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Real Human in this Fantastical World: Political, Artistic and Fictive Concerns of Actors in Rehearsal: An Ethnography

by

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

Department of Performance Studies
University of Sydney 2015
ABSTRACT

This study adopts an ethnographic and—in part—autoethnographic stance in the observation of professional rehearsal rooms, with a view to identifying the division of interests and responsibilities of actors working in mainstream Australian theatre.

From a position of intense professional locatedness as an actor and acting teacher, I examine and interpret rehearsal practices utilising an ethnographic rubric that embraces the legacies of Pierre Bourdieu, Clifford Geertz, and Michael Jackson, and through the lens of my own experience.

The study pursues a centripetal action, beginning with a focus on industrial and social realities, toward an identification of distinctions between artistic and fictive concerns, and so identifies three notional compasses: symbolic spaces that actors occupy in their journeys through professional engagements. These are: the political compass, representing industrial and social restrictions and liberations; the artistic compass, lying within the political, enormously divergent, and determined by the nature of the text under pursuit, and the influence of the director; the fictive compass, lying wholly within the artistic, which is found to be of a consistency and reliability that belies its prominence in the canonical literature on the craft of acting, particularly in the Stanislavskian tradition. That is to say, these actors in rehearsal are found to concern themselves most consistently and reliably with artistic challenges, as distinct from fictive challenges, and in the constant light of their industrial and social circumstances.

Along this centripetal path, notions of acquiescence, compliance, agency, mystery, roguery, epistemology, democracy, friendship, loneliness, and phenomenology are encountered and examined in the context of actors’ weird working lives.

Finally, claims are made for actors as artists, and these claims are held to the light of prevailing industrial structures that, perhaps, neither admit nor utilise the actor as artist.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study has been a deep pleasure and privilege to undertake. I am profoundly aware of the mechanisms that have allowed it: the University of Sydney and its officers; and the policies, structures, and people of the Australian Postgraduate Awards.

Although I hope I have credited them fully throughout the work, I must here thank the artists and managements that allowed me into their rehearsal rooms for the purposes of this study. All actors were kind and open in their forbearance of my odd presence, and some went further, offering time outside and inside rehearsals to discuss their work: Matilda Bailey, Kate Cheel, Tom Conroy, Lizzy Falkland, Jude Henshall, and Deirdre Rubenstein deserve special thanks in this, as does Alirio Zavarce, who inadvertently provided me with the study’s title. The four directors were extremely generous in the access they allowed, and the kindness and interest with which they allowed it: enormous thanks to Geordie Brookman, Adam Cook, Chris Drummond, and Rosemary Myers.

My pursuit of this research compromised my commitments to my regular students, and to my colleagues, at Adelaide College of the Arts, and I am grateful to them for their patience in this. In particular, I thank Ian Grant, whose “blessing” was required to undertake the study, and who gave it with the greatest enthusiasm. Ian is not only a fine institutional arts manager; he is also an expert gardener, and having built a metaphorical garden around my study with his support, he came to my house and built an actual garden around the backyard shed in which I worked: an unforgettable kindness.

As associate supervisor, Dr Glen McGillivray has made well-timed, provocative incursions into my work, for which I am very grateful.

Associate Professor Ian Maxwell’s support and guidance has been steadfast, caring, enthusiastic, highly sensitive, and expert. I could not have hoped for more from a principal supervisor, and I thank him with great respect and affection.

I believe that context is the source of all meaning, so finally I must acknowledge the context of my fortunate life, my friends and family, and the stars of that show: Louise, Lotte, Jack, Ava, Cassius... and Henry, a Labrador who might have expected something a little different for his middle years than lying at my feet hearing about ethnography.
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Alirio’s character passes through this scene: Gepetto searching for his lost son. Alirio goes to behind the production desk to look at the set plans in order to figure out where he enters from and what the entrance will look like. Having established an answer, he and the director are content for him to sit down, take the entrance “as read”, and move onto the next scene: a virtual rehearsal (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).

The above moment, ten weeks into my fifteen weeks of observing rehearsals, was a signal moment in the process of this study. It was startling, bamboozling, tantalising, and finally clarifying. It sustained through the following years of thinking, reading, and writing, as an emblem and a kind of haunting. I asked, and continue to ask, What kind of activity is a rehearsal when an actor can look at a map on a desk, point to the map, agree with the director on a path, then assume the rehearsal done? Although this was a radical manifestation of rehearsal behaviour, it nonetheless sheds light—in its extremism—on more regular practices. It seems almost like a parody of some kind of belief structure, but what might that belief structure be? What kind of social, industrial and artistic agency is at play? Where is the Stanislavskian project in this moment? Where is Gepetto’s broken heart? Where is fiction?
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

COLLOQUIALLY...

All PhD candidates, I imagine, have their study period regularly dotted with the dubious, interested, or merely polite enquiries of friends, acquaintances, and strangers: “What’s your PhD about?” When I have sensed an interest beyond politeness, or some investment in the field, or when asked by academic or theatrical colleagues, I have tried to sincerely and succinctly explain my project. It is with a refined version of this colloquial answer that I would like to begin:

I am interested in all the things, including but also beyond the fiction, that we obsess with or negotiate as actors. There are two propositions—or hunches—that are my catalysts: first, that when we walk onto a stage we are in some sense walking into a fiction, but it is also—and perhaps more—significant to say that we are walking into an artwork, yet the vast bulk of teaching and writing about acting respects only that we are engaging in fiction; second, when we meet a colleague who is in the early stages of rehearsal for, say, The Crucible, and we ask them how rehearsals are going, they are very unlikely to say something like, ‘Oh, it’s tough, because it’s very cold in Salem, and those witches are hard to pin down.’ They are much more likely to say, ‘Yeah, it’s going well. The director has a really strong idea of what she wants to do, good cast, lovely stage management. The money’s crap/good’, etc. These are not comments about the fiction but about the prospects of the art-work, the society of the room, and the realities of the industrial arrangement, yet they are representative of how we predominantly experience being an actor.

Given this, I am interested in how we negotiate the fiction. I am interested in the politics of being an actor. By that I mean the industrial and social realities, gig to gig. I’m interested in the way we industrially construct and engage in theatre, the things we agree to believe in, and whether they are assumptions worthy of challenge.

I have been heartened by the reception this colloquial response has received from friends and colleagues. I hope to honour that kind and enthusiastic response.
General Introduction

STUDY METHODS AND PROVENANCE

The philosopher is marked by the distinguishing trait that he possesses inseparably the taste for evidence and the feeling for ambiguity (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 4).

This study adopts an ethnographic and—in part—autoethnographic stance in the observation of four professional rehearsal rooms, with a view to identifying the division of interests and responsibilities of actors, particularly as they pertain to areas that appear to be other than the kinds of fictive interests that are the central concerns of the bulk of theorising on acting in the Stanislavskian tradition.

I bring to the work over thirty years of experience as an actor and acting teacher, and, specifically, a taxonomy of performance elements published in my book, Dimensions of Acting: An Australian Approach (hereafter referred to as Dimensions). The work of that book is not overly privileged in the study, but its taxonomy (the Dimensions) initially constituted a tool for reading the work of actors in the rehearsal room, gradually giving way to the conceptualisation of three compasses of activity that I refer to as the political, the artistic, and the fictive. The structural concept of the compasses was not taken to the study, but arose from it; in this respect, the research conformed to Kathy Charmaz's summary of the premise of Grounded Theory: 'to let the key issues emerge rather than to force them into preconceived categories' (2001, 351). Clifford Geertz puts something like this idea with typical plainness: '[y]ou see what you have been doing [...] after you have been doing it' (1995, 98); and Pierre Bourdieu guides us with less typical plainness: 'wait for the work itself to deliver the key for its own deciphering' (1993, 226). Conceptual structures grow in the light of engagement in the field, as true architectural features replace early scaffolding. The three compasses establish the ground for reading industrial, social, artistic and fictive encounters, and provide the framework for its rendering here in writing. They do not conclusively contain all observations. That is to say, having lifted this architecture, I do not look to verify it by squeezing evidence into the implied confines of any compass. The compasses bring shape to the study, and they bring some context, an ‘intelligible frame’ (Geertz, 1973, 26), to the observations and analysis.

My ‘positionality’ (England, 1994; Routledge, 1996) is crucial in a number of ways that will sustain throughout this general introduction, then be evinced in the following chapter, offered as a prologue. I must ask that my reader concede to me a level of authority and ‘locatedness’ (Bourd and Miller, 1996, 197) as an actor and a greatly experienced teacher of acting. This is not a petulant demand, but an essential claim in order for the study to identify its further interests, and to fight its battles as
it defines them. This research is profoundly further to my professional experience. I will not therefore offer a review of Stanislavskian and post-Stanislavskian acting theories and practices, yet hold throughout that Constantin Stanislavski's investigations into acting remain central axial points for discussion on the subject, if not universally, then certainly across the terrain of the study, the mainstream Australian theatre, and the industrial and scholarly structures that support it, and respond to it.

I stand on the shoulders of many scholars in this field—as I will shortly explain more fully—and I look to honour them, and make my own modest claims of nuanced newness by citing their work, claiming my own extant work, and moving forward, lest I write what they have already written: cogent, detailed analyses of rehearsal practices; or write again what I have already written: a book about how to act, or a scholarly rehash of my extant work. I aim to bring these two paths together. I therefore, in turn, make assumptions about my reader in relation to the Stanislavskian project, and I illuminate its coordinates only when I feel it is necessary. These inclinations lead to the positionality that I will now theorise, and, almost inevitably, to the strain of autoethnography that runs through the work.

**Positional ins and outs**

Gay McAuley provides an enticement for the likes of me to enter the field in the way that I do:

> [s]hould the observation, documentation and analysis of rehearsal process be undertaken by the artists themselves? Is this possible? Is it in fact preferable to the outside participant observer model I have been developing? (McAuley, 1998, 80)

Not preferable, I venture to suggest, but different. The position that McAuley (as a champion in the field of rehearsal observation and analysis) and others (many, her protégés) have taken, is one that is denied to me, as mine is, in some ways, to most of them. I did not need to learn the minute procedures and practices of a rehearsal process as they have been germane to my working life. I lost my theatrical virginity more than three decades ago, and I see no benefit in pretending to have it back. The divergent results of these divergent positions may be that some researchers fear that they may not see all of what is there to be seen and understood in the thick of the work; I may be in corresponding danger of not seeing all that isn't. Indeed, I wrote in my notebook at one rehearsal, “I'm overwhelmed by a sense that I am at home.” One may easily be the poorest judge of the aesthetic qualities of one’s own
home, and the poorest judge of the quality of one’s own housework. For feminist sociologists Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, however, there is no fruitful inhabitation of social-interrogative space without such claims and doubts:

Whether we like it or not, researchers remain human beings complete with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings, and moods. And all of those things influence how we feel and understand what is going on. Our consciousness is always the medium through which the research occurs; there is no method or technique of doing research other than through the medium of the researcher (1993, 157).

Peter Collins and Anselma Gallinat recognise swings and roundabouts:

those who may refer to themselves ... as “insiders” and are thus able to draw directly on personal experiences which may be more or less shared by research participants ... are likely to have a different perspective on the field from those who can plausibly make no such claim. This sharing, we argue, as well as its lack can bring about important insights (2010, 10).

For me to look at actors as if ‘fascinated by transcendent figures’ (Clifford, 1983, 121) is, in one sense, my obligation, but in another important way, would be disingenuous. I do not claim ‘the old epistemological nonchalance’ (Geertz, 1988, 29) because it would be a sham. I inhabit what Geertz refers to as ‘a common ground between the Written At and the Written About’ (ibid, 144), those whom he suggests, anticipating McAuley, ‘are nowadays ... not infrequently the same people in a different frame of mind’ (ibid). I am herein reconceiving a lifetime of embedded-ness in the field that constitutes, for Jackson, ‘a form of sustained communion’ (2013, 222). Ramifications of this provenance rumble through the prologue, and beyond.

Notwithstanding the distinctions, there is undoubtedly more common than uncommon methodological ground between this study’s antecedents and it, in our attempts to perceive rehearsal

as a site of complex interpersonal relations, a workplace, a crucible facilitating collective creativity. ... Traditional theatre scholarship provides little methodological guidance for dealing with such a task, but ethnography has been a rich source of analytical concepts, procedures and insights. I have taken the concept of ‘thick description’ from Clifford Geertz, and it is this that most encapsulates what I think the study of rehearsal needs to address (McAuley, 2008, 286).

Geertz’s regularly leaned-upon adaptation of the work of Gilbert Ryle, who quaintly refers to thick description as a ‘many-layered sandwich’ (1968, 2), is aimed for here
too, with my locatedness or insider-ness among the ‘several synchronous things’ (ibid, 1) employed for thickness, toward the interrogation of what Geertz calls the context of culture (1973, 14). This then is a research method that aligns with its object, theatre, described by Mark Fortier as a phenomenon of ‘sensual and experiential thickness’ (2004, 25), and with its researcher, who finds, with Sandra Acker, that ‘an insider-outsider status [is] more a continuum than a clearly delineated affiliation’ (2001, 160).

Generally, then, the study makes the common philosophical assumptions outlined by John Cresswell (1998, 74-78) for qualitative research. That is, I carry an ontological assumption that privileges subjectivity, and an epistemological assumption that my own locatedness in the field infects meaning-making, and is welcome in doing so.

A many-shouldered thing

The weave of the “mat” of methodology on which this study wrestles is of mixed provenance. The major threads being:

• post-Malinowskian ethnography, particularly the work of Geertz (1973, 1983, 1988, 1995), and those of his influence;
• the transference of the provocations of Bourdieu and Geertz into the field of performance studies by contemporary and (particularly) Australian researchers;
• the claims of autoethnography that flow with and from reflexivity, particularly as argued and evinced in the later work of Jackson (2010, 2011, 2013), and that of Georgina Born (1995, 2005); and
• the uncomfortable and discomforting agitations with regard to language and positioning by the geographer Paul Routledge (1996), educationalist bell hooks (1994), and others for whom the academy is not an inherited assumption, “first home”, or neat fit.

I will briefly expand on some of these points, and allow others to stand as foreshadows of moments where their influence is cast. I am not looking to place the characters and ideas of Merleau-Ponty (France, 1908-1961), Bourdieu (France, 1930-2002), and Geertz (U.S., 1926-2006) along a linear path or inside a geo-theoretical map, but to thread their voices beneath my own positioning, hence the image of a woven mat. I am not, to use Eugenio Barba’s evocative phrase, a ‘keeper and priest
of their tombs’ but rather a traveller ‘encouraged by their signs’ (1986, 202), using their legacy to guide but not determine (Eckersall, 2001, 148) my work.

**Maurice Merleau-Ponty**

I will cite Merleau-Ponty throughout, and lean most weightily upon his ideas in Chapter Seven, wherein I cite and extend the scholarship of Nicholas Hope (2010), whose PhD extensively links Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to acting, and particularly to the tradition of acting that largely follows Stanislavski. Hope finds, for example, that Stanislavski’s “Method of Analysis through Physical Action”, a tenet of Stanislavski’s wedding or welding of an actor’s work to her life-as-lived experience ‘is, in fact, a phenomenological method’ (2010, 165).

There is, in Merleau-Ponty’s work, a consistent thread of humility in the face of the unknowingness of life-as-phenomenon that is intrinsically attractive to an artist and to an artist’s construction of meaning, and sense of place-in-the-world. The ‘true meaning’ of phenomenology itself is framed as a quest for something located ‘in ourselves’ (1994, viii). Artists are bound to find a friend in Merleau-Ponty as he describes phenomenology with such transient constructions as ‘a hope to be realized’ (ibid), and insists on the phenomenological employment of the

actual body—not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement (1964, 162).

Merleau-Ponty’s notion that ‘[t]he world is not what I think, but what I live through’ (1994, xvi, xvii) reflects faith in our intimate predispositions, our sensate experience of the world, and in our consequent epistemological “gatherings”, and as such is a liberating foundation for all ethnographic examinations within the layered and fluid perceptual milieu of artistic creation. With this, Merleau-Ponty seems to succinctly describe both the phenomenon under investigation and the phenomenon of its investigation. Thus Merleau-Ponty provides an enticement to observe and study in the naturally located, grass-roots way I feel “condemned” to do:

Scientific thinking, a thinking which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general, must return to the “there is” which underlies it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body—not that possible body which we may legitimately think of as an information machine but that actual body I call mine, this sentinel standing quietly at the command of my words and acts (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 160-161).

Phillip Zarrilli’s recognition deepens the impression, as he refers directly to Merleau-
Ponty:

Whatever the flaws and problems of phenomenology, it is, arguably, one of the most appropriate methodologies to utilize when considering acting, since it ... foregrounds the “lived” embodied experience of the practitioner as central to its project (2007, 641).

Thus I am beckoned toward analysis of acting, holding the tools, tendencies, and vulnerabilities of an actor as legitimate: a shucked gaze of some potential acclimatising benefit.

Pierre Bourdieu

I approached Bourdieu hoping to find a way to theoretically position myself and my history or baggage—as actor/insider and as friend—in the rehearsal room and in the analytical work. I was in large measure looking for verification of my “qualification” to study acting in this way, which is an odd anxiety for someone who first studied acting at NIDA thirty years earlier, and can point to a history of studying it, writing about it, and teaching it—not to mention doing it—ever since. But to take this seat in rehearsal, assume this chin-fiddling distance from colleagues, with an aim to then decipher them for others, principally, inside a separate chapel, the academy...? How this turns out in practice is the stuff of the prologue; how it turns out in theory is that Bourdieu subsumes the structural within the social, and allows one to see the work of study itself, and all its anxieties, within a social field, and by so doing admits one’s skepticism, in fact demands that one’s skepticism be subject to the study’s concerns, not aloof to it (Jenkins, 1992, 61). I looked to find a home for myself in the study, and Bourdieu turns the search on its head, making the search for meaning and justification itself, in a sense, the object, opening the work to ‘a phenomenological, interactionist or ethnomethodological procedure which aims at grasping what agents actually experience of interactions and social contacts’ (1990b, 34). Bourdieu’s sociology tends to crack open the possibilities of analysing this altogether particular social world [that] ... has its dominated and its dominators, its conservatives and its avant-garde, its subversive struggles and its mechanism of reproduction (ibid, 140).

As I read more and more Bourdieu, something peculiar started to happen. I began, as with Merleau-Ponty, to see a correlation between the theory and the object, between the method of study and the thing being studied:

1 Australia’s National Institute of Dramatic Art, from which I graduated as an actor in 1984.
General Introduction

the questions evaded by structural anthropology and no doubt more generally by all intellectualism, which transfers the objective truth established by science into a practice which by its very essence rules out the theoretical stance which makes it possible to establish that truth (Bourdieu, 1990a, 29).

[strategy is] a term I never use without a certain hesitation. It encourages the fundamental logical error, that which consists in seeing the model that explains reality as constitutive of the reality described, forgetting the “it all happens as if” which defines the status proper to theoretical discourse (Bourdieu, 1990b, 90).

There appears here a strong correlation to a history of acting theory that tends to eliminate or seemingly “eat” acting as it is articulated; or to follow its own tracks, like Pooh Bear hunting a non-existent Woozle. I came to recognise a theme in Bourdieu with which I had been wrestling myself in trying to avoid the Woozle-hunt as an acting theorist:

Questions and answers about Objectives are important because they impact on all our thinking and a good deal of our playing. The lie is the suggestion that having identified the Objective, it is tattooed on our consciousness and we pursue it with full-throttled determination (Crawford, 2011, 41).

Here is Bourdieu’s distinction between rules (as guiding principles) and practices (determined by habitus in a given social/political field). This is an area to which I will refer considerably, anon. I saw that I had been leaning toward Bourdieu’s positions and determination to ‘escape from structuralist objectivism’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, 61) before I had heard of him.

Bourdieu warns of false projections onto practices: false precisely because they appear as ‘something to be deciphered’ (ibid, 99). This is a salient warning: not only is the description of the thing not the thing itself, but the process of analysing it toward description is a culturally codified “other” thing that sits discretely beside and not even within the thing itself. To take an example from sports commentary, “The batsman was caught at silly-mid-on” is an expression of some currency for all those who know the way the game of cricket is described. Of course it is meaningless for those who do not, but it might also be meaningless for those who play the game, particularly for the batsman and the fielder—the objects of the analysis—in the momentary act of taking and losing the wicket. Here the commentator is “doing theory”, immersed in a provenance of theorising rather than a provenance of practice. The threat exists for the analyst, defined by discrete cultural codes of relative foreignness to lived experience, that their interest in the thing may even undermine their qualifications for producing meaningful readings.
Left there, this thinking is enough to make the researcher take his bat and ball and go home. Bourdieu, however, turns his caution toward guidance when he describes, then prescribes,

the difficulties created every time that the objectification of the practical sense starts to occur without this process taking as its object the very operation of objectification (ibid, 101).

My reflexivity is of this purpose. It creates, somewhat paradoxically, a kind of social clarity, an opening through which the idea in question can be explored or claimed by others, a portal of generalisation. Okely suggests that autobiographical references ‘dismantle[s] the positivist machine’ (1992, 3). In similar fashion, Tayla Kingston describes playwright David Harrower’s ‘in-jokes’ and other ‘unashamedly culturally specific’ elements as masterful story-telling that opens up the experience to all (2014, 265).

Bourdieu is most thoroughly utilised in Chapter Two, for the illumination of the nexus of industrial and social phenomena, in Chapter Six, where his notions of habitus and field are applied as ways of understanding actors’ journeys through rehearsal processes, and in Chapter Seven, with the identification in actors of his concept of ‘sens pratique’, or practical ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, 108).

Bourdieu reveals himself a most appropriate uncle for the study with this:

Societies in which the degree of codification is slight, in which the essential things are left to a feel for the game and to improvisation, have a tremendous charm about them, and in order to survive in them ... you have to have a certain genius for social relations, and an absolutely extraordinary feel for the game. You doubtless have to be much more cunning than in other societies (1990b, 80-81).

This study will reveal, at many turns, the life of this comment, as actors plot their paths through symbolically treacherous, semi-lit, scantily coded fields of charm.

Clifford Geertz

I have cited Geertz a number of times already, and will continue to do so throughout, most particularly in Chapter Six, where I propose an analogous relationship between acting and ethnography. Geertz has had a major influence on
ethnography over the past forty-odd years. I will not attempt a précis of his work and influence. I want instead to explain briefly the impact his work has on me.

Geertz’s voice speaks to my cultural insecurities, my provincialism, my anti-intellectual childhood (Crawford, 2011, 14), anti-theoretical training at NIDA (ibid, 124-5), and my hitherto locatedness in theatre practice more than in scholarly practice. It comforts me. It expresses humility through admissions such as

the un-get-roundable fact that all ethnographical descriptions are homemade, that they are the describer’s descriptions, not those of the described (Geertz, 1988, 144, 145),

and his description of ethnography as a field

wedded to an ethic of imprecision … [O]ne is left with a collection of anecdotes connected by insinuation, and with a feeling that though much has been touched little has been grasped (1973, 312).

Such revelatory comment allows me to invest in my own humility, insecurity, and candour. In Geertz I see a giant taking on the noble task of identifying cant in an attempt to shovel it away; conceding that we are what we are and—further to Bourdieu—encouraging analysis from what we are. Geertz depicts ethnography as a human and humane science, essentially flawed, in human bondage. He echoes Bourdieu at many points, and cites his influence, yet appears much closer to us (an impression undoubtedly aided by the cutting out of translational middlemen), and franker:

art is notoriously hard to talk about. It seems … to exist in a world of its own, beyond the reach of discourse. It not only is hard to talk about; it seems unnecessary to do so. It speaks, as we say, for itself. … Artists feel this especially. Most of them regard what is written and said about their work, or work they admire, as at best beside the point, at worst a distraction from it (1983, 94).

Like Bourdieu, Geertz encourages me to identify difficulties in full in order to address them, and does so as if he were addressing my very case:

Finding somewhere to stand in a text that is supposed to be at one and the same time an intimate view and a cool assessment is almost as much of a challenge as gaining the view and making the assessment in the first place (1988, 10).

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2 A reference to W. Somerset Maugham’s masterpiece, Of Human Bondage, and its central character’s burdensome “club foot”.

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At times along this path, I have feared that I am like J.M. Coetzee’s isolated, decomposing magistrate in his novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, concerned that ‘[i]t is I who am seducing myself, out of vanity, into these meanings and correspondences’ (1980, 44). Such fears and challenges are met, finally, under Geertz’s sky, in the practice of thick description,

by searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviors—in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another (1983, 58)

... and in an interpretation of ethnography as ‘not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning’ (1973, 5). Geertz’s emphasis that meaning-as-understood-by-participants should provide the basis for analysis through the ethnographer’s lens of grounded intelligence, history, and arrival in the field with baggage of one’s own, as Anne Larson puts it (2010, 63), is the emphasis I adopt throughout.

**Ethnography, reflexivity, and autoethnography**

I will focus, in Chapter Six, on specific links between practices of ethnography and practices of acting in the light of actors’ encounters within or toward the fictive compass. For now, my aim is to continue to position and expose my methods and theoretical foundations rather than pre-empt my analysis.

The fascinating history of ethnography finds its defining fulcrum in the story of Malinowski and his infamous diary, wherein the privations of a positivist, scientific ethic were exposed as severe limits to the understanding of the science’s subjects, and potential pollutants of its meanings and social values; wherein Malinowski’s flawed self, exposed, revealed at least as much of value as his erstwhile rigid performance of positivist rigour.

Interestingly, reflexivity did not theoretically impel this crack of history, but quickly flooded it, and explained it, with many coming consequently to share Jackson’s ‘deep discomfort ... about the separation of the *vita contemplative* from the *vita activa*’ (2013, xiii). As Ruth Behar puts it:

[w]hat has changed so dramatically in our time is that there no longer is a justification for keeping a secret diary in the field. Ethnographers so thoroughly question their presuppositions now before embarking and wear their hearts so openly on their sleeves that there isn’t any place for them to hide (1999, 480).
As ethnography opens itself to the ethnographer’s true and active life, it opens to notions of praxis. Keith Berry and Robin Patric Clair suggest reflexivity has become ‘an irrevocable dimension to ethnographic research praxis’ (2011, 199); that is to say, contemporary ethnography is inundated with reflexivity, giving it license to travel anywhere and everywhere, with and in ethnographers as they ‘merge the personal and the academic’ (Bochner, 2001, 154). From here, sticky questions arise about the degrees and qualities of the merger, and theories coalesce—seemingly inevitably—toward autoethnography as a strain of ethnography, thence as a discrete pursuit.

This study is not an example of that discrete pursuit, yet gestures of autoethnography, recollections and excavations of my experiences (McMahon and DinanThompson, 2011, 37) allow me to ‘place my thoughts in relation to my cultural background and to declare my personal affinities and aims’ (Jackson, 1989, 18). Autoethnography is therefore not the study’s central focus but its contextual “gathering ground”. As Collins has it,

[i]f anthropology is partially grounded in reflexivity then the self, as the engine of the reflexive, must be an equally integral part of doing anthropology (2010, 235).

It is this positioning as the engine of research that is crucial for me, which in no way diminishes Kirsten Hastrup’s articulation of such research as ‘personal adventure’ (1992, 119). Indeed, I have no hesitation in aligning myself with Arthur Bochner’s construction: ‘what we do academically [is] part of how we are working through the story of our own life’ (2001, 138). Such alignments render me not ‘invisible but rather foregrounded as an embodied, situated and subjective self’ (Sikic-Micanovic, 2010, 46), putting me, in Leigh Berger’s phrase, ‘in conversation with myself as well as with those I am researching’ (2001, 507). These ways are chosen not merely for reasons of aesthetic and intellectual attraction, but in pursuit of common fairness and scholarly clarity. It is that situated identity that allows me to be, as is Born, ‘sensitive to unspoken assumptions and implicit forms of knowledge and belief’ (2005, 14).

Sydney-siders

The shore on which I forage for this study is one that has been visited and mined by many scholars over the past fifteen to twenty years. I am particularly indebted to those of my department at the University of Sydney whose work, as post-graduates
and as faculty, has enriched my study, and also scarified it. Australian rehearsal rooms have been audited and picked over with incisive skill and deft analysis by the already cited McAuley and Hope, and by Kate Rossmanith, Ian Maxwell, Jonathan Bollen, and others. Contemporary acting practices have been further investigated and illuminated by these scholars, and by Daniel Johnston and Paul Moore. My work is deeply indebted to theirs, and their findings will be found liberally throughout it. I do not just stand on their shoulders, but am directed—perhaps buffeted—by them. In this light, claims of newness are daunting prospects.

Rossmanith, Maxwell, Hope, and Johnston all arrive at findings that, we might say, see them fishing in the same lagoon as me. My modest claims to new knowledge must therefore be attendant upon the way things are weighed and rendered, and this, it seems, perhaps somewhat resignedly, relies on me. It is for this reason that I put such store in the sociological theories of Bourdieu, the ethnography of Geertz, a praxis and a writing style that embraces the calls of autoethnography, and its allowance of a somewhat literary bent.

Geertz says that

[s]tudies do build on other studies, not in the sense that they take up where the others leave off, but in the sense that, better informed and better conceptualized, they plunge more deeply into the same things (1973, 25).

This is a dangerous quote. I disown the ‘better’, and again offer the adaptation that my work is differently informed and conceptualised, that I therefore plunge differently into sameness, and that my conclusions are unique and true extensions of the “auto” I bring to the ethnography.

WHAT I DID

Between 19\textsuperscript{th} March and 11\textsuperscript{th} July, 2012, I attended rehearsals of four professional productions in Adelaide, South Australia. The productions were:

1. *The City* (hereafter referred to as *City*), by Martin Crimp, produced by independent company, nowyesnow, in The Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide, directed by Geordie Brookman;

2. *The Glass Menagerie* (*GM*), by Tennessee Williams, produced by State Theatre Company of South Australia (*STCSA*) in the Dunstan Playhouse of the Adelaide Festival Centre (*AFC*), directed by Adam Cook;
3. *Land & Sea* (*L&S*), by Nicki Bloom, produced by Brink Productions in the Queen’s Theatre, Adelaide, directed by Chris Drummond; and


McAuley claims that the task of rehearsal observation

requires full time presence by the observer ... [I]t cannot be done adequately by someone dropping in at intervals to view work in progress (2012, 10).

The truth of this, in relation to McAuley’s aims, is clearly evident in her exhaustively detailed book, yet both my task and my perspective are, as I have described above, distinctly different. I did not seek to record the entire rehearsal process of any of the productions but to view them comparatively, from one rehearsal context to the others, and comparative in a temporal sense, from one week of the process to the next, bringing my reflexive, close interpretation to the moments, and to the comparisons. In each instance, I attempted to attend equivalent or corresponding moments of the rehearsal process. For example, I sought access to each “first read”, then to regular rehearsals in the early to mid period of the process, then to each of the first runs or “stumbles”, and recorded and analysed the notes sessions of these, then a final dress rehearsal, after which I again recorded and analysed the notes sessions. This symmetry was aimed for but not always achieved, as the distinctive social, industrial and artistic peculiarities of the productions, the ‘messiness’ that Rossmanith (2008, 145) finds in the process impeded it at certain points. For example, I was asked by Geordie to not attend rehearsal until the second week because—partly due to the “co-op” structure of the production, with actors working without a union-level or regular salary—he would not have a complete cast until the second week, nor in fact a rehearsal room. A further example of asymmetry was in my incapacity to record substantial or equivalent notes of the first run or stumble of *L&S* because, being a new play of such knotty and esoteric content, the director was viewing the stumble with a dramaturgical rather than directorial eye, and therefore recorded no notes for actors.

Within these parameters, the study follows those researchers cited above some distance into the area of rehearsal analysis, exoticising what for me are—as I have indicated—relatively mundane professional practices.

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3 This is how the authorship of the show was described in marketing collaterals, and I will later makes claims on its significance.
It is also important to stress that these are local practices, and the behaviour, values and analysis constitute what Geertz would insist is ‘local knowledge’ (1983). I am mindful of what Zarrilli calls the ‘historically diverse and often contradictory views of acting’ (2008, 1), and of the narrow tranche of time, place and culture in which I work, and from which I report. Ethnography’s purpose is seeded in its locality, its limits, and its depth. It achieves generalisation only through its encounters with the horizons of those who read it. When I appear to generalise, to make claims for ‘actors’ or ‘the actor’, I do so only across the mainstream Australian profession. In many cases, these points may fairly be made with a high degree of generalisability, drawing as they do on the horizons of my own experiences as a teacher having taught actors of more than a dozen nationalities, stemming from diverse and non-“western” traditions. Across those experiences, I have been more struck by commonalities and continuities than by foreign-ness and discontinuities at the heart of performance anxieties and ambitions; my experience of theatre in Australia ranges across student and amateur theatre, and the “three tiers” of professional, subsidised theatre, and commercial theatre, and I suspect there is more diversity, and greater difficulty in generalising through this “vertical” plain than across the “horizontal” plain of nationalities, and nationally recognisable theatrical manifestations. Finally, perhaps, my reader will judge what broader territory pertains.

A VOICE FROM SOMEWHERE

The following disciplinary tendencies flow directly from—and form part of—the methodology hitherto described.

Tone

Reflexive sociology finds its voice in a rejection of what Geertz calls the ‘majesty of jargon’ (1983, 148), what Rosi Braidotti mocks as the ‘paralyzing strictures of an exclusive academic style’ (1994, 30), what bell hooks savages as ‘narcissistic, self-indulgent practice that most seeks to create a gap between theory and practice so as to perpetuate elitism’ (1994, 64), and what Routledge contextualises as being symptomatic of the academic’s ‘endless neuroses about being disrupted and proven “inaccurate” or “unfounded”’ (1996, 412). I follow those who have moved through the open door, as Berger puts it, to a relatively ‘literary style’ (2001, 506), consistent with the tradition of interpretative inquiry, as defined by Cresswell, that embraces a ‘personal, literary’ (1998, 77) language that I regard as a kind of bridging strategy; bridging observation to reflexivity, and theory to practice.
Beyond this general leaning, I find that language shifts as the hermeneutic radius shifts. That is, I pursue a tone that is more “bookish” the closer it is to books; more “theoretical” when theorising, and more practical and colloquial when “looking up from” the theory, looking into my history, looking toward the rehearsal room floor, or down at my feet for conference with my dog. I attempt to heed Bochner’s caution, and avoid a ‘voice from nowhere’ (2001, 138). Routledge calls for what he describes as a ‘third space’ from which to write:

a fluid site of continual repositioning, of permanent oscillation and fluidity within and between enunciatory sites, physical locations, political positionings, effecting a web of interconnected conditions of possibility. Emotions, memories, life histories, bodily experiences emerge from this space and breathe life into our words (1996, 412).

I am turned on by this, and by Routledge’s description of writing as ‘solidarity work’ (ibid, 402), a wonderful suggestion that the field may separate us, but the writing should bring us together. I dare to hope I have risen to Carolyn Ellis’ challenge: ‘[a]ssume everyone in your story will read it’ (2007, 25).

Michael Jackson, and getting to thinking how...

One of the greatest privileges of this research has been my introduction to contemporary ethnography, in general, and the work of Jackson, in particular. Jackson has become something of a hero to me for the ease with which he evinces his rigour, the compassion and humility he brings to his analysis, and the natural, narrative arcs of his “stories”. All of this, finally, represents ethnography as a gift of human wisdom. There is much more to celebrate in Jackson than literary style and tone, but I place my regard for him in this context in order to demonstrate how tone can be an expression of politic: ‘Traveling back to my hotel one night on the tube, I got to thinking how…’ (Jackson, 2013, 160). This might be read as a “nothing” quote, but in the midst of Jackson’s analysis of a lifetime of research, his own somewhat “statelessness”, and the travails of his subjects—Sierra Leoneans struggling for agency in modern London—it is a masterful flick of self-licensing, authorial surety, effortless analytical position-taking, and grace. Jackson’s later works, Life Within Limits: Well-being in a World of Want (2011), and Lifeworlds: Essays in Existential Anthropology (2013) are stunning achievements that encourage me to be brave in my “getting to thinking how...”.

General Introduction
Components and alignments

There are a number of generations of text that exist beneath the text as it appears here. I audio-recorded the moments of rehearsal discussion that surrounded runs and “passes” of scenes. In a notebook, I scribbled odd moments of discourse that I was not quick enough to record as audio, but more often scribbled draft analyses and conjectured interpretations of meanings. Consequently, material has been recorded and saved on 107 audio files. Text also exists as scribble in my notepad. I then created a file that I named ‘Observation Swill’ (hereafter, OS). This file grew to a length of over 65,000 words, and was written back in my study at home while listening to the audio recordings, reading and absorbing the scribbled notes, and engaging in something of a hermeneutic loop of description, analysis and interpretation, what Jean Jackson refers to as ‘a preliminary stab at analysis’ (cited in Emerson, 2001, 132). This logging of observational experience was done sometimes on the same day that the rehearsal was attended, and sometimes as much as six weeks later, as three of the four rehearsal periods overlapped, and I amassed a backlog of recorded material.

In writing this final generation text, I draw from OS directly, and at times extensively, presenting that as original research. In these instances, I italicise the text, and adopt a protocol of citing the production, the rehearsal date, and the rehearsal week from which the quoted conversation, statement or analysis stems (eg: City, 19-3-12, wk2), rather than create a dense web of references to various “hidden” sources. By these means I follow Born’s (1995, 2005) layout methods, wherein the provenance of different sections of text, the “angles”, as it were, are represented in the page layout. I conducted interviews with representatives of each cast, and, in the case of GM, with the whole cast together. In the latter instance, this commentary is absorbed into OS, and rendered as such. In the case of the other individual interviews, I cite the audio files directly: for example, (L120523.tom) refers to my interview with Tom Conroy for L&S, conducted on 23\textsuperscript{rd} May, 2012. I also scheduled an interview with actor, Lizzy Falkland, which had to be cancelled due to her feeling

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4 Not very far into the observation process, I discovered a challenge in how to refer to rehearsal attempts at whole scenes or substantial blocks thereof. There was no consistency in the emic references of insiders in the room: actors and directors would variously refer to having ‘a bash’ or ‘a go’ or ‘a crack’ at a section of a scene. They would sometimes also use the word ‘run’, but when they did so in this context, they said the word very differently to when they referred to a run of the whole play: in the former instances, the word was used with a very throw-away tone; when referring to a run of the whole play, all artist were more inclined to “capitalise” the word, even as they spoke it. Consequently, “run” seems inappropriate as it has connotations of advanced work, and I was often looking to name nascent work. I decided on an etic resolution, to dedicate the study to the word “pass” (a word I have used and heard others use in rehearsal rooms, but do not specifically recall hearing at all during the observation period) as a description of sections of sustained text that are attempted or achieved without interruption.
ill. Lizzy subsequently emailed me some thoughts in response to my questions, and they are here represented as (pers. com.).

**Tense**

The pursuit of the most appropriate tense with which to render ethnography is an issue of some vigorous debate. The most common mediation is through the adoption of what has become known as the “ethnographic present”, a strategy that concerns George Stocking for its vagueness (1983, 107), John Davis for its implication that action in the field is ‘permanent and continuous’ (1992, 208), and Renato Rosaldo for its capacity to render ‘a relatively spontaneous event into a generic cultural form’ (1989, 47). While Hastrup argues that ‘the ethnographic present is the only narrative construction of time which gives meaning to the anthropological discourse’ (1992, 127), she makes an important distinction between discourse and the action that instigates it: ‘[t]he dialogue was “then”, but the discourse is “now”’ (ibid).

Sensitive to this range of views, I employ the past tense to describe the things I did: “I entered a room” rather than “I enter a room”. What happened in the room is rendered as it happened or, more to the point, “happens”: “Jude asks me about my research”. My engagement as a player in the room is rendered in the same way as the actions of my observants: “Jude asks me about my research. I reply...”. The scribble that I render in my notebook was made, without deliberation, in the present tense: “I wonder why...”, and is retained as such. My further reflections on things that I observed, rendered in the bulk of my reflective text, is in the past tense: “Jude did not ask me at any stage whether...”. Finally, my interpretations claim the authority of the ethnographic present: “Jude’s question and my reply are indications of...”. I may have spontaneously defied these rules in OS at a few points, and my fidelity to citing that document as written leads me to sustain any such transgressions. Nonetheless, it is my hope that this structure allows me to weave ‘carefully between description and analysis, using different tenses’ (Davis, 1992, 210), along with other mapping devices. It seems complicated in explanation, but I hope my reader may find it inconspicuously organic.

**Names and pronouns**

Having introduced actors and directors, I refer to them by their first names, except in the case of the two artists named Chris. I occasionally remind the reader which Chris is being discussed (actor Pitman or director Drummond) by adding the family name.
Anyone writing in English faces the difficulty of single pronominal gender when referring in the general. I find ‘their’ distracting, and ‘his or her’ cumbersome. Nor can I come at consistently either masculinising or feminising the general. Also, I feel that one should use ‘one’ sparsingly. I therefore prefer to mix my references: ‘him’ or ‘her’; ‘she’ or ‘he’. I propose that when this gender strategy is not disruptive it is good; and when it is disruptive it is interesting.

More significantly, I often employ ‘we’ when referring to actors in general. This is a deliberate political-academic device that asserts my insider-ness, and my empathy.

ARCHITECTURE

A prologue, “Among Friends”, follows this general introduction. It is a bridge between methodology and research practice, or a demonstration of the merger of both. I discuss therein my early steps in the rehearsal rooms, and—in finding my place—begin to demonstrate and discover ways of analysing what I am seeing.

Beyond that, the study is in three sections (seven chapters), followed by a concluding chapter which is a summary of the ground covered, an analysis of the premises that implies, and some provocations that flow from these refined premises. There is in this a somewhat catalytic impulse with which the study ends, as if not settling a book neatly onto a shelf, but exposing it to prevailing winds.

The study grows to an analysis of how actors respond to the political and artistic pressures exerted upon them, but needs first to establish those pressures and contexts. Section One pursues the political compass, examining issues of spatiality, and industrial and social parameters. In Section Two, the enquiry is framed around epistemology and discourse, with particular interest in the distinctions between the four rehearsal processes. This leads to the questions of Section Three, which examine what comes of actors’ exposure to their political and artistic contexts; how we respond to the vibrant and shifting circumstances of weird working lives.

I link methodology and tone to architecture by beginning with more objective ethnographic analyses of place and space, and growing to more immersive and intimate processes and renderings as the focus intensifies to the more intimate work of actors.
PROLOGUE:
AMONG FRIENDS

INTRODUCTION

This prologue is a methodological exposure. It links methodology to practice, or evinces methodology as practice. It is neither entirely “map” nor “road”, but a little of both. At times, we find ourselves knee-deep in the grist of the rehearsal room work. I hope these couple of instances might be seen as part of a kind of overture or “trailer” for the immersions to come. They are positioned here in the context of an exposure of an actor as researcher: visible, context-laden, opinionated, and among friends.

DOUBLE-AGENT

Jude comes over to me, kisses me, and tells me, ‘It’s all taken a huge leap since you were in last.’ I say, ‘I can feel that in the room’ (Pin, 29-6-12, wk 5).

While I entered the rehearsal room with scribbled notes to myself about the things I was looking for, and how I should position myself to achieve a scholarly gaze, such gestures do not, in fact, reveal anything of the moment of my entry to the rooms. Rather, they are inclined to conceal that moment with a pose of objectivity. A more revelatory and honest tale to tell is that of my positionality: my social status within each room, and the relativities of friendship, collegiality and social agency I felt, was ceded, earned or was embarrassed by at various times. In line with Bourdieu’s insistence on the mechanisms of scrutiny being themselves held to scrutiny, that we might ‘objectify the truth of the objectifying relation to practice’ (1990b, 99), I offer a comprehensive review of my relationship to each of the institutions that I entered, and individuals I observed.

I begin by offering thumbnail introductions to each director and cast member in each of the four productions, and my relationship to them (a process that also serves to introduce the “dramatis personae” of the study). I then attempt an avowedly coarse empirical gesture in seeking to quantify my “proximity” to each show, and proceed to expose some moments in which my positionality led to welcome ruptures to any pretence of myself as what, seventy years ago, Schuetz cherishes as the ‘disinterested scientific onlooker of the social world’ (1944, 500) and Geertz later mocks as the ‘chameleon fieldworker’, an ethnographic ‘walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience, and cosmopolitanism’ (1983, 56).
City:

- **Director, Geordie Brookman:** Geordie is a person with whom I had built a close professional and personal relationship over the four years since my return to Australia in 2008.\(^5\) Geordie had directed me in three productions with the STCSA: *Attempts on Her Life*, by Martin Crimp (2008); *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare (2010); and *Speaking in Tongues*, by Andrew Bovell (2011). From my position of Head of Acting at Adelaide College of the Arts (ACArts), I had employed Geordie to direct two student productions. As a member of the board of STCSA, and subsequently a member of the recruitment panel, I had very recently played a significant part in the appointment of Geordie to the position of artistic director of the company.

- **Actor, Matilda Bailey:** Matilda graduated from ACArts in 2011. I taught her acting throughout all of her three years of training, and directed her as Gloucester in her third year production of *Richard III*, by Shakespeare.

- **Actor, Lizzy Falkland:** Lizzy graduated from Theatre Nepean in 1992. I taught her acting in her second year of study there. Since returning to Adelaide, I had acted alongside Lizzy in *Attempts on Her Life* and *Speaking in Tongues*.

- **Actor, Chris Pitman:** Chris trained at Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. We acted together in *Speaking in Tongues*.

- **Actor, Anna Stein:** Anna is a graduate of Flinders University Drama Centre. I had never seen her act, although we jointly participated in a week-long workshop of a play the previous year.

**GM:**

- **Director, Adam Cook:** I had known Adam since the 1980s. He was artistic director of STCSA at the time of the rehearsals, so my recent contact with him had been as a board member of that company, and Adam directed me in *King Lear* for STCSA in 2009.

- **Actor, Deirdre Rubenstein:** I had known Deirdre since the 1980s, although not well, and we had never worked together.

- **Actor, Anthony Gooley:** Anthony is from Sydney and was an interstate guest artist with the company for this production. He graduated from NIDA in 2007. I had never met him before rehearsals began.

- **Actor, Kate Cheel:** I had known Kate since I auditioned her for entry into ACArts in 2008. I taught her for the three years of her training, and directed her in *As You Like It* in 2010, and in her final year production of *Richard III*.

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\(^5\) I leave aside the present tense here in order to reveal the relationships as they stood at the moment I entered the rooms, not how they have developed, in some cases, in the intervening years.
Prologue

- Actor, Nic English: I taught Nic for the final year of his training at ACArts, in 2008.

L&S:
- Director, Chris Drummond: I had become close friends with Chris over the previous four years. He directed me in Molière’s The Hypochondriac for Brink Productions in 2009, and I had employed him to teach and direct at ACArts.
- Actor, Jacqy Phillips: I first worked with Jacqy in 1986 in Neil Armfield’s premiere production of Stephen Sewell’s Dreams in an Empty City. We acted together again in The Hypochondriac, and in 2010 she directed my play, Familiar Lies.
- Actor, Danielle Catanzanti: This is a young woman I had never met.
- Actor, Tom Conroy: I acted with Tom in Romeo and Juliet.

Pin:
- Director, Rose Myers: I had met Rose professionally but never worked with her, and did not know her socially.
- Actor, Danielle Catanzanti: I had met Danielle during L&S, but had never worked with her nor socialised with her.
- Actor/puppeteer, Sam Routledge: I had never met Sam.
- Actor, Alirio Zavarce: I had never worked with Alirio in a play, but I know him somewhat from “around the traps”, and I had employed him as a tutor at ACArts.
- Actor, Geoff Revell: I had never worked with Geoff, but had known him, though not at all well, being a fellow local actor, for many years.
- Actor, Jude Henshall: I had been a friend of Jude’s since acting with her in Attempts on Her Life.
- Actor, Nathan O’Keefe: I had been a friend of Nathan’s since working with him on The Hypochondriac and King Lear.
- Actor, ‘actor 1’: I had never met Actor 1, and did not receive permission from him to comment or reflect on his work, although he had no objection to my presence observing others as he also rehearsed.

Thus my relationships with these twenty-three artists can be characterised as: very close friendships in four cases; friendships in six cases; associations of various duration in seven cases; and in six cases the artists were strangers to me. With the simple assignation of four, three, two and one “points” to these designations, and those sums divided by the number of artists in each project, a percentage can be
arrived at that suggests a “familiarity” or “proximity” factor in each of the four rehearsal rooms, thus:

- City 80%
- GM 60%
- L&S 60%
- Pin 44%

These propositions are based on obviously limited data which accounts not for factors such as my relationship to and comfort within each producing company, my experience of and comfort in each rehearsal space, my familiarity and enthusiasm for the textual material, my familiarity, friendship or ignorance of each of the stage managers (SMs/ASMs) and others present in each room, nor the levels of enthusiasm and particular exhibitions of warmth and welcome extended by some artists. For example, in relation to GM, I enjoyed the privilege of a rehearsal process conducted entirely in a room that has been the base for much of my career as an actor, and that feels like a “working home” to me, the company is one with which I had a twenty-seven-year association and for which I at that point served as a board member, Adam exhibited particular enthusiasm and facilitation in relation to my study, and an actor I have only credited as an ‘associate’ (Deirdre) extended particular warmth and enthusiasm for my research. Notwithstanding this welcome qualitative sabotage of my own coarse empiricism, the approximate values projected above do give a true indication of my relative positionality, and my various proximities as they were felt, assumed, and ceded.

There were insignificant and significant moments when I was treated as other than or more than a researcher: the kisses and hugs with which I was met by friends each day; and the role of reflective counsel projected on me by my friend, Chris Drummond, with his phone calls to me after rehearsals to garner my impressions of the developing work. At other moments, there was some insecurity surrounding my need to assert just who and what I was. At each first rehearsal, everyone present stated their name, and designation or role in the production. I found these moments awkward, wondering, with Anthony Cohen, ‘Is there an answer which is at once comprehensible and faithful?’ (1992, 221):

*For The Glass Menagerie, I said, “I’m Terry. I’m a friend of the company’s, and an observer.” This was probably my best version. I tried to be braver and franker this time, and said, “I’m Terry. I’m a student observer.” This got a big laugh from everyone, which was not my intention. I felt like saying, “Well, I AM!” (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).*
I now want to look more closely at some moments when my positionality manifested. I do not look to deal comprehensively with my position as an actor and acting teacher, as that must be allowed to overarch the whole study. Here, my interest is in my place within the social life of the working room, and how it nudged or tickled aspects of my pursuit.

I approached the rehearsal room and my peculiar and unfamiliar role within it nervously, and was immediately challenged by mundane spatial and complex social-political anxieties. My response had something of the fumbling of a clumsy clown:

*I feel very uncomfortable. The politics of space plagued me: I sat well behind Geordie’s table DS, and on the extreme stage-right corner of the room. I could scarcely have been more remotely positioned without being in another room altogether. Then I had the dilemma of whether I should sit behind the desk, facing my computer. I simply couldn’t bring myself—as an actor—to do this. I have difficulty doing this as a director and (to a lesser extent) as a teacher too. I prefer to feel connected to the fluid, fragile space of the rehearsal room floor. In this instance, I decide to position the table against the wall, and I place the computer facing the room. This placement brings ... problems: ... I am going to be uncomfortable swivelling on a decidedly non-swivel-friendly chair every time I go from attending rehearsal to writing; ... when I do write something I will be turning my back on the actors to do so; ... After attempting ... to type some words, I decide that I just can’t pursue that strategy, no matter where the computer is, where the desk is, or where I am. After five minutes ... I grab my little exercise book and a pen, and scribble notes instead* (City, 19-3-12, wk2).

Thus I found a politic in the rudimentary negotiations of space. In evidence also is my compulsion to relate my observer presence to a history of presence: to my professional manifestations and reasoning. That is to say, I work as a researcher in relation to myself, or my other selves, as well as in relation to the artists I principally observe:

*... my insider credentials only serve to make me feel more outside. I feel lonely in the rehearsal room, even envious of my friends and colleagues, like a footballer with a broken leg sitting on the sidelines watching his mates run and win* (City, 19-3-12, wk2).

Within a few days, and after an assurance from Geordie that I was ‘a completely engaged and supportive presence’ (pers. com. 20-3-12), I began to find greater comfort:
I am much more relaxed ... and feel among friends and colleagues today, although my positionality as a teacher and director is more pronounced as the stage of rehearsals the actors are now at tends to impel me to intervene. I resist this throughout (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

The inference here is that while ever I was resisting, and however successfully I was resisting, I was doing something other than recording impressions with ethnographic purity. I recorded a number of such effortful, impure thoughts:

I acknowledge that I have difficulty separating my dramaturgical responses to the writing from my other observations. The play is an intriguing, non-linear structure, more web-like than lineal. It exposes itself easily to dismissal as being ephemeral, pretentious, and derivative. At other times it appears liminal, incisive and elegant (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

Irrespective of the inherent astuteness or otherwise of this analysis, it demonstrates the thickness of my presence, my coiled sensibilities and interests, my professional aegis and inclination to meddlesomeness as someone who spends most of his life watching acting-in-development, reading dramatic writing-in-development, and strategising for how they can grow better. I experienced something of Anne Arber’s challenge in trying to ‘keep to a marginal positioning on the boundary between the practitioner and researcher’ (2006, 147). In spite of these ‘confessions’, not often did I experience a ‘temptation to convert’ or to ‘go native’ (ibid, 151), nor do I believe my presence ever represented ‘an intrusion upon, [or] a repression of, the conditions necessary to rehearsal (risk-taking, spontaneity, intimacy)’ (Filmer and Rossmanith, 2011, 232). Rossmanith represents McAuley’s view that

rehearsal observers, like anthropologists, can be positioned by their hosts, they may be shown what hosts think they want to see, and they may be shown only what is thought to be appropriate to show an outsider (2003, 42).

I do not believe my presence led at any stage to a repression of spontaneity or intimacy for actors in pursuit of their work. Nor do I believe that any artist constructed anything of the rehearsal for my presence. I believe that the actors’ substantial awareness of my profile as “one of them” facilitated uninhibited pursuit of their work.

That there is a kind of divide among observers, and that I am on a peculiar side of it, was evident at the end of my interview with eminent actor, the late Bille Brown, for my book, Trade Secrets (Crawford, 2005, 11-25). I had never met Bille before. Only at the end of the interview did he learn in passing that I was the former Head of Acting at Theatre Nepean. He had recently worked with graduates—my former students—
and was so impressed with them that he had been loudly singing the course’s praises in the industry. His response was shock and embarrassment, along the lines of, “Oh my god. Here’s me talking to you like you’re a novice or an academic!”

It is also worth noting that, in my experience, the tradition of the ‘private, secret domain’ (Filmer and Rossmannith, 2011, 231) has diminished somewhat in the practices of the younger generation of theatre directors who are more inclined to agree with Geordie that

> it’s good to break down that sacredness a little and open up the room. it (sic) allows work to breathe’ (pers. com. 20-3-12).

This brings to mind Carl Weber’s recollection of Bertolt Brecht’s endeavor to have actors ‘in contact with the people ... as early in the process as possible’ in order to ‘get used to spectators’ (1967, 102). The notion of the secret domain thus suggests itself as a construction of Stanislavskian and particularly of Strasbergian psychological and architectural enclosures, and perhaps of the technical, emotional and financial anxieties that surround certain film-making.

Further cautions abound. Arber claims:

> it is not possible to be both a stranger and a friend, and the identity crisis that may arise precipitates an integrity crisis and one role overrides the other to resolve the crisis (2006, 153).

Here’s a point of worthy pause to expose some of the difficulties of cross-disciplinary citation: Arber is a nurse writing about a project involving sufferers of breast cancer. Her central point is generalisable, yet the distinctions of professional milieu perhaps sharpen it for her, blunt it for me. I found it impossible to not remain a stranger to those for whom I was a stranger, nor a friend to those for whom I was a friend:

> Like all first rehearsals, there is a joyous, celebratory atmosphere, with lots of kisses and laughter. ... I’m in on this (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).

In such moments I was not socially engaged as if present in my normal capacity as an actor or friend. I did feel a slight twitch of discomfort when I was most assuredly cast as a friend by someone’s kiss, or bubble of gossip, and I did sense the role of researcher come to the fore in order to restore my position, but this did not come near to a sense of crisis of integrity. McAuley’s description of being ‘in the rehearsal room, in it but not of it’ (1998, 77) rang true for me in as much as I was not part of the creative circle of artists, sharing that artistic communion, but it was not true of me in a wider sense, as I felt ongoing collegiality and familiarity not just in the
rehearsal room and in the social space, but around—if not in—the artistic challenge. That is to say, I was not one of the artists standing is if at the foot of a mountain, looking up with the terror of theatrical adventuring, yet I felt an effortless empathy with them in this. Something of Husserl’s ‘analogical apperception’ (cited in Dillon, 1988, 116) speaks to my feelings of being less in but decidedly of the challenge. Jane Nadel-Klein’s elegant summation appeals:

[s]imply put, we bring ourselves, our strengths and our limitations to the field and we try to do the best we can. But caring for the subject matter and being able to recognise the craftwork that sustains a moral community have been, for me, distinct assets (2010, 179).

There is nothing about the moral and social community of actors in rehearsal that seems foreign to me. My strengths and limitations are in that communion as surely as they are in the analysis of one for whom it all seems foreign or exotic. Collins reports Berger’s (2001) regard for empathy and ‘rapport with others’ as one of the “‘secret ingredients’ of successful fieldwork’ (2010, 223), and so it overwhelmingly seemed for me. From all of those artists I categorised as friends and associates (74%), and from one that I did not (Anthony), there was explicitly and implicitly ‘a sense that they (were) understood by someone who faces the same life challenges’, as Lynette Sikic-Micanovic puts it, and ‘reciprocity and trust [did] emerge’ (2010, 50).

