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BOOKBINDI

# What Empty Space?

## Text and Space in the Australian mainstream rehearsal process.

C.M. POTTS

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy

Centre for Performance Studies University of Sydney

MARCH, 1995

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Theatre practitioners are on the whole, natural semioticians. Their job and their everyday breadwinning activity is to create and to communicate meaning and in this, they choose to involve themselves in a very complex semiotic process which is at first glance instinctive: when discussing the new designs for Brian Thompson's set of THE FROGS[1], Geoffrey Rush was shown a very early working model of what was to undergo considerable changes but which found itself nevertheless at a crucial stage of investigative criticism. And whether acknowledged in such theoretical terms or not, spatial semiotics inarguably played a part in his directorial observations: "This set says Oedipus to me. It is a space in which we might expect to see a tragedy unfold. It says Sophocles more than it says Aristophanes. What we still need to find in the set are the properties specific to this particular piece and to the more unique features of its writing." This was an instinctive response which was no sooner articulated than acted upon and so, forgotten in the larger scheme of mounting a production. It was nevertheless concerned with the selection of signs, with their organisation and transmission in relation to one particular text rather than another. As surrogate spectator, the director was "reading" the set; and as interpreter, he was relating the signs communicated to a collection of perceived textual signs. Somewhere between the two, there is a show to be found. And in the vast and indefinite pool of potential signs which is the imagination, these textual signs are translated, recodified as a

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1 - THE FROGS, by Aristophanes was adapted by John Clark and Geoffrey Rush, produced by Company B and performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre in Dec. 1992

multitude of possible stage signs, abstract and still indeterminate since they are as yet only a property of the mind's eye.

On the one hand, Rush's responses were actually the expression of a rigorous textual reading, the playtext acting as a guide however subtle, in the selection and organisation of spatial signs. But spatialisation seems also to be guided by other phenomena, for example by the conscious practice of certain entrenched conventions or semiotic traditions: "I suppose there are a few rules." said Rush. "We all know that an o.p. entrance is stronger than a prompt one - simply because your eyes scan from left to right." And the awareness of spatial semiotics becomes even more evident in commonly used expressions, which for example equate a Prima Donna with "somebody who likes downstage centre." Within our culture and society, this is a key position or place. It communicates something to the audience about its own importance and the importance of what is happening there, of what is being said or not said. In other words, it is a position which cannot help but to be loaded with meaning. The design meeting for THE FROGS continued: "I see Charon entering in the boat from upstage centre making his way downstage. The scene should be played with Dionysus and Charon downstage centre." More than a steadfast decision, this choice comes with the flexibility of any good theatre solution, which is by definition neither temporary nor permanent, but must exist in order to be tested, then accepted or replaced. It is however an initial expression of spatial sense-making in which both playtext and established socio-cultural conventions play an equally important part: in the interpretation of the playtext, the figure of Charon is seen to communicate important meanings in relation to the overall organisation of perceived *textual* signs. In the creation of a coherent system of *spatial* meaning, he is therefore placed where he can best serve this textual interpretation. However it is in an adherence to convention and not to the play-text that this position is seen to be not only an important signifier, but an important sign in the overall organisation of *spatial* signs.

The transfer of THE POPULAR MECHANICALS[2] from the Belvoir Street Theatre to the Glenn Street Theatre serves as another anecdotal counterpoint. This involved a significant change from Belvoir Street's three sided open stage to the more conventional proscenium arch of Glenn Street. The absence of the Belvoir "vomitory", a characteristic so rich in semiotic

2 - THE POPULAR MECHANICALS, by Keith Robinson William Shakespeare and Tony Taylor was directed by Geoffrey Rush, produced by Company B and performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre in November 1987. This particular return season was in July 1992

potential and therefore rightly used as an essential spatial feature of most of the company's productions, demanded obvious readjustments in terms of design and blocking. Within the life of the Belvoir production, Bottom's disappearance through the vomitory and quite appropriately into the bowels of the theatre, endows the off-stage space beneath the audience as a place of terror or as Flute, Starveling and Snout so aptly put it, a place "full of cozenage" "with dark working sorcerers that change the mind", "and soul killing witches that transform the body"[3]. This space becomes at once a realm of the unknown, a type of dank dark underworld *physically separate* (and all the more fiercely contrasted) to the cheery yellow world of the Mechanicals. The latter overtly celebrates its own *lack* of any mystery or subtlety; its primary-coloured *on*-stage world of "what you see is where we are" claims possession of its *off*-stage space by endowing it with equal innocence: an entire routine is devoted to Peter Quince's sausage rolls burning in his kitchen and this is humorously played upon as a space "without", a realm of which he is master - when he remembers - and where nothing untoward is ever likely to happen.

The proscenium arch at the Glenn St. Theatre altered these nuances in meaning. The vomitory exit became an o.p. exit into the wings, counterpointed by Quince's prompt-side kitchen, but somehow given similar status to it in this altered stage/auditorium dynamic. Both worlds become part of the same theatrical convention, both equidistant from the audience and both "without" the picture frame. Bottom's threat is not the "underbelly" of this world, but locates itself just around the corner from the"Gold Phone", a constant symbol of the Yellow world. And so, danger lurks at Quince's doorstep, more immediate, more easily accessed, but ultimately a feature of the same *place*. While this introduction is not the place for analyses, it is important to make the point that obvious changes in meaning occurred which were brought about not by the text so much as by the sheer practical considerations of a new space, of its audience/stage dynamic, of its architectural features.

We are constantly being told that the theatrical experience is transient- that this is in fact one of its most attractive features. And indeed, each of these examples is drawn from an array of productions which come and go at the rate of their anticipated season or success. But in the revered ephemerality of

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3 - Robinson, K ; Shakespeare W; Taylor, T,*The Popular Mechanicals*, Sydney, Currency Press, 1992 p20

the stage, one concern is unflinching; this is a concern to understand the relationship between text and space - a concern which touches very obviously on the essence of the medium and so becomes more pronounced as the need for better theatre is more acute. What seem like anecdotes, spanning just a couple of mainstage productions are actually important illustrations of the attempt to negotiate such a complex relationship, to gauge its shifts and its subtleties and so understand how meanings are created. And this relationship which appears in as numerous and varied forms as we have productions, is as much a practitioner's concern as an academic's. Or to find a common but uncommonly perceived territory, it is the concern of the semiotician.

Theatre semiotics and theatre practice have at least in this country, become thought of as very distinct activities. They have assumed separate identities, developed different languages and cultivated different followings - and this has occurred to the extent that their common interest is often eclipsed: the fact that they share a reason for being is barely visible and so the ground for mutual enlightenment is destined to be remote. Similar goals are being sought, passionately but independently.

The theoretical framework of theatre studies at university levels has discovered its own momentum which, in a perverse way has propelled it away from the object of its study. While theatre semiotics began as a useful way to understand the nature of meaning on stage and therefore the nature of meaning itself, it was never far from having an interest in benefiting the eventual spectator or practitioner. Making revolutionary discoveries and reaping rich intellectual rewards, the semiotic study sky-rocketed leaving theatre to a certain extent, earthbound - happy to be just a speck in a new star system of which it understood very little. Seldom does theory seek to embrace theatre or theatre's own revolutionary developments as an integral part of its own move forward. And so the relationship has become less mutually invigorating than self-reflexive and self-fulfilling - with consequences of two sorts: on the one hand we have a complete world and wealth of knowledge *about* theatre practice but from which theatre practice is excluded. However willing, theatre has little recourse to current strains of philosophical thought since it simply does not speak the right language. And while the potential for electrifying artistic work is often realised, its intellectual rigour is often questionable.

On the other hand there occurs an academic "objectification" of a living activity about which assumptions cannot be made from afar or for too

long. When the nature of theatre itself is characterised by change such a degree of distance can only be dangerous. Not only is it of no use to practice, not only does it lead to bogus claims, but it denies its own progress into more interesting areas of investigation. Along with many Patrice Pavis, for example, whose works are admirable has nevertheless not proceeded with any detailed investigation into performance process which might match and further his theoretical findings. Workshop exercises and at best, performance product, have generated sufficient material for an abundance of semiotic conclusions. Whether these could be enriched or undermined by a firmer anchorage in professional theatre practice is not questioned, at least as far as Pavis is concerned. In short, if one is to take on the semiotics of theatre *bona fides*, the practice of theatre must be intimately known, and its complexities as rigorously understood as the complexities of semiotics itself.

Arguments such as these are made in the belief that there is, at present, an overwhelmingly strong desire to secure an Australian theatrical culture and identity. While our mainstage theatre history is comparatively young, there is already a solid body of artistic work at its core. This has been consistently absorbed into the theatrical subculture and provides the fertile soil for many of our current productions. It is not overtly recognised; there is little documentation, few critical works of inspiration, much less the sorts of theoretical analyses which provide a welcome springboard for European theatre practice. These facts do not help our national expression, nor does the divergence of a potentially enriching field such as semiotics. But our past works are nevertheless omnipresent and find highly significant ways in which to inform the theatrical process. It is their strength of presence which currently gives us a sense, however fragile, of our historicity.

The theatre anecdote, much maligned and misconstrued, is possibly the most important feature of our Australian theatrical language. It is therefore not by chance that I chose to open this study with the re-telling of one or two theatre experiences; they are typical anecdotes of the stage - the sort that either die quickly and unassumingly once a show has closed or remain present only in the nostalgic group-memory of those involved - of those who had to stand in a particular place, or had to move, and 'do you remember the time when...'; and these tales are told from one rehearsal room to the next gathering new information like moss which then becomes part of a working language, forever fluid but steeped in a heritage of valuable experiences. So

while it may be inappropriate to speak of historiography, there is nevertheless an oral history which is consistently giving practitioners a practical framework and methodology.

Three further examples which at first seem like benign industry gossip or sentimentalisations are quickly shown to be of more importance: the first of these involves the technical rehearsal of THE CRUCIBLE.[4] John Howard as Proctor walks about the stage ready to run through the first scene. He is in pristine 16th century costume, diligently period, with a thick leather belt around his waist. A large, twentieth century wallet sits awkwardly strapped in for all to see. The designer who is meticulously trying to put the overall look of the production into place, questions this incoherent addition. "It's my wallet. I don't want to leave it in the dressing-rooms. I'll just keep it here for now." "Give it to the stage-manager to look after." "No I'd prefer to have it here." "Well then give it to me. I'll look after it for you." "No, it's really all right..." "Well, it's not all right really. I'm trying to see you in your costume." "But a person's got to carry his cash somewhere!" There was a brief pause as John Howard stepped down from the stage. "You don't understand do you? This character has just travelled x miles. He's been on the road for almost twenty-four hours. You don't think he'd have something to put his papers in, somewhere to carry his coins? We're talking basic story-telling!" "That's a little naturalistic, John." "I don't think so. What, in this costume, is giving the audience that sort of information? Show me one detail that tells them about that."

The point is not that there may or may not have been tension in the rehearsal. Far more importantly it shows the conscious commitment on both sides to find appropriate signs within the overall system of stage-signs. It throws up a tussle, not between colleagues but between possible readings of the play, and between different styles, or ways of communicating these. Embodied in this is therefore the desire to question the creation of meaning for the practical benefit of the production. It is an analysis of sorts. But it is the anecdote that will be remembered, because it can find a place in our vocabulary.

Warren Mitchell tells a story which in some ways serves as a convenient counterpoint to the last. When rehearsing his celebrated production of DEATH OF A SALESMAN in the USA, he turned to Arthur

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4-THE CRUCIBLE, by Arthur Miller was directed by Richard Wherett, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of The Opera House in October 1991

Miller with a practical actorial question. "How heavy are these suitcases that I'm carrying around? What is inside them?" Miller replied: "Dreams, Warren. They're full of dreams." And so Mitchell was given a clear insight not only into the true dimensions of the play but into a style of performance which best communicated these. A somewhat naturalistic, method-based approach was questioned in relation to this particular text and to how its meanings were best conveyed in this production. It must be added furthermore that this story found its way into the rehearsal room of UNCLE VANYA[5] at the Sydney Theatre Company. It was told in relation to an actorial problem of a similar nature occurring then and there, and which was subsequently solved by the sheer telling of the anecdote.

One last example involves John Howard again in the concluding moments of the Sydney Theatre Company's production of THE CRUCIBLE. This final scene is often cited by practitioners as a great theatrical feat: to find the high-point of Proctor's claims of identity, (probably the lowest point in his personal existence) in the visceral, primal expressions of pain which spatially, are addressed to the furthermost upstage corner of the set, his back towards the audience, crumpled to the floor but which send a throbbing echo throughout the auditorium, and address everyone in fact. This solution involved something of a 'risk', challenging conventional staging, or accepted ways of structuring meaning. If it was lauded by practitioners, this is largely because it explored the relationship between text and space in a fresh, but meaningful way. It showed up the limits that we impose on readings, by breaking though them and expanding the range of possible meanings that a classic text can generate. In doing so, it confirmed the belief that performance, is after all both product and *process*. Like language, it is product in the sense that it is an emission, an output. But it is also a process "in the sense of a continuous process of semantic choice, a movement through a network of meaning potential, with each set of choices constituting the environment for a further set."[6] And this last point is vital in a field where product is often foregrounded at the expense of process, or at least of its recognition as such. It pays homage to the classic, to its constant rejuvenation, to its vast potential

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5 UNCLE VANYA, by Chekhov was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of The Opera House in August 1992.

6 Halliday, M A K ; Hasan, R, *Language, context and text: Aspects of language in a Social-Semiotic perspective*, Vic, Deakin University, 1985 p9

for meaning, and to its ability to engage us in an immediate way: to make emotional, intellectual and spiritual sense.

The relaying of this piece of staging, its transferral via the anecdote from foyer to rehearsal room and to the next, is broader acknowledgement that this processual nature of performance operates on two interactive and interdependent levels: it is not only a process which expands and changes theatrical meanings within play itself, but it informs a wider circle of rehearsal processes and through a sort of instinctive analysis, alters the ways in which choices are made and methodologies sought.

All this is by way of showing that practitioners *do* engage quite naturally in a process of documentation and analysis. They may not speak a theoretical language, but they do theorise: on the one hand, their process is informed by a retrospective appraisal of what worked when and why, or in other words by a form of oral documentation. This is then balanced by the needs of the present: the physical realisation of a script, which as shown through the first examples (FROGS and POPULAR MECHANICALS), brings into question the relationship between text and space and the "analysis" of how very particular meanings are created on stage.

This impetus to document and theorise, however covertly, furthermore responds to a *need* which ensures the growth of the art. It is an imperative which clearly exists, otherwise it would not look to be satisfied in these ways. But because it is never overtly acknowledged or articulated *as* a need, it has not necessarily found its most effective form of fulfillment. However strongly entrenched, the ingenuity of the anecdote for example, cannot always meet the demands of an art form which is becoming increasingly sophisticated. It is by nature subjective, contingent and immeasurable: ultimately it is an elusive foundation on which to build.

Other means are then sought to supply this demand, emerging in different guises, with different overt goals: a theatre production itself often has other inbuilt mechanisms which ensure an on-going sense of artistic identity, almost purely for the benefit of fellow practitioners. While the communication of the playtext to an audience may be its primary objective, it often communicates a different, secondary set of meanings which are sometimes only tenuously related to the playtext and which are furthermore destined to a specific audience of practitioners, whether they be on stage or seated in the auditorium. In THE FROGS for example, Paul Blackwell as Pluto imitates the voice of a well-known artistic personality. Regardless of

whether or not it was recognised, it was an appropriate character choice giving a colourful reality to the performance, and so creating important meanings for an audience at large. For practitioners however, it had a double significance: the cross-reference communicated certain things about the character on stage - "Pluto is indeed like so and so". But it also served to keep a name afloat, a contribution remembered.

In HERE'S JOHNNY [7], a small Downstairs Belvoir production, Steven Abott as Johnny Goodman moves towards what most practitioners would probably consider (given the space and set) the weakest position on stage. He turns to the audience and with a glint which is as much Johnny's as Steven's says to the audience: "Why doesn't anyone ever use this corner? I feel really good standing here. This is a really strong position." The general audience laughed at the pretensions of the character, while practitioners reeled as they recognised a send-up of spatial convention and rehearsal room jargon; in this, a recognition of practice and methodology: an affirmation of sorts.

These examples are small and perhaps trivial when seen in isolation, but a great many such details pepper contemporary productions. They are often more subtly inculcated, far greater in number than is immediately discernible and therefore acquire a certain broader relevance. When taken to an extreme, they are what are known as "in-jokes", indulgent and alienating when they occur at the expense of an audience's enjoyment of the play, when this secondary agenda overtakes the production's primary responsibility. But when both levels of meaning are simultaneously engaged, the production can be all the richer.

William Yang's show SADNESS[8], once again in the Downstairs Belvoir Theatre, is an important point in case. At a general audience level, it is a simple slide-show, and in his own words "just a diary which involves my friends, places I go to and events." But in this, he charts an emotional journey and chronicles the deaths of family members and close friends. It is in itself, and for a broad spectrum of people a work of great sensitivity and of universal relevance. But it engages another level of significance, not exclusive to, but particularly poignant to Australian artists as a whole: it groups a number of our most well-known cultural contributors, and in their

7- HERE'S JOHNNY, written and performed by Steven Abbott, was performed at Belvoir Street Downstairs in December 1992.

8- SADNESS, written and performed by William Yang, played at Belvoir Street Downstairs in January 1993

intimate portrayal captures the essence of an active artistic force. The recounting of their death affirms a heritage and celebrates a generation of people, a body of work: from Patrick White to Rex Cramphorn to Brett Whitely, key figures are united and personalized through the simplest of story-telling (anecdotes after all), but with the added difference that there is photographic material and the public forum of a show to disseminate the information to a broader sphere of people. So while those practitioners that keenly feel a personal and professional loss, can commemorate a memory and revitalise their own artistic endeavours, others can sense the importance of a collective human expression.

This last example therefore provides the practitioner with a more tangible form of document than any of those previously mentioned. But this still seems insufficient, hence the urge to look to Europe and the United States where theatrical publications and a whole support network of resource material can inform the practitioner's work and can moreover provide a sense of belonging to a sort of "global artistic pursuit". But this will always be an inorganic solution to specific cultural needs, and any sense of participation will prove deceptive since it cannot be substantiated by an authentic contribution. This is not to say that more mature theatrical cultures are unable provide useful examples. Magazines and journals such as *The Drama Review*, or the *Performing Arts Journal*, casebook histories like those recorded in *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale* should all have Australian equivalents. No doubt the purpose of *New Theatre Australia*, along with other publications such as *Spectator Burns* was to provide such an equivalent, and the fact that plans exist for an Australian Performing Arts Museum may be evidence of change but this seems to be occuring at a slow rate and to a relatively limited extent.

Similarly practitioners, particularly directors of note (Brook, Vitez, Strehler, Schechner to name just a few) are published writers. In relaying and entering into debate about their experiences and working methods, they encourage the healthy scrutiny of practitioners and enable a cross-fertilisation of ideas. These can also be absorbed by an interested public: rather than being alienated by what is often perceived as a "closed shop" or at best an enigmatic activity of curious worth, they can be given a demystified insight into motives and objectives. For our part however, interviews and programme notes are often the most thoughtful writings we inherit from our directors, and these by and large fall short of any philosophical investigation or questioning appraisal of working methods. Only two mainstage directors (and

I mean "mainstage" only in the sense that they do come within the eye of the mainstream public) have put more rigorous forms of documentation and analysis into place. They are the late Rex Cramphorn and Lindy Davies. For both (although distinctively), each new production is part of a continuing investigation which constitutes a rich dialectic: past findings are synthesized with new offerings. Reassessed and enriched, these form the basis for a further set of findings to which new questions are put, and so the exploration goes on. The use of video and written documentation facilitates this process and demands in its factual record of events, a certain rigour of assessment. It also promises a degree of perpetuity. Each new production therefore stands alone as a creation in its own right, but is also part of a continuum - the concern of which is to develop an accountable philosophy of performance and an entire pedagogical framework. Regardless of one's opinion of their work, they are two directors to whom *a method can be clearly attributed.* It may well be that anecdotes are less prevalent in their rehearsals because of this.

What is inherently suggested by all of these examples is that the theatrical creation embodies something of a paradox: both the notions of ephemerality and perpetuity connectively inhabit the one activity. Each production does stand as an entity in itself, transient in character, just as every performance within it cannot be recaptured. It opens and closes on a particular date, and unless its circumstances are exactly recreated at a later time (when touring for example and even then, this often involves different casts, crews, theatre buildings), that is the end of the production as such. Its life is limited and to a large extent practitioners have little desire to prolong it: a subsequent project becomes the object of their focus and their energies are oriented towards a next opening night and season. But each production is the fruit of something*much less ephemeral.* It is supported by a body of work which is solid and consistent and which against all odds, finds a more or less tangible expression. This is fluid and changeable, but it survives the actual season of a play. It is embodied wholly within the production, but somehow has an autonomy outside of it. These are quite clearly the distinguishing features of *process* and *product* in the theatrical context. And if performance product does paradoxically acquire a certain perpetuity, this is largely because process keeps it alive by linking it to other productions within the continuum.

Any work which seriously purports to study theatre should therefore turn its attentions towards *process* since it is after all here that the theatrical creation has its real source. This firstly puts a more accurate and useful perspective on the whole activity. Focus is directed to that area in which ground-breaking work is actually done, and of which public performance is then appropriately seen to be the show-case. It also *contextualises* the performance product which can only enhance how it itself is understood. Finally, the illumination of a "continuum" permits an overview from which broader observations can be made, not just about specific theatrical events, but about the nature of the art itself. And if this particular thesis has a first goal it is consequently *to foreground theatrical process as the vital generative force of theatre, and therefore as the most revelatory object of theatrical study.*

This in turn has important ramifications for all those issues discussed up to date. As it has been shown, a vital part of the theatrical process calls upon instinctive forms of documentation and analysis which occur more or less effectively. While any attempt to affirm the quality of Australian work and to develop its significance within our culture should be applauded, it must also be recognised that *quantitively* practitioners suffer from a paucity of documentation and analysis, and that *qualitatively* the ways in which they try to counter this remain somewhat primitive in their efficiency. The second goal of this thesis is therefore *to credit what work practitioners of the Australian mainstage do by giving this work a tangible expression, but also by broadening its base, and finding a rigour of approach.*

On the one hand this calls for a practical appraisal of the theatrical process, through the knowledge of a number of recent productions and with an intimate experience of different rehearsal processes. By further locating Australian stage practice within the theoretical framework of semiotics, and applying to it a rigorous methodology, it may be possible to find more satisfactory alternatives to achieve what is already being sought less effectively, in the various guises discussed. This may also show that the practitioner's natural propensity to theorise is not so far removed from that of the academic semiotician; that they do share a common objective, which they can more easily achieve together and which is to their mutual benefit. A third goal therefore consists in *uniting theatre practice and academic theory in order to rediscover their synthetic potential.*

Finally it is the aim of this thesis to achieve results which have both academic and practical ramifications on a broader scale. These have to do with the relationship between text and space in the creation of stage-meaning. In text based theatre the playtext is obviously a key structuring force. But the process of realising this text on stage implies a transferral from one sign-system to another. And in this transferral, space and the ways in which it is characterised and used, become key components in the structuring of concrete meaning. The relationship between these two signifying structures is of interest here and to shed light on it, it is necessary to explore the ways in which it evolves and defines itself throughout the process of transferral. What role does the text play, what status does it actually occupy in this recodification? Does this alter at different stages of the process? What interactive forces *other* than the playtext affect the creation of meaning, and in what ways? What bearing does all of this have on those meanings eventually communicated on stage? Finally what does this reveal more broadly about the nature of text-based theatre? about the nature of meaning? This leads to a final goal which is to activate a more far-reaching study into vital but relatively uncharted intellectual territory: *to initiate a comprehensive exploration of the theatrical process in order to unearth new features of theatrical semiosis.*

The following is an outline of how I hope to achieve these goals. A first section of the thesis will be devoted to an investigation of those concepts which are at the very basis of what will be discussed. The different perceptions of 'text' and 'space' will be dealt with in respective chapters, and in each I hope to unite the two perspectives of theory and practice, looking both at language and practice. In a third chapter, these concepts will be located in a practical context and given an application: it will chart the relationship between text and space as it evolves in the chronological course of an actual mainstage rehearsal process. Data will be drawn from a cross-section of recent text-based projects, but will rely mostly on specific illustrations from the recent Sydney Theatre Company production of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON[9]. In tracing its diachronic evolution we will find the common major articulations of the rehearsal process which can then be segmented into key units of time. Each stage will then be examined in terms of what

[9] - THE GIFT OF THE GORGON, by Peter Shaffer was directed by Wayne Harrison, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Wharf Theatre in April 1994

elements are predominantly influencing the making of meaning at that particular point in time, and in particular at the ways in which space is affecting meanings.

It will be of little surprise that this study promises to be lengthy, complex and highly problematical given such an intricate art form. And indeed, it would be naive to suggest that it is ever possible to know the full range of influences involved in the act of creation - what it is that triggers an idea and a feat of the imagination, what contingencies of circumstance are buoying a production along. And after all there is a life outside of the rehearsal room. The impossibility of an exhaustive study of something so [2] closely connected to the wider world and to the immeasurable influences of life, is perhaps worth accepting - and even celebrating as the source of those serendipitous elements which ensure that theatre does retain a touch of the unknowable, and a degree of magic.

# Chapter 1

# Perceptions of "TEXT"

*"You can define a net in one of two ways, depending on your point of view. Normally, you would say that it is a meshed instrument designed to catch fish. But you could, with no great injury to logic, reverse the image and define the net as a jocular lexicographer once did: he called it a collection of holes tied together with a string."*[1]

It is no great insight to suggest that the notion of 'text' has obsessed humankind since time immemorial - since the tower of Babel and the prehistoric utterances which first made of language both an achievement and a frustration. People have made texts since they have made noises , or since it was first their desire to communicate meaning. And since this is in itself an activity of contradiction, so important and yet so imperfect, the text has also become both a priority and an object of scrutiny.

The text has been defined and redefined to the extent that it is no longer possible , (or at least it is very difficult) to talk about it without making one's own definition at the outset; this is in turn problematic without canvassing all those areas where one may be misconstrued - oral text or written text? within a Western or Eastern tradition? in the context of structuralism, post-structuralism or any of their respective or overlapping derivations? literary text or dramatic text? I would like for the moment to push all these (necessary but potentially obfuscating) nuances to the side and begin by a notion that can by and large be agreed upon, and that is that the

[1] -Barnes, J, *Flaubert's Parrot* , quoted in Diprose, R; Ferrel,R(Eds), *Cartographies*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1991, pix

text is a communicator of meaning(s). This facilitates the exploration of the differing attitudes and perceptions from which definitions are extrapolated and so for the purposes of this thesis, puts the horse before the cart. It becomes the point not from which to postulate a truth, but from which to embrace different truths and achieve an overview: the aim is therefore not to define the text, but to reach an understanding of its riches, by holding the gaze of its complexity.

As a communicator of meaning, the text, in its various shapes and forms is important to everyone. But for academics in most areas of the Arts and for theatre practitioners involved in what we term "text-based" theatre[2], it is something of a tool of trade. For theoreticians who take on the added difficulty of studying meaning itself, there has always been the catch twenty-two of analysing texts by means of texts. It is heavily relied upon - and so it is of little wonder that its very *reliability* falls under scrutiny. Attention focuses upon what and how it communicates and this becomes a point of fascination; more than this there is a desire to ascertain its rate of success or failure. On the one hand its successes have been emphasized: we can draw a line from A to B , we can give and receive, we can bow and we can clap; primitive notions, but ones which still make of communication a simple transaction and direct correspondence: "the meaning I intend is the meaning I give and the meaning you receive" seems laughably naive but there is generally, and more specifically in theatre practice, a desire to perceive 'strings', to see lines and draw arrows; and implicit in this, is the text as a thing in which meaning is "caught", with limited boundaries and a scope to define. And this "desire to map, to contain and to represent" is after all, "to make familiar"[3] , to understand - and so find success.

This perception is of course undermined as soon as the communicator is disappointed by an attempt to convey meaning "successfully", or baffled by differences of meaning that can be attributed to the same text. If there are strings, there are also "holes" - and this elusive dimension carries both less and more than was bargained for: less in the sense that this is where communication becomes less reliable, where there is uncertainty of meaning and therefore scope for failure. And when texts are perceived to lose their capacity for truth , the sensation is more than one of disillusionment - it is one of threat:

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2 - The term itself is of questionable accuracy and help, and is therefore the subject of later debate.

3 - Diprose, R; Ferrel,R(Eds), *Cartographies* op. cit. px

> "We know that if the Word 'was in the beginning', it can also be in at the end: that there is a vocabulary and a grammar of the death camps, that thermo-nuclear detonations can be designated as 'Operation Sunshine'. It were as if the quintessential, the identifying attribute of man- the *Logos*, the organon of language - had broken in our mouths."[4]

And so there is a loss of faith as to what these flimsy strings represent anyway and focus turns to the holes, demystifying what we have perceived it to offer us and in doing so, discovering that this perception has actually short-changed us: that conversely there is *more* in the sense that "no ascription of meaning is ever final, no field of resonance ever end-stopped"[5] . As readers we bring our own imaginations to bear, expanding a range of meanings and causing a multiplicity of connections to be revealed. We have a part to play in the creation of meaning, and to perceive the text as having discernable boundaries denies our participation in the equation. To see the text in its most "successful" light ironically submits us to its tyranny and stultifies our creative responses.

If one then question to what degree the reader *does* ascribe meaning to a text,its very function (and therefore importance) as a vehicle for sense-making is brought into question. It could be conceivable that "the ascription of sense, the preference of one possible reading over another, the choice of this explanation and paraphrase and not that, is no more than the playful, unstable, undemonstrable option or fiction of a subjective scanner who constructs and deconstructs purely semiotic markers as his own momentary pleasures, politics, psychic needs or self-deceptions bid him to."[6] And in this vein, we head towards a "crisis of sense", a disenchantment with the text as a communicator of meaning.

The perceptions that are very generally hinted at here, are supported by a number of different theoretical standpoints. My concern in this chapter is to discover how, and indeed whether, they are supported by

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4 -Steiner, G, *Real Presence* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p6
5 - ibid. p4
6 -ibid. p12

common practice: where is theatre located in the light of these divergent (or perhaps not so divergent) theoretical views? What assumptions underlie the notion of "text-based" theatre?Where do practitioners stand in relation to a script and to the meanings they perceive it to have? I will explore this not just with the intention of elucidating theatre practice but in the hope that it may actually lead to a different understanding of what a text is and how it functions - an understanding which is less concerned with success or failure, one which relieves the threat of mis-communicating and misunderstanding and brings creation to the fore : where Flaubert can be heard to say : "But there is more to Art than the straightness of lines and the perfection of surfaces"; one which admits that "We have too many things and not enough forms"[7] but embraces this fact; in short, to an understanding which re-emphasises the text as an act of creation for both writer and reader.

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The range of texts I will be discussing is already narrowed given that my concern is with contemporary mainstage "text-based" theatre. The words "contemporary" and "mainstage" anchor the study fairly solidly within the Western tradition. While efforts are currently being made to redefine Australia's identity within the realm of mainstage practice, these welcome changes are not yet fully realised as an integral part of our theatrical culture. The first Sydney Asian Theatre Season at Belvoir Street, the shifting emphasis of programming at the Playbox in Melbourne, and even the Australia Council's new funding policies are evidence of wheels in motion, but still weigh lightly against the bulk of the State Theatre Companies and the major commercial entrepreneurs. It would however be an inaccurate reflection of the contemporary mainstage to suggest that its study could be confined to a rigidly defined "canon" of texts or indeed to make of programming a rule-bound process of imperial slavishness. I am however, talking of the text within a Western context and of the assumptions and attitudes that this affords.

"Text-based" is a loaded term in which the text is already endowed with status and is privileged over any other of the components which constitute a

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[7] Flaubert, *Preface à la vie d'écrivain*. Quoted by Derrida,J, in *Writing and Difference*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1978, p3

piece of theatre. It also implies a principle of foundation, both a starting point and an anchor. These notions are precisely points of debate, so I would like to start with the assertion that text-based theatre is very simply theatre which involves the staging of a pre-written dramatic text. All the while, it will be remembered that the dramatic text may be a text in the literary sense. As such it will at times be relevant to introduce literary theory as it elucidates this overlapping category of work. It is also language-based, and so linguistic theory may have a useful application. Finally, it is most fundamentally a communicator of meaning and as such, an invitation for the insights which theories of meaning may provide.

