history that demands more integration with society. Randerson aptly notes:

The artist can either be a stand-alone genius or can find ways to use their talent more generously in their community beyond a simple product exchange. "What can we offer in this society? Where are our skills needed? How can we be of use here?" (Rather than: "How can we get more people to come to our shows?")²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Harcourt.

²³⁹ Harcourt.

²⁴⁰ Jo Randerson, 'Big Live Relevant Art: Jo Randerson on What Needs to Change', *PlayMarket Annual*, 48 (Wellington, 2013), (p. 5).

Theatre has the capacity to be a part of the world, and to reflect that world for its audience. As Mnouchkine notes, theatre and performance are central to life: 'The theatre is a part of the world ... Do you remember what the Afghani people did when their first village was liberated? They broadcast music and songs on the radio.'²⁴¹ In Christchurch after the February 2011 earthquakes, the Court Theatre was one of the first venues to be rebuilt with donations from the public. As Chief Executive Philip Aldridge writes in the *Guardian*, 'In the face of the loss of all amenities ... it was the theatre that came back first.'²⁴² Theatre offers something communal, and Aldridge acknowledges this need for a shared experience to make sense of life or offer relief from it: 'The city is still in crisis, but every night the theatre fills up. It is really quite dramatic.'²⁴³

Directors everywhere are involved in a profession that maintains its magic via the pursuit of 'truth', albeit one in a constant state of flux. In 2014, New Zealand theatre directors must accommodate shorter-than-usual attention spans as expectations from the 'quick fix' of televisual and internet cultures take hold. Frames of reference are changing as audience members interact with entertainment and stimulation in fractured, individual ways. This means that a potential audience is arguably more literate on the information level, but less so in terms of narrative. The evolving contemporary theatre environment requires directors to engage with freedoms, and as this chapter has shown, these include those

²⁴¹ Ariane Mnouchkine in Armélie Heliot, 'In Search of Lives: Ariane Mnouchkine Interviewed', Programme for *Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odysées)*, Théâtre du Soleil, 6-22 October 2005, Melbourne International Arts Festival, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne.

²⁴² Philip Aldridge, 'No Home, No Show: How a New Zealand Theatre Rose from the Rubble', *Guardian*, 21 February 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/feb/21/new-zealand-theatre-christchurch-earthquake>> [accessed 14 May 2014].

²⁴³ Aldridge, 'No Home, No Show: How a New Zealand Theatre Rose from the Rubble'.

particular attitudes (such as risk) and techniques afforded by the collective of individuals in a professional locale.

Roland Barthes wrestled with the notion of freedom in art; specifically, 'real' life tamed in an eternal, visual moment in the genus of photography. In *Camera Lucida* (2000), Barthes considered a photograph to be either 'mad' or 'tame'; 'tame if its empirical realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits ... mad if this realism is absolute and, so to speak, original, obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time ... the photographic *ecstasy*'.²⁴⁴ If a photograph – as a representation of life through representation – is analogous to three-dimensional live performance, this is surely akin to the challenge that directors face when interpreting and staging a play text.

Theatre can either be predictable or wild. At its best, good theatre is a like the most intense rituals of life that remain in our conscious memory. Theatre, though, employs structure and metaphor to make meaning out of imaginary situations. It can be a visceral experience that assumes its own transcendent quality of time. When dynamic, theatre can remain extraordinary and unforgettable in the mind's eye and the viewer's memory. Ironically, the ephemeral becomes eternal to an individual, or an audience of many. This requires a direct engagement with the twin concepts of structure and freedom. Barthes' synopsis is a potent and telling reminder when he writes, 'Such are the two ways of the Photograph. The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality.'²⁴⁵ Therein lies the ultimate risk, challenge, and most of all, freedom for directors; making dynamic theatre that is not flawlessly

²⁴⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 119.

²⁴⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 119.

formed and confined by predictable definitions of 'art', but like a high country landscape, liberated, untamed and, through it, essential and available to many.

Chapter Five: Influences – Mike Alfreds

Having looked at the effect of restrictions and liberties on aspects of direction, the thesis now considers influences from outside New Zealand. It reviews working methods that directors have derived largely from selected traditions imported to New Zealand from abroad. These involve both directly organised and more haphazardly peripatetic ways. The chapter uses this legacy of established practices as signposts that chart a theatrical journey. It accepts the notion that the journey has traversed crude beginnings in populist music hall theatre through what McNaughton calls ‘mainstream theater, [sic] unashamedly middle-class and cautiously intelligent’, to the recent emergence of more confident, indigenous and multifarious voices in theatre culture.¹

Lisa Warrington has described this development as encompassing ‘an upsurge in both gay subjects and women’s theatre’ through to ‘significant new wave of Māori theatre’ in the 1990s followed by the “new waves” of the twenty-first century ... the multicultural theatre generation’ and ‘huge explosions of fresh young talent like Eli Kent, Miria George ... and the Kila Kokonut Krew’.² In this context of diversity, directors have often sought out (or been affected by) ways of working with text that accommodate constraints of limited time and money so endemic in the New Zealand situation. As a result, influences have been necessary, circumstantial, sometimes philosophical, occasionally fashionable, but always practical.

¹ McNaughton, *New Zealand Drama*, p. 149.

² Lisa Warrington and others, ‘ADS at thirty: Three Decades of Australasian Drama, Theatre, Performance and Scholarly Research’, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 60 (April 2012), 6-19 (p. 13).

Influencing Trends and Tradition

Overall, this chapter agrees with the conclusion of Michele Hine's thesis and other theatre scholarship that New Zealand directing's attempt to forge ahead draws on wide and varied influences. Until the late 1980s New Zealand directors were heavily influenced by European (particularly, English) and American methods.³ As Hine says, 'In the past four decades, text directing methods owe much to credit English and American practitioners.'⁴ These directing approaches established their roots in a mixture of realist English Repertory Theatre systems and naturalistic forms derived from Stanislavski's interest in psychological realism. It also confirms Hine's specific timing that, until the 1980s, 'most directors in New Zealand followed a model of direction largely inherited from the British. This model followed the pattern of read through, blocking, detailing, runs of acts, runs of the whole play, technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals'.⁵ This is not to claim the model is peculiar to English, text-based theatre. Nevertheless, given a New Zealand tendency to imitate things English in the arts generally, as well as politics and media, that theatrical tradition seems likely to be the most influential in mainstream, professional theatre.

Most New Zealand directors continue to exhibit a keen appetite for developing methods that have been imported or gleaned from books, teachings and practice from elsewhere. This evolution of directing methods is inevitable in any culture, but particularly so in the performing arts that seek to have a current conversation with its audience. Simon Shepherd notes the importance of 'cultural competence' for directors that is brought about by 'the discourse, knowledge, and expectations of family

³ McNaughton, 'Drama', pp. 321-93; Ruth Harley, "'Divine Gossip': Interviews with Six New Zealand Theatre Directors'; Hine thesis.

⁴ Hine, p. 2.

⁵ Hine, p. 2.

and peer group'.⁶ To that I would add, the wider directing fraternity. The development of 'cultural competence' is an ongoing, sometimes deliberate, and haphazard activity.

However, knowing what to discard has been a constant source of tension as the dominant discourse seeks – consciously or otherwise – to reassert existing assumptions. Peter Brook cautioned against forsaking the old for the new when he noted that 'tradition itself, in times of dogmatism and dogmatic revolution, is a revolutionary force which must be safeguarded'.⁷ Meanwhile, Barba makes a clear distinction between tradition (which he sees as craft) and authentic practice when he writes:

Tradition itself is also the exercising of refusal. It is our retrospective look at the human beings, the craft, the very History that has preceded us and from which we choose to distance ourselves through the continuity of our work.⁸

These comments frame the dilemma that sits pertinently in the conversation about evolving praxis. Directors often seek a definitive 'locale'⁹ or voice while staying connected to high quality, international conversations. Tradition can be discarded, but it is still a counterpoint that continues to exist. All interview subjects acknowledge this tension.

While mapping his own professional 'family tree', Eugenio Barba has noted that a director's evolving connection to tradition is marked by the 'family of our ethos, of our professional identity' which 'has to be conquered through successive discoveries, attentive understanding, and

⁶ Simon Shepherd, *Direction: Readings in Theatre Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 30.

⁷ Brook, ctd in Roger Foss <<http://www.thestage.co.uk/features/2009/10/its-play-time-how-much-interactivity-can-one-take/>> [accessed 2 February 2013].

⁸ Barba, 'The Essence of Theatre', (p. 12).

⁹ Related to their perceived community, a trademark aesthetic 'style' or concern, or a national identity.

sudden flashes of awareness'.¹⁰ In other words, these influences come to pass by virtue of the fact that a director is receptive or willing to seek them out, and able to apply the associated methods with respectful prudence.

Assessing Influences

Directors themselves confirm the observation that influences came to bear on New Zealand practitioners in waves; sometimes as a result of direct contact with an expert, at other times through the developing conversation of international theatre discourse. In his 1984 interview with Ruth Harley, Elric Hooper cited the previous two decades in New Zealand theatre as 'schematic theatre ... [where] whole series of tidal waves of ideas came upon us. Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski. With them came a whole new post-War idea of theatre as a social instrument'.¹¹

Lynch endorses this perspective of cultural import when he says that the highly prescriptive, annotated 'Samuel French prompt scripts were the norm [in the 'seventies] certainly in the community theatre world at that time'.¹² Hine continues that while 'some Stanislavskian technique was inherent in the process it was not named as such or his techniques studied (except in Auckland at Theatre Corporate with Raymond Hawthorne)'.¹³ She notes a break when, during the 1980s and 1990s, 'we have had a number of New Zealand actors and directors returning here having completed training, work with foreign companies, or just travelling abroad. These practitioners brought back a number of methods drawn from many different cultures'.¹⁴ Confirmation for that periodization

¹⁰ Eugenio Barba, 'Grandfathers, Orphans, and the Family Saga of European Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 19.2 (May 2003), 108-117 (p. 108).

¹¹ Harley, (p. 99).

¹² Lynch.

¹³ Hine, p. 2.

¹⁴ Hine, p. 2.

can be found in comments made by directors in the interviews for this thesis. During that period, Hine also finds an increase in ‘foreign directors working, teaching and/or immigrating [sic] here, bringing in more ideas on method and style’.¹⁵

Different approaches have been tackled by different generations of actors and directors as the ‘next big thing’. Certain British and European techniques have taken on new, heightened significance when imported to the geographically isolated New Zealand context. Jacques Lecoq’s highly physical sense of textual play through Bouffon, mask and improvisation made its way to New Zealand in the early 1990s via Penny and Anna Marbrook’s ‘Theatre at Large’ work. Both directors had been exposed to Lecoq teachings (and that of Philippe Gaulier) with Francis Batten at Drama Action Centre in Sydney. Tom McCrory (an ex-student of Lecoq’s in Paris), and Head of Movement for fifteen years at Toi Whakaari¹⁶, also imported his take on the Lecoq technique, thereby influencing many cohorts of student actors and directors.

Although little referenced by Hine, other directing methodologies have developed from Pacific, Māori, Asian and Eastern European influences. This gap has become more conspicuous and has been partially filled with the emergence of knowledge about traditional performance forms in recent scholarship. Charles Royal, for example, has written about Te Whare Tapere, the traditional Māori performance structure and philosophy.¹⁷ This, he suggests, can be ‘employed to construct a rationale upon which non-Māori forms and concepts such as mimesis might be employed in this new *whare tapere*’.¹⁸

¹⁵ Hine, p. 2.

¹⁶ From 1996 to 2013.

¹⁷ Royal.

¹⁸ Royal, p. iv.

Accordingly, there are now multitudes of ‘conventional’ and ‘experimental’ methods available for directors to deploy. Nevertheless, in line with its emphasis on predominant methods in mainstream professional theatre, this study focuses the discussion around the topic of the most prevalent approaches.

A ‘Cultural Dilemma’

For Harcourt, the work of Downstage Theatre Artistic Director Tony Taylor (1976-1982) was a strong local influence. She says he was ‘a very inspirational director for me ... He was a genius and no one knows about him now ... he totally formed my appreciation of directing and my appreciation of acting’.¹⁹ Hendry was similarly struck by Taylor’s directing vision, saying, ‘As a young person watching the work at Downstage, some of the work I saw that Tony Taylor did just blew my mind. Tony had such a strong aesthetic.’²⁰ This was despite his methods, which Hendry notes were exploratory but autocratic. He says, ‘Watching him work was a bit different because he was very of that ilk of the sixties of “I know and you do it my way”, and that’s not [to] my taste, but his aesthetic was so strong.’²¹

Taylor’s work at Downstage consolidated its reputation as a non-elitist theatre that promoted inventive solutions to staging plays. In 1977 he told Katherine Findlay that the interpretive stance harboured high aspirations for New Zealand theatre:

We have to bring our interpretive abilities to a play – find different ways of doing things, and that’s exciting. There’s no doubt in my mind that fed, nurtured and manured, theatre in

¹⁹ Harcourt.

²⁰ Hendry.

²¹ Hendry.

New Zealand can achieve the highest international standards.²²

However, Taylor himself openly questioned New Zealand's relationship with international tradition and influence as a one-way process. Our inherent reverence of all things foreign – what Bert van Dijk terms 'xenophilia' – has recently led van Dijk to question the nature of intercultural exchange in theatre.²³ He asks, 'how can it be that – after more than 200 years of Māori and Pākehā (non-Māori) coexistence – mainstream NZ theatre remains more or less unaffected by Māori culture?'²⁴ This is an ongoing dilemma in the bi-cultural environment.

This issue of one-way appropriation in the context of relative isolation from Europe, America, and elsewhere, was characterised as a 'cultural dilemma' in 1980, when at the Symposium '80 in Bonn, Germany, Taylor (then Artistic Director of Downstage) was invited to give a speech on the subject of 'cultural interchange'. He argued that it is too easy for a small nation such as New Zealand to rely on elevated, imported ideas and techniques, to 'see value in the imported product – not noticing the true quality or understanding the significance of its own indigenous and emergent arts'.²⁵ Taylor's advanced assertion was that rapid and real growth resides in the reciprocal interchange of ideas and cultural capital, rather than one-way assimilation:

True recognition of the capacity and quality of the indigenous work from larger nations can do much to assist and sustain internal efforts at identity and authenticity retention ... Nothing can help a small nation more than the acceptance of

²² Tony Taylor, *Listener* [n.d.], 1977, qtd in Smythe, *Downstage Upfront*, p. 216.

²³ Bert van Dijk, 'Towards a New Pacific Theatre', *Pacific News*, 31 (January/ February 2009), 38-31.

²⁴ van Dijk, (p. 28).

²⁵ Anthony Taylor, 'Cultural Colonisation: The Dilemma of the Small Nation', *Symposium '80: Culture: Bridge Across Borders* (Bonn, Germany, 1980), Taylor Family Private Collection, Auckland, pp. 1-4, (p. 3).

its culture as meaningful and needed in global understanding.²⁶

This may have been true of content, but perhaps not in relation to form or technique. Taylor's journey echoes that of many other directors who looked outwards for inspiration. Ironically – and perhaps inevitably – while in Europe for short and extended periods, Taylor (like McColl) was greatly influenced by German directors Peter Stein, Heiner Müller and Bertolt Brecht (in continual repertoire) and their associated methods.²⁷ Taylor was also impressed by the German arts funding model which, at that time, apportioned ninety-two per cent state subsidy to most professional theatres.

This contrasted with the New Zealand model where low level Arts Council funding meant companies like Downstage remained heavily dependent on a more privatised model; largely fluctuating, unpredictable box office returns comprised most of their fiscal support. Like other directors who have been affected by what they experience overseas, Taylor brought back to New Zealand a particular sensibility that eschewed reconstructive textual fidelity in favour of positioning the director as the primal, current and interpretive force behind the script.

Taylor's directing style evolved towards a more general European notion promoting interpretive stance, and away from the traditional English model of reverence for the text. According to Taylor's son and occasional collaborator Simon Taylor, actors were led through exercises that encouraged them to 'empty the ego' so that sensory deprivation would 'allow the imagination to take them further than they thought

²⁶ Taylor, p.3.

²⁷ According to Simon Taylor, Tony Taylor's son. Simon Taylor, personal communication with the author, Auckland, 26 March 2013.

possible'.²⁸ Works produced in New Zealand after the Bonn address also hinted at a renewed interest in the interpretive stance and strong visual aesthetic.

Taylor's long collaborative relationship with designer Raymond Boyce was legendary.²⁹ *Big and Little* (1981) – an epic four-hour long piece involving ten actors in numerous roles – brought an overtly Germanic sensibility mixed with a contemporary viewpoint to Wellington audiences with its striking, pared-back style, but critics didn't know what to make of it. The production attracted conflicting reviews. Ralph McAllister wrote in the *Dominion* that it was 'one of Downstage's finest accomplishments',³⁰ while Laurie Atkinson described it as 'very, very boring'.³¹ Taylor's attempt to challenge the cultural discourse with a different theatre language was either way ahead of its time or wildly out of step with the respondent audience. What is certain is that it provoked existing theatre frames of reference.

Two particularly identifiable examples of the influence of tradition from individuals come from different decades, and I would like to consider one in depth. The first was Grotowski's 1973 New Zealand visit and infamous abandoned lecture in Wellington, which provoked and strengthened the 'experimental' theatre tradition exemplified by companies such as Red Mole and Amamus.³² Edmond³³ and Maunder³⁴

²⁸ Simon Taylor.

²⁹ Taylor and Boyce worked on more than twenty productions together.

³⁰ Ralph McAllister, *Dominion*, 23 June 1981 quoted in John Smythe, *Downstage Upfront*, p. 224

³¹ Laurie Atkinson, *NZ Times*, 28 June 1981, quoted in Smythe, p. 224.

³² Mervyn Thompson writes, 'Early in the afternoon he [Grotowski] declared "zee vibrations not good" and left the room, never to return.' See Mervyn Thompson, *Passing Through and Other Plays* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992), p. 153.

³³ See Murray Edmond, *Lighting Out for Paradise: New Zealand Theatre and the 'Other' Tradition*, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 18 (April 1991), 183-206.

have traced the 'other' tradition's 'quest for a more authentic, grass-roots and relevant theatre practice' that was inspired by Grotowski, Augusto Boal, and others.³⁵ Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* espoused principles that befitted the New Zealand cultural climate trying to eschew dominant, conventional approaches to making drama; small spaces, immediacy of the actor-audience relationship and the primacy of the actor.³⁶ Anne Bogart's 'Viewpoints', Lecoq's 'Bouffon', Jeremiah Comey's 'FLASH'³⁷ technique and Suzuki's 'Grid Work' are a more few notable examples of imported methods that in the past three decades have fed this investigation of dynamic acting.

However, the dominant discourse was ready for new techniques as well. In 1988 Simon Bennett argued that 'popular theatre' needed to change and find new ways of engaging with its audience:

For theatre to survive and transcend the danger that it faces of becoming a dwindling relic of a bygone era, it must change. It must strive to entertain and capture the imaginations of the masses. It must strive to educate and generate a new theatre-literate audience for whom a theatrical experience is an enjoyable experience.³⁸

His plea was in part answered just a year later.

³⁴ See Paul Maunder's 'Thoughts on Popular Theatre', *Illusions*, 6 (1987), 18-20; 'The Rebellious Mirror, Before and After 1984: Community-based Theatre in Aotearoa' (published doctoral thesis, University of Canterbury, 2010); and *Rebellious Mirrors* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2013).

³⁵ John Smythe, 'Gems Aplenty to be Mined: Review of *Rebellious Mirrors*', *Theatreview*, 26 October 2013 <<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review>> [accessed 1 April 2014].

³⁶ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Eyre Methuen, 1969).

³⁷ This stands for 'Fear, Love, Anger, Sadness, Happiness'.

³⁸ Simon Bennett, 'Towards a Popular Theatre? - *The Affair* by Robert Lord', *Illusions*, 9 (1988), 11-13 (p. 13).

Individuals and Methods - Mike Alfreds

One particular event that was to have a long-term impact on New Zealand directing praxis was that of the two-week masterclass held in Wellington in 1989 by British director Mike Alfreds.³⁹ As a measure of this, New Zealand theatre practitioners still refer to the 'Mike Alfreds technique' nearly thirty years after he demonstrated his highly systematic text directing praxis in a seminal workshop.⁴⁰ Many New Zealand directors and actors regard this extended masterclass as providing a pivotal demarcation between 'instinct' (before) and 'craft' (after), as evidenced in my interviews with them and also with Alfreds.

Following this masterclass, generations of Drama School students and working professionals alike could deploy a common, internationally-sanctioned approach to text, character and play that was overtly actor-focussed and narrative-focussed. Stanislavski now had an intermediary to advance his ideal of 'delicate, artistic fooling'⁴¹ and – conveniently for translation and style – this emissary was English with a patient but firm temperament. The 'Alfreds approach' (as it has come to be known) and its direct effect signals a crucial development of theatre directing in this country.

Accordingly, the rest of this chapter examines the methods and approaches tested in Alfreds' New Zealand masterclass, held over twenty-

³⁹ 'Mike Alfreds has been directing plays for more than fifty years. In the 1970s he founded Shared Experience, and has since worked for the National Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe, the Royal Shakespeare Company and also extensively abroad. He is hugely respected within the profession.' Back cover, Mike Alfreds, *Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor*.

⁴⁰ Ironically, Alfreds himself rejects any one 'system' of directing. Stanislavski also insisted that his approach was called a 'system' rather than 'method', which he believed was too reductive. See Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. and ed. by Jean Benedetti (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁴¹ Stanislavski, ctd in David R. Press, 'Autocrat or Collaborator? The Stanislavsky Method of Directing', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 18.3, Special American Theatre Issue (October 1966), 264-270 (p. 170).

five years ago. Sylvia Rands, Hendry and Michele Hine are among many who regard this workshop as providing a pivotal demarcation between instinct and craft, since almost overnight the industry had a shared language of beats, actions, lists, given circumstances and objectives to bear on the work. The 'primacy of the actor' previously and simultaneously experimented with by Stanislavski, Brook and Grotowski was prominently in the foreground in Alfreds' methods.⁴² He is also renowned for underpinning seeming spontaneity with robust analysis and technique, or what Trevor Rawlins has called 'disciplined improvisation'.⁴³ This is captured in Alfreds' insistence that 'you must give the actors room to breathe ... Every night should be freshly created and the actors should be free to go wherever they want, physically and mentally'.⁴⁴ My own experience with these methods proves they can harness dynamic results between actors and audience.

A 'Priority Area'

The Alfreds workshop took place over two weeks from 9-22 January 1989 at the New Zealand Drama School in Wellington.⁴⁵ The Arts Council, who supported and promoted the visit, had identified a need for professional development in theatre directing. Nonnita Rees, then Manager Arts Programmes for the Arts Council of New Zealand, specified that 'directing

⁴² Alfreds, *Different Every Night*, p. 12.

⁴³ See Trevor Rawlins, "'Disciplined Improvisation'" in the Rehearsal and Performance of Shakespeare: The Alternative Approach of Mike Alfreds', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 30. 4 (Winter 2012), 431-447.

⁴⁴ David Allen, 'Exploring the Limitless Depths: Mike Alfreds directs Chekhov', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2.8 (Nov 1986), 320-35 (p. 325).

⁴⁵ At the 36 Vivian Street, Wellington premises.

has been identified as a priority area for advanced theatre training workshops'.⁴⁶ The intention was correct, if rather understated.

The Alfreds approach also fitted a developing performance culture that was gathering its own distinct confidence. In April 1977 writer Ian Cross had suggested New Zealanders needed to 'respond to their own environment, given creative expression in various forms by their artists and craftsmen'.⁴⁷ This has been a theme picked up on by Christopher Balme⁴⁸, Howard McNaughton⁴⁹, David Carnegie,⁵⁰ Judith Dale⁵¹, and others. Stories native to New Zealand gained prominence in the decades after Cross called for a local response, but techniques that challenged old conventions were required to strengthen their performance quality. In 1988 George Webby told Fiona Samuel that existing forms needed to be challenged:

Just what are we wanting in terms of theatre, where is theatre, are we actually on the right paths any more, are we perpetuating an old style? ... You have to put pressures on to make the kind of theatre you think we need.⁵²

So when 'old friend' Kenneth Rea wrote to Rees from London following a meeting in Wellington with her a year earlier, the conditions

⁴⁶ Wellington, Archives New Zealand, Public Education, Promotion and Research – Cultural Interchange: Visitors to New Zealand from Overseas – Mike Alfreds (Theatre Masterclass), Reference R20589321, 'Council Paper. Subject: Mike Alfreds Masterclass', 14 March 1989.

⁴⁷ Ian Cross, *Listener* (Wellington, April 1977), qtd in Peter Harcourt, *A Dramatic Appearance* (Wellington: Methuen, 1978), p. 8.

⁴⁸ Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*.

⁴⁹ See 'Drama' in *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* (1991 and 1998).

⁵⁰ David Carnegie, 'Recent New Zealand Drama', *JNZL: Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 3 (1985), 7-15.

⁵¹ Judith Dale, 'The State of Play: 'Outstanding Aotearoa' at the New Zealand Festival 2000', *Illusions*, 30 (Winter 2000), 36-43.

⁵² George Webby in Fiona Samuel, 'A Long Talk with George: Interview with George Webby', *Illusions*, 8 (1988), 29-33 (p. 33).

were ripe.⁵³ Rea and Mike Alfreds were working together 'serving on a major enquiry into the training of directors in Britain'.⁵⁴ Rea states that he had spoken with Alfreds, whom he considered to be 'one of the top directors in Britain ... he is the one most able to convey some of the principles and skills of directing'.⁵⁵ Alfreds, said Rea, would 'love to come to New Zealand' after stints in China and Melbourne.⁵⁶ Contact with Alfreds was made by Rees, and after several letters, the two-week masterclass was confirmed, with the Arts Council providing \$13,000 to the project: Alfreds would conduct a '12 day course for 6-8 directors who would work with approximately 12-16 actors'.⁵⁷

Structures without impediments

Ever hungry to learn, in 1989 New Zealand directors and actors were voracious in their appetite to eschew old methods in favour of 'new' structures, which (ironically) harked back to older Stanislavski-inspired systems. I suggest Alfreds' techniques, which were so firmly built on structure, fitted the post-colonial New Zealand environment very well. This theatre culture was hungry for forms that could transfer to other contexts without the impediment of cultural context, as were so often the case with German, Polish, Japanese⁵⁸ or Indian techniques that were intrinsically linked to cultural ethos. As Janinka Greenwood has noted in her *History of Bicultural Theatre: Mapping the Terrain*, cultural 'exchange' is

⁵³ As Rees described Rea in her letter to Alfreds. See Reference R20589321, Rees to Alfreds, 25 May 1988.

⁵⁴ Reference R20589321, Kenneth Rea to Nonnita Rees, 9 May 1988.

⁵⁵ Reference R20589321, Kenneth Rea to Nonnita Rees, 9 May 1988.

⁵⁶ Reference R20589321, Kenneth Rea to Nonnita Rees, 9 May 1988.

⁵⁷ Reference R20589321, File 4/13/1, Council Paper: Mike Alfreds – Directors Masterclass, 13 September 1988.

⁵⁸ See for example, a discussion of some of Min Tinaka's forms that were brought back to New Zealand by Michael Parmenter and Lyne Pringle in Dorita Hannah, 'Stomping Grounds: In Search of Earth Flesh and True Walls', *Illusions*, 26 (Winter 1997), 34-38.

most often concerned with theatrical form rather than with the complex meanings those forms carry in their original contexts.⁵⁹ She notes that Rustom Bharucha's criticisms concerned with the 'borrowing' of theatrical forms by directors like Brook did in *The Mahabharata*,⁶⁰ 'have problematized practices of intercultural borrowing and the understanding of both theatre and culture that underlie them'.⁶¹ She continues:

At the base of Bharucha's critique is an insistence that 'bios' cannot be separated from 'ethos'; that stories and forms cannot be separated from the meanings they hold for their own people, without doing violence to both the forms and the people.⁶²

Alfreds' approaches were neither culturally nor aesthetically specific; the techniques work just as well on devised, then scripted, material. The successful transference from Russian to English and American forms had already proved the methods were not culturally specific.⁶³ Stuart Young has suggested that Alfreds' work with Chekhov's texts singularly was responsible for a 'significant reappraisal of the conventions of a theatrical condition'.⁶⁴ Prior to his visit to New Zealand, Alfreds had directed the critically acclaimed Chinese premier of *A Streetcar Named Desire* at Tianjin People's Art Theatre.⁶⁵ This was

⁵⁹ Janinka Greenwood, *History of Bicultural Theatre: Mapping the Terrain* (Christchurch: Christchurch College of Education, 2002).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Rustom Bharucha, 'A Collision of Cultures: Some Western Interpretations of the Indian Theatre', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 1.1 (Spring 1984), 1-20; Rustom Bharucha, 'A Reply to Richard Schechner', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 1.2 (Autumn 1984), 254-260.

⁶¹ Greenwood, p. 8.

⁶² Greenwood, p. 8.

⁶³ I acknowledge that there is some debate about the extent to which Stanislavski's actors analysed 'beats', frequently thought to be a transliteration of 'bits', and the degree to which this analysis of minute detail and the application of emotional recall are intrinsic to Russian sensibilities. See Norris Houghton, *Moscow Rehearsals: An Account of Methods of Production in the Soviet Theatre* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938).

⁶⁴ Stuart Young, 'Mike Alfreds' Methods with Chekhov' in *Chekhov on the British Stage*, ed. by Patrick Miles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 169-184 (p. 182).

⁶⁵ First performance took place on 21 October 1988.

verification both to the design of his methods and his judicious application of them.

While the beauty of Alfreds' approach is that it could construct skeletal frameworks for play texts to be performed in any cultural setting (with reconstructive, interpretive or deconstructive frameworks), it converged most easily with the interpretive approach. The forms he offered were not dependent on cultural appropriation, but rather, provided structures to find freedom, connection, and thus to 'decolonize' the stage. O'Donnell has noted this apparent 'decolonisation' afforded by Alfreds' methods, which, in part, accounts for the popularity his methods experienced in New Zealand:

This freedom for the actors deterritorialises the stage, removing the imprint of the director's authority, allowing the actors to become nomadic, giving an enhanced sense of immediacy, of decisions being made spontaneously, of lives being lived for the first time.⁶⁶

A 'Master' class: 'the actor is absolutely the essence of theatre'

It is a testament both to Alfreds' expertise and New Zealand actors and directors – and their willingness to learn more about their craft – that the masterclass was a much-anticipated occasion. Both actors and directors wanted to understand Alfreds' methods that were renowned for bringing text dynamically to life. In keeping with his philosophy that 'the actor is absolutely the essence of theatre', Alfreds stated that the tone of the course was to be overtly actor-centric.⁶⁷ He wrote to Rees that the objective was 'to show them [actors and directors] some methods of work and to impart a little 'philosophy' on the primacy of actors'.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ O'Donnell, 'Redirecting National Identity: The Theatre of Colin McColl', p. 4

⁶⁷ Alfreds, interview.

⁶⁸ Reference. R20589321, Mike Alfreds, 'Letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p. 2.

This level of teaching and exposure to overseas directors available for extended conversations was rare in New Zealand at that time. As a result, competition to attend was fierce. More applications were received than places available. Consequently, a panel comprised of Sunny Amey and Victoria University's Phillip Mann selected seven directors, twenty actors and five observers. This meant some eighteen applicants with extensive experience were turned away in favour of fresh drama school graduates. Ellie Smith and Donna Akersten (each with at least twenty years in screen and theatre) were two such aspirants declined places. Akersten and Smith individually wrote to the Arts Council about their dismay at not being chosen. Smith's objection letters to Arts Council Director Peter Quin expressed her 'concern' and 'insult', stating that 'I wish it to be known by all concerned with the selection of participants for the Mike Alfreds course ... that I find their judgement unreasonable'.⁶⁹

What is most telling from this colourful correspondence is the sense of being denied inclusion at a significant event; the high esteem with which many (already experienced) professionals viewed the opportunity. Smith summed this up when she described the need for such professional development in New Zealand:

During the 8 years I have lived back in this country there has never been any course like this offered. Every few years I have taken myself overseas to see what is happening in world theatre, to refresh my ideas and hopefully learn a lot from what is happening outside of New Zealand.⁷⁰

She passionately argued that the relative smallness of New Zealand can lead one to professional stagnation:

It is difficult to continue growing as an actress here where one is working with the same tiny group of people over and over.

⁶⁹ Reference R20589321, Ellie Smith, letter to Peter Quin, 30 December 1988, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Reference R20589321, Ellie Smith, letter to Peter Quin, 30 December 1988, p. 1.

We all need outside stimulus, to be open to everything so that can be reflected in our performances.⁷¹

Despite the dissent, the seven directors accepted were Richard Mudford, Miles Taylor, Colin McColl, Jean Betts, Rangi Chadwick, Cathy Downes and James Beaumont. Included in the acting cohort were New Zealand Drama School⁷² graduates Jonathon Hendry and Simon Bennett. Participants paid \$200 each (actors and directors) and \$100 (observers), and were then sent material to prepare. Twenty actors and five observers were present, taking the total participant numbers to thirty-two.⁷³

Alfreds wrote to Rees on from London before travelling to China and Melbourne that there were two ambitious 'strands to the work':

- (1) Taking then through an entire rehearsal process for *The Seagull*;
- (2) Exploring matters of 'style' (I hate that word) and different realities through the scenes they choose. (NB: No 2 directors should choose scenes by the same playwright).⁷⁴

With this, he sent clear instructions on mandatory preparation work that might have leapt off the pages of Gorchakov's *Stanislavsky Directs*.⁷⁵ Script analysis on Chekhov's *The Seagull* was required and each director was asked to choose a section to work on with two or three actors. This breakdown of 'incontrovertible facts' consisted of a close Stanislavskian reading of the play text. Alfreds outlined the instructions for those involved:

A. FOR DIRECTORS

Make the following lists and bring them with you concerning the character assigned to you for preparation:

⁷¹ Reference R20589321, Ellie Smith, letter to Peter Quin, 30 December 1988, p. 1.