Reciprocity was suggested by actors’ generous expressions of curiosity about my project, and their eagerness to “serve my needs” in discourse though not at all in their acting practice. Trust was evident in the eagerness of some actors—and not exclusively those whom I had taught, but some who began as strangers to me too—to hear my views, both inside the rehearsal place and time, and at their periphery. An actor seeking advice from someone other than his director is a moment in which to exercise extreme caution. It is a challenge in which I am greatly experienced as a Head of Acting regularly employing directors to work with my students. I believe I exercised discretion, and promoted total faith in the directors at such moments.

I did not engage in discussion often in rehearsal, and rarely said more than a few words when I did, but Adam’s generosity toward me led to one or two instances of more thorough discursive engagement, such as in this discussion about Tom’s line, ‘Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes’ (Williams, 1947, 5):

Adam: That they looked very clearly-
Anthony: They had failed the system rather than the system had failed them.
Adam: Is it about working out who’s to blame for the financial crisis?
Anthony: Yeah. ...
Adam: Is it a distinction between the way people deal with social conflict in Europe and the way they dealt with it in America? I’m just wondering what point he’s making.

TC: Is it a reasonable paraphrase to say, “Either they didn’t see, or they saw but didn’t read what they saw.” That’s the failing of one’s eyes, isn’t it? Either they didn’t see or they did.

Adam: That’s good.

Anthony: Yeah.

Deirdre: Or can’t respond to what their eyes were telling them.

TC: And that’s a retrospective view that one could apply to any social disaster—that the things were there to be seen.

Adam: Yes. But nobody saw them.

TC: Whether it’s Nazism or whether it’s the great crash or whether it’s the financial crash of the last couple of years (GM, 13-4-12, wk2).

Adam’s enthusiastic ‘That’s good’ is evidence that in this moment I was entangled momentarily in meaning-making, or that I set aside, as Will Peterson has it, my ‘subject position as a distinct and separate entity from the other’, in order to ‘enter into the jointly shared position of time and place’ (2011, 136).

Differently, but no less entangled, I confessed to Tom in our interview in his apartment, that I spent some of my time in rehearsal:

[t]rying to separate my viewing of things, trying to separate the acting teacher from the… naked observer, and trying to separate it from dramaturgical anxieties in relation to Land & Sea (L120523.tom).

My most profound moments of “insider-trading” came in the phone calls Chris Drummond made to me after rehearsals of L&S. Chris is a person of exceptional intelligence, intellectual self-assuredness and emotional maturity, and with these qualities, correspondingly, an artist of open-mindedness, doubt and generosity. As a friend and colleague, he was not calling me in order for me to pull punches:

I offered advice about momentary tangibility: actors will remain lost when they are working in abstraction. One cannot act ‘abstract’. We can act inside a work that is entirely abstract, but we do so by linking tangible moments together. I talked about the Environment being a possible source of tangibility, and Dramaturgy, the identification of momentary dramatic transactions.⁶ We talked

⁶ Environment and Dramaturgy are two of the eight Dimensions. I will expand briefly on each of them when I come to employ them directly in Chapter Five. For now, it suffices to acknowledge that I was here referring to my own construction of acting, and to explain that this is why the words appear throughout in Title Case.
about the mind-sets of the different actors, and the different strategies that needed to be pursued for each of them.

I also offered the observation—indicative of the level of privilege in our working relationship—that Chris was physically occupying the stage more than I would think he normally does, and that he might gauge the progress of the rehearsal by his diminishing of this. I said, ‘If you find yourself more regularly on the perimeter of the circle rather than in the middle of it by this time next week, you can probably register that as good progress.’ He laughed and agreed. 

He appreciated these observations, and said they were helpful (L&S, 21-4-12, wk2).

Any claims of ethnographic distance turned to dust in light of this conversation. If distance was the projected tract and valued store, my study was corrupted when I hung up the phone. Here I was engaged as an acting teacher and theorist advising on what actors can and cannot act; as a guide suggesting alternatives dripping with the terms of my own published theories; and as a kind of mentor offering guidance in the director’s manner of directing: indeed, setting a benchmark for him. I felt that I had fundamentally transgressed, besmirched something, and I felt naughtily delighted to have done so. I then reflected that, in fact, rather than sabotaging my study, I had gestured somewhat toward its true coordinates, smashed and smashed through Schuetz’s (1944) old-fashioned ideal. With absolute distance scuttled, I instead continued to invest in proximity or, more correctly, in radial fluidity:

When Chris called me to again get my reflections, I said that what became evident was the need for the production to ‘cast a spell’ from its first moments, to effect a ‘change’ in the air, as it were, of the space, it needs to inherit what Michael Chekhov called ‘atmosphere’, and that this was simply impossible on this day, so the play seemed decidedly “un-magical”, slow, pretentious and disjointed. It was like trying to do ballet on a construction site scaffold (L&S, 9-5-12, wk5).

I continued to respond to Chris’ invitations inside and outside of the rehearsal room, and I understood that if my contribution was to be useful, I had to make it with the confidence of my expertise, or else I would fall into useless verbal dribble:

At the end of the run, Chris invites my comments, and I congratulate them. I’m delighted to be able to frame it within the peculiar and wonderful phenomenon of how it is as actors that we travel from being dispossessed to possessed: from the work seeming undoable to seeming unstoppable (L&S, 28-4-12, wk4).

The rhetoric here is significant. This is hyperbolic, motivational, acting-coach-speak, infused with the privileged position of being brought into the director’s circle of artistic and socio-industrial concerns. I was tacitly and knowingly trying to contribute
Prologue

to the harmony of the company. I was conscious of making a positive contribution, of playing a role as a member of a kind of support-staff, and of supporting Chris’ authority. I was a very great distance here from being a fly on the wall. I was, however fleetingly and shallowly, a player in the social, political and artistic game.

CONCLUSION

This prologue establishes my reflexive positionality in the rehearsal room, with the artists and their conditions impacting upon my presence, and the manner as well as the content of my research, and, correspondingly, my presence acknowledged as other than invisible, and somewhat incursive into their practices. These parries, deflections, wobbles and thrusts position me as part of the problem. From here, I carry my problematic self to the task of making strange—in order to perhaps make clear—the common coordinates of the notional political compass.
2014: I handed a cheque over to a bank teller. It was written by my agent, and had the agency’s name on it. The bank teller said, “Oh, you do a bit of acting on the side, do you?” I felt invaded, embarrassed, and pissed-off with her. I said, without pausing or thinking, “No, in the centre”.
CHAPTER ONE:
THE REHEARSAL ROOM AS INDUSTRIAL SPACE AND PLACE

INTRODUCTION

Chris: I’m choosing to believe that there is some benefit in what the space is putting on you guys (L&S, 28-4-12, wk4).

Hope (2010) has established the distinctions of place and space of rehearsal as detailed and intriguing phenomena. The enmeshed sensibilities of creative performance work and physical environment are enshrined by the work of Barba, who seeks the ‘external stimuli’ as provocations to action (Gordon, 2009, 340), and by Anne Bogart, who counts architecture among her Viewpoints, the features to which we kinaesthetically respond. Filmer claims that theatres ‘not only shelter the work that is carried out within them, but they are also participants in it’ (2008, 124). The spaces and places in which we work are key coordinates of the political compass of that work.

Space is foundational to the industrial relativities discussed shortly, impacting upon discourse and upon art-making in subtle and profound ways. Before getting to those, I will offer some discrete, relatively un-laden descriptions of the places in which my research was pursued.

REHEARSAL ROOMS AND THEIR OTHERS

I observed rehearsals in seven different locations:
1. St Francis Community Centre, 833 South Road, Clarence Gardens (City);
2. Cirkidz, 27 Fifth St, Bowden (City);
3. The X-Space of Adelaide College of the Arts (ACArts), 133 Currie St, Adelaide (L&S);
4. “Wayne’s World” at ACArts (L&S);
5. The Queen’s Theatre, Playhouse Lane, Adelaide (L&S);
6. Cabaret Space, Nexus Multicultural Arts Centre, 13 Morphett Street, Adelaide (Pin); and
7. Rehearsal Room 1, Adelaide Festival Centre (AFC), King William Road, Adelaide (Pin and GM).
St Francis Community Centre. This is a “church hall” seven kilometres from the centre of Adelaide on one of the busiest and noisiest arterial roads in the state. The hall is of standard layout and dimension for such buildings across Australia. It has a raised stage at its eastern end, arched, casement windows along its sides, with stained glass windows on its western exterior wall, facing South Road. The director sits with his back to the raised stage, and the broad, timber-floor ‘hall’ is used as the acting rehearsal area.\(^7\) The designated rehearsal space is large enough to replicate the performance venue, and has good natural light. It is serviced by a large ante-room with a table and chairs, and, adjoing that, a well-kept kitchen. These rooms have all of the paraphernalia of church activities, flyers announcing support groups, the odd bit of religious iconography, bookshelves full of remote and shabby “op-shop-lit”, the general detritus of a space that is cared for by many and ruled by none: a neat, conservative, doily-ed, “seniors’” feel.

Old aunty ante-rooms aside, and good floor, lighting and dimensions aside, the overriding and undermining feature of the space is the noise of the traffic from South Road. Hearing is constantly hard work.

Cirkidz. This is the home of the long-established children’s circus-skills school in Brompton, a semi-industrial, former “workers’” suburb on the western fringe of Adelaide, four kilometres from the centre of the city. The organisation occupies a rambling warren of former warehouse space, and 1970s office space. I made the following notes on space and how it was negotiated and framed for the rehearsal:

a disused office building with a large central area surrounded by ante-rooms, all with glass windows between them and the central area where we rehearse. Feels like a set from a Havel play. Off-white lino on the floor, low ceiling with fluorescent lighting strips. Geordie has placed a round table in the centre of the room (rather than, commonly, a rectangular table close to one wall) to define the acting area in one half of the large space. This creates a peculiarly fluid space with no sense of lateral boundaries, and with the sense of the director in the centre of the larger ‘stage’ rather than on the periphery of it (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

This peculiar space led to some peculiar rehearsal outcomes, as I will later show.

The X-Space, ACArts, Light Square, Adelaide. This is a custom-built “black box” performance space within the commercial and “arts sector” north-west quarter of

\(^7\)Such a rejection of the built-in stage would be dominant in the practice of contemporary directors, a wholesale rejection of Victorian theatrical spatiality that would occur with barely a thought in the minds of Australian theatre-makers since at least the 1970s.
Adelaide’s city grid. It was completely cleared of all seating in order to be used as a rehearsal room. The high ceiling includes a lighting grid accessible by a series of ramps. The “mark-up” of the set was on the floor on the first day of rehearsal. The large scale of the room, and the darkness at its perimeter are perhaps factors in the placement of the director and SM’s table some three metres from the southern wall. The room is much bigger than the performance space, so the whole central relationship between set mark-up and director “floats” somewhat in the space.

Although it has no natural light, is somewhat cold and dark under work-lights, and lacks intimacy, it is—by any measure—a first class professional rehearsal room.

“Wayne’s World”, ACArts. This is a small teaching and auxiliary space on the third floor of ACArts. It is an odd shape, and oddly fitted-out, with its southern wall lined with bookshelves full of “library reject” titles, its northern wall mainly lined with storage cupboards with large doors, and a kitchen sink. Within the ACArts acting program, this room—known to all by its unofficial title in honour of a former teacher—is the “overflow” work-space. A sign on the door reads, “Hi. I’m Wayne’s World, not a rubbish dump.” It is usually in some state of disorder.

Partly because of its small size, and partly because of its mess, Chris did not consistently orientate himself anywhere during his sessions in this room, and no stage management table was erected. This “roving licence” was self-commissioned also by something Chris brought to the room, or perhaps truer to say, by something the room brought to him. On the couple of days that Chris rehearsed L&S in this room, he did so with specific aims partially related to the space. When I offered him a larger, more professional rehearsal space, he said he wanted to stay in Wayne’s World for its ‘enforced intimacy’ (L&S, 3-5-12, wk5).

Queen’s Theatre, Adelaide. “The Queen’s”, as it is known, is a cavernous barn almost diagonally opposite ACArts, on Light Square. It is said to be the oldest theatre still operating on mainland Australia. It is a dubious claim. Truer to say it is the oldest theatre façade behind which theatre still regularly happens. The building has none of the infrastructure of an operating theatre. Everything must be brought to it and bumped-in. It remains a fairly popular performance venue as its semi-demolished interior wall is an evocative backdrop, and theatre can be set around the venue in greatly various ways. It has “atmosphere”.

There was major construction work going on around two sides of the building throughout all of the rehearsal and performance period. The “theatre” does not
achieve a blackout, as there is no ceiling, and the roof has translucent panels in part. It is a very challenging venue in which to hear and be heard. These and other hardships of placiality will be touched upon later, as more of the venue’s charms are brought to light.

**Nexus Cabaret Space, Adelaide.** This venue is among a number of arts-focussed buildings clustered around the corner of Morphett Street and North Terrace, Adelaide, in the north-west quarter of the city. The venue is a rock and cabaret room that, inside and outside Adelaide Fringe periods, lends itself to all manner of other pursuits. It is dark, with no natural light, has a carpeted floor and a very small raised stage. The single day of rehearsal the *Pin* company spent here was dominated by ‘work around the table’ (Gordon, 2009, 128), reading and discussion: work that did not expose any errant claims the room might have to being a professional rehearsal space.

For the first day reading and discussion, stage management had placed a number of tables together in the centre of the auditorium-cum-dance-floor.

**Rehearsal Room 1, AFC.** This room is leased to the STCSA by the AFC. This is significant in its distinction among the range of venues under review here, as it is the only instance wherein the company producing the work (*GM*) or co-producing the work (*Pin*) has a formal, ongoing tenancy claim over the space. It is the only room that feels anything like the production company’s “home”. This has been the STCSA’s principle rehearsal room since the opening of the Festival Centre in 1974. It is a large ‘box’, very high ceilinged, windowless, drab, but with a great sprung timber floor. With no natural light, and the occasional noise from street level above, it feels very much like a bunker. It connects to the STCSA workshop along its western wall via a large, heavy sliding door that allows large elements of set to be shifted between the rooms and the Dunstan Playhouse stage, which adjoins the workshop along its southern wall. The noise of machinery often encroaches upon the room. The adjacent “retiring room” is a functional if drab affair, with kitchen facilities, no natural light, leftover production furniture, and an array of production posters (mostly hideous) lining the walls.

These AFC rooms have been the sites of a great deal of my professional career as an actor. They are palimpsestic sites of enormous history for me and for some others in both *GM* and *Pin* casts.
SPATIAL DEMARCATION: MEANINGS AND MAINTENANCE

The primary division that is created inside a rehearsal room, by the placement of furniture and in many cases by the placement of tape on the floor as a “mark-up” of the plan of the set, is a division between the acting area and the non-acting area. I record and offer conjecture here on moments in which this division of space into sites of discrete labour within a single room was most clearly maintained, then moments when it was ruptured, and I reflect upon the conscious and semi-conscious purpose of these two strategies of spatial, social and industrial engagement by actors and directors.

Rehearsals commonly begin with a “first read”. This is usually the first time that the cast has all read the play together, aloud, and generally unfolds in the presence of other company members. In large companies like STCSA, this can involve reading in the presence of up to thirty people; in small independent or co-op productions, like City, which does not even have a full-time SM, only the cast and director may be present. Occasionally, directors ask actors to do particular things in relation to the first read. These can range from broad “coaching tips”—“Take it slowly” or “Have fun with it”—to distinct directions: being asked to read while on one’s feet, or to only say lines while maintaining eye contact with another actor, even though that will mean pausing before the delivery of every line in order to look down at the script and momentarily “learn” the line before saying it. Each of the three first reads that I attended held to the norm: actors were seated around a table, with scripts on the table, pencils in hand and water at the ready, and read the script with varying degrees of caution and liberation, as discussed below. Spatially, in each instance, an “inner circle” formed close to the table which included: in all observed cases, the cast, director, SM, and lighting designer; in the case of GM, production coordinator and dialect coach (roles not existing in other productions); and in the case of Pin, the designer, the general manager and the marketing manager. It is interesting that Pin, arguably the most avowedly commercial production, was the only instance in which the marketing manager assumed a place in the inner-circle for the first read. At a further radius sat other company members and guests.

After the first read and subsequent discussion, the circle is broken, as it were, and the distinction between acting and non-acting space is established and assumed. The

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8 The strangest imposition I have ever experienced was the cast being asked to do this, while also being asked to not say the line to the other actor until we had attached to it a specific sexual or pornographic thought, irrespective of the fact that the text included no such lines. It took many hours to read the play.

9 This suggestion is supported by the following observation, the only such comment/joke I recorded: Rose makes a comment about her enthusiasm and confidence in the show being great, and the lighting designer gets a big laugh with, ‘It’s sold out, so it better be!’ (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).
director establishes a “home base” beside or behind the same table as the SM, or an adjacent table. This ‘beside’ or ‘behind’ is a telling distinction, as it tends to indicate the degree and frequency of the director’s incursions into the acting space:

*Rose mainly sits behind the desk, occasionally getting onto the stage for specific purpose; Chris is—at an equivalent stage of rehearsal—constantly on his feet, prowling the stage, manipulating the action; Adam mainly sits to the side of the desk, often with his script on a music stand beside him, but rarely encroaches onto the stage; Geordie also sits beside the desk, able to leap onto the stage for his often private ‘coaching’ of actors* (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).

Geordie’s initial interventions, and his cast’s initial moments on their feet, were tentative. He approached his cast at a modest distance, and somewhat hesitantly, with all standing at some distance from each other, and holding scripts, sometimes to their chests, sometimes not (City, 19-3-12, wk2). There was a physical, spatial and vocal politeness in these early moments of communication.

The maintenance of the two discrete zones was most pronounced at the earliest and in the final stages of rehearsal, when space is respectfully ceded for the exploration of the play within ‘the domain of the fiction ... frequented only by the characters in the fiction’ (McAuley, 2012, 77), and a space of corresponding “viewing authority” is maintained for non-actors. Around the time of advanced rehearsal room runs, this respect for the performance area is pronounced, and underlined by behaviour that is somewhat formal, even ritualistic.

*Actors have the stage for twenty minutes to stretch and chat. Tables are lined up facing the stage. Behind the table, lighting designer, designer, stage manager, director, sound designer and—not at the table but behind it—me. Discussion amongst ‘creatives’ is also very quiet—a sense that this is “actors’ time”* (City, 28-3-12, wk3).10

The space afforded the cast of City was in order for them to achieve what we might allow as “inner focus”. The central concerns of the Pin company, however, were so determinedly “outer”, so obsessively Aesthetic, that they disrupted normal spatial expectations:

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10The collective noun, ‘creatives’, used to describe, basically, directors and designers, has crept into Australian theatre nomenclature over the last fifteen to twenty years. McAuley, with the aid of one of the designers she observed in the context of her book, *Not Magic But Work*, suggests that the term was ‘probably adopted into theatre practice under the influence of the mega musicals of the 1980s’, and concedes that it ‘could be construed as somewhat offensive to actors’ (2012, 45). I confess distaste for it, as I will reveal fully later, but its use (a remarkably successful adoption of new terminology into an industrial environment) is so thorough that to avoid it here would be perverse.
Rose asks if the supporting cast of the routine want to spend some more time on the choreography, and Jude immediately takes over as ‘dance captain’, and runs the room, while Rose conducts a peripheral conversation with Nathan and Alirio about Dramaturgy and Characterisation. It’s interesting that this discourse on matters of the inner-game occur sotto vocé and at the periphery of the space. The inner-game of acting lives in the margins of this rehearsal room, not at its core (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

That said, Rose was alone among the four directors in choosing her home-base behind rather than beside the SM’s desk. This offered and projected a maximum invitation and responsibility to the cast to “possess” the acting area, sans encroachment:

Nathan and Danielle inhabit the large, central “log” set fixture. They are climbing over it, accustoming themselves to it, joking with each other, and finding possible ways to position themselves for various moments of the scene to be rehearsed. Rose watches them (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).

The ‘creatives’ conversation continues. Meanwhile, Nathan has taken a position centre-stage. There are now two “circles of attention” in the room: one around the director, and one around the leading actor who is “holding court” as a kind of class clown. Nathan is a highly charismatic person, and attracts this kind of attention easily (Pin, 8-6-12, wk2).

I will reflect below on the particular tenor of the Pin room. Suffice to say, there is much of interest, and I believe there was much of value, in the space given to the cast of this production, and particularly to Nathan as its titular leader and hero.

In the early days of the rehearsal period, the maintenance of a spatial division between acting and non-acting areas played out as a division also between depths of discourse:

After a tea break, the cast carry another table to join the one that Geordie has been using, and sit around for a read of the whole play. The City is undoubtedly—like Crimp’s other works—a play of elusive meaning. It seems to me that this final discussion of the day has provided the company with the opportunity to unpack and toss around those meanings, and the characters’ relationships to them. I note with interest that this was done at the end of the rehearsal, after “practice”, and that the space was “rebuilt” for the purpose, with the tables brought together in a kind of denial of the usual intensity of
focus that is spatially achieved when actors are working “in frame”\textsuperscript{11} (City, 19-3-12, wk2).

In this moment, there was no doubt about these artists’ interests in the textual density of this material, nor their interest or capacity to discuss it. There was, however, a very strong sense of there being a “time and place” for such discourse, and consequently a reluctance to position it in the middle of a rehearsal session and in the centre of the acting space. Meaning is more than a mere frame for acting. It is more like an underlying canvas, yet it appears to be held more like a frame or margin in the early days of the rehearsal. In a successful production, come the performance, it will appear as an underlying canvas lain across, as it were, the artistic compass, and will feel so for the actor.

During the central weeks of each rehearsal process, on a scale consistent with each director’s personal style, the division between acting and non-acting areas were more regularly traversed or more fluidly interpreted.

Spatial fluidity, and transgressions of acting and non-acting areas, in the middle stages of rehearsal seemed to carry a variety of meanings and intentions. There were, on certain occasions, manipulations of space—such as Geordie’s habit of “bouncing” from his seat onto the stage for private consultation with an actor—that were organic moments of confluence with the dramatic excavation, and others that seemed more deliberately strategic, and outside the context of the improvisational flow of the work:

\textit{For the feedback session that follows, Chris gathers the cast into a tight circle, sitting on the stage area (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).}

\textit{At its conclusion, there is some general mingling for a while, then Adam gathers the cast into a small circle on the stage area (GM, 30-4-12, wk4).}

On these occasions these uses of space seemed intended to impart a message of solidarity. It was as if the director was seeking to reconnect, in the centre of this space, to a sacred lore, a conspiracy. As if the director is saying to his cast, “I am still one of you. We can do this!” As an actor, I find rehearsals to be full of this ‘we happy

\textsuperscript{11}My dedication to rendering material from OS leaves this reference to ‘frames’ intact. In the study, generally, however, I have avoided references to frames in order to dissociate the work from Goffman’s (1975) influential ‘frame analysis’. I was not familiar with this work at the point I undertook the observations, and have since come to the view that alluding to it in this study could be misleading, as I do not see appropriate correspondence between my work and it, and I do have ins and outs of my own to pursue. My use of the word in the following paragraph is in order to dispense with it. Respect for (and avoidance of) Goffman’s work led me, in fact, to the terminology of ‘compasses’.
few’ camaraderie, staring down fear. The inner-referential exclusivity of these circles is shared in the practice of football teams, particularly near the commencement of big games. Pledges have been embraced, and embraces pledged, in the shed, yet they must be done again, and be seen to be done, on the field, with players’ backs turned ostentatiously away from the “audience”. In the theatre, we do not make such a show of our exclusion of the audience, such that it is. Come “game day”, in performance, we express our ongoing exclusive “gang-ship” in the practices and strategies of “given circumstances” and the dubious “fourth wall”. Meanwhile, in rehearsal, we nurture the spirit of the gang (which we delicately refer to as “the ensemble”) by forming circles as spatial pledges to each other.

These moments in which the acting area became the site of discourse were all manifestations of ‘floor work’ that Rossmanith finds in actors and directors inhabiting the acting area as a discursive site ‘very much outside and separate from the fiction they were developing’ (2003, 93). My findings suggest these are manifestations that pertain predominantly to the central weeks of a rehearsal period.

Spatial transgressions are usually perpetrated on the demarcated acting area, and are usually dependent upon the agency of the director. Here is an example that contravenes those norms:

After another pass, Nathan pulls a chair up to the director’s desk ... to discuss a script idea, and other cast members create a small circle around this discussion. This strikes me as a rather unusual spatial achievement for a rehearsal room, particularly as initiated by an actor (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

Stepping back from this, I see it in part as the exercising of the particular agency of a leading actor playing a massive, title role, in the context of a rehearsal space that I will later describe as extraordinary in its achievement of democracy, fluidity and somewhat-chaos.

Actors pursue important work outside of the designated acting area: in tea-rooms, greenrooms, and having lunch together during rehearsal, and later, in dressing rooms. They also, from time to time, subvert the performance expectations of the acting area. One afternoon of rehearsal for City Chris Pitman and Lizzy began a line-run of the scene they were to rehearse. Sitting on the edge of the acting area in natural positions, and with the liberty to look downward, scratch their faces, do whatever they liked while rendering lines, they did so very comfortably (City, 19-3-12, wk2). The spatiality here was significant. They were not in the ante-room, not at

12 Shakespeare’s Henry V, 4:3, L60
the SM’s desk, and not fully onstage. They found a gap between spatial designations. Sitting hunched up with their bums on the line of demarcation between acting and non-acting areas, downstage, and their feet practically under the director’s vacant chair, engaged in a soft yet earnest conversation that no-one else could hear, they looked like two children bunkered in a cubby-house, plotting. Like the pledging circles, these secret plots that establish, among other things, the ‘checkpoints’ of their ‘layered sites’ (Filmer and Rossmanith, 2011, 231) are important elements in the building of theatrical art, and important steps toward the actors’ assumptions of command in the theatrical moment.

This assumption of agency is expressed by degrees, in socio-spatial games and claims. Actors “leave the nest” of the rehearsal in order to “find their feet” on the stage, and directors create mechanisms for this individuation. Stephen Aaron’s representation of this is offered under the aegis of an intensely psychologised approach to acting and an intensely psychologised and emotionalised American-Freudian interpretation of the relationships between the director and actors:

> an actor can get so frightened because he is about to engage in an act of exhibitionism in which he will display his genital beauty for approval. The actor is fearful that the audience will ridicule his genitals. He is exposed and risks subjecting himself to punishment for the crime of exhibitionism, namely, castration (1986, 92).

Although this seems a somewhat alarmist and disturbing characterisation, I am not able to dismiss it as easily as I might prefer, so long as my own actor’s nightmares continue to include, if not castration, certainly genital exposure. Yet Aaron is here describing the emotional loss of the attention of the director, and that does seem a generously gilded lily in the context of contemporary Australian practice, where individuation seems rather to be achieved through unthinking spatial manoeuvres such as the technical processes of establishing built structures that frame actors and only actors, aiming lights in their direction, creating dressing-room space that is solely their domain: we are ceded space rather than bereft of love.

An example of this was a notes session following the final dress rehearsal of *City* at the Bakehouse Theatre. In the absence of any appropriate ante-room, notes were given in the theatre itself, with the director off- and the actors on-stage:

*I note substantial changes in how the actors and director engaged with each other in this session ... In mid-rehearsal, the space of the playing area and the space of the director’s viewing are more roughly defined, and easily traversable: actors might come right up to the table to discuss something, or might enter from the viewing zone onto the stage, and the director will regularly shift from*
his chair at the table onto the playing space. Now space is clearly defined. ... impenetrable for anyone except actors. Geordie is now in the ‘darkness’ of objectivity. For the notes, he comes down and sits in the front row of the theatre, while the actors sit around on the stage (City, 12-4-12, wk5).

The most peculiar manifestation of an actor’s relationship to space occurred in the *Pin* rehearsal room: the moment of Alirio’s virtual rehearsal. This led me to ruminate on the meaning of space in the rehearsal room as space that *is* and is *not*: a kind of illusory space. ‘Where is the play?’ asks Drew Leder. Does the actor

move through a world of the imagination constructed by author, players, and audience alike, for which all worldly spaces are but a trigger and metaphor (2007, 108)?

Michael Kirby locates performance moments along a continuum by virtue of their theatrical aims, the reception they seek and, inevitably, at least somewhat by genre. My research respects this, but finds further nuance within it, imagining the continuum repeating itself along different axes, such that a performance of so-called ‘complex acting’, so defined by its aims and its *tendencies*, might hold within it elements of all kinds of acting and not-acting, as distributed along Kirby’s scale (2008, 40-52).

The agreement of actor, Alirio, and director, Rose, that the rehearsal had been achieved sufficiently without any embodiment on the stage at all seemed to suggest that this, after all, is not theatre; this set is not a set; this moment not a performance; the actor—for the moment—not an actor but a kind of *marker of acting*, an acting “scout”, in a moment that is, as it were, an illusion of an illusion.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter has examined artists’ behaviour within rehearsal spaces, looked at designations of meaning and purpose within those spaces, and pursued moments of compliance with, and transgression of, those designations. It has established spatiality as a factor in the political compass, while straying happily also into artistic ground. The following chapter explores political or industrial shadows across spatial manifestations and determinations, and across social and artistic constructions and projections. The politics of rehearsal space and time are wondered upon in this light.
CHAPTER TWO:  
INDUSTRIAL AND SOCIAL CONCURRENCES AND NEXES

INTRODUCTION

The suggestion of a political compass implies snares and enraptures for actors beyond the surface implications of art and fiction. It asserts a meaningful impact arising from the nexus of industrial circumstances and personal professional perspectives. This impact is examined in relation to performative outcomes, as political echoes, shadows, strains or stains within the acted moment. That suggests the study getting a little ahead of itself, as it describes the momentum toward the fictive, and the performance. We are still in the political compass, the outlying or underlying topography of art-making, but that momentum is worth recalling, as if we might look for moments that have indicators attached to them, like outlying milestones pointing us toward a city’s lights.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

‘What they do want—I think, most actors—is to feel that they’re being trusted with some information and knowledge about the piece that they’re working on. You don’t just want to be a hired labourer, you know?’ (Mitchell in Crawford, 2005, 106)

Heather Mitchell’s comment represents a persistent perception of actors as artistic and industrial underlings, at the beck and call of directors and producers, which is in contrast to notions of bravura, adoration and agency that surround their placement in and as the finished product of theatrical and cinematic production. Fortier cites a ‘struggle for a more humane [and] more democratic process’ (2004, 9) for actors in the ways of theatre-making. Bourdieu’s analysis of the ‘power relations, strategies, interests’ in the literary field which he asserts are ‘imposed on all the agents entering the field—and ... weigh with a particular brutality on the new entrants’ (1990b, 141) is entirely transferable to the theatre, as Moore suggests:

[t]he importance placed on finding employment in itself was at times seen as a negative influence which encouraged actors to compete rather than create, and competition was definitely viewed as the antithesis of creation (2004, 186).

It is important to remember that Moore’s study is largely focussed on early career actors who are not working in the kinds of esteemed productions—for wages—as
those that I observed, nor are they people who have acquired the kind of symbolic capital that the actors to whom I address my attention have, in some measure, acquired. Nonetheless, all of the actors involved in my study are people who know unemployment as an intimate foe, and who are likely to struggle to pay their bills as often as not.

In this chapter, I look for the moments in which actors’ experiences appear as manifestations of industrial realities particular, perhaps, to their profession, then at the impact these imposts might have upon their creativity and artistic agency. Looking at the work through this lens, I wonder on industrial encounters taken as normal throughout my career, and find myself regularly asking, What is going on here? Is this acting?

One cannot approach the question of actors’ agency or positionality without reference to the director. Harvie suggests that there is always ‘self-reflexive attention to the dynamics and ethics of power and authorship circulating’ amongst theatre-makers (2010, 2). I carried into this observation process an acknowledged paradox in relation to actors’ and directors’ roles and the nature of their collegiality within the politic of the process:

These two statements—‘the director’s ideas will shape the work’, and ‘the actor is the central artist’—create an obvious paradox. The only way of reconciling this paradox is of course through mutual respect, honest dialogue, joint focus, joint high artistic ambition and simple kindness (2011, 95).

Notwithstanding the post-observation inkling that dialogue between director and actor is probably better characterised as strategic rather than honest (or, perhaps, “not dishonest”), there was no shortage of these good reconciling things in the rehearsals I observed. The founding premise of actor-centrality, however, took a battering. Being in a rehearsal room as ethnographer rather than as theatre-maker brought to light a primacy in the presence, ethic and style of the director that astounded me, despite more than thirty years of being subject to it. The centrality of the director, the casting of their will and their personality across the room, the infection of their manner into every nuance of industrial process and artistic venturing, is a subject that will be more robustly wrestled with in the next chapter, yet must be stated here as the over-arching context in which actors experience anything at all in rehearsal.

The four directors consequently begin to make their entrances onto the “stage” of this study because it would be impossible or disingenuous to keep them from it. They “co-star” in almost every moment under investigation, and will therefore be dealt
with by analysis of their particular qualities a little later. At this point of their entrance, however, it is worthwhile returning briefly to my positionality, particularly in relation to the directors.

I have no wish to imply criticism of any of these artists. Some practices may be recorded in ways that may seem to represent unfairness or a kind of lordliness on the director’s part yet, in each case, this appearance is just that—an appearance. It is a perception deliberately rendered by an academic (as distinct from a theatre-professional) perspective, behind which lies a depth of contingent reality that modifies the moment in its industrial context, and supports James Clifford’s claim that all such ‘negotiated realities’ are in fact ‘multisubjective, power-laden, and incongruent’ (1986a, 15). Let me state very plainly that I was privileged to be witness to the working processes of four outstanding theatre directors who approached the daunting challenges of leadership in four completely distinctive styles and manners. My interest is in those distinctions, and how they impacted on actors. Consistent with Maxwell’s claims in observing and analysing Sydney Hip Hop culture, I aim to avoid a suggestion that these actors and directors are ‘in a state of disavowal’ (2003, 47). That is to say, the artists’ faith in each moment is its qualification for scrutiny, not any lack of faith, or questioning of their faith on my part. I do not suggest any kind of hierarchy of their overall quality as directors. I did not look for and did not find such ranking, and hope no such thinking is inferred.

Having said that, I should also hang out to air a further article of Bourdieuan “smalls”: I am not aloof to the cultural capital stakes, or immune to the actor’s feverous compliancy, as described or alluded to by Moore (2004), Hope (2010), McAuley (2012), O’Kane (2012) and others. As an actor with the privilege of a regular institutional income, I not only have a greater capacity to “speak-truth-to-power” than most actors, I feel it is among my obligations to do so as a character with a position of some industrial authority in a small community of theatre artists, particularly as pertaining to the privilege of custodianship of the “artists’ representative” seat on the STCSA board. Nonetheless, I am, as McAuley suggests, ‘reluctant to hurt people’s feelings or offend the powerful who have influence over future job opportunities’ (2012, 8). Actors presenting themselves as “available” is ingrained position-taking: enshrined sluttishness. These taints did not define or derail my presence; nor do they define or derail my writing. It would be disingenuous, however, to not acknowledge that they exist, and take some effort to control.
BEFORE THE BEGINNING

Actors arrive at the first day of rehearsals in a variety of states of knowing and depths of connection in relation to the script, the director, the company, the theatre and the city in which the production will be performed, and the cast.

Commonly, casting takes place over a long period of time, with actors for leading roles being part of the director’s plans many months in advance of the start of rehearsals, and those destined for small roles cast just weeks or sometimes only days in advance. Actors may have had the time and inclination to have done mountainous research, and spent many months with the script, or they may have had the time and inclination to do nothing.

Five of the seven cast members of *Pin* took part in a week-long workshop in 2011, and two of these were members of the company’s award-winning hit of the previous year, *Wizard of Oz*. One cast member who did not participate in that workshop was also absent from the first day of rehearsal. This history produced quite distinct divisions of authority and influence in the cast throughout rehearsals.

For *City*, Chris Pitman and Lizzy had committed to the production a year before rehearsals began, and had been talking about the idea for at least another year before that, as they both continued to work with Geordie on other productions throughout the preceding two years. Although the piece was not subject to a formal reading or collective interrogation, it is fair to assume that it was subject to a lot of informal reference during the many months of collaboration between these artists.\(^{13}\) Matilda was not cast until being directed by Geordie in her graduation production a few months earlier.

*GM* was cast gradually over the eight or so months prior to rehearsals commencing.\(^{14}\) Interestingly, Anthony was the last to be cast, only a few weeks before the commencement of formal rehearsals. This late casting is rather unusual given the size and centrality of the role.

*L&S* progressed through a series of script-development workshops throughout 2010 and 2011. Three of the four cast members took part in those workshops, and were crucially connected to—indeed, motivated—many of the play’s moments. Despite the cloudiness of much of the text’s meaning, and despite the fact that it would

\(^{13}\) Both actors were in Geordie’s production of Michael Gow’s *A Toy Symphony*, which played for many months around Australia throughout 2009/10, and both were in his 2011 production of *Speaking in Tongues*.

\(^{14}\) I was privy to this gradual process via Adam’s reports to the board of STCSA.
continually envelop its cast in clouds of confusion, there was some sense that these actors had an authorial stake in the work. Perhaps that is the thing that sustained their commitment through the banks of cloud. The fourth cast member, Danielle, who did not participate in those workshops, was subject to numerous moments of “extra tuition” that were framed in some way as “making up for” her lack of locatedness in the text. These are further realities and relativities of the political compass of each production that bled into the actors’ inhabitation of the artistic compass.

**MOMENTUM VS LUNCH**

In the broad industrial context, actors collaborate with many other theatre-workers. I observed rehearsals being curtailed for the purpose of actors needing to fulfil publicity obligations, wardrobe calls, and other obligations to Creatives. All of these collaborators “cast” actors in important industrial relationship to themselves, implying roles and tasks that make no appearance in standard theorising on “being an actor” yet are among the tasks of an actor, and therefore among the skills of acting. Social and industrial malleability appears to me a key requirement:

> _There is choreography along with the song that is the heart of this scene, and the actors are at a fairly advanced stage in their assumption of this. Rose says, ‘And, Jude, I think someone needs to take the role of Dance Captain, and I reckon it’s got your name on it.’ Jude accepts this responsibility immediately with her usual good grace. Yet, it is an industrial and social imposition. And it is ‘negotiated’ in time and space such that Jude could hardly have turned it down_ (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

The high level of intimate cooperation required to make theatre breeds a strong sense of camaraderie among theatre-workers inhabiting our ‘dominated position in the field of power’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, 144), such that common contemporary industrial tenets—be they enshrined in industrial awards or not—are able to be swept away in pursuit of the work:

> _At the end of the session, Rose says to the cast, ‘Can we gather? We’re behind schedule. What are people’s plans over lunch? We’re benefitting from drilling it, and I want to keep running it. I don’t want to lose the momentum.’_

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15 Allow me to capitalise the word here rather than mucking about with quote marks, and to attempt to ameliorate the ugly transition of adjective to noun.
There followed a renegotiation on the subject of the afternoon schedule that included an agreement to keep working, postponing lunch. The company had not formally taken a morning tea break (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

Thus work in rehearsal is experienced in such a way that, as Cole observes, ‘stoppages can only be understood as part of a continuum’ (1992, 9) and, by extension, such minor delicacies as a tea-break may be foregone for the greater good of art, “the good of the show”. Partly through such industrial leniencies and artistic collective mythologising, actors—not unlike the Hip Hoppers chronicled by Maxwell—look to ‘furnish themselves’ with a story of themselves:

an account of their belonging to something out of the multifarious, often regulating, disciplining, but also sometimes liberating, enabling institutions and interpretations constituting their fields of experience (2003, 17).

Bille Brown is alive to the mythologising:

As one actor said to me, as we were lying dead at the Royal Shakespeare Company, he said, in a loud whisper, ‘You know what I fucking love about this? It’s the last fucking existential job available to a man where you don’t have to get killed or kill anyone’ (in Crawford, 2005, 12).

Artistic outlaw tropes aside, there were other sly ways in which actors’ artistic pursuits were impacted upon by the socio-industrial contract; ways that led actors to remain ‘amicable’, as Moore puts it, with directors as ‘professional contacts’ (2004, 205) whose favour might be utilised in the pursuit of further work:

Rose gives a note to Danielle:

*Rose:* You’re becoming too much of a parent. Play against that a little. She’s still the cool girl that we met before.

*Danielle:* Ok. So she doesn’t change through all of this?

*Rose:* What do you mean?

*Danielle:* Through, like, the writing and stuff like that, obviously she turns into more of a parent…

*Rose:* It’s hilarious, stuff like that. People who are, like, going out together to… It can be flirtatious. It can be, like, you know what I mean? Yeah. You can play it up. You know what I mean? It’s cute and... Yeah (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

It is difficult to read the thickness of this encounter in merely the words that were exchanged. There was at least as much meaning produced by the tone of the conversation, the spatial relationship between the two speakers, the context of their ages, and their stocks of cultural capital in the industrial construct:
Danielle is a very young, untrained actor. She is ostensibly employed by Rose. She is engaged in the daily grind, painfully mapped by Paul Moore, of seeking a place in the industrial complex as an actor. From such positions, it often feels that actors can’t afford to disagree with directors, or that they play a dangerous game in doing so. She speaks here with meekness and doubt in her voice, there is the sense that she did not fully prosecute her case, as if she had more she might have said on the subject but chose not to do so; Rose responds with greater clarity and surety. Yet it is Danielle who seeks to justify her position in relation to text (albeit obliquely and scantily), and Rose who is simply defending her position with a vague generalisation, and who answers her own requests for understanding and compliance (‘You know what I mean? Yeah’). An opportunity to meet the actor on the ground of her own argument, for example, to look closely at the text and mark when and where the general ‘feel’ of parenthood, flirtation and cuteness might be found, and how that might reconcile with the actor’s notion of character development through the scene, was eschewed (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

Only by stepping back do such encounters appear novel, and become challenging:


This ‘side-coaching’ [Benedetti, 1985, 131] seems to me invasive, inorganic, yet perfectly appropriate and useful. ... [I]t is one of many examples where I reflect on the acts of submission the actor makes in the process. We leave our agency at the door of the rehearsal, so to speak, and submit to interactions and “directions” that we would likely judge to be somewhat abusive in other contexts. One might consider a chef talking to a sous-chef, yet in that situation the justification is the level of expertise held by the former in the area in which the latter seeks progress. One might think of the home-owner and the contractor (‘I want it like this, not like that’), yet in that case one is employing the other, they are not colleagues. Actors have skills the director lacks, and they are colleagues. This speaks to the peculiar power-relations between them (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).

The director’s position in this power-relationship is justified by notions around the perception of images, what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the condemnation of meaning (1994, xix) for which the director takes primary responsibility by virtue of his privilege of ‘distance in order to see [its] meaning’ (1963, 58). These privileges will be further explored later. Such underling encounters for actors, meanwhile, find their own odd privilege in Bourdieu’s idea that only by

grasping the game as such, with the stakes, rules or regularities that are its own, the specific investments it engenders and the interests it satisfies (1990b, 183)...

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... can the player of the game

disentangle herself from it ... and discover herself engaged in it, located at a
definite place, and endowed with definite and defining stakes and investments
(ibid, 184).

These achievements, however, if and when they exist, remain largely tacit, while
compliance is to the fore:

*The director’s interventions are confirmations of choices previously made, or
changes to earlier draft choices. I have the impression that actors are showing a
rough draft, and the director is making changes to it. Über-marionettes? (GM,
13-4-12, wk2).*

Again this foreshadows a direction the study will shortly take, looking more closely at
the primacy of the director as a manifestation of artistic rather than political stir.
Still, this was one of many occasions when I thought of Edward Gordon Craig’s early
twentieth century projection of actors as über-marionettes, and on doing so, usually
followed the thought with one such as this, scribbled in my notebook: “These über-
marionettes don’t even seem terribly über” (*Pin*, 14-6-12, wk3). That is to say, they
were, as Craig mandates, ‘minus egotism’ (1957, ix,x) yet there was no sign that they
were ‘plus fire’ (ibid, ix). Craig’s concept is generally held to be a distasteful
dehumanising of actors, and Americanised Stanislavskian acting theories work
steadfastly to bury it. In industrial terms, Australian theatre largely sees itself some
philosophical distance from, for example, Hope’s findings of corporate and
bureaucratic sway in Norway’s Nationaltheatret, where

> [t]he actors were the commodity, rather than the ensemble, which would be
used to effect the production, which was the product (2010, 143).

Contemporary Australian actors would find this construction entirely transferable to
the fields of commercial television and, particularly, advertising, but cherish higher
democratic, even Marxist, hopes for the theatrical environment. At the very least, we
look to find artistic choices made, as Hope describes, in ‘a collaborative, if
hierarchically determined, way’ (2010, 12). Many moments of my observations
suggest the ease with which any such flag-waving may be countered, and argued as
acutely relative. In performance, Australian theatre actors may indeed be more than
super-puppets. In rehearsal, however, they regularly appear involved in games of
crude shunting and dull placement, in which they appear no more animated than
dolls manipulated through a small child’s tea-party. In such moments, I again ask
myself, Is this acting? and again tease the question out with a supplementary
provocation that sustains the study: an actor is experiencing it, so this must be acting.

Leaving aside such foreshadowing of complex and interesting matter, actors’ work is corralled and challenged by other, more mundane social and industrial constructs, and found to be, as Gad Kaynar suggests, ‘predominantly circumstantial rather than play-oriented’ (2006, 245), as actors negotiate prosaic imposts of time, space, contractual obligations and egos:

Nathan and Jude go over to the musicians for a ‘chin wag’ about a moment. They’re promoting an idea they have for a moment of action as being worthy of a small change in the music to accommodate it. The composer politely asserts that the musical score is set and will be unchanged, and the actors accept the implication that they must work within it as it is (Pin, 29-6-12, wk5).

Rose (to Nathan): We’re just going to have to set a template of this, because I don’t know what it (the costume) is going to be like to work in. I don’t know what the sightlines are going to be.

So the acting is provisional. The pattern of impulses and the co-ordinates by which the actor is setting a path are all subject to change (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

These moments underline Christopher McCullough’s claim for the ‘inherent iterability’ (1988, 117) of performance. The actors’ score is the one component—of the many in the room—that is held to be most malleable, and endlessly so. Actors must find their functionality via investment in a ‘state of flux’ (ibid), and build strategies which, as Jenkins interprets Bourdieu, are

the ongoing result of the interaction between the dispositions of the habitus and the constraints and possibilities which are the reality of any given social field (1992, 83).

In this field, in moments such as this, it seems the actor is not so much rehearsing as researching the role and the challenges of the production, seeking a responsive functionality, an “in-character-ness”, a template pre-template, an ‘epistemic openness’ (Parviainen, 2002, 16) that will locate him in the infinite adaptations, constraints and possibilities that lie beyond the rehearsal room illusion of illusion.

One moment of rehearsal of Pin struck me as so bizarre that it might pass as an unqualified illusion:

For the opening of one sequence, Geoff is at the top of the revolving set structure, on a raked surface, with a large (660 mm diameter) “head” stuck on
his head, dancing! I cannot help but think instantly of the potential OHS issues, and the dangers to him ... What is the actor doing? Is he acting? Of course he is, but this moment of acting, like so many, is the performance of certain tasks inside certain constraints. ... [P]erhaps this is what acting always is, with the only differential being the degree of constraint (Pin, 29-6-12, wk5).

This moment seemed something like an actor’s nightmare, or fodder for future “trench humour” as actors sit around greenrooms and movie sets telling “war stories”. It was a grotesque underlining of the actor’s challenge. That it and the majority of the other citations immediately preceding it stem from the Pin rehearsal room is likely due to the outlandish, comic ambitions of that piece.

Actors sign up for a variety of challenges, and those variances are soon to be explored. It is worth noting, though, that the greatest impost upon all actors is time. At each first day of rehearsal, I was struck more profoundly than when involved as an actor or director by the size and complexity of the task theatre-workers set themselves, and the extremely limited time they are given in which to do it, both as a subjective seeming, and in objective comparison to the working processes of theatre-makers of many other countries. I was regularly taken aback by

the expanse of this distance to be travelled. It’s like we set off for a new planet without knowing what the planet is, and with the responsibility of inventing it as we hurtle toward it (City, 19-3-12, wk2).

This image invites the investigation that will follow, threading Bourdieu’s constructions of field and habitus, developed in the face of ‘unforeseen and ever-changing situations’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 18) to the “feely” missions and hurtling invention of the actor’s challenge, epitomised by Chris Drummond when counselling his cast on the ‘house- or company-style’ as something that is

‘hard to articulate but you’ll know it when you’re there’.

An interesting industrial-aesthetic reality for the actor: they enter a job with the expectation that they will act in a certain ‘house-style’, not unlike a corporate style (“Would you like fries with that?”) (L&S, 28-4-12, wk4).

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16 The standard rehearsal period at STCSA is four weeks, followed by a “tech week”, with preview audiences arriving at the end of that fifth week. Occasionally, shows get an extra week of rehearsal. Pin is one such show. Normally, only one production per year will be afforded this luxury. Hope (2010, 97) estimates a 64-hour differential in the rehearsal time available between the productions he observed and analysed at Sydney’s Griffin Theatre Company and Oslo’s Nationaltheatret, in favour of the Norwegian company.
That challenge involves a wide variety of work-a-day industrial expectations on actors that may not be clearly evident to their audience, their critics, their artistic theorists, their teachers, or even themselves. I want to juxtapose a series of observations as indicators of this range of artistic, quasi-artistic and “sub-artistic” projections, imposts and expectations. Each of these entries in OS contains some glancing analysis. I will then offer a further response. These are among the things that actors tacitly accept in taking the job:

Toward the end of the morning, Rose talks about the contribution of the choreographer, and how that should proceed: ‘I want to start with putting on some music, mucking around, doing a bit of movement, dancing. Do you want to start, like, building fitness? Because, like, singing, dancing, it’s quite a marathon, this show. But also for her [the choreographer] to start looking at the way you move and the offers you make. ... The way you work with actors, is to build from their palette rather than ... Actors offer a lot in the way that they can sell a lot of things.’

So these are projections on the actors’ lives beyond the rehearsal, the assumption of their total life-commitment to the show (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).

Another pass of this very physically demanding scene, and its song and dance routine. Nathan is sweating profusely, and attacking the work at full throttle. He appears to have reached a zone of athletic adrenalin-push.
Then focus shifts to another scene of very high energy, which the cast moves through with gusto in a first pass.
The feedback is entirely about horizontal projections of music, animation and set movement. The actors’ extraordinary physical effort goes unremarked. It feels like a tough game (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

Adam (to Anthony): ‘In my father’s footsteps.’ ... Can there be a sense of what he’s also saying is, “I ran away, and I’m an alcoholic.” I don’t know if you can play, “I’m an alcoholic” in that line, but there’s a sense of, like, what does it mean to him when he says, ‘I followed in my father’s footsteps.’ And it links you back to, ‘I’m the bastard son of a bastard.’
Anthony: Yep, sure.

Stepping back from this exchange, which again seems perfectly reasonable and common from an insider perspective, it seems curious that such a complex suggestion might be made, and then taken in such a cursory way by the actor. How will the director discern whether the note has been taken? Having given the note, having wedded himself to the logic of the note, and melded this thought to that line, how can the director be a reliable witness to the achievement of the
desired outcome? And how can the director divorce “his idea” for the line from the way it has been delivered erstwhile? Is the subtext:

1. “I note that you are thinking of alcoholism as you say that line, and I express that now as if it is a new idea”? I think this very often happens. In fact, as an actor one is very often inclined to ask the question of a director, “Are you giving me that note because you see something in the work that you like and want to encourage, or are you articulating something that is absent?” Very often, the former is the reality but the latter is how it has been framed.

2. “I experienced an association with alcoholism as you said the line, and I’m acknowledging that.”

3. “That line is not being imaginatively particularised, and it needs to be, and here’s the imaginative area in which it should sit.”

The amicable, self-doubting actor is always inclined to assume option 3 (GM, 3-5-12, wk5).

Jacqy defends a gesture she’d made, that Chris suggested was superfluous. Jacqy says, ‘I like doing it. … Because he’s come out of trauma, hasn’t he? ’ Chris counters this with, ‘Well, he’s come out of nothingness, in a way. Out of a consciousness… in every sense.’ This discourse is accompanied with long, thoughtful pauses, and resolves with Chris guiding the bare bones of action: where and when the actors walk, touch, gesture (L&S, 18-4-12, wk2).

A section late in the play is being drilled, with musicians, the revolve in full swing. Actors at the periphery of the room (and “off-stage” in the action of the piece) contribute full-voiced singing onto the stage, with great concentration and connection to the rehearsal action. Jude calls ‘dance captain’ instructions during the action, and Rose calls loudly, ‘Louder!’ to an actor, mid-scene (Pin, 29-6-12, wk5).

Some other of the director’s guiding comments during this session:
‘What I really need you to find is that they love each other. It’s not a play about two teenagers, and a mother who won’t stop haranguing them. … It’s got to have a foundation of deep love for each other’ (GM, 2-4-12, wk1).

Again, I find nothing sinister, abusive or artistically inappropriate about any of these moments, and I do not want to affect breathlessness in the face of these common practices, or have actors mocked as “poor darlings”, or deny their many industrial privileges. Yet I am obliged, in exoticising them, to reflect that actors are perhaps among very few if any other industrial fellows in going to work and being expected to:

1. accept supervisory responsibilities over others without consultation, formal acknowledgement, or financial reward;
2. muck around;
3. invest in nothingness;
4. have their every word, movement and gesture inspected and laid open to (sometimes, yelled) criticism;
5. embody a corporate culture via their own improvised discovery of it;
6. build fitness;
7. sweat profusely;
8. constantly bend their body and mind to the will of others; and
9. find love.

With his usual deftness and depth, Hope describes such phenomena as ‘implicit rather than institutional’:

the acceptance by all involved of the power relationships evident in day-to-day rehearsals. ... [N]ot necessarily part of a system of economic, architectural, or industrial relationship rulings, although these were contributing variables. They were part of a tacitly understood relationship within each company (2010, 105).

Though non-systemic, there are indeed economic and industrial factors within the tacit agreements and ‘unwritten rules’ (McAuley, 2012, 113), and many such agreements are made “on the run” because of their non-systemic nature. Along with the ‘improvisational radius’ (Crawford, 2011, 135) inherent in acting, and in rehearsing, there is a high degree of improvisation in the ongoing industrial contract between actors and their employers. There are tacitly acknowledged structural strengths and defects in the industrial “deal” of each show which impact on actors’ rehearsal processes in ways that constitute significant differences, show to show. I now explore this as the industrial “Ease Factor’ of each production.

EASE FACTOR: CAMP KITCHENS AND WORKSHOP BOYS

I have identified five components at the foundation of the industrial relationship that constitute the ease factor of each production. These might be seen as areas of potential compromise that surround the actors and their processes in each production, potentially impacting on the ease with which they might be positioned to pursue their work, aside from any social or inherent artistic realities. The components, and a rough estimation of their relative impact, are:

1. Availability of human and other resources (40%)
2. Quality of rehearsal space (30%)
3. Stability of rehearsal space (20%)
4. Actors’ availability / salary security (5%) and
5. Available time (5%)
The ratios suggested by the percentages are themselves relative in that, for example, available time would be a crucial differentiating factor if one of the productions had eight weeks of rehearsal and one of them had only two. As I have described, however, time paucity is a pressure that impacts upon all work, so the relativity of this across the four productions is fairly minor. So my ease factor is not presented as a transferable model capable of bringing true context to any production environment (although its articulation may aide in that); it is a mechanism designed purely for this particular research context.

I want to briefly appraise all of the components with reference to the particular circumstances of the four productions, then establish an ease factor that brings added context to the remaining observations of the study.

Availability of human and other resources

The ready availability of human and other resources created a stark difference in the working practices of each rehearsal room. Each of the three “established company” productions enjoyed the constant attention of a SM and ASM. Both productions rehearsing at AFC’s rehearsal room had easy access to other production personnel by virtue of the architectural placement of that working room in relation to the working spaces of those colleagues (the set was being built in the next room). The established company productions therefore rehearsed with major set components in place, and rehearsal room props and costumes easily and constantly available to them.

The diligent and constant attention of the SM and ASM gave license to cast and directors to make artistic decisions on-the-fly, as it were, and see them realised:

- A decision is made, in the moment, that the production will use real food in this opening dinner scene. The SM immediately goes about setting the table with cutlery (eating had hitherto been mimed).

- Discussion continues about the ramifications of real food vs mimed food [and] ranges over issues like cutlery and other props. Adam … then reverses the earlier decision and resolves that there will be no real food, at which the SM gets up and strikes the cutlery (GM, 13-4-12, wk2).

Adam had the privilege of seeing his conjecture realised instantly. Such conjecture on Geordie’s or Chris’ part would have had to remain notionally projected. Consequently, they would be more likely to make this decision before coming to rehearsal.
Quality of rehearsal space

I have already discussed the qualities of the various rehearsal spaces, so in large measure the relativity of ease these brought to artists in rehearsal can be taken as read. The difficulties the L&S company experienced in trying to achieve an advanced dress rehearsal in a space totally unconducive to the artistic goals of the work was earlier described by me as like trying to do ballet on a construction site scaffold.

It should be further noted that the relative hardships of the working conditions of the actors does not end with the theatre or the rehearsal room itself. The L&S dressing area was makeshift, so too the tea and coffee making facilities. There was no running water. The notes session following the dress rehearsal happened in the large, drafty ante-room/foyer of the venue, which was being used as “camp” kitchen (with water fetched in buckets). It was greenroom, sewing room, and a continual thoroughfare for all crew. The notes sessions took place in the late afternoon, the actors had a preview in a couple of hours, it was starting to get quite cold, and the session ran for over an hour. I made the observation in my notebook: “These are theatrical ‘hard times’” (L&S, 9-5-12, wk5). These backstage conditions are in stark contrast to those enjoyed by the GM cast, all of whom had individual, powered dressing-rooms, with personal en suite bathrooms.