The following is firstly an attempt to analyse some of the ways in which practitioners perceive the "script" or playtext that they are about to realise. As such it may firstly be of some use to look at the context in which these attitudes evolve. "Text-based theatre" has become something of a title, usually understood through its juxtaposition to "non-text-based theatre", "movement-based theatre", or more fashionably "multimedial theatre". There are many assumptions which underlie this juxtaposition itself: the assumption that theatre is either predominantly one or the other - that the emphasis upon movement disappears once a text is invited to the stage (not true for HAROLD IN ITALY[8]). By the same token, theatre which calls upon various forms of communication such as film or sculpture is often text-based - but not so called. Is not theatre which uses text all the more multi-medial in its reliance on this as yet another form of communication? (where can Barrie Kosky and THE DYBBUK be located?[9]) However unfounded there exists a dichotomy between text and non-text based theatre which has become a defining principle of practitioners' work, and what might seem to be no more than a theoretical split has quite real and practical manifestations: while I admit to generalising, one seems to work in either one or the other. These titles have come to represent two separate areas of work, two areas of speciality - and (the *assumption is* ) two distinct aesthetics and ideologies as to what theatre is there to achieve. But is the *text* really at the basis of this

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8 - HAROLD IN ITALY was performed at the STC under the direction of Richard Wherett and Kai Tai Chan; it was an attempt to fuse dance and script within the realm of the mainstage.

9 - Barrie Kosky's epic trilogy played in Melbourne with huge success and has been picked up as part of Belvoir Street's 1993 subscription season. It is based on the original Jewish text and incorporates a wide range of media.

distinction? Even granted the evolution of two seemingly different activities, is the text really an accurate point of distinction between them or are there other underlying qualities which are defining the general perception of them? It would seem that more often than not reference is being made to different sorts of theatre which *do* afford different aesthetics and ideological beliefs but where the use or non-use of text is merely incidental - a peg upon which to hang a number of opposing attitudes which run more deeply. When talking of text-based theatre, practitioners in particular are often referring to the mainstream *representation* of text - to the way in which Chekhov is performed and not to the use of a Chekhov play in itself. The more avant-garde representations of text are distinguished from this by the qualities of the avant-garde and not necessarily by their reliance on text. In short one is often (not always) referring to another juxtaposition which differentiates the mainstream from the non-mainstream. This may also be a dubious dichotomy - (where *can* Barrie Kosky be located?) but that is a different debate.

It is true the the mainstage has appropriated playtexts as a priority and uses pre-written dramatic works more often than not. It is also true that the "Fringe" or the avant-garde community has undertaken to explore other non-verbal forms of communication. Similarly the major theatre companies generally do not make it their business (and the financial connotation is intended) to mount self-devised works. And it is due to the existence of these areas of 'privilege' that the dichotomy has found its way into the language and perception of practitioners. The danger however is in allowing it to so govern the perception of practitioners, that it affects their diversity of vision, and that the healthy expressions of what they demand of art, are attributed not to the wealth of their creative imaginations, but to the text - or lack thereof.

The assumption that the text is at the basis of different theatrical ideologies furthermore places it in a position of inaccurate status. This has a number of significant ramifications. On the one hand it can potentially make the use of text in theatre a target for criticism; it is often more likely that what is being criticised is the *handling* of the text or the *way* in which it is performed. Ironically a critic of text-based theatre himself, Richard Schechner points out: "Ce n'est pas le texte qui détermine l'importance ou la banalité

d'une production"[10]. It is all too easy to be disillusioned by what a Chekhov for example, can offer if one finds fault in the theatrical ideology and context that produced it. When practitioners and audience members alike question the need to do a conservative classic I would argue that they are often questioning the need to do it conservatively. The text itself, and the desire to do text-based theatre are caught in the cross-fire and so acquire almost innocently, a negative appeal.

A second ramification extends on the idea of status which paradoxically is usually something associated with a positive appeal: the notion of text-based theatre privileges the text above and beyond any other of the components which 'play a role' in the making of theatre and which, as I hope to reveal during the course of this thesis, are often just as, if not more influential in the creation of stage-meaning. One does not refer to 'prosc-arch-based theatre' when in actual fact this architectural feature has a great deal to do with the ways in which the text's meanings are conveyed. The performance of a dramatic text in a proscenium arch theatre such as the Opera House's Drama Theatre already carries a stigma of conservatism, and the text is submissive in this sense.

But thirdly, and this concerns the practitioner more tangibly, this status that the text is afforded and the title under which he or she labours, must obviously affect how it is perceived within a day to day work situation: the text as basis, as anchor, as foundation ... From training to rehearsal to performance, if "text-based" theatre is the working realm, then the text remains unquestioned as a guiding influence and the privileged source of inspiration. The relationship is of course reciprocal and there is something of the chicken and the egg: an emphasis on the text as the pinnacle of artistic endeavour reconfirms the title of "text-based theatre" and solidifies the assumptions into perpetuity.

Text in its titular usage, text as pinnacle, as guiding star; conversely, text as base, source and anchor: there is already an inference of direction, the hint of a connection which draws a line between A and B. Just how much this correspondence is emphasized becomes apparent once theatre practice is more closely examined : sometimes overtly, sometimes more discreetly, the prevailing language and behaviour of practice constantly reinforce and

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10 -Schechner, R, In Féral, J; Savona, J; Walker, E (Eds), *Théâtralité, Écriture et Mise-en-scène* Montreal, Hurtubise, 1985, p48

manifest this status of the text and the desire to somehow be attached to it with 'strings'. And if this relationship is discernible, it is due to an assumption of the text as object, as container of meaning with boundaries and limits, strings of its own in which meaning is caught. A closer exploration of how these perceptions are manifest, may well uncover some inaccuracies or confusions in current thinking.

## LANGUAGE

The way practitioners *talk* about the playtext provides a first indication of how they relate to it. In the vocabulary and language which surrounds the very notion of realising a script certain resonances can be traced, through which we can see the emergence of a paradigm. The following is a random snatch of some commonly reiterated ideas[11] : they do not specifically relate to one director, actor, or company, nor will they *all* apply to each individual. For some practitioners, they are clichés and represent a conservative point of view. They are however still heard and in any case, while the cliché may be renounced, this does not immediately erase its stronghold or the mark it leaves in its wake.

1- "It is important that we serve the play."
2-"We must not impose a meaning on the text"
3-"We must discover the playwright's intentions and be faithful to them"
4-"Contact the impulse that drove the playwright to put pen to paper"
5-"Try to allow the play to speak through you"
6-"This director has really got into the playwright's head"
7-"Chekhov would be proud of us" .

*1- "It is important that we serve the play."*

The idea expresses a status relationship which advocates that practitioners should be submissive to a higher authority. The playtext is master here and the notion of servitude has significant and varied implications: loyalty and fidelity, keeping within limits, knowing the bounds of one's job and not erring beyond them. And just as a servant may be punished for not performing his or her duties, a practitioner can also perform

[11] - These have been collected from the cross-section of rehearsal processes observed for the purposes of this study.

badly. The implication extends: behaving oneself will be a safeguard against failure, an actor will be on the right track if they are good. An unwarranted(?) flight of fancy can be checked by a simple utterance - "you are not serving the play" : the text once again emerges as a thing which contains and confines. This is a very literal interpretation of the expression, and for the most part practitioners have moved away from such a rigid notion of servitude. They may be aware, not so much of academic works which question this relationship, but of works such as Artaud's for example who as early as the 1930's wrote the following:

> "Un théâtre qui soumet la mise-en-scène et la réalisation [...] au texte, est un théâtre d'idiot, de fou, d'inverti, de grammairien, d'épicier, d'antipoète et de positiviste, c'est-à-dire d'Occidental"[12]

While it is recognised that Artaud precipitated an important movement and raised significant questions as to the practitioner's relationship to the playtext, his ideas about theatre are understandably enough not perceived to be the goal of the mainstage; this however has produced the belief that he was somehow uninterested in text-based theatre and is therefore of dubious relevance - once again a questionable assumption (did he not write *The Cenci*?). It is perhaps more accurate to suggest that he was not interested in the *ways* texts were presented, and was claiming that this relationship of submission is perhaps where theatre had gone wrong. Artaud was furthermore countered by a strong tradition which survived him and which perpetuated the idea of serving the play, and whether or not practitioners believe so literally in this idea of servitude, it is an inherited tradition which still seems to underlie contemporary practice. If it is regarded as a conservative or antiquated stance, why then is the notion of servitude still alluded to? Perhaps it is not so much that there is a belief in the idea per se, but in its ability to harness and control: a "flight of fancy" can be checked by its utterance - is it then not a tool with which a director for example, can conveniently defer to a higher authority but which has more the function of serving his or her own purposes - in restricting a range of possible meanings, in "organising an anarchy"[13] according to his or her own vision - a symbolic

12 - Artaud, A, *Le théâtre et son double* , Paris, Gallimard, "Idées", 1938
13 - Derrida,J, quoted by Ubersfeld,A, in *Lire le Théâtre*, Paris, Eds.Sociales, 1982,p151

boss who keeps notions of hierarchy within a group irrelevant, and keeps colleagues working in harmony towards a common goal - that of "serving the play" but more likely, that of serving a coherent interpretation of the play?

*2-"We must not impose a meaning on the text".*

Here, it is implied that the practitioner should defer to the text's "own" meanings since there is a danger in stepping out of bounds. Such an expression therefore has similar implications to the ones outlined above. Practitioners must guard themselves from adding anything that has more to do with their freedom as creators than with the inherent meanings of the text: once again a possible control device where the nature of meaning is not sufficiently scrutinised to jeopardise its efficacy. For some practitioners its use may be a way of channelling meaning towards a coherent vision: we can still see the actor who takes an imaginative but somehow inappropriate leap being told that he or she is perhaps "imposing" a meaning. For other practitioners (and possibly this "fanciful" actor) it is simply a restrictive term which should be eradicated. In asking one director of his awareness of this expression, he shuddered - he knew it well and described its prevalence in the course of his training. When I asked what he took it to mean, he said : "Doesn't it mean that you can't do your job as a director?" In this he meant his job as an independent creator of meaning. Implicit in this expression are therefore two ideas which deserve further thought: the first is that the text carries its own meaning(s), the second is that practitioners are themselves creators of meaning. And this brings into question the nature of meaning itself as it applies to theatre.

I have already broadly defined the text as a communicator of meaning. It is a signifying structure which is part of that infinitely larger structure called language. From the multitude of signs available it selects a portion and in so doing, arranges a certain system and finds a loose but definite organisation. Meaning is already being created by the sign structure that is particular to that text and which distinguishes it from any other. Hjelmslev defines the text indeed as a semiotic process, but points out that this is always in expansion. Within the realm of meaning that this basic structure affords, the field of potential meanings is fluid, the range of interpretations is broad. If the expression is read this way, there seems little reason to question this first implication: "At the end of the philological road, now or tomorrow, there is a meaning or constellation of meanings to be perceived, analysed and chosen

over others. In its authentic sense, philology is indeed the working passage, via the arts of scrupulous observance and trust (*philein*) from the uncertainties of the word to the stability of the *Logos*."[14]

The second implication is that practitioners are creators of meaning in their own right. And indeed, when reading a text, one does "choose" and arrive at an interpretation deemed to be an individual response. Whether it is believed that this interpretation is drawn from within the 'boundaries' of a text's range of meanings, or that it is entirely a construction or deconstruction which occurs according to our own subjective needs, there is by and large a common belief that one does ascribe meaning, that the reader is in some sense a creator in his or her own right. This is particularly pertinent in relation to theatre in the sense that performance is interpretation: the concrete and physical dimension which the script acquires when realised, is quite obviously created, and this carries and communicates meanings of its own. The term *Konkretisation* may have been introduced by Roman Ingarden with a different nuance but it is fortuitously relevant and useful if we understand realisation in theatrical terms:

> "The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on a life when it is realised, and furthermore the realisation is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader- though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text."[15]

This idea of creative participation is by no means theoretical, nor is it new: Laurence Sterne was quoted regarding Tristram Shandy:

> "... no author who understands the just boundaries of decorum would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding , is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him

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14 - Steiner,G, op. cit. p10

15 - Ingarden, R, quoted by Iser,W, "Reading. A phenomenological approach" in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, Lodge, D (Ed), New York-London, Langman, 1988,p214

compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own."[16]

This all seems true enough. The text affords meaning(s) and the reader is also the creator of meaning as he or she interprets it. Where does this leave the notion of imposition? In the verb which links these meanings that *the reader* creates with those which are brought about by *the text*, there is an assumption of separation - an inference that there are two different sets of meanings which can somehow evolve independently to the point where the meanings *the readers* create- or in this case the practitioners - are impositional i.e. added, superfluous and indeed inappropriate to the meanings afforded by the text. But can our interpretation (given that it *is* an interpretation of that text and no other) ever be separated from it to this extent? It would seem that the act of creation which we perform as readers is indeed a two-way dynamic and that this is "absolutely linked"[17] to the text in question - or more accurately to the *perceived* meanings of the text. If practitioners talk of imposition - they are therefore firstly positing an idea of what meanings they perceive the text to generate. Secondly we are questioning the links or relationship that *our* interpretation or perceived textual signs have with someone else's. We are therefore not alerting ourselves to an imposition upon the text, but to a discrepancy or difference between one interpretation of the text and another - one which must attain a certain coherence by opening night. The expression would therefore more accurately read : You must not put forward a set of meanings which seems unrelated to the set of meanings *I* perceive the text to generate. The enunciator is suddenly brought back in to view - who is this "I" anyway? director, designer[18], one of the actors? once again if focus settles upon the text, it is diverted from any hierarchy within the group.

In a less extreme situation, it could also mean "you must not put forward an interpretation which is appears totally unrelated to the interpretation we as a company, have more or less agreed to pursue". But if the links between two sets of meanings are so obscure that they invite this sort of enquiry, are we not then saying "you must not write a different script?", "you must not develop a different text?"- one which is not an

16- ibid.

17 -Ubersfeld,A, *L'Ecole du Spectateur*, Paris, Eds Sociales, 1981, p10

18- This echoes the anecdote about John Howard and his designer during THE CRUCBLE, which as we saw was in fact a disagreement about readings.

interpretation, but which somehow seems to exist independently of any perceptible (for the company in question) meaning in the text - where Hamlet is a horse with no connection to Ophelia whatsoever let alone an Oedipal complex, where "to be or not to be" is neighed, rhythmically (admittedly), and there is very little of what we recognise to be the Shakespeare that we know. Flip comments aside, this is probably a valid piece of theatre if one perceives the text of Hamlet to embrace these points of inspiration. If not one may well talk of meaning imposed upon the text - but in doing so must realise either, that one is actually questioning its links with the text *as perceived,* or if these are not discernable, the creation of another independent text.

A more extreme understanding of the expression might carry the notion of the text's "meaning" even further. This has to do with an inherited notion, by and large exposed in practice nowadays but which expressions of this kind still encompass: that the text somehow has one inherent meaning which it is the practitioner's responsibility to uncover. For a long time this was believed to be the case, as Patrice Pavis supports in his *Dictionnaire du Théâtre:*

> "Longtemps, depuis Aristote, jusqu'au début de la mise-en-scène comme pratique systématique, à la fin du siècle passé, et à l'exception des spectacles populaires ou des pièces à grand spectacle - le théâtre a été enfermé dans une conception logocentrique. [...] Cette attitude revient à faire du texte l'élément premier, la structure profonde et le contenu essentiel de l'art dramatique. La scène [...] ne vient qu'ensuite comme ex-pression superficielle et superflue, elle ne s'adresse qu'aux sens et à l'imagination, elle détourne le public des beautés littéraires de la fable et de la reflexion sur le conflit tragique. Une assimilation théologique se produit avec le texte, réfuge du sens immuable de l'interprétation et de l'âme de la pièce."[19]

This statement alludes to all the connotations of the two expressions just discussed: the idea of imposition ("superficielle", "superflue", "*détourne* le public"), and the idea of status and servitude: ("élément premier", "contenu essentiel", and above all "théologique"- a concept which will be broached in

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19 - Pavis,P, *Dictionnaire du Théâtre. Termes et concepts de l'analyse théâtrale,* Paris, Eds Sociales, 1980, p392

more detail). As Pavis points out, these are directly related to a conception of the text as the holder of one inherent and immutable meaning. He goes on to suggest that this notion is not so antiquated as it may seem:

> "Il est troublant de constater que pour le public - et même pour beaucoup de metteurs en scène "réalistes" et de critiques "philologues", mais aussi de praticiens de plateau - cette solution est présentée comme exemplaire, comme le but à atteindre: "Une bonne mise en scène" est une transformation intime, point par point, qui n'évolue que dans son entier. Le texte est devenu représentation en poursuivant une direction de potentialité qui n'était auparavant qu'implicite et donc cachée, mais qui est maintenant actualisée de manière à sembler inévitable." (HORNBY, 1977). Cette théorie du texte comme "potentialité cachée" ou "virtualité scénique" (SERPIERI) considère en définitive que le texte contient une bonne mise en scene qu'il suffit de retrouver et que la représentation et le travail scénique ne sont pas en conflit avec le sens textuel, mais à son service" [20]

Once again if it is believed that the text has one inherent meaning, then one can quite comfortably talk of "conflicting with" as opposed to "serving" the play. I doubt that practitioners *do* consciously believe this today even though Pavis' examples are convincingly drawn from relatively recent writings. Nevertheless practitioners' *terminology* still carries the trace of this credo which has serious implications. As Anne Ubersfeld[21] quite rightly says, this attitude which privileges the text presupposes an idea of "semantic equivalence" between the written text and its performance. Only the means of expression would change, form and content remaining the same when passing from the system of textual signs to its corresponding system of performance signs. She goes on to say that this notion of equivalence is however an illusion, given that the collection of visual, auditory, musical signs created by the director, designer, musicians or actors constitute meanings beyond the collection of textual signs.

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20 -ibid.

21 -Ubersfeld,A, *Lire le Théâtre*, Eds Sociales, Paris,1982, p15

If we continue to believe that we can somehow achieve a direct correspondence of meaning between text and performance we are once again denying our participation as creators of meaning - and this has potentially devastating effects for theatre itself:

> "Le danger principal de cette attitude réside certes dans la tentation de figer le texte, de le sacraliser au point de bloquer tout le système de la représentation, et l'imagination des "interprètes" (metteurs en scène, comédiens); il réside plus encore dans la tentation (inconsciente) de boucher les fissures du texte, de le lire comme un bloc compact qui ne peut être que reproduit à l'aide d'autres outils, interdisant toute production d'un objet artistique. Le plus grand danger est de privilégier non *le* texte mais *une* lecture particulière du texte, historique, codée, idéologiquement déterminée et que le fétichisme textuel permettrait d'éterniser.[..] Ainsi les comédiens et certains metteurs en scène de la Comédie Française s'imaginent assurément défendre l'intégrité et la pûreté du *texte* de Molière ou de Racine quand ils n'en défendent qu'une lecture codée et plus encore un mode tres déterminé de représentation. On voit par cet exemple [...] comment le privilège accordé au texte risque de stériliser le théâtre".[22]

In referring to the Comédie Française, Ubersfeld is alluding to one of the stalwarts of the French mainstage. In doing so, she provides an all too pertinent parallel to our own Australian mainstage and to the notion of "text-based theatre" as discussed earlier: "une lecture codée", "idéologiquement déterminée", "un mode très déterminé de représentation" are all notions that we have suggested regarding our own mainstage, and come about according to Ubersfeld, because of a particular perception of the text. The sterility so widely deplored is not so much due to the use of texts in theatre, but to their codified and ideologically determined interpretations, to the particular way in which they are presented. And this in turn may well be attributed to an attitude which is overtly denounced but may be more deeply entrenched than practitioners would like to think. Perhaps still prevalent, even if unconsciously is the belief that the text does contain an inherent meaning,

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22- ibid. p16

and perhaps this is responsible for the "Deadly Theatre"[23] that practitioners would like to eradicate from our theatrical community. As Brook suggests, Deadly Theatre is after all what amounts to theatre's failure to analyse and reform its own conventions - a failure to scrutinise the assumptions that inform our practice.

3- *"We must discover the playwright's intentions and be faithful to them."*
4- *"Contact the impulse that drove the playwright to put pen to paper"*

Territories begin to overlap here as a constant paradigm emerges: once again the text acquires a status, once again the ideas of servitude and fidelity characterise the discourse. The words "discover" and "contact" confirm the notion of unearthing, of uncovering, reaching what - if not a truth. These notions have been extensively covered and in these two expressions I would like to concentrate upon what is more particular to them, and that is the emergence of the playwright and the act of writing as the figure of dominance. The putting of pen to paper, the expression of intention are no longer banal activities but become sanctified; firstly through the very use of the expression (like the others) which feeds its status as we come to recognise a truism not far from a type of theatrical commandment (oh that there were only ten). Secondly, by its allusion to the act of creation itself, to the moment of inspiration which prompts artistic expression. This is a difficult area since the idea of inspiration is largely intangible and remains somewhat mysterious - and is therefore likely to be mythologised. As to the act of creation itself, the strength of our western Judeo-Christian tradition (even if its strength is diminishing today), perpetuates the aura surrounding artistic endeavour: Matisse claimed "I am God" when he completed the chapel at Vence, while Picasso referred to "God, that other craftsman".[24] Michel Foucault reminds us that "In our culture (and doubtless many others) discourse was not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods. It was essentially an act - an act placed in the bi-polar field of the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous"[25] . As suggested earlier, there has been a theological assimilation with the text as an embodiment of truth. Extending upon this there has also been a theological assimilation with the artist as creator of this truth:

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23 - Brook,P, *The Empty Space*, Middlesex, Penguin, 1972, p11

24 - Foucault, M, "What is an Author" in Lodge, D(Ed), op. cit. p196
25 - ibid. p202

> "In current usage however, the notion of writing seems to transpose the empirical characteristics of the author into transcendental anonymity. We are content to efface the more visible marks of the author's empiricity by playing off, one against the other, two ways of characterising writing, namely the critical and the religious approaches. Giving writing a primal status seems to be a way of retranslating in transcendental terms, both the theological affirmation of its sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character. To admit that writing is, because of the very history that made it possible, subject to the test of oblivion and repression, seems to represent in transcendental terms, the principle of the hidden meaning (which requires interpretation) and the critical principle of implicit significations, silent determinations and obscured contents"[26]

The need to discover the playwright's intentions and to contact that mysterious impulse with which he or she was visited can indeed be seen as a search for hidden meaning and implicit significations, as a quest for truth. In this, the playwright stands as the final arbiter and sanctioner of the text's meaning, and as the upholder of that truth. Foucault once again reminds us that in the Middle Ages, those texts on cosmology and the heavens for example, were accepted as true only when marked with the name of their author. The authors' names were markers in discourses that were supposed to be received as statements of demonstrated truth. Similarly : "We now ask of each poetic or fictional text: where does it come from, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances or beginning with what design?"[27] And indeed, when broaching a dramatic text, the practitioner is very much concerned with these questions, which are manifest after all of a need to "discover" and "contact". And such simple expressions as these discussed are merely the tip of the ice-berg - their implication is supported right through practice if we consider how much diligent research is carried out to somehow immerse the practitioner into the world of the playwright:"where does it come from?"-

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[26]-ibid. p199

[27] -ibid. p203

resource material as to the country of origin abounds "when?" -encyclopedic references to the period are sought, "who wrote it?"- biographies are read, pictures are pasted onto walls, and the playwright somehow reigns over the rehearsal room. Our relationship to the text constantly points to and is reconfirmed by "a 'figure' that at least in appearance is outside and antecedes it". And then the vital question: "beginning with what design?" or in other words, with what intention? Derrida alerts us to this:

> "The notion of an Idea of "interior" design as simply anterior to a work which would supposedly be the expression of it is a prejudice."[28]

It assumes firstly that the playwright *does* have an intention or set of intentions which comes before the act of writing takes place. This may be true in his or her mind, although this leads to another assumption that the writing will somehow constitute a direct expression of these. And another assumption that they will be discernable to a reader. Let us look at each of these.

It is not necessarily true to begin with that the writer begins with a set of interior intentions of which the writing is believed to be the faithful external expression. "My words take me by surprise and teach me what I think" says Merleau-Ponty.[29] Needless to say, this transforms the notion of meaning as being containable and fixed. The fluidity and plurality of meaning somehow escapes control and can be seen to inform the act as it occurs.

> "Communication in literature is not the simple appeal on the part of the writer to meanings which would be part of an a priori of the mind: rather communication arouses these meanings in the mind through enticement and a kind of oblique action. The writer's thought does not control his language from without: the writer is himself a new kind of idiom, constructing itself"[30]

Even if writers do believe themselves to have a certain anterior design, it would be naive to think that they can ever have full control over the range

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28 - Derrida, J, *Writing and Difference*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p 11

29 - Merleau Ponty, quoted by Derrida,J, ibid.

30 - ibid

of possible meanings that their text may generate, nor that these can actually be predicted. Once again these are not merely theoretical standpoints, nor are they new: "that whore, Emma Bovary!" cried Flaubert. Once again it is possible to believe that "meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning."

Given this, surely it is equally naive on our part to believe that we can ever discover these "intentions", and perhaps it is irrelevant that we should want to. Not only are we on a bogus trail, but we are also undermining the wealth and plurality of meaning which constitutes both the writer's and the interpreter's freedom of expression. To end once more with Derrida:

> "But all faith or theological assurance aside, is not the experience of *secondarity* tied to the strange redoubling by means of which constituted - written - meaning presents itself as prerequisitely and simultaneously *read* : and does not meaning present itself as such at the point at which the other is found, the other who maintains both the vigil and the back and forth motion, the work, that comes between writing and reading, making this work irreducible? Meaning is neither before or after the act. Is not that which is called God, that which imprints every human course and recourse with its secondarity, the passageway of deferred reciprocity between reading and writing? or the absolute witness to the dialogue in which what one sets out to write has already been read, and what one sets out to say is already a response, the third party as the transparency of meaning? Simultaneously part of creation and the Father of Logos. The circularity and traditionality of Logos. The strange labour of conversion and adventure in which grace can only be that which is *missing*."[31]

*5- "Try to allow the play to speak through you."*

Once again the description of a direct line; once again the expression of status through the idea of surrendering. The implication is that the practitioner should submit and allow him or herself to be taken over, and this is particularly interesting in light of the religious connotations previously discussed. However innocently, when the idea of a higher being is

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[31] -Derrida, J, ibid.

coupled with the idea of possession, we are not far from a suggestion of the occult: at worst is conjured the idea of speaking in tongues or channeling energies. At best the practitioner is being reduced to a vehicle, voluntarily disempowering him or herself - as much a martyr as a cypher. Even if a kind of invocation of the supernatural is not being made, there is still the sense of a spell being cast, an allusion made to that ever elusive "magic of theatre". But too often the very thing that shrouds the artist's craft in seductive mystery is also a protective veil that when lifted, might reveal just how many personal choices and "deliberate actions" are involved in the realisation of the playtext .

> "When I hear a director speaking glibly of serving the author of letting a play speak for itself, my suspicions are immediately aroused, because this is the hardest job of all. If you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound. If what you want is for the play to be heard, then you must conjure a sound from it. This demands many deliberate actions."[32]

A term such as "conjure" still remains an allusion to magic, but the main difference that Brook highlights is the involvement of the artist. Practitioners are not passive in the face of the all powerful creator (of text). They do not wait to be visited but are actively responsible for whatever creation takes place. The relationship cuts both ways and there is at least some acknowledgement of the contribution made by the artist. Not only does this view seem more equitable, but it gives a more accurate reflection of what actually occurs. And whilst there is an implicit reciprocity, it is important that this is not seen as a direct exchange, or a type of give-and-take (a simple matter of lines or arrows pointing both ways) since this may encourage an oversimplification of the relationship: this in itself may carry certain assumptions and deter any scrutiny as to the nature of the "sound" itself.

In either case, (whether it is believed that the play can speak through the practitioner, or that it speaks when a sound is conjured from it), it is important to acknowledge that our very involvement, however minimal, changes what the playtext says anyway. It is impossible to give a voice or a physicalisation to a play without altering its meaning. In other words, the minute a choice is made in relation to the performing of a text, a choice is made in relation to its meaning. The play may well "speak through" the individual but what is heard would not be the play itself, as a kind of pure

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32 -Brook, P, *The Empty Space*, Middlesex, Penguin,1972 p43

entity. Similarly, the act of conjuring is an act of transformation which alters a playtext irreversibly. The "sound" that is conjured is not the sound of the text as such, but of the text transformed, modified, amplified - realised. One will never hear the sound it has in a vacuum package, alone or pure, and to intimate at any level that this may be a practical goal is also to intimate that it will never be reached. The very act of giving life to a play is a distinct act of creating meaning and perhaps therein lies the magic. This cannot be avoided and the danger lies not so much in pretending that it can, but in wanting to at all.

*6- "This director has really got into the playwright's head."*

Similar assumptions underlie this statement starting with the idea of possession. This time practitioners are not so much the "inhabited" few, but remain privileged nonetheless. Some directors are granted that rare gift which is an ability to "inhabit" the playwright, to experience the inception of his/her ideas and the trends of his/her thinking process. As opposed to the last statement it is the director who is active, and the playwright who is passive. The status relationship however does not seem to have shifted. There is a sense of the eagle not stooping to the fly, of the earthly practitioner scrabbling around and trying to penetrate the secrets of the Creator. The tone is one of admiration not disdain, and there is very much a sense that this is the goal of any respectable director, or at least of any director who "gets it right": the desirable eventuality seems to lie in a connection so complete between director and playwright that they fuse and are no longer separate. Even more than a delegate protecting the interests of a third party, even more than a type of ambassador of the text, and with a bond stronger even than the papal link to God, the director's role is to be the playwright incarnate. The image reaches far beyond a simple affinity between people, and suggests a relationship of equivalence.

This in turn harks back to the idea that there is a relationship of equivalence between playtext and performance text. In its most conservative form, it implies a certain redundancy where, as Pavis puts it "la scène cherche à rendre et à redire le texte. Dans [ce] cas, celui de la redondance scénique, la mise-en-scène s'est bornée à rechercher des signes scéniques illustrant ou donnant l'illusion au spectateur d'illustrer le référent du texte."[33] Once again this *is* firstly an illusion:

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33 - Pavis, P. op. cit. p391

> "Mise-en-scène is not the staging of a supposed textual "potential". It does not consist in finding stage signifieds for the verbal signs of the text; this would necessarily amount to no more than a superfluous repetition of the text itself. [...] Mise-en-scène is not the fusion of two referents (textual and stage) and does not strive to find their common denominator." [34]

And indeed, illusion or no illusion, what is even more baffling is that this should be seen as a desirable aim. Surely notions of redundancy and superfluity are antithetical to notions of creation. The paradigm that seems to emerge is a denial of the practitioner's own abilities, which is betrayed by a constant wavering between the belief of being a creator and that of being a cypher. It may not be a case of one or the other, but the language used seems to reflect a confusion or at least a lack of enquiry.

In a less a rigid perception of the relationship between text and stage, the practitioner may well see his or her role as providing something *more*. In this view the director for example, is not only a person who can be the playwright in his or her absence but one who also has the practical skills and knowledge of stage craft to put it on. The point here is that while this may be perceived as providing *more* it still does not suggest that the director is providing something *different*. There is still an assumption that the staging is simply a performative realisation of the text, that the director and actors simply have to carry out the instructions of the text as though these had the illocutionary force of a "cake recipe" in order to produce a stage performance.[35]

If this were the case, then surely practical markers of the playwright's vision such as stage directions, would be followed more closely in practice. If on the one hand, pains are taken to embody the playwright's psyche, and if on the other, these stage directions are clear steps in the 'recipe' and provide what Issacharoff aptly calls the "conditions *matérielles* de l'énonciation"[36] then surely there would be a more unanimous adherence to them generally. But lounge rooms are often set in garbage dumps, Englands in Australia and

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34- Pavis, P, "From Text to Performance" in *Performing Texts,* Issacharoff, M, & Jones, R,F (Eds), 1988 p89

35-See Searle, J, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse" in *New Literary History 6* (1975) pp319-332

36 -See Issacharoff's definition of didascalie in *Le spectacle du Discours,* Paris, Librairie José Corti, 1985 pp8-9

uncountable imaginative deviations from the playwright's "recipe", while still claiming to get inside the playwright's head. The argument takes another turn in a third view: that the very deviation from the playwright's written instructions may in itself be an act which brings the director closer to the playwright - that a director can get inside the playwright's head without obeying him/her to the letter. Whilst this idea is headed towards a more accurate and complex understanding of the relationship, its open-endedness can leave room for misunderstanding.