⁷² As it was called then. From 1992 it became known as Te Kura Toi Whakaari O Aotearoa: New Zealand Drama School.

⁷³ Observers also had to apply. Akersten and Smith were not present as observers.

⁷⁴ Reference R20589321, Alfreds letter to Rees, London, 27 August 1988.

⁷⁵ Nicolai M. Gorchakov, *Stanislavsky Directs*, trans. by Miriam Goldina (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1954).

1. Facts about the character
(Whatever information you can discover from the text which is utterly incontrovertible. i.e. non conjectural, non-judgemental, eg. biographical details, physical descriptions given [by] the author, their actions and behaviour during the play etc).
2. What the character says about him/herself
An accurate verbatim copying of anything the character says in describing him/herself or his/her actions.
3. What the character says about other characters.
4. What other characters say about 'your' character
To do this assignment work through the text four separate times – once for each list.

B. FOR ACTORS

- (i) Break down Act I into whatever you understand as a unit and give each unit a title eg. 'x and y have an argument' and 'x asks y to marry him', etc.
- (ii) Write out the actions of the characters for the first two pages of Act I – i.e. the things the characters do. Eg. 'she reproaches him', 'he rejects her', 'she agrees with him', 'she slaps his face', 'he cries', etc.⁷⁶

This detailed analysis enabled a significant amount of territory to be covered in two weeks. Those present had a full plate to digest, comprising of 'page-to-stage' techniques that included:

... the rehearsal structure (actions, Text – No Text – Text, objectives, feeding in, points of concentration; character analysis, super-objectives & main lines of action)...Laban Efforts, the uses and values of space on stage, visual focus, problems of translation and dealing with alien cultures and psychologies, and – via the character analyses, – a way of interpreting the play and discovering the themes and motifs.⁷⁷

By Alfreds' own admission, two weeks was not enough time to impart everything he had wanted to, as he was able to do in a six-week workshop held in Melbourne at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) in

⁷⁶ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, letter to Rees, Melbourne, 7 November 1988.

⁷⁷ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.2.

November to December 1988, just prior to coming to Wellington. Kim Durban, a participant in the VCA workshop, later wrote that Alfreds was brought to Victoria 'as a "Bicentennial gift to the nation"'.⁷⁸ Durban adds that Alfreds taught two fundamental acting concepts; 'contact between actors ... and into the space', as well as 'the actions with which the characters are affecting one another'.⁷⁹ He emphasized the power of this approach: 'It really works. Thus I use many of Mike Alfreds' methods, no matter where I work.'⁸⁰ Alfreds would have liked a longer time for the New Zealand workshop. 'On consideration, a month would have been an ideal length to deal with the material we had', he wrote to Rees.⁸¹ By comparison the Australian masterclass had allowed him to delve into much more territory: 'The 6 week season in Melbourne encouraged me to embark on all sorts of other areas (eg. narrative theatre, commedia, endless rehearsal exercises).'⁸²

In her report for the Arts Council, Rees concurs with this when she describes the advanced workshop as 'a very intensive 12 day affair with Mike Alfreds setting high demands and requiring strong commitment'.⁸³ Aspects of Alfreds' process not covered such as 'logic text' and 'commedia'⁸⁴ have remained absent in New Zealand amongst common understandings of the entire Alfreds approach. This puts an interesting spin on the intellectual and physical components that were left out of the

⁷⁸ Kim Durban, 'I Love the Quality of Playing, I': Directing Adventures in Ballarat', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 57 (Oct 2010), 115-28 (p. 120).

⁷⁹ Durban, (p. 20).

⁸⁰ Durban, (p. 20).

⁸¹ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.2.

⁸² Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.2.

⁸³ Reference R20589321, Council Paper: Mike Alfreds Masterclass, File 4/13/68, Nonnita Rees, 14 March 1989, p.2.

⁸⁴ As Alfreds refers to Commedia Dell'Arte in his letter to Rees. See Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.2.

Alfreds toolkit, and to some extent answers why these elements are sometimes perceived as wanting in the Alfreds approach here.

In need of philosophy?

Alfreds' post-workshop summation of the masterclass provides a window on the state of directing praxis at that time in New Zealand. Under the heading 'Theory/ Philosophy/ Concept (?)', Alfreds' report notes a general lack of clear philosophy amongst the participating directors:

It seems to me that none of the directors has any clearly thought-out concept about the concept of theatre, i.e. what it actually is. They all, in varying degrees, wobble between challenging some received ideas while, quite unquestionably, accepting others.⁸⁵

Alfreds was at that time described by Australian director and playwright Michael Gurr as a practitioner who eschewed verbosity; 'He's a great enemy of intellectual wank, which is terribly refreshing. His process is not about theory. He maintains that the more talk there is in a rehearsal, the worse it's going basically.'⁸⁶ However, Alfreds' own writings and work have championed the abiding central philosophy that the actor is paramount, and it is the director's job to establish the conditions under which creativity can happen. He advocates:

The actor is absolutely the essence of theatre, and all you need to do theatre is have actors with a story to tell. It doesn't have to be a play. It doesn't even have to be written (they can improvise), and an audience, and that's all you need.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.2.

⁸⁶ Reference R20589321, 4/13/68, Suzanne Olb, 'Mike Alfreds Shares his Experience', *NTA*, (March/ April 1989), 9-10 (p. 10).

⁸⁷ Alfreds interview.

This fundamentally corresponds with Brook's notion of the centrality of the actor⁸⁸ and Grotowski's assertion of the 'holy actor' as the essential component of theatre. The actor, whom Grotowski's 'poor theatre' model promulgated as 'the most elementary and obvious [of] objects,'⁸⁹ became the vital component in his ideal model of 'inductive' theatre that tried to find primacy. He said: 'The acceptance of poverty in theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of art-form.'⁹⁰ Alfreds contends that philosophy is fundamental to directing craft when he observes that 'without some sort of philosophy, or coherent view of theatre, I would think it's impossible to develop a coherent and sustained process of work'.⁹¹ A lack of paradigms is akin to being without basic, fundamental structure, or as Alfreds suggests, is 'rather like designing houses which may make all sorts of aesthetic and social statements while ignoring the fact that, first and foremost, they are for people to live in, etc'.⁹²

Because of this perceived absence of intellectual motivations, Alfreds depicted a cohort of professional directors driven by practical outcomes rather than theoretical inquiry. He wrote to Rees:

[The directors] seem to work pragmatically, choosing a play because it appeals to them or their apparent aims and then they work on it without a really strong context or framework. So decisions and choices are made from moment to moment, somewhat arbitrarily.⁹³

⁸⁸ See *The Empty Space*.

⁸⁹ Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 21.

⁹⁰ Grotowski, p. 21.

⁹¹ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.2.

⁹² Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, pp.2-3.

⁹³ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.4.

In Alfreds' view, all but one of participating directors lacked robust, analytical process, and he writes somewhat prophetically:

None of them (except maybe Colin [McColl]) always has a clear grasp of what a scene is about (in terms of action, plot, story, situation – i.e. what is happening). They often stress the incidental or irrelevant and miss the central event or issue. They look for complexity – and miss the simple and obvious.⁹⁴ Alongside this, Alfreds noted a tendency towards a product-driven ethos; a reflection, perhaps, of the gathering neo-liberal market-oriented language that emerged in the late 1980s that was increasingly concerned with 'product' and 'industry'. Alfreds remarked that the participating directors: 'tend to worry about details before they deal with the broad bones of a scene'.⁹⁵ He continued: 'This latter is mainly caused by the desire to get 'results', rather than thinking about process. It's rather like decorating a home before you've actually laid the foundations.'⁹⁶ This attitude of 'pragmatism' is often viewed as the direct result of working in the constraints of lack of money and time. While accepting this however, Alfreds challenged directors to eschew constrictions in favour of quality of work:

Working within these restraints – rather than acting as a goad to their imaginations – seems to provide them with excuses for taking short-cuts, and justify less than satisfactory work. (If there were no "excuses", one would have to stand by one's work).⁹⁷

Alfreds also highlighted a deficiency in the seven directors' language. He notes 'a semantic vagueness about their instructions to

⁹⁴ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.3.

⁹⁵ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.3.

⁹⁶ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.3.

⁹⁷ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.4.

actors. Although they may clearly understand the structure and intention of a scene, their instructions tend to be generalised, imprecise, approximate, unspecific [sic] – or they say too much’. Next to this he praised their aptitude; ‘the quality of the group was high, especially that of the actors’, while Nonnita Rees endorsed that ‘all directors showed clearer and more expressive work by the end of the course’.⁹⁸

In contrast to Alfreds’ findings in 1989, the interview archive evidences deep and wide understandings of theatre and performance philosophy, plus a willingness by these directors to consciously work with ‘tradition’, and against it. I suggest that Mike Alfreds’ techniques have now evolved to the point that they can be considered in a post-colonial context. The freedom with which directors happily employ this ‘Stanislavski-Alfreds-eclecticism-fusion’ points to a post-Alfreds confidence.

Participants

If Alfreds found it difficult to be ascertain how much material was absorbed in only two weeks, most participants were convinced the masterclass was a success.⁹⁹ The techniques afforded liveliness, spark and dynamic to work on stage. At its best I would argue that its raw power – largely afforded by structured, kinaesthetic, improvised playing – brings about immediate creation, and participants’ responses concur with this. Among the feedback comments, Alfreds’ approach was described variously as ‘a solid, complete, working process’, ‘the most stimulating experience in my career’, ‘a way of rehearsing a play that is disciplined,

⁹⁸ Reference R20589321, Alfreds, 'letter to Nonnita Rees: Some Thoughts About the Directors' Workshop', Hanmer Springs, 24 January 1989, p.3.

⁹⁹ As evidenced in the feedback forms collected by the Arts Council. Reference R20589321.

not threatening, peaceful and ultimately rewarding for all concerned', and a 'very necessary reinforcement of honesty, daring and trust as key ingredients in the work we do – too often absent due to many factors'.¹⁰⁰ Other participants pronounced it 'a strong affirmation of the ensemble process of creating theatre'; 'the pulling together of concepts and practical techniques into a systematic, creative, method for exploring texts and rehearsing with actors'; 'strong, structured processes for Text Analysis, character creation and exploring production processes with true creativity'; and 'confirmation of theatre organics and initiation to a very thorough holistic methodology that embraces it'.¹⁰¹ Another noted it as:

a rehearsal method which united a sound basis in text with a disciplined structure and exciting creative freedom for actors – how to identify and make important decisions at each stage – how to remain focused on the play right through the rehearsals how to respect a variety of talents and approaches.¹⁰²

Simon Bennett regards it as the single most formative experience in his directing career: 'It's informed everything I've done since and the way I think about my approach to directing.'¹⁰³ In the evolution of a distinctive local tradition, a revolution for the 'pragmatists' had begun.

The Alfreds 'ripple effect'

The ripples from Alfreds' masterclass continued to spread after the immediate impact of his work in 1989. Evidence suggests that some directors followed his version of Stanislavski's methodology straight away, while others encountered the work in more outward, incremental,

¹⁰⁰ Feedback forms, Reference R20589321.

¹⁰¹ Feedback forms, Reference R20589321.

¹⁰² Reference R20589321, Council Paper: Mike Alfreds Masterclass, File 4/13/68, Nonnita Rees, 14 March 1989, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Bennett.

and second-hand ways. Almost all of those present at the two-week event applied their newly-minted methodology to projects throughout the country, testing and refining the tools of analysis so lacking in many parts of New Zealand at that time.

Initially there was a tendency for directors to get it 'right', systematically working through the detailed process of analysis of three strands that Alfreds categorised as 'world', 'text' and 'character'.¹⁰⁴ This soon loosened up over time as directors tested the merit of Alfreds' methods against their own appraisal of 'immediate' theatre. Other practitioners who were not present learned the methodology through their peers as the technique spread further afield, and in the process, they experimented with fragments that seemed to work particularly well. As with every school of thought, a few directors have deliberately chosen to ignore the 'Alfreds technique' in favour of other approaches.¹⁰⁵ Whether immediate or long-term, the ripple effect has been enormous. Whether as a point of departure or exclusion, the amalgamation of Stanislavski-based text directing and performing strategies we have come to know as the 'Mike Alfreds technique' has been an irrefutable influence on the New Zealand directing landscape.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Clearly outlined in Fiona Samuel, 'Theatre: Direct from Text', *Onfilm*, 6.4 (1989), 43-44. However, Alfreds has long dismissed the notion that there is one 'right' way to direct a play, an observation endorsed by all of the directors I interviewed.

¹⁰⁵ See Alfreds, *Different Every Night*; Kenneth Rea, 'The Theatre of Mike Alfreds', *Drama* 1.163 (1987), 3-8; Mike Alfreds, *Shared Experience: 1975-1984* (London: Shared Experience, 1985); Mike Alfreds, 'A Shared Experience: The Actor as Story-Teller', *Theatre Papers*, 6 (1979-80), 1-24; Mike Alfreds and Clive Barker, 'Shared Experience: from Science Fiction to Shakespeare', *Theatre Quarterly*, 10.39 (1981), 12-22; David Allen, 'Exploring the Limitless Depths: Mike Alfreds Directs Chekhov', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 11.8 (November 1986), 320-335; David Allen, *Performing Chekhov* (London: Routledge, 2000); David Allen, *Plays and Players*, 25.7 (April 1978), 39.

¹⁰⁶ For further writing on Alfreds' impact overseas, see Kristin A. Crouch, 'Shared Experience Theatre: Exploring the Boundaries of Performance' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ohio State, 2003).

McColl, Downes, Bennett and Hendry were all part of the masterclass; two as directors and two as actors, respectively. The workshop came at a crucial point of professional development in their careers and coincided with their aspirations to direct text in theatre. Bennett is not alone when he describes the Alfreds workshop as ‘a landmark experience ... I probably got more out of those two weeks than I did out of two years at Drama School’.¹⁰⁷ Both Hendry and Downes similarly describe Alfreds’ impact on their methods as ‘huge’, and McColl cites Alfreds as a fundamental part of his variegated and evolving text directing techniques.

Of the interview subjects, Bennett and Hendry – who were partaking as actors in the masterclass – are the most faithful exactors of Alfreds’ techniques. In 1989 both had just graduated from the New Zealand Drama School and were involved as actors in an explicitly actor-centric workshop process. In this environment, the connection with and formation of a shared acting language were chief attractions to Alfreds’ work in Wellington. He offered a systemised, yet dynamic method of directing text with actors at the core that resonated well with performers and directors in search of a dynamic, performance-based experience.¹⁰⁸

Authenticity and primacy: application of methods

The Alfreds manifesto to be ‘different every night’ resonated well with the sports-obsessed culture dominant in New Zealand. Alfreds’ technique allowed for a kind of spontaneity not previously seen in text-based theatre where set ‘blocking’ (pre-determined moves) was common practice.

¹⁰⁷ Bennett.

¹⁰⁸ Critics of the Alfreds technique in New Zealand include Bert van Dijk, who has depicted the method as ‘a rather intellectual exercise – using long lists of verbs and actions leading to clean-cut productions that looked good...some emotional truth to it, but lacking depth in the physical and imaginative arenas’. (Guest, p. 159).

Alfreds told Fiona Samuel, 'It's the humanity and the liveliness of theatre that's important and if that's not there, then anything else about theatre is second best and irrelevant.'¹⁰⁹ His methods for making performance still resonate with a nation whose main form of entertainment was, and is, sport. On every muddy Saturday morning rugby field there exists the potential for real 'theatre'; to ask, 'What will happen next? Who will achieve their objective? What tactics (actions) will they employ? What is this story and how will it pan out?' If actors are re-enacting a narrative in theatre *as if for the first time*, sport is surely the closest analogy to dynamic performance.

The Alfreds technique rang true for those practitioners seeking more 'authenticity' and 'primacy' in theatre akin to the drama of sport. In 2012 Alfreds explained to me his own direct analogy with sport:

It's a bit like a soccer match where you do everything you can to be absolutely in peak condition. And then what do you do? You know the rules of the game, you know the rules of the particular game you're playing, you've studied the form of your opponents, you know how to deal with weather conditions if you're away, if you're at home will this affect you, and with all that knowledge you go onto the pitch and you've got objectives – to gain goals and to prevent goals. And to improvise.¹¹⁰

In this setting, the sporting analogy extends to the role of the director which Alfreds sees is akin to that of a coach. 'The role of the director – the director is everything and anything. Somebody once said to me, "Oh, you really function like a coach."¹¹¹ The ultimate purpose of this highly deconstructive-constructive technique is to enable freedom for the actor and – like the rules of sport – to afford a structure through which to make

¹⁰⁹ Samuel, (pp. 43-44).

¹¹⁰ Alfreds interview.

¹¹¹ Samuel, (p. 44).

choices.¹¹² Alfreds has noted that; 'You go through discipline to freedom. You really feel free when you know what you are doing.'¹¹³ This explains the seemingly improvised dynamic the technique aims for in performance, and perhaps explains why so many New Zealand directors eager for new methods took to it with such enthusiasm.

Many directors give credence to the explicit craft-based investigative emphasis of Alfreds' work. Simon Bennett characterises the Alfreds approach as 'a toolkit and a philosophy which is about directing *process* rather than *results*'.¹¹⁴ He advocates the 'process-based way of working, rather than a result-oriented way of working'.¹¹⁵ This is a framework Bennett has tried to 'keep alive through all [his] work subsequently. So that it's not about fixing something, it's about allowing something to flourish and fly'.¹¹⁶ Hendry reinforces this when he associated Alfreds' support of the directors' choices: 'What I thought was genius about what he did. was that he kept reminding us and working with us with, 'you choose', almost cherry pick and construct within your frame what to do with these techniques.'¹¹⁷

Bennett immediately put the newly-learned method into practice, infusing Ken Duncum's *Jism* (1989). The author describes the play as belonging to part of a 'subversive' performance oeuvre where 'we did a lot of fun things and did whatever we liked, which was very liberating'.¹¹⁸ Accordingly, Bennett thoroughly experimented with points of

¹¹² These choices are arguably made by the director in initial stages of rehearsal, but the actor is actively encouraged to take responsibility for choice as the process drives towards opening night and beyond.

¹¹³ Samuel, (p. 43).

¹¹⁴ Bennett.

¹¹⁵ Bennett.

¹¹⁶ Bennett.

¹¹⁷ Hendry.

¹¹⁸ David O'Donnell, "'Theatre is the Lightning Rod": Interview with Ken Duncum', in Maufort and O'Donnell, pp. 147-162 (p. 151).

concentration in a process he calls 'exciting'.¹¹⁹ This included detailed script and character analysis. 'I applied all this stuff that I'd learnt [with Alfreds] to the production of *Jism* and it worked, and basically vindicated the revelation for me that that course had been.'¹²⁰ Bennett explains the specific methods he used to keep things different every night, and their impact:

I went through the process of applying different points of concentration. So I'd give the actors a point of concentration in an envelope before a performance; this is once the show is in production, it was up and running. In order to keep performances fresh, to keep the actors continuing to explore an aspect of the story or their character or the situation, and also because the actors never knew where each other was going to be from moment to moment, they had to exist in the moment and there was always a sense of spontaneity and freshness. And a high level of energy in what they were doing, which was exciting. *Jism* was a big success in Wellington at the time.¹²¹

Central to the Alfreds approach is the exclusion of 'blocking'.¹²² He still maintains that 'blocking blocks', adding that he hasn't used it as a device for more than forty-five years.¹²³

Bennett applied this principle to *Jism* with absolute confidence that the actors would find justification for their own movement every performance, if they understood the three strands of world, text and character. It was such a direct pathway to dynamic, impulsive action on stage that Bennett has maintained a suspicion of predetermined movement ever since, even while directing for camera:

I remember Mike Alfreds saying something like the word blocking was an anathema to him because it implied actually

¹¹⁹ Bennett.

¹²⁰ Bennett.

¹²¹ Bennett.

¹²² Pre-defined or set moves for the actors.

¹²³ Alfreds.

shutting down options, choices, decisions and the imagination. And I agree with that ... I still don't like it. I prefer to think about it as staging because when you're dealing with camera and focus you actually have to have certain parameters. I went through a whole period in theatre where I didn't actually block at all and the staging, the movement of the actors was quite fluid from performance to performance.¹²⁴

Alfreds' principles of no blocking, strong points of concentration, Laban Efforts¹²⁵ and very clear objectives were applied to Bennett's production of *Conquest of the South Pole* (1990) at the intimate BATS Theatre. This was 'probably the most extreme extension of Mike Alfreds' approach in terms of its unpredictability from night to night'.¹²⁶ The set was comprised of 'a bunch of chairs and a table that got built into various configurations'.¹²⁷ 'I loved that show', Bennett asserts, since 'there was a very strong improvised element to it'.¹²⁸ Its dynamism was noticed by a wider audience than the ninety each night at BATS. The *Evening Post's* Laurie Atkinson noted there was a 'raw theatrical energy pounding through [the production] that demands one's attention',¹²⁹ while the *Dominion Sunday Star Times's* Patricia Cooke called the work 'a play of comic power, relevance and humanity ... which uses the theatre as a theatre'.¹³⁰ Cooke states that a Bennett production will typically be 'fiercely energetic, eclectic but centred on the play' where the audience can expect

¹²⁴ Bennett.

¹²⁵ Also known as Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis, 'Laban Efforts' (sometimes called 'dynamics') uses a multidisciplinary system of human movement analysis today to determine categories of movement according to inner intention. I explore this further in Chapter Seven.

¹²⁶ Bennett.

¹²⁷ Bennett.

¹²⁸ Bennett.

¹²⁹ Laurie Atkinson, 'Theatrical energy fires *The Conquest of the South Pole*', *Evening Post*, 2 February 1990, p.15.

¹³⁰ Patricia Cooke, 'Karge a high start to year', *Dominion Sunday Star Times*, 11 February 1990, p. 26.

‘originality, fun and a stimulating use of the acting space’.¹³¹ Reflecting on this directing method and its results, she asks, ‘is this the result of an Alfreds inspired acting exercise? Whatever it is, it works memorably’.¹³²

Bennett is also keen to underline the process of layering one element at a time as a crucial part of effective directing, attributed to Alfreds. He draws directly on the Alfreds notion that in directing – like acting – you can only ever do one thing at a time:

Mike Alfreds outlined ... that you’re never trying to attempt too many things at any one time. You’re concentrating on just one thing, one aspect of what you’re doing and you’re just doing it many, many times, each time concentrating on a different aspect. And for me directing ideally is like that, in that you are continually going over and over and over a work but each time you go through it, you’re concentrating on a different facet. A different part of your imagination or mind is coming to play.¹³³

Chiefly, Bennett attributes Alfreds with providing to him ‘a toolkit and a philosophy which is about directing process, rather than results’.¹³⁴ This includes the way both speech and emotion are viewed as a by-product of action; ‘a line is a symptom, as is an emotion’.¹³⁵ Bennett’s current directing process still resides firmly in a version of the Alfreds technique if time and purpose allow. A selective Alfreds practice is employed; ‘I will use aspects of it [the Alfreds technique] depending on how much time I’ve got and depending on how receptive I think the particular cast are going to be.’¹³⁶ The crucial element here – as with many directors – is not ineffective technique, but lack of time to thoroughly apply all parts of the

¹³¹ Cooke, p. 26.

¹³² Cooke, p. 26.

¹³³ Bennett.

¹³⁴ Bennett.

¹³⁵ Bennett.

¹³⁶ Bennett.

Alfreds approach:

If I direct a play for the ATC I may not actually have chosen the actors who are going to be in it and I know I've only got four weeks' rehearsal including a production week, so I can't waste any time if those actors aren't going to respond.¹³⁷

The inquiry of 'play'

Hendry, who participated in the workshop as an actor, was equally enthusiastic about Alfreds' approach following the masterclass, primarily citing the principle of 'freshness' that permeated every performance.¹³⁸ Hendry says: 'He gave ... freedom within a structure and that was immeasurably reinforced by the two week workshop I did with Alfreds when I'd just got out of Drama School ... that Alfreds workshop rocked my world.'¹³⁹ Alfreds still describes structure as analysis that gives 'deep knowledge [of the play]',¹⁴⁰ while Hendry makes the direct connection to Stanislavski's idea of persistent enquiry that the Alfreds technique draws on. This means 'constantly discovering a play, rather than thinking you have something to find and then present'.¹⁴¹ He summons the Alfreds analogy that 'every night you have a recipe and you re-cook the meal, rather than re-heating it in the oven'.¹⁴²

This concept of structured play is central to Alfreds' methods and anthropologists have noted it is fundamental to notions of dynamic theatre, irrespective of culture. Clifford Geertz's seminal essay, 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' highlights the centrality of play as a

¹³⁷ Bennett.

¹³⁸ Hendry.

¹³⁹ Hendry.

¹⁴⁰ Alfreds.

¹⁴¹ Hendry.

¹⁴² Hendry.

transformative, dynamic activity.¹⁴³ Geertz suggests that, when successfully executed, 'deep play' contains intrinsically binding characteristics that compel its audience to make meaning from the action:

If ... we go to see *Macbeth* to learn what a man feels like after he has gained a kingdom and lost his soul, Balinese go to cockfights to find out what a man, usually composed, aloof, almost obsessively self-absorbed, a kind of moral autocosm, feels like when, attacked, tormented, challenged, insulted, and driven in result to the extremes of fury, he has totally triumphed or been brought totally low.¹⁴⁴

Alfreds' model of structured play springs directly from Stanislavski's principle that in rehearsal and performance, the actor must feel the work is their own. Boris Zakhava (one of Stanislavski's directing students) employed the term 'creative reciprocity' to describe what he thought would be 'the ideal collaborative state of rehearsals'.¹⁴⁵ In practice, though, nothing is entirely equal and the director still has to assume the role of 'arbiter of taste' who accepts or rejects choices, so absolute equality is virtually impossible. In a similar vein Alfreds shadows Stanislavski's career trajectory that went from techniques that require relative autocracy to those that endorse a more liberal, delicate authority. Alfreds' own manner has a calm, centred presence that assumes an inherently open, generous authority.

Alfreds endorses this notion of 'reciprocity' when he says that the intention is for the actors to own the play. Central to this quest for ownership and seeming spontaneity is the director's willingness to 'give the play over' to the actors after opening night.¹⁴⁶ Hendry recently directed

¹⁴³ Clifford Geertz, 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 412-453.

¹⁴⁴ Geertz, p. 453.

¹⁴⁵ Cited in Press, 'Autocrat or Collaborator? The Stanislavsky Method of Directing', (p. 265).

¹⁴⁶ Alfreds, interview.

a production of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (2011) for Toi Whakaari that tested this principle. In this work he was 'interested in the idea of – just like Alfreds – giving the actors the challenge of really inventing in the moment, and really changing, playing and be affected by each other in the moment in relationship with the audience'.¹⁴⁷ The production was reviewed by Helen Sims as a kind of structured improvisation around Shakespeare's play:

Carrying through the theme of split identities, most of the cast have prepared the role of two characters. Games of chance (the flip of a coin, paper-scissors-rock or a card draw) determine which character the actor will play tonight. It also aims to ensure the show will be kept fresh, as the combination of which actor plays which character will be different each night.¹⁴⁸

Sims underlines the desired effect of being different every performance when she notes that 'the device works well to ensure a "live" dynamic'.¹⁴⁹ Hendry eschewed blocking and even predetermined casting in his quest for absolute vitality between actor and audience, saying, 'I'm more interested in that relationship with an audience than I am with creating perfect pictures.'¹⁵⁰ In hindsight he calls the production a 'success'; '[there were] moments where I would see the actor working the relationship with the audience and doing something completely fresh, even within a structure or completely new, having the confidence to play'.¹⁵¹ This meant the actors were encouraged to view performance primarily as an opportunity to create something new each time. As

¹⁴⁷ Hendry.

¹⁴⁸ Sims, Helen, 'Energy, Fun, and Some Inconsistency', 28 October 2011, <<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=4320>> [accessed 6 March 2013].

¹⁴⁹ Sims.

¹⁵⁰ Hendry.

¹⁵¹ Hendry.

Hendry observes, 'They were inventing for me like they do in a rehearsal room, having that "liveness" in the production.'¹⁵²

Hendry is certainly 'an actor's director', taking and reciprocating impulses with the performer at the centre of the inquiry of play.¹⁵³ He is keen to emphasize that he has experimented with aspects of the Alfreds approach over the years. While some tools such as 'Text – No Text – Text' are still used, he employs them according to the needs of the production. Discussing *Love's Labour's Lost*, Hendry notes, 'I got them [the actors] to engage with the play through Text – No Text – Text and I find that a very useful tool. But – I would hope that Alfreds would be happy with this – I'm not reverential about it.'¹⁵⁴ Akin to this is a democratic 'framing' of the actor's role in the company. Hendry exacts Alfreds' attitude that the company is there to collectively make the play. He states; 'That's really something that the Alfreds work and the work that when I've worked with the best [requires], is that we somehow get away from [ego]. So like Stanislavski ... there aren't stars.'¹⁵⁵

Hendry also cites Declan Donnellan, Max Stafford-Clark and George Webby as robust influences on his directing methodology. However, it is Alfreds to whom he gravitates when it comes to the nature of actor-audience relationship and a live dynamic in theatre:

And people won't reject that, they won't see that as something that is boring because if you can frame it or create an experience, a "shared experience" to quote Alfreds, between audience and actors that is alive, using that currency as happened down in the Southbank all those centuries ago, then that is rich. That is like me walking out of Peter Stein['s

¹⁵² Hendry.

¹⁵³ At the time of his interview with me, Hendry was Head of Acting at Toi Whakaari. He still works as an actor as well as director, as well as teaching acting there part-time.

¹⁵⁴ Hendry.

¹⁵⁵ Hendry.

production of *Uncle Vanya*] and feeling that I've been nourished.¹⁵⁶

Downes still uses some of the Alfreds' methodology in her text directing practice on particular plays, qualifying its adaptation; 'I still use part of that process.'¹⁵⁷ The lasting benefits for Downes from the Alfreds masterclass have been the tools of analysis and how to relate that to a particular actor. She explains:

He [Alfreds] gave me more tools in terms of the *how*. The tools I had were the *whys*, which is essentially doing a lot of hard work myself on what could help that actor ... Everyone knows when something's not working, but it's so difficult to know (a) how it could work better and (b) even more importantly how it would work in that actor's language. How that actor can make it their own.¹⁵⁸

Downes emphasizes that an important part of direction is 'knowing how to connect [with an actor]'.¹⁵⁹ She identifies text investigation as a highly effective pathway to unlock the 'how' and therefore the specific means of communication required:

So by looking at the script, it's all there in its words, in its arc, in its story. In the way that it phrases sentences, the beats, all those little things. So that helps you profoundly to know where you should go and how you should get there. But that doesn't interfere at all; in fact it supports the why – which is the objectives – which is a huge part of the Mike Alfreds toolkit.¹⁶⁰

A particular example of Downes' application of the Alfreds technique can be found in her award-winning production of Patrick Marber's *Closer* (1998) at Circa Theatre in Wellington. In a career that has aimed to contextualize theatre as something that will both 'help explain

¹⁵⁶ Hendry.

¹⁵⁷ Downes.

¹⁵⁸ Downes.

¹⁵⁹ Downes.

¹⁶⁰ Downes.

the world and offer an escape from it',¹⁶¹ Downes cites *Closer* as 'the most exciting production I've worked on'.¹⁶² Downes elected to spend considerable time using Text – No Text – Text, with absolute trust that textual form would suggest specific performance solutions:

I used a lot of Mike Alfreds on that in terms of Text – No Text, looking at objectives and beats. The structure and the form of the play was so fine; that was an example of where if you follow the writer to the letter, to the beat and look at the arcs of where he's taking that scene and play and the way that he counterpoints, [it works]. It was an exciting piece of music, and I suppose I keep comparing directing to conducting a score, and it is like that.¹⁶³

Like Alfreds, Downes considers predetermined blocking anathema to creating dynamic performance. 'I can't stand blocking; "blocking blocks". Actors can find their own blocking if they know what they're doing. A very Mike Alfreds thing to say, but I believe it.'¹⁶⁴ She is adamant that wherever possible, spatiality and corporeality (bodies in relation to each other) should be shaped by instinct rather than prescriptive movement, stating that 'we as theatre practitioners have a pretty good eye for balance and counterpoint on stage'.¹⁶⁵

While Downes has clearly departed from a pure Alfreds-structured text directing approach over the years, her structure suggests a methodology that is still heavily centred on the narrative-driven notions of text, world, and character action. She explains that a typical framework for working would be 'first week is exploring through the play, second week

¹⁶¹ John Smythe, 'Downstage becomes Downes' stage: Leading director returns to take over her home town', *National Business Review*, Saturday September 24, 2005
<<http://m.nbr.co.nz/article/downstage-becomes-downes-stage>> [accessed 10 July 2012].

¹⁶² Downes.

¹⁶³ Downes.

¹⁶⁴ Downes.

¹⁶⁵ Downes.

we'll try to do it again'.¹⁶⁶ Then:

*This is Mike Alfreds' influence [my emphasis] – I go through the text again and then really fine tune it. And then about week four, fine tune it. Then run it a few times, very standard stuff. But in weeks three and four I would come in and really start tuning what they are doing quite finely, physically and emotionally.*¹⁶⁷

This understanding of textual logic and the structural components of a play – alongside the unfolding of characters' journeys within a particular narrative – has undoubtedly been of huge benefit to Downes as a director of new plays. As John Smythe notes, Downes has brought Alfreds-inspired dramaturgical development skills to bear on 'world premiere productions of Briar Grace-Smith's *Purapurawhetu* and *Potiki's Memory of Stone*, Lorae Parry's *Eugenia*, Ian Cross's *The God Boy* and Witi Ihimaera's *Woman Far Walking*'.¹⁶⁸

Bernarda Alba: McColl applies Alfreds

John Godber's *Bouncers* was a national touring success in 1987, and was typical of the tightly choreographed, popular drama of the time. I saw its raw energy in the dark confines of the Tauranga Repertory Theatre in that year, and even now I can picture William Walker's testosterone-filled production with its thick northern English accents, set moves and stock characters from 'elsewhere'. Observational comedy was in demand.¹⁶⁹ Even then, though, my eighteen-year-old self found the production – sitting firmly within its style – to be highly energised but strangely forced, and without subtle connection to its audience. Within this environment of

¹⁶⁶ Downes.

