

The Role of the Writer and Authorship in New Collaborative Performance-Making in the United Kingdom from 2001-2010

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of London
18 July 2013

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Acknowledgments

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the following people for their guidance, support (both academic and emotional) and generous intellectual and creative contributions. Without it, this PhD would not have been possible.

For academic guidance: John Ginman, my supervisor, for all his patience and wisdom during the research and writing of this thesis, as well as John London, Göze Saner and Maria Shevtsova for their advice and assistance during the upgrading process.

For the generous cooperation and of the following practitioners who agreed to be interviewed: Jon Bausor, Stephen Brown, Oliver Dimsdale, David Farr, Helen Edmundson, Scott Graham, Theo Herdman, Steven Hoggett, Kirsty Hounsley, Samuel James, Dawn King, Bryony Lavery, Stuart McLaughlin, Nancy Meckler, Tim Phillips, Ben Power, Liz Ranken, Peter Rankin, Guy Retallack, Ferdy Roberts, Angela Simpson and Polly Teale.

For the friendly and helpful administrative assistance in arranging for interviews of the aforementioned practitioners, as well as the viewing of archival material: the staff of the offices of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre. Additionally, I would like to thank Aleks Sierz for the contribution of his own research materials and interview conducted with Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett.

For less official, but equally important academic advice, book recommendations and inspiring conversations: Rachel Shapiro, Jessica Beck, Arabella Stanger, Sarah Beck, Philippa Burt, Becca McFadden, Jenny Hodgson and Sophie Bush.

Finally, I am eternally grateful for the love and support of my parents, Kass and Michael Sigal.

Abstract

Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, the changing statuses of the writer and the text have not only been reflective of the ways in which collaborative theatre-making processes involving writing have changed, but are also emblematic of how theatre-makers have positioned themselves within the rapidly shifting cultural and economic climate in the UK. This thesis seeks to discover what shifts have occurred as well as future implications for the role of the commissioned writer. Its prime focus is an investigation of the working methods of three different generations of collaborating companies in the UK and the commissioned writers with whom they work: Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre.

This investigation is structured on a company-by-company basis, examining two productions from each company (each written by different writers or writer/directors) as examples of writer-company collaborative practice, comparing one to the other in order to understand each company and writer's approach to working collaboratively. It addresses such issues as, what is the role of the writer in new collaborative theatre-making culture in the UK and how it has been influenced by historical debates and practices regarding the role of the writer and the text: how texts can be produced in different processes that involve a writer; how authorship is negotiated by practice between writers and other creative collaborators; and the extent to which the models or processes of working analyzed here have originated from or been influenced by historical collaborative practice. This investigation utilizes interviews with practitioners involved in the development of these productions as well as company archival material and analyzes relevant contemporary texts and performances as well as the work of historical practitioners that has informed the legacy of these the three contemporary companies. In addition to performance theory, this thesis will draw on management and branding theory, in order to interrogate the relationship between hierarchy

and the creative process, within the context of the changing cultural, economic and political climate of the early twenty-first century.

This thesis will propose that historical practices of writing and collaboration and the distinct strands of working that evolved from it have a significant relationship to, and can illuminate contemporary practice as well as serve as historical models of working; some of the approaches to collaborative writing used by Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre can be considered either conscious copying or modification of an extant practice or accidental imitations which arose from similar cultural circumstances but embodied the same basic idea of an extant practice. This thesis will also propose that Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre and the commissioned writers and writer/directors with whom they have collaborated have developed a flexible process of working in order to allow for negotiation and serve their particular production and artistic goals. The role of an individual writer can change from company to company and production to production and therefore the author or authors of the piece might include not only the writer, but also the director, performers, designer and/or dramaturg. Ultimately, this thesis will look to the future by providing a framework with which performance scholars and emerging practitioners can better understand and also continue to develop writer-company collaborative practice.

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Introduction

Statement of purpose

This thesis is an investigation into the role of the writer in collaborative performance-making in the UK from 2001-2010. It will examine the function of the commissioned writer external to the permanent artistic directorship of three collaborative companies based in England—Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre, as well as a number of earlier, twentieth-century collaborative practices, focusing on the intersection of writers' working methods and those of the companies. The purpose of this investigation is to understand the different approaches to writer-company collaboration used during this seminal period in collaborative practice, and thus, possibilities for the role of the writer, the role of the text and authorship. The fundamental practical aim of this study is to enable writers and companies looking to work collaboratively to gain an insight into different possible writer-company working relationships—both contemporary as well as historical—so that they may be better placed to negotiate a mutually beneficial process, as well as to enable theatre and performance scholars to gain an understanding of the possibilities for writer-company collaborative practice in the UK.

This thesis will argue that the changing status of the writer and the text has come to be emblematic of the way in which English theatre-makers have positioned themselves within the rapidly shifting cultural and economic climate of the early twenty-first century; therefore it will also examine the ways in which this phenomenon of writers working in collaborative theatre-making has evolved culturally and politically throughout the past century, both in the UK and internationally. Describing how writing for performance in the New Millennium is becoming an ever more varied practice, John Freeman writes in *New Performance/New Writing*, 'Have we reached the point where we no longer ask, "What can we write?" so much

as “What can we do with writing?”¹ In the twenty-first century, the term ‘writing for performance’ has expanded to include not only singly-authored written work, but a variety of approaches such as the co-authorship of two writers or more, adaptations, collaborations between writers and companies and writing as scripting within a devising process. The evolution of this field has had implications with respect to notions of authorship and creative identity; especially in an environment in which a text is generated by a commissioned writer with particular evolving creative aspirations and identity within the theatre industry working in collaboration with a company (also with a particular evolving identity and creative aspirations), where text is often the product of layers of different creative influences from a number of practitioners, rather than simply the work of a single writer. The identities of writers and companies (perceived by others or consciously self-created) are also affected by this collaborative process insofar as practitioners are continually seeking ways of combining artistic styles and creative objectives while maintaining the integrity of their own approaches to performance-making. As a result of the flexible and varying nature of the collaborative process and the contexts within which the work is made, the role of an individual writer can change from company to company and production to production, and therefore the author or authors of the piece might include the director, performers, designer and/or dramaturg, in addition to the writer. This thesis will argue that within the first decade of the twenty-first century in the UK, the nature of the dramatic text has shifted in relation to changing understandings of authorship and the writer’s role, and as a result, it has the potential to be not only a product of the writer’s creative input, but a result of the shared creative agency of an entire production team.²

¹ John Freeman, *New Performance/New Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.15 & 2-3.

² ‘What does collaboration mean in practice? Is it a collaboration on one person’s idea, or is it a collaboration from “scratch”? Both of these lead to differing “expectations” being placed upon the writer, which will effect the whole process and therefore the outcome of the project [...]. What happens to the collaborative relationship between writer, director, designer, composer and lighting designer once the writer is actually alone with the text? Is the writer acting as a documenter and/or dramatist, writing up a series of collective “instructions” for a

In order to better understand the different possibilities for the writer and the text within a collaborative process, this thesis will define a number of collaborative compositional practices—what Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington term ‘the plurality of strategies and approaches’—of three UK-based companies who work with writers and writer/directors external to the permanent artistic directorship by comparing and contrasting two different productions from each company from within the time frame of 2001-2010.³ Additionally, we will also identify a number of historical approaches to collaboration from a number of different companies and practitioners from the twentieth century in order to situate the contemporary companies and writers within a longer, international tradition of collaboration and thus better understand their working methods with respect to writing and text. Collaborative theatre is complex because there are many different processes that are considered collaborative and many variables within the practice that often change from project to project in order to suit the needs of the hierarchy, aesthetics and ethos of the company, in addition to timeline, budget and nature of the production. Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter are not only collaborative theatre-making companies that make new work, commissioning scripts from writers external to the permanent artistic directorship, but they also make particular demands in terms of the kind of work they commission and therefore look for writers with particular skills and creative philosophies, engaging with the development of commissioned texts through a number of stages that encourage a process of continual adjustment between the company and the writer; as a result, there is a significant period of time between the moment when the writer is commissioned and the final performance of the production when the script is not a fixed entity, but rather subject to

specific performance? Or is the writer writing a piece of text which will act as a stimulus for a devising rehearsal process? The different expectations can effect the “status” of the writer.’ Ruth Ben-Tovim, ‘The Writer and the Early Development Stages’, in *Writing Live: an Investigation of the Relationship between Writing and Live Art*, ed. by John Deeney (London: New Playwrights Trust, 1998), p.65.

³ Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Abington: Routledge, 2007), p.7.

development and negotiation. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, collaborative performance-making denotes a piece of work with active creative contributions from performers (although this does not necessarily mean devised work, devising is often included in the process), a writer, director(s), designers (set, costume and lighting), producer and possibly a movement director; the script does not exist in any substantial form prior to the workshops, research and development and/or rehearsal period, and the company works together in dialogue with one another to create a production, sharing the creative responsibility. To echo Govan, Nicholson and Normington, the purpose of this investigation is not to establish ‘an overarching vision’ of what collaborative composition is, but to understand ‘how and why changes have taken place, why experimentations of practice have occurred, and what this means for contemporary performance-makers’, which we will do by studying the ways in which commissioned writers have worked with Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Shared Experience.⁴ Even since Govan, Nicholson and Normington’s *Making a Performance* was published in 2007 the field of writing and collaborative theatre-making has changed; therefore this thesis will contribute an investigation of how and why these shifts have happened, how they fit into the longer trajectory of the historical evolution of the writer’s role in collaborating companies throughout the twentieth century, as well as what they signal for the future of writing for performance.

Research questions

There are a number of lines of inquiry this thesis will seek to address regarding writer-company collaborative processes. Firstly and most importantly, we will attempt to gain an understanding of what is the role of the writer in new collaborative theatre-making culture in the UK and how it has been influenced by historical dialogue about the role of the writer

⁴ Ibid.

and the text. Secondly, we will examine how texts can be produced in different processes that involve a commissioned writer, investigating the common and differing characteristics of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre's working methods; we will look particularly at the extent to which these processes are a realization of both the company and the writer's perception of his or her own creative aspirations. Thirdly, we will examine how authorship is negotiated by practice between writers and other creative collaborators, as well as the implications in terms of the creative agency of the writer. Fourthly, we will question the extent to which models or processes of working have originated from or been influenced by historical, earlier twentieth-century collaborative practice. To what extent are these contemporary companies creating new models of working, if indeed these models exist and are not simply an appropriation of extant practices? By the end of this study, we will suggest how this thesis might be useful to individual practitioners, companies and students of performance in order to understand not only the processes used by writers and collaborative companies in the UK, but also the way in which the processes are negotiated, the structure of the companies and the way the practitioners involved navigate the practical demands of production such as funding, budgeting and scheduling.

Strategic selection of companies

These three companies have been chosen as case-studies because they span three generations of collaborative practice and also for strategic purposes; each serves as an example of a distinct process of collaborative creation with a particular artistic focus, within a specific hierarchical structure, coming from a particular generational and cultural context, resulting in a unique approach to authorship and the writer's role. There were numerous companies in the UK in the early Millennial period who could be broadly described as working collaboratively, but this investigation is particularly concerned with the work of

three companies that choose to commission writers and/or writer/directors: Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre. Not only does each of these companies serve a distinct function in this thesis, each is a significant company that has, for many years, consistently received public, subsidised funding, have been reviewed by major publications, have toured across the UK with their work, most importantly, is emblematic of a distinct strand of writer-company collaborative practice.

Founded in 1975 by Mike Alfreds and now run by co-directors Nancy Meckler and Polly Teale, Shared Experience works primarily by adapting canonical texts such as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. The purpose Shared Experience serves within this study is to provide an example of a company that works with writers particularly in order to adapt extant non-dramatic texts. As we will see discover in Chapter Two, the company is also conservative in its approaches to working with writers, in that Meckler and Teale are hesitant to work with new writers (unlike Frantic Assembly) or to devise material (unlike Filter Theatre). Shared Experience's work is characterized by the development of layers of authorship through the possibilities of dramatic adaptation from canonical text to playtext and the physicalization of classical themes and narratives. Shared Experience is the oldest company of the three case studies, providing the strongest ideological, historical and artistic link between them and their historical predecessors.

Founded by co-directors Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett in 1994, Frantic Assembly incorporates text and movement by working simultaneously with writers, performers and choreographers to create a three-dimensional narrative. The purpose that Frantic Assembly serves within this study is to provide an example of a company that juxtaposes written texts with movement scores through improvisational choreography and, of the three companies, is also the most interested in working with a variety of new commissioned writers. Frantic

Assembly also serves as the middle generation of the three case studies, bridging the generational and cultural gap between Shared Experience and Filter Theatre.

Established in 2001 by Oliver Dimsdale, Ferdy Roberts and Tim Phillips, Filter Theatre is the youngest of the three and a product of the New Millennium; their work is predominantly sound-driven, using sound effects and sound-scapes in conjunction with projections and moving sets, embracing a fluid, rapidly-changing style of staging. Filter creates original work, adaptations of non-dramatic extant texts and radical reworking of classic performance texts, such as plays by Shakespeare and Chekhov. The purpose that Filter serves within this study is to provide an example of a company that engages with writers to assist in scripting original work devised by the company so that the performance text is created from scratch through improvisation and experimentation; as a result, the spheres of influence between practitioners within the company tend to overlap more than they do in the work of Frantic Assembly or Shared Experience.

Context for study

Since 2001, what has been come to be known as collaborative theatre has flourished in the UK in a way not seen since the days of the political theatre of the 1970s which witnessed the emergence of companies such as Joint Stock, Monstrous Regiment, Gay Sweatshop and 7:84, but the reasons why this particular practice has become so prominent are complex. The New Millennium saw the emergence of companies like Filter Theatre, Punchdrunk (2000), Sound and Fury (2000), Gecko (2001) and 1927 (2005) as well as the growth of companies established in the previous decade such as Frantic Assembly, Improbable (1996), Hoipolloi (1994), Third Angel (1995), Told By An Idiot (1993) and the Shunt Collective (1998). What sets this category of companies apart from others is that they prioritize the use collaborative (and often devised, or partially-devised) approaches to theatre-

making in order to integrate text with other elements of production such as performance, design, use of performance space and the director's concept, as well as using text in original and unusual ways in order to find fresh possibilities for performance. Some of these companies such as Frantic Assembly and Gecko focus on devising movement, some such as Punchdrunk and the Shunt Collective are interested in the appropriation of unconventional, alternative performance spaces as well as the experience and participation of spectators while others like Sound and Fury and 1927 engage with media such as sound and video. The roles of the text and the writer (if a specifically-designated writer is used) have evolved in order to meet the distinct needs of these companies, whether to act as a scripting writer within the devising process, a writer/dramaturg in the rehearsal room working not only with performers and a director but also designers, a writer/director who shapes both the production and text or a writer or dramaturg who scripts a text for a particular performance space. Many companies seek the help of writers external to the company while some use internal or external writer/directors in order to create or adapt a text for a project; for example, Sound and Fury commissioned writer Bryony Lavery to write the text for *Kursk* (2009) and Hoipolloi employed company writer/director Shôn Dale-Jones to adapt Edward Gorey's *The Doubtful Guest* (2009).

One reason for the growth of new companies in the New Millennium is that Arts Council funding benefitted greatly from increased subsidy under Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour Government (1997-2007), which fostered innovation within companies, growth within the field of new theatre-making and also the development of new audiences. During the years under the Labour government from 1997-2010 the arts sector saw an increase in government funding: in an article on 18 February 2012, *The Economist* noted that, 'Under Labour, central-government support for the sector through Arts Council England (ACE), the principal funding conduit, more than doubled, from £179m in 1998-99 to £453m in 2009-

2010.⁵ During this period of increased subsidy, an increasingly wide variety of theatre companies were being funded and encouraged to develop a more expansive and innovative programme of work than in previous years in order to promote innovation, change the face of the arts in general and theatre specifically and to bring a new demographic into British theatres who had not previously been target audience members. As *Guardian* theatre critic Michael Billington comments:

once Blair and Brown shed the cautious financial pragmatism of 1997-99, theatre [...] experienced a sense of renewal. New money changed the cultural climate and had many positive effects: the regional survival, the expansion of the repertory, the quest for new audiences through cheap tickets. [...] As Blairism reached its twilight period, it was possible to detect ways in which theatre had become both more socially inclusive and more artistically inquisitive.⁶

A variety of new kinds of theatre and different theatre companies with distinct target audiences and objectives were encouraged to apply for funding, so along with minority theatre groups such as, for example, the British-African company Tiata Fahodzi (1997) and the British East-Asian company Yellow Earth (1995), collaborative theatre companies with claims to new and radical processes of theatre-making received public subsidy at a level not seen since before stringent funding cuts for the arts under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in the 1980s. As funding grew, more companies with a wide variety of different agendas began to emerge and produce new work that often challenged the status quo and experimented with innovative approaches to theatre-making. As Bristol Old Vic Theatre Artistic Director Tom Morris has said, increased public subsidy allowed theatre-makers to 'escape the strictures of the marketplace' by allowing them to 'invest in truly unpredictable work', but also to encourage new audiences that might not otherwise come to the theatre to see this work through inexpensive, subsidised play tickets.⁷ Increased public subsidy for the

⁵ 'The show must go on', *The Economist*, 18 February 2012, p.29.

⁶ Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2007), p.392.

⁷ Tom Morris, 'Without subsidy, our theatres will run out of hits', *The Observer*, 17 June 2012, p.4.

arts from the Labour Government helped new companies such as Filter Theatre who emerged during their administration to develop, as well as established companies such as Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly, to make new and innovative work, and to afford to commission writers external to the permanent artistic directorship. Increased public funding from the Arts Council and also regional, county and local authority councils allowed both existing and developing theatre companies make new work they might not otherwise have made had they been relying only on private investment, audience subscription and box office proceeds. (Additionally, large and mid-scale touring companies such as these three as well as others have turned to selling merchandise—for example books, DVDs and tee-shirts—collecting revenue from West End transfers and running workshops.)

As these companies became more numerous and influential, gaining a higher public profile and receiving public subsidy throughout the late-1990s and into the New Millennium, more practitioners felt encouraged to form their own collaborating companies with their peers in order to make work with a specific focus, made using a process particular to their company; these processes of making work bore similarities to the peers and predecessors of these companies, either because they were consciously influenced by the processes of other practitioners, or because the similarities in their processes reflected a similarity in artistic objectives, and perhaps training as well. A key factor here was that during this period, more universities began to offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in devised and collaborative theatre-making; by 2011, as many as nine different universities and drama schools across the UK offered undergraduate and postgraduate degrees specifically in devised and/or collaborative theatre-making, including (but not limited to) The University of Winchester, the University of Plymouth, the University of Leeds, the University of Huddersfield, the University of Chichester, Rose Bruford College, Kingston University,

Goldsmiths College and the Central School of Speech and Drama.⁸ The prevalence and popularity of collaborative theatre-making had spread from the world of professional theatre to that of academia, not only introducing young practitioners to the possibilities of collaborative theatre-making but also developing new audience bases for the work across the country. It is, of course, important to note that this diffusion of practice and theory of collaboration is not, in all circumstances, straightforward; in some cases, the work arose from directly from university drama programmes and drama schools, companies forming even before graduation.

With the increase of Arts Council funding for theatre, there was a radical increase not only in the number of new companies, but also in the number of new plays and new writers, effectively increasing the pool of talent from which companies could select when deciding to collaborate with a writer, as well as increasing the possibility that a percentage of these new writers would be interested in collaboration. Aleks Sierz explains this ‘renaissance of new writing’ in the UK: ‘In the past decade, more than 300 playwrights have made their debuts. It has also been calculated that between 500 and 700 writers make a living out of stage plays, radio plays and TV drama in Britain’.⁹ In 2009, the Theatre sector of Arts Council England commissioned an investigation into the state of new writing for performance, surveying, discussing and interviewing a number of new writing theatres, companies and practitioners across the country to gain an understanding of the state of new writing from 2003-2009 and understand the impact of the additional £25 million in funding secured under the 2003 Theatre Review and assess whether further investment would be fruitful.¹⁰ The report demonstrated that during this period, the ‘overwhelming majority’ of tickets sold were for

⁸ *The Standing Conference of University Drama Departments* (2011) <<http://www.scudd.org.uk/postgraduate-courses/>> [accessed 19 September 2011]

⁹ Alex Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011), p.16.

¹⁰ ‘Investigations into new theatre writing in England, 2003-2009’, *Arts Council*, <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/artforms/theatre>> [accessed on 2 September 2011].

new plays, forty-two percent of work produced in the theatres and companies surveyed consisted of new plays and that there was a significant growth in audiences for new plays, between 2003-2004 and 2007-2008.¹¹ As Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand wrote in 2009:

New writing in theatre at a grassroots level appears to have undergone a period of renaissance over the past six years. Additional funding has enabled a wider variety of new writing/new work to take place in an extraordinary mix of venues across the country. A new more diverse generation of voices is emerging into a culture of experimentation and change. [...] The period since 2003 was mostly viewed as one of growth, inspiration and diversification.¹²

Dunton, Nelson and Shand found in an Arts Council-commissioned survey that fifty-five percent of practitioners surveyed agreed with the statement: ‘There is a wider variety of work seen on stage under the banner of new writing/new work now than there was six years ago’, and thus sought to investigate in discussion groups how practitioners felt the term ‘new writing’ could be defined and what the roles of the writer and text were considered to be.¹³ The majority felt that not only ‘an individual writing a play’ but also ‘a writer collaborating with other artists’ could be included in the definition of new writing or new work, but also a third of the group also suggested that new writing/new work could be defined as ‘a company devising work’, ‘a devising process which results in a text-based piece of theatre’, ‘a group devised piece which has been crafted by a writer/director’ and ‘a theatre text that emerges from an artistic exploration of ideas, either individually or collectively’.¹⁴ Not only had new writing grown in the UK during the Noughties and had indeed been encouraged to grow through Arts Council initiatives, but the definition of new writing had expanded in the eyes of practitioners throughout the country, encompassing not only the work of a single writer or

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² ‘New Writing in Theatre 2003-2008: an assessment of new writing within smaller scale in England’, commissioned by Arts Council England from Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand (2009) <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/new-writing-theatre/> [accessed 2 September 2011].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

author, but also the collaborative composition of multiple writers, authors, practitioners and companies. The possibilities for new approaches to theatre-making, and specifically, collaborative writing, seemed to be opening up as quickly as the theatre-makers themselves could conceive of them.

Although there are many variations of the definition of new writing, there are even more variations of companies' and writers' approaches to collaborative composition; each company tailors the collaborative process to its own needs and aesthetics, and each writer has his/her approach to composition and collaboration. In 2007, Ruth Little, Literary Manager for the Royal Court Theatre, remarked on the ways in which collaboration has influenced new performance writing:

We are now regularly making work which takes the dramatic script as a “theatrical score”; where the playwright participates alongside director, designer, composer, choreographer, puppeteer, performer, drawing on live resources in action to produce a text. [...] Writers are developing new confidence in the languages of theatre, and in the dramatic potential of their own language.¹⁵

The rise of collaborative performance-making in the UK has encouraged writers to broaden their concept of the creative process and consider new ways of working which rely upon the involvement of collaborators within a production. Authorship in this context is bound up with the ‘live resources’ of the other company members, so the dramaturgical process of a collaborative piece becomes an ongoing dialogue between the writer and the rest of the company. If we are to understand the possibilities for writers and companies alike in the collaborative composition of this theatrical score, it is important to examine different writers' and companies' processes and the motivations behind them—aesthetic, ideological and practical.

The roots of this trend of the literary drive in theatre-making in the UK are anchored in a flourishing in the commissioning and development of new writing in 1950s and 1960s in

¹⁵ Ruth Little and Emily McLaughlin, *The Royal Court Theatre Inside Out* (London: Oberon Books, 2007), p.194.

companies and theatres such as Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and the Royal Court under the artistic directorship of George Devine and later William Gaskill (under the guise of the English Stage Company from 1956 onward). Although there has been a prevalent literary culture in the UK for hundreds of years, the publically recognized status and power of the playwright has been sporadic, waxing and waning, having to compete with the names of star actors and directors, only gaining comparably consistent recognition since the movement started by companies such as the English Stage Company and Theatre Workshop, especially within the realm of subsidized theatre.¹⁶ As late as 1955, writer J.B. Priestley wrote an article entitled 'The Case Against Shakespeare', denouncing the over-production of Shakespeare's works as an impediment to the creation of new plays, as producers, in putting on one Shakespearian work after another, did not have to take chances on the possible box office failures of new works by unknown dramatists and did not have to pay royalties to a long-dead writer.¹⁷ In 1958, the Royal Court's artistic director George Devine established a Writer's Group, developing such writers as John Arden, Arnold Wesker and John Osborne. Michael Billington notes that in this period, although there was still no 'loyal, regular audience in London for new writing', the Royal Court still persevered and promoted a 'bewilderingly kaleidoscopic array of new dramatists' from the late-1950s and into the 1960s, describing the period from 1964-1970 particularly as a 'golden age' of new writing and new theatre-making.¹⁸ During her tenure as the Artistic Director of Theatre Workshop (in residence at the Theatre Royal Stratford East from 1953-1974), Joan Littlewood produced new writing and

¹⁶ As an illustration of this phenomenon and prevailing concept of British self-image, the website for the British Council reads: 'The UK has an exceptionally rich literary tradition: authors such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Austen, Dickens, Eliot, Kipling, Hardy, Orwell, Wells, Auden all continue to have a global audience. Contemporary writing has many cultural influences. Writers such as James Kelman, Caryl Phillips, Jeannette Winterson, Salman Rushdie, Irvin Welsh and Benjamin Zephaniah are changing perceptions about the use of language and dialect in writing, drawing from many influences to produce challenging and innovative work'. *The British Council* (2012) < <http://www.britishcouncil.org/thailand-arts-literature.htm>.> [accessed on 7 June 2012].

¹⁷ Billington, p.49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.119 & 164.

encouraged writers such as Brendan Behan, Shelagh Delaney and Ewan MacColl. Although Littlewood established her company at Theatre Royal Stratford East by producing classic texts like Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1955), after producing Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1956) she refocused the efforts of the company with the intention of 'looking for texts with a spark of life, an original subject matter or grasp of everyday speech patterns from which the company could improvise'; Littlewood was interested in creating work that reflected the real lives of her working-class audiences, in new texts created by writers with whom she could collaborate, acting as both a director and dramaturg, with the help of the performers in the company who often improvised scenes in order to 'flesh out' the plays.¹⁹ What these two companies had in common was that their determination to commission new plays sprang not only from their desire to depart aesthetically and dramaturgically from what they felt was the tedious status quo of the plays of the conservative West End theatres, but also a comparably left-wing ideology that recognized the need to stage a more varied representation of society than the elegant, well-heeled drawing rooms of Terence Rattigan and Noël Coward. As

Billington notes:

It was a time when writers bracingly experimented with form and sought new ways to express their criticism of society; and you can see this most clearly in the work of Arnold Wesker, John Arden and the directorial genius, Joan Littlewood. Between them they reminded us of theatre's oppositional role and its capacity to raise questions.²⁰

The rise of new writing in the UK in this period signalled a new era of theatre as a conduit for voices that not only keenly observed but also questioned the machinations of society, linking new writing for performance with leftist politics—notably, and variously, in such plays as John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959), Arnold Wesker's *Roots* (1959) and Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965), amongst others. It is also important to note that other theatres that were dedicated to producing new writing such as the Hampstead Theatre (established 1959) and

¹⁹ Nadine Holdsworth, *Joan Littlewood* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.25-26.

²⁰ Billington, p.156.

the Soho Theatre (established as the Soho Poly in 1969) sprang up around the time of this explosion of new writing, further encouraging the trend and establishing a kind of legacy for the privileging of the writer's voice in the UK. The development of new writing and collaborative theatre-making practices at both the Royal Court and within Theatre Workshop are significant to this investigation, therefore we will return to a more thorough examination of them in the next chapter.

The idea of the UK as the keeper of a tradition of developing new writing for performance, combined with the simultaneous rise in branding culture within neoliberal political ideology, the dependence on government funding and the concept of the writer as a 'marketable commodity' has led to the increasingly heightened perception of a theatre company as a brand and the writer as a commodity to be positioned within the market since the New Millennium. In the past decade, the new technologies have also brought a culture of a heightened sense of self-awareness and image. As Patrick Barwise notes in *Brands and Branding*, 'The past few years have seen the triumph of the brand concept; everyone from countries to political parties to individuals in organizations is now encouraged to think of themselves as a brand.'²¹ New technologies and an increased interconnectivity bring with them increased opportunities for advertising for commercial companies and products but also self-promotion and self-controlled positioning for individuals and non-profit organizations like theatre companies. In the guidelines for the application for the Sky Arts Ignition: Futures Fund—a £30,000 performance project bursary for young, British-based artists—they explicitly suggest that applicants consider how they will brand and market their proposed project by citing the recommendation of Rupert Goold (Artistic Director of the company Headlong and panellist for the competition) that applicants should, 'think about where they are positioning their project in the wider world: "Think about how your piece of work and

²¹ Patrick Barwise, 'Preface', in *Brands and Branding*, ed. by Rita Clifton, second ed., (London: The Economist in association with Profile Books Ltd., 2009), p.xiii.

project will sit in the current cultural scene... Think about your marketplace””.²² In saying this, both Goold (a successful and prominent director of whom many young practitioners reading this brief would undoubtedly be keenly aware, if not admire) and Sky Arts Ignition are encouraging young practitioners to actively consider concepts of branding, public image and especially positioning, where their work fits into the marketplace when writing about it, not simply to consider the integrity and creative life of the work itself; in effect, they are encouraging these young people to learn to market themselves, to achieve brand recognition, in order to survive. Some might conclude that the new branding culture of the twenty-first century within both the private and the public sector is a direct result of the rise of neoliberalism, which Nick Couldry defines as, ‘the range of policies that evolved internationally from the early 1980s to make market functioning [...] the overwhelming priority for social organization’, a political ideology that, ‘presents the social world as made up of markets, and spaces of potential competition that need to be organized as markets, blocking other narratives from view’.²³ Couldry believes that the pressures of neoliberalism have obscured the identity or ‘voice’ of the individual, and has put particular pressure on the survival of the arts in the UK, a pressure to categorize and market the work of artists, to reduce that work to another free market commodity. We refer to David Lane in order to connect this concept of neoliberalism with Sierz’s point about the promotion of new writing in the UK: ‘For much of the past fifteen years the figure of the writer has been a constant and visible fixture and a unique selling point of British theatre—perhaps even a marketable commodity—both on a domestic and international scale’.²⁴ Perhaps it is this economic pressure that has not only pushed writers to become a ‘marketable commodity’ but also

²² ‘Future Fund tips for application’, Ideas Tap/Sky Arts Ignition (2012)
<<http://www.ideastap.com/ideasmag/the-knowledge/sky-arts-ignition-judges-top-tips>> [accessed 21 February 2012].

²³ Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2010), pp.4 & 6.

²⁴ David Lane, *Contemporary British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.2.

obscure their individual voice by having to ally with companies in order to continue to make work and survive financially. We will continue to investigate various concepts of the economic and cultural pressures on writers and companies to produce work in a particular kind of fashion throughout the thesis, developing it as a cultural context for the investigation of the role of the writer within the work of Filter, Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly.

Definition of terms

Within the field of collaborative theatre today, terms such as ‘writing,’ ‘collaboration,’ ‘devising,’ and ‘authorship’ are commonly used by practitioners, critics and academics alike; however, each term has a particular meaning within this analysis of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter’s working methods. Therefore the need for precise definition is crucial. Although some definitions of terms overlap in meaning from company to company or practitioner to practitioner, others differ within the context of the work being made. In the current dialogue regarding new theatre-making practices in the UK, certain terms are often used casually, vaguely, indiscriminately and even inaccurately. For example, perpetuating this trend, Andy Field writes in *The Guardian Theatre Blog*: ‘We hear a lot about “devised” theatre and “text-based” theatre [...] Yet, what do we mean when we use these terms? For me, all theatre is devised and all theatre is text-based’.²⁵ Phrases like ‘devised theatre’, ‘text-based theatre’, or ‘collaborative theatre’ have been used so frequently and their meanings are so transient that we are in danger of losing any kind of meaning for them at all; in losing the meaning of the words that describe the work, we lose the ability to discern the working processes of companies altogether. Field continues this misperception, explaining that, ‘devising is not a description of a process; it is a term that could refer to any

²⁵ Andy Field, ‘All theatre is devised and text-based’, *The Guardian* (2009) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/apr/21/theatre-devised-text-based>> [accessed 27 September 2009].

and all processes, to the simple act of getting on with things', that the labelling of certain theatre-making practices has led to a false dichotomy of what is considered devised versus what is considered text-based, or what is considered collaborative and what is not, ultimately leading to misrepresentation.²⁶ What Field misunderstands is that these terms should not be arbitrary but, rather, can be crucial in understanding different approaches to writer-company collaboration. Terms that may at one time have been considered distinct and even antagonistic, are now often used interchangeably, such as, for example, writing and devising. As such, it is important to discern which terms have unique meanings within the context of each practitioner's work, or whether different practitioners and companies have shared definitions for specific aspects of their creative process. In this way, we can gain an understanding of how collaborative and devised practices have disrupted traditional definitions within theatre-making practice.

Let us begin with the term 'collaboration'. The definition of this particular term is the most important within the context of this investigation because the way in which each artistic director and writer defined the word illuminated the way in which they worked and how they viewed the field of collaborative theatre as a whole, as well as their experiences of collaboration. In the case of Shared Experience, collaboration can be taken to signify the process in which a small group of practitioners—chosen by the artistic directors—work together, within a concept defined in part by the directors and in part by the writer chosen to work on the project (or writer/director, given the production); the collaborative process in this case is, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two, the most writer-driven. Within the context of Frantic Assembly, collaboration is similar to Shared Experience's concept in that the collaborative work is largely dictated by the directors and writer together, but the difference is that the performers have a larger role to play in that they have more freedom in devising

²⁶ Ibid.

the physical score. In the case of Filter Theatre, we may take ‘collaboration’ to mean a particular process involving a director, a writer, performers and musicians where a script is created through concerted efforts, but does not exist in any significant form prior to the beginning of the process. The difference between Filter’s conception of collaboration and the two other companies is that Filter does not rely completely on the efforts of a single writer to create the text, but rather creates it collaboratively through the devised efforts of the performers, directors and designers as well. It can be argued that Filter’s conception of collaboration is less methodical and more fluid than either Shared Experience’s or Frantic Assembly’s.

Now we turn to ‘collaborative creation’ and ‘devising’, two terms that are often closely linked. Although we will also use terms like ‘writing’ and ‘devising’ similarly, for each case study, ‘collaborative creation’ is an umbrella term used to signify a method of working designed to create material, not simply written work but also physical scenes, methods of staging and sometimes design. For Shared Experience, ‘collaborative creation’ can be taken to mean the process of creating the script, the physical sequences devised by the movement director with the performers or the staging created with the performers and directors. For Frantic Assembly, ‘collaborative creation’ can be taken to mean the process used to create the text with the writer, the devised movement sequences with the performers and also the process that melds the two elements together, led by the directors. In the case of Filter, the term ‘collaborative creation’ is slightly different and will be used to signify a process whereby original material is created (by actors, writers, directors, or designers) without regard as to whether or not it will be kept in the final production; for Filter, the act of ‘collaborative creation’ is the basis for the entire collaborative process, in that the script is being created roughly at the same time as the staging and soundscape.

When the word ‘devising’ is used with regard to Filter, it refers to a process wherein material (generally scenes, with or without dialogue) is created by the performers in the company specifically through dialogic (rather than physical) improvisation guided by a director present in the rehearsal room; the writer may then edit and incorporate the scenes devised by the performers into the text that is being developed. Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling define devising as, ‘a set of strategies that emerged within a variety of theatrical and cultural fields’.²⁷ For Frantic Assembly, devising is used not to create the written text but rather the physical sequences with the performers. In the case of Shared Experience, the term devising will be used less frequently than in the case of the other two companies, as improvisation is more commonly used as a director’s technique to unlock previously written material; the physicality partially devised by the performers, but the process is more tightly controlled by the movement director and artistic directors than in the case of Frantic Assembly, who allows their performers more creative agency.

The term ‘writing’ will signify the creation of material through the act of written or notated verbal composition, generally the task of the designated writer.²⁸ For Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly, all writing is carried out by the commissioned writer, but within the context of Filter, this person may also be more specifically referred to as the ‘scripting writer’, which signifies that his/her job is not only to compose new material but also to incorporate annotated scenes devised by the performers into the script. In Filter’s process, other collaborators such as the performers and company artistic directors partake in the writing process by contributing to the text scenes and monologues they have written themselves. Similarly, as we have a specific phrase to indicate which member of the company is in charge of the writing (scripting writer and not playwright), we also refer specifically to

²⁷ Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: a Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.2.

²⁸ Occasionally, a performer may contribute written work to the project that s/he has written alone, but in this case, it will be specified.

the ‘text’ when we mean the script for performance (including lines and stage directions) and ‘production’ or ‘project’ when we mean the work as a whole (including music, directorial decisions, blocking, gesture, and proxemics). In the words of Filter designer Jon Bausor, ‘the text provides a framework for the [production] to hang on’, or in Field’s words, a text is ‘a blueprint for performance and a basis for making something happen’.²⁹

It should be noted that we will use the term ‘writer’ throughout, rather than ‘playwright’, as the writers themselves in the study often self-reference (and are credited in programs) ‘writer’ rather than ‘playwright’. Within the culture of collaborative and devised theatre, the term writer is used more frequently than playwright because the term playwright can often bring with it connotations of independence, a separation of the writer from the company, of a playwright who writes the script separately from the director, designers and performers, rather than one who works directly with the company, often scripting alongside a devising process or creating fragments of text as inspiration for a workshop. Ben Payne explains this conundrum in an article written in 1998:

There is a spectrum of approaches to theatre which, though text-based, may not fit conventional notions of playwright. For instance, writing text for theatre [...] providing structures, “stimulus text” or fragments of text for a company to devise from or devise around [...] writing as part of a collective process of devising [...]. One attraction of the term “writing for performance” is that it appears to allow the writer to directly engage with other performance art forms, free from the historical and ideological associations of “plays” and “playwrights”.³⁰

Although Payne is also referring to writers who work within the context of performance art, his explanation helps us understand the stigma associated with the word playwright—a person who writes plays rather than, for example, working alongside a collaborative and/or devising process. The use of the term writer rather than playwright will allow us to broaden

²⁹ Jon Bausor. Personal interview. See also: Andy Field, ‘All theatre is devised and text-based’, *The Guardian* (2009) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/apr/21/theatre-devised-text-based>> [accessed 27 September 2009].

³⁰ Payne, p.28.

our thinking in terms of what the function of a writer within a collaborative theatre-making context could be apart from the playwright engaging in a solitary activity.

‘Dramaturgy’ will refer to the editing and overseeing of the composed material, both the devised work created by the performers (if applicable) and the scripted work by the writer or writers. The dramaturg in this case is more limited in terms of creative capacity—shaping material at hand rather than producing new material—than the scripting writer. We will examine the ways in which composition and authorship are constructed and isolate the variables and constants in each different case study by recognizing the dramaturgy of each company’s process—that is to say, the overview of the production of the piece with regard to the ultimate conceptual objectives. Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt define the purpose of dramaturgy as that which, ‘describe[s] the composition of the work, whether read as a script or viewed in performance’, and use dramaturgy synonymously with the term composition, linking dramaturgy to the practice of musical arrangement or the visual composition of a painter.³¹ We will also borrow Turner and Behrndt’s definition of the practice of dramaturgy as, ‘an observation of the play in production, the entire context of the performance event, the structuring of the artwork in all its elements’.³² Additionally, we will also apply Bertolt Brecht’s definition of the dramaturg as ‘a critical facilitator with an inherently collaborative sensibility, driven by an ideological commitment to realize the ideas of the philosopher in practical terms’.³³ Using Turner and Behrndt’s definition of dramaturgy as a process and Brecht’s definition of the dramaturg as a role, we will frame the collaborative process within the function of authorship in relation to the company’s intentions for the production. It is useful to observe and compare how different companies dramaturgically compose and arrange their material for the performance (and later, the finished dramatic) text; for the

³¹ Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.4.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p.98.

purpose of this thesis, these models of working are structured with regard to the nature of the writer's involvement in the project.

Since the concept of authorship is important to this thesis, being one of the subjects which we are investigating, we will wait to create a definition until we have explored the different case studies in which it arises, examining it within the context of each company, in the hopes of coming to an understanding of what is shared and what differs from company to company and writer to writer within the field.

Existing literature

This investigation into the role of the writer in contemporary English collaborative theatre is a unique contribution to the field of study of collaborative and devised theatre-making, as it is the only study that specifically investigates the commissioned writer's function within a company as well as the attitudes of the company members (especially the artistic directors) towards the role of the writer and text. The most current literature on collaborative and devised theatre focuses on the practice as a study in and of itself, juxtaposing different companies' histories and ethos, and often grouping collaborative and devised work into the same category. Although the body of work that specifically addresses devised and collaborative theatre-making and collaborative composition is not a large one, the following texts were useful to this thesis primarily because they helped to create a vocabulary for describing and defining the processes within each case study, and secondarily because they helped to create a context within which to place these case studies. In *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Routledge, 2007), the collaborative effort of Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, the authors study the practice and history of devised theatre through mainly English-speaking companies which focus on adaptation, physical theatre, site-specific theatre and political theatre. *Making*

a Performance explores the purpose of devising as an approach to performance-making, focusing particularly on the common link between devising and collaboration and also on the consequences of changes in the practice for future generations. *Making a Performance* is similar to Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling's *Devising Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre: a Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (Routledge, 1994), and could be perceived as a text that attempts to encompass both previous books' purposes of mapping the history of devised theatre (*Devising Performance*) and introducing a manual for practitioners (*Devising Theatre*). All three books cover many of the same companies, Oddey's being an early work on devising (previous books having mostly been written only about particular companies and practitioners), Heddon and Milling's covering a vast number of British, American and Australian productions and practitioners and Govan, Nicholson and Normington building on the research of the previous two books and going further, looking for the similarities and differences amongst the companies through analyses of their practices. The most recent addition to this body of work is *Devising in Process* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), edited by Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, a compilation of case studies chronicled by different writers on the process used by collaborating companies; this text contributed a valuable series of detailed analyses of work in process (whereas previous work mostly examined the resulting productions). *Dramaturgy in Performance* by Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrnt (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) is a history of the practice of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century in European and North American theatre, and is useful in understanding a variety of approaches to theatre-making; for this thesis, Turner and Behrnt's work allows us to contextualize collaborative practice within a wider range of approaches to theatre-making. Another notable addition to this body of work is the recently-published *Invisible Things: Documentation from a Devising Process* (Fevered Sleep and The University

of Winchester, 2011) by David Harradine, in collaboration with Synne Behrndt; *Invisible Things* is about the making of *An Infinite Line: Brighton*, a project created by Fevered Sleep for the 2008 Brighton Festival which resulted in a site-specific performance, an installation of 8mm cine films, and the book, which focuses on the devising process used to compose/construct the production, describing the challenges of the project both as a collaboration (involving both a dramaturg and a writer) and as a site-specific work. *Invisible Things* is different from the aforementioned works because it describes the case study of a specific project in detail, from the perspective of various collaborators, following the process step-by-step.

Although many existing studies have been written about various devising and collaborating companies and the history of devising and collaboration as practices, what is missing is a focus on the role of the writer within the context of the work of the company. In order to investigate the role of the writer in new collaborative theatre-making over the last decade in the UK, this thesis will take as evidence the testimonies of the commissioned writers involved (as well as other practitioners involved with the companies with whom they worked, such as directors, designers and movement directors). Many academics analyze and document performance, but do not necessarily examine the process with a focus on the role of the writer within it. For example, Eileen Blumenthal's *Joseph Chaikin* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), is a comprehensive overview of Chaikin's development as a director and his relationships with writers as well as actors using an extensive base of material (interviews, play texts, criticism, performances analysis and rehearsal documentation) and gives insight into the collaborative work Chaikin did with writers by focusing on his role within the company. There are also books by practitioners themselves (often directors) that tend to result in a combination of biography, diary, manual or manifesto, whether written as a reflection after the fact, a progressive series or a documentation of a production. In *Taking*

Stock: The Theatre of Max Stafford-Clark (Nick Hern Books, 2007), Stafford-Clark and editor Philip Roberts have collated a series of the director's journal entries and interviews about his career and the evolution of the Joint Stock and Out of Joint theatre companies. Stafford-Clark's memoirs and careful notes on workshops, rehearsals, performances and critical receptions are organized into case studies on different productions. Although the detailed rehearsal accounts, the reactions, the relationships, the exercises and the source material used are particularly useful (as it is unusual to find such detailed accounts of this nature), *Taking Stock* is ultimately a kind of memoir, so company members' perspectives are subjected to the director's. Susan Letzler-Cole's *Playwrights in Rehearsal: the Seduction of Company* (Routledge, 2001) is a documentation of American writers such as Sam Shepard, Arthur Miller and Suzan-Lori Parks and their role in the rehearsal room; the processes detailed, however, were not particularly collaborative, so the role of the writer, in most cases, seemed to be limited to an observatory role while the director led the rehearsals; Letzler-Cole spends more time detailing the minutia of each writer's daily, mundane habits and the surroundings of the rehearsal room, as well as her own analysis of their production texts than the interaction with the company.³⁴

The writer's perspective is often absent within the larger study of theatre-making, unless the writer-director relationship within the company was particularly strong or well publicized, or unless the writer was also the company director. The most commonly documented relationships within companies are those between the director and the performers, as the writer is seen more commonly as a separate entity from the entire process, and designers are rarely cited at all. John Deeney explains that while contemporary and

³⁴ For example, in her chapter on Sam Shepard, Letzler Cole writes, 'As I enter the fourth-floor rehearsal studio at 422 West Forty-Second Street in New York City, I see two long tables surrounded by ten folding chairs and a few, odd upholstered chairs on wheels. A former chunky peanut butter jar filled with fresh daffodils sits in the center of one table. To either side of the daffodils are paper cups, a few coffee mugs, a box of Kleenex, several other glass jars with sharpened pencils, and a bottle of water with the name "Jim" written on it'. Susan Letzler Cole, *Playwrights in Rehearsal: the Seduction of Company* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p.1.

twentieth-century theatre practice in the West ‘has been characterized by the emergence and dominance of the director’ as a result of the ‘theorizing of practice and the practice of theory’ of directing, writing for performance has not been subject to the same investigation and theorizing, which he believes to be a result writing being ‘undertaken in a private as opposed to communal context—a solitary activity which produces an authored work’.³⁵ He continues: ‘How a playwright writes is traditionally self-negotiated, dependent as it may be on the terms of a commission, a particular company and audience, and so forth’.³⁶ Deeney articulates the conundrum of the documentation of writing for performance, which is generally understood to be a more independently-driven process of theatre-making, as opposed to the documentation of directing, which is understood to be more open, more collaborative, and thus more easily observed and critiqued. There are, of course, books, manuals and plays by the companies themselves—either written collectively or composed by one member of the company. For example, playwright Howard Brenton wrote *Epsom Downs* (Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1977), a portrait of the flat-racing world as a microcosm of English society in 1977, as a commission for Joint Stock. In sources like these, we are privy only to the end-result of the collaborative process as it remains in a text, which leave the study of a writer’s involvement in collaboration somewhat a mystery.

What this thesis will also contribute to this body of work on collaborative composition and devised theatre-making is an investigation and analysis of the hierarchy and power structures of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre, specifically using management theory as a theoretical framework for understanding the complexities of shared authorship within these hierarchies and their impact on the writer’s role and experience. In order to understand the concept of authorship and the role of the writer within

³⁵ John Deeney, ed., *Writing Live: an Investigation of the Relationship between Writing and Live Art* (London: New Playwrights Trust, 1998), pp.6-7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

company-driven collaborative composition, it is imperative to fully understand the working relationships between company members that ultimately impact the writer's contributions.

Finally, this study contributes an analysis of recent work of companies that have only rarely been the subject of academic studies; the field of collaborative writing is expanding rapidly and it is important to understand the different and significant approaches to theatre-making that have been emerging in the last decade so that we may have a framework within which to contextualize work that may emerge in the future. Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter are significant touring companies that produce work that is well-attended and widely-reviewed and plays that are published, but they also conduct professional and educational workshops in order to disseminate their processes to their audiences; they each represent a kind of theatre-making in the UK that is not mainstream per se, but has a considerable following and has been influential on other, younger companies and practitioners in terms of style, ethos and approach.

Much of the existing literature on writing for performance further demonstrates the relative lack of recognition of the specific challenges faced by writers working in collaborative contexts. As this thesis deals with the role of the writer in collaborative contexts, books about the practice of writing for performance such as David Edgar's *How Plays Work* (Nick Hern Books, 2009) and Steve Waters' *The Secret Life of Plays* (Nick Hern Books, 2010) were not particularly relevant to this study, as they deal primarily with the elements of a play such as structure, characters, plot and dialogue within the context of a specifically written, solo practice, rather than a collaborative one. They are analyses of the text and approaches to writing as a solo practice, rather than a study of the different kinds of functions a writer can play within a collaborative context. Although they are both place the practice of writing for performance predominantly within the context of live art, John Deeney's *Writing Live: an Investigation of the Relationship Between the Writer and Live Art*

(New Playwright's Trust, 1998) and John Freeman's *New Performance/New Writing* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) were both helpful in understanding the possibilities and the problematics of the role of the writer within less traditional performance-making contexts.

Methodology

The methods used to research the working methods of and relationships between Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter and the writers with whom they worked consisted of interviews with practitioners involved (primarily writers and directors, but also movement directors and designers as well), company archival material, analysis of the dramatic texts (and, in some cases, drafts of texts), study of the final production and investigation of each company's hierarchy. This thesis has also utilized a number of primary and secondary sources pertaining to historical collaborative practice such as interviews, archival material, dramatic texts and documentation of productions and working processes in order to inform the study of the three contemporary case studies.

One of the central methodological issues in researching this thesis was the lack of access to live observation of rehearsals and development workshops, but the methodological solution applied to this dilemma was threefold: to analyse live and recorded performances of the finished productions, investigate as many drafts of the play texts that were available and interview practitioners that were involved in the process of making each production (as opposed to only the writers and directors), in order to get as complete a picture of the production as possible. At the beginning of this investigation, it seemed ideal to rely on observations of the workshops, research and development processes and rehearsals of each company, but many collaborating companies are wary of (and sometimes loath to) allow outsiders to observe their working process, some being concerned with the secrecy of the process itself while others are concerned with the disruption of the intimacy and privacy that

a closed rehearsal or workshop can afford. For example, although, like Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly conducts public educational workshops, directors Graham and Hoggett are reluctant to invite outsiders into rehearsals and workshops because of ‘practicalities’, as company administrator Alex Turner says; Frantic Assembly rehearsals often involve as many as ten or twelve people in the room at any given time (two directors, actors, multiple designers, stage managers, company interns and work placement students), and there is often not enough space to allow a number of people extraneous to the company and the process into the rehearsal room; additionally, a generous amount of space is needed for physical devising and so the company tries to minimize the number of people present; thirdly, as Turner notes, Graham and Hoggett feel the devising process is an intimate one and outside observation can often feel intrusive for the participants.³⁷ Filter was the only company of the three that allowed their research and development process to be observed during a week of research and development of a new project which will go into rehearsal in 2013.³⁸

Although the companies were reluctant to allow observation of their working processes, each was forthcoming with archival material (video recordings of past productions, production shots, reviews, programmes, play texts and sometimes multiple drafts of play texts), which was instructive in piecing together an analysis of the working relationships between writers and companies. Both the offices of Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly have archives which they open to those studying their work; while Filter does not have an official company archive as such, various members of the company were accommodating in providing archival material. Productions of Shared Experience’s *Brontë* (2005, 2010-2011) and *War and Peace* (1996, 2008), Frantic Assembly’s *pool (no water)* (2006) and *Stockholm* (2007) and Filter’s *Water* (2007) were in London and on tour during

³⁷ Phone call with company administrator Alex Turner, 24 August 2012.

³⁸ Filter Theatre website (2012) <http://www.filtertheatre.com/page/Coming_Soon/> [accessed 24 August 2012].

this study, and therefore the analyses from these performances are derived from the observation of live work, Filter's *Faster* (2003) had been performed long before this study began, and therefore the analysis of that production was derived from a recording of the performance. As this study progressed, it was important to watch recordings of these performances after having seen the live productions years before, in order to make a second, fresher set of observations. (In 2011, Shared Experience gave the bulk of their material to the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance Archives, which is open to the general public and accessible for research purposes.) In terms of accessing play texts for each production, *Brontë*, *War and Peace*, *pool (no water)* and *Stockholm* are published and in print, whereas *Faster* and *Water* are not; therefore it was necessary to request the play texts from the company. Unlike the other productions, writer Stephen Brown was willing and able to share multiple drafts of *Faster*, which proved vital to the investigation of his role in its creation. Unfortunately, while it would have been beneficial to have been able to access multiple drafts of all the play texts in this study, the other writers had not kept old drafts of their work, and were therefore unable to share them.

The most useful approach to understanding the working process of each company was that of personal interview, to which nearly every practitioner involved was willing to consent; as a result, the majority of the most significant research in this thesis is a result of testimony from the practitioners themselves. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the way in which each production was created, as well as the relationship between the writer and the company, from the perspectives of the writers and directors, but also the designers and movement directors. This method is not, of course, without its own drawbacks; practitioners sometimes had trouble recalling the specific details of a workshop or rehearsal; some had trouble elucidating their own descriptions, reflections, explanations and terminology; others were protective of their process, and therefore, reluctant to or wary of elaborating on it; and

many some reports from some practitioners conflicted with the testimony of others involved in that particular project. The best way to resolve this particular methodological problem seemed to be to interview as many people as possible involved not only in the company, but also those external to the company that participated in each production, in order to discern the clearest and fullest description of the company's way of working. Some of the contacts with interviewees were gained through personal connections (which often made the subjects more willing and/or available to be interviewed), while most were made simply by contacting the offices of the companies or the agents of the practitioners. It is interesting to note that most of the interviewees were more willing to discuss work they had already produced, rather than work that was in progress or in discussion; all subjects were willing to meet to speak about their work generally, but they found it more comfortable (and sometimes even useful for themselves) to speak about productions that had already taken place. Although writer Mark Ravenhill was unfortunately unavailable for comment, interviews in other publications, as well as his comments from an unpublished on his work at the Ravenhill 10 Conference at Goldsmiths College proved useful in lieu of a personal interview.³⁹ Many of the questions became standard after some time, in order to be able to compare and contrast different companies' and practitioners' perspectives on particular subjects—such as what was your role in the production, or how would you define collaboration—while others were amended for a particular practitioner or production. The questions often changed during the course of the interviews, becoming more detailed and asking for clarification as the subject revealed more about the process (or did not, as the case may be). One of the most important aspects to each interview was the tone; it was important for each practitioner to feel comfortable speaking about their work, that they would be represented fairly, but that their trade secrets

³⁹ It later became clear to me that Ravenhill may have been reluctant to be interviewed about his work on *pool (no water)* with Frantic Assembly because it was a difficult process and the production itself was not one of Ravenhill's great successes. It is interesting, however, that both Frantic Assembly directors Graham and Hoggett were willing to speak freely about the piece, its difficulties and complexities.

were not going to be revealed to a world of prying eyes, nor obscured by a sea of academic jargon.

In addition to interview, analysis of the final production and the text for performance, a comprehensive analysis of the company hierarchy proved useful to constructing a picture of the different processes that emerged and the relationships between the practitioners involved. The use of management theory has proved fruitful because one of the most significant elements of this investigation has been the analysis of the hierarchies and the power structures of the three primary companies involved. In terms of the methodological or theoretical framework, this thesis is supported by and contributes to a combination of contemporary studies on dramaturgy, collaboration and writing for performance and also studies on management structures and branding, both within the world of the arts and without.⁴⁰ To understand different collaborative compositional processes, it is important to find a way of mapping the patterns of creative influences and systems of decision-making in each company's compositional process; in order to map these patterns and layers of influence, it is imperative to understand the way in which the final artistic decisions are made. An academic study of collaborative and devised theatre is a challenging one because the way in which most collaborating companies work is often unsystematic and resists theorizing—what Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt refer to in the introduction to *Dramaturgy and Performance* as ‘the fixity of concept’ versus ‘the fluidity of performance’.⁴¹ In this case, what is resistant to the fixity of concept is not only the fluidity of performance but also of process and of company hierarchy. The complexity and obscurity of

⁴⁰ For example, see: Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); John Deeney, ed., *Writing Live: an Investigation of the Relationship between Writing and Live Art* (London: New Playwrights Trust, 1998); Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: a Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, eds., *Devising in Process* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Abington: Routledge, 2007).

⁴¹ Turner and Behrndt, p.5.

hierarchy within each company will be clarified and the roles within it will be examined with the help of management theory which will provide a method of systematizing and defining these hierarchies as well as the decision-making process used by each.⁴² Although these theories did not provide an entire framework within which the study was shaped, and in fact that there was no one theoretical framework which seemed appropriate to serve the entire thesis, along with different dramaturgical and performance theories, it helped to provide some structure and illuminate the ambiguities and complexities of the different case studies.

While the work of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter is the central focus of this thesis, the secondary study of earlier, historical approaches to collaboration proved constructive in crystallizing a theory about the possibilities for the writer and the text in collaboration. The work of these three contemporary companies and the writers they commissioned is specific—although they differ in ethos and working methods, they have similar approaches to making work and understanding text and writing; the study of historical approaches to collaboration proved to be more wide-reaching in terms of process and attitudes about the writer’s role and helped to inform an understanding of contemporary, British writer-company collaborative practice by demonstrating the different ways in which writing and collaboration have been conceptualized and implemented in years past.

Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis has a core of three case studies of three different collaborating companies (Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter) and their work with commissioned writers (Helen Edmundson, Mark Ravenhill, Bryony Lavery, Stephen Brown and David Farr)—comparing two different processes used in two different

⁴² See: Charles Handy, *Understanding Organizations* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976); Derek Chong, *Arts Management* (Abington: Routledge, 2002) and Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: the Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organisations* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2006).

productions for each company, within each chapter, in addition to a chapter dealing with the historical precedents of these companies and the historical question of the role of the writer and text in collaboration. This structure will help to illuminate the role of the writer external to the collaborating company by examining the way in which the collaborative process functions from company to company and also changes with the involvement of each different writer. Since the role of the writer changes from one collaborating theatre company to the next (and even from production to production within a single company), the productions of each company have been chosen in order to investigate the possibilities for a writer and also the possibilities for a company that chooses to work with a writer that are created through a collaborative process.

Chapter One is an introduction to the field of study, giving a revisionist overview of the historical origins of new collaborative theatre-making practices, specifically categorizing each production according to the role that the writer, writer/director and/or text played in each. The chapter examines the work of various companies and practitioners who worked collaboratively with writers and writer/directors from German director Erwin Piscator in the 1920s to Joint Stock in England in the 1970s. The three sections into which the chapter is divided will represent three tendencies which have emerged from the development of the writer-company relationship, each falling along a spectrum that encompassing practice highly informed by the writer's role to that which consciously chose not to involve a writer at all, which will enable us to understand the ways in which the roles of the text and writers have shifted over time. The first section, 'The Writer/Director', will examine the work of Erwin Piscator and the Theatre Workshop; the second section, 'The Role of the Writer and the Text Questioned' will examine the work of Jacques Copeau and his students Michel Saint-Denis and Jean-Louis Barrault, Antonin Artaud and The Living Theatre; the third section, 'The Writer-Company Collaboration', will examine the work of The Open Theater and The Joint

Stock Theatre Company. We will use this framework in order to understand the ways in which companies and practitioners perceived the role of the writer and the text, and also the emergence of creative possibilities within this field. Chapter One allows us to put the work of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre into the context of the often groundbreaking work of previous generations of practitioners.

Chapter Two examines the work of Shared Experience, specifically comparing Polly Teale's *Brontë* with Helen Edmundson's *War and Peace*, a comparison which this study will utilize in order to investigate the role of the writer in a collaborative theatre-making process focused on a stage adaptation of an extant text, thus combining the work of both the playwright and the novelist. The stage adaptation of a film, novel or short story is a reflection of the ethos, style and working methods of the producing company, the company's perceptions of the original piece and the way in which all these variables are negotiated within the production's socio-cultural context. The process is especially complex with regards to authorship as stage adaptations entail the work not only of the writer of the text for performance but also that of the author of the original source text (and sometimes translators as well), in addition to the practitioners working on the production such as directors, movement directors and designers who may have an influence on the text. We will compare the process used to adapt *Brontë* with the process used to adapt *War and Peace* because it will allow us to see the way in which Shared Experience alters its compositional process when working with a writer/director (Teale) and a commissioned writer (Edmundson) working with two co-directors (Meckler and Teale).

Chapter Three investigates the work of Frantic Assembly, comparing Mark Ravenhill's *pool (no water)* to Bryony Lavery's *Stockholm* in order to understand how directors Graham and Hoggett have altered their process of working over time in order to adapt to the needs of a variety of different writers external to the permanent artistic

directorship. This study will utilize this comparison in order to investigate the role of the writer in a collaborative theatre-making process focused on developing original texts created by commissioned writers alongside a physical score devised by performers and the artistic directors together. As Shared Experience represents an example of a collaborating company with a focus on adaptation, Frantic Assembly is an example of a company that works collaboratively with writers but also with performers in order to create a physical score which is devised to accompany the text. Graham and Hoggett have worked with a significant number of writers since the inception of the company (rather than a limited number, like Shared Experience and Filter) because, over the years, they have endeavored to find a writer who is able to create a text for the company that allows Graham and Hoggett the opportunity to use it as a framework for devising choreographed movement sequences that are designed to underscore and subvert the spoken language.

Chapter Four examines two Filter productions, Stephen Brown's *Faster* and David Farr's *Water* in order to chart the development of the company from its inception to a more mature work, looking at two different processes. This thesis will use this comparative study in order to examine the role of the writer in a collaborative theatre-making process focused the inclusion of new media, specifically for the creation of complex soundscapes, and also the creation of text not only through written composition but also through improvisation with the performers. Unlike Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly, Filter looks to the performers involved in each production to assist the writer, director or writer/director in composing not only the staging but also the dialogue. Therefore, analysis of their work is an examination of a more performer-centered process.

The conclusion will answer the research questions investigated throughout this thesis, summarizing the findings from each chapter in order to make an assessment regarding the various practices of writer-company collaboration, the greater culture surrounding it and the

role of the writer within it. It will also draw a number of conclusions from the preceding chapters and analyze their implications for students of performance and emerging practitioners that could be applied to future work and research. As theatre-making practice in the UK grows and diversifies, it is important that practitioners and performance scholars continue to expand their understanding of the role of the writer and the text within it.⁴³

⁴³ 'It is vital for the future of British drama that opportunities for production can diversify to match the ever-increasing pool of writers, and support the variety of work arriving from less conventional routes than unsolicited manuscripts sent to producing theatres'. Lane, p.194.

Chapter One

Historical Precedents: A new history of the role of the writer and text in twentieth-century collaborative theatre

Introduction

For theatre practitioners and performance scholars, the examination of the historical tendencies regarding the role of the writer and the text in collaborative theatre is necessary as a prelude to a study of the practices of Frantic Assembly, Shared Experience and Filter Theatre in order to situate these contemporary companies' practices within a tradition of collaboration and writing and be better placed to understand their working methods. In examining the predecessors of contemporary collaborative companies, we are able to understand the socio-political roots of early methods of collaboration, and thus, are better equipped to understand the ways in which contemporary writer-company collaborative practice have evolved. In addition to their completely new contributions to collaborative practice, many of the approaches to collaborative writing used by Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre can be considered what anthropologist Jared Diamond refers to as 'blueprint copying', conscious copying or modification of an extant practice, or 'idea diffusion', accidental imitations which arose from similar cultural circumstances but embodied the same basic idea of an extant practice.⁴⁴ As a result, much of the contemporary companies' work with writers and attitudes towards the text stem from a series of historical tendencies, debates and practices. Developments in twentieth-century collaborative theatre-making generated new possibilities for the creation of performance material and the manipulation of language (written, spoken, gestural and visual) as well as new ways of thinking about the role of the writer or writer/director and the concept of authorship.

Although the companies and practitioners in this chapter have long been the subjects of prior

⁴⁴ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, 3rd edn, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p.224.

studies such as John Elsom's *Post-War British Theatre* (Routledge, 1976), Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington's *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Taylor & Francis, 2007), Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling's *Devising Performance: a Critical History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Catherine Itzin's *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (Methuen, 1998) and Theodore Shank's *American Alternative Theatre* (St. Martin's Press, 1988), this chapter will examine their practices anew through the lens of the writer's role. By situating the collaborative writing practices of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter within the context of a genealogy of writer-company collaboration, not only might the companies themselves gain a better understanding of the extent to which they have been innovative with regard to the role of the writer and the text, but other companies, writers, dramaturgs and performance scholars may also gain an enhanced awareness of distinct ways of working, and also perhaps, possibilities for adapting or modifying their own work as a result.