It is firstly important to acknowledge that while apparent 'deviations' *may* "bring the director closer to the playwright", they also may not. In some productions, the links in meaning between the written text and "its" so called realisation may seem extremely remote. Even when they are not, it is worth exploring the motivation of the practitioners involved: is their commitment to the playwright or are they quite honestly indifferent to the playwright's intentions? This distinction is seldom made in the mainstream and perhaps this is because it often means the legitimisation of one over the other. In a world which so fiercely defends the Author as God, where the practitioners' allegiance with Him is their guarantee of success, it is either heretical or an admission of failure to commit to something else. While these may be understandable reasons, the danger in allowing such language to pass by unscrutinised, is not that one begins to condone an individual expression which is disrespectful of the playwright, but the inherent dishonesty that justifies an individual expression in the name of authorial fidelity. If Hamlet is a horse and this is what the artists believe, then it must at least be clear that there is a distinction between what *the artist* wants to say and what *the artist believes* Shakespeare wants to say. The one can all too often be called upon to account for the other and this is much more common than the glibness of the example suggests. The accord between director and playwright has become so much the measure of good theatre, that the practitioner may be in danger of loosing the ability to know - let alone the courage to commit to - what he or she wants and can say.

Let us assume alternatively that a deviation from the playwright's perceived "instructions" is paradoxically a way of getting inside the playwright's head - and that this is furthermore the practitioner's motivation. This is firstly an acknowledgement that the he or she does have a creative role and secondly that this is fundamentally linked to the playtext in question. Such a view at least sees the text and its realisation as two semiotic systems which are distinct, but linked. In each, different meanings are

produced, but they are never so different that there is not some discernable connection. If this is the underlying assumption when such a term is used, then the implied equivalence between playtext and performance text has been eradicated to some extent; the director is no longer the playwright's embodiment, but a person with distinct skills who speaks a different language, communicates through a different code. This throws up the idea of interpretation and translation which in turn illuminates a remaining assumption to do with equivalence. In adopting such a view there is still a danger in suggesting that the director is somehow the bilingual counterpart of the playwright, with access to his or her ideas in some pure form. In any event, it is common knowledge that a great deal gets lost in translation - we also know how much gets created, and this can at least be a safeguard against the belief that the playwright's ideas are laid bare in their entirety and in their complexity for anyone who has the key. Whilst this view may well be an acknowledgment of their different individual skills and in this the difference in codes, it may still carry a suggestion that director and writer somehow share the same head-space, in other words that the director doesn't *interpret* the playtext but is privy to *a meaning* - which is the playwright's.

The act of interpretation is therefore double-edged: on the one hand, it is selective and restricts the range of meanings that a text might offer. On the other hand these become recodified and in so doing, encompass new meanings and offer different interpretations. A person's knowledge of a text's meanings can never be exhaustive nor can it be pure in the re-telling. But once again, the point here is not only that this is an impossible feat, but that in practice, it is constantly portrayed as a desirable one. If the recodification process opens the text up to new meanings, why is this seen as an impoverishment and not an enrichment? Perhaps if what gets created were emphasized as much as what "gets lost", the relationship might be seen in a more complex light, the polarising tensions might be more closely understood. Why did Gordon Craig consider stage directions an insult to his freedom[37]? Why is a different setting so often chosen over the one mentioned in the play? Is it because this is believed to essentialise what the playwright wants to say to the audience? Or is it simply because there is something else to say, regardless of the playwright - who has nevertheless provided the space in which to say it. England becomes Australia, lounge rooms become garbage dumps because the realisation of a play has the

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37 - See PAVIS, P, op.cit. p89

potential to mean different things, (less and more) and because the practitioner rightly chooses to exploit this potential - to say what he or she wants to say.

Practitioners may not believe in any of these statements literally. They may not even use them personally. Even so, I would argue that the assumptions that they reveal when fully unravelled still exist and are enacted in practice. There remains a constant emphasis upon fusion and accord - the union of a playtext and its realisation, the direct line between practitioner and playwright. This may be an emphasis which in its limitation, actually pre-ordains failure: trying to force a union when it actually does not happen this way, setting an expectation that can never be met. And in turn failing in another more alarming way - by self-censorship and the inhibition of the practitioner's full creative potential, or by the avoidance of responsibility. Were the emphasis to shift from a desire for closeness to an acceptance of distance, from an insistence on lines, to an acknowledgement of the inevitable gap that lies between text and performance, it may be possible not only to put forward a more accurate reflection of what occurs, but also to see and therefore appreciate the very opening through which things *do* happen: perhaps the very thing that excites and stimulates the urge to make theatre is the existence of this "écart" and the creative potential it offers. Perhaps it is in this disparity that the artist is offered a new way of perceiving the reality suggested by the text - and in this, a new way of perceiving reality. And if there is an eagerness to look for magic, perhaps this is where it exists:

> "Peut-être notre plaisir au théâtre tient-il précisément de voir inscrire un texte, par définition étranger au temps et à l'espace, dans le moment passager et l'ère délimitée du spectacle. Ainsi la représentation théâtrale ne serait pas le lieu d'une unité retrouvée, mais celui d'une tension, à jamais inappaisée entre l'éternel et le passager, entre l'universel et le particulier, entre l'abstrait et le concret, entre le texte et la scène. Elle ne réalise pas plus ou moins un texte: elle le critique, elle le force, elle l'interroge. Elle se confronte à lui et le confronte à elle. Elle est non un accord mais un combat."[38]

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[38] - DORT, B, *Le Monde du dimanche*, 12 Oct. 1980 quoted in Pavis, P, *Dictionnaire*, op. cit. p392

*7- "Chekhov would be proud of us".*

There is little need to dwell further on the idea of the playwright's superior status, on the practitioner's apparent need for parental sanction or indeed the desire for accord which this statement suggests. Without denying that it does suggest them, this like the other statements may have a positive flipside which has been overlooked till this point. In demystifying the search for links with the playwright, it would be wrong to suggest that any attempt at forging a connection with the playtext or its author is by its very nature counter-productive. The argument is not that one should eradicate any desire to search for meanings in a playtext, or that the commitment of the practitioner should only be towards the selfish expression that the breach between text and stage affords. To *acknowledge* a disparity does not necessarily imply a need to *embrace* it. To alter the emphasis on authorial links does not mean that they should be *eradicated.*

It would be equally wrong to suggest that such a statement as "Chekhov would be proud of us" necessarily reinforces slavish tendencies towards an all-powerful creator. Throwing his pride back in his face could after all be evidence of the very parent/child relationship that is being questioned - in just the same way that a child who ferociously asserts his/her independence is ironically affirming a need for parental approval. For the fact that practitioners do care about the playwright may not be such an indictment: respect and admiration for another artist's work, the ambition to make a contribution which lives up to a personal standard are not in themselves signs of weakness, and do not automatically mean a loss of status. There may be something important that the adherence to such a humble turn of phrase is couching and this may have to do with the acknowledgement of the author as a party in what is after all a communal expression. Whatever the practitioner's role, if what he or she is alluding to is a desire to have reciprocated the same pride that he or she feels towards the playwright, towards the actors, director, designer for their contribution, then this is simply a show of appreciation and goodwill. There is a sense that the practitioner would simply like the playwright to be there to experience it first hand.

It may be just as valid however to be indifferent to the playwright's pride: whether or not the practitioner cares may have little bearing on the quality of theatre being made. Similarly, whether or not his/her approval is earned may not be a gauge of success - artistic, critical or financial. Such a term has different implications depending on how it is used and potentially it

allows certain assumptions to go by unchecked. Any claim over what the playwright might think is speculative after all - a matter of opinion and more likely to be a measure of *one's own* personal taste. A circuitousness emerges: "it is our opinion that this production of Chekhov is good therefore Chekhov would be proud and the fact that Chekhov would be proud means that the production is good." Whether "we" are the audience or the artists, we are really just propping up our own opinions. Chekhov likes a production when *we* like a production - the difference being that Chekhov carries a lot more weight. And so productions are validated because of the playwright's power of sanction. In actual fact it is an audience's critical response that measures a production's success or failure, not the playwright's. And in this the true "destinataire" can at least be acknowledged, that is, the spectator. If there were ever an accord to be had between playwright and practitioner then surely it is in their mutual intention to communicate to an audience.

Interestingly enough there are as many proud Chekhovs as there are Brechts who would turn in their grave. If these statements afford the luxury of appropriating the playwright's opinions and speaking on behalf of them, it is partly because they are never present to set the record straight. What is of interest in all of the preceding pronouncements and made particularly clear here is that they are all contingent upon the playwright's absence - and usually upon the playwright's death. Many of these statements may have come about from the mainstage concentration on classics and 'canonised' texts, or texts from overseas - from a glut of cases where the playwright is invariably absent. But their absence is not just the raison-d'être of these statements; it is often a condition for their perpetuation and for the various myths they encompass. We have only to look at some situations in which the playwright is alive and present to see that union and accord are not necessarily striven for, and even if they are, they are not necessarily achieved. This furthermore has little bearing on the "success" of a production. Conversely, attempts to achieve a rapport with the playwright do not necessarily guarantee a successful production.

**PRACTICE** (or anecdote)

*During a dramaturgical discussion over dinner, Wayne Harrison suggested to Frank Hardy that the first draft of his play had no drama. He pointed out that while Frank Hardy was an excellent writer, he was not a*

*dramatist. At this point Frank Hardy threw a steak bone at him and got him on the nose.*[39]

The relationship between writer and director is not always as harmonious as it often depicted in an ideal scenario. The point here is not to state that this lack of harmony exists, so much as to question whether the scenario that is so often depicted is in fact at all ideal. In doing so I will look at a number of different situations drawn from recent theatre practice: firstly, instances in which the playwright is in fact absent and then where the playwright is absent for rehearsals but present at the production.

*1-The absent playwright.*

> "Rien n'est plus terrifiant qu'un metteur-en-scène qui a des idées. Son rôle n'est pas d'avoir des idées, mais de comprendre et rendre celles de l'auteur, de ne les forcer, ni les atténuer en rien, de les traduire avec fidélité dans le langage du théâtre" [40]

Many things have changed since Copeau made this pronouncement. Were he to make it today, only a respect for his undoubted genius would save him from the wrath of many a contemporary director. However, the more things change, the more they stay the same and certain similarities emerge that connect contemporary practice so intrinsically to the past that Copeau sometimes feels positively modern- or is it the reverse?

Copeau was the director who attested to such a strong bond with the playwright that he would sit in front of his company on the first day of rehearsals and "intone" each line of the text, as it was meant to be performed - as it was intended. This may seem antiquated but there are echoes of this sort of relationship in contemporary practice. Arne Neeme is known to rehearse for long periods of time without looking up from his script, concentrating on

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39- This anecdote was relayed by Wayne Harrison (artistic director STC) at a panel discussion on the relationship between playwright and director at the Australian National Playwright's Centre in July 1994.

40 - Copeau, J, *Appels*, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, p268

the sounds produced by the actors like a musical score. In KING LEAR[41] Rodney Fisher apologised and warned his actors before a run that he may not watch them at all - that he wanted to concentrate on the text, and did so, eyes closed or downcast for a good part of the run. Neither of these directors would necessarily claim to know how the lines were "intended" to be said but the text still carries a privileged status and they appear to be cementing a bond with the absent playwright or at least a special relationship with the text. Their actions furthermore suggest a need to hear the text in its "pure" form-without the distraction afforded by spatialisation. If at least one authorial intention can be guaranteed, it is that plays are intended to be performed. With the odd exception of closet dramas, plays on the whole have an inherent spatialisation which is as integral and essential to their meanings as the rhythms of language or their auditory effect. To shut one's eyes to the "new" text that is being created with the marriage of playtext and space carries the suggestion that these two elements do not work together to produce meaning, that text and spatialisation are not complimentary and that they do not find themselves in production, so intertwined and interdependent that they are inseparable as far as the overall meanings communicated. There is much more to be said on this point. It is enough here to draw attention to the practical distinction that is made between (play)text and space and the idea that they can somehow exist in theatre, as separate and distinct elements - that they can do without each other.

But there is another term for what Copeau's technique involved: the "line reading" is the practice whereby a director asks an actor to imitate his/her exact inflection and therefore meaning of a line - and on the whole it is a method warned against in training and frowned upon in practice. Nevertheless, it occurs frequently and although many actors have come away from a rehearsal disgruntled at the restriction of their "freedom", no-one (in my experience) has reacted this adversely to one of Neil Armfield's line-readings.

Perhaps there is no better testimony to the fact that we read differently and glean different meanings from a text than the actor defending his or her 'freedom' to express that meaning through vocal intonation, "choice" of emphasis and characteristic rhythms and tempi... The reaction against the

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[41] Rodney Fisher's production of KING LEAR was produced by the STC and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House in May 1994.

'line reading' is after all a statement about the collaborative nature of theatre and the fact that different contributors bring different skills to bear. It may be that directors do not make good actors, and that playwrights do not make good directors, or that none of the various talents involved overlap. But in this, it is also a statement about the nature of communication, and a debunking of anyone's claim to be more "privy" to a meaning than anyone else. It actively works as a day to day safeguard against any bogus claim of having a greater connection to the writer than anyone else, of being privileged or of pertaining to an élite.

So does this mean that Neil Armfield has a *legitimate* claim and connection? Why is his 'transgression' not perceived as such? It is surely too simplistic to suggest that Armfield can get away with giving line-readings because of his status, reputation, and the fact that he is possibly Australia's leading director and therefore worth listening to. However much of a genius Armfield is, there is surely a danger in attributing to him the qualities of the privileged artist who has a special (almost superhuman) connection to the playwright. This assumption could all too easily be made - undoubtedly to the distress of the director himself - and if the actor is unquestioning of this practice, or if his/her rationale puts the onus back onto the director ('because I was told', 'because I trust the director', 'because the director is the best in the country') then it may reveal a lame if not lazy appraisal of how complex a system of communication it is. To trust a colleague or appreciate their expertise is definitely a productive and desirable stance, but this does not preclude enquiry so long as it is clear that the enquiry does not relate to a pedigree but to the nature of communication itself. How much more revealing is it to look further at *why* something works for one and not another, why rules come with exceptions, and what all this says about the nature of meaning - its fixedness or its fluidity, its propensity for restriction or for range.

There is firstly an initial danger in generalising what a line-reading is. If it is agreed that it is after all an interpretation of a particular line of the text, which is formulated furthermore in relation to other lines, then it follows not only that there will be vast differences of interpretation amongst individuals, but that their very *method* of interpreting i.e. *how* they 'line-read' is different. Just as a dislike of "text-based theatre" may actually be a dislike of *how* text-based theatre is realised, so too a disagreement with the idea of a line-reading can be confused with a disagreement as to *how* line-readings are performed. In some situations a line-reading may be given in

such a way that the actor involved feels constricted; in others they might feel directed and perhaps even liberated, but not constricted. Neil Armfield can tell Angie Milliken to lengthen the vowel on "If by your Art my dearest father, you have/ Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them."[42] On the one hand he is telling her how to intone the line: it is very difficult to lengthen this particular vowel without stressing the word. "Art" then becomes the key word, and put in relief. This in turn affects meaning - retrospectively and *potentially*: a clear link is made between the storm just witnessed and its cause - Prospero's spell. But it also establishes a paradigm, plots the seed of the drama to come and hints at the conflict that might unfold. In this particular case, the line-reading did "pin down" a particular choice for the actor, but it also unlocked a range of options and opened up the meaning potential for what was to come. This furthermore has little to do with how specific the line reading is or isn't: in UNCLE VANYA[43] readings were as specific as "I think it's better if you say it this way: ..." and in DEAD HEART[44] as general as "try moving this line up into the tenor range". The point is the way in which it acts upon meaning and this differs from one line to the next and from one production to the next so that it is impossible to formulate hard and fast rules. It seems however that the more a line-reading *opens up* meaning, the more it suggests a wealth of other possibilities to the actor, then the process is more akin to the excitement of discovery than the shortening of a leash. This however is the more difficult option, and requires skill if not courage on the part of the director: it does empower the actor, and therefore comes with a degree unpredictability. The realisation of a play is then not so much about fulfilling a pre-ordained vision, and bringing a company closer to this. It becomes more about relinquishing the personal and therefore restricted range of meanings that have made the text understandable, being prepared to abandon a mind's eye image that makes perfect (but *small*) sense of the piece and surrendering to the unknown potential of meanings generated in all facets of production; trusting that at least one coherent path will begin to emerge that will be recognisable and infinitely richer in meaning than

42 - Neil Armfield to Angie Milliken in rehearsal for THE TEMPEST, produced by Company B and performed at Belvoir Street in July 1990

43 - UNCLE VANYA, by Chekhov was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by the STC and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House in August 1992

44 - DEAD HEART by Nicholas Parsons, was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company B, and performed at the Eveleigh Railyards in March 1994

anything that could be imagined in one head. It is not surprising that outside of his production of HAMLET[45] Neil Armfield was fielding the diverse responses of spectators and enriching his own: few other directors would forgo so generously the sense of control that interpretation affords, few others could have an individual reading and so effortlessly acknowledge how limited the idea of a single reading is.

It is difficult to make these points without alluding to the Shakespeare experiments at the Sydney Theatre Company[46] which offer useful points of contrast. Here, the project brief was to recreate as closely as possible the exact conditions of Shakespearean performance in the theory that this might elucidate the texts and make them more accessible to modern audiences. Whether or not these succeeded (they were indeed very popular shows) , the point is that the emphasis was very clearly on "getting closer" to Shakespeare, and the assumption was that in so doing, the audience would be rewarded: in doing them as they were "meant to be done", we might understand them better.

These were very "faithful" productions in the sense that they involved copious research into the circumstances of performance (the limited rehearsal time, the space and style of play) and into the text itself: the folio versions were studied with great rigour and detail, from every punctuation mark (questioned in relation to its possible meaning) to a fairly strict adherence to the original role distribution (men playing women etc.). This may well have highlighted certain meanings but I would argue that they may not necessarily have highlighted any of the meanings that existed in Shakespeare's day. If the intention was to "unlock" or to "unearth" meanings, this again implicates those assumptions that we have been discussing. If the intention was to see what fresh meanings were created by doing Shakespeare in this particular way, then that is a very different issue. Given that the perceived textual signs are recodified by their transferral to the modern stage, meanings are therefore both restricted and broadened: to take just one example, "men dressed as women" are still men dressed as women, but the course of history and Priscilla movies will always ensure that one can never perceive things as they

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45 - HAMLET, by Shakespeare was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company B and performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre in June 1994

46 - Shakespeare Inc, under the auspices of the STC and the direction of Wayne Harrison and Philip Parsons were experimental productions of various Shakespeare plays from 1988 through to 1992.

were originally intended and that the sign will adopt a whole new connotative range. So while this particular way of performing Shakespeare may indeed speak to its audience very directly, it may be less because it has tapped into something authentic than because it happens to highlight meanings that are particularly relevant to our social context, and further informed by very current subcultures such as drag. Difficulties occur however, when the sign is not accredited its full denotative and connotative force, when it is not selected with careful consideration of the meanings it carries in itself and of the meanings it creates by its sheer placement with and relationship to other signs. I would venture that any criticism that did surround these productions had to do with this attempt to reproduce signs without acknowledging and in fact utilising their changing field of meaning - in other words by emphasizing links with the absent playwright to the detriment of the "living" text and its meaning potential.

*2- The present playwright*

Who knows what Shakespeare might have thought had he been present for these two productions. But a desire to make a connection with the playwright's intended meanings is not always the measure of a good production; furthermore it is all too easily assumed that these strong connections are being made if the playwright isn't there to corroborate our story. Any number of good intentions do not always guarantee the playwright's approval and this is clearly confirmed in some situations where the playwright *is* present, if not for rehearsals, for the production.

Ros Horin's production of ABINGDON SQUARE, by Maria Irene Fornes was performed at the Belvoir St Theatre in 1990. It was a script that the director had been devoted to for some time, and understandably her enthusiasm for it generated great admiration and respect for its author. The production was directed with meticulous concern for the playwright's intentions - perhaps fuelled by the fact the she was in fact arriving from New York to see the production. Ros Horin herself had made this visit possible and was very much looking forward to meeting someone with whom she already felt she had a great affinity. In this particular situation, Fornes arrived the day before the opening, in time for the last preview - at which she despaired. One of her main criticisms was in the understated style of play that Ros Horin had opted for: it was a very measured and even production where

emotions were kept in check and the drama underplayed. This was appropriate to her interpretation of the piece and her attempt to show the sort of destruction that results from the suppression of feelings and natural sexuality. Her concern was also to avoid sentimentality into which the play could easily fall. For Fornes, it was not sentimental enough, and she expressed disappointment that what had in fact been written as a melodrama was being played as naturalism and not inducing the "correct" audience reaction, or at least the one she had been used to in New York. Horin's argument against this was based on cultural grounds: she defended her own knowledge of Australian audiences (their dislike of sentiment for example) over Fornes' and said that the production that Fornes envisaged would mean certain critical death within our particular cultural and social frame of reference. Horin was nevertheless put in the dilemma of proceeding to opening night without adjustment, or of serving the intentions of the playwright as expressed plainly by Fornes herself.

This was furthermore a playwright whose intentions she had been scrupulously concerned with. A great deal of time was spent in finding textual clues that might elucidate these. The period was treated very seriously and research done to adhere to it as strictly as possible. Solutions were found as to possible reasons for her choice of setting etc. The time frame was analysed and the actors were made to take account of the various passages of time, seasons etc. in their story-telling. At this point it became clear that a particular date in the text, (the announcement of Marion's pregnancy) had interesting ramifications for the characters in terms of when in fact she did become pregnant etc. and what this meant for Juster's knowledge of the adultery : if the time frame was to be strictly adhered to, either it was a lapse in the writing or else the scene could only be played in a particular way. On questioning Fornes about this she admitted that she hadn't noticed it before and that it was in fact a lapse in the writing. What the actors had thought to be carefully mapped out with an anterior design, had not been, and they in fact created the logic that supported the time reference.

When the script of FALSETTOS[47] arrived at the Sydney Theatre Company, it was very sparse in stage directions and very few clues were given as to the playwright's intended spatialisation: the director Wayne

[47] FALSETTOS by W. Finn and J. Lapine, was produced by the STC, performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House In January 1994

Harrison relied on the sung 'dialogue" and what few directions there were, to piece together what was happening on stage. At the very end of the play when Whizzer is in his hospital bed, we are told: "*Whizzer can't go on anymore , and taps Jason as he leaves, escorted by Dr. Charlotte. Everyone else but Marvin follows.*" The final song then begins and the lyrics suddenly adopt the past tense suggesting a retrospective appraisal of the relationship on the part of Marvin:

"MARVIN *(left alone )*
What would I do if I had not met you?
Who would I blame my life on?"

When he comes back to the present tense in the second verse, Whizzer is still physically absent, as indicated by the previous stage direction. And once again it is only to ask:

"Where are you now?"

Then we are told:

*"Whizzer appears behind Marvin, dressed as we first saw him.*
*Marvin turns around, sees Whizzer and catches his breath,"*

The change of costume implies a memory of Whizzer, the suggested split staging confirming that they are in fact in different places and time frames. Marvin catches his breath as if he sees a ghost. What is more, Marvin goes on to say:

"God only knows too soon I'll remember your faults"

[..]

WHIZZER:
Do you regret --?

MARVIN ( stopping him)
I'd do it again.
I'd like to believe that I'd do it again
And again and again...
What more can I say?

[..] How am I to face tomorrow?

BOTH:
After being screwed out of today.
Tell me what's in store.

MARVIN:

Yes, I'd beg or steal or borrow
If I could hold you for
One hour more"

Whizzer exits before the last stanza leaving Marvin alone on stage. He repeats:

"No simple answers.
But what would I do
If you had not been
My friend .
My friend
My friend. "

His friends then gather round him and Trina consoles him as the lights fade to black. That Whizzer has died does not seem to be an implausible interpretation and the production took this angle in the genuine belief that this was the intended outcome. The composer William Finn flew from Los Angeles specifically for the opening night and was astonished to find that this interpretation could have been made. Whizzer did not die in the American production and he could see no reason for the assumption that he did.

In all of these cases the idea of anterior design and authorial intention seem arbitrarily related to what actually occurs in practice, even when practitioners are most adamant to secure a connection. There are as many examples which show playwrights delighted and "well served" by productions of their texts. But once again this is not necessarily because their intentions have been miraculously transposed from page to stage. In new work for example there are many instances in which the playwright is all too happy to have new meanings revealed through the course of workshopping or staging. In other instances writers are surprised that their texts afford meanings that they had never imagined. And this is perhaps because the writer does "absent" him or herself from the writing , draws back from it in order to allow interpretation to unfold:

> "*Absence* of the writer too. To write is to draw back. Not to retire into one's tent , in order to write, but to draw back from one's writing itself. To be grounded far from language, to be emancipated from it or lose one's hold on it, to let it make its way alone and unarmed. To leave speech. To be a poet is to know how to leave speech. To let it speak alone, which it can do

only in its written form. To leave writing is to be there only to provide its passageway, to be the diaphanous element of its going forth: everything and nothing. "[48]

This is no less applicable to the dramatic text, and if the passageway the writer provides is one which leads to its interpretation - then in this case it is a passageway towards concrete realisation. But the playwright's absence is contingent upon the interpreter letting him/her go; and it would seem here that the interpreter is the party unable to relinquish the idea of an omnipresent author and who tries so hard to counter his or her effacement by conjuring a presence. The insistence on direct lines and connections are ironically a way disallowing the playwright's absence, of clutching to the originator like a child to its mother. If the writer does "absent" him or herself from the writing and draws back from it, the practitioner might also benefit from allowing this eclipse - or at least from relaxing some of the ties that force meaning into fixity rather than fluidity.

> "We know now that the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the "message" of the Author -God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. [...] Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. [...] In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered: [...] the space of writing is to be ranged over not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way [...] *writing* , by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning to the text (and the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary, since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end to refuse God..."[49]

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48 - Derrida, J, *Writing and Difference*, op. cit. p70.

49- Barthes, R,"The death of the Author", in IMAGE-MUSIC-TEXT Trans. Stephen Heath, 1977

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To many theatre practitioners, the suggestion that "it is futile to decipher a text" would in some situations, (but particularly in the realm of mainstage text-based theatre) be met with incredulity and would perhaps even be seen to attack the very raison-d'être of their work. As extreme as Barthes' statement seems, its crux lies perhaps in his substitution of the word "disentangle" for "decipher", which doesn't suggest that links with the text are non-existent but simply that there is another way of seeing them. He presents another image and therefore a distinct perception of the text and this points furthermore towards a common concern across the range of theoretical views alluded to in this chapter. All seem to involve finding a new "image" with which to describe the text, and while these may vary, they all seem to define themselves by contrast to a common perception of the text. Each view seems to set itself against an "Author as God" or "Text as Truth" relationship, a relationship which as we have seen is characterised by a common set of assumptions: strings, lines, bonds, connections, ties - the idea of direct correspondence seems to encapsulate the "traditional" view of the reader's relationship to the text. Whether the contrasting images are "rhizomes" or "games" or the 'tangled multiplicity' that Barthes seems to suggest, each theoretical stance examined to this point seems to share a vocabulary and to culminate in a common paradigm. The following examples may help to extend this idea.

> "The essential thing is the noun "multiplicity" which designates a set of lines or dimensions which are irreducible to one another. [...] A line that does not go from one point to the other but passes between the points, ceaselessly bifurcating and diverging, like one of Pollock's lines. Every multiplicity grows from the middle, like the blade of grass or the rhizome."[50]
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> "The reader actually causes the text to reveal its multiplicity of connections.[...]The opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections- for filling in the gaps left by the text itself." [51]

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50- Deleuze, G & Parnet, C, *Dialogues* (trans. Hugh Tomlinson &Barbara Habberjam) New York, Columbia University Press, 1987 pvii

51 - Iser,W, op. cit. p216

> "Writing unfolds like a game that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing , nor is it to pin down a subject within language; it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears"[52]

The emphasis here is not so much on the lines but on the gaps: repeated allusions to 'spaces', or 'holes' occur within the theoretical vocabulary which then etches itself sharply against the practical back-drop: here as we have seen, language re-positions the text at its zenith and privileges whichever relationship represents the most direct link. Indeed "gaps" are generally perceived in a negative light, elusive areas through which meaning can slip by: if a script is "full of holes" it is commonly construed to be badly written.

As an anecdotal counterpoint and exception, Merryl Streep is said to look for the line in the script which eludes her the most and hones in on it because it will be the very "hole" that provides the opening into the character. Ironically the very place where meaning is most elusive may also be where it is created. As Iser says, "it is the unwritten part of the text that stimulates the reader's creative participation."[53] And if we perceive the practitioner as reader in this instance, then it follows that it is the unwritten part of the text that equally seizes upon the imagination, activates the faculties and enables him and/or her to "recreate the world it presents."[54]

For the practitioner however, this recreation will be more than an imaginary one: the "virtual dimension" to which Iser refers, the "coming together of text and imagination"[55] will find its concrete expression in the use of three-dimensional *space* .

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52 - Foucault, M, op. cit. p198

53- Iser, W, op cit. p213

54 -ibid. p215

55 -ibid.

# Chapter 2

# Perceptions of "SPACE"

*"Qu'est-ce que la théâtralité? C'est le théâtre moins le texte, c'est une épaisseur de signes et de sensations qui s'édifie sur la scène, à partir de l'argument écrit, c'est cette sorte de perception oecuménique des artifices sensuels, gestes, tons, distances, substances, lumières, qui submerge le texte sous la plénitude de son langage extérieure."* [1]

Many things contribute to our experience of a theatrical event and distinguish it moreover from our reading of a script: these are the unique and inherent features of theatre - features which come alive as Barthes suggests "à partir de l'argument écrit" but are not a property of the text itself. While fundamentally linked to the playtext, they have the propensity to create and communicate meaning in themselves and in this sense constitute separate and *distinctly* signifying structures.

The use of three dimensional space is one such feature, and indeed, the basic condition of any theatrical performance. As Ubersfeld says: "la représentation n'existe que dans et par l'activité scénique. [...] La scène est un lieu physique et concret qui demande qu'on la remplisse et qu'on lui fasse parler son langage concret".[2] Jansen supports this in highlighting it as the key point of distinction between narrative and dramatic texts: for the former, the reader's (or interpreter's) "point of access" into a text is the narrator, but

1 - Barthes, R, ESSAIS CRITIQUES, Paris, Seuil, 1964, pp41-42

2 - Artaud, A, *Le Théâtre et son double*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p51

for the dramatic text it is "un espace scénique".[3] It is interesting to note, that points of access are after all holes or openings - something that Ubersfeld also picks up on:

> "C'est au niveau de l'espace, justement parcequ'il est pour une part énorme le *non-dit du texte,* une zone particulièrement trouée - ce qui est proprement le *manque* du texte de théâtre - que se fait l'articulation texte-représentation." [4]

We are also reminded here of Iser's "coming together of text and imagination"[5] just as we are when Jansen concludes:

> "L'espace scénique assure la jonction [..] entre l'univers réel ou se trouve le lecteur et l'univers fictif.[...] On proposera donc de considérer l'espace scénique comme fondamental dans la structure formelle du texte dramatique." [6]

The theatrical text therefore finds its concrete expression in performance - that is to say in its physical realisation in time and space. *Space* and the ways it is characterised are the first components of concrete meaning - a major force in the density of signs which activates and transforms meanings. The very act of 'realising' a written text, (of staging it - i.e. 'spatialising' it ) and of projecting it into a different dimension, means that it is recodified, and in this sense rewritten: while performance never ceases to be an interpretation of the original text, spatialisation paradoxically broadens the gambit of meanings available - and since a new set of signs entails a new set of interpretations, performance becomes a text in itself from which new meanings may be created.

