Are We On The Same Page? A Critical Analysis of the 'Text-Based'/'Non-Text-Based' Divide in Contemporary English Theatre

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Declaration of Authorship

I Catherine Love hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

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Abstract

In recent years, debates about new work in the English theatre sector have often centred on a perceived divide between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work. This thesis offers a fresh perspective on this debate, arguing that this division rests on a misrepresentation of the relationship between text and performance embodied in, and perpetuated by, (a) the structures of Arts Council funding, (b) higher education and (c) theatre criticism. As such, I argue that the division between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work is not a straightforward reflection of divergent theatre-making practices; rather, it has been shaped by these theoretical and institutional contexts.

Chapter One makes an original intervention in theoretical discussions about text and performance, showing that there remains something conceptually unresolved about the ontology of the playtext. I argue against any hierarchy of text and performance, proposing that each is supplemental to the other, in a Derridean sense, thus endlessly deferring authority. I also reposition the notion of artistic intentions, which I suggest are indeterminate, multiple and embedded in creative processes.

With this theoretical framework in place, Chapter Two draws on extensive research in the Arts Council archive to argue that an

effort to support new playwriting, paired with an erratic approach to the funding of alternative theatre, created a division between different kinds of new work. In Chapter Three, I analyse how an opposition between text and performance has frequently been used to define Drama as a discipline in higher education, while Chapter Four identifies conventions in mainstream theatre criticism that have perpetuated a hierarchical understanding of plays and performances.

The thesis concludes by examining a series of brief case studies, demonstrating both the diversity of approaches to text in contemporary English theatre-making and the restrictive implications of the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide for the ways in which new work is funded, taught and discussed.

Contents

Introduction

The English theatre sector of recent years has frequently been framed as an artistic and ideological battlefield. On one side – depending on the preferred terminology – is 'new writing' or 'text-based theatre'; pitted against it is 'new work', 'devised theatre' or 'non-text-based theatre'. Throughout the twenty-first century, this oppositional vocabulary has permeated opinion articles, theatre reviews, conferences, panel discussions, and academic books and articles.[1] Concurrently, and contrastingly, theatre practice itself has increasingly confounded simple divisions on the basis of text. The proliferation of new forms – interactive, immersive, site-specific, one-to-one, among others – renders a two-pronged understanding of English theatre insufficient, while the sustained drive towards collaborations of various kinds continues to blur the already porous boundaries between practices of writing and devising. As Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling assert, 'any simple binary opposition of devising to script work is not supported by the briefest survey of the actual practice of companies who choose to devise' (6). In spite of this, though, the perceived distinction between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work has continued to divide theatre practice and its

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[1] Examples include Alex Chisholm's article 'The End of "New Writing"?', a panel on 'Text / Non-Text Based Theatre' at the Turning the Page conference at the University of Reading in September 2013, and frequent reference to these terms in books by scholars such as Liz Tomlin (*Acts and Apparitions*) and Duška Radosavljević (*Theatre-Making*). I will refer again to these and many other examples throughout the thesis.

surrounding discourses in England; according to some, it is possibly the 'defining theatrical schism' of the early twenty-first century (Haydon, 'Theatre in the 00s' 61).[2]

This thesis sets out to offer a fresh perspective on this debate. It does so by addressing the misrepresentation of the relationship between text and performance that I believe underpins the perceived 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide and which is perpetuated by a number of key institutional structures. Typically, 'text-based' theatre is seen to follow a national theatrical tradition of play- and playwright-led drama, in which the integrity, authority and vision of the script is crucial, whereas 'non-text-based' usually describes theatre practice that is perceived to be opposed to this tradition (whether or not the work itself includes text). While I do not deny that there are differences in how text is treated in different theatre-making processes, I contend that the stark demarcation of work as either 'text-based' or 'non-text-based' misunderstands the nature of playtexts and reduces the huge range of contemporary theatre-making practices, thereby eliding or misrepresenting the work of many artists. The limitations of this divide first frustrated me while writing about English theatre as a blogger and critic. The work I was

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[2] In her summary of Anglo American literature on new writing, Sara Freeman usefully describes this opposition as 'the now well recorded sense of fissure in the late twentieth century between new plays and new works for theatre ("performance") driven by experimentalist approaches to body, visuality, ensemble, and language that resist mapping by authorship or text' ('New Writing' 117).

seeing struck me as thrillingly diverse in terms of style and approach,

while the discussion around that work was restrictively binarised. I

was also having conversations with theatre-makers who felt similarly

hemmed in by the labels 'text-based' and 'non-text-based', which

prompted me to begin writing about the dichotomy that I and others

had witnessed in the English theatre sector (Love, 'A Tissue of

Quotations'). Those early frustrated discussions laid the first

foundations for my doctoral research, which remains motivated by a

belief that the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide is

misrepresentative and limiting.

In analysing the perceived divide between 'text-based' and

'non-text-based' theatre in England, I have chosen to focus on what

can be broadly defined as new theatrical works. By this I mean the

first productions of new plays or pieces of performance, as opposed

to revivals of existing works. It should be acknowledged at this point

that approaches to the dramatic canon have had a significant impact

on perceptions of theatrical texts in an English context. W. B.

Worthen, for instance, has persuasively indexed changing attitudes

towards the playtext and its relationship with performance against

shifting cultural perceptions of Shakespeare's works, arguing in his

important 2010 study *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* that

the 'centrality of Shakespeare to English-language literary and

theatre studies provides a paradigm of the understanding of drama in

print culture' (*Drama* 1). As Shakespeare's work – and, by extension, drama more broadly – became celebrated as literature, 'the stage itself came to be understood as like a printing press, as a means to *re*produce an already existing play' (*Drama* 2, original emphasis). Evolving understandings of the role of performance in restaging canonical dramatic works, therefore, have played a crucial part in how we as a culture conceive of the relationship between text and performance today. Meanwhile, new versions of classic plays can offer fertile territory for interrogating approaches to the text and assumptions about its authority. There is also a compelling argument to be made that new performances of old texts have a claim to being defined as 'new theatre', creating as they do new productions, in new circumstances and cultural contexts, for encounters with new audiences.[3] Indeed, such an understanding of revivals might go some way towards unsettling dominant hierarchies of text and performance by foregrounding the work that is commonly described as 'interpretation' (as opposed to the 'creation' typically ascribed to playwrights).

Nonetheless, I have chosen to exclude the staging of classic texts from this investigation. This is partly for reasons of scope: an

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[3] It could be claimed that there is a particularly strong argument at present for considering revivals as 'new theatre', following an increasing trend in English theatre for what are popularly described as 'radical' or 'revisionary' stagings of classic plays. There is a growing acceptance of the notion that classics can withstand directorial interventions, which sometimes sits at odds with attitudes towards new plays. I address this in Chapter One.

examination of attitudes towards the theatre text in English revivals

could be the subject of an entire thesis by itself. My main interest,

furthermore, lies in how the bifurcation of English theatre-making and

the misconceptions of the theatrical text that sit beneath this divide

have affected practitioners making new work. Although innovative

approaches can also be brought to old plays, it is new work that is

commonly viewed as the 'lifeblood' of a nation's theatre culture,

introducing new techniques and concerns to the existing repertoire.[4]

If this new work is constrained, it has consequences for the entire

theatre ecology. With this in mind, three of the chapters in this thesis

address contexts that I believe are crucial to the development and

discussion of new work: Arts Council subsidy, higher education and

theatre criticism – all of which, I suggest, perpetuate the

misunderstandings of text and performance I go on to address in

Chapter One. I discuss each of these contexts in more detail below.

        First, though, a brief note on the contexts that this research

might be seen to neglect. It could be argued that one decisive factor

in how new work is staged and received is the programming policy of

theatres. Artistic directors, producers and programmers are the

individuals who decide what makes it to the stage and, to a large

extent, how that work is framed. Although these decisions are

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[4] The Arts Council, for instance, has described both new playwriting and
experimental theatre-making as the 'lifeblood' of theatre (ACGB, *Annual Review
1968-1969* 25; Projects Committee).

important, and I would welcome more research into how venues

develop and programme artists,[5] I maintain that these decisions are

made *within* the larger framework of national subsidy. Without

dismissing the power held by regularly subsidised theatres or the

impact of those institutions' internal systems and traditions on

contemporary theatre-making, I am interested in examining the

structures of Arts Council funding that determine the resources

distributed to those theatres. Decisions made at this level, I argue,

have been more significant in creating and perpetuating the 'text-

based'/'non-text-based' divide, affecting as they do the decisions

available to individual theatres, as well as setting national cultural

policy. That is not to say that funding straightforwardly determines

the programming behaviours of theatres, but it does to a

considerable extent establish the contexts in which the artistic

leaders of those theatres make decisions. Another potential influence

on the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide is the expectations of

audiences. Could it be that theatregoers hold certain shared

understandings about the relationship between text and performance

and that practitioners are therefore limited by what their audiences

expect? While audiences are relevant to this discussion, it would be

almost impossible to conduct accurate audience research over the

period I am looking at, leaving me with little more than speculation

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[5] At an industry level, there has been some useful work gathering information about how subsidised theatres support emerging artists. See Venues North and Hannah Nicklin.