We will study a series of significant historical examples germane to the ways in which the roles of the text and writers have shifted over time and situate them within a framework of three tendencies which have emerged from the question of the relationship between a company and a writer, each falling along a spectrum that spans from practice that was highly informed by the writer's role to that which consciously chose not to involve a writer at all. The first section, 'The Writer/Director', will examine the work of Erwin Piscator and the Theatre Workshop; the second section, 'The Role of the Writer and the Text Questioned', will examine the work of Jacques Copeau and his students Michel Saint-Denis and Jean-Louis Barrault, Antonin Artaud and The Living Theatre; the third section, 'The Writer-Company Collaboration', will examine the work of The Open Theater and The Joint Stock Theatre Company. We will use this framework in order to understand the ways in which the role of the writer and the text have been perceived and modified over the course of the

twentieth century by addressing several lines of inquiry. Firstly, we attempt to gain an understanding of what was the role of the writer in each historical example in this chapter and why it is significant to this thesis. Secondly, we will examine the role of the text and how it was created (if indeed a text existed) in each study, investigating the common and different characteristics of each company's working methods. Thirdly, we will examine how authorship is viewed and negotiated between practitioners, as well as the implications in terms of the creative agency of the writer. Fourthly, we will question the extent to which each tendency influenced later writers and companies, such as Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter.

Though this thesis is a study of three British collaborative companies and the practitioners involved in each case are mostly British (with the exceptions of Meckler, who is American, and Phillips, who is Canadian), it is necessary to examine historical practices that are not only British (Theatre Workshop, Joint Stock), but also American (The Living Theatre, The Open Theater), French (Copeau, Michel Saint-Denis, Jean-Louis Barrault, Artaud) and German (Erwin Piscator), as the spheres of influence of these historical case studies were international and influenced British theatre. There are significant links not only among the historical practitioners in this chapter but also between these practitioners and Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter—whether in the form of ‘blueprint copying’ or ‘idea diffusion’—which we can use to illuminate the development of collaboration in twentieth century. Christopher Innes notes that ‘[Antonin] Artaud worked both with Roger Blin [...] and with [Jean-Louis] Barrault, [...] and Artaud’s *The Theatre and Its Double* had an almost immediate impact on the American counter-culture theatre groups when finally translated into English’, and also that Artaud’s influence on director Peter Brook led to the establishment of many ‘theatre laboratories’ across Europe, such as Brook’s own

International Centre of Theatre Research.⁴⁵ He continues this explanation of twentieth-century theatre genealogy, saying that, ‘Ariane Mnouchkine is consciously paralleling both Artaud and Brook’, and ‘Eugenio Barba was trained by [Jerzy] Grotowski, and [Joseph] Chaikin by [Julian] Beck and [Judith] Malina, while Grotowski, Brook, and Chaikin had collaborated on joint projects’.⁴⁶ Innes explains that ‘these interconnections chart the mainline avant garde movement’, but for the purpose of this study, it is important to note that these connections also had a significant impact on the possibilities that were created for writer-company collaborative practice.⁴⁷ Within these twentieth-century avant garde theatre movements, many practitioners were only able to develop new collaborative practices by building on previous practitioners from whom they learned or whose work they saw. We may expand upon Innes’s web of creative influence by noting that Piscator not only influenced Bertolt Brecht (who was a member of Piscator’s dramaturgical collective in Berlin in the 1920s) but also Judith Malina (who he taught at the New School for Social Research in New York in the 1940s), who went on to establish The Living Theatre with Julian Beck.⁴⁸ The Living Theatre trained and influenced Joseph Chaikin, who founded The Open Theater, a company that (along with The Living Theatre), greatly influenced the work of Joint Stock’s Artistic Director Max Stafford-Clark.⁴⁹ In addition to Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook, Chaikin was a major influence also of Shared Experience’s Nancy Meckler, whom she met while working in New York in the 1960s.⁵⁰ While on tour with the Berliner Ensemble in Britain in the 1950s, Brecht’s plays impacted on those such as Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop and the Royal Court under the direction of William Gaskill, who later went on to

⁴⁵ Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.71.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Judith Malina, *The Piscator Notebook* (Abington: Routledge, 2012), p.4.

⁴⁹ Philip Roberts and Max Stafford-Clark, *Taking Stock: the Theatre of Max Stafford-Clark* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007), p.31.

⁵⁰ Nancy Meckler. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

found Joint Stock with Stafford-Clark. Jacques Copeau and those who carried on his work such as Michel Saint-Denis (who influenced Gaskill's work) and Jean-Louis Barrault, influenced Ariane Mnouchkine; another influence of Mnouchkine, Brook and Malina's, Artaud had worked with Barrault.⁵¹ Although the historical roots of Frantic Assembly and Filter do not go as deep as those of Shared Experience (a company with a significantly longer history), it is important to note that Bryony Lavery (who worked with Frantic Assembly on *Stockholm*) had collaborated with Caryl Churchill (who worked with Joint Stock) and also Shared Experience (although under the direction of Rebecca Gatward rather than Meckler or Polly Teale),⁵² Guy Retallack (who had directed Filter's *Faster*) and Mark Ravenhill (who wrote Frantic's *pool (no water)*) both worked with Stafford-Clark.⁵³ Filter Artistic Directors Oliver Dimsdale, Ferdy Roberts and Tim Phillips claim the work of Complicite as one of their major guiding artistic influences—whose Artistic Director Simon McBurney was trained at the Jacques LeCoq School, a legacy of Copeau's methods.⁵⁴

This selection of writers, directors and companies has been chosen to demonstrate the ways in which the relationship between the writer and text and collaborative practice originated and subsequently evolved within a particular genealogy. The chronology of this chapter is sometimes discontinuous, as companies, productions and practitioners are grouped with respect to the similar tendencies in their approaches to the role of the writer and the text rather than strictly chronologically; and some productions may be synchronous with others, as they are categorized according to their importance relative to one another in order to outline a series of distinct but related approaches to collaborative creation. It is also important to acknowledge that in addition to the specific selection of writers and companies detailed in this chapter, there are further significant examples of this strand of work who have

⁵¹ Samuel Leiter, *From Stanislavsky to Barrault: Representative Directors of the European Stage* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1991), p. 196.

⁵² Bryony Lavery. Personal interview. 30 April 2009.

⁵³ Guy Retallack. Personal interview. 9 April 2009.

⁵⁴ Ferdy Roberts. Personal interview. 31 July 2008.

contributed to the field of collaborative theatre in general and writer-company collaboration specifically, such as, for example, Complicite, The Federal Theatre Project, Monstrous Regiment, Théâtre du Soleil, The Women's Theatre Group and The Wooster Group.

Although these companies are significant in their own right and have contributed greatly to this field, the writers and companies within this chapter have been chosen specifically to illustrate the three particular tendencies that will illuminate the work with writers of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter. We will begin with the work of Piscator in Germany in the 1920s and finish with the productions created by Joint Stock in England in the 1970s in order to examine the most fruitful time period regarding collaboration and writing in the years predating the early work of Shared Experience under the artistic directorship of Mike Alfreds starting in 1975.

Each tendency of writer-company collaboration represents a discrete approach to the development and/or questioning of the role of the writer and the text that resulted from a process of making work with the purpose of either creating an original production or adapting an extant text for performance. While one approach to this genealogy might have been to discuss only modes of practice that embodied the form of the company-commissioned writer (a narrower aspect of the field), instead, this chapter will investigate the ways in which the role of the writer and of the text have been the result of blueprint copying, idea diffusion or even questioning (sometimes to the point of eradication) within a constellation of practices. Some examples, such as the work of Jacques Copeau, demonstrate the work of companies who were not always focused specifically on the production of a text (at least in the period on which we focus in this chapter); companies such as these did not have designated writers (and, as such, may appear incongruous with other examples in this study) but nonetheless developed techniques to compose material collaboratively and have contributed to the dialogue concerning the role of the writer and text in collaborative theatre-making. As many

practitioners were interested in the ways in which text could adapt to the performing body (rather than vice-versa), this chapter will also examine the work of practitioners who chose not to work with a text or a writer, in order to understand the boundaries of the spectrum of experimentations with collaborative work. In establishing and investigating these groups of collaborative practice, we can attain a better understanding of the ways in which the concept of authorship has changed throughout the twentieth century, as well as the historical precedents which have influenced the working methods of contemporary writer-company collaborations.

1: The Writer/Director

The following section will consider the tradition of the role of the writer/director and the dramaturgical collective and its influence on writing for performance and collaborative practice. It is important to understand this strand of practice in order to illuminate contemporary work created by writer/directors such as Polly Teale and David Farr on *Brontë* and *Water*, respectively. The role that the writer/director plays (whether the writer/artistic director or commissioned writer/director) within the collaborative process is often distinct from that of the commissioned writer collaborating with a director in that the decision-making process, the authorship of the production and the modes they use for writing and scripting often function differently. We will examine the work of Erwin Piscator and Joan Littlewood and The Theatre Workshop in order to understand later permutations of director-led approaches to collaborative creation and the text. Although this is a limited sample of this strand of work, other well-documented, distinguished, historically important practitioners also exemplify this tendency such as Bertolt Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble; the Living Newspapers of The Federal Theatre Project (1935-1939), Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil (1964-present), Peter Brook and the Centre International de Recherche

Théâtrale (1970-present); John McGrath and 7:84 (1971-2008) and more recently, Simon McBurney and Complicite (1983-present). Although these companies are grouped within the same strand of the practice writer/director-company work, that it not to say that all the work made by these practitioners and companies was created solely in this manner; all the aforementioned companies and practitioners also worked to create new texts with designated writers separate from the director and also with extant, classic texts. For example, McGrath also worked as a director with writers outside of his 7:84 company such as Adrian Mitchell and David Maclennan (with whom he started the company), in addition to writing and directing productions himself; Mnouchkine acted as a writer/director in some of her early productions but later worked predominantly with writer Hélène Cixous. By way of example of two different approaches to this strand of collaborative practice, we will examine Piscator's early experiments with multi-authored work in Berlin with his dramaturgical collective on such productions as *Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schweik* (*The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik*, 1928) and one of the most well-known productions Littlewood created through the process of partially-devised scripting with The Theatre Workshop *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1963).

A: Erwin Piscator and the dramaturgical collective

The work director Erwin Piscator (1893-1966) pioneered in Berlin from 1920-1929 marks the beginning of writer-company collaboration as a definable, documented practice in the twentieth century: a way of working with the objective of creating material for performance through the combined efforts primarily of a director and a writer or writers. In order to respond to the problem of what he felt was a lack of compelling dramatic texts relevant to the political crisis in Germany in the aftermath of the First World War Piscator collaborated with a dramaturgical collective, sometimes taking control of a writer's work,

sometimes acting as a writer/director to make new work. Sub-section A will explore the collaborative process Piscator developed in his early creative period as a director and writer/director, while making *Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schweik*, as well as his earlier, lesser-known *Revue Roter Rommel* (*Red Riot Revue*, 1924) and *Sturmflut* (*Tidal Wave*, 1926), using a collaborative approach to scripting, technological innovation in staging and a dramaturgical process informed by a Marxist ideology. His work is illustrative not only of one type of writer/director model of collaboration, but also of methods of adaptation and the concept of the dramaturgical collective, to which we will return in later chapters.

I: Early experiments with multi-authored work

Piscator's frustrations with what he perceived as the limitations of solo-authored, Naturalistic and Realistic, 'bourgeois' play texts resulted from his experience serving in the German Army during the First World War. Disillusioned with the capitalist imperialism that sent millions needlessly to their deaths, he found these plays problematic because they only served to state the problem, rather than suggest a solution for the audience;⁵⁵ he felt that the role of art in society should be that of a vehicle for the proletarian cause, 'a weapon in the class struggle'⁵⁶ that could express the frustrations of a country indelibly changed by war, but needed to find the texts to stage and the writers with whom he could work.⁵⁷ Piscator approached theatre-making from a Marxist perspective, focusing on the economic determination of social forces on the worker, rather than the personal psychologies and individual motivations of 'bourgeois' plays, but felt there was little in the way of extant dramatic writing from which he could draw. As a director often commissioned by the

⁵⁵ Piscator states in 1929 in *Political Theatre*, 'Naturalism is not revolutionary [...] it never got past stating the problem. Cries of exasperation stand where we should hear answers.' Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, transl. by Hugh Rorrison (London: Eyre Methuen Limited, 1980), p.186.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁵⁷ In 1962, Piscator himself wrote, 'The war finally buried bourgeois individualism under a hail of steel and a holocaust of fire. Man, the individual [...] revolving egocentrically around the concept of the self, in fact lies buried beneath a marble slab inscribed "The Unknown Soldier"'. *Ibid.*, p.186.

Communist Party, Piscator was sometimes assigned writers for specific projects designed to convey the aims of the Party. As C.D. Innes concludes:

Established authors were frequently unable to comprehend his aims and uncooperative when asked to revise their work [...] so Piscator wrote his own scripts with the help of his dramaturge, or, when possible, worked in close association with a dramatist instead of accepting finished plays.⁵⁸

Influenced by contemporary Soviet directors such as Meyerhold and Eisenstein, the director felt he must develop a new way of creating texts and working with writers in order to incorporate factual documents such as statistics, photographic images and current news stories, inciting audiences to political revolt by providing answers to the big political questions of the time. This approach to dramatic writing was new and unfamiliar to many writers who struggled with Piscator's vision and subsequent needs for a dramatic text that would accommodate these new technologies.

Piscator developed skills as a writer and a dramaturg, pioneering collaborative methods of scripting both as an artistic application to a political ideology and also as a practical solution to problems regarding the convergence of new forms and new subject matter in performance. Piscator used Marxist ideologies as the dramaturgical basis for working methods he developed, also channelling his exposure to Dadaist influences that utilized randomness and chance to inform his approach to text and theatre-making. Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt note that 'according to Piscator, contemporary theatre did not offer scripts that exemplified this dramaturgy' that 'drew on montage techniques and mobilised all the technical resources of the stage' so his own creative intervention became necessary.⁵⁹ Piscator was not interested in texts commonly written throughout Europe at the time, dealing with the journey of an individual character and his or her emotional, psychological dilemmas; he wanted to stage productions that rooted everyday problems

⁵⁸ C.D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre: the Development of Modern German Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.68.

⁵⁹ Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.59.

experienced by real people that connected politics, history and economics to the human experience.⁶⁰ Turner and Behrndt continue, explaining that Piscator found ‘conventional dramatic structures were too compressed and too closely focused on the individual experience’, so through the use of montage, ‘he was able to present a layered, loosely knit presentation of the action as a series of clearly historicized events—using, for example, filmed interludes, projected text or documentary material’.⁶¹ Additionally, Piscator was able to expand the structure of his project to encompass the multiple voices of his collaborators, incorporating the work of designers, artists and dramaturgs—a development which would prove vital in his later work. In order to do achieve his goals, Piscator expanded his role as a director to that of writer and dramaturg who arranged the different fictional, documentary and visual materials necessary to dramatize the stories he wanted to tell and in the style in which he wanted to stage them. Piscator opened up the channels of production to encompass the notion of ‘author’ as more than one single writer, as being embodied by a collective—himself leading a group of collaborators who could help him work with the writing, presentation, staging and design of his productions. Most importantly, this collaborative approach to production allowed for greater flexibility in terms of the kind of script with which Piscator worked.

Working with writer Felix Gasbarra (who was sent to him by the Communist Party) on his first production *Revue Roter Rummel*, Piscator utilized collaborative methods in order to script focused, politically relevant and up-to-date work in a limited amount of time. Piscator found a means of working with Gasbarra as a director and dramaturg to shape the script and the production, while depicting the political events and ideas in which he was interested in a theatrical fashion within a flexible but structured format by creating a revue.

⁶⁰ John Willett, *The Theatre of the Weimar Republic* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1988), p.108.

⁶¹ Turner and Behrndt, p.59.

Revue Roter Rummel, a commission from the Party, used a series of loosely-connected sketches and songs to bring together the most current information, ideas and images in order to engage the audience in a new way. Depicting the ‘triumph of communism’, the production was designed to provide both entertainment and information for a politically undecided, and thus valuable, audience.⁶² Piscator noted that in compiling the text, he and Gasbarra, ‘put together old material and wrote new material to go with it. Much of it was crudely assembled to add up-to-the-minute material right to the end’.⁶³ Together, Piscator and Gasbarra had devised a method of collaborative scripting that allowed the director to co-author a series of scenes with the writer, giving Piscator more control over the project in order to make the style and content of the piece visually and theatrically exciting to audiences while disseminating a Communist agenda for the Party.

While working on *Sturmflut* (*Tidal Wave*, produced at the Volksbühne), Piscator found that the use of new technologies, such as projections, was necessary to facilitate collaboration with writers to create productions that could illustrate rapidly changing political ideologies. Piscator believed that theatre was not as ‘up to date’ as the newspapers in terms of political events and opinions because it was ‘still too much of a rigid art form predetermined and with a limited effect’, and wanted to create productions that were much more journalistic in that they could be updated regularly in order to keep up with current events.⁶⁴ In explaining his work with writer Janos Barta in 1920 on *Russia’s Day*, Piscator said that they came to understand that the problem was, ‘purely a matter of script’.⁶⁵ Piscator’s work on *Sturmflut* grew from his experience working with Gasbarra on *Revue Roter Rummel* and Barta on *Russia’s Day* and exemplifies his emerging role as a director-dramaturg guiding the collaborative process in order to work with a writer on a commissioned script. *Sturmflut* was

⁶² Shomit Mitter and Maria Shevtsova, eds., *Fifty Key Theatre Directors* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.43.

⁶³ Piscator, p.82.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.48

⁶⁵ Ibid.

a play about the Russian Revolution which the Communist Party had commissioned from playwright Alfons Paquet, with whom Piscator had worked two years previously on the successful *Fahnen* (*Flags*). Since they had worked together before, Piscator was surprised and disappointed when Paquet delivered a script which, in his eyes, was overly symbolic, inconsistent, lacking in factual information and a step back from the progress they had made with *Fahnen*.⁶⁶ While Piscator wanted Paquet to stage the Revolution by capturing a single moment of it, Paquet was more interested in a poetical depiction of the *Zeitgeist* of the Revolution in order to induce audiences to relate to the political events not only intellectually but emotionally as well.⁶⁷ We will further explore the complications and problematics inherent in this type of vision conflict between the writer and the director later in Chapter Three with Frantic Assembly's *pool (no water)* and in Chapter Four with Filter's *Faster*.

Sturmflut was ultimately a seminal moment in the development of the writer's role in collaboration from the writer's perspective as well as the director's; it marked a moment in which it was necessary for a writer to collaborate closely with a director on the text in order to meet his demands, thus sharing the authorship of the production. Piscator filmed images and scenes to be projected during the play to tell the story of the Russian Revolution in the Epic style in which he wanted to tell it, but found that the dynamics and style of the staging (his vision) were at odds with the structure of the script (Paquet's vision). Piscator found a solution in working with Paquet and the performers together during rehearsals to guide the writer in making alterations to the script in order to meet the demands of his elaborate staging and projections. In an essay in 1926, Piscator explained the process, saying they worked to create 'a complete reconstruction' of the text in a new kind of process for his company where he, Paquet, the designers and the performers often had to improvise in the moment to edit,

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.13.

⁶⁷ In the preface to the epic novel *Tidal Wave* (which he wrote at the same time as the play), Paquet writes: 'It is not the history of a revolution [...]. Not a picture of Soviet Russia [...]. It was not a matter of copying reality, but of capturing the motive forces of our times in a few figures [...] in images which would awaken in us the feelings that reality awoke'. Ibid., p.107.

rewrite and stage the script, using ‘their imagination to fill out new avenues and new twists as they occurred’ in rehearsal.⁶⁸ Piscator and Paquet discovered that working on a text in rehearsal allowed the writer to capitalize on the creative input from the company, rewriting the script with the director and reconciling the differing visions of the writer and director for the production. The director noted that Paquet ‘had the experience of seeing important new connections emerge in the moments of intuitive cooperation by all concerned’.⁶⁹ Piscator learned that if he wished to be a pioneer in the development of agitprop theatre and work with writers to do so, he had to find a way of approaching each production anew, relying on collaboration with the writer and the company to inform the dramaturgical process.⁷⁰

II: *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schwejk* and the use of stage design as an element of composition

Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk (*The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schwejk*) is an example of the way in which Piscator adapted a novel to the stage himself as a writer/director by relying on technological innovation and also the help of a dramaturgical collective.⁷¹ Piscator adapted Jaroslav Hašek’s unfinished novel of the same name, about Schweik, a Czech soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Army and the absurdity of his wartime experiences, in collaboration with Brecht, Gasbarra, Leo Lania, designer Traugott Müller, stage manager Otto Richter and cartoonist George Grosz. The group struggled to find a way of compressing the lengthy novel into a two and a half-hour play, and because Hašek had died five years before, the group could neither commission him as the adaptor of his own novel, nor could they consult him on the adaptation they were creating. This study of

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.110-111.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ In 1963, Piscator wrote of the period of 1926-1928 that, ‘my work with actors was very valuable for me [...] Gradually the kind of cooperation which my productions required transformed them into a human and artistic, and in a certain sense also a political community’. Ibid., p.120.

⁷¹ ‘This demand for a dramaturg who might “co-operate creatively” was an extension of a role that was usually confined to decisions concerning repertoire, casting and any necessary editing of play texts. It was Piscator [...] who developed the model of the “dramaturgical collective”’. Turner and Behrndt, p.60.

adaptation within a collaborative setting will be useful in understanding layers of authorship when we address the work of Shared Experience in the next chapter.

Piscator had found an alternative to either having to rely on the work of a single writer or having to work on the text alone that allowed him adapt Hašek's novel by utilizing the skills of his collaborators who helped him realize his vision for the production. As a writer/director, Piscator essentially discovered a way of writing through scenographic innovation, compressing the lengthy novel into a two and a half-hour play. Piscator used projections of Grosz's animations of the people and places Schweik encounters in his travels and also a treadmill on which Schweik could walk continually as a dramaturgical problem-solving device, allowing the performers to move physically without necessitating lengthy exposition—what Piscator had begun to call 'Total Theatre'.⁷² These two inclusions symbolised both Schweik's journey and the seeming endlessness of the First World War, drawing the audience's attention to the greater historical, political and economic forces at work in the main character's life.⁷³ Gasbarra noted that Piscator's decision to use the treadmill meant that Piscator and his dramaturgical collective 'no longer needed a framework other than the original story', 'strictly avoided using any material other than Hašek's original text' and that 'once the staging had been decided upon, the writer had only to compress the essentials of the novel'.⁷⁴ Piscator's dissatisfaction with the plays available to him led him to rely on these new dramaturgical approaches not only in collaboration with writers, but also as a writer/director in order to shape his ideas and resources into cohesive productions which suited the needs of the Epic. The production was what historian John Willett called, 'the most radical and successful of all Piscator's productions', as his major accomplishment was

⁷² Mitter and Shevtsova, p.44.

⁷³ Willett, p.109.

⁷⁴ Piscator, p.259.

finding a way of keeping, ‘so episodic and picturesque a narrative uninterruptedly on the move’.⁷⁵

III: Piscator’s legacy

The processes that Piscator pioneered in developing these three productions is unique in that they were the first significant examples of using a collaborative approach to scripting both with a writer in the rehearsal room and also as a writer/director working with a dramaturgical collective to make new work. Piscator is an important figure in early twentieth-century theatre because he developed new ways of making performance which involved the process of working with writers, dramaturgs, performers and designers as integral to the creation of the text, and, as a result, re-conceptualized the notion of authorship and generated new possibilities for the creation of new performance material. Piscator recognized that in order for theatre to continue to be relevant and politically informative to audiences, it must constantly change to reflect the culture, attitudes and politics of the world in which it is made. In 1967, Piscator’s wife Maria-Ley Piscator noted: ‘The artistic value of a production does not depend on technology, but it may well depend on modern dramaturgy opening new dimensions which can be best reached through technology.’⁷⁶ In making *Schweik* in particular, Piscator not only helped to develop a model for collaborative theatre-making as a writer/director, but also pioneered new ways of using scenography dramaturgically, encouraging practitioners to think more three-dimensionally when working on a text in order to engage with dialogue and space simultaneously. His approach to working with a writer in the rehearsal room in order to alter the text in an immediate fashion was a significant development in collaborative practice that continues today, not only in the three contemporary companies examined in this study, but in numerous other collaborating

⁷⁵ Willett, p.109.

⁷⁶ Maria-Ley Piscator, *The Piscator Experiment: the Political Theatre* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p.16.

companies in the UK and across the world. Piscator also discovered a unique way of approaching adaptation, which we will explore further with the productions of *Shared Experience* in Chapter Two and Filter's *Faster* in Chapter Four.

Piscator created a legacy for himself in America by establishing the Dramatic Workshop with his wife at the New School for Social Research in New York in 1940 after he left Germany in 1937, like many of his compatriots who opposed the Nazi regime. At the Workshop, Piscator trained performers such as Living Theatre director Judith Malina (whose company we will examine later in this chapter), and also sparked the Off-Broadway movement of theatre-making that was less conventional and commercial than Broadway fare with the work he developed at the Studio at the Workshop.⁷⁷ The development of Piscator's authorial vision and the way in which he as a director worked with writers and as a writer/director worked with the text significantly influenced the development of writer-company collaborative practice in the twentieth century, which we will continue to explore later in this chapter.

B: Joan Littlewood, Theatre Workshop and the practice of partially-devised scripting

Piscator's legacy of the politically-driven writer/director-led approach to collaboration is demonstrated most significantly in the UK in the productions of The Theatre Workshop (1945-1974), an ensemble started in Manchester and later based in London at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East. Artistic Director Joan Littlewood (1914-2002) not only worked with writers to create plays that reflected a realistic, working-class lifestyle she felt was little-represented in West End productions at the time, but also acted as an auteur, incorporating the tropes of popular entertainment traditions like cabaret, Pierrot shows and music hall into her productions in order to pioneer a more inventive, physical approach to theatre-making.

⁷⁷ Malina, p.12.

The director grounded Theatre Workshop's productions in text, whether radical versions of canonical texts such as Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1955), original texts by new writers such as Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1959) or her own work as a writer/director such as *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1963), varying the approach to suit the project in question. Although Theatre Workshop had been making work since the 1940s, like Piscator, Littlewood increasingly felt she needed to take an artistic stand against established 'old guard' realism and also a political one against the conservative politics of plays such as those seen in the West End in the 1950s.⁷⁸ She was greatly influenced by the work she and her partner writer Ewan MacColl made in the 1930s using living newspaper and agitprop techniques to create theatrically innovative productions with limited resources. MacColl had been a member of a travelling agitprop theatre company called the Red Megaphones, inspired by Berlin-based Marxist theatre; similarly to Piscator, MacColl and Littlewood relied on the inexpensive, mobile and simplistic sets and costumes used in the staging of agitprop plays in order to create short pieces with a strong political message. Littlewood was the acknowledged foremost creative agent in the company and made most of the major decisions affecting their process and programming, but she felt it was important to collaborate with other practitioners to make work that questioned the standards of contemporary British playwriting: 'My objective in life [...] is to work with other artists—actors, writers, designers, composers—and in collaboration with them, and by means of argument, experimentation and research, to keep the English theatre alive and contemporary'.⁷⁹ Although Littlewood also collaborated with and commissioned writers such as Shelagh Delaney and Brendan Behan to create new texts, sub-

⁷⁸ 'Far from experiencing an overnight revolution in 1956, the British theatre, like society itself, split into opposing camps. The old guard, sensing an external challenge and a shift in attitudes, became ever more protective of its territory and assertive of its values: the West End went on pumping out right-wing propaganda and peddling cosy reassurance. At the same time, a radical generation, principally though not exclusively young, acquired a new militancy and authority.' Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p.93.

⁷⁹ Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.48.

section B will explore the partially-devised scripting process Littlewood developed as a writer/director, while making *Oh! What a Lovely War*, utilising work devised by the performers of The Theatre Workshop, extant historical texts, music hall songs and staging that echoed Piscator's Epic approaches to theatre-making. Despite the fact that it was relatively uncommon at the time, Littlewood's process of devising with performers in order to explore research material as well as develop text and approaches to staging is a tradition that continues to be used today, which we will demonstrate in the next three chapters when we examine approaches to workshopping and devising used by Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter.

I: *Oh! What a Lovely War* and the writer/director-performer collaboration

Similarly to Piscator's problem of the need to adapt *Schweik* as a writer/director with the help of a dramaturgical collective, Littlewood created *Oh! What a Lovely War* in collaboration with Theatre Workshop performers out of necessity, also acting as the writer/director. Before rehearsals started, Theatre Workshop producer Gerry Raffles presented Littlewood with a BBC recording of a series of popular songs sung in music halls and by soldiers in the trenches during the First World War, compiled by Charles Chilton. When faced with a reading of a rough draft of a play based on the concept by writers Ted Allan and Gwynn Thomas, Littlewood rejected it outright, saying she could do a better job herself.⁸⁰ The director felt previous writers' attempts to dramatize the First World War lacked the freshness of a new perspective and the potential she had seen in period songs she knew a modern audience needed in order to be able to maintain an emotional connection with the historical material.⁸¹ Littlewood was looking for something that would both keep audiences

⁸⁰ In her autobiography, Littlewood wrote, 'Gwynn Thomas is a good writer, but he was telling us things we already knew.' Joan Littlewood, *Joan's Book: Joan Littlewood's Peculiar History As She Tells It* (London: Methuen, 1994), p.669.

⁸¹ John Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1976), p.86.

entertained in the kind of old-fashioned, populist tradition of music hall, as well as tell the (at the time) rarely-explored story of the life of the common soldier in the trenches; this initial vision drove Littlewood to take the helm of the project not only as the director directing the devising process and devising the staging conceits, but also acting as the scripting writer in charge of the text. With the support of the company, Littlewood scrapped the original script and starting over to partially devise and partially script the play with the Theatre Workshop, with herself as the scripting writer/director.

Littlewood came to be not only the director but also the writer on *Oh! What a Lovely War* because she believed in a democratic, participatory, collaborative process insofar as it benefited her system of working with practitioners with different skills, but also wanted to work in as efficient a manner as possible. After deciding on her vision for the production, the director came to the conclusion that to act as her own writer while directing a series of workshops to generate material with the performers (which she would then shape) would be the most practical route forward. Although the director maintained, ‘I do not believe in the supremacy of the director, designer, actor or even the writer. It is through collaboration that this knockabout theatre survives and kicks’,⁸² in an interview with Peter Rankin (Littlewood’s personal assistant who worked with her from 1964 until the end of her life in 2002), he noted that Littlewood preferred to be firmly in control of decisions made.⁸³ He explained that she felt the problem with collaboration and the democratic process of devising theatre was that, ‘if people really are all set having their say, it’s very slow’, and wanted to work as efficiently as possible.⁸⁴ He continued: ‘I think when they started Theatre Workshop [...] they did call it a cooperative and they did have meetings, but I think people began to find

⁸² Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p.48.

⁸³ ‘Sometimes you could come up with something that was rejected, and sometimes you’d come up with an idea that would be incorporated. It was always her editing. She used to say, I’m a concierge. She’d say, I’d sit there and watch things go past and I’d say no to some and yes to others. A bit more complicated than that, but she never liked being called a director. She’d say, I’m a saboteur or something or other, but never a director.’ Peter Rankin. Personal interview. 29 November 2007.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

they had a function.’⁸⁵ Although Littlewood believed that everyone in the collaborative process was allowed an opinion and should be able to contribute to the production, she also believed that the process was more efficient when each person had a specific role or ‘function’ and she herself was in charge of the overall vision of the piece.

In creating *Oh! What a Lovely War*, Littlewood acted as a writer/dramaturg by creating the text as the rehearsals progressed and also as a director by guiding the series of highly structured improvised scenes which she then scripted. As the ideas and the material for characters and scenes developed, Littlewood shaped the script and the devising sessions at the same time, allowing one to inform the other. The idea of starting without a script was not common practice for Theatre Workshop; although they had used improvisation and devising techniques to explore classical texts and make dramaturgical changes to new work, they had not produced an entire show in this way before. This particular approach was unique because Littlewood was devising dialogue with performers, scripting and arranging it with the intention of creating a fixed text for performance, but also devising the physicality and staging as well (in the way that Piscator did with his collective). Rankin described the process by explaining that Littlewood would guide the source material from which the company would devise work by bringing in research material on the First World War for them to read, war veterans for them to interview and even inviting in an army sergeant who led the cast through a series of military drills.⁸⁶ Then, the performers would improvise scenes under Littlewood’s direction during rehearsals in the daytime, while the director would take whatever was scripted home in the evenings and ‘put order into it and read and write it out’.⁸⁷ In the mornings before rehearsal, Littlewood would edit what she had scripted from the devising process the night before with what Rankin called a ‘secretary’, and then go over the new scenes with the performers before devising more material, repeating the process all over

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

again.⁸⁸ The process was systematic and methodical and also allowed Littlewood a maximum of control over the material, but it was also laborious and often frustrating for a group of performers used to performing with pre-written scripts rather than devising their own material, having to navigate their way through a wilderness of discussion, experimentation and constant adjustment. Littlewood recalled that during one rehearsal, actress Anne Beach came to her in tears crying, ‘We’re all lost. We’re getting nowhere. Can’t we just do a straightforward play?’. Littlewood replied, ‘If we don’t get lost, we’ll never find a new route’.⁸⁹ Littlewood scripted the work using a variety of material such as improvisations, anecdotes and interjections from the company—whatever she thought helped develop the text, moving the production forward.

In what Diamond would call ‘blueprint copying’, Littlewood drew from traditions not only of Epic theatre but also from music hall in order to create a dramaturgical structure for the script. Like Piscator and his revue, Littlewood created a flexible, episodic structure for the text that allowed for a variety of different scenes and musical numbers; as a result, the shape of the production was a modern interpretation of a music hall show—short comedic scenes patched together between song-and-dance numbers. Using the flexible, episodic dramaturgical structure of music hall and allowing her dramaturgy to be influenced by scenography like Piscator, Littlewood drew on the agitprop techniques she had learned working with MacColl in the 1930s such as projections of images and statistics from the period into the production’s design, and incorporated songs from World War I into the text; the effect was that the statistics of the deaths from the war undercut the glib patriotic propaganda of the songs. *Oh! What a Lovely War* met with great critical and commercial success (such as the 1963 Award for the Grand Prix du Festival at the Paris Festival), being a production rarely seen before by critics and audiences—meticulously and sensitively

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Littlewood, p.683.

researched, but modern in its approach. Although no contemporary company in this study mirrors Littlewood's use of the revue in the structuring of their productions, in an example of 'idea diffusion' rather than 'blueprint copying', when Filter created *Water* with David Farr, they also utilized a flexible, episodic dramaturgical structure in order to incorporate research material, statistics, projections and multiple storylines, which we will demonstrate in Chapter Four.

Oh! What a Lovely War was not only a lengthy process of composing a production and a text in collaboration with a company, involving a process of research and development as well as a devising period, it was also an example of the complexity of authorship of the piece. If one were to speculate as to who was ultimately responsible for the authorship of *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the most likely answer would be primarily Joan Littlewood, and secondarily the ensemble of Theatre Workshop. Littlewood told a story of sitting in a restaurant with Gerry Raffles after the play's opening; someone asked why her name was not on the programme (as the writer) and Raffles responded with, 'She's ashamed of us.'⁹⁰ Littlewood immediately wrote her name on the program and then added, 'For Gerry Raffles, the only begetter of *Oh! What a Lovely War*'.⁹¹ This seemingly incidental anecdote betrays a pronounced attitude regarding the authorship of the play which also affected the working methods and resulting style; although it was tremendously important to Littlewood to have full of artistic control over the play as it was being developed, it was less important to her for her public to know who had the most influence, the most authority over the composition of the piece. What continued to influence younger generations of British practitioners and companies throughout the 1960s and beyond of Theatre Workshop's work were the experimentation with traditional, popular or folk modes of performance, the politically-charged leftist leanings of the productions and also the way in which Littlewood made work

⁹⁰ Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarow, *Improvisation in Drama* (Basingstoke: the Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990), p.694.

⁹¹ Ibid.

as a writer/director.⁹² Even though companies today generally lack a shared, explicit left-wing agenda, her engagement with devising has left a legacy in terms of her approach to dramaturgical structures and developing material with performers for companies such as Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter.

2: The Role of the Writer and the Text Questioned

The following section examines the strand of collaborative practice that questioned and deconstructed the role of the writer and the text, moving both towards and away from text-based theatre-making. Like Section One, this is a limited sample of this strand of work, but other well-documented, historically significant practitioners also exemplify this tendency of questioning and deconstructing text with respect to other elements of theatre-making such as performance, direction and design, such as Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), Eugenio Barba and The Odin Teatret (1964-present), Richard Schechner and The Performance Group (1967-1980, later to become The Wooster Group under the direction of Elizabeth LeCompte in 1980), Split Britches (1980-present) and, more recently, companies such as Gardzienice (1976-present) and Teatr Pieśń Kozła (1996-present). Each group has questioned the role of the writer and the text for different reasons and with different agendas, but the work they achieved while doing so is important to the study of the role of the writer in collaborative theatre in that it allows us to understand the possible limitations of the role of the writer and text and the way they have been explored. In this section we will study the work of Jacques Copeau and his disciples Michel Saint-Denis and Jean-Louis Barrault and their focus on the creative presence and agency of the performer, the writings of Antonin Artaud on the possibilities for and limitations of text and finally the Living Theatre and its experiments

⁹² Of John McGrath, Maria Di Cenzo notes, that he was ‘part of a generation of theatregoers/makers whose conception of theatre’s form and function was being changed by the work of Joan Littlewood’. Maria Di Cenzo, *The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain, 1968-1990: the case of 7:84 (Scotland)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.153.

working collaboratively both with and without a writer. In understanding companies that have previously questioned or downgraded the creation of the text and the role of the writer (or done away with it altogether), we may better understand the parameters within which contemporary companies work today and the future possibilities for the negotiation of text-based practice.

A, I: The *création collective*: Copeau and his disciples

French director Jacques Copeau (1879-1949) is the first practitioner to be chosen for this section because he was the first documented twentieth-century director to experiment with working away from text-based theatre-making by developing a physical, performer-centred approach to collaborative creation. In the 1920s and 30s while Piscator was developing ways of engaging with text and writers in an Epic style, Copeau and his company les Copiaux were experimenting with group improvisation and gestural approaches to storytelling in order to create characters and narratives as an alternative to working with a pre-written script. Sub-section A will explore the ways in which Copeau, Michel Saint-Denis and Jean-Louis Barrault re-examined the role of the writer and the text, prioritizing the creative agency of the performer within the collaborative process and finding new possibilities for a writer-performer relationship. This work is illustrative of early experiments in physical devising and its impact on writing and the writer's role, a subject to which we will return in Chapter Three when we explore the work of Frantic Assembly.

Initially, Copeau's objective was to develop a corporeal approach to actor training in response to what he saw as the restrictions within French theatre regarding the division between the use of text and the use of the body in performance, reinforced by the classical work of the Comédie Française (1680-present) and the naturalism of director André Antoine

(1858-1943), two of the major artistic influences on French theatre at the time.⁹³ Although Copeau had worked predominantly with text before and during the First World War at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in Paris, producing new work by writers such as Jean Scumberger and Roger Martin du Gard as well as older work by Racine and Molière, the director wanted to investigate the relationship between performance material and the performer's creative agency. Copeau came to understand improvisation as a means of encouraging the performers to have a better, deeper understanding of performance in general, as well as specific texts. Robert Gordon commented that as Copeau developed this practice he discovered that 'unscripted play could mediate between the purely intellectual and wholly physical [...] integrating intelligence and physical skills through the development of the imagination'.⁹⁴ Copeau wanted to develop exercises which would encourage the performers to access their own creativity through improvisation and bridge the mind-body divide, which he felt was caused by the discontinuity between the performer's physical presence on stage and the intellectual engagement with the text s/he was performing. In order to do this, Copeau began to move away from using text in rehearsal, instead allowing the performers to improvise material in groups, negotiating 'the purely intellectual and wholly physical'.⁹⁵ Through the application of what Copeau called *création collective* (collective creation) to theatre-making, the company was encouraged to think about the performer as an alternative to the writer as a starting-point for creating work.

Copeau's work with *création collective* led him to reconsider the role of the writer within an ensemble; watching the performers in his company create scenes and characters collectively through improvisation, he realized that there could be a way of working with

⁹³ In 1938, Copeau looked back on his reasons for finding alternative ways of working, saying, 'Naturalism was a dead weight on dramatic inspiration.' John Rudlin and Norman H. Paul, eds., *Copeau: Texts on Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.111.

⁹⁴ Robert Gordon, *The Purpose of Playing: Modern Acting Theories in Perspective* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), p.128.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

writers and performers together in order to create a text. The work with *création collective* allowed the company to be more spontaneous in their performances than they would have been able to have been with text-based work, bringing together physicality and storytelling in a more organic fashion, emphasizing the importance of the unity of the actor's mind and body with the performance material, either scripted or unscripted. Copeau stated, 'I want the poet, having to express himself through the actor, to be as close to him as possible, as associated and incorporated with him as possible, so that the art of one joins with the other'.⁹⁶ Copeau felt that in order for the writer to be able to create texts that capitalized on the abilities and dynamism of the performers, s/he would have to consider new approaches to writing and collaborating with companies.⁹⁷ Copeau's problem with working with writers and extant texts for performance was similar to that of Piscator's—that there were no texts that he felt were suited to his own objectives; Copeau, however, decided instead to focus on working with actors directly to create new material in a workshop environment without a writer, instead of creating new texts for production.

II: Saint-Denis and the rejuvenation of writing

Although there are no records to show that Copeau collaborated with writers during his lifetime specifically to create new work, his interest in working closely with performers and writers together eventually manifested in later years in the work of one of his students, Michel Saint-Denis (1897-1971), who sought a writer with whom he could collaborate and create new texts. In 1929, Saint-Denis took over les Copiaux, renamed it La Compagnie des Quinze and temporarily resettled the company in the Burgundian countryside from 1931-

⁹⁶ Mark Evans, *Jacques Copeau* (Abington: Routledge, 2006), p.49.

⁹⁷ Copeau explained, 'Dramatic craft draws its necessity, form and cohesion only from dramatic invention. All original creators demand an authentic and new expression. Whenever the truth and sincerity of the characters is missing, the form loses all its value by being made empty of meaning. As long as they will never have created, as long as they will patch together the same plots and make travesties of their characters, dramatists will exhaust themselves in vain by manipulating a precious instrument which lends itself to everything'. Rudlin and Paul, p.110.

1934. Saint-Denis developed Copeau's *création collective* by infusing it with different forms of popular theatre such as mime, puppetry and *commedia dell'arte* in order to discover older, more traditional modes of theatricality, the development of which Saint-Denis hoped would help to release his performers from what he felt was the rigidity that resulted from training and practice rooted in performing realistic plays.⁹⁸ What Saint-Denis also discovered was the company's desire to work more independently as a group, which, in turn, encouraged him to consider a company writer who would work alongside himself and the performers to produce texts created to capitalize on the performers' abilities. Saint-Denis stated his aim was to 'produce a homogeneous group of people [...] that can work by itself and for itself; with writers, musicians, mechanics trained to perfection'.⁹⁹ While Piscator aimed to create texts in collaboration because he felt the extant play texts available to him were not suited to his politics and the principles of Epic Theatre and Littlewood wanted to create work that suited her tastes and the nature of The Theatre Workshop, Saint-Denis wished to create texts in collaboration in order to more thoroughly utilize the talents and abilities of the performers in his company, as well as capture the spontaneity of their group improvisations. Gordon emphasizes the legacy of Saint-Denis' collaborative work in Burgundy and his later influences on the British drama school system when he established the London Theatre Studio in 1935:

Group improvisation provided a foundation for the devising of new theatre pieces [...] Saint-Denis believed that dramatists could learn much by watching how a physical and musical language of theatre emerged in the shaping of such spontaneous dramas.¹⁰⁰

Although Saint-Denis never successfully found a writer with whom to collaborate and work as a company writer for his productions, he opened the door for further development of the concept of a dramatist inspired by the 'spontaneous dramas' that came from group

⁹⁸ Frost and Yarrow, p.28.

⁹⁹ Gordon, p.148.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.161.

improvisation. While Piscator discovered new forms of performance by looking forward, through innovation in staging and mechanics, Saint-Denis, like Littlewood and Mnouchkine, looked backward, to older, populist performance traditions to rejuvenate performance and find alternatives to realism, writing and more traditional approaches to theatre-making.

III: Barrault and the surrealism of Claudel

Jean-Louis Barrault (1910-1944), another student of Copeau's who went on to develop his own school of training, went a step further than Copeau or Saint-Denis by applying Copeau's theories of plasticity and spontaneity in performance to that of collaborative work with the writer. Barrault felt that in order to create material that was more dynamic, he needed to work closely with a writer who would have a more three-dimensional awareness in his/her writing in order to create material that reflected the dynamism of performer-centered improvisation. He often collaborated with writer Paul Claudel because his non-realistic writing style appealed to the director.¹⁰¹ Since Barrault had studied *création collective*, he understood the utility of improvised performance in making new work. He wrote:

I want to do my utmost so that young authors may envisage their task not only on the plane of dialogue but on the plane of the whole human being [...]. Expression in the theatre is not confined to conversation, it is a kind of plastic with all the explosiveness that this notion carries with it.¹⁰²

Barrault wanted to work with a writer who would consider not only dialogue but also the presence of performer's physical body in the creation of a text. Wallace Fowlie notes Claudel was unlike any of his predecessors or contemporaries because his plays were, 'composed in opposition to the taste of the day'.¹⁰³ Barrault appreciated that as a writer, Claudel was not simply limited to the logic of the material world, but wanted to experiment with surreal logic

¹⁰¹ Leiter, pp.189 & 196.

¹⁰² Jean-Louis Barrault, *The Theatre of Jean-Louis Barrault*, pref. by Armand Salacrou, transl. by Joseph Chiari (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961), pp.30-31.

¹⁰³ Wallace Fowlie, *Paul Claudel* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1957), p.53.

and malleable rules in order to achieve a higher level of theatricality.¹⁰⁴ Barrault was more committed to the notion of collaborative composition with a commissioned writer than Copeau or Saint-Denis, but there is limited documentation in terms of the ways in which Barrault and Claudel worked together. It is not certain to what extent their relationship was based on a practical collaboration (i.e., working together with actors in a rehearsal room) or an intellectual one (working together through discussion only); therefore it is unclear as to the dynamic of their working relationship, whether or not Barrault was involved in the dramaturgy or the scripting of Claudel's pieces and whether or not there was any participation from devising performers.. Where Piscator developed an approach to collaborative creation in order to rewrite existing texts and create new productions which would communicate his political ideals, Copeau, Saint-Denis and Barrault approached the practice with a focus to endow the performer with creative autonomy in order to create a closer relationship between text and performance. Barrault's contribution to this particular school of performance-making in France was still performer-centered, but symbolized a move toward working with writers to create text

B: Antonin Artaud: the philosophy of the text-performance relationship

Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) was a French writer, director and performer who, like Copeau, Saint-Denis and Barrault, was fascinated by the role of text in performance and the ways in which it could reflect and embody a more three-dimensional, spatially-aware and corporeal approach to theatre-making. As a result of his writings on this subject (more so than his practical work for the theatre), Artaud influenced subsequent generations of practitioners who were concerned with balancing the creative agency of the performer with that of the writer, such as Mnouchkine, Brook, Beck, Malina and Chaikin. Artaud explored styles of

¹⁰⁴ 'Between *Tête d'Or* of 1890 and *Le Soulier de Satin* of 1924, French poetry lived through a period rich with experimentation. From today's point of view Claudel's position is at the very head of the experiments with language which characterize symbolism and surrealism.' *Ibid.*, p.77.

theatre-making in order to reject more realistic and representational styles of theatre; he became interested in the inscription of space with that of physical, ritualized gesture. Artaud's fascination with a more corporeal, dynamic style of theatre encouraged others to consider possibilities for the importance of the unity of space, performance and text, what Piscator would have referred to as Total Theatre. Samuel Leiter concludes that the ideas of Barrault in particular, 'derive to a large extent from Artaud, who stimulated him to see the "simultaneity" of the art in which all theatrical elements form an orchestral unity at the heart of which is the actor, used as completely as possible'.¹⁰⁵ Brook (who, in 1964, directed the *Theatre of Cruelty Season* at the London Academy of Music and the Dramatic Arts, a season of new work inspired by the writings of Artaud) summarized Artaud's work by saying that he railed 'against the sterility of the theatre [...] [and] wrote tracts describing from his imagination and intuition another theatre [...] in which the play, the event itself, stands in place of a text'.¹⁰⁶ Artaud's work prompted Brook to ask in his own seminal treatise on the state of English theatre in 1968, *The Empty Space*, 'Is there another language, just as exacting for the author as a language of words? Is there a language of actions, a language of sounds—a language of word-as-part-of movement...?'.¹⁰⁷ This work illuminates a tradition of theatre-making that considers the role of the text within three-dimensional—sonic and visual—stagecraft, a strand of practice that we will later explore in Chapter Four with the work of Filter.

I: Spoken language and physical gesture

Disillusioned with traditional, text-based European theatre, Artaud wanted to make work which he hoped would emphasize a kind of visceral spontaneity and provide a cathartic release for the audience, but still struggled with the concept of what would be the role of text

¹⁰⁵ Leiter, p.196.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London and St. Albans: Granada Publishing Limited, 1977), p.49.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

within this work—if indeed text was necessary at all. He initially began his career by learning from and performing within a text-based theatre tradition, taking acting classes between 1921 and 1923 from Charles Dullin (another student of Copeau) and performing in Dullin’s plays.¹⁰⁸ He then joined the Surrealist movement in Paris for three years, from 1924-1927, where he, like Piscator, found inspiration from the role which chance, spontaneity and intuition played particularly in the work of the Dadaists.¹⁰⁹ He established the Alfred Jarry Theatre in Paris in 1927, but had to close it in 1930 due to a combination of lack of funding and ongoing disagreements between Artaud and his partners Raymond Aron and Roger Vitrac.¹¹⁰ Artaud’s difficulty in maintaining stable relationships with his artistic collaborators caused him to want to work more and more independently into the 1930s, turning to non-Western performance for inspiration. Artaud was greatly moved by a trip to Mexico in 1935, studying rituals of native tribes, as well as visiting Balinese and Chinese dance troupes which came to Paris around the same time; the ‘otherness’ of these cultures was so foreign to Artaud that it inspired him to attempt to create performances that inspired similar feelings in European audiences. It is important to note that perhaps because Artaud did not speak the language in which these companies performed he did not consider that these companies may have been performing a text; as a result, the dichotomy between text and performance became further entrenched in his mind, encouraging him to reject text entirely in favour of non-text-based performance.

By the 1930s, Artaud had come to the conclusion that spoken language and written text had become stifled in its dramatic incarnation and that theatre was in need of something

¹⁰⁸ Leiter, p.42.

¹⁰⁹ In *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, published in 1924, Breton defined surrealism as a ‘pure psychic automatism, by which an attempt is made to express, either verbally, in writing, or in any other manner, the true functioning of thought, the dictation of thought, in the absence of all control by the reason, excluding any aesthetic or moral preoccupation’. Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, transl. by Richard Howard (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), pp.96 & 97.

¹¹⁰ ‘Although Artaud would write of the need to produce a “manifesto-play, written in collaboration” between the three participants, no such homogeneous arrangement was possible’. Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1993), p.39.

less intellectual and more spiritual. Artaud longed for a theatre that would place as much emphasis on the spatial, physical and visual as on the textual, but felt increasingly that the solution was to discard the written word altogether. In a letter to writer Benjamin Crémieux in 1932, Artaud wrote, ‘To spoken language I am adding another language and trying to restore its old magical efficacy, its power of enchantment, which is integral to words, whose mysterious potential has been forgotten.’¹¹¹ Although Artaud was convinced that text was limited in its power of theatrical expression, ironically, it is his letters and essays which have left a lasting impression rather than his practical work for the stage.¹¹² In 1938, Artaud published *Le Théâtre et son Double (The Theatre and Its Double)*, his most significant body of work, a series of manifestos and essays on the importance of producing work wherein gesture, movement and design were integrated with the spoken word, detailing the importance of finding deeper, more meaningful forms of representation. Artaud wrote, ‘One of the reasons for the stifling atmosphere we live in [...] is our respect for what has been written [...] as if all expression were not finally exhausted, has not arrived at the point where things must break up to begin again, to make a fresh start’.¹¹³ He described an approach to theatre-making that called for a thorough re-evaluation and deconstruction of the text in order to find new artistic forms. Although unlike the other practitioners in this study, Artaud did not use a collaborative method of working, his highly ideological work embodied what Christopher Innes referred to as the ‘base root’ of all avant-garde theatre, the ‘ultimately [...] political position which has determined the almost universal appeal to irrationalism [...] and search for archetypal expression, as well as the return to primitive dramatic forms in

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.81.

¹¹² Ronald Hayman explains: ‘his genius was for using words, and it was here that ambivalence erected the greatest obstacle [...] Artaud was fighting not only against traditional “literature” but against language, often resorting to nonsense and magical incantations in his efforts to transcend its limitations [...] His influence on twentieth-century theatre has been enormous, but it has come mainly through his written formulations.’ Ronald Hayman, *Artaud and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.6-7.

¹¹³ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. by Victor Corti (London: Calder Publications Ltd., 1993), p.55.

ritual'.¹¹⁴ Artaud saw his work as symbolic of a spiritual revolution to free audiences from the risk of a deadening of the soul, which he felt was bound up with both text-based and naturalistic theatre—the two being inextricably linked in his mind. Brook explained that:

[Artaud] wanted that theatre served by a band of dedicated actors and directors who would create out of their own natures an unending succession of violent stage images, bringing about such powerful immediate explosions of human matter that no one would ever again revert to a theatre of anecdote and talk.¹¹⁵

Artaud wanted to encourage a kind of theatre that was so 'cruel', so difficult to watch and understand, that it would completely revolutionize the role of live performance in Western society, elevating it from a mere mode of entertainment to a kind of religious experience. However, he struggled to come to a conclusion as to how or even if the writer could play a role in this new theatre.

II: Artaud's dramatic texts

One paradox of Artaud's work is that despite his rejection of text, he was a writer himself, not only of performance theory but also of play texts, and his work as a writer was focused on finding a way of breaking free from what he perceived as the limitations of text. He was concerned with finding a means of creating a play which connected with the audience directly, the subject matter having been interpreted by the director and performers and then translated into a live performance through a semiotic system conveyed through the performer's gestures and the director's design choices. In *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud wrote, 'We will not act written plays but will attempt to stage productions straight from subjects and facts or known works.'¹¹⁶ Indeed, many of the short texts Artaud wrote for the stage take the form of what he called a 'mime play', such as *The Philosopher's Stone* (1929), or a 'stage synopsis', such as *There is no more Firmament* (1933), which he grouped together

¹¹⁴ Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992* (Abington: Routledge, 1993), p.182.

¹¹⁵ Brook, p.53.

¹¹⁶ Artaud, p.76.

under the umbrella of what he called ‘subject manifesto plays written in collaboration’ (which were, curiously, not written in collaboration with other practitioners), which consisted of a scene or scenes, with a limited amount of dialogue, written in prosaic style.¹¹⁷ In 1935, Artaud wrote and produced *The Cenci*, adapted from Percy Shelley’s tragedy and Stendhal’s translation of a manuscript about the sixteenth-century Italian Cenci family.¹¹⁸ In a letter to André Gide, Artaud wrote, ‘The gestures and the movements in this production are just as important as the dialogue [...] And I think it will be the first time, at least here in France, that a theatrical text has been written in terms of a production’.¹¹⁹ Although Artaud attempted to transcend the necessity of the written and spoken word, his influence was most keenly felt, not in his lifetime, but after his death by those such as Brook, The Living Theatre and The Open Theater.¹²⁰ In doing away with the trappings of traditional sets and costumes, Artaud hoped to reach a higher level of consciousness where the performers would induce a catharsis in the audience, transcending the limitations of the written text.

C: The Living Theatre: questioning the writer’s role

The work of The Living Theatre (1948-present) can be seen as the result of the idea diffusion of the work of companies and practitioners who questioned solo-authored work, experimented with the multi-author model and challenged the primacy of dramatic text in order to achieve a synthesis of dialogue, staging and physicality such as Piscator, Copeau and Artaud.¹²¹ Performance groups with an agenda to make political and/or experimental theatre were few and far between in the United States in the 1950s; after the Second World War and

¹¹⁷ Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works: Volume Two*, transl. by Victor Corti (London: Calder and Boyars Ltd., 1971), p.11.

¹¹⁸ Claude Schumacher and Brian Singleton, eds., *Artaud on Theatre* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), p.159.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.163.

¹²⁰ Barber, p.72.

¹²¹ ‘As Philip Auslander has observed in his study of acting, [...] practitioners as apparently diverse as Brecht, Grotowski and Artaud all stressed the significance of the actors’ self in performance-making (Auslander 1997: 38).’ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p.29.

America's subsequent economic recovery from the depression, New York theatres were more concerned with producing commercially successful musicals than plays that were experimental or overtly political.¹²² While Piscator was teaching at the New School for Social Research in New York in the 1930s and 40s, he had a pupil by the name of Judith Malina (b.1926) who occasionally brought her then-boyfriend Julian Beck (1925-1985) to class to learn the director's methods of dramaturgy and production. Inspired more by the likes of the politically-driven Piscator and the avant-garde Artaud than the more conventional plays and musicals being produced on Broadway at the time, Beck and Malina established The Living Theatre.¹²³ The company is unusual in comparison to the other case studies in this chapter in that Beck and Malina attempted a range of collaborative theatre-making methods whereby they began by working with extant text, collaborated with writers on new pieces and eventually created work through the practice of group writing without any one designated writer. Subsection C will explore the company's trajectory with respect to their engagement with collaborative practice and their deconstruction of and eventual disengagement with the role of the writer and the text from their early work to their first European tour in the mid-to-late-1960s. The Living Theatre is an example of a company that allowed their political aspirations to drive the identity of their company, rather than being impacted by branding strategies, market forces or funding requirements, as many contemporary companies do—an issue to which we will return in subsequent chapters.

¹²²In the opinion of American playwright Edward Albee, 'Throughout most of the 1950s, the American theater was [...] highly parochial, essentially middlebrow, and geared to the alarming proposition that an uneducated audience was the best guide to that which could educate itself toward a more sophisticated consideration of the uses and values of theater as a socially-useful art form.' David A. Crespy, *Off-Off-Broadway Explosion: How Provocative Playwrights of the 1960s Ignited a New American Theater* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2003), p.9.

¹²³'Piscator's Studio Theatre [...] set the standard for experimental theatrical forms in the context of the highest art'. Malina, p.12.

I: Work with writers

Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1959) marks a shift in the company's focus from trying to find an older play appropriate to their philosophy (such as Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* in 1951) to commissioning a writer to create new work in which the writer's text and company's staging complimented each other to create an entire event, rather than restaging an existing play in a more traditional fashion. The Living Theatre first staged plays by Brecht, Stein, Luigi Pirandello and Ezra Pound, but, like Piscator, eventually found staging the work of others unsatisfactory and were driven to find plays that challenged them to find a new way of making theatre. Beck and Malina stated, 'We can only expect that our audience understand and enjoy our purpose, which is that of encouraging the modern poet to write for the theatre'.¹²⁴ *The Connection*, a play about heroin addicts waiting for a delivery in Greenwich Village, portrayed the gritty existence of 'junky Beatnik' life through the surreal mix of jazz, poetic monologues and heightened realistic performances; the actors were encouraged to embody characters closely resembling their own personas and mingle with the audience in order to transform the evening into a total experience.¹²⁵ *The Connection* was one of the few new plays the company had produced working with a writer, and the effectiveness of the seemingly improvised style of the play encouraged the company to experiment with improvisation to keep creating 'authentic' experiences for the audience.¹²⁶ *The Connection* was commercially successful (relative to previous productions) and also received critical acclaim in the form of three Obie Awards (Best New Play, Best New Production and Best Actor), making a name for the company and encouraging them to continue to work with new

¹²⁴ Carlo Silvestro, ed., *The Living Book of the Living Theatre*, intro. by Richard Schechner (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1971), p.1.

¹²⁵ Of *The Connection*, playwright Edward Albee said, 'It was exciting, dangerous, instructive and terrifying—all things theatre should be.' Gussow, Mel, 'Jack Gelber, 71, "Connection" Playwright', *The New York Times* (2003) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/10/obituaries/10GELB.htm>> [accessed 27 April 2010].

¹²⁶ Robert Gordon cites *The Connection* as a product of the popularization of the Actor's Studio technique of improvising to explore 'given circumstances', that it was 'attempting to evoke the surface of everyday experience with its randomness and apparent lack of psychological coherence.' Gordon, p.193.

texts in innovative ways in order to subvert theatrical convention, such as their subsequent production *The Brig* (1963) by Kenneth H. Brown. This creative impulse was similar to Littlewood's desire to create a grittier, more immediate and more political kind of theatricality as an alternative to the popular West End star vehicles being created by her peers at the time.

II: Challenging the text

Throughout the 1960s, The Living Theatre moved away from the process of working with extant texts by single writers and towards the more 'egalitarian' process of what they themselves called 'collective creation', a process of theatre-making that encouraged company members to offer their individual suggestions during rehearsal, on how productions should be staged, rather than relying solely on a director or a writer's vision.¹²⁷ The company had become concerned with the expression of political ideology through the collective scripting and staging of productions—their increasingly experimental methods of theatre making matching their increasingly radical political convictions. The group had become known not only for avant-garde productions, but also for the activism of its members at protests and sit-ins, often being arrested and spending time in jail. As they became more concerned with embodying their political views in their day-to-day living, they felt their practice of staging pre-written texts had become too conventional, and they decided that they needed to experiment with different methods of collaboration in order to fully embody their politics in their creative work.¹²⁸ While The Living Theatre was on tour in Europe from 1964-1968, they created productions such as *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964), *Frankenstein* (1965), *Antigone* (1967) and *Paradise Now* (1968), using a collaborative process that incorporated

¹²⁷Bradford D. Martin, *The Theatre is in the Street: Politics and Performance in Sixties America* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press), p.67.

¹²⁸ 'The base root of all avant garde theatre is an uncompromising rejection of contemporary civilization and existing social structures [...] it is this ultimately political position which has determined the almost universal appeal to irrationalism'. Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p.182.

the emotional responses of the actors to the subject matter through vocal and physical expression, and a dramaturgical framework flexible enough to allow for changes from performance to performance. Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington described the work at that time as, ‘the process of collaboration developed by the company aimed to release participants’ “repressed subconscious” and thereby develop the individual’s creativity’.¹²⁹ This work was infused with Artaud’s concepts of the Theatre of Cruelty and the performer-audience connection,¹³⁰ imagistic physical gestures and Jungian archetypes in order to devise scenes as a way of making left-wing political statements through performance, moving away from developing texts in the process.¹³¹

During this period, The Living Theatre created productions that were partially scripted, but predominantly used physicality, gesture and sound as integral to the performance, moving away from realism and representationalism; their work became increasingly driven by an abstract style of production and performance, embodying expressive gesture and simplistic, improvised language rather than polished dialogue. This was exemplified in their radical adaptation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, a production about violence and human suffering perpetuated within capitalist, individualistic society, originally conceived for the 1965 Venice Biennale. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts describe The Living Theatre’s work as character and plot replaced by physical and collective imagery, demanding audience participation, characterized by ‘large-scale and lengthy performance rituals’, of which *Frankenstein* was no exception.¹³² The production was presented in three acts, turning Shelley’s novel into a public ritual: the exorcism of the Frankenstein monster, as

¹²⁹ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p.35.

¹³⁰ ‘Beck and the Living Theatre wanted language to affect the audience not just in the sentimental way that modern realistic drama attempted to elicit tears or laughter, but rather on a spiritual, transcendental level’. Martin, p.54.

¹³¹ Christopher Innes saw Artaud as a forerunner of many avant garde theatre groups in the 1960s and 70s, as he ‘mirrors the disillusion of the 1960s and 1970s with conventional forms of society and religion, and pioneered experiments with hallucinatory drugs.’ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p.60.