Depending on one's point of view, we are now faced either with a single text which transforms (this perception foregrounds the idea that meaning is indeed fluid), or with two texts and two signifying structures - namely the playtext and the performance text. Both carry and emit a multitude of signs which they organise into a meaningful system; both communicate differently and in so doing, communicate different things. But provided that we are watching a play - and not a dance for example - spatialisation will not constitute an independent semiotic system. As

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3 -Jansen, S, "Le rôle de l'espace scénique dans la lecture du texte dramatique." in *LLSEE* vol. 10, p255

4- Ubersfeld, A, *Lire le Théâtre* op. cit. p140

5- Iser, W, op. cit. p215

6 - Jansen, S, op. cit. p255

Veltrusky points out, albeit in relation to physicality (use of space after all) "Bodily behaviour, unlike language does not constitute a coherent semiotic system."[7] And if we do remove the text from a performance of Hamlet (unless it is in fact a ballet) it will undoubtedly be impoverished perhaps to the point of not "making sense". In text-based theatre, coherence seems to depend largely on the way that text and space inter-relate. The two semiotic systems are linked, but meanings alter according to the nature of these links. It is therefore in this ever shifting relationship that the main interest of this study lies. And in a field where the playtext often overshadows other semiotic features and is often seen as the dictator of what meanings are to be conveyed, the analysis of space and its use might furthermore elucidate just how much this particular aspect affects meaning in the course of a theatrical process. Indeed:

> "it is the performance as a whole that conveys meaning or has a sense, while the various components are meaningful in as much as they all contribute each in its own way to the integral sense of performance."[8]

In exploring the contribution of one such component (other than the one which receives usual attention) it is hoped that we will reach a more accurate understanding of just where the balance lies at each stage.

This is no easy feat given that the concept of space in the theatrical context has received comparatively little attention. From the practitioner's point of view, it is often difficult to ascertain just how much use of space is a concern since it is perceived justifiably as a given: it *is* the fundamental condition of theatre and in this sense it is taken for granted. But there are two sides to this coin: on the one hand this can be seen as tangible evidence that the purpose of performance is to "realise" the playtext in three-dimensional space; and implicit in this assumption is an appreciation and indeed an active exploitation of its meaning-making potential. On the other hand, treating the three-dimensional space as a given could mean that it is of much less concern to the practitioner than other facets of performance. When asked about 'blocking'[9] for example, director Sandra Bates described this as her least preferred aspect of directing and said that it was something that she usually

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7- Veltrusky, J. "Acting and behaviour: a study in the Signans". *LLSEE* Vol 10, p393

8 - ibid.

9 - Blocking is the part of rehearsals devoted to finding specific movements for the playtext, the staging proper.

left up to the actors to sort out[10] . On the other hand when Richard Cotteril left the blocking of a scene up to the actors, it was similarly because he believed in the actors' ability to find a spatial dimension to their characters' relationship, but there was nevertheless an implicit acknowledgement of the relationship between text and space, and an express desire to see the semiotic potential of space utilised: "if the relationships are right, then the blocking will be right - this is normally the case for a two-handed scene." His concern was not to avoid staging the moves, but to stage the moves by staging the relationship.[11]

When Neil Armfield was introducing the company and their respective roles on the first day of THE TEMPEST rehearsals[12], he jokingly introduced himself as 'the person who was going to block the show'. The expression was a conscious down-playing of his role and everyone laughed both at his self-effacement and at the thought that he would do so little. While the implication is that use of space (in the form of blocking) is a comparatively less crucial force in the communication of stage meanings, THE TEMPEST as it evolved in rehearsals and most of Armfield's productions ( the use of space was particularly crucial in DEAD HEART[13]) seem on the contrary to express a dedicated understanding of its potential - one which is far from trivialising. These examples simply highlight the difficulty - in the absence of dialogue and practical analysis - of ascertaining the perceived functioning of such a key structuring force.

From a theoretical point of view we are relatively not much further advanced although significant inroads have been made by theorists such as Ubersfeld who turned her focus to space long before it attracted others such as Pavis or Issacharoff in the seventies. Together, their major contribution - and the most useful for our purposes here, seems to lie in the investigation of spatial concepts and in the definition of the different elements of space. By counterpointing these with practical appraisals, we will hopefully be able to see the major articulations of space . Since these in turn focus our perception on the ways in which meaning is structured and communicated, it is worth

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10- Sandra Bates spoke at a seminar held by the Centre for Performance Studies, (Sydney University) in 1989.

11 - Richard Cotteril directed the graduating student's production of Caryl Churchill's SERIOUS MONEY at NIDA in 1991.

12 - THE TEMPEST, Belvoir Street op. cit.

13 - DEAD HEART, Belvoir Street production, op. cit. This production was staged in the Eveleigh Railyards with expanses of space simulating the Northern Territory desert environment, trucks and Utilities being driven to get from one location to another.

entering into an initial exploration of these definitions before looking at each element individually.

**DEFINITIONS** (language)

Since definitions are the main focus of this section it seems appropriate to use the *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*[14] as a starting point. Pavis begins his section on space in the theatre by alerting the reader to the difficulty of defining such a complex notion. Added to an already arduous task are the difficulties of translation and for this reason the following will make use of the original French titles which most of the theorists in question share. Pavis in particular isolates six concepts, only four of which concern the physical dimension of performance proper. These are "l'espace dramatique", "l'espace scénique", "l'espace scénographique (ou théâtral)", and "l'espace ludique". The following is an attempt to clarify each of these, firstly in Pavis' own terms, then by relating them to other theoretical points of view, in particular those of Issacharoff, Ubersfeld, Jansen,[15] Scolnikov[16] and McAuley[17]. McAuley in particular proposes the need for a "taxonomy" of space which I will hopefully confirm and contribute towards. In doing so, I will try to reconcile these different stances with what practical terminology we have in order to see how they may elucidate each other.

a) *L'espace dramatique.*

Pavis talks of "l'espace dramatique" as the space to which the playtext alludes, the abstract space which the interpreter constructs with the help of his or her imagination. Issacharoff uses the same terminology to describe "the

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14 - Pavis, P, *Dictionnaire*, op. cit. p146

15 - With reference to those works of Issacharoff, Ubersfeld and Jansen previously mentioned.

16 -With particular reference to: Scolnicov, H, "Theatre space, theatrical space and the theatrical space without" in *The theatrical space (Themes in Drama 9)*, Redmond, J(Ed), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987

17 - With particular reference to : McAuley,G, *Space in Performance* - Work in Progress, 1995

study of space as a semiotic system in a given playscript"[18]. He distinguishes two forms of language which create and focus space in the theatre, being language on stage (dialogue) and language not spoken on stage (stage directions). These differ in their respective functions:

> "The function of metadiscourse [stage directions] is to refer to what is visible or audible - that is what is supposed to be noticed or emphasised. The role of discourse (that is dialogue), on the other hand is to refer both to what is visible and to what is not, and hence, for example to what is described but not shown on stage."[19]

Pavis also sees 'l'espace dramatique' as constructed "à partir des indications scéniques de l'auteur et des indications spatio-temporelles dans les dialogues"[20] but avoids (at least here) delving beyond the surface level of what this entails. How are these indications actually encoded and communicated? how much do they inform our conceptualisation of space?

Ubersfeld teases this out somewhat further than either of these[21]. For Ubersfeld the text has an inherent spatialisation which can be revealed through a rigorous and methodical categorisation of spatial references. While she notes the difference between dialogue and stage directions, this distinction is less useful than distinguishing between the categories of elements which make up the spatial 'lexicon'. These consist of place names and parts of the space, prepositional phrases (implicating space), objects - including the actors themselves since they inhabit the space after all. Through this inventory, very clear spatial paradigms begin to emerge which show us how 'l'espace dramatique' is in fact deeply entrenched at the fundamental level of sign structures.

As far as theatre practice is concerned this inventory is resonant of the methodology of some designers who trace the "movement" of script by noting scene by scene locations, and the internal machinations of individual scenes by listing each spatial element referred to.[22] These will generally be of a practical rather than thematic nature ('a door on stage right" etc. ) and to my

18- Issacharoff, M, *Discourse as Performance,* Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989, p57

19 - ibid. p58

20- ibid. p147

21 - see Ubersfeld, A, op. cit. pp139-176

22 -Dereck Nicholson for example for his set of Buchner's WOYZECK, directed by Philip Keir, produced by the Theatre Studies Service Unit in conjunction with the German Dept., University of Sydney, 1987

knowledge are confined to these sorts of direct textual clues and largely drawn from stage directions. These may get transformed to acquire thematic resonances: this doorway may be extracted to an entrance way and then transformed into - a picture frame for example - maintaining its practical function but gaining another level of meaning. The visual image of a picture frame however, may be prompted more subliminally from the dialogue or from the range of meanings this affords. While 'l'espace dramatique' for the designer may appear to be encoded in the stage directions and direct textual clues, there seems to be an instinctive analysis occurring which isolates fundamental spatial paradigms from the deeper layers of the text.

These however do not always become apparent from a reading of the script. They may be revealed at the interim stage of a white-card model box when the inherent spatialisation of the text is "tested" for the first time against the physical reality of a miniature set - where the perceived "espace dramatique" hits against its first concrete structuring. Once this model box exists and the scale figures are apparent within it, some of the playtext's inherent spatial demands are made all the more obvious: it may become clear for example why an entrance needs to be stage right and that it furthermore needs to be at a certain distance from a table in order for the five characters to move comfortably within the space. Visually, this in turn might prompt the setting up of a clear thematic opposition between the outside world (door) and the inside world (table). This can all be revealed otherwise, through Ubersfeld's methodology, and because the spatialisation of a playtext is entrenched at such a deep level, similar paradigms will emerge.[23] The point is therefore not so much that definitions differ from theory to practice as the fact that they are arrived at by different means, and this sometimes obscures the common features of their perception. It is clear in any case that for the designer at least 'l'espace dramatique" is not a foregone conclusion but arrived at through the course of practice and gleaned from the continual alternation between the abstract and the concrete.

As for the actor's perception of 'l'espace dramatique', it is once again difficult to deduce given that there is so little dialogue surrounding space in the day to day rehearsing of a play. This may be because practice assumes it is really the concern of the designer and as his/her sounding-board, the director.

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23- See Potts, CM, " Structures de Signification Théâtrales: le rapport spatial entre texte et représentation dans *Woyzeck*." Undergraduate Thesis, Sydney, Dept. of French Studies, 1987

These are after all the two figures who seem to discuss the inherent spatialisation of the text in some detail. Once again however, it may be due to the obvious fact that space is actively engaged with as an integral part of what practitioners do: why talk about it when your actions talk for you. There may be no need to trace a particular movement back to the spatial markers in the text if you are convinced that the particular relationship "feels" right and if, as Richard Cotteril suggested, the blocking then follows. It would seem that for the actor, 'l'espace dramatique' reveals itself in a first instance, through the relationships that unfold between characters and between them and their environment. Details which characterise these relationships (and these are not confined to, but do include spatial details) may be seized upon and instinctively inform their sense of 'espace dramatique'.

Once again 'l'espace dramatique' is not determined in advance but through a gradual process of testing its boundaries against the concrete space: indications contained within the stage directions are definitely taken into consideration, although they are often not used literally but as a starting point. If a particular scene is being "blocked" for the first time and if the stage direction indicates "x enters stage left" the actor playing x will often enter stage left until the director makes another suggestion or until he/she comes up with a reason for using another part of the space. Whether this is actually getting closer to forming an impression of the text's inherent spatialisation or diverging from it, is a question to be looked at in the later analysis given that it cannot really be looked at out of the processual context that defines it.

2) *L'espace scénique*

This term has also been fleetingly referred to through Jansen's use of it when discussing the reader's 'point of access' in a text. On the one hand his usage seems more akin to Pavis' previously discussed 'espace dramatique' but this may be because his emphasis, like most theorists, is on the playtext and if studies concern space, they are generally confined to space within the playtext. This is certainly the case for Issacharoff who states his concern plainly, but whose definitions regarding such aspects as 'espaces mimétiques' and 'diégétiques', are as we shall see, paradoxically very useful in the analysis of concrete space and its use. For Pavis however, 'l'espace scénique' differs from Jansen's in that it quite specifically refers to the physical and concrete space that the actors endow, the 'stage space' according to his own translation, and this he defines in sharp contrast to 'l'espace dramatique' :

> "Espace dramatique s'oppose à espace scénique. Ce dernier est visible et se concrétise dans la mise en scène. Le premier [...] appartient au texte dramatique."[24]

There are a number of assumptions that underlie this definition which need further thought. On the one hand, Pavis seems to be talking about stage space as it exists in concrete reality - prior to its being fictionalised. In other words, he perceives it removed from its immediate function, and in this case it is difficult to ascertain what essential features characterise it as stage space; as Alter states "theatre does not seem to be bound by any particular type of stage. It has long demonstrated its ability to turn any space into a stage."[25] It is possible then that Pavis is referring to the concrete realm of *the fiction* which indeed he appears to when he says:

> "D'une part l'espace scénique est déterminée par le type de scénographie et par la visualisation que s'en est fait le metteur en scène dans sa lecture de l'espace dramatique." [26]

In this case to establish 'l'espace dramatique' and 'l'espace scénique' as opposites seems to be an inaccurate representation of the relationship since the former will necessarily be inscribed in the fictitious space. Similarly the implication that 'l'espace scénique' doesn't belong to the dramatic text sits oddly with the points just discussed and the suggestion that the 'mise-en-espace' found by the practitioners through the course of rehearsals is linked to the inherent textual spatialisation at the level of its deeper structures.

Another point which deserves discussion is the assumption that the stage space is that which is "seen as opposed to that which is imagined". Once again this could suggest that Pavis is referring to the stage space independently of its being activated by fiction - to its capacity of being seen and touched as part of concrete reality. In this case, does the off-stage space constitute part of 'l'espace scénique' given that it is just as concrete as the on-stage space, and often as perceptible - especially when not fictionalised? If Pavis is referring to only to that area of space capable of being fictionalised, then this definitely includes the offstage space: it is difficult to forget Quince's offstage kitchen in THE POPULAR MECHANICALS where sausage rolls became progressively more burnt as the on-stage action delayed him. This space "without" was as real as the rest of the fictionalised space, but remained,

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24- Pavis, P, op. cit. p146

25- Alter, J, *A Socio-semiotic theory of theatre*, Philadelphia, University of Pensylvania Press, 1990, p10

26 - Pavis, P, op. cit. p150

to use Issacharoff's terminology again, a 'diegetic' rather than 'mimetic' space - that is to say imagined rather than perceptible.[27]

At the risk of appearing pedantic, these are important nuances to clarify since they underline the fact that the question of space in theatre cannot be reduced to a dialectic whereby 'espace dramatique' confronts 'espace scénique' to find a synthesis in performance. In beginning to look at the concrete dimension of theatrical space it is important to acknowledge its complexity and to this end recognise firstly its two-fold nature: "L'espace scénique", as Ubersfeld defines it is simultaneously real (in the sense that it exists as a concrete entity) and fictitious (in the sense that it assumes the characteristics of the fictional world with which it is endowed through performance.) It is that area of the space which we can recognise as masonite and bricks, devoid of fiction and at the same time see as a Bohemian pasture - or a mechanical's lounge-room with a kitchen just behind the flat. By distinguishing the different functions of 'l'espace scénique' and introducing the idea of fiction into the definition, 'l'espace dramatique' has a place within its boundaries and the relationship is therefore more accurately represented. The imaginary and the perceptible co-exist and are no longer set in opposition.

The practical terminology for this suggested spatial realm seems much less sophisticated: by-and-large this is quite simply the 'stage', and this is something that Pavis hints at when he says "C'est à peu près ce que nous entendons par "la scène" de théâtre"[28] . This term however seems to mean a different thing for the spectator which is where Pavis tends to position himself.

For the spectators the 'stage' is very closely related to the theatre building and perceived as that area which is obviously set apart from their own, and towards which they have a clear vantage point. It is usually a delineated part of the space - raised, framed or bordered - sometimes simply where the paint stops. Often this does coincide with 'l'espace scénique' as defined by Ubersfeld, especially in more conventional forms of theatre where the fictitious space confines itself to the area delineated by the concrete space 'for this purpose'. With the exception of very few shows in the DramaTheatre of the Opera House for example, the concrete features of the space ( i.e. the 'stage' proper, as the raised platform under the proscenium arch provides an almost tangible barrier between audience and actors, and amounts to a

[27] -Issacharoff, M, op. cit. pp58-67

[28] - Pavis, P, op.cit. p150

confinement of the fictitious space to this area of the theatre. Nevertheless as Alter points out, these 'barriers' have always been symbolic to an extent and have continually been breached: they are both "respected as a rule and transgressed for specific reasons."[29] Many productions testify to this: at the Wharf Theatre entrances often occur through the audience, while entire scenes can be played out across the distance from the top of the auditorium aisle of the ' stage' proper. This was the case for Paul Goddard's first scene as Philip in THE GIFT OF THE GORGON for example.[30] At Belvoir Street THE TEMPEST[31] saw Gillian Jones delivering her Harpie speech from the railings above the vomitory, well inside the carpeted area with seating. No concrete feature contributed to the delineation of this space as fictional other than her own endowment of it. The audience however regularly transgressed this space and had to be consistently removed from an area which they were naturally attracted to and which they considered appropriately separate from their perceived stage.

For the actor however, while acknowledging that this barrier exists, it does appear to hold a more symbolic relevance than a real and practical one. In THE POPULAR MECHANICALS again, Keith Robinson's resounding "Get *off* the stage!!" which occurred when an audience member mistook part of the auditorium as his domain, was consciously playful but still alludes to the irony that the stage is in fact defined by its ability to be fictionalised. For the actor at least it would appear that the 'stage' is elastic, expanding and contracting as its use demands - or as the conventions established within the performance style dictate: once Paul Goddard stepped onto the raised platform, the area behind him reverted to the auditorium aisle and ceased to be part of the stage. The precedent having been set however, it could have become stage again at any moment - which it did in the last scene, appropriately bracketing the performance as a defined event. The term 'stage' therefore does encompass the ambivalence that Ubersfeld suggests and is more closely aligned to a practical definition of 'espace scénique'. It does however have the added property of being a mutable entity which is characterised by its fluidity as much as its preconceptions.

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29 - Alter , J, op.cit. p10

30 -THE GIFT OF THE GORGON, by Peter Shaffer was produced by the Sydney Theatre Co, directed by Wayne Harrison and performed at the Wharf Theatre in March 1994.

31 - THE TEMPEST, Belvoir St. op. cit.

It is also necessary to locate the term "set" or "set design" here, since it can coincide with the stage space but is different from it. Neither Issacharoff nor Pavis deal with this concept in any detail: while they may hint at their significance through allusions to "scénographie" or the adjective "scénographique" just exactly what these terms mean and where they fit into to the spatial 'taxonomy' escapes any real consideration. Pavis for example uses this term in the same breath as "l'espace théâtral" which to my mind is quite a different thing as we will see.

Ubersfeld's emphasis on the simultaneously real and fictional features of the stage space only proves its usefulness further since it elucidates quite clearly the main distinction. If the stage space evokes both the real and the fictional , the set pertains specifically to the fictitious domain. It may well be made of polystyrene and there is always a deep-seated awareness of this concrete dimension in the mind of the spectator - a voluntary 'suspension of disbelief'; nevertheless it is that aspect of the stage space which is consciously semiotised and stands in relief against its more 'neutral' parameters. It is often literally "where the paint stops" and this can coincide with the edge of the stage proper, (in the event that there *is* a stage or platform) or can continue up the sides of the walls, well into the auditorium as in the case of Steven Curtis' design for THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR[32] : while this area was never used by the actors, and the formal stage/audience demarcation was never in fact transgressed, the painted walls extended the boundaries of the fictitious into what is traditionally the audience's space. This would be considered 'part of the set' or 'set design' whereas the use of this area does not alone qualify it as such: while Paul Goddard's entrance through the auditorium might have stretched the boundaries of the stage, it did not stretch the boundaries of *the set* which remained that part of the space to which fiction had in a sense "been applied". THE TRACKERS OF OXYRINCUS[33] as a third case in point, is an example of where the auditorium itself was both used by the actors and made part of the set - in the sense that it was completely enveloped by the scaffolding and Hessian which characterised the fictional 'archaeological dig'. In other words, it would seem that the set has to be something concrete and tangible, constructed furthermore for the purposes of endowing the so-called "neutral" space with

32-THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR by Gogol was directed by Neil Armfield , produced by the STC and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House in 1990.

33 - THE TRACKERS OF OXYRINCUS by Tony Harrison was directed by Mark Gaal, produced by the STC and performed at the Wharf Theatre in 1992

fiction. While it pertains to the imaginary and fictitious level of performance, it is nevertheless "perceived" rather than "conceived"[34], "mimetic" rather than "diegetic"[35].

The practice of set design itself probably hits upon the clearest way of defining it when we consider the model box process: these black boxes are prefabricated scale versions of the theatre space (as defined next). A designer might have one of the Wharf Theatre for example, and this would include nothing but the architectural shell and any concrete fixture that exists within it. The "set" is the full scale version of the pieces which get placed within this black box as a result of discussions between the director and designer (- and often the production manager who keeps his/her eye on the costings). They are therefore the more transient spatial elements that get changed from play to play, and removed from the 'all-purpose' model box at the end - leaving it ready for the next set-design to be placed within it.

This is almost literally a "black and white" definition, but represents fairly much the practical conception of set. The only point worth adding, is that architectural fixtures can constitute part of the set , so long as they are 'fictionalised' - either by having something done to them which removes their neutrality (paint is again the obvious example) or if they are not tampered with, but in a sense "camouflaged" by or incorporated into the semiotic system as a coherent contributor to the overall meaning. Similarly, there are elements which can be placed inside a theatre space but which are not considered to be part of the set: blacks or flats for example are "additional" but do not necessarily add to the fiction of the space. It is interesting also that in the case of touring productions, blacks and flats are often owned and provided by the theatre in question rather than being considered part of the touring set. Perhaps this is because they are black and this is the colour coding for neutrality and non-fiction in the theatre ( a space always gets painted back to black after a show has finished its season - stage managers and operators change into their "blacks" for the show, whereas as actors don their colourful costumes...) or because they are the transitional elements which work as go-betweens from what is 'building' to what is 'set' , as if almost ensuring the easy passage of the spectator from the real to the fictional.

Finally, Ubersfeld talks about "*lieu scénique* " which is different again - both to the theoretical conception of 'espace scénique' and the practical

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34 - Skolnicov, H, op. cit.
35 -Issacharoff, M, op. cit.p58

conception of 'set design' as interpreted above. Roughly translated as 'scenic place', this seems to refer to a specific fictitious location that might be realised on stage. This can correspond to the set when it represents a complete fictional location: the fiction of the set *is* effectively the 'lieu scénique' in the case of SWEET PHOEBE[36] in that it coincides with the living area in the home of the young couple. In the case of TWO WEEKS WITH THE QUEEN[37] however, 'lieux scéniques' were as vast and varied as "the living room of the Australian family home", "the hospital ward", "the Sydney Airport", "the aeroplane", "Heathrow", "the subway", "Buckingham Palace" etc... The set design involved a child's sketch pad, the pages of which were scrolled or "turned" to reveal a drawing of each location as seen through the eyes of a twelve year old. These came to represent each of the places visited by the child throughout the play and in relation to which the story unfolded. The set therefore incorporated all of the necessary 'lieux scéniques' within its overall design concept, but did not really constitute any location in itself. Different again is the case of a set such as Robert Kemp's design for THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE[38]: the set represented not a concept so much as a literal location. Marie and LV's dilapidated house was both set and the 'lieu scénique' of at least most of Act I. A curtain pulled across the upper floor and some tightly focused lighting created another 'lieu scénique' which was the night-club and territory of Boo Lou. In this case, the set provides an overall and unifying 'lieu scénique' while incorporating the potential to present others within it. Lastly, the actors can endow a 'lieu scénique' by their movements alone, without there needing to be any visual or concrete representation of this on stage. Paul Goddard's use of space in THE GIFT OF THE GORGON is once again an appropriate illustration: Philip's "America" was represented simply by his physical distance from Helen, and if anything, by the absence of set: the opposition Greece/America, Old World/New World was in part established by the spatial contrast between the abstract and the concrete - Philip floating in an abstract and alien realm, Helen 'earthed' by her concrete surroundings and the tangibility of the set. Without anticipating the discussion of Pavis' "*ludic space*", in this instance the 'lieu scénique' is

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36 -SWEET PHOEBE, by Michael Gow, was designed by Robert Kemp, directed by Michael Gow, produced by the STC and performed at the Wharf Theatre in Nov 1994.

37 - TWO WEEKS WITH THE QUEEN, adapted by Mary Morris from the novel by Morris Gleitzman was designed by Kim Carpenter, directed by Wayne Harrison, produced by the STC and performed at the Parramatta Riverside and other venues from 1992 to 1994

38 - The RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE, ( STC) op. cit.

quite clearly a space endowed by the actor's physical presence, by his or her movements and gestures.

c) *'L'espace Scénographique' (or 'Théâtral')*

Pavis' definition of "l'espace théâtral" or as he otherwise calls it "l'espace scénographique" is as follows:

> "C'est l'espace scénique, plus précisément défini comme l'espace à l'intérieur duquel se situent le public et les acteurs au cours de la représentation." Il se caractérise comme rapport entre les deux, relation théâtrale (lieu théâtral)".[39]

A first point concerns the inclusion of the word "scénographique". Since he offers the alternative of 'théâtral', this was the preferred option given the potential confusions surrounding the word 'scénographique': this seems to implicate the set design, a feature belonging to the realm of the stage. Indeed Issacharoff's second "Type" of space is entitled the "Scenographic Space" and as "the stage space, that is the stage and set design"[40], it seems more closely connected to the afore mentioned 'espace scénique'.

As for the definition itself, 'l'espace théâtral' could be taken to mean a number of things: firstly it could be seen as the theatre building itself, with all its architectural features - not only those which delineate the location of the audience and actors, but which characterise it essentially as a Stables Theatre as opposed to a Belvoir Street Theatre - and as opposed to a bank. In this case, it would be necessary to distinguish this as a whole from the actual "theatre" within it. In some cases they may well be one and the same : in the case of the Stables Theatre (even though it has a foyer) the building and the space which is devoted to the audience and actors' coming together for the purposes of a performance, are fairly synonymous. The Performance Space is an even clearer example of where two such concepts coincide. These contrast with the Seymour Centre for example which as a venue has three distinct spaces within it for equivalent activities. But if the building as a whole is the 'espace théâtral', what do we call these sub-spaces? If on the contrary these specific areas or rooms 'inside of which' the actors and audience are in fact united are what Pavis intends, then there is need for a term to describe what is in a sense "seen from the outside" as opposed to from within. The building and the specific theatres are both architectural entities which is where Issacharoff

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39 -Pavis, P. op. cit. p146
40 -Issacharoff, M. op. cit. p56

is of little help, relegating 'l'espace théâtral' to the realm of 'architectural design'.[41] Ubersfeld is somewhat clearer in taking further what Pavis only alludes to here as "lieu théâtral" and distinguishing it from 'espace théâtral'. The former refers to the venue and site of the performance (i.e. Belvoir Street) which leaves the latter to describe that divided space in which the performance occurs. Perhaps this distinction has sprung from a perception of their differing semiotic features, from their discreet means of generating and communicating meaning - which Issacharoff at least is not necessarily concerned with:

> "Architecture and Scenography belong to the history of theatre and thus do not concern us directly here.[...] Research on theatre architecture and scenography, tends to be of an historical, sociological bent, with emphasis on the tangible and permanent: theatre buildings, decor, stage design, whatever can be permanently recorded. The focus of such research is thus the *context* of the literary work rather than the *mechanics.*"[42]

I would argue on the one hand that the broadest of architectural features can affect the meanings of the dramatic text which is realised always in relation to it - not just the audience configuration or the shape of the room, but also the size of the building, the texture of its walls...

On the other hand 'architectural' definitions for these spaces do not always encompass other important aspects of their meaning-making potential. They are partly characterised for example by the social, political or cultural codes which operate in relation to any space: as a 'lieu théâtral' the Marian Street Theatre may not be the place for the Tokyo Shock Boys.[43] As an 'espace théâtral' it has all the requisite features. As to its capacity to alter meaning, many a playscript has been changed because of its venue - the most obvious examples being where swear-words are cut or 'diluted', or where place names are changed depending on the space's location: Melbourne's North Baldwin became Balmain for the benefit of Sydney audiences in Tony McNamara's THE CAFE LATTE KID.[44] The point here is to underline the fact that distinctive characteristics signify differently, hence the need *to define*

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41- ibid.

42- ibid. p57

43 - As the title suggests, an avant-garde group of Japanese male Performers whose work is often characterised by its shock value.

44 - THE CAFE LATTE KID by Tony McNamara, directed by Marion Potts was produced by the STC as part of New Stages, its developmental wing, and performed in the Wharf studio in September 1994

them differently. Lines blur with generalisation and to avoid this it may be worth making a third distinction in order to accommodate both Ubersfeld's acknowledgement of the social and cultural codes surrounding a space, and Pavis and Issacharoff's implications of the theatre building as a concrete architectural entity, different again from 'l'espace théâtral' or 'theatre space'. From here on this will relate specifically to that space as "seen from the inside" where actors and audience meet. The whole architectural entity, including but not confined to 'l'espace théâtral' will be alluded to simply as the 'theatre building', while the theatre site, as a cultural and social place (and what I understand Ubersfeld to mean by 'lieu théâtral') will be referred to more practically as the 'theatre venue'. This title is an attractive one since it also has entrepreneurial and financial connotations which in a sense can be ascribed to the socio-political realm. As a venue, the patrons' tastes and the financial security of the theatre are closely linked when it comes to Marian Street's relationship to the Tokyo Shock Boys.

This brings us closer to the whole question of practical terminology : the usage of such terms as "venue" and "theatre building" is widespread and familiar. The purpose here is once again to explore the nuances of meaning which might elude us at first glance.

The 'venue' is known as a location which exists for the purpose of performance, but as a permanent site, is not attached to any one performance necessarily. It is also as often a place which rents its premises to different theatre groups (the Seymour Centre for example) as one of which a particular Company is resident. As a venue, The Belvoir Street Theatre exists separately from the Company B productions which make up its subscription season. As a venue for an independent production such as ABINGDON SQUARE[45] for example, it was chosen for a number of reasons, the first involving the social and cultural associations it both possesses and affords. To much the same extent as the Marian Street Theatre, Belvoir Street is associated with a particular type of theatre which the producers of ABINGDON SQUARE felt was in keeping with their own intended style. The common acceptance of this 'style' as it finds its way into the public arena, in turn generates and is generated by a characteristic group of spectators which constitute its audience base. And in this particular case, there are clear links with the resident Company since the quality of Company B work is largely responsible for Belvoir Street Theatre's reputation as a venue. While there is something of a perpetual cycle here, this does change and evolve; it will be interesting to see

45 - ABINGDON SQUARE, Performed at Belvoir St, op.cit.

how the venue is characterised once it begins to generate two remounted Shakespeare productions and a new one within the one season. [46]

Especially in the realm of practice, the 'venue' also has a pecuniary connotation - usually to do with its seating capacity: commercial venues are traditionally large and this in turn plays upon the selection of works presented there. The Theatre Royal denotes musical theatre through no other feature than its seating capacity which makes it a viable proposition for producers such as the Really Useful Theatre Co. Here we tread on territory that impinges on the realm of architecture since size and seating are after all part of the building proper. The social and cultural associations of a venue also have to do with aspects of comfort for example - whether there is upholstery and air-conditioning or scaffold-seating and wind-breaks. The Drama Theatre and the Eveleigh Railyards have a different cultural status and attract a different audience partly because of their architectural features - the venue is qualified by the building.

If the practical usage of the term 'venue' is as close as we get to Ubersfeld's 'lieu théâtral' then this overlap should be acknowledged though still distinguished from 'the theatre building' proper, which as a concrete architectural entity, affects meanings in a different way: the absence or presence of a fly-tower; the sheer space available for the purposes of spectacle and special effects; the wing space which might or might not demand that backstage action is exposed... The Stables Theatre building for example is constructed in such a way that there is only one entrance to the stage area. Many 'espaces dramatiques' require more. Another can be built in but more than one is at the cost of a severely reduced stage area. This in itself is an architectural feature that affects meaning quite tangibly, since, in some senses playtexts have to be "made to fit". The notorious "pole" which obstructed this only entrance was removed partly due to the difficulty of incorporating it into the spatialisation of a playtext. The history of Griffin productions up to that point however showed many bold and inventive attempts to incorporate this feature into its stage meanings. It is further arguable that this potential for the theatre building to become part of the semiotic system or to actively contribute to the stage meaning is not just limited to those architectural features which impinge upon the stage area or 'l'espace scénique'. And since the theatre building as a concrete entity does in fact activate and affect meanings, it is not only worth including as a definition, but worth

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46 - This is part of the intended programme for Belvoir's 1995 season

recognising as part of the semiotic realm of study and not just as the concern of history and architecture.