It is also worth noting that these distinctions in no way reflect the general cultural capital of the artists involved. In fact, looking at the question in some detail, I am inclined to suggest that the casts of the two shows subjected to the least ease (L&S and City) were comprised of actors of greater median experience and capital than those enjoying the most industrial ease (GM and Pin). This suggests a working life for Australian actors in which such conditions constantly recur, rather than seeing those conditions as rungs on a career ladder to be passed over with the accumulation of cultural capital. Many actors of my generation, for example, have experienced something of the junkets of U.S. television production in Australia, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s. We have had the limos and the flash hotel rooms, and we know that they are fleeting; that we are only days away from the next camp kitchen, shared mirror, shared toilet, and obligation to “muck in” to get the show on.

The significance of such distinctions was not lost on Rose, as her orientation speech to the Pin company included the observation:

*[w]e will be in Rehearsal Room 1, which is an amazing luxury for us at Windmill because we normally rehearse all over the place in sub-zero conditions during winter* (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).
This comment earned a big, knowing laugh from her cast.

**Stability of rehearsal space**

By stability of rehearsal space, I mean the degree to which each cast occupied one room designated for the sole purpose of rehearsal of that production. Again, inferences may be fairly drawn about the stability of spaces from my earlier introductions: *City* rehearsed in three venues (including one in the first week that I never observed); *L&S* in three (albeit the bulk of their rehearsal was in one very good but “hired” space); *Pin* in two (although they were in the inferior room for just one day); and only *GM* enjoyed a single, high quality rehearsal room from Day 1 to their “bump-in” to the theatre.

Part of the significance of rehearsing in a single, “owned” space is that its spatiality becomes that of a professional home. The space may have projected onto it (literally, with pins and sticky-tape) the organisational, dramaturgical and imaginative artefacts of the production as it develops. This continuity of spatiality helps actors too in the generation, regeneration and claiming of acting-body-mind achievements, with the erasure of spatial newness from the range of variables to which the actor must respond daily as she navigates the variables of the fictive field in construction.

**Actors’ availability/salary security**

To a minor degree, *City* and *Pin* suffered the partial unavailability of cast members. This is of some little significance as an industrial impost on the company members working in the absence of colleagues, and on those absent colleagues’ capacity or need to negotiate their absence, which relates to broader industrial constructs such as the availability of a regular salary, and the “grace” extended by particular directors.

**Available time**

As I have suggested, the variation in the effects of available time to produce the works is slight. Overall, I judge *Pin* to have been most “under the pump”, if only because of the scale of the production, with its multi-media components being such an enormous and integral part of the whole artistic ambition. This impacts on actors in ways that will be more fully explored in the next chapter, as they fall more properly into the area of difficulties experienced by virtue of the artistic works themselves as
distinct from the advantageous and disadvantageous ramifications of the tacitly understood industrial agreements.

As a consequence of these ramifications, the ease factor of each of the productions is reflected in the following data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources /40</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>GM</th>
<th>L&amp;S</th>
<th>Pin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality/space /30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability/space / 20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability/security /5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time /5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This indicates ease factors expressed as percentages:

- City 38%
- GM 99%
- L&S 75%
- Pin 93%

Not surprisingly, this data corresponds with the relative financial context of each of the productions, with STCSA being the most highly-funded company and the only one of the four producing entities to be a member of the federal government’s Major Performing Arts Group (MPAG) structure; Windmill lifting its ease-factor along with its co-production association with STCSA for the production of Pin; Brink’s status as a fully-professional company outside the MPAG framework, a beneficiary—at the time of the production—of federal triennial funding; and City being produced independently. It is worth noting, however, that the low ease-factor of City was ameliorated considerably by the substantial cultural capital pertaining to director, Geordie, who at this stage was a former associate director of STCSA, and its artistic director designate. Geordie’s cast was led by professional actors in mid-career, and his design team was made up of long-time colleagues from within the mainstream. This level of expertise and experience is not accounted for in the ease factor, yet it is significant in dealing with the imposts, and raising the level of the “real feel” of professionalism within the industrial construct.

Nonetheless, assessed in this way, the analysis suggests a startling distinction between the conditions in which actors pursue their work in the “third tier” or “indie” (independent) sub-sector as distinct from their experiences in the MPAG and “second tier” sub-sectors of Australian theatre, and reflects alarmingly on those less experienced co-operative adventurers, those without ingrained “first tier”
experience, in their efforts to achieve high artistic outcomes in straitened environments, seeking to navigate a field of only thirty-eight percent optimal supporting structure.

This distinction between the somewhat shallow empirical analysis of industrial ease and what I have described as the real feel of the professional environment suggests the nexus between the industrial and the social facets of the working experience. It is to these more distinctly social elements of the political compass that the study turns, and an attempt to have the culture of the rehearsal room explored as a context in which social events and their relationships to art-making may be thickly described.

WORK-FRIEND-SHIP, AND OTHER SOCIAL GAMES

I begin this sub-section with some general observations surrounding the peculiar coming-together of actors to form “ensembles”, and cite examples of ensemble-building practices. The ethos of the ensemble leads inevitably to the notion of creativity existing at a nexus of personal and professional, social and artistic experiences. Here the social is positioned within the political compass, notwithstanding the fact that social mechanisms and detonations crank and fire the artistic compass too, as will be examined in time. These then are attempts at what Bourdieu refers to as theories of the non-theoretical, the ‘partial, somewhat down-to-earth relationship with the social world that is the relation of ordinary experience’ (1990b, 20). This ordinariness is that of actors in their distinct ‘rhythms, flows, lurches and stutters’ (Rossmannith, 2003, 11, 12), acknowledging something of a cast’s ‘unique psychodynamics’ (Benedetti, 1985, 145).

I found all first mornings of rehearsal to begin in exciting, noisy socialising, and this is ‘a crucial part of the process’ (McAuley, 2012, 12), a carefully manipulated, mandated moment, within the hours of work rather than adjunctive to them, catered for by the company with “tea and buns”, and inducing what I recorded as a

joyous, celebratory atmosphere, with lots of kisses and laughter (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).

A large purpose given for ensemble-building—a process in which the sticky-bun represents only the first gesture—is the establishment of trust, which Lizzy underlines:
there is a level of trust needed between director and performer, and performer and performer. Without this trust you are reluctant to go out on a limb, take risks, reveal your soft underbelly (Falkland, pers. com. 16-5-12).

Ensemble-building is not experienced by actors as static moments in time, but as a continual, sedimentary process. Moments of conflict, irritation or tension in rehearsal are often subjected to such ensemble strategising, particularly on the part of leading players. One such moment of tension arose in Pin, and was decisively swept away by Nathan, determined to retain the sense of a happy, collegial space, as such a space is held to be most productive and conducive to artistic development:

[t]he moment is forgotten almost instantly, and the rehearsal progresses productively. Nathan continues to lead the process with endless energy, generosity and goodwill (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

Similarly, Deirdre led the cast of GM with what I noted as ‘an extravagant generosity’ (GM, 3-4-12, wk1) that aligns with Monica Stufft’s (2013) assertions on the collaborative heart of theatre, and supports my claims of leadership made for John Gaden’s habitual displays of passion, generosity and humour (Crawford, 2005, 110), Paul Blackwell’s heroic efforts (Crawford, 2011, 16), and my promotion of Nick Enright’s mantra that

theatre is itself an act of generosity, a phenomenon that occurs when people move toward each other with open hearts and minds (ibid, 17).

These are words and ideas that are held by the Bourdieuan Paul Moore to be dangerous and distasteful, even ‘fanciful’, a ‘humanist ideology’ concealing ‘symbolic violence’ (2004, 245) done to those outside the embrace of such ensembles. Furthermore, Moore claims that actors have a ‘specific interest in promoting ideas of equality, inclusion and “trust”’ (ibid) as a means of ignoring the violence done by these notions to their unemployed brethren. While acknowledging that it can hurt to be on the outside of good times, this commentary perhaps describes the limits of an “outsider” gaze in three ways. First, ‘goodwill and community’ (ibid) are not merely notional. They are demonstrated in the actions of actors in rehearsal, as I will show, and Hope (2010) and others have shown. They may appear fanciful to those who do not experience them, but that does not make them so. Second, the perspective from “inside” does not support the suggestion of employed actors as castled nobles pissing on the poor and weak outside their walls. As Moore’s important work itself attests, and as I have described above, symbolic capital for actors is a fleeting, tenuous phenomenon. Employed actors fully understand the momentary entitlement, and do not mistake the current privilege for future immunity from the symbolic violence of the industry. Third, it seems to me that Moore misses the vital
point that humanist ideology and its manifestations—while not fanciful—are strategies in art-making, negotiations of the artistic and fictive field, not lasting social outcomes, developments or determinations. One of Moore’s respondents, “GA”, wrestles through this: ‘making that distinction between work and friends is a fantastic lesson that takes time’ (in Moore, 2004, 244). Indeed, there is a pragmatism buried not very deeply in Filmer’s interpretation of the social-industrial-artistic ethos of Sydney’s Belvoir Street theatre: ‘The performance itself is valued above all else, although not to the exclusion of good social relations’ (2008, 115). I will continue to explore this idea of the social in acute service of the professional: work as life as work in the political and artistic compasses, and in the development of artistic and fictive habitus.

It is worthwhile sharing a unique perspective here that—while not supporting Moore in this—challenges any notion of theatre-making as social utopia. When I worked with Geoffrey Rush in the mid to late 1980s, he spoke to me of being a veteran of Jim Sharman’s revered Lighthouse ensemble at STCSA from 1981-1983. Rush made the point that Sharman took a position contrary to most in building an ensemble of actors. Rush felt that—far from seeking qualities of cooperation, spiritual generosity, and cultural homogeny in his actors—Sharman sought strong personalities that would clash with and challenge each other, believing there was as much creativity to be found in social disunity or discomfort as there was in social cohesion (pers. com. c1986). Among the interesting nuances of challenge embedded in this is the distinction between social and “work-social”, between niceness and cooperation, between the personal and the intimate.

This complexity was amply covered in my interview with Matilda, which calls for substantial representation here:

Matilda: Working with Chris [Pitman] was really interesting because he has a very strong personal style. ... I didn’t know him, learning about who he is, in order to better work the scene.  
TC: Do you mean in a personal sense?  
Matilda: Yeah, in a personal sense. Because it’s a two-hander, you’ve got such a focus on the other actor.  
TC: Why did you want to know about him in a personal sense? How does that feed in?  
Matilda: ‘Cause that’s what I do in life. I like to see people in order to see how I interact with people. Well, any human, you change yourself depending on who you’re talking to. And because of being the less experienced, the less... whatever, to know where I should stand. To be supportive. To be a supportive cast member. Not to go in and, This is what I’m doing, but to support him in it. And I think to support him would be to support him as the actor, not just on
stage in the acting, but through the rehearsal process ... to understand where his questions were.
TC: And how does that feed back into you?
Matilda: *(much stumbling and stumping in search of this answer, then, finally...)*
To be in tune with the other actor. And just because that allowed the whole rehearsal process to be cohesive.
TC: What if you chose instead to do everything you did on the rehearsal floor inside the passing through scenes, the running of scenes, inside the lines of the play. ... If you did everything exactly the same, but paid no mind to that social side. Firstly, do you think it would be possible to do that? And secondly, if you did do that, what would be the loss?
Matilda: I think you could tell. I think an audience would not believe it. I think that's theatre. That's why you go to the theatre, you see people communicating with each other and I think that if you don’t know a person as a human, I don’t think anyone would believe you. And that’s why theatre community is the way it is, because you go into a rehearsal, and if you have to play someone’s lover, you're cultivating a relationship at an extremely fast level.
TC: So you see the work as a clear extension of the social realities.
Matilda: I mean, you don’t have to like them. You don’t have to be friends, but I think you have to have a non-verbal understanding, an understanding of how someone else is...
TC: You don’t have to be friends with members of your real family, either. It is more like familial. I know the image of the family is a problematic image in the theatre that has been lauded by some and famously criticised by others as a dangerous image, but the relationships are in many ways more like familial relationships than they are friendships.
Matilda: Yep.
TC: We know our siblings in our bones but we’re not necessarily friends with them.
Matilda: I think, the closer you are to someone the more attuned you are to their impulses. It’s a non-verbal thing. You click with someone. And that’s what you need onstage, you need to click. Yeah, it’s a familial thing, because even if you hate someone, you’re really in tune with each other. It goes hand in hand with doing the work. You can feel it. You go onstage and say a line to someone, you can feel it, there’s not, nup, there’s nothing there, but when you have that... It’s also trust, I think.
TC: So familiarity is a conduit to an intimacy that you hold to be a readable and valuable thing?
TC: There aren’t many that are socially remote yet artistically intimate. Certainly you see actors who absolutely use their social skills as shorthand to doing work: openness, friendliness, interest in each other and support of each other.
Matilda: There’s something really nice in being able to open up, be there, get that out of the way, so that then you’ve got the time to work. Once you’re
working, you’re working. It’s about how to get the rest of that social stuff in
there. The stuff that I believe you have to get.
TC: It’s not a social game that anyone is necessarily interested in extending
beyond the work.
Matilda: (laughs) Yeah, yeah, yeah. It’s such an artificial environment. You walk
in the room and it’s like, We all have something in common now. We all care
about the same thing. Like having a child. Such a strong binding force, and when
that’s gone, you have rapport, you’ve built this understanding with each other
but... Do you have anything in common?
TC: What you have in common is the child, the show.
Matilda: But when the show’s gone...
TC: Well, that happens with children and marriages too.
Matilda: It’s a dangerous way to get to know people because you don’t foster
any of that other stuff. You’re not planting the seeds that you usually plant, of
other interests. If you were planting the other seeds, chatting about all the
other things, that would be detrimental because then you’re not focused
(C120531.matilda).

Professional friendship is a phenomenon of many working practices. Many people
have “friendly associates”, and in many cases these relationships, or gestures toward
them, are held to be conduits of business. Such manifestations include a sex
worker’s faux intimacy, and the facilitating warmth of a good doctor’s “bedside
manner”. Both of these, it is at least hoped, will facilitate the work at hand, and lead
to further work. How is it different for actors? Both doctors and sex workers perform
or fake a kind of intimacy, but are engaged in service-provider/client relationships,
judged by the clients, rather than collegial ones. Actors’ performance of intimacy is a
‘conspiracy’ (Brown in Crawford, 2005, 12) judged by an audience. In all three cases,
the genuineness of the intimacy is not, of itself, the point, even though, for actors, as
McAuley notes, there may be genuine ‘emotional warmth’ (2012, 28) in their
relations with each other. Indeed, if the sex worker is understood to be truly in need
of her client’s affection or love, it might ruin the moment of fantasy/theatre.

When I was last in Singapore, I was approached by a sex worker in a shopping
centre.17 She said, “Would you like to make love with me?” I was struck by the
politeness and formality of the suggestion. As I walked away I found myself thinking,
“Is that really what we’d be doing?” Her pitch represented a problematic business
strategy for its very propriety and nominal intimacy.18 If the doctor’s intimacy were

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17 This is a very common occurrence in a country riddled with prostitution, to which a highly
moralistic government turns a conspicuously blind eye.
18 I do not intend a cheap shot at this woman. Many of the legions of sex workers in Singapore are
“fly-in-fly-out” foreigners with little command of English, and a stifling lack of social capital and
agency, bordering on—and sometimes evincing—slavery. It is very likely that this woman was
not activating any nuanced verbal strategy at all, but simply saying something she had learnt or
to be read as genuine emotional connection it would immediately be deemed inappropriate. It is more a sense of intimacy that gets the job done, a genuine feeling of a feeling, as it were. This play of intimacy is for the doctor and sex worker related crucially to content. It is, in a sense, textual. That is to say, a sense of intimacy is dictated by the act of physical intimacy involved in the medical or sexual negotiation or penetration. Actors’ intimacy is not textual in this way, but purely strategic. Acting content may be more or less explicitly intimate (scenes of love, sex, violence) but the intimacy of acting exists irrespective of the textual content. Matilda’s work-friendship is required for any scene, to get, as she says, the requisite social stuff in there.

Actors are colleagues with shared investment, and commonality of purpose, shared vulnerability in the pursuit of what Herbert Blau evocatively refers to as ‘the leak in the Real’ (2009, 49). Acting’s peculiar call upon human intimacy is evident in Matilda’s suggestion that it is required in order for fictive intimacy to be perceived by the audience.

These actors appear to know, and seem to work with the assumption, as they commence a rehearsal process, that they are diving into a social world with a professional responsibility to advance social enmeshment at inorganic speed, to cultivate relationships, as Matilda puts it, at an extremely fast level. Mitchell implies the pleasures in this: ‘I’m always very excited to see the other people, and I go wanting to have fun’ (in Crawford, 2005, 96). When things go badly, the built ensemble provides solace in survivor tropes, such as Pamela Rabe’s:

‘[t]here have been a couple where I’ve thought, This (sic) whole thing stinks so badly, and it’s so awful, and so many people have been disengaged from what they’re doing, from their own talent, their own belief in themselves. Everybody has just crumbled … [T]hose are the ones where the power of the social group gets you through. … [Y]ou’ve all gone through a very odd hell’ (in Crawford, 2005, 46).

While Adam and Deirdre agree that some atmospheres become ‘toxic’, they also agree heartily that this is rare. Adam cites the ‘civilising influence’ of the artistic endeavour, and suggests a connection between the quality of the text and the potential for social harmony in the group, citing Michael Gow’s Away,19 Chekhov’s Three Sisters, and The Glass Menagerie as plays in which everyone was

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19 First produced at the Griffin Theatre Company in Sydney in 1984, Away is a play as secure in its claim to a place in the Australian canon as any.
so humbled by the experience, and so thrilled to be engaging with it (GM, 30-4-12, wk4)

... that the social harmony flowed from that humility and thrill. Between the heavenly Mitchell construction and Rabe’s sometimes-hell lie most social experiences for actors, and these social experiences and constructions at all points influence the artistic experience as well:

TC: Kate, you’re in the second play in a row with the same director, same company, and a second hugely canonical, famous play, so what’s different about being in this play?20
Kate: Firstly, the cast is a lot smaller. Not that having a bigger cast meant there were more people to hide behind, just... I guess I felt less pressure because there were more people telling the same story. And there were people I knew, who I could go to for reassurance. I’ve felt much more exposed in this, having a smaller cast (GM, 30-4-12, wk4).

Thus Kate finds herself in a different relationship to art-making as she find herself in different social circumstances. This observation gestures from the political to the artistic compass. These nuances of social circumstances that impact on performance might be general or, as in Lizzy’s case, momentary ruptures:

My favourite show was the last fri [sic]. I had this amazing charge from the get go (generated strangely enough by the fury I felt at a particular comment prior to the show from one of my fellow actors!) (Falkland, pers. com. 16-5-12).

This is interesting as a mark of how actors may channel negative social ruptures toward positive performance outcomes, recalling something of Rush’s interpretation of Sharman’s intentions at Lighthouse.

Time and again throughout the study I bore witness to actors’ co-reliance, and instances of leadership from senior actors (Deirdre in GM; Rory in L&S; Nathan—though young, an experienced leading player—in Pin; Chris and Lizzy jointly in City). One such instance was after a run of L&S:

Chris [Drummond] invites the cast’s reflections, and Rory makes a powerfully generous contribution about how strongly ‘held’ he was by a section of the Run that he was not in. He is very articulate in this, and I feel that this is one of the important ways that actors move forward: having their work encouraged and recognised by their peers. I don’t mean to suggest for a moment that there was anything disingenuous about this when I describe it as an act of leadership. Rory,

20 Kate did Three Sisters the previous year while still in her third year of study at ACArts.
In moments of life and art-making, the smallest gesture can be of enormous significance, and I believe Rory’s comment—generated by the thoughtless catalysts of habitus—had a kind of consoling and galvanising impact on the ensemble. Set in the dark, noisy industrial unease of The Queen’s, within a cast of exhausted, anxious actors, it played upon the ‘we happy few’ mythology, the outlaw trope of actors as rogues and rude mechanicals rehearsing ‘most obscenely’, as Shakespeare puts it, in pursuit of symbolic capital and beauty.

Nadel-Klein describes a ‘moral community’ among gardeners, meaning that they ‘assume an ethical, aesthetic and emotional commonality with other gardeners’ (2010, 168). This very much describes actors’ empathy for and bond with each other. The spirit of Shakespeare’s rude mechanicals lives undiluted in contemporary Australian actors. We see ourselves as undervalued, social shit-kickers, angels in the gutter, like Michael Leunig’s ubiquitous Mr Curley, whom I have elsewhere described as a ‘flagging hero [who] eulogises nature in the shadow of corporate towers’, yet nonetheless is a character of ‘defiant individualism’ (Crawford, 2000, 74). Like Mr Curley, actors see themselves as hyper-sensitive, deeply moral, ragged; the unrecognised, embarrassing soul of a nation in cultural denial. Brown refers to ‘the angel and the dust in us’ (in Crawford, 2005, 18). This is our mythology, and we cherish it. We maintain it by extending kindness to each other, sharing concern for the world, liberal political angles, anxieties around worth and worthlessness, distrust of financial and religious institutions, empathy in financial insecurity, some whingeing, and a lot of dirty jokes.

One of the great pleasures of working in the theatre is the amount of laughter that surrounds rehearsals, and the amount of quick-wittedness that is threaded through actors’ continual discourse. McAuley sees the jokes as ‘vital’ and ‘an important part of the actors’ strategy for negotiating the interface between their characters’ and their own subjectivities’ (1998, 76), and Maxwell cites them as a ‘medium’ through which actors ‘share and circulate skills learnt in practice’ (2001, 51). Taking further McAuley’s concept of an interface within what can be interpreted as the artistic compass, I suggest that jokes also allow actors to make sense of themselves within the political compass. I think of John Doyle’s reference to opening night diarrhoea,

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21 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 1:2, L 107.

22 Michael Leunig (1945- ) is a poet and cartoonist of national eminence. He was declared an ‘Australian Living Treasure’ by the National Trust in 1999. His Mr Curly character (and Mr Curly’s friends and artistic relatives) features in many works.
for example, ‘laying the brown carpet’ (pers. com. 1981) as a great example of actors’ scatological preferences being brought to bear on the anxieties and ironies of the political moment (while also demonstrating that this celebrated humourist was well on his way a long time before the emergence of “Roy and HG”). Jokes are also stakes in a game of ‘power relations’, the currency of a ‘linguistic market’ in which Johnson suggests, interpreting Bourdieu, ‘competence [is] measured’ (from Johnson’s Introduction in Bourdieu, 1993, 7). The “wit-stakes” of a rehearsal room can become a serious, secretly competitive game. I have known young actors—I was one of them—to become significantly intimidated by their lack of comic credibility in a cast. At nineteen, surrounded by expert gagsters, I genuinely wondered if my inability to keep up with the dressing-room repartee meant that I did not have what it took to be an actor. The gags are part of the habitus of many actors, a thoughtlessly acquired way of being in the world. For many, they become ingrained behavioural responses. In my fifties, I no longer have a desire or feel a need to be the “cast clown”, yet it remains a role of substantial credit in the rehearsal room, and I watch younger (mainly male) actors—jolly cocks in a pit—vying for the title.

More generally, humour (not just gags but the good humour of spiritual generosity) is a facilitating agent or lubricant in the slippery business of meaning-making and the maintenance of the feeling of ensemble, the club, “the family”, the outlaw gang riding the range of artistic possibility on the boundary of the social and the professional.

**OF WORK AND PLAY**

Having suggested some of the things that these rehearsal rooms are, I want to examine some observations that help to illuminate, perhaps, why they are as they are. These are moments in which work-friend-ships and social alchemy play out as moments of artistic achievement or progress; where what Atkinson calls ‘organized social relationships’ provide the ground for ‘creative or artistic endeavours’ (2006, 189). Clearly, we are fishing here in the diluted waters of the political and the artistic compasses, remembering that these are not projected as discrete zones: one cannot pass from the political to the artistic, as the political—by its nature—lies beneath the artistic and the fictive. This point is nourished by McAuley’s comment in relation to the ways-of-being in the rehearsal room: that ‘virtually nothing can be bracketed out as irrelevant’ (2012, 10). At times, the relationship between the social and the creative/professional appears as a juxtaposition or concurrence, at others like a kind

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23 Australian actor, writer, broadcaster and humourist (1953- ).

24 I began my career surrounded by actors who have had distinguished careers in funny stuff, such as Doyle, Jonathan Biggins, Glenn Butcher, and Stephen Abbott. It wasn't hard to feel wit-deficient.
of cross-infection:

I arrive at rehearsal toward the end of the lunch break, and the ‘retiring room’ ... is full of company members. At 2:00, the rehearsal is scheduled to begin, but really all that happens at this point is that the social life of the lunch room is taken into the rehearsal room. It seems that slowly conversations turn to matters of the show but, then again, so they were during lunch too. The energy of the ante-room was understandably dissipated, with musicians in one corner experimenting around a piano. Then a new musician enters the room and is casually introduced to all. Then most of the cast drift into the rehearsal room. The musos stay in the ante-room. One actor is late. The choreographer grabs a few actors to play out an idea she has. One actor is being spoken to by the publicist. An actor goes off to grab the hair and make-up person. The choreographer and Nathan begin to address Nathan’s flexibility. This turns into an extensive, dedicated stretch routine, centre-stage, and—seemingly only because there is an absence of any other dedicated focus to the rehearsal—this becomes the focal point, with most of the company watching Nathan stretching (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).

As will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, Rose was adept at creating a space that allowed for this fluidity and cross-infection of work and socialising, as per the oft-cited observation of Weber on his initial observation of Brecht’s company:

[h]is assistants, and the actors stood around, smoked, talked, laughed. Every so often an actor would go up on stage and try one of thirty ways of falling off a table. Weber thought everyone was taking a break, until the horseplay went on long enough to make him realise he was watching the rehearsal (cited in Rouse, 1984, 38)

Ways of being social and ways of being artistic may coalesce:

Lizzy asks if they might begin with a ‘line-run’ of the scene. She and Chris sit close to each other on a low table and half-read, half-remember the lines, and regularly look into each other’s eyes, smile and regard and respond to each other. The exercise is clearly more than a memory exercise (the ostensive implication of a ‘line-run’). It is an acting exercise, an exercise of Personalisation (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

This is an example of Personalisation as the infection of the fiction with real-world stimuli and association. Bjørn Rasmussen and Rikke Gürgens see this as still more significant, as a means to ‘regenerate our lives by artistic/aesthetic experiences’, suggesting that we
take in and bring out impulses that are part of our lives, our social and cultural understanding. In this way the aesthetic experience belongs to a hermeneutic cycle including life and art work (2006, 237).

This is an exciting suggestion, establishing a weave of art and life through the taking in and bringing out of impulses, and the cyclic imagery allows for the process to be seen in reverse. We may regenerate our lives with artistic/aesthetic experiences (the authors’ principal concern), but we may also regenerate our art with our life experiences. This foreshadows the work of Section Three of the study, Toward the Fictive Compass.

These actors are, as Matilda and others suggest, participating in a kind of collective hermeneutic cycle of doing together, then looking together, carrying the work with them, carrying their lives with them, and carrying a somewhat inorganic or even fictive socialised network, cultivated at an extremely fast level, with them back and forth into fiction, into life:

Adam contextualises a discussion during the lunch break with Deirdre: ‘Profound things come out of lunch-time chats’. This is a direct acknowledgement of the place of socialising in the development of the work. The point that was reported as having been uncovered was the way that Amanda sees her children as ‘unusual’, and the love and even perhaps pride there is in that description. It’s drawing a long bow to suggest that this point would not have been discovered within the time and place of scheduled rehearsal, but that is not the point. The point is that it was traversed outside the professional and within the social time and place of the riverbank over lunch. And it is not drawing too long a bow to suggest that the particularity of time and place infects the quality of the textual proposition, the sense of profundity that surrounds the conversation for the director (at least). That area of the work, that theme, will survive, and its by-the-river-ness and its lunch-ness will survive with it (GM, 2-4-12, wk1).

This survival is determined by the artist’s capacity to experience work, if not all of life, as a phenomenological exposure, subject to the memory/ies of body and mind.

CONCLUSION

Throughout both chapters of this section of the study, I have investigated the ways in which these actors pursue their work in a distinctive industrial context shaped by issues of time and space, anxieties surrounding questions of industrial agency, and the peculiar pressures and expectations surrounding social existence in the workplace, and furthermore, the ways these distinctions impact on art-making.
These things have been broadly explored as among the distinctions of a particular industry. There have, nonetheless, been many hints that theatrical situations are subject to distinctions within those distinctions. That is to say, plainly, that being an actor is different from being a boiler-maker or an accountant, but it is also different from being an actor in another context. These pointers toward the variables impacting on actors’ working lives, show to show, include: my analysis of a comparative ‘ease factor’; Adam’s suggestion that the quality of text will influence the quality of the social experience of the job; Kate’s comment on the size of the cast influencing her self-appointed social/industrial role within it; and the many intimations of the elusive meanings of L&S. In the following chapter I pull these threads apart, and investigate the degrees of difference, notwithstanding the similarities of this sample industrial ground.

In short, the hypothesis under investigation is that the greatest determinants of actors’ industrial and consequent artistic experience are the nature of the play they sign up for, the cast-mates they find on the job, and—most significant of all—the director with whom they agree to work. These are the major coordinates of the artistic compass.
1966: Like millions of others, my first appearance on stage was in a nativity play. I was five years old, and cast as a donkey. My mother searched Newcastle for a costume shop that had a donkey costume. It being Christmas, there had clearly been a run on them. All that remained for me was a kangaroo costume. This was way before Australia’s Easter Bunnies turned ‘bilby’, and our Arthur Millers turned ocker. My only obsession throughout the performance was sitting firmly on my roo tail, lest it pop up behind me, and ruin Christmas for everyone. My only line, ‘Ey-ore’, concerned me not in the slightest. Who could ruin a line like that anyway?
CHAPTER THREE:
DIFFERENT ROOMS, DIFFERENT WORLDS

INTRODUCTION: THE PLAY (AND THE PRODUCTION) IS THE THING

Beyond the slings and arrows that actors dodge by virtue of the ease or discomfort of their industrial context, the distinguishing features of the working landscape—the sea of troubles, if you will—pertain to the social environment into which they step, the director with whom they agree to work, and the play itself, with its particular inherent challenges. Of these, the influence of the director is of such significance that I will deal with it separately in Chapter Four. The layout of the current chapter sees references cited in rough chronology from early to late rehearsals, before then looping back to the first days of rehearsal to discuss the founding epistemologies of the rooms.

Throughout, the guiding interest of the chapter is in comparing the experiences of actors across, and at some points within, four different professional environments. These distinctions suggest a fairly consistent line drawn between two of the four productions, and the other two. Referencing Bourdieu’s symbolic-spatial ‘field of cultural production’ (1990b, 140; 1993; 1996, 124), both City and L&S were positioned in the subfield of the consecrated avant-garde, seeking symbolic capital and relatively high degrees of autonomy; Pin and GM were in the subfields of larger scale production, positioned closer to the field of power, more determinedly pursuing economic and cultural capital, and sacrificing some autonomy in that pursuit. These are distinctions ostensibly from the political compass, but they help to shed light on artistic findings to follow.

As indicated, the role of the director will be dealt with discretely later. That it crops up throughout this chapter so regularly is part of the rationale for looking at it discretely: it is a ubiquitous influence. Director-citing (director sightings) might be read here as “teasers”.

My reliance upon OS increases at this point, as I was increasingly inclined to pause, analyse and interpret observations in that initial write-up of the raw recordings and notebook scribble.
**FIRST MORNINGS**

All three first mornings began as I have generally described, with prescribed socialising, welcoming statements from management figures, coffee, and cakes. From there, the distinctions of genre, play, and personnel created a wide variety of experiences for actors.

I made extensive notes on the first reading of GM, in three sections: first, during the reading; second, early the next morning as a series of “overnight thoughts”; and third, on the next day after talking with actors:

> It is an exceptionally good first read, with the cast led by Deirdre—the most senior member—to a very full-blooded, exploratory encounter. Actors employ eye-contact with each other regularly throughout.

As Deirdre reads the early, long speech about the ‘gentlemen callers’ of her treasured youth, Anthony and Kate attend her with sustained, concentrated eye-contact.

> When Anthony reads Tom’s speech about his reasons for spending so much time ‘at the movies’, he engages in a remarkably deep, relaxed exploration; a “depth sounding” exercise of Personalisation (GM, 2-4-12, wk1).

**Overnight thoughts:**

> My reflections on the first rehearsal of The Glass Menagerie largely concerned an analysis of the quality, vigour and confidence of the first reading. I untangled three propositions for the success of the reading:

1. **Textual** – the inherent generosity to actors of the text;
2. **Historical** – the provenance and fame of the play;
3. **Social** – the leadership of the senior actor.

**Textual** – Tennessee Williams’ text is indulgent of great twentieth century American actors and acting. It renders characterisation as representative of real lives as lived in real life, with rich, deep histories and psychologies for each character. It places those characters in real surroundings, and with constant references to a geographically specific real world, in the context of historically specific real time. Characters luxuriate in their time, place and past, and actors luxuriate in these literary qualities. This is actors’ theatre: fun to read and fun to play.

**Historical** – The Glass Menagerie carries for most theatre workers a sense of rich history. It has either been seen on stage or screen, or at the very least—for the younger members of the cast, perhaps—been acknowledged for its fame and its place in the dramatic canon. [This] production has no stated aims of re-invention or de-construction. Its position as a ‘repertoire’ piece is respected by the production. This is no post-modern shake-up. As such, the director and cast
regularly refer to past productions, to the 1973 film, and to the substantial amount of written material on the play and its relationship to Williams’ life. The production has projected for it by this history an aesthetic ‘zone’; expectations of style, accent, and even perhaps physical carriage. Actors bring to the first reading a sense of ‘how we are to do it’. This brings security, even if it is a surface security; one that need not sustain the actor very far beyond the first read. They arrive on the first day knowing how the play should—roughly—sound.

Social – I suspect this is the least reported, least acknowledged and most potent reason for the strong first reading of the play. Deirdre Rubenstein is the senior actor in the group (by some decades), she has the role with the most lines, she is the ‘imported’ guest actor in the company. Deirdre is an exuberantly energetic, warm and generous person. Before the read she has shown these qualities to her young colleagues, talking warmly and interestedly with them and with all. When the cast sits to read, she throws everything at the words, confident and generous with vocal and physical gestures. The rest of the cast are given license to ‘play’ (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

Returning to rehearsal (and beyond):

Before rehearsals commence, I again congratulate Deirdre on the success of the first read the day before. I tell her that I have been contemplating the reasons for that success. Before I have a chance to expand on my theory, she knowingly taps on the script, and says, ‘It’s all there.’

After the rehearsal, I have dinner with Kate. I raise the same thing with her. She immediately says, ‘Well, Deirdre is so amazingly generous, it allowed us all to join her at that level of energy.’

Two out of my three propositions acknowledged spontaneously by cast members (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

Taken as a whole, the GM reading constituted a collective statement of exploratory confidence of a kind implied by Paul Goddard:

[m]ost of my theatre career I’ve worked on classic contemporary texts. Only on maybe four occasions out of 25 at the STC25 have I worked on texts that are really lacking in guidance for you. So the majority of my texts have been in plays where you read them and you go, Well, this is clear anyway (in Crawford, 2005, 178).

The other two orientation and first read sessions were framed by vastly different parameters.

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25 Sydney Theatre Company.
I have already written about the commercial pressures of *Pin* being brought to the actors’ attention on the first morning. The other distinguishing features of the show were the enormous and invasive design elements, and the broad multi-media environment into which the actors had to travel and find at-home-ness:

*The first subject of discussion after the first read ... is how the famous growing nose of the character is to be achieved.*

**Rose:** It’s going to be operated by a cable, with a kind of pack and a switch. So you’re going to be fairly rigged up, with the microphone as well.

Wearing a microphone is something of an inhibition; having a ‘wired’ nose with an additional ‘control pack’ seems a very substantial imposition on the actor, a substantial barrier to feeling “present in the world” in any way other than present in the artificial world of the theatre.

**Rose makes the substantial direction to Nathan,** ‘Also, I think it should be painful when it grows.’ This became a sustained motif for Nathan’s character throughout the run of the show: Pinocchio suffered substantial pain on the growth of his nose. This is a note on the character’s inner life, on Dramaturgy, yet offered casually and in the first moments of the process, at the first read.

**Rose then sets out her plan for the rehearsal,** which is to get a rough draft of the show on its feet in the first two weeks. She says that actors will be called every Saturday to rehearse music, and that all cast will be otherwise called all the time, rather than subject to a more detailed rehearsal schedule that nominates scenes and sections to be worked a week in advance. Land & Sea rehearsals operate in the same way. This is less common practice, but justified—in both cases—in terms of a work in development. Neither *The City* nor *The Glass Menagerie* operate in this way, but both plays have characters who do not appear in the play for long periods of stage time, and contain mostly two-hander scenes between, in each case, a cast of four. Nonetheless, this is a major industrial distinction. Being called because one’s scene is scheduled to rehearse promotes a particular harnessing of energy for that moment, and a capacity to prepare for it; whereas being permanently ‘on call’ can be debilitating, and leave less time for an actor’s private work between rehearsals.

While these might be considered political/industrial outcomes, they are justified in the context of the artistic compass as they flow directly from the distinct demands of the play, and the processes of the director:

*Another reality these actors exist with is the fact that this is a heavily ‘pre-imagined’ production. The set is a double-revolve, the complex moving visual*
projections are done and dusted, the music is composed. There is limited flexibility around all of these components, with limited time available. The actors now need to be put into a complex that has been subject to intimately detailed planning before this moment. ... The show will not develop around the discoveries or investigations of the actors and the director on the rehearsal room floor, in the way that, most clearly, The City was able to do. That was due in part to the script of The City which was fixed yet essentially fluid, the director’s interests, and, perhaps mostly, to the very few people in the room. Any substantial decision in that rehearsal room did not immediately impact on many people. The scale of a ‘co-op’ brings flexibility. Pinocchio has artistic flexibility more akin perhaps to the shoot of a feature film than that of a piece of guerrilla theatre (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).

All production decisions might be said to come from the text, but the written playtext of Pin was held so irreverently that it is more proper to think of that text as being in the service of, and deriving from, a broader artistic idea: the idea of a musical production of the Pinocchio story, which is clearly distinct from the motivation behind City or GM, which grow from a desire to engage with Crimp’s and with Williams’ texts, and hold each text as the instrument of steerage.

By corollary, the progress of City and GM, with extant, “proven” texts, is an exploration if not largely within the fictive compass, then certainly one leading from the fiction; a centrifugal exploration, as it were, with the fictive informing the artistic. Pin, by contrast, seems to be motored by a centripetal force, from artistic aim toward text.

L&S is interesting to consider in the context of centripetal and centrifugal artistic inclinations and strategies. I will later refer to that process as significantly centripetal, with the artistic work defining the play, or the meaning, but this impetus was limited, and perhaps somewhat thwarted, by the fact that the centripetal flow from actors’ and directors’ energies toward meaning-making, the play of the text, was disqualified from impact on the text itself (a point I will soon reveal more fully). A centrifugal construction suggests a text that brings purpose and momentum to the steerage of the art-work. This was not readily afforded the cast of L&S, whose first read might be seen as an acknowledgement of collective uncertainty. Chris anticipated this somewhat with his introductory comment:

I’m just trying to get a shared idea of what the forest is that we’re entering into. We’re all going to get lost together for a little while (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

And consequently, I observed that
The reading is very careful. The play is dreamlike. It wanders, grasps, tickles ideas momentarily and moves on. After it [the reading], most of the more peripheral guests leave, and Chris begins to speak about the play, the process and the production.

‘I’d think about them [the characters] in ... the same way that music returns to certain motifs and certain phrases. In this, each of the characters will return to certain qualities, certain perspectives, certain intents but—and this is the tension—to be inside each of those without carrying them... We can talk about it, but it becomes too intellectually burdensome, which is why we need to get up on the floor, to create the material to be able to sort of go, I know why I’m here and why I’m there. I guess I’m just at pains to say that it is not going to feel like a rehearsal for a few days, and to trust the room, to trust me, to trust each other. But there will be a point where we set it, and I understand that actors need to be grounded in... content. ... My prediction is that by week three it will feel like any other rehearsal, but not based on things that are thinly psychological.

If we start to go about the making of this work by saying, How do we focus upon clarity of narrative, and the expositions required by the narrative? Then what we’re really saying to the audience is, Follow this story. And I think that is counter-intuitive to what the piece is actually doing.’

Further on, Chris refers to its ephemeral qualities, with ephemeral ambitions for audience and actors:

‘The experience for the audience is not being able to sit back and get the whole image. Being inside that kind of elemental, transformative, seasonal, loopy, daylight, waking and sleeping ... and never a moment where you step back outside and go, Ah, I see what’s going on’ (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

Margaret Hamilton’s neat summation of postdramatic theatre helps contextualise L&S:

the stage is no longer necessarily structured as a microcosm of a known macrosom, but constitutes a space that engages the spectator in a compositional “logic” that privileges “semiotic” expression. The result is a production characterised by disturbances to representational “order” (2011, 199).

The L&S cast were clearly involved in the creation of abstract art. Actors do this reasonably often, but I am interested in how the representational disturbances and deprivations impact on acting processes. The consciousness of the actor is, as Schechner suggests and this study will bear, ‘full of alternatives and potentiality’ and ‘intentionally unsettled’ (1985, 6). The rub, perhaps, is in that intentionality. Actors
intend and design dis-location as part of their process. The dis-located, elemental, loopy text may make impositions of unsettled-ness, thus robbing that unsettled-ness of intentionality. Actors looking to initiate their loopy tricks on such terrain might be said to be skating on thin ice.

Thus actors are compelled to engage, from the opening moments of rehearsal, in a way profoundly responsive to the nature and stature of the text. The first read of GM was a generous invitation from a masterpiece of dramatic literature, entirely self-assured, to a greatly experienced leading actor, which was taken with like generosity, which led to a moment of significant social cohesion; that of Pin was a light-hearted skip through a rough sketch wherein the spoken text itself—from the outset—was clearly marked “not the thing”, and; the L&S cast figuratively touched fingers rather than clasped hands, and tentatively stepped toward—rather than into—a mysterious forest.

OTHER TIMES

What follows is a series of observed and analysed moments from the central weeks of the rehearsal period: that section of the process that I have described as most commonly subject to the dynamic, incursive and robust processes of direction and acting. I continue to do so in light of an attempt to demonstrate different experiences for actors of different productions: different artistic compasses:

Nathan refers to a former draft: ‘A few drafts ago there was a line that said, “I wish I was real”. I kind of like that because later on when she says, “I know you want to be real...”’
Rose: I think it’s good.
Nathan: Because he feels all of these things, especially for her, and it’s almost another way of saying, “I wish I was real because I feel this...”
Rose: So where would that come? After her monologue, then?
Nathan: I think so.

This is the leading actor talking about the ‘journey’ of his leading character. ... Nathan is decidedly better positioned to prosecute his points than is Danielle, and this surety is reflected in his voice as he does so (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

Simon Russell Beale acknowledges that ‘as a leading man ... your voice tends to be heard and allowed space’ (in O’Kane, 2012, 239). Given this, let us consider Nathan’s basic idea in other contexts. Were it Danielle’s idea for the insertion of the same line instead of it being Nathan’s idea, she may be disinclined to share it because a) it does not pertain to her character; b) she plays a relatively peripheral character; c)
The Artistic Compass

she does not have the experience of the pre-rehearsal workshops and the many months of contemplation since, so was not privy to the details of previous drafts; or d) she is relatively inexperienced (I hesitate to suggest the further possible reasons of her age, size, and gender). So Danielle’s agency in the centripetal flow toward the fictive compass may be compromised by circumstances of the political compass.

Next, to take a cross-production view, consider Nathan having an equivalent idea as a cast member of L&S: he/they have been effectively advised not to share ideas of textual alteration:

Chris: The play is set, and I don’t think there’s going to be much going back to Nicki and saying, Can we change this or that? (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

This advice is, in light of my experience of more than a dozen premiere productions by writers of the eminence of John O’Donaghue, Stephen Sewell, and Debra Oswald, extraordinary. The only time I have ever found myself in a premiere production as an actor without licence to challenge or provoke change in the script was when working with Nobel laureate, Patrick White, in his final play, Shepherd on the Rocks. Even then, this contract was not delivered to us as an edict by the director, Neil Armfield, but discovered collectively when Neil’s careful suggestions for alteration fell on imperious, deaf ears. Leaving aside questions of the wisdom of this strategy (I thought it unwise, on both occasions), and acknowledging that I am not privileged with an awareness of how it was negotiated between writer and director, or at whose behest, this barring of an avenue of textual challenge curtailed actors’ resources for achieving at-home-ness in a difficult play, and thwarted potential artistic agency.

This is an example of how actors’ search for locatedness in the artistic compass of the production and the fictive compass of the play is determined or delimited by social/political and artistic coordinates of those productions and plays. Malleability and rigidity exist in different ratios in relation to different elements of the art-work:

The revolve points and cues have been set. In this way, Rose represents something of the commercial producer, with clear and non-negotiable projections of expectations of actors. This is in interesting juxtaposition with her openness (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).

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27 Theatre, opera and film director (1955 - ), former associate director of Nimrod and STCSA, former artistic director Company B, Belvoir St.
28 An irresistible extrapolation: when Armfield’s first and only attempt, during the first week of rehearsal, to seek a script change was put to the author by way of a long, gentle, respectful rationale as to why a line was not quite delivering its point, White merely responded coldly, ‘It’s perfectly clear to me.’ This response was obviously intended to end such suggestions, and it did.
The juxtaposition exists not only in relation to Rose’s openness of character, but with the liberal invitation for the changing of text:

After the break, the script-development feel could not be more openly asserted than with Rose’s first words: ‘This is the part of the show, folks, that is majorly up for grabs’ (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

Significantly, though, this was an appeal to actors as writers. Their license as actors to explore and sediment traces of habitus within the fictive—as distinct from the artistic—compass was severely limited by the technical complex of the production, and the necessary industrial complex of the unusually large and broad society of the production. Weeks before the “company run”, the large creative team came to rehearsals, and Rose stated that the purpose of the rehearsal was to ‘show these guys’ the work in development:

In this early-mid stage of rehearsal, there are thirteen non-cast members in the room. More commonly, at this stage, there would be two (director and SM), as was the case in both The City and The Glass Menagerie. In fact, in The City there was most often only the director, as the person engaged as SM was not engaged in a fully professional way, and had limited availability. There is undoubted impact on developing acting in these very different environments. The kinds of exploratory tracks taken by actor Chris, for example, at this stage of rehearsal in City are simply not open to the Pin cast. They do not have license to explore ... They cannot fulfil the director’s brief of ‘showing these guys’ if they show something outside the aesthetic expectations (Pin, 8-6-12, wk2).

In Pin, Jude was subject to peculiar challenges. She played a cat, characterised in the horizonal vision of the production as what Jude described to me as a kind of ‘sex kitten’ (P120809.jude). There was clearly a very substantial invitation and responsibility to characterise, as I describe it (Crawford, 2011, 108-112, 141), yet there was no time given to its investigation in rehearsal, and no atmosphere of exploration. The script gave Jude neither any particularly feline characteristics, nor any sexual motivation. She was asked to play a sex kitten sans sex and sans kitten. This impelled concerns both within the artistic compass, and outward, toward the political:

I had a few issues with playing naïve, dumb and sexy as a woman, and realising we’re doing a family show and wanting to be a role-model of sorts for young girls, because there’s only one other girl for young girls to relate to in the show, and she’s in a bikini ... and if my own niece came and saw the show … what they

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29 A universal practice of inviting the wider company to view an advanced rehearsal room run.
would take away from the female roles in the play, and so I did have quite a few conversations with myself, wrestling with... (P120809.jude).

Meanwhile, her aesthetic responsibility, implicit in rehearsal time dedicated largely to singing, dancing and the development of lazi, was to ‘come on stage with a bang ... specifically designed to add energy, drive and athleticism to each scene’ (Henshall, pers. com. 17-7-13), to be ‘personally responsible’ (ibid) for her constant companion on stage (actor 1), and to maintain the unsought, un-negotiated, and uncredited role of dance captain.

The whole of the rehearsal process of Pin seemed a little like one long technical rehearsal. As in tech rehearsals, the director’s focus was necessarily on things other than the actors and their performances. At a tech, this lack of focus can be a wonderfully liberating thing, and many actors use the tech for further exploration or the re-touching of acting fundamentals (see Crawford, 2011, 154). For this to continue for much of the rehearsal process brought a particular liberation and responsibility for the actors. The actors’ work within or toward the fictive compass seemed to develop more in concurrence with the production/“rehearsal” process as distinct from via a series of acts that generate, re-generate, shape, re-shape or influence it. I returned in my notes to a cross-media comparison:

The multi-faceted focus of the room often resembles more a film set than a theatre rehearsal room. Indeed, there are elements of the industrial contract that are very like film and very unlike theatre practice, such as the role of the writer, who is positioned at no time like the author of the piece, but as a contributor to it, the servant rather than at any point, the served. Much of the acting is directed in terms of a kind of “hit the mark” relationship. Logic is to be served, but it too might be subsumed or sacrificed for the “bigger picture”. Land & Sea was a piece in development too, and in some ways actors were in continual service of the whole. In some ways, of course, actors always are and should be thus, but the point is that no actor was positioned in either process as part of the central problematic ... The acting process of The Glass Menagerie had quite a lot of this actor-centricity. The acting in The City, as directed, had focus on the actor as a central problematic too, but to a lesser degree, as it was a process of wondering-on-meaning rather than (building upon the) inherent and inherited meaning of The Glass Menagerie. The great difference in the actors’ experience of working on both pieces in development (L&S and Pin) was that in Land & Sea primary meaning was always being sought by the director, and sought largely through and with the actors. In Pinocchio, meaning was a horizontal projection, a known, visualised thing, and the actors’ role was to fulfil that vision, and take their place on that horizon (Pin, 8-6-12, wk2).
These conditions feed also into the way the work is received by an audience. Alison Howard was Education Officer at STCSA, responsible for facilitating after-show discussions with the Pin cast on a few occasions throughout the season:

The focus in the Q and As wasn’t about a particular actor or how good that person was, it was more about the overall picture and the idea of how the animation worked. The technical components were more of interest than the actors themselves. They were just part of this bigger picture (Howard, pers. com. 17-8-12).

It is fair to deduce from this that the audience “got” the show, received its priorities, and adopted them.

To L&S, where Tom offered a fictive observation to his director:

‘It’s getting less clear to me why he’s so docile through this section.’

As part of Chris’ response, he says, ‘Look, it could change again quite radically. We just have to embody this stuff. … These are long bows, at the moment. We’re so far away from… It’s there. Once we’re sitting right on top of it… It’s a hard graft, but maybe we’ve done what we can do—put some shapes into something. A lot of things are coming to making some sense. I say we just leave it there.’

This is a fascinating version of collaborative art-making. On the one hand, it feels like the director is conducting a conversation of such intuitive elasticity that he might be talking to himself. … On the other hand, the allowance of this single-minded constructionism is entirely facilitated by the actors being able to ‘ride’ with the process, contribute to it somewhat (only somewhat, I’d have to say) and continue their seemingly parallel journeys of building the struts of performance within and separate from the meta-narrative evolving and devolving in the director’s mind and discourse.

I don’t mean to suggest that Chris’ discourse is all ephemeral or vague or disinterested in the actors’ individual stakes and rationales. … Chris’ comment to end the session is entirely “awake” in the face of a “dream” play, and Tom’s expressed concerns:

‘We don’t yet know what each of those moments are or add up to, and the play is full of them, it’s labyrinthine. I think that’s the fundamental shape of the scene. It’s sluggish and contrived. It’s not a dynamic, detailed map yet’ (L&S, 18-4-12, wk2).

Tom reflected on the difficulties of the piece, describing certain sought qualities as being ‘un-actable’ (L120523.tom).
So the experience of actors as a consequence of their agreement to play in *L&S* had common ground with their colleagues in *Pin* in as much as both casts subtended their sense of personal artistic navigation to aesthetic concerns, to what Kirby calls ‘the physical/informational context’ (2008, 46), their art to that of the director, and forewent explicit investigations that might be tagged as Stanislavskian or relating to the inner game of acting for a determined focus on the outer game. Yet these two experiences had different motivations, aims and justifications for their aesthetic obsessions: *L&S* saw actors engaged as sculptural matter (putty?) in a pursuit of meaningful shape; *Pin* inherited meaningful shape in the vision of its creative leadership team, and the actors, as I have indicated, sought to embody that vision. Both experiences were a long way from those encountered by their friends in the other two casts:

*TC: What are the things that give you security?*
*Deirdre: The text. Trusting it.*
*Adam: Yes. There’s less urgency to craft something that is already immaculately crafted for you* (GM, 30-4-12, wk4).

This is a kind of security-of-canon that is generalised by Goddard’s earlier cited comment on the clarity of guidance offered by certain texts. Yet textual clarity does not of itself bring security to acting:

> [w]e can’t make assumptions about the play and the style of acting outside of the context of the production in which we find ourselves (Crawford, 2011, 75).

A significant part of the context for Anna in *City* was the size and shape of her role. Her character has two scenes, and the nature of the play and the production are such that she plays no ensemble role outside of those two focused scenes. By the time Anna arrived at rehearsal, her colleagues in leading roles had been deeply immersed in a growing sense of the aesthetic attending the production and the acting, having been rarely absent from the room. This gap in connectedness played out in an intriguing way during one of her somewhat spasmodic rehearsals mid-process:

> Anna’s acting is in some ways fuller and more complex than that of Chris or Lizzy. One might even say her acting is—in significant ways—better. Still, it feels less in tune with the play and the production. Anna pursues a more naturalistic or ‘life-ish’ approach, searching for thoughts and images, and more ostensibly connecting character motivations to lines. For all that, I listen less. I feel that she has brought something on—an approach to acting that would be appropriate and applauded in many contexts—that seems to cloud the play. Her acting on this day favours the density of psychology over the clarity of conduction.
On feeling secure in this impression over the course of the run, I eventually render it by scribbling in my notebook, ‘The writer is the star. This is writer’s theatre’ (City, 28-3-12, wk3).

Anna’s work subsequently attuned itself to that of her colleagues and the production, becoming outwardly bolder, inwardly simpler, odder, and her skill in achieving this shift or acclimatisation led me to wonder on whether her work on this day would have been different had she been privy to the discussions of her colleagues. That is, if the production happened to be one in which the director chose to have all four cast members attend all rehearsals, this actor may have walked on this stage and delivered a very different “draft” of her performance. It is difficult, in fact, to conceive that she would not have. I am not suggesting that this strategy should have been employed, and indeed Anna’s slight mismatching was very sensibly held by the director not as a rupture to the rehearsal but as the rehearsal itself. Still, what is of interest is that a differently figured industrial expectation may have led to a different result on the floor. The constant presence of actors at all rehearsals was a privilege assumed by directors of both L&S and Pin; partially justified, presumably, by those actors’ receipt of a weekly salary: there is a direct line through the broadest element of the political compass (the financial arrangement), through the interests of the artistic compass (a large cast “ensemble” piece as distinct from an intimate drama made up of “two-hander” scenes), and to the heart of the fictive compass (the actor’s engagement with text). The defining industrial reality of a wage-less encounter pierces to the acting on stage.

The qualities of the plays, and the rehearsal processes they cultivated, continued to impact on actors as they negotiated the ‘rites of passage’, which Bourdieu describes as the movement through ‘the different fields of application of the system of generative schemes’ (1990a, 153), wherein the artistic work is generated by rehearsing/repeating, kneading toward self-assurance. One such signal movement is the “stumble”.

STUMBLING

The stumble or stumble-through of a play is so-called in order to take pressure off what is effectively the first run of the whole play. “Stumble” often seems more appropriate because scenes that have been rehearsed in isolation have never linked to those preceding and following them, so these links are often uncertain, as actors see work of their colleagues for the first time, and are often uncertain of exactly when scenes begin and end in action. Nonetheless, in my experience, stumble-throughs are also times when actors start to really “go for” the requisite energy of
the scene, and accept responsibility for the stage being ‘occupied and rendered meaningful by the performers’ (McAuley, 2000, 7). They are often celebratory and liberating. For actors they are an opportunity to make a comprehensive and—very importantly—uninterrupted claim on all that has been discovered or identified; often, with full energy and focus, new things come unbidden. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for the stumble-through to be attempted while there are still many things yet to be adequately addressed. For example, a production with a fight sequence or a dance sequence or singing may not have had the special skill-work covered sufficiently or safely, and actors are asked to “mark through” such things. It is also possible that there may be a scene or two that have had very little or even no rehearsal, and actors are asked to just “wing” that scene, and “see what happens”.

This suggests that there is a broad range of legitimacy and meaning in the tag stumble-through, and expectations of achievements of agency are varied. Indeed, the significance of the rite lies in that relativity: the cast may acquire confidence that the production is ready to throw aside its crutches, and run; or acquire fear that it may be seriously or even permanently crippled.

Not by virtue of actors’ innate talents and skills but, again, by virtue of the plays and the productions they inhabited, the casts of GM and of City found confidence in stumbling. The cast of Pin also found confidence, albeit in the context of the reaffirmation of their “small-cogs-in-a-big-wheel” environment, and the cast of L&S—on whom I report more fully—found fear.

Chris Drummond began the session by acknowledging that the production was at the ‘genuinely stumbling’ end of the spectrum, as there were very significant transitions between the five Acts of the play that would become integral action, and had not yet been addressed. Further, one of the Acts had scarcely been touched in action. Chris determined therefore that the first part of the rehearsal would be spent looking at some of those things in preparation for the stumble. This struck me as sensible strategy in context. Nonetheless, it meant that this significant rite of the rehearsal process that, at its best, serves to underline all that has been achieved for a given company of artists, began, for this company, with a focus on all that had not. The difficulties facing the cast in achieving agency on this day were evident in the spatiality of the final moments before the commencement of the stumble:

*Chris stands at the centre of the circular acting area and demonstrates the series of actions and moves and tasks for the transitions between acts, and actors sit on the periphery of the circle taking notes (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).*

The stumble was—as predicted—a very rough affair. Chris called instructions
throughout, which is not at all in keeping with a first run of a play, even if named a stumble. The actors played with little sense of confidence. Their achievement was in stumbling through the blocking that had been set, remembering lines, and accumulating moments of discovery of meaning, momentum and Personalisation toward fictive habitus. It should not be inferred that these achievements are insignificant. It was entirely successful on its own terms: the stumble they had to endure, the only rehearsal achievement available to them on this day.