¹³² Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, eds., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.62.

represented by different cast members playing elements such as ‘the ego’, ‘the subconscious’ and ‘the imagination’, which, in turn, represented the destruction of society by the establishment.¹³³ New York Times critic Clive Barnes reviewed *Frankenstein* in 1968, describing it as, ‘non-verbal theatre [...] its emphasis on spectacle and movement,’ noting that it was sometimes ‘repetitious’ and ‘boring’, but ultimately a ‘raw, gutsy and vital’ piece of physical theatre.¹³⁴ An account from an audience member who saw *Frankenstein* at the Round House Theatre in London in 1969 noted, ‘The action was accomplished largely without words, the company preferring to use choric sound (murmurings, groanings, magnified heart beats, etc.) to evoke and suggest rather than state its effects’.¹³⁵ Although the company was still using a text (the *Frankenstein* novel) as a starting point, they had dissected and reassembled the novel to suit their own purposes, rather than creating a play text to act in dialogue with the original source material. The programme from their 1969 Round House performance does acknowledge the production as being based on Shelley’s novel, it does not list a writer for the text, rather citing it as a ‘collective creation’ of the company’s, ‘under the direction’ of Beck and Malina.¹³⁶

Although it is difficult to pin down the exact relationship between The Living Theatre’s collective creation, authorship and the role that writing played in these radical productions of the late-1960s, the programme credits suggest the way in which the production was created. Regarding the actual scripting and recording of the material devised by the performers, accounts from company members are vague, and those from critics and audience members are focused mostly on the design and proxemics, approach to stage time (such as long silences) and the general shock value of the productions. Beck described the company’s

¹³³ The Living Theatre programme for *Frankenstein*. The Round House Theatre, London (1969).

¹³⁴ Clive Barnes, ‘The Living Theatre’s *Frankenstein*’, *The New York Times* (1968) <<http://theater.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=FC77E7DF173BEE62BC4B53DFB6678383679ED>> [accessed April 26, 2010].

¹³⁵ Jinnie Schiele, *Off-Centre Stages: Fringe Theatre at the Open Space and the Round House 1968-1983* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press and London: Society for Theatrical Research, 2005), pp.155-156.

¹³⁶ The Living Theatre programme for *Frankenstein*. The Round House Theatre, London (1969).

process by saying, ‘we find an idea that we want to express physically. Then we do what is necessary to realize it. [...] Whenever we work physically we find things that we never could find if we did nothing but think,’ which is typical of other company members’ elusive descriptions of their methods of working.¹³⁷ However, what is significant is that, like Artaud, Beck emphasized the physical aspect of the company’s work, rather than the literary element, framing those two aspects of performance as binary opposites and giving little-to-no priority to the survival of a play text beyond the performance.¹³⁸ In their 1965 proposal to the Biennale committee, Beck wrote he hoped they would appreciate

a work in the tradition of Artaud’s concept of a non-literary theatre which, through ritual, horror and spectacle might become an even more valid theatrical event than much of the wordy theatre of Ideas which has dominated our stages for so long.¹³⁹

Theodore Shank noted *Frankenstein* had been ‘developed collectively by the company as a whole through research, improvisation, and discussion, then was shaped and put into focus by Beck and Malina’.¹⁴⁰ Although *Frankenstein* had no set text (it was a continually changing piece within which the performers could improvise), it still demonstrated a traditional three-act dramaturgical structure, as evidenced by the programme notes that survive the performance.¹⁴¹ Like Littlewood, Beck and Malina resorted to acting as writer/directors or director/dramaturgs in order to gather the material scripted and devised in rehearsal collaboratively by the performers into a single performance text, in order to at least have a blueprint from which to work, if not a play text that would survive the production; the collaborative process of consensus-based decision making had become laborious, slow and overly complicated, and Beck noted, ‘it was no longer possible to have twenty-five directors

¹³⁷ Silvestro, p.61.

¹³⁸ ‘*Theatre and Its Double* [...] persuaded many artists, particularly those associated with the Living Theatre, to work with Artaud’s playwriting experiments that explored language in visceral ways, moving beyond linear meaning to drama that excited the five senses and created an emotional truth beyond the logic of traditional dramatic structure’. Crespy, p.23.

¹³⁹ John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), p.208.

¹⁴⁰ Theodore Shank, *American Alternative Theatre* (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1982), p.16.

¹⁴¹ The Living Theatre programme for *Frankenstein*. The Round House Theatre, London (1969).

on stage'.¹⁴² In the end, Beck and Malina acted as the authorial voices on the production, making the final decisions, composing the text for performance and arranging the material devised by the company into a coherent whole. In Chapter Two we will return to this question of the primacy not only of the writer but also of the director when we investigate the process that Nancy Meckler developed from her years in New York as a young theatre-maker experimenting with consensus-driven devised work (in parallel with companies such as The Living Theatre) through to her years as the Artistic Director of Shared Experience developing director and writer-led methods of collaboration.

3: The Writer-Company Collaboration

The following section examines the strand of collaborative theatre-making that explored possible relationships between writers and companies as well as writers and directors, prioritizing the creation of a dramatic text that would survive beyond the performance. We will examine the work of The Open Theater and Joint Stock and their work with writers, but as in Sections One and Two, it is important to keep in mind that this is a selected sample of this strand of work. Other well-documented, historically noteworthy practitioners also exemplify this tendency of writer-company collaborative practice such as The San Francisco Mime Troupe (1959-present), Café La MaMa (1961-present, now known as La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club), The Women's Theatre Group (1973-present, now known as Sphinx Theatre, who initially devised work as a company and later commissioned writers) and Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company (1975-1993) who prioritized the creation of the text and worked with both commissioned and company writers such as R.G. Davis, Sharon Lockwood, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Lanford Wilson, Sam Shepard, Charlotte Keatley, Eileen Fairweather, Melissa Murraray, Gillian Hannah, Bryony Lavery and Caryl Churchill,

¹⁴² Martin, p.69.

respectively. Each company has conceived of the writer-company collaboration differently, and for some companies the process changed for each production.¹⁴³ In the following section we will examine the two different approaches to writer-company collaborative practice and authorship by looking at the work of The Open Theater with writer Megan Terry and that of Joint Stock with Caryl Churchill. This section is particularly significant to this thesis, as it explores a historical practice that is most closely related to that of companies working with writers today, such as Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter, and creates a useful historical parallel to their work.

A: The Open Theater: working towards writer-director co-creation

The Open Theater (1963-1973) was founded in New York by director Joseph Chaikin (1935-2003), and stands alone in this history of collaborative composition as the first company to be committed specifically to working directly with designated, commissioned writers to create a text alongside the performers, under the supervision of a director. Working with writers like Megan Terry, Jean-Claude van Italie and Sam Shepard, Chaikin used hundreds of different improvisation exercises in order to encourage his company of performers to create pieces that embodied a variety of distinct voices and unique visual motifs created physically. Productions such as *Viet Rock* (1968), *The Serpent* (1968) and *Terminal* (1970) dealt with themes such as politics, death and the emotionally crippling limitations of societal norms by establishing their own language, a mix of physicality, gesture, spoken words, wordless sounds and song, collated and organized into a text by the company writer. In 1966, Schechner said, ‘Playwrights are an important part of the Open

¹⁴³ Of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Susan Vaneta Mason wrote: ‘The troupe has experimented with collective playwriting since 1970, and although there is no formula, today most shows are created in a quasi-collective process. [...] All company members research each the topic, and most shows are written by more than one person, sometimes a team of five or more, working with one or more lyricists. [...] A show usually has one director, who as in traditional theatre has complete artistic authority over it.’ Susan Vaneta Mason, ed., *The San Francisco Mime Troupe Reader* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2005), p.4.

Theater,’ and cited Chaikin as saying: ‘These pieces are inspired by the actors’ work [...] there’s a give-and-take. After the writer has suggested a form [...] we begin to improvise with them. [...] the mode of language depends on the form of the improvisation, its goals, and our own warm-up’.¹⁴⁴ The company relied on a system guided by Chaikin’s own direction; a writer would suggest an idea to the performers on which they could expand through structured improvisations, led by the director. We can see this practice as being part of this long and complex legacy of collaborative creation, particularly focused on combining the textual with the visual and physical: Piscator’s inscription through scenography, the *création collective* of les Copiaux and The Living Theatre’s concentration on the physicality and gesture devised by the performer. This section will explore the ways in which The Open Theater conceived the role of the writer and the text in collaboration with the preoccupations and goals of both the director and the performers, ultimately attempting to come to an understanding about the problematic nature of authorship in collaboration.

I: Working with writers

Having been a member of The Living Theatre, Chaikin wanted to move away from their approach to theatre as propaganda for political radicalism, focusing instead on the creative agency of the commissioned writer (as well as the performer) through experiments with devising and collaboration in the rehearsal room, finding that the possibilities for the creation of text would give his company a way of focusing their energies collectively.¹⁴⁵ The Open Theater was primarily concerned with capturing what they saw as the personal, immediate creative impulses of the performer in his or her purest state, exploring the incongruity between the inner private life and the outer façade of the individual functioning within society through improvisation, working with a writer in order to record and structure

¹⁴⁴ Megan Terry, *Viet Rock and Other Plays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p.9.

¹⁴⁵ Arthur Sainer, *The New Radical Theatre Notebook* (New York: Applause Books, 1997), p.4.

the material. Chaikin was searching for new forms of expression produced through the relationship between the writer and the performer, communicating in live performance what might otherwise be incommunicable in everyday life through a non-naturalistic style of rhythm, gesture and song to accompany dialogue. Chaikin and the company chose to characterize the outer as being represented by dialogue and recognizable, everyday gestures, while the inner was represented by expressionistic movement, non-lingual vocalization or song. As Robert Baker-White notes:

The Open Theater [...] explored the possibilities of both actorly improvisation and textual creation in the process of their workshop exercises. Thus, more than any other prominent experimental group of that period, Chaikin's collaboration achieved a balance of exact language and improvised action in performance [...] Chaikin himself characterizes the place of dramatic language in the collective process in terms of structure: "the text gives a structure for the playing out of the story, and includes places for the company to improvise".¹⁴⁶

This particular approach to working was appealing to the company because it combined the tangible issue of helping a writer create a text for performance with the more ephemeral problem of expression of the inner, or the subconscious, in performance. The imprecision of improvisation as useful for exploration, and exactitude of writing as useful for composition and organization were also seen as two complimentary parts of a whole for a collaborative practice, rather than the binary and incompatible opposites that The Living Theatre had conceived of them.

On the whole (or at least before the more problematic era of the early-1970s), the writers involved with The Open Theater found working with the performers and Chaikin fruitful because it allowed them to have access to an immediate source of inspiration in the form of instinctive but structured devised material that could be adjusted according to the writer's needs. Terry in particular saw working as a writer with a devising company as a more progressive, interesting way of working than writing alone. In a 1981 interview with

¹⁴⁶ Robert Baker-White, *The Text in Play: Representations of Rehearsal in Modern Drama* (London: Associated University Press, 1999), p.174.

Dinah Leavitt, she reflected that, ‘With the playwriting techniques we discovered or rediscovered in the sixties you can explore interior states. You can dramatize the interior state of being. Once inside one’s head, body or soul, it’s vast’.¹⁴⁷ What Terry found interesting was the struggle for reconciliation between the interior and the exterior and how the dialogic and physical representations of this struggle could be developed through improvisation in workshops, and later depicted in performance. In working with the same group of performers on a regular basis, through observation (mediated either by their own interjections or Chaikin’s directions), writers like Terry developed a way of channelling the physical, emotional and intellectual responses to various games and imagined scenarios.¹⁴⁸

II: *Viet Rock* and the writer-driven devising process

Viet Rock (1966), the first significant Open Theater production in which the material was created through improvisation, but organized and scripted by a writer; it forged the way for future productions and established the company’s trademark style of combining strong physical images and rhythm with improvised dialogue. The production was structured by Megan Terry around a series of improvisations on the theme of violence and the Vietnam War, devised by the company and sometimes supervised by Chaikin who helped with the staging.¹⁴⁹ *Viet Rock* was produced at Café La MaMa in New York as part of a six-month long residency in which the Open Theatre made the transition from making work solely as part of workshop explorations to making productions to be performed in front of an audience, La MaMa Artistic Director Ellen Stewart had to talk Chaikin into making what he felt was a

¹⁴⁷ Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins, eds., *Women in American Theatre: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1981), p.329.

¹⁴⁸ ‘This interest in childhood, games and the influence of developmental psychology was reflected in the content of many of the devised performances of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Open Theater’s *Mutation Show*’. Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: a Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.34.

¹⁴⁹ Shank, p.38.

great and uncertain leap for the company.¹⁵⁰ Terry essentially ran the workshops to devise work for the project, using Chaikin's exercises developed with the company in order to devise material. When interviewed by Robert Pasolli, Terry said, 'The playwright experiments with the actors on movement and visual images, but then he goes home and writes the play, including the words'.¹⁵¹ Pasolli adds that Terry's description was a simplification, and that 'in the case of a workshop-created play it is really not possible objectively to separate the writer's contributions from those of the actors. Most of the *Viet Rock* cast considered themselves authors also.'¹⁵² Much like *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the complex nature of the devising, scripting and authoring of *Viet Rock* is reflected in the existing dramatic text; the script is characterized by detailed stage directions (how and where the actors move their bodies and what each action is meant to represent), lengthy and surreal songs interspersed throughout (often designed to represent the characters' 'inner') and fluid but disorienting scene and character changes. *Viet Rock* combines The Living Theatre's use of expressive, imagistic physicality with a tendency toward a more structured, linear, traditionally dialogic approach to scripting.¹⁵³ Pasolli notes that the performers were 'especially sensitive to changes of staging or dialogue, to realignment of priorities, to Miss Terry's assumption of total control over the production'.¹⁵⁴ The issue of authorship, which was not considered to be important in the early days of the then-unknown Open Theater, became a source of conflict and debate as the company began to produce work publicly and become known in New York and beyond. The issue of the writer having ultimate control of what was printed in the performance text became an important one, since the company used a

¹⁵⁰ Stephen J. Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp.176-177.

¹⁵¹ Robert Pasolli, *A Book on the Open Theater* (New York: the Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), p.80.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ 'Viet Rock fully embodied the Open Theater's conviction that actors were creative artists rather than mere interpreters of a playwright's word; but that a playwright was also needed to give form and voice to their experiments.' Bottoms, p.179.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

fixed script for performances, as opposed to improvising a different version of the play within a structure for every performance—like the Living Theatre’s *Frankenstein*. Ultimately, Terry faced the problematic issue of authorship and control over the piece not only with the cast but also with Chaikin; the main conflict between the two was that Chaikin wanted the play to have ‘an angrier tone’ and ‘a more overt antiwar message’ than Terry had given it, but the writer disagreed, saying that she felt her already antiwar, liberal audiences needed to see a play with a more ironic approach.¹⁵⁵ After Terry’s refusal of these changes, when the play transferred from La MaMa to the Yale School of Drama, Chaikin was so unhappy with the outcome of this failed authorial negotiation that he asked Terry to take the Open Theatre name off the programme for *Viet Rock*.¹⁵⁶ We will return to the issue of company hierarchies, authorship and creative discord later in this thesis, particularly in Chapter Three when we investigate the conflicts between Frantic Assembly and Mark Ravenhill with *pool (no water)* and in Chapter Four when we consider the roles of the different writers hired to work on *Faster*.

What made the productions of The Open Theater distinctive—the inability to tell what the performers and what the writer created, the fluidity of movement and dialogue—also eventually created discord within the company. And the conflict surrounding *Viet Rock* was not an isolated incident. The Open Theater closed in 1973 as a result of ongoing disagreements within the company about nature of the work, approaches to devising and workshops and the problems inherent in writing, authorship and ownership of the material. After the company folded, Chaikin himself stated that he felt he had never found a satisfactory system of working with a writer in collaboration and perhaps because of this, the importance of the writer decreased with each production.¹⁵⁷ What seemed to be the key issue throughout the history of the company was that the hierarchy was never entirely clear—that

¹⁵⁵ Bottoms, p.179.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.180.

¹⁵⁷ Shank, p.49.

the democratic ideals of the ways in which decisions were made were not always adhered to, rather that Chaikin felt that he was the foremost leader of the company. Pasolli's observation on Chaikin's role was that, 'Chaikin is the leader of the troupe but seems not to be; he controls practically everything while giving the impression of controlling practically nothing.'¹⁵⁸ After watching a series of workshops and performances, Pasolli describes the relationship of the writer to the workshopping process as 'elusive', and although the fact that each writer participated in the workshops with Chaikin and the performers before working on the text, the process changed 'from project to project and from writer to writer', 'obscured by the day to day interactions of twenty to thirty people'.¹⁵⁹ The element of the collaborative process that once was so attractive to The Open Theater had become problematic; the practice of allowing a writer access to the director-led devising process complicated the issue of authorship once the resulting production was scripted and staged. The writer in each project had to make certain editorial decisions in order to create a coherent script based on their own judgment and taste; the performers, having created material that went into the script felt ownership over the piece, but often, also felt a sense of betrayal over the decisions that were made within the text of what material was kept and what was cut. 'When the work is done and ready to be shown publicly, one can look back and say that the writer structured the workshop investigation to make it understandable to outsiders. In doing so, he asserted his own personality and vision, to the extent sometimes of radically altering the actors' private investigation'.¹⁶⁰ This issue of authorial conflict was intensified by the already ambiguous company hierarchy where Chaikin was ultimately in control, even though he attempted to preserve the illusion that influential decisions were made collectively.

¹⁵⁸ Pasolli, pp.10 & 11.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.36.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

B: Joint Stock: serving the writer

The Joint Stock Theatre Company (1974-1989) is, arguably, the most influential company in this chapter for both writers and collaborative companies in the UK today in terms of the model of working that it created over a number of years. With a particular focus on the role of the writer and the text, Joint Stock is an amalgamation of the practical and ideological approaches to the creation of text and collaboration of the Living Theatre, the Open Theater, the Epic Theatre tradition of Piscator and Brecht, and Copeau's legacy of *création collective*. Joint Stock was established by William Gaskill (Artistic Director at the Royal Court from 1965-1972), Max Stafford-Clark (Artistic Director from 1979-1993), David Hare (the Royal Court Theatre's literary manager at the time) and David Aukin, but was run predominantly by Stafford-Clark after the first few years. The company defined and firmly established the notion of 'workshop' within a British context as means of helping a writer develop a script by drawing from the practice of company-led research and discussion through structured improvisation. Joint Stock adapted The Open Theater method of using director-led, structured improvisation to help the writer create a script by infusing it with what they felt was a Brechtian emphasis on the materialist perspective—rooting their work in specific cultural or historical contexts and using the concept of economic determination of social forces as a dramaturgical framework for devising and writing. Subsection B will explore their particular approach to the writer-company collaboration, the significant role of the text and the all-important writer-director relationship that laid the foundation for future models of working.

I: A commitment to writing

Joint Stock was one of many left-wing theatre companies to emerge during the 1970s in the UK that embraced a practice that combined text-based work with devising, along with

others such as Monstrous Regiment, The Women's Theatre Group, Gay Sweatshop (1975-1997) and 7:84, but one of the few that were committed to commissioning work by new writers. One of Monstrous Regiment's founding members Gillian Hanna stated in an interview in 1978 that Joint Stock was one of the only companies she knew that worked collaboratively and commissioned writers, and that rather than doing so with a political agenda at the forefront of the work (like her own companies and many of her contemporaries), 'they don't have a reason for doing what they are doing over and above the desire to produce good theatre work with new writers'.¹⁶¹ Joint Stock worked with a series of writers such as Caryl Churchill, David Hare, Howard Brenton and Timberlake Wertenbaker and left as a legacy, not only a series of plays became highly influential additions to the British literary canon, but also an approach to writer-company collaboration that is still visible in collaborative British theatre-making today.

Joint Stock represents a particularly British, literary development of collaborative creation that focused on the role of the writer, more so than any other company previously discussed in this chapter, and their methods were created by directors with particular goals concerning the development of the text and the relationship with the writer in mind. In the beginning, Joint Stock was greatly influenced by Gaskill's interest in the French approach to collaborative composition, going back to the principles of Copeau's teachings. Gaskill established the Royal Court's Writer's Group in 1958, stating that he wanted the group to embrace a more active, physical workshopping process than simply reading scripts and discussing them: 'The class would be an acting class in which everyone would take part. We would learn what we wanted to find out about theatre by doing it'.¹⁶² This tendency to develop written work through physical embodiment was, as Gaskill noted, partly inspired by

¹⁶¹ Interview with Gillian Hanna by Peter Hulton', in *Theatre Papers: Second Series*, ed. by Peter Hulton, 8 (1978), p.12.

¹⁶² William Gaskill, *A Sense of Direction: Life at the Royal Court* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1988), p.36.

previous Royal Court Artistic Director George Devine (who had worked with Michel Saint-Denis at the Old Vic Theatre School) and partly inspired by Gaskill's years studying mime in Paris with Étienne Decroux (who himself had been taught by Jean-Louis Barrault) in the early 1950s.¹⁶³ The combination of the French influence of creating work through physicality and *création collective* and Gaskill's privileging of new writing development manifested itself in the form of an alternative approach to writing and theatre-making through collective experimentation at the Royal Court.¹⁶⁴ Gaskill's method was rooted in a belief that, 'when the writer feels part of the theatrical process, [...] his work will be better than if he wanders in isolation.'¹⁶⁵ He felt that a writer's work would be enriched if he or she was fully integrated into the collaborative process directors undergo with actors and designers, the script being an object of discussion and negotiation in the same way that the sound or lighting design had always been.¹⁶⁶

Stafford-Clark in particular felt that the role of the writer in the collaborative process was a highly important one and wanted to combine the more radical method of collaboration through devising and collaboration pioneered by The Living Theatre and The Open Theater with the more structured approaches to playwriting that Gaskill had been developing at the Royal Court's Writer's Group. Stafford-Clark noted, 'Largely ignorant of Brecht and European models, my big influences have been the wild American companies: the Open Theater, the La MaMa and the Living Theatre'.¹⁶⁷ Stafford-Clark did not consider these companies 'writers' theatres' and felt 'the writer played quite a small part in that movement', but at the same time also thought they had created 'a new language' which was 'electric and

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp.5-6.

¹⁶⁴ 'The modern notion of the playwright-in-residence is a direct legacy of Copeau's practice, and [...] Copeau would certainly have approved of the integrated collaborative approach of companies such as Joint Stock [...] where the writer, the director, the designer and the performers come together towards following the achievement of Copeau's "single act".' Evans, p.50.

¹⁶⁵ Gaskill, p.141.

¹⁶⁶ 'The whole area of performance art and non-literary theatre is something else. If all writers were qualified directors we would cease to exist.' Ibid., p.140.

¹⁶⁷ Roberts and Stafford-Clark, p.31.

interesting' as well as infused with political conviction.¹⁶⁸ He valued the impact of the creative agency of the performers on the writer's working process and ability to think three-dimensionally with regard to the text.

Like Chaikin's position in The Open Theater or Littlewood's role in Theatre Workshop, Joint Stock was another company that, while working with writers and performers together to devise work and develop scripts, was overwhelmingly director-driven. Joint Stock was created with the goal in mind that productions would be the result of a democratic process of collective decision making wherein each major decision would be brought to a vote of all the members; theoretically, since the performers would make up the majority of the company and their creative work would feed into the productions, their views and opinions were as valid as the writers and directors. However, many such meetings were held, but the two figures who were most influential in the company were ultimately Gaskill and Stafford-Clark. After working on *A Mad World My Masters* with Joint Stock in 1977, actor Simon Callow bitterly recalled his experience, claiming that Joint Stock was a 'directocracy' and its methods represented 'the tastes of its directors', 'the Joint Stock style was the Bill Gaskill style, the Max Stafford-Clark style'.¹⁶⁹ Callow maintained that Joint Stock, its methods and the productions it staged were reliant on what Gaskill and Stafford-Clark wanted to produce and the way in which they wanted to work. Billington supported this statement, commenting that within Joint Stock, 'Directorial taste remained a dominant factor' and collaboration was almost never synonymous with egalitarianism and democracy.¹⁷⁰ It is important to remember that, in this particular context, although the writer was upheld as playing a vital role in the company, the decisions made by the directors affected the structure of the company, the subject matter of the research, the types of exercises used in improvisations and the style of the productions.

¹⁶⁸ Little and McLoughlin, p.106.

¹⁶⁹ Simon Callow, *Being an Actor* (London: Methuen, 1984), p.64.

¹⁷⁰ Billington, p.267.

II: *Fanshen*, *Cloud Nine* and the writer's workshop

In contrast to The Open Theater, Stafford-Clark indicated that when the workshop period was finished, the company was satisfied to relinquish control to the writer, irrespective of how accurately the resulting text would reflect the workshop, which indicates that there was a greater level of trust between the writer and the company than there had been with The Open Theater. The first production for which Joint Stock chose to use a designated writer was the 1975 production of *Fanshen*, scripted by David Hare through one month-long workshop with the company, directed by Stafford-Clark and Gaskill. In Stafford-Clark's accounts of the workshops and rehearsal process, there is no statement regarding why the company decided to use a writer, but did state that, 'the book was over six hundred pages: the purpose of the workshop was to find some way of showing [Hare] how it could be dramatized'.¹⁷¹ *Fanshen* was the adaptation of a book by William Hinton of the same name about the communization of a small village in China after the Second World War; the company had found the political subject matter engaging, but turned to Hare to help them digest it, create a coherent storyline and make it performable. Stafford-Clark noted:

At the end of the workshop, you say to the writer: "Here's all this material we've researched. Now you can write a play about North Sea Oil exploration if you want, but that's the work we've done." And certainly early on with *Fanshen*, we explored a lot of stuff about women with bound feet, but it was of no interest to David Hare at all. It was, however, fascinating for *us* to become acquainted with that world.¹⁷²

One element that sets Joint Stock apart from the other companies in this chapter is that they allowed the writers with whom they worked a great deal of freedom with the devised material, despite (or perhaps because of) the amount of control imposed on the company by the directors. What Stafford-Clark says about Hare's role in the process indicates a great deal of trust, that he and the company trusted Hare to create a script with which they could work

¹⁷¹ Roberts and Stafford-Clark, p.31.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.36.

without constantly monitoring his process in the sixteen weeks Hare had to script it between the workshop and the rehearsal period. This is explained by the fact that Hare was a founding member of the company, he was previously a writer-in-residence at the Royal Court and that the company had been established from the beginning under the guise that the role of the writer would be central to Joint Stock's work. Stafford-Clark noted that even though Hare discarded much of what the company had researched and improvised, the workshop had been worthwhile because it had not only given them a background of information on the world of the play to use in rehearsals, but established a way of working with writers that would endure throughout the life of the company. Stafford-Clark stated that he, Gaskill and the company struggled to understand and identify with the material, but enjoyed the fact that it helped them come to an understanding about the kind of collaborative process that was productive for them.¹⁷³

As a result of the process that was used to create *Fanshen*, Joint Stock had developed a distinctive approach to collaboration and writing wherein the workshopping, devising and research process with the company was designed to serve the needs of the writer. This process was then applied to subsequent productions commissioned by the company such as Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979), a play dealing with sexuality in colonial East Africa and postcolonial Britain as a satire of historical and contemporary perceptions of race and gender. The first half of the play takes place in Victorian colonial Africa while the second is set in Britain in 1979; the themes of gender and sexuality are represented by casting against age and gender, symbolizing the rapidly changing social mores in contemporary British

¹⁷³ 'David Hare's *Fanshen* [...] invites us to consider the idea of a British 'Brechtian dramaturgy' [...] However, despite its subject matter, Hare's version of Hinton's expressly Marxist novel is not itself fundamentally based in a Marxist ideology. What did inspire its politics? To answer this, we need to be aware of the group's commitment to a democratic ideal. During the 1970s, political thinking about process and participation affected the organization of theatre companies themselves. [...] Joint Stock worked with a designated author, yet aimed to open up the writing process in some way [...] In searching for their own connections with the politics of the work, Hare and the company created a play about the moral and social issues of democratic process. In doing so, they revolutionized their own working process, but remained without unequivocal commitment to revolutionary socialism or the confident reference to Marxist thinking that underpins Brecht's work.' Turner and Behrnt, pp.76-77.

society. The workshop explored the personal lives of the company members—the cast being consciously composed of heterosexual, gay and lesbian couples with varied backgrounds and experiences. The company talked about sexuality and experimented with improvised gender role stereotyping and role-playing with direction from Stafford-Clark with Churchill observing and participating.¹⁷⁴ Churchill said, ‘For the first time I brought together two preoccupations of mine—people’s internal states of being and the external political structures which affect them’.¹⁷⁵ The Joint Stock way of working had been greatly influenced not only by the process used to devise *Fanshen* but also the socialist politics of the novel and the Epic style in which the play was structured; as a result, successive productions such as *Cloud Nine* were informed by this kind of materialist perspective, and the Epic use of an historical parallel and the economic determination of social forces became a dramaturgical framework for the script.¹⁷⁶ Since the workshops were influenced by a Piscatorian sensibility as well as an attempt at a kind of socialist, democratic hierarchical structure, the script that resulted from the workshop reflected these values; Churchill’s play was a heightened satire which examined personal reactions to the economic and social liberalisation of an entire culture.

As was the case with *Fanshen*, this process allowed the company to investigate the subject matter with the writer and feeling a sense of ownership over the resulting script and without feeling betrayed by the control exercised by the writer on the text. Michael Patterson notes that writer Churchill in particular had a way of working with the company that drew on ‘attitudes and values’ of the performers to give them the opportunity to identify with the subject matter with which they researched and around which they improvised during the

¹⁷⁴ Roberts and Stafford-Clark, p.286.

¹⁷⁵ Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p.287.

¹⁷⁶ Billington comments on Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble’s visit to London in 1956 and the lasting effect it had on Gaskill: ‘But no one has caught better than William Gaskill the adrenalin buzz created by the Ensemble’s visit, which, he says, changed his life [...] And Brecht’s notion of Epic Theatre—with its emphasis on discrete narrative, its use of theatrical montage, its appeal to reason rather than to feelings—had a huge effect on British dramaturgy.’ Billington, p.95.

workshop.¹⁷⁷ Churchill said, ‘If you’re working by yourself [...] You don’t get forced in quite the same way into seeing how your own inner feelings connect up with larger things that happen to other people’.¹⁷⁸ Churchill’s statement reflected Megan Terry’s comment regarding the advantage of being able to explore ‘interior states’ while working with Open Theater performers; in both cases, each of these commissioned writers was expected to connect a political movement or historical event to human, emotional responses. The position of being a writer on attachment to a collaborating company allowed Churchill to create a script which combined rich characterizations drawn from company members’ reactions within improvisations which were usually politically-oriented. Thus, Churchill was allowed more freedom than Terry, who felt a deeper responsibility to the performers to create a script that reflect the performers’ devising process and values as a company.

What sets Joint Stock apart from the other companies in this chapter is the fact that the writer was trusted as a co-creator of the resulting production, and the process was a complex combination of a number of collaborating traditions, combining devising with a Brechtian dramaturgical framework that informed the structure and style of the production. Since the creation of a script and the role of the writer were prioritized significantly, the company researched and explored the subject not only through research but also through devising, allowing the writer the benefit of watching a physicalized interpretation of what was often otherwise dense, historical and/or political material. The ultimate questions which remain regarding the process involved in creating productions such as *Fanshen* and *Cloud Nine* are whether the writer had a responsibility to the performers involved in the investigative devising process to give what they will feel was an ‘accurate’ representation of the devised work they had done in the final text, and what was the status accorded to the concept of ownership within the Joint Stock process. Stafford-Clark suggested that the

¹⁷⁷ Patterson, p.164.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

matters of creative control and ownership surfaced more than during any previous project because *Cloud Nine* dealt with the sensitive personal issues of the company members. In a diary he kept during rehearsals for *Cloud Nine*, the director wrote:

Clearly the actors had exposed their own lives and their degree of ownership put great pressure on Caryl. All of us were able to give approval to the high comedy of the first act but found it more difficult to digest and give credence to the reflection of our own experiences which Caryl had written for the second half. [...] Perhaps we wanted the play to deliver the rounded conclusion to our own lives which we were so signally unable to provide ourselves.¹⁷⁹

The heightened reality of the Victorian first half of the play was easier for the company to accept than the more realistic, personalized second half of the play. As a result, the company was ultimately uncomfortable with the way in which their personal stories and intimate confessions had been appropriated for the production; this differs from *Fanshen* in that the more academic subject matter of the communization of postwar China was not as personal to the performers as the subject of sexual identity of *Cloud Nine*. In the case of the Open Theater, with each scripted production, the company increasingly felt their creative impulses had been manipulated by the writer while working on the script; part of the reason why the company ultimately disintegrated was because Chaikin never developed a way of working with writers which satisfied him or the other members of the company. *Cloud Nine* was a resounding success in London and later transferred to Broadway, making Joint Stock an internationally-renown company and Churchill one of the most significant figures in British dramatic writing. Billington states:

it was [...] realised that, in addressing big public themes, historical movements or vast literary projects, some kind of collaborative approach was beneficial [...] Joint Stock didn't revolutionise British theatre. But it did open up a different way of working that enriched political theatre.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Roberts and Stafford-Clark, p.89.

¹⁸⁰ Billington, p.267.

It is likely that, despite the performers' misgivings about the result of that project, because of the amount of control Stafford-Clark exerted on Joint Stock, the company continued to use that model of working for subsequent productions.

Conclusion

The processes and philosophies developed by the different companies and practitioners in this chapter have been chosen in order to demonstrate the different ways in which the issue of the role of the writer and the text has manifested, developed and been questioned through the following categories: 'The Writer/Director', 'The Role of the Writer and Text Questioned' and 'The Writer-Company Collaboration'. Each strand of practice is distinct with regard to working methods, company ideologies, politics, hierarchy and attitudes towards the use of text, and has been included in order to illuminate the way in which the text and the writer's role were conceived and evolved. The tendencies detailed in this chapter are organized along a spectrum of that spans from practice that was influenced by the decision to prioritize the creation of text and designate a writer within the process to that which did not place a high premium on the creation of a play text and/or chose not to involve a writer at all.

As the practice of writer-company collaboration developed throughout the twentieth century, each writer, director and company reconsidered the role of the text and the writer within the process of collaborative theatre-making. From the early work of Piscator in the 1920s to the work of Joint Stock in the 1970s, the field of collaborative theatre-making has largely been the domain of the director, the practitioner who, in most cases, set the terms for the way in which his or her company would create work. Therefore, in discussing the role of the writer within this field, we must also come to an understanding about the role of the director, the writer-director relationship and the director's attitude towards the creation of text. In each of these historical case studies, the director in question embraced a different

agenda (both political and artistic), affecting the nature of the writer's participation and his or her role within the company hierarchy, if, in fact, there was a writer at all. What characterizes each of the historical case studies is that the relationship between the writer and the company was almost always mediated by the director's vision, aesthetics and working practices—all of which were a product of that director's reaction to his or her perception of a particular theatrical tradition and a set of political ideologies. The way in which the roles of writer and director intersected were the guiding influences of the development of writer-company collaborative practice in the twentieth century, as it remains today with contemporary practices.

We can see in each distinct strand of practice that the role of the writer and the role of the text were inextricably linked; company approached the role of the writer differently, depending on whether or not the director of the company prioritized the development of a dramatic text that would survive the production. If the development of a well-written script was a priority for the director of the company—as it was for Joint Stock, then the role of the writer was not only made to be distinct from the rest of the company, but the writer's process was supported by the company's entire approach to collaboration. If the development of a script was not a priority, then the role of the writer was either sidelined or enveloped completely into the company as a whole, as was the case of The Living Theatre which shifted focus from the development of new writing to the development of collective creation. However, the third category that has emerged from this study is that of directors who were faced with the problem not being able to find an appropriate writer with whom they felt could write the kind of text they wanted to produce; as a result, while directors such as Copeau, Barrault and Saint-Denis made their companies self-sustaining creative units through *création collective*, Piscator and Littlewood worked with their companies as writer/directors. Artaud, who was both a writer and a director, was in an unusual position in relation to the other

examples in that he was not making work with a company, but rather investigating the parameters of writing for performance as a mostly solitary pursuit. In order to illuminate the way in which companies viewed the creation of the text by referring to Schechner's explanation:

Those cultures which emphasize the dyad drama-script de-emphasize theater-performance; and vice versa. [...] Only "modern" drama since the late nineteenth century has so privileged the written text as to almost exclude theater-performance altogether. And since the early twentieth century a strong non-western influence has worked its way through western theater from the avant-garde to the mainstream.¹⁸¹

Although Schechner's theory has been conceived in order to understand performance within the context of ritual as well as more traditional theatre, what we can glean from this passage is the trend throughout the twentieth century of the separation of 'theatre-performance' from 'drama-script', but also an understanding of the distinction between the two. By 'theatre-performance', Schechner means the more physicalized, ritual-like productions of companies such as The Living Theatre and the writings of Artaud (both of whom influenced Schechner's work); by 'drama-script', Schechner indicates work more centered on the creation of text and the writer's role. Stafford-Clark perceived the writer as a distinct but also vital role to the company's creative process. Directors such as Piscator and Littlewood did not always view the role of the writer as a distinct and creatively autonomous entity within the company, but recognized the creation of a text as integral to their approaches to theatre-making. As for Beck and Malina's Living Theatre, the process of creating as collaboratively as possible with as flattened a hierarchy as possible was prioritized over the role of the text or the writer; as a result, the company turned to devising collectively to create work, with Beck and Malina in the background quietly shaping the material. Chaikin and the Open Theatre understood the writer as a specially-skilled role distinct from that of performer or director and necessary to the refinement and organization of material for performance, even if they later encountered

¹⁸¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.6.

issues with authorship related to their process of working and the symbiotic relationship between the writing and the devising.

By and large, the company and/or director's attitude towards the role of the writer was dependent upon the skills of that company or director with respect to writing; if there was a member of the company who felt confident enough to script, dramaturg or write performance texts, then the role of the writer was absorbed by the company and an external writer was not commissioned; if the company did not feel they could write the text themselves, the role of the writer as an autonomous creative agent within the process was more likely to be valued. McGrath of 7:84 (a writer/director himself) noted, 'Writing a play can never be a totally democratic process. They are skills which need aptitude, long experience, self-discipline and a certain mental discipline.'¹⁸² Hanna of *Monstrous Regiment*, demonstrates a similar philosophy that playwriting was a particular skill, and one which the company 'wanted to acknowledge', but instead who chose to commission writers external to the company, as no one within the permanent company felt able to write a text themselves.¹⁸³ Although both Hanna and McGrath believe playwriting to be a particular skill, historically, within the context of writing in collaboration, the writer or writer/director was not only someone with a particular skill set, but more significantly someone who was, to put it simply, in charge of the scripting or writing process, and thus, s/he who was primarily in charge of the development of the text over any other company member. For some, such as Churchill and Terry, these writing, scripting and dramaturgical skills were in place before the process began, while for others, such as Piscator and Littlewood, those skills were acquired along the way and developed according to the needs of the production.

The role of the writer differed according to each company's ethos of working, the level of collaboration, the amount of control imposed by the director, the amount of influence

¹⁸²Di Cenzo, p.93.

¹⁸³ Gillian Hanna, ed., *Monstrous Regiment: Four Plays and a Collective Celebration* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 1991), p.xxxiii.

from the writer and also the way in which their personal political views manifested themselves in their methods of collaboration and also the texts and productions that resulted. Throughout this chapter we have touched upon the idea of political theatre within each case study; the period from the 1920s to the 1970s was a golden age of political theatre, political plays and politically-motivated theatre-making processes. As Michael Patterson notes:

In the twentieth century, theatre with an intention to convert to a new way of thinking, or at least to challenge old modes of thought, became more overtly political, questioning not so much social morality as the fundamental organization of society, with an emphasis on economics rather than on ethics. Usually informed by Marx's analysis of capitalism, a number of directors and playwrights, most notably Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, sought to use the stage to propose socialist alternatives to the injustices of the world about them. In so doing they helped to define what we have no come to term "political theatre".¹⁸⁴

Although the case studies in this chapter have been selected for their contributions to the evolution of writing and collaboration, they also serve as examples of the way in which the writer's role and the text changed with respect to the political aims of the directors and companies. Beginning with Piscator, the companies in this chapter were (with the exception of the less politically-motivated French artists Copeau, Saint-Denis, Barrault and Artaud) those for whom a left-wing (most commonly socialist) political agenda was not just an afterthought but a motivation to make work for the theatre. Different companies, however, approached the relationship between political theatre and writing in a variety of ways. When Piscator struggled in his relationships with writers such as Gasbarra and Paquet, he began working as a writer/director, creating scripts with his dramaturgical collective in order to create texts that would ideologically and stylistically embody his political convictions. Conversely, as The Living Theatre became more politicized (both in their creative work and their daily life), they moved away from the delineation of roles within the company (including that of the writer) towards a flattened hierarchy and collective creation, which they felt to be a more democratic approach to collaboration. In the case of Joint Stock, although

¹⁸⁴ Patterson, p.1.

they began by creating a method of collaborative creation that was inspired by socialist politics and the concept of consensus-driven/democratized decision-making during *Fanshen*, they adjusted their process to suit the practical needs of a company working with writers external to the permanent artistic directorship.

The issue of twentieth-century political theatre and its relationship to writing and collaboration leads us to our final, and perhaps most important question of this chapter: what was the impact of the historical examples of writing and collaborative theatre-making on later companies such as Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre? As was demonstrated in the introduction to this chapter, there are links between the historical companies and practitioners with their contemporary counterparts; various people worked with, studied under or were influenced by practitioners in this chapter. However, the relationship between writing and political theatre is also significant in that it marks a difference not only in process but in working ethos between companies of the twentieth century and companies working today. Many politically-motivated theatre companies and practitioners through the 1970s worked with writers in order to crystallize a shared political vision, often from discussions and material devised by the company, such as (at least initially) Joint Stock, The Open Theater, Theatre Workshop, Piscator as well as others that we have only briefly covered, such as Théâtre du Soleil, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, The Women's Theatre Group, Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company and 7:84, to name but a few. However, none of the main three contemporary companies in this thesis professes the same political aims; this is not to say that their work is entirely apolitical, but neither the directors nor the writers involved in Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly or Filter Theatre have demonstrated the kind of political convictions in their work that their predecessors

did.¹⁸⁵ Part of the reason for this shift from the political to the de-politicized—specifically in the UK—is the shift in funding distribution when Thatcher came to power in 1979; there had been generous subsidies given to politicized, collaborating companies such as Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment, amongst others, throughout the 1960s and 1970s which ‘stimulated radical activity and thought’, but Thatcher’s government cut a significant percentage of this funding to these companies, causing many to seek other means of financial support and even shut down.¹⁸⁶ As late as 1998, feeling the after-effects of Thatcher’s cuts (and before the second boom of Blair’s arts funding increases), Ben Payne wrote that, ‘Thatcherism declared that art, like everything else, is only worth what people will pay for it. Market liberalism, in pernicious alliance with cultural conservatism has devastated the British theatre’.¹⁸⁷ He continued to explain that, in an environment where funding was difficult to attain, the possibilities for artistic expression and experimentation become limited.¹⁸⁸ As a result, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, collaborating and new writing companies not only became less of a presence in theatres across the UK, but in the small numbers in which they did still exist, were far less likely to make work that was considered experimental or political. This distinction between working with a writer for political or apolitical means is an important one to make, insofar that it provides one frame for examining the practices of companies today that choose to work with writers and how these motivations developed over the last century, what traditions and tendencies have shaped and influenced them.

Although we have come to an initial understanding of the agendas and interests of the ways in which contemporary collaborative theatre-making companies in the UK work with

¹⁸⁵ ‘Starting in 1994 [...] a remarkable number of striking young playwrights emerged in England [...] But unlike their predecessors, these dramatists had no obvious ideology, no political credo, no social agenda. [...] They reported on the urban British quizzically, reported the contradictions they saw, and left the audience to reach its own conclusions.’ Benedict Nightingale, *The Future of Theatre* (London: Phoenix, a division of the Orion Publishing Group Ltd., 1998), p.19.

¹⁸⁶ Patterson, p.177.

¹⁸⁷ Ben Payne, ‘Opposing Truths: New Writing and Its Discontents’, in *Writing Live: an Investigation of the Relationship between Writing and Live Art*, ed. by John Deeney (London: New Playwrights Trust, 1998), p.17.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

writers, the role of the writer and the text in contemporary collaborative theatre-making is one which this thesis will continue to explore in the following chapters.

Chapter Two

Shared Experience: dramatization as adaptation through intertextuality in performance

Introduction

In this chapter, we will compare the role of the commissioned writer to that of the writer/director, specifically within the context of stage adaptation, in Shared Experience's *War and Peace* (1996 and 2008) and *Brontë* (2005 and 2010-11), respectively. In doing so, we will examine how joint-Artistic Directors Nancy Meckler and Polly Teale have worked with commissioned writer Helen Edmundson on the former and how Teale functioned within the company as a writer-director on the latter in order to compare the possibilities inherent in two different working contexts, using a combination of management theory and performance theory to inform the argument. Amongst the three companies investigated in this study, Shared Experience is the oldest, the one with the strongest connection to the traditions and historical companies presented in Chapter One and also the company most concerned with the creation of what Arts Council England describes as 'highly physical interpretations', or adaptations, of classic novels.¹⁸⁹ Describing the company's work, Kristen Crouch says, 'Through the interweaving of text, gesture, movement, and inventive stage design, Shared Experience reaffirms the stage as a place for rediscovery, exploring, and reconstructing the novel anew'.¹⁹⁰ Currently run by Meckler and Teale, and the Resident Company at the Oxford Playhouse since 2011, Shared Experience was originally established in 1975 by director Mike Alfreds as a touring company based in the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield and for many years after, a London-based company. The company has a long and well-known tradition of adaptation work, although there is a marked difference between its early phase

¹⁸⁹ Shared Experience, *Arts Council England* (2011) <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/rfo/shared-experience/>> [accessed 10 March 2011].

¹⁹⁰ Kristen Crouch, 'Expressions of "Lust and Rage": Shared Experience Theatre's Adaptation of *Jane Eyre*', in *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classical Works: Critical Essays*, ed. by Sharon Friedman, (Jefferson: Macfarland and Company Inc., Publishers, 2009), p.202.

under Alfreds' directorship from 1975-1988, the middle period of Meckler's directorship starting in 1988, and the later phase under Meckler and Teale together, from 1995 to the present. Chapter Two will focus predominantly on the latter phase of the company's life that approached adaptation with a focus on text and working with writers, under Meckler and Teale. (It is important to note that although we will be looking predominantly at two productions falling within the main time frame of this study of the first decade of the New Millennium, we will also examine productions that pre-date this period in order to better understand Shared Experiences methods of working with writers.) The lines of inquiry this chapter will investigate are: if Shared Experience has a distinctive model of working with writers and text, and if so, what that model is; how we are to understand the concept of authorship in Shared Experience's work, and the role it plays regarding the composition of the pieces; what the company's approach to adaptation is; and most importantly, what the role of the writer (or writer-director) is.

Background and historical connections

Although now focused on work with writers and text, Shared Experience is a company with a history of devised, performer-centered work relating to the physical interpretation of extant source texts—a 'union of physical and text-based theatre'.¹⁹¹ The company is the oldest of the three central studies in this thesis, and also has the strongest connection to many of the historical companies and practitioners discussed in Chapter One. Meckler had studied under Richard Schnechner in a Master's program at New York University in 1968,¹⁹² and during her time in New York, she also performed with La MaMa Plexus, a small performance group associated with the La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club,

¹⁹¹ Shared Experience (2011) <<http://www.sharedexperience.org.uk/company.html>> [accessed 10 March 2011].

¹⁹² Incidentally, this was the same year Schnechner established The Performance Group and staged *Dionysus in '69*, the controversial adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae* which, in addition to excerpts from the original text, centered on physical sequences, chanting, audience participation and the highly stylized simulation of an orgy involving full-nudity.

the company with which The Open Theatre collaborated when they produced Megan Terry's *Viet Rock* in 1966.¹⁹³ Meckler commented that during her experiments with La MaMa, she met Stafford-Clark, who had come to New York to observe the company's work.¹⁹⁴ She added that in addition to La MaMa and The Performance Group, she saw and was influenced by the work of The Open Theater and The Living Theatre; she had met Chaikin on several occasions and was deeply affected by his practice of combining writing with performer-driven devising, although she did not have the opportunity to work with him.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, she had met and was familiar with the work of directors Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski.¹⁹⁶ In 1968, Meckler moved to the UK with others from La MaMa Plexus and in 1969, established a company with them called The Freehold, which saw some success both at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and around Europe with their adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* under Meckler's direction; although Meckler was interested in directors such as Chaikin, Stafford-Clark and Brook who worked with text, Freehold devised material without a designated writer. Heddon and Milling comment that The Freehold reflected the work of The Living Theatre and The Open Theater in terms of its content and process:

The aspiration of the group's rhetoric emphasized the empowerment of the actor [...]. The physical interaction between the actors in order to create theatrical images was a hallmark of the company's work, emerging from a long improvisatory workshop period. [...] Moments of the performance were left open for improvisation [...] The Freehold's focus on visual imagery was not conducted in rejection of the writer, indeed most of their productions were based on adaptations.¹⁹⁷

The emphasis of The Freehold's process of long periods of physical devising around a source text chosen for stage adaptation was reflected in the content of the performances, which, in turn, emphasized the collective nature of the production, improvisation and physical imagery.

¹⁹³ Nancy Meckler. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: a Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp.47-48.

Meckler noted that when she applied for the job of Artistic Director for the company, she ‘was very interested in carrying on this very physical way of working and carrying on the Shared Experience tradition where the actor is really at the centre of the work’, but ultimately knew that she wanted to work with writers.¹⁹⁸

As well as being connected to more corporeal traditions of theatre-making through Meckler, the origins of Shared Experience demonstrate Alfreds’ ethos of physicalized adaptations as the synthesis of the literary (the source text, rather than the play text) and the embodied (performer-centered devising). When he established the company, Alfreds had originally set out to discover how a company could adapt canonical literature by concentrating on the presence and physicality of the performers without working with a writer, having each performer devise and perform multiple roles directly from the book with himself acting as director-auteur—what Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling refer to as, ‘evolving a physical storytelling technique’.¹⁹⁹ Alfreds adapted works such as *Arabian Nights* (1975) and Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1977) with little or no set, lighting, props or costumes, using only performers to tell the stories in what Alfreds felt was a simple and direct fashion. The performers utilized techniques such as direct address, single narration, shared narration of two performers or more and the double, triple or even quadruple casting of performers to depict multiple characters which were supported and complimented by the physical, gestural way in which the adaptations were staged, exploring non-naturalistic possibilities for storytelling. Michael Anthony Ingham credits Alfreds as being ‘the chief exponent and most influential figure in the renaissance of fiction-based drama in the 1970s, for whom storytelling was a means to liberate the actor’s imagination and re-establish actor-

¹⁹⁸ Meckler, Nancy. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

¹⁹⁹ Heddon and Milling, p.60.

audience communication'.²⁰⁰ Alfreds demonstrated that a theatrical engagement with the adaptation of canonical texts could be achieved in a highly imagistic, visceral fashion, what Alfreds refers to as 'open-ended', with the actors as the 'central creative energy of the performance'.²⁰¹ Alfreds saw himself, the performers and even the audience—piecing together the narrative as it is presented to them by the company—as the authors of each adaptation.

Meckler and Teale's approach to adaptation is reliant on the interpretation of the playwright to produce tightly-focused adaptations reflective of the company's ethos, in contrast to Alfreds' lengthier dramatizations devised directly from the source text, without a commissioned writer. Teale commented that hers and Meckler's approach to working was rooted in working with a writer on a commissioned play text, while Alfreds' was more committed to a physical, performer-centered approach to performance.²⁰² The work is text-based in that Meckler and Teale always work with a script (rather than creating purely devised work, like Alfreds), but much of the adaptation relies on physical sequences which contribute to the overall aesthetic, representing certain tensions between characters' inner selves and the cultural norms of the world around them. Meckler explained: 'We're still very interested in this idea that you can stimulate the imagination by suggesting things, rather than creating something that tends to replicate reality. [...] I think we're always asking how we can distil something and get the essence of it', particularly through the scripting of the play text.²⁰³ Crouch describes this focus within the context of the company's 1996 adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (adapted and directed by Teale) by explaining that the *mise-en-scène* 'dramatically interrupts both the physical and emotional landscape' of the original

²⁰⁰ Michael Anthony Ingham, *The Prose Fiction Stage Adaptation as Social Allegory in Contemporary British Drama: Staging Fictions* (Lewiston: the Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p.337.

²⁰¹ Mike Alfreds, *Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 2007), p.22.

²⁰² Polly Teale. Personal interview. 10 July 2008.

²⁰³ Teale, Polly. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

novel, while the ‘openness of playing space allows for easy flow between one physical location and another, while also reflecting the shifts between layers of Jane’s conscious and unconscious desires’.²⁰⁴ Crouch describes a signature trait for which the company has come to be known—the depiction of the ‘physical and emotional landscape’ of the source text. Under the Teale-Meckler partnership, the company has adapted canonical texts well-known to British audiences such as *Jane Eyre*, *War and Peace* (1996/2008), *A Passage to India* (2003) and *Mill on the Floss* (2001), focusing on depicting the juxtaposition of the main characters’ internal fears and desires and their external societal pressures.

On one hand, the current work of Shared Experience can be seen as an example of a company that survived the arts funding cuts and policy changes of the 1980s and 1990s (that signaled the demise of so many other collaborative companies such as, for example, *Monstrous Regiment* and *7:84*) as a result of its focus on adaptations that appealed to a more artistically conservative era. On the other hand, it can also be seen as an example of a company that has preserved and developed the legacy of the ‘radical’ theatre companies of the 1960s and 1970s, addressing the problems adaptation poses by creating a textual language alongside a physical one. According to Arts Council statistics, between 1985 and 1992, the number of stage adaptations produced in the UK quadrupled, and by the mid-to-late 1990s, twenty percent of all new performances were adaptations.²⁰⁵ The particular practice of adapting canonical literary texts in a way that underscores the physical presence of the actor was initially popularized by Alfreds, and achieved further recognition with the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 1980 adaptation of Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* (scripted by writer David Edgar) with which Ingham attributes ‘the ensuing spate of novel transformations by established playwrights’.²⁰⁶ In addition to contributing to the popularity of stage

²⁰⁴ Crouch, p.194.

²⁰⁵ Ingham, p.8.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7.

adaptations, *Nicholas Nickleby*, ‘promoted the development of embryonic dramatic writing talent such as [...] Helen Edmundson [...] as well as nurturing existing collectivist and egalitarian values in the area of ensemble work [...] where the practices of Shared Experience [...] have been exemplary’.²⁰⁷ However, some believe the tendency to produce adaptations to be a conservative, reactionary approach to new theatre-making, rather than a progressive one, impeding the production of work that is wholly original, rather than new work based on existing source material. Caridad Svich describes this trend as a ‘nostalgic streak’, and evidence of the ‘desire for an ordered universe’ of familiar, but long-gone cultures and time periods, rather than the ‘chaotic’ and ‘random’ nature of contemporary culture often found in new work: ‘Repetition, not renewal, is what we seek’.²⁰⁸ Others go so far as to attribute the inclination to create adaptations (rather than new work) as a legacy of Conservative arts funding policies under Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major, under which many companies folded as a result of rescinded funding.²⁰⁹ Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart comment that established companies such as Shared Experience develop most of their work from extant source material, and question whether this is a reflection of ‘mainstream’ values of audiences uninterested in ‘purely devised work’.²¹⁰ Although *Nicholas Nickleby* was created in what was, at the time, an unusual manner (there were three directors and one writer on the project, with much material initially devised by the large company of

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Caridad Svich, ‘Theatre in crisis? Living memory in an unstable time’, in *Theatre in Crisis: Performance Manifestos for a New Century*, ed. by Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.18.

²⁰⁹ ‘The 1970s and early 1980s saw Arts Council funding come under attack for elitism and political bias, especially from the Conservative party minister Norman Tebbit. Funding was capped, and then cut. In 1987, Arts Council Chair William Rees-Mogg led a restructure of how funding was awarded, which cut the number of organisations receiving Arts Council funding by half. This was controversial, and led to protests from prominent figures in the arts.’ ‘The 1970s and 1980s: Criticism of regionalism and funding controversies’, *Arts Council England* (2011) <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/history-arts-council/1970s-and-1980s/>> [accessed 28 March 2011].

²¹⁰ ‘New companies and styles of work can bring in new audiences but theatres must balance this against the risk of alienating their loyal base audiences. Perhaps they see an adaptation as a safe bet in terms of the type of audiences they normally attract.’ Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, eds., *Devising in Process* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.21.

performers), the end result of this process could be considered dramatization rather than adaptation (like Alfreds' work), as it was a production highly dependent on the source text. Leon Rubin, the assistant director of *Nicholas Nickleby* who documented the process noted that the purpose of the project was to adapt the 'entire novel [...] complete with hundreds of characters, multiple plots, narrative and authorial comment'.²¹¹ Maria Di Cenzo explains that *Nicholas Nickleby* 'is a good illustration of how the theatrical establishment absorbed and adapted, in a sophisticated way [...], the techniques and performance styles that alternative groups exploited out of necessity'.²¹² It is not difficult to imagine that the devices and techniques Alfreds developed while creating his lengthy adaptations with Shared Experience in order to stage whole novels on a limited budget (such as, perhaps, *Bleak House*, another Dickens novel) must have influenced and inspired the more established, better-funded RSC to use a more physical approach to staging Dickens.

It is important to understand what it is we mean when we say 'adaptation' in order to more clearly define the company's process of working with writers and understand where the company is situated in relation to other adaptive practices. The spectrum of work that can be considered adaptive is broad, and thus is more accurately described as an approach to theatre-making; practitioners choosing to adapt work for the stage have used prose fiction, poetry, films, television, plays and nonfiction as the original source material, sometimes combining a number of different works from a range of different media as a starting-point. Ingham makes the distinction between 'adaptation' as an act of reconstruction of the source text in another medium, where a new product is created, but the original plot of the source text has been retained to some extent, and 'dramatization' as reproduction of the original source material in another medium, in which nothing new is said or created and the work is 'dependent and

²¹¹ Leon Rubin, *The Nicholas Nickleby Story: The Making of the Historic Royal Shakespeare Company Production* (London: William Heinemann Limited, 1981), p.12.

²¹² Maria Di Cenzo, *The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain, 1968-1990: the case of 7:84 (Scotland)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.51.

imitative'.²¹³ Ingham places the work of Shared Experience in the former category, and gives the 1995 BBC adaptation of Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* written by Andrew Davies as an example of the latter group, calling it a 'transmedium transposition', retaining the structure, characters and plot of the original source novel.²¹⁴ In regards to his adaptation of *Bleak House*, Alfreds says, 'We decided to embrace the book in its entirety to the limits of our collective abilities', creating a ten-hour long, four-part production.²¹⁵ In this context, we can see the work of Shared Experience under the Meckler-Teale directorship as adaptation, whereas the work produced under Alfreds' direction can be considered dramatization, as it is highly reflective of and dependent on the source text.

The practice of adaptation is a sub-set of theatre-making practice that can involve writing in different ways, allowing for a dramatic exploration of the source text and experimentation with style and working methods while working within a pre-existing narrative framework, providing practitioners with an opportunity to create a production that reflects their ethos. When *Guardian* theatre critic Lyn Gardner interviewed Meckler and Teale during rehearsals for the 1996 production of *War and Peace*, she noted that Meckler compared the Shared Experience process to the 'research and workshop-based productions of [...] Joint Stock',²¹⁶ and Alfreds stated that he was also influenced by the work of William Gaskill as well as Joan Littlewood.²¹⁷ One can understand the connection between Alfreds and both Littlewood and Gaskill's approach to directing, as all three practitioners' careers overlap not only in terms of time span, but also in that all of them were concerned with exploring the possibilities inherent in working directly with performers in a workshop setting. Additionally, many directors discussed in Chapter One were concerned with the process of

²¹³ Ingham, p.10.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Alfreds, p.14.

²¹⁶ Lyn Gardner, 'Turning a classic into a classic': review of *War and Peace* by Helen Edmundson, *The Guardian*, 19 June 1996.

²¹⁷ Alfreds, p.8.

adaptation, such as Erwin Piscator's *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schwejk*, Judith Malina and Julian Beck's *Frankenstein* and Gaskill and Stafford-Clark's *Fanshen*. Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington note, 'The use of fictional material provides theatre-makers with an opportunity to discover a language of multiplicity and excess [...] the translation from page to stage [...] poses creative problems that often prompt stylistic innovation'.²¹⁸ Stage adaptations are often the work of theatre-makers who utilize methods such as devising and workshops to find an aesthetic and thematic approach that will reflect the artistic (and sometimes political) agenda of the company, while also justifying the adaptation of the source material. Often the source text is canonical and thus known to the audiences, either from reading the text itself or from having seen another adaptation, so the assumed familiarity of the audience with the general narrative allows the adaptors to experiment with their interpretation. As Govan, Nicholson and Normington suggest, this experimentation is also prompted by the 'creative problems' posed by the original text, such as how to edit and restructure the narrative, which characters to include and how to reconcile the socio-cultural context of the source text with that of the production.

Company organization

Shared Experience's process of working with writers is systematic and changes relatively little, as opposed to Frantic Assembly and Filter, which both have methods of making new work developed as a system of trial-and-error and, to some extent, still change from project to project. This is the result of four reasons: Shared Experience have had many more years to hone their process, the classical novels they use for source material strongly inform their way of working, the circle of collaborators with which they work is somewhat smaller than Filter's or Frantic Assembly's and, most importantly to this study, they work

²¹⁸ Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Abington: Routledge, 2007), pp.100-101.

with fewer writers external to the company. (In contrast, Frantic Assembly and Filter have had to find a way of adjusting their method of working each time they commission a new writer or writer/director.) Shared Experience's process of working with writers is what might be termed more 'traditional' or 'conservative' than Frantic Assembly's or Filter's in that it experiments less with physical improvisation than Frantic Assembly and is not concerned with the incorporation of new media or the process of the partially-devised, partially-scripted text as Filter is. Shared Experience has undergone three different phases of artistic directorship (Alfreds, Meckler, Meckler and Teale); Alfreds experimented with process during the genesis of the company, but Meckler brought with her a considerable amount of experience and pronounced ideas about theatre-making and was able to create a process which has remained relatively stable over a number of years. Although there has been a shift from the way in which Alfreds created work to the way in which Meckler and Teale do, the company's process of working has not changed dramatically since Teale joined the company, with the exception of the fact that Teale often writes and directs her own work when she works independently of Meckler. What has proven to be an additional stabilizing aspect to the company dynamic is the participation of movement director Liz Ranken, who has been with Shared Experience for over twenty years and has choreographed the majority of the company's productions, bringing a certain visual and physical sensibility to the work which reflects the directors' desire to explore the duality of the characters.

To summarize the company's organization, Meckler and Teale are the co-artistic directors who make decisions about the people with whom they will collaborate and the projects they will produce; the two have worked together in the past co-directing productions, but as a general rule, direct their own productions separately from each other, one assisting the other as an outside eye from time to time. Teale sometimes adapts her own work and sometimes works with writers external to the company such as Edmundson. Meckler relies

either on Teale or on external writers such as Edmundson to write the adaptations for her. The two work with a series of designers, but have a small pool of people whom they trust and prefer to work such as designers Angela Simpson and Bunny Christie and composer Peter Salem. For the majority of their productions, they have worked with Ranken as a movement director, although she is outside the company's permanent artistic directorship. Meckler and Teale clearly have the most authority within the company, but consider Shared Experience's work to be collaborative. Similarly to Frantic Assembly's Graham and Hoggett, Meckler and Teale operate within what Mermikides and Smart refer to as a 'core-and-pool structure', the core being the permanent artistic directorship and the pool being the group of freelance practitioners upon whom the directors draw on a project-by-project basis—including writers.²¹⁹ Mermikides and Smart observe that many devising companies working in the UK today often have two people at the helm of the company (citing Kneehigh and Told By an Idiot, amongst others) and see this choice as a solution to the 'two conflicting factors' of the endemic problem of a lack of funding (hence a financial inability to maintain a large, permanent artistic core of practitioners such as performers, designers and writers) and also of what they note as 'the desire [...] for group structures that enable collaboration and to some degree resist sole directorial authority'.²²⁰

Shared Experience is semi-centralized in that Meckler and Teale (the core) run the company, but they each direct and make managerial choices regarding different productions—diversifying the projects which the company produces—and draw from a pool of freelance practitioners to work on these productions (including writers), further decentralizing the artistic contributions to the company's body of work. They allow their collaborators a certain amount of artistic autonomy and give them space and time to work; for example, when Edmundson is commissioned to adapt a novel like *War and Peace*, she is

²¹⁹ Mermikides and Smart, p.16.