Finally, the 'theatre space' as it is termed in practice seems to be the nearest equivalent to Ubersfeld's 'espace théâtral'. This usually means the defined area or 'room' in which the performance takes place and which is also referred to as the 'theatre' proper. Both of these terms are sometimes used to mean the 'venue' but as mentioned before, this is usually when the site has no more than one theatre within it. Interestingly enough, in this case it will more often than not be referred to as a 'theatre space' than as a venue, which is perhaps an indication of the relative status of this divided space: when the venue services only one 'theatre space', nominally this takes precedence, almost as if expanding spatially to overtake the foyer and semantically to incorporate all the connotations of 'venue'.

Since the interest here is to distinguish spatial concepts by making clear definitions, the 'theatre space' will remain for our purpose quite specifically the 'divided space which actors and spectators share'. It is interesting to note that when the venue is excluded from this concept, the emphasis falls constantly upon the relationship between the auditorium and stage space. To talk of "a wonderful theatre space" is not just an appreciation of its sizable stage for example, but of how this feels in relation to the rest of the space: how vast its proportion to the auditorium, how intimate or distanced, how far above or below. In other words, essential to the idea of 'theatre space' are certainly qualities such as the acoustic, the 'warmth' (colour and texture of the walls), but also factors specifically relevant to the structuring of spatial meaning such as the audience configuration and nature of the stage.

*d) l'Espace Ludique*

> C'est l'espace créé par l'acteur, par sa présence et ses déplacements, par son rapport au groupe, son *arrangement* sur la scène. [...] C'est l'espace créé par l'évolution gestuelle des comédiens. Par leurs actions, par leurs relations de proximité ou d'éloignement, leurs libres ébats ou leur confinement à une aire minimale de jeu, les comédiens tracent les limites exactes de leurs territoires individuels et collectif. L'espace s'organise à partir d'eux , comme autour d'un pivot, lequel change lui aussi de position quand l'action l'exige. [47]

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[47] - Pavis, P, op. cit. pp146-149

The word 'ludique' comes from the Latin 'ludare' which means to play, and in this choice of qualifier Pavis highlights the abstract rather than concrete nature of this type of space; it is defined by concrete physical properties only as much as the actors themselves are physical beings. Otherwise the absence of bricks and mortar throws the focus back onto the act of imagination which allows the actors and audience to create a space from thin air. In one sense, Pavis' 'espace ludique' could be translated as 'endowed space': As Ariel in THE TEMPEST, Gillian Jones endowed "grass-plot" in front of her by a sweeping gesture and the space changed before our eyes. [48] Together, actor and audience reached a kind of consensus and set the boundaries of this space, saw its greenness, felt its texture: this is indeed a different space to any that is visible on stage though no less visible within the mind's eye. This particular area of sand is in fact grass and made so not by physical materials but by gesture , by the word, and by an imaginative leap.

This is no doubt why Pavis also refers to 'espace ludique' as 'gestural space' although this is where my personal confusion begins: in a another sense Pavis seems to treat gesture and movement as its equivalent rather than its trigger, and this in turn leads me to question two things: firstly he could be referring to 'espace ludique' not so much as the space but as the shape created by the moves, the parameters of which are constantly changing in three different dimensions. This is the implication when he talks of "la façon dont le corps de l'acteur se comporte dans l'espace: attiré vers le haut ou vers le bas, recroquevillé ou détendu, en expansion ou replié sur lui-même." If this is so, then it must be distinguished from the particular space that might be triggered or endowed by one such a movement: the repertoire of Gillian Jones' movements and gestures in THE TEMPEST may amount to an important encoding of space but will not always amount to a grassy patch - it may, but may not refer to a defined space at all.

This leads to the second point: Pavis may well intend 'espace ludique' to refer to a defined space - to that which is created by the movements of the actors - the parameters of which *are* the parameters of the blocking. This is indeed what he seems to suggest when he says "les comédiens tracent les limites exactes de leurs territoires individuels et collectif."[49] In this sense

48 - THE TEMPEST, (Belvoir Co.B) op. cit. text ref: Act IV sc. 1, L.74
49 -Pavis, P, op. cit. p149

'l'espace ludique' seems to be more closely associated with what was earlier called 'the stage' or what McAuley refers to as 'presentational space'[50] : in the GIFT OF THE GORGON[50] therefore, the space expands with Paul Goddard's presence in the auditorium and this sets new parameters through gesture and movement alone - in this case the 'espace ludique' would stop where he stands. But this seems to contradict the idea of the actor as "pivot": the stage or presentational space may well stop where Paul Goddard is positioned, but the space that he endows fans out around him and grows to the size of America - and in this sense gains metonymic qualities: when positioned there, the character stands for 'America'.

Rather than positing new definitions, this is simply an attempt to highlight some of the confusions that arise from Pavis' definition and to reconcile them furthermore with the terminology as it is used and understood in practice. "The Blocking" is indeed the closest and only practical term for what I believe Pavis is alluding to. This is quite simply the inventory of movements made by the actors in the course of a performance, which despite some minor changes, remains reasonably fixed. This is so by definition: if an actor departs from the movements that are notated in the stage-manager's prompt copy, they are said to be changing the blocking. If a particular performance leaves the actors fairly free to spatialise their relationships as their impulse of the night dictates, then it is referred to as having no blocking. This may be the case in some forms of Avant-Garde theatre for example where the very idea of "fixing" meaning is seen as antithetical to creation, destroying the spontaneity of the actor and petrifying the life of the performance. In such circumstances Pavis' 'espace ludique' cannot be seen as 'blocking' proper but is still descriptive of the spatialisation generated by the actors' bodies. This is perhaps a more palatable description all round since it pinpoints and solves a key conceptual difficulty: Pavis' use of the term 'space' is perhaps what is misleading here. Movements may create a space or spaces as we have seen, but they are not spaces in themselves. 'Spatialisation' however, underlines the processual, the idea of cause and effect; it furthermore encapsulates the dynamic nature of what movements create and may therefore present a more accurate description. 'Spatialisation ludique' or 'gestuelle' would in some part overcome the problems outlined above.

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50 - McAuley,G, op. cit.
50 - THE GIFT OF THE GORGON, (STC) op.cit.

In mainstream theatre however, the actors' spatialisation is indeed termed 'the blocking'. By performance, movements are fairly much fixed and to some extent, the rehearsal process is about gradually fixing a spatialisation; here, rather than being antithetical to creation this may be seen as providing a form for the actor which is in fact liberating. It may also be seen as vital to any show that has complex lighting or technical requirements, given that fixed moves enormously facilitate focusing and cueing by the crew. These are different schools of thought and their differing philosophies should perhaps be reserved for another study. It is enough that our concern here is with mainstream theatre, and we can therefore safely refer to 'the blocking' as that spatialisation generated by the actors' physicality. It must however be clear that we do so in the understanding that this activates spatial meaning in different ways: one of which is in its facility to endow a space by its own virtues and create a whole new metonymic space, another is to extend and set the parameters of the stage space and another is to create patterns or shapes that reflect the dynamic of relationships.

Here, as in all of the preceding discussions about terminology and in the never-ending pursuit of accurate and useful definitions, I am well aware of the inherent problems that come with the territory. McAuley is particularly succinct when she articulates the difficulties that any attempt at a spatial taxonomy unavoidably encounters, and it would be wrong to suggest that they have not made their presence felt here:

> In proposing a general taxonomy of spatial function one is caught between the Scylla of excessive detail and the Charybdis of reductionism. The temptation is to allow categories to proliferate with numerous sub-categories and sub-sub categories in an attempt to account for every nuance and every application. The counter-tendency, springing from an equally laudable desire to highlight the functional structure underpinning this endless variety, is to simplify rigorously; the danger here is that important distinctions are submerged and one is left wanting to problematise every category. [51]

Pavis may well be right in saying that the enterprise is both "vain and desperate" and this warning can all too readily discourage - especially given the sea of material that still awaits theoretical exploration. Nevertheless

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[51] - McAuley, G, op. cit.

encouragement is refueled by the constant and hankering need to find terms for things and this is precisely because "the goal, as in any other taxonomy, is not the naming of parts as an end in itself, but to provide an analytical tool and to clarify our understanding and deepen our appreciation of relations involved."[52] This may be a point of debate for practitioners who have been surviving quite happily with the terminology that exists but I would argue that the clear or unclear expression of spatial concepts can be a determining factor in the overall coherence of a theatrical production.

It is no news that blurred thinking makes for blurred expression, but in the particular area of theatrical performance, conceptualisation is crucial because it is a form that relies so much on the establishment and breaking of what are known in practice as conventions. These are the rules that determine the boundaries of a theatrical world and govern its internal operation. They are important laws and there is no exaggeration in saying that their breach incurs harsh penalties. One anecdote in particular encapsulates perfectly how they are understood as well as testifying to their importance: this involves the sacking of one of the cast members of the London production of Nicholas Nickelby.[53] In a particular scene a Mother mimed nursing her baby which though imaginary, had been so meticulously endowed by the actor concerned that it may as well have been of flesh and blood. She carefully placed it on the bench behind her in order to step forward and participate in the conversation she was meant to be involved in. At the end of it, she retreated back to the bench and sat down on top of her baby. Apparently, the audience gasped- and this can only be due to the strength of the convention: they had been invited into a world which had posited certain rules - namely that the nursing of a baby makes the baby real. But this also makes sitting on a baby just as real. In order to keep making sense, the production must then account for her being a murderer or it must greet the exasperation of the audience member who is torn from his/her commitment to a make-believe world by its sudden incoherence. The strength of the convention also meant that the actor was subsequently fired for the transgression.

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52 - ibid. p2

53 - This anecdote was relayed to me and I therefore cannot entirely vouch for its accuracy. Even so, as an anecdote passed on from one person to the next it constitutes part of the oral history that informs our theatrical practices and is therefore a valid reference. The sheer fact of its telling affirms its point.

As a counter example, few productions are as seamless as Neil Armfield's production of THE DIARY OF A MADMAN[54] and this is more particularly an illustration of carefully handled *spatial* conventions. It is only made more relevant by the inherent irony of having to present coherently, the incoherent world of its protagonist. The production begins with Tovy, Proposhkin's servant talking to herself while cleaning his room. The 'fourth wall' is established separating the stage space from the auditorium: for her, we do not exist and our anonymity as spectators is established. From this moment Tovy's world (the world of the 'sane') becomes characterised by our separation from it. When Proposhkin enters he immediately acknowledges the audience and the musicians. This break from the established convention provides a vital message: we do not exist, yet Proposhkin sees us and speaks to us, and in this way we become part of his imaginary world; more than spectators of a performance at this point, we are incorporated as the characters who populate his mind. The audience space is identified with his head space and the action can then oscillate between the sane and the insane, until we are really the only people to whom Proposhkin can talk. All the more poignant then that as the on-stage world crumbles around him and as he calls towards the audience for his mother and begs for help, we can't respond. We are bound by convention in more ways than one - the original convention is re-established and he is cut off from us as well. We don't exist after all.

In this circumstance not only does the understanding of spatial conventions generate meaning potential, it also layers the production: when the convention is broken or a new one introduced, we carry its resonances through the piece and these keep informing the overall meaning. A level of irony underscores the drama given that we have identified Tovy's talking to herself as sane and Proposhkin's talking to 'real' people as madness. More importantly however, the production's establishment of a simple spatial convention to which it adheres, *sets the boundaries of the world* and this in turn makes it *intelligible* for us.

This idea is not only expressed but truly *staged* in a more recent Armfield production.[55] When Picasso asks the art-dealer at the Lapin Agile what it is that makes the Matisse's painting so good, the art-deal pulls off the

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54 - THE DIARY OF A MADMAN, adapted by David Holman from the short story by Gogol, was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company B and performed first at the Belvoir Street Theatre in 1989

55- PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE, by Steve Martin, was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company and performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre in November 1994.

frame and holds its up. "This!" he says. The frame is what gives it sense. And as if to pay spatial homage to the idea, the character props up the framed painting and steps back to admire it from a distance. It still holds up. He steps back further, it is still as good. He steps even further back and is almost at the edge of the stage space. It still holds up. He steps over the boundary of the stage space, out of the 'frame' of the set and into the black neutral space leading offstage: the painting abruptly stops making sense.

Theatrical conventions are therefore what render the world presented on stage intelligible both from within and as a complex entity in itself. As such they account both for the internal logic and overall coherence of a piece: the theatrical convention is in effect a structuring of meaning. It follows that it is vital to understand the operation of *spatial* conventions in order to make sense. These in turn are intrinsically tied to concepts of space, hence the need for a taxonomy which expresses them clearly.

The following is intended as a contribution towards such a taxonomy. In no way does it claim to provide a worthy substitute for any the valuable work that has been accomplished in this area. Rather, the aim is to bring a different perspective to the material by incorporating the practical terminology used and by relaying practical experiences and anecdotes to support this: this will further illuminate how the different major spatial determinants create and communicate meaning and will hopefully uncover some key defining principles. In other words, rather than re-inventing terminology through definitional discussion, we are aiming to find out to what extent space defines itself in the context of its practical use and function. The goal is therefore to add to previous findings by coming at the information from different angle.

**PRACTICE** (anecdote)

While I am aware that lack of consistency may often hamper the reader's ability to follow through an idea, it is also necessary to weight these arguments with a vast cross-section of experiences. At the risk of causing

frustration by jumping from one production to the next, these practical illustrations will be drawn from different areas of experience; they will however be limited to one or two simple examples which best epitomise the functioning of each major spatial determinant. As for the spatial determinants themselves, these have been extrapolated from the preceding discussions: in this way we will have incorporated valuable theoretical lessons while remaining solidly anchored in current practical terminology. This is also an attempt to embrace the idea that after all 'the extent to which a taxonomy [...] is useful or useable by others depends in part upon the degree of consensus about the theory of performance and communication that emerges from it, and also upon the accessibility of the terminology. " [56]

*a)The Venue*

The Theatre Royal in Hobart is one of the few Victorian Lyric theatres that remain in the world. It is plush with red velvet upholstery, detailed paintwork and an ornate proscenium arch. As such it carries all the associations of this sort of space - the marks of history are indelible and a particular theatrical genre, though extinct, claims its bloodline. In a sense the proscenium arch frames the production that is playing but simultaneously all those that have played before it. It is also reminiscent of the social conventions and codes of behaviour that such a venue has afforded and even now possesses an aura of respectability. These are some of the factors that pre-exist any production that takes place within it. Another fact and perhaps a more pertinent one is that it is in Tasmania and therefore operates within a particular social and political context. This obviously undergoes shifts as attitudes change and as the laws reflecting these are made to bend accordingly or refuse to flinch. To be in Tasmania in April of 1994 is to be unavoidably part of the complexity of events that surrounded the handing down of the United Nations decision regarding homosexual rights.

FALSETTOS[57] is one of the first mainstream musicals to embrace homosexual themes. It tells the story of Marvin, married to Trina and living in the context of strongly entrenched Jewish traditions, under complex cultural 'laws' regarding family, religion and sexuality. When he leaves her

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56 - McAuley, G, op. cit.

57 -FALSETTOS, by William Finn and James Lapine, was directed by Wayne Harrison, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed firstly at the Opera House's Drama theatre in January 1994

and their son for his homosexual lover Whizzer, they are all forced to reassess the nature and function of families in the nineties and make adjustments to more conventional but outmoded ways of thinking.

There may always have been a thought in the producers' minds that the Theatre Royal would constitute a good touring venue for FALSETTOS, precisely because of Tasmania's laws and the obvious relevance of the the musical's themes. However the fact that it was to open on the very night that the UN decision was to be passed down - locating the Theatre Royal at the hub of political controversy, was a coincidence. Fortuitous no doubt for the publicity machine and sale of the season, it had more interesting ramifications socially and these in turn loaded the text with meanings it had never had before: as John O'May leant a little more heavily than usual on the words, "Learning love is not a crime" and as two men lay in bed together and kissed under the gilt proscenium, their story signified differently. "This is where we make a stand" concluded Mendel and a sea of red-ribboned lapels rose as if to prove it.

*b) The theatre building*

The Adelaide Playhouse is part of the Adelaide Performing Arts Centre and is distinguished firstly by its size: it is a huge theatre complete with fly tower and workshop space and with a three tiered auditorium which can seat 1000 people. The Wharf Theatre in Sydney is comparatively intimate, seating 400 people; with a lower ceiling and a relatively shallow stage area, it is basically much smaller. They are obviously different as 'theatre spaces' but it is the architectural given of their comparative size that interests us here.

THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE[58] was intended for a tour which was to go to the Adelaide Playhouse after playing at the Wharf Theatre in Sydney. The one set design or spatial interpretation of the text was therefore asked to "fit" two completely different buildings. After much hard work Robert Kemp hit upon a design which not only took into account the numerous other requirements of each space but which could also suit the size of both theatres without need for great modification. The set therefore remained exactly the same for both locations - and yet the meanings of the text changed.

In the Adelaide Playhouse, the house seemed to float in a large pool of black and suddenly all the fairy-tale aspects of the text were illuminated.

58 - THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE, (STC) op.cit.

Billy's approach in his cherry picker is less the awkward one of a trapped rabbit trying to get through a hole than the one of a knight in shining armour riding up to the damsel in distress - freeing her from the ugly witch's castle which exists in some black, nether region of the world.

In the Wharf Theatre on the other hand, the decrepit house and LV's prison loomed large and overpowering in its proportions: taking up the whole space and almost flush against the theatre walls it might be one of many in a Manchester Street and rows and rows like it might exist, squashed in like this claustrophobically. This theme of stultification and oppression is further accentuated when, in an attempt to see beyond the bleakness of brown roofs and 'backs of houses', Billy goes up in the cherry-picker and moves only two inches before his head disappears into the lighting grid and will soon hit the roof of the theatre itself. What might have been a compromise or an accident of circumstance will nevertheless be read; and so the architectural features of the building will become part of the semiotic system.

*c) The theatre space*

THE GIFT OF THE GORGON[59] is about a young man who comes to meet his father's widow to ask her permission to write a book about his father's life. Having never known him, he sees this as a way of making him real. The widow on the other, sees it as an opportunity to expurgate his memory. It is a psychological thriller which explores the relationship between three key characters, but in so doing calls upon many more: these are conjured as the action dictates, mainly in order to recreate past scenes rather than have them described - to illuminate a particular trait, or substantiate a particular event... What is effectively a three hander actually has a cast of ten, and requires numerous plays within plays, technically complex space and time shifts from America to Ancient Greece, London to Byzantine and more.

Of the two theatre spaces available to the Sydney Theatre Company - i.e. the Wharf Theatre or the Drama Theatre of the Opera House, THE GIFT OF THE GORGON was programmed for a season in The Wharf. But in pre-production, when a model of the set had been made, constant doubt was expressed as to whether the "right" theatre space had been selected: the reveals seemed too shallow and the whole spectacular quality and epic scale of the production seemed compromised. But on imagining a production in the Drama Theatre, the fact that for much of the time, three people were on

59 -THE GIFT OF THE GORGON,(STC) op.cit.

stage and that the relationships explored were so complex and intricate, seemed to counter any argument and reaffirm The Wharf as a good choice. As a theatre space, it is within the building which as we have seen already characterises it to an extent: its sheer size does affect meanings here as well. But as the divided space which spectators and actors share, it has more specific features which affect the production that takes place within it. The stage/auditorium dynamic of the Drama Theatre is vastly different from that of Wharf, the space itself is less intimate, the acoustic more prohibitive: while its theatricality could have been highlighted, much of its drama may have been lost. The difference in emphasis means a change in meaning and the inherent qualities of a theatre space therefore contribute to those subtle shifts which make a play about some things or about others - about Edward Damson's megalomania or about the yearnings that his son reveals in the flicker of a glance.

*d) the stage space*

The stage space of the Theatre Royal Hobart which was mentioned before, was roughly two metres narrower and one metre deeper than the stage space of the Drama Theatre for which FALSETTOS[60] was originally designed. The set was therefore going to be cut up to fit the stage, and the action re-blocked accordingly: it was anticipated that rather than cramming the same blocking into a smaller width which might make everything look artificially "pinched", a few new moves might solve some of the problems. These were tested on the Drama Theatre stage before leaving, with bits of fluorescent tape to indicate the changes. Otherwise, the rule of thumb was not to change anything unless it was necessary.

When the set was eventually bumped in to the Theatre Royal, it became apparent that there was no need to re-block any of the anticipated moves, and that on the whole, the actors' positions throughout could remain much the same as they had been: the distances between them had tightened, and had been stretched depth-wise, but there was no unnatural sense of cramming or of a production being "forced to fit". On the contrary the blocking seemed quite organic to the space, more so in fact than when it had toured to Melbourne and lost less stage area. While the production remained

60 - ibid.

fairly much intact however, nuances in meaning were altered by the new stage relationships: for one, it was harder to isolate different playing areas so that the world presented was less clearly split-staged with logically delineated time-frames and locations. The effect was of worlds crashing in on each other, a stream of consciousness re-telling like in one of Mendel's therapy sessions - with a far more abstract sense of time and place. In the spirit of not changing anything unless necessary, nothing changed but ironically very much did.

*e) the set*

The original set for Phillip Keir's production of WOYZECK[61], was designed from numerous discussions and a meticulous listing of the spatial elements contained within the playtext. Drawing on a puppet theatre genre, a 'picture frame' proscenium was designed, enclosing the space from the top, and from the sides by four beige flats placed one behind the other, reducing in size to give perspective. The downstage flats contained windows, and a blue and yellow cloth, painted in the style of Van Gogh provided the backdrop.

The actors and director started their work in an empty rehearsal room with a mark-up, substitute props and furniture and the model box sitting in a corner for quick reference. When they finally got to the theatre and began to work in the set, they found that the spatialisation that they had been developing didn't work - that the scenes were in fact "impossible to play". The set was bumped out and replaced by a minimal set of their own design: three rows of calico curtains were strung across the space with separate drops that could be drawn individually. The floor was covered in sawdust and lights suspended from the ceiling were the only elements of 'enclosure'.

The key difference was that the second set emphasized the actor as a person rather than a puppet or even a fictional character. The new proportions emphasized their 'real' size and physical reality. The fact that they can now draw the curtains and position them in different ways means that in a sense they are made to create their own destinies: they create the different scenic locations rather than having one provided for them. The picture frame however, which reduces their sense of size and remains omnipresent throughout, seems to submit the characters to a greater outside force - a puppeteer, a painter or a just particularly cruel god.

When talking about 'the set', Peter Brook describes choosing 'the wrong shape' as locking himself into a trap out of which the production

61- WOYZECK (TSSU), op. cit.

could never evolve: "the set" he says, "is the geometry of the eventual play, so that a wrong set makes many scenes impossible to play, and even destroys many possibilities for the actors."[62] This is in itself an acknowledgement of the set's capacity to carry meanings of its own - meanings which might in fact conflict with those generated by a different reading of the *same* text.

*f) Set elements and objects.*

As the previous example suggested, the set design can encapsulate both the fictional world of the piece and discrete locations within this fictional world: while we are always located in a particular version of Germany, the drawing of a curtain can take us from a forest to a town square or to a small room. Within the set, distinct set elements and objects structure meaning further.

As an extension to the anecdote recounted in Chapter One, about William Finn's reaction to the opening night of FALSETTOS[63], it is worth questioning just how Whizzer's death came to be communicated. We have seen that the text left sufficient openings for this interpretation to occur, but given that it doesn't conclusively state that he dies (thus all the fuss), how then was this meaning conveyed - or in other words what feature of this particular production and no other made it so?

In the final scene of the production of FALSETTOS, Whizzer drops his champagne glass mid song and already this is a suggestion of what is to come. As he lies there, a gauze is pulled across the stage separating him from his lover Marvin and dividing the space in two. On this gauze are painted patchwork panels with the names of different people and dates: it is so close a representation of the commemorative AIDS quilt that legal action might be in the air. Whizzer appears behind the gauze dressed as before - his face lit to cast skeletal shadows and more than ever separate from Marvin. Whether in an afterlife or in Marvin's memory he is quite tangibly in a different space and had this barrier not been placed between them, the ambiguity which kept him alive in the imagination of others may have been retained. In effect, the nature and use of this particular set element meant the difference between the life or death of one of the characters.

The story behind this production has only in part been touched on. The first script that Wayne Harrison was sent had virtually no stage directions

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62-Brook, P, *The Empty Space*, op. cit. p113
63- FALSETTOS (STC) op. cit.

and the lack of clear spatial references within the text made the action virtually incomprehensible. Textual detail was particularly lean when it came to where the characters were located, who they were talking to and who else was present. With this in mind, it was decided that the staging would be crucial in providing the audience with sufficient information to make the necessary links: spatial sense became vital for the clear telling of the story. The table on stage had a miniature model of New York City which was lit in the preset, as the audience arrived. This immediately identified the 'theatrical macrocosm' or the fictional world in which the action was to unfold. This table also doubled as a chopping bench and when used by Trina as such, it was clear that we were in her kitchen. Similarly couches came to signify psychiatrist's rooms , or when pushed together a bedroom. The big set of bleachers took the action to a baseball match.

*g) the blocking*

In the cold light of semiotics, the actor's presence itself can be seen to function in the same way as an object in space[64] : Paul Goddard again does locate us in America every time he is in a particular position. And indeed even history has highlighted the similarities of their semiotic function: Molière was said to be able to place chairs on stage so effectively that "they could almost speak"[65]. Conversely, a critic observed that "Mr Gielgud from the waist downwards means absolutely nothing. He has the most meaningless legs imaginable"[66]. Finally, Proust's criticism of Sarah Bernhardt's Phèdre doesn't so much objectify her as personify distinct physical features:

> "Between the shoulder and the elbow the disobedient limbs displayed a biceps which knew nothing about the role. They continued to bring out the musculature instead of the Racinian shades of meaning."[67]

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64- In *Lire le Théâtre*(op. cit.),Ubersfeld makes this observation and locates the actor in the same spatial category.
65- Reid-Payne, D. *The Scenographic Imagination*, USA, Southern Illinois University Press, p110
66- Quoted in: Veltrusky, J, "Acting and behaviour: a study of the Signans" op. cit. p402
67 - ibid.

The actors' physical presence alone does have the capacity to generate meaning. Nevertheless I would argue (admittedly still coldly) that the actors' capacity for movement distinguishes his/her spatial function.

Buchner's WOYZECK[68] is about many things - one of which is adultery. With a three-way relationship at the core of the drama, the permutations that these characters have on stage can be a mine field of meaning: who sits between whom, who "wedges" themself in and which party is constantly seen at the periphery, slightly detached from a group and looking on? At what point do changes in the dynamic occur? These are signs which heighten the drama, and actually thicken the plot: in one particular scene Woyzeck enters to find Marie. Much time was spent on the details of an apparently simple entrance and precisely because so much meaning could be packed into a detail as simple as a kiss 'hello': who approaches whom? If *she* forgets or freezes up, doesn't this imply she's already committed the crime? If *he* kisses her and she turns away afterwards, won't he know - and have to take this discovery through to the next scene? What does this say about him given that he won't act on the knowledge for a good few scenes and probably some months in stage time? If *she* goes to kiss him, will this suggest that there is nothing wrong with the relationship? can she move towards him in such a way that we can keep the ambiguity afloat? Here, the blocking reflects the dynamic of the relationship, which in turn can affect the course of the story.

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To a degree, these spatial determinants therefore define themselves through their distinctive contributions to the making of meaning. These examples however reveal something other than the simple fact that spatialisation communicates a playtext's meanings; they reveal ways in which it actively *alters* meanings in the text *by virtue of its own semiotic features.* The fact that the same playtext - and often the same intended "interpretation" of that text has been seen in the light of different spatial permutations illuminates just how important space, as a signifier in its own right, is to the overall production of meaning. In other words the preceding examples

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68- Buchner, G, WOYZECK, trans. Dept. of German, University of Sydney - (unpublished).

highlight aspects of the relationship between text and space as two distinctly signifying structures.

In the first instance the social and cultural context in which the production took place and which existed as a pre-condition of the playtext's realisation, affected meanings considerably. We are reminded here of Halliday's context of meaning and his point that a text cannot be understood outside of its living environment.[69] In the case of FALSETTOS, the location of the venue, its history, its present position within the changing social sphere of Tasmania - in other words factors that existed "outside of the playtext" all affected its sense. Similarly the architecture of a building, the shape of a theatre space are not features of the playtext, but do alter meaning . Even the set, set elements and objects which are incorporated in the playtext's inherent spatialisation alter nuances to a certain degree - not necessarily by design or intention but simply because as Ubersfeld so astutely points out, "la représentation reverse sur le texte ses contraintes propres".[70]

In these situations the playtext did not 'resist' these changes - the two semiotic systems didn't collide and cause an incoherent whole. Rather performance incorporated the semiotic features of space into the emerging semiotic system or performance text. And this is in part due to the fact that the playtext does in fact have gaps or openings which do not necessarily reflect a paucity but only increase its potential for meaning: this is where other components such as space intercede and cannot help but be signs - since they are "on stage" in the broadest of terms.

In short while it is certainly true that "it is the language [of the playscript] that creates and focuses space in the theatre"[71], we have seen the flipside of this assertion in a collection of productions which show that space in the theatre also focuses and creates meanings in the language. This further refutes Issacharoff's premise that 'the playscript precedes performance'[72] since the examples weigh heavily in favour of Ubersfeld's counter-arguments:

> "Le texte de théâtre ne saurait être écrit sans la présence d'une théâtralité *antérieure* ; on n'écrit pas pour le théâtre sans rien savoir du théâtre. On écrit pour, avec ou contre un code théâtral

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69- Halliday, M.A.K,& Hasan, R, op. cit. p9

70 - Ubersfeld, A, op. cit. p143

71 - Issacharoff, M, op. cit. p57

72 - ibid.

préexistant. D'une certaine facon la "représentation" au sens le plus large du mot préexiste au texte."[73]

What can be extrapolated from both points of view is that the playscript occupies a certain status vis-a-vis its theatrical representation, and we can take this to include its spatial representation. What is expressed, however, may not be a disagreement so much as a difference in emphasis given that space and playtext both operate simultaneously in generating and communicating meanings. It is difficult to know what aspects of semiosis play a greater or lesser role, or indeed how they interact when it is possible that they interact differently at different stages of the process. Without taking into account the chronological nature of the evolution of the performance text it is difficult to make any conclusive points about the relationship between these two semiotic systems.

73 -Ubersfeld, A, *L'École du Spectateur*, op. cit. p14

# Chapter 3

# Text and space in the REHEARSAL PROCESS

*"We are ping-pong balls bouncing off the net of events[...] volleyed from one spot to another by obstacles that suddenly arise."*[1]

*"The sign always to some extent eludes control by the will"*[2]

As divergent as Brook and Saussure are as figures of wisdom, both encapsulate in their own right an essential dilemma: the interplay between control and lack thereof, between the intentional and the unpredictable, and in sum, the important paradox of having to plan against the arbitrary. These are all implicit in the leap of faith that is undertaken with any theatre project, and, to a certain extent make of meaning something that gets 'hit about' throughout a process, the essence of which is contingent upon the shifts that take place within a chronological course of events. Playtext and three dimensional space are key players in this process: as distinct signifiers in their own right as we have seen, they meet here as known constants but their potentials for meaning (both separately and interactively) are unknown and yet to be discovered. These shifts throughout time are the reflection of their synthetic 'tussle', the aim of which is not so much to fix meanings as to fix their means of expression and the circumstances which produce them. Where the balance tips, which of the two plays a greater or lesser role at which point in time - in other words how these two systems interrelate may therefore be revealed in a close examination of the rehearsal process.

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1 - Brook, P, *The shifting point*, New York, Harper and Row, 1987

2 - Saussure, F de, "The object of Study" in *Modern Criticism and Theory* op. cit. p9

This might all be very well but for the fact the rehearsal process, as an entrenched and encoded feature of mainstream practice has become an identifiable entity in itself, with its own characteristics which in turn affect how these two systems of meaning are to operate. In examining the chronological evolution of most of the productions mentioned up to date, common features emerge and begin to identify a 'norm'. No doubt the patterns that appear are based on realistic production needs and have been entrenched over time as a logical result of streamlining from experience. Nevertheless the extent to which they are so completely ensconced in common practice means that they have begun to dictate a formula, and decide upon such significant things as how much time should be allocated to each project, how this should be broken down and what it should be spent on. In other words, while the shifting interplay between text and space over a course of time may once have defined what we know as a rehearsal process, to a certain degree the rehearsal process now actually defines the interplay between text and space over time.