¹⁶⁷ Downes.

¹⁶⁸ Smythe, 'Downstage becomes Downes' stage'.

¹⁶⁹ In the 1987 New Year Honours list, Roger Hall was made a Companion of the Queen's Service Order for community service. In doing so, popular, middle-class comedy was endorsed by The Governor General as the country's preferred entertainment offering.

popular drama and fresh from the masterclass, McColl chose to direct Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1989) at Downstage using Alfreds' techniques.

The nine women actors in *Bernarda Alba* were introduced to an organic way of working that put the play firmly in their hands every night. McColl applied an unswerving Alfreds approach to mounting the play that systematically identified the world of the play, the character wants and objectives, strong 'outer actions' and physical manifestations of character (Laban) analysis. However, the company only had just over four weeks to rehearse it and this proved to be the real challenge; how to marry the deep textual and character investigations with the fiscal realities of shaping a work in a short rehearsal period. McColl spoke during a featured episode of television show *Kaleidoscope* entitled 'Alba – The Experiment' – that documented the rehearsal process. In it, he calls the Alfreds technique a 'group process ... a way of changing the text into behaviour'.¹⁷⁰ Veteran actor Dame Kate Harcourt is convinced of its merits when she states to camera, 'One wonders how one even worked or rehearsed a play any other way.'¹⁷¹

Time, however, was not on McColl's side for his experiment with the newfound technique. Downstage's production, billed on posters as having 'earthy realism' and 'erotic energy', was afforded only five weeks' rehearsal, compared to the usual eight to ten weeks that Alfreds preferred. In this time, McColl said he 'had to trust them [the actors] to find their positions, even if they're not technically correct in the conventional sense'.¹⁷² Despite his increasing fear that no blocking would produce 'terrible results', McColl remained steadfast; 'they still must explore ... the

¹⁷⁰ Colin McColl in 'Alba – The Experiment', *Kaleidoscope*, dir. by Howard Taylor, TVNZ, 2 July 1989 [DVD].

¹⁷¹ Kate Harcourt in 'Alba – The Experiment'.

¹⁷² McColl in 'Alba – The Experiment'.

thing is to define but not limit the actor's creative imagination'.¹⁷³ Dress rehearsal, said McColl, was 'a mess ... there are just some basic things wrong with the thrust of the thing the whole way through'.¹⁷⁴ Yet the critics largely applauded its energy and verve. Apart from Laurie Atkinson's review that echoed McColl's own discontent with structural weakness in the final scenes – 'Only at the very end of the play when all the built-up jealousies, hatreds and frustrations explode, does the production falter'¹⁷⁵ – others relished the 'dynamic performances'.¹⁷⁶

After *Alba*, McColl recognised the merits of Alfreds' methodology and hints at its shortcomings that he would address in later years when in 1989 he said: 'I've found it nerve-racking and challenging but it's totally fulfilling. In future I know I have to adapt the technique and make it my own, but it beats the pants off conventional ways of working'.¹⁷⁷ In his 2012 interview, McColl recalled that earlier production as being an exercise in absolute rigid fidelity to the Alfreds techniques that were offered in the masterclass. This resulted in a show that was so different every night it could be brilliant one performance and terrible the next:

I'd just been so influenced by Mike Alfreds because he'd just been to New Zealand, so I followed the Alfreds' methodology slavishly with objectives and it was very interesting to do that. I never ever blocked any of it. And it changed every night. Some nights it was hideous and other nights it was wonderful, what the girls came up with.¹⁷⁸

In 1993 McColl revisited *Bernarda Alba* for Toi Whakaari at Taki Rua Theatre in Wellington. Mounting the production this time, he was more selective with Alfreds' approach, using 'elements of his methodology that

¹⁷³ McColl in 'Alba – The Experiment'.

¹⁷⁴ McColl in 'Alba – The Experiment'.

¹⁷⁵ Laurie Atkinson, *Evening Post*, quoted in Smythe, p. 309.

¹⁷⁶ Smythe, *Downstage Upfront*, p.309.

¹⁷⁷ McColl in 'Alba – The Experiment'.

¹⁷⁸ McColl, interview.

kind of worked'.¹⁷⁹ However the significant asset here was not just selectivity, but time:

Because I had students who were interested to explore and time was not a problem – you know it wasn't like four weeks; we had plenty of time to do it – I think we came up with a much better result.¹⁸⁰

McColl attributes this result to the benefit of more time, selective application and organic evolution organic of Alfreds' techniques. A meeting a few years after the masterclass endorsed this approach for McColl. He explains: 'I met Mike Alfreds in London about three years later and I said, "Oh, everyone in New Zealand does Mike Alfreds now". And he said, "I don't even do that [one hundred per cent] now."' ¹⁸¹ Even Alfreds does not consider his methods to be fixed, but rather, evolving.

McColl still uses elements of the Alfreds approach that work for him: 'I like the actors to make their lists and I always break down the play into units.'¹⁸² But some of Alfreds' toolkit relating to world, text and character McColl adopts 'by instinct,' citing his lack of academic background as a reason. 'If I'm working on a difficult text I have to spend a lot more time examining it and preparing it before I go into the rehearsal room.'¹⁸³ As further preparatory work he will 'break the play down in terms of the action that's happening here and then into units of action'.¹⁸⁴ Added to that, McColl gives those actions an active title 'so there's always an active verb involved'.¹⁸⁵ 'Sometimes it's for a very pragmatic reason for how I'm going to rehearse the play,' he determines, 'but sometimes it's just to get my head round the shape of the play, how the dramaturgy of

¹⁷⁹ McColl, interview.

¹⁸⁰ McColl, interview.

¹⁸¹ McColl, interview.

¹⁸² McColl, interview.

¹⁸³ McColl, interview.

¹⁸⁴ McColl, interview.

¹⁸⁵ McColl, interview.

the play really [works]'.¹⁸⁶ For McColl, this kind of extensive research through 'deep reading' – exemplified by directors like Katie Mitchell¹⁸⁷ – comes from refining Alfreds' techniques. McColl will read the play many times before rehearsals start, sometimes 'just reading it looking at the props that are needed':

[T]hat's something that I suppose comes from Alfreds, because it's like a point of concentration for me when I'm looking at the text. I might be looking at character or I might be, say, I'm thinking who could be in this, so I'm reading the play for character and at the same time I'm thinking about actors who might be able to bring those characters to life. Or I'm reading it for the world of the play, and at the same time I'm reading around the play.¹⁸⁸

McColl and almost all of the interviewed subjects demonstrate a particular lack of ego exemplified by directors like London-based Australian Michael Blakemore, an effect which McColl attributes to Alfreds.¹⁸⁹ In response to my question of how he handles fear, McColl reveals his own 'imposter syndrome':

Alfreds said, "You do all this reading beforehand and then when you come to the first rehearsal you know nothing. Suddenly you kind of don't know anything, but actually you do." You know heaps but you feel like you know nothing ... They're going to see I'm just a fraud.¹⁹⁰

Wider ripples

Some directors who were not present at the masterclass still learnt and experimented with Alfreds' techniques, and it is worth examining these

¹⁸⁶ McColl, interview.

¹⁸⁷ See Katie Normington, 'Little Acts of Faith: Katie Mitchell's *The Mysteries*', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 14 (1998), 99-110, (p. 100).

¹⁸⁸ McColl, interview.

¹⁸⁹ See Elizabeth Schafer, 'Self-effacement and Self-fashioning: Michael Blakemore and the Craft of Directing', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 14:3 (2004), 30-38.

¹⁹⁰ McColl, interview.

wider ripples. Lynch credits his first Alfreds 'instructor' as Michele Hine, who was herself involved in the masterclass as an actor.¹⁹¹ Even though Lynch never attended the workshop, he used core elements of the work. This behaviour similar to other New Zealand artists who discovered new techniques and worked then disseminated them, irrespective of their own proximity to the source of knowledge. Lynch then went on to teach generations of Drama School actor training students (including myself) the 'Mike Alfreds technique'.

However, sometimes the message was lost in translation; here in New Zealand, certain parts of the Alfreds technique were stressed as more fundamental than others. Laban, for example, could be relegated as less important than beats, action, and text analysis, depending on the teacher. This frequently results in either a very intellectual exercise or a physical experience without detailed enquiry; occasionally the two meet. The organic pulse of the methodology that was innately present in Alfreds' own application and transmission of techniques could easily become diminished in another director's hands. Bill Guest has noted that since the 1980s, the prevailing acting methodology taught at Toi Whakaari 'was largely based on the Alfred's [sic] technique'.¹⁹² He argues that Alfreds' approach is actually a grouping together of 'an amalgam of other techniques including those of Grotowski, Uta Hagen, Mike Leigh and Robert Benedetti [sic]'.¹⁹³ Again, it must be noted that elements of Alfreds' system such as logic text and commedia were omitted from the New Zealand masterclass and have remained absent thereafter.

¹⁹¹ Lynch and Hine worked together on a production of Ionesco's *The Chairs* at the Maidment Theatre, Auckland, in 1989. They applied the Alfreds technique to this play along with actor Nick Blake, during which time as Lynch says, '[they] explored those techniques together'.

¹⁹² Guest, *Transitions*, p. 159. Having taught acting methodology at Toi Whakaari for eleven years I can testify that other practitioners' methods were included, but the predominant offerings were indeed Alfreds-based.

¹⁹³ Guest, p.159.

Lynch adopted the Alfreds system directly once he saw that it could result in translating text to dynamic action on stage. 'I hooked on to it immediately and from that point on [after *The Chairs*] I used it in every single production', Lynch states.¹⁹⁴ However, he is also keen to highlight the amalgam of techniques that Alfreds offers. 'Yes, Alfreds brought a lot of those techniques to the minds of New Zealanders but they're things that he as a magpie gathered from all sorts of different sources.'¹⁹⁵ Lynch had previously been exposed to action playing, objectives and through-lines from Raymond Hawthorne at Theatre Corporate, so explains that 'there was nothing that was absolutely new to me other than Text - No Text as a process, which I absolutely adore'.¹⁹⁶ Lynch elaborates that for him, Alfreds' great gift was not so much in the originality of techniques but in the way they related to each other as a system of working:

there are techniques that are part of the so-called Alfreds technique or process that, as I say, come from completely other places ... I guess what I discovered was it was a kind of a tool box that was put together in a different [way] to what I'd been exposed to.¹⁹⁷

O'Donnell remains unwilling to cite any one main influence with his craft. 'I have Stanislavski, Declan Donnellan, improvisation and Mike Alfreds; I have all these ideas buzzing around in my head. I don't have a particular [technique].'¹⁹⁸ O'Donnell's application to attend the Alfreds masterclass was unsuccessful, yet it reveals his aspirations to learn specific techniques in a director training void:

In future I would like to slant my career towards directing rather than performing, and as my only training in skills specific to directing has been of the on-the-job, learn-by-your-

¹⁹⁴ Lynch.

¹⁹⁵ Lynch.

¹⁹⁶ Lynch.

¹⁹⁷ Lynch.

¹⁹⁸ O'Donnell.

mistakes variety, I see this course as a marvellous opportunity to fill that gap.¹⁹⁹

In recent times, O'Donnell has applied a valuable 'insider' perspective to his directing work that reveals allegiance to various methods.²⁰⁰ His article 'The Epic and the Intimate: Directing *Albert Speer*' pinpoints a Stanislavski/Alfreds approach. He used:

methods of Konstantin Stanislavski, dividing the script into beats and asking the actors to nominate character motivations within these. Scenes were directed with these beats in mind, seeking to vary the rhythms and *let the blocking grow naturally* [my emphasis] out of the characters' objectives.²⁰¹

O'Donnell is mindful of suiting a methodology to the needs of a particular text, but an overriding philosophy is one of inciting play amongst the company. 'If I was going to say that the most important thing to me is that there's an atmosphere of play in the rehearsal room and that it keeps lively and energised so you don't want to get bogged down.'²⁰² Sometimes this can mean throwing technique away, as in the individual case of a young student director who O'Donnell found was too strongly wedded to the research and analysis components of the Alfreds system:

It almost became like working in the public service or something, like the actors would like of troop in like this in the morning [head downcast] with their scripts under their arms and sit down around the table.²⁰³

Recognising this stagnation, O'Donnell describes how he suggested more emphasis on spontaneity and instinct was required, advising his student,

¹⁹⁹ Reference R20589321, David O'Donnell application to attend workshop, 17 November 1988.

²⁰⁰ See O'Donnell, 'Cross-Cultural Shakespeare, Warrior Women and the Eternal Present'.

²⁰¹ O'Donnell, 'The Epic and the Intimate: Directing *Albert Speer*', (p. 31).

²⁰² O'Donnell, interview.

²⁰³ O'Donnell, interview.

'Just think; you've done all this great work on it and maybe you can now move on and it's sort of there.'²⁰⁴

However the particular director had previously had 'an amazing experience as an actor' using the technique [from Lynch]' which informed how the student thought it should be applied.²⁰⁵ But then, O'Donnell cautions against the technique getting lost in translation when he says, 'That's the danger of Murray translating Mike Alfreds' system from Mike Alfreds and then this person is translating the way that Murray did it, and then somebody else will come along.'²⁰⁶ O'Donnell calls such fidelity 'quite a deadly process' that was evident in the immobile quality of the final production.²⁰⁷

O'Donnell enlarges by saying that elements of Alfreds' techniques are most useful for him when they are collectively owned by the company and framed as 'a game'.²⁰⁸ I asked O'Donnell if he thought that there was a danger in 'misusing' or misinterpreting Alfreds technique, for instance when actors get stuck on the detail or a way of doing, whereas Alfreds can offer freedom. He agreed, citing the maxim that, 'From technique comes freedom'. He verifies this by way of further explanation about technique and art:

You can just look at a concert pianist or a great dancer who learns absolutely perfectly, rigorously and painstakingly the piece, and then the thing that makes them great is the fact that they can somehow [infuse] their own personality and their own ... they have a sort of freedom or an ease with it that, an expertise that transcends and builds on what the work is. And so I do kind of agree with that. I'm not saying I don't want to have any sort of rigorous techniques. I'm just saying for me actors are pretty much about their bodies working in tandem

²⁰⁴ O'Donnell, interview.

²⁰⁵ O'Donnell, interview.

²⁰⁶ O'Donnell, interview.

²⁰⁷ O'Donnell, interview.

²⁰⁸ O'Donnell, interview.

with their minds, not about just working with their minds or pieces of paper.²⁰⁹

While Penny has toyed with the Alfreds process, he no longer employs the methods. Penny first encountered the Alfreds technique 'through Murray Lynch; I did Genet's *Death Watch* with him when I was at university, I was an actor in that. And he taught it to [us], he did it with us and so I'd been through that process'.²¹⁰ Penny applied parts of Alfreds' process to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Auckland University Summer Shakespeare, 1992) along with other techniques. He describes this process:

We were working off Alfreds' process, so for the first go at beating a whole text it was intimidating doing Shakespeare. And then we just used commedia principles so make it lively, make it large, and then using some sort of post-modern formalisms; so directing all the mechanicals as mechanicals. So we did it all to music ... But it was quite a "chancy" thing. It just was a very academic idea that didn't kind of make sense in the end.²¹¹

Penny concedes that Alfreds' methodology forces a director to engage with structure and shape when he admits that, 'I learnt to understand dramaturgy from Alfreds; I think it really helped me go, "So what's the scene got to do? How is it doing it? Where are the shifts?"'²¹² Similarly he credits 'impulse' (what other directors have described as 'freedom') as a by-product of Alfreds' technique when used properly. According to

²⁰⁹ O'Donnell, interview.

²¹⁰ Penny.

²¹¹ Penny.

²¹² Penny.

Penny, 'Ian McKellen was chatting about this at The [Drama] School last month that with Alfreds, he learnt to trust his instincts more.'²¹³

Despite the capacity of the Alfreds approach for live connection between actors and audience, Penny is not an Alfreds acolyte. He states that Alfreds' objective 'was really to keep it [the drama] live but in a way it's ended up not doing that a lot'.²¹⁴ Penny explains, 'I think its bones are solid but its use of action is weak.'²¹⁵ He describes dynamic action as 'essential action', the kind of work that Penny achieved with American acting coach Joan Scheckel. Penny focuses this on Scheckel's demand for 'super strong' actions:

And she really goes for the *essential* action. And it was very funny, and that had about six beats so we had to keep changing and we didn't know the text. So she was coaching us all the time. And it was very dynamic.²¹⁶

Penny refers to his experience in 2001 of Scheckel working with bigger beats of rhythm than Alfreds:

That really made sense to me. And then she has a way of testing whether something's an action. "Can you play it to yourself, can it play it for someone else, can you play it to the room, can you play it to God?" Now once you run that test on the Alfreds' *Book of Actions* lots of them aren't actions. They're

²¹³ Penny. This was endorsed first-hand by Ian McKellen in a conversation I had with him at the National Theatre in London, the very same day I had interviewed Mike Alfreds. I told McKellen I'd just interviewed Alfreds, and his instant reaction to this was, 'Mike Alfreds – he completely changed my life. We only worked together once [on *The Cherry Orchard*, 1985] but I felt incredibly free with his approach.' Ian McKellen, conversation with the author, National Theatre: London, 11 September 2012. Mike Alfreds endorsed this in return when he stated that McKellen was incredibly willing to 'play' for dynamic truth in his role as Lopakhin: 'Ian was so open, and was curious ... he was so totally open to change and willing to explore. Ian was one for always asking questions ... and with such huge energy and imagination. I've worked with Mark Rylance, too, and he's the same: endlessly curious and risk-taking.' Alfreds, interview.

²¹⁴ Penny.

²¹⁵ Penny.

²¹⁶ Penny.

actually outcomes of actions. It's what the audience should see when you play the action.²¹⁷

Lost in translation?

I question whether something has been lost in translation, or if the impasse of time has challenged its place as central cultural capital in directing discourse. To my mind, this sounds like Alfreds' approach, albeit in a different vernacular. Other questions emerge. Is it still the 'Alfreds Technique' if it has been selectively reproduced and permuted many times over? Permutation is inevitable over time, and the endemic directing ecology in New Zealand supports that. Has the Alfreds method become an 'outmoded' heuristic device? Has there been a resistance to Alfreds' methods from newcomers who see it as a convention to be discarded?

Hendry alludes to this: 'What became, I think weakened, as it rolled out and people taught people, was that I think what happens is that then this idea of orthodoxy or almost like a cultism creeps in.'²¹⁸ Nowadays, Penny steers away from working with beats or units of action in directing practice directly aligned with Alfreds methodology:

I don't work with his beats any more. I don't like the way that those beats are so prescriptive. And what I found myself and directing actors in it is they end up sort of thinking the thing they're saying and you can sort of see it. So we still teach it here [at Toi Whakaari] and I don't like it because they end up going "I love you, I reject you". That's very primitive but that's what happens, because they're thinking the action they're playing.²¹⁹

Penny later admitted that what he calls the 'Alfreds methodology' is useful in exceptional circumstances where step-by-step dramaturgical

²¹⁷ Penny.

²¹⁸ Hendry.

²¹⁹ Penny.

directing is required: 'I use it if I'm stuck and I also use it if I need a shortcut.'²²⁰ He adds:

I had to direct Norm Hewitt at one point in a piece of film-work for *Duffy Books in Homes* [schools tour] and he was locked in a container, so a non-actor. So I just worked out what the beat was, what the scene was, what he had to play, and then I don't tell him any of that I just say, "You play this and then you play this."²²¹

Points of difference

For some New Zealand directors, Alfreds' methods have been a more honoured in the breach than the observance. Canadian academic and acting teacher Tom Scholte has commented that the 'integration of improvisational techniques, rooted in the neglected 'later legacies' of Stanislavsky', are key for performance cultures that are typically time-poor. Scholte defends his own departure from 'round-the-table' script analysis techniques that forms part of the Alfreds system in pursuit of methods that allow for 'authenticity in performance'.²²² He advocates that Active Analysis (Methods of Physical Actions) – embodied in Alfreds' 'Text – No Text – Text' exercise – is highly effective. Scholte could be describing the New Zealand experience when he states:

the integration of improvisational techniques ... might, in fact, be the most effective way to make our work go further faster and to make the most of the extremely limited time available to Canadian theatre practitioners in a professional rehearsal context.²²³

²²⁰ Penny.

²²¹ Penny.

²²² Tom Scholte, 'The Stanislavsky Game: Improvisation in the Rehearsal of Scripted Plays', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 143 (Summer 2010), 24-28 (p. 24).

²²³ Scholte, (p. 24).

In keeping with a more extreme perspective of this view, Harcourt, who identifies as ‘an actor’s director’,²²⁴ has never really warmed to Alfreds’ instructions regarding script analysis. Although very actor-centric in her emphasis – and renowned for creating crisp, emotionally alive work – Harcourt prefers to eschew text investigation in favour of analogy. She says, ‘Instead of working through [the imaginative] “as if”, I work through [the experiential] “when I was.”’²²⁵ Alfreds’ structured, systemised approach to directing driven from analysis clashes with her own preference for ‘ownership and uniqueness’.²²⁶ From that point of ownership of a character’s situation, Harcourt describes that an actor will ‘begin to develop characterisation’ based on ‘internal landscape’ and ‘vista’.²²⁷ Character, in this sense, is largely constructed through the (physical and spatial) choices an actor makes, activating their imaginative memory and the connection between them and their fellow actor. Harcourt explains in the context of bringing an audition script to life with actors:

So beyond learning your lines what’s going to serve you best in an audition is to genuinely connect to that real person, and then the camera catches some amazing magic between you. And that’s when the director – when he or she has got it on fast forward – goes, “Oh, that’s interesting”, because there’s some indefinable magic that is happening – not in you – but between us.²²⁸

Yet despite her overt rejection of methods of script investigation that engage analysis towards action, Harcourt refers to ‘objective

²²⁴ Harcourt.

²²⁵ Harcourt.

²²⁶ Harcourt.

²²⁷ Harcourt.

²²⁸ Harcourt.

correlative', 'Stanislavski's affective memory'²²⁹, 'Laban' and 'actions'.²³⁰ It is difficult to ignore the linguistic similarities with Alfreds. Conceptually there are parallels, too, with Alfreds suggesting that an objective be stated 'I want you to (do something)', thereby having to involve the other party. In part, Harcourt's methods involving individual affective memory, are probably a response to the kind of manufactured creation of character sometimes seen when Alfreds' methods are misused (and that O'Donnell has referred to). 'I see too many actors who get so caught up in their process of creating the characterisation that they stop connecting with the person that they're acting with', says Harcourt.²³¹ It's hard to imagine Alfreds disagreeing with this perspective, given their shared interest in genuine connection between – and beyond – actors.

Hurst was exposed to the Alfreds techniques through actors, but remains vehemently opposed to its effectiveness. He calls it 'a waste of time' that replicates the preparatory work an actor must do before day one of rehearsal.²³² To Hurst, text analysis and actions are the actor's responsibility; it's 'homework ... come to me with that done, thank you very much'.²³³ In his process, the equivalent of the given circumstances are established at the read-through and revisited throughout rehearsals. But lack of time is the key driver that distinguishes Hurst's process from end product:

To me the main thing is to come to me with all that research and work done. Do this work [the text]. Don't expect me to do your work for you. Don't tell me, show me. Especially in this

²²⁹ An exercise for unlocking emotional truth where Stanislavski took his actors back to a specific time and place when something analogous happened, and the actor recalls the actual physical sensation of the associated memory. It was actually a remedial exercise for actors who were emotionally stuck, rather than a commonly used one.

²³⁰ Harcourt.

²³¹ Harcourt.

²³² Hurst.

²³³ Hurst.

country where we get four weeks [to rehearse]. I just can't stand time wasting.²³⁴

With particular reference to his production of Beckett's *Happy Days* (2010) at Auckland's Silo Theatre, Hurst explains the frustration of using a version of the technique driven by an actor who has often used this approach. Hurst agreed to use Text – No Text and actioning in order to help the actor playing Winnie learn her huge swathes of dialogue. For Hurst, the process vindicated that it wasn't an effective approach for this highly imaginative, product-driven director:

Two weeks it took to action every line, which basically was her learning her lines. I don't mean to be disparaging but ... after *two weeks* of it, I thought, 'Now I can direct'. I find it a waste of time. ... We don't muck around with all this nonsense about actioning. Let's do the text, please.²³⁵

In 1984, Mercury Theatre director Jonathan Hardy saw the need for new approaches to challenge conventional acting and directing practice when he said, 'Maybe we need new techniques – techniques that support the pulse of the blood in New Zealand.'²³⁶ Five years later Hardy's call was partially answered. The Alfreds masterclass introduced New Zealand theatre practitioners to working methods that, by virtue of their assimilation into the local performance discourse, have continued to affect subsequent generations of artists; either as points of reference or departure. John Smythe notes that in the wake of Alfreds, 'the revitalisation of the directing and acting processes could be said to have had untold long-term benefits as directors and actors absorbed the principles in ways that worked well for them'.²³⁷ In light of this, dominant and emergent contemporary directors now have a 'post-Alfreds'

²³⁴ Hurst.

²³⁵ Hurst.

²³⁶ Harley, (p.93).

²³⁷ Smythe, *Downstage Upfront*, p. 309.

relationship with Alfreds' methods as the organic triumvirate of application, selection and adaptation has taken effect over time. Ultimately, the archive supports the claim that such masterclass experiences can have a huge impact on the profession; the immediate and long-term ripples meant that directing discourse was incontrovertibly changed. Mike Alfreds took just a fortnight in 1989 to influence generations of New Zealand theatre practitioners. Good things take time, but great things sometimes happen all at once.

Chapter Six: Working with Actors – Directing the Process of Engagement

While the extent to which directors lead a rehearsal process differs, one thing is common: good direction requires the deployment of skills that frame and shape engagement with actors. This chapter explores how directors manage elements of the rehearsal process and work with actors in rehearsal. It addresses the importance of communication processes that frame interaction, casting and the preferred pathways for realising the essential action of a scene, presence and emotion. It also studies dynamic acting as a measure of highly effective performance, and considers how the selected directors frame and shape the process of engagement with actors.

Certain acting exercises can be viewed as microcosms of dynamic performance and process in action. In *There Are No Secrets*, Brook describes a popular acting preparation exercise in which a group of actors arranged standing in a circle count from one to twenty without any two people ever speaking at the same time.¹ The exercise serves to remind participants of the basic elements in connected acting; (simultaneous) freedom and discipline. The director establishes and monitors the rules. Any actor can speak whenever they want, yet the structure of following numbers in ascending order without overlapping imposes discipline. There is an end-point in mind that is mapped by the rules of the game, yet *how* the actors get there is not predetermined. Success depends on the actors listening on many levels; aurally, spatially and kinaesthetically. This exercise is a simple reminder of what connected acting can look like; structured and free, with actors alert and listening to what happens next. If this can serve

¹ Brook, *There Are No Secrets*, pp. 66-7.

as a microcosm of great acting, how can and do directors create the conditions for such presence, simplicity and connection? This chapter considers the communicative and interactive processes that, coupled with interpersonal skills, New Zealand directors typically employ when working with actors in rehearsal.

Framing engagement: relationship to purpose and 'concept'

Much attention has been devoted to the connection between leadership and directing since the emergence of the director, and this correlation resonates in the archive. In the early twentieth-century, Nemirovich-Danchenko referred to the director as 'the real dominator of the production'.² In recent times, this categorisation has since shifted towards more subtle power arrangements. In 1985, for example, Benedetti assumed the director's 'executive capacity'³ and suggested that effective leadership can take the less assertive form of 'quiet authority'.⁴ *How* directors lead differs enormously, but the fact remains that directors have enormous authority in the rehearsal room. Alfreds says that, given this perceived or assumed supremacy, *how* directors frame the rehearsal process is vital:

It's taken me a long time to really understand that we directors have incredible power, more than we realise. When we go into the rehearsal space everybody is waiting for us to set the tone. We're creating an environment. And you have to create a sort of good working environment.⁵

He credits a director's individual manner with having a huge effect on this 'tone', in a role that has enormous sway:

It depends on your personality of course; when to enthuse, when to be calm ... everybody has to find their own way of

² Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, 'The Three Faces of the Director', in Cole and Chinoy, pp. 119-124 (p. 120).

³ Robert L. Benedetti, *The Director at Work* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985), pp. 23-4.

⁴ Benedetti, p. 6.

⁵ Alfreds, interview.

working, obviously, we all have our weak points and our strong points, but I think you've got to be aware that you have huge power and (often) people endow you with more power than you have any right to hold.⁶

Given this 'power', how do directors frame engagement that encourages the predominant attributes of 'collectivity', relationship to purpose and 'concept'?

This can be problematic when the rehearsal process serves as a kind of discovery with purpose. As Brook has stated, the creative process is a collective effort, the lynchpin that holds together the three stated tenets of praxis: 'You may feel, like a sculptor, a "latent form in the material" – but this form only emerges gradually and in play with your collaborators. It is a process of genuine discovery.'⁷ When Polonius says to Reynaldo that they shall '[b]y indirections, find directions out' (*Hamlet*, 2.1, 1.65), directors can read this not as a statement of deception, but a way of navigating the unpredictable elements of the rehearsal process. The answers to a play's questions and how to stage its central concerns are not always immediately clear, and it takes collective effort to create compelling performances. As Brook suggests, the director navigates this journey not in isolation, but with the actor: '[T]he director is there to force what won't happen by itself. It's the challenge again. The director needs the challenge of actors to bring out what the director can do.'⁸

The archive evidences that almost all the chosen directors enlist concept as guiding principles that liberate the themes of a play, rather than absolutely rigid parameters that drive every aspect of the realisation

⁶ Alfreds, interview.

⁷ Peter Brook in Richard Shannon, 'The Inaugural Peter Brook Lecture: 6th February 2010 at the Barbican: An Account.', *The Director's Guild of Great Britain website*, 6 February 2010 <<http://www.dggb.org/files/Peter%20Brook%20Lecture>> [accessed 12 March 2013] (p. 3 of 6).

⁸ Margaret Croyden, *Conversations with Peter Brook 1970-2000* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2009), p. 54.

of the drama. Even with lack of time and money so prevalent in the New Zealand environment, and the growing interpretive confidence that has emerged in recent years, the need for ensemble discovery *in relation to concept* is stressed as imperative. In this sense, a director's vision is not a fixed restriction that everything must be bound by. Even with the most radical interpretive re-imaginings of classic works such as McColl's *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, and *The Vikings at Helgeland* or Harcourt's *Romeo and Juliet*, the actors were encouraged to make that setting their own. In turn, this 'ownership' renders the play more accessible to an audience. In doing so, the rehearsal room has been decolonised even more. A demonstrable assumption in the archive is the understanding that theatre is a collective effort skilfully led by a director who relies on this 'collectivity' to create the performance. The 'cloak of invisibility' might be worn by one, but it affects many.

Lynch discovered early on in his directing career the benefits of genuine engagement with a collective approach to process that assumed leadership in a quiet, firm manner. He explains the profits of working in a non-prescriptive and collaborative way with actors that he has tried to follow since:

Doing *Small Change* (Centrepont Theatre, 1977) it became so much more of a collaborative process with that cast, because we had to work it out together. I mean I'd done some devising work where we were creating stuff together, but here was a fixed text and I found it quite freeing to start exploring more with the actors rather than defining the moves, taking them into the rehearsal room, and adjusting and doing all that, but being completely in this instance now, not defined. And so that helped free up from that point on.⁹

Bennett also explicates the importance of genuine engagement with process as opposed to product. By way of example of what not to do, he

⁹ Lynch.

describes an ATC production of *Dead Funny* (1995) 'about a bunch of Benny Hill aficionados' that was 'totally culturally removed from New Zealand, [and] Auckland audiences'.¹⁰ Actor Tim Bartlett – who was in TV soap *Shortland Street* at the time – was on stage for the entire play, but in a three-week rehearsal period he wasn't available for the middle week. This drastically reduced the time available to engage with a collective creative process. Bennett explains the end result focussed too much on product:

I had to rehearse this ATC play, really difficult, a comedy with tragic overtones ... with a week's rehearsal, a week off, a week's rehearsal and then it was on. It was terrible; the play was alright but it struck no chord with the audience here. It was completely end-gaming. I had to completely end-result the whole thing and I wasn't happy with it. It was not good.¹¹

Despite most directors' awareness that there is a necessary process to encounter and work through in rehearsal, as already suggested, technique can become a false substitute (read 'shortcut') when time is short. This is a constant challenge for directors to negotiate. Saint-Denis warned against following any one "'method'", whether old or new, which stops questions or discourages change'.¹² He pointed to the protean nature of veracity when he said, 'We search for truth – but truth is always changing as our lives change.'¹³

'Purpose' is mentioned in the interview archive as a guiding principle for the determination of acting process in many ways, commonly in relation to concept or overall 'vision'. Several directors talk about the need for ensemble and the importance of maintaining and developing a working language *with a company or ensemble*. Directors refer to the main 'question' of the play as a guiding attitude, or the chief concern from

¹⁰ Bennett.

¹¹ Bennett.

¹² Michel Saint-Denis, p. 112.

¹³ Michel Saint-Denis, p. 112.

which design, casting and performance construction fall. This is notable since it typically involves placing parameters for a predetermined concept and vision for how the play will be interpreted, and how the space will be inhabited by the actors. With lack of rehearsal time it prearranges the viewpoint on a chosen play text, and while this can limit the playing choices available to actors, some argue that this is the director's central role that results in refined inhabitations of the world of the play. Ian Mune has asserted that the director's main task is to lead discovery by stating that, 'the diamond can be found in that direction',¹⁴ and lead the actors there accordingly. While this is a very 'director-centred' approach, it also implies that discovery or construction of 'the play' is a collective effort.