²²⁰ Ibid., pp.16 and 17.

given the time and artistic freedom to work alone, with little intervention from Meckler and Teale. Howard Davis and Richard Scase explain this arrangement in terms of ‘demarcation’, that the work which can (or must) be outsourced to practitioners external to the company’s permanent artistic directorship (such as writing, movement direction and designing) becomes a mode of demarcation of artistic territory, so to speak.²²¹ Davis and Scase comment that this is a common managerial approach within arts organizations because

the “most” creative cultural workers such as novelists, scriptwriters, fine artists, actors, composers and musicians [...] are freelance because of the highly autonomous nature of the creative process and the difficulty of providing any structure of work organization and control other than that imposed by the individual creator himself or herself.²²²

Mermikides and Smart would argue that many artists work on a freelance basis because the funding available to arts organizations such as theatre companies is insufficient to maintain a large, permanent company, that it is more economically viable for companies to hire practitioners on a project-by-project basis. This is certainly the case with Shared Experience, but it is worth noting that, to some extent, Meckler and Teale share Davis and Scase’s opinion that each individual practitioner’s process of working is unique, and while they ask those they hire to work for the company to adhere the company’s particular aesthetic and overall approach to production, each practitioner is given the physical and intellectual room to create his or her work in his or her own fashion.

Teale conducts a lengthier, more organic collaborative process when creating a new production as she is so often her own writer and thus has control over the text, whereas Meckler, who works with commissioned writers, feels more secure in knowing what the nature of the text (over which she has less control than Teale) will be. Teale joined the company in 1993, six years after Meckler, initially as an artistic associate under Meckler’s

²²¹ Howard Davis and Richard Scase, *Managing Creativity: The Dynamics of Work and Organization* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), p.72.

²²² Davis and Scase, p.76.

directorship, when she co-directed *Mill on the Floss* with Meckler (and again in 1995), which was adapted by Edmundson (a friend of Teale's previous to joining the company).²²³ Teale had less control of the company when she first joined as Meckler's younger, less experienced assistant, so therefore it is likely that Meckler already had a process of working with writers in place when Teale arrived that Teale was not in a position to alter; as a result, instead of changing Meckler's process, Teale has developed her own by creating work as a writer/director, with some peripheral, unofficial, dramaturgical advice from Meckler. Teale's process on productions she writes and directs independently differs to some extent from Meckler's in terms of practice, but not in terms of aesthetics or company ideology. Meckler and Teale have commented that they were able to work together and have continued to do so for many years because they have a similar perspective and a similar aesthetic in relation to production. Designer Simpson remarks that Meckler, 'makes sure her team is secure and everything is in place' before she begins to rehearse a production; in other words, that she has all her meetings with the writer, movement director and designer early on in the process so that she feels secure that the script, movement and design are ready to be implemented and she can devote her energies during the rehearsal period to working with the actors.²²⁴ In contrast, Simpson says that continues the discussion about how the production is evolving as it is developed with the entire production team, keeping the writer (if she is not adapting her own script), movement director and designer in conversation with each other throughout the development and rehearsal processes.²²⁵ Although Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett are also artistic co-directors in terms of the direction of Frantic Assembly's overall trajectory, they are also co-directors on each production, working closely, side by side and in continual conversation with each other, as well as their other collaborators; the difference here is that

²²³ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 10 July 2008.

²²⁴ Angela Simpson. Personal interview. 5 December 2009.

²²⁵ Ibid.

even though Meckler and Teale have worked together co-directing productions, they have mostly worked individually within the company, with one being in charge of the direction (and sometimes, in Teale's case, the script as well) and the other acting as a kind of support or outside eye (in Meckler's case, often as a dramaturg). Performer Theo Herdman, who was in the 2008 production of *War and Peace*, says Meckler and Teale 'have their own projects and they have various degrees of shared authority and responsibility on a project-by-project basis'.²²⁶ Where Graham and Hoggett set out to establish a company together in which they could co-direct each production, Shared Experience was established independently of Meckler and Teale, and the two directors joined the company at different points in time.

Collaborative process in brief

The process of transposing a novel to the stage is one which Shared Experience and the writers with which they have worked have approached by balancing the prosaic and dialogic with the physical and the visual, using the play text as a framework within which the movement score of the production can be developed. Within the restrictions of the basic parameters of the narrative and characters of the non-dramatic source text, Meckler, Teale and Edmundson use performance in order to reinvent and comment on this text by exploring the hidden or underdeveloped aspects of the story which interest them and which they feel will interest contemporary audiences. Julie Saunders notes that it is not unusual in stage adaptations of nineteenth century novels for companies to, 'seek to voice marginalized or repressed groups [and] [...] reveal "hidden histories", the stories between the lines of the public works of fact and fiction'.²²⁷ The marginalized or repressed group on which Shared Experience focuses is often that of women such as fictional characters Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina or the authors of the source texts (also, often women) such as Charlotte,

²²⁶ Theo Herdman. E-mail correspondence. 10 May 2011.

²²⁷ Julie Saunders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Abington: Routledge, 2006), pp.123-124.

Emily and Anne Brontë, expanding upon the narrative from the source novel or extant biographical material in order to delve theatrically into their hidden emotional lives and repressed fears and dreams. Saunders continues: ‘Adaptation [...] can parallel editorial practice in some respects, indulging in the exercise of trimming and pruning; yet it can also be an amplificatory procedure engaged in addition, expansion, accretion, and interpolation.’²²⁸ The kind of editorial intervention which Teale and Meckler, Edmundson and movement director Ranken practice is that of using the characters’ extended physical scenes and gestures in order to convey in a matter of minutes what their literary counterpart says or experiences over a great number of pages. Edmundson explains that the company’s ‘mixture of text and physicality’ is ultimately rooted in text, but utilises movement to express the emotional subtext of a scene, often replacing ‘reams and reams and pages about what somebody’s thinking or feeling’ with visual motifs.²²⁹ Edmundson uses the collective ‘we’ in her statement, acknowledging the fact that this approach to adaptation is something which she, Meckler, Teale and Ranken have developed together. The authorship of the final production can be seen in layers; the source text has been written by the author of the source text (most often deceased and thus, not an active collaborator in the process), the dramatic text is written by Edmundson or Teale (and, on occasion, by other writers external to the company), the movement is created by Ranken who interprets the text visually, while Meckler and/or Teale shape the overall production, editing and refining the different layers of influence.

Both Meckler and Teale ultimately prioritize the play text as a basis for their process, as they prefer working with a nearly fully-developed draft of the play text before going into rehearsals. Often, when there is a partial script, the company conducts workshops so that Ranken can contribute ideas for staging the source text; this stage of the process allows the

²²⁸ Ibid., pp.18-19.

²²⁹ Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

writer to see the physical possibilities and images within the text which she can then embed in the script, it allows the director to see the different themes and visual motifs which recur in the script and possible ways of staging. It also allows Ranken to construct a physical language for the production, experimenting with different ways of creating images with the performers' bodies that will later be used in the final production. Once the text is adapted and a draft of the play text is ready to be used in rehearsal, it is used as a framework within which the director, performers and movement director can devise physical scenes and gestures which are designed to illuminate the narrative's hidden underbelly and the characters' inner thoughts and emotions. This approach to making work is reflective of the content of the adapted novels, which have largely been works written in the nineteenth century portraying restrictive, censorious socio-cultural environments whose mores and values impinge upon the main characters' freedom of expression; within this particular time period, the relationship between the spoken and the physicalized was confined, in that people were usually encouraged to express a polite exterior while keeping their physical impulses (whether violent, romantic or otherwise) in check. The company's relationship with Ranken has allowed them to create a balance between physical and textual language in their work, and endowing Ranken with an authorial voice on productions related to the visual and the physical, but ultimately rooted in the authority of the text. Ranken has worked on the majority of Shared Experience productions, having worked with Meckler and Teale for twenty years and describes her relationship with the company in positive terms, explaining she appreciates their 'commitment to an evolution' of the relationship of text and movement on stage, what Ranken refers to as the 'metaphysics' of the novel's subtext.²³⁰ She is free to contribute ideas to each project, not only in terms of the choreography, but also in terms of the overall themes of the piece which she sees in the source text and ways she feels the

²³⁰ Liz Ranken. Personal interview. 28 June 2011.

production can be staged.²³¹ Ranken is focused on movement as the emotional, physical and psychological subtext of the dialogue, or what she refers to as ‘body states’, the physical language of characters that changes in relation to the character’s thoughts and relationship with his or her environment.²³²

In comparing the development of the textual language and the physical language in Shared Experience productions, there is a similarity in the way in which the work is collaborative but not purely devised, but, rather, authored by the writer and by Ranken. Since the source text is primarily interpreted by the adapting writer or writer/director, that writer or writer/director is in charge of the ways in which the novel will be transposed from a written medium to one that will be performed on a stage. This is not to say that the writer has the most control over the production, but the writer is given the responsibility of initiating this collective interpretation ultimately realized by the entire company. Teale explains that in the process she uses in staging a text (whether her own or Edmundson’s), she avoids improvising dialogue with performers and prefers to improvise physicality instead, using the written text as a framework to support stylized dramatic conceits. In speaking about this particular issue, Teale notes that, ‘the scenes need to be very honed and sprung and muscular’ in order to allow the director and movement director guide the performers through physical improvisations which will ultimately depict a ‘non-naturalistic’ device that conveys a concept.²³³ The amount of experimentation and trying out different approaches to staging sections of the novel in question is tightly controlled by the writer and directors in order to produce a particular effect, a particular aesthetic. As an example, Teale describes the device from *Jane Eyre* where Bertha, Mr. Rochester’s wife who is kept prisoner in the attic, is used as a representation of Jane’s hidden, forbidden sexual passion for her employer Mr.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

Rochester; Bertha exists not only as a character in her own right, but also emerges as a physicalization of what Jane is feeling, communicating Jane's thoughts through heightened, stylized physical action. Teale elaborates, 'There's quite a big idea behind that that you're trying to express theatrically. And I'm not sure that's something that actors could improvise their way into. Somebody has to take hold of that and say, how do we make this work?'.²³⁴ Teale feels that the script can provide parameters for the physical expression of dramatic devices in the way that the source text provides parameters for the entire production; she worries that if the performers were asked to improvise this concept that it would be too difficult and ultimately unsuccessful. Ranken is less specific in her demands on performers in workshops in rehearsals when developing the physical language of the production, but still provides a framework in which they are expected to create physical scenes and gestures with her. Ranken said that in working on *Jane Eyre* and in developing the motif of Bertha as Jane's emotional life, she worked with such directives such as 'physicalizing the color red', and 'the idea of confinement, the different stages in Bertha's journey in becoming more towards almost an animal state'.²³⁵ Since Teale had already decided that Bertha was going to represent Jane's unrestrained, primitive desires, Ranken then followed this idea, finding ways of physicalizing and staging this particular motif with the performers helping to devise the movement.

When examining the production history of the company, one can see that Meckler has based her approach to making new work on the blueprint of the process of working with Edmundson, the first writer with whom she worked on the first adaptation under Meckler's direction, *Anna Karenina* (1991-1992), setting a precedent for the company both in terms of content and process for later works. Meckler explained that she found it easier to commission Edmundson, a writer with whom she could collaborate intimately, rather than devise scenes

²³⁴ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

²³⁵ Liz Ranken. Personal interview. 28 June 2011.

straight from the source text in a long, laborious process as Alfreds had done before her.²³⁶

Near the beginning of Meckler's directorship of the company, after she had staged such extant plays as Euripides' *The Bacchae* and Sam Sheperd's *True West*, she intended to produce a series of three Greek tragedies for a tour, but she found it difficult to obtain bookings for the company in regional theatres with this repertoire, so she decided to commission a stage adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, which she felt would be more likely to attract the interest of theatres and audiences, but also might have a potential for 'expressionistic' interpretation in staging.²³⁷ Ingham explains the seemingly paradoxical situation in which many practitioners like Meckler find themselves when having to choose material for a production that will not only prove marketable to audiences but also provide an artistic challenge for the company. Framing this challenge within the context of stage adaptation, he says:

there is a strong case for arguing that many playwrights and companies have made a virtue out of necessity by exploring and experimenting at both adaptation and rehearsal phases with approaches that have ultimately proved liberating and forward-looking. Whilst selection policy in the commissioning of material tends toward the unimaginative, and indeed often represents a blatant attempt to profit from the success of film and television versions of popular fiction, playwrights and companies frequently succeed in hijacking an imitative programming policy and turning it to their own ends.²³⁸

Initially, although Meckler's choice to adapt *Anna Karenina* was born from a need to produce a play that would appeal to touring theatres, as Ingham points out, stage adaptations can also afford writers and directors the opportunity to experiment with techniques in writing and staging, allowing them to create a new piece of work from an already well-known cultural artifact while at the same time subverting audience expectations. Meckler commissioned Edmundson to adapt the book and was not only excited by the quality of her writing and interpretation of the novel, but also by the opportunity to work with a nearly-finished script

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ingham, p.9.

before rehearsals started.²³⁹ The director indicated that the meeting between herself and Edmundson was both serendipitous and providential in that it happened to work so well that it resulted in a model of adaptation for the company that could be replicated; however, she added the drawback is that the experience has made it ‘difficult to do a different model’.²⁴⁰ Meckler makes a distinction between her way of adapting source material with writer Edmundson and Alfreds’ approach of devising material with actors straight from the source text in order to illuminate the way the company changed under her direction. Although the director was vague in her explanation of her decision to continue working not only with Edmundson but also with a practice that involved the writer delivering a script to the director before the rehearsal process began, one can discern from her tone, that she finds her process of collaboration more orderly, less chaotic, than Alfreds’, and Edmundson’s ability to work relatively independently from the company on the script reassuring.

Now that we have explored an overview of the way in which the company works and the interrelationship between their approach to adaptation, the socio-cultural ethos behind it and their process, we will examine the way in which *War and Peace* and *Brontë* were created, with a specific focus on the role of the writer and the text (both original play text and source text) in each.

War and Peace: working with a commissioned writer

War and Peace was originally adapted by Edmundson for the company in 1996 for a production at the National Theatre and revived in 2008 with changes and additions to the play for a touring production that culminated in a four-week run at the Hampstead Theatre in London. Meckler and Teale co-directed both productions, with Teale playing a somewhat more minor role in the revival. After Edmundson worked with Shared Experience on *Anna*

²³⁹ Nancy Meckler. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

Karenina and *The Mill on the Floss*, Richard Eyre, who was the artistic director of the National Theatre at the time, invited the writer and two directors to meet him to discuss a co-production with the National Theatre. Meckler, Teale and Edmundson came in with a list of possible projects and Eyre chose an adaptation of *War and Peace*.²⁴¹

Research and development

Edmundson said that after she, Meckler and Teale read the book, they held a workshop with some performers with whom the company had worked before and gave them the task of experimenting with different ways of approaching the text so that Edmundson could start to see the possibilities within the novel for adaptation—what motifs and storylines would be best suited to the stage.²⁴² The workshop was run primarily under the direction of Meckler with the assistance of Teale and the movement direction by Ranken while Edmundson observed and, from time to time, conferred with the directors. As a result, the writer was able to begin to visualize the novel as a play text, as she says, to ‘bring some life to it and help me think of it as actors in a space rather than words on a page’, which she explains is ‘quite a big kind of shift’.²⁴³ Essentially, these workshops consisted of Edmundson requesting certain episodes to be taken straight from Tolstoy’s novel and Meckler and Teale guiding them through a performed interpretation of them, with the help of Ranken to give them physical tasks to facilitate the devising.²⁴⁴ As Edmundson said, ‘we just kind of [took] the book cold and [said], let’s try this bit. What happens when we put this bit on its feet? [...] Let’s just try it out and split into groups and try different ways of approaching it’.²⁴⁵ Like

²⁴¹ Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

²⁴² The workshop helped Edmundson to, ‘bring some life to [the adaptation] and help [her] think of it as actors in a space, rather than words on a page, which is quite a big kind of shift [...] It helps enormously if you can just be in a room with some actors and get them to try bits out’. Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

Teale and Meckler, Edmundson's language tended to be vague when she discussed the development of the project, which perhaps was unintentional, an indicator of the instinctual nature of the work—as it seemed to be when Meckler described her reasons for working with Edmundson. On the other hand, it is possible that Edmundson, like many practitioners, was careful not to be too descriptive of her process, which she preferred to remain hidden from public view. In order to help us understand the way in which Edmundson is functioning within the company here, we can return to Derek Chong's concept of this kind of company as a 'spider plant,' (which we first applied to group one in the previous chapter) using this particular image 'to represent the desire of organizations to be more flexible and innovative'.²⁴⁶ He continues:

The umbilical cord (like those of a spider plant) serves to reconcile the contradictory demands of creating decentralizations while supporting accountability and control. Decentralization offers local units power and autonomy for some kind of self-organization activity; at the same time, a measure of control is retained.²⁴⁷

In the case of *War and Peace*, the 'umbilical cord' the directors used to reconcile the decentralization of power (or what Davis and Scase refer to as the 'demarcation') in order to afford collaborators artistic autonomy while maintaining cohesion within the project was not only the continuous conversations they carried on with their collaborators but also the research and development process that went on before rehearsals began. After having done that, she and the directors could begin to collaborate on their vision for the interpretation of novel, giving each other a forum to express their opinions of the physical world of the adaptation as well as gain input from trusted performers who had worked with the company before and understood the way in which Shared Experience works. The work Shared Experience does relies on this balance between the autonomy of the individual collaborators with various skill sets such as writing, direction, performance and design and the

²⁴⁶ Chong, Derrick, *Arts Management* (Abington: Routledge, 2002), p.69

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

accountability of these collaborators, not only to Meckler and Teale, but to the cohesion of the project as a whole.

Since members of the production team for *War and Peace* tended to work largely independently on the production with a limited number of discussions and meetings, the research process provided a common ground upon which the collaboration could be based and relationships between collaborators could deepen, especially before the text was written. After the workshop process, Edmundson, Meckler and designer Christie went to Russia together on a research trip in order to research Russian culture at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russian involvement in the Napoleonic War, the life of Tolstoy and other cultural and historic elements pertaining to the source text.²⁴⁸ Edmundson and the directors also read books about Russian history and culture such as, for example, *Natasha's Dance* by Orlando Figes (Picador, 2003) in order to enrich their understanding of the world of the book.²⁴⁹ A long research process for writer and director(s) (as well as other members of the company such as designers and performers) was not unusual for Shared Experience and was especially necessary for *War and Peace*; since the company has largely specialized in the adaptation of canonical novels, often much of the research has pertained to the history and the culture surrounding the narrative and characters of the source text. Davis and Scase comment that, 'Within highly integrated organizations, there will be clearly defined aims and objectives, strongly held values to which the overwhelming majority of employees are bound, and work processes which, although diverse in their nature, are oriented to these values.'²⁵⁰ Being able to travel together or to expose each other to the same books, films, music, art and other research material seems to help to bridge any discrepancies in the aesthetic and content of the production, especially between the writer and the directors. The act of a highly detailed

²⁴⁸ Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

²⁴⁹ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

²⁵⁰ Davis and Scase, p.95.

research process with a particular focus on historical accuracy and culturally-specific behavior shapes the text, design, musical composition, direction and performances within the production measurably and complements the early workshops Edmundson held with Ranken, Teale, Meckler and the performers, enhancing what Chong calls the ‘umbilical cord’.²⁵¹ Edmundson’s next step when she came back from Russia was to ‘work out an approach’ to adapting the book, to ‘choose a through-line’ before she began writing, and then to approach the directors with this outline for the play text before she began writing.²⁵² As Edmundson had already gone through an extensive research process as well as the process of an exploratory performance-based workshop with the directors, the way for this meeting regarding the through-line of her text had already been paved.

At this stage of the process, Edmundson had the most control over the production and was the primary author of the piece since the production was, in this way, chiefly text-driven—not only by Tolstoy’s novel but by her own play text, without which the company could not begin rehearsals. The primary relationship between text and production was between Edmundson’s text and the company—as opposed to the way in which Alfreds’ made work for the company, in which the main relationship was between the company and the source text itself, not a scripted play text written by a commissioned writer. Directors, designers, movement director and performers looked to Edmundson to provide a main concept, a focused, structured interpretation of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* extracted from the source text, with which to work. Edmundson was the primary mediator between the novel and its realization as a stage production from whom all other elements (direction, design and performance) arose in this semi-centralized process. (It is also important to add that Edmundson was the primary mediator between the translated novel—into English from the original Russian—and its realization as a stage production, as Edmundson did not work from

²⁵¹ Chong, p.69.

²⁵² Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

the Russian text.) Davis and Scase note that, ‘The first feature of the creative process in organizations is autonomy, in that individuals occupy broadly defined work roles which allow them to experiment and to exercise relatively independent judgment in how they execute their tasks and fulfill organization objectives’.²⁵³ Edmundson had been given the task of adapting writer, which was relatively specific within the confines of the company’s process, but the way in which she worked was a result of this creative autonomy afforded her by Meckler and Teale as a result of their intimate knowledge of her work and faith that she would produce a text which would satisfy their needs for the production.

Relationship between play text and source text

Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, originally published in Russian in 1869, is an epic novel spanning four volumes, nearly thirty characters and over a thousand pages, chronicling the lives of Russian aristocrats from the beginning of Russia’s involvement in the Napoleonic Wars to the Emperor Napoleon’s invasion of Moscow at the Battle of Borodino. The narrative begins in St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1805, examining the aristocratic social circles of the two contrasting cities (the mannered, Francophile St. Petersburg and the more traditionally Russian, less cosmopolitan Moscow) and the opinions of their inhabitants regarding Napoleon and the approaching war with France. As the novel progresses, Tolstoy focuses on three main families (the Bolkonskys, the Bezuhovs and the Rostovs) and explores the way in which the characters’ lives are altered by the course of Russian history. By comparing and contrasting different characters representing different socio-political opinions, Tolstoy paints an expansive portrait of Russian society and sketches a philosophical doctrine, ‘dismissing free will as an illusion and the exercise of will as futile and dangerous’, and proclaiming, ‘that real freedom lies in relinquishing the will and reconciling ourselves to

²⁵³ Davis and Scase, pp.19 & 20.

whatever life brings'.²⁵⁴ Tolstoy dedicates protracted chapters describing settings, characters and their inner thoughts and the greater philosophical, scientific and historical implications behind the narrative shifts, creating increasingly elaborate webs of character relationships:

While half of Russia was conquered, and the inhabitants of Moscow were fleeing to remote provinces, and one levy of militia after another was being raised for the defence of the country, we, not living at the time, cannot help imagining that all the people in Russia, great and small alike, were engaged in doing nothing else but making sacrifices, saving the country, or weeping over its downfall. [...] It seems so to us, because we see out of the past not only the general historical interest of that period, and we do not see all the personal human interests of the immediate present are of so much greater importance than public interests, that they prevent the public interest from ever being felt—from being noticed at all, indeed.²⁵⁵

War and Peace explores the role of individual will and changeability of human behaviour in order to demystify the turning point in Russia's history that was the Battle of Borodino and the subsequent invasion of Moscow by Napoleon. Tolstoy argues that, in order to understand great turning points in history, we must honour the motivations of and relationships between the individuals involved.

Edmundson found a way through the dense, lengthy and complex text by making bold dramaturgical choices in terms of the structure of the play text and also in terms of the characters, themes and narrative strands on which to focus. The writer explained that the greatest challenge of adapting for the stage, especially in the case of *War and Peace*, was the need to condense the hundreds of pages of original narrative into a few hours of stage time.²⁵⁶ She noted that the advantage of working on stage adaptations was that they give her the confidence to write about subjects and events which she had not thought previously to be 'particularly achievable onstage', such as, 'people drowning in floods' (*The Mill on the Floss*) and 'people [...] throwing themselves under trains' (*Anna Karenina*), and that this kind

²⁵⁴ Helen Edmundson, *War and Peace* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 2008), p.v.

²⁵⁵ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, transl. by Constance Garnett (New York and Toronto: Modern Library Paperback Edition, 2002), p. 1071.

²⁵⁶ Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

of writing process encouraged her to ‘expand the boundaries’ of her practice.²⁵⁷ Edmundson had plenty of opportunity to experiment with possibilities for dynamic stage directions, as Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* revolves around a series of vast, expansive, greatly differing and constantly changing locations. Edmundson believes it is important to respect the original text in that the adaptation does not ‘change it beyond recognition’, while being ‘bold enough to put the novel aside [...] and allow it to become a piece of theatre in its own right’; this, she explained, could be achieved by adhering to the ‘heart’, ‘atmosphere’ and ‘essence’ of the source text, but feeling free to alter the structure and dialogue in the adaptation’.²⁵⁸

Edmundson’s tendency in writing stage adaptations for Shared Experience is to focus on the elements of the source text that are likely to lend themselves to what Meckler referred to as an ‘expressionistic’ style of performance; in other words, she tailors her interpretation of the novel to the company’s tastes by focusing on aspects of the text that can be interpreted visually and physically, rather than writing dialogue-heavy pieces within a more realistic context. This not only allows Edmundson to create an opportunity for the directors to influence the adaptation but also to create a shortcut in the narrative, abbreviating lengthy passages of prosaic description of the original novel. Edmundson’s objective to ‘expand the boundaries’ of her writing by outlining physical interpretations of narrative developments compliments the directors’ desire to create a production where, as Meckler said, ‘the actor that creates the atmosphere’ through strong visual motifs and physical work.²⁵⁹

As a result of the already familiar and trusting relationship between Edmundson and Meckler and Teale, their shared aesthetic values, their much-discussed perspective on the source text and mutual observation of artistic boundaries, the way in which Edmundson collaborated with the rest of the company was relatively straightforward and situated the text

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

²⁵⁹ Nancy Meckler. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

at the centre of the project. Edmundson stated, ‘We don’t do that much collaborative work’, saying that once they had held the preliminary workshops, she was free to write a draft of the play text, which was then given a dramaturgical examination by the directors; after taking in their feedback, she would write another draft, which would be used in rehearsals.²⁶⁰ As to her involvement within the rehearsal room, Edmundson says, ‘it’s more a question of cutting and sometimes slight editing things and putting things together in a slightly different way’, rather than using the time with the performers and directors to make major changes or additions to the text, as she had done during rehearsals for *Anna Karenina*.²⁶¹ The challenges involved in developing the text seemed to Meckler and Teale to be mostly dramaturgical and logistical and were often left to Edmundson’s discretion to amend; this is opposed to a situation which both Filter and Frantic Assembly had both experienced at one point where the greatest challenge in the development of the script was the miscommunication between the writer and the company. Edmundson emphasized that in working on *War and Peace* in 1996, the greatest challenge was making sufficient cuts to the text in order to keep the length within the three-hour time frame allotted to them by the National Theatre.²⁶² Interestingly, Edmundson referred more to her relationship with Meckler than with Teale while discussing both the 1996 and the 2008 productions of *War and Peace*, implying that Meckler had more control over the production than Teale and thus, perhaps, even more of an effect on the text than Teale did. Meckler agreed with Edmundson in that since they had worked together on previous projects, *War and Peace* necessitated fewer drafts and less development time after rehearsals had already started; she felt that Edmundson’s ability to know ‘what will make it

²⁶⁰ Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

work theatrically' could be attributed not only to her experience as a writer but also as a former performer and deviser.²⁶³

Let us, for a moment, consider the nature of the first text of *War and Peace* for the 1996 production in order to understand the way in which it changed between the first version and the second in 2008. This version of the text was nearly half the length of the later version at 118 pages, with seven acts, a prologue and an epilogue. While the 2008 text was divided into two parts with two acts apiece, the 1996 version was structured quite differently, almost more episodically than its successor. Ingham describes it as, 'predictably more selective in its briskly episodic restructuring of Tolstoy's magnum opus'.²⁶⁴ Although Edmundson stated that she prefers to adhere to the 'essence' of the source text and alter the structure, it is arguable that in this case, especially in the 2008 text, she adhered to Tolstoy's overall structure more than to the essence of his style. In his description of *War and Peace* as adaptation rather than dramatization, Ingham would argue that the essence of the source text is changed radically in order to make a piece of theatre that stands independently from the novel, which was Meckler, Teale and Edmundson's goal from the beginning. Due to the constraint of a three-hour time limit on the length of the play imposed by the National Theatre, Edmundson was forced to strip away a good deal of Tolstoy's narrative and many of his characters, focusing particularly on Natasha, Pierre and Andrei and their changing world view as the decisive Battle of Borodino approaches; in these three characters, we are shown the way in which the decadent, leisurely lifestyle of the Russian aristocracy was altered by a war, previously considered to be a far away 'European' struggle, on their own soil. Before the Battle of Borodino, General Kutuzov says to Andrei, 'Tomorrow, we shall win. We shall win because we are Russians and because this is our soil and our spirit will never surrender'.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Nancy Meckler. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

²⁶⁴ Ingham, p.105.

²⁶⁵ Edmundson, *War and Peace* (2008), p.148.

Edmundson's text is not only an exploration of Tolstoy's philosophy of human freedom, but also an exploration of the way in which an entire country is altered by war, making the themes of *War and Peace* universal and relatable for a wide range of audience members.

Edmundson breaks Tolstoy's novel into condensed, dramatic episodes that are able to lend themselves to dramatically interesting, imagistic moments that not only represent the original narrative physically but also to reduce the need for lengthy dialogic exposition to make connections from one scene to the next. The episodic structure of the 1996 text presents the lives of the characters in an economic fashion, but also reinforces the Piscatorian element prevalent in Shared Experience productions—the device of emphasizing and illustrating the socio-economic pressures on the individual. This particular approach allows the adaptation to make the themes of the original source text and the experiences of its characters universal and thus, accessible to contemporary audiences. In other productions such as *Brontë*, *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary*, the episodic approach to structuring serves to highlight the feminist nature of the production, focusing on the hardships and limitations of the lives of women in the nineteenth-century; although *War and Peace* did not follow this pattern of feminist influence as strongly as the others, the adaptation did follow an episodic structure which underscored the struggle for individual thought and freedom in the face of overwhelming pressure from society to conform in order to combat the increasing sense of chaos in a time of war. In order for a contemporary audience to sympathize with Tolstoy's characters, Edmundson highlighted the difficulty the characters have adjusting to a rapidly changing world and political climate. Ingham says:

Edmundson's contribution to [Shared Experience's] adaptation work has been to introduce a broader visual and spatial dimension, with episodic but essentially naturalistic dialogue and snapshot imagery, thoroughly assimilated into the theatrical process. The fusion has resulted in less abstract, more concrete physical theatre and a reduction in verbal storytelling for narrative continuity.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ Ingham, p.131.

Edmundson's text provides a framework for the visual aspect of the production, both in terms of the design and the physical sequences. For example, at the beginning of the play, Pierre, the illegitimate son of a nobleman, returns to Russia from Paris where he has been studying, enamoured with Napoleon's mission to unite Europe under his rule as one whole Republic; by the end of the play, having seen the ruin and destruction Napoleon has caused throughout Russia in his quest for power (and after having been taken prisoner by the French army), Pierre realizes that his campaign threatens Russia's existence, limiting national determinism as well as personal freedom. In the novel, while Moscow is being evacuated, Pierre decides to stay to assassinate Napoleon:

convinced that Moscow would not be defended, he suddenly felt that what had only occurred to him before as a possibility had now become something necessary and inevitable. He must remain in Moscow, concealing his name, must meet Napoleon, and kill him, so as either perish or to put an end to the misery of all Europe, which was in Pierre's opinion entirely due to Napoleon alone.²⁶⁷

Here, Tolstoy gives the reader an example of an individual, emotional and absurd response to the horrors and the chaos of the French invasion through Pierre's decision to assassinate Napoleon. Edmundson translated and physicalized this theme for the stage by turning Napoleon into a manifestation of Pierre's imagination. In Pierre's fantasy encounter with Napoleon during the Battle of Borodino in Edmundson's text, Napoleon tells him, 'I am fighting this war for the stability of the world,' and Pierre responds, 'No. You are fighting it so that your power will never again be threatened or your will defied'.²⁶⁸ This stylized, fantastical conceptualization of the novel reflects a kind of Piscatorian impulse to depict larger political issues within the context of the way that they are embodied in the individual, as well as physicalizing more abstract concepts for the audience. Edmundson reconciles the problem of such overwhelming concepts as the Napoleonic Wars and Russian nationalism by

²⁶⁷ Tolstoy, p.1027.

²⁶⁸ Helen Edmundson, *War and Peace* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 1996), p.91.

focusing on one man's philosophical, political and emotional journey and his changing perception of Napoleon.

Edmundson combines realistic dialogue with emotionally-charged, evocative stage directions in order to inscribe space for the more difficult events to realize dramatically, such as the Battle of Borodino, the Battle of Austerlitz and the burning of Moscow. The dialogue is a fusion of a contemporary approximation of language from the Napoleonic period and more contemporary British idioms, summarizing episodes from the novel and often foreshadowing future events, as well as illuminating the characters' opinions, fears, desires and fantasies. Towards the beginning of the play, just before the battle of Austerlitz where the Russians fought alongside the Austrian Army against the French, Count Rostov says, 'Why should we send our young men to Austria? What has it to do with us?'.²⁶⁹ And his son Nikolai, who is about to go off to the battle, replies, 'I can't believe you mean that, Father. [...] We Russians must fight to the last drop of blood. I, for one, am willing to die for my Emperor'.²⁷⁰ In Tolstoy's novel, this particular incident does not occur in this way; although Nikolai expresses great patriotism and willingness for sacrifice throughout the book, the father does not express the sentiment that the Battle of Austerlitz is irrelevant to Russia. Tolstoy uses the Battle of Austerlitz to emphasize the Russian fetishization of military glory at the time. During a military review by the Tsar, as a young officer, Nikolai is described as such:

He really was in love with the Tsar and the glory of the Russian arms and the hope of coming victory. And he was not the only man who felt thus in those memorable days that preceded the battle of Austerlitz: nine-tenths of the men in the Russian army were at that moment in love [...] with their Tsar and the glory of the Russian arms.²⁷¹

Edmundson has not only translated this episode to the stage by turning prosaic description into succinct, aforementioned dialogue, but also by modernizing the dilemma for the

²⁶⁹ Edmundson, *War and Peace* (2008), p.30.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Tolstoy, p.284-5.

audience. With Count Rostov's line, 'What has it to do with us?', Edmundson projects the concerns of the UK in 2008 of wars 'being fought in foreign countries'.²⁷² Not being quite convinced that we should necessarily even be going to war, (i.e., Anglo-American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan), which she found to be a useful parallel to Austerlitz, as opposed to Borodino, which she felt was 'more akin to the Second World War,' in terms of its scope, immediacy and sheer number of casualties.²⁷³

Edmundson not only navigated Tolstoy's lengthy epic but also made room within the text for creative freedom of Meckler, Teale and Ranken by creating highly imagistic, symbolic stage directions that lent themselves to interpretation by the rest of the production team. The more obviously stylized stage directions indicating breaks for the physical scenes were intended to be almost timeless, inviting the audience into a surreal physical sequence in order to emphasize the juxtaposition of the historic world of the play with the contemporary world of the audience. In a 1996 interview with *Time Out* during rehearsals for *War and Peace*, Edmundson explained that this adaptation differed from *The Mill on the Floss* and *Anna Karenina* in that she felt she and the directors were able to develop devices to represent the main characters' inner struggles, whereas in *War and Peace*, she felt that the characters, 'although terribly profound, don't have the same complexity of struggle going on within them. That throws the emphasis on the intellectual'.²⁷⁴ Edmundson's challenge was to find a way of translating this long, 'intellectual' work, heavy with philosophical and descriptive passages for the stage, for a company which had become accustomed to staging the complex, inner lives of fictional characters. For example, in the 1996 and the 2008 text, she depicted the Battle of Borodino in two ways. In order to foreshadow the coming battle, she wrote in a stage direction:

²⁷² Edmundson, *War and Peace* (2008), p.30.

²⁷³ Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

²⁷⁴ Jane Edwardes, 'Novel Gazing': review of *War and Peace* by Helen Edmundson', *Time Out* 19 June 1996.

*All around PIERRE, the injured of the play have gathered—MARIA, ANDREI, PRINCE BOLKONSKY, NIKOLAI, the COUNTESS—everyone in fact. They walk forward and then collapse down as though they have been shot, then pull themselves up and walk forward again.*²⁷⁵

This approach is heavily stylized and demonstrates the all-consuming destructive nature war has on society, both in the public or military sphere and also in the private or domestic sphere, as both are represented by the various and contrasting characters in the play, such as Andrei and Maria. Edmundson suggested a simple gesture meant to foreshadow the battle which Meckler, Teale and Ranken were then able to realize in the productions in their own chosen style. Edmundson not only conveyed the sense of the universal nature of war, but also replaced hundreds of pages of description and philosophical prose with a single image representing the collective sacrifice the characters make during the Battle of Borodino and Napoleon's invasion of Moscow.

Both Edmundson and Shared Experience's approach to adaptation is reminiscent of Piscatorian staging not only because of the politics embedded in the style of writing and staging but also because of the techniques of adaptation, such as the use of perspective, character and physical and visual imagery. The other way which Edmundson chose to represent the battle in the stage directions in both versions, was to show it from Pierre's perspective, making it a more focused, personal experience for the audience; Pierre, being an outside observer not participating in the battle, mirrors the audience's status as witnesses and outsiders. At first, Pierre, standing on a hill, is able to see the beginning of the battle, but as the sky fills with smoke and the charge begins, he becomes confused and does not understand how the battle is progressing or where the Russian troops are situated:

As the sun rises fully in the sky NAPOLEON raises his arm and lowers it and a moment later the first cannon ball explodes over Borodino. The emphasis of the battle should be PIERRE's changing attitude to it. At first it should seem extremely beautiful, like a sound and light show, with swirling mist and violet smoke, brilliant

²⁷⁵ Edmundson, *War and Peace* (2008), p.142.

*sunshine and gleaming dew, the flash of steel, the silk standards, the white church glistening in the distance, the moving bodies of soldiers in uniform.*²⁷⁶

And then, a page later, as the battle becomes more violent and confusing for Pierre, it reads: ‘On the hill, PIERRE is looking worried. He can’t make sense of it any more. It seems to be out of control. [...] He realises he has arrived in hell’.²⁷⁷ The closest comparison one might find in the novel to this passage in the play text occurs at the beginning of Borodino, which Pierre has come to observe; the battle becomes chaotic and frightening for him when he survives an explosion from a canon ball: ‘Pierre, beside himself with terror, jumped up and ran back to the battery as the one refuge from the horrors encompassing him’.²⁷⁸ In comparison to Nikolai’s abbreviated quest for military glory (‘I, for one, am willing to die for my Emperor’), Edmundson explored and expanded upon Pierre’s experience of the grim reality of war in order to demonstrate the beginning of the trajectory of the great change he undergoes throughout the battle and the invasion of Moscow.²⁷⁹ The stage directions are more poetic, suggestive and expansive than the dialogue; Edmundson created space within the script for the directors to stage the battle, giving them the freedom to find a way of doing this in their own style, but also while indicating the purpose of the battle at this moment in the text, demonstrating Pierre’s disillusion with what he had previously felt to be the glory of war. The glamour of flashing swords and ‘swirling mist’ changes to the grim reality of death and destruction. In this way, Edmundson created a context for the individual’s experience within a nationalistic, power-hungry and destructive society unsympathetic to the experience of the individual. Ingham describes *War and Peace* as an ‘exhaustion of the theatrical

²⁷⁶ Edmundson, *War and Peace* (2008), p.154.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p.155.

²⁷⁸ Tolstoy, p.910.

²⁷⁹ Edmundson, *War and Peace* (2008), p.30.

methodology' that, 'extends the frontier of Epic, ensemble adaptation if only because the novel is so vast and their play version theatrically cohesive and modern in its subtext'.²⁸⁰

Edmundson expanded the 1996 version of the adaptation for the 2008 production into 210 pages, two parts, four acts, a prologue and an epilogue. This longer version of *War and Peace* was performed over five and a half hours (as opposed to the four and a half of the 1996 production), which the audience could see either over the course of a single day with two short intervals and one long dinner break between parts one and two, or over the course of two days. The play text and resulting performance still reflects the structure of the original novel, but in an abridged version retaining only the basic skeleton of Tolstoy's narrative. Edmundson comments that originally, in 1996 when the company was working at the National Theatre, they had wanted to create a five-hour-long production 'in order to do full justice to the story', and was she frustrated that she had to cut so much material in order to keep the running time to four hours.²⁸¹ She continued, 'Amongst many other things, I have been able to take us all to the battle of Austerlitz, to give proper attention to Prince Andrei and to award more time to Pierre's challenging and ever-shifting philosophy.'²⁸² One of the greatest additions to the text in 2008 was that Andrei's story was expanded, giving the audience the perspective of a typically nationalistic, dutiful member of the Russian aristocracy and his disillusionment with the glory of war, as well as creating a counterpoint to Pierre's character who becomes more enlightened, hopeful and politically involved throughout the course of the play. In the 1996 *Time Out* interview with Edmundson, Jane Edwards comments, 'A major decision was to concentrate on the maturing Pierre [...] to the detriment of Andrei', because Edmundson said she, 'felt very strongly that it wasn't possible to have two characters who are constantly philosophizing', and that she felt Pierre was 'so

²⁸⁰ Ingham, p.122.

²⁸¹ Edmundson, *War and Peace* (2008), p.vi.

²⁸² Ibid.

much more sympathetic and human' than Andrei.²⁸³ By 2008, Edmundson had found a way to depict both characters in counterpoint to one another, Andrei, the more fatalistic character who dies from wounds sustained in battle ('How deceived I have been in this life. Everything I have clung to is an illusion.'),²⁸⁴ with Pierre, the more optimistic character who we see up to the final scene, contemplating Russia as a republic and foreshadowing the Decembrist Revolution: 'All ideas which have great results are simple. My idea is just that is vicious people unite together into a power, then honest people must do the same'.²⁸⁵

The action in the play is as continuous as it was in 1996 and Edmundson continued to use the technique of blending one scene into another, allowing different characters' worlds to coexist on the same stage at the same time, but there are also additional short scenes, exploring moments in the lives of the characters; in this way, the audience was able to delve deeper into the world of the play, juxtaposing, for example, the cosseted adolescence of Natasha, surrounded by her loving family, with the lonely spinsterhood of Maria, who is forced to take care of her demanding, callous father on their remote estate. This tendency to expand on the number of short, private scenes in the play was not only a result of Edmundson's decision-making process, but it also served Teale and Meckler's goals as directors. In the education pack provided by Shared Experience, Teale is quoted as saying,

Tolstoy is brilliant at dipping inside a person's consciousness and describing the inner sensation of the moment. Often this is at total odds with what the character allows other people to see. It is this conflict between the outer and the inner self which fascinates us and is crucial to the physical life of the work.²⁸⁶

While the 1996 text condensed the stories of the different characters for the sake of time, the text for the 2008 revival expanded upon these personal moments in order to illuminate the conflict between the inner and the outer of the characters. Once again, we are able to see the

²⁸³ Edwardes.

²⁸⁴ Edmundson, *War and Peace* (2008), p.153.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.210.

²⁸⁶ Gillian King, Shared Experience education pack for *War and Peace* by Helen Edmundson (2008) <http://www.sharedexperience.org.uk/media/education/war-and-peace_edpack.pdf> [accessed 2 August 2011].

way in which the decentralized aspects of the production, such as Edmundson's autonomous choices as the writer, are brought together in order to maintain artistic cohesion within the production; she aligned her objective in adapting the novel with the directors' vision for the production.

Production

In terms of the relationship between Edmundson, Meckler and Teale, there was a marked difference in power and control over the production in 1996 and the revival in 2008 in that Meckler had more control over the revival than Teale. In 1996, Meckler asked Teale to co-direct *War and Peace* with her because she was overwhelmed with projects external to the company at the time and had difficulty coping with a production on such an enormous scale. Meckler, Teale and Edmundson all commented on the feeling that the production was rushed and fraught with practical problems, including an actor being injured in rehearsal and subsequently replaced for the run of the show and Edmundson giving birth just before the opening. Teale expressed a positive view on her experience co-directing with Meckler, saying that although it was challenging, 'the wonderful thing is that you get to watch someone else work. [...] I've found it so stimulating and interesting and rich. [...] it stretches your own understanding. [...] it has been a real [...] collaboration'.²⁸⁷ Since her co-direction of *War and Peace* came near the beginning of Teale's tenure at Shared Experience, when she was still a young director, perhaps Teale's memory of the experience is a positive one because she was able to play a greater role than simply assisting Meckler, as she had in the past, as well as being able to learn from an older, more experienced director at the same time.

Meckler, on the other hand, was less positive in her assessment of the experience of co-directing. She states that although the two had co-directed previously on *The Mill on the*

²⁸⁷ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 10 July 2008.

Floss and they both have a similar aesthetic and way of working as directors, they found the process ‘very difficult’ and did not think that they would ever repeat the process on another production. Ultimately, Meckler felt the problem was that it is ‘difficult to share a vision’, and that ideally, ‘one person has to be able to take the lead’.²⁸⁸ Meckler and Teale divided the scenes between them and directed different scenes, each feeling strongly about how the play should be interpreted, but unable to come to an agreement as to how a compromise would be reached and who would make the final decisions.²⁸⁹ One can understand Meckler’s perspective as an older, more experienced director who had really only worked with the younger, less experienced Teale as her subordinate, as one who challenged her views but ultimately submitted to her authority. As a result, since it had been Meckler’s idea to remount *War and Peace* in 2008, Teale agreed to allow Meckler to have the final authority over the production, while she would serve as a kind of assistant, or, in Meckler’s words, a ‘helper’ to Meckler.²⁹⁰ Cast member Herdman recalls that Meckler ‘called the shots,’ and that Teale would give notes to Meckler and rehearsed scenes separately from Meckler in order to help her with the production, but ultimately ‘deferred to’ Meckler.²⁹¹ Herdman explains that, ‘Their style was quite different. [...] [Meckler] is clearly a hard-headed and outwardly assertive character and [Teale] is a bit more quietly strong.’²⁹² Here, we may use Charles Handy’s expression ‘territorial violation’, or when the territory of one person’s area of expertise, job or task is infringed upon by another collaborator; clearly, Meckler felt that her area of expertise as a director, her influence and control had been breached by Teale during the process of their co-directorship of the production, and that the only way to be able to

²⁸⁸ Nancy Meckler. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Theo Herdman. E-mail correspondence. 10 May 2011.

²⁹² Ibid.

work together on the revival was for Meckler to be in control and Teale to assist.²⁹³ In this way, Meckler was able to establish her layer of authorial contribution as a director as a dominant one.

As a practitioner who had previously been operating under the parameters of artistic autonomy of a semi-centralized company, the occupation of a single role (that of director) by two people (Meckler and Teale) within the production proved problematic for Meckler. We can illuminate this conflict Meckler felt so acutely during this production by examining a statement she made concerning her conception of ensemble work and collaboration. She says she is ‘committed to the idea of ensemble theatre’, defining ‘ensemble’ as ‘a special energy you get with people really working together to make something that’s outside themselves,’ rather than the process of collaboration itself.²⁹⁴ Meckler is wary and skeptical of the idea of what she calls a ‘democratic’ collaboration (involving a devising process with performers, rather than a scripting one involving a writer), saying she had tried that approach to making work in the past (presumably with the Freehold Theatre), but that it was problematic; she felt that, ultimately, a director needs to make final decisions for the group, which she defines as, ‘The person with the strongest personality, the strongest desire to get everyone to do what they think [...] I don’t know if you could really ever put together a piece and have it be what everybody wants’.²⁹⁵ Recalling Chaikin’s experiences as a director devising material with performers while simultaneously working with writers to script productions, we can see the similarities in the experiences the two directors had with working collaboratively and the subsequent decisions they made as a result. Meckler’s previous experiences working in collaborative theatre have strongly influenced her pragmatic, director-led and also text-based approach to working with the company; here we are better able to understand the dynamics of

²⁹³ Charles Handy, *Understanding Organizations* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), p.230.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Nancy Meckler, *Theatre Voice* (2005)

<http://www.theatrevoice.com/listen_now/player/?audioID=299> [accessed 28 March 2011].

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

the relationship between herself and Teale, as well as herself and Edmundson. Meckler's statement reflects Edmundson's statement that the process in which she engages with Shared Experience is not collaborative per se; the process, although described by the company in other statements and other documents by other collaborators within the circle as collaborative, is one that is semi-centralized and reliant and relationships of trust, the demarcation of tasks and what Handy calls the 'expert power' of each individual practitioner, or 'the power invested in someone because of his acknowledged expertise'.²⁹⁶ Handy declares:

In a meritocratic tradition, people do not resent being influenced by those whom they regard as experts. It is, furthermore, a power base that requires no sanctions. The specialist departments of an organization, if acknowledged to be expert, will find their suggestions or instructions readily implemented.²⁹⁷

Each member of Shared Experience's pool of collaborators (such as Edmundson, Ranken and Simpson) has been carefully hand-picked by Meckler and/or Teale on the basis of their talent and expertise; therefore, the directors work with their collaborators again and again, rather than bringing new practitioners on to each project, in order to have a stable working environment governed by those with separate but equal skill sets.

The fact that Edmundson was a relatively self-sufficient writer seem to be a relief for both directors, as it limited the amount of compromise they would have to make amongst the three of them regarding the development of the script. Teale commented that Edmundson rarely needed to workshop her scripts and was often able to deliver a completed draft of the play text to the company before rehearsals began.²⁹⁸ Meckler supports this statement by saying that Edmundson's adaptations are, 'very unusual [...] because they're almost complete when we go into rehearsal', and that Edmundson is, 'rare in the sense that she can picture the action, and she has a lot of very strong visual ideas, but also she will write something

²⁹⁶ Handy, p.119.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

knowing we'll be able to find a way to abstract it physically'.²⁹⁹ Since Edmundson had already worked on other productions with the company, she was familiar with their aesthetic, as well as the directors' preferred way of working, their desire to have highly segregated artistic roles and be allowed to work independently of one another, with a certain amount of discussion along the way. It was, no doubt, also helpful to the process that Edmundson had previously adapted *Anna Karenina*, also a lengthy and well-known work of Tolstoy, and was familiar with the writer's style, philosophy and biography, as well as with nineteenth-century Russian culture. Edmundson says that since they had produced *War and Peace* once before, she was less involved in the revival and had less of a presence in rehearsals, trusting Meckler and Teale to work without her. Additionally, during rehearsals, movement director Ranken worked with the performers alongside Meckler and Teale to physically improvise the production's movement sequences, which served not only as an expression of what Teale refers to as the 'inner' selves of the characters, but also as a visual shorthand to blur the lines between different settings (such as a ballroom and a battlefield) coexisting in the same stage space and clarifying the narrative, all of which Edmundson had loosely indicated in the stage directions of the play text. Ranken served as another interpreter of the text for Meckler and Teale, contributing the unique ability to develop the physical language of the play without encroaching on the directors' artistic territory. Herdman says that during rehearsals, Meckler was 'respectful and attentive' to Ranken, that Ranken would lead the movement sessions and Meckler would watch, 'often trying to bring out links and connections between the exercises and the [...] world of the play'.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Helen Manful, *Taking Stage: Women Directors on Directing* (London: Methuen, 1999), p.168.

³⁰⁰ Theo Herdman. E-mail correspondence. 10 May 2011.

Critical responses

War and Peace was largely received more warmly in 2008 than in 1996. In the first production, critics often compared it unfavorably to *The Mill on the Floss* and *Anna Karenina*, which they felt were more successful, inventive adaptations. In both years, many critics felt the cast was talented, but that Meckler, Teale and Edmundson had taken on too much by adapting such a lengthy text and were not able to give it sufficient emotional and intellectual depth. In 1996, Donald Rayfield writes in *The Times Literary Supplement* that the production ‘defies expectation’, but that despite the fact that Tolstoy ‘has been thrown overboard [...] fidelity is the real danger’, that the play would have benefitted from even more scenes from the original novel being excised.³⁰¹ Michael Billington, on the other hand, entitled his review of the 1996 production ‘War crimes’ and felt the adaptation was ‘pointless’ because Tolstoy’s novel was practically unconquerable as a stage adaptation (as did Nick Curtis reviewing for *The Evening Standard*); he found the physical scenes ‘cutesy’ and what was missing were the ‘historical truth’ of the novel and an overall idea governing the production’s ideology; he concludes by saying he preferred Piscator’s 1942 adaptation to Shared Experience’s ‘theatrical virtuosity suffused with a woolly humanism’.³⁰² In other words, Billington felt Piscator’s adaptation contributed something unique because of the director’s use of Tolstoy’s novel as a reflection on the Second World War and the Nazi invasion of Russia, whereas the Shared Experience production focused too much on adapting the novel in its entirety without a particular focus. The critic accused the company of an overly faithful, but misguided and misunderstood translation of the novel. The number of reviews of greatly differing opinions on the 1996 production may lead one to believe that *War and Peace* is a novel with such a lengthy history of interpretations and adaptations

³⁰¹ Donald Rayfield, ‘Taking vital liberties with Tolstoy’: review of *War and Peace* by Helen Edmundson, *The Times Literary Supplement* 11 July 1996.

³⁰² Michael Billington. ‘War crimes’: review of *War and Peace* by Helen Edmundson, *The Guardian* 27 June 1996.

(stage, film and television) and such a loyal following of readers that audiences and critics were hard-pressed to judge the production on its merits (or failings) as a play in and of itself.

In 2008, the reviews were less dramatically divided in opinion and more positive overall; perhaps this is because many critics had seen or were at least aware of the 1996 production, so the 2008 revival did not come as much of a surprise or shock the second time around; on the other hand, it may be a result the more fully-fleshed version which satisfied audiences' need to see more of Tolstoy's story on stage. For example, in *The Evening Standard*, Fiona Mountford calls the production a 'magnificent achievement', saying, 'in the confident hands of that team of master adaptors, Shared Experience, Tolstoy's examination of Russia at the time of the Napoleonic Wars gleams afresh'.³⁰³ In *The Daily Telegraph*, Tim Auld writes, 'For its revised production, Shared Experience has given Edmundson more time, around five and a half hours in all [...] to allow her to do full—or at least fuller—justice to Tolstoy's Russian epic set during the Napoleonic Wars'.³⁰⁴

***Brontë*: the writer/director-led process**

Brontë was written and directed by Teale, rather than an external, commissioned writer, and was first produced for a regional tour in 2005 which culminated at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre in London. It was subsequently revived in 2010 for the Watermill Theatre in Newbury, Berkshire and again in 2011 for the Tricycle Theatre in co-production with the Oxford Playhouse. Teale's adaptation was changed slightly for the revival and Meckler directed in place of Teale. The revival was the result of the Watermill Theatre's invitation to Shared Experience to collaborate on a production in which the company would remount *Brontë*, involving a group of young performers and designers who had never

³⁰³ Fiona Mountford, 'Epic with an intimate feel': review of *War and Peace* by Helen Edmundson, *The Evening Standard*, 15 April 2008.

³⁰⁴ Tim Auld, review of *War and Peace* by Helen Edmundson, *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 April 2008.

previously worked with Meckler or Teale, exposing them to the company's process of working over the course of seven weeks. Additionally, rather than Ranken working on both productions, Ranken choreographed Meckler's 2010-2011 version, while Leah Houseman choreographed the 2005 version, making the authorship of movement more complex.

Source text and play text

Brontë differs greatly from *War and Peace*, and, in fact, other Shared Experience adaptations as well, as it is Teale's amalgam of adaptations of the different literary works of the Brontë sisters, as well as an imagining of their lives in their childhood home of the parsonage at Haworth, Yorkshire. *Brontë* deals with the lives of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, the authors of, respectively, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, amongst others. Teale chose to construct the play on the basis of well-researched but imaginative speculations revolving around the question of what were the circumstances and events which inspired those three, isolated women to write those novels so rich in their descriptions of human experience. Teale says what shaped the text was:

the idea that these three spinsters—and I'm using that word consciously because I think they would have felt like spinsters in that society—how their life experiences were so limited and, as far as we know, they had no sexual experience—how they'd written some of the most passionate and even erotic literature of all time.³⁰⁵

The play tells the story of the three sisters, beginning with their childhood growing up with their brother Branwell under their father's strict supervision, after the death of their mother and two older sisters. We see each sister develop as a writer and achieve literary success, only to die at relatively young ages (Anne at twenty-nine, Emily at thirty and Charlotte at thirty-nine). Teale used an adaptive approach to script the text, not only depicting the lives of Charlotte, Anne and Emily, but also adapting brief moments from each of their novels, inviting the audience to come to their own conclusions as to how these sheltered and isolated

³⁰⁵ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

women, leading lives of dreary, rural domesticity in nineteenth-century Yorkshire, socially and culturally isolated, caring for their aging father and alcoholic brother, wrote such richly imagined texts. The action takes place within the parsonage, juxtaposing the reality of the Brontës' daily lives and turning points in the narrative of their biography with the fantasy of the creation of the characters and the elaborate worlds of their novels. The story of the development of the sisters' artistic maturation is interrupted by these moments of adaptation, blending the lives of the historical figures with the fictional ones.

In the *Brontë* script, Teale not only presented the lives of the Brontës within the context of their work, but also constructed a hypothesis regarding their relationships to one another and their experience as women living in rural Victorian Yorkshire, subjugated to the demands of the men around them. Teale explained that the play was the culmination of what ultimately became a trilogy after having produced both *Jane Eyre* and *After Mrs. Rochester*. She comments that while adapting *Jane Eyre*, she became intrigued by the 'mythic power', 'danger and eroticism' and 'terrifying rage' of the madwoman in the attic, Mr. Rochester's wife Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre*, and by what she imagined to be Charlotte Brontë's 'repulsion and attraction to her own creation,' as well as how the character was created and what she essentially represented for Charlotte, if she was intended as a reaction to a Victorian world of ideals of femininity and strict morality.³⁰⁶ Ranken says she used elements from Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* when she choreographed *Jane Eyre*, physicalizing the character of Bertha with 'empathy', making a point to depict her as someone judged harshly and unfairly by society, forced into confinement and alcoholism.³⁰⁷ As a result, Teale carried on with this liberal, contemporary, postcolonial interpretation of Bertha by adapting *Wide Sargasso Sea* and then causing her to appear again in *Brontë*. Ranken views *Anna Karenina*, *The Mill on*

³⁰⁶ Interview with Polly Teale, 'Three sisters', *The Guardian* (2005)
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/aug/13/theatre.classics>> [accessed 3 August 2011].

³⁰⁷ Liz Ranken. Personal interview. 28 June 2011.

the Floss and *Jane Eyre* as ‘a continuation of this great long evolution,’ Meckler and Teale’s use of the subtext exercises Ranken employed to embody the emotional and psychological subtext—the ‘metaphysics’—of a scene, but that Teale’s uses these exercises in her directing choices ‘more freely’ than Meckler.³⁰⁸ The figure of the madwoman in the attic and all the socio-cultural associations behind it became the conceptual through-line for all three productions, allowing Teale (who wrote and directed each) to explore the work of female authors such as Charlotte, Anne and Emily Brontë and Rhys from a feminist perspective, at the same time, pursuing what she feels is one of the central objectives of the company, to ‘make physical the things that are usually hidden [...] the interior world of feeling and memory and imagination’.³⁰⁹ Charlotte Canning explains that, in late-twentieth-century feminist theatre, the concept of the female ‘experience’ has been widely emphasized by writers and directors, especially in terms of exploring and reconstructing socio-cultural history and literature in opposition to the more commonly received, traditional ‘male’ viewpoint. She says:

The term *experience* describes the process of constructing an identity in context. The events, emotions, impressions, and thoughts comprising that context are inseparable from the identity they produce. By attending to the ways that women produce and interpret experiences, the historian can break with the masculinist definitions that have governed history in order to make women historically visible on their own terms. [...] A strong connection was made between the events and feelings of “private” life and their legitimate role in shaping the agenda of “public” life. [...] Part of the legacy for feminism was the important connection between public and private.³¹⁰

The prioritization of personal experience over a more ‘masculinist’ definition of history has influenced the feminist agenda to reconstruct the historical, contextualized female identity; we may link this feminist legitimatization of the link between the private and public life to Teale’s objective to emphasize the staging of the interior, the hidden, the personal and

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 10 July 2008.

³¹⁰ Charlotte Canning, ‘Constructing Experience: Theorizing a Feminist Theatre History’, *Theatre Journal*, 4 (1993), p.530.

subjective. Teale did not take Charlotte's creation of Bertha, the madwoman in the attic, at face value, but rather investigated this popular literary image in relation to Charlotte's experience as a woman and a writer.

The overall effect of *Brontë* was one that indicated the audience was not simply watching a dramatization of the sisters' lives, but was also witness to their memories, imaginations and inner lives in a kind of auteur piece imagined, scripted and realized by Teale. *Brontë* (in both 2005 and 2010/2011) had a cast of six performers playing the parts of twelve characters, both historical figures and 'ghosts', characters from the sisters' novels. The set consisted of a simple, nineteenth-century table and chairs, most directly representing the Brontë's kitchen, but also serving as different rooms in the house and also fantasy locations within the characters' imagination and memories. The lighting design played a major part in the production; the back wall was lit with a series of colored gels, changing to reflect the mood of the scene, sometimes changing as rapidly as the characters' emotions and reactions. While the performers playing the father, the brother and Cathy/Bertha enter and exit the space, the performers playing Charlotte, Emily and Anne are mostly present, waiting at the edge of the wings—just visible to the audience—even after they have died, as if they are watching over and protecting each other constantly.

As the writer, Teale used an intertextual approach to adaptation by combining excerpts and characters from novels *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights* with letters written by the Brontë family and poems by Charlotte, Emily and Anne in order to provide an entry point for the audience to be able to have an insight into the lives and minds of the sisters, whose personal lives have remained relatively unknown. Teale structured the text (as the writer) and staged the production (as the director) to indicate that the audience was invited to discover these stories (fictional, real and imagined) along with her, emphasizing the constructed, speculative nature of the story. This method of depicting

the Brontë sisters' lives and adapting their novels contrasted with what Teale calls the 'dreary, repetitive, uneventful' exterior lives of 'drab domesticity' with the inner lives of 'soaring, unfettered imagination'.³¹¹ Like *War and Peace*, *Brontë* began with a prologue with some of the characters in modern dress; Edmundson had the actor playing Pierre begin *War and Peace* as a modern-day British visitor to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, while Teale had the actors playing Charlotte, Anne and Emily begin *Brontë* as contemporary young women researching the lives of the Brontë sisters before they donned early Victorian costumes. The three anonymous women address each other and the audience, asking, 'How did it happen?', 'How was it possible?', observing, 'Three Victorian spinsters living in isolation on the Yorkshire moors', in regard to the past and to the characters they are about to play.³¹² Teale notes that she began the play in this way in order to emphasize the fact that the play is 'a response to the Brontë story, not a piece of biography,' so that the audience recognizes that they are looking at this story 'through the filter of time'.³¹³ Govan, Nicholson and Normington explain:

The change from the diegetic system of "there and then" to the mimetic one of "here and now" is essentially about creating action from narration. In undertaking this adaptation, practitioners have discovered a number of devices through which to convey fiction on stage. In effect, they have developed metaphorical means through which to carry the meaning from one medium across to another. The act of transferring fiction to the stage draws attention to how narratives are constructed. [...] In searching for the metaphor through which to stage fiction, practitioners need to decide [...] from whose point of view the narrative is told and the relationship that the characters or roles will have with the audience.³¹⁴

Teale drew attention to the intertextuality and constructed nature of the story in order to remind the audience that what Shared Experience is presenting is a *response* to the work of the Brontës and existing biographical material pertaining to their lives, rather than a

³¹¹ Interview with Polly Teale, 'Three sisters', *The Guardian* (2005)
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/aug/13/theatre.classics>> [accessed 3 August 2011].

³¹² Polly Teale, *Brontë* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 2005), p.13.

³¹³ Interview with Polly Teale, 'Three sisters', *The Guardian* (2005)
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/aug/13/theatre.classics>> [accessed 3 August 2011].

³¹⁴ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p.91.

dramatization or realistic portrayal of their world. The narrators throughout the play were Charlotte, Anne and Emily, with Charlotte taking centre-stage as the longest-surviving sister of the three; Teale alternated between allowing the characters to address the audience directly as contemporary, anonymous women in the prologue and epilogue—framing the historical narrative of the characters’ lives—addressing each others, as historical characters, and addressing each other as fictional characters from each other’s books. For example, Branwell often made an appearance in each writer’s story-in-progress, serving as Heathcliff in Emily’s *Wuthering Heights* or as Arthur Huntingdon in Anne’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, suggesting that he, as one of the few young male figures in their lives, served as a model for the alcoholic, emotionally abusive male characters in their novels. In one of his alcoholic outbursts, Bramwell tells his sisters, ‘I used once to be loved by a beautiful woman. But she had a husband and he had a gun,’ while reaching out aggressively to fondle Anne, making his sisters increasingly uncomfortable with the lines, ‘Tell her [...] I think of her night and day. Her flesh, her smell, the deep, dark places where I drank’.³¹⁵ In a review of the 2005 production, Sam Marlowe writes, ‘This is no biographical history lesson but an imaginative envisioning of how, in fiction, the sisters found release from a grinding existence’.³¹⁶ Teale combined the creation of action from the narration of the source texts with the theatrical metaphor that illustrated her hypothesis about the genesis of the Brontë sisters’ work.