Afterwards, Chris talked of the ‘erratic pulse’ and the ‘fragility of structure’ of the piece. As mentioned earlier in the study, he reported to the actors that he did not take many notes, preferring instead to

‘watch and absorb, trying to get a sense of what the flow of the show was’ (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).

This was a statement of a clear distinction, for these actors involved in this piece, of the artistic and the industrial reality of a premiere production flowing directly into actors’ processes. That is to say, they are deprived of detailed acting reflection from their director because the call upon his investment is so great in relation to the structure and meaning of the text, he cannot at this stage devote it to the details of acting.

Chris drew a palpably despondent cast into an unusually tight circle. This spatiality allowed intimacy for a discussion that had the feel of ceremonial profundity (‘We few, we happy few...’) as Chris attempted to contextualise the despondency:

‘It’s a strange one because, having done a first run, what you’re not left with, I imagine, is a sense, in acting terms, that it highlights the fragmentation of the piece. Would that be a fair assessment?’ (None of the actors are forthcoming in response) ‘Normally a stumble-through like that is good for actors because you can go, “Ok, now I know what the arc is that I’m building.” And I think we’re going to get to that experience after more rehearsal. I would not expect that you’d be feeling that today. Try not to, as best you can, carry that away as some kind of burden because I think, until every moment is set, and every moment starts to give the right energy and clarity to the next moment... Only then will you be able to have a clear sense of what it is that you’re carrying. In the most difficult terms, I’d say it was probably a run we’d prefer to have at the end of the first week, then at the end of the second week you’d be going, “OK, now I’ve got it.”’... The fundamental shape is there’ (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).

The point here is that the shape’s meaning was not subject to the actors’ bodymind embrace. Bourdieu speaks of the distinction between being possessed by, and being
in possession of, one’s habitus (1990a, 18). The actors were embodying an object without the phenomenological erasure of the object/subject division; doing but not experiencing; treating the aesthetic without yet personalising it; immersed in a world that was not yet ‘showing-itself-in-itself’ (Heidegger, 1973, 54). Or perhaps it is fair to suggest that being possessed by one’s habitus might get one so far and no farther. It might be the generative motor through the political and even artistic compasses, the navigation of the social, a way-of-being inside the meaning-challenged form of this stumble, yet not sufficient to find at-home-ness in the fictive compass. Perhaps what is required for that at-home-ness is the actor’s possession of habitus as distinct from its possession of the actor. Or perhaps it may be that the actors here were trading on the skills and habitus of their professionalism, not yet of their art.

**RUNNING**

In this more advanced stage of rehearsal, issues stemming from the nature of the play continued to impact on the working lives of the cast of L&S. At an advanced-stage run of the play (28-4-12), the director, consistent with his response to the earlier stumble, gave many fewer notes than actors received in other shows, as he was ‘still mapping the terrain’ (Cole, 1992, 112) of the play, and affirmations were tinged, very often, with doubt:

*Chris: Given how elusive our understanding of the bath scene is, I think it’s in really great shape (L&S, 28-4-12, wk4)*.

From Tom’s perspective, this was ‘like acting inside a void. You don’t really have anything to hang onto. It just felt very bewildering’ (L120523.tom). While a performance score will often have its security founded on momentary elements of aesthetic concerns and, indeed, I have argued that ‘such moments are among the artificialities that turn our work into art’ (2011, 118), there is perhaps the suggestion here that these securities cannot entirely replace the actor’s need for more life-like rationales. To put it another way, it suggests that the actor ceaselessly inhabits the artistic compass during his time on stage rather than inhabiting only the fictive compass, but that the latter lies within the former, not separate from it, and must also yield its coordinates to the establishment of habitus.

Despite the powerful influence of the plays’ peculiarities on actors’ experiences, those peculiarities and distinctions come to actors—as enlightenments and bewilderments—largely through the perceptions (enlightened and bewildered), and the character, of the director. I asked Tom, for example, how he eventually found security:
‘Ultimately I think it was that Chris decided he knew what the show was about. Once he knew, he was able to direct us in a way that was very specific about what his vision was and how we fit within that’ (L120523.tom).

Actors fit within a director’s vision—it is suggested—like matryoshka dolls, their intellect subtended, subsumed, unseen. Actors’ intellectual grasp is provisional upon its concordance with that of the director. Actors have no security until secured by the director. Frankly, these notions horrify me, yet they were the wolves baying at my mind’s door throughout all of my observation of rehearsal, and the study now needs to confront them.
CHAPTER FOUR:
(SELF) PORTRAITS

INTRODUCTION

Directors regularly appeared to me to be arbiters of space, time and temper. So much so that at one point I scribbled in my notebook that the rehearsal room seemed like the director’s ‘self-portrait in space’. Theatre direction is an extraordinary pursuit, an awesome wrangle of people and ideas, and a grope with time, leading to an artwork that the director usually did not textually initiate and does not momentarily represent, yet somehow seems to infect as an intimate exposure of self.

This chapter pursues these notions, and examines how they impact on actors in the context of artistic centrality, epistemology, autonomy, democracy and agency.

THE PRIMACY OF PERCEPTIONS OF THE DIRECTOR

I want to begin with two autobiographical fragments: the first is one of those memorable little quips one remembers from one’s most impressionable learning stage, early career; the second an indulgence in autobiography that claims legitimacy with the lasting impact it has had on me as a theatre-worker. I recall an older actor once giving me the advice, “If the director gives you a note you don’t understand, the fool-proof response is to just do it the way that he [sic] would do it. Impersonate the director, and he’ll think it’s brilliant.” The second anecdote comes from the response of my then life-partner to my first production as a director. This came after living together for six years, throughout which time she had seen me act in around twenty theatre productions: “I saw more of you in this production than in any performance I’ve ever seen you give as an actor.” Notwithstanding the fact that this may be fairly read as a covert criticism of my acting, both episodes speak to a notion of theatre direction as being—no less than any other art—an inevitably autobiographical project. My interest here is in investigating how—if this proposition is accepted—theatre can be simultaneously an autobiographical project for the actor, and where, in this confusion of projected selves, sit knowledge and meaning/s.

Barba’s assertion that ‘meaning is always the fruit of a convention, a relationship’ (1995, 104) is not in dispute, but the relative agency within that meaning-making

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30 I have taken the expression, ‘primacy of perception’, from Merleau-Ponty.
relationship gives pause for reflection as actors strive for at-home-ness in each of the three compasses they inhabit.

Michael Chekhov discusses a ‘defeatist attitude’ that can pollute the actor, based upon his belief that ‘no matter what his conception of the role and how to interpret it, he will ultimately have to do it the director’s way anyhow’ (1984, 73). The director sets the boundaries of interpretation and therefore of exploration.

The “actor-friendly” qualities of GM have been discussed. It is a play that invites any degree of imaginative projection beyond the words of the text. An actor may do as little or as much imaginative exploration as she wishes, but the director will determine whether this becomes part of the ordained discourse of the rehearsal room, and therefore whether it will become shared knowledge or remain entirely private. Similarly, a director of one production of this play may favour improvisations that delve into the history of characters, primitive movement explorations, and theatre games; another director of the same play may consider all of that a waste of time. So we may see that life within the artistic compass is pursued, guarded and guided by its own aims, laws and coordinates, and that these bear a relationship to text that may be the idiosyncratic construct of the director.

The director sets not only the boundaries of the intellectual pursuit but also the means of weighing its findings. An epistemological framework, according to Stanley and Wise,

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\text{specifies not only what “knowledge” is and how to recognize it, but who are “knowers” and by what means someone becomes one, and also the means by which competing knowledge-claims are adjudicated and some rejected in favour of another/others (1993, 188).}
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This distinction between knowledge \textit{per se} and the socio-political establishment of knowers is salient in the context of these theatre rehearsals. My research suggests that actors are ordained as knowers exclusively by the director, that their knowledge claims are ratified or annulled by the director, and that any annulled knowledge claim tends either to be foregone or to “go rogue”, driven to the anti-social sphere of outer-rehearsal mumbles. I have been in productions wherein substantial concerns have been held in consensus by actors, and never aired with directors. In fact, this scenario occurs as often as not.

I want to now return to the first days of the GM and L&S rehearsal rooms to analyse a little further the stakes laid in pursuit of collective epistemology.
During a short speech that interrupted the faux-social company tea and cakes on the first morning of GM rehearsals, Adam used the words ‘sweet’, ‘gentle’ and ‘humane’ (GM, 2-4-12, wk1) to describe the play. These are not, it seems to me, inappropriate adjectives, but another director of another production might just have easily floated other words above/into the heads of the company: Anxious? Iconoclastic? Savagely loving? Eloquently constipated? John Lahr refers to the play as a ‘saga of hatred’ (2010), which is a very long way from ‘gentle’ and ‘humane’. This establishes Adam’s guiding thoughts as idiosyncratic, however legitimate. I thought nothing of them as they were spoken, but then wondered on the impact they might have on the weeks of artistic and industrial experience to come for actors. Would ideas be banished if they were judged not sweet enough?

Benedetti, in his canonical book, The Director at Work, is alive to the concerns of the director’s opening remarks ‘displaying a weight of critical and historical preparation which puts the actors in a passive position’ (1985, 112). At other times throughout the opening days of the rehearsal, Adam’s natural and substantial erudition and scholarly preparation led to a discourse that he dominated. This intellectual domination was contextualised within an artistic philosophy that perhaps, with its avowedly collective aims, tacitly acknowledged the potential passivity of his cast, describing his challenge as

‘how to re-create what’s in my head and what’s in your heads as a collective energy’ (GM, 30-4-12, wk4).

Considering Barba’s dictum that performers are defined by their translation of ‘mental images into physical impulses’ (1995, 20), what remains of Adam’s thought is the idea that the re-creation is the director’s task. Ostensibly, this is not true, yet it speaks to the peculiar epistemological processes of theatre-workers, and the director’s vaporous tenancy inside actors’ minds and bodies.

Adam told the cast that he did not want to stay sitting in discussion beyond this first day, but for the actors to be on their feet by the following day:

‘I don’t think you all need to hear discussions on each other’s scenes to play yours. I’m never really big on slavish analysis for days. I like to get up, right away. Then, we end up with a rough mudmap of everything faster than we might. Then we can come back, enrich it and colour it in’ (GM, 2-4-12, wk1).

This is not an uncommon description from a director on how he wants to proceed. It is a description of the processes of the vast majority of Australian directors with whom I have worked over thirty years. It is, fair to say, de rigueur. Furthermore, as an actor, I should record that a director could say nothing to please me more. Indeed, it
is exactly how I proceed as a director. To step back from Adam’s comments, though, I am obliged to make some observations that are inescapably blunt and problematic: first, that determinations are made by the director as to the collective store of knowledge to be held by the actors; second, that analysis is characterised as a kind of slavery, or potential slavery.

Having claimed Adam’s position as my own, let me extrapolate on or speak to this position on my own behalf. There will be no shortage of opportunity for the cast to discuss the play. The time must be organised, and that organisation of time must be by the director. Any actor who would particularly like to observe rehearsals and participate in the discussion of rehearsals of scenes in which they do not appear may very likely be welcome to do so if they prefer, but most actors treasure the time that they are not in the rehearsal room for learning lines and other preparations, and for socialising with cast-mates in anterooms. The director is the character that must hold the collective knowledge store of the developing art-work. There is potential benefit in having actors see the whole work primarily through the matrix of sensibilities of their own individual work, for if the character is the sum of all that the actor does, then a degree of ego-centricity in the process can nurture the inevitable ego-centricity of character. These arguments contextualise and ameliorate the epistemological and social imbalance embedded in the practice, without making it disappear.

It is perhaps reasonable to suggest that this practice of limiting the flow of knowledge represents an assumption that the actor is unable, or disinclined, to recognise and order the different and at times competing knowledge stores: on the one hand the global perspective of the participating artist; on the other the narrow, fictive interests of the role. Does a vexed position in relation to an old theoretical chestnut, the separation of actor and character, in part justify or determine the withholding of knowledge from the actor with the rationale that it is a necessary or helpful withholding from the character? Is knowledge and, with it, artistic agency sacrificially sunk and lost in ‘the muddy, in-between territory that lies between “self” and “character”’ (Maxwell, 2001, 50)? On the face of it, the proposition seems both feasible and trite.

Analysis would become slavish if it lasted for days because everyone would then feel enslaved by the time-restrictions imposed by the schedule. While it may be so that actors do not feel totally at ease when sitting around a table engaged in the ‘purely analytical study of the play’ (Gordon, 2009, 128), it is not only the call of their professionally tuned phenomenological bodyminds that makes it so: it is also the mundane ticking of the clock. Thus industrial strictures play out as epistemological limits.
One day I observed the cast rehearsing the Act One scene in which Amanda returns home to discover that Laura has been deceptively skipping the classes she has undertaken to attend, and has instead been wandering somewhat aimlessly around the city. Between actors’ second and third attempts at the scene, Adam shared a detailed personal experience, generous in its emotional revelation and candour, and concluded:

‘The reason I’m talking about it is because I’m curious about the range of feeling she experiences when she’s on her own during the day. ... She goes to the places where she’ll be happy. ... The movies transport you’ (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

Adam’s autobiographical offering was a long-ish recollection from his own experience of travelling alone and growing depressed as he did so. In the cited conclusion, there is a subtle shift in pronouns from the first person (‘I’m talking... I’m curious...’) to the third (‘she experiences...’) to the second (‘... transport you’): from Adam, to Laura, to Kate (as Laura). This suggests a fusion of the actor’s construction of character with not only their own biography and subjective, empathic constructions, but those of others. The director’s personal experience is held to be of value to the actor. The actor’s capacity to empathise with the director’s real experience, offered through the prism of the director’s empathic understanding of the character, can then be turned toward the embodiment of her own empathic projections. It’s a peculiar construction that is triadic but not triangular, an odd syllogism: Adam sees and understands Laura; Kate sees and understands Adam, therefore; Kate sees and understands Laura.

This expectation of a kind of “step”-empathy is of course not a phenomenon of the theatre, we regularly project it in life, but it stands out to me because in the theatre it must lead to the embodied outcome of the performance. It strikes me therefore not so much as a strange social interaction, but as a strange tool for making performance. As the anecdote passed, it struck no-one, including me, as peculiar or inappropriate in any way. It was taken as part of ‘the profoundly collaborative nature of theatrical creation’ (McAuley, 2012, 4) wherein ‘virtually nothing can be bracketed out as irrelevant, whether it is jokes, gossip, story-telling, a sudden silence’ (ibid, 10).

The industrial and social contract of the rehearsal room dictates—as an article of common politeness and deference—that such tales from directors will be met with affirmative nods. If, however, the gap is true, and the step-empathy not “actable”, it constitutes a gap between standard social and industrial procedures of rehearsal and the moment of performance for the actor. The moment is assumed as meaningful for the actor in rehearsal, yet may prove not to be there for them in performance. That is to suggest a kind of bleeding boundary between the political and the artistic
compasses. The moment reflects little more than respect for the director following from the industrial-social construction of the rehearsal process as being a phenomenon of the director’s will and agency. The director invites the actors into the production. Actors experience theatre as a social phenomenon hosted by the director, like a party at his house. Actors subsequently subtend their intellectual and even their empathic responses to those of the director: sometimes in the genuine hope that the director will understand and see things that they cannot, as he is privileged by time, space and industry as a superior knower, and sometimes as the mere meeting of industrial expectation: politically-drenched politeness.

With regard to L&S, the rehearsal of a premiere production of a new, complex and abstract script provided a fascinating context for investigation into the searching, claiming and collectivising of knowledge to found the production.

I am compelled to make the point that L&S became a critically and artistically successful production, and one which, I can attest from my position as mentor and artistic confidante to many undergraduate acting students, genuinely cut through to a theatrically-ambitious younger audience in particular, and generated great excitement among them with its abstract, internal loops of (il)logic that darkly and ironically pursued themes of cruelty, attachment, and abandonment via a cleverly correspondent aesthetic attachment, flirtation, and abandonment of imagery and association. This was redolent of dance theatre, musical composition and sophisticated contemporary music film-clips. My compulsion to make that note stems from a concern that, without it, the following references to the text may seem unduly and unrepresentatively disrespectful.

That said, I do not believe that any of the actors in this production, at any stage of the rehearsal process, had any significant intellectual grasp on the meaning of the play. I do not believe that any such attainment was collectively sought by them, sought on their behalf by their director, transferred to them, or achieved. I do, however, believe that they were working with one of the finest theatre directors I have ever encountered. Those comments stake the problematic ground for the analysis that immediately follows, and the thicker description of Chris’ distinctions as a director.

Both before and after the cast’s tentative first read of the play, Chris talked almost incessantly, and nary another artist said boo. Unlike Adam’s measured, scholarly (though no lesser) domination, Chris’ talk was searching, uncertain, philosophical, respectfully perplexed in the face of the play’s challenges:
The Artistic Compass

‘It’s a theatrical experience rather than a naturalistic play. (Rehearsal) will be about finding a performance language, a clarity of story-telling. Looking to ... build a language, compositionally, so [we’re] looking for gestural markers’ (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

These and other comments on elements of acting practice and experience that actors should avoid carrying into the work constituted substantial disavowals of actors’ intellectual and practical knowledge, while entirely exoticising and scarifying the play’s otherness. The net effect of this and the cited moments that follow, and the domination of Chris’ lateral, sophisticated discourse, was to position the director centrally: to claim not only the nuts-and-bolts theatrical challenge but the ontological challenge too as the director’s work, subject to the director’s ‘special faculty’ (Copeau, 1990, 147). I had the impression throughout the process that actors took licence for the construction of meanings in the kind of momentary, fragmentary, phenomenological way that the play allowed them, “actorly meaning”, as it were; but that global meaning, political purpose, overarching thematic containment, these were the director’s domain. Peterson Joseph says that ‘to stand on stage and not know what the play is about, why you are doing it [is] horrific’ (in O’Kane, 2012, 270), yet L&S’s meanings and purposes appeared to constitute stuff that actors might align with or not; like or lump.

As with GM, actors were, with neither consultation nor complaint, kept from substantial discursive engagement:

‘So much of it is in the bodies, and the space between. ... After this morning, I want to be up on the floor working. I don’t think there’s a lot to be gained from sitting around talking about it philosophically or aesthetically. I think it’s a making process even more than it usually is’ (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

Chris invited the playwright to speak, and she briefly mentioned

‘liminal moments ... catching in-between states ... a way of moving from one world to another in a simple way that doesn’t make sense and does make sense’.

At this final comment, she and the director acknowledge the difficult circularity of the comment with a nervous, somewhat self-deprecating laugh. Interestingly, no actor laughs (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

Notwithstanding the modest vocal tone of the playwright in this, and the fact that craft-centred discourse with actors is not among her responsibilities or privileges, this division of humours suggests a division of labours between these actors and their
artistic colleagues, particularly in relation to epistemology, a division put bluntly by one of Shakespeare’s murderers as a distinction between ‘talkers’ and ‘doers’.\footnote{‘Talkers are no good doers’, says one of the murderers to the King in Richard the Third, 1:3, L351.}

I have talked about the actors not grasping a strong sense of meaning. This was not for want of Chris expanding on it, and theorising a theatrical purpose:

‘What I hope the audience feels when they walk out is that it has been a meditation on the nature of existence... through this series of brutalities. ... It is a record of single lives constantly transformed. ... In a world where there is no god, then life is just about survival, a world of brutal abandonments, there’s no deeper meaning. It just leads from, hit someone in the face, to killing six million Jews. It’s all a trajectory into death. Or, if there is no god, then we’re kind of freed to reimagine ourselves and be transformed by our own creativity in the wondrous way that being part of nature is an endlessly opening, flowering experience, and in some sense—and I hope not an intellectual way but in a visceral sense—reflects on our subjective experience of being alone and being free to transform ourselves’ (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

None could ask for a text to be honoured with more sensitive and intelligent analysis. I cannot say that actors did not carry this with them through the process. They very possibly did. In fact, at the conclusion of this study I will imply that they can and should do precisely this, but for now we are in a discussion of epistemology. They did not in any way construct this interpretation, nor challenge it, nor augment it, and consequently it did not live in them in any thorough, reliable intellectual way. There appear limits to the security afforded actors who position themselves in this way, as ontology-mules for someone else’s intellectual stash:

‘It’s interesting because, the way that Chris was approaching it... If you spoke to him about it, it was like the spirit of collaboration, and everyone being kind of in the work space together trying to create something together, but ... there was no sense of ownership, really’ (L120523.tom).

This perceived lack of ownership sits in stark contrast to the vigorous quest for meaning and artistic context that the director undertook and privileged as a central pillar of the project:

‘I think that’s what art—what abstract art in particular—music, painting—can get us to: a kind of communion with our sense of being alone in the world and our sense of ourselves beyond language and beyond reason. ... For me this is what the piece is endeavouring to take us to—a collective experience where in the final moment we all sit inside our own smallness and our own sense of
wonder at the fact that... life is quick. It’s not even intellectual, it’s just a feeling. If we can hit that single note... that’s the moment we’re trying to ring in the collective space of the theatre. ... Talking about it feels... deeply esoteric ... But get up on the floor, and suddenly a moment of that kind of feeling happens, through just doing. Action. So we’re just going to get up and start mucking around’ (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

Here again is the clear articulation of a perceived distinction between the kind of knowledge to be wrestled through by the director (deeply esoteric) and the kind that is the actors’ concern (sought and found by doing).

For all the insight and erudition of Chris’ orientation speaking, it seemed not so much aired for the actors, but sounded-off them, given to the air, philosophically, by the central philosopher-artist. In sum, Chris’ achievement of the first day was to place three core elements into a single industrial-artistic structure: first, the play was marked as a foreign, mystical forest, unknowable from the inside; second, the cast was positioned as the “unknowers”; and third, the director was positioned as the sole builder of the knowledge required to guide the production to the light. The image suggests the director in the centre of a circle, looking upward toward an uncertain celestial path, with actors surrounding him on the edges of darkness. As discussed in the previous chapter, this image was manifested consistently by Chris’ and the actors’ inhabitation of the rehearsal space.

Had all of Chris’ or Adam’s words at these first rehearsals come from one of the actors, they would be heard and held by the group very differently. They would be considered tangential or circumferential views rather than a central, guiding set of ideas. They would constitute a clear transgression of the accepted politic of the working space. The director’s thinking is ‘going to shape the work, and that’s as it should be’ (Crawford, 2011, 94); the actor has ‘a responsibility to respect the director’s ideas and to try and embody them’ (ibid, 95). Furthermore, the first aim of the actor in the early stages of rehearsal is in ‘absorbing the director’s ideas’ (ibid, 152). All this was embodied in this rehearsal room, and my faith in these premises were not challenged; however, stepping back from notions of industrial habitus in the Bourdieuan field of cultural production, there is revealed a startling social and intellectual hierarchy for the containment and dispersal of cultural capital, or, at the least, a complex and substantially hierarchical system for the same:

Chris: There’s a central vision (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

In these cases, the “central visionary” is clearly the director, and this lies at the heart of a kind of paradox of power:
The tricky thing ... is how to embody this deference ... without feeling like a puppet. It angers me when actors enter a process like passengers on a mystery bus trip, plonking themselves down in the back of the bus to wait for the director to get in behind the wheel and drive them somewhere. This flies in the face of a central premise... that the actor is the central artist of the art form (Crawford, 2011, 95).

My observation of all of the four rehearsal rooms resoundingly problematises notions of artistic centrality. One could view the first day of L&S as constituting a kind of symbolic abuse of actors: social and artistic disenfranchisement. Yet the actors survived it, and their acting survived it. The epistemological framework need not have been as it was in this rehearsal room. It might have been constructed for greater social and intellectual cohesion. I want to linger a little further on how and why it was like it was; what lies between projections of actors as dumb passengers, and those of actors as central artists; and how it may be that the director sought to liberate rather than annul with his epistemological domination.

There is a world of difference between the poor, resource-less puppet that I fearfully project (cited above) and the actors I observed here. I see that my projection was shallow, and was itself a disavowal of what we are and what we do as actors. There is in the seemingly one-way intellectual traffic a sense of passive absorption, with actors as containers of the potential energy that will be needed to play the game; actors existing for this time in a dominant silence, as surely as footballers sit in dressing-rooms in a passive/active state, resting upon and interiorising an unspoken faith in the essential ‘truth-claims that are implicit in the act of performance’ (Johnston, 2007, 62), absorbing the words of a coach before going out to explode their massive reserves of energy to fight and win. This leads to actors’ complicity in the director-centred epistemological framework.

At one point in rehearsal, Chris reflected on his reading of meanings, and the nuanced distinctions that came from Danielle’s and another actor’s positions in space, and the timing of her movements:

*Without engaging in the discussion of meaning at all, Danielle asks, ‘Shall we try it again?’ Implicit is, “Shall we give you more or different impressions for your ongoing reading of meaning, while we remain aloof to that cognition? Shall we continue with our process, which is something other than the articulation of meaning, yet is the delivery of the essential resource by which you may do so?” Chris says, ‘Yeah, sure’ (L&S, 18-4-12, wk2).*

My use of quote marks in this OS entry might suggest an attempt at mind-reading. It was perhaps an unfortunate way to record the idea. My analysis in quotes is not an
interpretation of what the actor consciously meant with her words, but an analysis of what it amounts to regardless of what she meant. The actors/passengers/players were not without agency as they played the roles, simultaneously, of feeders and receptors of the director’s grasping intellectual interpretation, but they held their agency in reserve. There was the strong sense in this rehearsal room, in the context of this play, that Chris effectively “unburdened” his cast of the responsibility for an intellectual holding of meaning in a production that would inevitably yield its meaning to an audience not through its text—which the actor might otherwise reasonably deduce—but from its broader semiotic codes, which the actor may never see to read. Finally, the centrality of the actor as an agent of semiosis is challenged only in relation to their relative centrality in the artistic compass, as it is drawn from the inferences of the play-text. The actor is not—of and in herself—centrally challenged by the director’s forceful purview of epistemology, but perhaps, in cases like this, liberated by it. Actors and directors may, as Barba says, ‘navigate a common river’ (1995, 151), but perhaps they do so by attending, respectively, to the rapids and to the stars.

Nonetheless, these incidents and this analysis establishes the uniquely privileged role that the directors take in building meaning with and for the collective of artists in the rehearsal process. It also begins to identify the inevitable tempers and humours of individual directors. Taking the former point as a motivating premise, the study now turns to explore the latter.

TOWARD A TYPOLOGY OF DIRECTORS

The influence of the directors over the tone, time, space, humour, interests, and priorities of each rehearsal room led me to think in terms of metaphoric types for each of the four as a way of understanding their processes and transactions, and so see more clearly the actors’ experience under the directors’ influences. I acknowledge Cole, who attempts her own extensive typology:

father-figure, mother, ideal parent, teacher, ghost, invisible presence, third eye, voyeur, ego or superego, leader of an expedition to another world, autocratic ship captain, puppet-master, sculptor/visual artist, midwife, lover, marriage partner, literary critic, trainer for athletic team, trustee of democratic spirit, psychoanalyst, listener, surrogate-audience, author, harrower/gardener, beholder, ironic recuperator of the maternal gaze (1992, 5).

I might place at least three of “my” four directors within that typology, yet I do not want to be thoroughly corralled by it. That said, some corralling is inevitable, as typology is, by its nature, a somewhat essentialist pursuit. The descriptions that
follow then should be read as indications of tendencies, or as the articulation of the greatest distinctions between the directors, not as definitions of them as artists. For example, in describing Geordie as a “Sports Coach”, I do not mean to imply that he is a Sports Coach instead of a theatre director, or that the tag suggests any deficiency in his directorial style or process.

Here and throughout this study, I am saying, in effect: This is what happens in the theatre, these are the measures taken, we respect them as sound practice. Now, from an insider/outsider ethnographic distance, What are they? And at this point, given the establishment of the primacy of the directors’ impressions and inclinations, it is legitimate to ask not only, What are these practices? but, What (if not who) are these directors?

**English Master**

Adam’s directorial style was, as has been previously implied, founded on a dedicated and thorough immersion in the play text and related literature. His rehearsal room was defined by calmness, respect, support, intellectual curiosity, textual deference, and non-confrontation. Discussion on the first day of rehearsals was framed by textual material the director had brought to rehearsal, archival documents from Williams’ biography, such as a letter to Elia Kazan about *A Streetcar Named Desire*, from which Adam quoted at length. The conversation had something of the feel of a lecture, with the cast seemingly content to receive rather than engage with the material as presented. The director’s research, his intellectual generosity and erudition, his enthusiasm, his fine speaking voice, compelled the cast to attend with studied deference. Here was the intellectual leader establishing the principle points of reference, neither provoking nor receiving by their own agency any challenge to the epistemological positions being projected or the aesthetic inclinations they were held to suggest, or sold as suggesting.

I reflect on Adam’s direction in the context of my experience of the Australian theatre in which—as almost exact contemporaries—we both were nurtured.

In my Masters thesis, I wrote a little about Aubrey Mellor’s process as a director, having worked with him in a couple of Chekhov-related projects:

Mellor treated the rehearsal room like a garden (my image, not his), where all that was needed was nurture, fertilisation, and, with faith in his cast and Chekhov’s material, good things would grow. He enriched the “soil” with knowledge and understanding of the text and ... understanding of Chekhov, the
Mellor is worth considering at this length here because he is among the most influential directors for Australian theatre workers of my and Adam’s generation and professional provenance. His influence upon me is evident:

I assert that trying to act Chekhov without understanding something of his life and times and his other work is to deplete the experience or just make it unfathomably difficult. To know of Chekhov’s childhood, his ruling stars—a violent father, a rapacious sexuality, lifelong ill-health—is to find the perspective from which to read the plays and embrace the characters (Crawford, 2011, 96).

The references to both Mellor and Chekhov are significant because of the former’s influence upon Adam, conceded to me during rehearsals, and Chekhov’s influence on Williams (Zhao, 2010). These connections are alive in Adam’s widely sourced references to Williams’ biography. They would be valuable in dealing with any Williams play; they are particularly so in dealing with this more-rather-than-less autobiographical one. If Adam is any kind of English Master, he is a good one, offering actors a deep, reliable foundational grasp on the text at hand:

*Adam allows the actors to complete whole passes of the scene, even at this early stage, which is uncommon. I don’t believe this is due to the nature of the material. I believe it is his normal practice to see the work in whole chunks, then reflect, rather than constantly interrupt and craft the scene in its nascent stages, as do both Chris Drummond and Geordie Brookman* (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

His faith in, and corresponding reliance upon, actors is absolute and explicit:

‘I think we’ll just find it as you keep exploring the scene, and we’ll look at particular moments that go wrong’ (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

For directorial intervention and contribution to be reliant upon actors’ wrongdoing is recognised by Keith Bain as representative of a generational shift from the directors of the 1970s and 1980s to those of the 1990s, wherein there tends to be a ‘wider creative input from the cast, whilst the director edits the actors’ offerings’ (2010, 150). It can be a rather passive position, but it is one aligned with the impression throughout of Adam as a gracious “host” of proceedings:

‘Well done. I think that’s a really great way to approach this scene’ (GM, 13-4-12, wk2).
Some would be surprised, I suspect, to learn how seldom actors hear such unfettered congratulation in rehearsal:

* He is unfailingly polite ... creating a platform of good humour, reliable intellect and aesthetic taste on which the actors rather gently pursue the work. Politeness is among Adam’s strong qualities as a person, and this (almost) gentility pervades his rehearsal room (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

This gentle pursuit was at all points preferred over a more dynamically entangled, challenging, corporeal rummage:

* There is no sense of rehearsal ... as any kind of ‘mud-wrestle’, as it is for some (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

Passes of scenes were followed by affirmations of text, however they manifested in actors’ bodies. I did not have the sense of the director viscerally engaged with the actors’ work, but monitoring it somewhat non-judgementally against the evidence of the text:

* The discourse is still about given circumstances, character histories, the restating of meanings. Gentle suggestions are occasionally made for the reinterpretation of lines and reactions. ... [T]he challenges ... come directly from the writer, not interpreted or prosecuted by the director.

* Cast and director continue to state the realities of text: ‘She is...’; ‘He knows...’; ‘Her attitude is...’; ‘He believes...’; and generalise the fictional circumstances and character experiences and perspectives into the cast’s and director’s lives. Again, this feels like deep, intelligent, pleasant chat rather than the kind of problematised wrestle of other rehearsal rooms—a conversation that seems to be predominantly about the play rather than the embodied work on the stage, with the faith that the former will flow into and nourish the latter (GM, 13-4-12, wk2).

Far from being an iconoclast, Adam is something of an iconolater: a lover and worshipper of the source material; a pursuit he quasi-spiritualises at one point:

* ‘I actually went to the beach this morning at about 5a.m., and just sat reading it quietly and watching the sun come up’ (GM, 17-4-12, wk3).

This is a powerful image of the director as artist, in solace, with nature, seeking communion with his “god”, the playwright. Whatever power is accessed will lie beneath ongoing communication with the actors, without necessarily being explicitly expressed. At the same time, it is a somewhat lonely image: the director isolated
from the hell-for-leather fun, flirtation and experiential construction of the rehearsal process.

As suggested, I was often impressed with Adam’s measured language and calm, authoritative voice. His way with words calls to mind Bourdieu’s critique of political language, which he claims

is characterized by a rhetoric of impartiality, marked by the effects of symmetry, balance ... propriety and decency, ... discretion, ... everything which expresses the negation of the political struggle as struggle (1991, 132).

Adam’s language and sangfroid were largely effective in creating an atmosphere of calm confidence among the collaborators, but appeared at times a negation of the artistic struggle as struggle. Nevertheless, his emphases are impressive and important:

*I hear a constantly supportive, intelligent reasoning, an obsession with fidelity to text as the guiding light of the work (GM, 17-4-12, wk3).*

These emphases are further represented in the following citation, which demonstrates a remarkable grasp of source material, knowledge of acting, and great attention to the responsibilities of artistic/pastoral care of a young cast member. It is worth citing in full because it is Adam at his best, and because it represents a broad range of tactics in the phenomenon of rehearsal room transferences from director to actor:

‘At the beginning of the scene she’s terrified, having to engage with him, even though she’s dying to; that, and the end, after the kiss when he says, “I’m actually seeing somebody else and I’m getting married soon.” That’s when the candles of her own inner world are snuffed out and she seems to have disappeared into herself. But through the scene, what we have to be careful of is that you don’t inhabit one area of low-key introspection. So, let’s chart it together as we work on the scene together, when she begins to feel more relaxed, enjoys being herself, can share her secret life with him. And he gives her so much, endowing her with importance as an individual human being. And she enjoys that. So in the beginning she says, “Oh, dear god, I’m going to have to speak to him”, but in the course of the scene let’s see when she can love it, and come out of herself, and her capacity for joy. I mean, it’s not just any boy, it’s the one she’s already in love with, who she never thought she’d see again. And he’s in her living room, and he’s kissing her, so that’s kind of wonderful. So the more we see the positive impact he has the more shattering it’s going to be for us when that surprise comes, and we have that, “Oh, why couldn’t this work out? How wonderful that she’s found somebody who can love her and respect her for
who she is, and who can help her.” If it’s the first time you’ve ever loved anybody, it’s exhilarating, and devastating. And it’s the one you’ll never get over because suddenly your emotional life is calibrated in a more extreme way than it has been’ (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

Adam is unlikely to be the first or last theatre director to be described as don-ish. The legitimacy of the anchorage in waters of scholarship is in this provenance and presumed future, and established by such insight and dedication to the “sacred texts” as was evident in his processes at all times.

**Sports Coach**

As with the case of all four directors, elements of Geordie’s processes and emphases are touched upon elsewhere in the study, and—as with all of these typological thumbnails—he may in those moments appear to embody or defy the notional relationship between his work and that of the sports coach.

Distinct among this quartet of directors, I have an intimate and broad perspective on Geordie’s directorial style and processes, as I have been directed by him on five occasions from 2008 to 2014, including in *Hedda Gabler* and *The Seagull*, both for STCSA, which were produced after *City*, and in the middle of my PhD candidature. Consequently, my inclination to generalise here derives from confidence in doing so, and a sense that I would be unhelpfully withholding impressions were I not to do so. I hope not to “un-level the playing field” with this, but rather acknowledge the field’s prevailing variables.

Geordie appears to bring to rehearsal substantial and detailed conceptions of character and action as horizonally imagined projections: a strong sense of a “game plan”. He projects sometimes quite cut-and-dried rhythmic expectations on sections of text. These may then be fastidiously and laboriously “drilled”:

> Not a lot of directors will begin with these kind of aesthetic projections onto actors early in rehearsal, but I recall the early days of Speaking in Tongues, when—before we’d been on our feet with the scene—we timed certain pauses and plotted relative values of shared lines etc. Here too he responds to the ostensive line-run with very detailed guidance about structuring performance through specific beats and the links between them. Geordie’s knowledge of the

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32 By comparison, I have been directed once by Adam (*King Lear*, 2009), once by Chris (*The Hypochondriac*, 2009), and never by Rose. *Hedda Gabler* played throughout April and May, 2013; and *The Seagull* played through February and March, 2014. For both periods I took leave-of-absence from the study.
text is intimate, his dramaturgical preparation is substantial and detailed, and he looks to contribute this research to the actors (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

Nonetheless, he will constantly encourage actors to continue exploring, and regularly reasserts the rehearsal space as a place of exploration:

at the end of the run, Chris [Pitman] invites mockery of his work, and mocks himself, and says something along the lines of “I just needed to go there”, and Geordie agrees it was a ‘worthy exploration’ (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

Actors are given broad and explicit scope to explore the text in action, but he is constantly asserting parameters of exploration, patrolling the boundary lines of interpretation. There is detailed and meticulous steerage that seems to me to exist in a tradition of Australian theatre directors of my experience that includes Arne Neeme,33 Neil Armfield and Gale Edwards.34 These are directors who remain at all points assiduously in control of all elements of production, indefatigably immersed, and finely attuned to the developing work of their actors.

Something of a sense of the constant inter-play of artistic license given to actors, faith in aesthetic means of shaping acting, and surety of artistic vision is evident in this moment:

‘A lot of ground to cover, but we’ll deal with it beat by beat and shape it up. And I think that with those beat changes, give yourself time to make them. We can always squash down those pauses later, but at the moment we have to mark, “Ok, I have to jump from here to here”’ (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

Shaping it up and squashing it down, Geordie is entirely unfazed by talking about acting in these purely aesthetic terms; acting being, seemingly for him, one element of a complex artistic frame in which design, music, sound and light are given equal respect, and spoken of with no greater or lesser reverence or concision. Some directors will wave away certain of these categories of concern at certain times: not Geordie, nor any of those on whose shoulders I place him.

Geordie sits by the desk at the front of the rehearsal room, often crouched in deep concentration. He has a propensity to jump to his feet and hurry onto the stage to conduct an intimate conversation with one or two actors. This is among the distinguishing features of his work: the close range discussion or pep talk. This is one

33 Theatre and television director (1945 - ), former artistic director of National Theatre Company, Perth, Hunter Valley Theatre Company, Australian National Playwrights’ Centre, former Head of Theatre at Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) and The Actors’ Centre (Sydney), former Senior Fellow, National University of Singapore.
34 Theatre and opera director (1954 - ), former associate director of STCSA.
of the prompts for the tag Sports Coach. Geordie will come onto the stage and conduct a very private discussion with an actor, a kind of plotting of a strategy for the scene, or the close examination of character motivations. When I told Matilda, twelve months after City, I was attempting to describe Geordie’s direction, she immediately cited ‘the intimate chats, one on one’ as the thing she recalled most vividly (pers. com. 27-5-13). I have known these conversations to last for up to half an hour, if an actor feels “stuck”.

I have seen Geordie stuck too. Among his strengths is his willingness to concede this. One extraordinary moment from the peculiar Cirkidz rehearsal space evinces this:

_The turning point of the afternoon is when Geordie suddenly excuses himself after the first pass through the scene, and after a 15-minute discussion of it (‘There’s just something I’m on the edge of’) to go outside to gather his thoughts. The actors wait. There is a long silence punctuated by little bits of conversation, but mainly they wait in silence for the director to return. Geordie returns after about two and a half minutes, to holistically annunciate an idea about Chris’ character:_

_‘There is no desire to be wild or crazy. They act how they best fit the world or how the world best fits them. She searches for complication. She wants something, anything, and he avoids it. He’s not secretly desiring passion ... he wants things to be easy, simple. A large part of the arc of this scene is dealing with what you do when that is taken away from you’ (City, 23-3-12, wk2)._  

This had been prompted by an afternoon in which actor Chris had been experimenting very boldly and somewhat erratically with an expansive, clownish energy. What is interesting in Geordie’s gathered thoughts is the tone of authorship in his words. Here, Geordie sounds to me like a writer projecting an image of a scene to be written, subject to an horizontal clarity: as if seeing what he describes on an imagined stage (page) in front of him. It was the turning point of the afternoon not because of the explicit achievements of the conversation itself, but because of the effects it had on the actors as they returned to more focussed work on the rehearsal floor, then to still more confident discussion after it. I will later recall this moment as evidence of a virtuous circle of rehearsal activity. This episode indicates the robust detail of Geordie’s intelligence, and the social respect with which his long-time collaborators, Lizzy and Chris, afford him. It speaks, in short, of depth and trust.

The aim here is to articulate some distinctions in style and emphases of the four directors, in order to view these distinctions as variables in the paths of actors’ experiences. I have already foreshadowed my own responses as an actor to Geordie’s direction, and now venture to access that experience, to take an analytical or
The interpretive leap to a further, personal radius in order to attempt to describe what for me is this director’s most distinguishing feature.

As an actor, I feel the more-or-less proximity or alignment of a director’s sympathy with my artistic ambitions in the role. I feel the director “with me” in my ambition, so to speak, sensitive, moment to moment, to the score I am constructing and the rationales for it, or somewhat distant from those elements of craft and interpretation, as if the nuanced story of character I am attempting to impart to the audience, and my interpretation of function, might come as a surprise to him. At the same time, I sense an equal variance in the amount of latitude I am being afforded in a production, the artistic license, as it were, the freedom to own the role and own each moment. It is possible to feel crowded by the director, as if they want to be doing it with me, implying that they may not trust me to do it alone. These two things may be imagined as two separate axes: one describing a degree of sensitivity, from remote to intimate; and the other a degree of liberty, a variance that results in the actor feeling, perhaps fair to say, free-ranged or caged.

Most directors seem to equate intimacy of connection to the actor’s work with caging the actor, as if being “with them” in ambition requires them to be “with them” in the performance pursuit of the ambition. Correspondingly, directors who afford actors free-range in the performance are usually somewhat distant from the actor’s artistic ambitions, seeing both as an extension of artistic liberty. I find Geordie unique in that in all five roles I have played under his direction, he achieves intimacy on the sensitivity or “collusion” axis while giving maximum free-range license on the liberty axis. I feel that he has intimate knowledge of almost every moment of my performance, yet allows me the space to explore and claim the performance as my own, not his. This is chief among the reasons I consider him (pointless for me to shy from this here) a superb director of actors.

This quality in Geordie, and his general energetic demeanour, recalls for me the sports coach in his “dug-out”, galvanising a team of support staff around him to equip him for the ongoing flow of the game, ready to respond with passion, compassion and insight into the tactical nuances and changes required for victory, ready with the inspirational whisper in the star-player’s ear, ready, finally, to tell the players to go out there and “have fun”.

**Mistress of Revels**

In the previous two cases, I believe I have given impressions (only) of directors that are—both from my observation of their processes in these shows, and my wider
knowledge of them—substantially transferable to their work in other contexts. The same cannot be said of the impressions I give here of either Rose or Chris. The reason for this is the material on which they worked, and the extraordinary pressures and distinctions that came with those nascent and developing texts. I make no claim that the descriptions I imply here, or the typological tags I put on them, are of much verity beyond the context of these productions. As I have had the privilege of working with Chris, I know this to be the case for him, and I must allow that it may be equally true of Rose, notwithstanding the comments cited here from actor Jude. These are impressions of the directors as their native instincts and habitus confronted these unique circumstances.

I have never seen a rehearsal room operate in the way that the Pin rehearsal room was run. My surprise and intrigue led to much scribbling in the room, and copious subsequent analysis, which explains the extent to which I rely on OS entries here. I feel that they best capture the energy of my search for meaningful extrapolation on a process that led me continually to three interrelated themes: democracy, chaos, and femininity, and wondering on those interrelations.

That Rose navigated a show to a very successful outcome is remarkable testament to the elasticity of approach open to theatre directors, particularly as her challenge was the development of a new piece of work, and a musical; a show with not only the usual dramatic coordinates of acting, sound, lighting, set and costumes to cohere, but the additional challenges of a developing text, music, singing, dancing, and near-constant visual projection onto a complex set that included a revolve. The challenge seemed awesome, ridiculous, impossible. For this scale of challenge to be met by a director of Rose’s attitude and approach tended to stupefy me during the process, and left me astounded at her social and artistic talent and achievement.

I have already hinted strongly throughout this study of the industrial and artistic preoccupations, priorities and tendencies of the Pin rehearsal room. It was highly distinctive from the first moments, in some ways already recorded, and also in that Rose did not offer a substantial opening statement to the company, let alone discursively dominate in the way the two other directors did, and this had an immediate effect:

*I feel that Rose’s lack of an opening “lecture” on the play, the brevity and sparseness of her leading contribution, has opened the room to more participation by actors in the discussion* (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).

[35] The show won two 2014 Helpmann awards: Best Children’s Theatre, and Best Original work (nationally), toured to Sydney, and in 2015 played a season in New York.
I continued to be impressed by gestures and intimations of democracy:

*Everyone feels comfortable airing their views. Why? Perhaps because of their history with each other, both in former shows and through the workshop process of this show; perhaps this is a manifestation of a ‘feminine’ space, although I don’t associate this openness with all female directors, nor is it barred from the rehearsals of male directors. Or is it because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the work? There are people in the room with unique perspectives (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).*

The final suggestion may be verifiable in the license given to artists like musicians, puppeteers and choreographers, but that license, extended by Rose, was for comment on all manner of artistic areas, inside and outside the purview of their specialist skills, and extended to others too:

*The stage manager gives her appraisal of the work. The first time in four shows and sixty-five hours of observation that I have heard an SM engage in the work in this way (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).*

Cast members with whom Rose had worked before (particularly *Wizard of Oz* veterans, Jude and Alirio, and leading player, Nathan) were clearly positioned as directorial “fellows”, and they took these honours with opinions liberally expressed, and position-takings at the director’s desk, close by her:

*Rose asks Alirio and Jude if they think they achieved enough in yesterday’s rehearsal of their scene together. Again, this is a small moment, but a highly unusual one. A director is most unlikely to cede this judgement to anyone else. It seems to me an immanently wise strategy (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).*

Rose was at all times transparent, open and frank with her cast, and they with her:

*Later, this openness is evinced as Rose says to the room: ‘Are we going to dump that song?’ and is met with a choral ‘Yes!’ from the cast (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).*

*So much of the feel of this room, its organic, chaotic, defocussed democracy must be put down to the personal style of the director, given the inferences that normally surround musical theatre, a form of such complex multi-disciplinary challenge that it is subject to the theatre’s most militaristic disciplining of time, space, and human and all other resources. If that inference has any substance in*

36 It would remain the only such instance.
common practice, this rehearsal process is wildly iconoclastic (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

The process smashed notions of industrial demarcation. Actions that would be judged transgressions in a highly demarcated industrial field (such as a fully-funded film set) were thoughtlessly pursued, and such demarcations thoroughly disenthralled, such as: a song being cut via a coarse straw-poll, without consultation with the composer, lyricist or playwright; Jude’s hurried, informal appointment as ‘dance captain’:

The choreography is not just negotiated but nuanced in the absence of the choreographer. This would be the taking of an unusual industrial license even if the dance captain were an official title held by a separate employee. That it is a privilege assumed by one of the cast members leads me to return to the overarching theme:

There is the constant sense of a democratic theatre-making troupe: an actor throws in textual suggestions from behind the drum-kit he’s momentarily playing; a puppeteer calls corrections on choreography; the director works to no formalised schedule, so the SM has no “whip to crack”, but simply waits for new “crystals” of concentration or focus to form. This hugely challenges the inherited practice of the commercial musical. Things are “drilled” at the instigation of cast members, and in a piecemeal way rather than as per schedule or as directed by the director. Yet the drilling happens, and perhaps this ownership of process will lead to artistic ownership of the product: A Marxist construction over the means of production? Yet the director’s authority is not challenged by this. The director may not have her hands on the construction of moments, she generously cedes this to whomever has the hands for the job in any given moment, but she remains the arbiter, the dominant claimant of authorship (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

This final point is important. For all of the latitude given her creative colleagues, and for all of the moments in which she appeared to be disavowing the primacy of the director’s voice, Rose was never challenged as the final word-sayer, nor do I suggest that this rehearsal room was any less than the others a director’s autobiography in time and space, a collective expression of an individual artist’s weft and gruel. Indeed, with its uniqueness, it might be argued that it was more so.

Stephen Tyler defines polyphony as ‘a means of perspectival relativity’ (1986, 127), and this seems fitting to Rose’s work, which is by no means subject to ‘a guilty excess of democracy’ (ibid), and is in no way ‘an evasion of authorial responsibility’ (ibid). Yet polyphony in the context of a theatre rehearsal room tends toward cacophony, and toward chaos, as Jude suggests:
'Probably the same chaos when we did Wizard of Oz but – in my opinion, twenty times worse [then]. … I did speak to Rose before we went in, and I told her some concerns about the distractions in the last rehearsal process and that it was really quite difficult, and whether she felt the same way, or whether that was an ideal working scenario for her. So I could mentally prepare. She said, “No, no, no, I do work chaotically, I do know that about myself, but it won’t be like last time.” You can’t help that their psyche and their personality is—along with their particular creativity—stamped all over this piece, and this rehearsal room. Like, there’s no other rehearsal room that is like Rose Myers’ rehearsal room, that has all the balls up in the air all at once and can feel completely unfocussed and chaotic but at the same time she works very well in that sphere. It’s her preferred mode’ (P120809.jude).

Because rehearsals proceeded without a schedule (an extremely unusual strategy), sessions would sometimes begin in a loose, fractured, relaxed way that did not achieve collective focus—on the two occasions cited below, for example—until half and hour or even an hour into the call:

*Rehearsals are scheduled to start at 2:00, and at 2:00 the company enters the rehearsal room. By 2:10, the room is no less fractured than ever. Rose not yet in the room, but ten other company members working alone: musical director playing music, actors studying text or climbing the set; lighting designer and vision designer both working on laptops; puppeteer experimenting on stage.*

*Rose enters and slowly begins connecting with individuals and with different groups of artists on social and show-related things. Rose then waits while the lighting designer and the puppeteer finish a conversation about the lighting of the “hero” puppet.*

*Rose then begins with the designers a conversation framed around the ‘visual treatment for Fame Town’ (a section of the piece). Quite strangely and gradually, without any calling-to-attention, but just through her leading designers in this conversation, and with her voice increasing in volume throughout it, the focus of the room slowly collectivises. Actors play no part in this conversation, but stay at a variety of radii, some listening, some not (Pin, 8-6-12, wk2).*

This ceding of centrality surely evinces an extraordinary level of confidence in her leadership (not insignificant in this is her role as artistic director of the company) as well as an impressive level of respect afforded her specialist colleagues. The room

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37 I was reminded of living in France, and taking my then eight year-old son to play soccer in the village team. The coaching strategy was *laissez-faire*, totally unlike that I had experienced over many years in Australia: unfocussed, no “drilling” of skills or strategies. The idea was simply that the kids spend a lot of time with the ball at their feet, as if working solely on the establishment of a habitus drenched in the phenomenon of having a ball at their feet. Each kid was thrown a ball and basically left alone to muck about with it.
was not—moment to moment—claimed by Rose as her space, subject to her momentary interest. Rather, the focus was at all times up for grabs, available to whoever most needed it and was willing to claim it:

At 1115, Rose first takes leadership of the room, and briefly sets an agenda for the rest of the session. Even as she does so, two other conversations continue: one between the SM and the ASM; another between the MD and the sound operator. They are unfazed by the director’s first “public” utterances of the day, and she is unfazed by their failure to attend to them (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

I was regularly drawn to consider the uniqueness of Rose’s approach in the context of her being the only woman among the four directors that I observed, the links between her processes and her gender. This study does not have the scope, nor do I claim the expertise, to investigate this question fully, but it would be disingenuous of me to exclude it, so I share some of these moments of wondering such that readers—perhaps better qualified—may wonder with me:

TC: It is very interesting to me that she was the only woman director I observed. I wouldn’t say the sorts of things you’re talking about are necessarily related to being a woman, but it’s nonetheless interesting if you think of ‘the woman’ in the adjectival, literary sense of being released upward rather than claimed downward—it is in that sense a feminine process.
Jude: Yep (P120809.jude).

I grew fascinated by my own tendency to admire a room of such disparate energy. I am reminded of Sue-Ellen Case’s feminist perspective on canonical notions relating to both acting and dramaturgy:

objectives and through-lines might not be suitable acting techniques for representing women’s experiences. For the female actor to understand a female character, the through-line might be a fallacious way to work (1988, 123),

... and in relation to play construction, her observation that

some feminist critics have described the form of tragedy as a replication of the male sexual experience. Tragedy is composed of foreplay, excitation and ejaculation (catharsis). ... A female form might embody her sexual mode, aligned with multiple orgasms, with no dramatic focus on ejaculation or necessity to build to a single climax (ibid, 129).

In a similar vein, it is tempting to project this distinctive working space as a gender-related rejection of some of the more militaristic traditions of rehearsing theatre as
‘dynamics antithetical to feminism’ (Gainor, 2002, 165). This might be seen in particular relation to musical theatre, with its common nesting within the industrial rigidities of commercial theatre (see Pamela Rabe in Crawford, 2005, 43-55):

Rose doesn’t feel the need to have everyone hang on her every utterance. She is speaking to whom she is speaking, and that conversation can brook the concurrence of other conversations. Rose will raise her voice to the point of shouting in order to be heard by actors across the space before she will ask others to stop their conversation, or even exhibit any annoyance that she is having to shout. In the case of most directors, this is unthinkable (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

Having thrown this gender ball in the air, here’s the catch: in looking for antecedents in the directors of my experience, I find them not among the women by whom I have been directed, but in the attitudes and processes of a few distinguished men. Fewster (2002) and McAuley (2012) have both written about the direction of acclaimed Australian director, Neil Armfield, with Fewster finding that he would “seem” not to notice two of the actors and the assistant director throwing a tennis ball behind his back, tolerate a noise level uncommon in mainstream rehearsal, and permit jokes and repartee between the actors to flourish (2002, 112).

Yet somehow, as I have previously suggested, there is no shortage of iron fist in Armfield’s velvet glove. A determination to remain loose and unhurried is a strategy I have encountered on being directed by both Peter Kingston38 and Rex Cramphorn.39 In both cases, as it happens, and despite the enormous talents of both, and the pleasures of working with both, this led—to my actor’s mind and body—to significantly under-rehearsed productions. Something of an inevitable consequence may be inferred; that directors who invest in an unhurried rehearsal space achieve it at the expense of detailed attention to the actors’ work. My suggestion of an axis of sensitivity and an axis of liberty, mistakenly encountered by most directors as correspondent, may be worth recalling here. In the case of Kingston, Cramphorn and Rose, it may be that actors enjoy the liberty of free-ranging, without the enmeshment, scrutiny or thorough investment of great sensitivity. This is an easier arrangement for the actor to deal with than its opposite, high sensitivity and caging, because an actor—usually either through experience or glove-fit casting—does not necessarily need the director’s microscopic affinity, whereas an actor must always, I

38 Theatre director and teacher (1957 - ), former artistic director of Griffin Theatre Co, Sydney; former Head of Acting at WAAPA; former Head of Directing at NIDA.
believe, in order to feel successful, feel that the performance is her own. This interpretation, while it rests substantially on my own sens pratique, is nonetheless respected by Jude’s comments:

TC: The amount of attention an actor gets, if one was to time that in a two-hour session, is pretty small.
Jude: Yes, absolutely. ... There’s not a lot of focus time, one on one, but... you do have to work independently, and you would immediately have seen who flourishes with that and who struggles with it. And that’s why I think Rose is very careful about who she works with because she can’t have more than two or three people in a cast of eight who need very much attention.
TC: Guidance in an actorly way?
Jude: Yeah.
TC: Like an engagement with anything like an inner life or... An actor is someone who is put into this large, complex mechanism, and kind of does their thing. ... Which is not a criticism. I don’t count that as bad direction.
Jude: Rose’s direction is quite simple. The closest Rose got to talking about an emotional journey was one day saying to Nathan, ‘Do you think you could cry a bit more. Go on, give it you best shot’. Then laughed it off.
TC: But we were talking about another director earlier whose dealing with that would include trying to get inside your head as you did whatever you did to try and cry. To have someone stand at some distance from the centre of your contemplation, and say, ‘Here’s the effect. Try that’, and to be somewhat flippant about it, can as often as not be liberating.
Jude: Yes. Yes.
TC: Because there’s a lot of trust put in you.
Jude: Yeah. And at the same time, when you know you have someone who is standing that far back, and not in your head at all, you trust that they are looking after the audience and the entire big picture much more than someone who is right there trying to understand your motivation for everything you do. I definitely trust that Rose doesn’t give a shit how I get there, but that her primary concern is all about the end result and the effect, and that fills me full of trust and confidence when she says those three words that might be very simple (P120809.jude).