Interpretive decisions directly affect actors' process since these viewpoints shape playing decisions. Mune surmises that actors and directors are both required to 'tell the story and speak the truth *as you see it* [my emphasis]'.¹⁵ McColl talks about 'the themes' of a play (which Nola Millar alerted him to), for which he does extensive visual and factual research. Meanwhile, Hurst finds a conceptual point of departure that guides decisions 'right from the very beginning. [This is] the first interpretive thing that I do'.¹⁶ He will 'never look at other productions,' saying, 'I look at the period' to let location and historical setting determine interpretation.¹⁷ An example is his third production of *Cabaret* (2010),¹⁸ for which Hurst found strong anchors in 'Wehrmacht, Hitler, Wagner, the end of the nineteenth-century ... All of that incredible Germanic stuff'.¹⁹ Janet McAllister called the work a 'shocking ... fabulous, original, risqué

¹⁴ *Life of Ian*, dir. by John Carlaw, prod. by Colin Hogg (3rd Party Productions, 2008) [DVD].

¹⁵ *Life of Ian*.

¹⁶ Hurst.

¹⁷ McColl, interview.

¹⁸ Presented by Auckland Theatre Company in the Spiegeltent Salon Perdu at Viaduct Basin, Auckland, 30 October-18 December 2010.

¹⁹ Hurst.

production'.²⁰ Hurst explains the application of concept to the text in the final moments of *Cabaret*:

So I started in 1915, and at the end of it [the play] I came out in a full SS uniform with a beautiful blonde woman in a female SS uniform and we came out and that whole last speech of [in German accent] "Where are your troubles now? Forgotten? I told you so. We have no troubles here." Sinister as all get-out and then I [as MC] shot the entire cast with a gun. "Bang, bang, bang." Except Sally Bowles, and then I walked up to her and everybody is going, "Oh my God." And then I just put the gun to her forehead and it was a blackout. So a much more powerful and sinister take on it, because that's what I wanted to say.²¹

Hurst freely admits that he mines a play text in the context of present concerns for its 'essence'.²² This conceptual, referential language permeates his work and demands that the actors meet it. Hurst's *Chicago* (2013) presented a totally reworked version of the play which illustrated his belief that 'theatre should never be too safe. We should always be seeking to provoke, to surprise and to stimulate, as well as to entertain. Productions that preserve ideas in a kind of theatrical aspic do little to transport audiences'.²³ In this framework set up by Hurst's depiction of the central conflicts in *Chicago*, the actors employed the play as a direct

²⁰ Janet McAllister, 'Theatre Review: *Cabaret*, Spiegeltent', 2 November, 2010
<<http://www.theatrereview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=3489>>
[accessed 17 September 2013]

²¹ Hurst.

²² Hurst.

²³ Michael Hurst, *Chicago* Programme Notes, Auckland Theatre Company, November 2013, p. 6.

means of communication with current politics.²⁴ Hurst's stance is perhaps the most extremely subjective, interpretive position of the directors interviewed for this study. Even so, there are many examples of highly interpretive, slightly authorial,²⁵ reimagined classics that have been presented by other directors on the New Zealand stage. McColl's *Hedda Gabler* 'relocated Ibsen's play from 1890s Norway to 1950s Wellington, without changing a word of the text'.²⁶ This was born out of a trip to the USA in 1986, where McColl saw the Washington DC's Arena Stage theatre's expressionist production of *The Wild Duck* directed by Romanian Lucian Pintilie, who, McColl mentioned, is still a strong influence.

Concept and its embodiment by and with actors does not always sit so easily with all the directors. Downes admits she does not always have a fully formed idea of what the end product will be. She prefers instead to rely on 'a sketch of everything' to guide the end product, rather than entering rehearsals with a model to be fully realised on the rehearsal floor. When asked if she comes to a rehearsal process with a fixed idea about

²⁴ In a review, I noted that this preordained a way of playing that differed from the usual established norms of this musical and its genre: 'Andrew Grainger as Amos Hart is fantastic as the solid, real-world counterpoint that anchors the piece against the cast of screwed-up characters bent on revenge or ambition. His version of "Mr. Cellophane" is a rip-roaring expression of anger and pain that opens the song up to new levels of expression. This is a raw, bristling take on the number that's normally more at home in the vein of A Chorus Line. I now understand the song's suppressed anger and rousing passion.' See Vanessa Byrnes, 'Sexual Dexterity in *Chicago*: ATC Smashes Open a Classic Musical for a New Era', *TheatreReview.org.nz*, 3 November 2013 <<http://www.theatreReview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=6491>> [accessed 7 November 2013].

²⁵ Saint-Denis first made the distinction between interpretative, authorial, and auteur directors. At one end of the directing spectrum is the auteur director, whose 'radical modifications of the text diminish the playwright's significance.' At the other end of the spectrum is the interpretive director, who 'endeavours to uncover the playwright's intention; the authorial director to impose his or her own intention, using the text as a point of departure.' Most contemporary [text-based] directors fall somewhere in between the last two. See Saint-Denis, 'Style in Acting, Directing, and Designing', (p. 69).

²⁶ Smythe, p. 314.

how the play will happen, she says:

No, I don't – otherwise why would I be doing it? I know that some directors do have that, and then the job of the production is to meet that vision. I don't want to work like that because I expect that *our collective result* [my emphasis] will be far greater than my solitary sketch or blueprint.²⁷

Sometimes this 'sketch' will be bolder than others; for example, in her production of *Othello* (2001) Downes had 'a very strong concept that [she] worked up with Jim Moriarty, and it worked well. This was to set *Othello* in the Land Wars fighting alongside his own race'.²⁸ Hurst, Downes and McColl's inventive repositioning of plays support the notion that directing in New Zealand is highly interpretive but invites collaboration within that revelatory framework.

'Democracy' and leadership: 'the spider that weaves the web'

All directors speak about creating a sense of collaboration in their process. In the absence of theatre fixed ensembles, they are faced with the dilemma of how to create 'collectivity' alongside the leadership that dynamic directing calls for. Democracy in the rehearsal room emerges as a notion that directors do not prefer; rather, 'collaboration' is a desired outcome.²⁹ Hine has noted that Larry Rew, a Birmingham director who worked in New Zealand in the 1990s and 2000s, exhibits a directing style that is 'collaborative but with an autocratic side to it'.³⁰ This description of democracy with an authoritarian touch fits the New Zealand style represented by these directors well; it emerges as a prevailing feature of most of the selected directors' praxis.

²⁷ Downes.

²⁸ Downes.

²⁹ For a recent perspective on the relationship between collaboration and leadership in theatre, see Robert Cohen, *Working Together in Theatre: Collaboration and Leadership* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³⁰ Hine, p. 13.

Lawrence openly invites input from actors but cautions against absolute equality, saying, 'I will go with the democracy rule but often people respect my absolutism as well. But I don't think democracy necessarily makes for the greatest of theatrical experiences.'³¹ This is typical of good leadership that is consultative and open, yet willing to make tough decisions. Downes extends this further when she marks her position as the frontrunner who is open to input in order to advance the work:

I am the leader of the play, and I'm the leader in the room. I'm very interested in discussing and receiving input and ideas from my creative team – the set designer and lighting designer. I don't want to design the show. I will pick a lighting designer I'm on the same page with and I don't want to sit there with a lighting designer going, "Oh, what shall we do?" I want a lighting designer to come in and say, "I've thought about this." And if I hate it, I'll go ... but usually it'll be, "Fabulous. How about a bit more of this?" So they're designing, I'm tuning.

With actors, she says, 'There's a fine line between constructive, excited discussion where we find something together, which is what I like', and destructive criticism.³² Downes is vigilant about having clear rules for how feedback is given:

I don't like actors giving each other notes on the floor, and I make that quite clear. I say, "Look if you have got things to say to each other, say them through me and we'll discuss it." It needs to be constructive in terms of the weaving of the piece, because essentially I'm the spider that weaves the web, and there's only one spider. But the web is made up of all those other people.³³

³¹ Lawrence.

³² Downes.

³³ Downes.

Downes insists: 'I am the leader of the play, and I'm the leader in the room. I'm very interested in discussing and receiving input and ideas from my creative team – the set designer and lighting designer.'³⁴

Meanwhile, Hurst rejects a consensus view in the rehearsal room, saying, 'There's no place for democracy in directing.'³⁵ When asked why not, he says that good directing relies on assertiveness and ownership of a singular point of view:

I am very clear about that. I call it "my production" and "my rehearsals". And I'm not selfish about it. I say, "This is what you're investing me with. I'm the director." And I want to be invested with that. So I won't be saying, "What do you think we should do now?" Who wants that? A lot of chickens with their heads cut off. It just doesn't work. That sort of directing – I've been in productions like that and I want to scream.³⁶

Harcourt concurs with this view, adding that her role in life as a mother evokes strong parenting skills in her relationships with actors. She says, 'I agree with him ... like Michael I'm an auteur; it's just that ... that is a gender thing because I'm a mother of three little children.'³⁷ Harcourt warns against the style of directors who employ democracy as a communication tactic. She says they 'flatten it out and mak[e] it so ridiculously democratic and so ridiculously circumlocutive in terms of getting to what you wanted to be doing, that it drain[s] any energy or desire away'.³⁸

Bennett attributes his high standards as a shaping force in rehearsals. He is uncompromising, and finds that actors will respect this. This ambition has driven Bennett throughout his career: 'I have to be the best at what I do. I've got an absolute imperative that if I'm not the best at

³⁴ Downes.

³⁵ Hurst, interview.

³⁶ Hurst.

³⁷ Harcourt.

³⁸ Harcourt.

what I do, I don't do it. I *can't* do it.'³⁹ Interestingly, his usual 'shyness' in everyday life falls by the wayside when he is directing.⁴⁰ This self-assurance affords Bennett the ability to lead:

When it comes to directing I'm hugely confident because I don't think you can direct if you're not. You have to have a huge amount of confidence. And my shyness in no way ever gets in the way of me directing, of being a leader in a creative role.⁴¹

Penny is firm on his role as a 'leader' who will not settle for less than what he wants out of an actor. He relates his 'Myers-Briggs' analysis ('slight extrovert, high intuitive, big feeling') to his ability to listen to actors and push them hard. He calls this 'odd combination' of traits 'an odd [mix], in a leadership role ... Most male leaders in our culture are ENTJs'.⁴² Penny observes that 'one of the reasons I can liberate actors is because I know how not to feed the dependency'.⁴³ He sees this as fundamental to not feeding a culture of scant praise, and framing an actors' engagement with purpose that he has modelled on Gaulier's approach:

And it's a big thing I'm trying to work with here [at Toi Whakaari] because lots of our teaching feeds the dependency so that actors keep looking to the teacher. Gaulier is great on that too; you know he's never hard on you and he's never very praising. When you get a good word out of him you've really earned it.⁴⁴

By comparison, Lawrence will concede his power to other points of view if he thinks it is warranted, although he is loath to concede that this relinquishes his authority: 'I will bow to a strong opinion if someone feels

³⁹ Bennett.

⁴⁰ Bennett.

⁴¹ Bennett.

⁴² Meaning 'Extroverted, iNtuitive, Thinking and Judging'. Penny.

⁴³ Penny.

⁴⁴ Penny.

strongly enough about something then, yes, I will consent to democracy.'⁴⁵ However he cautions that 'democracy [does not] necessarily makes for the greatest of theatrical experiences ... I will go with the democracy rule but often people respect my absolutism as well'.⁴⁶

Communication and Interaction

Knowing how to talk to actors is crucial, and the interviews reveal a range of directing methods disclosed through communicative practices. Bennett, a trained actor, is particularly sensitive to the performer's needs and will tailor his communication approach depending on 'who the actor is and what the context is'.⁴⁷ He describes how vital learning experiences have come from well-meaning errors where he has 'made mistakes in the past' by 'making public notes that should've been private', or 'embarrassing actors ... humiliating them when I thought I was joking or being light-hearted but actually in hindsight being quite offensive'.⁴⁸ He is 'more sensitive now' to how feedback is given.⁴⁹ 'On set, particularly', Bennett will 'tend to make notes very private because usually it's just one actor, one issue; it doesn't concern anyone else'.⁵⁰ This is driven by his imperative that 'you don't want the actors to feel that they've got something wrong or that the director's on them'.⁵¹

One occasion early in Bennett's career – directing *Titus* (1994) with Paul Minifie in the title role – highlighted this point well. Bennett explains that he 'had a breakdown of communication with the lead actor, which is

⁴⁵ Lawrence.

⁴⁶ Lawrence.

⁴⁷ Bennett.

⁴⁸ Bennett.

⁴⁹ Bennett.

⁵⁰ Bennett.

⁵¹ Bennett.

why it wasn't good'.⁵² He describes it as 'another one of those fundamental mistakes that you make that you vow never to do again'.⁵³ After a run of the play in the rehearsal room, Minifie 'just *went there*, he went out on a limb emotionally and there was just this raw flood of grief and emotion pouring out of him ... he took such huge risks'.⁵⁴ Bennett's response was to tell his lead actor that the performance lacked structure:

[A]ll I thought was, "this is shapeless, this is just wallowing, you can't watch this. Yes, it's profoundly upsetting to watch". I gave him the note afterwards in front of everyone that it was fantastically moving where he'd gone but that it was shapeless and that we needed to observe the structure, and that was it. He said, "You do not know how to talk to actors", and he didn't respect me from that point on. He "phoned in" a performance that I could not influence, shape or form in any way after that. [It was] really sad. But I learnt something.⁵⁵

Downes has also learnt from past experience 'how to [increasingly] connect' with actors, despite being a trained and working actor. She says: 'Occasionally I've put an actor off by giving them a note and they've taken it the wrong way.'⁵⁶ This returns again to the point of empathetic communication when she states, 'A lot of the hard work is in actually knowing how to open the door with that particular actor in their language.'⁵⁷ Likewise, Bennett speaks about communicating with actors in the technical vein they are familiar with: 'I think being able to direct actors and talk in terms of actions and objectives and character qualities is very, very helpful.'⁵⁸ Bennett stresses the multi-tasking nature of directing again when he observes that this requires the director is able to 'co-ordinate and

⁵² Bennett.

⁵³ Bennett.

⁵⁴ Bennett.

⁵⁵ Bennett.

⁵⁶ Downes.

⁵⁷ Downes.

⁵⁸ Bennett.

control a whole raft of different elements that are all taking place at the same time in order to bring them together for a common end'.⁵⁹ However, Lawrence concedes that this is not always possible when he says, 'Yeah, there are some people that you cannot learn their language because they speak a different language every day or every hour, depending on what mood they're in.'⁶⁰

A crucial aspect of interaction is casting. Even when the actors are known to a director, this first encounter can have profound knock-on effects to the production. McColl openly states that dynamic directing is reliant on having the most suitable people in the roles, and it is an activity he prides himself on. 'Good casting is part of it and as Rabbit always says, "Oh, you so know how to cast"'.⁶¹ McColl will invite actors to audition, approach preferred actors, or work with those he has previously directed. Lynch refers to casting as one of the two vital elements in directing:

I always say that the two most important things a director does is (a) what the material is they choose to work on and (b) who they do it with, and that's the cast and the crew. And those are the two crucial elements towards an effective production.⁶²

O'Donnell considers casting to be 'underestimated in directing'.⁶³ He says that directors must take responsibility for casting actors who are up to the task, saying, 'Another thing I think that's really important in directing actors – and I've seen this many, many times – is not to take it out on the actor if you miscast them. So you have to take responsibility for that.'⁶⁴ He says that the audition serves as a manifold exercise, since it is often the first real act of engagement between actor and director, and actors and

⁵⁹ Bennett.

⁶⁰ Lawrence.

⁶¹ McColl, interview.

⁶² Lynch.

⁶³ O'Donnell, interview.

⁶⁴ O'Donnell.

each other in relation to that particular play. O'Donnell also emphasizes the importance of auditions, which he says can set the tone for how the play is eventually performed:

[T]o me also the production kind of starts with that audition process in that if the audition process is exciting and thrilling and the actors are energised, if they're sweaty and they're stimulated, then that will transfer into the rehearsal process and then that, in turn, will transfer into the performance.⁶⁵

Viewed in this way, auditions frequently bring to the surface a director's key concerns about interaction, an actor's perceived existing skill set and their acting potential. O'Donnell stipulates that what he is concerned with in auditions are fundamental components of connection between actors, and that for him, active reciprocity is vital: 'What I'm looking for is, are they listening to each other? Are they connecting with each other? And that to me is the most vital thing.'⁶⁶ If an actor is 'sort of struggling with that' O'Donnell will question whether he can 'actually direct them to get better at that.'⁶⁷ Right from the first audition, he is looking for responsiveness 'to each other and to me, and am I responsive to them?'.⁶⁸ Added to that: 'Are they offering things that I find useful? Are they responding to what I'm offering them?'⁶⁹ O'Donnell positions the audition as a kind of gauntlet-throwing exercise, where actors meet the director's performance expectations and show their ability to respond. He says, 'Working actors hard in an audition process is a great way of finding the actors that are going to do all those things you're talking about – be dynamic and responsive.'⁷⁰

⁶⁵ O'Donnell.

⁶⁶ O'Donnell.

⁶⁷ O'Donnell.

⁶⁸ O'Donnell.

⁶⁹ O'Donnell, interview.

⁷⁰ O'Donnell, interview.

This has parallels with accepted practice in film directing. It is notable that Bennett – now a seasoned screen director and producer – still engages with a theatrical sensibility on a film set. He explains that narrative engagement with actors is crucial:

There are a lot of people in the film world, a lot of very high up and very successful people I think who would feel that the actor's job is to act and that's their expertise, and my job as a director is to pull it all together. I tend to jump in and work closely with the actors because I just love the acting process. And also I'm very text aware so it's also about making sure that the text is honoured and the story is being told as clearly and as interestingly as it could and should be.⁷¹

Aligned with this, Bennett suggests good casting that results in a 'magical' connection between actors can often take the place of strong direction:

There are great film directors who say virtually nothing to actors as far as performance direction goes. And I think the way they get around it is because they're very, very good at casting. They will find actors who are perfect for the roles and who spark, and spark off each other in a way that generates something quite magical when they're working together. And actors obviously who really know what they're doing. I'm thinking of Stanley Kubrick ... he just did take after take after take after take without saying a single thing to the actors about why he was going again. [However] I don't necessarily approve of that approach.⁷²

Harcourt also references 'connection' as a crucial quality that can emerge in auditions. As if taking the Stanislavski-derived mantra that 'acting is reacting', Harcourt cautions against focusing too much on creating 'character', instead favouring a real, present, moment-to-moment relationship with the other actor or reader. In auditions, she looks for 'connection' between actors: 'So beyond learning your lines what's going to serve you best in an audition is to genuinely connect to that real person

⁷¹ Bennett.

⁷² Bennett.

... there's some indefinable magic that is happening not only – not in you – but *between* us.⁷³ She notes that, too often, actors get so 'caught up in their process of creating the characterisation that they stop connecting with the person that they're acting with'.⁷⁴ She underlines that 'in an audition your best performance is in the reader'.⁷⁵

Beyond connection, other qualities emerge as significant markers in auditions. Lynch describes finding actors who have qualities that relate to what he thinks his reading of the play requires. Lynch explains using an interpretive analysis of the text as the point of departure for casting. This could be something that has 'come to [him] from the play'.⁷⁶ This becomes the point of departure to 'feed off'.⁷⁷ Most of the time this 'stays and grows and develops, and that's what you have to use as your balancing off point as to what you take in terms of how the play is cast'.⁷⁸

Harcourt most often favours an acting skillset over personal qualities or personality, particularly when working with classic texts. She says: 'I would rather cast an actor who is really au fait with the text and then lead that actor towards a feeling performance, than cast someone who's got no idea about the text but has got an amazing charisma.'⁷⁹ An example of this is Shane Boshier's production of *Tartuffe* (2011),⁸⁰ in which Harcourt cites the lack of textual rigour in the actor playing the titular character that became a deterrent. Although she 'loved watching [him] – he's got amazing charisma, a great way of being in space', this was secondary to

⁷³ Harcourt.

⁷⁴ Harcourt.

⁷⁵ Harcourt.

⁷⁶ Lynch.

⁷⁷ Lynch.

⁷⁸ Lynch.

⁷⁹ Harcourt.

⁸⁰ Silo Theatre, Auckland, November 2011.

the actor's technical proficiency:

[H]is ability with the rhyme structure in the text was so truncated and stunted that it really annoyed me, and so I got stuck with the text because he was stuck with the text. And so I didn't have a direct pathway through into the heart of the character.⁸¹

In contrast to this she mentions another seasoned actor who she calls 'a great Shakespearean performer and performer of the classics' whose skill with the text is 'such that he can ... chuck it away and allow his feeling performance to ebb and flow like the tide through the matrix of the text.'⁸² This accentuates the importance of technique with actors. As Harcourt says, there is a limit to what a director can teach an actor in a limited amount of time: 'You can be a pencil sharpener, but there's no point in being a pencil sharpener unless you've got a great pencil in the first place.'⁸³ She states that the actor's job is 'to be a good pencil ... you can go to a number of different places to sharpen your skill. But, yeah, I don't think you can teach what it is to be a *great* pencil'.⁸⁴

Lawrence speaks about casting according to 'reconciling the strengths of the individual human being with the things [skills] that are required to become an interesting actor'⁸⁵. He prefers casting actors because they 'have a quality that makes [them] really unique and interesting'.⁸⁶ Lawrence cautions that these quirks can be eradicated with training:

Sometimes training institutions try and take that out of you ... I remember Miranda Harcourt once saying, "Oh, isn't she great if we can just fix her posture?" And me saying, "But that's the thing that makes her really interesting; she's got this

⁸¹ Harcourt.

⁸² Harcourt.

⁸³ Harcourt.

⁸⁴ Harcourt.

⁸⁵ Lawrence.

⁸⁶ Lawrence.

amazing voice and her brain works really well, but she's got this really weird walk."⁸⁷

Fundamentally, Lawrence concludes that casting relates to the crux of the acting dilemma when he says that, 'effective casting would be about the balance between retaining the essence of the human being [while] making them 'performative' and 'performable'.⁸⁸

Implicit here in communication and interaction is an element of trust. Stanislavski spoke of trust as an essential part of the actor's process when he wrote:

Truth onstage is what an actor can sincerely believe in, and even a blatant lie must become truth for it to be art. For that to happen, an actor needs a highly developed imagination, childlike innocence and trust, artistic receptivity to the true and true-seeming in his mind and body.⁸⁹

Similarly, O'Donnell amplifies the requirement to earn trust on a personal level beyond the rehearsal room, saying, 'The more resistant kind of actor ... [I] actually go out for more coffees with them and talk to them more, because that's what they like.'⁹⁰ O'Donnell, an 'actor's director', works to understand how actors communicate and then relates to them accordingly. He suggests the director must establish how a particular actor prefers to work, then shift the process to suit. This is a tailored and actor-driven method that requires O'Donnell to 'figure out how to work with them ... I need to know if somebody really likes working with psychological realism or they prefer to work in a more physical way ... or what worked for them before'.⁹¹ This, he says, is 'about talking to people

⁸⁷ Lawrence.

⁸⁸ Lawrence.

⁸⁹ Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. by Jean Benedetti (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 261.

⁹⁰ O'Donnell.

⁹¹ O'Donnell.

.... But I also think the key thing is, I really have to listen to them and I have to earn their respect somehow'.⁹²

In this regard Lawrence condenses the notion further. He cites Penny, who, at a forum at BATS some years ago, had suggested that it is the director's role to converse in a tongue familiar to the actor. 'I work out what language you speak and then I learn to speak your language', Penny had said.⁹³ O'Donnell is sensitive of particular needs to the extent he will tailor his process to earn trust from the actor. As an example he mentions a particular actor who 'was a more senior actor'.⁹⁴ They 'didn't like being given notes in front of the whole company, [they] felt it was me getting at them or something'.⁹⁵ O'Donnell realised that the most effective way of dealing with this situation was to 'just sort of give that person a bit of praise in the notes', and then devote individual attention to the aspects that needed improvement; 'the things I thought they really needed to work on, [I would] have a drink with them or a coffee and talk to them about it, and then they would act on it'.⁹⁶

This propensity for 'levelling' with actors marks a lack of ego in the majority of praxis. Many directors talk about inviting a lack of ego from actors in the rehearsal process and modelling this kind of behaviour in their own demeanour. This can be considered a particularly New Zealand characteristic, where in society more generally, humility is deemed more praiseworthy than arrogance. This is arguably the flip-side of the egalitarian social structure that also gives rise to the pejorative term 'Tall

⁹² O'Donnell.

⁹³ Qtd by Lawrence.

⁹⁴ O'Donnell.

⁹⁵ O'Donnell.

⁹⁶ O'Donnell.

poppy syndrome'.⁹⁷ On lack of ego, Hendry cites the Stanislavskian manifesto of 'equal billing' as one to promote. In his work with Alfreds, Hendry says, 'ego had left the room and I think that's really something that the Alfreds work and [in other] work – when I've worked with the best – is that we somehow get away from [ego]'.⁹⁸ Most directors confess to increased self-effacement as their careers advance and as they have less to 'prove' to themselves and others.⁹⁹ Hurst, who has strong opinions about acting and directing, emphasizes this: 'You have to be careful; you have to *really* know what you're doing to fully face it. Hubristic behaviour is always going to be damaging for an actor. Or a director.'¹⁰⁰

While eschewing ego, the interviews suggest that directors place emphasis on holding actors' interest. O'Donnell tries to 'make it interesting for the actors', inviting offers and exploring situations.¹⁰¹ Lack of time does not deter this. He proposes holding the actors' attention, even when 'you have to get something on in a very short time so you have to be very pragmatic and what you do is the best you possibly can'.¹⁰² O'Donnell is principally concerned with building an ensemble that has conterminous ownership of the rehearsal process. Accepting offers and suggestions from actors is a huge part of this, and as he explains, this has the twofold effect of trying out unexpected possibilities, plus validating that actor's impulse. He says: 'I find I always say "yes" to any idea and we'll try it out.'¹⁰³ This builds confidence in the company. If, out of 'fifteen

⁹⁷ 'Tall poppy syndrome' describes a social phenomenon in which people of genuine merit are resented, attacked, cut down, or criticised because their talents or achievements elevate them above or distinguish them from their peers.

⁹⁸ Hendry.

⁹⁹ This is perhaps therefore inevitable when interviewing directors in the mid-to-late stages of their careers.

¹⁰⁰ Hurst.

¹⁰¹ O'Donnell.

¹⁰² O'Donnell.

¹⁰³ O'Donnell.

ideas only one might make it through, the person who's given the idea thinks, "Oh. I thought that would work, but it didn't."¹⁰⁴

Lawrence presents praxis analogous to this. He says, 'I go in with a game plan. I go in knowing what I think the play is and what I want it to look like, knowing I have the answers if they're necessary.'¹⁰⁵ These 'answers' can change if actors present questions that are strong enough to validate a different understanding of the text. Lawrence cites the first day of rehearsals on *Hitchcock Blonde* (2006) in which the lead actor's offers changed Lawrence's perception of how the play would unfold. Lawrence 'went in with a conception of the main character of going "this is how he works"', but one of the main actors went, "'Oh, no. I thought he thinks this and that he genuinely believes this.'"¹⁰⁶ Lawrence responded with: "Oh, that's much better. Let's make that work."¹⁰⁷ For Lawrence, this flexibility has become 'like a default' behaviour in his directing method.¹⁰⁸ He says: 'I have kind of worked it out ... if someone has a better idea, if someone [else] makes a better offer that I think can work within the framework of the play, I will run with it.'¹⁰⁹ This elasticity and confidence was noted in the reviews. Terry MacTavish's review illustrated the ownership of style amongst the cast: 'Lawrence seems to revel in the complexities of script and staging, subjugating all to the steady build-up of suspense, lightened by humour but climaxing in moments of pure horror ... the acting is uniformly impressive.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence.

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence.

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence.

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence.

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence.

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence.

¹¹⁰ Terry MacTavish, 'Challenging and Not to be Missed', *Theatreview*, 30 July 2006 <<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=292>> [accessed 19 September 2013].

Lawrence will also encourage actors to ask questions that cross-examine ‘every aspect of the play’, particularly with Shakespeare. While working on *King Lear* (2007) he spent six months working with English actor Edward Petherbridge. Lawrence realised that ‘actors in New Zealand do not work this way’.¹¹¹ He continues: ‘That was the thing that everyone was really excited about, was what this is going to give us as practitioners working with an actor that interrogates every single aspect of the performance in a way that we don’t.’¹¹² Lawrence attributes this to the observation that, ‘It wasn’t that long ago that actors in Shakespeares in New Zealand didn’t feel that they had to understand everything that they said.’¹¹³

Allowing the actors to ask questions that in other (less permissive) rehearsal environments might expose them ‘as a dunce’ is crucial, suggests Lawrence.¹¹⁴ He cites an experience of directing a seasoned actor in *King Lear* (2007). At the first rehearsal the actor asked Lawrence, “‘what does this word mean because this comes up in a lot of plays and I’ve always wondered what this means?’”¹¹⁵ Lawrence wondered why this actor, who had “‘directed professional productions of Shakespeare ... how can you have directed and been in all these plays and not asked these questions?’”¹¹⁶ Lawrence explains that the particular actor’s honesty revealed this was directly related to a culture that promulgated the role of ‘director as expert’:

He said that he’s felt like he would be exposing himself as a dunce if he said “I don’t understand what this means”, because the rules of Circa are you do what the director tells you. The sort of the territory pissing-on that goes on in the

¹¹¹ Lawrence.

¹¹² Lawrence.

¹¹³ Lawrence.

¹¹⁴ Lawrence.

¹¹⁵ Lawrence.

¹¹⁶ Lawrence.

kind of the generation of actors and practitioners before ours doesn't allow you to admit that you don't have all the answers.¹¹⁷

In an analogous vein, the process of encouraging actors with constructive feedback emerges as vital to making dynamic theatre. Actor and director Grant Tilly remembered Nola Millar as a director who gently invited the actor to meet the situation. He states that working with her 'was almost like creating a character with help by osmosis from the director'.¹¹⁸ Tilly recalls that Millar's style was a subtle kind of leadership which was not conventional at the time:

I don't remember her ever bullying her actors, as was a popular method at the time, nor did she employ a raft of overt suggestions or a barrage of naked enthusiasm, but seemed to work with a subtle nudge here, the whisper of a suggestion there.¹¹⁹

Downes concurs when she says, 'Nola did love her actors.'¹²⁰ This affection was borne out of constructing a performance based on detailed, positive reinforcement: 'She would work very closely with me on the "why" – the "what is going on here?" Listening for truth and every beat of the journey towards its climactic arc.'¹²¹ Downes condenses the argument further when she says, 'I wouldn't open my mouth unless I had something key to support my actor.'¹²² She says, 'Some directors are punishing, and perhaps see that as nurturing – to deconstruct the actor and then rebuild them, whereas I don't believe in that process of "deconstruction" [of the actor] at all.'¹²³ O'Donnell stresses giving actors 'a lot of positive reinforcement',

¹¹⁷ Lawrence.

¹¹⁸ Grant Tilly in a letter to Darien Takle (2005), reprinted in Guest, *Transitions: Four Decades of Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School*, p. 44.

¹¹⁹ Tilly in Guest, p. 44.

¹²⁰ Downes.

¹²¹ Downes.

¹²² Downes.

¹²³ Downes.

while Penny admits that his directing methodology has advanced from the early days of expecting brutal, 'extreme commitment' from actors to that of 'encouraging people to go beyond [what they think is possible]'.¹²⁴ McColl's analogy of the play as a garden that needs to be cultivated explicitly relies on positive nurturing for organic growth. He says: 'You sow a seed and you're hoping that the flower or the lettuce will grow and you nurture it, you're nurturing it.'¹²⁵ This includes 'giving it the right nutrients and watering it when it's dry and all of that, hoping it will flourish.'¹²⁶ He frames the director-actor relationship as a parent-child one where 'the actor is kind of like an adolescent' in the process of becoming an adult; they are 'exploring all sorts of things and pushing the boundaries and they're emotional, up in the air one minute, in the doldrums the next'.¹²⁷ In this arrangement he sees that 'the director is much more paternalistic in that you're trying to guide or set boundaries or shape them or prepare them for going on. But you must be able to let go, and let them go'.¹²⁸ Occasionally this can mean the enforcement of boundaries that reflect a 'tough love' approach. Lawrence describes working with an older actor who was obstinate and tested his resolve to the extreme. Lawrence allowed the actor to exercise his own approach, but he eventually learnt (rather publically) that this was ineffective: 'What I thought was encouraging to him was actually the last thing that he needed.'¹²⁹ Other members of the cast subsequently endorsed this when they told Lawrence; "He needed you to stand up to him and to tell him to learn his lines, and to not just let him do what he wanted."¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Penny.

¹²⁵ McColl, interview.

¹²⁶ McColl, interview.

¹²⁷ McColl, interview.

¹²⁸ McColl, interview.

¹²⁹ Lawrence.

¹³⁰ Lawrence.