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and generalisation. Furthermore, I would contend that theatregoers'

expectations are shaped (though, again, not entirely determined) by

the public discourses that are in turn heavily influenced by my three

principal areas of investigation.

Arts Council subsidy is widely accepted as crucial to the

support of new work, although its role in this area has rarely been

investigated in any great depth.[6] One important exception is *Giving*

Voice to the Nation, an AHRC-funded research project run by the

University of Reading and the Victoria and Albert Museum between

2009 and 2014, which began to explore and catalogue the Arts

Council's archive – a rich resource that remains surprisingly

underused. In Chapter Two, I draw further on this archival material,

arguing that the Arts Council's approaches to new work have

significantly shaped the theatre sector over the last 70 years. Higher

education institutions, meanwhile, play a crucial role in nurturing the

next generation of theatre-makers, as well as helping to stimulate –

and sometimes financially support – new work. Here, too, as I

explore in Chapter Three, a version of the 'text-based'/'non-text-

based' divide is largely upheld. Finally, as I go on to argue in Chapter

Four, reviewers have frequently perpetuated the perceived divide

between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre and reinforced

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[6] This link is observed but not examined, for example, in Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt's *Dramaturgy and Performance*, while the *Modern British Playwriting* and *British Theatre Companies* series comment on Arts Council funding in their introductions.

flawed assumptions about theatre texts. Theatre criticism is another

under-explored component of the theatre sector, which I believe is

overdue critical examination.[7]

This thesis seeks to capture as much of the vast scope of

subsidised new work in England as possible. At various points

throughout, illustrative examples provide a focus for wider points, and

I turn to a series of brief case studies in Chapter Five. But my aim,

rather than to discuss specific practitioners or organisations at length,

is to reflect the diversity and complexity of the English theatre

ecology. My tendency to draw on geographical and biological

metaphors – to describe English theatre as a 'landscape' or an

'ecology' – feels apt in this regard. Reflecting on her own use of the

word 'landscape' in relation to theatre criticism, Duška Radosavljević

suggests that this dictates a

> focus on a wider and more geologically layered context: in
> this case the layers include cultural, geographic, economic,
> philosophical, technological, historical and authorial
> considerations. (*Theatre Criticism* 2)

Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri find the 'instability and ubiquity' of

the term, which suggests at once 'a systematicity and a coherence'

along with a 'fundamental fuzziness', particularly productive for the

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[7] The existing literature primarily consists of practical how-to guides and subjective summaries of theatre and/or criticism written by current or ex-critics. See Mark Fisher (*How to Write About Theatre*), Irving Wardle (*Theatre Criticism*), Ian Herbert and Michael Billington (*One Night Stands; State of the Nation*). One notable exception is Radosavljević's 2016 collection of essays (*Theatre Criticism*), which offers a much-needed scholarly overview of critical practice(s) and how these are shifting in the twenty-first century.

field of Performance Studies (12). These aspects of landscape as metaphor make it equally fitting for describing the English theatre sector, which can seem at once coherent and messy, formed of and by many overlapping layers. Ecology, meanwhile, as a field of knowledge that investigates 'the relationships between living organisms and their environment' (OED, 'Ecology, N.'), resonates with the complex interrelatedness of theatres, companies, artists, funders, scholars, educators, critics and other players. The structure of the English theatre sector – 'comprised of a complex and interconnected range of organisations' (BOP Consulting and Graham Devlin Associates 17) – is far from straightforward.

Situating English theatre

The word 'theatre', writer, performer and director Chris Goode suggests,

> is now not only so capacious as to cover every denomination to be found within our present 'broad church' …, but also so contested that it could conceivably be applied to practices that have literally nothing in common. (*The Forest and the Field* 41)

His comment, written in 2015, captures both the heterogeneity of the contemporary English theatre sector and its fraught internal politics of self-definition. The contested nature of English theatre has been particularly visible over the last decade or so, as debates over 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre – including debates over the very viability of those terms – demonstrate. In 2009 theatre-maker Andy

Field was one of the first to publicly rail against 'a spurious divide in theatre between "text-based" and "devised" work' ('All Theatre'), which as he observes was regularly agitating both practitioners and commentators on online forums in the early years of the twenty-first century. Though distinctions between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' persisted, as Cathy Turner observed the following year, 'at least their relationship now seems to be on the agenda' ('Writing for the Contemporary Theatre' 77). A couple of years later, Alex Chisholm expressed her desire to bring 'an end to the … unnecessary opposition between New Writing and New Work' (Chisholm), provoking a fresh wave of discussion about the contending terms. Unpicking the divide observed in these examples, however, demands an understanding of the complexity of the 'broad church' that is English theatre in the twenty-first century.

First, a word on geography. This thesis explicitly investigates 'English' rather than 'British' theatre, despite the fact that the latter has usually been favoured by scholars in this field.[8] My decision to focus on English theatre, though, is both honest and pragmatic. While my initial aim was to look at the theatre sector across the UK, I realised early in the research process that the practices and conditions I was responding to are largely confined within the borders

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[8] While my investigation remains focused on English theatre throughout, I do at several points in the thesis refer to 'British theatre' where this is the term used by scholars I am engaging with.

of England, and that I was in danger of conflating 'contemporary English theatre' with 'contemporary British theatre'. It is my wish to avoid this misrepresentation and to respect the distinctiveness of theatre practices and cultural contexts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Pragmatically, meanwhile, my focus on subsidy makes it logical to examine English theatre separately from that of other British nations. Since 1994, subsidy has been devolved to Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, the Welsh Arts Council and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and even prior to this, arts funding in Scotland and Wales was relatively autonomous. The funding structures in question, then, are largely specific to an English context.

I believe, furthermore, that there is a set of approaches to the theatrical text that is distinct to England and does not pertain in the same way to the rest of the UK. Here I depart slightly from scholars such as Jen Harvie, who in *Staging the UK* claims that British theatre historiography has created 'a narrative which constructs British drama and theatre as uniquely and consistently literary' (113). While I am equally critical of such historiography and believe, like Harvie, that the assumed primacy of text and writer is partly a product of material conditions, I contend that it is more accurate to describe the critical tendencies and institutional structures identified by Harvie as

specific to *English* theatre rather than *British* theatre.[9] This is a

potential objection that Harvie herself acknowledges, but which she

addresses by 'try[ing] to look at theatre that is not only English' (146),

whereas I am arguing that these conditions reflect something

particular to English theatre culture. While the theatre of Scotland,

Wales and Northern Ireland cannot be cleanly divorced from that of

England, and there are many flows of influence back and forth, the

performance cultures of these nations differ from England's in some

crucial ways, which I will here briefly outline.

As Trish Reid points out, there is an 'absence of a continuous

distinguished playwriting tradition in Scotland' (40),[10] while thanks to

twentieth-century companies and theatre-makers such as Glasgow

Unity and John McGrath, who built on popular performance forms

that stretch back much further, there is an important tradition of

politicised populism in Scottish theatre. This has been consolidated

by the post-devolution founding of the building-less National Theatre

of Scotland (NTS) in 2006, whose internationally successful

production of *Black Watch* (2006) followed in the tradition of

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[9] Many academic studies of British theatre similarly have a disproportionate focus on England (and often, within England, on London). The *British Theatre Companies* series, for instance, profiles 16 companies based in England, two based in Scotland, and none based in Wales or Northern Ireland (Bull, ; Saunders, *British Theatre Companies 1980-1994;* Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies: 1995-2014*).

[10] There are many, complex reasons behind this absence (or, as some have argued, perceived absence), some of which are helpfully addressed by Ian Brown. Whatever the cause, though, the crucial point is that 'the role of Scottish playwriting had different roots and different kinds of prominence from English theatre-writing' (Brown, 'Introduction' 2).

McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973) with

his company 7:84 (Scotland). *Black Watch*'s director John Tiffany

has suggested that '[f]uelled by variety, visual art, music and a deep

love of storytelling, Scotland's artists have created a form of theatre

that is as significant and vital as its written drama' (Reid 16). Thanks

to a complex web of interconnected factors, storytelling and popular

forms have been as influential for the development of Scottish

theatre as its dramatists, if not more so. Among Scotland's most

prominent contemporary playwrights, meanwhile, the likes of David

Greig and Anthony Neilson are known for their embrace of

collaborative and experimental ways of working, throwing into

question some of the text-led orthodoxies that dominate south of the

border.[11] Reid posits, furthermore, that Scotland's particular brand of

popular, often genre-blurring theatre may have been important for

'asserting its difference' from its neighbour (49). It is striking, also,

how quickly NTS has established itself in the Scottish theatre

landscape, with a significant emphasis on experimental, site-specific

and community projects over large-scale, main-stage shows.

When National Theatre Wales (NTW) was established in

2009, its model was largely inspired by that developed by NTS. It too

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[11] Greig was one of the founding members of the experimental theatre company Suspect Culture (1993-2009), while Neilson typically develops his plays during the rehearsal process in collaboration with actors. I discuss Neilson's work briefly in Chapter Five. It should be noted, though, that both Greig and Neilson have worked widely in England, demonstrating that it is far from straightforward to isolate English theatre from its neighbours.

is a national theatre without walls, and much of its work to date has been site-specific and community focused. Prior to the founding of NTW, Wales had a more piecemeal theatre network than either Scotland or England, with a strong amateur tradition but relatively few professional theatre venues. Several of its better-known theatre companies, meanwhile, were from what might be considered a 'non-text-based' or physical theatre background: Brith Gof, Pearson Brookes, Frantic Assembly (who formed in Swansea before later relocating to London) and Volcano Theatre, to name just a few. Welsh theatre has been described as 'expansive, interdisciplinary and experimental', with much of its homegrown work 'blur[ring] the distinctions between theatre, live art and dance' (Geliot and Gomez). Furthermore, alternative theatre in Wales has been actively supported since the 1970s through institutions such as Chapter Arts Centre, Moving Being and the Centre for Performance Research (previously Cardiff Laboratory Theatre), as well as having an academic counterpart in the Performance Studies department founded at Aberystwyth University by Brith Gof's Mike Pearson in the late 1990s. Since its inception, NTW has commissioned and partnered with many of the artists nurtured through such channels, reflecting a stylistically diverse theatre culture.[12]

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[12] This theatre culture also includes a significant strand of Welsh-language theatre, funding provision for which has been criticised in recent years (BBC).

Finally, theatre in Northern Ireland has arguably been shaped

more by political and religious forces than by artistic ones. Civil

unrest during the Troubles forced many theatres to close for

extended periods, while 'theatrical performance regularly found itself

at odds with the self-perception of Ulster Protestant identity'

(McDowall 327), thus hindering the development of a local theatre

culture. Ophelia Byrne characterises Northern Irish theatre as 'a

theatre struggling to articulate an artistic and political line presenting

its society's "own way of things"' (Byrne), a description that implies

how the nation's theatre has grappled with attempts to define itself in

relation to its Irish and British neighbours. Even prior to the

partitioning of Ireland in 1921, Mark Phelan suggests that the Irish

National Theatre Society displayed an 'unwillingness to cross [the]

proto-partitionist border' ('Gap of the North' 597), hence excluding

the North from its imagining of a national theatre culture. With the

exception of the Ulster Literary Theatre (1902-1934), furthermore,

Northern Irish playwrights were largely neglected by the theatre

establishment in their own country until the 1970s. All of this meant

that there was not a national playwriting tradition to anything like the

same degree as in England. When greater commitment to Northern

Irish playwrights did emerge, there was a reductive expectation that

they must engage with the Troubles, which have continued to

dominate notions of Northern Irish theatre even in what might be

termed a 'post-conflict' landscape (Phelan, 'Troubles to Post-

Conflict'). In the twenty-first century, meanwhile, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland stresses the importance of the country's independent theatre sector, which encompasses a wide range of practices, often outside of traditional theatre settings.

Having briefly delineated some of the ways in which Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish theatre cultures are distinct from their English counterpart, it is nevertheless important to stress that English theatre is not being made or seen in a vacuum. All the practices, discourses and institutional structures that I discuss are located within a British and a wider globalised theatrical context, as well as in the specifically English set of conditions that I go on to explore. Especially in the context of rapid technological development and ever-increasing connectivity, all theatre is being made, shown and received – to greater and lesser extents – on an international platform, with online communication and dissemination eroding some (though certainly not all) of the old borders.

Within England, there is a complex network of theatres operating on a variety of scales and financial models. The English commercial sector is comprised of London's West End and numerous regional receiving houses, many of which are owned by large companies such as Ambassador Theatre Group and Delfont Mackintosh, and which mount shows presented by commercial

producers. The subsidised sector, meanwhile, ranges from the

National Theatre, to high profile London-based theatres such as the

Almeida Theatre and the Royal Court Theatre, to large regional

producing houses, to arts centres, small theatres, and touring

companies. Alongside these, there exists a constellation of small,

unsubsidised theatres generally referred to as the fringe (although

the terminology is contested).[13] There is also, despite the lines often

drawn between them, regular traffic between subsidised and fringe

theatre and the commercial houses of the West End, while

organisations such as the National Theatre have established

commercial arms to facilitate the transfer of their most successful

shows. As a report commissioned by the Arts Council in 2016 noted,

'[c]ollaborations between the subsidised and commercial sectors …

have increased' over the last 20 years (BOP Consulting and Graham

Devlin Associates iii). Outside of (but connected to) this convoluted

web of theatres, meanwhile, there are many independent, non-

building-based theatre companies running on a range of models and

scales, as well as individual theatre-makers producing their own

shows. Many of these practitioners receive regular or occasional

support from the Arts Council on a project-by-project basis.

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[13] In a 2015 article titled 'Fringe theatre? There's no such thing', theatre critic Lyn Gardner argued that the term 'doesn't really reflect the range of activities taking place' ('Fringe Theatre?'), while her colleague Andrew Haydon has questioned the meaning of 'fringe' at a point in time when 'the sorts of theatre made in the original fringe venues have now become mainstream staples' and suggested that the fringe has become a 'staging post for actors and directors trying to reach the mainstream' ('Fringe Theatre').

For the period 2018-22, Arts Council England is providing regular funding to 844 organisations in its National Portfolio, of which 190 are theatre organisations. All funding is now offered over fixed periods, with companies having to reapply for National Portfolio status when that period expires. National Portfolio funding for the theatre sector ranges from £16,700,000 a year for the National Theatre to annual grants of under £100,000 for smaller organisations such as Camden People's Theatre and the Tobacco Factory Arts Trust (ACE). Companies that are not part of the National Portfolio can apply for financial support for individual projects through Grants for the Arts, the Arts Council's open-access funding programme, while the Council also targets specific areas through its strategic funding strand. Although my interest is in work that is typically classed as 'subsidised', theatres and companies funded by the Arts Council also rely on several other sources of income, including box office, sponsorship, commercial transfers, local authority funding and funds from trusts and foundations. The Arts Council's increasing emphasis on corporate sponsorship as part of subsidised theatres' income is briefly addressed in Chapter Two. While local authorities also form an important part of the arts funding make-up of England, these bodies generally have broader (and often instrumental) aims for arts activity in their areas and are therefore less likely to be concerned with the specific theatrical forms they fund. Especially in

times of austerity, many local authorities have focused their attention on the ways in which the arts can support local health, educational and environmental objectives (Harvey). Furthermore, local authority funding for many theatres has shrunk in recent years as a result of cuts from central government, declining by more than 50% between 2008/09 and 2014/15 (BOP Consulting and Graham Devlin Associates 1), and therefore making up a decreasing proportion of many theatres' income. For these reasons, as well as considerations of scope, I have excluded local authority funding from the remit of this project.