Jude’s comments embrace the range of responsibilities, liberties and challenges for the actor working amid the revelry of Rose’s production.

Sculptor

I have already written quite extensively of the peculiar challenges and processes of L&S rehearsals. My aim here is to contextualise or theorise Chris’ work a little more deeply and broadly, beginning with this moment that contains some self-analysis:
‘There is a tension between what I think happens inside the brain when we sort of hear stories and they serve as some kind of parable for life—and I think that kind of explodes in one part of the brain; and when we see images, it explodes in another part of the brain. I think it’s possible but it’s clearly difficult to have a continuous sort of meaningful engagement with something that hovers between the abstract and the narrative. ... That’s my personal preoccupation, to try to find the point where they orbit one another in a way that... you don’t go too much into narrative or too much into the abstract such that you can’t find your way back in to one or the other. And I think that’s our biggest challenge, to sit on this knife-edge. In acting terms, I think it’s about trying to find compositional ways of locating where you are in time and space. The arc that you build for yourselves is not going to be built psychologically or emotionally (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

There is the stuff here to sustain analysis way beyond my current scope, and to shed light on the achievements of some other superb productions directed by Chris. To merely nibble at the feast, however: I suspect there is a strong correlation between the delicate navigation that he describes here between narrative and abstract ‘explosions’, and his work with actors, navigating between his intellectual sophistication—tending toward the esoteric—and the practical tasks of meaningfully directing actors. As indicated by this and other citations, Chris is a deep thinker. His intelligence is matched with an emotional intelligence that allows for great humility, self-effacement, warmth, generosity and charm, and the comingling of all these qualities facilitates his personal preoccupations toward meaningful engagement.

That said, the powers of L&S, which Fortier, at least, might allow as Brechtian, describe a directorial challenge for ‘control in the face of the infinite dispersal of significance’ (2004, 33). Chris subsequently tended toward an approach to his actors and their stores of craft knowledge that was profoundly disruptive and disarming, leading—as has been described—to disavowals, to a level of lostness for his actors, or rather a sense that he had uncoupled from them to pursue an esoteric reconciliation of narrative and abstraction, meaning and action:

We want to create a new language ... that can strike us with the same immediate force as the sight of a mother protecting her child, or of a man who kills another in the street in cold blood (Barba, 1986, 46).

This idea from a radical practitioner and theorist might justifiably have come from Chris, and might believably refer directly to L&S, which is to indicate the scale and force of the directorial challenge, and perhaps explain some of the symbolic violence
that surrounded it. Certain disavowals, social negations or radical re-positionings were conceded as such by Chris:

‘This is quite unnatural, what I’m asking you to shoot for ... I’m just trying to push onto the stage what I see. I know I’m imposing and imposing’ (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).

These impositions were deemed necessary to unearth a semiotic language to tell the non-narrative tale, seeking ‘a corporeality in theatre which is over and above the presentation of meaning’ (Fortier, 2004, 20). This is a hard row to hoe in four weeks of rehearsal, and the position that Chris took to do so was one that I regularly found myself describing as that of a sculptor, a designation that—perhaps unsurprisingly—does sit within Cole’s (1992) typology, and, interestingly, was attributed by John Rouse (1984, 36) to Brecht as director.

These references are telling. Although Chris has cited to me on a number of occasions the influence of Armfield’s work on his sense of theatrical aesthetic, and notwithstanding my recognition of that, nor the links I see to Australian directors such as Cramphorn and Jenny Kemp, I am inclined to theorise Chris’ work in the context of twentieth century European figures such as Craig, Jacques Copeau, Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, Barba, and Peter Brook:

What was Copeau’s dramatic renovation? In essence it was an attempt to return to the sources of dramatic performance, in order to recover a theatrical economy in which dramaturgy was inseparable from theatrical form (Gordon, 2009, 122).

Chris’ performance-deconstructive instincts relate directly to Barba’s call for a de-cultured or de-educated body that ‘must detach itself from its models’ (1986, 95), and to Grotowski’s aims for ‘perfect expressivity [through] an organic psychophysical process’ (Gordon, 2009, 294, 295):

More short bursts of work on the floor are followed by more somewhat pensive commentary by Chris, yet what is interesting is that the commentary leads to very finite, physical direction, ‘come here, back away there, touch him, achieve a balance for when she enters’ etc. I am again reminded of a sculptor staring at an inanimate raw material that does not articulate itself, knowing that the only way it will begin to resemble a meaningful shape and form is through hands-on manipulation. Chris kneads the actors with substantial, quiet force.

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40 Theatre director and playwright (1955 - ).
Chris’ constant inhabitation of the acting area is conspicuous. He is always on his feet, either close to the actors or at some radius, offering constant character-centric rationales, holding actors at bay with his arms, indicating actors on and off stage, and toward and from each other. Actors as über-marionettes. Chris conceding, ‘We’re working outside in’. He conducts the actors, line by line, eg ‘She looks up… (actor does so) Your line...(actor delivers line).’ It’s a bit like visiting the doctor—“open your legs and cough”: The delivery of one’s sense of self-direction or agency into the hands of another, a trusted “expert” (L&S, 18-4-12, wk2).

All of Chris’ direction on this day is still being pursued while on his feet, travelling over the acting area, and then off it to a point of greater objectivity.

He expends the most physical energy, more than any other director at any other rehearsal. I make the observation that this is not entirely due to his personal style. I have known him to be high-energy, even anxiously ‘wired’ in the rehearsal room, but more inclined to contain this for sustained periods of the session. Here, it has rarely been contained, and I put this down to the play, and the sense of ‘perpetual development’ that surrounds the process, and the corresponding sense of low-lying anxiety that the cast feel in the light of it (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).

Chris did indeed walk an artistic knife-edge during this rehearsal, re-wiring elements of the actors’ acting, or their mechanisms for understanding their acting, while decoding a somewhat recalcitrant if richly evocative script toward a production that, paradoxically, relied intensively on the actors’ command of ritualistic, loaded gestural scores. He did this not by privileging the actor in rehearsal, but largely by taking the role of the central artist himself, the sculptor, exercising a kind of naked sensitivity and intuition, alive to

the good idea that flew from the water glass … but looked good where it spilled… [T]he compelling, inescapable detail that makes you stop still and ask, “Now where the hell did that come from?”’ (Edwards, 2003, 15).

Chris exercised these skills and this position as a means of shaping his process to the text: a feat of highly evolved and vital artistry.

CONCLUSION

This chapter and the previous one establish the notion of an artistic compass, lying within and dependent upon a political compass, in which actors dwell. The defining stakes of the artistic compass are its text, its design and, pre-eminently, the director,
who might be said to be its author. I have examined in detail some variables of the artistic compass, with particular emphasis on the variety of directorial approaches taken by the four directors, determined by their own industrial, artistic and personal predilections and inclinations, and have established that all are capable of facilitating actors onto the stage, and into the artistic compass, to—in each of the four instances under investigation—artistic and box-office success. All manner of roads, it would seem, lead to a kind of Rome.

While it may be true that the ‘nature of the actor/director relationship [is] defined by the directorial style’ (Hope, 2010, 123), the nature of the artistic outcome may not be subject to the same hegemony. The agency of actors—from Hamlet to eternity—Is in their doing: their essential presence, even while the director may choose absence. So it would seem that—however reconciled to the notion or not either party may be—leadership, agency, centrality is transferred from the director to the actor.

Directors, by means of their various absorptions, are clearly relying on actors: on their trust; their malleability and open-mindedness, certainly; but principally on their capacity to translate the idiosyncrasies of the director’s rehearsal leadership, established here as an experiential, philosophical, social, textual bombardment, into coherent, repeatable and readable performance. From my funny, elastic radius of an insider stepping out to look in at the results, I am inclined to wonder, with Edwards (2003, 15), as I watch performances, Where the hell, indeed, did that come from?

This question calls for a refined focus on the actor, and how—to put it plainly—they respond to their political and artistic encompassing circumstances; this fine mess they have got themselves into! Although the study will never seek to discretely examine the fictive compass, lest it fall into the trap of a ‘How to…’ pamphlet, we begin to lean toward the fictive compass in analysing actors’ ways of percolating meaning. Before that work of the final section of the study, I need to remain a while longer on the directors and, more specifically, their words. I want to examine the profoundly impactful means that pave the way to the actor’s experiential ends: discourse.
CHAPTER FIVE:
DIMENSIONS OF DISCOURSE

INTRODUCTION

The terms through which the devotees of a scholarly pursuit represent their aims, judgments, justifications, and so on seems to me to take one a long way, when properly understood, toward grasping what that pursuit is all about (Geertz, 1983, 157-158).

This chapter’s interests are in analysing and somewhat categorising—using the taxonomy of Dimensions as a tool—the discourse between actors and directors in rehearsal as a means of finding out what the rehearsal is, as Geertz says, all about.

The chapter begins with reference to notions of the theoretical “shyness” of theatre professionals: treating on the ancient, contestable duality and ‘oversimplistic dichotomies’ (Zarrilli, 2008, 4) of theory and practice. Next, I examine the use of metaphor, and what I refer to as “meta-text”, a strategy that includes fragments of sub-text and paraphrase, but is not limited to them. The study then takes something of a quantitative turn, with the mapping of directors’ “notes” to actors expressed as “Dimensional” data, and analysed for discursive trends and distinctions, before the identification of an overwhelmingly dominant Dimension in discourse, relating to the artists’ inhabitation of the artistic compass, and the ramifications of this for actors.

ON THEORISING

An instinct or strategy for veiling acting theory in the preparation of performance has been noted:

knowledge is rarely verbally articulated. ... At no stage do they talk about their training, their backgrounds, and the practices they are enlisting. They just do the work (Rossmanith, 2008, 142).

It seems to me that there is nothing particularly startling or unique in this professional relationship of theory to practice. It might be admitted that electricians and hairdressers are no more or less inclined than actors to subsume and contain the underlying theories of their practice in that practice. The comparison is not facetious: rather, it privileges acting as an inherently practical task, as underlined by Brown:
It’s about doors, shoes, walking, turning. Being heard, being fat, being skinny, being naked. There is a whole series of very practical aspects that I really think is the great beauty of the craft, and shouldn’t be poo-pooed (in Crawford, 2005, 18).

Maxwell’s comments are corroborative and comprehensive:

the kinds of theoretical ideas that circulate in academic theatre and drama departments are rarely invoked in mainstream theatre rehearsals; actors do not sit around rehearsal tables discussing semiotics, or any of the other analytical tools which we find useful for describing performances. They are more likely to invoke a previous production when discussing acting styles or the practicalities of rehearsal than they are to cite Stanislavsky. Actors share and circulate skills learnt in practice, from previous directors, or from their training, or recent classes, often through the medium of anecdotes and jokes, and often without consciously considering what they are doing. Ideas about style and conventions circulate, and are disseminated, tried out, and rejected in practice, as potential solutions to day to day problems in rehearsal (2001, 50).

In this circulation, through these anecdotes and jokes, resulting in this dissemination and rejection, it seems to me that four possibly inter-related things are going on. None of them seem to disclaim theory, but to disguise it, humanise it, break it down, de-loft it:

1. At certain points theory appears to be subject to this break-down for no other reason than that it is assumed knowledge entirely embedded in commentary as it is in actors’ minds and bodies;
2. Elsewhere it appears as a kind of simple or accidental slippage of a theoretical referent;
3. At times there seems a determined anti-chauvinistic intent, a gesture toward intellectual inclusivity;
4. At other times it appears designed toward the collective and individual empowerment of actors.

Taken as a whole, the ‘words, images, institutions, behaviors’ (Geertz, 1983, 58) with which theatre workers represent ‘themselves to themselves and to one another’ (ibid) suggest a constant pull toward a kind of collective, purpose-built, one might even say “home-made” theoretical foundation, expressed in what Barba calls a ‘fugitive language’ (1995, 154), and most significant in the context of the artistic compass. I want to now briefly cite examples of each of these theory-veiling tendencies.
Assumption

Deirdre: I want her to be appreciated. I’m encouraging her through all this.

One of the most ‘actorly’ statements (ie – theorised) of the entire observation period, inasmuch as it is the clear articulation of an objective (for Laura to be appreciated) and an action (encourage), and all wrapped in the Personalisation mechanism of the first person pronoun. It is as if Deirdre is saying with this—although this is not her intention by any means—“I am a theorised Stanislavskian actor” (GM, 13-4-12, wk2).

This is an example of what Stanley and Wise refer to as

a relationship between theory and practice which not only sees these as inextricably woven, but which sees experience and practice as the basis of theory (1993, 58).

It is assumed knowledge, subsumed theory, a moment that happens to bespeak a theoretical sub-life.

Slippage

Spontaneous, even oblique, references to acting terminology are rare. These might be viewed as occasional engagements with theory or, alternatively, with just as much justification, and just as often, they may be seen as moments when the veil of assumed knowledge slips, and theoretical referents are unwittingly exposed:

Rose: It gives him a great action to play (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).

It is possible that ‘action’ is the one word of acting theory that is most regularly permitted access to the discourse of actors and directors with little if any embarrassment or sense of transgression. At other points, remarkable sensitivities appear in the quoting of foundational theoretical tenets:

The director’s general note is very interesting and salient. She makes the point that she thought the story-telling and timing were being well-achieved, and then said, ‘... to give you something to focus on with your performances ... making sure that everyone’s really listening to each other. You know, basic 1.01 ... You’ve never heard these lines before. Be in the moment, and be really listening and hearing each other.’
This is one of the clearest references to canonical acting theorising that I’ve encountered. It’s interesting that it is given at this point, before opening night. The partial apology for making a ‘1.01’ offer indicates perhaps an Australian reticence to formalise the work with theorising, and/or the extent to which such theory is held to belong way back in the halls of learning, rather than in the workplace (Pin, 11-7-12, wk6).

Then again, in the wake of the hitherto research of this study, it may also be that the apologetic impulse surrounding the cited theory is out of respect for this as “actors’ business”, not the domain of the director. This opens up the ground for what I refer to as the anti-chauvinistic impulse, which may be seen as a version of this expressed not as a director/actor transaction, but one between actors.

Inclusivity

Acting theory is a very “broad church”, its breadth almost impossible to treat in précis. This breadth is in part borne of vexation and wonder, and in turn promotes further vexation and wonder. Acting theorising is a kind of cloud-catching, made so by the endlessly perspectival claims of time, place and baggage. This is summed up in a kind of personalised sting-in-the-tail of Hope’s skilfully objective dissertation, wherein the final paragraph sees the scholar-as-actor return to the picture, with the claim that his acting is subject to his
cognizance of [my] immediate lived world, my idea of ideolocality, my inner sense of somatography: my very understanding of world, and therefore, I propose, of self (2010, 262).41

Likewise, Johnston links Heidegger’s notion of ‘Interpretation’ (Heidegger, 1973, 148) to Stanislavski’s teachings:

It is not a matter of artificially bringing something new to a part or play, but rather letting what is already there in the play and in the actor’s own life combine and become what they are (Johnston, 2007, 106).

The notion of Personalisation will be further scrutinised in the final section of the study. For now it suffices to say that for actors, looking at acting is like—and determinedly includes—looking in a mirror.

41 Nicholas Hope is an acclaimed Australian theatre and film actor. His scholarly work referred to here, unlike mine, positions his professional knowledge and experience as implicit, and peripheral.
Such reflections can easily sound cheap: theory without theory; knowledge without interrogation; self-avowal; self-satisfaction. If there is a reliable distinction between knowledge and theory, it is surely in rigour, interrogation, and articulation. The struggle to maintain these tenets of theory, while claiming actors’ bodies as their principal sites, is difficult, elusive, and, I would suggest, only moderately successful across the Australian acting profession. That said, the corresponding claim that this struggle can exist is the central project of those of us who work in tertiary actor-training, or it should be. Johnston claims that the

actor’s knowing is not a theoretical and detached knowing of something as present at hand, but rather an existential knowing and exploration of the possibilities of existence (2007, 107).

This strikes me as perceptive and true, but it tends to cut little ice in our institutions or, it has to be admitted, in this search for discursive output.

Nonetheless, this establishes the rehearsal room as a place where colleagues come together to forge intimacy, while understanding that the ways and means of going forward together into intimate art-building are understood differently, and at different depths, by all. This is not a problem experienced by electricians coming together to work as a team. This experiential, epistemological and theoretical diversity in the face of a strongly collectivised and innately intimate human project tends to be resolved by the keeping of one’s own theoretical counsel, and allowing others to do the same. I propose this is largely why the process may be observed as

not one of a careful, systematic building, but instead manifested as dynamic discussion full of half-asked questions and incomplete thoughts (Rossmanith, 2008, 144).

This is what I describe as inclusivity: the anti-chauvinistic or democratic impulse that may lead to limited theorising in rehearsal.

**Empowerment**

The fourth category I suggest for the way theory and theorising are employed and eluded in rehearsal is an instinct or strategy for empowerment of actors, most commonly employed by the director, as in this brief rehearsal moment, and my subsequent reflection:
Rose offers clear Aesthetic guidance for the scene at hand: ‘We made some really good pace yesterday, and that’s the pace we need to set and… then we’ll be better actors. Just like the Olympics.’

A wonderful example of a coarsely unsophisticated expression by the director that nonetheless serves a sophisticated power-relationship in the developing art. The pronoun, ‘we’, evokes camaraderie, but the coarse anti-theory of ‘be better actors’, and the dislocation of ‘Just like the Olympics’ leaves actors the space to make their connections, and build their meanings, their fictional habitus. Is there an inverse relationship between the sophistication of the director’s commentary and the agency afforded the actor? Certainly, when I was challenged by a colleague in 1998 for telling a student actor to ‘act better’, my interrogation of my own practice was extremely valuable, and my final defence of the note still retains currency for me: this actor knew exactly what more to do and how to do it, they were simply not allowing themselves to do it. With my coarseness, I was giving license to them to self-analyse; I was acknowledging their ‘knowing’ and their capacity to turn the knowing into doing. The comment was made in the context of teaching strategies and acting theorising that framed the rehearsal moment. Sometimes (I claimed then, and still claim) ‘act better’ can be the best note available to a director. At other times, when none of these circumstances apply, it would be useless. I believe Rose’s use of the strategy here is entirely productive and useful (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

The discourse of the rehearsal room is drenched with knowledge and experience. It is interrogative in relation to textual meaning, and in relation to the pursuit of the aesthetic of the production, the coordinates of the artistic compass. Perhaps most of all, it is focussed on social harmony as the conduit for the work at hand: on gags, small kindnesses, and mildly sexualised flirtation. It is not deeply reflective in relation to canonical acting theory. What then, as Geertz emphasises, is the import? What is ‘getting said’ (1973, 10)? Broadly, I offer this interpretation of what we are saying with our discursive engagement with each other: “Accept me as I accept you. Forgive me my stores of knowledge, and chasms of ignorance, as I forgive you yours. Work with me. Play with me.”

Metaphor

This 25-minute discussion led at one point to Lizzy referring to ‘the different meta levels, blah, blah, blah…’ I thought it interesting that the prefix, ‘meta’, felt so invasive. Not, I should say, that anyone else responded to it, but that Lizzy herself responded to it by dismissing it with a waving arm gesture and the ‘blah, blah, blah’ as soon as she uttered it. A taboo language-token—impractical baggage—
had been stumbled upon, and then wiped over. This was not hostility but shyness.
Most interesting of all, though, was the discursive space that this small, ostensive gaff opened up. The discussion then led to metaphors, with both the leading actors engaging in building an agreement of a metaphorical projection across the scene. Lizzy led on to find images of ‘sparks and embers’. Chris [Pitman] said, ‘It feels like... all life is gone’. Lizzy agreed that there was ‘A weird settling of ash.’
Then, directly after this conversation and after one hour of rehearsing, another pass through the scene was achieved with hitherto undetected confidence and flow.

Why was the scene better on this third attempt? Obviously, it was emboldened through the benefits of ordinary practice and familiarity. Growth might reasonably be expected with repetition and without any discussion. I believe it was also enhanced by ... those metaphors. What power is there in people airing and agreeing on a central metaphor? If an army or society can truly be galvanised to tangible effect by rhetoric (‘We few, we happy few...’, ‘Adolf Hitler is Germany and Germany is Adolf Hitler’,42 ‘Sorry,43 etc) then we as colleagues of any type must also respond to a shared “narrative”, to employ the term our political jargoneers now favour. The ‘meta’ conversation of embers, lifelessness and ash seemed to create a common space for all four actors to inhabit, a common imagery, the beginnings of the field to be constructed, a space that had hitherto been non-communal (City, 19-3-12, wk2).

So it was throughout my observation of rehearsals that making strong metaphoric claims on scenes and characters appeared to focus and empower actors,

seeing them suddenly awakened to an understanding of concepts and practices that had eluded them until a new thought process, tactic or metaphor is offered (Bain, 2010, 108).

Although metaphors were projected in all four rooms, they seemed particularly potent to the City cast, and I will focus on that rehearsal process with further citations in pursuit of ‘[h]ow is it that a metaphorical statement can be at once both true and false?’ (Basso, 1976, 96), and how that truth moves actors so reliably:

Chris says of his character, ‘He’s living in this kind of sea of confusion, and then suddenly there’s droplets of what might help... He’s trying to piece the puzzle together.’

42 From Rudolf Hess’ speech of February, 1934, “Der Eid auf Adolf Hitler” (The Oath to Adolf Hitler).
43 Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, gave an “Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples” in parliament on February 13, 2008.
This … continues … Chris’ (in particular) proclivity for metaphor as a mechanism of understanding and assurance (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

This proclivity infected his colleagues, with his director and co-leading actor—all three of whom, it should be remembered, greatly experienced in their collegiality with each other—continually using metaphor to make their points, and build the links between them. Here are four examples from the same afternoon:

Geordie: There is the sense of the beaten dog with him.

Chris: She’s on a slide away from him.

Lizzy: It’s a scab, and she’s, like, If you’re going to do that, let’s get the whole scab off.

Geordie: He absorbs it, sponge-like (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

Perhaps it is so that some works of art—Crimp’s peculiar, jagged dreams among them—are best described in artful terms, just as Bottom can find no prosaic way to describe his dream, and suggests that the only way it can survive is in Peter Quince’s art. Metaphor offers Chris the opportunity to expand his concept of character:

‘Yes, I think there is a certain element of wetness there, but I think there is a murky monster within that wetness that pokes its head out but doesn’t get enough oxygen, and goes back inside’ (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

A central metaphor was developed by the cast as a collective, guiding talisman, verified by both Matilda and Lizzy, in separate reflection:

Matilda: We had the constant image of the slippery fish. I don’t know where it came from, but that the play was a slippery fish. To catch hold of it was impossible, so you couldn’t (C120531.matilda).

Lizzy: Slippery fish. That’s the overarching description that comes to mind. Just when you think the show's in your grasp it slips away. Or it is in your grasp but then it seems to slip out of the hands of your fellow actor (Falkland, pers. com. 16-5-12).

Interestingly, it may be that the slippery fishiness of the play is the very thing that called for the reliance on a central collective metaphor: opaque art finding clarity through metaphor; slippery fish begetting slippery fish.

44 ‘I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called Bottom’s Dream; because it hath no bottom.’ Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 4:1, l.215-217.
Meta-text

*Adam:* I’ve seen the future if we don’t solve it. … It’s all a gamble. Who’s to say how it will turn out?45 (GM, 3-4-12).

Meta-text is a somewhat problematic reference, as it has “form” in the history of performance analysis and theatrical theorising. Patrice Pavis uses the word to describe the rewriting of the text offered by the *mise en scène* (2001, 34). With this, he suggests a communication between artists and their audience. I use the term as descriptive of how artists speak to each other. While not in dispute with a simple dictionary definition—taken from the nearest source to hand to discover representative essence—of ‘a text describing or explaining another text’, 46 actors find a home for a type of meta-text concurrent with text, as conduit between text and performance-as-text, and as a contextual frame for performance. Alan Sinfield claims that ‘metadiscourse emerges behind’ the text, ‘controlling’ discourse (1988, 131). The assurance artists find in this kind of discourse seems profound, as evinced by their regular reliance on meta-text as a means of controlling their collective understandings, describing themselves, and their interpretations, to each other.

Very often, when directors and actors reached a point of some confusion, meta-text was spontaneously employed to negotiate the epistemological impasse:

*Deirdre:* You’ve like it best when it’s less emotional. When it’s more factual.
*Adam:* See, now that you say that, I find that perplexing because I don’t think that’s right.
*Deirdre:* It was emotional today.
*Adam:* Yeah, that’s right. That’s good.
*Deirdre:* But then it bothered you and you’ve given me a note about it.
*Adam:* The emotion didn’t bother me. It’s understanding why the next sentence is, ‘There’s so many things in my heart.’
*Deirdre:* Because, I think it’s, Keeping on going is Spartan endurance when my heart’s broken.
*Adam:* Yes. And I could give you many examples when I adopted the very attitude I’m encouraging you to have. That’s it. It’s in that terrain, isn’t it? I couldn’t give you lots of examples right now, I just need you to stay on the right path, and not fall on the… the same way your father went.
(Long Pause)
*Deirdre:* But it bothered you today because it was very genuine today.
*Adam:* It’s not the way you play it that I’m questioning. I need to know why, as I watch her, why she then decides to say, ‘There’s so many things…’

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45 From this point on I have chosen to embolden all examples of meta-text.
Deirdre: *It's not easy. Life's not easy, and I haven't been able to give in to my hurt* (GM, 30-4-12, wk5).

Directors tend to avoid giving “line readings” to actors, putting the character’s lines into their own mouths. It is generally held to be bad practice, and can be taken by actors very unappreciatively. Meta-text allows directors to nonetheless engage with the character’s thoughts, and in something like the character’s voice, while avoiding this industrial transgression. Adam was particularly adept at this strategy in communication with his younger actors, as in this example referring to the ‘gentleman caller’ scene:

*Adam: I'm here to boost your self-confidence. Don't be afraid of other people. Everybody else just wanders the earth. You don't. And if you want to stay in here, that's fine, because you're... THAT girl.*

Throughout this offering, Nic continually says, “Yeah”, and at its punch-line, Kate laughs loudly. There is a strong sense of tutelage and leadership in this moment, as an experienced mid-career director “massages” a young cast in the evolution of the work (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

Here Adam is beyond sub-text, something that lies within the shadow, as it were, of a text. Adam’s meta-text is supplemental to that shadow. It deftly embraces interpretation, not just lineal sense. At another point, Adam joins Nic in a kind of soliloquising duet, facilitated by, and played entirely as, meta-text:

*Nic: I know you’re shy.*  
*Adam: Yeah.*  
*Nic: And that's OK.*  
*Adam: That's alright.*  
*Nic: That's a good way to be.*  
*Adam: Better than a lot of the other girls I've seen around. ... I can see where you're going with your view of all that, but don't think that way. ... You're shy with people – big deal! That's alright! ... He never says, Gee, that must have been excruciating and, yeah, that's a problem you've got to work on* (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

Barba underlines the extent to which the director ‘works with words’, using ‘verbal analogy’ (1986, 101) correspondent to the actors’ work. Indeed, there seemed no end to the applications of this strategy in rehearsal, redolent of what Keith Basso describes as ‘synonymity’ (1976, 98). Meta-text allowed Geordie to stake the ground of the conflict between Crimp’s frayed wife and husband with great delicacy:
Geordie: *See, this is exactly what I’m talking about. Your neediness and asking for permission for everything is exactly what I’m trying to shift you out of.*

*Ok, I’ll be the man you want me to be, I’ll step up* (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

I confess that I found delight in the discovery of this mechanism, and the artists’ propensity to use it. On reflection, I think I respond to a depth of analysis being brought into simultaneity with rhetorical invention. It seems both smart and fun. The following citation of rehearsal transcription nicely shows the path of this praxis, and the way the artists are attuned to each other in the improvisation of a meta-textual interpretation, initiated by a metaphoric suggestion:

*Chris: There’s a moment of realising it’s actually hollow.*

Geordie: *... Why do I need this? Why do I need to be different? I didn’t need to be different before. You always loved me for being me.*

It’s about the idea of difference, the idea of change at first feeling positive... so let’s follow this idea that something has changed through cracking yourself open and allowing himself to get upset, that there is a change and at first, That’s good, that’s good, that’s good, but then he gets to a point where he goes, Well, no it’s not. I liked who I was.

*Chris: Yeah, but it’s one more manipulation, Oh, my god, you nearly fuckin’ had me. So something has snapped in that. It’s snapped, and it’s allowed a little bit of room to see the manipulation.*

Lizzy: *She gives herself room to take a swinging kick and say, Yeah, you’ve been a fucking sad-sack who’s been driving everyone in the house down with you. And let’s face it, you’ve been fucking impossible. ... He’s still asking, fucking ASKING... I thought we’d got over this, I thought you were, you know, the new man.*

Geordie: *Yes. We can’t go round this circle one more time* (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

In the language of the actor rather than the character, meta-text renders meaningful broader situational positions. As such, it is a tool of Personalisation. Yet it is also a tool of collegial communion. Horizontal projections are negotiated by cross-ratification, affirmation, generalisation, “rapping” on thematic threads, and psychological reference or profiling, such that all colleagues are aligned to the same path toward the horizon.

**NOTES SESSIONS**

Complete runs of plays are traditionally followed by notes sessions, wherein the director interprets for the cast the scribble she has created throughout the run, identifying advice, criticism and reflection on each actor’s performance-in-
construction, and to the cast as a whole. I attended two runs and notes sessions for each of the four shows. In each case, I attended an early or first run (commonly around the end of the third week of rehearsal), and a late or final dress rehearsal.

After Geertz, I attempted a ‘dialectical tacking’ between the language of the director as ‘local detail’, and my taxonomy of Dimensions as something of a global structuring device, in an attempt to ‘bring them into simultaneous view’ (1983, 69). I assessed 299 notes across these eight sessions, ascribing each of them to one of my eight Dimensions. This method requires some clarification and, preceding that, a brief introduction to each of the Dimensions, as offered in the book that introduces them:

- Environment: the place, the time, the weather, surrounding noise—the sensual experience of being where and when we are.
- Activity: the commonplace things we do or might do in this Environment.
- History: the political and cultural ‘moment’ of the play, and all that has happened to our character in the distant and immediate past.
- Dramaturgy: all the points of textual analysis that we understand about the scene.
- Personalisation: owning or empathising with the words, ideas and motivations of the role.
- Characterisation: the variety of ways in which we manifest differently on stage to how we normally behave offstage.
- Aesthetic: the way the play and our performance looks and sounds, its form and grammar, our engagement with technology, and our self-monitoring.
- Communication: the ways that we listen to, respond to, and engage with others (Crawford, 2011, 70).

My interest was not in examining each note for its underlying aim or intention, but for its language. So, for example, the moment of an actor being asked to play a line “more brightly”, or to cue a line in response more tightly, or to enter a beat sooner or later, may be a moment that is disguisedly concerned with issues of Characterisation or History, but has been expressed purely in aesthetic terms, and is therefore scribed as an Aesthetic note. The purpose in making this distinction is related to Geertz’s guiding ethnography: by establishing codes, agreed terms, we may recognise deeply rooted ethics, motivations and schemes.

Here are a couple of examples of the accreditation of notes with each Dimension:

Activity:
‘Concentrate on packing the knife away when you’re saying...’ (City, 12-4-12, wk5);
‘the folding of the sheet needs not to be a folding, but should be a grab’ (L&S, 9-5-12, wk5).

History:
‘it’s about connecting it back to what he has been [to you]’ (L&S, 9-5-12, wk5).

Dramaturgy:
‘In that series of disappointments, it’s got to be that him apologising is the greatest disappointment’ (City, 12-4-12, wk5);
‘It should be clearer that you know who he is, and that you’re lying’ (Pin, 29-6-12, wk5).

Characterisation:
‘the quality that Lizzy was talking about the other day—the soft butcher—I got him back today’ (City, 28-3-12, wk3).
‘we lost that delicious exciting side of the fundamentalist today’ (City, 12-4-12, wk5).

Aesthetic:
‘get nice, clean focal shifts’ (City, 28-3-12, wk3).
‘put your face back on’; (L&S, 28-4-12, wk4).
‘come down in energy’;
‘saving the dam break’ (GM, 30-4-12, wk5).
‘turn, then line’;
‘the new shape was a much better picture’;
‘drive through pauses’;
‘turn up the knob, by 10%’ (L&S, 9-5-12, wk5).
‘get that a little bit tighter’;
‘a bit pacier’;
‘a bigger gesture’ (Pin, 29-6-12, wk5).

Communication:
‘hear the whole thought before you react’ (GM, 30-4-12, wk5).

Only on the one occasion cited above could I ascribe a note singly to the Dimension of Communication. The absence of citations associated with the Dimensions of Environment and Personalisation is due to the fact that no notes could be singly ascribed as notes pertaining to those Dimensions.

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47The data records two instances relating to Communication, but in the other the note was not given solely in those terms.
Notes as Dimensional data

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Any statistical comparisons presented here are done so with caveats stemming from the placement of such quantitative measures deep in the heart of a qualitatively-immersed ethnography. That is to say, this data is not privileged as the “proof” of anything, but offered in the context of all that has preceded it. The industrial circumstances from which the data springs—the political compass—is held to be a generative influence upon it, as are the implications of character and professional emphases of the four directors who are the authors of the notes. There is no worthwhile analysis of this data outside of this context. I do not intend to reflect further upon the statistics in relation to the personal styles of the directors. Having subjected the directors to scrutiny in the previous chapter, I invite the reader’s reflection on those connections, while I instead look for other angles.
Discursive variances as industrial and artistic responses

*Figure 1* represents the relative number of total notes given across all four productions, expressed as percentages.

The somewhat rogue components here are the results of both *City* and *Pin*, with very close to twice as many notes passing from the director to the actors at these crucial points in the rehearsal processes in the case of the former over the latter. In considering the other ways in which these two productions were most dissimilar, it may be possible to suggest a corollary between those distinctions and this ratio.

I earlier established an industrial ease factor for these two productions of thirty-eight percent and ninety-three percent respectively. This might suggest that increased communication is facilitated by more guerrilla-type or less fully professionalised circumstances. This is somewhat borne out by the closer proximity in these figures of *GM* and *L&S* to *Pin*, with *City* being the show most isolated, given that an enormous gap was established in the ease factors of *City* (38%) and the next “most easy” professional milieu, that of *L&S* (75%). One of the components of the ease factor was access to resources, including personnel, and one of the outcomes of having a larger creative team surrounding the director is that the director has more people to whom to report. At the end of both runs of *City*, Geordie had access to other Creatives as they continued to work on the stage, but he focussed on the tight circle of the cast. His broader team did not “settle” for notes, but attended to jobs on the run. Alternatively, Rose was surrounded by creative colleagues in numbers greater than her cast, all of whom sought guidance from their director.
This distinction in personnel was not entirely related to ease factor. It was a function of the art as well as the industry. All of the *Pin* colleagues at the notes sessions represented the multi-faceted complexity of *Pin*, which has already been discussed, and the relatively small number of notes given to actors is consistent with the previous indications of the study of the non-centrality of acting concerns in the process.

**A division in discourse**

I have characterised actors’ process through the latter part of the rehearsal period as a reconciliation of the Aesthetic demands of the artwork with the life-as-lived facilitation of Communication. Further, I argue that the former is happily subsumed, and the emphasis on the latter increases throughout the performance season (Crawford, 2011, 151-155). This is consistent with all acting theorising on both sides of the psycho-physical divide, from Jacques Lecoq’s emphasis on *le jeu*, to the Americanised Stanislavskian enshrinement of the pursuit of “being in the moment”.

The data on the observed notes sessions, however, suggests a misalignment between these focal interests and collegial discourse. That is to say, actors may well be focussed increasingly on Communication in their time on stage as they progress toward the performance season, but that is not what gets discussed with the director. This suggestion is consistent with my claims of significance of the distinction between ‘knowing and doing’ (ibid, 134-135) in acting, which places action and its meaning beyond the ‘confines of epistemology’ (Bhabha, 2006, 343).

The contribution of the director in notes sessions might then be seen in the light of restoration and repair of a performance platform rather than discussing the actor’s in-the-moment performance. Further analysis of the ramifications of this proposed divide between what is thought about by actors and what is spoken about with directors will be pursed in the conclusion of this chapter. Before that, some respect needs to be paid, and scrutiny given, to the remarkable primacy of the Dimension of the Aesthetic recorded in this research.
The Artistic Compass

PRIMACY OF THE AESTHETIC

Chris [to Jacqy]: When Rory stops, just stand there and watch the dead body. Stop. Walk to the centre. Don’t change when you walk. Hold. Walk around. He’s right there. Start to see. You should walk after he throws. You should be there. And I don’t think you should ever bend (L&S, 9-5-12, wk5).

As has already been recorded, notes exchanged between the directors and their actors were dominated by aesthetic references. The Dimension of the Aesthetic is described as ‘the way the work looks and sounds—the shapes and noises the audience sees and hears’ (2011, 112). It is made up of the things that ‘challenge the romantic notions of reality in acting’. It represents ‘the beautiful and liberating artificialities’ (ibid). It needs to be remembered that I am not looking to “ratify” or prove anything in relation to the Dimensions; merely to use them as analytical tools. Again, the language used allows for inferences of the interests embedded. The dominance of aesthetic references is starkly evident in Figure 2:

![Total notes across all four productions](image)

**Figure 2**
What is now called for is some analysis of why this primacy is maintained in discourse.

Put bluntly, directors speak in aesthetic terms because they—like the audience—receive the work as aesthetic codes for deciphering, what Hope describes as ‘free-standing aesthetic product’ (2010, 21), and they attempt to reflect in discourse their interpretation of the ‘confrontation of the fictional universe structured by the text and the fictional universe produced by the stage’ (Pavis, 2001, 28). The faith in aesthetic discourse will always be subject to the inclinations of directors, and the implications of plays:

*Chris [Drummond]: You don’t bring any extraneous things to each moment. I don’t think you need to frame that moment beyond the intention of what I’m trying to, where I’m trying to get to with this. … That’s what I meant on the first day when I talked about the character not being as deeply embedded as… This is where we are entering into that dance-theatre aesthetic where the dancer is always just the dancer through every part of the choreography (L&S, 28-4-12, wk4).*

Actors were framed as if dancers within choreography more often than not across all productions. This was sometimes expressed as ambivalence toward acting, although I have suggested above the capacity for this to be something of a feigned ambivalence in the service of actors’ creative empowerment:

*Rose: Performance is fine. I’m only worried about how we use the space (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).*

The use of space is at all times, in all productions, of keen interest to directors, with actors regarded as components of relative privilege in the directors’ picture-building toward the reading of meaning. Deirdre was re-positioned in order for the audience to better see her face, as she had the most lines in a particular scene (GM, 13-4-12, wk2). This is directorial “bread and butter” stuff, so mundane that it might seem only as remarkable an observation as the observation that a bird flaps its wings and flies, yet its very commonplaceness serves as signal for the ways in which actors exist not only in a fiction but in an aesthetic artwork. More, it speaks to the central thesis that in fact actors’ existence in an artistic compass is the dominant and dominating reality of their rehearsal and performance time-and-place-ness.

This goes deeper than the notion of a common facilitating language, or even of a common facilitating theoretical paradigm, such as *Dimensions* or Bogart’s Viewpoints, that
has nothing to do with the actor’s or character’s feelings or psychology but, more properly, assists that actor to explore the effect of visual and aural composition (mise-en-scène) on the spectator (Gordon, 2009, 118).

Beyond a tendency or facility for strategic exploration of this kind, I find a facilitating industrial and artistic culture, or a culture and collective habitus of such facilitation. Rossmanith finds that actors understand their work ‘not as a deep psychologised process of discovery but as very pragmatic process of constructing meanings’ (2003, 122). This either/or-ness suggests a kind of schism in the understanding of acting as art, as if fiction is denied in order to construct meaning. It describes activity of less rather than more “inner-ness”, more rather than less “outer-ness”: ‘the practitioners did not focus on internal states but rather shaped external characteristics’ (ibid, 103). My observations position the phenomenon slightly differently, as activity within an artistic compass, and that this positioning does not create a binary between outer-ness and inner-ness, and does not represent ‘a departure from those ideas concerning actors’ embodiments of plausible, whole people’ (ibid), because the fictive compass lies within the artistic compass. So the suggestion further to Rossmanith is that the pragmatism of meaning-making does not eliminate or preclude the actor from investment in deep inner processes, but may facilitate it.

Similarly, Filmer and Rossmanith contextualise actors’ capacity to respond to notes like “‘sharpen that line”, “‘tweak that moment”’ as examples of responses to ‘shorthand direction’ (2011, 233). It may be so, but there is something in the dedication of ‘shorthand’ that suggests compromise, an other-than-the-thing-ness, discourse “made easy”, a discourse pursued instead of some other discourse that might be truer or fuller. Some of this may be true, but I am nonetheless attempting to locate this discourse as the-thing-itself. The fiction is ground-within-ground, or, as Bourdieu might allow, a field within a field, or, indeed, a kind of play within a play. Composite mechanisms (engines, watches) require componentry to operate in different, sometimes counter-directional ways. These counter-directional, or contrapuntal, operations function symbiotically. It is in this way that I see actors aliveness to objective readings, self-readings, as symbiotic with their imaginative landscaping, their fictive concerns and responsibilities:

So when Graham (JOHN) paused, brought his hand to his face, breathed deeply and lowered his head, no-one asked what was happening ‘inside’ him; the important thing was that signs were being produced that could be read (Rossmanith, 2003, 127).

Like all of Rossmanith’s analysis, this is incisive and fine, but I am interested not only in what was being asked of the actor, but in what he may have been asking himself. It
does not follow that the actor did not have ‘happenings’ inside him (and I am not suggesting that this scholar does not see this distinction). The suggestion is that the happenings happen in counter-directional concert with the discourse, and that the aesthetic focus of the discourse facilitates the inner happenings, it does not banish or retard them. This brings light to Bollen’s observation that ‘what practitioners say about their practice, and what actually happens in performance, are not simple reflections of each other’ (2001, 127). They are in fact somewhat oblique or surreal reflections of each other, motivated by steps back from the stage, privileging the perspective and perceptions of the performance reader over those of the performance writers. In order to dig a little further into this idea, I want to look at the ways in which actors embrace the primacy of the aesthetic in their communications with the director, with each other, and with their “inner” arbiters.

Complicity

There is a canonical truism about actors and how they relate to directors. It was not uncommon, when I was a NIDA student, to have directors spoken of as people who “didn’t understand” us as actors, who spoke in their own needy, artistically inferior way, acting-ignorant. We were regularly told that among our most valuable skills would be the ability to “translate” a director’s coarse demands into meaningful acting terminology, which we generally held to be a translation from seeing-ness to feeling-ness. Moore seeks to substantiate the apartheid:

Film and television directors rarely train in the same environment as actors ... they do not understand how a trained actor works and the language commonly applied to techniques (2004, 212).

This is a reference to directors of film and television, but is transferable to theatre directors because, however much closer theatre directors’ training may (or may not) be to actors, they are little more inclined to speak as Moore would, presumably, like them to speak: in the language commonly applied to the inner game. Those that do so cannot speak in universal terms because, as has been established, here and elsewhere, such terms scarcely exist, and actors themselves do not, in fact, commonly apply themselves to technical language. This idea, though, of a kind of “Venus and Mars” partition is cherished among some actors. It is, in essence, a denial of the aesthetic concerns, or carries underlying assumptions that these things are not within actors’ conception of their artistic purview, and that communication on them is not within actors’ interests or skills. The experience of my observation suggests that what both Moore and I experienced in our actor-training was a lack of
real-world perspective, which he tends to frame as a problem of the world rather than a problem of the training.

One day, in GM, Deirdre expressed her concern about the blancmange her character was to bring into the scene. She worried that, if the blancmange were to be real, and the food of Act One was to be mimed, it would represent a ‘mixed convention’ (GM, 13-4-12, wk2).

There is nothing in this of inner concern. It is not a question of life-as-lived. It is the reading of the scene from what we might consider a directorial perspective.

More subtly, Lizzy’s language in reviewing a performance is interesting:

... it was a cracker of a show. I tried to use the same catalyst the next night but of course reheating last night's dinner never works. So obviously the challenge with every show is to keep it fresh and alive each time (of course there's a level of skill, technique and professionalism that means the show will never slip markedly) but I live for the 'zinger' shows where the charge for performer and audience alike is palpable! (Falkland, pers. com. 16-5-12).

The acknowledgement of the kinds of skills and techniques that sustain performance in less inspired moments is relevant, but my main interest is in the little words: ‘cracker’, ‘fresh’, ‘slip’, ‘zinger’ and ‘charge’. These are the unselfconscious expressions of an actor’s performance analysis. Lizzy does not report that all her actions were successfully played, or that the communication between the actors was particularly strong or weak, or that her character choices were rigorously maintained. She had a palpable cracker:

*Rose:* Do you want to run that one more time?
*Jude:* Sure.
*Rose:* Or do you just want to wait till we have the correct lines, because, really, there's no subtext or anything going on in here, it's pretty straightforward (lots of 'yeahs' from actors). The image looks good. The boat looks good. You in the water looks good. You in the water looks great.

There is general agreement to not continue, on the common ground of investment in the effects of the show rather than the needs, inner or outer, of actors. This strikes me as not unusual, and sensible. I record it for those reasons. It is a demonstration of the kind of practical and pragmatic tone of rehearsals, and the common investment actors have in the “greater good” of the show as a complex whole. *This is being an actor* (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).
Adam gives Anthony a note, and Anthony says, ‘Yeah, I know. Half way through it I was going, “This is shit”’ (GM, 17-4-12, wk3).

Here is an example of an actor pursuing the Aesthetic mechanism of self-monitoring, and evincing the range of foci to which ‘our mind kaleidoscopically adjusts’ (Crawford, 2011, 112) during performance.

Along with an interest in these actorly inclinations to review and analyse work in aesthetic terms are those inclinations to strategise, or to shift from analysis to strategy, via such terminology. In this, actors were consistently complicit with directors:

*Chris [Pitman] reflects on his delivery of a line: ‘I gave it a bit of a pause’, and then refers to ‘the forward momentum’ of the character’s earlier confidence* (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

*Lizzy asks a question of pure technique (Aesthetic), and frames it as such, ‘On a technical level, do you want those laughs to bleed through into the cry?’* (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

More persuasive in the prosecution of actors’ complicity and enthusiasm for aesthetic discourse as germane to their art-making were the many moments that I witnessed of actors themselves translating, as it were, from life-as-lived references by the director, to purely aesthetic terms or codes:

*Adam: We’ve gone too far in the direction of smug judgements about him. Yes, be true to the fact that obviously you’ve fed his vanity, when he wasn’t kicking goals...*  
*Anthony: Be lighter about it?*  
*Adam. Yes!*  

*Later, Kate questions a note...*  
*Kate: Smaller?*  
*Adam: Yeah, It’s a cold sweat but it’s not hypothermia.*  
*Kate: A rigidity?*  
*Adam: Yeah, and dread (GM, 30-4-12, wk5).*

These moments—and there were many of them—cast doubt on the idea that actors need to translate directors’ notes into inner, acting-theorised language. Throughout the observation, I had underlined for me the fact that actors—far from being repulsed by the directors’ aesthetic concerns and expression of them—embrace the aesthetic elements of their responsibilities. Indeed, as in some of the examples
above, we privilege or forge an aesthetic rendering of a note; it is our preferred referential frame:

Chris: I think that if I have a slightly different quality through the whole scene, the apology’s going to be easier. Rather than rejecting her, it could be, Please, let's be friends. More of that.
Geordie: Yeah. I'm sorry if I treated you badly
Chris: And I think there’s actually less... I really gave it a rip that time, but... less in that. I think it’s not so much of a tear.
Geordie: I like it being torn because you seem so immediate.
Chris: Then I need to find what the specific tear is. At the moment it’s just a general, Fuck! Fuck! (City, 28-3-12, wk3).

Recurrently, then, the aesthetic facilitates the real. It appears as if in order for the alive-in-the-world-ness of the characters and situations to be dealt with, it needs to be addressed in aesthetic terms, as if moving through a kind of artificial portal. There is something almost symbolic or ceremonial in this: the deeply en-cultured regularities of a rehearsal process, costumes, the “high-tech” rigours of the technical rehearsals. I am reminded of a wedding ceremony, in which it might be said that people look to enter a truth, a reality that embraces a great deal of expected mundanity, through ceremonial ritual, and through a kind of fancy-dress, a kind of artistic portal, a language and manner that determinedly does not represent the thing itself (married life). For example, we exchange wedding rings and vows very differently to how we present a morning cup of tea to a partner in bed ten or fifty years later; our sexual hunger and the sexual culture of our relationship is masked by the wedding ceremony. Yet perhaps this sexuality and the cosy, pleasant dullness of a morning cuppa in bed relate back to formal vows and “performances”—commitment ceremonies—for deeper context and meaning. In other words, perhaps long love, old love, slightly worn-at-heel love, clings somewhat to the formal vows of yore. We understand the reality of our marriage or other life-long partnership in part because we have been through the fantasy/ritual/artistic processes of our wedding, or wedding-like “performance”. Perhaps this is why people formalise their relationships with such moments, and why actors like to locate a reading of meaning of their work in terms that do not directly interfere with their inner experience of it; the secret “sexuality”, as it were, of their performance. In this way, whatever ‘real-ishness’ (Crawford, 2011, 30) supports actors on stage may be beholden to a discursive process marked by purely aesthetic references: “It looks like this”, “It sounds like this”, “It evokes this metaphor”, and, in turn, its ‘life-ishness’ (ibid, 80) clings to this metaphor, this size, scale, tempo, image, pattern.
CONCLUSION: SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE

This chapter has established a mode or terrain of discourse as a kind of meeting place for actors and directors to talk about the work. This meeting place, however, this discourse, is not identified as a transparency of the performance work itself, any more than the discourse of the boxing ring corner is the dodge, feint and punch, or the wedding is the marriage. This is a fine line that I am asserting: on the one hand, that complicit dedication to aesthetic referents is not an opposition or a bar to actors’ pursuit of inner life but a facilitation of it; on the other hand, that it is nonetheless a somewhat peripheral and “asexual” discourse, aloof to further inner challenges. I now want to cite and analyse a few instances wherein the limits of these peripheral engagements are tacitly acknowledged:

Geordie: Needs more belligerence. It’s belligerence and hurt. It’s the little boy in him. It was a bit too gentle today, and measured. ... They have to hurt each other. The way that you hurt each other at the start of the scene defines how the rest of the scene drumrolls. And you weren’t puncturing each other on a deep enough level at the start of the scene today the way that you did last night.

Chris: There’s no technical way to play this scene.

Geordie: No. You’ve got to play the emotional content.

Chris: Otherwise there’s just an empty box.

Geordie: And we may only see the occasional thing hit, but it –

Chris: It has to be there, I know.

Geordie: Because it meant there wasn’t enough there for you at the start of the monologue. ... Chris: It’s something I’ve been playing for a couple of days that is probably not helpful.

Geordie: Yeah. Today you kicked in about a third of the way through the monologue and it crackled along from there.

Chris: It comes purely from getting the start right: the rejection out of the kiss; then it just finds its own momentum. You have to make it... There’s just not enough there to kind of pretend. I’ve just got to... I’ve got to be there. Today I wasn’t.

Geordie: Yeah. And whenever you have to pretend, that’s the moment when it feels like you’re over-working it vocally.

Chris: Yep.

Geordie: You try and do it with language instead of emotively.

Chris: In most plays you can do that.

Geordie: Yeah, not this one (City, 12-4-12, wk5).

The point of the primacy of aesthetic here is that it is used even to describe the ways in which the moment cannot be played, as it were, aesthetically. So it is a mode of
outer game discourse that points toward the inner game. Yet there is also the sense of the unknowable country, beyond discourse, the ‘there’ to which both artists refer, and to which only the actor can go, as well as the sense that Chris has moved out of the rehearsal room, into performance, and to a distinctly authorial relationship to the performance, and the director respects that relocation.

Actors need to build their work, aside from all the blocking, and aside from all the talk, in another way, in another territory, another compass:

*Before another pass of the scene, Rose calls loudly over the substantial hubbub, and in the face of limited attention being paid to her, ‘Let’s see what we’ve got. And, everybody… start practicing singing out, because even though you are mic’ed, you have to sing out … You can’t amplify nothing. So you cannot just go, “I’ve got a mic.” Sing out.’*

*Very little of the Stanislavskian project reflected here! Actors bring their inner-game to the room; the room’s interest is in the outer-game. The director must be the reader and purveyor of the outer-game, of perceptions, and therefore the room inherits a primacy of perception. The actors not only master the inner but the outer-games. They must conflate them, embroil them, alchemise them, and they must largely do this in private* (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

Consistent with the many ways that Rose’s unique talent and manner have been addressed, the private responsibilities of actors is obvious in the *Pin* rehearsal room. Perhaps this makes her separation from the inner project a more easily held position, as suggested earlier by Jude. It does not make the distinction between shared discourse and actors’ discrete work beyond discourse any greater or lesser a division.

I hesitate to share this thought, but am inclined to admit rather than censor: when I read the citations above, I feel a slight sadness. For me they describe an emotional parting, a kind of “close but no cigar” reality for directors: eunuchs in the brothel. I have seen directors invest so much intelligence, emotional energy, and intense focus in the work that I feel sorry for them that they do not finally get to do it. A silly response, probably: an actor’s response.48 I am not referring only to the ‘essential aloneness of the director’ (Cole, 1992 224) in the parting of ways that occurs with the arrival of the audience, but of the partition, suggested above, that exists throughout. I sense a kind of tunnel that actors pass through to acting, with directors as base-camp instructors at the beginning of the exploration, then as judges or mirrors at the end of it. Directors “arm” actors with what they will need to “pass

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48 Nonetheless, I confess that, as a director, I find the feeling of opening night an exquisite superfluity.
through”, then help them to see and understand what has become of their passing, to weigh and categorise their booty. But the citations above betray the something-in-between, something through which the actor must travel alone: a tunnel through a mountain, with the director saying, “Here’s what you’re looking for. Here’s what you’ll need. See you on the other side”.49

The director then seemingly takes a different path. This different path is taken, in reality, in company with actors, in the rehearsal room, but there is a sense of separation, a point at which the director can go so far but no further with the actor. Perhaps this is the actor’s negotiation of the fictive compass, that part of their work that assumes and enshrines the work of the director, the aesthetic of the production, the established codes and modes of the artistic compass, yet simultaneously negotiates a deeper, more private, communion-in-quietude with the writer, the fiction, the world-of-the-play that lies within or spectrally appears from the play itself, a haunting.

Notwithstanding this response, this establishes the limits of discourse within the rehearsal room. It suggests actors’ trajectory beyond discourse, activities toward and within the fictive compass.

49I was rather stunned when, the very next day after coming up with the construction, ‘See you on the other side’, I was a guest in another rehearsal room for a run of a show, and the director used that exact phrase as his final comment to the cast before the run began.
SECTION THREE:

TOWARD THE FICTION COMPASS

2013/14: When Hedda shot herself at the end of the play, the director left the rest of us on stage for an extended, silent period of sadness. When the lights finally went out on my/Brack’s final line, I came to cherish those few seconds of silence and darkness as a period of mourning: a deeper, truer sadness, not for the fictional Hedda Gabler, but for all suicides.

Less then a year later, in The Seagull, I found myself again playing a man (Dr Dorn) witness to the suicide of a young person whom he loves, given the last line of the play, and I experienced the same phenomenon in the few brief seconds between the lights out on the show, and the lights up for the curtain call. I welcomed—“programmed in”—a momentary plunge into a kind of universal grief for “the loss of youth” to suicide, then bumped out of it immediately in order to embrace all the good and important things represented by the curtain call.

On opening night of The Seagull, though, a strange thing happened. I didn’t bump out of sadness when the lights came up. I stayed in it. I couldn’t party. It is most unlike me to carry some kind of emotional baggage from the fiction to off-stage. I teach against it, and have written dismissively of the suggestion that it can/should/does occur.

My mother was gravely ill in hospital on the other side of the country. I couldn’t get to her. I am somewhat estranged from her, in any case. It is a relationship immersed in sadness and loss. I believe that—through subconscious trips and traps—my fear and hurt in relation to my mum stopped me from smiling convincingly in the curtain call that night, and kept me with the dead Kostya.
INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter established a separation of actors from their directors, even within rehearsal space and time, in order to pursue more private strategies that might be viewed as being toward responsibilities of the fictive compass. Discourse in rehearsal has been established as significantly reliant upon aesthetic references, and the limits of this discourse have been suggested as the boundary of the separation. Directors have been shown to respect the separation, and in some measure facilitate it, yet the pursuit is seen to lie beyond or beneath explicit discourse. This section of the study aims to wade with actors into this deeper water. It is interested in this somewhat estrangement of the actor and the director. It might be said that the director has been seen to enter the process having formed an intimacy with the text, and to have shared it, and I have revealed the analytical depth with which these directors nurture this intimacy, and the sincerity and generosity with which they share it, but the actors need to forge their own intimacy, their communion, through additional or different channels and strategies, calling upon discrete facilitating skills and processes.

The section has two chapters. In the first of these, I want to explore the image of the actors’ process as a journey, and describe that journey from three different angles: first, as a journey from knowingness to a knowing doing-ness; second, as a series of adaptations of habitus; and third, as a kind of ethnographic passage. Importantly, these are not three different journeys, nor consecutive tacks of a single journey, but three different perspectives, three lenses through which to view the journey.

The first angle on the journey reveals the heart of the progress through rehearsal, from the potential energy of the actor’s store of knowledge of the political compass, and a store of knowledge of the “dormant” fiction, through activation in the artistic compass, toward performance: the performance being the action that contains the knowledge with which the process began, and that which has been acquired along the way. I describe the second “angle on a journey” as the development of nuanced habitus, from the political, through the artistic and fictive compasses. It is largely homologous with the first. The third angle positions the actor as a kind of ethnographer seeking an understanding of the “native”, and might be seen as analogous with the first. The point of drawing this analogy, however, is not merely to view it as interesting, or ironic (being an ethnography of an “ethnography”) but because the practices and discourses of ethnography might reflect meaningfully back on acting.