An interesting aspect of communication and interaction to emerge from the archive is 'warming up'. This is a significant part of the rehearsal process for some directors interviewed, but not all. Penny explains how Jacob L. Moreno's psycho-dramatic notion of 'warming up' as a form of preparation – where 'you're never not in a state, you're always warming up to something' – is essential in his process.¹³¹ 'It helped me understand how people [work]', and how they prepare for work. He refers to the interview as an act that, like rehearsal, requires preparation:

So when you sit down with me you warm me up to being with you around this area that you're interested in, that you know I know [about], and have experiences in. You warm me up and then now I'm warmed up and then I'll go home and I'll have to warm up to being a father and warm up to this gig I've got to do on Friday.¹³²

For Penny, this constant digestion of process 'really helped me work out how to work ... that I was coming in too hard sometimes and that was killing the warm-up. Or I needed to do more things'.¹³³

Most directors actively employ methods of what O'Donnell calls 'warming up in some way'.¹³⁴ Lawrence allows actors to warm up in a self-selected manner, ranging from doing the daily newspaper crossword together to a group physical warm-up. He says The Bacchanals¹³⁵ have set rituals that are linked to normal, everyday behaviour: 'We always do the

¹³¹ Penny.

¹³² Penny.

¹³³ Penny.

¹³⁴ O'Donnell.

¹³⁵ The Wellington-based theatre group Lawrence frequently makes work with. The Bacchanals are 'dedicated to exploring text-based theatre ... and trying to ensure that the theatre remains a place for social, spiritual and psychological debate'. Since 2000 they have staged twenty-five shows. See The Bacchanals website <<http://thebacchanals.net/>> [accessed 3 May 2014].

Dominion Post quiz at the start of the day ... we will always start the day with a quiz and we will usually do the horoscopes after lunch.’¹³⁶

One unique New Zealand approach towards framing the process is ‘karakia’, or prayer. This is typically employed at the beginning and end of each day’s work to invoke spiritual guidance, protection, or frame the discourse surrounding the work. Karakia might be in Māori or English (usually in Māori) according to the agreed protocol of the company and local iwi.¹³⁷ O’Donnell describes his experience with karakia under the guidance of Rangimoana Taylor while directing for Kirimogo Theatre Company in Dunedin, where they ‘always had karakia at the beginning and the end of the day’.¹³⁸ This was augmented by ‘a period where people could talk about anything that was bothering them about the production or whatever’.¹³⁹ On one occasion this process of disclosure included an actor acknowledging their grandfather who had just died, so the company ‘talked about that at the beginning of the day’.¹⁴⁰ This is in contrast to the conventional notion of leaving the everyday problems of life ‘at the rehearsal door’, yet O’Donnell endorses such openness: ‘I think that’s great because in the Pākehā process of doing it you might not discover that at all’.¹⁴¹ The company employed a similar process with the second production of Albert Belz’s emotionally demanding play, *Te Karakia* (2008) which also had Taylor in the cast presiding over the tikanga Māori (protocol):

So we’d have karakia at the beginning and the end of the day
but we’d also have space, so if somebody was unhappy with

¹³⁶ Lawrence.

¹³⁷ ‘Iwi’ refers to groups of people who identify as a tribe in Māori. This classification can be further honed into groups that include ‘hapū’ (‘clans’) and ‘whānau’ (‘extended families’).

¹³⁸ O’Donnell.

¹³⁹ O’Donnell.

¹⁴⁰ O’Donnell.

¹⁴¹ O’Donnell.

the process they could talk about it and just get it out in the open, which I thought was great.¹⁴²

O'Donnell is quick to point out that having someone appropriate to mind and enforce the kaupapa¹⁴³ helped validate his role as director:

[T]he great thing about having somebody like Rangimoana as a kind of kaumatua in the room, is it takes some pressure off the director to fill that role as well. Because you're doing so much as the director, as you know, to have somebody who has a kind of more senior, that everybody respects, that can say, "Well, okay, we've got a problem here, let's talk about it or whatever [is great]".¹⁴⁴

This is an element of the New Zealand theatre experience that warrants recognition as a culturally-specific ritual that, apart from the spiritual purpose, also invites a deeper resonance to the present environment. Karakia can evoke a very still, centred awareness that focuses those present on the immediate moment and the spoken word. It calls on spiritual, emotional, intellectual and (sometimes) physical dimensions. Lynch mentions karakia as an essential part of Hone Kouka's *Waiora: Te-u-kai-po (The Homeland)* (1999), a play he describes as 'a fairly seminal production' in New Zealand theatre practice.¹⁴⁵ 'I was really drawn to work on Māori texts', says Lynch.¹⁴⁶ 'I loved going into that [Waiora] with the sort of Māoritanga that I had been exposed to [before then] at Toi Whakaari.'¹⁴⁷ The use of karakia and understanding the tikanga with a dedicated Kaumatua (male elder) on the production

¹⁴² O'Donnell.

¹⁴³ Refers to an accepted plan of action, or the 'proper' way to do something according to protocols.

¹⁴⁴ O'Donnell.

¹⁴⁵ Lynch.

¹⁴⁶ Lynch.

¹⁴⁷ Lynch.

allowed Lynch as a Pākehā director to navigate the ‘realisation of that story’ and bring to life ‘the kind of spiritual element that *Waiora* has’.¹⁴⁸

Lynch says, ‘To have the Kaumatua there – to have a wonderful, wonderful man like Bob Wiki to work with – he was just a wonderful support.’¹⁴⁹ Wiki had a gentle but firm presence, and *Waiora* – with all its interracial meanings pertaining to home and belonging – was steeped in a cultural confidence that came to the fore at its tragic conclusion. Lynch observes that framing the experience with customs worked well, and he has returned to this approach again. He says: ‘Bringing the sort of tikanga to a script was important to the realisation of that story, and something that I enjoyed immensely and have done in other opportunities that I’ve had to work with Māori.’¹⁵⁰

Lynch agrees that all theatre has a potential transcendent aspect to it, saying: ‘I think I’ve always held a belief that there is a spiritual element in being closed in the dark together, or watching any kind of performance element whether it’s outdoors or indoors.’¹⁵¹ This is connected to ‘the whole thing about theatre being us receiving or sharing human experience’ that Lynch calls ‘the essence of what we do as theatre makers’.¹⁵² However the particular issues and cultural domain of *Waiora* (2007) challenged him to find processes that both warmed up and then ‘held’ the work to keep it ‘safe’:

There are certain pieces you do that don’t feel anywhere near the approach, the kind of spiritual element that *Waiora* has. But there in that text you’ve got something that is, it’s a spiritual story you know, it requires that wairua to be running through

¹⁴⁸ Lynch.

¹⁴⁹ Lynch.

¹⁵⁰ Lynch.

¹⁵¹ Lynch.

¹⁵² Lynch.

it for it to work and it speaks to Pākehā and Māori in the same way, I think.¹⁵³

McColl, Penny and Downes have all engaged with similar processes when directing 'Māori theatre'. McColl's work at Taki Rua theatre on *Nga Tangata Toa* (1994) evidences how dynamic this can be. William Peterson noted how the play fused 'many of the performative rituals embedded in the culture of the marae' (a communal or sacred place).¹⁵⁴

Conversely, Hurst vehemently opposes taking time for actors to warm up, believing it's the actor's responsibility to 'gear up' for the work. He says: 'I want to start rehearsals [and go]. If we start rehearsals at two o'clock, it means arrive at 1.30pm or whenever and get yourself ready, and we start [at 2pm], and we go.'¹⁵⁵ Hurst describes himself as 'not one of those directors' who will use warm-up games once the cast is gathered. He says, 'I can't stand them. Games are what you do at Drama School, or somewhere else if you need that. But don't come to me and expect me to waste my time playing stupid games.'¹⁵⁶ In a similar vein, although he prefers warm-ups that galvanise a cast, O'Donnell is pragmatic about the extent to which professional actors will all comply with a group approach. 'There are so many subtle dynamics in a cast', he observes.¹⁵⁷ '[I]n the real world of professional theatre' he will sometimes get a bit disheartened' at actors who refuse to engage with unfamiliar process.¹⁵⁸ He explains that the reality and ideal are often far apart:

I directed one play where half the cast demanded to have warm-ups led by me, and the other half refused to participate in them. So we did warm-ups and three of the actors just had a

¹⁵³ Lynch.

¹⁵⁴ William Peterson, 'Reclaiming the Past, Building a Future: Māori Identity in the Plays of Hone Kouka', *Theatre Research International*, 26.1 (March 2001), 15-24 (p. 18).

¹⁵⁵ Hurst.

¹⁵⁶ Hurst.

¹⁵⁷ O'Donnell.

¹⁵⁸ O'Donnell.

cigarette or read the *Dominion Post* and off we went. But I don't think I like to work like that; I like the idea of warming up in some way.¹⁵⁹

Feedback

In keeping with Brook's notion of the rehearsal as a collaborative 'process of genuine discovery', the interviews reflect the imperative of providing constructive feedback or notes to actors. Hurst refers to 'practical notes' that will give actors something concrete to focus on.¹⁶⁰ An example of this is how he, as an actor, was told years back about standing with energy on stage. He says, 'I was also told once, "For God's sake, Michael, sit down as if you're standing up!" [This is] so that you don't lose the energy.'¹⁶¹ This informed a concrete approach to giving notes that has implications for design which facilitates energy on stage. 'A practical rule for me is that if I can avoid furniture, I will. My Shakespeares have basically no furniture', he says.¹⁶² Instead, Hurst will 'make people stand or sit on the floor, because if you're going to go to the effort of doing that it's much greater, because when actors sit down, they go, "Oh" [energy drops].'¹⁶³

Despite this pragmatic approach, Hurst suggests that some notes are most useful if they are slightly 'mysterious' and evoke a poetic or imaginative response.¹⁶⁴ He explains that metaphorical feedback can conjure up more creative ways of encouraging actors to find playable solutions, as with 'some notes that you can give which are those things which I think are mysteriously effective'. He cites a few examples of this

¹⁵⁹ O'Donnell.

¹⁶⁰ Hurst.

¹⁶¹ Hurst.

¹⁶² Hurst.

¹⁶³ Hurst.

¹⁶⁴ Hurst.

imaginative direction:

I was told once about madness by a director, who said, "Hmmm...madness; it flicks off the back of the neck." That's not a practical note, but in fact it really is. Another director said to me once, "This character is *pierced* with tears." And I think that sort of work is really good for actors to respond to the way words are. It's like poetry, the way poetry works [original emphasis].¹⁶⁵

Lawrence urges notes to be given in the right place and at the right time. He stipulates that this understanding came from playwright and director Jean Betts, who told him; "'That actor doesn't need that note now; they need that note at the end of next week. That's where the right place for that thing is.'"¹⁶⁶ Lawrence is aware that this protective approach is vital to keeping the show on track once it has opened, too, saying, 'In some cases it's saving stuff until it's the right point in the process to go, "Here's the information you need to know".'¹⁶⁷ Unlike most directors who prefer to give notes after a run so that changes can be digested overnight or before the next performance, Lawrence will only 'note' before the next show. He believes that giving notes after a show is discourteous to the actors and the theatrical process. He says, 'The catharsis at the end of a performance ... I find it's disrespectful to the actors' process depending on how deeply or lightly embedded they are in what they're doing.'¹⁶⁸ Relaxation and 'coming down' off the show are also important. Lawrence stresses that 'an actor doesn't want to finish a show and then have to sit there and listen to forty-five minutes of notes when they could be having a drink or winding down or whatever'.¹⁶⁹ He states that giving

¹⁶⁵ Hurst.

¹⁶⁶ Lawrence.

¹⁶⁷ Lawrence.

¹⁶⁸ Lawrence.

¹⁶⁹ Lawrence.

notes after a show has opened is vital, since, 'I don't really know what a show is until I see it with an audience'.¹⁷⁰

Lawrence confesses he has a reputation for being 'a big noter', meaning that he will give lots of detailed feedback at frequent intervals. He will typically 'watch every single show' and give notes 'most nights of the run, whether they're just things like, "pick that prop up with the other hand"' or, "'Here are new things to think about, here are things that are sliding, here are things that are not working"'.¹⁷¹ Despite working with many of the same actors in *The Bacchanals*, this noting process will differ according to the needs to each production and the time available. With *King Lear*, Lawrence 'filled an entire journal with thoughts and ideas' and 'probably still had forty-five minutes of notes each night before the show'.¹⁷² The first time he directed *Hamlet*, was similar, whereas there are other shows such as *Julius Caesar* where he 'would probably be lucky if [he] gave forty-five minutes worth of notes in the entire run of the show'.¹⁷³ With some productions, if conditions demand it, Lawrence will 'micro-manage' feedback:

[With] *King Lear* [where a new Lear was brought in at the start of week three of a four-week rehearsal process] I had noted every line and every scene before we started rehearsal. I had linked up all the character journeys, I had all the kind of the RSC style, "this will be the revelatory never-seen-before piece of business"; that will happen on that line. I had all of that stuff mapped out.¹⁷⁴

A critical feature of Lawrence's note-giving process is his employment of episodic analysis of text and action as a way of framing activity. This appears to be a way of simplifying the description of action

¹⁷⁰ Lawrence.

¹⁷¹ Lawrence.

¹⁷² Lawrence.

¹⁷³ Lawrence.

¹⁷⁴ Lawrence.

alongside very detailed notes. He says: 'I always start out trying to note every single scene of the show, trying to come up with I suppose the "gest", kind of a bastardised Brechtian form', he states, adding that; 'I do that preparation to an extent just as a process that I always go through.'¹⁷⁵ This came from his training under John Downie at Victoria University of Wellington, to who taught Lawrence to find the 'gest' of a scene. Downie explained that it 'you can sum the essential action of a scene up in one sentence that doesn't have lots of colons and semi-colons and brackets and commas and hyphens and ands and thens'.¹⁷⁶ When Lawrence was 'an under-grad', Downie told him: "'The gest of Act 1 Scene 2 of *Richard the Third*, Richard woos his victim's widow" ... "You can't say any more or any less about the scene than that".'¹⁷⁷

Downes proposes that 'knowing how to connect' with actors is crucial, and effective notes are central to this.¹⁷⁸ 'Occasionally I've put an actor off by giving them a note and they've taken it the wrong way,' she states, 'and so a lot of the hard work is in actually knowing how to open the door with that particular actor in their language.'¹⁷⁹ Once a show has opened, Downes refers to notes as a way of 'tuning' the production. But this is 'unusual' practice. She says, 'Sometimes I do come in after the opening night or something and change it. But that's unusual. Unless I think I've screwed up.'¹⁸⁰ She favours handing over the production to the actors once it has gone beyond opening night, then will 'usually come in once or twice early on to see how it's going and to see if it needs to be

¹⁷⁵ Lawrence.

¹⁷⁶ Lawrence.

¹⁷⁷ Lawrence.

¹⁷⁸ Downes.

¹⁷⁹ Downes.

¹⁸⁰ Downes.

more fine-tuned'.¹⁸¹ After that she will 'leave it for a while and gift it over to the actors and come in maybe a week later with a pen and masses of notes'.¹⁸² This is 'usually to tighten it and retune it, but it isn't to differently tune it'.¹⁸³

McColl shares this view that notes beyond opening night are to be kept to a minimum. As if echoing Alfreds, he encourages organic growth in the run, saying, 'I welcome them [the actors] doing what they like.'¹⁸⁴ An exception here is if the production does not adhere to the integrity of the piece, as happened with his 2012 production of *In the Next Room (or The Vibrator Play)*. McColl states that the play was 'getting out of hand ... the actress playing Mrs Daldry was getting lots of laughs, and she thought she'd get even more laughs and she was playing it too coarsely for the kind of the delicacy of the piece'.¹⁸⁵ As a result, McColl gave notes to 'nip it in the bud' and return to the sincerity of the production.¹⁸⁶

As a rehearsal tool, 'coaching' is another way of actively giving feedback on the floor. Most directors use a form of coaching in the rehearsal process, but some prefer it to giving notes before or after chunks of rehearsal. Penny suggests that coaching is a method of 'encouraging ... [the actor] to pay more attention to something. It's a way of getting out of the self-consciousness'.¹⁸⁷ He says this can shift the director-actor relationship from observer/participant to a more complicit one: 'If I'm in

¹⁸¹ An unusual part of New Zealand theatre practice is the lack of public preview or critics' nights. Typically, shows open on a Thursday, Friday, or Saturday night to a public audience of critics and paying or complimentary ticket holders. Dress rehearsals are very rarely treated as public runs, unlike overseas. This is usually the first time that actors meet 'the final character', an audience. In recent times theatres such as Silo and Auckland Theatre Company now frequently run at least one reduced-rate preview performance before the main opening night.

¹⁸² Downes.

¹⁸³ Downes.

¹⁸⁴ McColl, interview.

¹⁸⁵ McColl, interview.

¹⁸⁶ McColl, interview.

¹⁸⁷ Penny.

there coaching, you don't think I'm watching you anymore, you know that I'm working *with* you [original emphasis].'¹⁸⁸ He adds: 'Notes are often a waste of time because you're not actually dealing with the material at the point when someone can actually shift.'¹⁸⁹ Taking the sporting analogy further, Penny sees coaching as a way of 'driving the work up the front', and it is certainly rigorous, and often very tough.¹⁹⁰ He advocates coaching as an active form of communication that capitalizes on the kinaesthetic awareness that most actors hold:

Because actors learn in their bodies, it's easier to give them the note while coaching than later as an academic thing. And I learnt it from not being able to incorporate other people's notes myself, but getting it when they said "Now, do this." And you're all warm.¹⁹¹

For Lawrence, coaching can be a more intimate form of direction that happens when working individually with actors. He explains how this came to fruition when the lead actor in *Othello* (2000) stipulated how he preferred to work. Lawrence and Taika [Cohen/Waititi] would 'go over to [Cohen's] flat and [they] would play pool for the afternoon and occasionally talk about character things'.¹⁹² Lawrence describes this as a 'very passive actor/director relationship ... Taika didn't want to be directed'.¹⁹³ Instead, Cohen wanted Lawrence 'to explain difficult passages for him and to co-ordinate the other actors around him but he had in his head what he wanted to do'.¹⁹⁴ While unique, this one-on-one approach was successfully applied to other actors in the play before the whole cast

¹⁸⁸ Penny.

¹⁸⁹ Penny.

¹⁹⁰ Penny.

¹⁹¹ Penny.

¹⁹² Lawrence.

¹⁹³ Lawrence.

¹⁹⁴ Lawrence.

was brought together:

Carey Smith was playing Iago. I would spend the same amount of time with him as I would with Taika but Carey and I would sit down with piles of books and he and I would go line by line, scene by scene, and craft everything.¹⁹⁵

Bennett makes the point that giving effective notes is essentially dependent on what a director perceives that the specific needs of a performer and play might be. He says, 'Every actor's different. You have to find a way as a director of speaking to each actor in a way that he or she will respond to.'¹⁹⁶ Bennett suggests that 'there's a lot of psychology involved in directing', and 'if you just come in and say 'blanket approach', [then] I understand the resistance that some actors put out.'¹⁹⁷ Bennett – always reliant on craft – brings the discussion back to technique, and speaks for others when he proposes that giving effective notes is linked to respect for the acting process: 'I would never ever show an actor how I wanted them to do something or tell them how I want them to say a line.'¹⁹⁸ This relates to how he views objective-driven action. For Bennett, 'the whole thing about line readings is an anathema', because 'a line is a symptom, as is an emotion'.¹⁹⁹ He continues: 'You're talking about what do these people *want*, always, and the drama and the emotion comes from conflicting objectives, you know, that's how it works'.²⁰⁰

Meeting emotion

Many of the directors interviewed agree that while a range of emotions enter the fray, fear is a particular given when working with actors in a

¹⁹⁵ Lawrence.

¹⁹⁶ Bennett.

¹⁹⁷ Bennett.

¹⁹⁸ Bennett.

¹⁹⁹ Bennett.

²⁰⁰ Bennett.

rehearsal process. While it might manifest as anger, non-participation or paralysis, fear is the enemy of creative impulse. Downes prefers to look at the flip side of fear and focus on building trust. She says, 'I suppose what I would do is I will talk about trust, so I'd turn it around. Like not saying, "I don't like what you're doing", but saying instead, "Can we talk about where you're coming from?'''.²⁰¹ Like many of the directors, she stresses that *how* feedback is given is fundamental to circumventing anxiety.

Bennett actively tries to avoid casting actors whose default position is fear, saying that, 'As far as great acting goes there needs to be trust, there needs to be fearlessness, there needs to be the ability to take great risks, the determination to always discard the obvious.'²⁰² Bennett recalls the paralysis of fear when he was an actor at Drama School and, 'all I can do is remember when I was terrified and couldn't do something'.²⁰³ However, fear is inevitable in any creative process. When actors become afraid, he prefers to use distraction. He will say, "'Okay, this is the problem. We'll shelve it for a moment and we'll try and work our way round it, you know.'" In the moment you've just got to come up with solutions.'²⁰⁴

Meanwhile, Hurst talks about meeting an actor's apprehension head-on with a frank approach. His assertion is that feedback needs to be honest, because it can relate to simple technical elements that are not being met. 'Actors need to be able to say to you, "Was that working?" I say that all the time; "Does that work?''', he states.²⁰⁵ This honesty from a director is essential, Hurst observes, if actors are to be seen and heard by an

²⁰¹ Downes.

²⁰² Bennett.

²⁰³ Bennett.

²⁰⁴ Bennett.

²⁰⁵ Hurst.

audience who typically experience the work only once:

I think you've always got to be told by a director whether it's working or not. It's not about being good; it's about whether it's working. Do you believe that? My biggest fear (as an actor) is not being heard. I say to audiences all the time; could you hear it? That's my biggest bugbear about quite a lot of theatre I see, actually, I can't hear it.²⁰⁶

O'Donnell concurs with Hurst's position on fear, seeing it as a manifestation of vulnerability that must be met with gentle honesty. He says, 'I can't just take for granted my position of power ... I think you have to remember how vulnerable people are.'²⁰⁷ Understanding this sense of exposure is crucial to how directors meet fear in the actor, says O'Donnell. Sometimes, actors 'get upset and it's just because they are ... putting themselves up there, they're putting their emotions, their bodies, their voices on the line for you [the director] and you don't actually have to get up there'.²⁰⁸

Harcourt acknowledges that the distress most likely to emerge in both actors and directors 'is the fear of not knowing what happens next'.²⁰⁹ Her strategy resides in losing the peripheral vision of the play, which can be daunting, and focussing the work on a close investigation of the text: 'My way of dealing with that [fear] as an actor and as a director is to really examine the articulation of the scene, where you have to use imagery through which to learn your text.'²¹⁰

Here, Penny cites theatre pedagogue Gaulier, from whom he learnt that fear was a given; 'Gaulier was good on fear ... he [Gaulier] just went, you know, "The fear never goes away"', implying that acceptance of it is

²⁰⁶ Hurst.

²⁰⁷ O'Donnell.

²⁰⁸ O'Donnell.

²⁰⁹ Harcourt.

²¹⁰ Harcourt.

the first step towards moving beyond it.²¹¹ Penny concludes that as a director the response is to consciously manage it and have systems in place to disintegrate the negative consequences of anxiety:

You kind of crowd it out, is the way I think of it. One does have to train oneself to tolerate a huge amount of anxiety and learn to not react to the anxiety, but to the need of the company wherever that comes from, the producer. So it really helps to have a couple of good people around you who are also locked down solid.²¹²

Extending on this, Penny prides himself on confronting fear with actors in rehearsal. 'I think one thing I've been able to do is make people face the fear in a way, or not deny it or, not make it nice,' he says.²¹³ This is in direct contrast to what he calls 'the "luvvey" culture where the director says "it'll all be okay".'²¹⁴ But he warns if it's not 'okay', actors need to know in order to dissipate the fear and deal with the inciting problem. In recent times, he has become more honest than ever in reaction to 'a weird thing in our theatre culture where people relate to the actors like they're not adults':

[T]he stage managers do it a lot, they go, "Oh, it's my job to look after the actors." So I'm fiendish about all of that, I won't have people "mothered". I mean, the more work I've done with actors, the more compassionate I've got and the more appreciative I've got of their skill and craft. But equally I'd say I've got fiercer about when people are deluding themselves.²¹⁵

When asked about his own relationship with fear or anxiety, Penny is equally honest. He suggests it is a crucial part of the creative process that can signal deeper engagement with the 'essence' of the piece. In that sense, he suggests, directors should embrace fear if it gets them closer to

²¹¹ Penny.

²¹² Penny.

²¹³ Penny.

²¹⁴ Penny.

²¹⁵ Penny.

the crux of a play's concerns and says, 'I think if you're *not* doing that you're not actually making work of any substance.'²¹⁶ He recalls an occasion when Annie Ruth was directing *Small Lives, Big Dreams* [2005]. Ruth 'came in one day and she went, "Do you ever get like really *lost* in the middle?" I was like, "Yes, like every single time." And she was like, "Do you?"'.²¹⁷ Penny describes that 'her picture of me directing is that I have the idea and then I go ahead and do it', which he points out is not the case.²¹⁸

Lynch also embraces distress as an underlying given, saying, 'Well, we're all fearful.'²¹⁹ His overriding response is that directors must acknowledge trepidation and be honest with themselves and others, saying, 'It's a matter of going into it and not pretending that it isn't a fearful situation. I think being honest about your response to stuff [is vital].'²²⁰ This approach has developed over the years, and Lynch compares its evolution to his early years of directing that would stipulate, "'Okay, this is how we're blocking it" and all that stuff.'²²¹ This soon changed:

By the time I got to the 'eighties and I was exploring it all with everyone, – well actually from the mid-seventies, really – you have to be in a position where you're going, "I don't know if that works or I don't know what we do here." I think, "Let's take a break", or, "Let's jump this" and go away and think about it, or, "What else shall we explore?" And kind of be[ing] absolutely clear that we're all in it together and that the only way that we're going to grow forward is by us all leaping into it, really.²²²

²¹⁶ Penny.

²¹⁷ Penny.

²¹⁸ Penny.

²¹⁹ Lynch.

²²⁰ Lynch.

²²¹ Lynch.

²²² Lynch.

His current view accepts that fear is an indispensable part of the creative process when he says, 'yes it's fearful, it's fearful for all of us'.²²³ This can lead to questions being asked about the play's on-going deconstruction and construction that he has observed follows a pattern: 'I always find that week four of rehearsal is when I'm at my most tense; it's not in production week, it's actually in the week before'.²²⁴ This, he says, is 'because I want us to be at a point where it can all be exploded and pulled apart by the tech week'.²²⁵ Lynch's comments highlight the need that most directors express, which is to find theatrical dynamism in the work – an indicator of 'quality' - before technicals begin. Something lively has to be evidently present, Lynch cautions, before the performance can take on technical elements. He suggests the work 'has to be at a certain point of readiness and "liveness" within the structure we've got in the rehearsal room before we have to then explode that, let go of that'.²²⁶ This includes being able to 'fall apart while we find out and orientate ourselves to the physicality of the set and the lights and all of that stuff'.²²⁷ This can put pressure on an already compressed rehearsal process, so more than ever, honesty is crucial. Lynch says, 'I try and be as clear [possible] about [fear] ... it's reminding ourselves as we go about where we're at, what else we've got to achieve, where else we've got to go'.²²⁸

Meanwhile, McColl candidly admits fear is a part of his process. 'Oh, yes, I'm terrified at the first rehearsal. Terrified. I'm absolutely terrified', he says.²²⁹ He cites this 'imposter syndrome' as a common condition amongst directors, saying, 'you do all this reading beforehand and then

²²³ Lynch.

²²⁴ Lynch.

²²⁵ Lynch.

²²⁶ Lynch.

²²⁷ Lynch.

²²⁸ Lynch.

²²⁹ Lynch.

when you come to the first rehearsal you know nothing. Suddenly you kind of don't know anything, but actually you do, you know heaps but you feel like you know nothing.'²³⁰ Here, McColl acknowledges Alfreds: 'I can't remember if it was Mike Alfreds when I did his workshop [who said it]. Oh yes, [I feel] fear all the time.'²³¹ McColl adds that this is shared with other 'creatives' beyond the directing realm. This includes the designer and ceramicist John Parker who was designing McColl's next play. Parker told McColl; "'I'm always terrified each time we start the first day of a new rehearsal because I'm going to be exposed as a fraud.'"²³² In response, McColl thought, "'That's it. I love it, that's exactly what it's like; they're going to see I'm just a fraud'.'" ²³³ As a twist, however, McColl suggests that there is something intrinsically exciting about fear and avoidance that can add excitement to the creative process:

[Tony] Rabbit always says that about me; that I don't make decisions until the eleventh hour, he said, "I know you do it to just give yourself a hit, you know, so just so you can really [get] a buzz out of panic." You know, like here I am a couple of weeks out of starting rehearsals for *Awatea*, and the cast is not complete yet and I'm going ["Argh"] but he says, "You do it all the time just to give yourself a rush", but I don't know if that's true.²³⁴

In dealing with emotion, courage emerges as central to the skillset of directors working with actors; displaying it, encouraging it and modelling it. In the pursuit of characteristic directing 'languages', all directors have displayed resolution and nerve with their choice of play and how it might be performed. Downes' memory of *Closer* (1998) – 'an amazing play; a brilliant play' – stipulates that she had 'four fabulous and very willing and

²³⁰ McColl, interview.

²³¹ McColl, interview.

²³² McColl interview.

²³³ McColl, interview.

²³⁴ McColl, interview.

creative actors' alongside a 'great set design'.²³⁵ Like other directing successes, bravery is seen as the critical ingredient with this production.

Hurst explains that his earlier acting days of working with Mike Mizrahi and Marie Adams of Inside Out Theatre in productions such as *The Holy Sinner* (1990) required him to push the limits of what was physically and emotionally possible. He says: 'I did several productions with them [Inside Out] and I explored that way of working, really fully. We improvised so hard it was like running a marathon. It was physical, and all of that.'²³⁶ This informed Hurst's directing praxis which, while not so extremely, physically demanding of actors, still requires them to bring courage to everything they do. It also finds credence in the saying, 'Don't tell me. Show me.' This includes having the courage to make mistakes: 'In a rehearsal space – actor or director – surely that is the time when you can make a fool of yourself and know that people around you are going to go, "That's fine."'²³⁷ He adds the proviso that 'you don't want to be an idiot on stage – you want to have got past that'.²³⁸ For Hurst, 'rehearsal must be the place where you make awful mistakes and nobody judges you for it. In fact they say, "fantastic that you went there".'²³⁹ He reminds us that risk-taking is what lies at the heart of dynamic theatre when he asks, 'Isn't that what people are paying for? To see the sweat, the blood, and the intellectual rigour and all of that stuff?'²⁴⁰ Again, Hurst returns to the role of the actor and director, to 'not underestimating the responsibility of being up there [on stage].'²⁴¹ This includes the director 'not

²³⁵ Downes.

²³⁶ Hurst.

²³⁷ Hurst.

²³⁸ Hurst.

²³⁹ Hurst.

²⁴⁰ Hurst.

²⁴¹ Hurst.

underestimating that, either. Making sure that you are pushing to achieve that, so that someone in the audience can transcend their situation'.²⁴²

McColl names courage as one of the key ingredients that attributed to the success of *Hedda Gabler* with Catherine Wilkin. She was an actor he describes as 'at the height of her powers doing Hedda ... such a brave, outrageous interpretation of the character that just blew people away'.²⁴³ Penny suggests that fostering courage in actors can be in the form of providing structures for the actor, particularly when large roles demand it. He says: 'If you direct the structure of the work, with good actors they know how to work off that'.²⁴⁴ This approach came from *Cyrano* (1997), where he 'stopped being interested in going "there, you should go there, you should do that"'.²⁴⁵ Instead, Penny learnt: 'It's actually not better if I do it; it's better if they [the actors] do it'.²⁴⁶ This determination to lead the actors to engage with courage was born in the audition workshops for *Cyrano*, which Penny describes as, 'full-on ... (or I was a bit full-on). Anyway, from that work we had a very committed company already, and then we did seven or eight weeks of rehearsal'.²⁴⁷

Courage is also a vital element when challenging accepted notions of 'truth' on stage, and communicating that with actors. McColl explains his fascination with 'the German style of acting' that is 'kind of Brechtian [in] style, but it's not the way we think of Brechtian, which is like, "Oh, I'm being Brechtian."' ²⁴⁸ He observes it is 'just very relaxed with the audience,

²⁴² Hurst.

²⁴³ McColl, interview.

²⁴⁴ Penny.

²⁴⁵ Penny.

²⁴⁶ Penny.

²⁴⁷ Penny.

²⁴⁸ McColl.

it's just letting them know in a very relaxed way that, "hey, we're just actors here and we know that you're the audience".²⁴⁹

McColl continues to explain his admiration for the courage required to be truly present in this style of acting:

In the middle of [Frank Carstorf's] *Endstation Amerika* someone did a big sneeze in the audience and they said, "Bless you", or whatever it is in German. One of the actors on stage just said it without dropping out of character; you know, like they just acknowledged that we're all in the same room. And something fell off stage and an actor just jumped down off stage and picked it up from the front row.²⁵⁰

With its disruption of the traditional model of sustained verisimilitude in representational theatre, Carstorf's work proved to McColl that courage with form is exciting:

They [the actors] can go from this hyper, hyper naturalism like we don't even know ... hyper, hyper-naturalism and they can go like that in a split second from that to incredible expressionism ... I just loved in *Endstation Amerika* how they would go from just doing something naturalistic to going "aaaargh", and really like physical, extraordinarily physical things.²⁵¹

Occasionally, reference is made to other directors for their courageous approach to directing. O'Donnell cites Augusto Boal who posits that no matter how serious the subject matter, a sense of play is essential to the 'game' of theatre. This, says O'Donnell, is fearless. 'Even though you're dealing with the most serious, terrible real problems in the real world in his theatre, that he had the slogan, "Have the courage to be happy".'²⁵² Closer to New Zealand shores, Lawrence mentions Wellington director Danny Mulheron who has influenced Lawrence's praxis. He says:

²⁴⁹ McColl, interview.

²⁵⁰ McColl, interview.

²⁵¹ McColl, interview.

²⁵² O'Donnell.