Within such a complex theatrical ecology, ideas of the 'mainstream' and that which lies beyond it – onto which the categories of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' have often been mapped – become complicated. For all the oppositional rhetoric of much 'alternative' theatre (which I discuss further in Chapter Two), there has long been overlap and interpenetration of mainstream and fringe. In 1971, the Arts Council suggested that the influence of alternative theatre on larger companies was 'already clearly perceptible' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1970-1971* 49); eight years later, the distinction between fringe theatre and mainstream was 'being blurred in several ways', with the Council identifying fringe companies performing in established theatres and playwrights who began their careers on the fringe writing for the National Theatre

(ACGB, *Annual Review 1978-1979* 10). By 1980/81, according to the
Arts Council, 'the proportion of [commercial transfers] originating
from so-called "fringe" or "alternative" companies [was] almost equal
that from mainstream companies' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1980-1981*
10). Thanks to outward-looking artistic directors, such as Nicholas
Hytner and his successor Rufus Norris at the National Theatre, this
movement from 'fringe' to 'mainstream' has arguably increased even
further in recent years. Writing in 2016, theatre critic Lyn Gardner
asserted that

> [t]he mainstream's magpie-like tendency to alight on what
> glitters and nab a bit for itself is apparent on the well-funded
> stages of the big flagship companies, in the West End, and
> in every form of theatre from puppetry and circus through to
> verbatim theatre. ('Look before You Leap')

Meanwhile Matt Trueman claimed at around the same time that '[i]t's
hard to think of any artist in British theatre who couldn't sit within the
current NT programme' ('What Happens').

        If, as Trueman argues, '[e]xperimentation has become hard-
wired into our theatre culture' ('What Happens'), then distinctions
between mainstream and fringe/alternative are difficult to uphold
when surveying the contemporary theatre landscape. There remain,
however, distinct inequalities in how individual theatres and
productions are supported, with a world of difference between
heavily subsidised institutions such as the National Theatre (or even
the seemingly 'alternative' Battersea Arts Centre, which was awarded

£693,897 of annual National Portfolio funding from the Arts Council

for 2018-22) and small companies surviving on project-by-project

funding. Historically, there has also been an imbalance between

London and the rest of the country, which the Council's current

policies acknowledge and aim to address. Research commissioned

by the Arts Council itself found in 2016 that it supports 'a very

uneven portfolio' with 'definite peaks and troughs in terms of funding,

geographical coverage and the size and scale of organisations' (BOP

Consulting and Graham Devlin Associates 70). Furthermore, the

work referred to by Gardner and Trueman has largely entered the

mainstream on specific and limited terms. While Hytner achieved an

impressive opening-up of the National Theatre to new practices

during his tenure, these practices were often located both physically

and metaphorically outside of the main building. Shows by

companies such as Shunt and Punchdrunk were (admittedly as much

by necessity as by choice) sold through rather than hosted by the

theatre, while much of its most experimental work could be found in

temporary festivals and spaces such as Inside Out, Watch This

Space and The Shed.[14] In terms of funding, scale and audiences,

meanwhile, playwright-led theatre continues to dominate; as the

British Theatre Consortium's 2014 repertoire report found,

'individually-written new theatre forms the majority of work presented

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[14] Rosalind Haslett even suggested, writing in 2011, that 'the division which has emerged in attitudes towards theatre space might be viewed as the physical marker of a perceived dichotomy between modes of production: those supporting "new work" as opposed to those supporting "new writing"' (358).

on British stages' (47).[15] An investigation of how funding and significance are assigned to certain practices over others, therefore, remains an important project.

My research into Arts Council funding and policy builds upon some valuable recent contributions to a previously under-investigated field. Jane Woddis's PhD thesis, written in the early years of the twenty-first century, represents an early investigation into the role of arts practitioners in the cultural policy process. This work offers useful insights into the Arts Council's approaches to new writing and the extent of practitioner involvement in policy-making, though it is tightly focused on the case study of the playwrights' groups that formed from the mid-1970s onwards and its scope is restricted by the limited availability of Arts Council archival material at the time. Woddis's work shares some ground with Jacqueline Bolton's doctoral project (*Demarcating Dramaturgy*), completed in 2011, which looked at differences in dramaturgical practice between English and German theatre cultures, in the process also touching on the divide in England between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. In particular, both in the thesis and in a subsequent journal article published in 2012 ('Capitalizing'), Bolton persuasively asks that we consider the 'new writing boom' of the 1990s and 2000s as

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[15] In 2014, new plays accounted for 51% of what the authors of the report designated 'straight theatre', followed by postwar revivals at 20%. Devised work, meanwhile, formed 15% of the repertoire (BTC et al.).

the result of a series of financial and structural developments rather than as a spontaneous flowering of talent. Her attention to the conditions of production is one that I extend, albeit with a focus on national funding and policy rather than on individual theatre institutions. A further worthwhile aim of Bolton's thesis was to stimulate greater dialogue between academia and the theatre industry, inviting more scrutiny of those structural features of the sector – such as funding and programming – that have largely proved unattractive to scholars.

One significant attempt at such a dialogue was the *Giving Voice to the Nation* project (2009-2014), which investigated the theatre archive of the Arts Council of Great Britain and began to explore the funding body's impact on theatre practice over time.[16] The project resulted in a series of guides to the structure and content of the archive, three conferences (two of which I attended), and a series of publications on specific aspects of the research team's findings in the archive.[17] This represents the most extensive investigation of the Arts Council's archive to date and has laid important foundations for other researchers. The survey of the archive undertaken by the research team has made it easier to access and navigate the

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[16] Bolton worked on this project as a post-doctoral researcher.
[17] See University of Reading. Among the publications resulting from the project was the *British Theatre Companies* series. Taryn Storey also completed her PhD on the development of new writing in post-war British theatre as part of this project, but unfortunately I have been unable to access this research.

labyrinthine folder structure, while the books, chapters and articles

emerging from the project provide useful models for how the material

in the archive might be applied and interpreted. Furthermore, the

conferences brought together speakers from across the academy

and the industry, including contributions from scholars,

commentators, practitioners and producers. Still, though, I believe

that there could be more of the dialogue called for by Bolton. While

there is considerable cross-fertilisation between academia and what

might be considered 'experimental' or 'alternative' theatre

practitioners – many of whom are indeed employed by universities –

it strikes me that there is less interest in critical conversations

between academics and those working in (for want of a better term)

the subsidised mainstream. These are the conversations that I hope

my research can begin to open up.

Finally, before moving on, a note on censorship and the

subsidised theatre sector in England. Until the Theatres Act of 1968,

scripts for public performances had to be submitted to the Lord

Chamberlain for approval, effectively prohibiting the creation of work

that did not have a pre-existing script. This had a significant impact

on the funding of new work in the first two decades of the Arts

Council's existence, helping to establish precedents that favoured

plays and playwrights.[18] Censorship also reinforced many of the

misconceptions about the relationship between text and performance

that I go on to discuss in Chapter One. As Helen Freshwater notes,

'[t]he Lord Chamberlain's staff did their best to subdue theatre's

unpredictable communicative potential by chaining it to a single text',

thus denying the multiplicity of performance ('Anti-Theatrical

Prejudice' 53). Yet the Lord Chamberlain's archive also reveals that

'the censors struggled with theatre's ephemerality and slippery

elusiveness', illustrating 'performance's evasion of the authority of

the text' (55). In several instances, performances of licensed scripts

took on new, undesirable (from the censor's perspective) meanings

in performance despite careful vetting of the text. As Freshwater puts

it, '[a]ll theatre negotiates the gap between the text and the spoken

word or physical gesture' (56). The failures that followed from the

censor's denial of that gap reveal something about the nature of the

relationship between text and performance, which – as I will go on to

propose – is far more complex than popular understandings have

allowed. In order to argue for this complexity, it is necessary to make

an intervention in existing theoretical discussions about text and

performance.

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[18] The Arts Council did discuss the possibility of funding work that flouted or
circumvented censorship (for example through performances in private theatre
clubs), but it decided in 1967/8 not to support presentations of any unlicensed
plays, despite receiving funding applications from theatre companies without pre-
written scripts.

Theoretical divides

Any project that interrogates the text today does so in the wake of poststructuralism. Since the late 1960s, concepts of objective truth have received an intellectual battering, as have the authority of language, texts and authors. As John Freeman wryly notes, '[t]hat there are no absolutes in our world has become quite possibly the sole absolute of 21st-century life' (*New Performance* 74). Poststructuralist theorists challenged many of the traditions and assumptions of Western philosophy, unsettling seemingly stable notions of meaning and truth. This theoretical context informs the field in which I am attempting to intervene. Poststructuralist theory has had a profound impact both on the discipline of Performance Studies and on questions of text specifically. While there are aspects of this theory that I find useful in unpicking misunderstandings around the relationship between text and performance, I also want to suggest that some of the ways in which poststructuralist ideas have been taken up by scholars and theatre-makers have unhelpfully served to reinforce a perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre.