While these angles do provide a context for the chapter that follows, they are not mere “set up”. The angles are themselves analyses of processes, if from the
somewhat middle-distance that is implied by homology and analogy. The study has hitherto glided from an industrial radius to a social radius to an artistic radius. Chapter Six steps closer to the actor, and the following chapter comes closer still.

As I stated in the general introduction to the study, this section is not titled “The fictive compass” but “Toward the fictive compass” because the values of fiction, and therefore the pursuit of its meanings and resonances, are contingent upon its placement within the field of the political and artistic compasses. This is consistent with McAuley’s claim that, come the performance, the fiction remains a dubious phenomenon, ‘grounded in the lived experience of both performers and spectators’ (2000, 252). Therefore there is little that can be said to stand within the fictive compass as a discrete zone. This has been established by the weights and measures of the political and artistic compasses already examined. Rather, the artistic compass is thickened or deepened by the fictive compass, as if double claims are being made on symbolic territory.

Such multiple claims upon the moments of rehearsal that I cite, and the theory that I cite, occur consistently. That “this thing” might also be seen as “this other thing”, and lie just as legitimately within other notional bounds, is in some measure the point of my ethnography of actors in rehearsal, and indicative of my thick description of it.

The journey attempted in the following three guises is largely a secreted or disguised series of activities and modulations. Barba speaks of the actor’s ubiquity, their need to ‘weave the lining of the action which is then made visible’ (1995, 118), then, changing metaphors, claims that the actor’s ‘road (must) be secret, shielded from the spectator’s gaze’ (ibid). This, along with sundry mundane practices, implicates actors in acts of concealment and selective revelation. This might seem blindly obvious of performance, but it is interesting to note that actors conceal their processes in rehearsal too. That is, they conceal not only from the audience, but also from their closest collaborator, the director, and this concealment is acknowledged by the director, with rehearsal commonly ‘not conceived as a process of nurturing the imagination of the actor’ (Gordon, 2009, 253).

This claim might, with some justification, be disputed in many instances, and some of the spatial observations and analysis of the first section of this study might be seen in the light of imaginative nurture. It is perhaps truer to say that the actor’s imaginative nurture is not subject to the direct or discrete attention of the rehearsal. It is something that actors must, by and large, simply get done, as indicated in the conclusion of the previous chapter. It might be said, simply, that directors are more comfortable talking about some things than others. I do not contend that this is improper, or representative of a deficiency, but that it is interesting.
Nor do I contend that actors are unique in being positioned as learners in their work, or that the notion of professional, industrial progress involving the secreted or private maturation of knowledge and experience toward competence is a unique phenomenon of the actor. I am interested, though, in the ways this general human capacity manifests for actors, and in peculiarising the cogs of its progress.
CHAPTER SIX:
THREE ANGLES

ANGLE ONE: KNOWING TO KNOWING/DOING

This is the story of how we begin to remember
This is the powerful pulsing of love in the vein
After the dream of falling and calling your name out
These are the roots of rhythm
And the roots of rhythm remain

Under African Skies
Paul Simon

Telling the same story

I have not tracked the ratio of words spoken in a rehearsal room into the categories of those that are set down in the text, and those that are not: the words of characters and the words of artists. My practical sense, however, is that the ratio would greatly favour the latter at least until the rehearsal of runs of the play. This suggests that we speak more about the play, about the characters, and about the production than we speak the words of the play itself. Why? Where do all these words go? Many, as has been established, are invested in processes of social and industrial facilitation. Those that are invested in the art and the fiction are often tossed, speculatively, like broad shies at epistemological foundations, with all parties remaining “sensitive” to the signs of recognition and consecration’ (Bourdieu, 2000, 165), and so some stick. Thus disparate individual knowledge claims are collectivised, galvanised into an epistemological structure, largely via aesthetic referents, through which actors contribute modestly, and to which they subject their constant immodest actioning of text, a cycle evident in this moment from City:

At the end of this rehearsal, Chris [Pitman] offers the following analysis of the reading section of the scene:

‘I think for me there are three distinct stages through it (the scene): the first one is just, beginning to read it, nonsensical almost; then getting to a point where he’s really trying to piece it together, which pulls him back into an earlier version of himself; then, once he’s got to there, he begins to re-pick through it, in the last paragraph or two. So that by the end it actually... He’s reading it how she...
[intends]. Now, it’s about detailing the transitions in and out of that. But I think... that makes sense.’

This strikes me as a succinct reflection of the lived-experience of the ‘in-frame’ rehearsal, and allowing that immersion to inform dramaturgical constructions of meaning, and broad acting challenges for achieving them.
The first half of the afternoon is rounded by broader philosophical discussion about the play ...
My sense is that—just as the scene was fed so distinctly by the discussion of metaphor—the play will be continually enriched by these discussions of meaning.
These things that bring us into each other’s scope, that put us on the same stage, telling the same story (City, 19-3-12, wk2).

Zarrilli sees this in the context of ‘knowledges “about”, “for”, and “in” (that) continuously inform each other, and are not simplistically dichotomized’ (2001, 44), and cites James Austin in suggesting that, through such Zen-like ‘interacting, dynamic configurations’ (ibid, 34), it is for all actors, as it is for Helen Buday, ‘just taken for granted that there’s an accumulation going on’ (in Crawford, 2005, 142):

What strikes me most is the way the discussion has bled through to the work on the floor. It seems clear that the discourse is guiding the action, and it reads as an allowance or a license to pursue things in action. The discussion has provided a frame, and within the frame the actors find patent security and anchorage. This is reliant on concord. It is difficult to imagine that a discussion that did not achieve general agreement on dramaturgical points, and readings of meaning and character motivation would lead to creative productivity once the actors return to in-text rehearsing. Well, it is my experience that sometimes there might be disagreement that is rendered superfluous by the consequent period on the floor, but that’s a little different. In that case the disagreement has been shown to be on a false premise of significance. When the disagreement remains significant, the work on the floor (I know also from less happy experience) remains stilted (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

Bourdieu would have it that the words of the rehearsal room are toward the establishment of a grammar, ‘a change of ontological status’ (1990b, 80), but that those who speak the language which adheres to that grammar—in this case, actors who pursue in action a newly built, home-made ontology—do not do so by obeying the grammar, but by speaking the speech.
**Please, please make the right sound**

In practice, the achievements of language over grammar cannot be taken for granted, and do not necessarily come easily; the grammar is for actors an elusive epistemology in the process of being built and collectivised. Its construction, and the language that will eventually overcome it, is subject to toilsome, stumbling anxieties:

> The work is generously explored but lacks detailed dramaturgical structure. Also, in fairness, the work is somewhat laboured, as actors’ security with material tends always to make the work a ‘sum of parts’ rather than a ‘whole’ at this stage of rehearsal ... this coarse running and waiting for organicity to develop around the ‘bits and pieces’? (GM, 17-4-12, wk3).

Kate: I’m still going back and forth. Sometimes I can communicate clearly, and other times I’m paranoid about the sound of it so I’m not thinking the thing as clearly as I’d like to. Every time I open my mouth I kind of go, Please, please make the right sound (GM, 30-4-12, wk5).

My general sense is that a difficult, remote, glacial aesthetic has been found by the cast, and is sitting with more or less confidence and consistency in the actors (City, 12-4-12, wk5).

I have a sense that the aims of the rehearsal are inorganically projected toward a kind of gesture of completeness that is not matched by the actors’ readiness. It seems like they’re doing a disservice by ‘marking’ depth—they’re faking it (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

The readiness therefore can be seen, within this knotted praxis, as a readiness to act based on knowledge, but also as a readiness to analyse based on disjunctive, disruptive doing/practice/acting. Both areas of the praxis identify the flaws in the other, problematise the other, and so grow symbiotically. It might therefore be said that in order for actors to inhabit their roles (or to put it in more kindergarten-acting parlance, “become their characters”), they must become not only the ideas and words of the character, but those of the rehearsal room, which is to say, the words of both the fictive and the artistic compass must become, as Gaden cites *Othello*, ‘engendered’ (in Crawford, 2005, 110), while simultaneously the theorising must become, as it were, muscularised by the practice that sustains it. This does not appear to be achieved simply by “hearing and forgetting”, knowing and then just doing, or indeed doing and then simply talking, but by saddling one’s self with ontology even as one turns toward practice, then taking the altered breath, and the sweat of practice, to theorising.

Heidegger (1973) seems to be suggesting something of this kind:
[a]ny cognitive determining has its existential ontological Constitution in the state-of-mind of Being-in-the-world; but pointing this out is not to be confused with attempting to surrender science ontically to feeling (1973, 177).

That is to say, knowing everything and knowing nothing are co-existent states, not subject to an essential chronology or growth, one state to another. Martin Dillon puts it that ‘[p]roblems of knowing are at the same time problems of being’ (1988, 2), and so it appears for actors whose success might be tracked as a path from Zarrilli’s notion that ‘[p]erceptual knowledge is ... practical knowledge’ to his happy outcome: ‘one knows how’ (2007, 644). This know-how, which, according to Fraleigh, is always a form of ‘bodily lived (experiential) knowledge’ (cited in Parviainen, 2002, 14), is the end sought, characterised by a depth of engendered knowledge and muscle-toned thought. Lesa Lockford and Ronald Pelias see continuity between the discourse of fiction and that of analysis:

as characters are constructed through in-scene talk, actors generate fictive histories and accompanying role expectancies. With each new detail that is inserted into the communicative dialogue, new behaviors are mandated (2004, 432).

Wiltshire characterises it as a ‘balance’

in our conceptual system between notions of offtage and onstage. Each side feeds the other with digested material that was previously assimilated from it. We are caught in a circle of concepts that must be explicated (1982, xiv).

This aligns actors’ processes with Blau’s notion of the whole theatrical endeavour as a shadow of theory (2005, 60).

**Singing freedom**

The development of one of the complex, multi-voiced songs of *Pin* was an interesting source for reflecting upon the progress of learning, and the stages of learning performance, and how they manifest:

*The Musical Director (MD) calls the actors to focus on a singing rehearsal. Actors form a semi-circle around the MD, and sing, dancing loosely. All very relaxed and focused* (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).
At this stage, the MD was sitting behind a console, among a mess of instruments, a mixing desk, laptop computers open, and the arc the actors formed around him was approximately four metres in radius. The song appeared three-quarters known, and was being “drilled”:

This work has been the subject of ‘primary learning’: subject to concentrated, accuracy-obsessed, compartmentalised aesthetic issues—the dots. Now it is broadened into a kind of secondary learning phase, which means creating an arc of greater radius from the MD, in an attempt to secure the primary learning in a more open, “owned” space, and to move their bodies with it, and to begin to engage with each other as they do so—and to fuse primary learning with broad character contexts (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

At a subsequent pass of the group song, the MD got out from behind his desk (a position that could be described as one of primary pedagogy), and joined the circle of actors, dancing with the actors, encouraging them to sing out and stay loose, creating a more liberated, actor-empowered space.

In this moment, the knowing was being “danced” toward knowing doing-ness. The radius of actors to the MD fractured, with each actor taking a position seemingly proportionate with their confidence with the “text” (words and music), some wandering away, still singing, as if demonstrating that they can: that their capacity to sing the song was not dependent on the spatiality of the “classroom”, and the maintenance of the formal arc. Others remained more attentive of their teacher, who now danced among them, and toward those requiring more attention, encouraging them with smiles through his singing, with gestures of relaxation and release. The shape of the arc had been obliterated:

When the MD calls for the rehearsal of another group song that has been subject to less rehearsal to this point, the space changes—the loose fractures of spatiality are again tightened, with the MD returning to behind his desk, and the actors moving into a closer, more formal semi-circle, restoring the spatiality of primary learning (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

Such radial spatiality of the performer-as-knowing-doer to the source of their knowledge (MD/director/playwright) symbolises or epitomises the journey of independence actors must make toward performance on the stage, and the emergent superfluity of their erstwhile “tutors”.
Real Human in this Fantastical World

I want to cite a substantial section of my field-notes to explore a movement through discourse toward a new depth, a movement through the artistic and toward the fictive. I have previously reported on the first morning declaration to Nathan that the character of Pinocchio would have a mechanical, growing nose, and that the growth should hurt the character. This detail led to further quizzing about how the work, more generally, might be played, and this in the first two hours of the rehearsal process:

The discussion ... shifts—and remains for the greater part of the session—to the developmental dramaturgy of the text and the technical elements of the production: its set, lighting, the animation, the music. Actors all look at the work as if from the perspectives of both the writer and their technical collaborators.

It seems to me that the actors are here looking for the aesthetic and dramaturgical co-ordinates in which they will “become”—not become the characters in a Stanislavskian sense, but become present, become located. No-one is here looking for guidance in, or the placement of anything ‘inner’. ... Actors are not looking for individual guidance or personal character “findings”, but rather for co-ordinates, the frame, and the expectations:

Sam: Do you imagine a kind of heightened or stylised physical style?
Rose: I do. I see the whole thing as a fantastical... fairy-tale world ... That’s for us to play with. ... It’s like this strange little land that’s not a real land. And that should be echoed in how we...
Sam: Yeah. Great.

This is a good example of the kind of open-logic that often rules discourse. Taken at face value, this could be described as a vague answer to an equally vague question. There is no empirical finding or transference in this exchange, yet it is both a setting of very broad co-ordinates and it is a rhetorical gesture toward the “finding” process of rehearsal. That is to say, actors will at least take from this—if they hadn’t already gleaned—that walking onto the rehearsal room floor as if walking into a coffee shop is without the coordinates (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).

This finding emboldened theorising at greater depth, or inner-ness:

Alirio: What about in terms of the human and the non-human characters? What is real? What do we define as real? Being human, and then... Because there’s all that struggle, wanting to be real...
Jude: And the fact that the personality of Pinocchio is a personality and psyche that he owes to his family, whether or not it’s a world reality but... What’s real love? Or what’s real truth between two people?
Toward the Fictive Compass

Alirio: What is real human in this fantastical world?
Rose: The love is real between those two (Pinocchio and Gepetto).
Nathan: When the blue girl says, ‘You’re real’, he doesn’t need skin and blood to know that. I know... I’ve been for a while.
Jude: Yeah. He had to believe it.
Nathan: Yeah... Rose: That first stage of that is with the blue girl. He learns love with her (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).

It is impossible to say that this beat of the conversation would not have happened without the kind of purely aesthetic beat that preceded it although, interestingly, to reverse them seems inorganic. The conversation seems to move, consequentially, through the artistic to the fictive; from bodies, as it were, to souls; from style to substance. Both style and substance—as evinced throughout the study—are crucial, but here there is the suggested link between them, and a sense of deepening epistemology, with the artistic both framing and ushering the fictive. Jude appears to anticipate this point, and anticipate the “on floor” work that must finally justify the discourse:

‘Another thing is that when a tale is so morally strong, that means we can go as spastic and sideways as we want to in how full-on and evil and gross the characters are’ (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).

With this, the development of a collective sense of dramaturgical purpose, or the identification of what Rush calls the ‘theatrical place you belong’ (in Crawford, 2005, 212) justifies a performative strategy. Purpose, place, and strategies continue to develop with further knowledge and skill acquisitions.

I have often described rehearsing as entering and passing through a cone, from the point of smallest diameter: the further one travels, the larger the diameter that one inhabits becomes. The more we achieve, the more it appears there is to be achieved. It seems to me that I witnessed these actors’ journey through something like this conical structure, and that the awesome challenge identified at the start of each process is reliant upon constant motion, as it were, radial motion around the perimeter of that cone, circumscribing theory and practice into a single looping blur, in order to progress to the end point of maximum circumference:

This fuller, more confident discussion of meaning was prompted by deeper practical engagement on the floor, and subsequently led to still further surety in the actors—a virtuous circle of achievement from practice to theory to practice (City, 23-3-12, wk2).
From the beginning of this first run of the play in its entirety, I can see the work that I’ve observed in the three previous rehearsals being absorbed, and to a large extent I see it ‘settling’ in the bodies of the actors. Chiefly, Chris’ bold ‘over-the-top’ explorations of 21/3 have been eschewed, but leave a discernible trace. The work of the run begets a smoothness that has not been evident in the previous ‘stop/start’ work, and I feel that Chris and Lizzy allow a sense of surrender into the text (City, 28-3-12, wk3).

Kate takes Adam’s note about enjoying the scene, and when Jim kisses her, she achieves the ‘bright, dazed look’ of bliss. It’s a powerful discovery, and one that will become a significant ‘peg’ for her, a moment that will get a wonderful reaction from the audience in performance up ahead. The discovery of a ‘find’, by hearing a director’s ideas, and allowing them to underpin exploration, and by being genuinely open to impulsive connectedness on the rehearsal room floor (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

In evidence in these moments is in some ways a common accumulation in an intellectual sense, in the way that Geertz describes theoretical concepts becoming part of a ‘general stock’ (1973, 3), part of ‘our intellectual armoury’ (ibid, 4), and consequently infecting our engagements effortlessly. It is fruitful, however, to consider psychologist John Heron’s more comprehensive paradigm in light of actors’ achievements, as reviewed here by Denis Postle:

Heron points to the existence of four modes of learning from experience, each dependent on the other and arranged in what he calls an ‘up hierarchy’. The first of the four modes, at the top of the pyramid, is a practical mode of learning from experience. This refers to “learning through doing”, expressed through the competent practice of skills. Adjacent to this lies a conceptual mode of learning from experience. This refers to the use of language in some form, whether spoken, mathematical or symbolic. It features learning “about” a subject, making statements and propositions. It embraces analysis, logic, proof, argument and debate. A third, imaginal mode of learning, refers to learning though the use of imagination. It finds expression through envisioning and devising possible futures but, most fundamentally, through the intuitive grasp of sequences, processes and situations as a whole. A fourth, affective mode of learning, refers to learning by encounter, by direct experience. It finds expression through “being there”, through immersion in an experience (1993, 33).

Heron’s taxonomy is most interesting for consideration in light of acting in that he teases these things apart in order to describe their interconnectivity. For example, the conceptual mode is ‘the domain of defining, differentiating things, and picking out what is salient’ (Heron, 1992, 17). This seems like crucial operation for the actor, but surely not in isolation, so Heron allows a context for such activity. He suggests, with his up-hierarchy, that the practical (action) is latent in the conceptual
(judgement), which is in turn latent in the imaginal, which is latent in the affective
(ibid, 20). The essential constant for actors is one we may easily recognise by this
light as the fourth, affective mode, wherein we

participate in wider unities of being, to become at one with the differential
content of a whole field of experience, to indwell what is present through
attunement and resonance, and to know its own distinctness while unified with
the differentiated other (ibid, 16).

My reporting above of Kate’s kiss is a manifestation of this kind of sophisticated
participation and learning. In this instance, however, and in most instances of
rehearsal, actors are using a combination of all four of Heron’s modes of learning, in
different combinations and ratios, and indeed in a general movement “upward”, with
latency implied in all stages of development: hence the notion of personalisation, and
of “giving one’s own Hamlet”: the Hamlet latent within the actor.

Bodymind

Viewed squarely, actors’ processes of accumulation are processes of labour, of
rehearsing: harrowing and re-harrowing; the elemental maturation, as Copeau puts
it, of gesture (1990, 131), in what Rasmussen and Gürgens describe as ‘dynamic
movement’ that ‘controls simultaneously both the doing and the perception’ (2006,
241); ‘not magic’, as McAuley has repeatedly stressed (after Brecht), ‘but work’
(2008, 2012). In evidence are ‘image schemas’, as Raymond Gibbs interprets them,

which arise from or are grounded in human recurrent bodily movements
through space ... [and] exist as continuous and analogue patterns beneath
conscious awareness, prior to and independently of other concepts (2008, 233).

This in turn echoes Sanford Meisner’s notion of acting as stemming from patterns of
impulses, honed by and embedded in the repetitions of rehearsal, re-action, re-
experience (Meisner and Longwell, 1987).

Paul Connerton’s work on societal memory through ritual action, taking such rituals
as those imposed by militaristic regimes on “the people” (obligatory rallies and
parades) as its chief reference, wherein ritual action achieves the status of canonical
sequence that eventually become habitual memory, sedimented in the body, and
pervading all spheres of life (1989, 41, 44, 72), is of analogical interest here. Actors
might be said to be establishing just this kind of canonisation of ritual action, for just
this purpose: its sedimentation in their bodies as a foundation or security for a sense
of habitual being-ness and responsiveness. Simon Coleman interprets Connerton’s
claims of ‘habit memory’ as ‘the embodied capacity to reproduce performances, such as riding a bicycle’ (2010, 218). Here memory is a function of action, as it is for the actor, whose physical score is activated in order to simultaneously activate lines, thoughts, imaginary constructs, and emotional empathy. Ask an actor to radically change the spatiality or physicality of a scene that has been well drilled, and he will very possibly forget his lines.

While I have undertaken to leave investigation on the facilitators of these outcomes and processes to the next chapter, this moment requires brief acknowledgement that all that has been discussed so far challenges the Cartesian split ‘which detaches the knowing and speaking subject from the unknowing inert body’ (Jackson, 1989, 123), and must finally reject Leder’s claims that the ‘lived body has a genius that surpasses the plodding intellect’ (2007, 108), as it rather finds a unity of body and intellect in the notion of the bodymind, forager and storer of ‘pragmatic/intuitive knowledges’ (Zarrilli, 2001, 44) that are able to be deployed ‘in the “flow” of the moment’ (ibid). Peter Snow sees ‘two aspects of the same process’:

what is always going on is both an imagining that is largely corporeal, and an enacting that is always and already being re-imagined, and it is this continual oscillation that is imagined and thus embodied (2006, 243).

In conclusion, this oscillation is central for actors in turning ‘interpretation into experience’ (Johnston, 2007, 31), and in shifting their presence to achieve what Barba calls ‘thinking in motion’ (1995, 88), and what Blau tags as ‘blooded thought’ (1991, 2005, 60).

Balance and imbalance: Theoretical, literary, and personal reflections

In a literary context, Bourdieu speaks of ‘privileged interlocutors’ (citing Plato and Marx), those whose work is

implicit in the writings of every producer, those reverend antecedents whose thought structures he has internalized to the point where he no longer thinks except in them and through them, to the point where they have become intimate adversaries determining his thinking and imposing on him both the shape and the substance of conflict (1993, 139).

For the actor, this sounds like nirvana, with the writer, director and designer as the privileged interlocutors: embedded guides that frame our movement, as do elders, lore, myths, parents, gods. With them, we have a place in the world and, ironically, beautifully, only with them can we individuate ourselves; without them, we are
shucked, rudderless, parentless, (dare I say) Chekhovian.\textsuperscript{50} Actors must find the “parental” structures, the ballast to right us as we cast off in a role.

The truest and most consistent emotion that lingered in me following the death of my father was strangeness, or displacement, borne of the fact that, by definition, the world had changed, as I now looked at a world without him in it, one I had never known. I felt with alarming surety that I had to again find my feet on new ground, and find a way of looking at signs—very ordinary signs, like street signs, advertising billboards, these would often be the prompts, but other markers too, like my children—anew. This autoethnographic digression points to a division between a loss of having and a having, imbalance and sure-footedness, lostness and at-homeness, and this is just the kind of rubicon actors seek to cross. It also points to the sometimes mundane markers of life’s journey as the coordinates of that balance or imbalance, and it is just such markers—lines, moves, gestures, lights, props, furniture, concepts—that determine the artistic balance or imbalance of the actor.

With this, the lens adjusts from one that detects an embodied learning process to one that is calibrated to consider the process as a process of \textit{being} more than learning. The reintroduction of Bourdieu, my self-reflective gesture, and this refocus on being-ness, dependent as it is on the coordinates of world, invites the journey to be told in another way: to a significant extent, in Bourdieu’s way.

\textbf{ANGLE TWO: TOWARD A FICTIONAL HABITUS}

\begin{quote}
Ah, my friends from the prison, they ask unto me,
"How good, how good does it feel to be free?"
And I answer them most mysteriously,
"Are birds free from the chains of the skyway?"
\end{quote}

\textit{Ballad in Plain D}

Bob Dylan

Well, you know your lines and you know where you’re meant to be. You feel confident in working with the people you’re working with. There’s no real problem. Look at it this way, you’re going into a situation where you know exactly what you’re going to be saying for the next two hours. You know exactly what all those people are going to be saying to \textit{you} for the next two hours. You

\textsuperscript{50}Chekhov never produced a successful father across his hundreds of fictions, having lived a life cowered by his own brutal father, and having the pathetic fate of “failing” in fatherhood himself, with the miscarriage of he and Olga’s only known pregnancy.
know what’s going to happen, where you’re going to be at almost every particular point in time. So what have you got to be worried about? It’s more stress, in a way, to just walk across the street (Robert Grubb in Crawford, 2005, 128).

On habitus and field

Bourdieu attempted definitions of his notions of habitus and field at a number of different points, testament to the intriguing sophistication of the ideas, as is the magnetism they have had for many others who have attempted to explain their grasps of the concepts (including, from the limited scope of this study, Jenkins, 1992; Maxwell, 2003, 2010; Moore, 2004; Hope, 2010; Coleman, 2010). ‘Field’ refers, in general terms, to a set of resources that constitute the scene of a struggle. The struggle is for access to those resources, that access constituting the accrual of capital within the field, and the capacity to assert the value of the resources, their meanings, and the limits of those values and meanings, and so to adjudicate on the meaningfulness of the field itself. As such, a field is a socially constructed environment that is subject to, even while subjecting, those who inhabit it: it legitimises their presence in the same way, and in the very moment, that their presence legitimises it. This mutual legitimisation generates illusio, which is the tacit acknowledgement of a ‘fundamental belief in the value of the stakes’ of the field (Bourdieu, 2000, 102). As Moore has it, the field ‘determines what we value, and what we believe is worth competing for’ (2004, 41).

The coordinates or “rules” of a field may be more or less explicit. A military academy may be considered a field of explicit self-articulation, yet is no more of a field than one subjecting its inhabitants to a less explicit range of values. Field can appear at times a kind of game-zone with provisional governing principles, a little like a play-pen in which babies bustle, wherein it exists in a state of constant availability and malleability, yet still may not be encountered affectively without respect for its tenets or coordinates, its “pen”.

Habitus is a ‘system of durable dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, 190) developed through exposure to the logics of a given field, and which positions agents not only to exist within that given field, but to do so ‘devoid of strategic design, without rational computation and without the conscious positing of ends’ (ibid, 108). Habitus therefore allows and condemns us to navigate a given field with no more thought to our navigational capacity or existence as both subject and agent of the field than a baby has of its babyhood. That is to say, a person’s habitus refers to
systems of schemes of perception, appreciation and action [that] enable them to perform acts of practical knowledge, based on the identification and recognition of conditional, conventional stimuli to which they are predisposed to react; and, without any explicit definition of ends or rational calculation of means, to generate appropriate and endlessly renewed strategies, but within the limits of the structural constraints of which they are the product and which define them (Bourdieu, 2000, 138).

Playful cracks

Jenkins’ book, *Pierre Bourdieu*, is as valuable for its identifications of weaknesses or inconsistencies in its subject’s output as it is for its expansion of strengths, and will be accessed liberally in this section.

In order to stake out some ground for the relationship between Bourdieu’s ideas and practices of acting, I want to examine two sections of Jenkins’ criticisms. First:

the relationship between habitus and field is far from clear. In places, he writes as if each field generates its own specific habitus. Elsewhere, it seems to be the case that actors bring to whichever field they are a part of their own, preexisting and historically constituted habituses. Both of these options may, of course, be true. Individuals must grow up, acquiring their habitus as part of their process of social and personal development, within a field or fields. But what about fields which agents only ever encounter as mature, formed adults? And how, if at all, is it possible for a field to “have” its own habitus, if the habitus is a property of embodied, individual agents? (ibid, 90).

I was deeply immersed in reading Bourdieu during the period of the rehearsal observation and subsequent swill writing. My grasp of the concepts Bourdieu investigates and propagates are not only formed alongside the observation of actors, but are formed in large part by that observation. There is something Bourdieuian in that proposition, in that the matrix of constituents of a field, the tenets of theory, ‘only becomes sensible contextually’ (Moore, 2004, 42). Thence, I find in Jenkins’ criticisms a kind of opening through which Bourdieu can be more closely considered alongside actors’ journeying through the multi-depth symbolic territory of the political, artistic and fictive compasses, with the three compasses positioned as Bourdieuan fields to be negotiated.

To look first at Jenkins’ assumption of truth in the two options of the field’s defining influence on habitus, and the concurrent defining influence of habitus over field. How, he asks, might the fully-formed adult meet the challenges of a new field?
As an acting teacher, one of the common explanations-of-self that I use with students, with the market, and to myself, is that I “professionalise talent”. That suggests taking something innate, and doing something to it or, rather, subjecting it to something. Teachers build things around students: environmental coordinates, industrial expectations, theoretical constructions, simulations, carrots and sticks. The successful actor develops a way of being in “the business”, the temperament of an actor, a habitus. Among the generative dispositions of this habitus are the much-lauded notions of adaptability and flexibility. The adaptability that is germane to the notion of habitus is, as it were, intensified or centralised in the habitus of the “jobbing” actor, as they carry their habitus from site to site, engaging in the distinctive artistic fields that they encounter. These vary enormously from the commercial radio voice-over studio to the Shakespearean rehearsal room, and across the range of industrial constructs indicated by my application of an ‘ease factor’ in this study. This variety is exemplified in the values and stakes implicit in the illusio required for success in each site. Actors then approach the fictional field with their politically formed, artistically forming habitus, relying on the generative capacity of the habitus to be influenced by the fiction, which is itself daily fed and nurtured.

Yet here is the startling thing about the homology: actors are seeking a way-of-being in a field that is fictional: it does not exist. This was for me the amazing (I use the word carefully, and literally) phenomenon I continually encountered. Actors are looking to find positionings from reading coordinates that are not there until they place them, and place them but provisionally. They are like tourists at a lookout, “oo”-ing and “ah”-ing over a view that does not exist, or is totally obscured by fog. Their guidebook tells them the view is sensational, and they will soon enter down into its terrain and audaciously attempt to claim it as theirs, but they cannot see it. This is not a discrete problem of early-rehearsal, as McAuley reminds us, but a foundation of the performed and received theatrical moment, that may lead to tears being shed for ‘something that is not in fact occurring’ (2000, 253).

Jenkins’ identification of ‘ontological weakness’ (1992, 93) in the macro-philosophising of Bourdieus field/habitus projection, then, may prove a strength in its projection here as a transferable model in theatre-making. That the field is as reliant on the habitus of the individuals who encounter it becomes an argument for the distinctive qualities of different productions of the same play, for example. Habitus adapts to field, and field correspondingly articulates itself through those

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51 see Moore (2004), and my blog post on this subject at http://tcdimensions.wordpress.com/2012/08/04/auditioning-for-acting-school-2-temperament/
adaptations. This might be likened to a process of colonisation, whereby the cultural traits of the coloniser are carried to new ground, and are there disrupted by the field (its climate, natural resources), even as these disruptions make of the field a new field that will continue to nurture and shake, and be nurtured and shaken by, its impact upon the individual and collective habitus of its colonisers. Anglo-Australian traditions around Christmas “dinner” is an example of this: the roast struggles against the environment to maintain its place as essential cuisine in the context of the Australian summer, with prawns, salad, and other cultural influences of the field encroaching.

When I worked as Head of Acting at the Theatre Training and Research Programme (TTRP) in Singapore, I supervised a cohort of students from more than a dozen different countries. Cultural expectations and habits, including my own, regularly problematised and disrupted the daily functioning of the school. To a large extent, such problematics were embraced as part of “the point” of an inter-cultural, multi-ethnic project. They were the habituses that would and must form the field. But these cultural differences, as they pertained to issues such as time, space, and gender relations, at times created ruptures that seemed beyond or counter to the purpose or ethos of the institution. My position in such moments of upset or bad-feeling was that, however liberal we were in accepting and negotiating cultural difference, and however central that liberality was to the project, we needed to assert an institutional culture: principles that would and must guide behaviour on campus. I do not claim to have acted with authoritative wisdom in this delicate area. That is to say, the point of this digression is not to recount a successful strategic manoeuvre inside a labyrinthine multicultural milieu. I do not know, and I do not know if it is possible to know, whether my colleagues and I “solved” anything, or whether there is anything to solve, but here was habitus asserting field, and field asserting habitus, in a way that was not idyllic, but (typically) fraught, tense, enmeshed, co-responsive, confused, and sincere.

Next, Jenkins asks how it is that a field, if formed by habitus, can be a field in isolation from, or prior to, its “colonisation”. Bourdieu’s response, presumably, would be that no field is a vacuum. This is a kind of “god-made-the-world-but-who-made-god?” proposition. In the theatre, we need not be coy about godliness: the playwright acts as a god over a text. Who made the fictional field? The playwright. She was there, in the beginning, and lingers as a kind of spectral guide. Just as surely, we may say that the director builds the artistic field, somewhat provisionally, and awaits the ruptures of the habitus of actors. Here too, if Jenkins is nit-picking, he is picking nits that nourish us.

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52 Now renamed the Intercultural Theatre Institute.
And later:

[d]espite the significance which he attaches to the temporality of practice, his theory becomes a machine for the suppression of history, banishing it with an eternal ethnographic present that is indistinguishable from the past and prefigures the future. It is a world where behavior has its causes, but actors are not allowed their reasons (ibid, 97).

This distinction between cause and reason suggests a distinction between the Meisnerian or Bogartian phenomenological approach to acting and the deterministic objective-driven ideas attributed, perhaps overly, to Stanislavski. I wonder again if the extent to which Jenkins’ assertion of a somewhat betrayed history might not be better reconciled in the artifice of the play-text than in life, given the relatively slight gesture toward the complexity of real life and real, living histories that is the explicit stuff of even the most life-like dramatic text. The density, for example, of one of Arthur Miller’s major characters is immense in its invitation for biographical thickness, yet this thickness is the work of the actor’s imagination, encouraged by Miller to the task. This question, which might boil down to, “Thickness of what?”, is pursued later in the chapter. Neither causality nor reasoning are a priori, but require construction. The fictional field implies and compels the fictive habitus. The actor’s own reasonings are somewhat suppressed, along with their detailed biography (history), precisely in order to exist in the moment (the eternal ethnographic present), content to be a container of only traces, intimations of, flirtations with, history. The banishment of history, therefore, is eminently reconcilable. It might again be said that Jenkins’ cracks in Bourdieu, however legitimate, are the very things through which the idea of the fictive habitus might sneak and play.

Coordinates and vines

Given the above, the actor in the field might be seen to thrive on partiality and provisionality, in order that they might find and make the world, or a partial, provisional framework of the world, and assert that their action and their thought, their

\[\text{gesture of expression partakes}\] within the inauguration of differentiations in order to allow a new tradition to then be instituted (Kaushik, 2011, 49).

As Heather Mitchell puts it, ‘fairly quickly, you need some framework, even if it’s the wrong one’ (in Crawford, 2005, 96).

Of L&S, Chris Drummond says,
‘This piece is a series of crystalline moments, that if each moment rings true and clear, and the next rings true and clear, and the next, then you get that accumulative journey of the show.’

What is truth and clarity? It comes of the habitus that the actors must forge from these sparse and ethereal co-ordinates (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).

Habitus requires the identification of coordinates, in life and in work; the identification of what David Schneider refers to as a ‘galaxy’ made up of ‘a cluster of symbols and their meanings … [A] total cultural system’ (1976, 214). When it comes to the establishment of the actor’s fictive habitus, these clusters and coordinates, again, do not exist. They are called for, as I have said, by text, but must then be placed by the actor. ‘Is this a dagger which I see before me?’ asks Macbeth.53 The good director, teacher, or theatre-goer will ask, Well… is it? The good actor places the dagger, and then allows the dagger to motivate the rest of the soliloquy: artistic habitus forges fictional field, which forges fictive habitus; the actor makes the dagger, and the dagger then turns the actor, as it were, into the character:

Bodies are always in relation: in relation to the world, in relation to one another, in relation to parts of bodies, in relation to selves, in relation to imagined beings and imagined states, and places, and times. To be able, therefore, to imagine these multiple relations is to be able to embody them, which is to be able to attend, edit/select and articulate them. … [P]erformers are imagining and enacting at the same moment continually (Snow, 2006, 243).

This ‘complicated process of appropriation’ (Butler, cited in Auslander, 2003, 99) does not presuppose, according to Bourdieu, ‘a conscious aiming at ends’ (1999, 53). This is an interesting distinction in the context of the fictive habitus because actors are not in this aiming for ends, but aiming rather for means, the generative processes that will allow them to exist inside the artistic and fictive compasses, which will pass as an inhabitation of “character”. As the late Wendy Hughes puts it:

‘[o]nce you’ve done all that, and you’re into the character and you’re doing it, then hopefully, instinctively you’re going, No, hang on, she wouldn’t do it like that’ (in Crawford, 2005, 72).

Tom was able to articulate the less happy outcome, when the accumulation falters:

‘[y]ou don’t really have anything to hang onto. There are no vines to swing from, from one to the other’ (L120523.tom).

53 Shakespeare’s Macbeth, 2:1, L33.
This is a potent metaphor, particularly when one considers the thoughtless agility, the objective in the subjective, of chimpanzees’ movement through forests or artificial replicas:

*Chris’ reading of the diary, the text-within-text, is perhaps the most secure moment of the scene. I suggest this is so because of the tangibility of the diary. Even though there is no decent facsimile or prop, just a meaningless piece of paper, it exists, it is handed to him and he can hold it. The scene achieves greater focus and sense of natural air* (City, 19-3-12, wk2).

Having a handle (literally and figuratively) on the Object will liberate acting, provide a vine, and here was a clear example. The tangibility of the “diary” meant that the scene could begin to ‘play itself’ (Crawford, 2011, 145). There was also in this moment the liberation of the removal of one of the layers of early-rehearsal obstacles, the actor reading the script. Chris could subsume the burdensome reading of his script in the necessary and liberating reading of the diary. With this, the script, which is, ironically, both the “holy book” of the fictional field, and a dormant, oppressive weight in the actor’s hands, both the description of the fictional field and the bar to entering it, was recast as a key coordinate, a token of the values of the struggle within the field. It seemed, in this moment, that by turning the script into something other than the text, the world of the text was accessed.

When drawing lines between the fragments of one intellectual discipline and the practices of another, it is easy to get “cute”, and reduce the process to a kind of intellectual train-spotting. My claim here, though, is for homology, not analogy, and it seems, as Johnston (2007) has exhaustively pursued, and Moore (2004) has touched upon, that acting is not just like an investigation into ways of being in the world, but is itself just such an investigation. My hope is that the study to this point allows the following citation to be read and accepted in this light:

[a] field, therefore, is a structured system of social positions—occupied either by individuals or institutions—the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants. It is also a system of forces which exist between these positions; a field is structured internally in terms of power relations. Positions stand in relationships of domination, subordination or equivalence (homology) to each other by virtue of the access they afford to the goods or resources (capital) which are at stake in the field (Jenkins, 1992, 85).

That a description of these goods sounds like lecture notes from Stanislavski is where potential cuteness needs to be identified in order to be dispelled in favour of homology:
These goods can be principally differentiated into four categories: economic capital, social capital (various kinds of valued relations with significant others), cultural capital (primarily legitimate knowledge of one kind or another), symbolic capital (prestige and social honour) (ibid).

These are the coordinates of the fictional field, the stakes of the struggle, as relating to the character’s store of capital in terms of money, love, education and recognition, respectively. I now want to chart this process of the identification of coordinates of habitus, the accumulation of stores of capital, the ‘series of pertinent events [that] is practically present in the latest’ such that ‘the series itself tends toward uniqueness’ (Bourdieu, 1993, 108) across the political, artistic and fictive compasses.

**Political to artistic habitus**

The specific logic of a field is established in the incorporated state in the form of a specific habitus, or, more precisely, a sense of the game ... which is practically never set out or imposed in an explicit way. Because it takes place insensibly, in other words gradually, progressively and imperceptibly, the conversion of the original habitus ... passes for the most part unnoticed (Bourdieu, 2000, 11).

TC: The suggestion is that we find comfort and security in plays by identifying the ways in which they are distinct. Or that’s one of the ways that we do it. And that along the way we make observations that we think—at the time, at least—are unique to this play.

Matilda: Yeah, like create the culture of the piece.

TC: Exactly, the culture of the acting that is specific to this play (C120531.matilda).

The peculiarity of the experience of actors cast in L&S, and the distinctive way the director approached it, have been thoroughly indicated. In this light, this may be seen, in the first instance, as a “coming to terms with” the particular artistic predilections and emphases of a director. Actors often describe their passage through the early days and weeks of rehearsal in terms of the director’s “vision” and style, and how their own way of working is aligned or misaligned with that style. Jacqy experienced such misalignments, as she regularly referred to “life-as-lived” artistic coordinates that clearly, on occasion, stumped or even irked Chris Drummond. My swill analysis of such a moment brought Arthur Miller’s canon back to mind as the epitome of the kind of play Jacqy, perhaps, was looking for, and not finding, and the kind of acting that Chris, as previously cited, provocatively described as ‘thinly psychological’:
Chris’ use of the term ‘thinly psychological’ is of course exciting for its reverberations with Geertz. If acting were to be projected as a ‘thick description’ of human activity, one might expect that it might be the kind of acting that carries knowing, sedimentary, social and cultural historicism; a sense of deeply contextualised social and cultural placement; an expressed relationship between personal character-based action and the world in which and on which the action is taken. For example, a magnificent performance of Willy Loman might be what one would call ‘thick’ acting: dense, multifaceted, with life-ish complexity and social connectedness. My use of the word, ‘sedimentary’, is taken from Butler, whose description of the body’s acquisition of gender is also perhaps helpful in untying the distinctions between Jacqy’s character-based projections, and Chris’ more corporeal enticements into the forest, and between the ‘might be’ thickness I ponder above, and the ‘might be’ thickness that Chris implies:

the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic (Butler in Auslander, 2003, 101).

Such renewed, revised and consolidated acts are aligned with Chris’ offered trust in the repetitions of motifs, phrases, perspectives and intents ... avoiding natural, cultural foreclosure. What may be sought and achieved then is a thickness of possibility and abstraction rather than of determined, articulated meaning (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

This is an example of an actor adjusting her habitus to the artistic compass of the production.

I have described the play’s relationship to its own production, the relationship of the fictive to the artistic, as centripetal, as if it is the production that is not only articulating but making the play, rather than—arguably more commonly—the play that is articulating the production. The text, of course, exists, and is influencing the action around it, but the text does not dictate action, it finds its potency in action. The text and its meanings wait upon action to a greater degree here than the norm. This intensifies the necessity for actors to contour their habitus toward the working room in order to find security in the working processes before and over-and-above a security in the play. This distinction is suggested by Tom, in his comments about the director and direction:

Once I felt that I knew what he was doing, I was able to let go a bit of any sense of responsibility for the show apart from how I was making my own work (L120523.tom).
The ‘he’ to whom Tom refers is the director, not the character, and it is interesting that he uses the construction ‘the show’, which is not uncommon, but which underlines actors’ primary concerns of art-making over fictive inhabitation, as does the craft-like phrase, ‘making my own work’. Tom then described his making process as one of logic-building, somewhat in defiance of the text:

I was able to make a very specific story about what the character was coming on to the room with, what that journey was, and what that meant. Now it feels like any other play in terms of how I go through it, a strong thread through that that I can travel. ... The pattern my character goes through ... is quite straight-forward, actually (L120523.tom).

This is a fascinating insight into what the actor seeks, and how the actor’s place in the artistic compass, as distinct from the fictive compass, determined by artistic habitus rather than fictive habitus, is valued. Additionally, the use of the word ‘pattern’ is interesting for its association with artistic or artisanal product. It is a question I interrogated in the interview:

Tom: The sense that I have now of a trajectory, I now I have a sense of past and future.
TC: Yeah, because you’ve built this narrative.
Tom: Exactly.
TC: You’ve now built it into a narrative, which is interesting, isn’t it, when you say, this is not a narrative piece, but the actor has to live, from beginning to end, and therefore will build a narrative.
Tom: That didn’t happen until after we’d opened. I remember even on opening night going on for a scene as an isolated moment, then going onto the next one and living within that one. It’s funny, it is such a neutral mask kind of thing, that idea of absolutely dropping into the present.
TC: The figure that’s never existed before.
Tom: Yeah. It’s funny being so inside it. I have no objectivity at all about what it must be to watch this show. I don’t even know what that’s about, is it an inherent desire for finding an arc, a character arc or something?
TC: I think it’s the actor’s embodiment of the sometimes derided Robert McKee idea that story is human instinct. Because we experience life in a lineal way, we’re looking to build meaning at every step, so when the actor is deprived of that meaning in a normal way ... when a play is seeking to do that, the tension is between that and the fact that we are bound to seek sense. That’s how abstract art can work, it works precisely because it’s counterintuitive, in a way. We find meaning in any random placement (L120523.tom).

54 A reference to McKee’s book, Story (see bibliography)
Later in the interview, Tom speaks again in ways that reflect on the constructed epistemology of the rehearsal phenomenon, the necessity for communion, and the power of a nuanced habitus:

Tom: [I]t’s funny because in this process I think everybody felt we were floating in limbo for a lot of it, and there was a long time of Chris not really being sure what he was wanting, or how to communicate that in a way that was able to be embodied, that gradually changing, and witnessing that really remarkable thing of him giving a note to, like, Rory, for instance, and it’s like, In this bit, can you do such and such and such a thing, and it’s like often quite an abstract idea, but Rory will be like, Oh, yeah, yeah, I get that, and I’ll be thinking, Yeah, yeah, I know what he’s referring to. I always find it so amazing with notes sessions because it can be really specific, but without that shared experience of the weeks before of rehearsal finding that shared language it would just mean absolutely nothing. ...

TC: There’s a common intelligence that’s built, a collectivising of all the intelligence in the room ...

Tom: Which is why I think if this play was done by a group of actors who’d been working together for a couple of years, or if we started now, the process would be so much easier. We would have a stronger, immediate sense of ownership, not relying on someone else telling us what it’s about or what it is that we’re searching for (L120523.tom).

Here we find, as did Rossmanith, the ‘rehearsal room as a site of intimate knowledge and experience ... mapped onto the actor’s self’ (2003, 75). Here we see the structures of habitus ‘constructed from within interactions and events’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993, 138). Here habitus is established as a social interaction and articulation, as described by Maxwell:

[...]his articulation involves a cultural labor applied to sustain a felt contiguity between the idea and the practice, the labor of producing a habitus, and, more importantly, ensuring that meanings are maintained over time. ... a fit between what is done, or is being done, and the narrative of “culture” within the context of which the actors understand their practice (2003, 44).

Coming to an understanding of practice, and of artistic culture, is not only an issue of actors negotiating the needs, whims, strengths and weaknesses of their director, but with the political habitus of each of their fellow actors:

Alirio seems to be playing against the high-fiction of the character and its fairy-tale foundation: an old man chipping away at a log as a ‘boy puppet’ emerges from it. Alirio is focusing on simplicity, Personalisation; Geoff seems focused on distinctive character choices. Actors pursuing the work dictated by their own
standard practices more than the stated demands of the play or the production, or the stated focus given the cast by the director (Pin, 29-6-12, wk5).

This was an observation of two actors not yet on the same page, both pursuing equally legitimate but not yet collectivised working processes. This moment might be seen as one where the fictive compass is encountered shallowly in advance of the establishment of a collective artistic habitus, or of the broader industrial habitus being starkly exposed by a lack of cohesive purchase or agency, as a thing that has been brought to a new field, and apt to function insufficiently.

I was startled in the rehearsal of Pin one day by the image of the leading actor, central, and alone:

Nathan doesn’t sing this song, so he climbs up to the top of the set with his text, and studies it. ... I think it’s interesting that he does so on the set, in the centre of the stage, the space he must command in performance. ... Actors must acknowledge their primacy in the moment, and a leading actor must make centre-stage his or her own. This idea is powerfully evoked on this set with its enormous central log. Nathan looks for all the world like a lion sitting on the highest available rock, owning the space and all that he surveys (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

This was the forging of a different element of artistic habitus: that of leadership. It is inconceivable that any other actor would have, in a moment of private script-study, climbed to the “summit”, or that Nathan would have done so if he were playing a peripheral role. In order to be central, the actor practices centrality. This is a negotiation of ego, away from the practices of the political habitus, which are embroiled in notions of collectivism, humility, ensemble, and toward “stardom”.

The following citation suggests the persistent claim that the artistic habitus has over the work, even in the advanced stages of immersion in the fiction. That is to say, the artistic habitus is not a “stage” of rehearsal to be gone through, just as the artistic compass is not a symbolic terrain with easily discernable borders:

At the end of the notes session, Rose gives a very open invitation to the actors to comment on how they want to use the remaining time available to them in the rehearsal room with the set, eg—whether they want to do another run, or work on ‘bits’.

Throughout this discussion, the only concerns about performance are referred to as aesthetic problems relating to at-home-ness on the set: ‘we can do a run because it is your last opportunity to work on the set in the rehearsal room.’
The implication here is that the actors’ work—the performance—is so wedded to the environment on which it exists, that it will be a depleted thing, a thing of absence and lost-ness—if attempted outside that environment. A couple of specific moments of the play were isolated and described as moments on which work could be done ‘without the set’.

Rose: Next week you’ll have your opportunities, while we’re tech-ing, to work on stuff ... You’ll be able to take your moments, and work stuff out.

I believe the stuff that Rose is referring to here is further Aesthetic stuff—the locating of the performance within the technical machinery and media of its context (Pin, 29-6-12, wk5).

The point here is that very little exists that is not of the artistic as well as the fictive compass, and so a fictive habitus alone cannot equip an actor to act. Consider, for example, a fictive habitus attuned to a story of a young Russian woman, circa 1902, desperate to get to Moscow. This, by itself, would leave the actor grossly under-equipped for a production of Three Sisters. It is simply not the principal claim on which her agency is based. To take the fantasy a little further, consider a very fine performance of one of the sisters, then consider asking that actor to turn up to a different theatre, and walk onto a different stage, a different set, wearing a different costume, into a different production, with different actors surrounding her. Her fictive habitus—her “Olga-ness”—would perhaps give her some capacity to generatively scheme her way through, but not without anxiety, and even physical danger. I am reminded of the old reductive joke-instruction about acting, “Learn your lines, and don’t bump into the furniture.” Our poor Olga would know her lines (fictive), but very likely struggle to avoid collisions with furniture (artistic).

This is not to pretend—as I have taken pains to stress and re-stress—that the fictive and the artistic are in a binary relationship, for actors, directors, or for writers. In emphasising that performances and productions are works of art as well as works of fiction, it needs to be remembered that plays are also works of art and fiction. Art and fiction are deliberately collapsed or interwoven in the work of playwrights. Of the four works under investigation, this can be seen in Pin in the performative “knowingness” germane to works of musical comedy; in GM through the central character’s autoethnographic narration; in L&S’s centripetal license to the artistic measures that construct it; and in City in relation to its psychological disruptions, its existential interests, what Johnston describes of Brecht as a ‘radical continuity between the human subject and its environment’ (2007, 179), its slippery fishy-ness:

Matilda: “This is fiction.” “This is not fiction.” “Do I know I’m fiction?” “Do I not know?” All that stuff was like a sink-hole. Stop trying to grab onto those and just
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let them live as questions. I kept them as questions and I was ok with them being questions, which I don’t think I’d ever usually do, but I think that’s what the play was (C120531.matilda).

It might be said of all plays, as I have hitherto implied, that there is no line at all between the pursuit of the artistic and the pursuit of the fictive, only moments of relative focus on the questions of fiction as distinct from the questions of art; the development and exercise of a fictive as distinct from an artistic habitus. Still the fictive habitus must be developed. Our fantasy Olga’s inverse, the actor superbly attuned to the ways of a director, perfectly at home in an artistic design, acting with exquisite agency within an artistic frame, is of course no Olga at all until she has her own private Moscow for which to yearn.

Artistic to fictive habitus

‘You have to acclimatise’ (Gaden in Crawford, 2005, 120).

Gaden’s typically concise comment invites broad contemplation of the range of things, the coordinates, to which the actor must acclimatise. This might be easily described as the “becoming of character”, but in problematising that prosaic notion, this study seeks a range of fictional coordinates that sit within a range of artistic coordinates, within a broader range of social and industrial coordinates, in the context of a store of symbolic capital, operating within an idiosyncratic, insecure professional field.

Fictive habitus is formed by exposure to, and bustle within, the playwright’s text as distinct from the more liberal “texts” that surround it. This text, however, is not merely a store of fiction—as in fragments of lives-as-if-lived—but is itself a store, and a field, of artistic, dramaturgical and poetic gestures and strategies. There is style in the substance; artifice to the flesh; artistic functionality in the fiction. So considering the influences of our most obvious artistic colleagues, then considering that the author is an artistic colleague as well as a god of fiction, it is clear how limited is our attention to purely fictive concerns, and this is at stark odds with the Stanislavskian tradition and, particularly, the version of it that had suffered what Bogart describes as ‘Americanization, or miniaturization’ (2005, 37).

Nonetheless, actors need to be within fiction, and search, like ‘chooks in a pen, scratching around for some nutrients’ (Crawford, 2011, 145). Robert Grubb reports:

‘[u]sually I’ll put the shoes on and feel, Yeah, this is right. I can see him. And that starts to get all the juices going’ (in Crawford, 2005, 133).
These are the juices, and this is the ‘going’, of cogito, an intellectual, imaginative, emotional and physical liberation in context. But not all plays offer up their secrets easily. Not all characters can be inferred by an at-home-ness because not all of them have homes, as do the characters of GM, nor marriages, as do the central characters of City, nor, necessarily, shoes. This differential in the quality and degrees of life-ish-ness afforded actors by different plays is indicated by the two following moments of rehearsal:

For a section of the rehearsal, the actors walk very slowly through a wordless scene, with Chris [Drummond] voicing the characters’ motivating thoughts, eg—‘And you think, “Ah”.’

This seems very strange to me. It feels like very rudimentary, kindergarten-like blocking of child actors, and delivering their “inner-monologue” to them as they are ferried around. On the surface it seems borderline offensive, yet it relates directly to the text. It is almost inconceivable that this director would be speaking to this cast (in this way), at this stage of rehearsal, if they were engaged with a clear narrative life-like text. Logic is still on the agenda, a logic of gesture and of prosaic space and time, not the logic of History, or characters-as-people in the same deeply located way as it is in The Glass Menagerie, but in the absence of this text’s foundations in that kind of soil (L&S, 3-5-12, wk5).

That which was absent for the actors of L&S seemed present in surfeit for those of GM. That is to say, there is so much History in the play that the cast riffed off the characters’ explicit histories into implicit histories and hypotheticals:

A lengthy discussion about what might have become of the characters had they adopted different positions with each other. … Despite its value, this is ostensibly another discussion about what the play isn’t … It is, perhaps, part of the construction of imaginative fecundity that lies beneath what the play is. Most significantly though, again, is that it treats the characters as people living lives and, indeed, in exactly the way we analyse our own lives and those of others, people not living lives they might live with different choices (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

Meanwhile, in an early rehearsal of L&S, Rory searched for tangibility in absence:

‘We all meet them at a point when they don’t know what’s happening. They don’t have control. There is no control… in any of them. … None of them are settled. They’re not comfortable’ (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).
The “feeliness” and ethereality of this nascent analysis reveals the sense of purpose in identifying ‘life-ish’ (Crawford, 2011, 6) footholds. The attention given to the development of at-home-ness in the fictional circumstances of character was pursued in different ways and to different degrees across the four rehearsal rooms, and can be characterised thus:

- in City, the forging of fictive habitus seemed strongly reliant on thematic justification. Actors looked to meta-narratives, social statements, in order to find a home in the fractionally dramatised “lives” of their characters;
- in Pin, actors seemed required to dig beneath the surface comic-book façade of the genre, to wonder on what was not in the text. This was perhaps less an engagement with meta-narrative as with a sub-narrative, or ghost narrative, as if taking cartoon characters and imagining them out of their two-dimensional cells, into the concerned world, and considering their lives within it, way beyond the confines and responsibilities of the play;
- in L&S, the fictive habitus seemed rarely discrete from the artistic habitus, to the point of being largely non-discernable. “Where am I?” “What am I doing?” “How do I operate?” “What generates my being on stage?” Such questions were answered with, seemingly, and not inappropriately, only fleeting and partial dedication to the pure fiction of characters in circumstance. Interestingly, this does not denote a lack of imaginative or emotional investment or expense on the part of actors, but the investment and expense is associated with impulsive being-ness on stage. That is to say, it is an emotional and imaginative investment of artistic habitus;
- GM, clearly, offers the most direct investment in characters as if people living in the world, and this offer was accepted by a cast who took the fragments of fictional biographies as the foundations of fictive habitus, largely via a process of generalising fictional circumstances into their known worlds. Moments of character History were investigated with imaginative thoroughness as research, when required. The caveat is important due to the limits of the play’s presentation of life-as-lived, and its interests in a fractured reality that played out as a limit in actors’ life-like strategies toward fictive habitus.

In arriving at these thumbnail conclusions, I am conscious that, while the four plays represent a very broad range of theatrical circumstances, styles and challenges, none of them are deeply and thoroughly embedded in what is often referred to as realism, and what I prefer to call life-ishness. The ramifications of this were brought into contrast for me when, during the research process, I acted in two signal works of the life-ish canon, Hedda Gabler and The Seagull. Both had among their casts actors under scrutiny elsewhere in this study: in Hedda Gabler, Nathan (Pin) and Kate (GM); and in The Seagull, Matilda, Chris Pitman, and Lizzy (all of City). This
extraordinary web of circumstances, borne of the small professional ensemble in Adelaide, invites an important autoethnographical digression in relation to the pursuit of fictive habitus.