'Danny has an absolute "exposure of bullshit" quality to him that is really abrasive and at times offensive (I think deliberately so), but I wish that I had his courage.'²⁵³

The interviewed directors all show enormous resolve both inside the rehearsal room and outside it, navigating a career. Bennett draws attention to the need for tenacity when he refers to the gradually subsiding, yet abiding 'suspicion' of locally-created work when he says that in a 'tiny community', there is still 'huge "schadenfreude"²⁵⁴ in the industry'.²⁵⁵ Bennett's observations perhaps point to a larger need to challenge frames of reference, funding pathways, and structures that connect, objectify and extend directing praxes in New Zealand. Only through conscious dialogue can the profession flourish. McColl stressed this twenty-five years ago when he said: 'Development is only possible when the company works as a team.'²⁵⁶

The identity of directors is strong, though, and this is an underlying feature in the archive that warrants recognition. Bennett doubtless speaks for other directors when he says: 'There's nothing else in my life that gives me that feeling and I started directing when I was eighteen, so [it's been] a long, long time now.'²⁵⁷ Although typically self-effacing, the directors explored in the archive show a post-colonial self-reliance, coupled with fertile imaginations and practical determination.

²⁵³ Lawrence.

²⁵⁴ Pleasure derived from the misfortune of others.

²⁵⁵ Bennett.

²⁵⁶ Reference MS-Papers-8874-24, 'Colin's Contribution: Farewell Speech to Downstage Theatre', 2 August 1989, p. 14.

²⁵⁷ Bennett.

Challenging the actor

O'Donnell is attentive to what happens when actors are challenged, and he names this as an essential quality in dynamic performance. He says, 'If you put challenges in the actors' way, the actors will come up and be more charged, more alive and more electrified.'²⁵⁸ The obstacles can be 'intellectual, imaginative, or physical ... If you put challenges in the actors' way, the actors will come up and be more charged and more alive and more electrified.'²⁵⁹ This leads O'Donnell to posit: 'So the question for me will be, "How can you get that in the theatre?"'.²⁶⁰ How directors 'get actors [to be spontaneous]' in the way site-specific theatre can, includes 'constantly bringing challenges up for the actors so that the actors have to keep working hard'.²⁶¹

He describes a recent example of directing an adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* (2010) in which the cast were all challenged. O'Donnell explains that the performing obstacles presented by this play eschewed idle performances:

[T]he cast were quite energised because they had to break out of playing characters and do song and dance routines as well. So they couldn't sort of be lazy at all because they had to be physically engaged. And also the way the play was written, even people playing major parts – most people playing major parts – had to play a whole lot of other smaller roles as well.²⁶²

John Smythe described the particular imaginative vitality of *Gatsby* when his review noted; 'there are some stunning moments where collisions of

²⁵⁸ O'Donnell.

²⁵⁹ O'Donnell.

²⁶⁰ O'Donnell.

²⁶¹ O'Donnell.

²⁶² O'Donnell.

light, sound and action leave us swearing we've really just seen what we've been provoked to imagine'.²⁶³

Bennett cites the highly physical, extremely challenging work of Mizrahi and Adams and Hurst as influencing his directing praxis. Their theatricality and sheer scale of work shaped a perception of how far actors could be pushed: '*The Holy Sinner* but also *The Lover* and *The Beloved* ... that kind of the warehouse stuff they did; that rough but highly visual, physical, theatrical stuff I really liked, and it has been an influence.'²⁶⁴

Fundamentally, the actor-director relationship is an evolving, creative one, subject to the highs and lows of all artistic bonds. The concentrated rehearsal process so common in New Zealand theatre schedules often means that working with actors under tight parameters and lean conditions can be joyful, tumultuous or both. It is never bland. It is distinctive that so many New Zealand directors started or continue to work as actors. The actor-centric focus that informs interpretive directing in New Zealand also underscores Downes' lament of the dearth of those directors who can hoist actors up:

Where are the good directors that I can relate to like Nola [Millar] and Aubrey Mellor who will elevate me, give me wings so that I can fly, and when I fly over the cliff, know that I will glide? Or will take me over the cliff rather than just push me onto a rock?²⁶⁵

The director has a role to play in the creation of this alternate theatrical reality of the 'magic if.' To Peter Brook, the human connection is the essence of dynamic theatre, and the actor-director relationship is at the centre of this relationship. He claims 'the supreme jujitsu' style of directing 'would be for the director to stimulate such an outpouring of the

²⁶³ John Smythe, 'A Rich Man's World', *Theatreview*, 1 August 2012
<<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=3280>> [accessed 31 July 2013].

²⁶⁴ Bennett.

²⁶⁵ Downes.

actor's inner richness that it completely transforms the subjective nature of his original impulse'.²⁶⁶

New Zealand theatre directors perceive their creative relationship with actors as something deep and essential, underpinning the actor-director process. Penny's explanation of the development of his directing ecology after the critically praised, actor-driven work, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, sums this up well. He says, 'with *Cyrano* it changed. I think up until that point I was just trying to figure out how to direct acting ... and make it attractive'.²⁶⁷ After *Cyrano*, he started to 'really rethink how to make the work more with the company'.²⁶⁸ For Penny, this marked a turning point: 'So in one way I think of it as [previously] I just brought my will to bear on actors and the obvious consequences of working that way are well documented.'²⁶⁹ Subsequently, Penny's praxis evolved into something considerably more distilled and essential. This instigated authenticity in his directing:

I think from that point I started to direct, look for a deeper kind of source for the work. It's sort of like at that point I knew enough of the technical elements. I'd done enough time in the cockpit so I knew how to manage groups, I knew how to run the day, I knew how to help people get from A to B, I knew how different actors worked. I really knew how to draw a performance and I was very good at casting, so that helped. But I really feel, after that, I started to think about how to *direct*.²⁷⁰

In its consideration of dynamic theatre, the next chapter will consider what techniques nominated directors employ when working with actors towards revelatory acting.

²⁶⁶ Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 61.

²⁶⁷ Penny.

²⁶⁸ Penny.

²⁶⁹ Penny.

²⁷⁰ Penny.

Chapter Seven: Working with Actors – Revelation

O 'tis most sweet/ When in one line two crafts directly meet.
(Hamlet, 3.4., ll. 210-11)

Tuesday 5 February, 2013. The heat of an Auckland summer afternoon invades the white rehearsal studio. Harsh shadows hit the stark workshop space. In the room as well as the discussion, reflection is the leitmotif of the day. Questions of core philosophy and practice sit on the shoulders of veteran actor Lisa Harrow.¹ She is on a break from *King Lear* rehearsals, talking to a group of sixteen trainee actors on The Actors' Program.² Each actor has questions about the nature of acting that provoke her immediate response: what is acting? How do we bring text to life? What is it that directors are doing with actors on stage when they work at their best? How do the two crafts directly meet?

Fundamental to the discussion is Harrow's attempt to provide parameters and define what it is that actors do. 'Actors are holding the mirror up to nature,' she states. 'Revealing, touching, consoling; extending the audience's knowledge of themselves. Not indulging in some sort of psychodrama: it's an ancient art that we're part of.'³ Her observations directly relate to the etymological derivation of the word 'actor' in ancient

¹ Lisa Harrow, interview with Michael Hurst for The Actors' Program (Auckland, 5 February, 2013). Harrow was back in New Zealand to direct the University of Auckland as director of the 50th Anniversary Outdoor Summer Shakespeare production of *King Lear*. Appearing in the Auckland Summer Shakespeare's first production in 1963, Harrow is a New Zealander who graduated from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London in 1968 and began her stage career at the Royal Shakespeare Company under John Barton. She has featured internationally in numerous films, theatre productions and television dramas. To have her return to direct this production was considered by many a logical extension of her acting skills.

² This is a one-year, privately-run, professional training course for actors that describes its immersive and practical program as 'A New Approach to Actor Training in New Zealand' (2013 Brochure). I have worked for them since January 2012.

³ Harrow.

Greek, which some have suggested translates to 'one who has the courage to reveal their self'.⁴ Perceived revelation of the actor's self is at the crux of the ambiguity that comprises dynamic acting; what is actual and what is fictional intersect.

This philosophy of acting emerges as the predominant view of all the directors interviewed. The process of facilitating revelation for and with actors – how directors encourage actors to disclose themselves and connect with each other, the play script and the audience – is central to this chapter. It considers how New Zealand theatre directors engage with acting towards revelation, a particular view of performance that foregrounds Stanislavski-based methods and positions the actor at the centre of the theatre experience. A New Zealand genealogy of directing might look like a Stanislavski-Alfreds-eclecticism fusion.

The chapter closely examines these directing techniques with a view to dualities, the role of the imagination, preparatory work, and the importance of task. Techniques that elicit disclosure include 'Text – No Text – Text', repetition, character work, improvisation and Laban Efforts. As the thesis advances the discussion of how directors bring text dynamically to life, a consideration of evidence gained from interview data will now focus on working with actors with emphasis towards certain elements that elicit dynamic performance; specifically, disclosure of the self.

⁴ The original word for a performer in early to mid-Athenian tragedy was 'hypokrites', meaning 'answerer' or 'one who interprets', which likely accounts for the function of an actor answering the chorus. 'Actor' is derived from Latin 'āctor' ('doer') and from Ancient Greek 'aktōr' (meaning 'leader, carrier, conveyor, bringer'). Greek performer Photos Photiades explained that the broad etymological derivation of the word 'actor' in Ancient Greek is understood as 'one who has the courage to reveal their self'. Photos Photiades, personal communication with the author, Wellington, 1998.

Dualities

In considering revelation of the self, there are dyads that must be acknowledged. In 'The Three Faces of the Director' (first published in 1936), the co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, Nemirovich-Danchenko, referred to the three roles of the '*régisseur*' (director) as 'interpreter', 'mirror', and 'organiser'.⁵ His description of directorial functions is still apt:

[H]e [sic] instructs *how* to play ... The *régisseur*-mirror's most significant ability is to perceive the individuality of the actor; to follow it uninterruptedly in the process of work ... so that the actor may see himself [sic] face to face, as in a mirror [original emphasis].⁶

With reference to the task to 'perceive the individuality of the actor', there are dichotomies that directors are constantly aware of in the view of acting that presents script-based constructs of character distinct from (but related to and presented by) the actor.

This is just one of many dualities at work. The construction of 'character' in dynamic theatre calls upon the meeting of two parties; action and direction; actor and audience; feeling and thought; structure and freedom; 'self' and 'character'; relaxation and energy; concealment and revelation.⁷ In this arrangement, both actor and audience are aware of the dichotomies that exist between actor and character, or reality and imagination. For Alfreds, the act of revelation by the actor in real time coupled with the audience's awareness of it, presents the central duality

⁵ Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, 'The Three Faces of the Director', in Cole and Chinoy, pp. 119-124 (p. 119).

⁶ Nemirovich-Danchenko, (p. 120).

⁷ Relaxation and concentration are the skills that Stanislavski imparted through his 'public solitude' work. Jean Benedetti has suggested that 'relaxed concentration' was encouraged by Stanislavski for actors to experience 'liberation through unself-conscious involvement in ... "accidental" performance'. See Jean Benedetti, *Seeming, Being and Becoming: Acting in our Century* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1976), p. 43.

that is 'the essence of theatre, the nature of its uniqueness'.⁸ As Crouch has noted: 'One of the most vital outcomes of transformational theatre is, for Alfreds, the "shared act of imagination", an interaction that brings actors and audience into constant mutual awareness.'⁹ This is important because the pursuit of 'shared experience' theatre is to allow the actor not just to 'transform' himself or herself, but to allow the audience to experience that change in the same time and space as the actor. Alfreds has said: 'The actor said, in effect, "I am both me, here, now and someone else in some other place and time".... The audience had to be made aware of this duality.'¹⁰ In this shared transaction there resides an implicit agreement to engage the creative power of the imagination.¹¹

This idea of acting as a feat of revelation by an actor through character, emotionally – with the effect of moving or affecting the audience in some way – is central to dynamic theatre. While there are a myriad of techniques that sit on the performance continuum, there is no 'one way' to work with an actor. Directing often involves the merging of known techniques with the development of new ones. As already noted, Stanislavski worked 'inside-out' and 'outside-in' at different points in his career; he constantly shifted his views, always trying to find more efficient ways for the actor to perform towards naturalism. So, too, do all the interviewed directors shift in how they experiment with pathways for the construction of acting on stage.

Energy and relaxation represent a dichotomy. Energy is central to dynamic acting. The drive for dynamism has long preoccupied twentieth and twenty-first century theatre practice. From the disciplines mooted by Michael Chekhov, Brook, Barba, Grotowski, Alfreds and Mitchell,

⁸ Mike Alfreds, 'A Shared Experience: The Actor as Story-Teller', (p. 4).

⁹ Crouch, pp. 81-2.

¹⁰ Qtd in Crouch, pp. 81-2.

¹¹ See Crouch, p. 82.

effective theatre is seen as a mutable, present force that exists within and between the performers, space and audience. Vitality is crucial to this. New Zealand theatre directors speak of the need for energy and mutability when working with actors, and their techniques invariably embrace approaches that engender actor-centric performance, rather than what has been called 'director's theatre'.¹²

Bennett pinpoints energy in acting as a key ingredient that sustains performance when he says, 'good actors are people who can maintain engagement. People want to watch them for hours'.¹³ He recalls that with *Jism* (1989), to 'keep the performances fresh' the actors had to 'exist in the moment and there was always a sense of spontaneity and freshness. And a high level of energy in what they were doing, which was exciting'.¹⁴ Hurst, too, pinpoints vitality as a central component to how he views theatre, an 'elevated ... pageant' where 'all of these pseudo-religious things are real, and therefore the people on stage and the director must take that really seriously ... or you will be cheap'.¹⁵ Within this environment where 'theatre is elevated', Hurst suggests that energy is needed to 'offer up' in the pageant in non-naturalistic ways, and capture 'the whole intrinsic factor of it'.¹⁶ He is a 'muscular' actor and director who brings enormous energy to his work in both roles.

Alfreds endorses this when he says that what makes great actors, or what he calls 'stars', is 'endless energy coupled with a willingness to imagine and give. It's most particularly this extraordinary energy, though;

¹² Interpretive, deconstructive, or reconstructive in their approach, 'director's theatre' refers to a form of performance that is particularly focussed on exacting the director's vision rather than the input of a collective. See, for example, the work of Robert Wilson.

¹³ Bennett.

¹⁴ Bennett.

¹⁵ Hurst.

¹⁶ Hurst.

those actors never seem to get tired'.¹⁷ On a performance level, Alfreds suggests that energy and its effect on another actor or the space itself is what the director needs to be constantly aware of: 'I can see when the energy isn't really travelling across the stage from one actor to the other;[if] it drops away before it reaches them.'¹⁸ He adds that this is an objective-driven 'need' that relies on the deliberate externalisation of an internal desire. 'Very simply it is: 'I want, therefore I do.'¹⁹ The archive shows a clear understanding of these dualities in the pursuit of dynamic acting.

By the same token, McColl describes ease as an essential quality in expert performance. He recalls watching German actors in Berlin who, while energised, were 'just completely relaxed'.²⁰ He pinpoints the Brechtian tradition where 'it's just very relaxed with the audience, it's just letting them know in a very relaxed way that, 'Hey, we're just actors here and we know that you're the audience.'²¹ This easeful complicity with the audience arguably allows for constant dynamic as the actors can spring from one state to another with utmost freedom. Alfreds also stresses that relaxation is important to 'release something' if tension is being held and preventing the actor from a full exploration of the character. He cites Feldenkrais²² as one tool that can assist this: 'I do believe (although

¹⁷ Alfreds.

¹⁸ Alfreds.

¹⁹ Alfreds.

²⁰ McColl.

²¹ McColl.

²² The Feldenkrais Method, named after its founder Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, 'uses slow and precise movement sequences to engage your brain through your body and nervous system. Through your neuromuscular system it activates more parts of your brain by helping your muscles move outside of their habitual pattern.' The New Zealand Feldenkrais Guild, http://feldenkrais.org.nz/Site/About_Feldenkrais/About/Method_Intro.aspx, [accessed 13 January 2015].

technically I couldn't explain it) that we hold emotions in our muscles'.²³ Energy and relaxation are a duality in constant dialogue.

Shaping revelation

A compelling play is often all about what is not said; tensions, juxtapositions and subtexts masking other 'truths'. As director Michael Blakemore writes, play texts require the actor to bring their self, and the director to shape that individuality:

Every word that is uttered, every action the play requires, has to be particularised through the personality of the individual performing it. It has to be translated into a second language, the language of acting, and this is something that has to be found; it is not self-evident.²⁴

Often through probing and pressing, this disclosure of the 'hidden' will come to the fore. Extensive research on the 'character lists',²⁵ 'given circumstances'²⁶ and 'incontrovertible facts'²⁷ connected to task and environment can bring this about.

Using such methods, the shaping of revelation can be an 'outside-in' process that relies on physical archetypes as triggers for an internal response, or an 'inside-out' process that generates character from an inner impulse. Sometimes, as directors acknowledge, it is a combination of both approaches. Both are equally valid, and equally prevalent in New Zealand performance discourse, as the interviews expose. Directors acknowledge

²³ Alfreds.

²⁴ Michael Blakemore, *Stage Blood: Five Tempestuous Years in the Early Life of the National Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 93.

²⁵ 'Lists' are everything that is said by or about a character.

²⁶ 'Given circumstances' are any 'facts, events and conditions that influence the situation taking place.' See Alfreds, *Different Every Night*, p. 104.

²⁷ 'Incontrovertible facts' are indisputable facts that cannot be contravened. For example, Hamlet, an only child, has two parents; one has recently died. The *effect* of these facts are to be interpreted by actor and director.

that character can be constructed from the outside-in as a way of inviting revelation to occur.

Stanislavski's Method of Physical Actions is strongly evoked in Alfreds' 'character lists', and it is this approach that Downes, Lynch, Hendry and Bennett favour as a way of constructing character. Bennett's detailed description of this conveys a thorough investigation of a process that gets to revelation through application. Comprehensive lists on the 'incontrovertible facts' about each character from the text are written by the actors, i.e. What does my character say about themselves, what does my character say about other characters and what do other characters say about my character? Bennett will then 'sit down as a cast and spend a bit of time each day on character work'.²⁸

Ideally, this includes technical personnel to captivate the progression of character and stave off pre-empted designs. Bennett says, 'I usually get the costume designer in as part of that process as well, because I don't want anything starting to be designed in advance. It's got to actually come organically out of the process.'²⁹ After reading through these lists, key 'assumptions' are made about the characters that inform clear decisions about character behaviour, such as:

What is the main line of action in the play? What do they want in the play? How could you describe this character's super-objective? What do they want in life without which they would cease to exist? ... And those lists, when read out, give really strong, clear clues.³⁰

Following that, Bennett leads a 'guided improvisation with the whole cast exploring that character, except the actor who is playing that character,

²⁸ Bennett.

²⁹ Bennett.

³⁰ Bennett.

who sits out and watches'.³¹ Then, he will 'talk them [the actors] through a whole lot of scenarios' and lead a discussion that presents scenarios prefaced by, 'How might it feel if ...'³² This relies heavily on the imaginative capacity, rather than the experiential that Harcourt prefers. While Bennett emphasizes he does not wish to create pre-set performances, he looks for authentic acting that is generated by internal responses; '*I want them to explore internally what this character goes through and anything that happens externally is a product of that [my emphasis]*'.³³

In addition to constructing character from a series of textual 'facts', this approach has the benefit of giving suggestions to the actor from others in the cast. Bennett observes the impact this can have:

I've done this a lot and whenever I'd done it the actor who's sitting out, who's playing the role that everyone else is exploring, is quite profoundly touched and moved. ... also you get such an overwhelming essence of who this character is, that the actor who is playing the role will make notes all the way through. And again it's more stuff that can go into the imagination.³⁴

In another way, many of the directors interviewed see dynamic acting as an act of disclosure that can be reached because the character is perceived to be close to the actor's usual disposition in real life. This assumes the director has a clear idea about who what the character is before the role is cast. It also presumes that some pre-existing quality is present in the actor. It is true that actors in New Zealand have often been cast for their own intrinsic qualities rather their capacity to 'transform'. In a letter to one of his mentors (Sunny Amey) while working at Downstage,

³¹ Bennett.

³² Bennett.

³³ Bennett.

³⁴ Bennett.

McColl writes that the selected cast for his upcoming production of *The Cherry Orchard* (1985) needed to be comprised of actors who were able to expose a rough, recognisable part of their inner self that 'fits' the character.³⁵ 'It must be A team – with actors who can look like crushed up paper bags (I mean, lived in)', McColl writes.³⁶ Ralph McAllister has called McColl's style a 'customary stamp of sensitivity and awareness',³⁷ and in his correspondence as well as his work there is the preference for actors to be revelatory, rather than applicatory. This reverberates throughout the archive.³⁸

Revelation can be subtle. For example, it can mean working against the emotional outpour that is sometimes misconstrued as the staple of engaging acting. In the *struggle* to remain intact lies the drama. As McColl says; 'If you see a man on stage on the verge of breaking down, that is going to be much more powerful and that will make the audience cry. So getting the actors to hold back [is often most effective].'³⁹ Therefore perceived revelation or what or can *potentially* happen to the actor, is powerful.

Conversely, revelation can also be presented as a more extreme version of disclosure. Hendry refers to principles of energy and connection underpinning Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty ethos that an actor generates through a vital performance. Hendry says, it's '[l]ike Artaud speaks about; you want "theatre of the blood", you want your audience to *engage* in something and feel it. You don't want them sitting back politely and going, "that was very nice"'.⁴⁰ Downes also stipulates that working

³⁵ McColl names the (now deceased) actors 'Alice Fraser and Michael Haigh as Luiba and Lopakin' [sic]. Reference R2617467, Box 4, McColl to Amey, 1985.

³⁶ Reference R2617467, Box 4, McColl to Amey, 1985.

³⁷ Ralph McAllister in Smythe, *Downstage Upfront*, p. 281.

³⁸ The old adage that 'amateurs apply while professionals reveal', comes to mind.

³⁹ McColl, interview.

⁴⁰ Hendry.

towards revelation lies centrally in her praxis when she says, 'That's our job, to *reveal* something that will illuminate something, not to just tell a story [original emphasis].'⁴¹ She continues that her attraction to a role is often actor-centric, rather than character or narrative-specific: 'I will usually go to see plays because I want to see a particular actor doing that piece, rather than because I want to see that piece.'⁴² Downes says this is driven by the hope that actors will 'make me feel that they will reveal something that will illuminate me.'⁴³

McColl insists that in this regard, directing is organic and part of the wider ecology of a production. McColl will often cast actors who are perceived to be at a pinnacle in their careers, as was the case with Catherine Wilkin in *Hedda Gabler*, Stephen Lovatt and Robyn Malcolm in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (2000), and Barbara Ewing in McColl's farewell production at Downstage of *Death and the Maiden* (1992). The latter was reviewed by Susan Budd as a 'coup de theatre': 'McColl's production is masterly. Authoritative and superbly stylish, it charts the passions of the protagonists with supple strength and clarity.'⁴⁴

Some directors refer to the importance of framing the task of acting as a creative act in which there are specific learnings that must occur. Penny suggests that 'relationship to purpose' is crucial for actors to understand the rehearsal journey that awaits them.⁴⁵ He explains that in *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1997) the main actor had a mammoth task that was explicitly outlined, compared to the unhappy experience of the main actor in *King Lear* where the expectation of task was predominantly unclear:

Cameron's [Rhodes] relationship to the risk he needed to take to step up was really clear. So then you're not – there's no

⁴¹ Downes.

⁴² Downes.

⁴³ Downes.

⁴⁴ Susan Budd, *Dominion*, 19 October 1992, ctd in Smythe, p. 332.

⁴⁵ Penny.

fight. The only fight is making the art better, whereas in *Lear* Ian's relationship to doing the role wasn't at all clear, and so you end up having a fight – or many fights – about the wrong thing.⁴⁶

This requires clear definitions of both the actor's task and the world in which the characters operate. Alfreds might refer to this as the 'given circumstances'; the sets of information that shape the world of the play.

Here Penny mentions American practitioner Joan Scheckel,⁴⁷ who visited and taught in New Zealand in 2004.⁴⁸ Her work calls for the play to have a backdrop of adjectives that define the pursuit of action within that context. In the case of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Penny cites 'three adjectives: brutal, chaotic, and maybe moral is the third one, but we changed that around a number of times, it became something else'.⁴⁹ In order to show this quality, the opposite must be portrayed and then worked against. In this dance of opposition, the drama comes to life. Penny explains that 'in order to show chaos you have to show the opposite ... So for the world to seem chaotic it actually has to be really ordered'.⁵⁰ Scheckel has said that story and imagination are essential to the arousal of feeling in the audience. She says: 'A performer has the privilege of awakening feeling in an audience, of stirring the heart ... I wanted to explore how the whole event, story, performance, direction, unite to inspire feeling and truth.'⁵¹

⁴⁶ Penny.

⁴⁷ Scheckel is a screen director, acting teacher and script consultant who has worked with directors including Anne Bogart and Joanne Akalaitis.

⁴⁸ Both Penny and Harcourt worked with Joan Scheckel in Wellington as actors in her masterclass. Scheckel has worked with directors who include Anne Bogart and Joanne Akalaitis.

⁴⁹ Penny.

⁵⁰ Penny.

⁵¹ Joan Scheckel, 'Workaholic: Joan Scheckel' <<http://blog.theworkmag.com/post>> [accessed 10 May 2013].

Imaginary forces are an important part of this construction of 'truth'. The imagination, and its relationship to acting, is constantly cited in the directors' interviews as a feature they employ to create revelatory acting. There is strong evidence that directors engage with the imagination in ways that allow revelation of the actor's self to take place. Meyerhold enforced this when he wrote: 'A work of art can function only through the imagination. Therefore a work of art must constantly arouse the imagination, not just arouse, but activate.'⁵² Michael Chekhov – whom James Lipton has called 'one of the most important tributaries' of the Stanislavski system of acting – has also stressed the importance of engaging the imagination when working with actors.⁵³ Chekhov said: 'The basis for any true art is our ability to live consciously or unconsciously in the World of Imaginations.'⁵⁴ Sanford Meisner likewise pinpoints Chekhov's teachings as providing the framework for him within which to widen the definition of 'truth' in performance. For Meisner, it was Chekhov who made him realise that the truth, as in naturalism, 'was far from the whole truth ... In him I witnessed exciting theatrical form with no loss of inner content, and I knew I wanted this too.'⁵⁵ The role of the imagination, and how to activate it, is central to dynamic drama.

In Stanislavskian technique (as in most other theatre training systems), an actor does not necessarily actually *believe* in the truth of the events on stage, only in the *imaginative creation* of them. So, too, the relationship between the audience's imagination with 'real' (happening

⁵² Vsevolod Meyerhold, 'The Theater Theatrical', in Cole and Chinoy, *Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theater*, rev. edn (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), pp. 164-178 (p. 165). Originally from Meyerhold, 'On the Theater', trans. by Nora Beeson from the essay 'On the History and Technique of the Theater', 1906, *Tulane Drama Review*, 4 (May 1960), 134-147.

⁵³ James Lipton in Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. xxv.

⁵⁴ Chekhov, *To the Actor*, p. xxv.

⁵⁵ Sanford Meisner in Chekhov, *To the Actor*, p. xxvi.

before us) or ‘imaginary’ (happening off stage or potentially about to happen) is a prevalent association in New Zealand theatre. In reference to emotional revelation, McColl states: ‘By the same token the partially-clothed body is much more erotic than the naked body on stage’, thereby implying that theatre still relies on the ‘imaginary puissance’ that *Henry V*’s Prologue references; or the complicity between presented action and ‘imaginary forces’.⁵⁶ Revelation can occur when the audience (collectively or individually) realises that a change occurs, and sometimes it demands that imagination is brought to bear on the work.

This is a condition that directors name as an ‘actor-audience compact’ to strive for. In New Zealand it is frequently employed as a device to generate effective theatre. Lawrence cites an experience of watching a Thomas Sainsbury play in the mid-2000s, which captured the ability for effective theatre to rely heavily on imagination to create dramatic meaning. ‘He [Sainsbury] did them with the working lights at BATS on and the house lights on, and no technical cues.’⁵⁷ Lawrence remembers that:

[H]alfway through the show I realised that what I was *watching* and what I was *seeing* were completely different things. And there came a point where I just went, “Hang on, you’re not Indian, in fact you’re not even a man, here’s some twenty-something year old girls in a white t-shirt convincing me that I’m watching an elderly Indian man”, or that for that one actor [but] I’m seeing six different characters [original emphasis].⁵⁸

Lawrence explains that this explicit use of the audience’s imagination to construct theatre denotation and reveal that great paradox of drama – an ‘imagined reality’- can be made when, ironically, effort for artifice is not

⁵⁶ *Henry V*, Prologue.

⁵⁷ Lawrence.

⁵⁸ Lawrence.

employed. He says, 'When you make no attempt at illusion the potential for illusion is magnificent', whereas 'if you make some sort of concession toward it then you are creating a logic that is fictitious and that has holes and chinks in it.'⁵⁹

Alfreds – whose commitment to ensemble theatre is matched by his determination to give the audience a role in constructing it – concurs with this view of imagination being facilitated by economy, or essentialism, in theatre when he says: 'The less you have on stage, the more the audience can imagine their own show.'⁶⁰ This sparsity can lead to the creation of a dynamic kind of theatricality that invokes revelation that is not easily achievable, even with expensive technical elements. He says, 'If there's nothing there apart from the actor who is suggesting things to you and using words, they'll see whatever their frame of reference is, or whatever their upbringing gives them.'⁶¹

Alfreds describes a 'marvellous experience' of that when he directed the ten-hour adaptation of *Bleak House* (1977), which he calls 'one of the best things I've ever done; it was very thrilling'.⁶² The audience, according to Alfreds, had become so involved in the story they were seeing extra elements and details that were not *actually* there.⁶³ Alfreds explains that using 'six actors' and 'six folding black chairs', they did ten-hour long performances playing 'a hundred and something characters'.⁶⁴ Through the way the actors 'spoke and the way they moved in this empty space, miming everything', the actors created 'all these worlds from which

⁵⁹ Lawrence.

⁶⁰ Alfreds, interview.

⁶¹ Alfreds, interview.

⁶² Crouch says that *Bleak House* was 'truly a company project, as all members went through the novel chapter by chapter, selecting and compressing the text. It took nine months to complete and the company ended up with a text that, although only one-fifth of the entire novel, was presented in four parts for a total of ten hours.' See Crouch, p. 94.

⁶³ Alfreds, interview.

⁶⁴ Alfreds, interview.

people would say to [Alfreds], “Oh. The lighting was fantastic.”⁶⁵ He continues:

Yet we had a permanent white light state that didn’t change for ten hours. It was just white light on the audience so the actors talk and see the audience and themselves. The audience said, “Oh! The firelight, chandeliers, gas lamps and the fog.” But it was because the audience had created their own images. They’d become so involved in the story and so they were seeing these extra elements and details.⁶⁶

This concurs with Alfreds’ core view of dynamic theatre, brought to life through both imaginative and transformative effort. He has said this involves a combination of ‘the actor’s transformation and fact of the audience’s awareness. Through this duality ... the two groups of people shared in an act of imagination’.⁶⁷

Conversely, for Harcourt, experience – not imagination – is located firmly at the centre of her pursuit for revelation in performance. Stating, ‘I don’t believe in imagination’, she considers acting a craft that demands the actor ‘not to *act* it but to *be* it’.⁶⁸ She explains: ‘There’s something I say to actors all the time; “there’s too much acting. I don’t want to see any acting, stop doing all that *acting*.”’⁶⁹ Her allegation is that the actor must be reveal more of their own way of doing what the action is. She has propelled Stanislavski’s subjective mantra known as ‘the Magic If’ (‘If I was in this situation, *what* would I do and *how* would I do it?’) to be an absolute primal mode of expression for her actors. In this way, the actor’s physical choices are married with the character’s objectives from an inside-out pathway.

⁶⁵ Alfreds, interview.

⁶⁶ Alfreds, interview.

⁶⁷ Alfreds.

⁶⁸ Harcourt.

⁶⁹ Harcourt.

To my mind, this approach is closely aligned to Sanford Meisner's endorsement of the mantra to 'live truthfully under imaginary given circumstances'.⁷⁰ It is also prominent in the work of Los Angeles-based Jeremiah Comey, who visited and taught masterclasses in New Zealand in 1993 and again in 2013.⁷¹ Comey's principles for actor-training firmly assert the Stanislavskian aim of getting actors to experience and reveal emotions derived from the five categories of fear, love, anger, sadness or happiness. For Comey that individual 'positioning' in the work is critical for an actor:

My aim is to get you to relate to another actor as a real human being – woman to man, boy to girl, mother to daughter, man to man – and not as a person saying words from a script according to some logical idea as to how they *should* be said [original emphasis].⁷²

For Harcourt, connection is vital in dynamic theatre, irrespective of style. She beckons Lepage to underline this point:

The Seven Streams of the River Ota was something which was essentially "theatrical"; it was inspirational physically in its use of space and its use of the body, but also it had connection, narrative, relationship and psychology at its core. And they're the things that appeal to me; connection, psychology, relationship.⁷³

Harcourt's process has undoubtedly been formed by her early experiences working with prison inmates; for example, the cabaret *Stars Behind Bars* at Arohata Women's Prison, Tawa in 1991. As she says, 'my experiences ... with prisons and with death are really what have formed my ideas about

⁷⁰ See Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *Sanford Meisner on Acting* (New York: Vintage, 1987).

⁷¹ Comey's approach has been (and continues to be) taught in New Zealand by film director/acting coach Vicky Yiannoutsos. In 2014, she calls her Film Acting Course 'The Art of Relating'.

⁷² Jeremiah Comey, *The Art of Film Acting: A Guide for Actors and Directors* (Woburn, MA: Focal Press, 2002), p. 20.