A closer examination of these entrenched patterns will therefore already reveal aspects of the relationship between text and space in their chronological course of play. This initial exploration will also substantiate the articulated segmentation which will be used in the main body of this chapter where the aim is to show through specific examples that these patterns (while prescriptive to an extent) are also supported by the different ways in which the text/space dynamic unfolds. Here, the practical anchor will be the production of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON[2] : alluded to haphazardly to date, it will now be possible to follow this one production through each of the major articulations of its chronological process, with a view to weighing up the playtext against other factors that affect the production of meaning. While this constant example will be what underpins the exploration, I will nevertheless allow myself some parentheses where other productions may be of interest in highlighting a particular point.

## REHEARSAL PARADIGMS

2 - THE GIFT OF THE GORGON, (STC) op. cit.

A first common characteristic of each rehearsal process is its juxtaposition to a pre-production phase. Both are defined in relation to each other and their distinctive features set them in opposition. Firstly the arrival of actors is what marks the first day of rehearsals, and in this sense much of the pre-production phase can be seen as a preparation period geared to their arrival. A number of deadlines are met by this time, the most significant of which is possibly the design deadline and in a sense the presentation of the model box which takes place on the first day of rehearsals also marks the transition from one phase to another: this finished miniature 'space' provides a common reference point, and is handed over on the one hand for the actors to invest (in its substitutional form of a rehearsal mark-up with stock furniture and props) and on the other, for the workshop crew to build (in the form of floor-plans and cross-sections). In short, things stop being theoretical and begin to get tangible, the abstract begins to make way for the concrete.

Another difference is that the rehearsal process is given a limited amount of time whereas the pre-production phase is more open-ended. Within stricter interpretations, the latter can begin as late as the week before rehearsals start which marks the commencement of stage-management's full-time employment. Otherwise it can be taken to begin from the moment a play-script is decided upon, a venue allocated and funds provided for it to proceed. In this case it can vary in length and can be seen to incorporate the entire time in which a director starts mulling over ideas, in which he/she meets at various times with the designer to discuss meanings, arrive at a concept, initiate drawings, solve areas of difficulty with a white card model box, etc. Casting takes place, lighting and sound receive at least preliminary attention...these various activities are all to do with decisions that have to be made before the start of rehearsals the degree of energy invested in them therefore usually accelerates as this date draws near. The difference hinted at here can also be highlighted by changes in relationship: while all relationships are significant, it may be said that the most important creative bond in the pre-production phase is between the designer and the director, whereas as a shift occurs in rehearsals which forefronts on the one hand the relationship between actors and director, on the other the relationship between designer and workshop, wardrobe and props crew.

More often than not however, the rehearsal period has a specific time frame. Conventionally, four weeks in the rehearsal room and a production

week immediately following is considered the norm for a show with average demands. This in turn has become a matter of course, banked upon quite literally to the point that a budgetary imperative is to fit the rehearsal process into a five week period. The demands of a show have to be quite substantial for the production company to lend a sympathetic ear; time is money after all and for a company to adequately prepare a Shakespearean piece for example, this can mean an extra twenty thousand dollars *per week.* The Sydney Theatre Company's recent production of THE THREEPENNY OPERA[3] had rightly scheduled six weeks due to its sheer size, difficulty, its technical and scenic demands (which were incidentally made quite particular due to a complex design concept). It was decided that the extra week would be traded in order to employ an extra actor. Either way, this specific budget was confined by more general budgetary guidelines which quote five weeks as the norm. Similarly, Belvoir Street's production of THE FROGS[4] had five weeks and this involved mounting a new script in first draft stage, un-workshopped and untried. At least a week of that was spent in dramaturgy. Five weeks once again is considered to be the rule of thumb and because funding for the arts is so parlous, the suit is cut to fit the cloth. Incidentally both of these productions received ambivalent critical response.

A third common feature is the way in which these five weeks are segmented into key units of time. Obviously enough the "working week" is the main structuring force even in such an irregular industry, and this has been acted upon logically in the need to schedule and in adherence to Equity rules. More interestingly however, each has come to represent a different stage of development: "To be in week two" is often tantamount to "being on the floor", whereas "to be in week four' might mean being stressed. Even in less conventional processes, each week seems to correspond naturally enough to a different stage of evolution. In the realm of mainstage practice however, these are not only clearly articulated, but associated with specific areas of work. From the cross-section of rehearsal processes documented, the following activities emerge as common features or paradigms. In their summary, I have allowed myself to use phrases and expressions that keep

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3 - THE THREEPENNY OPERA by Berthold Brecht was directed by Simon Phillips, produced by The Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Opera House's Drama Theatre in September 1994

4 - THE FROGS, (Belvoir) op. cit.

occurring: descriptive in themselves, they are also revealing as "linguistic" features associated with each stage.

*a) WEEK 1: Reading and discussion.*

The first day of rehearsals often begins with a presentation of the model box and costume drawings. Miniature though it is, this is where the actors first see the set in its final form and begin to get acquainted with the space that they will inhabit. Unless they have had some preliminary fittings, this is also where they will see their costumes for the first time. The director gives a brief talk about the play, summarising his/her particular interpretation and the aesthetic decisions that have informed the production concept. The designer also talks on this, elucidating the rationale behind design decisions and describing how the various features of the set function. Following this is a sit down reading involving the whole cast and as much of the crew as can be present. The playtext is usually read straight through and then discussion is opened up for all to participate in. This process of reading and discussion continues throughout the week in a stop-start fashion and the play text is explored in detail: questions get asked which make a frame-work of enquiry for the weeks to come. Discussion might be as broad as the overall themes of the play or as specific as the interpretation of a single line. The whole play will have been fairly much covered from beginning to end by the end of the week.

*b) WEEK 2: Blocking*

This is the first time the three dimensional space becomes activated by the actors: the play is tackled scene by scene with a view to "moving" it or taking it "onto the floor". From the chairs in which they have been sitting, they move to the 'mark-up' which in floor-tape, sets the boundaries of the stage-space and those features of the set that will affect the actors' movements and the spatialisation of the play. If levels or different heights are required, efforts are made to ensure that some indication of these is provided for the actors to work with. Spatial boundaries are therefore already set when the actors move across to the space. Script in hands, the actors discover with the director a "rough shape" or preliminary blocking for each scene, and in doing so they also set certain spatial conventions. This develops in tandem with the discussion of textual detail when necessary. Questions still get asked and more questions are generated from the answers found. These are often tentatively solved on the floor: on the whole, the emphasis is on 'doing it'

rather than 'talking about it' and the broad aim usually seems to be to get the play 'blocked' by the end of the week. The actors present are usually only the ones involved in the scenes to be covered and so there may be no more than a few people in the room at any given point. The week sometimes finishes with a run for consolidation purposes but also to give everyone an overview of the direction in which the production is generally headed. If this is the case it will be attended by the rest of the cast but in the absence of anyone else the atmosphere remains intimate and supportive.

*c)WEEK 3: Fine-tuning or detailing*

The common activity emerging from this third week of rehearsal is a 'fine-tuning' or 'detailing' of the production in its broadest form. By now there is a general blocking and here the aim is to touch on each scene again with a view to making everything very specific. Final adjustments are made whether it be to the blocking or to the interpretation of a line. Some entire scenes might change shape while others may barely be looked at. There may be lengthy discussions with little physical activity about. The actors may still be 'on the book' but more and more they will be relinquishing their scripts. The production begins to find a crystal form as more solutions are found than questions asked, as the play text is 'embodied' by the actors and as the broader features of the production are sketched in. This week also often culminates in a 'run' and this is often attended by other members of the crew some of whom are present for the first time: the lighting and sound designers, the playwright if they are involved; the set and costume designer(s) may have already seen some of the embryonic production throughout rehearsals but are usually present here as well. In this sense, for the actors, this run is the first real approximation of a performance since it is where they initially experience a new audience. It is understandably characterised by the requisite nerves and alters the style of play: performances are more outwardly directed and there is a concern to make contact with spectators fresh to the event. In short, this run initiates a movement from the intimate to the social, which is the principal concern of week four.

*d)WEEK 4: Running*

By the fourth week of rehearsal, 'running' usually characterises the week. Indeed if the production isn't "ready" to be run alarm bells begin to sound. By now the play will normally have been covered at least twice, and any problem scenes picked up and worked again: enquiry always plays a part

but by now 'solutions' and the consolidation of what has been 'found', carry the emphasis. This phase tends to be very much about putting together large chunks of the play so that the actors can acquire a real sense of its overall flow and of the trajectories that they make as characters. By now they have generally abandoned their scripts and while the stage-manager might be a frequent prompt at the beginning of the week, this will diminish as it draws to a close. During this week most of the actors are obviously called most of the time and the room is therefore generally more active and more crowded with surrogate audience members. The intimate atmosphere of the rehearsal room subsides and begins to incorporate as many features of the actual performance as possible. During runs, articles of costuming start appearing, the sound cues begin to be practised and the wider social realm becomes a tangible prospect. Even the director's notes begin to reflect his or her growing awareness of that third party, the audience. By the end of the week they are ready to move from the rehearsal space to the theatre space - in other words to that divided space which actors and *spectators* share.

*e)PRODUCTION WEEK: Teching*

By the beginning of the week the set has been 'bumped in' and 'moving into the theatre' is everyone's priority. The production schedule follows a fairly standard pattern: lights are rigged and focused while the final polishes are added to the set (paintwork, door handles etc..). If necessary, sound systems might be installed and speakers positioned. Meanwhile the actors may be having a few final runs in the rehearsal room before this is packed up. But the director's efforts are now geared to the technical aspects of the show, and his/her relationship with the production crew is brought to the fore. On the one hand this involves close collaboration with the lighting designer over a lighting plot: here, with the support of stage-manager and operator, they go through each scene and set a preliminary lighting state for each. Someone generally 'walks' which simply means that they stand in for the actors, echoing the blocking, standing in key positions for long lengths of time so that levels can be checked against them, colours tested, any dips or hot spots made apparent. A sound plot follows this, and works on much the same basis: each sound cue is 'plotted' into the computer or prompt copy, preliminary volume levels are set and directions given to the stage-manager as to whether it should snap or fade, and in this last case, over what length of time etc. When time is running short, this if anything, is usually what falls by the wayside since it is the easiest technical aspect to pick up and get right

through the course of the following runs. All of this usually happens over a day or two but the time allocated to each stage depends on the demands of the particular show: the pattern will be different for a musical for example which will generally include such things as a 'sitz probe'[5] and a longer lighting plot (traditionally it is no surprise if the number of cues doubles for a musical).

The technical rehearsal marks the completion deadline for all departments: set, costumes lights and sound all converge in readiness for the actors. The play is then run with particular emphasis on any technicality: the purpose is specifically for cues to be practised, special effects to be tested or quick-changes to be timed, and large portions of dialogue may be skipped over if none of these things are called for. Rather than an acting exercise, the performers concentrate on readjusting any blocking that comes up against sightline problems, or that might 'feel' wrong in this new space, break in their costumes and see that it allows them the necessary freedom of movement etc. Generally however, they take a back-seat and offer themselves up to the complexities of the technical process. The dominant figure here is the stage manager who 'runs' the rehearsal, calling a stop when necessary and continuing only when ready. In a sense the rehearsal is for him or her, and the director is there to make sure that the cues are happening as planned or as imagined. It is also a time to confer with each designer: a lighting state might need to be brighter, a costume may need changing etc. This rehearsal is then followed by a dress rehearsal where the aim is to create as closely as possible the circumstances of the eventual performance: the play is once again performed in full costume and make-up, but without any stops if possible, and with the uninterrupted cueing of lights and sound. Each designer and the director will take notes as to further adjustments, except perhaps for the lighting designer who might still be at the lighting desk, changing states on the go. The number of dress-rehearsals varies once again depending on the complications of the show. This is the same for the number of previews - and throughout this period the process is a similar one of smoothing any technical problems and gradually 'getting it right' - or at least as close as possible to the intended 'vision'. As the technical considerations are ironed out, the performances resurface and the play-text becomes a renewed focus. Hopefully the culmination of these various aspects coincides with the opening night.

[5] -The' Sitz Probe' is a German expression and refers to the first time the band or orchestra actually meet with the singers; they sit and run through the score together from beginning to end.

It is important to make clear that these are not so much descriptions as extrapolations: they represent simply a summary of the noticeable recurring common features taken from a broad cross-section of rehearsal processes. They are therefore by their very nature generalised: obviously not all rehearsals begin with a reading, and there is no doubt leeway given to those artists who do not want to work in this way. But the pattern that emerges is nevertheless indicative of an accepted working method that is not only a reflection of the rehearsal process but informs it as well: it is tradition at the Sydney Theatre Company for all members of staff to be included in the model presentation on Day 1, some of whom will stay on for "the reading", as do the staff of Belvoir Street. In Week Four members of administration invariably ask when they can see a run. The fact that there will be "a run" or "a reading" is a given and in this sense the rehearsal process follows a pre-ordained course. Far from being an argument against this laudable inclusion, this does prove however that the rehearsal process has become codified and emerges as a reasonably set pattern. This is once again affirmed by the financial pressures involved in running the rehearsal process as cost-efficiently as possible and by the logistical difficulties of coordinating the different departments of large mainstage companies: stage management can predict that substitute props should be ready for Week 2, workshop can build any substitute set items into the rehearsal space by this stage. The lighting designer will know when it will be useful to come into rehearsals. By the beginning of Week 4, most of the costumes need to have been made and final fittings will have occurred. Any scenic art or preliminary carpentry must meet the bump-in deadline - or the end of Week 4. In this streamlined process where so many cogs are turning in relation to each other and to the overall production, it would be very difficult to deviate from the normal code of practice without throwing a major spanner in the works. This therefore begins to dictate how the process of rehearsals is to unfold, which in turn becomes identifiable as a set working process. Obviously not all major companies are modelled along these lines: many European companies are structured to incorporate longer rehearsal periods. This however is not the case in Australia at the moment.

So as a result of these observations, what are the patterns that emerge in our own mainstage companies? The page to stage trajectory is clearly reflected in the general title that each week tends to receive: from 'reading' to 'teching', there is a clear movement which obviously enough reflects a general movement from the playscript to the three dimensional space. The simple fact there is a gradual relinquishing of scripts is the clearest illustration of this , but does not itself suggest that the playscript comes to play a lesser role in the creation of meaning. Whether or not this trajectory indicates a movement from one predominant influence over meaning to another, may be asked but cannot be anticipated. For the moment this is a trend to be noted more interestingly for what it opens up about other parallel and simultaneous trajectories:

a) From the part to the whole: after the first reading the playscript is broken down through discussion into "scenes"; deconstructed into key sections, or discrete units of dramatic action, it is moved to the floor where it is initially broached "scene by scene" before these are run together. In other words the play is worked upon in manageable pieces before larger sections are tackled. As the process continues the play begins to get run as a whole until this is the main purpose of rehearsals.

b) From the general to the specific: paradoxically, the play is chipped away as a large block until specific details are chiselled in. From the abstract existence of words, the play is given 'rough shape' and then proceeds to be 'finetuned'. From general feelings about what a scene might mean as it is discussed, specific interpretations are decided upon. In their enactment levels get deeper, resonances become apparent and detail gets woven into characterisations.

c) From questions to solutions: the preponderance of questions by all parties characterises the initial stages of the rehearsal period and establishes a process of enquiry. These questions diminish as time goes on and as the work begins to offer up answers and solutions are found to problems : the process gradually becomes one of discovery until statements are assertively made about particular details that may once have been open for debate.

d) From the intimate to the social: from the first day of rehearsals where the entire company meet, there follows an abrupt drop in numbers, particularly once the blocking process begins. Those present represent just the core of that section of text and meanings in the scene are then tackled in this nuclear way with actors, director and stage manager in close contact. Gradually the rehearsal room gets opened up to other people: firstly to those other members of the cast who may not be in the particular scene in question; then to

outsiders though still part of the extended company - costume, set and lighting designers for example. Finally the actors have little say over who walks in or out of the technical rehearsal and so long as they are not perceived to be "outsiders"- i.e. members of the general public, there is little concern. Finally the public too is admitted from the previews until the opening night, when in a sense the production gets handed over to this third party.

Interestingly enough, while these conclusions are drawn as mentioned, from the documentation of a number of rehearsal processes, a related study has hypothesised these very points, though from a different source: the script and collection of notes taken by one of the actors in the afore-mentioned production of WOYZECK[7] was closely analysed and discussions recorded as to what each particular note referred to, and to which stage of the process it belonged.

In the front section of the notebook, the script was pasted into one side with a page for writing on the other. These were glued in scene by scene, and often sectioned with a pencil mark into units. At the end of the notebook, a section was devoted to pages taken during the notes sessions of the various runs at the end of the process, in which the entire show was dealt with all at once. What was firstly tackled in parts became integrated as a whole. Both the director's notes and the notes from the actor to herself here testified to the need to include the third party audience; notes to do with clarity for example, or to the adjustment of a move, indicated a clear trajectory from the personal to the public. What is more, the front of the notebook contained such things as postcards and visual images, which were said to provide an initial trigger for ideas and a general reference point from which to begin a more detailed appraisal of the character. Notes pertaining to the latter part of rehearsal were much more specific, and any reference to character had moved not only from the broad base of a picture postcard, but from the third person to the first: from "Marie" to "I". Similarly *questions* abounded in those notes taken from earlier on, particularly to do with character motivation and objectives; questions such as "what does she want?" were replaced by a predominance of statements such as "I hate Franz". Often answers could be directly related back to earlier questions once a solution had been found on the floor. In each case

[7] - The actor was Lyn Pierse in the role of Marie; the production, WOYZECK (TSSU) op. cit.

there is evidence that lends support to the emergence of certain key rehearsal paradigms.

Having drawn these conclusions we can now determine both what they confirm about the nature of meaning and what further clues they offer us as to its means of production and communication. The movement from the general to the specific suggests after all that meanings are broad and varied and that the process of interpretation does indeed involve a *selection* of signs. From the vast range of possible meanings which present themselves on day one, only some are picked up and even fewer may be acted upon; this gradual harnessing of meaning and honing of focus distinguish this production of a playtext from the next and become the trademark of its specificity.

But the detailing of these 'selected' features is also the result of answers being sought to questions in the script. While the playtext provides an initial structuring force, its lines of meaning are only a symbiotic feature of its gaps. Throughout the rehearsal process, answers are furnished and holes get filled by the creative imaginations of the actors. Both 'detailing' and 'solving' become other terms for the creating of meanings and this is all too sensitively proved; as the anecdote goes: "My character wouldn't do this!!" says the writer to the actor."Well *my* character would!" replies the actor to the writer[8]. And if solutions are found through the course of this process - which is one also characterised by a movement from the playtext to the three dimensional space - it is as much as to say that meanings are found by virtue of a process of spatialisation.

The company's creative input to meanings is further underlined by the fact that the playtext is deconstructed and rebuilt as a new whole. This is resonant of Brook's description of the rehearsal process as one which begins with a reality without a form, and ends with the same reality suddenly reappearing, "grasped, channeled and digested". "Only at that moment" he says, "will reality become a living, concrete thing"[9]. The breaking down of the playtext into discrete parts seems to be a condition for its reconstruction into a text with a form - that is to say into the same reality to which Brook refers, but one which is also transformed by the process of concretisation. This process of reconstruction is therefore one which describes the transformation of playtext

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8 - Relayed by Nicholas Parsons, author of DEAD HEART, (Belvoir) op.cit.

9 - Brook, P, *The shifting Point* op.cit. p18

into performance text. And it is this new text that is handed over to the audience for them to read and for new interpretations to be made. In this sense, the process of moving from the intimate to the public is in effect a process of writing.

As to how meaning is influenced at any given point in time, these patterns can only give us a clue; while the trajectory is one from the written word to its concrete form in three-dimensional space, and while this implies that space begins to play a larger role as time progresses, it does not *necessarily* reveal anything about what is predominantly contributing to the making of meaning or about the shifts of status that occur within this general trajectory. What we can hypothesise is that in the "reading" phase of rehearsal, meanings will be sought in relation to textual clues, since the three-dimensional space has not yet been activated and is only a consideration in its model form. It would seem that the playtext is therefore the primary influence here. In week two, however, the general title of "blocking" puts the emphasis back on space. While the playtext is obviously omnipresent, the general focus is towards creating meanings in relation to space, and this it would seem, is given a predominant semiotic role. In the detailing and fine-tuning of the third week, however, spatial and textual considerations seem to play an equally important role; as the interpretations begin to crystalise and as the textual meaning becomes inseparable from its concrete form, both seem to be signifying to the same extent. Finally, however, space becomes a renewed primary influence as the move to the theatre takes place, as the distinctive features of this new space have to be incorporated into the overall semiotic system, thus affecting meanings further. The dynamic therefore seems to be characterised by a shift of emphasis from week to week, foregrounding Text / Space / Text&Space / Space as the more significant influences at each stage. In this, however, we have omitted a vital phase which is the Preproduction phase: while not strictly part of the rehearsal process proper, it is nevertheless a crucial stage in the process of making meaning. Arguably, the playtext takes a back-seat here since so many of the decisions which affect meaning quite directly, are made in relation to factors outside of the text such as the availability of "name" actors, the budget, the theatre space available...

Whether the Drama Theatre or the Wharf is chosen for the production of a particular text may be something that belongs to the realm of programming and company direction. The fact that this choice of space may affect meanings to the extent that it does, may have been predicted, but only substantiated through the practical illustration of THE GIFT OF THE

GORGON[10] which was described earlier. The ideas that have only been presented embryonically here therefore need the back-up of real experience before they can be considered meaningful findings. This particular production is in fact an appropriate case study against which to test these clues: by following one production through the different stages of its development - that is from pre-production to opening night - and by looking specifically at how different meanings were articulated, at what stage key changes occurred and what factors were determining this, we may see if the above claims can in fact be supported by what has actually occurred in practice.

**Case Study: THE GIFT OF THE GORGON**

THE GIFT OF THE GORGON was written by Peter Shaffer whose notable hits include EQUUS and AMADEUS. It was premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company in London in December 1992, starring Judi Dench, Michael Pennington and Jeremy Northam. This production was seen by Wayne Harrison, artistic director of the Sydney Theatre Company who obtained the rights for it to be performed in Australia. It became part of the company's 1994 subscription season which when launched, was said to be based around the general theme of loss and retrieval. Other productions included Falsettos, Arcadia, Sweet Phoebe, Threepenny Opera and indeed one of the features that broadly unites these various choices is the protagonists' plight and journey: to an extent these all involve the loss of something that they cherish or consider valuable. But this invariably acts as the catalyst provoking a change in their lives which might prove just as valuable. A story about a woman coming to terms with the grief of her husband's vengeful suicide, both justifies and slots into this theme-based season.

Helen (Sandy Gore) is the recent widow of playwright Edward Damson (William Zappa), who has died from all accounts, due to an accidental fall near his cliff-face villa on the Greek island of Thera. Philip (Paul Goddard) is his son from a former relationship; though they never met, Philip has devoted his life and academic career to the study of his father's plays. When he arrives at the reclusive villa to ask for Helen's cooperation in writing Edward's autobiography, he is mysteriously shunned. As he persists however, Helen sees in this the opportunity to "set the record straight", to introduce

10 - THE GIFT OF THE GORGON, (STC) op. cit.

Philip and the general public to the real Edward and in doing so, exorcise the many torments which came to characterise their relationship. They begin work: Philip takes notes while Helen relives the key events in their lives, and conjures (on stage), the memories of their past. Their relationship and Edward's writing become increasingly entwined, and as the scenes of his plays get more violent, so does their treatment of each other. Eventually their relationship finds potent parallels in Greek tragedy, in Perseus' quest for the Gorgon's head and in Athena's Sacred Gift of Vengeance. Increasingly for Edward the violence of revenge becomes the only form of cleansing, the only means of restoration and purification. And so when they are finally at their lowest ebb and Helen threatens to leave, he begs her to cleanse him with one last ritual: while he dances his Dance of Rightful Stamping, she lathers him with a cake of soap into which he has inserted the sharp blade of his matt knife. Before she realises it, he is a blooded corpse, moving towards the terrace where he bows to the sun before falling to his death.

Directed by Wayne Harrison, designed by Angus Strathie, starring Sandy Gore and William Zappa, (as credited in the publicity material) this production was programmed to open at the Wharf Theatre on the 15th of April 1994.

Even in this initial retelling of the background to the production, the argument that the meanings forwarded by a playtext can in any way precede the conditions of its production, is quite practically refuted. Here the suggestion is that playscripts are in fact selected due to a number of factors which often have little to do with the inherent qualities of that text or the messages it can be seen to communicate. To an extent the selection of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON was made in relation to its own perceived meanings: it would no doubt have been overlooked if it had not been considered a worthy inclusion - a good play; but its range of perceived meanings also fell in with certain pre-requisites, that is to say, it was selected in relation to an anterior set of meanings, and these in turn will quite literally determine its own potential for making meaning. The playtext's most tangible influence here is therefore in its incorporation of themes common to other plays - ones which meant that it it could contribute to a particular subscription season.

A less tenacious but equally valid influence is the fact that it was written by Shaffer after all, and this immediately means it falls within another set of criteria. The playwright's reputation as one of Britain's leading lights of the mainstage may be more meaningful in this instance than the

particular play he wrote. It ensures for example a level of public interest and a reasonably secure box office return; it carries with it the guarantee that the content and quality of ideas will be both suitable to and representative of the mainstream - i.e. of the sorts of plays the STC wants to be seen to be doing; finally, it serves to maintain a standard that a mainstage company such as the STC wants to uphold in the eyes of a substantially middle-class, middle-aged and intelligent audience base. Once again the playtext itself carries little weight against the strength of pre-existing structures and evolving trends.

The biggest box-office success of the previous year was THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE,[11] by Jim Cartwright, also an established English playwright, also providing the vehicle for a 'star' or 'name', in this case filled by Amanda Muggleton, well-known on stage for SHIRLEY VALENTINE but in television for a great number of roles. The selection of GIFT OF THE GORGON therefore seems to be part of an emerging trend at the Sydney Theatre Company to pick up plays which a) belong to a body of canonised work b) which are foreign but more specifically Anglo i.e. English or American c) which have enjoyed a degree of success overseas, d) which come with one or two virtuosic roles which will be bait for a leading talent and therefore for an audience. This trend is furthermore generated by demands which come from two directions: on the one hand, the company's own desire to act upon its artistic policies, and on the other its need to cater to the expectations of its audience. Pulled by these different currents, the playtext only 'means' to the extent that it services of these needs. The danger is that in a sense, THE GIFT OF THE GORGON becomes interchangeable with THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE, that Shaffer replaces Cartwright with little close appreciation of their distinctive traits or the differences in meaning that their plays afford.

*a) Pre-production*

As mentioned before, the pre-production phase begins the moment a play is selected and a venue chosen for its realisation. In this particular case, these two premises are one and the same: the play's selection by the Sydney Theatre Company comes hand in hand with a particular venue since the company (at least where its subscription season is concerned) only operates out of two theatres, that is the Wharf Theatre (newly named Wharf 1) and the Drama Theatre at the Opera House. For other production companies, the

[11] - THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE (STC) op. cit.

play's inherent qualities might suggest a 'best' location and influence where it is to be staged; the Eveleigh Street Railyards for example were the intended space for DEAD HEART before they were part of Belvoir Street. But rather than a venue being selected for a play, in this instance the play was selected for a venue - or specifically for one of two venues. And whichever of these ends up being the chosen one, it will already carry certain meanings by virtue of the fact that it is one of the home-bases of the Sydney Theatre Company. Both the Wharf and the Drama Theatre have similar qualities which hark back to the nature and standing of the Company. To go to either of these theatres means going to see a play which has all the features we have just mentioned: regardless of what particular meanings that play might generate of its own doing, these will already be structured in relation to the set of criteria that the space stands for, viewed through the grid of what the venue means as part of a larger company.

In this case, the venue chosen was the Wharf Theatre and once again this decision was brought about by a number of factors other than the play's inherent suitability. If anything, the specific demands of the eleven other plays in the season had just as much of an influence - and for each of them, the eleven others were important. In short the venue was selected as part of the complex juggling feat which typifies the programming process of any large company with such a high turn-over of productions and only two main venues. Here many different permutations are tested and the best decisions are made not for any one play but for the general balance and the overall season. Even the requirements of the plays as a set are weighed up on the one hand, against the company's other activities (its touring programme for example), against its own inherent restrictions (limited space and back-up resources determine to a degree which venue will be used and at what time) and finally, against the company's needs: if a star has expressed interest in one of the plays, the decision to make this a Drama Theatre show may be financially astute. Once again the factors that ensure the company's continued and efficient operation will always be a determining influence. THE GIFT OF THE GORGON therefore becomes part of a complicated machinery which transfers its own demands back onto the playtext: it is supplied with a venue and all that this signifies - since the venue's own inherent qualities will now play an inevitable part in the structuring of meaning.

As we saw earlier, a theatre venue is characterised not only by the sort of work it becomes known for, but by other features such as the regular

audience base it has built up. This will - at least in attitude, be slightly different and will account for a variation in meanings: we are jumping ahead here to the end of the rehearsal process and beyond, but in a sense the preconceptions that surround the venue do precede the playtext. For example: going to a play at the Wharf is less of a formal "event", people do not dress up as much, they are more relaxed... this in itself may affect anything from the humour that is generated from a particular line to the ways in which the play is viewed in anticipation: it most probably will not be a musical or a grand classic, it will have a small cast, so it will be intimate and probably fun. These expectations have to do with the qualities that the venue has cumulated over time and may have little to do with the play; in this sense a judgement is already being made about Shaffer's play. When he is known for the epic scale of his work, what does its programming in this venue signify? Is it a change in style? is it a lesser work for the STC not to want to risk a larger venue? As for its cast size we have already hinted at the way a venue can alter our judgment: many people came away with the impression of a three-hander whereas the play has a cast of ten - a particularly large number in this age of cut-back funding, and larger in fact than HOTSPUR[12]: this had five and played at the Drama Theatre. In short the preconceptions associated with a venue become its characteristics and these in turn precede the meanings of a particular playtext.

More important features, though perhaps less attractive, are the economic concerns of its seating capacity and its potential for box office return. This is intimately connected with the budget allocated to any show that takes place within it: logically enough, more seats mean more profit, which can then offset the production costs. Regardless of any special effects or particular technical demands that a play might demand, once a venue is selected, its budget will always be calculated in relation to a percentage of the seating capacity. That the GIFT OF THE GORGON was to play in the Wharf rather than the Drama Theatre meant a difference in the resources that would be provided for it, and therefore an overall difference in production values. This budgetary implication therefore also means that the chosen venue sets the financial boundaries for the production.

Finally, the decision of the Wharf Theatre as a venue for the interpretation of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON also determines the nature of

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12 - HOTSPUR by Geoffrey Atherton, was directed by Simon Phillips, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House in October 1994

the space that it will inhabit: such spatial features as the architecture of the building, the nature of the theatre space, ultimately all fall within the scope of the venue. For both sites, the scale of production echoes the scale of the space and Drama Theatre and the Wharf differ firstly in their respective size. As opposed to the former which seats over five hundred people, the Wharf seats a maximum of three hundred and eleven. The space itself is therefore considerably smaller and this applies as much to the stage space as to the audience space. The stage space is flat on the ground with the rows of seating raked up around it so that in the absence of any built-in structure, the audience looks down on the action. While the seating is to a degree, mobile, the predominant configuration is a semi-circle which makes of the stage a slight thrust, with a fairly shallow area upstage. The back wall of the theatre space is virtually the back wall of the theatre building except for a narrow passage way which allows for quick travel from one side to the other: there is therefore little backstage area, other than directly off from the wings. These are furthermore at some distance from the stage so that unless flats are erected to hide them, actors are visible for some time from the auditorium before they reach the exposed part of the stage, where they are visible to all. Two big cross-beams supporting the roof cut across the space above the audience's heads; the ceiling is relatively low, with exposed cat walks and a lighting grid which reaches fairly far back into the auditorium. These are broadly some of the spatial characteristics which exist independently of any meanings within the text.