Along the lines of my published emphases, I expected my engagement with my first mature Ibsen to lead me to a deeper-than-normal immersion in imaginative constructions around the fictional off-stage “life” of the character.\textsuperscript{55} I surprised myself with the extent to which this was so, and seemed necessary. Recognising that Brack rarely says all that might be said, that his power in the play is based on knowledge held rather than expressed, that many of the major incidents of the play occur off-stage, and that much of the time on-stage is spent in direct reflection, reporting, and misreporting of those incidents, I found myself thoroughly immersed in fantasising detailed histories of my sexual relationship with Hedda (only hinted at in text), and of the night of Brack’s soiree, the intricate fate of Lovberg’s manuscript (on which so much of the play turns), and the tragic fall of Lovberg. I imaginatively constructed a whole, long evening, from the character’s exit in Act Two, to Brack’s return the next morning, in Act Three. These fantasies, and the techniques of recalling them in preparation for each performance, were the coordinates of the fictional field, created by, and in turn creating, my fictive habitus. They were the structural constraints that defined the action. This not only allowed me the capacity to communicate on stage subject to a reliable generative scheme (habitus), but my performance was consciously steered toward a greater reliance on the fictive habitus than I have commonly experienced in a sustained way throughout a whole play. Neither Ibsen, nor the director, was found to place any obstacles in the way of this fictive inhabitation and reliance.

I was not alone in finding fictive immersion a cornerstone of the work in this lauded production.\textsuperscript{56} I was privy to Nathan and Kate spending hours in research on their roles, imaginatively constructing the past relationship of Thea and Lovberg. Nathan wrote a lengthy fictive biography of his character, and often referred to it in rehearsal. He did not do so to play Pinocchio. This was not a case of an actor arbitrarily changing his standard rehearsal practice, but of one responding to the unique demands and privileges of a play, and so developing a fictive habitus that was discernably discrete from, though still enmeshed in, the artistic habitus of the production.

\textsuperscript{55} My only other experience, as an actor, of Ibsen, was at NIDA in 1983, when I played one of nine Peers in \textit{Peer Gynt}, directed by John Clark.

\textsuperscript{56} It was nominated for a Helpmann Award for best production of 2013, and Alison Bell won the best actress Helpmann for her performance as Hedda.
These reflections momentarily broaden the scope of the study in order to gesture toward a fuller terrain of experience for actors in relation to the pursuit of a fictive habitus. They demonstrate, as do the observations of the other four productions, how ‘habitus is adjusted to objective conditions’ (Jenkins, 1992, 79), and how it is both individually and collectively developed, ‘mutually adjusted for and by a social group’ (ibid). This establishes habitus as essentially emergent and organically reliant on its social source, which includes the habitus of the various individuals who make up any given society. Thus, we bring our individual embodied habitus to the forged collective, the social group of a cast, together we explore and identify artistic coordinates, and fictive societal coordinates, subject ourselves with an intense, inquisitive bodymind sensitivity, as a newly formed social mass, to those coordinates, and develop a habitus as a collective toward the artistic field, and the fictional field that lies within it.

Un denouement

I want to conclude reporting from this angle by returning to the intriguing source of much of Bourdieu’s thinking, the site of his epiphany, as described by Jenkins:

[i]t was the marriage patterns of the Berber peasantry of Algeria which first alerted Bourdieu to the contours and dimensions of the problem. Here he was particularly concerned with the distinction between the official version—the ideology, who ought to marry whom, the rule—and practical kinship, who actually married whom and the familial strategies which brought these outcomes about. The official ideology of marriage preference—for patrilateral parallel cousins—is, in fact, a rhetorical resource, to be drawn upon or not as circumstances require; it is emphatically not a proscription (1992, 39).

This is of great interest. Here we have a principle that might be said to be foundational yet not governing. Perhaps my response to Bourdieu’s habitus is rooted in this non-rootedness, this shifty relationship between ideology and practice. Habitus, Bourdieu suggests, is in all contexts, yet it perhaps comes most starkly to light in such environments of, as it were, parentless cultural pursuits: like marriage ideology that may be glanced at as the suggestion of a guiding star but is not a determined path; or like acting, with its mythic ideology of the inhabitation of character which, in the final moment, is an ideological referent rather than a practice; a logic sedimented in the actor, consonant with the logic of the field. Thus the notion of the artistic and the fictive habitus, and their attendant strategies, arise somewhat vapourously from a disconnection between theory-as-ideology and practice as pressured response, and brings actors—and with them, their notional characters—into what Blau describes as ‘the orbit of the riddle’ (2005, 64).
I dove into the study of ethnography as a way of placing myself in this research, as I have described in the introduction. I quickly began to see the broad story of the history of ethnography in remarkable alignment with the story of the development of acting throughout the twentieth century. I have argued that Stanislavski needs to be understood in the context of the ‘unholy trinity’ (2011, 4) of Darwin, Marx, and Freud:

There was a need to see people presented on stage more as they really were, and to see ordinary men and women, the people whom Darwin showed to be the equals of kings and queens in evolutionary terms, whom Marx argued should be equal in political and social terms, and whom Freud would later insist were just as complex and darkly nutty as any Prince of Denmark (ibid).

The upsets and problematics of post-Malinowskian ethnography can be viewed in the same context, and seen to contain many of the same drivers, with the abolition of the all-knowing ‘mysterious, impartial outsider, an observer freed of personality and bias’ (England, 1994, 81) and of the ‘obfuscating claims of objectivity’ (Lather, 2003, 189) from the ethnographic field, reading like a kind of Brechtian demolition of the false walls and premises of the Edwardian stage. Both disciplines seemed with this to welcome the individual, and welcome her flaws, her impartialities and biases, not to mention her gender. They both privileged the notion of the ‘socialized body, not as an object, but as the repository of a generative, creative capacity to understand’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 20). This invites a methodology that Bochner (2001) and Arthur Frank (1995) defend fervently, and Michael Fischer describes as a ‘personal empathetic “dual-tracking,” seeking in the other clarifications for processes in the self’ (1986, 199).

It is a persuasive and instructive analogy to consider the actor as an ethnographer viewing the character and the fictional society it inhabits as foreign subjects, “others” with whom the actor seeks understanding, acceptance, and a kind of embedded-ness that feels a little like a blood-ritual or, perhaps, a conspiracy or, as Deirdre suggests, a corporeal gestation:
‘a sort of energy that I feel growing, that I become truer and truer to’ (GM, 30-4-12, wk5).

Coleman identifies the way in which

a previously explored field site becomes a kind of ethnographic “voice” inherent in the sensibility of the researcher entering a new site (2010, 224).

This is a quite beautiful evocation of the actor’s experience of moving from role to role, mystery to mystery, or, after Blau, riddle to riddle.

There is a shared sense of humility and partialness in the two disciplines. These qualities are argued for ethnography by Geertz (1973) with his claim that all cultural analysis is ‘intrinsically incomplete’ (1973, 29), and is put passionately here by Donna Haraway:

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. ... I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god trick is forbidden (2003, 34).

Actors may not grant themselves the privilege of all-knowing nowhere-ness, as their structured bodies are their means of investigation, their only sites of liberation and of findings, and, tantalisingly, their constant drag; their humbling.57

Geertz writes, ‘[w]e are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture’ (1973, 49). Actors trade on this incompleteness, seeking at-home-ness in the fiction of a dramatic context. We are objects seeking subjection in fiction, seeking to be (re)gendered and, as Alison Phipps puts it, ‘enlanguaged’ (2010, 98). Actors must learn to live in a foreign language, and are not merely sanguine about the changes this brings, but hunger for them. The feely-ness of the pursuit, recorded up to this point in the study, and soon to be its focus, finds a deep sympathy in Geertzian ethnography, as does its artistic outcome:

[un]derstanding the form and pressure of ... natives’ inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke—or, as I have suggested, reading a poem—than it is like achieving a communion (Geertz, 1983, 70).

57 An acknowledgement of the notion suggested by the title of Philip Roth’s 2009 novel about an actor, The Humbling.
This is interesting, given my privileging of the word ‘communion’ up to this point. The communion to which I have referred—and I have done so without consideration of Geertz’s quote—is a communion with the writer, with colleagues, and with the audience, not with the character. Geertz’s devalued communion is therefore not inconsistent, but instructive, as it suggests the relationship to character (be it native or fictional native) as a lesser achievement than the relationship to character-in-context, a fleeting, imperfect harmony of form, pressure, circumstance and, perhaps, aesthetic. It therefore tends to privilege form over content or, rather, it places the inner within the context of the outer; content (the subject, the character, the fiction) in the context of its form (the art, the pressure, the joke).

Actors, either through the determined processes of the Strasbergian Method, or via the kinds of processes I favour of personal historical-emotional association contextualised as catalysing research (Crawford, 2011), use their personal experiences in ways that Jackson (1989), and Gallinat (2010, 29) invite ethnographers to do, as a means of opening the subject to scrutiny. Such openings of personalisation constitute what Jackson calls, borrowing from William James, ‘radical empiricism’, which, by radically exposing the gaze of the ethnographer via personal associations and stories, ‘seeks to grasp the ways in which ideas and words are wedded to the world in which we live’ (Jackson, 1989, 5; see also Heron, 1992, 5). In something of this way, actors’ reflexive engines motor toward a new manifestation of self, based upon their ethnography of a fictional other, achieving of the objective a new subjective, a new stance, new holdings that will read as the inhabitation of character:

We need to be infected by the role, and allow the infection to spread through us and change us, and the role needs to be infected with us, in as much as it cannot be anybody else that we send on stage to perform it for us in our name (Crawford, 2011, 88).

The story of ethnography over the past century hinges on a central relinquishing of the role of the great white christian man who walks among lesser souls, constructing for them their reality, reporting their meaning, performing a kind of sexless-ness and propriety (regardless of what might go on behind closed tent-flaps). The new role, described by Clifford as a predicament ‘linked to the breakup and redistribution of colonial power in the decades after 1950’ (1983, 118), and consequently infected with post-colonialism (Geertz, 1988, 131, 132; Conquergood, 2003, 358), Marxism, feminism, ethical, moral and legal responsibilities (Lincoln and Guba, 2003, 220, 221), embracing reflexivity (Dillon, 1988; Jenkins, 1992; Desjarlais, 1996; Routledge, 1996; Maxwell, 2001; Mishler, 2003; Moore, 2004; Harvie, 2010; Collins, P., 2010) and ‘catalytic validity’ (Lather, 2003, 201), appears in many ways a lesser role, or a
less central role: a less heroic role, perhaps, at least in a kind of chest-beating way. The Great White Man can no longer be relied upon to be great, white, or male. It is interesting to compare this shifted praxis with that of acting over the same period. While it could be argued that Hollywood has been over-run with super-heroes, the trends of praxis of the theatre, and of acting in the theatre that I encounter, and that my respondents encounter, have similarly relied upon such concessions, relinquishments and acceptances. What is the Stanislavskian project if not a call to reflexivity?

Contemporary practices and theories of ethnography invite ways of looking at acting that bring problematic questions around the inhabitation of character, the accumulation of knowledge, the epistemological grope of rehearsal, and the inevitable translational disruption that is germane to the contemporary theatrical moment (the reading of writing, the blooding of thought), to new light.

A REMARK IN SUMMARY

This chapter has explored actors’ agitations and negotiations from the political and artistic compasses toward the fictive compass as an achievement of the expression of embodied thought, and as the accumulation of generative capacities (habitus) of increasing nuance and multi-dimensionality. Finally, I have briefly surveyed an analogous relationship between actors’ challenges and the positions and strategies they adopt, and those of contemporary ethnographers in the field.

With these angles I seek to sensitise the reader for the final chapter of the study. Taken as a whole, they provide a dense vision of what actors do, their responses to the political, industrial, social and artistic pressures bearing on them in pursuit of the fictive. What remains to be pursued is an analysis of strategies and facilitations, explicit and implicit, understood and vaguely felt, that allow these responses to manifest.
CHAPTER SEVEN:  
STRATEGIES AND ENABLERS

INTRODUCTION

This, the final chapter of the study, focuses on three strategies I observed actors undertake throughout the journey of rehearsal toward performance. These strategies are:

1) Sub-rehearsal;
2) Horizonal projection, and;
3) Road Runner Theory.

I then examine three enablers: mechanisms of facilitation and acceleration of these strategies. They are:

1) Personalisation;
2) Bourdieu’s ‘sens pratique’, or ‘feel for game’, and;
3) what I describe as a state of acquisitive, reflexive, intuitive astonishment (ARIA).

None of these three enablers are entirely original findings (indeed, they are in some ways canonical, as will be acknowledged), although claims of definitional nuance pertain to the first and the third of them. My interest is not in the “discovery” of these facilitators, but in placing them in this context, and evincing them in the processes of actors. These strategies and enablers are not proposed as being all that actors do, or all that they possess. Rather, they are proposed as the observable actions and possessions that align with the conceptual structure of the study to this point and, more specifically, at this point of contemplation of the fictional challenges of acting as a notionally discrete sub-field within broader challenges.

Thematically, what remains buoyed throughout this chapter is the idea, or paradox, of the absences that form and direct the “presents” of acting. That is, the characters and other fictive coordinates that are not there, but are only notions of characters and coordinates, yet must be made corporeal in the actor’s body. Actors, as it were, dissolving into incorporeality, or flirting with such a dissolve, in order to alchemise the notional and the actual, and reform as artistic and fictive entities.

Talk of alchemy, and dissolving into and out of corporeality sounds like a mysterious tale. Let me briefly review the industrial and artistic context of that suggestion, then
dwell a little on the contentions of mystery, because a sense of exploring mystery pervades the chapter.

The conditions of the pursuit toward the fictive compass have been established as, first, a discontinuation or non-sequentiality of discourse, including the demonstrated practices of limited theorising, and, second, a kind of aloneness stemming from both the necessary isolation required of the self-reflective and self-sounding practices of Personalisation, and the social and industrial tendency of actors to keep their own theoretical counsel.

These are the conditions that breed the tropes of mystery that haunt acting, from Jane Lapotaire’s door-slamming insistence that it is ‘a process of mystery and myth, that no one can analyse’ (in Zucker, 1999, 80) to the partial concurrence of Deirdre Rubenstein, for whom it’s ‘miraculous and mysterious, and I just have to trust that that will happen’ (GM, 30-4-12, wk5), and Judi Farr, who is inclined in difficult patches to hand her work over to the universe, saying, ‘I can’t do this. You do it for me’ (in Crawford 2005, 161).

While I do not suggest that all that happens inside actors is explicable, nor deny that framing the inexplicable or theoretically remote processes as mysterious is necessarily bad professional practice for actors or their directors, I am obliged to not rest at these points, and I am fundamentally sympathetic to Rhonda Blair’s concern that Stanislavski-inspired practices can easily lead to ‘anti-intellectualism, narcissism, and mystification’ (2002, 188), through positions such as Meisner’s, characterised by Rosemary Malague as ‘determined anti-intellectualism’ (2012, 146):

“‘[W]hat I’m trying to do is get you out of your head. Do you follow?’
“Get me out of my head,” Lila says.
“Into what?”
“My emotional life.”
“Point to it.”
Lila points at her heart.
“That’s right’” (Meisner and Longwell, 1987, 47, 48).

Cole’s citation of mystery (reflecting on Robert Wilson in rehearsal) begins to steer closer to an objective rationale:

actors need privacy in an absolute sense. Appropriately, it is just this bargain that allows Wilson’s vision to live only when it draws life from the repository in actors that remains as mysterious and unknowable as the “characters” they inhabit (1992, 156).
Still, there seems something of a schism here. It is among the principal contentions of this section that actors need just this kind of privacy, but that the unknowable mystery, if such it is, is not necessarily unknowably mysterious to the actor in their privacy, even if it is, as above, mysterious. It is perhaps only unknowable to the director, and other observers, who, like Cole, are not privy to it. A distinction also needs to be drawn between the repository and the action toward it. The former is the actor’s life and experiential sum, which cannot be held to be any more mysterious for the actor than for anyone else; the latter, the mechanism for accessing the life, perhaps the mysterious common ground for all, and the closer interest of the study. That said, Cole’s approach seems, from an ethnographic perspective, one of assessing native behaviour as unfathomable to an outsider’s gaze, and consequently tending to enshrine it in a mythologising narrative. This may appear a split hair, but I am drawing a distinction between a director’s/outsider’s observation of mystery, and an actor’s felt experience.

Throughout this chapter I attempt to intercede between the director and actor at the point of their division. In the manner of an old-fashioned “cut-in” on a dance floor, I try to tap the director gently on the shoulder, and ask to dance with the actor more closely in order to analyse the details of their mysterious steps. The director, as always, hovers close. I do not look to refute claims of mystery, but to enter the mystery, to examine the states and positions from which actors are inclined to report mystery, or aggressively rebut it, as in the “no-bullshit” claims of such as Bill Hunter, who famously reduced his concerns about acting to the claim:

‘As long as the director told me where to stand and what to say, I was happy. Any-one who says there’s any more to it than that, is full of bullshit’

Though Hunter may thunder from his grave at being analysed by a bullshit-artist, it seems to me that his defiance is in fact in perfect theoretical alignment with the established ground of this study: his happiness stems from a security in the artistic compass, subject to the aesthetic discourse of the director, and allowing the actor to do—in his own good time, and by whatever means available and chosen—whatever is to be done above and beyond where to stand and what to say. It is only proper to assume that Hunter was not being disingenuous. Such commentary nonetheless flirts perversely with the stakes it most aggressively seeks to disavow: those redolent with Blair’s (2002) concerns cited above. That is to say, anti-intellectualism is enthusiastically embraced, a badge of honour for those playing along Hunter’s lines,

58 Hunter (1940-2011) was an iconic Australian film star, and recipient, in 2001, of the Centenary Medal for service to acting.
however, a palpable link from anti-intellectualism to narcissism and finally, ironically, to mystification, is less comfortable to contemplate. There is a fine line between refusing to speak, and refusing to be understood. In any case, Hunter was a great Australian film actor, and I do not mean to dishonour him. His comments on acting are sincere and interesting, and may be theorised in terms of a highly-tuned bodymind responsiveness to time, place, text and fictional context: a sensitivity, perhaps, to each of the three strategies that arose from my observations of actors in the four rehearsal processes under investigation.

STRATEGIES

Strategies are, according to Bourdieu, the ongoing result of the interaction between the dispositions of the habitus and the constraints and possibilities which are the reality of any given social field (Jenkins, 1992, 83).

Sub-rehearsal

I define sub-rehearsal as any rehearsal moment that occurs outside the specific, organised schedule of the rehearsal, outside the direct interrogatory gaze of the director, or beyond or beneath the understood agenda of a rehearsal moment. I propose the following circumstantial components of sub-rehearsals in order to suggest a taxonomy that might run to more than a hundred categories.

Sub-rehearsals occur:

• Inside or outside rehearsal time;
• On or off the rehearsal room floor, or in a marginal space in between;
• Subject to collective (that is, director-ordained) strategising, or as guerrilla activity;\textsuperscript{59}
• Within or without the director’s presence;
• Relating to major reconstructions of dramatic moments, exploration of general character traits or themes, or to minutiae;
• Framed by respect or disrespect for the director;
• Attended by a spirit of defiance, anger, or hurt, or by a spirit of joyful invention and inspiration;
• As something done “in alignment with” the director (revision), “further to” the director’s work (refinement or further invention), or “in spite of” the consecrated artistic ground lain by the director (newness or otherness);

\textsuperscript{59} Such activity is usually at the stir of actors, although I once participated in a sub-rehearsal that was called by an alarmed theatre management, framed as “support” for a flailing director.

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• As action or as discourse.

As an actor I have found myself in sub-rehearsals of (probably) every one of the categories implied by this mix of motivations and circumstances. Although many of these could frame “war stories” of less happy moments, I am interested in referring to more productive and harmonious moments, as these were predominant in the rehearsals I observed, as they are, indeed, in my broader experience. Nonetheless, this bitty analytical unpacking clears the way for a kind of joke. Very early in my career as an actor I received advice from an older actor on how to tell if I was working with a bad director. He said you knew you had a bad director when it got to the end of the rehearsal day, and actors were going up to each other, whispering, “Hey, you want to do a bit of rehearsing?” It is worth briefly considering the range of potential meanings that lie behind the joke by way of extrapolating on the notion of the sub-rehearsal.

A successful rehearsal requires recognition by the actors of the strategies being employed by the director and, to a lesser extent, the same in reverse. The director may be focusing on components of the political, artistic and/or fictive compasses, and she may be doing so wisely or unwisely, poorly or well, and this focus may or may not be recognised as productive by the actors, and very often is recognised as such to different levels and extents by different actors in the same cast. For example, I worked with Rex Cramphorn on a project in which he invested an enormous amount of time on what I would consider the political compass, spending at least as much time on “ensemble-building” exercises as he did on anything specifically relating to the text at hand; conversely, I found in Jenny Kemp a director focused on fictive extrapolations through improvisation. In both cases, some actors would have described the director as “on target” and others would have described them as “off target”. Some would (and did, in both of the cases I cite) view the work as a “legitimate” rehearsal, and some would decry it as time wasted. There is no call to be made, no laugh to the joke, without consideration of social context, and individual artistic and political habitus.

Sub-rehearsal, therefore, is not necessarily a phenomenon of failed rehearsal time, or failing rehearsal focus, as the old joke implies. It is often a strategy woven into rehearsal, facilitated by directors, and pursued by actors expressing agency, ambition, and canniness. Consider Bogart’s recollection of directing an actor in a major role wherein she deliberately gave focus to ‘everything on the stage except him’ (2005, 124) in order to leave the actor alone to ‘do his work’ (ibid). Such a strategy is understood, or at least positively felt, by the actor, or it is not. The distinction leads only to the accreditation of the strategy as either a director-constructed sub-rehearsal (as it clearly was), attended by gratitude for the time,
space and latitude to do the work, or to an actor-constructed sub-rehearsal, attended by a determination to do the work in spite of the director’s perceived dereliction of duty.

This discussion frames the few rehearsal moments I will now cite.

On many occasions I observed actors doing something other than the stated agenda of the rehearsal moment. I have already cited the not uncommon practice of “down-playing” the significance of a moment by tagging it a “line run” or a “read”, thus allowing for a sub-rehearsal:

_Under the guise of a ‘read’, the actors do much more: they look up from the text whenever they can to meet each other’s eyes; they touch each other’s arms at times to mark empathy or emphasis; they take time to dwell in the fiction as it is stated, to ‘depth sound’ for Personalisation (GM, 3-4-12, wk1)._ 

This is a curious phenomenon. The actors pursue vital and intimate connections to the ideas and structures of text, and to each other, yet do not frame this work as such. Artists are disinclined to say to each other, “Let’s do an exercise wherein we look deeply into each other’s eyes as often as possible, and maybe touch each other when we are impelled to do so, and take as much time as we like to feel our way through the scene.” In fact, student actors may from time to time be given just this kind of license or frame for such a pursuit, but it is most uncommon in the profession. The observation then is that these most vital signs of life in the scene are for sub-rehearsal, for the gaps in time and space that can be snuck into, and worked within. I cannot escape the sense of a kind of symbolic-spatial inversion, with the centre of the work lying at the periphery of the work site.

Rehearsals, as they unfold, become increasingly subject to the pressure of impending performance. To continue to explore the work, and particularly to explore their more doubtful thoughts and strategies, actors must often find moments that are other than performance moments. “Now I am acting” is not a switch that gets turned on in front of an audience. Nor is it a position that is ever completely non-existent in the rehearsal room, even in the earliest days. It rather appears a grey-scale. When it shines on the work most brightly, during the performance season of a show, actors continue to conduct their sub-rehearsals in symbolically cloistered dressing-rooms, reinforcing the trusses of their performance, and refining moments.

When the light of performance flickers more dully during mid-rehearsal, actors can dodge its beams on the rehearsal room floor, as Chris deftly did in _City_, during a discussion immediately following a formal pass of a scene in which he has the line, “I’m Christopher”: 

"Now I am acting"
Chris does a large expansive gesture ... [and] says as he gestures, “I’m damn sure who I am. I’m Christopher.” This suggested to me that Chris was taking greater liberty and allowing himself more expansive exploratory space outside the context of the ‘run’ of the scene: an exaggerated gesture and an exaggerated rendering of the actual line of text. The fractured zone, outside formally framed runs, is where Chris continues to explore looser, more relaxed and fuller exploration of ideas. The discussions outside the ‘frame of the text’ were not only moments of acting and play analysis, but in this sense moments of greater acting-testing—that is, rehearsing—than moments inside the frame of the text. In this way—to whatever extent it is consistent with other actors’ behaviour—the rehearsal session is not a clear-cut separation of ‘in frame’ and ‘out of frame’ experiences, but an habitation of blurred boundaries between the two (City, 19-3-12, wk2).

Pin has been thoroughly established as a working environment requiring, particularly of the director, constant multi-focus, and so was prone to a great reliance on actors’ capacities to recognise and construct moments of sub-rehearsal:

*Rose begins a conversation about various aesthetic elements of the scene with other creatives at the director’s desk, while Nathan and Geoff conduct a quiet, private conversation about how they might play the scene (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).*

*The director’s focus is not on the actors but on the set. Actors stay in the room, and engage in a kind of ‘sub-rehearsal’: talking together, studying the script, practicing ideas with a kind of shadow movement through the developing performance score (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).*

*During the next formally-framed pass, the acting is rough, then during the sub-rehearsal that follows it, actors come together for the private refinement of moments (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).*

Having established the primacy of the aesthetic in rehearsal room discourse, and having established the notion that directors are in a constant state of partition from actors in relation to certain acting practices (“See you on the other side”), and having continually emphasised a political sanguineness about this, my aim here is to ask what comes of this for actors. It is clear that the phenomenon of sub-rehearsal is chief among the strategies that ply with these circumstances. It may be argued, in fact, that for the actor a rehearsal consists of two concurrent phenomena: work displayed for the director (framed as rehearsal); and work pursued for herself (in sub-rehearsal). Where this is true, it does not suggest artists at cross-purposes. It does, however, suggest artists working somewhat cross-directionally. Again, this calls to mind an inverted symbolic space, with what is peripheral for the director—
that which Husserl would nominate as the ‘natural world’ (2010, 103)—being the very thing that is most central for the actor—Husserl’s ‘arithmetical world’ (ibid, 104), and vice versa. Unsurprisingly, in the realpolitik of the rehearsal room, the director’s visualist priorities dictate the orientation of the landscape. Directors name the topography, as it were, while actors—quite happily—dance like Ibsen’s trolls in the mountain’s sub-terrain.

**Horizontal Projection**

What does an act of imagining mean in the life of man? (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 60)

Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on artists and the philosophy of artistic practices constitute a body of writing that I find consistently beautiful (well-served by a succession of translators). There is a kind of gentle rapture that overcomes and drives the author here more markedly than in the rest of his output on perception and phenomenology (though all his work is touched with élan). There is love and wonder beneath the work on art, as if he is pulling back the artist’s canvas with the carefully gloved hands of a professional restorer, seeing what he sees—‘the universe of possibilities confined in a human body and a human life’ (1996, 113)—with critical intensity, yet sharing what he sees in a voice infected with something of the beauty of the art itself; the object in the subject.

I am inclined toward this epigraph as introduction to this sub-section because this gentle yet rigorous wonder reminds me of the way that actors view their challenge, and humbly submit to it, seeking the object of the fictive and the artistic in the subject of their transient, performative being-ness. Actors, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, ‘experience a perception and its horizon “in action” (practiquement)’ (1964, 12), then express it in refined behaviour.

I will enlist Merleau-Ponty to help thread some analysis through these perceptions, but first offer examples of their sources. Actors regularly look to the artistic horizon to seemingly set their coordinates for onward journeying: sometimes in search of what we might think of as character (toward the fictive compass); and at other times as a means of placing themselves in a future evolution of the broader artwork (the artistic compass):

> *At one point, Chris [Pitman] says, after agreeing how something probably should be, ‘I don’t know how that comes out yet, but we’ll see.’*
Much of this discussion has its focus on imagining the acting work that lies ahead, casting it forward as an ideal to then be chased, assumed, embodied (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

Michael Chekhov describes an exercise of imagining the performance in detail, then putting one’s body to the images of oneself that one has cast with one’s imagination. Chekhov’s is the extant theory that aligns most closely with horizontal projection, as his distinction among acting theorists is reasonably summarised as emphasising that acting is founded on the functions of the imagination, just as former Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating, says of political leadership (2011, 529). Similarly, hooks describes her professional and social liberation as founded on her capacity to ‘imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently’ (1994, 61). It needs to be acknowledged that hooks is writing of an African American experience, and that I do not seek to imply an equivalency for my privileged position, nor that of Australian actors, with that of those embroiled in race-related social and political struggles. That said, I relate to this comment as an Australian artistic pedagogue. As such, one must at times focus not on an institutional politic as it exists, but toward one that does not: an ideal, perhaps. For actors, a sense of dispossession or groundlessness is profound as they face the artwork and the fiction, and liberation necessitates kinds of idealist—or perhaps Robert Gordon would have it, virtualist—gestures (2009, 2). Keating (as political visionary), hooks (as African American educationalist), me (as artistic pedagogue), and Chris and the others (as actors), look for ways of being in the world in the future by projecting a future world and a future/virtual/ideal way of being.

Chris was particularly inclined to this way of working, constantly gazing, as it were, not inward but outward to an imagined horizon. At one point, he startled me with a softly spoken, steely assurance to Geordie and himself, ‘I’ll find him’ (City, 23-3-12, wk2): the actor as high plains bounty hunter, like John Wayne in the great John Ford western, The Searchers.⁶⁰ The character is out there somewhere, and will be “brought in”.

Horizontal projection is not only a strategy in pursuit of the fictive, but of the artistic and technical compenentry of the work. It is a broad horizon:

Chris: I really think that I need to be in the theatre to figure out exactly that. I need to feel how much to put out to an audience, so that they can lean forward to it. There has to be that quality of them reaching forward for it (City, 28-3-12, wk3).

⁶⁰ Warner Brothers, 1956.
Jude evinces a range of actor’s interests in the pursuit of a solution to a moment: "Could it be that it’s set into something quite tight. A square of light ... For the whole play so far we’ve been quite big and broad. We haven’t really closed it down. So it could be a moment where we’ve got this ... really tight, close-up, screen-testy kind of box of light ... we just kind of churn through it. ... pan it on different speakers as well.

The actor here projects the work of the director, lighting designer and sound designer in projecting a possible theatrical moment (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

While horizontal projection is mostly framed as a strategy of actors in their separation from directors, it is also a means by which directors negotiate the partition:

Geoff asks Rose if what he’s doing and how he’s relating to the set in one moment is ‘what you want’. Rose takes a moment to look down to the imagined Object, the horizontal finished product in order to answer (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

What is this image to which these artists refer? What, to paraphrase the epigraph of this sub-chapter, does imagining mean? Merleau-Ponty answers his own question provocatively:

the image is not something observable, though it pretends to be. ... It is an absence of the object that tries to pass as its presence. It calls up an object, as one speaks of calling up a spirit (1964, 60).

This suggests actors summoning characters as spirits from the unobservable pretence of the fiction. There is in this Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘perceptual faith ... interwoven with incredulity, at each instant menaced by non-faith’ (1968, 28). Here is a philosophical “push-me-pull-you” effect. We are liberated by our dubious perceptions, bound by our selves as the agents of those perceptions, yet somewhat enticed by our consequent authority over them.

[I]f a perception is able to be my own it must from the start be one of my ‘representations’—in other words, that I, qua ‘thought,’ must be what effects the connection between the aspects under which the object presents itself and their synthesis into an object (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 43, 44).

While we may feel deep in mystery now, there is something in this of horizontal contemplation. It brings to the mystery-challenge vital propulsion: the moment of experiential or phenomenological struggle for the actor is thus framed as a reality-in-
motion, a thing of ‘toward-ness’ and ‘from-ness’. Rajiv Kaushik privileges action in a way that brings context and power to the “actor”:

Matisse is guided by a painting that “does not yet exist” only when he begins painting, not before. The painting that is not-yet is thus emergent on the basis of a gesture that never has before it an ideal painting. The painting to come, we might say, morphs in accordance with the hand, creating and cancelling out the unformulated conditions that arise with each stroke (2011, 38).

It is so for the actor. Very often we are surprised to find ourselves pursuing the image of character that we are pursuing, as it differs markedly from the image of character we “falsely” held before entering rehearsal, the site of our first “reliable” gesture. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty places the painter in front of the mountain, subjecting the image to his interrogatory gaze:

What exactly does he ask of it? To unveil the means, visible and otherwise, by which it makes itself a mountain before our eyes. Light, lighting, shadows, reflections, color, all the objects of his quest are not altogether real objects; like ghosts, they have only visual existence. In fact they exist only at the threshold of profane vision; they are not seen by everyone. The painter’s gaze asks them what they do to suddenly cause something to be and to be this thing, what they do to compose this worldly talisman and to make us see the visible (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 166).

This is wonderfully evocative of the actor’s horisonal projection. Actors do not see people on the horizon, although we might say with Merleau-Ponty that they see images that pretend to be observable people. We see lights and shadows of humanity, and we gesture toward them, approach, encircle, subjecting our gaze to nuanced re-patterning of the image on the horizon, and we asks these shadows, What is your true form? How do you come to appear like that? Why do you exist? How might you be given flesh, my flesh?

Road Runner Theory

After a tea-break, rehearsals recommence with the articulation of a distinct strategy:

Chris: So, we take our time through the changes.
Geordie: Try not to get lost (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

Here is a theory that shone through the observation period, establishing itself as one of the most common strategies applied by actors and directors, both in partition
from each other and in collaboration. In Dimensions, I name it Road Runner Theory (RRT), and now offer an edited version of that description to enable its terms here:

In the olden days, before God invented The Simpsons, cartoons were made by artists painting individual transparent ‘cells’, then layering them on top of each other to make a multifaceted image. Think of the old classic, ‘The Road Runner’. One plastic sheet or cell has nothing but orange earth and blue sky. Now imagine another transparancy with nothing but a couple of cacti painted on it. Lay the first sheet on top of the second, and you have a desert landscape. Paint some rocks on another cell and lay that cell on top, and the picture is more detailed. Paint clouds on another cell, paint a picture of the Road Runner in flight on another, then a final single sheet of the Coyote running. Try reading something of value out of any of these individual cells, and you’d be struggling, but put them all on top of each other, and you have a fully realised moment—an iconic picture.

We can rehearse using the Dimensions in exactly this way. If you are prepared to pursue one thing at a time—paint one cell at a time—leaving aside others, it will bring some daily order to the chaotic business of rehearsing a role (2011, 140).

I have been wary of, and have tried to remain vigilant in avoiding, self-vindication with this study. It is therefore in some ways difficult to report that the ideas above played out across rehearsal rooms constantly.

I want to look briefly at categories of RRT found in these rehearsals. The two categories are created by the basic distinction of whether the strategy is framed by the director or by the actor. I omit those moments when the work of the room could be retrospectively framed by me as a version of RRT, yet holds no sense of strategy on the part of the artists enacting it, for two reasons: first, because the notion is of a strategy being enacted, not action merely found to incidentally have traces of the theory embedded; second, because the foundational concept that a complex structure is made of componentry is one that can be generalised to most human moments. For example, traces are easily discernable in Jude’s advice on the challenges of trying to marry nascent singing and dancing:

“It’s all about timing for us. If we change it [the choreography] while we’re singing, it takes a lot longer for us to practice it, so… putting them together means we’re going to fuck-up one at the moment” (Pin, 14-6-12, wk3).

Here Jude is skating close to a version of RRT as a theoretical justification in response to rehearsal pressures, rather than strategising in advance of practice. Jude clearly “gets” the notional premise of RRT, but is not framing the work in this moment along those lines. RRT is hence reported as determined, even if un-theorised and unrecognised, strategy, such as in these two moments from GM:
As the cast is about to go for another pass at the scene, Deirdre says, ‘I’ll try to, absolutely, honour the punctuation, so... it’ll be slower... but I just think it will help.’
Adam replies, ‘Oh, it will. The cadences are perfectly marked out with the punctuation.’

Deirdre determines and negotiates a singular focus on the Dimension of Dramaturgy, focus on the text as it is rendered by the writer, and concedes that other things—in this case, she predicts that the Dimension of Aesthetic (pace)—may be compromised. Both she and Adam are relaxed with the prospect of any such slippage, which implies their tacit understanding and appreciation of the concepts discussed and coined in Dimensions: ‘One important Dimension might slip as you pursue another, but it doesn’t always slip, it doesn’t entirely slip and it doesn’t slip forever’ (2011, 133) (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

Deirdre’s deftness at this strategy, and her willingness to pursue it, suggests experience, confidence, and agency. The strategy implies a capacity to demonstrate incompleteness, to “productively fail” toward ultimate success. This is not a function of the role. Another actor might play the role with no such liberation and boldness in the pursuit. Here are the stars of the political compass shining light on the pursuit of fiction:

Deirdre: I was angry that time, but I’m just playing.
Adam: Yeah. But it’s a really nice discovery to make (GM, 13-4-12, wk2).

Deirdre appears to have designed a rehearsal as “play” time: tailored a gap in performance expectation in order to explore either a perceived element of the character in the scene, or simply a liberty for its own sake, dedicated to what I have called the ‘improvisational radius’ (2011, 135-136). In City, Chris ranged over both:

Chris is ‘going for things’ in a fairly random if liberated way. I feel that he’s allowing the strangeness of the character and the scene to lead him to an overt projection of generalised ‘strangeness’. He is unafraid to pursue this to an almost grotesque degree. I suspect everyone in the room understands—from our close collegiality—that Chris does not feel he’s ‘onto something here’ (as he put it at the last rehearsal I observed), rather that he is almost purging something, exploring what this strangeness isn’t (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

As with Deirdre’s moment above, this invites analysis from the broader perspective of the study. It offers the opportunity to again loop back glancingly in order to observe the influence of the political compass on this moment, soaked as it is in collegiality, and in the status of the actor as a leading, mid-career artist, among
friends, in a bizarre rehearsal space (at Cirkidz), on an afternoon of ruptured norms, within a liberated guerrilla theatre milieu. Here is political and artistic habitus pressing artistic and fictive fields, laying all open to disruption, pursuing RRT toward refinement:

For the next pass through the scene, Chris has dropped the externalised exploration, and takes on the note of the ‘cipher’ that came out of the long discussion following Geordie’s thought-gathering hiatus. ... Geordie applauds the result, and further encourages this direction (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

The achievements of this particular afternoon were many and significant, and hinged, as I have reported, on ruptured rehearsal norms in terms of space and behaviour. Theatre artists dream of custom-made space, and professionally ordered time, yet it is enticing how disorder often breeds creativity.61

Appreciation of this was behind the decision on which I reported earlier, of Chris Drummond’s choice to remain in the enforced intimacy of Wayne’s World. This suggests RRT designed by the director, and that session had a distinct temper, and was clearly intended as an immersion from which actors would remain somewhat drenched:

an opportunity to discuss things that are perhaps difficult to discuss at the chaotic barn-like Queen’s Theatre ... Chris says, ‘So, any kind of semblance we had of a neutrality of actor, that’s gone. You are in these moments ... [Y]ou are in the middle of it, in the hell of it.’

This is a very interesting development that reads like the eschewing of a formerly stated modus operandi and distinguishing artistic goal and feature (L&S, 3-5-12).

And a little later:

Chris and the cast are working on one small section of the text. Chris begins by saying, ‘Let’s work on the power structure’ (L&S, 3-5-12, wk5).

RRT is a kind of triangulation: the taking up of new positions to allow for new perspectives.

The directorial strategy of returning the cast to a reading of the text (which Adam did on 17-4-12, and Geordie does regularly), is an interesting version of RRT, in which directors are looking to facilitate a re-layering of the actors’ work, focusing on

61 See, for example, Maxwell, 2001; and Pamela Rabe’s comments on peculiar rehearsal spaces and their impacts on rehearsal practices in Crawford, 2005, 54.
dramaturgy after sweat, after emotion, after dreams (and actors often dream as part of their preparation), trusting that the diggings of the rehearsal room floor have created deeper cavities into which the play on the page can seep, while simultaneously subjecting the outcomes of the performances-in-construction to the interrogatory light of the text on the page. These moments of active engagement with the text allow actors to see things in the play that they were previously unable to see. I have earlier described the “book” as both bible and block: the enticement into the field, and the bar to entering it. At these moments of re-immersion, the book has changed. Its authority is tempered by the bustle of the artistic compass. It is newly fictive or “re-fictioned” in the gaze and the muscle of its now knowing-doing beholders. Consequently, it does not retain its impossibilities, its arrogance, or its defiance. It no longer says to the actor, We both know you can’t do this.

RRT is a strategy that allows for nuanced growth in knowledge, being, and confidence. It allows actors to find, as do Geertzian ethnographers, the little local details that lead to the understanding of the erstwhile daunting whole, and to allow knowledge of that whole to continue to inform, and form, the intricate ways of seeing and being.

**ENABLERS**

I propose that the three strategies outlined above are prosecutions beneath which lie certain enabling facilities that actors hold. I do not mean to suggest a chronology in the acquisition of the three enablers, then the enacting of the three strategies, but a gradual evolution of all toward a structure where the “items” of this section can be positioned as essential in the pursuits of the previous section. For example, a novice might lack the developed sens pratique to recognise and value the moment and purpose of a sub-rehearsal; RRT has already been suggested as an advanced strategy pursued most confidently by senior players, and one that is very often structured in order to pursue Personalisation; and the deeply “feely” business of horizontal projection necessitates Personalisation, and the sophisticated yet primal positioning of what I will soon describe as ARIA.

There is no absolute alignment of strategies and enablers, and there are no hard borders between them. There is here posited and examined a partial relationship wherein the latter tend to facilitate and accelerate the former, along with facilitating and accelerating all else that actors pursue and achieve. What I describe as

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62 I witnessed this very recently on a film set when a leading actor and I were playing a scene accompanied by an “extra”: a nice, chatty guy who simply didn’t understand that there was work to be done, sometimes in silence between us, at moments other than when the cameras were rolling.
strategies are things that actors do; and what I describe here as enablers are things that actors, by virtue of born or ingrained talent, and by virtue of experience, have.

**Personalisation**

The audience has come to see not Prince Hamlet, but Prince Hamlet enacted. ... (W)e see neither the character alone nor the actor alone, but this-actor-as-this-character (Wilshire, 1982, 27).

You respond to ideas that somebody’s feeding you, but it’s about how those ideas land (Rabe in Crawford, 2005, 44).

Personalisation is a difficult concept within acting theory, often cited as an absolute foundation, yet rarely articulated effectively. The term is, somewhat astoundingly, not used in books by any of Stanislavski (1984), Lee Strasberg (1988), Uta Hagen (1973, 1991), Stella Adler (2000), Meisner (1987), or Richard Boleslavsky (2010). Yet it is liberally cited online as being essential to everything an actor does, and reduced by ‘The Daily Actor’ to a trick of carefree simplicity: ‘a technique used by method actors to help them give “real” performances without the need for imitation or inspiration’. For those of us who prefer a little inspiration in our acting, these comfortable assumptions, after the resounding silence of the canon, are curious.

Serious secondary interpreters of theory, such as Lawrence Parke (1985) and Steve Vineberg (1994), make insightful analyses of the notion, yet in doing so lend weight to the idea that Personalisation is an assumed essence, or even a paraphrase, of something at the heart of Stanislavskian and post-Stanislavskian processes, as in Vineberg’s claim that it holds a place in ‘Method terminology’ (1994, 111). Interestingly, Vineberg’s index cites a section of his book (110-112) wherein the notion is explored, but never named. This is indicative of the terminology’s uncertain provenance. I do not, however, believe these are misguided assumptions. They are accurate assumptions, and “personalisation” is an accurate summary paraphrase of a large tract of Stanislavskian thought. This might incline the reader to think that I am splitting semantic hairs, but for the fact that I am looking for logic in this semantic disconnection, and proposing that it lies in the distinction between strategy and enabling capacity.

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63 The first page of a simple online search found affirmations with two websites:
http://www.backstage.com/advice-for-actors/acting-teachers/what-is-personalization/, and
http://www.brodow.com/Articles/ActingTechniquesForSpeakers.html, both accessed, 27-12-14.
I have described my relationship to Personalisation as ‘complicated and a little uncomfortable’ (2011, 87). My training at NIDA, and the pedagogy and philosophy of my teacher, Nick Enright, had Personalisation as its constant guiding principle, but there remains hesitation when it comes to describing exactly how that guidance was and is negotiated and articulated. This paradox is due to the sense that while Personalisation ‘is basic to all acting’ (ibid, 92); it is also true that

Personalisation will largely arise spontaneously from our attention to other Dimensions. That is, if I have absorbed the Environment, have decided on whether I might employ a positive Activity, dreamed and studied a rich and appropriate History and thoroughly studied the Dramaturgy, my work will be personalised (ibid, 90, 91).

Parke’s sophisticated, “real feel” analysis is consistent with this notion of a talent in-readiness:

whether we recognise the sensory parallels out of our own emotional memory bin or not, they are always there adding their own acute personalizing influence to the character’s experience step by step as they weave in and out, as they tend to do (1985, 87).

Describing the discrete measures by which an actor may pursue Personalisation is difficult, and citing evidence of an actor under my observation in this study assuming such focus is elusive, despite my identification of numerous moments when the breath of Personalisation was “in flow”. The exercises by which an actor might seek to personalise material can seem somewhat flaccid and reductive. The current research suggests that this may in part be so because it is in the nature of Personalisation to resist taxonomic pedagogy; that personalised means are required for personalised ends. My current repositioning of Personalisation as an enabler rather than as a strategy perhaps allows for a closer reconciliation. Personalisation seems to occur largely as a function of thoughtless habitus—albeit sophisticated and developed—rather than determined stir.

It is important to recall that Personalisation “scored” very poorly in my analysis of rehearsal room discourse. This again hints at the deeply personal and private nature of this part of an actor’s praxis and being, and that we are in the waters of Schechner’s ‘paradigm of liminality’ (1985, 123), wherein the performer is permitted ‘to act in between identities’ (ibid). Citing such scholarship foreshadows my aim for the current section. Having found myself in the thick of a canonical acting premise, I want to avoid a position at the “how to act” lectern by weighing what I saw in
rehearsal with what I did not previously have, theories from other than “how to act” sources:

*Adam contemorises ... a point Kate makes by saying, ‘Yeah, she put it on facebook.’ The world of the source culture is thus imaginatively fused with that of the receiving culture* (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

Jacqy made a comment that sought to generalise the *L&S’s* themes of dispossession into her life:

‘*I feel now, in the world that we’re in, totally dispossessed. I am now at the mercy of whatever is happening beyond me*’ (L&S, 10-4-12, wk1).

It seemed at the time in one sense a vague musing and something of a *non sequitur*, yet it is of perfect thematic relevance. The comment seems indicative of the essential self-reflection actors must pursue in making personal connections to the world of the play and to ideas of the director. Actors often elaborate on a prosaic impulse that might be described simply as, “Me too”. It is a response that both Johnston and Hope describe as essentially Stanislavskian: ‘For Stanislavski, the actor must begin with experiences which are “mine” in each case’ (Johnston, 2007, 90);

*The Stanislavsky actor searches for their version of truth ... but that truth is built from their own ... pre-reflective knowledge of the world* (Hope, 2010, 26).

Educationalists David Bourd, Ruth Cohen, and David Walker claim that

the major influence on how learners construct their experience is ... the learner’s personal foundation of experience. This is a shorthand for the cumulative effect of learners’ personal and cultural history (1993, 11).

Construction of the actor’s experience is achieved through constant generalising of the fictive circumstances and detritus of the play into that of their own lives (the “Me too!” effect). In some cases, as above, this appears as the unknown/fiction/play being “found a home” in the known/reality/life of the actor. At other times, the movement is more strategic and assertive.

For my role in *Hedda Gabler*, I saw no point in “setting” my supporting fantasies in a world other than my own. Thus in my imagined constructions Brack and Hedda’s sex-life occurred in Brack’s North Terrace, Adelaide, penthouse apartment, with electronically-controlled blinds that were operated from the bedside; Lovberg fell drunk at Brack’s feet on Hindley Street, outside Imprints bookshop; Brack deserted
him, and drank a short black at his regular window table at the Amalfi restaurant, on Frome Street; and so on.

While directors are not found to refer to the processes of Personalisation, they nonetheless are constantly feeding actors the stuff required for the effects of Personalisation to ring out. Many previously cited directorial comments might be seen in this light, none more eloquently put than this, from Geordie:

*There is no desire to be wild or crazy. They act how they best fit the world or how the world best fits them. She searches for complication. She wants something, anything, and he avoids it. He’s not secretly desiring passion. ... He wants things to be easy, simple* (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

The actors took this third-person analysis of character as a cue for some detailed first-person revelations from their own lives, and the lives of others known to them. They extrapolated for over fifteen minutes. Such moments of rehearsal feel to me like a kind of self-massage. It does not feel like an injection, because the action is too gentle and too lateral. It could pass as gossip for gossip’s sake, or could be seen as time-wasting by someone unfamiliar with artistic ways. It is the deeply humane and lateral caress of Personalisation.

Adam’s finely tuned relation to Deirdre’s processes of Personalisation are found in this moment:

*Deirdre almost always refers to her character in the first person. On this rare occasion, she refers to her in the third person, yet while she speaks the words ‘Amanda’ and ‘her’, she places her hand on her chest. By the end of the thought, Adam steers her back to the first person:*

*Deirdre: Partly why Amanda is so... shattered... It reflects on her... It reflects on her...*  
*Adam: That you produced that child.*  
*Deirdre: That I produced that child (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).*

This quite elegant dance of pronouns represents a constant play of pronouns throughout rehearsal as actors search for the license to make the “other” another self. Most often this is unselconscious or subconscious. I have known it to be a determined stance, however, with some actors finding strength in always insisting on referring to the character in the third person, and others seeing the work as if founded on the need to make of the third person a first person. Either way, there remains a stubbornly corporeal self, and a need to claim things (actions, words),
however theoretically contextualised, as “mine”. Merleau-Ponty suggests this process as an organic cultivation:

> [o]nce I have read the book, it acquires a unique and palpable existence quite apart from the words on the pages ... One may even say that, while I am reading the book, it is always with reference to the whole, as I grasp it at any point, that I understand each phrase, each shift in the narrative or delay in the action, to the point where, as the reader, I feel ... as though I have written the book from the start to finish (Merleau-Ponty, "An Unpublished Text," p11, cited in Muldoon, http://www25.brinkster.com/marcsgalaxy/merlric.htm, accessed, 16-9-13).

Our potential to absorb and contain the motivations and actions of fiction, the traces of human form on the horizon, seem endlessly reliant upon, and limited by, our personal stories and experiences, which may be directly accessed, and our imaginations and empathic tendencies, which are in turn culturally and historically capacitated or catalysed:

*The discussion after the read is largely on the imagined premise of the characters as inhabiting a real household. The cast and director employ a complexity of social generalisations, pronoun interplay, and other imaginative projections:*

Adam: He feels completely trapped because he has to provide for them.
Deirdre: Yes, so you pay the rent and I pay the tuition fees and maybe for the food.
Kate: He has the responsibility of keeping the house, but none of the freedom.
Adam: Yes. And that very familiar scenario of a parent being suspicious of what you’re getting up to. And you want privacy. Don’t you? ... You don’t have to share you whole life with your parents. You reach that crossover point when you stop being an early teen and you don’t want them in your room anymore and you don’t want them to know what you’re doing.
Kate: And you’re always much more impatient and short-tempered with your parents. So any question, no matter how politely it’s phrased, is annoying.

*These are powerful connections. ... If Kate has not experienced being the child of parents in these ways, they will not be made, or they will be made in different ways, to different effect in the performance. This is the way in which Personalisation might be likened to some extent to a game of Bingo:*

whatever of Hamlet I can’t imagine or embody or see will end up on the shelf for the next actor (Crawford, 2011, 88) (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

Merleau-Ponty’s notion of reversibility is interpreted by Dillon as being beholden to ‘corporal reflexivity, a body whose ability to touch depends on its own tangibility’ (1988, 128). That is, we can only know what touch is because we can be touched.
This speaks to the reflexivity actors bring to the exploratory processes of acting, and the deeply felt achievements of Personalisation, looking for what might be in the moment by focusing on what is in the moment for themselves in space, and looking for what might be of fictive resonance in what resonates in the context of their own life.

Yet, somewhat paradoxically, this dogged self-referencing is contextualised as being in the service of transformation, as Deirdre puts it: the essence growing inside (GM, 30-4-12, wk5). This essential other can be likened to what Dillon describes as a ‘transcendent object’ that requires her to undertake an act of negation which is mediated through time: I am not what I was; this ... is what-it-is-not-yet (that is, my anticipations of future adumbrations are constitutive of my present cognitive grasp of an object) (1988, 41).

So it is for the subjective self/actor and the object of character/role: I am not what I was; this character is what-it-is-not-yet. The sense of a present and fragile cognitive grasp is resonant for the actor in rehearsal, and perhaps, sensing this fragility, we are inclined toward the security of the known image in the mirror. This puts the actor in a bind of sorts, trying to affect a triangulation of corpolarity, history, and an emergent cognitive grasp of fiction:

The chiasmic relation between what is explicitly expressed and that out of which the expressed emerges ultimately bears the structure of what Merleau-Ponty famously refers to as “flesh”. ... [A] generative realm underneath and between things (Kaushik, 2011, 68).

As such, Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh is a being and a having, not a doing, a generative realm, powder in the keg, so to speak. Actors’ habitus, thoughtless and dynamic (like J.M. Barrie’s heartless rebel, Peter Pan) must light the fuse. Flesh, as it were, explains the resultant explosion. How and where things land comes back, again, to the actor who, as in Fischer’s description of the discovery of ethnicity, looks to find ‘a voice or style that does not violate one’s several components of identity’ (1986, 196).

The simple truism goes: we take from things what we bring to them. But acting is not such a simple exchange. We might adapt the truism: we make of things what we bring to them, and what they bring to us. That is to say, as Muldoon claims, ‘when we speak of meaning and the self, we are speaking about interrogation and interpretation’ (http://www25.brinkster.com/marcsgalaxy/merlric.htm, accessed 16-9-13). We are speaking also, as Maxwell reminds us, of habitus, which
renders the world with which we are familiar—its logics, its values, its tastes, all embodied as our own, as our self—as a natural world and one in which, because it has shaped us, we feel at home (2010, 13).

While this celebrates the mercurial genius of habitus, it also hints at its boundaries, its at-home-ness, Dylan’s previously cited chains of the skyway. Deirdre felt the rattle of these chains in a moment of frustration when the character’s reaction to circumstances did not align with hers:

*Deirdre: I feel like saying, All very well for you, missy, to go and have a nice, you know, Clark Gable moment.*

*Actors practice empathy. It is a tool of trade, but here we see that an actor’s empathy is no less confined to her own experience of the world than anyone else’s. It may be that we seek to live a life of broad vision in order to have broad parameters for our empathy, and it may well be that the exercise of empathy increases its elasticity—that empathy breeds empathy, as it were—but we are still limited to the vision of our own eyes, the constructions of our own imaginations* (GM, 3-4-12, wk1).

Michel Foucault appears to acknowledge the difficulties of narrowly empathic expression, and offers a provocative alternative in the ‘anonymity of a murmur’:

*We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: “Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?” Instead, there would be other questions, like these: “What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions?” And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: “What difference does it make who is speaking?” (1979, 160).*

This might be the Mission Statement for a whole school of acting, and it could be argued that those approaches to acting that cluster around the fragmentary legacy of Brecht do indeed search for how expression might represent an appropriation of discourse rather than a representation of deepest selves, the heart of the text over the personage of the author and the authenticity of the actor.

*Kaushik, after Merleau-Ponty, offers another alternative, via surrealist painting, that breaks with natural being and instead sides with a pathos that belongs to the artist apart from nature* (2011, 7). *Muldoon entices us into similar territory:*
Each text ... becomes a potential horizon or world that I can enter into and, in turn, transforms my perception, my outlook, my sense of being-in-the-world (http://www25.brinkster.com/marcsgalaxy/merlric.htm, accessed, 16-9-13).

Actors appear somewhat torn between instincts for a transformation of their dominant perspective, and other strong, comforting instincts toward mollification of it. We do not seem socially or professionally en-cultured to readily content ourselves with empathy drawn of super-reality, or surrealism.

All these complications and discomforts lie here in the context of Personalisation as an enabler, whereas they tend to suggest it is, if not a disabler, a problematic construct as capable of leading to opacity as transparency. Bourdieu brings historicity to the problem with this description of the results of habitus as ‘tending to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product’ (1990a, 72). What we project forward, therefore, may in fact be our inheritance, and the achievements to come are the achievements and projections of our past. The new will be discovered and claimed as new, when it is in fact a “new old”, a kind of auto-cultural “remix”. Auto-cultural remix might appear as reliable and pliable a description of acting as any, and tends to put Personalisation in its place, as a major struggle within the fictive compass. At times it appears to be a strategy, as in the two moments cited below, but these moments are more properly read, I suspect, as instinctive gestures of habitus that open the actor to the digestive functions of a deeply rooted enabling capacity.

Another pass at scene. Nic has the bulk of the dialogue. He half-knows it, but needs the book in his hand. Kate has a text to hand but rarely refers to it. Both actors explore Personalisation. Nic takes every opportunity to watch Kate closely. Nic’s instincts are therefore, in acting practice, to mirror the character, Jim’s, instincts in the scene, of “reading” Laura in order to diagnose her (GM, 11-4-12, wk2).

Lizzy takes the license of the line-run proximity to lean in to Chris and speak with the intimacy of marriage that the staging does not or may not easily accommodate (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

Intimacy, self-reflection, reflexivity, self-indulgence, privacy, quietude: while I have here enlisted theorists to wonder on alternatives to this crop of associations, they remain the standard ramifications and manifestations of this enabling well-spring at the depth of these good actors.
Feel for the game

Chris [Pitman] ... comes to a moment of patent epiphany. He even clicks his fingers at one point and says, inside the run of the scene but outside of the text, ‘I’m onto something’ (City, 21-3-12, wk2).