Following the interventions of thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, the identity of texts, their relation to their authors and the process(es) of interpreting them have all come under question. Barthes' 1967 essay 'The Death of the

Author' announced an effort to shift analytic emphasis away from the biography and intentions of the author and towards the multiple interpretations of the reader. In this essay, which challenges the stranglehold of authorial intention on interpretations of texts, Barthes famously asserts that 'to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author' ('The Death of the Author' 148). While this does not necessarily entail the denial or expulsion of the author's intention, as some have read it to imply, it does unsettle familiar interpretive procedures that take intention and its grounding in the author's biography as the ultimate goal of literary criticism. Writing in 1969, meanwhile, Foucault separated the writer as *individual* from the author as regulating *concept*. He calls this regulating concept the 'author function', which 'manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture' ('What Is an Author' 107). Again, intention is not jettisoned, but authorship is revealed as a construct and the idea of the author as a self-expressive individual is emphatically rejected.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to prior models of understanding text and language in this period, though, came from Derrida. Derrida's typical deconstructive manoeuvre, rather than reversing the hierarchy of the binaries underpinning Western culture (speech and writing, say), demonstrates that the privileged term in

any given binary shares with its other the negative qualities attributed

to that other, and that each side of the binary bears the trace of the

other within it. This 'trace of otherness in the selfsame' (Belsey 87) is,

for Derrida, constitutive of language. Deconstructing Western

metaphysics, Derrida refuted the belief that writing is a corruption of

pure, originary speech. Instead, for Derrida, the 'supplement' (in this

instance, writing) that produces the sense of real or pure presence

reveals that such real or pure presence has never existed; there is

nothing, in other words, beyond supplementation. I return to

Derrida's notion of the supplement in greater depth in Chapter One,

but the crucial point here is that he unsettled a long-held opposition

between speech and writing. For Derrida, furthermore, linguistic

meaning depends both on difference (the definitions of words are

determined through reference to other words) and on deferral (the

idea that the signifier both supplements and supplants the pure

concept to which it is supposed to refer, which is forever deferred) –

the two words captured and intermingled in the French pun

différance, the term invented by Derrida to describe the process of

making meaning through language (*Of Grammatology*). This view of

language disrupted the philosophical and linguistic traditions based

on what Derrida calls 'the metaphysics of presence' by denying the

possibility of any pure concept or authority to which we can appeal to

decide meanings.

As Marvin Carlson has noted, the association of performance with poststructuralist theory was a useful way for its early champions to differentiate it from theatre (*Performance* 57). The terms on which scholars and practitioners of performance have eagerly seized on poststructuralism, however, can and should be challenged. In her 2013 book *Acts and Apparitions*, Liz Tomlin astutely reapplies the poststructuralist theories to which many theatre-makers and academics have turned in recent decades, questioning the radical credentials of much of the performance work operating under this influence. What has emerged, she suggests, is 'the repetition of a series of conventions which had grown out of the first tentative conclusions to the emergence of Derridean deconstruction', threatening to create a 'new totalising narrative' within contemporary performance that is 'predominantly constructed on the basis of a growing scepticism of the real' (*Acts and Apparitions* 6). Meanwhile, according to Tomlin, the binary that already existed within the British theatre sector 'undoubtedly bolstered the ideological alignment of text-based work as "reactionary" and non-text-based work as "radical"' (10); poststructuralism was simply offering a new vocabulary with which to critique 'text-based' forms and champion their 'non-text-based' counterparts. 'Text-based' theatre was seen to uphold the now discredited authority of the author, while 'non-text-based' work supposedly offered a radical challenge to this authority

and to representational forms based on the eroded concept of 'the real'.

Revisiting the work of Derrida and its application to performance, Tomlin argues that – contrary to claims that performance replaces representation with presence – theatre on both sides of the binary is 'always already representational' (*Acts and Apparitions* 76). While Derrida's work has often been used to support critiques of dramatic theatre and advocate an end to representation, Tomlin's re-reading convincingly demonstrates that an escape from representation is, in Derrida's own terms, impossible. Although it is possible to deconstruct dramatic realism on the basis that the 'reality' it represents cannot appeal to any kind of absolute truth, Derridean deconstruction also dictates that we are endlessly caught up in the play of representation, supplementation and deferral. In a discussion of Antonin Artaud and the failure of his 'Theatre of Cruelty', for example, Derrida states that representation 'has no end' (*Writing and Difference* 316) and that '[p]resence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already been penetrated' (314). Debunking the claims of performance work that locates its radical potential in its non-representative 'presence', Tomlin suggests instead that poststructuralist interrogation might be constituted by self-reflexive performance practice that examines and reveals its own representational structures. Her crucial point is that

> [a]ccepting that every narrative is implicitly ideological does not equate to the acceptance that any given narrative is thus beyond ideological analysis or distinction. (*Acts and Apparitions* 6)

She is ultimately proposing an 'insistence on ideological distinctions' (34) that could productively change what we perceive as constituting radical performance today, though it is not entirely clear what this self-reflexive insistence might look like in practice.

In recent years, the rise of the term 'postdramatic theatre' has reinforced the divisive ideological alignments critiqued by Tomlin. The vocabulary arose from Hans-Thies Lehmann's 1999 book *Postdramatic Theatre,* which gave the name 'postdramatic' to a series of developments in theatrical form in the latter part of the twentieth century. Dramatic theatre, in Lehmann's terms, is defined by its reference to a whole world or *logos* and its presentation of a narrative; it 'proclaims wholeness as the model of the real' (22). Postdramatic theatre, on the other hand, is

> more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information. (85)

As opposed to a theatre of action and plot, postdramatic theatre is a 'theatre of states' (68), in which the possibility of developing a narrative is abandoned or relegated to the background. By the time Lehmann's study was published in an English translation in 2006, its eponymous terminology had already found currency among a

generation of scholars and theatre-makers, particularly in continental Europe but also increasingly in the Anglophone world. In her review of *Postdramatic Theatre*, Elinor Fuchs notes that 'for the English reader the book by now has the peculiar fate of being both prophetic and behind the times', suggesting that '[o]ne doesn't even have to read the book to adopt its central term' ('Postdramatic Theatre' 178).

Peter M. Boenisch, though, has warned against the imprecisions of mapping Lehmann's influential observations onto a UK context. He argues that, because of the existing schism between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre in Britain, Lehmann's study has been misapplied to British theatre practice, and that we should not simplistically distinguish between different forms of contemporary theatre based on the presence or non-presence of the text – that, indeed, to do so is to misunderstand Lehmann's arguments. He suggests instead that by thinking of postdramatic theatre as a challenge to 'the earlier paradigmatic aim for synthesis, coherence, and closure' we can easily 'deconstruct the antagonism between "devising" and "text-based theatre" as rather a product of ideological and culture-economic desires' (163). I largely agree with Boenisch's caution here and wish to echo his argument that the importing of Lehmann's vocabulary has had an antagonising impact on an already divided English theatre sector. However, I also believe that the use of the dramatic/postdramatic distinction to shore up an

existing divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre in England is at least partly rooted in Lehmann's ambivalence towards text.

When addressing the role of text in theatrical performance, be it dramatic or postdramatic, Lehmann's book is riddled with contradictions. Early on, for example, he asserts that one of the essential qualities of *all* theatre is that on stage 'the text is subject to the same laws and dislocations as the visual, audible, gestic and architectonic theatrical signs' (17), but later it is seen as specifically characteristic of *postdramatic* theatre that text 'is merely a component with equal rights in a gestic, musical, visual, etc., total composition' (46). There are two ways, meanwhile, in which text features in Lehmann's 'panorama of postdramatic theatre': as the new, 'no longer dramatic' text, or as the classic dramatic text which is '*de-dramatized*' in its theatrical presentation (17, original emphasis). Both are under-developed by Lehmann. It is not clear what exactly constitutes a 'no longer dramatic' text, except that it 'continually reflects its constitution as a linguistic construct' (17). Anglophone readers are instead forced to rely upon Karen Jürs-Munby's introduction, in which she unequivocally states that postdramatic theatre does *not* exclude the text, making reference to writers such as Martin Crimp and Sarah Kane and thus actively encouraging the problematic and imprecise transfer of Lehmann's terms onto English

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practitioners (Jürs-Munby 6). Lehmann also insists that in

considering postdramatic theatre

> we have to include the observation that there are directors
> who may stage traditional dramatic texts but do so by
> employing theatrical means in such a way that a *de-dramatization* occurs. (74, original emphasis)

Once again, Lehmann deploys a term without expanding upon or

ever fully defining it; all we are told about such productions is that

they relegate dramatic plot to the background, supported with a few

specific examples of work of which Lehmann approves. Such

imprecision may suggest that the attempt to delineate opposing

categories with defined characteristics (such as dramatic and

postdramatic, or 'text-based' and 'non-text-based') is doomed to

failure, an idea that I will return to later in the thesis.