At this stage, comparative to the choice of venue, the choice of play text has had little bearing on the production of meaning. This is supported by the fact that as a venue, The Wharf means similar things for any play that is likely to take place within its walls: namely, it will be subject to the audience's preconceptions, to a particular budget, and to the distinctive structural features and qualities of the space. These are the givens which seem to come in tandem with the selection of a play for this particular company, no matter what this play is. They affect meanings already since they dictate certain boundaries, but they may also affect meanings which will not be perceptible till further down the path of the process. Obviously this is a highly complicated enterprise which only testifies to the multi-facetted nature of theatre: all of these factors are intertwined, overlapping and mutually perpetuating. The architecture is also related to the preconceptions of an audience, the choice of seating configuration will affect the budget etc. This highly complex network of communication is already in operation, long

before attention is turned with any real scrutiny to the playtext, to its own distinctive boundaries and potential for meaning.

The first point at which there is tangible evidence of this occurring is in the discussions about the set design. This happens some time after the preliminary decisions have been made, and while there is no doubt that the creative team may have been mulling over the playscript in the interim, this is one of the first times its meanings get discussed and acted upon. Here, the director Wayne Harrison and designer Angus Strathie came up with a number of broad criteria based on their individual and joint responses to Shaffer's text. Thematically Harrison expressed a desire to pursue a number of strands in the eventual set design: firstly its resonances with Greek tragedy were to be picked up by modelling the forms of the set along the lines of a Greek amphitheatre, by establishing different playing areas, by using marble and whitewashed neutrals as the colour references etc. Secondly the thriller aspect of the plot was to be foregrounded by allusions to the Film Noir genre: this would affect costuming - all in tones of grey, or black and white. The idea of a special effect also surfaced in relation to this which meant the incorporation of a set element: the stage was to be swathed in black cloth at the beginning of the show to disappear violently down the mouth of the Gorgon - its head represented by an object which would serve later as the waste-paper basket which swallows up all of Edward's failed drafts of plays. This would occur, as is tradition within the genre, on a dramatic note with dark and heavy underscoring to set up the idea of suspense and surprise. It would also occur simultaneously with the coffin, supposedly containing Edward's remains, disappearing into what becomes his desk underneath and from thereon in, the symbol of his omnipresence. Finally the importance of violence and redemption, as key messages in the play led to the isolation of Edward's suicide as one of the most important moments to be staged. This generated the idea of a wall of lava, made up of two panels, positioned along the back wall of the theatre and with bright lights behind it so that when the two panels separated, a blinding light disguised Edward's disappearance behind them. The stage would then be bathed in red light.

Otherwise the playtext's basic spatial requirements were taken into consideration: the set needed to provide for the simultaneous staging of four different realities: the 'real' place and time in which the plot is unfolding - i.e. the level of reality engaged by the Philip/Helen plot -this is characterised by important set elements or objects such as the terrace (from which Edward threw himself), and the antique desk (at which he wrote most of his plays) ;

the flashback reality where scenes between the living Edward and young Helen are recreated for the purposes of her narration of past events; the fantasy and fictional worlds of Edward's writing which incorporate such diverse settings as Ancient Greece, Byzantium, Northern Ireland. etc. Finally the "America" evoked by Philip's letters at the beginning and end.

All of these aspects (and no doubt more) were taken into account and acted upon in coming up with a preliminary set design. The playtext therefore seems to be playing a substantial role at this stage: while many of the ideas were not generated in strict adherence to the play's stage directions or overt spatial clues - indeed there is no 'black cloth' mentioned and the disappearing coffin can be seen to actively contradict the script where it is removed by way of a few Greek villagers - nevertheless these were the product of its close consideration or in other words, they amounted to an interpretation of the playtext's inherent meanings. In the realisation of these ideas many things transformed the space in the model box but these were also realised in relation to the space's own distinctive features, the ones which set the parameters in the first place and which were alluded to above.

Firstly, the architecture, of the space itself affected a decision to raise the stage space a good fourty centimetres above the floor. This had to do with the relationship between the steepness of the auditorium's rake and the ground which means that the actors' natural eye-level is no higher than the third row. Compounded by the fact that the hanging support beams across the ceiling already cause some acoustic problems in the back rows this only increases the difficulty of playing to the whole house, and none of the action seems to penetrate beyond the first three rows. So many productions in the Wharf Theatre have a raised platform designed into their set and this is once again regardless of the particular playtext. It does rebound upon the playtext however: the amphitheatre effect (a desired interpretation of the playtext) is already compromised by a requirement that takes it a long way from any legitimate amphitheatre reference; another effect which adds to this is a heightened sense of demarcation between audience and stage.

Secondly, the configuration of the audience has as much to do with the Greek amphitheatre effect as the audience sightlines: the seating had to be arranged in a certain way in order to advantage the greatest number of spectators. This already dictates a certain relationship between the real and fictional worlds, plays upon the dynamic between actors and between them and the audience.

Thirdly, (and here the playscript enters the equation at last), the juggling of the different realities or perceived textual requirements, soon hits up against the sheer limitation of space available: in order to achieve the coherent functioning of the *number* of spatial conventions needed, these had to be scrupulously thought through in advance, with particular areas allocated and fixed well before the beginning of rehearsals. In other words, particular scenes were played out in certain areas because there was simply no other place for them: the reality of Philip in America was relegated to the auditorium partly because of the cramped proportions of the stage space and the fact that a certain amount of distance is needed for 'real' distance (intercontinental distance) to read in this style of play. The idea of locating his entrance and exit here occurred at this stage of pre-production, and suggested itself as the most viable option because of the size of the stage. The combination of this pre-ordained positioning and the heightened demarcation of the raised platform added to his sense of distance, and extended this even further to a sense of dislocation - from his father's colourful world, and in a sense from others: he becomes quite literally a loner, outside of the action not so much because of Shaffer's characterisation than the contingencies of space.

Once he treads up onto the stage, the convention has to change (given such a clear spatial demarcation) and this is the most logical place to locate the Helen/Philip reality: being the dominant reality, not only in terms of stage time but in terms of it being the anchor-base of the play, the text comes to claim for its central plot the main exposed area of the thrust. The fact that this is the only area of the stage which has perfect sightlines from all vantage points nevertheless plays a part in this decision, and also suggests the location for the flash backs: this is decided once again not only because of its own requirements (the need to be near Helen at all times, since she switches abruptly from one to the other; the extent to which it contributes as well to the main plot) but also because of the requirements of other scenes: once again a scrupulous 'toss-up' between this and the fantasy/fictional scenes takes into account the proximity of the dressing rooms, the easy access to the wings for the number of quick changes needed in these scenes. These factors contribute in the allocation of the shallow upstage platform for all of these 'fictitious' scenes, which of course affects meanings in turn.

This area is approximately three and a half metres in width and as mentioned before, for all intents and purposes, its upstage wall is quite literally the end of the theatre proper, there being no backstage area

whatsoever. In the absence of a fly-tower or any other storage space provided by the theatre's architecture, all the backdrops (which were conceived as the most efficient means of indicating so many different locations and time frames) had to be stored one behind the other here, ready to be pulleyed across on cue. This firstly meant a limited number of backdrops: sometimes a same backdrop had to be used again though with a lighting effect to give the appearance of a different location. It also meant that the playing area for these scenes would be restricted to the remaining downstage space - a space only just wide enough to fit them between the backdrop and terrace doors through which most of the reveals were to happen. This limitation reinforced the need for more room, namely for another platform which could appear only for these scenes and which allowed the characters in question to infiltrate the space more without making a confusing break in convention and populating Helen's downstage territory and the primary reality. A motorised platform, disguised within the steps leading to the terrace was designed to extend downstage to reach the desk (centre), so that Perseus for example, could use this entire area, including the desk surface as his playing space. As a solution, this yielded nicely to textual interpretation, since these representations of Edward's - at times violent - creativity could be seen to invade the territory of their day-to-day relationship and 'real' lives. Nonetheless it remains a solution brought about by spatial considerations.

Finally, the combination of all of these various factors were to culminate in the meanings alluded to already: the psychological dilemmas of three people bound together by a complex relationship was pushed to the fore since the notion of realising the playtext's spectacular or epic potential became impossible - not because it didn't exist, but because of the nature of the space. On the contrary the playtext did suggest this potential and this is precisely what prompted the director's repeated and perceptive questioning as to whether THE GIFT OF THE GORGON should perhaps have been allocated the Drama Theatre - not just because of the latter's opulent stage space, its qualities as a theatre space, or its architectural features, but because of all of these and its character as venue: these expressions of concern were in response to each of the Production Manager's requests to cut costs, to produce a design which didn't exceed the budget. Over the textual requirements, or at least over the designer and director's joint interpretation of it, the venue's budgetary constraints took precedence.

One last feature of the pre-production phase which at first glance seems only tenuously connected to the use of space, is the casting of the play. This can be a long and complicated process which is of little concern to us here other than to mention the casting of Paul Goddard in the role of Philip. This was a seen as a difficult part to cast given that on the one hand, it requires a highly skilled and sensitive actor, but that on the other hand it appears on the page, to be quite a minor role. Having approached Paul Goddard to play the part, and while discussing it with him, Wayne Harrison emphasised to him the importance of Philip's journey: they began to perceive his presence as pivotal in the drama, recognising that a lot more could be made of the role than either the text had suggested or the English production had realised. With the mutual assurance that this was the tack they would take in rehearsals, the play was cast. As a final aspect of pre-production, this converged with the finished set and costume designs for the beginning of rehearsals.

*b) Week One*

The first day of rehearsals began with a presentation of the model box attended by the full cast, most of the crew and members of the company. At this point Wayne told us what attracted him to the play, the key features of his interpretation and the thematic rationale informing the set. Using the model box and design concept as a springboard, he reiterated all of the above-mentioned aspects of the text: the Film Noir genre, the overtones of Greek Tragedy etc ... He was supported in this by Angus Strathie who then went on to explain the functional aspects of the set and described the costume for each character. In short this presentation outlined in summary the decisions that had been reached during the pre-production phase and made clear to the actors the meanings that had already been structured.

A full read-through of the playtext followed this introduction. Though this was not limited to the immediate company (actors, director, stage managers) and still included such members of the extended creative team as lighting designer, voice consultant, dramaturgical assistant and others, the numbers were substantially reduced from the model box presentation. They were reduced even further once the reading was over and the discussion

began. While any member of the company would have been welcome to contribute, the focus now turned more specifically onto the director and the actors and in it the playtext proper began to be talked about directly, albeit in broad terms: the thematic concerns that had been summarised during the model presentation guided the course of the discussion and were now teased out in more detail with Wayne pointing out particular textual references to support the interpretive stance. These were counter-pointed or reinforced by opinions proffered by the actors and constituted the first encounter between the many interpreters and the next step towards a synthesis of meanings. What the director had interpreted was held up against what the actors had gleaned from the script, independently and in their own right.

While the creative energy that often characterises such a first discussion is not to be underestimated, it must be remembered that these steps towards a concrete interpretation can only ever be taken from within certain parameters: the range of meanings targeted and embodied by the set design are for the most part irreversible since the completion of the model box and the costume drawings has put other wheels in motion: money is already being spent, labour is underway. In the rehearsal room, the set and design are seldom mentioned. But while meanings begin to be generated from within the group and in engagement with the playtext directly, from this time on decisions are always made *in relation* to the spatial structures now in place, or in other words to an already evolving performance text. Only in acknowledging this overriding influence as both a given and an omnipresent feature of the process at this point, can we say that the main focus is now on the text.

To give a detailed account of this week would not only prove virtually impossible, but it would become very tedious for the reader, for very little purpose: what is of interest here is to find out what factors exerted predominant influence in the creation of meaning, and since the three-dimensional space was seldom referred to other than on the first day - we can safely ascertain that it took a back seat. One point however is worth making and that involves the discovery of a key theme which was to play a greater role as time went on. Once the broader discussion of themes had taken place the play was sifted through, scene by scene with a view to discussing its meanings in more detail. This process took most of this first week and once again the number of people present reduced again until only those involved in the particular scenes were called - although Paul Goddard attended almost

as much as the two leads, even when his character had no dialogue. On about the third day of rehearsals, when we were well into Act II, Wayne Harrison started the day by saying: "The more I read of this play, the more I think that the whole thing is about Philip (Paul Goddard's character) trying to make his father real to himself. It's really his story." And having stated this, he went on to provide substantial textual back-up: brought up in his father's shadow, without ever having met him, without so much as a birthday message acknowledging his existence and having devoted his life and career to the study of Edward's plays, Philip's purpose in writing his biography is to meet him properly and discover him as he really was; this he states quite directly as his objective when trying to convince Helen to let him stay:

> "PHILIP: Would you believe me if I said I knew every word Edward Damson wrote by heart - good, bad and indifferent? If I wasn't related, he'd still be an obsession. But he's not finally there. He's just a photo accepting awards in theatre magazines. I thought...if I could write his life...
> HELEN: Yes?
> PHILIP: He would become real for me." [13]

Other allusions supported this stance, such as Helen's "He will be real to you Philip. He'll be real now - very soon."[14], on her exit in Act II. And when Philip leaves to return to America, he is presumably satisfied and has fulfilled his personal journey: he has reached a point where he has all the necessary material about his father's life but no longer has any need to write the book. Given this, Wayne Harrison's next question was to ascertain when in fact this had taken place: on what line of text was his thirst for knowledge quenched and at what particular moment was his father made real? This was kept in mind when reading through Act III and on a particular page, everyone agreed that a turning point was occurring that could not be overlooked: this was in Edward's speech when he describes watching Philip through the window of his lecture theatre at the American University where he was talking on the works of Edward Damson:

> "I watched his mouth, endlessly opening and shutting, giving artificial respiration to the obviously extinct. He was like some Icon of Irrelevance! And I, on the other side of the glass, *irrelevant too* ! Our images fused into one - the dramatist and the professor of Drama: both unneeded. Just Nobodies in

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13 -Shaffer, P, *The Gift of the Gorgon* , London,Viking, 1992 p5.
14 -ibid. p59

> Nowhere USA - which is now Everywhere. I shouted through the window at him: 'Stop your yap, for God's sake. The soldier's pole is fallen!... I at least created theatre and wasted my life. What are you who merely spend it commenting on a waster?'" 15

This seemed to be the general area of text at which Philip came the closest to meeting his objective, and was therefore mooted as a temporary answer to Wayne Harrison's question. Any further honing was to be left till later: for the moment, the question was posited, but left to acquire a firm solution further on in the process. Both the director and the actor involved however were acting upon their joint interpretation which had been discussed before the rehearsals began. It is impossible to know whether or not this in itself had geared Wayne Harrison's thoughts towards ways in which this role was meaningful, or could be made *more* meaningful, or whether the fact that Paul Goddard made the presence of his character felt by providing such an important contribution to the discussion (by being very much a part of the play, even when not directly involved). It is simply a point that highlights the complexity of such a dense and interwoven process, and suggests that the ascription of meanings can be traced back to many an occurrence - not least of which is Shaffer's text, not least of which again is the commitment of an actor, the perception of a director or the arbitrariness of circumstances beyond all of their control.

*c) Week Two*

By the second week, the actors had finished going through the play and were ready to move on to the floor. The stage manager had made a mark-up of the set on the rehearsal room floor and the actors playing Philip, Helen and her maid Katina were called to start working through the play chronologically. The first step taken by the director was to establish the preliminary spatial boundaries and conventions in relation to which the blocking was to develop: Philip's letter from America was to occur not on stage with Helen as the playtext had suggested, but in the auditorium as the spatial requirements of the theatre had suggested; while its influence was only being felt at this point in the process, this decision harks back to the pre-production phase and comes back to reaffirm its strength now that the three

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15 -ibid. p77

dimensional space is engaged with and meanings tested against these pre-existing structures: not only is Philip's entrance more or less pre-ordained, but so are they all to an extent. If as we saw earlier, the limitations of the space meant that certain worlds had to be activated in certain areas, then these rules must inevitably govern the blocking: if the different realities are to be coherently communicated, they must be coherently maintained. And so, Edward's entrance can only really happen from one place, otherwise the internal logic of the piece is disrupted and the spatial sense undermined: like Damsinski and Parvis, and all the other characters in the flashback scenes, he must appear at least at first, from behind the louvre doors. Katina on the other hand, as part of the primary reality of the house on the Greek island and of the action unfolding in "time present", must enter from within the house - or what has been allocated to signify the house - i.e from downstage of the louvre doors.

The first part of the blocking phase therefore involved fixing entrances and setting parameters of movement. These were sometimes virtually pre-ordained by past decisions, and at least always restricted by them. But even *within* the limited options that this first structuring offers, the nature of the space, still seems to have an enormous input into the making of sense and often dictates what choices are made. There are only two aisles through which Philip can make his entrance, and the choice of the prompt side aisle over the other is not made in relation to the text but is almost predetermined by the sheer practicalities of such a physical medium: the prompt side aisle is by definition the one closest to the bio-box, which in this space has access not only into the auditorium but also leads backstage. In using this entrance, the actor is provided not only with a hiding space but with a quick and discreet access, unnoticed by the audience.

This in turn affects Katina's entrance: given that she must, for convention's sake enter downstage of the three steps leading up to the louvre doors, she too only has two options in the prompt or o.p entrance. And what determined this choice was once again not the playtext, but firstly, the location of Philip's entrance, and secondly the nature of the theatre space and set design. If she enters from the o.p side, she can see Philip from the moment she steps out from behind the masking, and would therefore have to acknowledge him. From here however, the configuration of the seating and the nature of the stage space means that she can be seen by some of the audience but not all, and therefore not enough. Given that this is the first encounter not only between the two characters but between the two

conflicting worlds of the drama, and given more importantly that the first few minutes of any play are the most densely packed with vital information, the actor is caught between two evils: the need to react convincingly but be lost to a large part of the audience, or to travel six metres in a limbo land, reacting half-heartedly for the few that can see, trying to keep this happening over a long ten seconds of stage time until reaching the main platform where everyone can be satisfied: by this time the moment would have been well and truly killed. The other option, which was to enter from the prompt side, meant that she could be masked from Philip until she actually reached the exposed part of the stage: their initial confrontation could then happen succinctly, realistically, and for all to see.

The point of access to the stage is also a point of access into the fiction. In determining how the fictitious world is to be entered, these spatial considerations are in effect determining the circumstances under which the playtext proper can begin to exercise influence over the actors' movements. And even then, it is clear that fixing an entrance will limit the options of where you can go next. And so these spatial considerations also provide the point from which the blocking develops, therefore playing a pivotal part in any further investment of the fictitious world. There is little place else for Philip to go. Certainly, the signifying structures proper to the playtext restrain him from inappropriate movement: he is more likely to pace nervously than to hop on one leg. Nevertheless, he is also restrained by set elements for example, and the choices which informed their location on stage: he cannot pace very far, because of the desk which occupies a large portion of the stage and will be responsible for the developing relationships and spatial dynamic throughout the play.

As we have seen, this desk had to be of a sizeable dimension, big enough to swallow up a coffin of feasible proportions. As a central image, formulated not so much in relation to direct textual evidence, but certainly in relation to an interpretation of the text, this was placed in the middle of a not so large stage space. Incidentally - there was little room for it to go anywhere else and so the limitations of the space are once again seen to impose certain conditions for the generation of meaning. This decision, also made some time ago, is now seen to have important ramifications: the area in front of the table is useful to some degree given that all the audience can get an unobstructed full-length view of the characters. This is the only area for example where the actors can lie down and still be seen, and this immediately hones the blocking for the love-making scene. Otherwise, scenes can occur on

either side of the table but they are cramped for more than two people. The two consequences of this are firstly that scenes cannot be played here for long periods of time, and secondly that this encourages the actors to work on either side of the table, with the action occurring across it, around it. Unless it is being directly used, behind the desk is once again cramped and a frustrated view for the audience and so scenes that are played out there seem to end up on the steps where the action is raised and therefore more clearly visible: these sorts of considerations affect the blocking almost before the actors step onto the stage, although often they are discovered throughout the process by trial and error. The strongest place on stage however seems to be an accepted feature of the space rather than a feature of this particular fictitious world, and this is at or on the table - in other words centre stage. In blocking the play, this seemed to be the area reserved for all key moments and dramatic high points - the 'acting out' of the Athena/Perseus scenes encapsulating the three turning points in their relationship, Edward's Dance of Rightful Stamping. It was not that these scenes were played here that made this location important; the location itself seemed to draw the scenes towards it and give them a weight that they did not have elsewhere. Often there was no need to try out the blocking in other areas of the set. The actors would gravitate there naturally or make a decision before-hand: sometimes "I think this should be at the table" but more often than not "I think this should be center".

The reasons for this are fairly obvious, but the point is simply to underline that in this instance the space is seen to have features which signify independently and that the theatre-space in particular, as a heavily codified *type* of space, carries social and cultural meanings which transcend those of a particular playscript, but which can be put to its use. The centre stage was not made strong by the presence of the table, but by the sight and energy lines in the space, by the place at which the focal points of all spectators naturally converge - and which in turn has made of it an entrenched 'hot-spot' and culturally loaded position.

This is where the character of Philip sat for most of the production. Logically enough, his main activity was to listen and take notes and the desk provides a useful leaning post. But the centrality of the desk is not suggested by the playtext and indeed the English production located Philip upstage to one side, well out of the way of the "main" action. The combination of decisions - firstly on the part of the director and designer to place the desk in such a strong position, secondly on the part of Paul Goddard to place himself

always well within the action, meant that the role of Philip was being quite literally made a *central* role in the drama.

Once this decision was taken, every other scene was blocked in relation to Philip's presence since he is on stage for the entire play. Perhaps one of the reasons that the Royal Shakespeare Company production had relegated him to the periphery was because of the staging difficulties brought about by his inclusion: when so much of the action is centred around the evolving relationship between Helen and Edward in flashback, it must be clear to the audience that Philip is not part of those scenes, but that he represents on the contrary a different reality, in which these events are being narrated. When positioned in the thick of the stage action, it became quite difficult to differentiate between the two worlds. Wayne Harrison and Paul Goddard therefore developed the convention that he would never have eye contact with the character of Edward: he would contrive at all times to move away, to turn out or to take notes when Edward was close by, in order to signify to the audience that they were in different time frames and avoid confusion. Most of the blocking for Philip was developed along these lines and this also affected the movements of the other characters: at some points it was necessary for Helen to jump out of a flashback to address Philip directly, and then switch straight back into it. In order that *she* could have contact with both characters without *them* having contact with each other, often meant a meticulous plotting of movements on all parts: Edward's embrace of Helen had to twist him upstage, while Philip would "cheat" to the downstage to avoid seeing a movement at a centimetre's distance. The word "cheat" was used to indicate an artifice rather than something that the character would "really" do, a movement for which a motivation was contrived rather than motivated by the playtext.

This convention which may well have been frustrating at first, was soon embraced as a virtue and its meaning potential utilised in all sorts of unpredicted ways. The father/son relationship could be all the more potently represented non-verbally by the interplay between their movements: echoing each other, counterpointing each other, the one gesticulating furiously while the other polishes his glasses and sharpens his pencils; sitting next to each other both a centimeter and a world apart, both of them writing, but writing such different things... The development of another theme was foregrounded: that we can never escape our parents, that we turn into our fathers and inherit their failings was both argued by the playtext in Edward's growing likeness to Damsinski, and countered by the blocking in Philip's

sharp contrast to them both: the relationship gains in generations of complexity.

The perceived breakthrough however was when the blocking process reached the third act, near the passage which was outlined in the week of reading and discussion as the point at which Edward becomes real for Philip. As usual, at this point Philip was sitting at the desk taking notes, now dead centre stage, being careful to maintain his separate reality. Edward was standing next to him, staring straight ahead until he said : "I went outside into the dark and watched him through the window [...] I watched his mouth, endlessly opening and shutting". Over these lines he gradually turned to look at his son, endowing the window of the lecture theatre, treating him as present in this past, and in a sense inviting him into his reality. Talking to his son for the first time ever, he insults his raison d'être and treats his life with contempt: "Stop your yap! [...I] wasted my life. What are you who merely spend it commenting on a waster?" On these lines as if awakened by the direct address, Philip gradually turned and his expression turned to horror as he saw his father for the first time. The convention of eye contact, studiously maintained to date, was broken to make an interpretive point. The actors knew that they were looking for that moment, but had been unsure where to place it until the spatialisation offered up a solution and unlocked a turning point.

Once again, it is a vain exercise to ascribe this moment to one or the other of the signifying systems: by now they were well and truly working in tandem. One thing, however, can be gleaned from the examination of this blocking phase, and that is that space plays a much larger part than is immediately obvious. The creation of meaning is already underway from as far back as the pre-production phase, taking effect now not only in setting the parameters and providing the circumstance in which the playtext's fictitious world must evolve, but in restricting the range of movements available and encouraging others.

*Week Three*

In the case of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON, the blocking process took longer than one week and spilled over into week three. Once the whole play had been given a shape however, the aim was to return to the beginning and work through it again with a closer eye to detail. So began a laborious process

whereby scenes were teased out moment by moment, where the intertwining of meanings put forward by the playtext and the three-dimensional space were made inseparable, and were crystalised into the formation of a new, organic text. In this sense, the aim of the week was to reach a point of inextricability, and the fact that both playtext and space were no longer set up or treated as opposites, provided some proof of this. Whereas being "around the table" in the first week privileged readings of the text, "blocking" is immediately identifiable with use of space and set in opposition. Now however, the week incorporated discussions of text and the altering of nuances, as well as the adjusting of positions and movement on the floor. More interestingly however, it also incorporated discussions about staging, whereas much of the movement had to do with clarifying a particular textual point.

As an illustration of this, the following piece of text was reworked at length on the floor because it "felt wrong" :

> HELEN (To Philip): We were in Greece. Now we return to England. To our marriage. And our glamorous life together.
>
> PHILIP: When was your wedding?
>
> HELEN: As soon as we returned.
>
> [*Light change. Edward enters sulkily...*]
>
> HELEN: My father, of course, did not attend. It was the only time I met his mother. She didn't like me.
>
> EDWARD: She has forgotten how to like. Poor woman, she was brought up to believe that work has to be unpleasant or it isn't real work. Theatre is at the top of her list of what's frivolous... Frankly I don't know why we've come back to this country at all.
>
> HELEN: Because this is where it counts and you know it.
>
> EDWARD: Balls! You talk such real balls learned!

The blocking of this scene that had occurred in week two saw Edward entering from the prompt, standing at a few metres distance from Helen and delivering his lines from there before sitting at his desk next to Philip. When this scene was touched upon a second time, something seemed amiss: whether it was the shape that had been created for the moment, or the interpretation suggested by the intonation of the line was difficult to ascertain. William Zappa's delivery of these lines suggested an apprehensive Edward lingering around the table, going to it as a last resort and with increasing frustration, sitting, and affectionately saying his last line. For some reason it simply did not work and he wanted to stop to find a solution.

Wayne Harrison suggested that these last lines should erupt and betray his anger towards his family which he transfers onto her, confirming the pattern of their relationship. He pointed out the rhythmic build and the exclamation marks in the text to back this up. William Zappa put forward the view that this might anticipate a moment only a page later, where he needs to erupt again, this time with more exclamation marks, and even more colourful language. His concern was that if he peaked here he would have nowhere further to go. What is more, the couple are on their honeymoon at this point, and we should see some basis for the relationship and at least pitch a point from which their marriage gradually declines. And so they ran the section on the floor again and it occurred to them that if the movements changed at the beginning of the scene, the way that William Zappa wanted to play it might make sense. In approaching Sandy Gore (Helen) and embracing her on "She's forgotten how to like, poor woman", the affectionate delivery of his last line seemed more motivated, while still maintaining a sense of mounting frustration. This in turn triggered an idea in Sandy Gore to deliver the line "She didn't like me" to Edward rather than Philip, and this helped to smooth the transition and follow through with the intentions even further: the scenario suddenly became different and read as though they had just got home after the wedding and were talking about the way she had been received. Helen felt bad about not being liked and looked to Edward for reassurance - which he could give by moving towards her and embracing her, explaining that his mother is like that, the very thought of her reminding him of how much he hated being home.

With the interplay between playtext and use of space so intricately bound, it is clear that meaning has evolved beyond a point where it is possible (or indeed desirable) to discern one major influence over another. The prospect of delving into the minutia of the overall performance text is less helpful than the discovery that, at this stage of the process, a new text has emerged and is still emerging - and that to a great degree this overcomes oppositions, and makes the separating of signifying structures, redundant at this point in time.

*Week Four*

The end of week three finished with a Saturday rehearsal given that the previous week had run behind and the time had to be made up: otherwise there would be little chance of getting through all that needed to be done in the four weeks allocated. Here the play was run and this set the tone and activity that would dominate the rest of the time in the rehearsal room. The play was firstly run in individual acts, then in two act sections and finally as a whole. This gave all involved the opportunity to stand back from the detail and gain a perspective on the new "text". In other words the production as a whole work in its concrete form, was seen for the first time and held up for the interpretations it proffered in its own right. Interestingly enough, when the week began, the production would swing in various directions, and take a different course from one run to the next, and this in turn cast different meanings on the story.

In one run, the story seemed to be about a manipulative woman, who sees in Edward a potential object of control and the opportunity for vicarious success; preying upon his natural talent and charisma she makes him think he needs her and begins to exert more and more influence. But human will and the basic desire for creative freedom win out, and he increasingly finds ways of resisting, be it by argument or by infidelity, until at last he escapes in suicide. Left alone and feeling cheated, she sees Philip's arrival to write the book as a way of exerting final control and taking revenge.

In the next run the relationship appeared to be much more equitable, with the two meeting and falling in love as young, vibrant and creative people full of positive potential: as time moves on, the patterns of behaviour that are so intrinsically tied to their past and to their identity begin to encroach until they are trapped in a cycle: these destructive patterns which they are unable to shirk, begin to colour their actions, push them to provocation, and become the central driving force of the relationship. Edward's death is the consummate exercise in power and one-up-manship.

Both of these readings are gleaned from the same playtext, but something in its concrete realisation modified emphases from one run to the next. What exactly caused the difference between these two readings is difficult to say, other than to point out a single directorial note which was given to Sandy Gore at the end of the first of the above runs: this involved fully entering into the reality of the flashback scenes and playing the youth of Helen much more than the narrator who is looking back. This meant a change in physicality as much as a change in intonation and vocal quality: she became much lighter on her feet, enjoyed their banter and laughed a lot

more, alleviated the tone and portentousness of the language. While it had seemed logical to present the information as the bitter woman she had become when looking back, this not only made the character quite unsympathetic, but gave a sense of premeditation to her actions in the flashback scenes: we never saw her behaving with youthful spontaneity and so the relationship with Edward seemed to evolve according to a set of mysterious agendas. This particular reading was the least preferred and so Sandy Gore decided that as much as possible she would try to steer the performance away from this direction.

Clearly this is not a reading that everyone would arrive at, but the performance text did seem to encompass a set of meanings which made this interpretation possible to a number of surrogate audience members. And indeed the important thing about this week seemed to be that the new text was being held up for the first time against prospective interpreters: the emphasis was moving quite strongly towards what the production would offer the spectators as a whole, what meanings they might come away with and in short, how it holds up as a night in the theatre. The approach of the theatre space proper was therefore imminent as the audience began to infiltrate not just the consciousness of the creative team, but quite literally the rehearsal room itself. Gradually, all the elements were introduced that might make this as close an approximation to the eventual performance conditions as possible: technically, the introduction of a sound tape for example, or the "wearing in" of a costume item; the main feature however was the expansion of the audience - from director and stage management, to the rest of the company and crew, to the members of staff and the theatre company itself - those that had been at the model presentation and were now back to see the transformation.

Coinciding with the arrival of these new participants, was the growing pressure of running times. The rough timing of the piece as a whole had been deduced from the various readings, from counting the number of pages etc. and this could now be more accurately judged. When the first few timings went beyond the three hour mark there began to be some cause for concern and this was only confirmed by the interim audience's growing restlessness. The feedback, though positive, was that it was a little long. Added to this is an unwritten company policy that all productions should come down before eleven o'clock at night. While this is no doubt the result of restlessness in 'real' audiences, there are other practical justifications such as last trains and early working mornings: people simply get up and leave. Rather than

disallowing longer productions, the Company usually makes the decision to alter the starting times of shows that are obviously going to run over three hours. A Shakespeare might start at seven thirty rather than eight, but in the case of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON, this was not an option because all the publicity material had gone to print stating eight o'clock. It was thought to be a more viable option to try and get the running time down, and short of the actors speeding their delivery up to the point of unintelligibility, the playtext had to be cut. The BBC announcement at the very beginning of the play was stripped back to its essential information, the rationale being that it anticipated action that would be discovered throughout the course of the play anyway. Another edit involved Helen's disclosure that she had had an abortion on Edward's request. Dramaturgically, this seemed logical since it was a side-story that was never picked up upon or made relevant again; it was also a neat cut that could occur almost imperceptibly in the dialogue. Nevertheless it was argued against precisely because of the meanings it altered: how much higher the stakes when we know what Helen has sacrificed? Cutting information always alters meanings and in this instance transformations were made in relation to a time-slot and a company guideline: here the venue and its particular characteristics came back to exercise their influence, with the promise to subscribers of a user-friendly night. By the end of the week the play was running at less than an hour for each of the three acts.