⁷³ Harcourt.

acting now.'⁷⁴ This experience marked an important hallmark in her directing praxis. In a funding application for the project, Harcourt wrote that through this drama, emotions would be approached 'from the specific viewpoint of each individual within the project'.⁷⁵ She continues, 'That is, we will use specific personal images and memories to knit together a common experience.'⁷⁶

The performance text would take shape from the parameters given by inmates' experiences and their capacity to share those narratives. Former colleague and later director at Toi Whakaari, Annie Ruth, noted Harcourt's inside-out approach as observed while Harcourt was teaching a forty-five-hour block course on 'the exploration and presentation of British texts' at the School. A written reference supporting the application for funding to Internal Affairs pinpoints Ruth's observation of Harcourt's revelatory method that can aptly accommodate different viewpoints:

Miranda works from an improvisational process, drawing the work out of the students rather than imposing a form on them. This gave weight to individual experiences within the group and was well suited to the bi-cultural nature of our student group.⁷⁷

This approach was echoed by Diana Cooper, Course Leader at Central/Sesame Course in Drama and Movement Therapy in London.⁷⁸ Her reference in support of Harcourt's application details the various and

⁷⁴ Harcourt.

⁷⁵ Wellington, Archives New Zealand, Miranda Harcourt Funding Application for Drama Project at Arohata Women's Prison, Tawa, Reference AAAC W5333 8756 Box 37/ MN-GEN 001-20684, 1991-1992, Harcourt application, 1991.

⁷⁵ Reference AAAC W5333 8756 Box 37/ MN-GEN 001-20684 , 1991-1992, Annie Ruth, letter in support of Harcourt Funding Application, (30 October 1991).

⁷⁶ Reference AAAC W5333 8756 Box 37/ MN-GEN 001-20684 , 1991-1992, Miranda Harcourt Funding Application for Drama Project, 1991.

⁷⁷ Reference AAAC W5333 8756 Box 37/ MN-GEN 001-20684 , 1991-1992, Annie Ruth, letter in support of Harcourt Funding Application, (30 October 1991).

⁷⁸ Harcourt was sponsored by the British Council to attend the Central School of Speech and Drama London to do a one year fulltime course in the use of Drama and Movement in Therapy. She completed the course and was awarded the certificate in July 1991.

challenging fieldwork settings encountered by Harcourt at Central that clarify the development of a specific, in-situ, subject-oriented process. Cooper details this accordingly; 'Miranda's experience was in a psychiatric unit attached to a hospital, a social education centre working with profoundly multiple handicapped adults and finally in a school for deaf children.'⁷⁹ Harcourt has often spoken of 'universality through specificity', and individual revelation for the purpose of universal connection is certainly at the heart of her directing process.⁸⁰

Harcourt asserts a belief in the actor finding interrelation with the role from the actor's own frames of reference, rather than the character's. She says, 'once again these are not directorial things so much as a total commitment to performance, to the actor's experience of finding something in the role'.⁸¹ This has recently evolved into four precepts that she calls 'connection, white space, internal landscape and vista'.⁸² Each construct uses real memory or experience to bear on the text and situation. The actor's 'internal landscape' is revealed through a scene, and in this way, a pathway to revelation takes place.

Downes brings another consideration to bear on this understanding of revelation. She likens it to the act of disclosure as a method to unmask a hidden cogency pertinent to the drama:

[This] excites me most about a revealing [of the self] and not just what is there, but what might be underneath or behind the veil. What are we doing when we're exploring a play, when we're putting on a production? Why are we doing this? And are we just exposing a piece of naturalism? Or – for example

⁷⁹ Reference AAAC W5333 8756 Box 37/ MN-GEN 001-20684 , 1991-1992, Diana Cooper, letter in support of funding application, (October 1991).

⁸⁰ Harcourt often asserts that she is trying to create 'universality through specificity' in performance, thereby underlining the importance of individual expression and locale to anchor the drama.

⁸¹ Harcourt, interview.

⁸² Harcourt, interview.

with *The God Boy*, a memory play – how distorted is memory?⁸³

Downes has often worked with actors in ways that expose the ‘hidden potential’ of a text through clear character work. Her Court Theatre production of *Three Days of Rain* (2004) was noted for its ‘acting, rather than the words’. This implies that the embodiment of character and situation was more dynamic than the narrative alone.⁸⁴

Penny agrees with acting as an act of revelation. However he provides insight into how radically different his current directing approach is to elicit this disclosure compared to his early directing days. ‘In those days [with Theatre at Large] we kind of got to that revelation by extreme commitment, whereas now I can get to it by encouraging people to go beyond’, he says.⁸⁵ Above all this includes getting actors ‘to do the work of revealing, which is really their work of acting, by linking them to what has to be revealed more ... and that bit, I love’.⁸⁶

Technique: the need for repetition, habit and craft

The development of habit and craft in theatre draws heavily from the activity of repetition, and this can facilitate dynamic acting. Things repeated are learnt, and regularity of practice allows for a kind of memory in that particular art form. In *The Creative Habit*, choreographer Twyla Tharp asserts that creativity is facilitated by repetition when she writes, ‘I will keep stressing the point about creativity being augmented by routine and habit.’⁸⁷ This has foundations in the philosophy of traditional western

⁸³ Downes.

⁸⁴ Faith Oxenbridge, ‘A New York State of Mind in Christchurch’, *Listener*, 10 April 2004, p. 54.

⁸⁵ Penny.

⁸⁶ Penny.

⁸⁷ Tharp, *The Creative Habit*, p. 7.

actor training programmes derived from the work of early twentieth century practitioners Saint-Denis and Jacques Copeau. Their notions of repetition to inform practice have permeated theatre craft.

Repetition is a method that both determines and informs directing praxis, and it is a condition that directors everywhere embrace. New Zealand directors are acutely aware of the need to repeat the work in ways that are stimulating but achievable within the overarching controls of limited fiscal and practical resources. The bind here is that the work must be repeatable but seem fresh. To coin Alfreds term, it must give the impression of spontaneity by genuinely being 'different every night'. But theatre – a time-based art form – is arguably different every night by virtue of its fleeting, ephemeral, and present moment nature. Once the work is over, the experience has vanished (although sensations may live on in the mind of the audience or performers) and it has to be created anew the next performance.

Factors that govern conditions of production and reception in theatre mean that the work is always slightly altered; exact audience make up is never the same, an actor may feel different on Monday night compared to Friday night; a costume is worn in another way. Ian McKellen has stated that exact repetition is impossible, and therefore an embrace of difference is the state to strive for:

The show should be different every night – anyway you are twenty four hours older the next time you do it so you'd better bring something new to it! Otherwise what are you living for? Live theatre is for the nonse – the "now" – otherwise it's dead theatre. If we truly expect this, as an audience, then you are going to witness and be part of a totally unique experience every night.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Ian McKellen, lecture at Toi Whakaari, Wellington, 2006.

Penny has become more aware of the value of repetition. It was while directing Cameron Rhodes in the titular role in *Cyrano de Bergerac* for Theatre at Large (1997) that he really understood the importance of learning lines and repeating the text. Penny says that Rhodes – who had more than 7,000 lines in the show – ‘taught me a lot; I’d never watched an actor build a big role like that ... I particularly just watched the grunt work he did on learning the lines.’⁸⁹ In production week Penny noticed Rhodes getting ‘freer and freer’. Penny continues:

I remember saying to him [about that] and he said, “Look, they’ve got to be in my body.” ... He knew he didn’t want to be “reaching” for anything. As soon as he would stop rehearsal he would sit down and start learning lines. That’s basically all he did for seven weeks.⁹⁰

Technique is considered essential to the creation of dynamic, revelatory acting. Take the case of McColl working with Rena Owen for her role as Aroha Mataira in *The Pohutukawa Tree* (2009). McColl refers to Owen as an actor ‘who can be wonderfully, emotionally; she can *really go there* like very few actors that I’ve worked with, when she needs to [original emphasis]’.⁹¹ Yet for McColl, the problem for this experienced screen actor was not so much emotional accessibility, but the repeatability required in theatre night after night in sustained performance. Owen was playing a large role where (compared to film) the medium provides few breaks once the drama starts. This caused ‘huge fights in the rehearsal room because she [Owen] would be all over the place’.⁹² McColl would ask, ‘Can you just try it again?’ to which Owen would say, “‘You don’t understand what it takes out of me. You don’t understand. It’s so hard for

⁸⁹ Penny.

⁹⁰ Penny.

⁹¹ McColl, interview.

⁹² McColl, interview.

me to do this and it's so emotional."⁹³ McColl states that theatrical repeatability was the problem:

I'd say, "You have to do it eight times a week, Rena, so you've got to find a way through it." Because she's just working on raw emotion, you know, completely. She's got no technique at all as an actress; she just works on raw sort of gut thing which is fabulous, but it has to be channelled so that she can do it eight times a week.⁹⁴

McColl's response in this instance was to 'anchor' the work; to provide objective-drive, relational, and situational structures that would firmly hold the experience. For him, this experience validated that 'you have to subtly shape it and find a framework for her [the actor], so it's not just a big vomit of emotion, because that's a real turn-off for the audience'.⁹⁵ The strength of feeling is then a by-product of the situation. In Stanislavskian terms this might be phrased as, 'want, do, feel,' which is a pathway that can be repeated night after night. Alfreds might consider the challenge of repetition as being at the heart of the rehearsal process. As Crouch has noted: 'Alfreds has concluded that the rehearsal process must be about locating the boundaries, and defining the rules of the world they would create.'⁹⁶ In this regard, craft needs to be considered.

Technique is a pathway to revelation, and while seeming spontaneity is important, practitioners understand the value of craft. Alfreds has said that:

Beyond a certain point, theatre cannot be controlled. That is to say, neither should actors be controlled, nor should they be wholly in control. Competent actors make things happen. Good actors let things happen. That's why theatre always has,

⁹³ McColl, interview.

⁹⁴ McColl, interview.

⁹⁵ McColl, interview.

⁹⁶ Crouch thesis, p. 83.

or should have, the potential for danger, for the unpredictable.
A performance should be disciplined improvisation.⁹⁷

In *The Presence of the Actor* (1991), director Joseph Chaikin writes: 'Technique is a means to free the artist.'⁹⁸ Harrow echoed this call for technique in her talk at The Actor's Program. She told the trainee actors that stamina and effect are linked to technique when she noted, 'It's so draining if you act all the time on feeling. [Technique is vital]. The important thing is that you break someone else's heart – not your own.'⁹⁹ Hurst, who was interviewing Harrow, reiterated this during her talk saying, 'I will block fast because I think *structure gives you freedom* [my emphasis]. I'll block it as quickly as I can and then it can all change, it doesn't matter, because we've got something to diverge from.'¹⁰⁰

O'Donnell agrees with this notion of structure being essential when he says that in the rehearsal room, technique is a constraint that allows creativity to flourish. This resonates with a production of *Hamlet* O'Donnell directed for Dunedin's Fortune Theatre in 2005. The production had to be rehearsed in only three weeks, so O'Donnell turned to director Elinor Renfield for inspiration. He describes that her response to directing *The Cherry Orchard* on Broadway with an all-star cast in just two weeks was to learn all of their text before they started, augmented by specific tasks once rehearsals were underway. O'Donnell adopted a similar approach, despite its challenges for the cast:

[W]ith *Hamlet* I said, "You have to learn your entire text before you arrive." And I thought they might complain about that, but nobody really did. There was one person who didn't learn

⁹⁷ Mike Alfreds, cited in Trevor Rawlins, "Disciplined Improvisation" in the Rehearsal and Performance of Shakespeare: The Alternative Approach of Mike Alfreds', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 30.4 (Winter 2013), 431-47 (p. 431).

⁹⁸ Joseph Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor*, 1st edn (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1991), p. 5.

⁹⁹ Harrow.

¹⁰⁰ Hurst.

their text but they pretty quickly learnt it, because everybody else knew theirs, including Matt Wilson who was playing *Hamlet*. He'd learnt the whole of *Hamlet* prior to starting.¹⁰¹

O'Donnell qualifies this strategy with the proviso that his directorial 'radar' must be attuned to preconceived ways of performing the text – an actor's 'tricks'¹⁰² – when it is already learnt. He says, 'there's one argument that you don't want actors to that because they'll get stuck in patterns, but I think that it's my job, because I can see straight away what actors' patterns are'.¹⁰³ Here, O'Donnell is clear about the director's role: 'I think I know [if] you're doing your pattern; so my job is to break you out of that.'¹⁰⁴

With this pre-formulated 'learning' of the text already in place, O'Donnell describes the benefit of play that can emerge. The first read-through which was conducted (unusually) on its feet encouraged a sense of immediate connection between the actors that would not have been possible if the script was unknown. 'They were pretty experienced actors and they just loved the idea of "we're just going to play"', he says.¹⁰⁵ This resulted in discoveries for smaller characters, too: '[T]here were a whole lot of things that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ... they improvised all this great stuff in the read-through that ended up in the production.'¹⁰⁶ O'Donnell was 'madly making notes' at the read-through, thinking, "'That's fantastic"... It becomes a basis to build on.'¹⁰⁷ The final performances were 'really *dynamic* [my emphasis] ... it was alive and it was fun'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ O'Donnell, interview.

¹⁰² Alfreds frequently refers to 'habits' or 'tricks' as pathways to 'deadly' theatre.

¹⁰³ O'Donnell.

¹⁰⁴ O'Donnell.

¹⁰⁵ O'Donnell.

¹⁰⁶ O'Donnell.

¹⁰⁷ O'Donnell.

¹⁰⁸ O'Donnell.

O'Donnell made another discovery on this production, confirming his faith in the philosophy that 'structure gives freedom', this time with the rules of text. Having taken a psychological approach to playing the character of Hamlet, actor Matt Wilson was stuck. 'To be or not to be' was an 'angst-ridden thing'.¹⁰⁹ O'Donnell, who states that the director's job is 'to help the actor in whatever way they need to be helped,' was determined to find an emotionally connected way of *playing* the text while anchoring it in textual fidelity.¹¹⁰ He describes how in this instance he discarded a Stanislavskian-derived analysis of the text in favour of a close structural reading of the script. This released the actor from the burden of subjective, personalised inspiration:

So one day it was just he and I in the rehearsal room, we were working on it, and I said, "Look, let's forget all about Hamlet, let's forget about the character, let's forget about his back story and his given circumstances and let's actually just concentrate on some simple text exercises. So we're going to really go through the speech and we're going to circle any repeated sounds or phrases, we're going to really hit all the consonants, we're going to look at the imagery, we're going to look at the punctuation and things like that." So I could see a sort of visible relief on him for being able to do that for a start.¹¹¹

O'Donnell continues to describe the freedom that was gained from a textually 'rigid' reading of the scene:

[Matt] got up and he started playing with the text around these different things, and eventually we started to realise it's got a lot of jokes in it. And that whole day ended up being a turning point for the way that he played Hamlet because he went from thinking this was like an angst-ridden turgid kind of tragedy to thinking this guy is liked and witty, and his text is full of really sparkly consonants and he's making jokes even when he's at his darkest and he's thinking up great ideas or connecting things. So without any psychologising whatsoever,

¹⁰⁹ O'Donnell.

¹¹⁰ O'Donnell.

¹¹¹ O'Donnell.

all that came purely out of simply old school text exercises ... I don't think I would ever work on Shakespeare again with "what do you want?"¹¹²

This confidence in textual 'form' as opposed to 'feeling' exists across the board and sits comfortably alongside psychologically-driven approaches. When questioned as to how they work with Shakespeare, all directors interviewed prefer to allow the text to provide essential action-playing clues from structure.

For Hurst, it is his attention to long-held principles of acting technique that are perhaps most unwavering. He explains that established 'rules' of craft are shortcuts to effective performance:

"Dropping down" is one thing. People think they need to do this [intones upwards] when they're acting on stage but I do this shorthand signal [points down] which means "take your voice down". Because when you take your voice down you're connecting to this [gut]. And no matter what (of course I'm a rationalist and I know that all things exist in your brain), but when we feel things we go there [to the gut] and so I go, "here's your pelvic girdle. It's like a bowl."¹¹³

Hurst says that, 'there is an ancient bargain between audience and performer – between the congregation and the priest', and for this he has received admonishment for categorizing theatre as an ancient craft.¹¹⁴ 'I get criticized for this all the time. I get so much criticism when I talk about the higher purpose of theatre. But it's true and it doesn't preclude entertainment.'¹¹⁵ He is quick to dismiss the temptation to play games in rehearsal ('It's got nothing to do with bouncy games or throwing balls at each other ... These are practical things that are hundreds of years old, I'm

¹¹² O'Donnell.

¹¹³ Hurst.

¹¹⁴ Hurst.

¹¹⁵ Hurst.

sure'¹¹⁶) when theatre can rely on tradition to create 'magic.' 'The kind of magic that we do here ... it's two and a half thousand years old and it's from ritual. That, for me, is real.'¹¹⁷

This was evident in a showing of Shakespeare scenes performed by actors at The Actors' Program, directed by Hurst.¹¹⁸ 'What's important is how much committed energy it takes to play Shakespeare and that Shakespeare gives you all the clues, but the trick is to surrender to what's going on', says Hurst before the actors kick off. Clearly propelled by this, the actors, attired in street-clothes, explore the text so that consonants carry punctuating ideas ('Padding palm and pinching fingers') while vowels carry emotion ('Hie thee hither'). Antithesis, metrical form, and rules of text propel the actors forward. Unlike many contemporary directors, Hurst rejects strict paraphrasing lest it dilute the density of meaning in Shakespeare's text. However the argument in every scene – what Alfreds would call logic text – is universally clear.

Technique also allows the actors to reveal their own expressions of character in the particular situation. Scenes are interspersed in a postmodern mash-up, yet craft is evident to good and bad effect with trainee actors who have limited opportunity to work with Shakespeare on a regular basis. It is clear when lines are pre-empted too quickly, when a scene's forward motion has been undercut by a diminished energy. The size of energy demanded by Shakespeare's text is met with young vigour, but energy alone is not enough. Technique is essential. It is also compelling to see when an actor finds their 'magic' and surrenders to it. As Hurst says, 'It is dynamic when actors suddenly find themselves in a

¹¹⁶ Hurst.

¹¹⁷ Michele Hewitson, 'The Michele Hewitson Interview: Michael Hurst', *New Zealand Herald*, 31 May 2008, Section A, p. 28.

¹¹⁸ The Actors' Program Shakespeare showing, Thursday 11 July 2013, at TAPAC, Auckland.

current and *really* have to say the words.¹¹⁹ They are sometimes stunted by the epic commitment required; sometimes swept away by the organic process of logic and emotion, thoughts and feelings meeting situation. It is risky, and certainly dynamic to watch.

Character work

Consideration of the pathways towards construction of dynamic acting also includes the common understandings of an actor's relationship to their role.¹²⁰ These frameworks underline the diverse range of directing ecology in New Zealand. Hurst suggests the conduits for revelation reside firmly in the domain of empathy, and in how the individual actor chooses to play the choices of action that relate to their own experience. Again, this parallels Stanislavski's 'Magic If' principle. Hurst says that in the case of playing Macbeth, the actor's job is to ask questions that connect with fundamental points of action; 'If I was that, would I be doing it that way? And do I share that thing, and therefore do I expiate my own sense of grief or shame or whatever it is?'¹²¹ Despite this, he disavows a psychological determinist point of view of acting when he says, 'I'm not interested in Stanislavski.'¹²² Instead, Hurst declares allegiance to Ancient Greek and 'Brechtian' views of acting that serve a ritual, narrative-based, transformative, or instructive point of view where 'theatre is about mess. It all comes from the Ancient Greeks; when they did a play the first thing

¹¹⁹ Michael Hurst, personal communication, Thursday 11 July 2013, at TAPAC, Auckland.

¹²⁰ David Kaplan outlines the complexity of this in detail in *The Complete Five Approaches to Acting* (New Jersey: Hansen, 2007). Kaplan's main argument is that different actors, play texts and outcomes require approaches that are pertinent to any one of five approaches, which include; pursuing tasks and action with Action Analysis; playing episodes through Episodic Analysis; building images through Imaged-Based Exploration; uncovering and building the world of the play through Situational Analysis; and telling a story through Narrative Analysis.

¹²¹ Hurst.

¹²² Hurst.

that happened was a kid, baby goat, was sacrificed. That's kind of what is inherent in theatre to me.¹²³

O'Donnell reveals a similar understanding of the actor's relationship to their role when he says, 'I sort of feel deep down I am really a kind of a Brechtian. [That's] about, "you don't *be* the character, you *show* the character [original emphasis]."'¹²⁴ O'Donnell's admission is at the heart of many debates about effective acting which challenge a totally Stanislavskian framework when he says, 'Even though I'm totally fascinated by Stanislavski, the whole "psychology thing" I've just gone more and more off, because it becomes too much about the actor.'¹²⁵ However, his comments regarding the construction of character indicate a fusion between the two approaches that results in an outward, singular reality based on individual behaviour:

There's such a "doubleness" there, because the actor is both themselves and the character ... But what it does is you do get a sense more that they are presenting the character to you. It's about what the character *does*, so how you nod your head as part of your character, how even your props are part of your character.¹²⁶

Meanwhile, McColl takes a late-Stanislavskian viewpoint of constructing character. While this is based on analysis and interpretation it brings physical actions to bear on the 'character'; it is devoid of moral judgement and repeatable.¹²⁷ Of directing Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, McColl says the real test is to let the characters exist without moral

¹²³ Hurst.

¹²⁴ O'Donnell.

¹²⁵ Hurst.

¹²⁶ O'Donnell.

¹²⁷ Stanislavski's work is often viewed in two distinct phase incorporating expressly inside-out approaches with 'Emotional Memory' (1911-1916) and 'The Method of Physical Actions' (1934-1938) using outside-in tools of analysis, imagination, and physical impulse, amongst others. Using this understanding I suggest that McColl typically employs approaches close to the latter.

imposition. 'That's why it's so difficult for actors because the characters are completely stupid and glorious at the same time', he says.¹²⁸ McColl qualifies that 'actors are always looking for, "Is this character good or bad? Oooh he's nasty but I'm going to play him with a smile on his face".'¹²⁹ Despite this, McColl asserts that Chekhov 'won't let you make any moral judgements about them so it's completely elusive, but so constantly open to interpretation'.¹³⁰ He adds: 'I think I've done it three times and still haven't got it, *The Cherry Orchard*.'¹³¹

Bennett says that 'characterisation' is hardly ever prescribed, saying, 'Because I don't want anything starting to be designed in advance, it's got to actually come organically out of the process.'¹³² For him, textual clues provide the springboard for individual interpretation of behaviour: 'I don't want the actors to give demonstrative, end-result performances.'¹³³ Bennett states, 'I want them to explore internally what this character goes through and anything that happens externally is a product of that.'¹³⁴ This is 'not from Mike Alfreds' but is 'something that [he] picked up from John Anderson who directed [their] Drama School graduation production of *The Three Sisters*'.¹³⁵ Bennett uses Anderson's 'tool of character statements, whereby each actor finds three or four short lines from the text, each of which encapsulates a particular key aspect of their character'.¹³⁶ These character deductions then become the blueprint for unpremeditated exploration of behaviour which is 'a fantastic tool' that he will use for improvisation, 'if time allows it'.

¹²⁸ McColl, interview.

¹²⁹ McColl, interview.

¹³⁰ McColl, interview.

¹³¹ McColl, interview.

¹³² Bennett.

¹³³ Bennett.

¹³⁴ Bennett.

¹³⁵ Bennett.

¹³⁶ Bennett.

Bennett developed this into 'Character Circles' where 'the entire cast would stand in a big circle and everyone would have a go at this':

[I]t would be someone's turn and they'd be in the centre and one by one they'd invite one of the other characters into the circle with them. And an improv would develop. ... It may be two characters that never meet in the play but you still form a relationship and all that actually informs what's happening on stage.¹³⁷

This is essentially looking for authentic impulse. Bennett cautions that this is not a straightforward process, but one that asks for both actor and director to engage with exploration of behaviour rather than being 'clever' as writers. The benefits, however, are potentially huge, since it 'really, really informs the relationship' towards freedoms:

[T]he most successful shows I've done this with were *The Shrew* which I did at the Watershed, probably *Into the Woods*, definitely *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Actors' Company. And you can see it, it pays. There's a fantastic confidence and a uniqueness and an idiosyncrasy to all the characters which is not the actor, and a real confidence in the way the characters engage and interact on stage. So it's great. I've used that a lot.¹³⁸

Penny notes that there is an underlying naiveté in this aspect of directing work when he says, 'with [most] work in New Zealand you don't get to *imagine* the character, you get *told* who the character is'.¹³⁹ In some cases I would agree with him, but extensive research and the permission to 'play' on stage can provide extensive possibilities, rather than a presentation of reductive choices. This is the kind of dynamic theatre that fizzles with the possibility for both audience and actor to construct meaning in consort. Penny suggests that 'character' is constructed back from 'action': 'What I've worked out myself more is that

¹³⁷ Bennett.

¹³⁸ Bennett.

¹³⁹ Penny.

character emerges in action.’¹⁴⁰ This means that ‘in order to get the action you have to have the force that creates the action and makes the characters act’.¹⁴¹

Actors’ preparatory work

Directors are increasingly aware of the need for actors to undertake preparatory work before rehearsals start, and this is even more crucial when time is short. Like many directors, McColl prefers his actors to ‘make lists’ according to the Alfreds-derived Stanislavski method of combing the play for essential information about the character, but is insistent that it is the director’s task to break the play up into units or beats. ‘I always break down the play into units ... If I’m working on a difficult text I have to spend a lot more time examining it and preparing it before I go into the rehearsal room.’¹⁴²

O’Donnell favours ‘getting actors to do all the play research’, because it embeds the context of the play in the actor’s frame of reference. He says, ‘if you’ve had to go away and research Ben Jonson’s plumbing or something, you come back, you have more investment as an actor.’¹⁴³ Downes also requires her actors to research the play, tailoring the focus of inquiry according to the needs of that particular project:

Looking at *Othello* it’s a good idea to actually research the Land Wars, if you’re going to set it there. I do a certain amount of that and I also set tasks for my cast ... and if I have as well, that kind of goes without saying, really.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Penny.

¹⁴¹ Penny.

¹⁴² McColl, interview.

¹⁴³ O’Donnell.

¹⁴⁴ Downes.

Downes says that such research must be useable in the piece; 'there's a difference between exercises and product, and what's good for the play, as opposed to a marvellous experience for that actor to go through on a Tuesday morning'.¹⁴⁵

Lawrence prefers actors to make investment in the form of research before they start rehearsals, but is comfortable with varying degrees of input: 'Some of them will be [off book], others won't ... it's a balance between the people that are prepared and over-prepared and the people that are expecting that I'll help them through it.'¹⁴⁶ As noted, Hurst is more insistent that as much work as possible is done by actors before day one of rehearsal, but he qualifies that with the condition of limited available time.

Opinion is divided amongst directors whether text should be pre-learned before rehearsals commence. Harcourt favours text to be learnt by actors before rehearsals start, yet draws attention to the difference between preconceived notions about character that can emerge from rote learning of text: 'Too often what we see is somebody who's done a good job of learning the lines but that is different from playing the role.'¹⁴⁷ She likens it to 'when you try and get your academic, intellectual appreciation of the words on the page; you're trying to drive them to another part of your body'.¹⁴⁸ To achieve this she has a frame of reference that suggests lines of script must have a kinaesthetic memory for the actor:

The phrase that we have for learning lines when I email people the text that I want them to learn is, I go, "Please learn this off by heart." Then I say to them, "So what did I say?" and they say, "Please learn this off by heart." And I say, "Do we say in the English language "please learn this off by brain?" We

¹⁴⁵ Downes.

¹⁴⁶ Lawrence.

¹⁴⁷ Harcourt, interview.

¹⁴⁸ Harcourt, interview.

don't. You've gotta get it out of your brain and into your heart.¹⁴⁹

Hurst also shares the view that actors should learn text before day one of rehearsals, saying that this is an essential part of the actor's craft: 'Put them into your brain. It's like a carpenter picks a hammer up; actors pick the lines up.'¹⁵⁰ This view of acting as a practical craft has become more prevalent in recent times, as actor training has become more diverse in its range of methodologies on offer.

Exploratory Tools

Occasionally, other structures are employed to give more freedom to both actors and directors, and to explore the text in the quest for dynamic performance. Improvisation is one such tool that allows directors and actors to access liberty from the confines of a designated platform. All directors use aspects of improvisation in their process to varying degrees. For Hendry, improvisation has gathered momentum as an effective technique in his directing work. He claims that in performance he seeks to create 'a "shared experience"' where the audience leaves '*feeling something*'.¹⁵¹ In pursuit of this visceral 'liveness', Hendry directed a highly innovative production of *Love's Labour's Lost* (2011) for Toi Whakaari that was billed as 'a hilarious exploration of the language of love.'¹⁵² His director's notes for the programme observe 'that the plays would have

¹⁴⁹ Harcourt, interview.

¹⁵⁰ Hurst.

¹⁵¹ Hendry.

¹⁵² Toi Whakaari website <http://www.toiwhakaari.ac.nz/whats-on/productions/past-productions-2/2011-productions> [accessed 11 July 2013].

been originally performed with more of a sense of 'liveness' than they are now, with short rehearsal periods and on-stage improvisation.'¹⁵³

Reviewer Helen Sims noted that the inevitable risk brought dynamism to the performance; 'the device works well to ensure a 'live' dynamic but is bound to falter if even one actor isn't as prepared or comfortable with his or her chance-allotted role as the rest.'¹⁵⁴ John Smythe observed that 'the principle of using games of chance to allocate twelve of the sixteen roles between six pairs of actors allows them 'to discover the play anew with the audience'', and as such, liberated this less popular play from the canon:

Hendry and his cast and crew have infused the whole production with the directly connected-with-the-audience spirit he tuned into at the Globe in London, which may be credited with liberating Shakespeare from fusty academe and elitist adoration, and returning him to the people.¹⁵⁵

Hendry was visibly excited by the potential afforded to this play by improvisation structures. The method was able to 'give life to what is such a densely complex, artificial series of discourses with different poetic, philosophical [matters] drawing from different and totally esoteric things.'¹⁵⁶ The trainee actors would 'flip the coin' to determine casting each night. 'I was very influenced by Tim Carroll there', concedes Hendry, who was an Artistic Fellow at Shakespeare's Globe for a month in 2003.¹⁵⁷ He was keen to bring those Globe principles of immediacy to bear on a conventional theatre space. These structures meant that textual rigour

¹⁵³ Cited in Helen Sims, 'Energy, Fun and Some Inconsistency', *Theatreview*, 28 October 2011 <<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=4320>> [accessed 11 July 2013].

¹⁵⁴ Sims.

¹⁵⁵ John Smythe, 'A Delight of Dichotomies', *Theatreview*, 5 November 2011 <<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=4338>> [accessed 11 July 2013].

¹⁵⁶ Hendry.

¹⁵⁷ Hendry.

suffered, yet the performance was considered an experiment:

The energy of setting up those structures meant that when we opened it was pretty much a disaster, if not a very messy production ... and people said, "I can see what you're trying to do". But ... as I'd [said], "Well, this is going to be the way we approach this. I'm not so concerned about opening night, I want us to learn, I want to learn".¹⁵⁸

Despite mixed reviews, the production was a successful experiment in how to harness improvisation to create dynamism in scripted performance, and New Zealand audiences are increasingly receptive to such risks. Of his own work, Hendry asserts the essential, live dynamic that he was trying to create. He states an interest in the idea of, 'just like Alfreds, giving the actors the challenge of really inventing in the moment and really changing and playing and be affected by each other in the moment in relationship with the audience'.¹⁵⁹ This component of improvisation reflects a central hallmark of Alfreds' work. In the context of recent New Zealand performance history, this approach marks a world away from the early productions of Shakespeare by the likes of Ngaio Marsh, which Elric Hooper has described as 'illusionist ... a series of pictures and the actors placed according to the laws of painting ... sightlines, perspective'.¹⁶⁰ He summarised that; 'Ngaio's oft-stated dictum was that sight takes precedence over sound.'¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Hendry.

¹⁵⁹ Hendry.

¹⁶⁰ By most accounts Marsh's work – typically involving a large cast – was epic and structured, but often lacked a real emotional connection or sense of immediate dynamism. One of her devotees Hooper writes, 'Ngaio's paradigm was the theatre in which Henry Irving was king ... her basic vocabulary was that of the large proscenium stage, the large effect and the romantic gesture. The theatre Ngaio was born into was illusionist. Basically the play was seen as a series of pictures and the actors placed according to the laws of painting.' Elric Hooper, 'Ngaio Marsh: A Life for the Theatre' in *Return to Black Beech: Papers from a Centenary Symposium on Ngaio Marsh* (Christchurch: Acheson and Lidgard, 1996), 7-20 (p. 11).

¹⁶¹ Hooper, (p. 11).

A few directors directly name Laban Efforts as another technique that allows actors to reveal inner realities. Also known as Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis, Laban Efforts (sometimes called 'dynamics') uses a multidisciplinary system of human movement analysis today to determine categories of movement according to inner intention. *What* the movement is may be determined – for example, to throw a punch. *How* the movement happens – what kind of a punch is thrown, thrust or flicked – can be analysed according to the four subcategories (Effort factors), each of which has two opposite polarities (Effort elements).¹⁶² Ironically, this highly systemised method of movement analysis can bring about very unique and bold performances.

Laban Efforts – notably introduced by Alfreds to directors at the 1989 masterclass – allows a language to underpin an exploration of inner and outer rhythm. The categories are organised as:

Effort Factor	Effort element (Fighting polarity)	Effort element (Indulging polarity)
Space	Direct	Indirect (Flexible)
Weight	Strong	Light
Time	Sudden (quick)	Sustained
Flow	Bound	Free

¹⁶² Rudolf von Laban named the combination of the first three categories (Space, Weight, and Time) the 'Effort Actions', or 'Action Drive'. The eight combinations are descriptively named as Float, Punch (Thrust), Glide, Slash, Dab, Wring, Flick, and Press. Flow, on the other hand, is responsible for the continuousness or 'on-goingness' of motions. Without any Flow Effort, movement must be contained in a single initiation and action, which is why there are specific names for the Flow-less Action configurations of Effort. In general it is very difficult to remove Flow from much movement, and so a full analysis of Effort will typically need to go beyond the Effort Actions. See Jean Newlove, (1993) *Laban for Actors and Dancers: Putting Laban's Movement Theory into Practice* (London: Nick Hern, 1993); Rudolf von Laban, *Laban's Principles of Dance and Movement Notation*, 2nd edn, ed. by Roderyk Lange (London: MacDonald and Evans, 1975).