In terms of what we used to call the VOTE sheet, at drama school: Victory, Objective, Tactics, Expectations. After a certain amount of practice, I think they just become automatic. You read a piece of material, those things fall into place (Joel Edgerton in Crawford, 2005, 40).

Once we “have it”, once we reach a certain level of ease and fluency in a language we forget what it felt like not to be a speaker of French, German, Xhosa, Farsi. In fact, more than that, we can’t go back on the bodily knowing such speaking entails (Phipps, 2010, 98).

These three epigraphs suggest—from the perspectives of: an actor on the rehearsal room floor; an actor in reflection; and an ethnographer, respectively—the notion described by Bourdieu as sens pratique, a practical sense, or feel for the game. I look to find evidence of such feel in the reflections of the rehearsals I observed, and to drill a little way into them. I identify three divisions in the phenomenon:

1. A general capacity to improvise with a view to responding to myriad concerns as one improvises and adapts (which I refer to as Adaptation);
2. Evidence of faith in a kind of reflective knowingness, giving over to processes of gestation or digestion, such that the work of this moment is ‘felt’ in one way, and simultaneously understood horizontally in another more evolved way, made perceivable by the sens pratique of this moment (Faith);
3. The thoughtless holding of sophisticated skills and sensitivities as if they are simply in one’s blood: embedded knowledge (Blood).

All three, importantly, are accessed without conscious application. They constitute what Kaushik interprets as execution without conception (2011, 13).

Adaptation

This “feel for the game”, as we call it, is what enables an infinite number of “moves” to be made, adapted to the infinite number of possible situations which no rule, however complex, can foresee (Bourdieu, 1990b, 9).

Unforeseeable complexity in the face of the superfluity of rules is an apt description of the actor’s application of bodymind to the ‘kaleidoscopic’ (Crawford, 2011, 117,
148) reality of being onstage. Theory is subsumed in action as actors work out of a kind of transcendence ‘without taking up any critical standpoint over the transcendence’ (Kaushik, 2011, 13). Actors read and respond to the cherished “moment” with intricate and intimate adaptations, such as in Lizzy’s description of her response to the nuanced receptions of different audiences:

Some nights you’d be drowned out by an audible reaction from the audience so the next night you’d be half expecting to have to put a little “flick pause” etc in to allow for a laugh (Falkland, pers. com. 16-5-12).

Here the actor is exercising a competence that Jenkins describes as ‘located largely in the middle hinterland of cognition, neither conscious nor unconscious’ (1992, 179). Competence and confidence are the rewards for the experienced and talented actor who opens the process to thoughtlessness and improvisation:

Nathan continually invents business, checking out to the director and other colleagues, seeking their approval or appraisal. Thus the actor is ‘inside’ the action, led by impulses, and stepping out to an unspoken communication about the effect. He is writing and reading ... with mercurial shifts (Pin, 31-5-12, wk1).

I have often used the word ‘mercurial’ to describe a highly valued quality some actors possess, and perhaps all of us need in some measure. Actors appear to seek a flowing, buoyant play-zone above concrete concerns, an alive-ness that might infect the rehearsal room, thence the theatre. As acting is not just knowing but knowing-doing, knowledge is not—as has been discussed—static but blooded, and presence is not the result merely of consciousness, but redolent of a feel for the game that allows for a peculiarly playful, careless, reflexive, kinesthetic, kaleidoscopic, phenomenological positioning above consciousness, toward constant adaptation.

Faith

Embedded within the evolved talent for adaptation as an article of sens pratica, there appears a capacity to project such adaptations forward; to view the horizon of performance from the melting pot of rehearsal or, if not to view it clearly, to trust a perception of it; to understand or feel that if a path begins from this source, it will likely lead to a conceptualised corresponding outcome:

Jude: All the elements are there. It’s finding the ones to push, and stretch, and stuff (Pin, 28-5-12, wk1).
Jude’s commitment to pushing, stretching and stuffing is richly evocative of the visceral and aesthetic processes of creating performance, and stand in lovely juxtaposition with the wondering projection that underscores those coarse actions. As Kaushik suggests, aesthetic choices do not ‘come after a survey of “all possible lines,”’ but emerge from perception and gesture (2011, 38). Lockford and Pelias explain some ways of knowing as ‘intuitive sedimentation’ (2004, 436) that ‘functions as a sentient map’:

> With an embodied set of buried rules for navigation, improvisational moments ask actors to seek somatic signs, follow hunches, and trust impulses. They maneuver down a path of intuitive speculation and apprehension (ibid, 437).

Actors move forward holding such scraps of incorporated achievement, with faith that they will form, and be formed by, an evolving sense of performative one-ness. Chris Pitman sought solace and justification in the deeply feely ground (or air) of such practice:

> ‘I started to understand that then, now I need to let it filter through me.’

> Chris trusts that a phenomenal experience will be ‘filtered’, will find its home as his habitus within the field of the play [as it] develops toward the horizon (City, 23-3-12, wk2).

Here horizontal projection is enabled by a type of sens pratique that manifests as a faith in the future based on a remix of the tracks of previous and present experience.

**Blood**

Not wildly dissimilar to the manifestations of sens pratique sketched above, here the phenomenon is observed less in an immediate reflexive context, and more as a sentient holding, a ‘wealth of accumulated bodily knowledge [and] incubated sensibilities’ (Lockford and Pelias, 2004, 437):

> When Deirdre loses a line, she isn’t content to start again from that line, she asks Kate for the cue. This strikes me as an experienced actor who understands Meisner’s premise that the performance will not be a pattern of lines but a pattern of impulses. If she has lost the line it is because she has not made its connection to what precedes it, so to gather the line in isolation from the cue, and recommence, offers no reason to suspect the line would be remembered next time (GM, 13-4-12, wk2).
This is what McAuley refers to as ‘deep craft knowledge’ (2008, 282), the kind of knowledge that, as Rossmanith keenly observes,

no longer feels like knowledge to practitioners but rather a way of being in the world. It no longer feels epistemological but ontological (2008, 148).

Actors are capable of feeling, as is Lady Macbeth, ‘the future in the instant’, a point claimed by Lockford and Pelias:

Much like baseball players, who after years of playing the game know as soon as the bat hits the ball where to go on the field, performers know after years of performing where to go to make a scene work (2004, 436).

This is a feel for the game in the blood of the actor. It is what Merleau-Ponty, after Husserl, recognises as

operative intentionality ... that establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life, the intentionality that appears in our desires, our evaluations, and our landscape more clearly than it does in objective knowledge (2012, lxxxi).

In the objective-challenged manoeuvres of the actor, such secreted intentionality is relied upon for any progress.

State of ARIA

Certain mind pictures have become so adulterated by the concept of “time” that we have come to believe in the actual existence of a permanently moving bright fissure (the point of perception) between our retrospective eternity which we cannot recall and the prospective one which we cannot know (Nabokov, 1974, 147).

All we can really say is, there is the flux (Conard, 2006, 67).

In this part of the study, I aim to introduce some material from my rehearsal observations in order to establish a problematic enabler, to review some extant philosophical theory that has approached this phenomenon, and to then glance toward extant acting theory as a means of exploring the notion that actors dissolve to what I describe as a state of ARIA (acquisitive, reflexive, intuitive astonishment).

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65 Shakespeare’s Macbeth, 1:5, L58.
Toward the Fictive Compass

There were two moments of rehearsal observation that stunned me, and have haunted my work throughout this study. The first of them was Alirio’s “virtual rehearsal” in Pin; the second was the vision of Jacqy in a moment from the rehearsal of L&S:

Jacqy ... stands in a deeply focused silence of contemplation when Chris says from offstage, ‘And would you go and get tea?’, to which she says, ‘Yeah, maybe’ (L&S, 20-4-12, wk2).

As a naked account, this appears an insignificant moment, but I find in it multiple layers of interest. Chris’ question implies his reading of Jacqy’s being-ness in this moment as either that of character or of actor: an inhabitation of the fictive or the artistic compass. Alternatively, his question assumes either that the actor will respond with her special insight from within the character (“What would the character do?”) or from within the artistic team (“What should the production do?”). Or perhaps she was simultaneously in both, or inhabiting the terrain of Schechner’s liminality.

Jacqy’s posture was crucial to my arrest. Her arms were held by her side, not in complete relaxation, but in a kind of controlled readiness, forearms arcing out from her body a little, akin to a ballet posture, shoulders low, hands in non-balletic relaxation. Her legs appeared slightly bent, knees unlocked. Her head was set slightly forward: not in what one would describe as a “head push”, but, again, denoting a kind of animal alertness. Her eyes were cast down, not toward her feet but at about forty-five degrees ahead of her, toward the ground. It is evocative of the posture of the “impulse work” I learnt from Lindy Davies, and have described as

a total physical dedication to the space, the other actors and the text—a thoughtless, intuitive approach that searches for the genuinely impulsive time and space for each line, each thought and action (2011, 19).

The position of the head and direction of the gaze is that which I and other actors spontaneously adopt seemingly as a result of de-investment in direct gaze, and investment in peripheral vision. Taken as a whole, the posture denotes spatial enquiry, availability, discovery, as suggested above, and at the same time, tentativeness, even fear. I think again of Merleau-Ponty’s description of the body as standing sentinel.

From out of this body, the voice in response to Chris’ question is short and sharp. In a sense, it could be interpreted as impatience, or annoyance, as if the director has

66 Australian actor, director, teacher (1946 - ) former Dean of Drama, Victorian College of the Arts.
invaded a kind of dream, but I feel in the moment that it is in fact something of the opposite: not annoyance but efficiency—a kind of intuitive grunt—perhaps not an anti-social but an unsocial vocality: primal. All in all, the impression was that the actor was somewhere else, doing something else: pursuing her different responsibilities while still facilitating the director in his pursuit of his responsibilities.

This signal moment of observation had a long tail in my thinking, as I regularly found myself scribbling in my notebook references back to “the Jacqy moment” or “the Jacqy thing”. Two weeks later, again with the L&S company, I pursued a further manifestation:

*It seems to me that three things are happening simultaneously throughout this rehearsal:*

1. *Actors are being moved around the stage by the director in order to embody his ‘vision’, and in this they seem somewhat passive mannequins;*

2. *Actors are—as if at another level “above” the shifting of their bodies—engaging in an intellectual discourse with the director about meanings and narrative, as if horizontal, a projection into the future of what will be read and what this will mean for them in performance;*

3. *Something in between the coarse shunting and the theorising of meaning, a facilitating or mediating mechanism between the two, a ‘feelingness’... between the present corporal and the future interpretive (L&S, 3-5-12, wk5).*

Taken together, these three modes of functioning do not much resemble acting as an audience receives it. Acting does not often or only involve any one of these three things:

*Are these actors acting? Yes and no. They are rehearsing, which is to say they are “being actors” but they are not acting as they will [in performance], nor is that phenomenon simply the amalgamation or artful assimilation of these three components of being as I’ve described them. They are exhibiting a lot of patience, politeness and physical discipline in standing still in order to maintain collective shapes for the director’s analysis, but they need ‘aliveness’ as they do so. They are being über-marionettes (L&S, 3-5-12, wk5).*

This strange aliveness seems both an absence and a hyper-presence: a dissolve into a state that surrenders subject/object duality to a more primitive, sensate experience of the world.

*Chris asks for a Run of the silent ceremonial scene that has been their focus: ‘Has everybody got a plan?’*

*Pass of the wordless scene.*
Actors inside this pass switch to a totally different mode of behaviour. They must eradicate the first and second of the things that I identified earlier—they explicitly must not be passive bodies shunting themselves around the stage, and they must not hold discourse on their own meaning-making. It seems that they now give greater focus to the body-mind, not as a go-between for the dull body and the objective intellect, but to facilitate subjective presence of body and mind (L&S, 3-5-12, wk5).

Phenomenology—along with existentialism and transcendentalism—has described modes of mental and physical being that speak to the state actors achieve as they hunt, and are haunted, within the fictive compass. Some acknowledgement needs to be made of the canonical thought that shoulders my analysis and interpretation.

Husserl writes that:

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\text{[e]very experience is in itself a flow of becoming (...) a constant flow of retentions and protentions mediated by a primordial phase which is itself in flux in which the living now of the experience comes to consciousness contrasting with its “before” and “after” (2010, 220).}
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This ‘mode of non-actuality’ (ibid, 268) is described as a ‘dead enjoyment of consciousness’ (ibid, 269), an ‘empty mist of dim indeterminacy [that] gets studded over with intuitive possibilities’ (ibid, 101).

Heidegger describes his “‘fallenness” into the “world”’ (ibid, 220) in a way evocative of the knowing-everything-and-knowing-nothing constructions of acting: ‘Being fallen into the “world” does not now somehow come to rest. The tempting tranquilization aggraves the falling’ (ibid, 222). In contemplating the distinctions of appearance and phenomena, Heidegger’s construction of appearance as that which shows itself, and of phenomena as that which never appears (ibid, 53), serves in crediting acting as phenomenological, and goes a long way toward suggesting the kind of willful bewilderment and astonishment that is at the core of actors’ impulsive engagement with space and fiction.

Merleau-Ponty sees the artist operating in ‘a sort of provisional eternity’ (1996, 95), unable to say ‘what comes from him and what comes from things’ (ibid). He values a meditative rather than too-reflective position, in art and in life, as allowing values and ideas [to] come forth abundantly to him who, in his meditative life, has learned to free their spontaneity (ibid, 120).
Kaushik describes Merleau-Ponty’s belief in the artist’s ‘fidelity to phenomena’, inhabitation of the sensuous (2011, 4), and responsiveness to alterity (ibid, 113), as among the basic elements, along with ‘a desire that is in the process of organizing itself’ (ibid, 115).

These ideas resonate in contemplation of Jacqy’s primal stance, and shed light on the claims of acting as phenomenology, which ‘takes up the task of uncovering the logic of experience from within that experience’ (Kaushik, 2011, 2). Rehearsing in this stance appears consistent with Dillon’s interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s ‘flesh’ as ‘an interweaving, an elementary knotting, which is always prior to its unraveling in language and thought’ (1988, 155).

On the other side of the theoretical coin, an under-acknowledged strain of Stanislavski’s writing is his emphasis on the creative state (1984, 261), which is contextualised as both a performance and an investigative/rehearsal state. Barba’s (1995) notion of the pre-expressive body recalls Merleau-Ponty with its valuing of a kind of primal readiness and energy- and meaning-ladenness. Bogart’s claim that the actor ‘cannot create from a balanced state’ (2005, 130) evokes a particular kind of imbalance known to actors. It is not a thorough or consistent physical imbalance, such as would disable the actor, yet it has something of physical imbalance to it. It is not a psychic imbalance, such as would disable the pursuit and retention of complex tasks and sensitivities, though it arguably has something of this too. It is an imbalance of knowingness, a kind of disarming of ego, a nakedness or shucked-ness, a readiness and responsiveness, an imbalance or un-ballasting of judgement in pursuit of ‘the most inspired connections’ (ibid, 121).

Lecoq’s innovations with the neutral mask in pursuit of the ‘necessary state of creative openness’ (Bradbury in Lecoq, 2006, xiii) constitute, for me, as actor and teacher, the most direct pursuit and nurture of the enabling state of ARIA:

The neutral mask ... is rooted in silence and calmness. ... (T)he body emerges as the only thing to guide you through the silence. ... It helps us discover the space around us, and the rhythm and gravity of things (Lecoq, 2006, 105).

Represented here is the sense of dissolve that I read in actors’ bodies throughout my observation of them at work, surrender not to lifelessness but to paradoxical calm aliveness. Actors appear to dissolve, as it were, their attention or their social presence into a state of acquisitive, reflexive, intuitive astonishment. This is a liminal state, between the social structures of the political and artistic compasses, the fiction of the play, and their own selves or baggage. They appear in this in-between state as caught between art, fiction and life. The fiction they stalk is an illusion that
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requires—if not concretising—at least corporality, even while being cherished for its provisionality and plurality. We search a landscape for what we know is not really there—life as lived—and feed off the very absence of tangibility to sustain the corporality we call performance. Those acting challenges that make lesser claims to life-as-lived, and are more frank in their ambiguity, may, as Matilda suggests, offer as much that is liberating as confounding:

Matilda: All the ‘given circumstances’, all that stuff.... I don’t know where I came from. I don’t know if I existed prior to that moment. So all that... I couldn’t say I just walked into that room from this room. I don’t really think that I existed when I wasn’t interacting.
TC: So you didn’t present characters as if they are people living in the world.
Matilda: Except for that moment. And in that moment, I was living at a very high level. It was very sensorially motivated (C120531.matilda).

Thus the actor throws herself ‘into the stream of lived interactions’ (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1996, 171), via astonishment, to a partial retention of astonishment, enacting perception, as Alva Noe suggests:

[p]erception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do. Think of a blind person tap-tapping his or her way around a cluttered space, perceiving that space by touch. ... (W)e enact our perceptual experience; we act it out (2004, 1).

This is very close to what one sees of the actor ranging between compasses and levels of consciousness on the rehearsal floor (Jacqy moments): reading meanings and receiving intellectual projections from the director, while “feeling” the space that they inhabit; acquiring vital links in a performative chain, the “notes” and rhythms of the score; enabling a reflexivity to impulse and fragmentary history and fiction; intuited a navigation through winds and currents of the moment; remaining astonished by their presence in all this queer whirl, disguising that astonishment as surety in some moments, and revealing it as lost-ness in others. Substantially blind to the fictional world, or amazed by its dim, shifting allusions to reality, actors nonetheless tap-tap it out, because we must, finally, express, be read, and own our text.

IN SUMMARY

This chapter has attempted to move at close quarters with actors through some of the more veiled processes of rehearsal. It has shone some light on the margins of rehearsal, and the margins of extant acting theory, by exposing that marginality to
broader philosophical thought, and to my own reflexive practice and sensibility as an actor and acting teacher. I have found that actors—while engaged in the highly social practices of rehearsal—rely on private processes of relative and sometimes absolute quietude for their profound connectivity to fiction. This is suggested in the myriad forms of sub-rehearsal actors construct; in their engagement with horizontal perceptions of the fiction; processes of personalisation; sens pratique which is, by definition, a hand of cards held close to the chest; and an enabling capacity to achieve a state of bodymind that is acquisitive and reflexive while remaining highly intuitive, and reads as a kind of astonishment.

The fictive compass remains uncertain ground, as if a seasoning of, or a conditioning of, the more tangibly felt political and artistic compasses. Some reconciliation of the spotted fiction with the social and political realities of actors in rehearsal is called for in summary as part of the study’s conclusion.
CONCLUSIONS, QUESTIONS, AND PROVOCATIONS

In this concluding chapter I want to exercise a movement somewhat *via negativa*: to summarise in order to catalyse. A review of findings is offered, then briefly contextualised with reference to the legacies of Shakespeare, Stanislavski and Brecht, leading to a claim for contemporary actors that calls into question certain elements of the prevailing *illusio* of theatrical political practice.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study has tracked my encounters with actors and directors pursuing four theatre productions within the Australian professional theatre. Throughout, I have unapologetically acknowledged and exposed my social, professional and theoretical position as laden and ripe. My experience as an actor and acting teacher has seasoned my responses, leading to a research context that is both reflexive on my part, and at times autoethnographic.

Beginning with codes established in earlier work, I pursue a process whereby that initial coding allows key issues to emerge and deliver a substantial new way to sort and weigh the data of rehearsal observation. Thus a genealogy of thought is traceable from the ‘hunch’ that begins *Trade Secrets*, that actors ‘are making it up as they go along’ (Crawford, 2005, 1), through that book’s conclusion that acting is ‘not only about finding one’s self, but finding everyone else too’ (ibid, 226), and to the emphasis placed on the Dimension of the Aesthetic in *Dimensions*, particularly its excavations around notions of actors’ concerns for other-than-fictional elements of acting while in rehearsal and performance (Crawford, 2011, 112-119). These ideas constituted the lens through which I saw the work of friends and colleagues in rehearsal, and allowed that work, and the extant and developing ideas, to create a new context in which to see the broad work of acting in the broader symbolic space of three compasses of concern. I have located the fictive concerns of acting wholly within a broader artistic compass, and located that artistic compass within a still-broader political milieu defined by industrial imposts and liberties, and social constructions and manifestations.

I find that actors operate within a political compass, as do we all, yet that this political compass delivers special sensitivities and proportionalities to actors by virtue of the peculiar qualities of their industrial field, such as the insecurity of work, the insecurity of salary even while working, and the perceived need to please—moment to moment—in order to continue to work. Political imposts are seen to penetrate the artistic work of actors, such as when working environments are
subject to massive differences in terms of the industrial ease with which actors pursue their work, where basic facilities like showers and toilets might be available for each individual actor in some circumstances, and be roughly improvised facilities, shared by all, in other environments. At times, paradoxically, industrial ease is found to equate with artistic restriction and, conversely, industrial hardship can denote artistic freedom in ways that impact on actors and directors. Social manifestations of political imbalances include the tendency for actors to experience—by virtue of their role, their salary, their lack of salary, or their age—significantly diminished or enhanced agency in the rehearsal process.

I explore the peculiar ‘leap’ that McAuley finds (and concedes is ‘rarely discussed’) ‘from pseudo-intimacy to complete absence’ (2006, 26): the way that actors forge odd work-friend-ships that are held to be essential gestures toward emotional connectedness in the social-political sphere in order to facilitate a cherished intimacy in the artistic work, yet are often found later to be chimerical.

The bulk of the study, and its major finding, concerns the ways in which actors concern themselves with artistic, as distinct from purely fictive, challenges. The artistic compass is projected as by far the most dominant ground on which actors spend their time, and to which they direct their skills and sensitivities inside rehearsal time, with the fictive compass—the fiction of the play—occupying a fairly small and somewhat dappled space within the artistic compass.

These artistic factors that define the experience of actors include: the style of the writing of the play; the provenance of the play; the aesthetic of the production as projected by the director and designer; and the style and predilections of the director. Allow me to briefly review some of the findings as they relate to these distinctions:

• Some play texts are found to promote what I have described as a centrifugal motion toward their production (GM, City). In such cases, the play substantially forms—not just informs—the production. There is evidence of such text bringing a kind of guiding ease to the artistic work of the actors. In other cases, a more centripetal motion is seen to exist, whereby the text requires the production to galvanise (Pin) or even reveal (L&S) its purpose. In such cases, the contention is that this brings specific difficulties to the actor;

• New texts (L&S, Pin), complex, poetic and abstract texts (L&S, City), and texts that are being developed as they are rehearsed (Pin) place significant pressures on actors, and can undermine or limit the depth and constancy of the actor’s relationship with the director.
Conclusions, Questions, and Provocations

None of these things, it is important to note, have anything to do with the fiction of the plays. Tennessee Williams, Martin Crimp, or Nicki Bloom might just as easily have written a play about a puppet that wants to become a boy, and written it in the style of their plays represented here.\footnote{67 Indeed, this is not a bad metaphor for Tom's painful quest in \textit{The Glass Menagerie}, nor for Bloom's subsequent piece, \textit{Little Bird}.}

- Directors’ projections of scheduling and spatiality become areas of major concern for actors;
- Set, costumes, and lighting provide actors with profound guidance in their work, and are the source of significant attention;
- Acting styles suggested or made explicit in the text (such as singing and dancing), or defined by the director as core aesthetic concerns, provide actors with substantial grist for the mill.

I would hate this to seem like a litany of whinges. I have not suggested in the study that these things are barriers to the work of actors (although some might be, sometimes, for some). They are just as likely to be liberations. They are necessities. They denote no more than writers, directors and designers doing their jobs. My purpose is to claim them as significant in their impact on actors, and as lying within the artistic as distinct from the fictive compass.

Directors are found to have an overwhelming authority over the epistemology of the rehearsal room. Actors are guided toward collective beliefs and knowledge—or at least toward agreement on aired and shared beliefs and knowledge—by constant framing of the boundaries of those beliefs by the director.

Given the enormity of the director’s influence on actors, a salient finding of the study is its identification of radical distinctions in the processes of directors. These distinctions include degrees of intimacy with actors’ artistic ambitions, imaginative process and performance scores, and degrees of liberty offered to actors in the pursuit of these elements. These wide-ranging distinctions have a correspondingly wide-ranging impact on actors’ industrial and artistic experiences and—axiomatic, given the findings of the study—the quality of their engagement with the fiction.

Actors are found to be complicit with directors in favouring aesthetic referents in their discourse about the developing work, and in regularly seeking to establish metaphors to define common ground in their understandings and their artistic ambitions. A strategy I refer to as meta-text is used liberally by directors of all profiles as a means of entering with actors into the fictive compass, or at least gesturing toward it.
As rehearsals Intensify, there is an apparent gap between the dominant discourse of the rehearsal room, and the actors’ negotiation of the fictive compass. This leads to an impression of core work for actors that needs to “get done” by them around the edges of the rehearsal room’s predominantly aesthetic or artistic interests, or concurrently, as embedded, private or secret business, often in the context of sub-rehearsals: a phenomenon for which I suggest the stakes and distinctions for a wide variety of types.

The citing of theories or theorists of acting is extremely rare.

I have been persistently led to an impression of a balance or tension between what I scribble many times in the study as ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ concerns: the inner game and the outer game. These are problematic descriptions because they imply the actor’s dual service of impressions and expressions; a duality of concealment and revelation; what is going on inside the actor-as-character—or the actor responding to the fiction—and how that is being expressed. That tension is a real and constant concern for actors, and I have indeed represented innerness and outer-ness in that way. In the terms of the study, that version of an inner/outer struggle should be seen as a tension between the actor’s work within the fictive compass, and her maintenance of her performance within the Dimension of the Aesthetic. The distinction between inner and outer that I look to distinguish here as a more significant finding of the study is a distinction between the performance (taken as both impressions and expressions) and what it means within the broader artwork; how it is received and perceived by the audience. This inner/outer is not found to be in opposition, but by and large balanced, even symbiotic, and this is evidence of the fictive compass existing within the artistic compass, which is to say that actors’ fictive concerns are always subject to the meta artistic concerns of the production and its potential meanings.

It is hoped the reader will recall some of the many rehearsal moments cited in the study that support this conclusion, yet will nonetheless allow for a further two citations of rehearsal observation to reinforce this major point here.

One day, in Pin, Nathan was in the middle of the rehearsal room floor, ostensibly “in character”, responding to a direction from Rose that he and another character make a partial exit (to up-stage) around to the back of the large central “log”. After taking the direction, the cast set back to prepare to do the sequence again:

"Nathan says, from the stage and on his feet, as distinct from sitting around a table: ‘As long as we know where they’re going and why. I didn’t know why.’"
This is interesting because here Nathan places himself as both subject and object simultaneously. The ‘we’ that he refers to is the audience. He is placing himself in the audience in making this comment, even though the ‘they’ he refers to includes himself. The ‘I’ is clearly himself too, but it is not spoken from the character’s perspective... any “inner” interest, as in, “I do not understand my motivation for doing this”; the comment comes from a purely Aesthetic perspective: “In watching this I would not understand it”\(^{68}\) (Pin, 5-6-12, wk2).

Late in the rehearsal process of GM, Anthony reviewed an early-rehearsal piece of stage business:

Anthony: Is the moment with the hot coffee...?
Adam: We could cut that.
Anthony: Is that that... good?
Adam: On a sliding scale, no.
Anthony: I don’t know what it’s... adding to the sequence. Just: pick up the coffee and head straight down. I don’t think you’re losing much by, “Oo, he’s burnt his tongue on the hot coffee”.
Adam: No.
Anthony: Give that a go?
Adam: Yeah.

An indication of the minutiae with which actors concern themselves, and the frankness with which they analyse it, and the way that they do so from the audience’s perspective, in terms of the ‘reading’ of the business, as distinct from the conversation being about what the moment means to the character-as-person (GM, 3-5-12, wk5).

At all points, the four directors seemed to welcome—and in many moments, seemed to rely upon—these broader sensitivities. This is interesting, as to step outside the purview of the study momentarily, it would appear that vexed questions sustain around issues of what actors “should” know or take interest in, with demarcations sometimes vigorously prosecuted, such as by film director, Di Drew: 69

[the thing I hate most of all from an actor on set is when they ask, “What’s your coverage for this scene?” I’ve gotten to the point where my answer now is, “I’ll direct. You act! Thank you.” Now that sounds a bit arrogant, but it’s really not. When an actor says that, it means they are much more concerned with what I’m

\(^{68}\) I should have written, ‘artistic perspective’ rather than ‘Aesthetic perspective’, but at the point that I wrote this initial analysis, in the early stages of the study, I had not yet figured through the very distinction I am now making at the conclusion of the study. I render the “error” here in the service of fidelity to the citing of the OS material.

\(^{69}\) (1948 - ) Current Head of Screen, NIDA.
doing rather than giving me what I want by doing what they’re supposed to be doing. If you give me good work, I’m likely to actually change my coverage, according to what you give me, and you can only give me your best work if you focus on what you have to do rather than what I’m doing. … [B]asically you … won’t work for me again’ (Macaulay, 2003, 39).

This is honest commentary from a well-credentialed artist, offered with sincerity, and with a mind to making better art. Nonetheless, it is difficult not to be distracted by the feudalism of the tone, and I am compelled to loop back for an instant to the industrial concern of actors in the political compass who need to “behave” themselves in order to get more work.70 Drew’s hatred is directed toward an infringement of what she sees as strictly demarcated industrial and artistic lines. The clear implication is that concerns for how actors’ performances are framed have no place within their work, and furthermore that they threaten the sanctity of her work. Drew hates in vain. She may achieve the erasure of these annoying questions on set, and very likely has achieved this given her public threat of no more employment for a transgressor, but this study suggests she cannot stop actors from thinking about such things, even as they dutifully cower at the prospect of sharing their thoughts with their director.

It is interesting to note that Drew’s comments come from the milieu of film production rather than theatre, and from a director of an older generation than any of the four involved in this study. They portray a startling assumption of imperious authority not inconsistent with tropes around the centrality and industrial privilege of the director in film. Still, it is tempting to wonder how far the political determination might go: whether, for example, Cate Blanchett71 or Hugo Weaving72—should they have the privilege of working in this “don’t ask / don’t tell” industrial and artistic structure—would receive Drew’s advice at this moment of transgression in exactly the same way as would a young or “jobbing” actor. As to how much either of these distinctions—medium or age—illuminate her position, we cannot here investigate but only wonder on.73 It is important to note that none of the four directors I observed were seen to withhold from actors any sought

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70 In glancing back to political issues, I am inclined to again cite—with a great sense of indebtedness, even though I have struggled with some of its premises and its conclusions—Moore’s (2004) extraordinary investigation into such social and industrial imbalance.

71 Eminent Australian actor (1969 -).

72 Eminent Australian actor (1960 -).

73 I raise the generational question because I am very conscious of a shift in the attitudes of theatre directors of today from those of my early career. This is obviously a very limited and personal observation, and a generalisation, yet Beale makes exactly the same observation (in O’Kane, 2012, 236-7). I have witnessed egregious social behaviour in professional contexts, including full-blown tantrums, from directors. They are all distant memories, I am happy to say. None of them pertain to experiences of the last fifteen years, and all of them seem a world away from the social-professional behaviour of Adam, Chris, Rose and Geordie.
information on the artistic framing of the actors’ work, and were rather more inclined to volunteer such coordinates precisely in order to locate actors in the artwork.\textsuperscript{74}

I have identified actors’ interests in all of the technology that surrounds them as part of the essential concerns of the Aesthetic of their performance. Further to that, this study identifies their interest in what finally comes of themselves within that technological and artistic frame as essential acknowledgement of their position within an artwork. These are not transgressions but constant \textit{intra}-migrations between the sub-fields of the artistic and fictive compasses. There is no territory within the theatrical process in which these actors do not stake an interest. In performance and in rehearsal, they do not so much move into and out of character, but into and out of the sub-zones of the theatrical moment, with and without what Zarrilli calls ‘characterlogical implications’ (2008, 22): its technology, its fiction, its sediments of autobiographical reference, its spatiality, its unique momentary society (the audience of the rehearsal room and of the theatre), its guiding aesthetic disciplines.

In emphasising theatre artists’ engagement with art as distinct from fiction, I am at pains to reiterate that the fiction is addressed, and discussed with the director, but I suggest that it is discussed in substantial proportion to the realistic or life-ish treatment of that fiction in the art/aesthetic of the writing, and that of the production. In other words, it is addressed proportionate to its value \textit{as art}. Fiction is given its value or weight by the playwright in the first instance, then—chiefly—by the director. And this value determines the focus the fiction will receive in the discourse and practice of the rehearsal room.\textsuperscript{75} Thus, the actors of \textit{GM} and of \textit{City} were afforded considerably more time to consider their characters as if living in the world, including in discourse with their directors, than were the actors of either \textit{Pin} or \textit{L&S}. Yet even when discourse addresses issues of fiction, it is seen to go only so far, and does not challenge the above finding that there remains significant work that actors do in private, and that the rehearsal room is a place—quite properly—of collective rather than individual work.

I have examined the close-quarters of the fictive compass by embracing notions of mystery that surround it, finding that it remains a site of substantial intangibility. Therefore, lateral approaches have been taken to describe actors’ engagement with it: first, with a focus on the actor’s processing of intelligence into embodied,

\textsuperscript{74} It is also worth noting that I have experienced many film directors (and Directors of Photography) who readily share such information on set as a matter of course.

\textsuperscript{75} For example, I have been in the production of a Chekhov play in which the fiction was rarely discussed, and a production of a Handke play in which fiction was liberally \textit{invented}. 
expressive form; second, as a series of developments of habitus in each of the three compasses; third, positioning the actor analogously as an ethnographer seeking explication of a culture of otherness. Withal, the challenging gap that presents for actors is a division between ethereality and corporality; between fiction and fact; between the notional and the expressible:

The power of the habitus derives from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation, rather than consciously learned rules and principles (Jenkins, 1992, 76).

There’s the rub for the actor. Thoughtless embodiment is exactly what is required to achieve or unlock the generative schemes to allow for creative being-ness on stage, yet our capacity to engender it through habit and habitation is limited given that fiction appears to the actor like an eternally horizontal phenomenon. The study suggests that between learning in the normal acquisitive sense, and inhabiting in the dependable, lived sense, there is a way of being for actors: a receptive, inquisitive phenomenological embodying that can lead to sustainable hexis. A series of strategies and enablers are identified as facilitating reconciliation with the fiction, even as it remains somewhat intangible.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the fiction, the artwork has shape and form, and actors are seen to gravitate toward that tangibility, manifesting artistic habitus (inclusive of fiction) that largely passes for fictive habitus. This is a way of being within the artistic compass (as a container of fiction along with everything else that it contains), within the production, a way of being on stage, as a more significant, felt, reliable and relied upon thing than an inhabitation of the fiction as a discrete phenomenon.

ART AND THE ACTOR

Actors often baulk at calling themselves artists, as evident in my interviews with two senior Australian actors, John Gaden and the late Bille Brown (Crawford, 2005, 114, 25). In order to offer industrial provocations on behalf of actors, it is worth seeking some kind of historical foothold on the logic behind the reticence, and behind actors’ current industrial and artistic marginality. As foreshadowed, I want to bring onto the stage—for a brief bow, as it were—three familiar historical figures: Shakespeare, Stanislavski and Brecht, to help create context for understanding how things are.

We know that Shakespeare’s theatre operated with a hierarchical structure whereby among the raft of players were senior players of increased agency, among those were share-holders in the company, and among those—as the sixteenth century
turned into the seventeenth—Shakespeare emerged as the leading light of The King’s Men. It is not improper to equate the role that Shakespeare assumed—as share-holder, actor and writer—with that of a contemporary artistic director or, at the very least, co-artistic director. That Shakespeare was an actor with a highly developed sensitivity to the political and artistic compasses is—fair to say—a magnificent understatement. More significantly, if Hamlet’s advice to the players is what we perceive it to be (advice from Shakespeare to his fellows), we might assume that the advice of this powerful industrial figure was heeded, and the actors of the Jacobean (if not the Elizabethan) stage were likewise actors who knew what play they were in, and controlled its effects, even while pursuing the ever-deepening psychological fictions and ever-broadening dramaturgical experiments of their “boss”. Yet their boss was an actor among actors, and this was an actors’ theatre.

Stanislavski’s theatre was a vigorous response to perceptions of industrial and artistic practices of acting that wanted rigour, discipline, and focus, in the face not only of the realist texts with which it is most commonly associated, but with works of many genres, in the context of a realist epoch. That is to say, the motivations were more about the perceived receptivity of a contemporary society than a particular style of play—such as Chekhov’s—emerging out of thin air. These concerns of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries played out in the development of Stanislavski’s highly unsystematic “system”, and, in the U.S., eventually, as the highly unmethodical Method.76 From there, in the U.S. at least, new problems emerged:

[i]n the late 1950s, critics identified as a problem the fact that American actors were either exclusively introspective creators of psychologically detailed characters, or barnstorming virtuosos with a purely external technique inappropriate to the performance of sophisticated drama. Method actors were said to lack basic techniques of voice and speech production, while musical theatre performers could perform but not act (Gordon, 2009, 192).

These distinctions can be easily placed in the intellectual context of this study as the incoherence of fictive and artistic concerns.

It is uncontroversial to suggest that Brecht is among the most significant influences—if not the most significant influence—upon the theatre of the twentieth century. The legacy, like Stanislavski’s, is ragged and confused, as I have suggested elsewhere (Crawford, 2011, 5, 106, 156), but this point from Gordon might be universally admitted among the emphases:

76 I render the words, “system” and Method, in these ways to distinguish between the more humble or equivocal way that Stanislavski tended to make his claims (always using quote marks, for example), and the confident assertions of Strasberg on behalf of his enthusiastically capitalised Method.
It was important for the actor to accept that the main aim of the performance was to communicate the point of view of the play, rather than to seduce spectators into an illusory belief in the reality of the characters’ world (2009, 229).

Clearly, this calls for prioritising of artistic rather than fictive concerns.

What might we deduce from these truck-stops along theatre’s “western” road? These three “thumbnails” would be laughably inadequate as a means of telling the story of western theatre, but no more thorough telling would challenge the basic proposition: a successful actors’ theatre lost its way (that I have left out the hows and whys of its loss is, again, insignificant), and was rescued by pedagogues, theorists, and by the emergence of the director. That is as it may be, yet if this is an onward journey, if the theatre is evolving, this study offers a context for questions about where we are in that onward journey.

It appears that the actors under my observation have absorbed the lessons of Hamlet, Stanislavski and Brecht. It is difficult to align the actors studied here with the above criticisms of Method actors and barnstorming virtuosos. Subject to variance given the individual actor’s talent, intelligence, experience and sensitivity, it must be conceded, surely, that these are post-Stanislavskian, post-Brechtian actors. The evidence of the former claim is their capacity to achieve meaningful, expressible contact within the fictive compass; the latter their capacity to secure and contextualise that contact within the broader artistic compass.

This study suggests that contemporary professional Australian actors have been thoroughly “Brecht-ed”. Interestingly, this process, described by Hamilton in interpreting the conclusions of Ulrike Garde as both thorough and imperceptible (Garde, 2007, 365; cited in Hamilton, 2014, 538) has occurred in an industrial environment in which actors encounter the works of Shakespeare—by enormous degrees (see Meyrick, 2012)—more commonly than those of any other playwright. Thus, the lessons of Stanislavski and Brecht have been reconciled in the context of a continuing post-colonial project concerned with acting Shakespeare, along with acting everything else. Notwithstanding Kath Leahy’s suggestion that a ‘fast-paced, fluid’, innovative post-colonial approach was pursued as early as the 1920s (2009, 87), research for another time might fruitfully pursue a suggestion that Australian theatre found Shakespeare through Brecht, and by so doing, significantly avoided the “American” trap that Tom Cornford sees:
Conclusions, Questions, and Provocations

The original political force of the idea of showing life-as-it-is-lived has long since drained away, and we have somehow become trapped within its husk (2013, 709).

I wonder whether the contemporary theatre fully acknowledges, in its industrial systems and structures, the un-trapped entity I now refer to as the artistic actor; correspondingly, whether industrial structures are superfluous husks; outmoded solutions for problems long overcome.

The study clearly asserts that actors are artists by virtue of their demonstrated interest in what Tim Crouch refers to as the ‘microcosmic rendering of the macrocosmic idea of the play’ (in O’Kane, 2012, 93), their prioritised investment in the artistic compass, and the manifold security they derive from it.

What might come of an acceptance of the proposition that actors think and work as artists, in this sense? That is the question I want to wrestle with and tease out as the study’s final gestures, with faith placed in the notion that theatre’s industrial structures may be among the things that Randall Collins suggests appear to us as ‘fixed global culture’ while in fact being no more than a ‘situationally generated flux of imputed rules and meanings’ (2005, 8).

POSITIONING THE ARTISTIC ACTOR

For us to transform reality, we must first be able to imagine ... our utopias (Behar, 1999, 483-484).

The questions and provocations that arise for me as rudders and sails for my onward journey as an actor, teacher, and scholar are many. They include questions about:

• studio practice in actor-training, and how well it represents actors’ inevitable focus on art over fiction;
• the institutional structures of training, its housing in academies and studios that tend to enshrine or fetishise the fictive “moment”, and the potentials and problematics of its re-housing in theatre companies, the sites of pragmatic industry and art; and
• whether directors’ purview over rehearsal processes need be so total and so constant.

I hope it does not seem irresponsible at this stage to throw such curly things into the air. I do so out of respect for my lack of remaining space, and with the aim of allowing the pursuit of one such question to represent the future pursuit of others,
and reflect back upon them. With this, I hope not to seem too strident in proclaiming, in Ellis’ words,

> how things are or how life should be lived, but instead strive to open up a moral and ethical conversation with readers about the possibilities of living life well (2009, 17)

... or, at least, about the possibilities of doing theatre better.

I was in the final weeks of writing this thesis when I discovered Patrick O’Kane’s excellent book of interviews with contemporary British actors, *Actors’ Voices: The People Behind the Performances*. In it I found a serendipitous co-alignment with some of the anxious themes I am pursuing, and I enlist those actors’ voices here in collegiality with their Australian counterparts.

**On creativity, agency, and silly fuckers**

> Insofar as we can recognize moral progress, it has less to do with the discovery or invention of new principles than with the inclusion under the old principles of previously excluded men and women (Walzer, 1987, 27).

How the artistic actor might be repositioned in theatre’s industrial and artistic structures is a multitudinous and cacophonous question. In identifying only one area below, I do not mean to suggest it as primary “corrective” or target, but as a representative site of provocation, and because—if I have compellingly suggested anything, I hope I have suggested this—if we change the politic, we change the art.

I briefly passed over, in Chapter Two, the ‘relatively new phenomenon’ (McAuley, 2012, 45) of the emergence of the collective term, Creatives, to describe the director and designers of various hues, and confessed my unease with it. At this conclusion of the study, I am able to go some way to illuminating that unease.

Let me begin with what I believe is well-meaning and good about the term and the practices that flow from its adoption. I believe it represents: generosity on behalf of directors to acknowledge technological advances in theatre practice, growing interest and reliance on those advances, and on the artist/technicians who control them; reconciliation of historic ambivalences in relation to the artistic claims of technical areas; a general, and perhaps generational, shift from theatre directors as sole drivers, serviced by all, to a somewhat de-centralised leadership structure; fair and just designation for designers, and one under which their talents have been given greater reign. These are preliminary points, really, because actors are not yet
explicit in them, yet they clear the way for questions about actors. With these affirmations, admirable intentions, and happy outcomes as premises, the question I pose is this: Does this designation tend to isolate actors from the generating centre of the art-work?

There is evidence to indicate that actors—who already ‘reside in an environment of perpetual uncertainty and fear, with regard to their relationships with directors’ (O’Kane, 2012, 10)—are indeed further isolated by what Crouch calls the ‘creative team clique’ (ibid, 110). The potential for offense that McAuley and her respondent articulate, and that I acknowledge as an actor, is not necessarily caused by the term, nor by its primary function of drawing designers closer to the centre of artistic decision-making, thus securing their place within that ruling elite, but—by computation—by creating an impression of an elite, with actors excluded, shunted further to the periphery of generative processes. It is—as is the formation of any cabal—simultaneously a gesture of explicit inclusivity and a gesture of implicit exclusivity.

How might our professional theatre’s industrial practices relieve actors of impressions of marginality, and benefit from the artistic actor’s more central positioning? Collegial generosity and respect toward actors are evident in the practices of all four directors in focus here, and Rose’s manifestations are significant because they extend into the broad aesthetics of the artwork. They remain, however, manifestations of rehearsal time and place. The question, though, might be addressed at its roots in the political compass: in industrial set-ups, particularly as they pertain to the pre-rehearsal period. Further to the acknowledgement of the thoroughly ‘creative’ designer, might the democratic impulses behind the adoption of the term, Creatives, presage meaningful responses—in artistic and political compasses—to the identification of the artistic actor?

Actors are rarely employed by theatre companies on an ongoing basis, so they are rarely on-call during the pre-production stages in which the over-arching interpretive decisions on the production are made, and sets and costumes thence designed. Even when actors might be available during the pre-production period, “union-house” theatre companies are rightly sensitive to industrial protocols around seeking their time outside of the traditionally contracted rehearsal and performance schedules for any contribution to the “creative” conversations. Companies’ universal response to these circumstances is to not budget for such contributions from actors (although they may occur occasionally as courtesies extended to actors of substantial industrial agency). Consequently, all major artistic decisions are made by the Creatives prior to rehearsals commencing, delivered to actors like Christmas presents on the first day of rehearsal, and excitedly anticipated by actors in just this spirit: Mum and Dad up
all night putting the trampoline together while the kiddies ignorantly sleep, or, as Claire Price puts it, continuing the theme of unwelcome infantilising of actors:

> the children are allowed to play, whilst the adults go away and make the big decisions about what the children will wear, and how they’ll be lit (ibid, 33).

These revelations of the closeted work of the Creatives lead to galvanising positivity in actors, and, disturbingly often, to profound disappointment and vexation over the way the audience will read the signs, along the lines of Ruairí Conaghan’s characterisation: ‘the audience will ... be wondering why this silly fucker’s wearing silver trousers’ (ibid, 55). During the first week of rehearsal, actors come together in private moments to share their concerns about the artistic decisions—the silly trousers and the silly sets—that have been delivered, and that cannot be returned. Selina Cadell sees this design practice as among the things that have ‘governed the theatre with such destructive consequences’ (ibid, 215), and ‘hates’ nothing more about being an actor than not being ‘part of the creative team’ (ibid, 226). It is important to note that this practice pre-dates the adoption of the term, Creatives, yet the adoption of the term has tended to charge the “delivery” moment with a greater sense of power imbalance between the adults and the children.

Actors are undoubtedly infantilised by a variety of industrial practices—and prevailing industrial prejudices—that appear not to recognise that Brecht ever existed, or that actors ever learnt anything from him, or from Stanislavski, Craig, Lecoq, Bogart, or any of the good teachers and directors who have represented their legacies. Actors’ concerns around aesthetic issues are not the concerns of artistic children, of Hamlet’s ‘robustious periwig-pated’ fools,77 the self-centred stars of Russia’s imperialist theatres, or self-obsessed “Method-ists”. They are the concerns of the artists this study finds actors to be. Is their positioning, aloof to key creative decision-making, respectful of their artistry? Is it a positioning that draws maximum benefit—indeed, any benefit—from their highly attuned sense of “what works” in the theatre, evinced in countless moments of observation in this study as a deeply felt sensitivity and habitus that might be as properly relied upon as any director’s or designer’s act of creative clairvoyance? Or is it representative of what Conaghan disturbingly calls ‘systemic, institutionalised prejudice against actors’ (ibid, 83); a kind of revenge for actors’ solo burrows through the mountain; revenge for the applause?

Put more coolly: is it a positioning for these times? Might it be redressed, in some measure, to better effect, without challenging the artistic agency of designers or directors? Might actors be repositioned in relation to key, germinating directorial

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77 *Hamlet*, 3:2, L 9-10.
and design ideas in a way that reflects their sensitivity to, and highly attuned attendance of, the broader artwork?

I am confident that some would find these provocations horrifying, offensive, or nutty. The study suggests they need not be any of these things, but be subject to sincere attention, ‘from contemplation to experimentation’, as Jackson (2013, 261) puts it, framed by secure theoretical boundaries, historical precedents, and a philosophical premise that theatre’s artistic flowerings will reflect its industrial and social roots and branches, and that those roots and branches might—as a consequence of this enchantment—be worthy of actors.
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A selection of other influential works read


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APPENDIX: REVIEWS

I offer here reviews of the four productions. To create a limited and even context for this, these reviews are all by the same reviewer, for the same publication: Murray Bramwell, the greatly experienced Adelaide-based theatre critic; and the national newspaper, The Australian.

The City


“Why is it”, asks one of the characters in Martin Crimp’s 2008 play The City, “that our hopes make us so sad?” It is one of the very few direct comments anyone makes in this captivating, eighty minute maze of disconnected details, emotions, lacunae and cul-de-sacs.

Crimp’s plays have often used indirection to find direction out. Earlier works, like the self-descriptive Play with Repeats, use re-starts and repetitions to find variations and might-have-beens. His 1997 hit Attempts on Her Life is subtitled “seventeen scenarios for the theatre” and provides neither casting clues nor stage instructions.

In the opening dialogue of The City we initially feel we are on surer ground. A couple – Clair, a literary translator, and her husband, Chris, are discussing their day. He has had trouble swiping his staff ID to get into the building, she has a chance encounter with a writer named Mohamed whose child has gone missing at the railway station.

But in no time we sense there is a different weight to the two stories – one is apparently trivial and neurotic, the other potentially tragic – and this disjunction widens and twists as the play steps in and out of narrative focus. A neighbour, Jenny, appears. She is a nurse on shift work unable to sleep because of the children playing. She reveals that her husband, a doctor, is involved in “a secret war”, where a city has been pulverized, even its inhabitants, reduced to “fine grey dust.” This ruined city is a recurrent image, a spectre at the edge of the apparently calm domesticity. Is it a harbinger of bad faith? A moral rebuke, perhaps, and a reason for these agitated, unquiet lives?

Director Geordie Brookman and his nowyesnow company use the intimate confines of the Bakehouse theatre to strong effect. Victoria Lamb’s abstracted minimalist décor of white and glass panels, (along with Ben Flett’s impersonal lighting) is deliberately short on reassuring particulars and Andrew Howard’s soundscape is
frequently ominous.

The performances are excellent. As Clair and Chris, Lizzy Falkland and Chris Pitman (ably supported by Anna Steen and Matilda Bailey) lucidly, and often amusingly, capture the unease and insecurities in their relationship, while also remaining disturbingly dissociated and elusive (like voices in a T.S. Eliot poem) as the narrative shifts, intriguingly, dreamily, and in tiny increments, out of our grasp.

Brookman is soon to take over as artistic director of the State Theatre of South Australia. It will be a welcome achievement if he can bring the intensity, clarity and freshness of this production – the same urgent nowyesnow-ness - to the mainstage of the Playhouse.

The Glass Menagerie

“Return to the dim rooms where great playwright made his memories”, May 10, 2012, p.16.

Tennessee Williams called it “the saddest play I have ever written” and, first performed in 1944, The Glass Menagerie is certainly his most autobiographical. “The play is memory”, the narrator, Tom, informs us in the startlingly direct opening address – “Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic.” While this is true in part, Williams’ account, of life with his mother and sister in St Louis in the Depression of the mid 1930s, is never mawkish and carries an emotional authenticity which made it an immediate success and still sustains it now.

Caught between duty and a restless sense of destiny, Tom Wingfield works in a shoe factory warehouse to support his mother Amanda, an irrepressible Southern belle who, as she herself says, wasn’t prepared for what the future brought. He also has a fragile sister, Laura, who has retreated into an imaginary world represented by her collection of glass figurines. In despair at his lot, Tom escapes “to the movies”, while his mother contrives one last-ditch plan to find a “gentleman caller” to rescue her daughter from impecunious spinsterhood.

In the final production of his eight year tenure at State Theatre, director Adam Cook has created a Glass Menagerie with all of its theatrical ducks in a row. Victoria Lamb’s clever design, using suspended sections of the tenement décor (as well as providing more literal dining and lounge acting spaces), meets Williams’ own requirement that it be “dim and poetic” while Mark Pennington’s lighting is sympathetic but never sentimental.
The performances are uniformly excellent. Anthony Gooley, as Tom, is a mordant narrator and an abject character, at times unsparingly churlish as he reflects Williams’ guilty self-portrait of a young man ready to cut and run. The playwright cattily describes Jim, the Gentleman Caller, as “a nice, ordinary young man” and Nic English exactly meets the brief. No wonder Amanda gurgles with delight at the sight of him, and his key scene with Laura which awakens her hopes (and that of the audience) is a highlight.

As Laura, Kate Cheel depicts her painful shyness, her fugitive charm and her quiet rebellion. Like her brother, she is an adult over-stayer in the family home. Maybe, nowadays, she’d be an emo.

It is up to their mother to put a cracker under all this torpor, however misguided her plan, and Deidre Rubenstein’s outstanding performance as Amanda, while capturing the frustrated tiger mother in all her coquettish affectation, also dignifies her heroic effort to turn the tide in the affairs of men.

Land & Sea


“Land&Sea”, Nicki Bloom explains in her program notes, “exists in the in-between space. In between consciousness and unconsciousness, knowing and not knowing”. Which is where, it might be added, all music and most poetry comes from. Brink Productions newest work, directed by Chris Drummond and performed in the cavernous shell of Queen’s Theatre, aspires both to the musical and poetic.

Divided into six sections, Bloom’s text spans time, space and history. The opening scene, shrouded in a gauze tent, features a father and daughter in a Tempest-like trope – Prospero and Miranda (except their names are Mr Greene and Vera) on an isle of noises where a woman called Essie gathers baskets of eggs. The father tells her he has made the world and Vera wonders why there are no young men in it – until Poor Tom appears on the beach complete with a tree branch.

The second section is a mix of English ballad and Game of Thrones – Mr Greene is now King Billy, and Vera meets Prince Tomason and Queen Esther – similar names, different packdrill. By section three Vera is begging in the street and writing messages on squares of cardboard. We are in wartime Europe in the late1930s in section four; radio broadcasts break through in four different languages and people are being shot down the telephone.
As ever, Chris Drummond’s production is beautifully fashioned. Wendy Todd’s white canopy set (on a disc of yellow sand) lifts away, later, to reveal a carefully detailed European hotel room. It is all delectably lit by Geoff Cobham and Hilary Kleinig’s evocative music, played live on cello and piano, uses themes from folksong to Gluck and Satie.

The excellent actors work valiantly to bring precision to the mercurial leaps of the text’s narrative and rhetorical styles. Rory Walker capably manages Mr Greene the magus and the assorted characters called Bill, Danielle Catanzariti is enchanting as the various Veras, Thomas Conroy is a steady consort as the multiple Toms and as Esther/Estella, Jacqy Phillips not only covers the nasty queen archetypes but sings the ballads, humming choruses and boulevard chansons with flair.

But Land & Sea is less than the sum of its very diverse parts. We follow the repeated symbols of eggs and branches, the motifs of exile, abandonment and lost love, but they do not gather momentum or dramatic intensity. Instead of being intriguing and vivid, the result is often arbitrary, mannered and unrewarding.

Mr Greene says at the close – “You can’t see where the earth ends or the sky begins. No ocean in between.“ Alas, we don’t share that sense of discovery. We just feel all at sea.

Pinocchio


First appearing in 1883 in the stories of Italian writer Carlo Collodi, Pinocchio, the mischievous wooden puppet who longs to become a real boy, has become a modern archetype, written about in numerous translations and adaptations and catapulted into pop culture in the immortal 1940 Disney movie.

Following on from their 2009 re-jig of L. Frank Baum’s classic The Wizard of Oz, Windmill Theatre, in collaboration with State Theatre, has also given the Pinocchio stories some contemporary tweaking.

Director Rosemary Myers and writer Julianne O’Brien have kept the story’s core elements. The creation of the boy, emerging from a block of wood at the skilful hands of Geppetto the toymaker (affectionately played by Alirio Zavarce), and the plot by fiendish Stromboli (the mercurial Geoff Revell) to steal him away from his home, are central.

Present also are Pinocchio’s fellow travelers and party animals, Fox and Cat (the
Appendix: Reviews

lively Derik Lynch and Jude Henshall), and his guides and conscience – the Blue Fairy (now called Blue Girl and hauntingly played by Danielle Catanzariti) and the cynical wise-cracking Cricket (no longer Walt’s Jiminy) steered by puppeteer Sam Routledge. As Pinocchio, Nathan O’Keefe is a delight, from his stringy puppet walk to his crackling lie-detector extending nose, his performance is anything but wooden.

But with many Pinocchio episodes and variants to choose from, the production, at just under two hours, runs the risk of carrying too much narrative freight. Perhaps there is not room for two contrasting worlds to Geppetto’s tranquil hearth – Stromboli’s evil Playland, luring children away to be turned into carnival donkeys, as well as the dream factory Strombollywood, even if the latter is a juicy satiric swipe at the narcissism of media celebrity.

We can also wonder why, in the brilliantly staged sea scenes, Pinocchio and his father escape from the entrails of a large shark and not the biblical regenerative whale of previous stories.

But there is no escaping the extraordinary flair and the visual and musical style of this dazzling production. Rosemary Myers has gathered her Wizard crew again. Designer and illustrator, Jonathan Oxlade, in combination with video designer Chris More, has created a versatile décor using a large revolving wooden hexagon on to which are projected cartoonish cityscapes, sea scenes and funparks, all in vintage Looney Tunes colours and complemented by Geoff Cobham’s outstanding lighting.

The music – a succession of catchy, sweet pop/rock ballads, all fetchingly performed by the cast and impressively delivered from the pit by composer and MD Jethro Woodward and musicians, Shireen Khemlani and Paul White – completes the experience.

Even in the crowded, uncertain world of new musicals – given some narrative nipping and tucking – this Pinocchio should win by a nose.