    While the idea of the postdramatic has been eagerly taken up

by many English scholars, it has also been subjected to important

criticisms. David Lane, arguing in the opposite direction to Lehmann,

insists that

> [w]e must extend the remit of drama to work that not only
> echoes characteristics of the dramatic theatre … but also
> shows innovations in form, performance environment,
> concept or audience-performer relationships.
> (*Contemporary British Drama* 10)

In other words, what is needed is not yet another term for further

parcelling up performance practice, but an expansion of existing

understandings of what constitutes the dramatic. Tomlin, meanwhile,

emphatically rejects the dramatic/postdramatic distinction, arguing
that

> the enthusiastic uptake of [Lehmann's] definition of the postdramatic, and his own focus on the 'dramatic' as the postdramatic's 'other', too often encourage the division of theatre practice into an either/or binary configuration. (*Acts and Apparitions* 51)

For Tomlin, such binaries are a distraction from genuine interrogation of the ideologies implicitly espoused by different pieces of performance. I would reiterate this, adding that these binaries also have troubling implications for the way different theatre practices are supported, staged, seen and discussed, as I go on to explore.

Tomlin's study is helpful both for exposing the ideological stakes involved in the binary between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' practices, and for establishing the intellectual context of current debates about the theatre text. I agree with Tomlin's contention that

> the conclusive alignment of ideological characteristics on the basis of form alone is ultimately self-defeating, and destructive to the future development of new strategies and contexts in which radical models of performance … can be conceived. (*Acts and Apparitions* 12)

In order to question the political claims made by various pieces of performance, the divide between different forms on the basis of their perceived relationship to text needs to be unpicked. My approach to this task, though, differs from Tomlin's in a few crucial ways. Tomlin asserts that

> [t]he legacies of the avant-garde, the rise of performance studies, and the emergence of the postdramatic have combined to produce a discursive act which positions representational strategies and dramatic realism as politically moribund in order to assert the radical efficacy of new performance practices in the postmodern era. (*Acts and Apparitions* 46)

While I am not seeking to deny or displace these important factors, I also want to draw attention to other forces behind the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' binary in a specifically English context, concentrating less on the political claims of particular practices and more on how these practices came to be seen as opposed. For Tomlin, the binary between dramatic and postdramatic, or 'text-based' and 'non-text-based', is 'underpinned by a poststructuralist scepticism of representations of the real' (*Acts and Apparitions* 8), while I am arguing for the importance of other economic, epistemological and discursive factors. I also go back to conceptions of the relationship between text and performance, suggesting that the misunderstandings underpinning the current binary can be located here as well as in the application of poststructuralist theory to contemporary performance. Furthermore, Tomlin's argument that late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century performance practice threatens to constitute a 'new master narrative' (*Acts and Apparitions* 34) in its discourse of radicalism and resistance is complicated by the fact that much of this work – both economically and in terms of audience numbers – remains relatively marginal to the English theatre sector.

Defining the terms

While my concern throughout this thesis with the opposing categories of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' could be seen as mere quibbling with terminology, I believe that these terms and the implications they carry in English theatre culture have tangible effects, as do other uses of vocabulary. One relatively straightforward example of how particular labels can lead to material impacts is the categorising of different theatre practices for funding purposes, something that has caused numerous headaches for the Arts Council and its clients alike. But other uses of terminology throughout the discourse surrounding contemporary English theatre, while not so directly linked to concrete financial implications, also affect the whats, hows, wheres and whys of theatre practice. It is crucial, therefore, to begin defining and interrogating this terminology at the outset. Below, I set out the slippery and confusing array of terms relating to this discussion, outlining some of their connotations before pragmatically settling on the vocabulary that I will be adopting for the purposes of this study.

I have already introduced a selection of terms on either side of the binary I am analysing: 'text-based' theatre, dramatic theatre or new writing versus 'non-text-based' theatre, postdramatic theatre, new work or devising. These terms are often used interchangeably,

but they have varying associations. There is also the slightly older

distinction between theatre and performance, arising from the

scission of these as objects of study during the emergence of

Performance Studies as a discrete discipline in North America.[19]

Writing in 1996, Fuchs observes that

> the term 'theater,' floating far from its old associate 'drama',
> has itself become a proliferating source of meanings. New
> terms have sprung up in efforts to distance new
> performance modes from dramatic theater or to associate
> formerly distinct performance modes with theater.
> Performance, performance art, art performance, solo
> performance, the 'performance piece', even *performance
> theater* have arisen, all with different shades of meaning
> intended to edge them differently away from association
> with the more closed and traditional forms of dramatic
> theater. (*The Death of Character* 7, original emphasis)

As Fuchs suggests here, the definition of new terms or the

redefinition of old ones is often with the intention either to distance or

to ally certain practices from or with others. In some cases, as with

the example of postdramatic theatre, this terminology arises from

scholars and commentators; in others, it is deployed by practitioners

seeking differentiation and self-definition.

As discussed above, the dramatic/postdramatic binary has

been widely adopted in academic contexts, although it poses

problems when applied to the English theatre sector. Within the

sector itself, 'new writing' and 'new work' have often been the

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[19] This disciplinary separation of theatre and performance is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

favoured terms in recent years.[20] 'New writing' is sometimes used

simply to mean the staging of new plays, but more often it implies

certain *types* of plays and the infrastructure of literary management

that supports them. According to Aleks Sierz's restrictive but

influential definition, 'new writing' is drama that is 'written in a

distinctive and original voice that speaks of the here and now';

mirroring much of the marketing material and public discourse that

surrounds these shows, Sierz's 2011 book describes this work as

being characterised by novelty, contemporary subject matter and

youth (*Rewriting the Nation* 65). For Bolton, on the other hand, 'new

writing' simply refers to 'the first production of an individually

authored unpublished play', regardless of content or style

('Capitalizing' 209). Even the authors of *New Writing in Theatre*

2003-2008, a report commissioned by the Arts Council, admit that

'there was not one definition of new writing that would satisfy

everyone' (Dunton, Nelson and Shand 7). 'New work' is similarly ill-

defined; it is perhaps easier to identify what it is *not* than what it *is*.

Following the expansion of new play development in the 1990s and

2000s and the growing currency of the term 'new writing', 'new work'

emerged as its counterpart. It has thus become a vague catch-all for

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[20] These are the terms taken up by Chisholm and discussed by Haydon in his introduction to British theatre in the 2000s ('Theatre in the 00s'). They are also referred to throughout the 2009 reports *Theatre Assessment 2009* (Millman and Myers), *Writ Large* (BTC) and *New Writing in Theatre 2003-2008* (Dunton, Nelson and Shand), although in these contexts 'new work' is used somewhat interchangeably to refer at times to all new theatre and at others to work not originating from a solo-authored text, demonstrating the problematic nature of these terms.

contemporary theatre not falling under 'new writing', including

practices variously defined as devised theatre, contemporary

performance or performance art, as well as site-specific, immersive

and interactive work (and this is not an exhaustive list). The

imprecision of these terms – as well as the possibility of confusing

'new work' as a vague aesthetic category with new theatrical work in

the broader sense in which I am employing it – leads me to set them

aside at this stage, although they will appear again in the writing of

some of the scholars, critics and practitioners I cite.

Devising is another term that has frequently been set in

opposition to 'new writing'. For Field, '[t]o devise is simply to invent',

an all-embracing definition that can encompass a whole variety of

practices with a range of different approaches to text ('All Theatre').