Bennett is a proponent of this rehearsal technique, stating that at first he and the actors will forage for information that will determine perceived behaviour. They will:

read through those [character] lists and make some assumptions, things about the characters. Like what is the main line of action in the play? What do they want in the play? How could you describe this character's super-objective? What do they want in life without which they would cease to exist? ... And those lists, when read out, give really strong, clear clues.¹⁶³

Following that analysis, Laban efforts are applied and tested. Bennett designates a progression that is firmly directed towards objective-driven action:

Where might this character's physical centre be? What might the character's inner rhythm be like? Laban efforts; I use that a lot, what might the character's Laban effort be? Tense, easy, direct, indirect, broken, sustained?¹⁶⁴

Next, Bennett will allow that actor to watch a structured exploration of that character's Laban efforts followed by directed improvisation with the whole cast exploring that character. This happens while the actor who is playing that character watches the rest of the cast, while Bennett talks the cast through different scenarios. This can take forty-five minutes to an hour per character.

Lynch also uses this Laban effort structure to explore interior and exterior character rhythms, a process from which 'a whole range of gestural and physical potential' can emerge.¹⁶⁵ Lynch names this technique as a practical tool that provides an outside view of an inside-out process, saying, 'I think that's a great analytical tool for just opening up ideas, and

¹⁶³ Bennett.

¹⁶⁴ Bennett.

¹⁶⁵ Lynch.

there are quite often things [where] you'll go, "That's a really good offer that actor's made for your character."¹⁶⁶

Harcourt also talks about her use of Laban via 'internal landscape', which is akin to 'affective memory'.¹⁶⁷ 'Vista' – or what she describes as the actor's relationship with anything other than their self – is where Harcourt's current fascination lies. 'This is where my interest in Laban kicks in and also my interest in sign language kicks in; people's behaviour in space', she says. Vista has direct parallels with Laban 'whether it's your objective correlative or whether it's the way in which ... actors allow the imaginative vista to impact on a performance.'¹⁶⁸ The assumption is that the actor's performance will be magnetised by what their destination and related objectives are, and these should be palpable in the playing of each moment.

Another technique that remains a solid part of the directing landscape is 'Text–No Text–Text'.¹⁶⁹ This is an Alfreds-inspired structure that focuses on putting the script on its feet while being deliberate about where a new beat starts. For a beat (or unit) of defined action, the actor is free of the text and therefore able to explore the particular playing choices in that unit. The actors work through 'a scene or act unit by unit or in small blocks of units, each played three times, first with the text, then without the text, then with the text again'.¹⁷⁰

Downes foregrounds this as a useful tool to determine what is not working or 'landing' with an actor in a chosen moment. Since it allows the actor to explore the text in relative freedom for a beat (or unit), Text–No

¹⁶⁶ Lynch.

¹⁶⁷ Harcourt, interview.

¹⁶⁸ Harcourt, interview.

¹⁶⁹ Commonly abbreviated to 'Text – No Text'.

¹⁷⁰ Alfreds, *Different Every Night*, p. 175.

Text diagnostically presents alternate ways of achieving the stated objective while uncovering what is not working.

Hendry finds similar problem-solving value in Text – No Text, which he describes as:

a way of me seeing whether they [the actors] really understand what's going on. Because the text is so complex, by them having to not say everything in their own words but tell the story in their own words, I can see what's landing with them and what's not'.¹⁷¹

This has direct merit with respect to individual interpretation of character and situation, which Hendry says he is able to understand through Text – No Text, and then accommodate. Text – No Text will reveal the story that the actor is interested in, and this shifts what Hendry will do. He describes it as a process of 'watching them work the play and discovering what they think about the play through that'.¹⁷²

Hendry has also discovered that this method demands the actor takes direct responsibility for where the units of action fall. Most directors such as McColl, Downes and Lynch will prescribe delineated beats in a script to expedite the textual, diagnostic stage of the rehearsal process. However, Hendry has found that Text – No Text can function as 'a way of us deciding the units of action'.¹⁷³ He explains that he is 'very interested if a company comes in and goes, "I think the unit's here."' ¹⁷⁴ In his view, this technique brings forth investment and collective ownership from the cast. This must be established from the beginning:

If I can incorporate that at the formative stage of working with a company – if you start to enter the dialogue where they know that their offers aren't going to be like, "well that's not your, you've just got to do what I want," and start to set a

¹⁷¹ Hendry.

¹⁷² Hendry.

¹⁷³ Hendry.

¹⁷⁴ Hendry.

different contract, that for me, especially with more experienced actors like with Jennifer [Ludlam] in *Othello*, [is valuable].¹⁷⁵

Bennett views Text – No Text as a logical and valuable step following playing actions where the actors find *what* they do; ‘Now, the next question is *why* the characters do it. So it’s about objectives.’¹⁷⁶ To Bennett, Text – No Text quickly liberates actors from the text without the tyranny of thinking ‘what’s my next line?’. Since it is an objective-driven exercise that focuses on what happens next rather than what is said next, Bennett accentuates the technique’s capacity to give shape to action that is motivated and alive:

Because you go through it so many different times and different ways that by the time you’re actually running chunks, the lines (which are the tip of the iceberg of the actor’s process) are there because they’re the most obvious thing to say at that particular moment with that particular objective.¹⁷⁷

Meanwhile, because it has a structure, O’Donnell describes Text – No Text as the vehicle that allows him to play with pulsation in a scene: ‘I love playing with rhythm, so for me dividing it up into beats is a way of doing that.’¹⁷⁸ The central concern of this exercise relies on when the new action starts and, out of that, what is being pursued. ‘The question of the objective, the ‘I want’; I still find [I agree with] Stanislavski’s idea that if the actor doesn’t know why they’re coming on stage, then they shouldn’t be there’, he says.¹⁷⁹ O’Donnell cites director Willem Wassenaar¹⁸⁰, who ‘divides things up into beats but he makes it a game so they read at the

¹⁷⁵ Hendry.

¹⁷⁶ Bennett.

¹⁷⁷ Bennett.

¹⁷⁸ O’Donnell.

¹⁷⁹ O’Donnell.

¹⁸⁰ Theatre director who trained at Toi Whakaari (MTA in Directing, 2006), set up Long Cloud Youth Theatre Company, was largely based in Berlin .Deceased October 2014.

read-through and if anybody thinks there's a new beat, they yell out, "Beat!".¹⁸¹ This becomes a highly competitive game for the whole cast.

An extension of Text – No Text is feeding in, where an actor will shadow another just outside the designated playing area, feeding in the lines, impulse or an action one at a time. Bennett describes how the 'suspend-receive-play' process – while 'painstaking' – is 'a fantastic way of actually fully committing to each objective and playing moment by moment by moment with each other without thinking, 'What's my next line?'.¹⁸² The key thing to elicit a dynamic response here, suggests Bennett, is releasing the actor from pre-empting how it is played, in favour of 'staying in the moment'.¹⁸³

The importance of task: emotion as a by-product of action

Most techniques employed by the surveyed directors assume that emotion is a by-product of action, and through this Stanislavskian notion of task-oriented action, empathy and revelation are very likely to occur. Stanislavski's idea of action was radical because it emphasised the importance of task-related activity as opposed to playing a feeling. David Kaplan notes that instead of defining behaviour (outcome), it 'defined *motivation* as the technical basis of good acting' [original emphasis].¹⁸⁴

Alfreds refers to Stanislavski's positioning of 'the essential problem' for directors and actors. As Alfreds points out, the last chapter of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* is called 'On the Threshold of the Subconscious'. This implies that our emotions are not deliberate. It relates to the central problem of acting; if emotions are subconscious, how can

¹⁸¹ O'Donnell.

¹⁸² Bennett.

¹⁸³ Bennett.

¹⁸⁴ David Kaplan, *Getting to the Task*, The Five Approaches to Acting Series (New Jersey: Hansen Group, 2007), p. 4.

actors summon their emotions? Alfreds suggests that directors must help the actor find pathways to ‘coax’ the emotions out through objective-driven action where obstacles are met: ‘That’s where playing objectives and actions serve their purpose. [They] connect the actor with his or her unconscious imagination.’¹⁸⁵

This process-driven pathway is still considered an authentic route. Lisa Harrow endorses this when she references her teacher John Barton, who urged actors to dig ‘beneath the script’ for motivation. ‘It’s all about getting underneath the lines,’ she tells the trainee actors.¹⁸⁶ ‘Nothing is said without you needing to say it. Everything comes from a thought.’¹⁸⁷ This, in itself, is a deeply-embedded New Zealand sensibility that relates to practical action as a result of want or need.

Bennett refers to actions [what is done] as ‘the first part’ of a process towards crafting vitality in performance.¹⁸⁸ He says that action-playing can quickly define specific ‘offers’ from actors. His is an action-playing method where ‘every moment needs to be specific’.¹⁸⁹ He adds that, ‘it needs to be a clear, “This is what I’m doing” and a clear, “This is why I’m doing it.” And if you can get those things right, then that’s a big part of the job done.’¹⁹⁰ Harcourt describes actions in a more choreographic sense as ‘the articulation of the scene.’¹⁹¹ She often shows actors ‘a video of Douglas Wright doing part three in the *Watching Douglas* DVD, where the articulation of his body is so unbelievably precise’.¹⁹² She draws attention to the exactitude of Wright’s process, and likens it to unstitching playable actions in and ‘beneath’ the text, before constructing them again: ‘I say,

¹⁸⁵ Alfreds, interview.

¹⁸⁶ Harrow.

¹⁸⁷ Harrow.

¹⁸⁸ Bennett.

¹⁸⁹ Bennett.

¹⁹⁰ Bennett.

¹⁹¹ Harcourt, interview.

¹⁹² Harcourt, interview.

“The way his body is articulated is the way every thought needs to be articulated inside the scene”, and that is like ... digging down, and then going, “Why is the scene going in that direction?”.¹⁹³ An important element here is the nature of choice that Harcourt stresses is linked to narrative and event-based action:

When I talk about the articulation of the scene I’m going, “The scene goes in this direction because of this choice, but what if something else happened?” So a key question for me in rehearsal is, “What if the scene ended a different way?”¹⁹⁴

The next vital question, Bennett suggests, ‘is *why* the characters do it.’¹⁹⁵ This leads to the notion of objective-driven action; the process of identifying and applying characters’ objectives from moment to moment is a common technique. ‘I want you to...’ relates the active objective in a transitive, playable sense. ‘Characters are always trying to affect other characters in some way or another so it’s about defining precisely how their character is trying to affect the other characters in the scene’, says Bennett.¹⁹⁶ ‘It’s all about getting away from generalising; actors getting away from playing a general emotion or playing a state. It’s about always giving them something very specific to play.’¹⁹⁷ This ‘builds up a layer in the sub-conscience of the actors’.¹⁹⁸

McColl mentions task and objective-driven action as central tenets, and this philosophy is an evident backdrop in his praxis. Early in his career, Nola Millar ‘cut through the bullshit’ and urged him to pay attention to ‘wants’ and what the play is ‘really about.’¹⁹⁹ He describes this

¹⁹³ Harcourt, interview.

¹⁹⁴ Harcourt.

¹⁹⁵ Bennett.

¹⁹⁶ Bennett.

¹⁹⁷ Bennett.

¹⁹⁸ Bennett.

¹⁹⁹ McColl, interview.

awakening to the play's central concerns with Millar that occurred in many different styles:

She was the one who said, "No, it's rubbish, it's just rubbish, you just need to find out what that play's really about." So she'd say "look for the theme, look for the themes". She was really the one that put me onto that, you know "look for the theme, the theme and the piece" ... [She talked in terms of] "wants", probably, yes. But once again, then she did Brechtian [as well as Stanislavski]; she worked in all different styles.²⁰⁰

This has been apparent in McColl's work over the years, as his highly interpretive style has invigorated classic texts such as his 1993 production of *A Doll's House* at Circa Theatre. It was heavily driven by objectives, through-lines and wants. Nora just *had* to escape, at whatever cost. McColl's 2011 production of Arthur Meek's *On the Upside-Down of the World* placed objective-driven action firmly at the centre of this solo drama set in 1841 Auckland. Rabbit's set – comprised of an tangled metal 'forest' made from aluminium ladders on a sand floor box – provided the fitting metaphor for the partially-crippled character Lady Ann Martin's braced entrapment. Swift lighting design alternately liberated and threatened to swallow Martin up as it changed the landscape; this imposing set accentuated her need to find a 'home' in the brave new world. The aluminium 'bush' became the central obstacle against which the action took place, but this time the audience were expected to construct the wider vista. The set gave ample opportunities for becoming many different locations with both actor Laurel Devenie's and the audience's complicit imagination, and McColl's tight direction exploited this well.

Strong, task- driven action was fundamental to this. Before the show opened McColl noted that the production was strangely contemporary: 'Lady Martin's observations of life for Māori and Pākehā settlers alike

²⁰⁰ McColl, interview.

have uncanny resonances for us today. We hope this play will invigorate people's interest in New Zealand history, early Pākehā settlers and politics.²⁰¹ This 'contemporaneity' – where the audience recognises the drama as if it could happen now – is a hallmark of dynamic New Zealand theatre.

Every director interviewed admits that emotional 'presence' is part of the necessary currency in theatre. Harcourt declares her concern with emotional vitality when she admits: 'Whether I am directing other people in that emotional aesthetic, or whether I'm doing it myself, that is what I'm interested in.'²⁰² Like many other directors, Harcourt agrees that emotion is generated from an interest in action. You cannot play emotion for the sake of it; it has to have purpose. There is a practicality attached to this that directors are conscious of. Even with 'play-against' – a strategy that aims to find the least predictable way of playing an action – the emphasis is on recognisable 'truth'.²⁰³ As Hendry says, 'if we're talking about directing actors, directing them away from the obvious [is important] because we're getting that reinforced around us all the time'.²⁰⁴

McColl states that he is never concerned solely with finding emotion, but rather, 'just trying to find the character'.²⁰⁵ An audience will be galvanised by certain things; McColl says that 'in a comedy you're

²⁰¹ Press release: '*On the Upside-Down of the World*', Theatreview <<http://theatreview.org.nz/reviews/production.php?id=2178>> [accessed 4 May 2014].

²⁰² Harcourt.

²⁰³ 'Play-against' is a strategy of acting that brings about an emotion by the actor playing to suppress the typical physiology of that emotion. This is sometimes called 'playing the opposite' or 'playing against the emotion'. The actor first contemplates all the physiological symptoms associated with the emotional state the script dictates him or her to play; then he or she tries to consciously to suppress them in him or herself. For example, a reaction to shock might be played as laughter, rather than tears. It is a technique that has caught on in New Zealand, arguably due to its laconic and sometimes 'suppressed' nature. For some, it is a more 'truthful' reflection of how we actually behave and react to situations in contemporary life. Play-against is frequently used by film actors, and sometimes in theatre.

²⁰⁴ Hendry.

²⁰⁵ McColl, interview.

aware that you need the laughs, so perhaps more so in comedy than in drama'.²⁰⁶ At the same time he acknowledges there is never a deliberate aim to create 'moments' where 'Oh we want everyone crying at this moment', preferring to find a more organic process of revelation that connects with the audience.²⁰⁷ 'You have to subtly shape it and find a framework for her, so it's not just a big vomit of emotion because that's a real turn-off for the audience', he says.²⁰⁸

Emotion, says Michael Chekhov, is the 'physical manifestation of that want (objective).'²⁰⁹ This can be exhibited by the actor or, sometimes, by the audience. Mitchell²¹⁰ and Lepage regularly point this out.²¹¹ McColl similarly admits that emotion does not always translate to a dynamic performance when he says, 'I'm very aware that if you're bawling your eyes out on stage then the audience are not necessarily going to be.'²¹²

This final consideration invites the question of where dynamic theatre really lies. As much as directors attempt to anchor the drama in concrete rules of text and craft, *dynamic* theatre is a 'shared experience'

²⁰⁶ McColl, interview.

²⁰⁷ McColl, interview.

²⁰⁸ McColl, interview.

²⁰⁹ Chekhov, *To the Actor*.

²¹⁰ Katie Mitchell explains that her understanding of emotion that has developed from thinking it is the actor's responsibility to *really feel it*, to shifting that attention to the audience: 'When I started directing I thought that emotion had to reside in the actor, so everything I did in rehearsals was designed to help the actor experience a real emotion on stage in front of an audience. Over time, however, I realised that it was more important for the audience to experience emotions and that the audience's experience was not always dependent on the actor experiencing an actual emotion.' See Katie Mitchell interviewed by Siobhan Davies, 'Conversations About Choreography' <<http://www.siobhandavies.com/conversations/mitchell/transcript.php>> [accessed 12 July 2013].

²¹¹ Robert Lepage says that emotional response is active and dynamic when it affects the audience: 'Emotion in an actor provides him [sic] with tears, not understanding, nor a mastery of this very complex art that consists in moving the audience. An actor must find the energy that will produce an emotion in his audience, not feel it himself.' See Remy Charest, *Robert Lepage: Connecting Flights* (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 153.

²¹² McColl, interview.

that actually happens in the space between actor and audience.²¹³ In a lecture delivered in 2005 on 'The Art of the Present', Brook referred to this palpable quality:

As an observer when theatre really works, there is something in the shared experience. As an observer you are constantly rising or falling in the level of your experience. Theatre form teaches us that a series of images was in the present, and that present has gone forever. No theatre experience has any validity unless it moves us forward like music. We will be with that all the time. When that rhythm is right we can have those moments of truth. In that moment, everything stops, and we know that something is true.²¹⁴

Directing dynamic theatre relies on both craft and art in equal measure. Techniques help, but at its best, vital theatre that contains a 'spark' connects with our shared humanity. The potential for actors and audience to not just become, but transcend one's own reality through revelation, is enormous. Alfreds highlights this when he says: 'Most actors are always working on the level of "Oh I always do this", but they're just using a very small part of themselves. Playing objectives and using points of

²¹³ In 1999 I gave a paper which proposed that revelatory performance – when 'something is true' – is directly connected to qualities of self-awareness and aspiration that Boal has talked about. The paper asserted that revelation in actors can occur when actors dared to use their own uniqueness as the point of connection with 'the character':

This finds validation in the work of Augusto Boal who has frequently recognised the quality of self-awareness in the actor is a necessary part of the "unmasking of character" in the self. To paraphrase [Boal], when the human being observes itself, it perceives what it is, realises what it is not, and imagines what it could *become*. This could also be articulated as daring to use our own stories; to express one's own "obviousness".

See Vanessa Byrnes, 'Constructing the Stuff that Dreams are Made on: Bi-Cultural Processes of Investigation and Training at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School', Theatre & Teaching Studies Academy Of The Arts, Queensland University Of Technology Proceedings From The 1999 QUT / Australasian Drama Studies Association Conference. 'Industrial Relations: A conference exploring the links between theatre scholarship and professional theatre practice', (Brisbane, 5–9 July 1999) <<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/31293/1/31293.pdf>> pp. 45-50, (p. 50).

²¹⁴ Peter Brook, 'A Meeting with Peter Brook', A meeting with the British director Peter Brook, laureate of the 2005 Dan David Prize, Tel Aviv University 23 May 2005, 38:45, YouTube <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDxfKiHRPpg>> [accessed 15 April 2104].

concentration often release the possibility.²¹⁵ As this chapter has argued, in making dynamic theatre, a majority of the selected New Zealand theatre directors adhere to the belief that acting involves both the observation of transformation and revelation, through their own talents and the uniqueness of an individual actor. This connects to the international conversation. In New Zealand and elsewhere, good theatre is a collaborative and collective venture with engaged directing praxis at its heart.

²¹⁵ Alfreds, interview.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion – Walking the Tightrope

The documentary *Peter Brook: The Tightrope* (2012) follows the renowned British theatre director in pursuit of ‘a true and almost impossible challenge’, described as ‘making theatre that is real, that is alive, alive at every moment, that touches one and which, once [it takes] hold, does not let go’.¹ The central exercise involves walking an imaginary tightrope to create compelling, destination-based theatre that ‘has to take you from here to here in a way that’s all the time alive and interesting’.² For two weeks, Brook, his eleven actors and two musicians attempt to construct vital theatre around this provocation. There is no rope, but the ‘compelling strength of the actors’ imagination creates the illusion of something real ... at the moment the actor is so convinced [that the rope is real] that the audience will go along with it’.³ The difficulty heightens with the introduction of imaginary obstacles such as fire and cascades of water. The restrictions are clear, but the ‘theatre’ consistently evades and meets director and actors as they play with the image of the tightrope.

Brook’s documentary serves to crystallise two key themes articulated in this thesis. First, theatre is a time-based art on display; one moment the work is brilliant, the next, it descends into something bland. There is no single formula to follow, since what is needed to create the drama changes from one present moment to the next. This challenge underlines the point that it is critical to bear in mind the central conditions of time, place and suspension of disbelief so fundamental to effective theatre practice. This dynamic elevation of a moment, a gesture, or an

¹ *Peter Brook: The Tightrope*, dir. by Simon Brook.

² *Peter Brook: The Tightrope*, dir. by Simon Brook.

³ Peter Brook, ‘Peter Brook talks with Charlie Rose’, 13 February 2014, YouTube <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1QICo2ogvc>> [accessed 15 April 2014].

entire play makes a study of an ephemeral, time-based art form challenging. One solution (as Simon Brook found in his eighty-six-minute film) is to condense these impressions of time, and through interview, consider how directors view their work from reflective points of view.

Second, there are parallels between Brook's 'stretched wire' and the practicalities of navigating a successful career in the relatively small New Zealand theatre directing profession.⁴ In 2014, the enduring presence of this tightrope restrains even the most innovative of directors against taking huge creative risks. The findings in this thesis must therefore be read in light of this ever-present tightrope; sometimes, a director's desire to embolden their praxis is there, but the conditions will not permit taking such risk. In dealing with the distinct and evolving methods that are employed by theatre practitioners in New Zealand, it is remarkable that so much distance has been travelled in the past thirty years.

The thesis has identified a number of principal findings that have been addressed according to key thematic concerns of dynamic text-based contemporary theatre directing in New Zealand. It has pursued the central question: how does a select cohort of professional New Zealand theatre directors bring text dynamically to life? My goal was to look for points of similarity and difference between directors' praxes in the pursuit of 'dynamic' theatre, and in so doing, align New Zealand directors with a wider international fraternity. Since theatre directing is part-art and part-craft, it has been essential to allow the directors their own voice in this research. The ten selected interviewees, by proxy, speak for many more. The New Zealand directing profession is relatively small, so this group of

⁴ Peter Harcourt alluded to this when, in 1979, he compared this developing, market-led condition at Downstage to like 'walking a tightrope'. See Peter Harcourt, *A Centre of Attraction: The Story of Downstage Theatre*, p. 11.

'dominant' directors can be considered a strong representation of their wider directing cohort.⁵

The thesis has taken a thematic approach to the analysis of the interview archive. Chapters one and two outlined the unique contextual factors affecting the practice of theatre directing in this geographically isolated setting, and the problem of the director's (in)visibility in a profession that relies on mutuality in many forms.

Chapter three considered the constraints (a necessary part of any theatre economy) that are particularly astringent on directors in New Zealand. The physical isolation, relative lack of director training, short rehearsal times, absence of company structures to foster a 'company' ethos, together with a highly competitive funding environment have shaped directing towards a highly product-centred mode of practice. Economic imperatives have also changed the ways in which actors are hired, typically to reduce the number of actors on payroll. The thesis found that both compromised recurrent, sustained practise, longevity and familiarity with theatre language. It also found the cultural 'clash' of new techniques provided resistance and excitement. Nevertheless, it illustrates how stimulating results occur in this pressure-cooker environment intent on making 'lively' theatre.

Another notable finding here was that of nomadism and its associated 'line of flight' from one territory to another. This means that the 'director' self is reframed into a new territory or 'reterritorialized', to invoke Deleuze and Guattari.⁶ This shift in roles results in directors who are highly proficient multi-taskers capable of adaptation and change, and understanding from different points of view, with little allegiance to any one system or dogma. It does, however, deny directors in this 'imagined

⁵ In 2015, an approximate estimate would be under fifty professional theatre directors.

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

community' the possibility of forging one identity or 'voice', unless they are ensconced as the artistic director of a larger commercial theatre company.

The thesis also found how enormous freedoms in the New Zealand directing domain encouraged the creation of dynamic theatre. Chapter four considered the notions of settings, risk and techniques to explore the inherent solitude of the director. In this domain they are poised to travel vertically and horizontally across the professional landscape. The isolation from Europe, America, and within the local community is both a perceived constraint and a practical element that affords enormous freedoms. Interviewed directors are aware of their isolation from international trends, but ensure that they stay connected to major developments. This constant 'seeking-out' of larger developments causes these directors to be characteristically reflexive, self-effacing, and practical according to the resources at hand. This mobility combined productively with factors such as cooperative effort, genuine exploration, and emergent interpretive confidence. This in turn was augmented by the ability to make theatre in small spaces that invoke audience involvement in the drama invoking irreverence and risk. In this complex synthesis, the thesis has found techniques that can be identified, codified and described.

Chapter four also considered how the disruption of expectations corresponds with the way a play is interpreted and then realised in performance. Interpretive confidence has grown in this regard as directors seek to unsettle theatrical norms and to understand play texts in present-day contexts. This is particularly strenuous in a low-level subsidy environment like New Zealand, where the box-office return is imperative. This capacity for risk-taking where possible, especially in smaller venues, is a key finding from the archive. It is also prevalent with directors who work on large cast pieces like Shakespeare, and this seems to be an

accepted feature of the domain; there is very little 'hierarchy' and mobility/ accessibility are features of the profession.

It also examined how influences that bear on directors were broad and varied, although often linked to particular instances of practitioner intercourse. While it discovered these interactions to have been both deliberate and spasmodic, it identified that to a large extent, the predominant theatre language in New Zealand is narrative drama with Stanislavskian roots.

As a contributory part of that genealogy, and for other impacts, the thesis positioned Alfreds' 1989 masterclass as a pivotal moment in New Zealand theatre history. Directors were undoubtedly then hungry for 'new' techniques that could create dynamic drama in the extant conditions. Alfreds' methods enabled directors to advance theatre practice that was 'different every night', thereby inspiring a certain performance primacy on stage that reinvigorated directing confidence. The Alfreds techniques also imparted structures that, while not culturally specific, fitted New Zealand conditions. The thesis made links with a developing indigenous confidence in theatre that challenged the colonial 'frames of reference' of audience and theatre makers alike. The tools of the 'dominant' text directing discourse have enabled directors like McColl, Bennett, Harcourt, Lynch, Downes, Penny, Lawrence, Hendry, O'Donnell and Hurst to reimagine classic and contemporary play texts in inventive and typically post-colonial 'New Zealand' ways.

Added to that, these directors show there is deep and wide understanding of philosophy about theatre and performance praxis, plus a willingness to work with 'tradition', and against it. These traditions include largely British and American techniques that have affected the practice of previous generations, and of the current generation of 'dominant' directors. Mike Alfreds' techniques have now evolved to the

point that they can be considered in a post-colonial context. The freedom with which directors happily employ this ‘Stanislavski-Alfreds-eclecticism-fusion’ points to a post-Alfreds confidence that is active. Further, while Alfreds’ methodology ‘decolonised the stage’, it can also be viewed as an act of colonisation that significantly impacted – in this case, for the better – on the domain. In speaking about Alfreds as a historical event that continues to resonate on praxis, directors employ a kind of ‘post-colonial hybridity’. Techniques meld and merge. The cross-pollination of methods and techniques apposite to the work or ‘magpie-ism’ is commonplace. In 2015, ‘post-colonial hybridity’ is thriving.

The evolving cultural identity and developing social perspectives of New Zealand theatre have affected expectations over time of what – and how ‘good’ – theatre can be. In the past thirty years, for example, fewer ‘political’ and large cast plays have been staged in mainstream theatres. Although the desire to engage with politics on stage is real, this has created a more concentrated and arguably less ‘risky’ form of drama in New Zealand. This has concentrated directors’ praxes towards working more intensely with fewer actors while still meeting the challenge of telling stories in ways that work within and, at the same time, subvert orthodox structures. McColl’s letter of resignation as Associate Director with Downstage Theatre in 1977 captured this sentiment well, and it remains prescient: ‘I believe that if the theatre is to be kept alive and sparking with creative energy, there must be a place for devoted anarchy.’⁷

Within this actor-centric milieu, the selected directors employ techniques that frame the process of engagement with actors. Chapter six considered how the interview subjects direct this process through

⁷ Reference MS-Papers-8874-24, Colin McColl letter of resignation, 2 November 1977.

communication, interaction, feedback, meeting emotion, and challenging the actor. For most of the subjects, the absence of authoritarian flavour in favour of more democratic inclinations is a conspicuous feature here; the analogy of a certain kind of sports coach is not out of place. The directors interviewed for this study have clear ideas about the importance of casting, creating trust and encouraging a lack of ego in the rehearsal room. The creative relationship that directors and actors occupy is a close one, often (but not always) led by the actor's needs. It is also one that demands actors extend themselves beyond their perceived limits. Actors are seen by many to occupy a role of disclosure or revelation, for, and sometimes with, the audience. This frequently places the actor at the centre of the rehearsal room. There are dualities at work here that must be negotiated by directors and actors. Directors who work to shape revelation in consort with actors understand the place that imaginary forces, preparatory work and the importance of task-related action occupy, alongside emotion. These factors, along with the Eurocentric frameworks that have permeated New Zealand theatre in the past, are part of the reason why New Zealand directors are typically inventive and almost always self-effacing.

Chapter seven devoted attention to the actor-centric process so prevalent in these directors' praxis. Attributed largely to the fact that most directors have emerged from acting backgrounds, the thesis found this is also connected to the actor-centric points of inquiry in theatre making in New Zealand. The unique pathways towards revelation of the self were scrutinized here.

Some directors interviewed for this thesis refer to their perceptions of their work and 'the way word of mouth operates' as factors to be acknowledged.⁸ These are powerful tools in a small but highly mobile

⁸ Bennett.

society. Audiences are eager for relative measures on the quality of work before they buy a theatre ticket. However, subjective opinion can be beneficial, capricious or arbitrary. In a profession often seen as 'the loneliest game in the most social of playgrounds', this is the real challenge of navigating the tightrope. As Bennett suggests, 'if something has been deemed to be not good then they'll jump on that bandwagon really quickly ... There's a certain pack mentality with the public and particularly [with] New Zealand work'.⁹ This, combined with an enduring 'xenophobia' for all things foreign, has not helped to bolster a developing New Zealand directing 'tradition', although this is certainly changing as practitioners understand the unique nature and value of cultural capital in the post-colonial locale.

The thesis has contained its inquiry to certain discrete areas but acknowledges rich potential for future research in the field of New Zealand theatre directing studies. It aspires to provide something of a foundation and a springboard for other researchers to undertake further study and interrogate local directing practice. For example, a semiotic phenomenology of directors' interpretive choices with play texts would alone repay further research. Another area for future investigation is how the style of performance in New Zealand reflects or anticipates theatre trends internationally. In summary, the diverse range and energy of New Zealand theatre directing, the richness of the evidence and the rapid pace of change in directing practice warrant further scholarly investigation. Directing is, above all, a practical art that will continue to evolve and change. It is a highly pragmatic profession whose central tenets are developed in relation to how individual directors work with and within the available resources. This thesis has demonstrated that there is a clear

⁹ Bennett.

developing New Zealand theatre directing aesthetic and praxis. However, just as 'there are no secrets', there are no fixed rules. Directors are practical artists. In New Zealand (as elsewhere), directors can assimilate, combine and cherry-pick techniques in the name of experimentation. 'Magpie-ism' is a virtue to be upheld.

Contemporary theatre directing in New Zealand is also full of contradictions, and these dichotomies are central currency in theatre praxis generally. Every play demands its cast and crew start afresh, 'reading' the play text as if for the first time, yet deeply informed by research and prior readings of it. Every director displays a knack for interpretation that is unique to their world view, yet this interpretation must speak to recognisable or univocal tropes that its audience can relate to. Theatre demands actors bring their most private selves to a public arena, and directors facilitate the conditions this happens in. Directors and casts must forge intensely strong familial bonds, only to dissipate after final night. Theatre finds universality through an exposure of specificity. Dynamic theatre can therefore be specific and universal at the same time. Constraints give life to freedoms. Influences situate an individual's methods in a larger discourse. Actors are predominantly at the centre of it, and the pathways toward working with actors determine a post-colonial character that is unique to New Zealand theatre.

These themes ring true for the ten theatre directors at the heart of this present study. It is vital to reiterate here that the interviews that comprise the archive represent a collection of distinct yet harmonious voices that speak to both difference and commonality. In the scope of this thesis it is impossible to make explicit all the thematic connections. Nevertheless, the interview findings confirm that text-based directing in New Zealand is an organic praxis; it continues to evolve in reaction to both the macro conditions of production, and micro individual ethos.

As the first of its kind to claim prominence for the work of selected New Zealand theatre directors in the emerging field of Director Studies, the thesis hopes to attract other researchers. In removing the 'cloak of invisibility' shielding and protecting directing practice, this thesis offers a new paradigm for local theatre analysis and scholarship and suggests fresh ways of 'making visible' and understanding the hitherto unseen working processes employed by these theatre directors as they traverse Brook's tightrope. By virtue of looking closely at the subject who walks the tightrope, the cloak has become discernible, too. The cloak of New Zealand theatre directing has been elevated from an invisible garment to that of a highly-treasured korowai.

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