Teale’s text for *Brontë* (both the 2005 and the 2010 version) re-presents and revisits canonical novels and history in order to explore notions of subjectivity and experience. The narrative focuses on not only Charlotte, Emily and Anne’s relationship to their work, but also to each other, painting a picture of three women who relied on each other for creative and moral support, depicting their memories of childhood and fantasies through physical expression. The first printed version of the text, written and produced in 2005, is ninety-five

³¹⁵ Teale, *Brontë* (2005), p.72.

³¹⁶ Sam Marlowe, review of *Brontë* by Polly Teale, *The Times*, 9 November 2005.

pages long and divided into two acts. The second printed version, written and first produced in 2010, is slightly shorter, at eighty-three pages, also divided into two acts. Unlike an episodic text like *War and Peace* which Edmundson divided into many different scenes, Teale divided both versions of *Brontë* into acts, rather than scenes, with the scene changes indicated in the stage directions such as: ‘*Lights change. Two months later. CHARLOTTE arrives home in coat and shawl with luggage. She sneezes. ANNE gives her a hanky as she continues her story*’.³¹⁷ This structure to the text indicates a more subtle change between scenes, allowing the representation of the passage of time to be fluid and stylized, rather than realistic, indicated by a change in lighting, music and sometimes costume; this gesture not only underlines the surreal, speculative and constructed nature of the world of the play, but also indicates an endlessness to the tedium of the sisters’ lives, the only respite from which being the moments in which they write and escape from their day-to-day tasks. The change from one scene to the next is smooth and subtle, allowing for the interruption of the depiction of the Brontë household with the short adapted scenes from the Brontës’ novels, the imaginings and fantasies springing forth from the world around them. In discussing Shared Experience within the particular context of Teale’s adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, Crouch writes

Central to the stories of all the adaptations are passionate and intelligent women in conflict with cultural expectations of women [...] The Shared Experience productions take a closer look at characters that defy patriarchal convention and subvert the restraints of social acceptability by offering a more explicit representation of female characters’ social, emotional, and sexual needs.³¹⁸

Crouch identifies the company’s preoccupation with the contextualization of women in particular times and places, the way in which we can see the experience of a woman through the lens of her environment and response to it.

As in *Jane Eyre* and *After Mrs. Rochester*, the most prominent motif in the text, around which Teale structures the entire narrative, is the use of the metaphor of the haunted,

³¹⁷ Teale, *Brontë* (2005), p.51.

³¹⁸ Friedman, pp.190-191.

tormented fictional characters as visual representations of Charlotte, Emily and Anne's hidden fears and desires, or what Crouch calls, 'a "split" in the heroine—a division between warring aspects of the character's subjectivity. [...] deconstruct[ing] and interrogat[ing] the heroine's public and private identities. [...] To reveal hidden tensions and conflicts'.³¹⁹ The most common characters to appear are Cathy from Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Bertha from Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* (Anne's character Arthur Huntingdon from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* made only a single, brief appearance), representing Emily's intense emotional and spiritual connection to the surrounding moors (what Teale calls, 'the free, primitive self that exists before self-consciousness, before socialization') and Charlotte's repressed, inner sexual passion.³²⁰ For example, in the first act, we see Charlotte's composition teacher Mr. Heger (played by the performer playing Charlotte's father as well as Mr. Rochester) teaching her how to write prose as Charlotte becomes noticeably aroused and infatuated with him. Mr. Heger exits and Charlotte writes to him. As she does, Bertha appears and begins to control Charlotte physically, representing her repressed sexual desires, as we read in Teale's stage directions:

The bell rings again. He leaves as she watches him

*Lights change. Some weeks later. CHARLOTTE is alone at home. She writes to MR. HEGER. BERTHA enters, no longer young and beautiful, but ravaged by years of madness and incarceration. She crawls towards CHARLOTTE.*³²¹

At this point, Charlotte gives in to her inner, repressed desire for her teacher Mr. Heger as Bertha comes stage, crawling along the floor and grabbing onto Charlotte. The character of Bertha (which Teale refers to as one of the 'ghosts' in the 2005 text) represented Charlotte's hidden, shameful longing as well as her creative writer's imagination. However, as the scene continues, Teale weaves her own imaginings in with one of Charlotte's letters written to her

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Polly Teale, *Brontë* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 2011), p. ix.

³²¹ Ibid., p.38.

boarding school tutor in Brussels, Constantin Héger, on January 8, 1845, an older, married man for whom Charlotte harbored an unreciprocated and secret infatuation, in this context serving as a kind of model for the Mr. Rochester realized in Teale's adaptation.³²² In this excerpted letter, Charlotte writes to herself onstage, reading aloud:

CHARLOTTE. Dear Sir. Day and night I find neither rest nor peace. For three months I have waited and still you torture me with no reply. Nothing. Not a morsel. Not a mouthful. It is cruel. The poor need little to live. They ask only for the crumbs that fall from the table. Deny them this and they die of hunger.³²³

Teale then demonstrates Charlotte's deeply-repressed frustration with the stage direction, '*She screws up the letter and starts again, trying to compose herself*', and then constructs a line herself, in the style of the real Charlotte's writing: 'Dear sir. In your last letter you told me of the snowdrops you could see from your window', building the tension by taking the intensity of Charlotte's passion down a level.³²⁴ While Charlotte struggles with writing this letter to Monsieur Héger, crossing out words, the tension building inside of her, we see that '*BERTHA is behind CHARLOTTE, wild with longing and frustration.*'³²⁵ Suddenly, Charlotte, possessed by the spirit of the more sexual Bertha, bursts out with, 'I love you. I love you. I love you. You can't do this to me. If I was a dog you wouldn't do this to me. I wish I was your dog so I could follow you and smell you and lick your shoes and have you beat me and', before she stops herself '*horrified*', saying, 'Oh God [...] Oh Lord, forgive me', while Bertha throws herself to the floor in pain and frustration, a symbolized embodiment of Charlotte's own thwarted passions.³²⁶ The second, more impassioned half of this speech is imagined by Teale and spoken onstage by the performers playing Charlotte and Bertha simultaneously; we are meant to suppose that the wild, animalistic rant is meant to be both Charlotte's subtext and also what Bertha would say if she had been given any dialogue

³²² Muriel Spark, Muriel, ed., *The Brontë Letters* (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1954), p.118.

³²³ *Ibid.*, p.38.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

in the book by Brontë. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha never speaks; she is described in animalistic terms. When Jane first meets Bertha in the attic in which she is kept in Mr. Rochester's house, we see Bertha through Jane's eyes:

In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell; it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. [...] She was a big woman, in stature almost equaling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was.³²⁷

In the novel, Bertha is dehumanized almost completely; she is described as a 'beast' nearly as large as Mr. Rochester (in comparison to the dainty and childlike Jane, a model for Victorian womanhood), and does not speak but rather growls like an animal. In the play, Bertha is portrayed as an element of Jane's, and thus Charlotte's, personality, representing her repressed, shameful desires, in dialogue with the real letters Charlotte wrote to her former teacher.

In the author's note for the 2011 publication of the text, Teale explains that Bertha is represented in three phases throughout the play, expressing different stages of Charlotte's social and intellectual development; at first, in her childhood, Bertha represents Charlotte's fantasy of what it would be to be a beautiful grown woman, she then becomes 'an expression of the part of Charlotte (sexual longing, rage, frustration, loneliness) which she wishes to disown, conceal from others', and later, in the second act of the play, once *Jane Eyre* has been published, Bertha becomes the evil and immoral 'antithesis' of Charlotte's imagining of herself as Jane Eyre, the 'good angel'.³²⁸ Govan, Nicholson and Normington explain this approach by saying that the adaptation process, 'demands the development of metaphor', and that, 'companies that work in this genre often seek to open up the texts to new interpretations.

³²⁷ Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre* (London: Macdonald and Co., Ltd., 1955), pp.326 & 327.

³²⁸ Teale, *Brontë* (2011), p.ix.

The cultural status of the sources is challenged, often inverted or politicized'.³²⁹ Teale examines the historic-biographical material as well as the source texts through this psycho-analytic lens, this metaphor of the characters as elements of the authors' psyches, in order to make her intertextual approach to the play dramatically viable and appropriate for Shared Experience as a company with a tradition of physical interpretation. In doing so, Teale is challenging the concept that Jane is the outright hero of *Jane Eyre* and Bertha is the monster who attempts to destroy the man she loves, standing in the way of her future; instead, she re-envisions Bertha as a victim of Victorian morality and repression. It is interesting that although Ranken did not work on the first production of *Brontë*, her concept of seeing Bertha through Rhys's sympathetic lens stayed with Teale through the entire trilogy, culminating in the third play, being written into the text as a strong motif throughout. Ranken's influence on Teale's thinking about the Brontë sisters remained even when Teale employed Houseman as the choreographer on the 2005 production of *Brontë*.

Research and development

The initial development of the text in 2005 mirrored that of previous works written and directed by Teale in that Teale was the main arbiter of the source text(s), assisted in her interpretation, adaptation and staging by a creative team whose ideas greatly informed, but were ultimately subordinate to her own. After a long research process in which Teale gathered information about the Brontë family, reading all their novels and poetry, excavating biographical and historical material (pertaining not only to their lives but also to the area of Yorkshire and time period in which they lived) and visited the Brontë house in Haworth, she wrote a partially completed first draft of the text. Teale then held a three day-long workshop with Leah Houseman, the choreographer for the 2005 production, and a group of performers.

³²⁹ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, pp.100 & 101.

Like Edmundson, Teale is vague in her description of this workshop, saying she was unable to remember the specifics of the kinds of exercises she and Houseman carried out (as the interview took place nearly six years after the workshop), saying only that they put scenes from the draft ‘on its feet’ in order to see how (and indeed, if) the convention of the ‘ghosts’ co-existing with the real characters worked.³³⁰ It is probable, however, that this workshop functioned similarly to that of the workshop for *War and Peace*, in that Teale led the actors through a series of improvisations derived from sections of different Brontë novels, with the help of Houseman, in order to gain inspiration for the way in which she would adapt the source texts for her own play text. Teale explained that the workshop was ‘incredibly useful’ because, while she was writing the text, this concept was ‘actually quite difficult to visualize and imagine fully when it [was] on the page’.³³¹ On the subject of devising dialogue, we may refer back to Teale’s earlier explanation regarding the development of *Jane Eyre* in combining the text and the physicality, that she avoided improvising dialogue with performers, preferring to improvise only physicality, using the written text as a framework to support the images created and introduce visual metaphors, such as Bertha who was used to represent Charlotte’s fragmented psyche.³³² After this workshop, Teale continued to expand upon and rewrite the text, using Meckler as an informal dramaturg during this period, but only outside of the workshops, as Meckler did not attend these. (Curiously, although Teale states that Meckler was officially credited with the role of ‘dramaturg’ on the 2005 production of *Brontë*, she was not.) When the text was ready, the company went into rehearsals, with Teale making changes to the text along the way.

The next query we may investigate is why Teale seems to prefer to direct her own work, what benefits she reaps from it and what effects the decision has on the play text. The

³³⁰ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

2005 production of *Brontë* was Teale's third production for Shared Experience where she had served as writer and director (the first two being *Jane Eyre* and *After Mrs. Rochester*). Like Piscator and Littlewood's dissatisfaction with much of the single-authored plays of their time, Teale explained that she often has difficulty finding plays by other writers that will lend themselves to Shared Experience's brand of 'expressionism', as she calls it, and that the creation of physical sequences often 'disturb the tension of the piece,' rather than serve to illuminate the story, subtext or characters.³³³ Teale says that in each work she has written for the company, she has set out to create a 'device that will allow them [...] to explore, to excavate, express the hidden world', like, for example, the metaphor of the madwoman in the attic that served all three plays in the *Brontë* trilogy; and because she writes and directs, Teale said, 'it felt like quite a logical thing,' to direct her own pieces, although she admits the process is challenging as it is more difficult to be 'objective' about the way the physicality and the text work together.³³⁴ Teale writes her texts with the company's style and ethos in mind, and to some extent, she tends to embed the physical images into her writing. However, one wonders if Teale's impulse to direct her own pieces stems, in part, from a desire to wrest control from Meckler; as Meckler felt co-directing with Teale was mostly difficult and strenuous, perhaps, similarly, Teale—as the comparatively more junior director of the twosome—felt that she needed to direct her own texts in order to maintain artistic autonomy and establish an image for herself apart from Meckler's. Davis and Scase comment that, 'The management of creativity requires different processes of organization. These stem from the values of creative workers and their expectations of how they should be allowed to perform their tasks.'³³⁵ As we have already established, Shared Experience is a company that operates within a semi-centralized organization wherein the collaborators involved are generally part

³³³ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Davis and Scase, p.viii.

of small teams that rely on communication, trust and artistic autonomy; Teale and Meckler are willing to allow the artists with which they work the freedom to choose the kinds of processes which they feel will best serve the production. Accordingly, perhaps it is the case that Meckler and Teale are not concerned so much with who works on which production in which capacity, as long as their responsibilities are separate but equal, that their artistic territories are demarcated and segmented.

Despite the fact that Teale and Meckler often work separately from each other on different projects, they are also mutually dependent collaborators, especially when Teale is functioning as a writer as well as a director. Although Teale is an experienced writer, she often turns to Meckler for creative advice as an outside eye. Even though Meckler was not formally involved in the 2005 production, she still served as Teale's dramaturg before rehearsals began; Teale comments that this is often the case, that Meckler usually serves as an unofficial dramaturg, helping her edit texts while they still in development. In the 2010 production of *Brontë* (which was subsequently remounted in a nearly identical production the next year at the Tricycle Theatre), Meckler directed and Teale solely played the role of the writer, coming in to rehearsals to make adjustments to the script; this production is remarkable in that it is the only time where Meckler has directed a piece that Teale has written. There is not much recognizable difference between the 2005 and the 2010 version of the play text in terms of content and writing style, except for the fact that the latter is shorter than the former and the indication of movement and physical sequences is somewhat clearer. Teale commented that one of the greatest changes was that Meckler was helpful in suggesting significant cuts to the text, allowing the movement to play a more prominent part in the narrative, giving the performers, in Teale's words, 'more breathing space' as some parts of the 2005 text proved to be cumbersome and difficult to perform.³³⁶ Teale said that she felt

³³⁶ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

one of the most difficult tasks as a writer was to leave enough room for what is ‘unsaid’ between characters, and Meckler was helpful in achieving this, allowing her to have distance from the script, rather than being immersed in it as a writer and a director.³³⁷ In explaining the relationship between collaborators in creative organizations that operate on a project-by-project basis, Davis and Scase write, ‘The key to control and integration within these “project teams” is the mutual dependency of autonomous “creatives” for whom the theatrical production is the essential vehicle for their artistic talents’.³³⁸ Meckler and Teale function most effectively when they have the flexibility to be autonomous, but also to refer to each other for feedback on scripts and productions.

Whether working on individual projects or collaborating together, Meckler and Teale rely on one another’s creative support more so than it might appear to an outsider. *Guardian* theatre critic Lyn Gardner interviewed the directors during rehearsals for the 1996 production of *War and Peace*, declaring that, ‘having two directors of equal status is still a rarity’.³³⁹ Teale responded to her comment by saying, ‘The way we work is very time-consuming. A scene of dialogue may not take that long to direct, but an image that barely lasts a minute can take hours to rehearse and our productions do tend to have a lot of images’.³⁴⁰ We may apply this comment to *Brontë* in that although Teale had directed her own scripts in the past—and *Brontë* once before—clearly she did need Meckler’s support as a dramaturg and director in order to gain insight into the production and be able to cut unnecessary dialogue; also, it is possible that because Teale had immersed herself in the Brontë trilogy for the past fifteen years, she needed to be able to step away, not only from directing the play, but also from the subject matter, in order to create the kind of text that could support those elusive, hard-won

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Davis and Scase, p.91.

³³⁹ Gardner, Lyn, ‘Turning a classic into a classic’: review of *War and Peace* by Helen Edmundson, *The Guardian*, 19 June 1996.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

images she mentions to Gardner. In a review of the first production in 2005, Charles Spenser wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* that Teale should stop ‘hitching a ride on her literary heroines and [attempt] to write a play forged from personal experience’, accusing the production of representing a genre of ‘art that cannibalizes art’.³⁴¹ Although Spenser seemed to be missing the point of the production, his reaction may be indicative of Teale’s potentially overwhelming immersion in source material relating to the Brontë sisters.

Conclusion: the role of the writer and text

Ultimately, both Meckler and Teale are more concerned with creating well-articulated working relationships with a small number of writers, rather than working with a different writer on each project. Shared Experience does not have a specific model with which they work, but rather two loose blueprints for working which they have developed over the years as a result of Meckler and Teale working as directors with writer Edmundson, and Teale writing and directing her own work with Meckler’s assistance, as a director and a dramaturg. This is both productive for the company, but also limiting in that this blueprint for collaborative writing may perhaps discourage the directors from working with external writers other than Edmundson; as Meckler said herself previously, this blueprint for working with writers has made it ‘difficult to do a different model’.³⁴² Ranken feels Shared Experience has a unique process that involves ‘releasing the subtext’ of a novel in the text and ‘physicalizing parts of the psyche’ of the characters in the staging and the movement score of a production.³⁴³ The process is that the directors, movement director, writer and designers meet to discuss the project, and subsequently undergo a research stage which unites the group as a whole in terms of the ideological, structural and aesthetic direction of the

³⁴¹ Charles Spenser, ‘More to life than Brontës’: review of *Brontë* by Polly Teale, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 November 2005.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Liz Ranken. Personal interview. 28 June 2011.

adaptation. The writer writes a draft of the script, takes part in a workshopping process involving the director and movement director and afterward delivers a final draft to the group before rehearsals begin. Relatively few adjustments are made during the rehearsals to the text, and unless, like Teale, the writer is also the director, the writer plays little part in the rehearsals. Teale notes that whether or not a workshop is held during the development of a project depends on ‘the writer’s process and whether they find it useful’, and that she herself likes to develop work through workshops, but understands that not all writers find that process productive.³⁴⁴ This process is predicated on the expertise of the writer involved and that there will be no major crisis involving the text that would necessitate major workshopping or adjustments during the rehearsal period. The person to whom these workshops are most helpful is Ranken (or another choreographer such as Houseman), who takes the opportunity to develop a physical language for the production upon which she is able to expand during the rehearsals.³⁴⁵ Throughout, the director(s) continues to carry out meetings with the writer and designers to make sure there is cohesion to the vision of the piece. Meckler and Teale adhere to a principle that Davis and Scase’s summarize by saying, ‘The best way to maximize the potential for creative people is to set the task and then extend them the necessary autonomy for its execution’.³⁴⁶ Shared Experience’s process is the most writer-led out of the three companies in this study and also the least collaborative, in that the roles of each company member are relatively demarcated and rarely overlap or conflict.

There are several reasons why Meckler and Teale have worked with so few writers in the past, which Meckler herself has admitted to be ‘a limited connection’.³⁴⁷ First of all, Meckler and Teale clearly feel comfortable working with Edmundson, a writer who they have been commissioning for nearly twenty years. Meckler says that Edmundson, ‘gives us the

³⁴⁴ Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

³⁴⁵ Liz Ranken. Personal interview. 28 June 2011.

³⁴⁶ Davis and Scase, p.72.

³⁴⁷ Nancy Meckler. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

freedom to play and try things out and [...] make it our own vision', explaining that she is able to impart her own specific vision onto the text, but is also able to allow the directors room to add their own interpretation—not only of the text but also of the adapted novel.³⁴⁸ Conversely, Meckler believes that with 'other writers, it's much harder for them because they try to do something they think is a Shared Experience production and then doesn't work'.³⁴⁹ Since the company's style of work is distinctive, it is understandable that writers commissioned by the company would attempt to write scripts in imitation of previous productions, rather than in their own style. Secondly, the company often restages old productions and familiar themes (as in the Brontë trilogy and *War and Peace*, as with many others); there is no need to work with a new writer if there is already an existing script from the last production and the directors were satisfied with the writer's work, as is the case with Edmundson and Teale. Thirdly, Teale often prefers to direct her own texts and, as Meckler says, her plays are 'like auteur pieces and when Polly [Teale] does her own adaptation, it's her vision'.³⁵⁰ Fourthly, perhaps in working with a few writers they can trust, the directors are limiting the variables in the complex process of creating a stage adaptation and giving themselves the freedom to work with more original texts and more authors in working with a few trusted adaptors. We can see that this hesitance to work with new writers is, ironically, less reflective of Meckler's role models Chaikin and Stafford-Clark (both of whom worked with a number of writers), and more reflective of such directors as Littlewood and Piscator, who both had preferred writers with whom they worked and also worked as writer/directors themselves to avoid having to commission an external writer at all.

Meckler, Teale and Edmundson all agree that Edmundson is the author of *War and Peace* and Teale is the author of *Brontë*; however, one could say that the authorship of *Brontë*

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

is simpler than that of *War and Peace*, as Meckler and Teale had a relatively large amount of input into the project from the very beginning, discussing the direction of the piece with Edmundson and guiding it the entire way, and Ranken can be considered the author of the physical language that, as Ranken says, ‘runs underneath’ the spoken dialogue.³⁵¹ Edmundson is aware that as a writer, although both directors trust her completely, she does not have as much control over her work as Teale does when she writes, but seems to find this a kind of benefit of working with the company because this arrangement pushes her to experiment with staging certain difficult scenes. She notes that especially when she writes the stage directions for a text, she tries to be ‘open’ because the company’s work is so influenced by the directors’ contributions.³⁵² Edmundson defines collaboration as, ‘a kind of openness and fluidity between the different artists involved’, and that when she works with the directors, she tries to keep this channel of communication as open as possible.³⁵³ Meckler considers Edmundson the sole author of *War and Peace* because she is the creator of the structure, ‘dramatic drive’ and themes of the play.³⁵⁴

One cannot help but conclude that it is Meckler who is most responsible for Shared Experience’s blueprint for working with writers, and it seems that her opinion regarding this subject is a strong one rooted in past experiences working with her old company The Freehold in the 1960s, when many companies were experimenting with writer-company collaborations. Meckler believes that a collaborative writing process is too ‘difficult’, explaining that when she was directing The Freehold and the company attempted to collaborate with external writers; when the writers brought in text they had written and tried to work on it with her and the performers, the fact that each company member had an opinion on the direction of the writing unnerved and ultimately paralyzed the writers, ‘and the whole

³⁵¹ Liz Ranken. Personal interview. 28 June 2011.

³⁵² Helen Edmundson. Personal interview. 19 May 2008.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Nancy Meckler. Personal interview. 9 July 2009.

thing just went down the tubes'.³⁵⁵ She notes that she prefers the Joint Stock method of working where even though the director, writer and performers had investigated a topic in a series of workshops, the writer was not obligated to use anything from that period and had the artistic autonomy to write a script independently from the company. (However, this comparison is ironic, as Joint Stock designed their approach to scripting in order to work with a number of different writers, rather than the small group with which Shared Experience has worked.) She feels a writer is only the author of a piece—and that the writer *should* be the unquestioned author—when they are in complete control of the structure, rather than working in collaboration with a group, taking into consideration everyone's opinions, as a 'writer-for-hire' or a 'hired hand'.³⁵⁶ Meckler finds this particular approach to collaborative writing (practiced by groups such as the Open Theatre) too chaotic and unstructured, feeling that roles such as writer and director should be separate and distinct within an ensemble. Herdman elaborates on this statement, saying that he was under the impression that the performers' opinion on any changes to the text during rehearsals 'was not sought. Or important,' that Meckler 'wouldn't allow it', but also that Meckler wanted the performers to be 'free to commit to the script they've got,' which Herdman himself found 'liberating'.³⁵⁷ Meckler works in such a way that the boundaries between company members are carefully observed so that each participant contributes the artistic input that they are hired to provide for the production and are enabled to do so by being allowed to focus on their specific task.

The most significant impact that writers such as Edmundson and Teale ultimately have on the source texts is that they delve into the adaptation process with the intention to make the narrative and the experience of the characters relevant to contemporary audiences while retaining the essence of the time period and culture in which the novel was written. In

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Theo Herdman. E-mail correspondence. 10 May 2011.

order to do this, they investigate the emotional and psychological motivations of the characters and demonstrate them through what Ranken calls the ‘metaphysics’ of the physical language of the productions. The audience is given not only a window into the world of the novel but is also allowed to look through the lens of a modern perspective, trying to imagine parallels between the characters’ world and their own. The writers use the source text as a starting point from which the designers and directors are able to mine images and approaches to staging and proxemics. This source text also provides a shared focus for companies such as Shared Experience who are not concentrated on a shared political vision, such as many of the companies in Chapter One.

The process of adaptation is often a very seductive one for companies, as it allows practitioners to experiment with an existing narrative framework and an existing—and often well-known—cultural artefact in order to communicate to their audiences how their company works and what they value politically, stylistically and ideologically. Shared Experience’s goal is not to create faithful dramatizations of the original source text but to expand upon it, exploring its themes, characters and narrative in order to create a new piece of work. Adaptation is dependent largely on use and style of narration, how the story is told and for what reason, as well as the dramaturgical structuring and editing process, what is kept from the original, what is eliminated and what has been added. The undertaking of adapting canonical novels for the stage has been highly influential to Shared Experience’s overall process of working as a company and, more specifically, to their process of working with writers, and the company’s structure and approach to collaboration has informed the process of adaptation. The kind of adaptations Shared Experience makes focus on the inner life of the characters—their memories, dreams, fears and fantasies—reinforcing what Alfreds set out to create when he established the company in 1975, a personalized, intimate experience for the audience which complements the intimate experience of reading. There is a degree of self-

conscious construction to Shared Experience productions which encourages the audience to be active in discovering the buried stories within the adapted novels, piecing together the more hidden, secondary narrative running underneath the more dominant narrative, for themselves. The way in which the adapting writer interprets the novel and, subsequently, constructs the text guides the production so that the text serves as a framework for the physical sequences. The movement, key to this expression of these hidden histories and inner struggles, is devised in workshops and rehearsals with the performers and movement director in response to the text the writer has created; therefore, the writer's expert power to structure the adaptation appropriately is seen as essential to the production, which is why Shared Experience process tends to be writer and text-driven and the productions character-driven, despite the sometimes complex narratives of the narrative adapted novels, as with *War and Peace*. The role of the text and of the writer are both seen in precise terms, both text and writer making a specific and important contribution to Shared Experience productions, creating structure and stability for the rehearsal process.

Chapter Three

Frantic Assembly: writing through the text and the body

Introduction

Chapter Three will examine the contribution of commissioned writers to the combination of written and physical languages that are the key characteristic of Frantic Assembly's work by comparing the different processes used to create Mark Ravenhill's *pool (no water)* and Bryony Lavery's *Stockholm*, two plays by external writers commissioned by the company, as well as the nature of Artistic Co-Directors Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett's working relationship with each writer. We will examine the ways in which Graham and Hoggett have worked with different writers external to the company's permanent artistic directorship in order to produce written playtexts as well as the unwritten (or, in some cases, less notated) physical scores; we will use management theory to inform our understanding of the company hierarchy and performance theory to help contextualize Frantic Assembly's process of working. (It should also be noted that in addition to the original interviews, this chapter includes research material not yet in the public domain, such as extracts from the Ravenhill 10 Conference at Goldsmiths College in 2006.) Founded by Artistic Co-Directors Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett with Vicki Middleton as Company Administrator in 1994, Frantic Assembly works with writers and performers, devising physical language with performers to complement the textual language created by the commissioned writer. The company is best known for work such as *Hymns* (1999), *Dirty Wonderland* (2005), *pool (no water)* (2006) and *Stockholm* (2007), amongst others. It is important to note that although we will be looking predominantly at two productions falling within the main time frame of this study of the first decade of the New Millennium, we will also examine productions that pre-date this period in order to better understand the development of Frantic Assembly's approach to working with writers. The lines of inquiry this chapter will investigate are:

whether or not Frantic Assembly has a distinctive model of working with writers; what the relationship between physical and written composition in both process and performance is; if the company's approach to composition has changed in the last sixteen years, and if so, how it has changed and why; how we are to understand the concept of authorship in Frantic Assembly's work, and what role it plays regarding the composition of the pieces; and most importantly, what the role of the writer is.

Formation of working model and early company-driven work with text

The first production Frantic Assembly created was not with a writer to commission a completely original text, but with writer-dramaturg Spencer Hazel to adapt John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1994 into what Hoggett referred to as a 'pared back' version to accommodate the movement score he and Graham devised and performed under the guidance of choreographer Juan Carrasco.³⁵⁸ Graham explained his and Hoggett's goal when they first started Frantic Assembly was to enable their audiences to understand the 'mechanics' of performance by emphasizing the way in which performers' bodies were affected by physical and emotional forces within the play.³⁵⁹ Graham remarked that his intention was to 'invent a physical language', in order to 'find the guts of the play', exposing the human mechanics of *Look Back in Anger* by concentrating on characters' physical responses to Osborne's dilemmas.³⁶⁰ Adapting Osborne's play under the guidance of a writer-dramaturg external to the company allowed Graham and Hoggett as performer-directors the freedom of creative expression to 'invent a physical language' within the structure of a specially-adapted text of a well-known play. Graham and Hoggett began the

³⁵⁸ Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Interview by Aleks Seirz. 19 February 2004. Message to author. 15 April 2010. E-mail.

³⁵⁹ 'We were not trained and felt like theatre was something that happened somewhere else. We want to make exciting work and to give people access to the mechanics of a company so that it can seem relevant to them.' Scott Graham. Email correspondence. 13 April 2010.

³⁶⁰ Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Interview by Aleks Seirz. 19 February 2004. Message to author. 15 April 2010. E-mail.

company as undergraduate students studying English literature at Swansea University, with very little training related to performance, choreography, writing or directing. This maiden production could be seen as a young company's attempt to create a radical new production despite their lack of training and experience of performance-making, developing a method of working with text and movement by adapting a well-known text rather than creating a new one. The two wanted to find an antidote for what Graham calls a 'VHS culture' of the continual and uninspiring process of remounting of established plays that they felt characterized British theatre at the time by creating what they saw as a more exciting, youthful approach to theatre-making.³⁶¹ Graham and Hoggett felt the most efficient way to rediscover what was once shocking and exciting to audiences when the play premiered in 1956 was to reduce the text to what they felt were its essential themes and create an opportunity for the audience to understand these themes through a combination of dialogue and movement. From that point onward, the company's remit came to be to use choreographic dramaturgy to create a different kind of theatrical language which simultaneously subverted and complimented the textual dialogue.

The early years of Frantic Assembly tours were the product of an intensely collaborative, company-driven and relatively democratic working process where company members' roles often overlapped, but the two directors still made it a priority to work with a specifically-designated writer on a new text for each project so that the text and the physical score could be created at the same time.³⁶² The company's goal was to create productions wherein the textual and physical elements were fully integrated with each other, making performance pieces that would be engaging for young audience members of the same generation and with the same tastes as Graham and Hoggett. Hazel wrote the texts, with dramaturgical assistance from Graham and Hoggett, and performed in the productions, and

³⁶¹ Scott Graham. E-mail correspondence. 13 April 2010.

³⁶² Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

all company members discussed the development of each production as a collective.³⁶³ The directors commissioned Hazel to write a trilogy: *Klub* (1995), *Flesh* (1996) and *Zero* (1997). The process which Frantic Assembly used with Hazel on the three productions developed as a result of the fact that the company was established in a pragmatic fashion, rather than as an artistic experiment; the process of working with text was constantly in development, but was also intended to be functional, as the stringent economic demands of the company's survival did not allow for workshops designed to experiment with different approaches to creating text and movement together.³⁶⁴ The early approaches to collaboration the company used to create productions involved an ever-changing combination of devising, choreography and scripting. Graham notes that Hazel would take notes during group discussions and script some scenes, while other scenes were unscripted because they originated as 'physical ideas' rather than textual ones, and, 'Sometimes the need for more script came about through the failure of a physical idea'.³⁶⁵ Hoggett explains that Hazel 'wrote about us and for us', using the performers in the company 'as a device, as a conduit for a theme or idea', writing scenes and monologues to work through in the rehearsal room on the basis of a conversation with the company.³⁶⁶ The concepts, stories and characters of each production were intended to be realized, both physically and on the page, as quickly and effectively as possible. Both directors performed while choreographing the work with the help of external, more experienced choreographers on a project-by-project basis. Frantic Assembly booked demanding tours which often consisted of going to two or three different venues in the course

³⁶³ Hoggett comments, 'Because we'd never had any dance training, we always had a choreographer who was essential to each production and who cast an external eye on the show. This helped an ethic to develop within the company so that everyone participated. For example, the lighting designer sat in on script meetings, and there was a freedom for everyone to make suggestions outside their specialization. Gradually, we were thus able to understand each other's work.' Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Interview by Aleks Seirz. 19 February 2004. Message to author. 15 April 2010. E-mail.

³⁶⁴ Steven Hoggett notes, 'When we started the company, we were very clear from the start that we wanted to make it full-time, we were utterly committed to it as a small business (if you don't have money to put petrol in your van, you're not going to get to your first gig), and we did business seminars and three-year plans.' Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

of a week, gaining performance and production experience for its members, as well as raising the profile of the company and cultivating an audience base.³⁶⁷

The company's method of creating material, both text and physical scenes, was informed by a sense of functionality that resulted from a kind of commodification caused by the pressures of the demanding touring schedule and limited budget. This functional method of working which integrated scripting, physical devising and discussion allowed the company to discover new and unexpected approaches to working with text and writers. In *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre* (Routledge, 2009), Graham and Hoggett state, 'Our unorthodox route into theatre had actually presented us with a world of possible styles and approaches'.³⁶⁸ For instance, the subject matter of *Klub*—mid-nineties clubbing culture in the UK—determined the structure of the show, which was discovered accidentally, by trying to recreate the atmosphere of a nightclub with the help of a DJ. Graham states, 'It was never considered a play by anyone involved. We pushed it as an event.'³⁶⁹ *Klub* consisted of twenty scenes, each two-to-three minutes long, and the realistic feel of a club environment was reinforced by the minimal use of props and set, as well as the use of the actors' real names, all used to connect to the young audiences that attended the performances. As *Klub* depicted the environment of a nightclub, the directors wanted to compliment the physicality inspired by club dancing, choreographed by Steve Kirkham, with music inspired by club DJs, and approached professional DJ Andy Cleeton.³⁷⁰ Cleeton explained the structure of a three-hour music set as well as the 'shape of the performance', how many beats per minute each song is meant to be and also how to respond to how the crowd was reacting to the music and what

³⁶⁷ 'The only way we could create shows back then was to book the tour, start rehearsals six or seven weeks before that, and have an absolutely solid period of work'. Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett, *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre* (Abington: Routledge, 2009), p.30.

³⁶⁹ Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Interview by Aleks Seirz. 19 February 2004. Message to author. 15 April 2010. E-mail.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

they wanted.³⁷¹ Hoggett explains that Cleeton's influence 'taught us to think about structure in a new way. The structure of the show then determined the music because the structure dictated the pace, speed or intensity'.³⁷² The subject matter of the project helped determine the structure of the play text as well as solidifying the importance of popular music in Frantic Assembly productions. The company looked for inspiration in areas with which they were comfortable or those which excited them rather than the work of other theatre practitioners because they were not as familiar with theatre; as a result, Graham and Hoggett began to find other kinds of live and recorded performance and entertainment (such as dance, music and club culture) fitting examples from which they could work.

The need to work with different writers with distinct authorial voices and approaches to collaboration became more pronounced, as the two directors wanted every show the company produced to create what Hoggett referred to as a 'different physical pallet' and a unique aesthetic style to suit the subject matter of each play. Ultimately after having to part ways with Hazel over a conflict regarding their third production *Zero* (undisclosed by the directors), Graham and Hoggett found a more methodical, purposeful way of working with the company's next commissioned writer Michael Wynne on his play *Sell Out* (1998). At this point, the directors had become focused on the staging and physicality of each production, and found that their increasingly sophisticated choreography demanded an external practitioner who was designated specifically as a writer, rather than being heavily involved with the complexities of devising physical work as a performer as well. The company of writers, dramaturgs, performers, designers, choreographers and directors (whether members of or external to the company's permanent artistic directorship) had skills which overlapped, and were mostly comprised of friends and practitioners Graham, Hoggett and Vicki Middleton had met through Swansea University, contributing to the unrefined, informal and

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

collective nature of the creative process.³⁷³ Additionally, starting out, Graham and Hoggett felt that because they were untrained and inexperienced practitioners, (despite being the company's founders and artistic directors) they were not in a position to dictate the rules of the company.³⁷⁴ The company's early methods of scripting and devising movement were informed by a combination of a lack of formal training in devising and production and a sense of functionality that resulted from the pressures of a demanding touring schedule and limited budget. As Mermikides and Smart note, 'method and technique arise out of and serve intention. [...] context is everything in terms of the processes'.³⁷⁵ As Frantic Assembly became more widely recognized in the UK by audiences, venues and funding bodies, they became better equipped to focus their intentions and shift the structure of the company in order to suit the kind of work they wanted to make.

Graham and Hoggett discovered that what they ultimately wanted was for Frantic Assembly to be structured as an organization in the form of a small, permanent base co-directed by two practitioners together, working with a variety of freelance writers external to the permanent artistic directorship that they could approach with ideas for new commissions.³⁷⁶ Like Shared Experience and Filter, Graham and Hoggett wanted to work within a semi-decentralized organization in order to control the time frame and structure of the process for working with writers; Graham and Hoggett decide on the general theme of and timeline for the project before inviting a writer to join them, but then allow that writer the freedom and resources to work in the way s/he is most comfortable and productive within

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, eds., *Devising in Process* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.28.

³⁷⁶ 'It is different for each production. It is all about the greater vision for the production. Each writer still finds the act of writing a very private process and we respect that. [...] We include the writer at very early stages of development. We have the initial idea ourselves and then approach a writer with a proposal to join us on this project. We don't tell them what to write. We try to explore a world together and arm them with a physical and visual vocabulary that they use to write the first draft. Soon after that we try to bring in our other creatives.' Scott Graham. Email correspondence. 13 April 2010.

that framework.³⁷⁷ The development of Frantic Assembly coincided with the movement in British theatre in the late-1990s toward developing and encouraging new writers and new writing theatres, partly in response to an Arts Council initiative; as well as Vicky Featherstone's tenure as Artistic Director of new writing touring company Paines Plough from 1997-2004, who introduced Graham and Hoggett to many different writers.³⁷⁸ Knowing that they were able to find different writers who would be appropriate for and interested in different projects initially conceived by the directors empowered Graham and Hoggett to make the decision to have the freedom of working with a variety of commissioned writers. Frantic Assembly, is, like Shared Experience, a company with what Mermikides and Smart refer to as a 'core-and-pool structure', the core being the permanent artistic directorship (and in Frantic Assembly's case, their small office of administrative staff) and the pool being the group of freelance practitioners upon whom the directors draw on a project-by-project basis.³⁷⁹ The difference between the two companies is that Shared Experience works with a smaller pool of freelance practitioners than Frantic Assembly, choosing to work with the same writers again and again, whereas Frantic Assembly works with a larger pool of writers because they aim to find the writers whose interests and approaches to working will suit each project. In Hoggett's words, the company is 'excited by' the concept of new writing and had always intended to find writers to 'be part of that collaborative team'.³⁸⁰ After three productions, Graham and Hoggett still felt they needed to continue to collaborate with outside artists if they were going to continue to grow as a company and keep producing innovative work, but at the same time, wanted to be in greater control of the way in which the work was created. Hoggett attributes this decision in part to his and Graham's affinity for the highly focused, highly structured way in which films convey narrative, and says he and Graham are

³⁷⁷ Graham and Hoggett., p.197.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Mermikides and Smart, p.16.

³⁸⁰ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

‘far too controlling’ to make theatre that allows for a great deal of interpretation, preferring to create theatre that mimics filmic devices in their use of focus and perspective: ‘that’s when we feel at our most comfortable, if we think we can confidently say yes, that’s what the intention was’.³⁸¹

In making the transition from working with an in-house writer/dramaturg (Hazel) to working with a writer external to the company (Wynne) within a core-and-pool managerial structure, Graham and Hoggett gave the text more importance and decided that the commissioned text would frame the movement score—the characters and narrative emerging from the text primarily and the movement secondarily. Hoggett remarks that he and Graham had always wanted to work with writers, saying, ‘it’s where we’re most comfortable. I think we’re much happier looking at text as a starting-point for physicality, rather than the other way around’.³⁸² When the company commissioned Wynne to write *Sell Out*, they made sure the communication was clearer than it had been with Hazel before the process began, and also allowed the writer time to write the text separately from the rehearsal process. Whereas Hazel’s written compositional process was integrated within the rehearsal and devising process involving movement and staging, Wynne’s was segregated, giving him more time to write independently. Hoggett explains, ‘The most important thing we told [Wynne] was not to write a physical theatre show but to concentrate on the integrity of the text.’³⁸³ Working with a writer external to the permanent artistic directorship whom Graham and Hoggett did not know well induced the directors to be more specific in their requirements for him; the directors felt this not only allowed the writer time and freedom create a more substantial piece of writing, it also gave the company more jurisdiction over the text, and subsequently, the devised movement. As Howard Davis and Richard Scase explain, ‘From the managerial

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Interview by Aleks Seirz. 19 February 2004. Message to author. 15 April 2010. E-mail.

point of view [...] there is greater flexibility in using freelance workers than permanent employees', but one of the main disadvantages is 'the difficulty of monitoring, controlling and assuring the outcome of the creative work process'.³⁸⁴ Graham and Hoggett use freelance writers on the basis of a single commission, rather than as an in-house writer and permanent member of the company so that they can try each writer out and see if s/he is able to write a text that will meet their aesthetic and practical requirements; if the text is unsuccessful, the directors can move on to commissioning another writer, being under no obligation to work with the previous one again. (Additionally, it is more cost-efficient to commission writers, paying a fee for each script produced, rather than keeping an in-house writer on a salary which would, presumably, increase over the years.) Hiring writers like Wynne who may or may not have been known to the company previously was a risk in terms of the quality and nature of the resulting script, but at the same time, the decision to entrust the written composition to external freelance writers gave the company a certain amount of freedom as well. Hoggett adds that, on his own initiative, Wynne began what later became a common Frantic Assembly practice of giving the company a questionnaire pertaining to the subject of the play before he started writing the text; one can see this device as a more distanced, measured substitution for the kind of intense involvement Hazel had during rehearsals as a writer-deviser within the company. After a period of time, Wynne gave the company a draft of the text with which to work and develop in rehearsal, making rewrites and changes himself along the way in response to the company's amendments, additions and suggestions.³⁸⁵ This process led to the two year-long time frame the company currently uses for a period of development of any given project, which roughly entails: two developmental periods ranging from two weeks to one week for research and development involving the writer, directors and

³⁸⁴ Howard Davis and Richard Scase, *Managing Creativity: The Dynamics of Work and Organization* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), p.76.

³⁸⁵ Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Interview by Aleks Seirz. 19 February 2004. Message to author. 15 April 2010. E-mail.

performers over the course of two months; between six and twelve months for the writer to write the text alone; six months of dramaturgical meetings between the writer and the directors to edit and develop the text into a working draft; and finally a four-to-five week rehearsal period.³⁸⁶

As a result of the development of this semi-decentralized, core-and-pool management structure, Graham and Hoggett developed an approach to writer-company collaboration which Davis and Scase refer to as ‘mutual adjustment’. The process of mutual adjustment is one in which ‘interpersonal negotiation and patterns of mutual reciprocity tend to shape the execution of tasks and the definition of organizational goals in relation to specific circumstances and conditions’.³⁸⁷ Davis and Scase note that this particular mechanism is valuable to ‘creative industry organizations’ such as theatre companies where the ‘management function’ is integrated within the role of those who are considered to hold foremost position of creative leadership, such as artistic directors like Graham and Hoggett, who want to minimize ‘the need for formal managerial control’.³⁸⁸ In other words, Graham and Hoggett developed a system that allowed them to work with a number of different writers with various approaches to composition and diverse aesthetic tastes, while maintaining a certain amount of control, without imposing rigid strictures on their artistic processes. This mechanism of mutual adjustment allows for the coexistence of the centralization of subtle managerial and artistic control and the decentralization of collaboration of ideas and compositional methods on a project-by-project basis. Despite that fact that there would be a particular number of variables in terms of the nature of the project’s style and subject matter, number of performers and working methods of the writer, all these elements could be structured by Graham and Hoggett into a relatively constant working method through a process of negotiation and discussion to facilitate the development of the production. Within

³⁸⁶ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

³⁸⁷ Davis and Scase, pp.13-14.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

the overall trajectory of each project, the directors allow for time to adjust the commissioned text for production by holding dramaturgical meetings with the writer once the first draft has been completed and also by holding a rehearsal period after the text has been submitted (the period in which the directors and performers devise the choreography), making additional changes to the text with the writer's assistance if needed. This process allows for a subtle measure of managerial control, overseeing the text that the writer produces and making sure that it will meet the demands of the rehearsal room, without imposing a measure of control that would stifle most commissioned writers.

We may posit that a script commissioned by Frantic Assembly is intended to serve as a kind of blueprint for the final production, wherein the writer creates a structure within which the designers, directors and performers can follow in order to construct the production. In an article on new forms of dramaturgy, Claire MacDonald remarks that she believes the future of writing and dramaturgy lies in thinking of writing as, 'drawing on [...] artists' engagements with language as graphic, sonic and visual material; [...] writing as mark making and with scripts and scores as machines for making performance'.³⁸⁹ MacDonald views the future of writing for performance as showing an increasing tendency toward reciprocal relationships with physical, sonic and visual language, as opposed to simply representing written dialogue. The writing facilitates the visual and choreographic concepts which are subsequently composed by the rest of the company. This process fits into the larger Frantic Assembly ethos, as the written composition is a product of the original concept usually initially conceived by Graham and Hoggett and the writer him or herself is chosen by the directors as well; all other choreographic, dramaturgical and design choices are also overseen by Graham and Hoggett. The directors are able to benefit from the outside

³⁸⁹ Claire MacDonald, 'Conducting the flow: Dramaturgy and writing', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 1 (2010), pp.92.

perspective of freelance practitioners who bring their skills to each production, but also have the advantage of being able to shape and, if necessary, veto this input.

The managerial mechanism of mutual adjustment allows Graham and Hoggett to incrementally adjust the manner, structure and style in which they work with a commissioned writer (with whose style and process they may not be familiar) without losing control over the end-product of the finished text. Davis and Scase state, ‘Mutual adjustment allows indeterminate human resources to be focused, converted and combined for the purpose of producing complex cultural products’.³⁹⁰ The complexity of the overall production necessitates this particular process because even though Graham and Hoggett want to allow writers a certain amount of artistic freedom, they also demand the composition of a particular kind of text that allows for the inspiration for and incorporation of a secondary, physical language. In their book, Graham and Hoggett write, ‘One of our main requirements when commissioning a writer is to consider space. By that we mean the unsaid. [...] By remaining unsaid they offer rich pickings for choreographed physicality’.³⁹¹ Graham and Hoggett require a writer to be able to provide them with a text that is open enough to inspire the physical devising process for the directors and the performers, but also one which is structured enough to have what Hoggett referred to as ‘integrity’, which complicates the remit of the commission and increases the potential room for error on the part of the writer.³⁹² In Hoggett’s words, he and Graham view the text by itself ‘as a piece of literature’, considering the integrity of the script as something that, ‘stands up as a piece of writing first and foremost’, rather than simply a basic framework incomplete without the corresponding movement.³⁹³ In other words, the demand for writers to produce work that is not just, as MacDonald says, a machine for making performance, but also a fully-fleshed piece of writing

³⁹⁰ Davis and Scase, p.16.

³⁹¹ Graham and Hoggett, p.170.

³⁹² Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Interview by Aleks Seirz. 19 February 2004. Message to author. 15 April 2010. E-mail.

³⁹³ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

is a very specific and often very difficult task which not all writers have been able to fulfill in the past. Graham and Hoggett write that not all the writers they have commissioned have given them the desired 'space' within the text, such as Brendan Cowell and Ravenhill whose works had the integrity of individual works but not the pliancy of texts designed to incorporate choreography.³⁹⁴ As a result of this problem, Graham and Hoggett have had to work around the text in order to address the problems it posed for the development of physical sequences, rather than working with the style of the writing and discovering the opportunities delivered by the writer.

Let us for a moment, reflect on the greater historical context within which the work of Frantic Assembly and the writers with which they collaborate sits; in terms of the spectrum Chapter One laid out of historical theatre-making that was strongly engaged with text to that which questioned the role of text and the writer, Frantic Assembly would fall closer to the former than the latter. In establishing Frantic Assembly, Graham and Hoggett wanted to bring a three-dimensional, physical element to their work from the beginning, but also made their work with commissioned writers and text a priority as they developed as a company. Although Frantic Assembly does not have the strong personal connections to its historical predecessors in the way that Shared Experience does, we can compare this impulse of wanting to make performance more visceral and engaging for audiences through the incorporation of physicality with text with most strongly with the work of The Open Theater. Like Joseph Chaikin did, Graham and Hoggett have always sought a way of working with writers and devised, performer-generated movement together, matching the physical score with the tone, style and form of the text. Although the company's impulse to create work that is more dynamic than more traditional, solo-authored theatre is similar to that of practitioners such as Jacques Copeau, Jean-Louis Barrault, Michel Saint-Denis, Antonin Artaud, Julian

³⁹⁴ Graham and Hoggett, p.170.

Beck and Judith Malina (those who fell into the category of practitioners who questioned the role of the writer and the text), as we will see, Frantic Assembly is far more committed to the development of the text and the relationship with the writer than any of these historical theatre-makers who were, at points in their careers, willing to do away with text altogether, albeit for some, temporarily. We may also compare the company's work with that of Joint Stock, but Graham and Hoggett's intention for commissioning a text from a writer is more connected to the creation of physical theatre than Stafford-Clark's was.

The 'writing' of physical language

Now we will consider the choreographic approach with which Graham and Hoggett work to create a physical score that underpins and complements the written score in order to understand how the two processes work together. Although Frantic Assembly places the commission and creation of original texts as well as their relationship with writers at the forefront of their work, devising a physical score as complex and dynamic as the textual one and the integration of text and movement are the two greatest challenges for Graham and Hoggett as directors. The role of movement in the company's work is to contribute to the complexity of the text by physically and visually articulating the subtext of the written language and emphasizing the complexities and contradictions within the characters by creating a counterpoint to and a subversion of what is said.³⁹⁵ (Incidentally, this is in contrast to The Open Theater's work wherein the text and the movement were created in tandem, complimenting one another.) If we refer back to MacDonald's theory of a text as a 'machine' for creating a performance, then we may understand movement as the material that is fed into that machine; if the text is composed with the potential visual and spatial elements of the production in mind, it influences the way in which the movement is devised and executed by

³⁹⁵ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

the performers. As Graham and Hoggett have written that they commission texts that ‘consider space’ for movement, they also express that there is a reciprocal relationship in that they as director-choreographers must also consider this space, treating the text with the same integrity with which the writer has treated the potential for movement within the developing script: ‘subtext is crucial. It is very important to aim to express what is not said verbally. If you are enforcing what has been said verbally, then you are just saying things twice’.³⁹⁶ The physical score of each production runs alongside the dialogic, textual score, complementing the text but also articulating the subtext of the scene and conveying another layer of complexity of concept, characterization and narrative. This is not to say, however, that the physical sequences are only present when there is spoken dialogue, as there are often physical scenes that are completely nonverbal; these nonverbal scenes follow the same logic as the scenes where the physicality runs underneath the dialogue in that they create a counterpoint to the dialogue spoken before and after the sequence. In *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling write that, ‘the rhetoric that surrounds the devising of physical theatre companies is that the gestural and spatial interaction of bodies provides a different language from that of words, for the audience to decipher’.³⁹⁷ The movement that is devised by company performers, guided by Graham and Hoggett, provides a second language, adding a dynamic element to the performance. Working by beginning with a draft of a commissioned text demands that Graham and Hoggett devise movement with the performers that is both complementary to the written dialogue (not simply physical work that stands apart from it) and also subversive in the kind of second narrative it tells through the characters’ bodies.³⁹⁸ In Hoggett’s mind, not only does the movement devised in *Frantic*

³⁹⁶ Graham and Hoggett, p.170.

³⁹⁷ Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.189.

³⁹⁸ Regarding the relationship between spoken dialogue and physicality, Hoggett explains, ‘Physicality [...] at its best, [...] is counterpoint or it’s subversive to what is being spoken [...] it’s where we think the heart of our intention for physical work rests’. Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

Assembly productions need to create a kind of second, subversive language to the spoken dialogue, it also needs to ‘make sense of’ the character’s journey and the themes within the play.³⁹⁹ Although Hoggett maintains he does not want the text and physicality to ‘say the same thing twice’, by the same token, he does not want the physical composition to say something that is completely different to the dialogue, confusing the audience and unnecessarily complicating the production.

Graham and Hoggett have designed different exercises, games and patterns of movement in order to create movement for each particular production in collaboration with the performers which have, in turn, influenced the kinds of texts that they have commissioned from writers; the directors supervise the performers as they devise sequences of movement in pairs or groups in response to scenes from the text, using Contact Improvisation. The directors write:

The physical element in our work means that there is quite a methodological approach to the physical side of rehearsals but we are long-term advocates of a slightly looser approach to theatre making when it comes to creating and developing scenes.⁴⁰⁰

While the physical element of the directors’ rehearsal period is rigorous and demanding both physically and creatively, they try to approach the physical dramaturgy applied to each written scene, the composition of the accompanying movement, in an open, flexible fashion in order to make the necessary changes and additions.⁴⁰¹ Each scene is devised using a semi-decentralized approach; the performers have a certain amount of creative license in terms of the work they devise, but they work within parameters set by Graham and Hoggett. It is important to note that although they are responding to the text and create physical scenes in response to what the writer has written, the remit they are given is to concentrate on a

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Graham and Hoggett, p.26.

⁴⁰¹ ‘By choreography we mean any formalized movements that become set and can be repeated’. Ibid, p.125.

particular theme or concept reflecting the play, rather than particular scenes.⁴⁰² This technique allows the performers to devise within thematic parameters dictated by the text, but also allows them to avoid falling into the trap of devising movement that simply reinforces and/or mimics the dialogue in a particular scene.

The primary method which Frantic Assembly uses in devising movement, a physical improvisation technique called Contact Improvisation, is another mechanism of mutual adjustment which Graham and Hoggett use in order to further their semi-decentralized approach to working, separating the creation of text from the creation of the physical score. By devising movement to create a physical language within the play using Contact Improvisation, Graham and Hoggett allow their performers a certain amount of creative license within a tightly framed rehearsal structure, breaking each physically devised scene into what they call ‘tasks’, lasting only short periods of time, in order to prevent the performers from becoming overwhelmed with the pressure of having to think about the text or the production in its entirety.⁴⁰³ Although neither Graham nor Hoggett cite the method of physical composition through which they guide their performers, one can see that the roots of this approach stem from the discipline which dancer-choreographer Steve Paxton began to develop in 1972 with the New York-based dance company Grand Union.⁴⁰⁴ Sally Banes describes Contact Improvisation as ‘movement that originates in a variety of duet situations’

⁴⁰² Samuel James, a performer in *Stockholm*, commented, ‘we would look at sequences, an idea of movement or an idea of a theme of movement [...] We’re going to look at the idea that you’re on the floor or we’re going to look at the idea of stopping [...]. Think about the idea of stopping. [...] It was very much, these are your boundaries that we’re looking for. [...] But interestingly, [...] it was never necessarily sort of placed in the exploration of the sequence—it was never given a specific place within the script, that that’s where we’re intending on placing that bit’. Samuel James. Personal interview. 26 March 2008.

⁴⁰³ ‘All of our devising is broken down into tasks. [...] They never set out to encapsulate the whole production idea or solve the entire demands of the text. They are always as simple as we can make them as they were merely building blocks [...] By setting tasks you allow your performers to offer much creative input into the devising of choreography without burdening them with the responsibility of creating the whole show. [...] The shaping of theatre and choreography requires an outside eye and it is this objective influence that can liberate the performer to be brave, take risks and try things new. We, as the directors/choreographers, are liberated too as the performer is now providing a palette so much larger and richer than our own imaginations could provide. We feel this relationship and process sets both performers and directors free to use their full imaginations as well as working with ideas we would never have thought about.’ Graham and Hoggett, p.7.

⁴⁰⁴ Cynthia J. Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p.10.

inspired by familiar, everyday actions such as dancing, fighting or shaking hands, involving ‘lifts and falls, evolving organically out of a continuous process of finding and losing balance’, as well as a ‘give and take of weight’ and also the relationship between such elements as ‘passivity and activeness’ and ‘demand and response’.⁴⁰⁵ We can see the utility in this kind of approach to devising movement from Graham and Hoggett’s perspective, as their productions are not only driven by linear narrative but also follow a relatively realistic style of speech and movement. The interspersal of movement within the dialogue creates an expressive style to each production, but the dialogue and design schemes are essentially rooted in realism (or at least highly recognizable elements of everyday life, movement and speech), so accordingly, the movement itself is rooted in realistic, everyday, practical modes of physical expression. In short, Contact Improvisation relies on the interaction between performers who take recognizable, everyday movements and extend or exaggerate them in order to illuminate the characters’ interior states. Again, we see similarities in the kind of approach the company takes to making work with that of The Open Theater, as the latter company was also concerned with the way and which scripted dialogue and gesture could reflect the nature verbal and physical expression within social behavior, specifically the conscious and the unconscious. Additionally, this tension between speech and movement has been explored in the work of Copeau’s *création collective*, which was designed to understand the ways in which improvised dialogue and movement could enhance spontaneity in performance.

We may see this approach to devising movement as another application of Frantic Assembly’s mutual adjustment strategy; since each production deals with different material and themes, written by a different writer, devised by a different cast (often taken from a pool of performers with whom they have worked before), Graham and Hoggett endeavor to

⁴⁰⁵ Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), p. 65.

regulate the varying creative input from these freelance artists through a semi-decentralized approach to management, minimizing their formal control over the work as a whole. Davis and Scase explain:

Mutual adjustment is a means of coordinating inputs within the work process from those with a wide variety of talents and skills. Organized around projects, these elements are constantly reconstituted so that the organization can be adaptive and, therefore, innovative.⁴⁰⁶

Approaching physical devising through Contact Improvisation allows Graham and Hoggett to utilize the performers' physical interpretation of the script in a thematic fashion, addressing the particular needs of each text on a project-by-project basis, while also allowing the performers a certain amount of creative agency. All devised physical work is videotaped so that at the end of each rehearsal day, Graham and Hoggett can watch the sequences again, trying to decide which ones can be kept and which can be cut—making decisions affecting the physical dramaturgy of the production in a similar way to which a script is edited. The performers Graham and Hoggett cast are often a combination of people who have formal movement or dance training and those who have no background in physical performance at all. As a result, the directors often have to teach at least some members of the cast a common physical language so that they can communicate with each other during devising sessions and have an arsenal of movement techniques from which to draw; as the writer composes with written language, the performers are expected to compose work physically, writing through the body. The directors' use of video in the physical devising sessions demonstrate the role technology has played in the development of collaborative theatre-making; while writers working with The Open Theater were obliged to be present for the devising sessions Chaikin led with his performers, those working with Frantic Assembly are not, as they have written the text before the devising has begun, but they can alter the text they have created after

⁴⁰⁶ Davis and Scase, pp.14-15.

having watched videos of the physical scores created in rehearsal, discussing the work with the directors throughout.

We will now look at an example of Frantic Assembly's method of physical composition, taken from the public, one-day, physical devising workshop Hoggett conducted at the Tonybee Studios in London on November 26 in 2007. Hoggett began the workshop by putting the participants through a series of warm-ups involving stretching and cardiovascular work framed by games and exercises designed to heighten the participants' awareness of the studio space, their own physicality and that of each other, as well as encourage them to use their bodies in the most economic fashion possible. Hoggett played music during the warm-up session, encouraging people to consider the way in which the rhythm suggested the pace and quality of the movement. Hoggett spends the rest of the workshop guiding the participants through physical devising exercises. The first one was focused on devising short scenes in pairs. Hoggett emphasized that as a written narrative would not start and end in the same place, a physical narrative should also take the audience somewhere new, finishing differently from the beginning; he explained that in order to do this, a performer has to start by working not only from physical but also emotional and psychological neutrality in order to follow the natural trajectory of the scene, rather than falling into predictable, easily-recognized patterns of movement and gesture. Working in this way allows Graham and Hoggett, as well as company members, to work from the text for inspiration, ensuring that the movement devised in rehearsal was appropriate for the narrative and characters. Hoggett walked around the room, watching each pair's improvisation and giving notes, ultimately allowing the different pairs to perform in front of each other. The workshop reflected the collaborative ethos of the company; participants were encouraged to give each other feedback on their scenes, learning from each others' successes and mistakes, in addition to being

guided by Hoggett.⁴⁰⁷ Once the workshop participants had absorbed the director's approach to devising, they were asked to create another scene, this time using a picture or a concept given to them by Hoggett (in the tradition—albeit unconscious—of Copeau's *création collective* and also Paxton's Contact Improvisation.)

The accessible, instinctual nature and lack of codification of Frantic Assembly's approach to Contact Improvisation allows for another element of the continual dialogue between the two artistic directors (managers) and the freelance performers (employees) under their direction necessary for the kind of light directorial touch Graham and Hoggett endeavor to achieve in their work. Graham and Hoggett assign the creation of the texts for their productions to external writers in order to make use of the expertise of experienced writers, as they do not consider themselves writers and do not feel they have the skills or experience necessary to script their own productions. Although Graham and Hoggett used to perform in their own productions and devise physical sequences, the directors now delegate the devising of the physical scenes to performers in order to achieve a layer of distance between themselves and the composition of the production, maintaining a semi-decentralized approach to the devising while maintaining an element of control over the production's development as a whole. Performer Samuel James, who was in *Stockholm*, explains that Graham and Hoggett do not choreograph in the sense that they direct the actions and movements of the performers. He says, instead, 'They give you an idea or a particular story to tell and you come up with something', that he and co-star Georgina Lamb, 'had to go off on our own and we had to come up with a sequence and when we came back together, they said, that's the sequence'.⁴⁰⁸ James added that all inspiration for the movement came directly from Lavery's text for *Stockholm* and he, Lamb and the directors worked to observe the dictates and constraints of the text. Like Graham and Hoggett, early Contact Improvisers such

⁴⁰⁷ 'Contact improvisers, particularly during the last ten years of the form, have sometimes claimed that their dancing is a kind of folk dance, something that everyone can participate in and learn.' Novack, p. 11.

⁴⁰⁸ Samuel James. Personal interview. 26 March 2008.

as Paxton and Yvonne Rainer videotaped their work, which Cynthia J. Novack explains was important because it provided feedback to the dancers, helped develop a 'shared movement vocabulary', and 'became a kind of teacher, a means by which new movement and shared aesthetic values could be implicitly delineated'.⁴⁰⁹ The freedom to improvise as well as the use of the video camera decentralized what might have otherwise been more typical choreography, directed by Graham and Hoggett.

The system of mutual adjustment Graham and Hoggett have set in place allow a kind of reciprocity in terms of communication between the writer and the directors and the director and the performers, using the text as a primary conduit for spoken dialogue as well as a blueprint for the devising, and the physical devising as a secondary conduit for physical expression and proxemics. This semi-self-regulating, semi-decentralized process not only reinforces the minimal amount of managerial control Graham and Hoggett need to impose on their collaborators, it also segregates the different freelance artists (writers, designers, performers) into units so that their work can be carefully overseen by the directors who are acting as dramaturgs both for the written and the physical creation. In an article exploring writer-company relationships, Gareth White notes, 'interlocking circles of collaboration (between writer, director, actors, reference group and interviewees) create different kinds of agency in the project'.⁴¹⁰ In terms of the working relationship between the two directors, both have stated that they do not always agree, but they make sure to discuss all the decisions that are made together.⁴¹¹ James explains the synchronicity of the directors' relationship, that they discussed rehearsal room issues between themselves and resolved any disagreements before returning to the discussion or activity with the performers, in order to keep rehearsals running

⁴⁰⁹ Novack, p.78.

⁴¹⁰ Gareth White, 'Devising and Advocacy: The Red Room's *Unstated*', in Mermikides and Smart, p. 94.