*Production Week*

On the weekend of this last week, the rehearsal room was packed up leaving just the bare essentials such as the floor mark-up to enable the actors to run the play again at the beginning of the week. During this time it was anticipated that the rest of the crew and the director would be in the theatre taken up with technical aspects of the show. In order not to waste time the actors were therefore left to their own devices for a day or so, running the play under the supervision of the director when possible but otherwise of the assistant stage-manager or assistant director. Some time was devoted to line runs where the focus was on rhythms or simply on memory work. Very little discussion about meanings took place and for the actors, this brief time seemed to be geared more towards thought and consolidation.

Meanwhile the set had been moved into the theatre and the crew was in a frenzy of activity on stage and around the theatre space: last minute painting and carpentry work included the hanging of the louvre doors which masked the scene changes from one fictitious scene to the next, from a flashback to a scene on the Greek terrace in time present; electricians were rigging lights up in the grid, focusing them with the lighting designer. Props tables were being set up backstage with quick-change areas, costumes were being hung in the dressing rooms. The playtext itself now seemed very remote from the activities at hand although one exception to normal practice should be noted. The big black cloth that disappears down the Gorgon's head at the beginning of the show was tested in the space with unsuccessful results. There was simply not enough depth to the stage space to make the pulley system work efficiently and for the effect to be as fast and dramatic as desired. In this case, it was decided that rather than loosing the effect - which though not mentioned in the script, was instrumental to Wayne Harrison's vision of the piece - a hole should be drilled through the back wall of the theatre space itself, into the passage way outside. This enabled the effect to take place and provides a rare illustration of where the theatre activity is not confined to the parameters of the theatre space, where the architecture of the building itself is altered to accommodate the interpretation of a playtext.

Otherwise however, the theatre space and more particularly the technical features that also characterise it as such begin to play a more dominant role. One of the most important stages of this production week was the lighting plot where the director and lighting designer make key decisions about all the lighting states throughout the production. In THE GIFT OF THE GORGON lighting is particularly relevant to the meanings conveyed given the fractured structure of the story telling and the abrupt shifts of time frames and locations. While the spatialisation had gone a long way in communicating these, the lighting was heavily relied upon for isolation and punctuation purposes, ensuring their total clarity. This lighting process is therefore guided by the performance text as it has evolved up to date, but it is also *in itself* influenced by the spatial 'givens' which in turn affect meanings: the nature of the theatre space, the architecture of the building and once again its status as a venue all play a part. The audience configuration for example made lighting certain things on stage impossible without lighting the spectators themselves or having them suffer the discomfort of a constant beaming in their eyes. Lighting is also determined by the relationship between the ceiling (and therefore the lighting grid) and the stage: the height

of the former combined with the shallowness of the latter dictates certain angles of lighting which in turn made some things possible and others not. Certain effects were superseded simply by the need to see the actors faces and not cast them in shadow. Finally, like the set designer, the lighting designer is allocated a budget (in accordance with the venue) which limits the number of lights, colours of gel, their range and capability, etc. The isolation of a particular area on stage may be dependent on the number of 'specials' that the production can afford. Lighting ideas as important to meaning as the planned effect for Edward's suicide can be compromised due to budgetary constraints which are only made apparent at this stage of the process.

In this particular case, the blinding of the audience which was intended to disguise William Zappa's step backstage as Edward's suicidal fall over the edge of the cliffs - was not bright enough to create the desired sense of staring straight into the sun. The way that the lighting designer had hoped to achieve this effect was by studding the 'gold-plated' back drop with globes, bringing them up to such a bright level at the appropriate time that the whole wall of light simply engulfed Edward and allowed him to disappear backstage without being seen. The effect was agreed upon on the condition that the globes used were those that had been left over from the previous production of FALSETTOS which also studded the back and side walls of the set. But these were of a particular wattage and when installed, proved too weak: to produce more power would have meant more expensive globes and this exceeded the budget. Edward's suicide was a simple step with arms outstretched through the parting set panels which then closed behind him. The lights were bright but could not realistically be interpreted as blinding sunlight: the literal nature of the image was lost but the moment was given a more theatrical solution.

Similar compromises were made during the sound plot. Once again this is one of the processes that takes place in production week while the actors are elsewhere and like the lighting plot, it involves going through each cue, listening and setting levels and timings. Very little time was spent on this here although key changes were made, for example to the content of the music itself. The opening bars during which the black cloth covering the stage was intended to disappear were not dramatic enough and did not seem to support such a major spatial transformation with the appropriate weight or dynamic. The composer was therefore asked to recompose the piece with this effect in mind.

In summary, this 'bump-in' period was pressured given that so many different departments had to meet their various tasks, and time was kept to a strict minimum for budgetary reasons: this is where overtime can accumulate and double the wages bills for an already expensive period of full-time and casual staff hire. Many different activities, too numerous to mention in great detail, were therefore being dealt with simultaneously although all aiming to culminate in the common dead-line of the technical rehearsal.

This is when the actors arrived, bringing with them into the theatre space proper, the performance text as it had evolved up to the point of leaving the rehearsal room. Even in the concrete form that it had already reached, it underwent further changes directly related to the change of space and to the new circumstances which now took precedence. During the technical rehearsal, the performance text was not realised in total, and as for the playwright's words themselves, these were never spoken in full or with more than a passing concern for meaning. The technical requirements of the production dictated what dialogue was to be said and what scenes were to be touched on. Even then, the scene transitions rather than the scenes themselves received emphasis, since the concern of the technical rehearsal was primarily to run the production "from cue to cue". When nothing was happening from a sound, lighting, or mechanical point of view, the rehearsal would often jump ahead with only a few exceptions, which were once again all 'technical': if there was a need to test a costume, to try a quick change, or to practice with new props, or if re-blocking was required due to a lighting focus or sightline problems.

Where the lights were concerned, one cue would be repeated until all were satisfied that it happened as intended. This was often to do with timings and involved close communication between the stage manager and the director. In some cases if an actor stepped out of their light, Wayne Harrison would ask the lighting designer if there was a way of rectifying this. In other cases, however, he might stop the action to ask the actor to find their light and modify his/her movement accordingly. While the lights would be guided by the performance, the latter was also adjusted in accordance with the lights. As for the sound, it would be edited to the action, only if the action couldn't be timed to the sound: the first choral announcement about Edward's death was repeated a number of times in order that the actors acquaint themselves with the length of the cue and time their delivery accordingly. The already cut-down version of the playtext was now made to fit a sound cue.

The next cue called for simultaneous mechanical, lighting and sound operation and this occurred a number of times, not just because it required the synchronisation of all three, but more particularly because it involved the disappearance of the big black cloth that shrouded the stage at the beginning of the production. This would catch on some feature of the set and have to be dislodged each time. Other mechanical cues stopped the action such as the timing of the louvre doors which would open to reveal an actor still stepping on from offstage. At other times they would simply get stuck half way across and not expose the actor at all. The changes of backdrop would be repeated until the Byzantium cloth could disappear for the Irish scenes and until England would not be seen with the trail end of a moving cliff of lava.

The technical rehearsal also allowed the actors the opportunity to work in their costumes: Sandy Gore's shoes were discovered to be too small, whereas William Zappa was made aware of how little time there was to run backstage from a calm exit, strip and be changed into a toga-like sheet, then to be smeared with fake blood springing from realistic cuts and race back for a new entrance within the minute. Blocking was adjusted to make this possible, with William Zappa creating a motivation within the scene which would cheat him as close as possible to the edge of the stage space in order to literally "make a quick exit". Similarly, at the end of Act II, when Edward pours a full bottle of red wine (or raspberry cordial) over his head, the blocking had to be reworked so that some seconds later when Philip violently seizes Helen, they would not be in danger of slipping in the puddle. Incidentally, having the real liquid did alter the dynamic and require a weaker reaction on the part of Philip than previously, subtly suggesting new things about his character, about their relationship, about his emotional need for his father.

During this rehearsal Wayne Harrison would also move around the auditorium, sitting in different seats in order to judge sightlines: all the scenes up the steps and behind the louvre doors had to be brought forward in order to expose them to the audience on the extreme sides. Edward's kneeling proposal to Helen had to occur with him up on one of the steps higher to avoid being masked by the table. As if compensating for his shortness against her height, this gave him a strange sense of vulnerability which helped in swinging both the audience and Helen's sympathies. Spatialisation was therefore still evolving, this time not only in relation to the playtext or to the preconceived spatial factors. Meanings were changing in relation to those features of the new space that had not yet been experienced.

Illustrations such as these abound and I have limited those chosen to one for each of the technical areas concerned during this phase of rehearsals. These are after all now functioning as intrinsic features of this new space: as a 'theatre space' as opposed to a rehearsal room, this does come with a lighting grid and a sound system, a backstage and a bio-box and the presence of these features cannot be separated from their purpose: by definition it is also a technically activated space and in entering its parameters, the realisation of the playtext is now submitted to the ways in which these new givens affect meaning. But the theatre space is also defined by its auditorium and this now implicates the only missing factor to complete the move and the week's work: the introduction of an audience was the next step in the process and this occurred to some degree during the dress rehearsal but more importantly on the first preview.

The dress rehearsal immediately followed the technical rehearsal and here the aim was to run the play as much as possible as if it were a public performance: it was a non-stop complete run in costume and make-up, where the full script was said, the adjusted blocking incorporated and performance levels pitched a little further. There was a small audience mainly consisting in members of the crew and once again people associated with the company. The focus however still seemed to be on the technical aspects of the show, ensuring that all the cues that had been worked through were correctly operated in the course of the play. Some hitches occurred such as doors opening at the wrong times, late lighting cues etc. and their correction then became the goal for the preview. The primary concern here was for everything to be in a presentable state for a paying public: to eliminate anything that might draw their attention to the artifice involved, that might jar with the fictitious world and remind them of the reality in which mechanists in black clothes are pulling cords and making doors move, where people are controlling the sunrise at the push of a button. In other words, the aim for the preview seemed to be in making the operation of the show as seamless as possible. What did this then leave for the opening night? If everything was meant "to be ready" for the audience, what is it that is still missing that justifies an extra ten dollars in the price of a ticket?

Firstly, it is true that there is no guarantee that technical aspects *won't* go wrong, and in this case at least, whether or not the cloth would work, whether or not the doors would run smoothly was always a surprise. On the third preview one of the doors came completely off its hinges leaving the

actors to do some deft improvisation. In another performance the motorised platform coming out from the steps to join up with the desk stopped in mid action, so that the actor playing Perseus had to jump across the breach in full Greek regalia. That these sorts of things will happen during previews is by no means a foregone conclusion, but the reduction in ticket price in a sense is a reservation of the right for this to happen and at least warns the prospective spectator of this risk.

The existence of previews however has another perhaps more pertinent purpose; this has less to do with the likelihood of technical things going wrong than the fact that the production is as yet bereft of the meanings that the incorporation of the audience engenders. In THE GIFT OF THE GORGON the performance text altered quite a lot in relation to the audience's response: on one particular preview, William Zappa found that the audience laughed on Edward's plea for Helen to stay with him when he played the lines in a particular way. Impulsively and slightly melodramatically, he would drop to his knees (on the step above, for sightlines) and claim: "I'm excessive. I'm extreme." Not only did this affect how he played the lines in future runs, but it meant that the rhythm of the scene altered, the laugh providing a punctuation point from which a new unit of meaning and another section of dialogue could begin: a new ploy, a fresh tack in the seduction of Helen. Similarly, the sheer fact of being in front of an audience in his empassioned manifesto about theatre made him aware of certain ironies that turned him to face the audience directly when delivering the following lines: "Theatre was an illuminant, sacred and indispensable. What is it now? Rows of seats with people to sit with folded arms. People who have forgotten their needs."

The previews also helped to point out confusions: those spectators who stayed back after the show could be approached and asked about certain problem moments, and areas in which it was felt that the audience was getting lost. For example people could be asked such questions as whether it was clear that the Athena and Perseus scenes were parallel enactments of Edward and Helen's relationship? While this was clear for the most part, for those for whom it did not, Sandy Gore's physicality changed to echo this more closely, and her blocking adjusted slightly as though she was delivering her lines through Athena, as though being mediated by this other persona. Finally, the previews helped to isolate areas within the play as a whole, where the audience could be felt to be slip away or lose interest. This would signal to the performers and director certain shortfalls which could then be

surmounted: for example it illuminated where the action lagged and needed to keep driving towards the fulfillment of an objective, or where the stakes of the drama needed to be raised etc. These are the result of a close observation of audience response over a number of nights, since the audience changes from one performance to the next. By altering the performance accordingly different emphases and nuances could be tested. The previews were therefore compared from one night to the next and in doing so the actors conducted a type of instinctive analysis as to what worked, at what times and for what reasons.

On the one hand, the previews for THE GIFT OF THE GORGON were therefore in aid of getting the technical aspects of the show in smooth working order. This however was fairly certain to come with practice and so the predominant effort was geared towards completing the rehearsal process by incorporating the audience: by assimilating those changes in meaning that are contingent upon another party; that are influenced not so much by the playtext as by the response to it or to it in its concrete form; in short that are the result of a new space which implicates another presence. Gradually however, as the previews go on and as the convergence of all these new influences begins to be weathered, as the production gets accustomed to all the ramifications of the change and incorporates them into the semiotic system, the playtext seems to re-emerge, although differently: it is the opening of Shaffer's GIFT OF THE GORGON, rather than Harrison's, Gore's or Zappa's. But it *is* its concrete expression and in this sense, the performance text and playtext while separable in theory, are now in practice, synthetically one.

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Pre-production/reading and discussing/blocking/detailing /running/ teching: this represents the entrenched segmentation of the rehearsal process in a mainstream production house such as the Sydney Theatre Company. Implicit in this are a number of assumptions. Firstly that this is generally a sufficient preparation time for the realisation of a play, secondly that this range of activities and the stages at which they occur will adequately cover all the necessary facets of the production. In short this is a fully endorsed and encoded process which has become so bound with practice that it is often impossible to determine whether it has formularised a creative process or is the natural result of it.

Hopefully the detailed observation of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON has elucidated this to some degree. Despite some minor differences, it clearly echoes the pattern extrapolated from a cross-section of other Sydney Theatre Company productions. However this doesn't seem to be the outcome of the team's creative needs nor was it developed from the inherent requirements of the playtext so much as being a set journey which existed prior to the rehearsal's commencement. Rather than the playtext or the group's interpretation of it guiding the rehearsal process, its course was steered by the customary requirements of the production company. The rehearsal process can therefore be seen as synonymous with a production process and is submitted to a much larger system of operation. This is clearly substantiated if we look at all the prescribed factors that affected the outcome of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON. Firstly, the time frame of five weeks was never questioned, even given its technical complexity. Secondly the way these weeks were spent not only echoed other productions, but was part of an assumed working method: the fact that all major design decisions were expected to be finalised before rehearsals began, the presence of the company at different points in time, the foreknowledge of different crew members as to when to see a run, the freneticism of the production week as a given characteristic and the timely convergence of different departmental deadlines. All these factors are a reflection of and contribute towards a streamlined production house; they are the necessary conditions for its efficient operation.

But the relationship between the production company and the space it inhabits are so closely bound together: in a sense the term 'venue' encapsulates this connection since it not only suggests both, but hints at their interdependent relationship. The space or theatre site, is a reflection of the company - of its standing and of the sort of theatre that gets produced there: if the company pitches itself at the mainstream, if it is well publicised and targets an upwardly mobile, intellectually responsive audience, the space will become associated with a certain style of work. On the other hand, however, the company is a reflection of the space: its size and number of seats will determine in advance its commercial viability and therefore the sorts of producers that might seek it out as a viable option. This in turn means that it will become associated with certain production values, certain sorts of plays and a particular sector of the public that responds to these as a potential audience. If as McAuley so rightly points out, "theatre is the only art form in which the name of the place where the artistic event occurs is the same as that of the art form itself" and that "popular usage has thus enshrined a

perception of the vital connection between physical space and the artistic communication in question"[16], then it is also true to say that nowadays a third element has entered into the equation: popular usage has not only enshrined a vital connection between physical space and artistic communication, but between these and their commercial viability . The term "theatre" these days seems to describe not so much the art form and the space it inhabits so much as these, and the way they are epitomised by the "theatre company" in question; in short the concepts of space, art-form and commercial standing are inseparably intertwined. And in this particular case they exist prior to the selection of the playtext and even inform it.

But if the course of rehearsals is prescribed by the production company, and since this is the process through which meanings are created, it follows then that this prescribed pattern may also be a determining influence in how meanings develop. In short it is this that seems to dictate how the relationship between text and space evolves: the rehearsal process of THE GIFT OF THE GORGON is indeed evidence of the fact that significant influences are not always predominantly textual and that at particular times the spatial givens in fact appear to be directing the course of meaning. Such is the case in pre-production, in week two and from week four onwards until it re-emerges - and even then only through its concrete form - just before the opening.

For if the company is determining such influential factors, so is the space: the company in this particular incidence *is* the space to the extent that it determines the venue, and therefore all the ensuing spatial determinants; the particular venue means a particular theatre space which is characterised by certain architectural features and therefore has budgetary ramifications. The set had to develop within the simultaneous, equivalent boundaries of the theatre space and its budget and this in turn meant that the blocking had to evolve in a particular way etc. The fact that William Zappa's line "I'm excessive. I'm extreme" got a laugh on the opening night can certainly be traced back to Shaffer, without whom it would not exist. But from another perspective and an equally significant one, it can be traced back to certain decisions made in the preproduction phase. The Wharf Theatre has particular architectural features which include a shallow stage space and an amphitheatrical audience configuration; the combination of the two means that the set is already subject to certain impositions. The stage/auditorium dynamic is predetermined and contingent upon sightlines, which in turn

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16 - McAuley, G, op. cit.

reduce the stage space even further: the set must incorporate a vast number of different playing areas to represent the gamut of fictional locations and time-frames. If the flashback realities have to be within easy access of the dressing room then the desk has to be centre as part of the main reality. For a number of reasons - related, but also unrelated to the text, Paul Goddard positions himself here at the centre. This leaves Edward the upstage area of the desk in which to kneel when blocking the scene. Once in the theatre, the sightlines dictate that Edward should be up on the step rather than at ground level with Helen. This in itself carries meanings which when coupled with the line, "I'm extreme" produce laughter. Such a humble and vulnerable action counterpointed by such grand claims are both inherently arrogant and funny - a combination which charms and ensures the audience's sympathy.

Decisions are therefore made which are not directly related to the playtext, but which affect meanings nonetheless. Would the audience have read Philip's journey to be in any way as significant if Paul Goddard hadn't accepted a role or if Wayne Harrison hadn't appreciated his expertise? Would the powerful moment of his seeing his father for the first time have existed if they hadn't decided, together, to create meanings and hadn't in fact created them spatially? If the playtext affords a *range* of meanings it is because it affords holes in which other meanings evolve - which transform rather than replicate and create afresh for the interpretive joy of new readers - or in this realm of concrete form, for its spectators.

# Conclusion

as a crucially influential stage and one in which the different articulations of space suddenly emerge not only as participants in the semiotic process, but as its principal determinants: not only are they generators of meaning, but initiators of meanings and a key structuring force which from thereon in, steers the course of the entire process. If as Issacharoff implies, the text precedes the creation of stage meaning[1], this is only so within a process that starts from "week one" as it were, or in other words from within a restricted view of the process and therefore of the making of meaning in theatre. If on the other hand, we include in our perception of the process, the point at which a project begins, then we also take into account the social, cultural and political givens of the wider context and locate theatre practice and its theorisation within the real world. In this case, it is necessary to accept that the theatrical space, from its articulation as 'venue' to its embodiment in the actors and their movements, is always the expression of a codified society[2] and in this light, the playtext can be seen as secondary to these anterior structures of meaning.

It is important at this point to underline again the limited scope of this study - if only to highlight an important irony. As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the study is restricted to mainstream practice, and indeed, the production company and the space it inhabits are so intertwined in this realm that the influence of one cannot be separated from the other. It follows that the significance of the three-dimensional space in its guise as "venue" is particularly heightened in this sort of sphere which is based on a corporate and cost-efficient model, where for financial reasons major decisions have to be made before rehearsals begin and before the actors are even present, let alone included as creative participants affecting the eventual meanings on stage. Identifiable with this sort of production company are therefore a venue and all the spatial ramifications that stem from it and which mean that three-dimensional space is a particularly strong guiding influence. The case may be different in other social, cultural and political spheres of theatre. The irony however is that it is the mainstream that is so often identified with the realisation of playtexts and considered the true home of text-based theatre. Where space is at its most powerful, it is the playtext that has the most focus. By its nature, mainstream theatre is venue-based but by common definition it is text-based. This can be uncovered as a contradiction in terms, but only if we

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1 - Issacharoff, M, op. cit.

2 - Ubersfeld, A, *Lire le Théâtre*, op. cit. pp143-144

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[1] - Issacharoff, M, op. cit.
[2] - Ubersfeld, A, *Lire le Théâtre*, op. cit. pp143-144

are capable of seeing how the selection of a venue affects the rest of the process - in other words if we are allowed to gauge the way space functions in the creation of meaning *throughout the full course of the chronological process*. These findings are not discernable when looking more traditionally at the product itself, where the emphasis returns to the playtext: they are made possible only by locating this product in its broader context of evolution, by the insistence on process as the most informative and accurate reflection of what actually occurs. And in looking back to the objectives outlined at the start of this work, this has indeed foregrounded the theatrical process as the generative force of theatre and therefore as the real object of any theatrical study that hopes to be revealing.

It must be conceded however, that this has inherent problems given the paucity of documentary evidence on the rehearsal process, which in turn means that it is difficult to develop any adequate methodology. On the one hand this is due to the practical difficulties of comprehensively documenting five weeks of full-time work and finding a means to do so that is both sufficiently thorough and unobtrusive; because on the other hand, there exists a certain apprehension on the part of practitioners towards the documentation of the rehearsal process, which also accounts for its lack of focus as an object of study. When the work is so personal and exposing, the idea of observation can be met with understandable reluctance. If, as this particular study has suggested, 'intimacy' is an essential part of a process which only moves gradually towards the incorporation of the public, then this is undermined as soon as more than one observer takes part - and even in the case of a discrete camera, the implications are still far more public than are necessarily desirable. Archival recordings themselves (and these are always product-based) are submitted to the most stringent of ethical and legal guidelines which make them very difficult to access even for the purposes of study.

In short, there are little means of collecting data let alone actually following through with the sorts of valuable findings that can be drawn from them. Hence, our reliance upon less rigorous, but necessary (in the absence of anything else) forms of documentation: the theatrical anecdote, stories passed from one rehearsal room to the next establish a sort of oral history and constitute the only real form of documentation and analysis from within the parameters of practice itself. These, coupled with the close observation of numerous rehearsal processes have provided the basis for this particular study. Without this rare and fortunate access, or the collection of data that it

afforded, it simply would not have been possible. This is the exception rather than the rule, and otherwise any rigorous study of the theatrical process that is based on real experience and a practical appraisal, is made extremely difficult. But not impossible: hopefully this thesis has shown firstly that it *is* possible to document theatre both with academic and intellectual rigour *and* with the necessary appreciation for its practical and artistic peculiarities. Secondly, it has highlighted the value of such empirical attempts as the anecdote to safeguard and perpetuate our Australian theatrical identity, and shown the danger in underestimating its efficacy as the only real existing form of analysis that *does* take place *for and by practitioners*, and which feeds back into the theatre sub-culture as a regenerative force. Finally, it has hopefully emphasised the need to continue in this direction, and initiated an attempt to broaden the scope of study and develop a rigour of approach: to encourage the existence of such an oral history, while recognising its propensity towards Chinese Whispers, to value it not through nostalgia and sentimentalisation but through constant and renewed enquiry; and this can be achieved by acting upon the assertion that "everything on stage is a sign" and thinking through the everyday decisions that affect meanings communicated - by making taxonomies if need be, and if only, to ensure clarity of convention and spatial coherence; by listening carefully to the language used and the assumptions that underpin common usage; by holding up to scrutiny the sorts of entrenched beliefs that generate their own momentum and become mythologies rather than a reflection of what actually occurs. As just one example in many, it is by juxtaposing such a strongly endorsed belief as subservience to the playtext and its author against the factual evidence of practice, that the mainstage can revitalise its means of expression, that its practitioners can accept responsibility for their creative input and therefore for the standard of theatre produced - let alone reach any conclusions about the communication of meaning in theatre or anywhere else.

In this particular study the importance of space and its relationship with the playtext it purports to 'serve' was furthermore uncovered with the help of literary and linguistic theory, with the help of semiotics and its emphasis upon different networks of meaning. By locating mainstage practice within the framework of current intellectual thought, this study goes beyond its initial emphasis on the space/text dynamic to reveal certain assumptions about the the nature of meaning itself, highlighting opposing perceptions of how this is generated and communicated. On the one hand the emphasis is

on a relationship of direct correspondence, upon clear lines connecting author and reader to each other, the former as upholder of Truth, the latter as its crusader, and their perfect contact is somehow the measure of successful communication. The contrasting view sees meanings created as the result of the interpreter's own subjective scanners and conditioned outlook, and this in turn engenders the author's absence if not death, and characterises the communication of meaning by holes and spaces, which subjects any connection between the two communicating parties to imperfection and arbitrariness. What is particularly interesting however is revealed only by uniting theory and practice under the one umbrella: their working juxtaposition not only shows up weaknesses of argument in each other, it paradoxically corroborates what is valuable in the opposing view. On the one hand academic theory helps to illuminate what mythologies and entrenched beliefs are the operating assumptions of mainstream theatre by bringing to it the findings of recent intellectual thought. And in doing so theatre practice also illuminates where these theoretical perceptions of meaning are particularly apt but elsewhere, where they hit against some resistance on the part of practical data, where on the other hand they fall short of reflecting an accurate overview. What is it that *does* unite the various productions of Shakespeare's HAMLET after all, if not for some common connection that has a basis in meaning? The value of uniting practice with theory as they have been throughout this thesis, is therefore the extent to which they offer a rounded picture of the production and communication of meaning, which neither can do as well in isolation. And in this the final objectives of this study are embodied and met: in illuminating these particular facets of theatrical semiosis, the synthetic potential of practice and theory is substantiated and hopefully encouraged not only as fruitful, but as complementary and mutually exacting.

It is of little surprise that the most pertinent analyses are the ones which have a basis in human experience, which are after all accessible and find an application in day to day reality. Conversely it is widely acknowledged that practical experience is enriched by insight and intelligent appraisal. The question is perhaps one of perspective and priority, and in this it is appropriate to conclude with the introduction of a different thesis and a different author. Very few theoretical writings locate in such a heartfelt and practical way the dilemma of communication - the desire to fix one's grasp on what is always elusive and arbitrary. Even fewer theatre writings summarise

so articulately the balance of holes to strings, the reader's inescapable bond to the playtext and the latter's propensity to offer itself up to creative interpretation. In this, the act of communication is never analysed in terms of success or failure, in terms of perfection or imperfection. Intelligence is derived from the complexity of experience and this is made a clear priority and point of departure for the critical appraisal of any artistic endeavour. Its perspective on the nature of text is equally applicable to the playtext and epitomises the revelations and propositions expressed independently throughout this thesis. Though unrelated to the study of theatre proper, it may offer a final counterpoint and reinforce these very specific and topical findings from a different vantage point and for a broader field of pursuit.

> "We must read *as if* .
> We must read as if the text before us had a meaning. This will not be a single meaning if the text is a serious one, if it makes us answerable to its force of life. It will not be a meaning or figura (structure, complex) of meanings isolated from the transformative and reinterpretative pressures of historical and cultural change. It will not be a meaning arrived at by any determinant or automatic process of cumulation and consensus. [..] Above all the meaning striven towards will never be one which exegesis, commentary, translation, paraphrase psychoanalytic or sociological decoding can ever define as total. only in trivial or opportunistic texts is the sum of significance that of its parts.
> We must read as if the temporal and executive setting of a text do matter. The historical surroundings, the cultural and formal circumstances, the biographical stratum, what we construe or conjecture as an author's intentions, constitute vulnerable aids. We know that they ought to be stringently ironised and examined for what there is in them of subjective hazard. They matter nonetheless. They enrich the levels of awareness and enjoyment; they generate constraints on the complacencies and license of interpretive anarchy.

This 'as if', this axiomatic conditionality is our Cartesian-Kantian wager, our leap into sense. Without it, literacy becomes transient Narcissism."[3]

[3]- Steiner, G, *Real Presence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p19

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-ABINGDON SQUARE, by Maria Irene Fornes was directed by Ros Horin, produced by Ros Horin and Penelope Wells, and performed at Belvoir Street in September 1990

-THE CAFE LATTE KID by Tony McNamara, directed by Marion Potts was produced by the Sydney Theatre Company as part of New Stages and performed in the Wharf studio in September 1994

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- DEAD HEART by Nicholas Parsons, was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company B, and performed at the Eveleigh Railyards in March 1994

- THE DIARY OF A MADMAN , adapted by David Holman from the short story by Gogol, was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company B and performed first at the Belvoir Street Theatre in 1989

- THE DYBBUK, adapted and directed by Barrie Kosky, was produced in its Sydney season by Company B, performed at the Eveleigh Railyards in 1993

- FALSETTOS by William Finn and James Lapine, was directed by Wayne Harrison, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company, performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House in January 1994

-THE FROGS, by Aristophanes was adapted by John Clark and Geoffrey Rush, produced by Company B and performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre in Dec. 1992

-THE GIFT OF THE GORGON, by Peter Shaffer was directed by Wayne Harrison, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Wharf Theatre in April 1994

- THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR by Gogol was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House in 1990.

- HAMLET, by William Shakespeare was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company B and performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre in June 1994

- HAROLD IN ITALY devised and directed by Richard Wherett and Kai Tai Chan, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House in 1989

- HERE'S JOHNNY, written and performed by Steven Abbott, was performed at Belvoir Street Downstairs in December 1992.

- HOTSPUR by Geoffrey Atherton, was directed by Simon Phillips, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House in October 1994

- KING LEAR by William Shakespeare was directed by Rodney Fisher, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House in May 1994.

- PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE , by Steve Martin, was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company and performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre in November 1994.

- THE POPULAR MECHANICALS, by Keith Robinson, William Shakespeare and Tony Taylor was directed by Geoffrey Rush, produced by Company B and performed at the Belvoir Street Theatre in November 1987. This particular return season was in July 1992

- SADNESS, written and performed by William Yang, played at Belvoir Street Downstairs in January 1993

- SERIOUS MONEY by Caryl Churchill was directed by Richard Cotteril, produced by NIDA (student graduation production) and performed in the Parade Theatre in October 1991.

- SWEET PHOEBE, written and directed by Michael Gow, was produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Wharf Theatre in Nov 1994.

- THE TEMPEST by William Shakespeare, was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by Company B and performed at Belvoir Street in July 1990

- THE THREEPENNY OPERA by Berthold Brecht and Kurt Weil, was directed by Simon Phillips, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of the Opera House in September 1994

- THE TRACKERS OF OXYRINCUS by Tony Harrison was directed by Mark Gaal, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Wharf Theatre in 1992

- TWO WEEKS WITH THE QUEEN, adapted by Mary Morris from the novel by Morris Gleitzman was directed by Wayne Harrison, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Parramatta Riverside and other venues from 1992 to 1995. It is currently playing a season in Johannesburg, South Africa (March 1995).

- UNCLE VANYA, by Anton Chekhov was directed by Neil Armfield, produced by the Sydney Theatre Company and performed at the Drama Theatre of The Opera House in August 1992.

-WOYZECK, by Buchner, was directed by Philip Keir, produced by the Theatre Studies Service Unit in conjunction with the German Dept, University of Sydney, in 1987

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