This, though, is an unusually expansive application of the

terminology. In their 2006 book *Devising Performance*, Heddon and

Milling offer a helpful overview of its more typical definitions:

> Devising is variously: a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between life and art; the erasure of the gap between performer and spectator; a distrust of words; the embodiment of the death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge for spectators; an

expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental; non-literary. (4-5)

This list of various possible meanings deliberately highlights some of the ideological associations that devising has frequently taken on. As discussed by Tomlin, this work is often seen as inherently radical and experimental, signalling a break from the text-dominated mainstream. Alison Oddey likewise states that '[d]evised work is a response to the playwright-director relationship, to text-based theatre, and to naturalism', describing devised theatre as being concerned with 'the collective creation of art' (4). Others, such as Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender, define devising in terms of process: it is 'a method of performance that starts from an idea or concept rather than a playtext' (2). Generally, it is seen as collaborative, 'non-text-based', and in some sense opposed to playwright-led theatre.

Despite deep intellectual and emotional investments in particular terminologies, though, these definitions often break down under scrutiny. Unpacking the ways in which 'devising' processes have been distinguished from 'text-based' ones, Mark Smith reveals the difficulty that such definitions experience in sustaining clear differences from practices to which they are seemingly opposed. Supposedly defining characteristics of devising such as working collaboratively in a group can be applied to all performance, while attempts to define the beginning of a devising process – and therefore delineate such processes with reference to the lack of a

script at this stage – also run into problems when applied to examples of practice. Many productions that would typically be categorised as devised, for instance, begin with some sort of text as an impetus, while 'the work of the archetypal writer in the garret also starts "from an idea or concept" which is then fleshed out into a playtext' (Smith 28). This is further complicated by the many processes in which playwrights work alongside companies from the early stages of development, such as in the making of Frantic Assembly or Kneehigh shows. Smith persuasively concludes that

> the question of 'beginnings' is problematic whether discussing 'devising' or 'text-based' processes – and in fact this might be seen as an indication that it is divisive and misleading to separate 'devising' so distinctly from an imagined text-based mainstream. (30)

Addressing similar difficulties in differentiating devising from text-led work, Radosavljević proposes that 'devising increasingly requires to be seen as a ubiquitous creative methodology rather than a genre of (non-text-based) performance' (*Theatre-Making* 68). While I do not wish to erase the oppositional role of devised theatre at a particular point in English theatre history, I agree with Radosavlejvić that 'devising' can no longer sustain genre status. Indeed, as Radosavljević notes, devising methodologies are now frequently used within processes that might otherwise be seen as text-led, dissolving any perceived binary between the two.

While questioning their premises, for the rest of this study I will be taking up the terms 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' to describe what are perceived to be the two opposing camps within the English theatre sector. I choose this vocabulary both because of its prevalence in the existing literature and because of its explicit reference to the text, which I believe is crucial to the binary I am attempting to unsettle. There is, I believe, something conceptually unresolved about the relationship between text and performance, which sits beneath the persistent schism in English theatre. The theoretical slipperiness of the playtext is a problem that I directly address in Chapter One, although it also recurs elsewhere in the discourses of funding, education and criticism. Regular references to 'the text' embedded within the central terminology of the thesis, therefore, serve both as a reminder of what is being investigated and – I hope – as a prompt to keep revisiting what we mean by 'text' in a theatrical context. My aim in deploying this terminology is to strike a balance between observing the perceived divide in the English theatre sector and problematizing and undermining that divide. While I will frequently have cause to invoke the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' binary, this is not with the intention of reiterating or reinforcing it – a possibility that I remain alert to in a thesis that must necessarily repeat the very terminology it is contesting.

Those discussed above are not the only problematic terms in this field. Namings have been particularly multiple and contested in the area known variously as fringe, experimental, alternative or avant-garde – terms which have all, at one time or another, stood in for the 'non-text-based' side of the binary I am discussing. In certain cases, such as in Harvie and Lavender's 2010 collection *Making Contemporary Theatre*, the word 'contemporary' even comes to represent certain, favoured forms of performance practice, suggesting that such practices are synonymous with the present day (and, by implication, that productions of plays are outdated). Harvie notes in the book's introduction that 'our particular inflection in the term "contemporary" emphasises not immediate temporality so much as a focus on innovative, emergent practice' (3). This is a reductive yoking of form and newness that I wish to eschew, and therefore 'contemporary' can be read throughout this thesis as carrying temporal rather than aesthetic connotations. The demarcation of the contemporary is, like any form of periodisation, both loaded and slightly arbitrary, but for the purposes of this study it can be taken to refer to the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

It should be recognised, before moving on, that all these terms are in constant flux. As Anne Millman and Jodi Myers observed after surveying a wide range of English subsidised-sector practitioners and

organisations for an Arts Council commissioned report in 2009, the

early years of the twenty-first century

> saw a shift in the language used by some theatre
> practitioners to describe what they do: there was more
> reference to 'theatre making' and the terms 'experimental'
> or 'performance art' were less frequently used by
> practitioners or commentators. (35)

Millman and Myers also introduce the possibility that these changing

self-definitions might have been 'influenced by funding criteria' (35),

a suggestion that I return to in later chapters. Beth Hoffman,

meanwhile, has suggested that there has been a similar, ongoing

tension for live art practitioners between a resistance to fixed

definitions and 'the necessity to remain recognizable enough to the

Arts Council to secure funding for the work' (101).[21] Definitions thus

serve pragmatic as well as discursive purposes, mutating in

response to the requirements of funding and official legitimation.

They are also historically determined, representing not the

culmination of a long series of purposeful events and decisions, but

rather the temporary outcome of often haphazard developments.

Practices and discourses are always changing, but how we got to

where we are – including the consequences of various choices and

accidents along the way – remains a crucial question to ask.

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[21] Live art sits on the edges of the work I discuss in this thesis, sometimes
conceived of as distinct from theatre and hosted in different institutional sites (such
as art galleries) and sometimes intertwined with and directly influencing theatre
contexts. Hoffman has argued that from the 1960s onwards drama and live art
were 'in many ways mutually constitutive and always already deeply enmeshed in
one another as they developed' (97), disavowing a binary between the two in much
the same way as I hope to unpick the binary between 'text-based' and 'non-text-
based' theatre.

How did we get here?

As noted above, the practices and debates I am responding to can largely be located in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The most thorough and wide-ranging study of how theatre practice in these years has challenged old assumptions and binaries is Radosavljević's 2013 book *Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century,* which provides an important point of departure for this study. Radosavljević's use of the term theatre-making – which, as she observes, has increasing currency in the English theatre sector – helpfully dissolves any implied hierarchy between text and performance or any division between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' practices. She defines theatre-making as

> a deprofessionalized, collaborative activity that takes an active and integrated intellectual and embodied approach to the notion of theatre authorship (whether or not it is based on text). (*Theatre-Making* ix)

This term is applied to developments in a number of seemingly distinct theatrical processes – the staging of classic texts, devising and adaptation, new writing, verbatim theatre and what Radosavljević dubs 'relational works' – in order to demonstrate an increasing dispersal of authorship and transcendence of text/performance hierarchies.

Radosavljević's focus is on 'particular changes taking place at the beginning of the twenty-first century' (*Theatre-Making* 193), and for her these changes are driven primarily by the theatre-making strategies of artists rather than by external, contextual factors, although the study does acknowledge the influence of economic, epistemological and training structures. The book is, by its own admission, 'primarily concerned with working methods' (ix) and thus its scope does not allow for in-depth analyses of these contexts, whereas I am looking in greater detail at institutional frameworks such as funding, education and reception. While I agree with Radosavljević that the work of many theatre-makers today refutes any simplistic division between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based', my contention is that these divisions are nonetheless perpetuated by a complex, interlocking set of economic and institutional contexts. I also want to question Radosavljević's suggestion that certain work 'transcends' the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' binary, arguing instead that the terms themselves are not fit for purpose.

Most recent surveys of contemporary English (or, more commonly, British) theatre are, like Radosavljević's, closely focused on the work of practitioners. Here, yet again, the divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' can be observed. The existing literature tends to fall into one of two camps: studies of playwrights and plays, such as Vicky Angelaki's edited collection *Contemporary British*

Theatre: Breaking New Ground (2013), the Methuen Drama *Modern British Playwriting* series (2012-2013) and Aleks Sierz, Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer's *The Methuen Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights* (2011); and studies of devising or performance practice, prominent examples including Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling's *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (2006), *Making Contemporary Theatre* (2010), edited by Andy Lavender and Jen Harvie, Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart's *Devising in Process* (2010)*, Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (2007) by Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, and Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (1994). The *British Theatre Companies* series (2015-2016), published by Methuen Drama and offering an interesting counterpoint to its *Modern British Playwriting* texts, includes a wider range of case studies, though all the companies it features are defined to a greater or lesser degree against a perceived mainstream of play-producing theatres. While the contexts of funding, education and criticism are important backdrops in many of these studies, meanwhile, their primary interest lies firmly in theatre practice, not in the structures within which that practice takes place.