⁴¹¹ 'We tend to team tag. When one is flagging the other steps in. We both direct and choreograph. We communicate very quickly, some would say imperceptibly. That is not to say we always agree.' Scott Graham. Email correspondence. 13 April 2010.

smoothly and provide a united front.⁴¹² On one hand, the fact that Graham and Hoggett are, on most productions, not only the people with the most artistic control, they also have the advantage of years of experience developing the loosely-defined process that they have designed for the company; some might argue that this aspect of the process reduces the collaborative element of Frantic Assembly productions because it is not entirely democratic, but we may perhaps refer to this arrangement as an ‘enlightened hierarchy’.⁴¹³ Graham and Hoggett undoubtedly sit at the top of the company’s chain of command, but it does not mean that they make all the decisions that make up the productions, nor does it mean they create all the material—they keep a dramaturgical eye on the developments of each project in order to ensure continuity.

Mark Ravenhill and *pool (no water)*: the problematics of conflicting visions

Now that we have outlined Frantic Assembly’s approach to creating the text and the physical score of each production, we will look at the ways in which it has been tested at a turning point in the company’s development by examining the process used in two different productions: *pool (no water)* and *Stockholm*. Graham and Hoggett explain that one of the main reasons why a particular text would be difficult to negotiate in terms of the physical devising process would be because it did not invite or encourage the authoring of a physical language by the directors and performers designed to sit side-by-side with the textual one. They give Lavery’s *Stockholm* as an example of a play wherein, ‘the concept of space and the physicality that filled it was central to the writing process’, but add that they ‘have had to fight for this space on other productions’, citing Ravenhill’s *pool (no water)*.⁴¹⁴ In order to fully understand the company’s relationship with writers, it is important to dissect this statement regarding the relative difficulty or ease with which certain writers have worked

⁴¹² Samuel James. Personal interview. 26 March 2008.

⁴¹³ White, in Mermikides and Smart, p.96.

⁴¹⁴ Graham and Hoggett, p.170.

within and influenced Frantic Assembly's method of producing work. We will examine this approach within the context of what Hoggett has called the most challenging production in the company's history, *pool (no water)*, and secondly, within the context of what the director has called the most effective production in the company's history, *Stockholm*.⁴¹⁵ In doing so, we will be better equipped to understand the role of both the writer and of authorship within the company's process, and also the ways in which different writers' approaches to scripting affect the relationship between the textual score and the physical one.

Even though Frantic Assembly had built their reputation on continual stylistic and formalistic experimentation, by the time they met Ravenhill in 2005 at the National Student Drama Festival and discussed the possibility of collaboration, this meant not only that they felt the pressure to continue to be at the vanguard of their field, but also that they had to solve the problem of finding texts suited to this kind of work; in other words, they felt under pressure not only to protect their identity or 'brand', but also to continue to innovate. That same year, Aleks Sierz wrote in *Theatre Forum*:

Now entering its second decade, Frantic Assembly faces enormous challenges. Having developed their unique style by coming to theatre from left field and enjoying a cult audience following, they have matured into a mainstream company with a style that fuses text, music, and movement. But, as with all imaginative groups, there is pressure on the company to constantly experiment and innovate. Despite the perennial problem of finding suitable texts, Frantic Assembly has built up a body of work [...]. Their work has clear hallmarks, but also boasts considerable variety. Although they are now fighting hard to stay at the cutting edge, their work, with its blend of provocative text and physical expressionism, remains a vision of the future for British theatre.⁴¹⁶

Sierz sums up the position of the company in terms of the profile they had built for themselves through the style of productions they had made and the way in which they had come to be perceived by the theatre-going public. At the Ravenhill 10 Conference in 2006, Graham and Hoggett remarked that at the time when they met Ravenhill, they felt the

⁴¹⁵ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

⁴¹⁶ Aleks Sierz, 'Frantic Assembly', *Theatre Forum* 26 (2005), pp.8-9.

company was struggling and were excited about the prospect of working with a writer of Ravenhill's well-established reputation, thinking it would be 'a fantastic opportunity' to continue to build the company's body of work and bring in new audiences.⁴¹⁷ The directors felt that collaborating with a writer like Ravenhill (who himself was known to be at the forefront of British playwriting at the time) would help solve their problem of how to advance the form and style of the company. As for Ravenhill, he commented that he had already known the directors personally through their mutual work with Paines Plough where he had been the literary manager and with whom Frantic Assembly had previously collaborated that he had considered working with the company before, but was, 'waiting for a moment when I felt that my writing had reached a point where there'd be something that would benefit from working with physical theatre'.⁴¹⁸ Like Frantic Assembly, Ravenhill felt he needed to add value to his 'brand' or public image by doing something he had never done before—namely collaborate with a physical theatre company. The collaboration was to be mutually beneficial for Ravenhill and Frantic Assembly, as it would expose both the writer and the company to a new approach to collaborative scripting, as well as raise their public profiles.

Ravenhill, Graham and Hoggett approached the project with the hope that the collaboration would somehow benefit their work, but none of them had considered how they wanted to collaborate and what kind of project they wanted to produce, which was unusual, as in every other production, the directors had initially proposed the main idea for each play they commissioned, and ultimately became one of the biggest problems of the collaboration.⁴¹⁹ Ravenhill wanted to work with Frantic Assembly because he had never

⁴¹⁷ Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Mark Ravenhill, *Ravenhill 10 Conference*, facilitated by David Lane (London: Goldsmiths College, 12 November 2006).

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Steven Hoggett said, 'It was quite strange talking to a writer where we thought, this could be great, but at the time I don't think we were very erudite about what it could actually be about. We were floundering for about a

created a text for a physical theatre company before and wanted to expand his image as a writer with the ability to collaborate in various situations. David Lane comments that a growing trend over the past decade has been for writers like Ravenhill (whom he mentions as a specific example) to, '[take] on the mantle of being self-innovators', which he attributes to a greater trend in writing in the UK:

As a result of the growing interest in new writing and the role of the writer in collaboration with other artists beyond the solo-authored play, the imaginations and skills of writers are being put to the test in new working environments. The processes of creating and producing theatre that involve the writer as a collaborating artist, or a structuring force behind a collage of raw material (among many other possible roles) are filtering into the mainstream, challenging our perception of drama simply being the realization of a writer's singular vision.⁴²⁰

Although Ravenhill might have simply had an interest in working in a different kind of way, Lane posits that, like Frantic Assembly, he felt the pressure to be innovative as a writer and reinvent himself as a collaborative practitioner. Graham and Hoggett wanted to work with Ravenhill in part because of his reputation as a writer in the UK and in part because his style of writing was sufficiently different from the writers with whom they have previously worked. Although this did not seem to pose a problem in the beginning to either party, the lack of clear expectations and a pronounced difference in aesthetic identity and artistic practice became the foundation for the problems that emerged during the process of making *pool (no water)*.

Stability vs. change in the collaborative process

Frantic Assembly was faced with the problem of finding a way to remain a successful and dynamic company, experimenting with working with new writers and texts, while also maintaining a certain amount of stability and consistency in their process as a company.

Graham and Hoggett had collaborated with eight writers previous to working with Ravenhill,

year and a half, trying to pick up our act. It was just meeting people like Mark, it was part of the way forward. We hadn't thought anything about what Mark might bring to it.' Ibid.

⁴²⁰ David Lane, *Contemporary British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.30.

but were more willing to take a risk in changing the way in which they usually initiated a project in part because they felt they had reached a kind of stasis in their work and, in part because Ravenhill was a well-known writer with whom they were eager to collaborate.

Graham commented that the first week of devising without any kind of script or concept with Ravenhill present in the room was ‘quite scary’ because they had never been in that position before.⁴²¹ For two directors who readily admit to being influenced by film and its meticulous control over the content of a performance, who admit to being uncomfortable with creating highly interpretive work, their response to this new way of devising is unsurprising.⁴²²

Graham and Hoggett would devise movement and Ravenhill would respond in kind by writing some short texts, which the directors would then attempt to use in the devising process the next day. Graham explained that he and Hoggett were driven by the ‘excitement’ of working with Ravenhill, and that they trusted that the process would be beneficial no matter the outcome.⁴²³ Management theorist Henry Mintzberg explains the problem of creating a new strategy for an organization is that, although the central theories regarding management strategy claim that change must be constant, ‘this proves to be ironic, because the very concept of strategy is rooted in stability, not change’, and that the problem is ‘when and how to promote change’.⁴²⁴ He continues: ‘A fundamental dilemma of strategy-making is the need to reconcile the forces for stability and for change—to focus efforts and gain operating efficiencies on the one hand, yet adapt and maintain currency with a changing external

⁴²¹ Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Mark Ravenhill, *Ravenhill 10 Conference*, facilitated by David Lane (London: Goldsmiths College, 12 November 2006).

⁴²² In response to conference facilitator David Lane’s question about whether physicality or text came first in their work, Hoggett said, ‘It’s always, always text first, for us. [...] I think we’re at our best when the text is right at the forefront of how we work. We don’t particularly enjoy creating movement out of a feeling or even an aesthetic. [...] I don’t think we have that kind of formal understanding of movement for its own sake, so as long as we’re able to link it back to the textual genesis of an idea, then we’re able to communicate very well’.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Henry Mintzberg, *Mintzberg on Management: Inside Our Strange World of Organizations* (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1989), p.25.

environment on the other'.⁴²⁵ An effective organization must be able to maintain relative stability and consistency in its operations, while at the same time remaining flexible enough to adapt to the changing environment around it. At the time, Ravenhill was known for such plays as *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999), being part of a generation of 1990s British writers that produced what had been termed 'in-yer-face theatre'—plays that dealt with previously taboo topics (such as sex, drugs and violence) in the form of graphic, shocking and extreme images and language, and was therefore a potentially suitable writer for Frantic Assembly, a company which had also tackled similar subjects in productions of their own. Although older than Graham and Hoggett, in the 1990s, Ravenhill usually targeted an audience similar to the one which Frantic Assembly targeted, aiming to speak to twenty- and thirty-somethings yearning to see characters to whom they could relate, whose values and preoccupations reflected their own, represented onstage.

The collaborative process became more focused when Graham, Hoggett and Ravenhill agreed to use images from American photographer Nan Goldin's book *The Devil's Playground*, a collection of photographs which documented her injuries and hospitalization which resulted from a fall into an empty swimming pool, as a starting point.⁴²⁶ All three collaborators claim that this decision was serendipitous, a result of this book being nearby while they began the workshopping process; it is, however, important to note that Frantic Assembly was producing a piece around the same time also inspired by the work of Goldin called *Dirty Wonderland* (Brighton Festival, 2005), scripted by Michael Wynne. Goldin, who began her career in the early 1970s, is best known for a collection of pictures entitled *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1979-1986) chronicling the lives of her friends in the form of portraits. Goldin's work largely revolved around the gritty, overexposed, hyper-realistic aesthetics of downtown New York in the 1970s and 1980s: drug abuse, makeshift urban

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p.25.

⁴²⁶ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

families of friends, health and illness, intimacy, alienation, the transvestite and drag lifestyle, sexuality, intimacy, alienation and the AIDS epidemic. It is unsurprising that Goldin's photographs served as inspiration for two Frantic Assembly productions, as her approach to portraiture allows the viewer a kind of voyeuristic pleasure in gazing upon intimate moments in the lives of strangers, and is also focused on the concept of the changing human body, in a way similar to Frantic Assembly's interest in movement. Guido Costa explains that her work encourages the viewer to 'be active', to identify with the subjects by using 'common archetypes' and collective memories', that, 'The spectator must to some degree become an active participant in the taking of the picture, reconstructing what went before and the circumstances in which it was made'.⁴²⁷ The photographs suggest complex but open-ended stories from which the viewer may extrapolate, and often feature the same people over and over, in different states and settings. Hoggett commented that what Ravenhill was attracted to within *The Devil's Playground* was Goldin's fixation on her own body in a state of trauma and her ability to self-document in such detail in such extreme circumstances.⁴²⁸

At this point in the development of *pool (no water)*, Graham and Hoggett were attempting to test the boundaries of the process of mutual adjustment with which they had previously used in order to facilitate their work with commissioned writers; they were giving Ravenhill more freedom to work than they had given previous writers, in order to maintain an approach of minimized directorial intervention. Even though Ravenhill and the company had managed to agree on the subject matter of the project, the problem was that they did not agree on the way in this material would be interpreted by Ravenhill. Part of the problem was that the communication was never clear enough between the directors and the writer, while the other was that Ravenhill never completely trusted Graham and Hoggett. Despite having stated at the Ravenhill 10 Conference held after *pool (no water)* had been produced that he

⁴²⁷ Guido Costa, *Nan Goldin*, transl. by Imogen Forster (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2001), p.3.

⁴²⁸ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

was eager for the challenge of writing for a physical theatre company, in an article written for *The Guardian* published just after *pool (no water)* had finished rehearsals, Ravenhill wrote that it took him until after he had written the first draft of the text and after he had seen *Dirty Wonderland* (which he liked) to trust Graham and Hoggett fully. He writes:

If I'm honest, up until this point I'd been holding back, seeing where the project might lead us; ready to bale [sic] out at any time, hopefully with a few lessons learned. I've never been a huge fan of physical theatre. Often the physical bit isn't as exciting as sport or dance, and the theatre bit isn't as substantial as a good play. While I was keen to work with directors younger than me—which I'd never done before—it can be uncomfortable to find you are the oldest person in the rehearsal room.⁴²⁹

Ravenhill's skepticism of physical theatre and the failings of its inherent hybridity combined with his mixed feelings about working with directors younger than he led to a deep mistrust, which, although he claims he eventually overcame, created an unstable base from which to work and was most likely at least partly to blame for the inhibition of further discussions with Graham and Hoggett. Additionally, even though Ravenhill was further placated by what he felt was Graham and Hoggett's thorough dramaturgical handling of his script, he states in the same article that he was 'deeply envious' of Graham and Hoggett's close working relationship, as he felt relatively 'lonely' and isolated in comparison, and even, at times in rehearsal, somewhat left out of the process.⁴³⁰ It is difficult to pinpoint Ravenhill's true feelings about the experience; he was unwilling to give a personal interview, so the only statements available that he has made about the process are rather public (and thus, perhaps, highly edited) ones, such as *The Guardian* article and the conference at Goldsmiths College.

⁴²⁹ Ravenhill, Mark, 'In at the deep end', *The Guardian* (2006)

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/sep/20/theatre1>> [accessed 20 April 2010].

⁴³⁰ 'I wrote a first draft and showed it to Scott and Steve. When they came back to me, I was surprised by how detailed and insightful their notes were. I'd wrongly assumed that in the world of physical theatre, the writer would pretty much have to fend for him- or herself, while the director got on with creating physical shapes. But these two were clearly avid scrutinisers of a piece of writing. I began to work out the different approaches of the two directors. During initial discussions, I'd been struck by how much they operated as a unit. [...] Coming from the often lonely territory of the playwright's desk, I was deeply envious of this. [...] They complemented each other perfectly. While Steven would often drive meetings or rehearsals along with a breezy energy, Scott was always checking detail, making sure there's a foundation to Steven's ideas.' Ibid.

One may infer from the word choice and tone that Ravenhill's feelings about his involvement are, to say the least, ambivalent.

Ravenhill's text

In *pool (no water)*, Ravenhill combined the source material of Goldin's *The Devil's Playground* with what he felt was a theme that ran through Frantic Assembly's work, namely that of friendship and the contemporary concept of families of friends. The play is the story of four artists (two men and two women in their 30s-40s) who go to visit a friend who is living abroad. It is important to note that the number, ages and genders of the characters were Graham and Hoggett's choices, as Ravenhill did not specify this in the text. The friend they are visiting has been the most financially and critically successful in their group, and, as we later learn, they are desperately envious of her wealth of career success. In the beginning of the play, the woman drunkenly dives into empty swimming pool, nearly killing herself and ending up in an intensive care ward in the hospital. The other four live in her house, eat her food and use her personal staff while waiting for her to recover and visiting her in the hospital—all the while cynically commenting on their ambivalence toward the woman, her professional success and their relationship with her. The group decides to photograph the woman's injuries while she's in the hospital in a coma, turning her gruesome incapacitation into a new and potentially lucrative artistic endeavor. When she awakes, they show her the pictures; instead of being angry about this attempted exploitation, the woman usurps the project, directing the others to continue photographing her for an exhibition. The others become envious and attempt to sabotage what has become their friend's project, revealing their deep insecurities, jealousies and anxieties about their own lives and careers. Ravenhill states that he wanted to examine, 'the other side of friendship and how destructive it can be, that often [...] there can also be something claustrophobic about friendship [...] and

sometimes even cruel [...], that it's got an odd duality to it',⁴³¹ as well as concepts of celebrity and the pressures career success (or the lack thereof) place on relationships.⁴³²

Ravenhill's intention was to write what he felt was an 'open' text, rather than a piece of writing that dictated details of staging, character and blocking to the directors, giving Graham and Hoggett what he felt would be more freedom to choreograph.⁴³³ The text itself is prosaic in its structure in that there are paragraph breaks to indicate a change in thought, but no indication of character or number of characters, stage directions or suggestions of physical interludes. Each section of speech seems to be designed to be delivered to the audience, rather than from one character to another; no one is referred to by name, with the exception of the friends who have died before the play has begun and the staff the main character employs in her household, to whom the four characters refer in an offhand, demeaning fashion ('The pieces that first began when we lost Ray to the whole Aids thing').⁴³⁴ Ravenhill intersperses 'we' and 'I' throughout the text, using 'we' to narrate a progression in the plot and 'I' to articulate an individual experience within the group. The impression this gives—both in the text and in the performance—is that the characters come to represent a kind of Greek chorus. For example, we may examine a turning point in the text when the friends decide to destroy the main character's photographs during a drug and alcohol-fueled binge after finding out that she is planning on holding an exhibition using the photographs taken of her battered body in the hospital:

And we sit in silence. Waiting for...

Oh God.

⁴³¹ Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Mark Ravenhill, *Ravenhill 10 Conference*, facilitated by David Lane (London: Goldsmiths College, 12 November 2006).

⁴³² In light of Ravenhill's comments regarding the way in which he often felt left out of Graham and Hoggett's working partnership, this statement leads one to wonder if he was considering the two directors' friendship with each other, as well as their friendships with other people in the industry.

⁴³³ Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Mark Ravenhill, *Ravenhill 10 Conference*, facilitated by David Lane (London: Goldsmiths College, 12 November 2006).

⁴³⁴ Mark Ravenhill, *pool (no water) and Citizenship* (London: Methuen Drama, 2006), p.3.

Waiting for...

I blame the personal trainer, He wouldn't be the first—is there a personal trainer in this world who doesn't deal as well as train? But it was the personal trainer who dealt us the stuff that night. He was selling but yes okay and we were buying.

I thought I was clean I really thought I was so clean. But I'm not. I never am. Never will be. I'm a user and I always will be. Until the day I die. Isn't that great? Isn't it fucking great? Because I know who I am. This is me. I'm a userjunkiecut-crackwhorefeelmyKholecuntedtwtat that's me and it feels... fucking great.⁴³⁵

One can see that without stage directions or character delineations, this section could be directed to be performed by any number of performers of any age or gender, in any fashion. The scene (of which the preceding excerpt is merely a short segment), depicts a moment in which the group of friends succumb to a moment of jealousy regarding their host's success, and also to the temptation to throw themselves into a self-destructive night of drug abuse. This scene combines the subject matter of Goldin's work (casual sex, failing relationships, drug and alcohol addiction, self-destruction), as well as Ravenhill's intention to create a play about the dark side of close friendships; the scatological language and repetition of words and phrases convey a rapid, collective descent into narcotic ecstasy punctured by fleeting moments of guilt and self-doubt. The lack of delineation of character here, the possibility that this section could be performed by any number of people, suggests a choric aspect to the work; we see this group as people who enable each other's addictions as the rhythm and tone build up to the crescendo of the bacchanalian revelry.

Frantic Assembly wanted a script that not only allowed for movement, but explicitly necessitated it; the reality, however, was that Ravenhill wrote a text that was characterized by the density of the dialogue, standing alone as a written work, rather than necessitating an accompanying physical score in order to complete it. Graham and Hoggett demand a certain

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p.26.

amount of openness within a commissioned text, but Ravenhill misinterpreted this demand by delivering a text which was open in terms of the nature of the characters, as opposed to the nature of the written dialogue, seeing his commission as an opportunity to experiment with concepts of character. At the Ravenhill 10 Conference at Goldsmiths, Ravenhill stated that he felt that British theatre was generally fettered to the tradition of social realism, and this tradition was overwhelmingly influential in the way new writing was dramaturged and directed, much to the detriment of the writing itself.⁴³⁶ He continued that one of the reasons why he wanted to work with Frantic Assembly was because, ‘social realism doesn’t come into the equation if people are throwing themselves around on walls like they do in Frantic Assembly shows’.⁴³⁷ What Ravenhill felt was the most exciting prospect of working with a physical theatre company was the possibility of being able to escape the ‘hermetically-sealed’ concepts of character propagated by more traditional theatre, which he felt could be achieved by disposing of the concept of ‘individual characters’ in *pool (no water)*.⁴³⁸ He explained: ‘I wanted the characters to be able to shift around responsibility; they never know when they’re speaking for themselves individually or as a group, and so nobody ever quite takes responsibility for the cruelty of what they’re doing.’⁴³⁹ Ravenhill wanted to create a text in which the prosaic, open composition of the words reflected the ambivalent psychological state of the characters and their shifting intentions. However, the lack of specifically delineated characters and stage directions became a major problem within the rehearsal room, as the directors struggled to find a way to intervene visually and physically within the density of the dialogue. Despite the fact that Ravenhill believed he was disposing of individual characters by writing a text without character names or delineations of who is speaking when, in fact he was simply leaving the delineation of character up to Graham, Hoggett and the

⁴³⁶ Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Mark Ravenhill, *Ravenhill 10 Conference*, facilitated by David Lane (London: Goldsmiths College, 12 November 2006).

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

performers, who were forced to create individual characters to find a way to physically interpret the dense text.

Mutual adjustment of text and movement

After working with Ravenhill to make some dramaturgical changes, when Graham and Hoggett began rehearsing the finished script, they began to discover that rather than being an 'open' text which gave the directors room to develop movement, it was so dense as to be resistant to physical interpretation of the themes of the play; consequently, the directors found the integration of movement and dialogue the most challenging aspect of the process. The main problem was that Graham and Hoggett found it difficult to discern where in the text the characters behaved as a group and when they behaved as individuals, as Ravenhill uses pronouns 'I' and 'we' freely without any indication of who the different 'I's represent. Graham explains that this lack of concrete distinction between the group and the individual within the text had potential because the transitions back and forth between individuality and group identification conveyed both a sense of their complicity and also a lack of responsibility in the sabotage of their friend's new photographic project.⁴⁴⁰ He also adds that part of the difficulty in conveying this concept physically lay in the fact that he and Hoggett fell into a trap where what they emphasized choreographically was the concept of all the characters operating as a group: 'it was only ever one thing where they were continually saying, we are a group and you see it. We'd say it and you'd see it in front of you'.⁴⁴¹ This dynamic interfered with the company's ethos of devising movement that subverts but does not mimic the dialogue it supports; instead, the movement was not only mimicking the dialogue, it was undermining the complexity intended by Ravenhill's text. In a review for *The*

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

Stage, Roger Malone commented on this problem of the singular, choric voice of the four characters:

The excellent quartet of actors are never allowed to relate to one another and are trapped instead in a shared script that speaks for their collective whole in the way a monologue might. While there was a richness in the emotions aired, there would have been more power to the dialogue had the characters been allowed to spark directly off one another.⁴⁴²

Graham and Hoggett did not have the freedom to shift back and forth between collective and individual responsibility, as Ravenhill had originally intended, questioning the morality of the group. Instead, they were forced to adhere to a collectivity throughout the play, occasionally touching on the limited individual aspects of each character by casting a group of performers who all looked very different from one another, had distinct qualities of movement and wore costumes that indicated unique tastes. Ravenhill had intended that the use of 'I' within the different sections of speech would indicate the individual experiences standing out from the group reflections, but this use of 'I' was not enough to wring individual characters from this chorus primarily because the speech patterns and preoccupations of each character were too similar to stand apart from one another, which was one of the main problems for Graham and Hoggett during rehearsals.

The physical score of *pool (no water)* that was inspired by the text was ultimately limited by Ravenhill's failure to endow the dialogue with any semblance of individual characterization from one section of speech to another. In order to understand the relationship between text and movement in the final production, let us take, for example, the choreography that Graham and Hoggett developed with cast members Kier Charles, Cait Davis, Leah Muller and Mark Rice-Oxley to illustrate the drug binge from the previous, excerpted section. In this scene, after the characters have stated that they are making the decision to spend the evening using drugs, the performers then depict this physically, racing

⁴⁴² Malone, Roger, Review of *pool (no water)* by Mark Ravenhill, *The Stage* (2006) <<http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/14311/pool-no-water->> [accessed 8 December 2010].

around the set, throwing themselves against the walls, groping each other and falling down, using erratic, punishing physicality that mirrors their erratic, self-destructive behavior. The set consisted of a cross-section of an enormous, outsized swimming pool—complete with ladders, built-in lights and white tiles—which also doubled as a hospital room. The high walls, ledges around the sides and ladders gave the performers opportunities to climb vertically, making use of the space in a frenzied, ecstatic way, bridging the gap between a realistic and a more stylized, heightened aesthetic. Although the use of lighting and sound completed the depiction of an intense narcotic high experienced by a group of people, the scene is an example of the fact that many of the physical scenes merely served to underscore the spoken, scripted ones, rather than have a narrative arc of their own, creating a subversive counterpoint to the dialogue. In his review for *The Independent*, Paul Taylor commented that the cast was ‘well-drilled as they pass to one another the baton of the rapid dialogue and throw themselves around in abandoned gestures expressive of their psychological and chemically enhanced states of mind,’ but felt that the play was ultimately ‘shallow’ in its exploration of the theme of envy.⁴⁴³ Writing for *The Observer*, Susannah Clapp took a dimmer view of the play, describing the movement as, ‘swaying together as a hate band, leaping up walls, slumping, flopping and distorted’, saying, ‘Taking the ambivalence out of jealousy, cutting it free of reluctant admiration, removes the guts of the subject’.⁴⁴⁴ Both reviewers felt the style of the movement detracted from the play’s central narrative. The intention was that the audience watches the self-destructive nature of the group as a whole represented by the physicality of group behavior, rather than the individual experiences of each character and the complexity of their inner selves. The problem, however, was that although Ravenhill wanted to represent characters who ‘shift around responsibility’ for the

⁴⁴³ Taylor, Paul, Review of *pool (no water)* by Mark Ravenhill, *The Independent* (2006) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/first-night-pool-no-water-lyric-hammersmith-london-422591.html>> [accessed 8 December 2010].

⁴⁴⁴ Clapp, Susannah, Review of *pool (no water)* by Mark Ravenhill, *The Observer* (2006) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/nov/05/theatre>> [accessed 8 December 2010].

things they do, back and forth between the individual will and the collective will, the ensemble nature of the choreography reduced this intention to a representation of the collective will.

At this point, the Frantic Assembly process of working had reached an impasse; the directors attempted to give the writer room to create a text from which they could work, but in doing so in a manner that differed from their usual method of working, Graham and Hoggett impeded Ravenhill's ability to deliver this text by failing to provide a vital framework of dramaturgical requirements. Here we may return to the statement MacDonald made about the concept of 'writing as mark making' and texts as 'machines for making performance' and consider whether or not Ravenhill's text was designed as a score, a kind of blueprint or machine into which the devised movement would later be fed.⁴⁴⁵ Graham and Hoggett negotiated the mechanism of mutual adjustment by allowing Ravenhill the freedom to fulfill his need for creative license, but Ravenhill did not fulfill his end of what was intended to be a mutually reciprocal contract because he did not completely understand what kind of 'blueprint' text Graham and Hoggett were seeking, perhaps because the two directors were intimidated by Ravenhill's reputation and were reticent to place too many demands on his commission, for fear he would change his mind. Interestingly, Graham and Hoggett made the decision regarding number of characters and delegation of lines between characters in rehearsal with the performers, but Ravenhill states that he did not take part in the discussions concerning those choices.⁴⁴⁶ *pool (no water)* was Frantic Assembly's most challenging production partly because Graham and Hoggett were not clear enough about what they

⁴⁴⁵ MacDonald, p.92.

⁴⁴⁶ 'I wrote this to be an open text [...] in that there's no specified characters or speakers or anything, you could do it with any number of performers and you could find different paths through it [...] Scott and Steve and the actors actually made their choices about which lines they'd have and characters do emerge [...] They'd start to stop links between particular lines and particular moments. [...] I didn't really join in the rehearsal room discussions about that.' Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Mark Ravenhill, *Ravenhill 10 Conference*, facilitated by David Lane (London: Goldsmiths College, 12 November 2006).

wanted from the commissioned writer. In an article on the future of script development and emerging dramaturgical practices, Lane writes:

This fundamental dynamic of conversation underpins the collaborative act of making theatre. [...] However, without a common theoretical terminology—the vocabulary that articulates our craft—and an ability to stretch our application of this terminology across different genres and dramaturgies, we are less supple practitioners [...], less helpful collaborators. For dramaturgs in script development, who often engage with work-in-progress—when the craft of the writer and the rules of the play may not yet be fully established—clarity becomes even more important: mistakes can embed themselves in the work.⁴⁴⁷

Lane emphasizes the importance of clear communication between collaborators when developing and dramaturging a new script by saying that without it, miscommunication can quickly translate into ‘mistakes that can embed themselves in the work’, or problems regarding narrative, structure, character, style or dramatic conceits. Although Lane is describing the role of the dramaturg, we may also apply this statement to Graham and Hoggett’s roles as director-dramaturgs in the process of developing *pool (no water)*. Since the communication between the directors and the writer was flawed from the beginning of the project—expectations not having been established clearly enough—the embedded mistake was Ravenhill’s misconception that the omission of character distinctions or stage directions would be useful in allowing Graham and Hoggett to create a physical language for the play. In fact, what Graham and Hoggett really wanted from Ravenhill was a text that would be structured enough to allow them to use it as (in Graham and Hoggett’s words) a ‘springboard’, or an inspiration for the movement they would later devise with the performers. It is important to note that the concerns regarding the piece were not the directors’ alone—Ravenhill too was concerned about the lack of interaction between characters onstage and wondered if the problem lay in the direction, performance, writing or

⁴⁴⁷ Lane, David, ‘A Dramaturg’s perspective: Looking to the future of script development’, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 1 (2010), pp.128.

all three.⁴⁴⁸ The main problem was the lack of clear communication in terms of initial expectations on the directors' part regarding the nature and structure of the script, and on Ravenhill's part regarding the interpretation of the script and his own objectives for the production, that led to the mistakes that became embedded in the work.

One of the main dramaturgical flaws in the text which resulted from either a lack of understanding of each other's objectives, a fundamental miscommunication during the development period of the text or both, was the fact that the directors' and the writer's intentions were at odds. Graham and Hoggett were ultimately seeking to create a piece of theatre that was precise and controlled in its visual and verbal language, whereas Ravenhill was seeking to create a kind of open, interpretive text. We may shed some light on this conflict of interest by turning to another aspect of Lane's description of emerging dramaturgical practices. Lane says,

Taking the elements of playwriting as sites for exploration and introducing a technical vocabulary that includes "problems" as dramaturgical choices may indicate a desire to place greater responsibility upon the audience than on the playwright: it might indicate a shift towards a looser, less disciplined, dramaturgy.⁴⁴⁹

What Ravenhill intended to achieve by creating a text without stage directions or delineations of character was to explore and test the boundaries of narrative and character in order to get around what he felt was the oppressive influence of contemporary British dramaturgy on writing. By doing so, he moved toward Lane's looser dramaturgy not only by placing responsibility upon the audience to interpret his open, fluid approach to characterization and storytelling, but also by placing it upon the directors as well to translate the text physically, visually and spatially. The problem was that Graham and Hoggett had already established in their process of working that the movement had to emerge from the text, and in order for that

⁴⁴⁸ Towards the end of the rehearsal period, he writes, 'there are still nagging fears about the overall tone of the piece. The play I've written is largely a story told by the four performers to the audience, and the actors are starting to miss the interplay that dialogue gives them. [...] Is there anything amiss in the writing? The production? Or does it just need time to bed in?'. Ravenhill, Mark, 'In at the deep end', *The Guardian* (2006) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/sep/20/theatre1>> [accessed 20 April 2010].

⁴⁴⁹ Lane, 'A Dramaturg's perspective', p.140.

movement to be appropriate for the text, the text had to provide a certain structure in terms of clear themes, characters and a narrative. The directors worked with the performers by giving them simple tasks and directives to incorporate into their devising process, attempting to maintain a certain distance and give the performers freedom to create, while also providing helpful parameters within which to work. Within a process that is designed for mutual adjustment while working with performers as well as the writer in order to maintain a semi-decentralized, semi-self-regulating approach to collaboration, the physical work becomes difficult when the commissioned text does not clearly indicate or even necessitate physical sequences.

In examining the various problems Frantic Assembly experienced with *pool (no water)*, one might conclude that the ultimate issue that governed the production, its development and rehearsal, from the initial meetings to the opening night, was the fact that the collaboration between Ravenhill and the company became a conflict of artistic visions and identities. Despite the fact that theatre companies, playwrights and directors are rarely seen within the industry as brands, in order to understand this from a practical, more managerial perspective, one might even look at the two units of Frantic Assembly and Ravenhill as theatre-makers two separate identities. In *The Twenty-Two Immutable Laws of Branding*, Al Reis and Laura Reis define branding as, ‘based on the concept of singularity,’ which is designed to enhance ‘the perception that there is no product in the market quite like your product’.⁴⁵⁰ We may posit that both Frantic Assembly and Ravenhill are two very distinct entities within the theatre industry, with particular images, who make work that is of a particular style. Both emerged on the contemporary British theatre scene in the mid-1990s, and because of this, they both appeal to a similar generation of theatre-goers, both their original fan-base and also the younger generation of audience members who have grown up

⁴⁵⁰ Al Reis and Laura Reis, *The Twenty-Two Immutable Laws of Branding* (London: Harper Collins Business, 1998), p.7.

studying their work in school. The problem with a collaboration between two relatively well-known entities such as Frantic Assembly and Ravenhill is that in the case of *pool (no water)*, their approach to working and artistic objectives were in conflict. This is not to say that both the company and the writer were too self-interested to engage in a fruitful collaboration, but rather that their perspectives on what the play would be were too influenced by their previous projects and their individual aims for the future development of their work. We can see an example of this conflict in a statement Ravenhill made at the Goldsmiths conference:

I wanted to write something that would be formally different from the plays that I've written [...] it seemed to me there would be little point in writing a play with fairly realistic dialogue and then stopped, and then people leapt around. So I actually found [...] something that was fairly dense textually and [...] quite formal with words, would be for me, the most exciting collision between what Scott and Steve would bring to it and what text would be doing. And in a way, I wanted the actors to be as challenged by speaking the words as they would be physically by what they would be doing in the movement stuff.⁴⁵¹

Ravenhill compares the text for *pool (no water)* to texts he had written previously, wanting to create a text for the company that would avoid what he felt were the restrictions of realism, thus making it more adaptable to movement, albeit more difficult for the performers to speak. Ravenhill's comment that he wanted the performers to be as challenged by the writing as they would be by the movement suggests a competitive attitude toward writing for a physical theatre company, as if he is concerned that his dialogue would have been engulfed by the choreography devised by the performers and directors had it not been difficult to negotiate. His objective was to make the dialogue as challenging for the performers as the physicality, when in actuality, what Graham and Hoggett wanted was for Ravenhill to create a text that reflected his style and ethos as a writer, but had enough space and structure to facilitate the physical devising process. Hoggett as well admitted that *pool (no water)* has been the company's most challenging production to date, explaining that, 'realizing [...] that our

⁴⁵¹ Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Mark Ravenhill, *Ravenhill 10 Conference*, facilitated by David Lane (London: Goldsmiths College, 12 November 2006).

process wasn't going to match the play that we'd commissioned was very difficult'.⁴⁵² Since Frantic Assembly's public identity was that of a company that produced plays with dynamic physical sequences, the directors felt limited in the kind of play they could (and wanted to) create with Ravenhill's text. Accordingly, since Ravenhill's public identity was that of a writer that created plays that pushed boundaries in terms of style and subject matter, he felt obligated to write a play that would be seen as contributing a new approach to creating text.

Strategic revolution and adjustment of process

During the period between developing *pool (no water)* and *Stockholm*, Frantic Assembly experienced a small but significant 'strategic revolution', to use a phrase of Davis and Scase, which they define as, a 'period of evolutionary change [...] suddenly punctuated by a brief bout of evolutionary turmoil in which the organization quickly alters many of its established patterns [...] to leap to a new stability quickly to re-establish an integrated posture'.⁴⁵³ Up until working on *pool (no water)*, Frantic Assembly had established themselves as a physical devising company that had a particular approach to working with writers and commissioning scripts; in working with Ravenhill, the company attempted to change their approach to commissioning and collaborating with writers in order to adjust to Ravenhill's needs, and in doing so, raise the profile of the company, which Graham and Hoggett felt was necessary at the time. The problem was that although Graham and Hoggett adjusted their process in the beginning of the project (by starting from scratch, rather than an idea they had conceived), they tried to impose their process of working on a script which was unlike other scripts with which they had worked. The result was that both Ravenhill and the company found the whole process challenging and Graham and Hoggett were ultimately dissatisfied with the outcome. Hoggett notes,

⁴⁵² Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

⁴⁵³ Davis and Scase, p.36.

We weren't able to integrate a true physicality into it that was fluid. [...] We crow-barred physicality in there. [...] We found some lovely springboards for physicality in the text [...] but structurally, once we'd made the material, we found to thread that through the actual text [...] really hard. [...] The text and movement was hard to put together.⁴⁵⁴

Despite the fact that the text provided inspiration for the physical devising process, because it was so loosely structured dramaturgically, without specially-intentioned room for movement, the directors found it difficult to find possibilities for movement within the dialogue.

Ravenhill explains it was not a true collaboration because both he and the directors were trying new methods of working and so tended to pursue their own concepts and goals within the development and rehearsal process.⁴⁵⁵ He explains further that this issue was reflected in the work, as Graham in particular pursued and developed the suggestion that the four characters were not addressing each other, but rather the audience, as if they were being interviewed in separate rooms, which not only restricted the performers' verbal contact but their physical contact as well.⁴⁵⁶ It was not the company's managerial approach of mutual adjustment that had failed but rather the overall collaboration between the director and writer—specifically, the integration of ideas of the directors, writer and performers.

In this period of change, in order to regain stability but also to learn from the experience of creating *pool (no water)* and continue to evolve as a company, Frantic Assembly had to find a solution to the problem of a lack of true collaboration with the writer and how to integrate the writer's objectives and working methods with their own by

⁴⁵⁴ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

⁴⁵⁵ 'But I think that this wasn't collaborative in the sense that we did an initial period of just a week of theatre where we did something where I'd write some texts and we'd do something and I'd write some texts. [...] I wrote a text and Scott and Steve created a performance which we were able to test that out how stuff would work because we were both trying new ways of approaching our work at the National Theatre Studio. But it wasn't ever a group of people saying, let's stick around and discuss things, improvise things, research things, it wasn't that process.' Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Mark Ravenhill, *Ravenhill 10 Conference*, facilitated by David Lane (London: Goldsmiths College, 12 November 2006).

⁴⁵⁶ Ravenhill commented: 'In rehearsal, [Graham] particularly was driving the idea that these people were speaking to the audience but they weren't in the same room at the same time as each other. The actors had to imagine that they were being interviewed about something that had happened. [...] That they'd been interviewed, and they'd been interviewed at separate times and somebody had edited together what they'd said, and so they weren't aware of what the others were saying. The actors were instructed not to listen to each other, so they had a kind of strange job as performers. [...] So it was almost anti-collaborative, and [...] it was kind of very much based on isolation.' Ibid.

developing a more integrated, holistic kind of dramaturgy in developing newly commissioned texts and working with them in rehearsal. In understanding the concept of dramaturgy within the context of Frantic Assembly's work, here we may turn to MacDonald's definition:

Contemporary dramaturgs, or interventionist thinker-artists who practice dramaturgy (they might not think of themselves as dramaturgs) [...] engage the space between the elements of composition and the unfolding of a performance in the presence of viewers. They research, watch, gather and note strands of development, editing, curating and asking questions, assisting in the "delivery" of a process with and on behalf of the artists. In this sense, the new dramaturgy is a mediating process *par excellence*.⁴⁵⁷

Although Graham and Hoggett do not have a designated dramaturg working on their productions, they act as director/dramaturgs, since they oversee both the writing and the rehearsal process. In order to solve the problem they faced with *pool (no water)*, Graham and Hoggett began to embody more fully MacDonald's definition of the dramaturg 'interventionist thinker-artists' who engage with a more complete integration of the ideas of the directors and writer from an earlier stage in order to facilitate a more structured but fruitful collaboration. Hoggett comments that every dramaturgical process changes as a result of the nature of the writer's writing style, personality and approach to working, and that Frantic Assembly has become better at learning to 'shift the goal posts' in order to accommodate them. Hoggett attributes this not only to years of experience, but also because he and Graham have, 'become better resourced in terms of researching and developing the work before going into rehearsals, so the writer is given that license to be part of the process'.⁴⁵⁸ The directors have learned that the early development stages of the process—the discussions with the writer involving initial concepts, source material and research—are as important dramaturgically to the project as dramaturgical meetings working on the text.

As every Frantic Assembly production is constructed as much from text as it is from movement, correspondingly, the directors' approach to the development of the physical score

⁴⁵⁷ MacDonald, p.94.

⁴⁵⁸ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

also changed in order to meet the dictates of the text and the writer's ideas, in order to avoid the mismatch of text and process that plagued *pool (no water)*. Hoggett comments that in the beginning of the company's work, the directors and the choreographers with which they had worked created rougher, more aggressive movement, whereas now, he and Graham endeavor to create a more 'subtle' physical score that mirrors the development of the textual score throughout the production, in order to facilitate the coexistence of dialogue and physicality.⁴⁵⁹ Hoggett explains that a major part of understanding how to create a narrative arc for movement was understanding where and when to cut devised physical sequences (as opposed to hanging on to movement pieces that did not help the narrative, simply because they liked them).⁴⁶⁰ Graham and Hoggett write, 'When thinking about movement versus words we often consider distillation. How can the crux of the matter be distilled and presented most effectively?'.⁴⁶¹ Since the directors work in a semi-decentralized fashion, allowing the performers to interpret the text physically using their own creative agency, it was also important to improve their ability to aid the performers in understanding how to devise movement using the script as a 'springboard', so that they would be less likely to devise what would ultimately be superfluous physical scenes.⁴⁶² Additionally, one may suggest that the increasing adaptability of the choreography is in part to do with the fact that although Graham and Hoggett worked with external choreographers off and on until they produced *Rabbit* in 2003, they shaped the choreography between the two of them, possibly narrowing margins for error and miscommunication.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Graham and Hoggett, p.195.

⁴⁶² Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

Bryony Lavery and *Stockholm*: communication and a shared vision

The initial contact and agreement between Bryony Lavery and Frantic Assembly is less dramatic than the company's initial meeting with Ravenhill; Graham and Hoggett did not feel that the company had reached a point of artistic stasis and Lavery had already written for physical theatre companies. Simply, Lavery heard through John Tiffany and Vicky Featherstone at Paines Plough about a project revolving around the Stockholm syndrome and domestic violence that Graham and Hoggett were planning. Lavery proposed herself for it as a commissioned writer and Frantic Assembly accepted, based on her previous work as well as recommendations from Tiffany and Featherstone.⁴⁶³ Lavery says, 'It has been so far charmed in that, I think that they were looking for someone like me and I was looking for someone like them.'⁴⁶⁴ Although she did not know the company's work previously, Lavery found she got along well with Graham and Hoggett from the beginning and both parties felt there was a natural sense of ease about the collaboration. Hoggett attributes this ease partly to the fact that Lavery was an established writer by the time she met the company, and so she had the experience and the reputation to be able to take a chance on a project with a company with which she was unfamiliar without the fear of failure. Regarding Lavery, he continues, 'Bravery is afforded by writers who have their house style. She's happy to explore. [...] And also she's a theatre-maker as well. She thinks about more than just the words and she responds brilliantly to movement, physicality, to choreography, music'.⁴⁶⁵ Hoggett makes a distinction here between writer and 'theatre-maker', attributing Lavery's bold approach to writing to the fact that she had worked in the industry long enough to be able to try different forms of composition that involved different sonic, spatial and visual elements of performance; for Hoggett, theatre-maker supersedes writer in that a theatre-maker is familiar with all aspects of production and takes these aspects into consideration when s/he writes.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Bryony Lavery. Personal interview. 30 April 2009.

⁴⁶⁵ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

This particular perspective reflects MacDonald's theory of new dramaturgy regarding texts as 'machines for making performance' and 'writing as mark making'. We are able to see here that if *Stockholm* was Graham and Hoggett's most fruitful, rewarding process, then Lavery fulfilled their desire for a writer who would treat the text as a kind of blueprint for movement, a detailed and well-structured base from which to devise.

Even though Graham and Hoggett have stated repeatedly they are most comfortable when working physically from a text that has already been written, their research and development process for *Stockholm* began with two weeks of workshopping, where Graham and Hoggett devised movement with four performers, with Lavery watching, taking notes and making sketches. They worked from the concept of the Stockholm syndrome and domestic violence, which was a premise upon which Lavery and the company had agreed; this early decision allowed Lavery to present her own research during the workshopping process. Whether it was the fact that all involved in the devising process were particularly inspired by the material, sheer luck or a combination of both, Hoggett says that they were able to make 'quite precise material from very vague ideas', in a process which the company found successful.⁴⁶⁶ He added that part of this success was due to the fact that he and Graham did not put pressure on Lavery to create any text in that two week period, in contrast to the research and development process for *pool (no water)* where the directors anxiously waited for Ravenhill to produce text in order to have material with which to work. In order to facilitate the physical devising process in the workshop, the company discussed any books, films, stories or personal experiences to do with the Stockholm syndrome; when they had narrowed the project to the idea of personal relationships, the material narrowed to the realm of the domestic and concepts such as kitchens and recipes were used as starting points.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ 'The first session that we had, we told Bryony to come along and if she felt compelled to write something, then to write something. If she didn't, not to worry. [...] But it was that idea that there was no responsibility for her to write words. We had ideas for the scenes, and actors read out recipes during that week. We heard text in

Lavery commented that since she did not know Frantic Assembly and their way of working, it was useful for her to be able to observe the directors guide the performers through the physical devising in order to understand their methodology.⁴⁶⁸ This is not to say, however, that Lavery observed passively on the sidelines while Graham and Hoggett made all the decisions; since the three had examined each other's source material relating to the Stockholm Syndrome and discussed the possible directions in which the project could go, there was already a stable base of collaborative thinking and conceptualizing from which to work. This workshop process involving a commissioned writer is reminiscent of the workshops held by Joint Stock to help the writer research a particular topic, such as the one used to develop *Cloud Nine* with Caryl Churchill; Lavery had the support of the company in investigating the themes and the potential physical life of the project, but was free to use what she had witnessed within the creation of the text in the way that she saw fit. It is important to note that Lavery had worked with Churchill on *Floorshow* (1977) for Monstrous Regiment, and thus, (unlike Ravenhill) had come from a tradition of working with companies collaboratively that perhaps facilitated her collaboration with Frantic Assembly.⁴⁶⁹

Lavery and the project itself benefitted from the strategic revolution Graham and Hoggett underwent after making *pool (no water)* by adjusting their process to incorporate more discussion and exploration of starting concepts and source material with the writer in order to develop a secure foundation from which to work. Lavery and the company entered into the research and development process with a sense of trust and confidence, a willingness to experiment and a firm structure within which to do it, whereas Ravenhill did not entirely

the space and we heard text that wasn't about a writer creating material. [...] She sketched the actors. [...] The first day that we were in the room, we talked about the Stockholm Syndrome. Anything around that. [...] books, films, images, stories, anecdotes— anecdotes from the company and their experiences with it. [...] We started making work based on tiny things like restraint, cooking, dancing, kitchens'. Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ 'It was the first time we've worked together so we were kind of trying to learn each other and how we worked. [...] I did try writing something, but it just didn't work, it was too early. So at some stage very early on, I said I'm just going to sit and watch and I drew a lot. [...] that was terribly useful for me.' Bryony Lavery. Personal interview. 30 April 2009.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

trust the company nor the medium of physical theatre, and Graham and Hoggett were anxious about Ravenhill's failure to produce viable writing during the early workshops. Graham notes that because of this, '*Stockholm* was much more collaborative than *pool (no water)*'.⁴⁷⁰ He explains that the text Ravenhill wrote after the research and development period was based on their work, but yet 'separate' from it as well, and not what the company was expecting. '[Lavery] took all of this and laced it through a text that contained much of what had been talked about around the table'.⁴⁷¹ It is reasonable to assume that the lack of communication and its outcome during the development of *pool (no water)* encouraged Graham and Hoggett to be more thorough in their dramaturgical approach with *Stockholm*, making sure to maintain their ethos of mutual adjustment through a semi-decentralized approach through a clear system of communication, but also to seek out a writer who would be more open to their collaborative process than Ravenhill. Lavery seemed to have had a relaxed and patient approach to working with the company during the research and development period, understanding that it would be to her benefit to understand the company's style of movement and their approach to devising it:

I just realized that actually there wasn't yet a need for words [...]. So for the first two weeks I just let the movement be centre-stage and I watched what story was developing. And that was a revelation because the narrative unfolded in a very different way.⁴⁷²

Before she began work on the text, Lavery felt there was a narrative emerging in the workshops, which is reflective of Frantic Assembly's earlier work, when Graham and Hoggett were working with Hazel on the company's first few productions. In addition to the first two weeks of workshopping, the company also held a week-long workshop after Lavery had produced the text in order to explore ways in which the movement and dialogue could be combined which allowed Lavery to make adjustments to the structure and content of the

⁴⁷⁰ Scott Graham. Email correspondence. 13 April 2010.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Bryony Lavery. Personal interview. 30 April 2009.

piece before rehearsals began, so that the text could serve as a basis from which the movement could be created.⁴⁷³ Graham commented that working with the physicality at the forefront of the project during *Stockholm* has encouraged Hoggett and himself to be more ‘confident about creating physical work and understanding where it might sit’ within the overall production.⁴⁷⁴ The company had worked for so long under the assumption that the script was the primary element of a Frantic Assembly production that they had forgotten that the physicality was equally important.

Lavery’s text

In comparison to *pool (no water)*, Lavery’s text is more conventional in its use of delineated characters and stage directions, but in doing so, creates possibilities for and even necessitates the intervention of movement sequences. *Stockholm* is the story of Kali and Todd, a couple living a seemingly perfect existence from the outside, secretly locked in an abusive relationship. The entire play takes place over the course of an evening in Kali and Todd’s home, as Todd cooks dinner for the couple and Kali becomes embroiled in her own fears and jealousies about the relationship which manifest themselves in outbursts of anger:

KALI

Why does he pretend to forget the fennel?
So he can sneak out to pretend he’s buying fucking fennel?

How remedial does he think she is?⁴⁷⁵

We slowly discover Kali is emotionally and physically abusive to Todd, who, being unable to leave her, is the play’s embodiment of a victim of the Stockholm Syndrome, someone who has identified with his captor. Graham and Hoggett explain *Stockholm*:

The tension built up to a brutal and shocking fight between a couple who had charmed us and sold us a vision of their perfect life together. All their defenses drop as they shatter in front of us. The intention was that these people would feel like our friends

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Scott Graham. Email correspondence. 13 April 2010.

⁴⁷⁵ Bryony Lavery, *Stockholm* (London: Oberon Modern Plays, 2007), p.50.

and while we are shocked and appalled by the nature of their destruction, there is still a part of us that understands why they will forever crawl back to each other.⁴⁷⁶

After the explosive fight, the last scene depicts Kali and Todd, lying together on a precariously tilted bed high above the stage, reconciled, but also foreshadows a sinister end suggesting children, darkness and death. Lavery expresses their relationship in an abstract, distanced style by making use of pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘I’ to suggest when there could be contact between the performers and the audience, when there could be contact between the two performers and when this contact has potentially been shut off. (The use of the conditional is appropriate here, as little in the stage directions that indicates how the lines are delivered, other than poetic and opaque statements open to interpretation.) The use of ‘we’ is sometimes expressed by Kali and Todd in earnest—demonstrating the happy moments in the relationship—and is sometimes subverted by the physical action, gestures or tone of voice of the performers, indicating the underlying strain and mistrust between the two. The use of the plural ‘we’ may seem similar to that of *pool (no water)*, but the difference is that Lavery’s use of ‘we’ is used to illuminate the extremities of a codependent relationship, whereas Ravenhill’s use of we was a stylistic choice intended to resist the conventions of character, not necessarily inherently connected to the subject matter of the play.

Lavery has embedded a need for physicality within the text by creating a continuous contradiction between what Kali and Todd say and what they do; the act of movement is needed to tell the whole story of the relationship, to convey the disturbing aspect of how quickly their interactions switch from romantic to destructive, as well as how the characters feel about each other moment to moment, and what they actually admit to feeling. Her stage directions are written in a loose, poetic style, suggesting physical acts, but not dictating exactly what should take place. For example, in the turning point of the play, Kali starts a physical fight with Todd, enraged by the suspicion that Todd is having an affair. It reads:

⁴⁷⁶ Graham and Hoggett, p. 84.

KALI

Let's remove that smug fucking expression...

And now, a terrible beautiful fight.

Let's kill him for this betrayal

She, trying for his absolute annihilation.

He, trying to hold her, contain her until the fury passes.

But it's probably a beautiful wild dance...

TODD

This

With improvisations on a theme

Is how it goes

She leaps for him

KALI

You fucker!!!!

TODD

He tries to contain her

Tries to anticipate her

Parry her

Until all her stuff's out⁴⁷⁷

Kali's reaction of jealousy is not surprising, as jealous, irrational outbursts crop up throughout the play, building to this point, but the fervor of her anger catches the audience off-guard. Lavery dictates that there will be a fight, but imbeds a layer of ambiguity and complexity by describing it in the stage directions as 'beautiful'. The nature of the relationship between Kali and Todd is exemplified in this moment where Kali lashes out irrationally at Todd, but Todd not only expects her outburst but knows what to do to stop, or at least endure, her attacks. We are also caught off-guard by Todd's measured, aware reaction, which subverts the violent language of the stage directions. What Lavery has done here is unusual for *Frantic Assembly*; instead of the characters' physicality representing the internal and the dialogue representing the external, here, we see the indications of movement representing the external and the dialogue narrating the internal world of the characters, more

⁴⁷⁷ Lavery, pp.65-66.

so than acting as communication between them. Here, for the most part, Kali and Todd's lines are directed out (suggested by Lavery's use of third person), making the audience complicit in their poisonous relationship. The stage directions are inserted in the middle of the characters' speeches to indicate a shift in tone and/or action.

Relationship between text and movement

The way in which this scene was interpreted and performed by the directors and performers Samuel James and Georgina Lamb not only conveys a sense of violence and destruction, but also, reflecting the complexity and ambiguity Lavery indicates in the script, recalls the more affectionate scenes from earlier in the play, specifically the scene in the kitchen where Kali and Todd dance together as Todd tries to cook dinner. This movement sequence is both a fight and a dance, coordinated in such a way that suggests that they have fought physically before. The tone is layered and the sequence is designed not only to distance the audience, but also to remind them of the obsessive desire bound up in the cruelty and destruction of the relationship. As in *pool (no water)*, the set is designed to facilitate the mobility of the performers, informing the way in which they move and giving them a physical structure in which to develop their characters' physical relationship. (The performers were able to work with a finished set from the beginning of the devising process.) Where the set of *pool (no water)* was characterized by a cold, sterile space meant to evoke both a swimming pool and a hospital setting, the *Stockholm* set was characterized by hard steel surfaces, state-of-the-art appliances, dark colours and sharp edges, indicating both moneyed, urban sophistication and also the ultimately chilling nature of the relationship: what Allison Vale called 'both a naturalistic, slick city apartment and a dangerous and, at times, fantastical

nightmare' in her review of the play for *British Theatre Guide*.⁴⁷⁸ Towards the beginning of the play, James and Lamb move in the space with grace and ease, emphasizing the apparent perfection of their life together, whereas later, the house becomes a kind of cage where predator and prey fight to the death.

Since Lavery was given such a specific context with which to work, the specifically of the *Stockholm* set may have helped her envision the world of the play and thus, be more in sync with Graham and Hoggetts' vision. Although it is not always specifically indicated in Lavery's text, one of the most striking elements of the production was the way in which the stage set, sound and lighting scheme conspired to propose that the house was an extension of the couple's emotional turmoil; James and Lamb interacted with the set and its hidden mechanisms in moments of extreme outbursts of emotion, indicating thoughts and feelings so powerful they cannot be repressed and the audience becomes enveloped in them, not only through the physical, but also through the use of lighting and sound. Aspects of the set became dynamic, engaging with the performers physically to further illustrate their feelings about each other—often in private moments when we see either Kali or Todd alone—expanding upon the proxemics, inscribing the space and adding an additional dynamic to the physical narrative of the production. For example, in a moment in the beginning of the play, after Kali and Todd have had a brief, intense argument about Todd's parents and then, subsequently, Kali performs oral sex on Todd on the stairs of the house, when Kali leaves the hallway, Todd has a moment of doubt and panic. In the text, it reads:

**As he passes, something much stronger than him
reaches out and takes him in its grip into the small
cupboard...**

It speaks

US

Got you!

⁴⁷⁸ Vale, Allison, Review of *Stockholm* by Bryony Lavery, *British Theatre Guide* (2007) <<http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/stockholm-rev.htm>> [accessed 9 December 2010].

Look at this, Todd!
 Look where you are.
 Look around, Todd...
 See how *narrow* it is?
 This is a very small airless cramped space!
 This is where we might keep you.
 Would you like that? Would you?
 Scrunched up here like an old electricity bill?

TODD
 No⁴⁷⁹

In the way the scene was realized in the production by the company, Todd was physically lifted by a mechanism hidden in the wall, decked out in innocuous floral wallpaper, and drawn up nearly to the top of the set from behind, flailing and kicking, as if taken prisoner by some sinister power. Lavery has written a scene that indicates stylized, abstract expansion of the spatial and emotional dynamic between Kali and Todd, but does not dictate how this scene will play out, leaving the performers, directors and designers the freedom to conceive the scene on stage. Hoggett commented that in the script, ‘Everything opened up and opened up and opened up. [...] *Stockholm* had all these avenues for exploration. It totally embodied a sense of movement’.⁴⁸⁰

While rehearsing *pool (no water)*, Frantic Assembly struggled to discover what kind of movement would be appropriate for the production and how it would fit in with the dialogue, whereas while rehearsing *Stockholm*, the challenge was discovering the amount and placement of movement to compliment the text. Hoggett says, ‘The thing that was very different with *pool (no water)*, there was no sense of where the physicality would be. Whereas *Stockholm*, it had been placed by Bryony in the text already’.⁴⁸¹ Graham, Hoggett, Lamb and James found the text so open to physical intervention that one of the main problems became which movement sequences were necessary for the telling of the story. Lavery performed the function of dramaturg at this stage, coming in occasionally to lend an

⁴⁷⁹ Lavery, p.33.

⁴⁸⁰ Steven Hoggett. Personal interview. 11 October 2010.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

outside, critical eye while Graham and Hoggett videotaped all the physical pieces that James and Lamb devised in order to go back and decide which material would be kept and refined and which would be cut. At the Frantic Assembly devising workshop in November, 2007, Hoggett commented that *Stockholm*'s physical sequences were devised around pair work with Lamb and James, concentrating on the principle of a start-stop motion where one person starts a movement and the other stops it from following through; this approach allowed the performers to convey the element of surprise and unpredictability while avoiding clichéd, easily recognized movements. Lane says,

This collision of antagonistic relationships is visibly expressed in performance. Dance-based sequences are marked around a push-pull exchange of movements, the characters travelling from mutual co-operation in some activities [...]. To warring factions in others.⁴⁸²

The stop-start, or push-pull, motion is symbolic of the ambivalent, volatile nature of Kali and Todd's relationship; the tone of the production changes from intimate to claustrophobic and back again, alternately pulling the audience into the world of the play and pushing them back out again.

The structure and style of the writing allows for the freedom of physical interpretation of the directors and performers; Graham and Hoggett are given space to devise movement within the script and the performers are given space to develop their characters, depending on how they interpret the unusual punctuation of the dialogue and interspersal of the lyrical stage directions. Performer Samuel James (playing Todd) explained that this fluid use of pronouns in the text allowed himself and Georgina Lamb to experiment with the characters' relationship to each other as well as to the audience—what they wanted the outside world to see of their relationship and what they wanted to shield from the audience. James explains

There [...] was extensive discussion and experimentation with how much of it we played to each other and how much of it we took out. [...] You invite this audience in

⁴⁸² Lane, 'A dramaturg's perspective', p.95.

and you say to them, look at us, isn't it great to be us, and share our joy, and then, at a designated point you tell them to fuck off again and that it's none of their business.⁴⁸³

James says that this particular device in the script not only allowed Lamb and him to explore the character's relationship but also to find a way of exposing the dysfunction, by shutting the audience out with their physical and verbal language. This aspect of Lavery's dialogue can be connected to Graham and Hoggett's decision to base the devising process on the push-pull/stop-start principle; the nature of the subject matter agreed upon by the company at the start of the process informed the workshops during the research and development, which then informed the style and content of Lavery's script, which subsequently informed the nature of the exercises and concepts used to guide the physical devising. The holistic nature of the production was appreciated by Lynn Gardner in her review of *Stockholm* for *The Guardian*:

This latest show from Frantic Assembly comes together like a perfectly designed piece of flat-packed furniture and is a sinister joy. [...] script, design and lighting, soundtrack and choreography conjoin in one lethal embrace. Bryony Lavery's needle-sharp script toys with the audience like a horror movie. In their role as directors and choreographers, Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett create a danse macabre that is played out with brilliant controlled recklessness by Georgina Lamb and Samuel James.⁴⁸⁴

Conclusions: authorship and the role of the writer

During the period that lasted from Frantic Assembly's production of *pool (no water)* and their production of *Stockholm*, Graham and Hoggett realized that the relationship between the written text and physical score must be reciprocal from the start of the development of a project to the end in order to produce a dialogue between the two. When the directors worked with Hazel on the *Generation Trilogy*, they did not wholly rely on Hazel's text to generate material for their productions; rather, they devised movement and worked from Hazel's texts alternately, moving back and forth between physical and textual composition, creating a natural balance between the two. As the company began working

⁴⁸³ Samuel James. Personal interview. 26 March 2008.

⁴⁸⁴ Gardner, Lynn, Review of *Stockholm* by Bryony Lavery, *The Guardian*, 26 September 2007.

with writers external to the permanent artistic directorship, Graham and Hoggett became increasingly reliant on writers to provide the text from which they would then use as a springboard for devising movement, which destabilized the balance between the text and physicality. After seeing the discrepancy between Ravenhill's text and the movement Graham and Hoggett devised with the performers in response to this text, the company underwent a strategic revolution, which prompted the directors to be more attentive to the research and development period with the writer in order to allow them to come to a mutual understanding about the nature of the project. Graham and Hoggett write:

For a long time we maintained that the words always came first in our devising process. That rule is not so hard and fast now that we feel more confident about working from images and through physicality. Our experiences on *Stockholm* and *It Snows*, both with Bryony Lavery, have shown us that the physicality can be just as inspiring as to the words as the words have proven for the physicality.⁴⁸⁵

When the directors worked with Lavery on *Stockholm*, they were careful to create a development process wherein not only were the directors able to explore the subject of the piece physically before a script was produced, it also allowed the writer to understand the company's style and devising process more completely. They also were careful to commission an experienced writer who would be open to and interested in the company's approach to working; in choosing Lavery to write *Stockholm*, the directors had chosen a writer who had emerged from the British collaborative theatre tradition of the 1970s of companies such as Joint Stock, Monstrous Regiment and Gay Sweatshop (with whom she had also worked) that prioritized the creation of a text, but used methods that involved workshopping, physical devising and group research in the process. As a result, Graham and Hoggett came to understand that just as physicality could result from the text as a starting point, the text could also result from the physicality. Lavery was able to create a script that provided a balance between structure and openness, allowing space for the intervention of

⁴⁸⁵ Graham and Hoggett, p.169.

physical composition. The *Stockholm* text was a response to conversations Lavery had with the directors regarding the subject matter of the play during the research and development period, as well as the initial two-week devising workshop the writer witnessed. What the directors do not say is that in addition from learning from Lavery that physicality can inspire text, they also learned that text can be limiting or even detrimental to the physicality, as they learned from working with Ravenhill.

Using the mechanism of mutual adjustment, Graham and Hoggett were able to incorporate contributions from all members of the company working on each production (performers, writers, designers) with minimal managerial intervention, creating a method of working that was decentralized enough to allow them to collaborate with external freelancers while maintaining ultimate artistic control and continuity. In order to do this, the directors learned to become more active dramaturgs in a continual process spanning the whole production, from the beginning of the research and development period to the opening night, layering their editorial adjustments within the textual and physical compositional process to achieve thematic and stylistic continuity. The directors of the company are also the overseers of the dramaturgical integrity of each piece, for the text and movement alike. Although this is the responsibility of any director, but Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt explain that this need for attention to minute detail and also the overarching shape of the production is especially important to those who work with devising because

anything and everything can become significant and it takes a creative eye and sensibility to be able to pick up on the potential and the poetry of what is going on in the space: a certain look between two performers, a sudden hand gesture, an accidental entrance or simply a particular feeling about the timing or duration of a moment might provide an exciting shift in direction.⁴⁸⁶

Although Graham and Hoggett maintain they, ‘have no commitment to any one process’, they have, in fact, established a rough model of working designed to create productions

⁴⁸⁶ Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.177.

which combine textual and physical composition.⁴⁸⁷ They have, however, adjusted this process in order to compensate for the particular needs and attitudes of the continually changing group of freelance writers, performers and designers hired to work on each production. Derek Chong explains, ‘Decentralization offers local units power and autonomy for some kind of self-organized activity; at the same time, a measure of central control is retained’.⁴⁸⁸ Graham and Hoggett continually adjust their process to accommodate the needs of practitioners invited to work on their productions.

The company’s attitude toward working with writers is a product of many years of working with writers under various conditions, and as such, Graham and Hoggett recognize that every writer’s process and attitude to the material will be different, so the lines of communication must be clear and the needs of each party must be considered and negotiated.

They write:

Your practical relationship with writers is as idiosyncratic as the writers themselves and the project you are working on. [...] This is the most important relationship to have clear and understood from the start. You must both know what you expect from each other. [...] You need to know whether the writer is expected/willing/able to write in the rehearsal room. You need to know if your writer is going to take inspiration from the devising processes or whether they need the privacy to follow their own clear line of creativity and then pass that on to you/the devising company.⁴⁸⁹

Their use of the conditional ‘if’ in this statement demonstrates that despite the fact that they have learned that an initial research and development process which integrates the writer into their physical devising process, they have realized that some writers will not find this useful to their process, which is something Graham and Hoggett are prepared to respect. This gesture in itself shows that the directors divide the authorship of the production between the writer and themselves. They explained in an interview with Alex Sierz in 2005 that they wanted to bridge the gap between physical theatre and text-based performance, ‘to invent a

⁴⁸⁷ Graham and Hoggett, p.197.

⁴⁸⁸ Derrick Chong, *Arts Management* (Abington: Routledge, 2002), p.69.

⁴⁸⁹ Graham and Hoggett, p.197.

physical language'.⁴⁹⁰ The directors are moving toward a more holistic text-movement hybridity in order to create productions which consider not only the text, but also spatial and physical considerations integral to theatre-making; as such, their relationship with writers is also informed by a desire to create possibilities for collaboration with other practitioners such as performers and designers. Lavery refers to the role of text in Frantic Assembly's work as 'a kind of stepladder' to 'the release of the body into the movement,' indicating that text and movement were intertwined in the company's work, that one facilitated the other.⁴⁹¹ Graham states, 'Devising is not to the exclusion of working with a writer. And that writer has to be allowed the freedom to develop a text and not just be expected to be inspired by what is created in the rehearsal room'.⁴⁹² Graham and Hoggett have created a working environment wherein writing and devising are two complementary practices of making work, but also one in which writing can be practiced separately, outside the rehearsal room, giving the writer as much support as possible, but enough artistic autonomy to be able to express their unique style.

In the case of Frantic Assembly, writing can be defined as the occupation of the designated writer working on the production, but is not necessarily synonymous with authorship. In *Stockholm*'s programme, Bryony Lavery is listed simply as 'writer', Graham and Hoggett are credited under 'direction and choreography', and the production is listed as 'a Frantic Assembly production'. The *pool (no water)* programme is identical, with Mark Ravenhill is listed as 'writer'. *Stockholm* was equally a product of writing, devising and directing, so the authorship can be attributed to those involved in the writing, creation and origination of the production: namely, Lavery and Frantic Assembly. Lavery describes herself as 'the author of the text' and Frantic Assembly as the author of the production (attributing authorship to designer Laura Hopkins as well as the directors), describing the

⁴⁹⁰ Sierz, p.4.

⁴⁹¹ Bryony Lavery. Personal interview. 30 April 2009.

⁴⁹² Graham and Hoggett, p. 6.

production as ‘the synthesis of the people in it’.⁴⁹³ As a result of the collaborative nature of Frantic Assembly’s approach to composition, the authorship of *Stockholm* and *pool (no water)* is shared between the directors, writer, dramaturg and performers, as both written and non-written applications of composition became important to the genesis and structuring of the piece. When asked about the authorship of Frantic Assembly productions, Graham was resistant, saying he felt the word authorship was ‘limiting and reductive as it still reflects a literary process’, but does little to describe the collaborative process Frantic Assembly uses. He continues: ‘That literary process is still crucial to the work but if we are looking to define moral ownership of a created collaborative piece of work then I think we need to start again’.⁴⁹⁴ Here, the crediting system in Frantic Assembly programmes is illuminated; Graham admits that such labels are somewhat reductive, but necessary in the artistic environment in which the company produces their work.

The authorship of Frantic Assembly productions is shared jointly between two entities, the writer and the company, wherein the company can be understood to be an umbrella term for the authorial influences of Graham and Hoggett, as well as movement created by performers and input from outside choreographers. Graham and Hoggett commission writers and performers to compose the written and physical score for the production, while they act as director-manager-dramaturgs, overseeing the work, assuring continuity of narrative and style, as well as making sure it is representative of the style and ethos of Frantic Assembly. The relationship between written and physical composition is such that the written text is intended to create a framework for the physical score of the production; the spoken dialogue provides a narrative and the movement expands upon the subtext of the production. The model the company used, before *pool (no water)*, consisted of what was largely a two-part process: the period the writer spent composing the script and the

⁴⁹³ Bryony Lavery. Personal interview. 30 April 2009.

⁴⁹⁴ Scott Graham. Email correspondence. 13 April 2010.

period the directors and performers spent working through the script, devising movement to accompany it. After *pool (no water)*, the model was adjusted, becoming a three-part process, as a response to Graham and Hoggett's changed perspective regarding the positive value of a development period for the company and the writer to work together; the expanded research and development period involving the writer as well as directors and performers creates a more solid base for the writer to create a script. Since working with Lavery, Frantic Assembly has begun a slower, longer process involving the writer and allowing the rest of the company to be more influential in the overall story and theme of the production in the pre-text phase, and engaging the directors themselves in a more holistic, continuous style of dramaturgy. The company has utilized a mechanism of mutual adjustment on a project-by-project basis to accommodate the needs of various writers with whom they have worked; by doing so, Graham and Hoggett have learned how to develop a dramaturgical model of making work that incorporates the writer and performers' contributions, as well as their own, with minimal intervention.

Chapter Four

Filter: the chaos of devising and the organization of writing

‘I used to call it “punk theatre”—that it was both chaotic and organized simultaneously’.⁴⁹⁵

Introduction

Chapter Four will analyze the relationship between the commissioned scripting writer and the company in Filter Theatre’s *Faster* (2003) and that of the commissioned writer/director and the company in *Water* (2007), examining the process use in each, the role of the text and the ways in which the company hierarchy was adjusted to suit the project, using a combination of management theory and performance theory in order to inform the argument. (It should also be noted than in addition to the original interviews, this chapter includes research material not yet in the public domain, such as extracts from the Filter archives, and—to a greater extent than the other chapters—is completely dependent on this new material.) Filter represents a strand of contemporary collaborative theatre-making whose process developed through the search for a working balance between the ephemeral nature of devising and the organization of the more fixed nature of writing. Filter was established in 2001 in London by Oliver Dimsdale, Ferdy Roberts, and Tim Phillips, and has since produced original productions *Faster*, *Water* and *Silence* (2011), as well as adaptations of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (2007), *Twelfth Night* (2007-8) and *Three Sisters* (2010). Filter’s method of devising new work has been structured in such a way that the creative agency of the commissioned writer or writer/director and the work s/he has produced have been exactly regulated by the company’s politics of authorship. The mission statement for the company’s profile on the Arts division of the British Council’s 2009 website read:

Filter Theatre brings together actors, musicians, technicians, designers, writers, and directors to create both new works of original theatre and thrilling incarnations of existing texts. Filter’s shows create an on-stage fusion of live and recorded music and

⁴⁹⁵ GuyRetallack. Personal interview. 9 April 2009.

sound, naturalistic and stylised physical movement, and video images. The live chemistry between these elements is a vital aspect of the company's work.⁴⁹⁶

The profile (taken from a version of Filter's website dating from the period when *Water* was made, but has since been revised) emphasized both the company's use of technology in staging and also their intention to collaborate with practitioners with distinct skill sets to produce work; neither here nor on their current website does the company make a public statement specifically regarding the role of the writer within the company, so it is important to examine Filter's working methods in order to understand their approach to working with writers and text. The lines of inquiry this chapter will investigate are: whether Filter has a distinctive model of working with writers, and if so, what that model is; how the process with which they experimented while making their first production influence their later projects and aims as a company; how we are to understand the concept of authorship in Filter's work, and what role it plays regarding the composition of the pieces; and most importantly, what constitutes the role of the writer and text within Filter's work.

The principles behind Filter's collaborative practice stem from the Artistic Directors' desire to make theatre that reflect their personal tastes as audience members and knowledge of working methods as practitioners, allowing them to have the kind of creative control over their productions which they would not have had otherwise as freelance performers.

Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts met when they were students at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama from 1999-2001, Dimsdale and Roberts studying Drama and Phillips studying Music. Roberts explained that they began working together in order to fulfill a personal need to express themselves as creators and find their creative voice in response to the techniques they were learning:

We found that the music discipline and the acting-training side of things didn't really cross at all, so therefore, we would meet [...] and talk through ideas and discuss the

⁴⁹⁶ Filter Theatre, *British Council, Arts*, (2010) <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-performanceinprofile-2009-british_council-filter_theatre.htm> [accessed 25 May 2010].

possibilities of the ways in which the music can interact as organically as possible with the acting and the movement and the textual training we had been given.⁴⁹⁷

Roberts emphasizes that the particular frustration that encouraged the group to make their own work was the shared feeling that they were being ‘taught to be directed’, but not to be creators themselves, to make their own productions.⁴⁹⁸ The trio’s main goal was to apply actor and musician-training techniques to a method of collaboration that combined musical with theatrical modes of generating material for performance to allow them to collaborate and devise productions in the rehearsal room. Filter’s interest in a theatre-sound crossover led to a student production called *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (2000); the idea behind it was to devise a performance through the close collaboration between actors and musicians, with the contribution of each side being integral to the production. Filter continued to create a similar production every year, and when Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips graduated, they applied for and won the 2001 Deutsche Bank Award which gave them £7,500 in seed-money to establish Filter Theatre as a company.

***Faster*: the scripting writer-company collaboration**

Faster provides an example of the way in which a collaborative scripting process can be problematic regarding the writer’s role in the production and also of the possible resulting conflicts surrounding authorship. We can trace the creation of *Faster* through the way in which each draft of the text for performance was created because it represents a tangible record of the changes to which the entire project was subjected, as well as being a representation of the way in which the company viewed the writer(s) role within the developing project. *Faster* was adapted from the non-fictional book *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (Abacus, 1999) by James Gleick, and the process of adaptation

⁴⁹⁷ Ferdy Roberts. Personal interview. 31 July 2008.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

involved several stages of work and layers of influence from different people over the course of eighteen months. As a result, those who were involved said they found it difficult to describe what exactly happened on a day-to-day basis and sometimes who was responsible for a particular stage of the development of the project. To clarify this process and the role of the text and the writer within it, we will separate it into three stages: the first stage involving the production team without writers, the second stage involving the production team with writers Ollie Wilkinson and Dawn King, and the third stage involving writer Stephen Brown.

Stage One: Filter, James Gleick and Guy Retallack

Gleick's *Faster* is rich in information, philosophy and sociological theory, but does not lend itself easily to dramatization, as there are no characters or narrative per se; however, Dimsdale, Roberts and Phillips explained that the book appealed to them because they felt it accurately described the fast-paced culture in which they lived and also the increasing mediatization of that society, which Filter tries to reflect in their productions through the incorporation of technology into the staging and design. Each chapter of *Faster* is an essay dedicated to different time-saving devices and the way in which human psychology and behavior has been altered in response to their proliferation. In his book, Gleick responds to the overwhelming proliferation of computer technology and the spread of internet usage in Millennial America; in doing so, he looks backward in time, at different scientific and industrial revolutions around the world that brought society to this particular point of technological development. Gleick argues that while modern technology has allowed people to do more things, see more places and communicate with more people than at any other time in history, our quality of life has suffered:

I [...] believe now more than ever, that we are reckless in closing our eyes to the acceleration of our world. [...] We struggle to perceive the process of change even as

we ourselves are changing. [...] We don't exist in a steady state, and we don't have a motionless platform from which to observe the changing world around us.⁴⁹⁹

According to Gleick, not only do we choose to ignore the way in which modern technological 'progress' has altered our lives, but even if we wanted to be able to understand these great technological revolutions, we would not be able to perceive it because they move too quickly. *Faster* argues the pros and cons of a fast-paced society becoming increasingly more fast-paced, while observing, for example, the changes that have occurred between the invention of the telephone and the invention of the computer or from the standardization of time across the world. Gleick begins in his prologue by saying that, 'increasing wealth and increasing education bring a sense of tension about time', and concludes at the end of the book that this tension, this impatience, has prevented modern Western society from being able to perceive the flaws in this system of so-called efficiency, using an arsenal of resources such as interviews, statistics, scientific data, novels, poetry, academic essays and magazine articles to support his argument.⁵⁰⁰

At the beginning of stage one, Filter's initial approach to collaborating on *Faster* was developed to give Phillips, Roberts and Dimsdale a maximum amount of authority over the content and process, while also benefiting from the creative input of practitioners external to the company's artistic directorship. The process used to create *Faster* was tightly controlled by Dimsdale, Phillips, and Roberts who wanted to establish as much of the style and the content of the piece as possible before inviting artists external to the company to join the devising process. They first brought their idea to adapt Gleick's book in the fall of 2001 to the Battersea Arts Centre, where they were able to gain artistic support and rehearsal space to develop the project. Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips went through the process of a research-and-development week dissecting *Faster*, trying to conceive a provisional storyline,

⁴⁹⁹ James Gleick, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (London: Abacus, 1999), p.287.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

characters and dramatic conventions stemming from themes and ideas revolving around speed and technology.⁵⁰¹ Filter then invited other performers to join the project, as well as director Guy Retallack, who was hired to oversee the devising process, with the aim of creating enough material for a scratch performance for funding bodies and other potential collaborators. Dimsdale described the company's approach to control as a system of checks and balances within a 'benevolent dictatorship' designed to situate all outside artists 'inside the collaborative mix as democratically as possible', while at the same time, admitting that the process was 'about retaining as much artistic control' as possible for themselves.⁵⁰² It is important to note that from the beginning, the company's ideal of a collaborative democracy without any one authorial voice was at odds with their stronger instinct to maintain authority over the work devised or written, but was most likely a response to their experiences as students, relating to the statement Roberts made regarding the lack of opportunity to have control over the material in which they performed.

In order to maintain a structure for the emerging text without the participation of a writer and a focus for the devising process, Filter came to rely on director Retallack and producer/dramaturg Kate McGrath. The performers worked to develop a series of structured improvisations around a theme and a set of characters under Retallack's guidance and direction with the aim of creating a rough draft of a text for the scratch performance; Phillips said that for the first scratch, he edited the text into a working script, but it was essentially

⁵⁰¹ In July, 2008, I observed Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts working in this way for a week at the National Theatre. The production in question is a western that will be produced in 2010 or 2011 and is currently being developed within the National Theatre Studio system. Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips worked for a week in a rehearsal room writing down ideas for narratives, characters and methods of staging. Although the three were mostly alone for the entire week, on the first day they brought in an expert on nineteenth-century American history to speak to what was then the provisional cast. On two different days throughout the week, company designer Jon Bausor came in to brainstorm ideas about design and staging. The rest of the time was spent with the three working together to establish the nature of the production, looking over source material relating to the American West, such as videos, books, websites, pictures and music.

⁵⁰² Oliver Dimsdale. Personal interview. 23 July 2008.

‘unwritten’—that there was no dedicated writer at that stage.⁵⁰³ The company tried to work through Gleick’s book together and find what Retallack called the ‘obvious scenes’, but this process proved difficult because *Faster* is nonfiction and does not contain a plot or any obvious characters.⁵⁰⁴ Since Phillips became increasingly involved with the sound design for the project, McGrath became the dramaturg, eventually playing a far more important role in the making of the text than Filter had anticipated in the beginning. Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt explain:

During the public seminar, “Structures in Devising” (2003) [...] Retallack commented that [McGrath’s] input and dramaturgical structural overview was invaluable when it came to pulling together the different strands and elements. Retallack pointed out that it was immensely useful to have someone who could come in with fresh eyes to make observations on structure, dynamics and communication.⁵⁰⁵

From Retallack’s testimony, we can see how important it was for the company to have someone involved in the project from the beginning who would be able to maintain an outside perspective on the structure and content of the piece. Since there was no scripting writer in the beginning to watch, record and organize the material produced through the devising sessions, Filter became reliant on McGrath not only as a creative producer but also as a dramaturg for her critical judgment as a means of coordinating all the elements of the creative material that contributed to the production such as the discussions, ideas, devised material and staging and design concepts. Although Retallack had McGrath’s help as a dramaturg, having more control over the shape and direction of the project, he himself was performing the task of a kind of second dramaturg as well. Turner and Behrndt note that ‘ideas of bridging, translating, framing and contextualizing run through most of the dramaturg’s work’, which is how Retallack’s role could be described, in addition to being a

⁵⁰³ Tim Phillips. Personal interview. 19 January 2008.

⁵⁰⁴ Guy Retallack. Personal interview. 9 April 2009.

⁵⁰⁵ Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.172.

director who was guiding the devising process, without infringing too greatly on the three Artistic Directors' creative agency.⁵⁰⁶

Filter initially aimed to devise the project for as long as possible without a scripting writer, which was partly due to Phillips, Dimsdale and Roberts' preconceptions about collaboration and devising, and partly due to some initial prejudices about text and writers. Filter's resistance to working with writers stems from the artistic directors' desire to have direct control over the composition of the scripts the company produced. In their testimonies, Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips expressed the concern that a piece written by one person independent of the company would inevitably be too heavy-handed to realize their vision of a production significantly informed by music and sound design. Roberts said: 'More often when you go and see plays, you just hear the writer's voice [...] and no matter what they write, however brilliant, there's always going to be an element of them in [...] every character'.⁵⁰⁷ Roberts' statement indicates a fear that the single voice of the writer, if too strong, would become too authorial and drown out the voices of the members of the company, compromising and even, perhaps, negating Filter's artistic agenda. Even after working with writers, several years after making *Faster*, in 2008, Phillips stated that he found scripts authored by a single writer less imaginative than a piece created collaboratively: 'I think it's really hard for a writer to [...] conceive of a staging like [*Water*] at a desk'.⁵⁰⁸ Underpinning the directors' views and prejudices is frustration; Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips all expressed disappointment in needing to hire a writer to script the text for performance, rather than being able to do it themselves. The three directors acknowledged the conundrum that that they did not have the skills to script a production themselves but at the same time, wanted to retain as much control as possible over the development of the script.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., p.150.

⁵⁰⁷ Ferdy Roberts. Personal interview. 31 July 2008.

⁵⁰⁸ Phillips, Tim. Personal interview. London. 19 January 2009.

Filter's anxiety regarding the role of the writer in production reflects a similar anxiety that many other practitioners and critics in the UK have debated, which has become more prominent over the past decade with the rise of devised and collaborative theatre. In the pages of newspapers and theatre journals, on arts blogs, in Arts Council meetings and in rehearsal rooms all over the country, practitioners have contested the relative merits of what is often popularly divided into 'text-based' or 'writer-driven' work and 'non-text-based' work. *Guardian* theatre critic Michael Billington states that, 'the authority of text-based work has been increasingly challenged in recent years by the growth of what is variously described as "physical" or "visual" theatre', and that this movement 'has undeniably widened the vocabulary of theatre, liberated generations of actors from traditional inhibitions and produced some good work'.⁵⁰⁹ Billington champions what he perceives as the writer's cause, and while he grudgingly acknowledges that 'physical' and 'visual' theatre has 'produced some good work', he still maintains that this kind of theatre is a challenge to text-based productions. One of the main reasons for this tension is the question of funding; often practitioners perceive the Arts Council as a funding body that decides which companies will receive Arts Council funding on the basis of their particular devised or text-based practice. The divide between the two is often a superficial one generated by misconceptions of the practice; devising or collaborating and writing often go hand-in-hand and many collaborating and devising companies (such as Filter) use a writer or dramaturg in their methods of production. Continuing to press his case for the primacy of the writer, Billington later states that theatre 'has shown that, for all [...] the growth of physical theatre and the move towards more collaborative structures, it is the individual dramatist who is best equipped to record the anxieties of the time'.⁵¹⁰ Again, Billington encourages the notion that 'collaborative

⁵⁰⁹ Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2007), p.395.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.401.

structures' are separate from 'the individual dramatist'. It is partly the widespread prevalence of this false dichotomy of writer/deviser that has encouraged companies such as Filter to be wary of the inclusion of a writer in a devising process, for fear of a limitation of the creative process a director, designer and performers undergo while devising.

This question of the dichotomy of the text and non-text-based approach to collaboration is not, of course, particular to British theatre-making of the past ten to fifteen years, but rather one that has surfaced repeatedly in European and American traditions of collaboration throughout the twentieth century, as we have seen in Chapter One. We may compare Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts' concern regarding the creative agency of the writer, singly-authored work and the role of the written text within company-driven collaboration to that of practitioners such as Piscator, Littlewood, Beck, Malina and Chaikin. We may compare Filter's preoccupation with experimentation with sound, projections and staging with that of Piscator and Littlewood's in that all were interested in ways in which bold and three-dimensional approaches to staging could convey theme and narrative in a more engaging fashion than dialogue and scripted exposition; additionally, all three came to rely on commissioned writers whose work was designed to be incorporated into the larger proxemic element of the production, although Piscator and Littlewood were both able to script their own productions themselves, whereas Filter have never done so. Although Filter's concern about the potential limitations of singly-authored work mirrors that of The Living Theatre, Filter ultimately bases their work (both adapted and original) in text and works with writers and dramaturgs, while The Living Theatre moved away from a text-based approach over time. Ultimately, Filter's concern with incorporating written, scripted work into devised, performer-driven work is similar to that of The Open Theater's work with writers and performers, a point to which we will return later on in this chapter.

In order to understand the way in which the writers and dramaturgs who participated in the project were incorporated into the process, it is important to consider how Filter developed as an organization throughout the three stages of the creation of *Faster*. In *The Starfish and the Spider: the Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organisations* (Penguin Books, 2006), Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom describe the kind of organization which Filter could be said to represent as a ‘hybrid company’ which is half centralized and half decentralized, ‘a centralized company that decentralizes internal parts of the business’, which has ‘a CEO and some hierarchy,’ but also ‘starfishlike DNA’.⁵¹¹ They use the expression ‘starfishlike DNA’ to refer to decentralized power structures which are self-governing and self-regulating and have no designated leader. (This is in comparison to the starfish, an organism without a centralized brain, directed by its nervous system which is spread out throughout its arms.) Filter is centralized because Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips act as the company’s leaders (i.e., the ‘CEOs’), but also decentralized internally when they are collaborating within the rehearsal room, taking ideas and suggestions from visiting outside artists, such as Retallack, hired for that particular production. This model of organization is not unlike that of Frantic Assembly and Shared Experience, although during the creation of *Faster*, since Filter was in a nascent stage of development, the Artistic Directors were less certain than the other companies about the collaborators who would become more permanent fixtures within the company and who would remain as occasional artistic associates.

At the time of the first stage of creating *Faster*, Filter was a semi-decentralized hybrid company trying to balance the decentralized aspect of collaboration with outside artists with the centralization of a top-down power structure, and Retallack functioned as what Brafman and Beckstrom would call a ‘catalyst’ within the process, a person who functions as a leading facilitator in order to get the other members of the group to work together within a relatively

⁵¹¹ Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: the Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organisations* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2006), p.175.

structured fashion without being a leader per se; after facilitating the work within the group, the catalyst steps away and allows the group to work together without much interference. Brafman and Beckstrom note, ‘At their best, catalysts connect people and maintain the drumbeat of the ideology’.⁵¹² Retallack was a catalyst in the sense that it was his job as the director to facilitate the improvisations and the relationships between the performers, writers, musicians, designers and technicians, alternatively stepping away from the work from time to time to allow the company to generate material and then stepping back in, in order to check the progress of the production and the direction in which it was going. Brafman and Beckstrom explain, ‘catalysts require a high tolerance for ambiguity’, but also bring ‘chaos and ambiguity’ themselves to the project in which they are involved.⁵¹³ Although Retallack was frustrated with the often disorderly nature of the rehearsals, he also brought a certain amount of disorder to the project because of the ambiguous nature of his role, of the project itself and of the process of devising without a writer.

In the first draft of the *Faster* text for the first scratch performance, we can see that Filter was devising not only the dialogue, but also approaches to staging in order to facilitate the narrative through usages of sound, movement and design, all under the guidance of Retallack who was acting as a director but also a kind of dramaturg, but also McGrath who was functioning as a dramaturg as well as a creative producer, in lieu of a writer. At fourteen pages, the first draft (improvised by the company, recorded by McGrath and edited by Phillips) was irregular in its style, giving a sense that it was a product of many voices and much exploration. It roughly outlined the ways in which the lives of four characters—Ollie, Ben, Victoria, and Rachel—were affected by the speed of modern technology in order to dramatize Gleick’s *Faster* and his perspective on the impact of speed and efficiency on human psychology. The stage directions indicate that Filter was developing a particular style

⁵¹² Ibid., p.207.

⁵¹³ Brafman and Beckstrom, pp.127 and 131.

of staging reliant on lighting and sonic cues to indicate quick changes and place, time and atmosphere, and the style of the language is exemplified by the cutting and changing of characters' lines, switching back and forth between stories. The dialogue is at odds with the quick transitions, sometimes slightly awkward and burdened with exposition, which was most likely a result of the fact that there were designated stage, sound and lighting designers at this stage of the project's development but not a designated writer. The dialogue is what Roberts called 'devised'—that is to say, it gives the impression of language that was improvised and then recorded straight to paper—that it is sometimes natural, smoothly leading from one line to another, and sometimes jarring and over-explanatory.⁵¹⁴ The unfinished nature of the script can be attributed to the fact that the performers were adjusting to Filter's developing method of working and also that they knew they were creating material for a scratch (not a final) performance.

In lieu of a collaborative model where a scripting writer would guide the development of narrative and characters as a catalyst within the project, informing the direction the improvisations would take, Retallack wanted to find a way of allowing the performers to develop the storyline with a certain amount of structure without taking too much control from Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips. Retallack said rehearsals often felt frustrating and non-productive for him and his relationship with the actors was 'chaotic'.⁵¹⁵ This is not surprising considering the fact that *Faster* was Filter's first production, the company hierarchy was not entirely clear at this stage in the process, and the nature of devising with performers in a rehearsal room is generally considered chaotic, confused or disorganized even under the best of circumstances:

A devising process might [...] require, on the one hand, a search for structure, while on the other hand, the facilitation of possibilities. The need to keep the process open can make it seem chaotic because one idea might lead to an exploration of parallel

⁵¹⁴ Ferdy Roberts. Personal interview. 31 July 2008.

⁵¹⁵ Guy Retallack. Personal interview. 9 April 2009.

stories or ideas which in turn lead to other ideas and before long the process is going down different, perhaps disparate avenues and paths. It is easy to get lost in the creative turmoil of devising [...] Paradoxically, this seemingly free and open-ended process might require an even stronger sense of structural organization and overview than a production of a conventional play would demand.⁵¹⁶

When devising *Faster* in the first stage, both Filter and Retallack wanted to create as much material with the actors around the theme of speed as possible; in order for that to happen, they had to allow for a certain amount of disorder within the process. Retallack described the project as ‘something that was evolving and constantly shifting and subject to instant change,’ and that his role was to ‘be constructive’ while encouraging the actors.⁵¹⁷ He noted that he felt ‘tested’ as a director in that situation because his authority had to be, as he said, ‘both there and be absent almost simultaneously’.⁵¹⁸ Retallack continues, ‘I used to call it ‘punk theatre’—that it was both chaotic and organized simultaneously [...] It was always a bit of a struggle to [...] find the direction that we were going in’.⁵¹⁹ The nature of the production kept changing and Retallack’s approach had to change with it in order for the devising to continue to progress in order to create enough material for a scratch performance. The director said that although Filter wanted to devise *Faster*, ‘it was clear [...] that there was no real writer within the company’.⁵²⁰ In order to develop a narrative structure that that would help create ‘a piece with real meaning and depth’, Retallack felt the company needed the organizing presence of a writer assigned to script the text.⁵²¹ Although we have compared Filter’s circumspection regarding the role of the writer in collaboration to that of companies such as The Living Theatre and The Open Theater and practitioners such as Piscator and Littlewood, this particular situation is distinct from the others’ (including that of Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly) because, at this point in making *Faster*, Filter reconciled

⁵¹⁶ Turner and Behrndt, p.171.

⁵¹⁷ GuyRetallack. Personal interview. 9 April 2009.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid..

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

themselves to commissioning a writer to script a text for the production, rather than beginning the project with the expectation that working with a writer would be inevitable and/or desirable (like The Open Theater, Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly), or beginning with a commissioned writer and then working instead as writer/directors, a dramaturgical collective or doing without a writer altogether (like Piscator, Littlewood and The Living Theatre).

Stage Two: Dawn King and Ollie Wilkinson

By stage two, after the first scratch performance of *Faster*, Filter commissioned Dawn King and Ollie Wilkinson (two young writers they met through the Soho Theatre Young Writer's Programme) to help them write the second version of the text for performance. However, neither Wilkinson nor King had ever worked with Filter and both were professionally inexperienced as writers.⁵²² At this point, the central conundrum with regard to the role of the writer and the text was how these two novice writers, coming into the project after a significant amount of work had already been done without them, could develop a text with a certain amount of creative agency, while also continually referring back to Filter for authorization. Filter was, at this point in the process, a semi-decentralized organization whose collaborative practice with respect to working with writers was informed by the way in which the hierarchy of the company operated. After the first scratch performance, Dimsdale, Roberts and Phillips agreed with Retallack's decision that they needed someone who was able to fill the position of a scripting writer working to their specifications with the material given to him or her and, as Phillips put it, 'Make them better. Make them read like a play'.⁵²³ Phillips's comment is contradictory when compared to his earlier remark that a single writer

⁵²² King said, 'Up until that point I hadn't really done anything that was professional. I hadn't been inside a rehearsal room or seen any kind of show rehearsed, let alone my show'. Dawn King. Personal interview. 3 September 2009.

⁵²³ Tim Phillips. Personal interview. 19 January 2008.

could not have conceived of the kind of production Filter wanted to create; they wanted a text that would look unified, as if written by a single writer, but actually be the product of the work of an entire company. Filter wanted to have a collaborative and semi-decentralized devising process, but also hire an outside writer (and in this case, writers) who would be in charge of the scripting of the improvised scenes and characters (adding an additional element of centralization on top of Dimsdale, Roberts and Phillips's control over the project). Filter wanted Wilkinson and King to be able to produce a script to their specifications, incorporating the material already developed for the first scratch performance, within the potentially restrictive hierarchy of the company.

Part of the reason why tension developed between Filter's Artistic Directors and the two writers in the second phase in the development of *Faster* was that Dimsdale, Roberts and Phillips considered themselves and the company the authors of *Faster*, but as writers, Wilkinson and King were placed in a position of control over the script, which would ultimately direct the entire production. A by-product of the process of trying to find a way of working with writers at this stage was role conflict between Filter and Wilkinson and King, which ultimately impeded the progress of the project. In *Understanding Organizations* (Penguin Books, 1976), Charles Handy explains that with the problem of role conflict, 'the expectations of each role may be quite clear and the expectations may be compatible for each role, but the roles themselves may be in conflict', another concept that was introduced in Chapter One within the context of the company hierarchy of the Open Theatre.⁵²⁴ Filter's expectations were that the writers would script a text directly from the devising sessions going on in the rehearsal room under Retallack's direction, editing the improvised scenes into a cohesive text, but not create a script independent of the devising process. As Handy says, 'Role variety, role opportunity, role diversity are no doubt desirable, but they bring in their

⁵²⁴ Charles Handy, *Understanding Organizations*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), p.59.

train complexity and uncertainty, insecurity and strain'.⁵²⁵ There was an uneasy relationship within the working process between the freedom those involved were given to contribute material and the hierarchy that ultimately governed this freedom. King and Wilkinson worked unsupervised most of the time, faced with the difficult task of co-writing the text side-by-side while unfamiliar with the way Filter worked and uncertain of the company's expectations. In a personal interview, King commented that attempting to co-write a script with another inexperienced writer, under the absented authority of the company, was difficult and frustrating, involving a constant series of arguments and compromises.⁵²⁶

In addition to the chronic lack of communication, one of the main problems was that Retallack represented one kind of authority within the process while Wilkinson and King represented another. Retallack (who was more familiar with the project) was in charge of directing the devised scenes in the rehearsal room while Wilkinson and King were in charge of the written scenes, essentially working alone. In the beginning, King and Wilkinson met several times with Retallack, Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips to try to establish their responsibilities within the project. Retallack instructed King and Wilkinson to read Gleick's book and select excerpts they found interesting and relevant to the project. They were also given access to Draft One of the text and also the video of the first scratch performance, material they were expected to incorporate into Draft Two, to some extent. Occasionally, King and Wilkinson would come to rehearsals to see what the company had produced and try to work from those scenes, but most of the time the writers would bring in scenes they had written for the performers to develop with Retallack. When King, Wilkinson and Retallack did have contact, it was unclear to the writers as to who was the guiding force within the creative process; the roles of writer and author were in conflict and the expectations for those roles were not made clear enough to them by Filter. King noted, 'it was quite hard to figure

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p.53.

⁵²⁶ Dawn King. Personal interview. 3 September 2009.

out who was in charge. [...] It wasn't always clear that [Retallack] was in charge or that everyone trusted his decisions. [...] The hierarchy was really fuzzy and that's when we got into trouble'.⁵²⁷ In addition to the fact that King and Wilkinson were working independently from Retallack when they were writing the text, it was unclear as to who was the guiding force within the process overall: Retallack, Wilkinson, and King, or Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips? Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips grew frustrated when they felt the writers had become too independent of the devising process and were not delivering a text that reflected their needs and desires for the production. Phillips said: 'We kept sending stuff back to them going, this isn't what we want. We would be in the rehearsal room and they would be next door writing', but also admitted, 'It was our fault as well. [...] we hadn't explained to them how it was going to work in the first place'.⁵²⁸ Filter had a vague notion of the role they wanted the scripting writers to perform, but were not able to clearly articulate how exactly this approach was to work, and the writers were not experienced enough at the time to discover a way of scripting the text that would suit the company's needs.

The second draft (scripted by King and Wilkinson), at twenty-nine pages, is roughly twice as long as the first, and sacrifices most of the references to Gleick's *Faster* in order to develop the characters and narrative.⁵²⁹ It is difficult to tell whether the changes made were by the writers, were a result of developments during the devising sessions, reflect a decision made by Retallack in rehearsal, or were a combination of all three. (This is partly due to the fact that this stage of the process was conducted between seven and eight years previous to the interviews and those interviewed were unable to recall the details, and partly due to many of the participants' reluctance to take credit or blame for this particularly problematic stage of

⁵²⁷ Dawn King. Personal interview. 3 September 2009.

⁵²⁸ Tim Phillips. Personal interview. 19 January 2008.

⁵²⁹ It should be noted that the character names correspond with the actors who created them in rehearsal and performed them in scratch and final performances. The changes in characters and character names may have been a result of relative availability of the performers at the time, certain people having been able to be involved for certain stages of the devising process.

Faster.) There was far less engagement with Gleick's *Faster* in Draft Two than Draft One and the references that were retained mostly seem randomly placed and unnecessary to the narrative. Draft Two depicts a love triangle between Will, his flatmate Ollie and his childhood friend Gemma who Will secretly loves and with whom Ollie has a relationship. The style in which the dialogue is written is smoother and more edited than that of the previous draft, a reflection of the fact that the company had spent more time developing the storyline and characters than in stage one, but also evidence of the influence of the two writers. Ollie's character evolved from Draft One, Gemma took the place of Victoria and Rachel and Will replaced Ben. King said she and Wilkinson found it difficult to incorporate the original book into the script and that their replacement Stephen Brown was more successful with that element of the adaptation.⁵³⁰ She speculated that besides Gleick's *Faster* being difficult to incorporate into fictional narrative, one of the problems was that she had no previous experience with that kind of specific, commissioned work as a writer.⁵³¹ For example, in scene twelve, Will says, 'You can judge the inner health of a land by the capacity of its people to do nothing', which is quoted verbatim from Gleick (quoting Sebastian de Grazia in his chapter on boredom).⁵³² Because it is lifted word for word from the book, the line retains its original nonfictional tone rather than contributing to Will's character or to the plot of the play. It is clear from the text that the element of adaptation was difficult for the writers, as the excerpted sections from the book are at odds with the dialogue.

Since the relationship between the writers and the rest of the company was becoming increasingly strained and remote, Wilkinson and King resorted to drafting their own narrative in order to write a cohesive text for Drafts Two and Three. The ending in Draft Two is far

⁵³⁰ Dawn King. Personal interview. 3 September 2009.

⁵³¹ King said, 'I think that that was one of the things that they were asking is, how can we get more of the book in?' Ibid.

⁵³² Filter Theatre, Dawn King and Ollie Wilkinson, *Faster*, Draft Two, unpublished (2002), p.19. See also: Gleick, p.268.

more conclusive and bleaker than that of Draft One. Draft Two ends with Will's monologue, which is implied to be a voice from beyond the grave, after his death in a car accident:

We are in a race. With each other, with ourselves, and to go slower is an admission of defeat. The world had defeated you. But speeding up takes us further and further away from each other and we don't notice until something sends us hurtling to a sudden stop.⁵³³

The narrative in Draft Two is more complete than Draft One and each character's journey is informed by Gleick's theory that we are, as Will said, in a race that we do not notice until 'something sends us hurtling to a sudden stop'.⁵³⁴ It is reasonable to assume that if the roles and company hierarchy had been clarified before Draft Two was finished, there might have been a more harmonious relationship within the text between the composition through writing and the composition through devising of staging and performance. As a result, in Draft Three there seemed to be an increased tension between the original intention to adapt the book and the new story that was being developed by King and Wilkinson. The third draft continued to develop the storyline, but relied more heavily on dialogue and exposition than the first two drafts, which relied on sound cues to facilitate transitions between scenes. Draft Three was less clear in terms of the narrative than Draft Two and increasingly reliant on the love triangle between Wole, Gemma and Will to push the story forward.

Stage Three: Stephen Brown

By the end of stage two, *Faster* had reached a saturation point that precipitated a crisis; there were so many people responsible for originating different ideas being fed into the scripting and devising process that there were too many variables within the project for an effective method of working to emerge. Marking the beginning of stage three, the company ended up replacing Wilkinson and King with writer Stephen Brown who was commissioned

⁵³³ Filter Theatre, Dawn King and Ollie Wilkinson, *Faster*, Draft Two, unpublished (2002), p.29.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

to be the scripting writer. Brown had the advantage that both Dimsdale and performer Will Adamsdale both knew him previously before inviting him to make a preliminary assessment of the material that had gone into *Faster* at that point, and also of having been given access to the videos of improvisations and previous drafts of the script, as well as having seen the scratch performances of versions two and three. Filter encouraged Brown to be a more integral part of the creative process, as they had learned that keeping King and Wilkinson at a distance from the rehearsal room resulted in a script that was incompatible from the devising carried out under Retallack's direction. Roberts notes that Brown was hired to, 'collate everything we'd done and to try and write something using all our ideas and our improvisations'.⁵³⁵ Brown estimated that he wrote roughly a third of the script before rehearsals started and the rest over the next three weeks, working both by himself writing scenes and also in the rehearsal room watching improvisations and discussing decisions with the company. He struggled to recall the exact process by which *Faster* was scripted, but admitted that he 'played around' with the material, adding in what he called 'my particular obsessions' to the story, and then adjusted the rest with the help of the company.⁵³⁶ Brown, the company, or the two together would come up with an idea for a scene and then work with it until it came out in a way that suited the rest of the piece: 'Some of it was fairly rapidly just taken up and put on its feet and played about with and tweaked a bit'.⁵³⁷

Once Brown joined the project, *Faster* had, in effect, three dramaturgs who functioned not only in accordance with their primary role within the production but also in relation to each other, helping Brown become integrated into the delicate hierarchical balance within the production team. Even after it became clear that Brown's job would involve writing additional material to develop the existing script, his role continued to have a

⁵³⁵ Ferdy Roberts. Personal interview. 31 July 2008.

⁵³⁶ Stephen Brown. Personal interview. 19 February 2008.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

dramaturgical function as he shaped and edited the material created before his arrival. Retallack—who had served as a kind of director-dramaturg to the compositional process through writer-less devising from the first stage—maintained his role as director/dramaturg, liaising between Brown and the performers in order to work out problems relating to the script. McGrath also continued to play the role of dramaturg, in addition to her role as producer; having been present at all the rehearsals and devising sessions, she liaised between Retallack and Brown, and also Brown and the actors, allowing Retallack to spend time working with the actors. Brown noted that during the three-week rehearsal period, he met with Retallack and McGrath both separately and together several times in order to keep track of how the drafts of the script were being changed during rehearsal without interfering in the delicate dynamic between the actors and director.⁵³⁸ Brown described McGrath as a ‘sounding board’, that one of her strategies was that after a group meeting and discussion she would summarize the key points of the meeting, ‘constantly kind of nudging and pushing’.⁵³⁹ As Turner and Behrndt explain, ‘the dramaturg represents the audience within a rehearsal process, able to identify the potential gap between what is *intended* and what is likely to be *received* and to give the artist a perspective on what they are creating’.⁵⁴⁰ McGrath functioned as an outside eye, a somewhat neutral member of the production team who was able to watch rehearsals and read drafts of the script with the perspective of the audience in mind. This three-layered approach to the dramaturgical, editorial process of *Faster* allowed Filter to maintain a balance between the organization of editing and writing and the chaos of devising throughout the third stage more successfully than the previous two. Brown’s role within the process used to create *Faster* is reflective of a combination of different scripting

⁵³⁸ It is important to note that not only was Brown a more experienced writer than King or Wilkinson and had a closer working relationship with the company, he had the additional support in the form of dramaturgical advice from McGrath. McGrath was not, however, present when King and Wilkinson were composing material. One could assume this change was a result of the difficulty the company previously experienced in stage two of the process. Dawn King. Personal interview. 3 September 2009.

⁵³⁹ Stephen Brown. Personal interview. 19 February 2008.

⁵⁴⁰ Turner and Behrndt, p.156.

processes explained in Chapter One such as Piscator's work with writer Alfons Paquet on *Sturmflut* where the two combined writing and devising processes to draft a text that met the director's expectations, Littlewood's approach to combining scripting in a devising process with the use of a dramaturgical assistant with writing (although she had no commissioned writer and worked as a writer/director) and Chaikin's work with Megan Terry combining performer-led devising with scripting on *Viet Rock*. The process used in stage three represents the kind of strategy of 'mutual adjustment' described in Chapter Four that integrates the director-led devising process with the writer-led scripting process in order to produce a text that will meet the company's needs, but also reflect the writer's distinct voice.

The fourth and final draft was scripted by Brown and is roughly twice the length of Drafts One and Two at fifty-eight pages and belies a not only a different style of writing than the previous drafts, but widens the focus of the production to include more of Gleick's concepts. One of the main differences between the final draft and the previous ones is that the language in Draft Four is more reflective of the message and themes of the piece. Both the syntax and the length of the sentences portray Will, Ben and Victoria (now the three main characters) as young, impatient people living in a fast-paced urban environment; their sentences are short, they often speak in one-liners or with one-word responses, cutting each other off and preventing each other from finishing their sentences and thoughts. The communication has broken down and, as we can see from the stage directions, the audience has been left with insertions of expressionistic aural cues and signifiers to fill in the blanks regarding the rest of the characters' world and how they feel about each other. In other words, the text was designed to reflect the way in which the characters saw reality in terms of filming techniques.

By Draft Four, *Faster* had become a piece about the media generation who seem to experience the world in terms of close-ups, long shots, freezes, flashbacks and flash-

forwards, the editing techniques of cutting and splicing. To complement Filter's tendency to use quick transitions and technology to enhance the narrative, Brown seemed to have added moments in the text where the characters' perceptions of reality are shaped by what Gleick calls 'the acceleration of just about everything' (although, again, as with Wilkinson and King, it is not certain who was responsible). Regarding the process of adaptation, Govan, Nicholson, and Normington state that, 'The use of fictional material provides theatre-makers with an opportunity to discover a language of multiplicity and excess', and that the process of adaptation 'poses creative problems that often prompt stylistic innovation'.⁵⁴¹ The problems that the original text or what Govan, Nicholson, and Normington call 'artifact' pose to the company dramatizing it are often solved through technical resourcefulness and originality. This was indeed the case with Brown's Draft Four, which reads somewhat like a television or film script with shorter, tighter scenes than those of previous drafts and less exposition. For example, in the beginning of the story, when Victoria has just met her friend Will's flatmate Ben, Ben drives Victoria home from dinner with himself and Will and the stage directions read: '*[Will] hurtles into the background as [Victoria] and [Ben] leap into the car together and are driving along at breakneck speed. [Will] is watching them*'.⁵⁴² Not only is the scene expressed in televisual terms, but the characters even articulate a desire that their lives play out like a film. Just before Victoria and Ben kiss, Victoria says in direct address to the audience, 'I always want—that moment just before you kiss somebody for the first time—I want it to stretch out forever', pauses and then finishes this sentiment with, 'I suppose that's impractical', acknowledging the reality of speed, competition, and progress which Gleick described in his book and which informed the world of the play.⁵⁴³ This scene exemplifies Gleick's observation of the (largely negative) effect of speed and technology on human

⁵⁴¹ Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.100.

⁵⁴² Filter Theatre and Stephen Brown, *Filter*, final version, unpublished (2003), p.13.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.14.

relationships while also demonstrating Filter's own thoughts about the effects of the media on the way people perceive each other and the world around them.

Example from the text: evolution of a scene

In order to clearly illustrate the way in which the text for *Faster* evolved at each stage, it is useful to examine an excerpt of the script (in this case, the introduction from each draft), tracing it through the four written drafts. In Draft One, the introduction is simple, drawing the world of the play in the most basic terms before we see the first scene; the structure allowed the company to experiment with a narrative and a method of adaptation of Gleick's book, while also establishing an audience-friendly tone in the style of direct address. The script begins with a voiceover: 'I shut my eyes and turn off the mental pictures in my brain to black. I refuse to see anything but black, then switch on with my imagination in overdrive'.⁵⁴⁴ It continues with an interspersing of the lines of Ben, Ollie, Victoria, and Rachel, as we hear each character speak separately but simultaneously. Each character starts by saying a one-word line such as 'progress,' 'panic', 'control' or 'speed', describing the world of the play from the very beginning, and then introducing the characters one by one. These lines alternate between those that embody Gleick's message ('The quicker you go, the less you're in control'.) and those that introduce the characters ('My name is Rachel, I'm 23. I like fast cars and fast food'.)⁵⁴⁵ The somewhat arbitrary nature of some of the lines is indicative of the devising process used to compose the scene; as this script was improvised by the performers, one can see how they were encouraged by Dimsdale, Roberts, Phillips, and Retallack to free-associate within the theme of speed.

In Draft Two, the first scene is a series of disembodied lines from Ollie, Gemma and Will that alternately connect to each other as if in conversation and alternately disconnect and

⁵⁴⁴ Filter Theatre, *Faster*, Draft One, unpublished (2001), p.1.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2.

float on the page as separate entities. The scene does not introduce the characters as the previous draft did, but feels more cohesive, more ‘written’ than the previous draft that was purely devised by the company without a writer, a result of King and Wilkinson’s work on the script. In Draft Two, it is actually the second scene which is closer to the first draft’s introduction, each character introducing himself or herself (in a sense) with short lines intercut with one another; the difference is that in Draft Two, the love triangle is more emphasized than excerpts from Gleick’s book. For example, the end of the second scene reads:

GEMMA: It started a while ago
 WILL: Years ago
 OLLIE: Six months ago
 WILL: It’s
 GEMMA: Complicated
 OLLIE: We hadn’t even met.⁵⁴⁶

The syntax of the speech embodies the urgency, rush and pace of modern life. The relative differences between perceptions in time reflect how society’s perception of the passage of time is affected by this urgency, but the focus is on the nature of the relationship between the three characters. This draft is less overly-expositional than the first draft, but appears to be wordier, more written, more finished in its style.

The prologue to Draft Three highlights an example of Filter’s experiment with the use of a kind of semiautobiographical approach to the material. The prologue to Draft Three is nearly identical to the second scene in Draft Two, only adding in Ben and Wole, while taking out Ollie, and also adding in an occasional random line unrelated to the scene from the musicians and technicians. Phillips and sound designers Christopher Branch and Tom Haines (onstage and visible during the performance) also interrupt with arbitrary remarks, lightening the tension of the threesome.⁵⁴⁷ In addition to the way in which the company uses the real

⁵⁴⁶ Filter Theatre, Dawn King and Ollie Wilkinson, *Faster*, Draft Two, unpublished (2002), p.2.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

names of the performers in the script, the style of the direct address to the audience insinuates a kind of intimacy within the studio, playing with the idea that perhaps the audience is being allowed to see a dramatization of the personal crises of the actors. Regarding autobiographical work in devised performance, Govan, Nicholson, and Normington state:

Contemporary devisers often explicitly draw on their own experience when creating work for performance [...]. Questions of authenticity are raised when fact is blended with fiction; selfhood is addressed as performers present a distinct persona to the audience; and the processes of reception are heightened as they invite the audience into an active relationship with the material.⁵⁴⁸

When devising engages with autobiographical material, the intentional blend of fact and fiction serves to make the audience more active in their participation. Although *Faster* was only loosely based on the lives of the performers, one can still see the way in which the prologue of Draft Three (and indeed Drafts One, Two, and Four) attempts to use a shortcut to engage the audience by using their own names and characters similar to their own personalities, making the audience guess as to what is true and what is fictionalized. In this draft, we can also see how King and Wilkinson were attempting to blend their conception of *Faster* with the previous version devised by the company.

In Draft Three, there seemed to be a tension between the original objective to adapt the book and the new story that was being developed by King and Wilkinson, which was most likely exacerbated by the growing distance between the two writers and the rest of the company, and also the increasing difficulty King and Wilkinson were having scripting the text. The third draft built on the story from the previous draft but relied more heavily on dialogue and exposition than the sound cues which the first two drafts used to facilitate transitions between scenes. The characters became Gemma, Ben, Will and a new character called Wole. Gemma and Will's characters stayed the same and Wole took Ollie's place, while Ben performed the function that the voiceover performed in Drafts One and Two,

⁵⁴⁸ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p.60.

playing different characters to demonstrate the pervasiveness of modern technology and consumerism.⁵⁴⁹ Another difference between the third draft and Drafts One and Two was that the dialogue wove in and out of realism and a more abstracted style, sometimes conveying a realistic, domestic scene between the characters, sometimes expressing the inner thoughts and concerns of the characters onstage. For example, the first break into a more stylized scene is a game show hosted by Ben where Gemma, Wole, and Will are contestants—Wole and Will competing for Gemma’s attentions. This scene demonstrates the anxiety Will feels as he is forced to watch Wole seduce Gemma, the secret the love of his life, as well as Wole’s competitive nature. This scene is the part of the script that lends itself most to the interspersing of sound and lighting cues to make a transitional break from the style of previous scenes, whereas the rest of the draft becomes increasingly confusing and increasingly reliant on the love triangle between Wole, Gemma, and Will to push the story forward. There are still references to Gleick’s book, but because the script had become more character-driven, they were manifested mostly in the exploration of the lifestyle of the early twenty-first century Londoner working in the advertising business. This technique, while focusing the narrative, eliminated some of the richness of Drafts One and Two which made multiple references to different aspects of Gleick’s book.

Draft Four represents the way in which Brown negotiated the tension between the contributions from the company, coming out of the rehearsal room with the written work. It combines the random, devised nature of the lines from the prologue in Draft One with the focus on the love triangle from Drafts Two and Three. However, Brown made the lines more cohesive, making the decision to have Ben, Victoria and Will each tell his or her own

⁵⁴⁹ The fact that the performers changed from version to version of *Faster* probably only added to the amount of stress the entire company was feeling during the process. In that kind of production environment, the changes being made continually tend to increase number of variables within the process and often limit the progress the company is able to make. Not only was the story changing on a regular basis, Filter was experimenting with an approach to working and the cast was fluctuating from version to version. While a changing cast meant an increase in the number of potentially positive, creative influences, it also meant that each performer had to be conditioned to the working process and the themes of the project each time he or she joined the company.

separate story, often touching on each other's lines, crossing and intersecting. Even the format of the script differs greatly from the previous drafts. The prologue is written in a grid-like format in such a way that one could scan across the page, reading what Ben, Victoria and Will are saying simultaneously, with two-to-three characters speaking at once:

Ben	Victoria	Will
You show me a dissolve; I show you a remote control.	I had a panic attack.	
The living room is not a waiting room.	In the fiction section.	
		You want to know about casseroles?

The stories exist separately, introducing each character in an indirect fashion, by allowing each one to tell his or her own narrative. Ben explains how advertising has changed to compensate for an audience with the ability to read ads quicker, Victoria briefly explains why she quit her job to go traveling and how she has felt since she came back to London and Will gives a broken, roundabout story about cooking which eventually dissolves into Ben and Victoria's stories. The writing (or perhaps Brown's editing of a newly devised introduction) was the most sophisticated of the four introductions because it introduced the characters indirectly, how and when they say their lines reflecting their characters. For example, since Ben is the most dominant of the three, his explanation of the evolution of advertising (a direct reference to Gleick and a thematic shift between fact and fiction) is the fullest story of the three and eventually overrides the lines of Will and Victoria. The accompanying stage directions just before this segment read, '*Ben speaks rapidly, passionately. The speech in each row should begin simultaneously. There should be no gaps between rows*'.⁵⁵⁰ Although Ben's speech is the fullest, none of the speeches is complete, as they were designed to overlap, giving the impression of people living a harried existence, rather than to tell stories

⁵⁵⁰ Filter Theatre and Stephen Brown, *Filter*, final version, unpublished (2003), p.3.

to be heard in their entirety. Because Will is the character who is the most resistance to this rushed, efficient lifestyle, his lines are the most random and his character is the one who is barely able to get a word in edgewise with Ben and Victoria. The beginning of the play has been transformed from the first to the last draft as the company found a storyline and a style which fit the themes of the play, combining Gleick's material with the fictional material created in devising sessions with Retallack and created by Brown.

Conclusions from *Faster*: role of the writer(s)

Roberts, Phillips, and Dimsdale chose Gleick's *Faster* specifically because it dealt with the phenomenon of contemporary urban living and the advantages and drawbacks of living an increasingly efficient, rapid lifestyle. The adaptation not only dealt with this subject matter with regards to the lives of three twenty-something Londoners, but was designed to reflect the speed of life at the beginning of the millennium. Designer Jon Bausor believes that Filter's work is made for 'an audience of people that walk around—particularly London—bombarded with advertising and images and sounds'.⁵⁵¹ *Faster* was a relatively short production whose narrative was compressed into a running time of seventy-five minutes. The rapidly-delivered dialogue, the quick scene changes and the focus on consumption of time as a kind of commodity was intended to situate the audience in the characters' world. The essence of the production could be summed up by one of Ben's lines: 'People who say life is not a race have misunderstood the situation. Deadlines don't wait'.⁵⁵² As Billington states:

Above all [...] an assertive belief in the medium of theatre itself has been combined with a prevailing post-millennial disquiet about the rootless materialism of western society. Theatre, in the late Blair years, reminded us of its capacity not just to entertain but also to epitomise our own unsettling anxieties.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵¹ Jon Bausor. Personal interview. 28 July 2008.

⁵⁵² Filter Theatre and Stephen Brown, *Filter*, final version, unpublished (2003), p.39.

⁵⁵³ Billington, p.397.

Billington's observation that a prominent theme in theatre in the past decade is the collective anxiety regarding what he refers to as 'rootless materialism' applies to Filter's work. The company's adaptation of Gleick's *Faster* served not only to test different methods of production and staging, but also to air the company's own fears and concerns regarding the effects of a fast-paced, materialistic, urban lifestyle on the spirit of the individual. In relation to the critical response to *Faster*, it seems the first objective of innovation in production was successful, while the second was less so; some reviewers felt the production was exciting and innovative, while others thought the theme of the escalation of the pace of life insubstantial and unoriginal. For example, Lynn Gardner, writing for *The Guardian*, calls *Faster*, 'The most astonishingly confident debut show I've seen for a long time',⁵⁵⁴ and Rachel Halliburton for *The Evening Standard* called Filter's use of sound 'groundbreaking',⁵⁵⁵ while Charles Spenser for *The Daily Telegraph* wrote that while he found the style of staging and performance appealing, he felt the production had 'almost nothing interesting to say',⁵⁵⁶ and Sam Marlow for *The Times* felt *Faster* was lacking in 'dramatic substance'.⁵⁵⁷ Interestingly, both Gardner and Marlowe compare Filter to work by Frantic Assembly.

By the time *Faster* was completed, the process Filter had developed was one in which the authorship of the piece was (to borrow a phrase of Retallack's) 'filtered' through a process involving a group of people with specific roles at different points in the collaborative process, finding a balance between the chaos of devising and the order of writing and draamturgy. Even though Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips initially felt a dynamic, complex production was more likely to be produced by a collaborating company than by a single writer, Retallack felt that once a piece was devised by a company, it could only become

⁵⁵⁴ Gardner, Lynn, Review of *Faster* by Filter and Stephen Brown, *The Guardian*, 9 April 2003.

⁵⁵⁵ Halliburton, Rachel, 'A modern piece with no time to lose': review of *Faster* by Filter and Stephen Brown, *The Evening Standard*, 8 April 2003.

⁵⁵⁶ Spenser, Charles, 'Fast lane to nowhere': review of *Faster* by Filter and Stephen Brown, *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 2003.

⁵⁵⁷ Marlowe, Sam, 'The pace of London life goes out of control in *Faster*': review of *Faster* by Filter and Stephen Brown, *The Times*, 9 April 2003.

textured and complex once a writer was involved. As the scripting writer, Brown unified all the improvisations, ideas, and research that had gone into the production by the third stage in order to make the text appear less inconsistent and disunited. Retallack noted that while Filter, ‘did have a lot of imaginative things to say, what it really needed was somebody who was going to record those voices’.⁵⁵⁸ Retallack felt a writer was needed to give a devised, collaborative production a distinctive voice, especially with a piece that had been through as many scratch performances, written drafts, and creative contributions as *Faster* had. The director says the company needed someone to ‘record’ the different voices creating material for the production, but what Brown did was not simply record, but organize and augment those voices with written material. For reviewers who had seen scratch performances of *Faster* as well as the final version, Brown’s contribution to the production was obvious. In her review, Halliburton says, ‘An earlier version of the show seemed slightly lost in the swirl of technology and speed-fuelled concepts, but this hugely improved production owes much to a strong script by Stephen Brown, which cleverly balances *Faster*’s emotions with its intellectually fleet-footed observations’.⁵⁵⁹

By the time Filter had reached stage three, they had learned from the mistakes they made with King and Wilkinson and knew how much structure, freedom and trust they had to give Brown as a commissioned writer—that they had to abdicate some control to Brown in order to produce a cohesive script. Filter’s method of working with writers stems partly from the artistic directors’ prejudices against what we may call ‘single-authored work’—productions authored through a written process by a single playwright with little or no influence from any kind of collaborative devising. Before working with Brown, the Filter Artistic Directors had fallen prey to the false dichotomy of work that is considered text-based

⁵⁵⁸ Guy Retallack. Personal interview. 9 April 2009.

⁵⁵⁹ Halliburton, Rachel, ‘A modern piece with no time to lose’: review of *Faster* by Filter and Stephen Brown, *The Evening Standard*, 8 April 2003.

and that which is considered devised—and that the former was stodgy and traditional while the later was more progressive and experimental. Brown allowed the company to reach a compromise in experimenting with written and devised composition because his creative aesthetics and his working practices happened to complement Filter's. Handy's position on the incorporation of individuals into organizations is useful in understanding the complexity of Brown's relationship with Filter: 'A lot of credibility credits stem from one's observed behaviour, e.g. a willingness to see what is important or salient in the situation for the other party, or evidence that your objectives are consistent with theirs, or a low-key, low-threat approach'.⁵⁶⁰ Brown dealt carefully with his revisions of *Faster*, always referring back to Retallack and McGrath as he worked, so that he did not stray too far from the company's intentions for the production. He was also an older, more experienced writer than King and Wilkinson and was better equipped to negotiate the personality conflicts within the project as they arose, taking what Handy calls a 'low-key, low-threat approach'. In the end, the process of composing *Faster* in a collaborative fashion was not necessarily, to borrow Dimsdale's word, 'democratic' in that everyone involved was given the opportunity to vote on each decision made, but democratic in that there were continual discussions amongst various combinations of people within the company in order to push the project along and develop the script alongside it.

In order to create a text that satisfied the company, Brown had to develop a strong narrative structure in order to help Filter organize their material, but also allow the company leeway to experiment. First, he had to incorporate a significant portion of Gleick's book into a fictional narrative that allowed the company to experiment with the integration of music and sound design. Secondly, Brown had to edit the dialogue and stage directions in such a way that they allowed for a series of quick, smooth transitions, changing time and place

⁵⁶⁰ Handy, p.129.

rapidly, all within the running time of seventy-five minutes. Roberts admitted, ‘Without [Brown], we [...] would have had a very devised script,’ and that Brown was not only ‘important’ but ‘integral’ to the process.⁵⁶¹ Brown said that this task was a challenge, but that, ‘working with Filter made me feel much freer about location and about creating worlds rapidly’, that the involvement of the performers pushed him to ‘think through 360 degrees’ of the world of the play.⁵⁶² Filter managed to work with Brown in a way that was mutually-beneficial for both parties; the company found a writer that could work to their specifications, helping them realize a particular vision for the play and Brown found a company that could help him find new ways of composing material. What helped Brown in achieving this three-dimensional world within the text was not only the assistance he received from Retallack, the performers, and producer/dramaturg McGrath, but also the method of working with writers that Filter had developed through trial-and-error over the first two stages of *Faster*.

Water: the writer/director-company collaboration

In comparison to *Faster*, *Water* was a far more streamlined, less conflict-ridden process of composition that involved both devising material as an ensemble and writing individually. Director David Farr met Phillips in 2005 because Phillips had arranged a meeting with the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre’s previous director Neil Bartlett as a result of the success of *Faster*. By 2006, Bartlett had left the Lyric and Farr was the new artistic director; Farr agreed to work with Filter on a new project after seeing the result of three weeks of research and development in which Phillips, Dimsdale and Roberts were involved: namely, a forty-five minute scratch performance consisting of a series of devised scenes. Farr commissioned Filter to create a new piece based on the work they created during the development week, initially paying them each an authorship fee and signing them on as

⁵⁶¹ Ferdy Roberts. Personal interview. 31 July 2008.

⁵⁶² Stephen Brown. Personal interview. 19 February 2008.

writers.⁵⁶³ It was agreed that Farr would act as a writer/director, and John Clark and Jon Bausor were hired as lighting and set designers, respectively. Broadly speaking, the devising and rehearsal process were two stages of work involving the larger artistic team, with Farr helping to structure the project while scripting and directing it. In total, starting from the first research and development period, the whole process took eighteen months.

The specialized role of the writer/director

The process of creating *Water* was markedly different from the process used to create *Faster* because Filter was able to modify their approach to working in order to negotiate the company hierarchy with respect to the role of the writer (and in this case, the writer/director) more successfully. In response to Farr's acknowledged specialized skill scripting and directing in a devising context, Filter was more transparent in their contractual agreement with him, as well as more resolute in their decision to share the authorial power throughout the project. Where *Faster* was a learning experience for Filter, when they set out to create *Water*, the company knew that they wanted to work with someone like Farr who was experienced in writing, directing and devising, who would be able to provide a stabilizing force for the project, much like the combination of Retallack and Brown did for *Faster*. Phillips explained that the company's relationship with Farr worked primarily because Farr is a writer as well as a director, he was be able to construct a narrative using the different scenes the company devised, simplifying the whole process of transferring devised work from the rehearsal room to a script. Phillips said, 'A lot of [Farr's] job was figuring out [...] how to get from one scene to the next [...] We can do it, but we're not writers. How to stage it [...]

⁵⁶³ Later on, after *Water* was finished, Farr and Filter agreed any royalties would be split between the four of them. There were also separate fees and contracts for each Filter member as performers in addition to the writing contract. David Farr. Personal interview. 2 July 2009.

putting it together is more of a specialized job'.⁵⁶⁴ What is remarkable about Phillips's statement is that while in the context of *Faster*, the idea of using a 'writer' on the project was unappealing, in the context of *Water*, the idea of using a director who was 'more writer than a director' was attractive because Filter had come to consider it more efficient. In short, Filter had more respect for Farr from the beginning of the project than they had in the beginning of *Faster* for Retallack, Wilkinson and King. Phillips indicated that working with Farr was a positive experience, not only because he was a skilled writer and director, but also because he allowed the freedom to create new work while structuring the devised scenes into a coherent narrative framework. In working with Farr, Filter had not only hired a writer/director, but also a dramaturg to oversee and coordinate the devised and written material. Here we may use Turner and Behrndt's definition of a dramaturg as 'someone who helps keep the process open, while at the same time being aware that decisions have to be made in order to shape the material towards performance'.⁵⁶⁵ McGrath who had performed the role of dramaturg for *Faster* was not involved in *Water*, leaving the position of dramaturg open, and leaving Filter with the task of finding someone who could fulfill that role. For Farr to consider the staging and the narrative of the production simultaneously, it was inevitable that he would also play a dramaturgical role for the company. (It is, however, important to note that in the programme, Farr is listed as 'director' and the only other signification of authorship is a credit that *Water* was 'created by Filter'.)

An additional reason why *Water* was a more streamlined process than *Faster* was that as a result of appreciating Farr as a well-regarded practitioner working within an established theatre, Filter had an increased respect for the specialized skill of scripting and also the role of the text in devising than they had when they began work on *Faster*. In bringing the concept for the production to the Lyric and working with Farr, the Lyric's Artistic Director, Filter was

⁵⁶⁴ Tim Phillips. Personal interview. 19 January 2008.

⁵⁶⁵ Turner and Behrndt, p.162.

working within a larger, more established organization than they had with *Faster* at the BAC; *Water* was a co-production between Filter and the Lyric, so the way in which the process was structured was negotiated between the two organizations from the beginning, rather than Filter being solely in charge. As a result, the process of creating *Water* was established on more precisely defined terms, making for a more consistent, stable process. Although Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts regarded single-authored work as less dynamic than devised or devised and scripted work (even after they produced *Water*), Phillips in particular conceded that the job of scripting and/or performing the role of dramaturg on a devised project was ‘specialized’ and that he, Dimsdale and Roberts were not able to perform these particular roles. As in Chapter Two when we analyzed Meckler and Teale’s process of choosing collaborators through the lens of what Handy terms ‘expert power’ (‘the power invested in someone because of his acknowledged expertise’), we may use this terminology once again to illuminate Filter’s reaction to Farr’s role as a writer/director.⁵⁶⁶ In observing that, ‘people do not resent being influenced by those whom they regard as experts’, Handy explains a more simplified version of the role Farr held while working on *Water*, as Farr’s contributions to the project did not go completely unquestioned by the company; it is, however, an apt description of one of the reasons why Farr was integrated more smoothly into the production than Retallack, King, Wilkinson or Brown had been with *Faster*.⁵⁶⁷ Since Farr was regarded by Filter to be an expert not only in directing and writing, but also in combining a scripting process with a devising one, he was considered to be an expert and allowed more liberty to work. As he was already known to the company to be someone who was an experienced writer and director by profession, they were more likely to trust him as an ‘acknowledged expert’, conveniently combining the roles of director and scripting writer, which Retallack and Brown had played previously, into one. Additionally, agreeing to work

⁵⁶⁶ Handy, p.119.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

with Farr as the writer/director of *Water* allowed Filter the opportunity to mount a production at the Lyric Hammersmith, a more established, better funded and prestigious venue than the Battersea Arts Centre, where they had produced *Faster*.

Research and development

Since there was no formal methodology for the composition of the production, Filter and Farr relied on a flexible system of open communication and checks and balances in order to keep conflict and miscommunication to a minimum; it was agreed between Filter and Farr that a combination of research, discussion, devising and writing would be the primary means of composing the production and script. As a semi-decentralized hybrid organization, Filter combined the centralization of the top-down company hierarchy with the decentralization of collaborative creation and devising. Phillips explained, ‘We really felt our way through it much more than any other show we’ve done’.⁵⁶⁸ *Water* was an original production which revolved around three narrative strands about a diver, a political advisor and two estranged brothers. Farr was responsible for the bulk of the scripting and the text while (similarly to *Faster*) the themes, aesthetics and approaches to staging had been decided during the research and development period, from which the characters and storyline stemmed. *Water* dealt with the stories of Joe, a cave diver; Claudia, a government worker; Graham, an environmental officer and Peter, Graham’s father. The play combines the personal with the political, investigating each character’s story, focusing on his or her increasingly self-inflicted condition of isolation while also drawing from themes such as globalization and climate change. Since the scope of the piece was so broad at this point, the company divided the research as to what topic would concern each company member’s character. Dimsdale developed and researched material pertaining to his character, the diver, while Roberts did

⁵⁶⁸ Tim Phillips. Personal interview. 19 January 2008..

the same for his character, in preparation for the devising sessions with Farr, Phillips and performer Victoria Mosely (who had been involved with *Faster*). The production was composed as a result of the arrangement of scenes devised by Dimsdale, Phillips, Roberts and Mosely and guided by Farr in the form of what Phillips called ‘semi-structured improvisations’.⁵⁶⁹ During the devising sessions, Farr, Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts had ongoing discussions about the progression and direction of the production, the background research they were doing, what they felt was missing and what they wanted to eliminate. Regarding decentralized and semi-decentralized hybrid organizations, Brafman and Beckstrom note:

Starfish systems are wonderful incubators for creative [...] ideas. [...] Good ideas will attract more people, and in a circle they’ll execute the plan. Institute order and rigid structure, and while you may achieve standardization, you’ll also squelch creativity. Where creativity is valuable, learning to accept chaos is a must.⁵⁷⁰

The process of creating *Water* was not particularly regimented, but the somewhat chaotic, instinctual nature of the process was appropriate for a company with a semi-decentralized hierarchy. Throughout the project, Farr maintained the outside eye of a dramaturg in order to maintain a sense of balance and structure amidst all the writing, researching and devising the company was doing both together and independently of each other. ‘The dramaturg is there to facilitate someone else’s vision, or maybe more accurately is there to facilitate the production’s vision’.⁵⁷¹ Farr not only was able to be an organizing presence for the company as a writer, but was also to facilitate the company’s vision for the production as it emerged. Farr was able to fit smoothly into Filter’s semi-decentralized hybrid organization by acting as an outside expert advisor without threatening the control Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts wanted to maintain over the material.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Brafman and Beckstrom, p.203.

⁵⁷¹ Turner and Behrndt, p.163.

According to Farr and Filter, there was a strong autobiographical element to the *Water* text, which was result of one of the company's approaches to the devising process, but also a by-product of the negotiation of the authorial power shared between the director and the company. Dimsdale explained that one of the techniques Filter used early on in the devising process to develop the characters was that of hot-seating, or the cross-examination of one performer playing a particular character by the rest of the company in order to answer a series of questions about his or her character, an approach to character development through devising.⁵⁷² In order to keep a record of the developments made during the hot-seating process, someone from the company (generally Farr) would record the performer's responses to the questions and then incorporate that material into the developing script, either expanded into a monologue or as a contribution to a scene in the form of dialogue. Since this technique of improvised, immediate response was used, it is unsurprising that much of the material generated for *Water* turned out to be semi-autobiographical for the company members, basing characters on themselves or people they knew, as well as the developments in the narrative. This technique of incorporating personal details and links engaged with the company's hierarchy and methodology by maintaining the chaos of devising while decentralizing the way in which the creative input was contributed by company members. Brafman and Beckstrom note that, 'an open system doesn't have central intelligence; the intelligence is spread throughout the system'.⁵⁷³ Through the contributions of autobiographical material, the devised, improvised and written contributions (in this case, the 'intelligence') were able to be distributed relatively evenly between Farr, Phillips, Dimsdale, Roberts and Mosely, whether they contributed in the form of improvised, physical or written composition. In this way, no one person working on the production was an 'expert' in any particular subject—everyone in the company had a given topic to research, but was also at liberty to improvise (or in Farr's

⁵⁷² Oliver Dimsdale. Personal interview. 23 July 2008.

⁵⁷³ Brafman and Beckstrom, p.39.

case, to write) freely using personal experiences. While Farr had the advantage of being able to maintain a kind of outside eye on the development of the project, the performers had the advantage of working with material that was individual to them and readily accessible during improvisation sessions.

The use of autobiographical material in the devising process not only functioned as a way to generate scenes, but also as a bridge between what the performers wanted to achieve in terms of character development and what they needed Farr's expert power as a writer/director to do. Being encouraged to delve into personal information in order to construct characters and a narrative during the devising process gave the performers a starting-off point from which to create characters with which they could become comfortable within a relatively unstructured devising process. Farr's relationship with each performer differed according to the nature of his or her involvement in the production and also his or her own inclination and ability to write. Farr worked closely with Dimsdale and Roberts to create the characters of Joe, Graham and Peter, helping script and edit from the accumulated improvised scenes, pieces written alone by Roberts and Dimsdale and excerpts from their combined research material. Roberts stated that since he was not a writer, he worked closely with Farr and that Farr's role was 'together with me, try to find the voice of Graham and the voice of Pete the father, but the voice that would sit comfortably with me the actor'.⁵⁷⁴ Farr was able to help Roberts discover a character through structured improvisations that was both meaningful to him and suitable for him as a performer that he was not able to script himself, as well as later transfer the devising to the written script. Govan, Nicholson and Normington explain that, 'Autobiographical performance is a distinct mode of working with an emphasis on a self-reflexive, creative methodology', and that the 'tensions' inherent in staged

⁵⁷⁴Ferdy Roberts. Personal interview. 31 July 2008..

autobiographical content 'are explored and even exploited for theatrical effect'.⁵⁷⁵ The material that the company produced was fruitful for Farr, as it allowed him to experiment with the balance between the similarities and the differences between the characters and the performers who created them within the script. The element of autobiography is often highlighted within the script in Farr's use of self-reflexive language, which gives the impression that the dialogue used is intended to remind the audience that what they are watching has been created collaboratively by Filter. For example, as the play begins, Dimsdale addresses the audience directly as himself before he becomes his different characters, saying, 'Hi, welcome to the Lyric Hammersmith, I'm Ollie. We'll be taking you to a lot of different places tonight, but we'll start by going back twenty-six years and travelling 4,725 miles west from here'.⁵⁷⁶ When Graham meets his half-brother Kris for the first time who is a DJ in Vancouver, the radio station depicted onstage plays the music of Cathead, Phillips's band.

While *Faster* was a project that began with an intellectual argument from which a narrative could be loosely adapted, the process used to create *Water* worked in the reverse; since Filter had started from a general theme and then devised characters and a rough storyline through research, discussions and improvisation, the central argument of the production came later into the development of the project. Farr explained that he developed what he referred to as a 'thesis' while reading a book called *H2O* about the properties of water which had been given to him by the company; he proposed to the company that they could centre the entire production around the way in which the oxygen and hydrogen atoms that comprise a water molecule bond, and 'whether or not we have the ability to literally behave like water, to reach out and be sociable and use each other, rather than being

⁵⁷⁵ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p.62.

⁵⁷⁶ Filter Theatre and David Farr, *Water*, final version, unpublished (2007), p.2.

individualistic'.⁵⁷⁷ As a result of this discovery, Farr was able to help Filter construct a strong but flexible narrative framework that reflected this argument. Once the argument was solidified in the minds of all involved in the production, it was clear to the company that each character and plot development had to have significance and be relevant to the central argument. Farr explained that Dimsdale's plot strand of the diver and his great dive into a deep cave, 'became a metaphor for individualistic human striving onwards and onwards', and that the 'notion of making contact with other human beings [...] became central'.⁵⁷⁸ In developing this line of thinking, Farr was able to facilitate further developments in the devising and scripting process, organizing the ideas the company was producing without discouraging or confusing them. We can again cite Turner and Behrndt here to illuminate Farr's role:

Here, the dramaturg becomes a kind of artistic advisor, who looks to develop and deepen the conceptual approach through suggesting practical solutions as to how the theme could be explored. There is a simultaneous engagement with research and finding practical ways into the work.⁵⁷⁹

In devised work, an overarching metaphor, often constructed by the dramaturg, becomes important to frame the work created and assist the development of a narrative. Farr helped facilitate the research and devising Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts were doing by suggesting an ideological framework for the production that was simple enough to allow for a variety of different characters and narrative strands, but complex enough to create a strong overall message. In creating this ideological and dramaturgical framework, Farr was also developing a structure which could accommodate the devised material, texts written by various members of the company and ideas that arose from group discussions.

⁵⁷⁷ David Farr. Personal interview. 2 July 2009.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Turner and Behrndt, p.156.

Writing, scripting and devising

The methodological blend of the three kinds of approaches to creating material used in *Water* (written, scripted from the devising and devised and/or physical and proxemic) represent the different interests of Farr and Filter reflected in the content of the production, as well as the ways in which they were negotiated. Farr made a distinction between the work he scripted that was taken from the notated devised scenes and exercises, and the work he had written independently of the devising process by saying that the devised work was more personal, about the characters' emotions and relationships, while the written work was more of a political nature.⁵⁸⁰ Govan, Nicholson and Normington explain:

Devising performance is socially imaginative as well as culturally responsive, and articulates between the local and the global, the fictional and the real, the community and the individual, the social and the psychological. In these terms, devising performance has a significant part to play in redefining the ways in which debates about theatricality and performativity are enacted and in recognizing how they are connected. Devised performance is an agency of both personal self-expression and community or civic activism, and these visions offer a means by which cultural exchange can be promoted.⁵⁸¹

The process of devising is often as eclectic as that which Filter developed to devise *Water* because it is a flexible form of composition, and as Govan, Nicholson and Normington explain, one that can bridge a number of different subjects and styles of performance. Phillips commented that in producing a show that centred around water, the company—and Farr especially—felt they should deal with the subject of global warming and rising water levels in one way or another; in order to present this political strand of the narrative without, as Phillips put it, 'lecturing' the audience. They approached global warming as a metaphor, rooting the politics in the personal, semi-autobiographical narratives, so as to make the more politically-driven aspect of the production seem more intrinsically related to the main

⁵⁸⁰ David Farr. Personal interview. 2 July 2009.

⁵⁸¹ Govan, Nicholson and Normington, pp.194-95.

narrative.⁵⁸² Farr focused on developing the characters' emotions and relationships with the actors because he felt, from previous experiences, that it was too difficult to try to devise politically-informed scenarios with a group of people—that everyone in the room had to be equally well-informed about the subject matter in order for the improvisations to be accurate and fully developed.⁵⁸³

The result of working with designer Bausor from an early stage in the project was that he lent another dimension to the way in which the story was developed; he focused on inscribing the space in order to establish an aesthetic and a series of dramatic conceits, assisting Filter in devising a narrative and using a design-centred approach to create expositional shortcuts. Farr felt that the design scheme of *Water* encouraged the company to develop the characters and the story alongside the practical conceits of how to depict the world of the play. He called creating a narrative or characters from an image 'working backwards' and gave as an example the scene on the squash court where Peter is playing a game of squash with a colleague who encourages him to apply for a job in Vancouver.⁵⁸⁴ Towards the beginning of the project, Phillips, Bausor, Dimsdale and Roberts came up with the idea of two characters playing squash at the beginning of the period of development and figured out how to stage it; at first, Farr rejected the idea because he did not feel that it had a useful place in the story, but as the company pressed him to consider the scene further, he found a use for it, devising around the concept of a squash game. Farr reflected that one of the benefits of working collaboratively with Filter in was, 'having an armoury of visual ideas [...] subconsciously create[d] in the dark [...] but with a sort of sense that you've got a

⁵⁸² Tim Phillips. Personal interview. 19 January 2008.

⁵⁸³ Farr explained, 'I would go away and write some of the political scenes between [...] Victoria's character [Claudia] and her political boss [...] there are certain things an actor cannot improvise. They can't improvise knowing stuff about political things. If they don't know it, they don't know it. And so you have to go away and actually write it. They can always improvise in relationships. Of course it's something we all have contact with'. David Farr. Personal interview. 2 July 2009.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

theme'.⁵⁸⁵ This compromise between structured and unstructured work allowed Filter to create images, characters and ideas around a theme without feeling hampered by the pressure to create a cohesive story right away. This creative process was also a clever negotiation of power and creative control between Filter and Farr, that Filter could come up with dramatic conceits and ideas in the beginning and Farr could mould the raw material into a text later on in the process. Management theorist R. Meredith Belbin explains that:

The useful people to have in teams are those who possess strengths or characteristics which serve a need without duplicating those already there. Teams are a question of [...] individuals who balance well with one another.⁵⁸⁶

Farr's dramaturgical overview, which called for the company to continually consider the way in which the project would function structurally balanced Filter's desire to work conceptually, laterally and visually. Since Farr enjoyed collaborating with practitioners who were more inclined to 'create visually' than he was, he respected Bausor in the way that Filter respected him, allowing Bausor a certain amount of freedom to design and devise various ways of staging the production.⁵⁸⁷

Perhaps a result of including Bausor in the development of the narrative was that the nature of the script is such that each scene is relatively brief and the locations within the play change constantly; *Water* changes back and forth rapidly between the perspectives of Graham, his father Peter, Joe the diver and Claudia his ex-girlfriend. The way in which the company decided to stage this particularly episodic text was to begin with a base of a minimal set that conveyed a stark, contemporary and even cold appearance with a heavy emphasis on shadows, silhouettes and clean lines. This minimal space allowed the company to shift locations rapidly, flying in screens, frames and pieces of furniture from above.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ R. Meredith Belbin, *Management Teams: Why They Succeed or Fail* (London: William Heinemann, Limited, 1981), p.77.

⁵⁸⁷ 'I'm a very good storyteller and a good linguist [...] I know something visual when I see it, but [...] I don't create visually. [...] So I'm always keen to collaborate with people who do that.' David Farr. Personal interview. 2 July 2009.

Transitions were facilitated by images and sounds that were able to shift in order to signify different locations, cultures, time periods and atmospheres. For example, when Graham finds an x-ray of his father's lung, it is projected onto a large screen, which then facilitates the transition to a scene revolving around Joe the diver; the projection of the lung functions as a signifier of the cancer from which Graham's father Peter died, as well as to foreshadow Joe's death by drowning during a dive, reinforcing repeated themes of water, isolation, sinking, separation, loneliness and death. The performers in the different narrative strands of the play, although all sharing and passing through the same physical space, like ghosts, do not acknowledge each other or connect dialogically. The text, soundscape, staging and design complement each other, blending and weaving together as the audience is continually reminded of the loneliness of the contemporary human condition made lonelier by modern technology. The result of this style is that each character's emotional experience is underscored and heightened as the play shifts back and forth from scene to scene and moment to moment between realism and more stylized forms of representation. The most frequent directorial and authorial technique used to achieve this effect is the form of direct address. For example, the audience is taken back to Vancouver University in 1981 where Graham's father Peter is giving a lecture on marine biology and rising water levels. Peter uses the metaphor of human relationships to demonstrate how hydrogen atoms bond to form water particles, emphasizing the role of cooperation in fighting climate change:

How successful we are in our reaction to these challenges may rely on our ability to be like water. To reach beyond our own selves and bond with those around us. But are we capable of doing so? Or are we destined to be increasingly solitary, alone, and unbonded, constantly pushing further and further as individuals, placing the planet on which we live under intense pressure and leaving us unable to connect both with each other and the world we live in.⁵⁸⁸

Peter's lecture stands alone as a monologue, going on for another short paragraph, addressed to us the audience as if we are the audience in the lecture hall at the university, feeling the

⁵⁸⁸ Filter Theatre and David Farr, *Water*, final version, unpublished (2007), p.14.

intensity of this character's challenge to his students. This monologue stands alone from the rest of the dialogue in the play, emphasizing its importance.

In addition to Farr, Bausor and the performers involved in the devising, Phillips's work on the sound design for *Water* represented another authorial influence within the construction of the production. While Bausor created visual cues and design concepts to facilitate the narrative and scene transitions, taking the place of lengthy exposition, Phillips's use of sound functioned similarly. Phillips utilized a combination of realistic and more abstract, non-representational sound in order to create settings and atmosphere for each scene, as well as merging two different sounds together to create a new scene or indicate a shift in the mood of the moment; for example, in an early scene where Graham is at home in Norfolk, the sound of his typing on the computer morphs into the sound of raindrops outside, connection the themes of isolation and water aurally. The choices in Phillips' sound design indicate that Filter is concerned with the power of suggestion and the economy of subtle parallels rather than lengthy exposition and extensive dialogue. About her own work, American director Anne Bogart says, 'I find it more interesting to trigger associations in the audience than psychologies'.⁵⁸⁹ Filter aims to create work that makes room for the audience to make thematic connections through the details of set and sound design, in addition to performance. In both *Faster* and *Water*, Filter focused on an aesthetic approach and a method of staging to suit the narrative of each so that the writing, design and performance style serve the story, illuminating central intellectual argument of the piece along the way; the difference, however, is that *Water* is a more mature and successfully executed piece of working, benefitting from the company's added years of experience and inclusion of outside practitioners such as Bausor and Farr, which is reflected in the critical response to *Water*, which was more uniformly positive than the response to *Faster*. Rivka Jacobson for *British*

⁵⁸⁹ Anne Bogart, *And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.37.

Theatre Guide refers to the ‘fascinating manipulation of music and technology’, writing that, ‘This production is in the good Brechtian tradition of *Verfremdungseffekt* (Alienation) and it carries off its agenda with considerable panache’.⁵⁹⁰ Paul Taylor, writing for *The Independent*, calls *Water*, ‘a distinctive and distinguished piece of theatre,’ that offers, ‘a sophisticated take on how private emotions enmesh with public policy’.⁵⁹¹ Even Billington, with his skepticism for devised theatre (which, as he says, ‘at its worst, often leads to narrative and political flabbiness’), concedes that Filter, ‘successfully plaits together several narrative strands’ which are, ‘bound together by firm ideas’.⁵⁹² Taylor, Jacobson and Billington praise the depth and specificity of the subject matter, as well as the sophistication of the staging and sound (which is what pleased critics in *Faster* four years previously). Phillips says Filter is concerned with developing engaging methods of staging in order to accommodate the ‘layers of performance’, the way in which the sound, movement, set and dialogue are integrated into the production in order to create what he refers to as ‘a total experience’.⁵⁹³ The resulting effect is that the two stories (about a man who goes in search of his family and a deep-sea diver attempting to break the world record) are created by piecing together the details or fragments of stories, allowing the audience to be active in putting together the narrative, and also in understanding the sub-textual message about the dangers of global warming.

⁵⁹⁰ Jacobson, Rivka, Review of *Water* by Filter and David Farr, *British Theatre Guide* (2007) <<http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/water-rev.htm>> [accessed 26 July 2011].

⁵⁹¹ Taylor, Paul, Review of *pool (no water)* by Mark Ravenhill, *The Independent* (2006) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/first-night-pool-no-water-lyric-hammersmith-london-422591.html>> [accessed 8 December 2010].

⁵⁹² Billington, Michael, Review of *Water* by Filter and David Farr, *The Guardian* (2007) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2007/oct/19/theatre1>> [accessed 26 July 2011].

⁵⁹³ Tim Phillips. Personal interview. 19 January 2008.

Conclusion: authorship and the role of the writer

The authorship of *Faster* can be traced through the layers of creative contributions that were manifest in each of the three stages of the compositional process: the scenes and approaches to staging devised by performers under production director Guy Retallack's guidance, the writers' amendments of these improvisations and new written scenes (Wilkinson, King and Brown), and Dimsdale, Phillips, and Roberts's final decisions regarding what would be cut and kept in the final script. The authorship of *Water* was simpler; Farr, Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts were the primary authors of *Water*, although Mosely contributed to the devising process and Bausor to the narrative as well as the design. The authorship was established from the beginning, and although Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts—as the central artistic directorship of Filter—had the final say in what was eliminated and what was kept in the final production, the stability and consistency of their relationship with Farr allowed the director a nearly equal authorial position. In the more complex case of *Faster*, Retallack called the process 'an ensemble effort' and attributed the authorship to the entire company, but said that Brown 'had authorship of *Faster*'.⁵⁹⁴ In this case, Retallack defined 'authorship' as, 'one person ultimately taking everybody else's contributions and shaping them into an organic mould' and that Brown 'took the role of taking and pulling all of that together and giving it a very definite texture and wit'.⁵⁹⁵ Both Brown and Farr fulfilled Filter's role of the scripting writer able to make his own contributions while incorporating the scenes the company devised, accepting Filter's final editorial decisions while unifying the work into a tangible, written whole; the main difference between the two collaborators was that Farr had more influence on the content of the piece not only because he was a part of the project from the beginning, but also because he guided the devising sessions and directed the final production.

⁵⁹⁴ GuyRetallack. Personal interview. 9 April 2009.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

Filter's approach to authorship was influenced by the way in which the hierarchy influenced the decision-making during the compositional process of each production. Farr defines the concept of the author or authors as, 'the people who originated the idea and without whom the idea could not have happened'.⁵⁹⁶ We will understand the 'author' of Filter productions to be twofold; the authors in the case of both *Faster* and *Water* were the people responsible for the origination of the concept for the project, but also those who have the most influence regarding the final editing and structuring of the material. Similarly to Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly, Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips, as Filter's artistic directors, established the central theme for each production before the devising process began and approved all the final decisions made to the production and the text. In a sense, they were the authors of each production, but this was complicated by the involvement of directors, designers, performers and writers who all contributed material in both instances.⁵⁹⁷ Filter's method is marked by the fact that Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips are the authors and legal owners of each Filter production, but do not compose the material that goes into each production alone; the final production is a reflection of Filter's vision for that particular piece, but a vision that can only be realized with the help of outside artists. Filter relied on Brown, Retallack and Farr as organizing presences in order to help shape, guide, and create material for the text for performance for *Faster* and *Water*, maintaining a balance between the chaos of creation and the order of writing and dramaturgy integral to their process.

Before and after both productions, Filter maintained a certain ambivalence regarding the role of the writer, the process of writing and the development of text, which was in opposition to their relatively comfortable attitude regarding the practice of casual notation within the rehearsal room. Even after producing well-edited scripts which smoothed the

⁵⁹⁶ David Farr. Personal interview. 2 July 2009.

⁵⁹⁷ It should be noted that even though Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips are the artistic directors of Filter, they are also performers. Dimsdale and Roberts perform as actors and Phillips as a musician in each production. Accordingly, the three may be referred to as directors and also as performers. If there is a reference to a production director hired by the company to direct a project or to other performers, it will be specified.

edges of the originally devised dialogue for *Water* and *Faster* with the help of the writing and scripting skills of Farr and Brown (as opposed to mere templates for sophisticated productions), Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts maintained a scepticism about ‘written’, singly-authored work. Filter looks for writers who are able to help the company create a text for performance, serving both as a writer in a creative capacity and also as a dramaturg in an editorial capacity in relation to their pre-conceived concepts and rough-hewn scenes devised with performers. The directors have wanted to work with a writer who, in Phillips’ words, was ‘confident enough’ to ‘not be precious about what they do’.⁵⁹⁸ One way in which we can interpret Phillips’s statement is that Filter has wanted to work with writers who are professionally experienced and self-assured enough to make bold decisions, but are also sufficiently aware of their role within the company hierarchy that they had the ability to defer to Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips, who have the power to make the final decisions.⁵⁹⁹

Dimsdale explained, ‘Maybe one day [...] we’ll take the dare on giving someone a subject matter [...] and then they go off and write it, but I would have imagined that we’re not quite in that position yet,’ indicating Filter did not feel established or secure enough to allow a writer autonomy.⁶⁰⁰ One could say that the relationship between Brown and Filter functioned well partly because Brown was already known to people involved in *Faster* as an experienced writer, and partly because he was coming in at a stage of the project at which much of the material, narrative and approaches to staging had already been established. The relationship between Farr and Filter was successful because Farr was known to the company as an experienced writer/director, but also because Farr shared some of Filter’s views on writing

⁵⁹⁸ Tim Phillips. Personal interview. 19 January 2008.

⁵⁹⁹ Dimsdale said that ultimately, ‘it comes down to [...] not wanting someone to have to spend six months writing something and then cut that thing to ribbons’. Oliver Dimsdale. Personal interview. 23 July 2008.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

and text.⁶⁰¹ Ultimately, neither Brown nor Farr posed a threat to or came into conflict with the company because Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts did not feel that they were vying for authorial control and respected their expertise.

Filter's process has been influenced by the intricacies of the channels of communication, involvement of various practitioners and the company's power structure during each project; as a result, it changes to suit the circumstances of each production, so there is not, strictly speaking, any one model to which Filter adheres (especially since some of their work consists of remounting versions of canonical plays, such as *Three Sisters* and *Twelfth Night*). In a broader sense of the word, Filter's method of working with text in terms of their original work relies upon a balance between collectively devised and individually written work to create a text for performance, but to some extent, is similar to older models of writer-company collaborations, such as the work Chaikin did with The Open Theater, experimenting with high levels of participation and contribution of performers, combining the input of performers with the contributions of writers. The approach they used to working with text on *Water* is comparable to the processes that Piscator, Littlewood and, more recently, Teale used as writer/directors incorporating input from performers and designers as well as devised dialogue and approaches to staging. What differentiates them from their predecessors, however, is that Farr functioned as a commissioned writer/director, in contrast to Piscator, Littlewood and Teale, who were also the Artistic Directors of their respective companies, and thus did not have to negotiate the processes used and material created with higher authorial powers. Filter does not have a model of working partly because each project

⁶⁰¹ Farr explained: 'the only reason why you would do this process and not get someone to go and write the play is because you want to create things like [the squash court scene] which [...] I almost think it would be impossible to do. A writer would go, I don't know how this is going to be possible—it'll be terrible. A writer can't do that. A writer will always veer towards a safer choice of location'. Reflecting Phillips's statement earlier, Farr added that he felt the company collaborating together, combining their different skills, achieved a result that would not have been possible had *Water* been scripted by a single writer. It is interesting that although Farr himself served as the scripting writer for *Water* and had produced written plays working independently as a playwright previous to this project, he maintained the idea that a writer working alone would tend to choose 'safe' settings for plays and would be limited in his or her range of imagination. David Farr. Personal interview. 2 July 2009.

upon which they embark is so different from the last, both in terms of the practitioners involved external to the company, in terms of subject matter of the piece and also in terms of the venue and purpose of the project. However, perhaps in the future, when Filter is a more established company, their process will become more methodical.

While Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly are companies with aesthetics and working methods that differ greatly from those of Filter, there are some similarities in the way in the company hierarchy operates within each production. For example, one could say that *Faster* is similar, in a way, to Frantic Assembly's *Generation Trilogy*, the first three original plays the company produced; in these plays, the writer both devised material with the performers and wrote text outside rehearsals, integrating different methods of composition into the process. Also, in the early years of the company, directors Graham and Hoggett performed in their production and devised work, as do Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts, in a way that made the work almost entirely performer-driven. *Water*, on the other hand, is more comparable to a production like Shared Experience's *Brontë*, with Filter using Farr as a writer/director in the way that Teale operates; the difference with Filter, however, is that *Water* was highly influenced by the performers' contributions and Farr used devised dialogue and staging in the text that he composed. The main difference between Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly and Filter is that while the two older companies allow the writers they commission (such as Edmundson and Lavery) a certain amount of freedom and time to compose a script independently, Filter keeps a close eye on the writer or writer/director chosen to script their productions; Dimsdale, Phillips and Roberts use a framework within which the script is created continuously alongside the work devised in the rehearsal room so that the final product reflects their vision and remains under the company's control. The combination of written text, devised material and ideas during rehearsal which any writer, writer/director or writer/dramaturg is expected to incorporate into a Filter production

complicates the authorship of each piece and blurs the boundaries between contributors involved in each production, whether they are part of the company's permanent artistic directorship or not, making the nature of authorship and the writer's role more complex than in Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly productions.

We will understand the 'authors' of *Faster* and *Water* to be twofold: those responsible for the origination of the material for the project, but also those who had the most influence regarding the final editing and structuring of the material. Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips are the authors and legal owners of each Filter production; the final product is a reflection of the vision of the central artistic directorship, but one which could only have been realized with the help of outside artists. Filter's method of composition is structured in such a way that the artistic autonomy of the writer is limited and his or her work exactly regulated by the company's semi-decentralized hierarchy. The writer's role in a Filter production is to script a text in collaboration with the directors and performers, structuring the work devised in rehearsal and combining it with text written outside rehearsal. As a result of the collaborative nature of Filter's approach to writing and scripting, the authorship of *Faster* and *Water* is shared between the directors, writers, dramaturg, designer and performers, as both written and non-written applications of creation of material were important to the genesis and structuring of each piece.

Conclusion: understanding the possibilities for writers and text

The function of a writer

This thesis has been an investigation not only of the function of the writer in the collaborative process, but also of the role of the text and the myriad of ways in which it can be created through writer-company collaboration, as well as the many possibilities those texts can facilitate for performance, within the context of both contemporary and historical practices. It is the aim of this study that the ever-increasing pool of writers and companies in the UK can benefit from this investigation and be better equipped to understand not only how they can balance the fluidity of process with the organizing power of the management of communication networks and hierarchical structures, but also the nature of the different possible models of working between companies and writers, so that they may one day create their own models to contribute to the long legacy of collaborative practice.

Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, the changing statuses of the writer and the text are not only reflective of the ways in which collaborative process involving writing have changed, but are also emblematic of how theatre-makers have positioned themselves within the rapidly shifting cultural and economic climate in the UK. The ways in which Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre have worked with writers and writer/directors demonstrate a tendency towards a creating a shifting (either more incrementally, in the case of Shared Experience, or more dramatically, in the case of Frantic Assembly and Filter) and flexible process that allows for a certain amount of negotiation between the commissioned writer and the company in order to serve the production and artistic goals of the collaborators involved. Over the past ten to fifteen years, the role of the text has become more flexible in response to the way in which the writer's role and the concept of authorship have changed within the context of collaborative theatre-making; the role of an individual writer can change from company to company and

production to production (depending on the goals of the both the writer and the company and the requirements of the production) and therefore the author or authors of the piece might include not only the writer, but also the director, performers, designer and/or dramaturg. As a result, texts produced by writers and writer/directors such as Helen Edmundson, Polly Teale, Mark Ravenhill, Bryony Lavery, Stephen Brown and David Farr have been the product of the writer's contributions but also, to varying degrees, of the shared creative agency of an entire production team.

This study of early twenty-first-century collaborative theatre-making in the UK is a unique contribution to the field of new writing and also collaborative and devised practice because it offers a way of understanding the role of the writer and the development of the text in contemporary collaborative practice by studying the way in which writers' working processes and those of the companies by whom they are commissioned intersect. This study is significant not only because these productions have not previously been examined within the context of an academic inquiry, but also because the subject of the role of the writer in collaboration has not previously been the focus of critical work; there have been numerous studies, books and articles on collaborative and devised practices and also playwriting as distinct approaches to theatre-making, but this thesis is the first significant study on writer-company collaborative practice. Although there have been previous studies on historical collaborative practice, this thesis is the first to examine the role of the writer and the text throughout twentieth-century collaboration—the findings of which we shall return in the next section of this conclusion. The purpose of this study is not only to contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to writing for performance and collaborative theatre-making, but also to aid writers, companies and performance students and scholars in gaining a better understanding of writer-company collaborative practice so that they may develop further possibilities for collaboration and creating text, as well as being better placed to negotiate a

mutually beneficial process with future collaborators. Although there are a number of books on playwriting in existence, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, these texts fail to address issues facing the contemporary writer seeking a variety of modes of writing for performance in a number of different practical contexts, such as collaboration. It is crucial that theatre-making students and early-career writers are aware of the variety of existing collaborative processes in order to create more professional opportunities for themselves, especially at this juncture in the development of new theatre-making in the UK when funding is becoming increasingly scarce and theatre-makers are often obliged to seek partnerships in order to continue to make work/survive. Although it is not impossible for writers who create singly-authored work to thrive in this environment, it is becoming increasingly more difficult in such a competitive atmosphere for them to do so. In this conclusion, we will elaborate on a number of points gleaned from this thesis in order to understand the practical implications they can have on writers and their collaborators.

Possibilities for the role of the writer

As we have seen throughout this study, the role of the writer and his/her relationship with a collaborative company can change greatly from project to project. A writer can be a practitioner within a company who also plays another role, such as a performer, as in the case of Spenser Hazel for Frantic Assembly's *Generation Trilogy*, or a director, as in the case of David Farr for Filter's *Water*. A writer can also be a practitioner who serves in a role that is distinct from the rest of the company who is charged with the creation of a text, such as Bryony Lavery for Frantic Assembly's *Stockholm*, or the driving force behind the conception and execution of the project, such as Polly Teale for Shared Experience's *Brontë*. The writer in these cases was someone who was able to serve the project in ways that other company members could not, who was able to provide not only a unique skill set regarding the creation

of text but also the outside perspective of the dramaturgical eye. In each case within this thesis, the circumstances that called for the function of a writer were such that a text was needed to provide stability and organization for the production, a framework for the visual and physical features as well as a record of written dialogue, rather than changeable, improvised movement and language.

The role of the writer is variable and is ultimately subject to the demands and process of working of the artistic director(s) of the company commissioning the work, unless the writer in question is also the director of the project and artistic director of the company. That is not to say, however, that the role of the writer is completely dictated by the company's director(s), but rather that the director(s) often conceives of the project and then commissions the writer or writer/director, after which the process is negotiated between the two parties. (The exception here is Teale when she functions as a writer/director on her own projects for Shared Experience.) The artistic director(s)'s process and needs, however, are, correspondingly, often influenced by the commissioned writer's approach to working and ideas about the project, but at the same time, this writer is generally chosen by the company for his/her style and method. The implication of this conclusion for students and early-career practitioners is that it is important for both writers and companies to be able to negotiate not only regarding the process of working, but also the content of the production being made; although every practitioner will undoubtedly have his or her own approach to making work and opinions about the work being made, it is crucial to be willing to negotiate in order to develop a fluid and productive collaborative process.

The key to sharing the authorship of a text and production while creating an efficient collaborative process is inherent in the clarity of the initial agreement between collaborators regarding delegation of roles, the hierarchy of the company and its effect on the decision-making process and an open discussion of the expectations of the collaborators involved, as

well as a potential for a flexible approach to solving any problems that may arise in the development or rehearsal process. ‘It’s incredibly important that you and [...] the writer know exactly where you stand before going into the process’, commented Oliver Dimsdale when asked about Filter’s relationship with writers external to the company.⁶⁰² The relationship between the writer and the commissioning company is a reciprocal one with a bifurcated power structure that influences the content, process and authorship of the resulting text and production—i.e., the written and physical or proxemic score. This hierarchy can be instrumental in either clarifying these relationships between collaborators or obfuscating them, complicating the process of working, channels of communication and layers of authorial influence. The clearer the initial agreement between the writer and company (and in fact, any practitioner commissioned to work with the company) is, the more productive the process of working will be for all involved. Hierarchies within companies and within writer-company collaborations also tend to dictate processes of working and modes of communication and decision-making, so the implication for students and early-career practitioners is that clarity is crucial regarding the ways in which collaborators understand their respective positions so that working processes can evolve and the collaborators can obtain their artistic objectives.

Additionally, it is important for practitioners to understand that a harmonious working process is likely to be more productive and efficient for the collaborative process than an acrimonious one; the case studies analyzed in this thesis have demonstrated that while a company may produce an excellent production as a result of an acrimonious process, the result may be that the trust between collaborators became eroded along the way, and thus, these practitioners were less likely to work together again, as was the case with *pool (no water)* and *Faster*, leaving them searching for new collaborators for the next project who will

⁶⁰² Oliver Dimsdale. Personal interview. 23 July 2008.

ultimately have to learn their process and artistic values all over again. A process with a limited amount of conflict between collaborators is potentially the more positive of the two, as those involved are more likely to work together again, and thus be able to establish an artistic shorthand that increases the facility for clearer communication, as well as a consistent level of trust, as with *Stockholm*, *Water*, *War and Peace* and *Brontë*. Clarity of communication and a high level of trust and respect are crucial for a commissioned writer to be both flexible and dynamic enough to be able meet the demands of the commissioning company while also maintaining a certain amount of creative agency. An acrimonious process has the potential to be lengthier than a harmonious one, increasing the need for additional funding and possibly delaying the development of the production. Essentially, the conclusion that faces us is that ensemble practice is, in a way, ideal for collaborative work—that the same directors, performers, designers and writers will work together again and again; this, however, is a difficult goal in the UK, as ensembles are costly to maintain, and as a result, most practitioners—and writers especially—must resort to working as freelance artists.⁶⁰³

The legacy of historical discourse and practice(s)

Throughout this study we have investigated the ways in which historical collaborative processes that have involved writers and/or text throughout the twentieth century have influenced contemporary writer-company collaborative practice. One of the most significant conclusions we can draw from our findings in Chapter One is that the majority of these historical companies spanned a spectrum of engagement with writers and text, questioning the text and the writer's role for political reasons, while most contemporary companies working today are not as explicitly political in their work and are more automatically

⁶⁰³ 'The group members are more likely to be in flow while working toward such a goal if they've worked together before, if they share much of the same knowledge and assumptions, and when they have a compelling vision and a shared mission.' Sawyer, p.44.

accepting of the writer and the text. While the work we explored in Chapter One crossed a wide gamut of working methods, the contemporary work we have investigated in Chapters Two, Three and Four represented a narrower field of practice: writer-company collaborative practice that involves a balance of written and devised material, developed in discussion, workshops and rehearsals. The work of many of these historical companies was infused with and greatly informed by a particular political conviction, and they often turned to text and collaboration with writers in order to crystallize a particular political message, whereas the work most contemporary companies is a product of a less overtly political movement in performance-making and the act of commissioning a writer is no longer necessarily done to achieve a political aim. For some companies—The Living Theatre and Theatre Workshop in particular—working without a designated writer was a political act in and of itself, indicating a commitment to collaborative, collective creation and resisting the tradition of text-based theatre-making.⁶⁰⁴ Companies like The Open Theatre and Joint Stock worked with writers not only for practical and artistic reasons but also for ideological ones; especially in the case of productions such as *Viet Rock* and *Fanshen*, their processes of working were consciously designed with particular objectives not only of collaborative but also democratic practice (or at least an attempt at democratic practice) in mind.⁶⁰⁵ Furthermore, not only were many of these processes created to embody certain, left-wing political ideologies, the subject matter of the productions (the Vietnam War and the rise of Communism in China, respectively) was also overtly political. Although many critics have commented that much of Shared

⁶⁰⁴ Writing for *The Observer* in 2010, writer/performer Stephanie Street argued that, ‘my generation of writers and theatre-makers are often only encouraged to make work about where we come from and what we know. [...] If the reach of political theatre is to grow to fit the boots of the current moment, we need to be emboldened and enabled to make bigger, more complex plays’. Stephanie Street and Max Stafford-Clark, ‘Is mainstream theatre politically engaged enough?’, *The Observer* (2010) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/sep/05/debate-athol-fugard>> [accessed 2 October 2011].

⁶⁰⁵ To provide another example of this, we can look to Théâtre du Soleil’s *1789* (1970), a production composed collaboratively under the direction of Ariane Mnouchkine. ‘Collaborating through collective scripting allowed the actors to feel as though they, too, were participating in the process of revisiting history, of analysing it according to their own political understanding [...] The actors’ creative work thus became the expression of their political identity’. Judith Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine* (Abington: Routledge, 2007), p.33.

Experience's work is made through a broadly feminist lens, this kind of ideology is inherent in the way in which the source texts are adapted and the productions are staged, rather than in a particularly topical, political subject matter.⁶⁰⁶ In the case of Frantic Assembly, the work is not overtly political like, for example, The Living Theatre or Piscator's productions, but seems to be more concerned with the more subtle, everyday politics of identity, gender and sexuality, rather than the politics of economics and war, for example.⁶⁰⁷ Similarly, Filter is no more politically motivated in either the way they work or in the subject matter of their productions; although *Water* dealt with the increasing urgency of climate change, Farr was the driving force behind the political strand of the text, as opposed to Phillips, Dimsdale or Roberts.⁶⁰⁸ Although most companies and writers today do not privilege an explicit and shared political agenda while collaborating that influences their process; companies and writers might be more productive if they can be articulate about the role of the text and if there are perhaps underlying political dimensions within their practice as a whole. If there is no political agenda inherent in the company's working methods, it is important for both the writer and the company to understand what their agenda is, as well as the commonality between their ethos and aspirations that makes the work function.

We have also learned that the contemporary conceptualizations about the role of the writer and the text in collaboration investigated throughout this thesis were, in some cases, a product of direct blueprint copying, such as in the case of Nancy Meckler who learned different approaches to devising physical language and combining it with text from practitioners such as Chaikin, Richard Schechner and Jerzy Grotowski when working and

⁶⁰⁶ 'The Shared Experience productions take a closer look at characters that defy patriarchal convention and subvert the restraints of social acceptability by offering a more explicit representation of female characters' social, emotional, and sexual needs.' Kristen Crouch, "'Expressions of Lust and Rage': Shared Experience's Adaptation of *Jane Eyre*", in *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classical Works: Critical Essays*, ed. by Sharon Friedman (Jefferson and London: McFarland and Co., Inc., Publishers, 2009), p.190.

⁶⁰⁷ While working with the company on *pool (no water)*, Ravenhill commented, 'I wanted to write political and social theatre; Frantic Assembly's work seemed to be more about the personal problems of twentysomethings.' Ravenhill, Mark, 'In at the deep end', *The Guardian* (2006)

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/sep/20/theatre1>> [accessed 20 April 2010].

⁶⁰⁸ Oliver Dimsdale. Personal interview. 23 July 2008.

studying theatre in New York in the 1960s. In other cases, these conceptualizations and practices influenced contemporary practitioners in a more indirect way, through the idea diffusion of productions seen, discussions that developed over time or through the impact of an oblique (or even unintended) transfer of knowledge; for example, Lavery, who had collaborated with companies as Monstrous Regiment, brought the experience she gained in collaborative writing over her long career to Frantic Assembly when she was commissioned to write *Stockholm*. It is difficult to trace the exact genealogy of writer-company collaborative practice, as there are many processes and ways of thinking about working with text in collaboration that have gone undocumented or may not have even been consciously acknowledged by those involved in developing them. In his book *Group Genius: the Creative Power of Collaboration*, Keith Sawyer explains, ‘Collaboration drives creativity because innovation always emerges from a series of sparks—never a single flash of light’.⁶⁰⁹ We may use Sawyer’s metaphor of the ‘series of sparks’ to understand the ways in which historical practices have influenced and been absorbed by contemporary ones; although some practitioners (writers, directors, performers) documented their work for posterity and were documented by those on the outside, others produced work that was never formally critiqued, interrogated or understood, due to a number of circumstances such as the relative profile of the work made, the time period and/or the venues in which the work was developed and produced.

Ultimately, while there are strands of collaborative practice from Chapter One that have influenced contemporary writer-company collaborative theatre-making that did not involve a designated writer and even expressed an uncertainty or even scepticism regarding work with text and writers, what has resulted from this tradition of twentieth-century collaborative practice is a legacy of contemporary practice in the UK that embraces writers

⁶⁰⁹ Keith Sawyer, *Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration* (New York: Basic Books, a Member of Perseus Books Group, 2007), p.7.

and text and encourages the development of collaborative work with writers and writer/directors. Although there are many collaborating companies working today who do not work with designated writers or concentrate specifically on the development of text such as Punchdrunk, Stan's Cafe, Improbable, 1927, the Shunt Collective and the People Show (to name but a few) who can be seen as the inheritors of the legacy of those historical companies who did not prioritize the use of text, it can be argued as the most influential work that has had the widest implications on British writer-company collaboration is the work of those companies that worked with writers to create a text, most specifically the work of Joint Stock. Joint Stock is not only a company that has documented their work through the published texts of the plays by writers such as Caryl Churchill, David Hare and Timberlake Wertenbaker, interviews with the practitioners who ran and worked with the company and books such as Stafford-Clark's *Letters to George* and *Taking Stock*, but has also survived in a the more recent incarnation of the Out of Joint company, also run by Stafford-Clark. The director comments that his collaborator William Gaskill came from an older tradition in which 'you rehearsed the script as it was written or you didn't do it at all'.⁶¹⁰ He felt that together they created a new tradition of creating a text collaboratively through workshops and readings in which the writer is the 'starting-point' but also a 'senior collaborator', which he feels is now 'current mainstream thinking' in British theatre.⁶¹¹ As Stafford-Clark was not only the Artistic Director of Joint Stock but also of the Royal Court Theatre from 1979-1993, one of the most significant new writing theatres in the UK, his impact on new writing in the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first is considerable. In terms of the connection between Joint Stock and Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter, not only has Lavery worked with Caryl Churchill (a Joint Stock writer), but Ravenhill worked with Stafford-Clark on *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999) and

⁶¹⁰ Duncan Wu, ed., *Making Plays: Interviews with Contemporary British Dramatists* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), pp.57-58.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.57-58.

Retallack assisted Stafford-Clark on several productions for Out of Joint; although Shared Experience does not have as many direct connections to Joint Stock, it is important to consider the fact that their model of script development is similar to that of Joint Stock in terms of the role of research and the ways in which the writer develops the text both independently and through a workshopping process with the company. The implication of this conclusion for students and early-career practitioners is that modes of writer-company collaboration can be gleaned from the investigation of both historical and contemporary practices, which can then be developed and adjusted to suit the needs of the writer and company in question.

Influence of market forces on identity, process and hierarchy

Although this thesis has not been focused primarily on the issue of funding and its impact on writer-company collaborative practice, it is an important subject to discuss as we reach the end of this study, as the current funding situation in the UK for new theatre-making (both private and state subsidy) has become an increasingly significant factor in the way in which companies work and will work in the future. From investigating the ways in which Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter's processes of working with writers have shifted over the years, this thesis has demonstrated that the identities of both the writer and the company with which they are working are influenced by market forces such funding (both public and private) and the necessity for branding and positioning within the market of new theatre-making in the UK. The decision of these three contemporary collaborative companies to commission writers is related to their desire to focus on the production of text, but also to various socio-economic reasons; the artistic merit inherent in working collaboratively with writers is not the sole factor in this phenomenon of the popularization of the writer-company collaborative process. To some extent, Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter have

all chosen to focus on what lends their company a unique identity within the market of collaborative theatre and the highly-competitive realm of public subsidy in the UK; the choice to work with writers external to the permanent artistic directorship has been, in each case, related to this concept of a distinct creative identity and even distinct (or seemingly distinct) process—like a kind of brand. Shared Experience is known as a company that adapts canonical novels using a physical theatre approach, designed to be relatively accessible to audiences of a wide variety of ages; the way in which Edmundson views these source texts is closely associated with the company's vision for themselves, and, in fact, the name Helen Edmundson has been associated for so long with the company that she herself has become part of their identity as a company, although she herself has her own identity as a freelance writer that is distinct from the company. Frantic Assembly's public image is that of a company that creates new work that blends text with movement, and so, inherent in that image is the collaboration with a writer; part of the appeal of watching a Frantic Assembly production is either discovering a relatively unknown writer or being able to watch the end-result of a well-known writer's collaboration with Frantic Assembly (as was the case with *pool (no water)*); although Ravenhill had a distinct identity as a writer known for his work during the 'in-yer-face' theatre of the 1990s, as she has collaborated with a number of companies since the 1970s, Lavery's identity is that of a writer who often makes work with devising and collaborating companies. Being the youngest of the three, Filter is still, to some extent, building a public profile, but has garnered the reputation of a company that experiments with incorporating sound into live performance, whether working with original work, adaptations or new productions of classics such as *Three Sisters* and *Twelfth Night*; although working with both original and classical texts is part of the company ethos, their commitment to working with writers is not as strong as Shared Experience's or Frantic

Assembly's, and so it is not an integral part of their identity, but may perhaps become so in the future if Filter continues to collaborate with writers.

The contemporary British theatre industry has become an increasingly competitive market, not only for audiences but also for private and state funding; the concept of a public identity—the company's or writer's image, methods of working, chosen collaborators and productions—has become particularly crucial for survival either as an individual practitioner or a company. Although there was a significant increase in funding for both new writing and new company-driven collaborative and devised theatre-making under New Labour from 2003-2008, since the economic downturn in 2008 and the election of Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative government in 2010, as *The Economist* noted in 2012, the 'long funding heyday [...] is now drawing to a close' and 'artistic ventures must now work a lot harder to justify their claim on state funds' as the arts organisations that had already suffered from local government funding cuts faced further cuts from the central government in April of 2012.⁶¹² The article continues: 'Cash support was chopped by 6.9% during the current financial year and is set to fall by a total of 15% in real terms between 2011 and 2015. [...] Some 206 of the 849 arts organisations that were funded before have been cut off'.⁶¹³ Especially since the Financial Crisis, theatre practitioners in the UK have been feeling the pressure to continue to create new, innovative work, while also promoting and maintaining their public profile. Although each of these companies has chosen to make work in a particular kind of way based on personal preferences, training and past experiences, they are, like all companies, seeking to gain or maintain Arts Council funding and are thus under pressure to reinforce the notion that they not only are contributing work that is unique and innovative within their field, but are doing so by using approaches to theatre-making that are unique and innovative. The 2011-2012 Arts Council website states that Arts Council

⁶¹²'The show must go on', *The Economist*, 18 February 2012.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

England, ‘argues for excellence, founded on diversity and innovation’.⁶¹⁴ Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart draw the conclusion that, ‘The stability of a company [...], which is determined to a large extent by its funding situation, inevitably impacts on its structure’.⁶¹⁵

This thesis proves that it is not only the structure of a company that is impacted by its funding prospects; as the company hierarchy inevitably informs the creative process and the product (both text and production), these two elements are also heavily influenced by funding.

Although an Arts Council report written in 2009 explains that additional funding infused into the industry between 2003 and 2008 ‘has been acknowledged by many individual artists, companies and programmers as having had a real impact on their abilities to take risks and innovate’, and that it has encouraged many organisations, ‘to develop an active policy of supporting new writing and so improved the situation for the creation and presentation of new work’, one could argue that the flipside of this exchange of funding for innovative work is that these companies have had to focus considerably on the novelty of their work and working processes to secure Arts Council funding and continue to be able to exist.⁶¹⁶

In terms of the underlying socio-economic reasons for writer-company collaborations, the pressure companies and practitioners feel within the private sector to gain publicity and reviews and, thus, audiences, and also within the sphere of public subsidy to continue to innovate while maintaining a distinct creative identity (as many companies rely on both state subsidy and private funding), which directly impacts the work being made and can adapt and change for each project, and also a ‘brand’, or publically-projected image, cannot be underestimated. Celia Lury explains the impact of market forces on a company’s brand and the increasing importance of the concept of a brand as a public identity:

⁶¹⁴ ‘A strategic framework for the arts’, *Arts Council England* (2010) <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/a-strategic-framework-for-the-arts/>> [accessed 24 October 2011].

⁶¹⁵ Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, eds., *Devising in Process* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.15.

⁶¹⁶ ‘New Writing in Theatre 2003-2008: an assessment of new writing within smaller scale in England’, commissioned by Arts Council England from Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand (2009) <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/new-writing-theatre/> [accessed 2 September 2011].

as marketing has increased its influence as a management discipline, the brand has become increasingly important to the economy. [...] And the brand has been a key focus for marketing strategies. As a consequence, the past thirty years or so has seen the emergence of the brand as a medium for the organisation of products and production activities over time and space.⁶¹⁷

Lury is describing branding within the context of corporations, but we may apply this statement to these theatre companies as well in that there is a connection between the public brand, image or identity of a practitioner or company and the way in which the work is made and the collaborations are managed. For example as we saw in Chapter Three, Frantic Assembly and Ravenhill decided to collaborate in 2006 on *pool (no water)* partly because they felt it would be an exciting and interesting project, but also, for Ravenhill, that he could expand his reputation as a writer and gain increased professional exposure by working with a known physical theatre company, and for Graham and Hoggett, that they could enhance the profile of their company by working with a well-known British writer. In terms of the way in which market forces have impacted the management structure of these companies and their collaborators, although we have noted in previous chapters the prevalence of the core-and-pool structure that is embodied in all three companies' hierarchy, it is also important to note the impact of economic pressure for theatre companies and individual practitioners to function with as few permanent company members and as many freelance, associate artists as possible, as it is unusual in the UK that a company can afford to be able to employ more than a skeleton staff of an artistic director(s) and an administration team (or administrator singular). Sawyer notes:

As society changes more rapidly, and the business environment becomes more competitive and unpredictable, companies will increasingly have to rely on an improvised innovation. In today's innovation economy, work is often done in small temporary teams, where the stakes are high, the meaning of the situation is uncertain, and the competitive and technological environment is rapidly changing. The organization of the future will run on group genius.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁷ Celia Lury, *Brands: The logos of the global economy* (Abington: Routledge, 2004), p.45.

⁶¹⁸ Sawyer, p.37.

Writer-company collaborative processes are not only a product of individual artistic choices, group negotiation and historical legacies, but also a symptom of the changing economy and job market; not only is the collaboration of freelance artists (or of freelance artists with companies) an artistic practice, but also a mechanism of coping with an irregular economic climate. It is important that students and early-career practitioners are aware that most companies have an identity that they wish preserve, and will work with writers on projects that they perceive as reinforcing their particular identity or brand. Alternatively, when seeking a collaboration with a writer, a company that has been working for a number of years may be looking re-brand their identity and thus will be looking to the writer to have a particular identity which will then inform their company profile; this, in turn, will influence not only the collaborative process but also the product the two entities create together.

Authorship and the writer

Regarding authorship at the beginning of the new millennium in the UK, one of the most significant conclusions we may draw from this study is that the central concept for a project often originates with the commissioning company because the company is generally a more powerful entity in terms of financial backing, public presence and audience base than the single writer. In terms of the way in which authorship is conceived, despite the fact that it changes slightly for each production, we may understand the ‘author’ of the work of each company and writer in this investigation to be threefold: the practitioner(s) responsible for the origination of the concept for the project, the practitioner(s) responsible for composing the bulk of the material (both textual and physical) and the practitioner(s) who has the most influence regarding the final editing of the material.⁶¹⁹ The concept of authorship is reflective of the way in which each company’s hierarchy and the way in which the role of the

⁶¹⁹ This is understood to be distinct from ‘ownership,’ which, in this case, will be given to indicate legal ownership and the domain of the copyright.

designated writer or writer/director is treated influences the compositional process. For Shared Experience, the authorship of the writer or writer/director and the authorship of artistic director(s) and movement director are reciprocal; in the case of *War and Peace*, although Edmundson was the author of the text which influenced the staging and movement, Meckler, Teale and Ranken were the authors of the highly influential staging, movement and overall concepts that shaped the text. Teale was the primary author of *Brontë*, but Leah Houseman (as the movement director in the 2005 production) and Ranken (as the movement director in the 2010 production) contributed to this authorship greatly by composing the movement that realized Teale's concepts, characterizations and dialogue. Frantic Assembly's concept of authorship is similar to Shared Experience's in that the textual and physical compositional processes are reciprocal; Graham and Hoggett have created what has become the company's approach to making work, and thus greatly influence the work of the writers they commission; they also establish the central theme for every production, which the writers then develop into a narrative, around which the directors devise movement with the performers. The writers produce the texts, sharing the authorship with the directors, and the performers contribute to the authorship of the choreography in the devising sessions during rehearsals. In the case of *Faster and Water*, Dimsdale, Roberts, and Phillips contributed to the authorship because they established the central theme for each production before the devising process began, and approved all the final decisions made to the production and the text, although the material produced was composed primarily by Brown and Farr (who also share in the authorship), and secondarily by other collaborators such as Retallack, McGrath, Bausor and performers involved in the devising.

It is important for students and early-career practitioners to be aware that a company will likely have their own agendas when commissioning a project (perhaps unanticipated by the writer, unrelated to the aesthetic or political agendas of other contemporary and historical

companies), and it is far less likely that they will be at the disposal of the writer to develop the writers' ideas. Ultimately, a good rule of thumb is that the less established a practitioner (such as a writer) is, the less power that individual will have; an exception to this rule is when the company commissioning the work is either at the same level of recognition (or the lack thereof/anonymity) as the writer, or less established than the writer. This scenario could potentially give the writer more authority over the content of the work as well as the process used to develop it, especially if the writer is in a mentor position with relation to the company.

Concluding notes

The different approaches to producing a text within writer-company collaborations can be distilled to roughly four modes of working:

- In the first case, we have the process that is highly influenced by the **writer-director relationship**, in which the initial concept for the production is agreed upon between the two and the text and its corresponding production are mutually dependent but created within relatively separate spheres, such as that of *War and Peace*.⁶²⁰
- In the second case, we have the process that is driven by an auteur-like **vision of a writer/director** who is responsible for the initial concept as well as the bulk of the material composed (in terms of both proxemics and text) who collaborates with other practitioners who have a less significant contribution to the process, as with *Brontë*.

The second example of a process in which a writer/director is involved but not as fully in control of the authorship as with *Brontë* is that exemplified by *Water* where

⁶²⁰ 'I wouldn't say that we've created something that came out of a devising process. It tends to be that the writer goes away and writes and then brings the material [...]. We've never done the sort of Joint Stock kind of model where you literally begin with a group of actors [...]. It depends on what sort of writer you are. I mean, Helen [Edmundson] is very brilliant at going away and conceiving the whole thing herself. I mean, people have different brains.' Polly Teale. Personal interview. 15 March 2011.

the external writer/director is commissioned by the company but is not necessarily responsible either for the initial concept or the final editorial decisions.

- In the next instance, we have a method of working in which an **external writer is commissioned** to create a text for a company whose directors (and sometimes performers and/or designers) may already have a concept in mind, not only for the process of working but also for the subject of the production; the writer works alongside the company to create a text while the director(s) not only acts as a dramaturg but also composes the staging and/or movement through devising with the aid of performers, as we have seen in the case of *Stockholm* (and, to a lesser extent, *pool (no water)*).
- The final example we may extract from this investigation is that exemplified by *Faster* in which a **writer, acting as a scribe, is commissioned** by a company to compose a text alongside the company while the director (perhaps also external, commissioned from the outside) or directors devise scenes with the performers, who may also be at liberty to contribute written texts of their own; this writer has the task of collating the both the devised and written work into a text for production that meets the needs of the company.⁶²¹

It should also be noted that any of these processes can and often do involve a dramaturg working alongside the writer, either formally (in the case of Filter) or informally (in the case of Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly), who may also be taking the role of a director, performer, producer or designer already.

As a result of the written and non-written applications of theatre-making developed to suit the objectives and aesthetics of the genesis, development and dramaturgy of each

⁶²¹ 'I think the writer needs to be in a sort of zig-zag with the company. Come in, be involved with their discussions, feeding ideas in. I'd almost say, go away and let them devise for a while and explore, then come back in and be in the rehearsal room for a few days, then go away again. Maybe come back with some bits of scenes.' Stephen Brown. Personal interview. 19 February 2008.

production, the authorship of the texts and productions of Shared Experience, Frantic Assembly and Filter Theatre is shared to varying degrees amongst the collaborators involved, and the role of the writer is reliant on the demands of the company's artistic director(s), and thus, infinitely variable. Their practices are the legacy of historical approaches to collaboration that either embraced or questioned the role of the writer and the text, having been influenced by them to varying degrees and in different ways, through conscious blueprint copying or the less conscious idea diffusion. It is the aim of this thesis that future generations of writers and companies can gain a comprehensive understanding of both contemporary and historical writer-company collaborative practice, including the advantages and challenges, systems of communication, hierarchies and modes of authorship so that they may work more efficiently in their own practice and, in time, develop their own methods of working.

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