Alongside *Theatre-Making*, another exception to the bifurcation of practices witnessed above is Sarah Sigal's 2017 study of the role

of the writer in collaborative theatre-making. However, her insights are more useful for practitioners creating theatre texts in collaborative ways than they are for scholars seeking a new perspective on the relationship between writing and theatre-making. The book pursues well-worn narratives about the impact of funding and the evolution of the writer's role in line with the needs of collaborative theatre companies, while Sigal's consideration of the relationship between text and performance fails to get to the heart of the issue. Sigal favours 'text' over 'play' and 'writer' over 'playwright', but her reasons for doing so underestimate the complexity of the playtext. For instance, she adopts Field's description of text as 'a blueprint for performance and a basis for making something happen' because this definition 'feels usefully open and flexible in this context, rather than the more conventional term "play", which feels like a different kind of text for performance' (14). As I discuss later, though, plays are just as 'open and flexible' as the 'texts' Sigal contrasts them with. Her claim that 'text' is a more neutral term, meanwhile, ignores the vast discourse around text and textuality that has influenced Performance Studies since its inception. These are gaps that I address in my theoretical discussion in Chapter One.

Despite foregrounding the contemporary context, from which my interest in this research area was born, a large part of the thesis re-interrogates the developments in the second half of the twentieth

century that have contributed to the current situation. While

contemporary attitudes towards the theatre text could be traced back

much further – to the publication of Shakespeare, as Worthen

discusses, or through the long history of theatrical censorship – I

have chosen to examine the period from 1945 onwards. This is partly

influenced by existing approaches to periodisation, which frequently

use the end of the Second World War as a threshold between one

theatrical era and the next.[22] More significantly, though, the years

immediately following the war mark the establishment of two

institutions that are central to my study: the Arts Council in 1946 and

the first English Drama Department at the University of Bristol in

1947. The state subsidy of theatre and the acceptance of Drama as

an independent academic discipline suggest a shift in the cultural

perception of theatre-making – a shift that I think is pertinent to

considerations of text and performance in English theatre. I want to

remain aware, though, of Claire Cochrane's argument that

> [t]he problem with watersheds is that undue emphasis
> underestimates the extent to which political attitudes and
> cultural practices do not change that easily or that quickly,
> or indeed can be reversed. (12)

An understanding of that which persists (especially when looking at

understandings of the theatre text) is therefore as important as

investigating what has changed. Accepting that 'period concepts are

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[22] For example, this period marker is used by John Elsom in *Post-War British Theatre* and by Michelene Wandor in *Post-war British Drama: Looking Back in Gender*. The end of the Second World War also acts as the starting point of several chapters in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre* (Kershaw) and of *Played in Britain: Modern Theatre in 100 Plays* (Dorney and Gray).

basic and essential generalizations' (Postlewait 192), I am retaining the mid-1940s as a starting point while attempting to stay alert to the ways in which our construction of historical periods can shape our critical thinking.[23]

My approach to this recent English theatre history is partly inspired by Foucault's concept of 'genealogy'. Genealogy is for Foucault an approach to the past that 'must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality' ('Genealogy' 76), rejecting the idea of an 'unbroken continuity' (81). This methodology, inspired by the thinking of Friedrich Nietzsche, acknowledges the world as a 'profusion of entangled events' (89), denying the historical myth of unified origins. To provide a genealogy, for Foucault, is

> to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that give birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us. (81)

This resonates particularly with some of the under-explored contexts that I am reassessing, where 'accidents', 'errors', 'false appraisals' and 'faulty calculations' can all be seen to have played a (rarely recognised) role in how we as a culture have come to value certain theatrical forms.

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[23] Thomas Postlewait has persuasively argued that '[n]ot only do we impose schemes onto history that produce and sanction our conclusions …, but we fail to appreciate how the concept of periodization acts as a controlling generalization, an unconscious or unarticulated presupposition' (191).

The interaction between past and present is a crucial concern throughout this thesis. Michael Shanks helpfully distinguishes between the image of 'a separate past being distorted by a biased present' and a (more sophisticated) understanding of 'the unity of the present-past' (Pearson and Shanks 7). There is an echo here of Foucault, who described his genealogical approach as 'writing the history of the present' (*Discipline and Punish* 31). I thus turn to the past with a series of questions that are firmly rooted in the present. In doing so, I set out to provide an alternative view of recent English theatre history, arguing that the multiple roots of our present, binarised culture can be traced back to small choices or accidents, as well as to mythologised moments of aesthetic departure. This kind of reassessment, I believe, still has a place in theatre history. Historians 'create something – a meaning, a narrative, an image – which stands for the past in the present' (Pearson and Shanks 11). A self-reflexive knowledge of this subjective, never definitive act of creation can co-exist with Tomlin's idea that, in the wake of poststructuralist challenges to truth and authority, our choice of which narrative to propagate is more important than ever. The narrative that I set out in this thesis is one that interrogates previously overlooked areas of influence and questions ossified myths and binaries, all with the intention to better understand the present.

In accounting for both the ways in which institutional structures largely define and confine new work, and the ways in which theatre-makers are occasionally capable of disrupting or expanding the structures within which they exist, I find it useful to turn to Raymond Williams' definitions of 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' culture in *Marxism and Literature*. Despite cleaving to a Marxist analysis of dominant culture, Williams argues that when undertaking historical analysis

> it is necessary at every point to recognize the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance. It is necessary to examine how these relate to the whole cultural process rather than only to the selected and abstracted dominant system. (121)

In other words, 'abstract dominant systems' cannot account for the complexity of culture, which includes many small and shifting 'movements and tendencies' – all of which exist *within* the dominant system, but not all of which align with hegemonic values. Cultural processes over time, according to Williams, involve not only the 'dominant', but also the 'residual' and the 'emergent'. The residual 'has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process … as an effective element of the present' (122). These 'residual' elements present alternative ways of thinking to those of the dominant system, and can thus be distinguished from other aspects of previous cultures that have been absorbed by the 'dominant' culture of the present. The 'emergent' is likewise defined not simply as new but as oppositional in relation to the 'dominant'

culture. Williams also notes that emergence is uneven and that initially oppositional practices may often be incorporated into the 'dominant' culture. While I am not undertaking a Marxist analysis in this thesis, I believe that Williams' three terms are versatile historiographical tools, allowing for both continuity and novelty and offering a framework for understanding how 'dominant' institutional structures and discourses limit but do not exhaustively control artistic activity.

As the above paragraphs suggest, I do not have one clear theoretical allegiance that guides my research throughout this thesis. Instead, I have engaged with a range of different theoretical models, including poststructuralism, cultural materialism and analytic philosophy, alongside ideas drawn from sociology. At times, as when drawing on both the poststructuralist and analytic traditions in Chapter One, I attempt to bridge these typically opposed intellectual camps, demonstrating how their ideas might speak to one another within specific contexts. My research methodology has also involved extensive engagement with a number of archives: the Arts Council of Great Britain archive at the Victoria and Albert Museum; the archives held at the University of Bristol containing documentation related to Glynne Wickham and the founding of the university's Drama Department; and back issues of the publication *Theatre Record*, which collates mainstream theatre criticism. These archives are all

'susceptible to a state of incompleteness, to a kind of failure of memory' (Gale and Featherstone 24), providing only partial images of the institutions they represent. The history I have been able to construct on the basis of this fragmentary evidence might therefore be seen as 'not so much a survey of what was, as an investigation of what might have been' (Davis et al. 97).

Chapter One establishes the theoretical framework for the thesis, beginning from the position that there is something still unresolved about the way in which we understand the relationship between text and performance. I open by interrogating the idea of artistic intentions in relation to theatrical performance, arguing against constructions of intention as monolithic and authoritative. I then attempt to break down any hierarchy of text and performance by turning to Derrida's notion of the supplement, which I propose might illuminate the relationship between texts and performances. Derrida appears again in a section exploring the relationships of playtexts to different contexts, in which I draw on the concept of iterability. Finally, I suggest that rather than being 'open' or 'closed', playtexts are characterised by a mixture of determinacy and indeterminacy.

In Chapter Two, I turn my attention to Arts Council policy and patterns of subsidy, which I propose have – through both design and accident – played a crucial part in shaping the English theatre

landscape of today and in creating the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' practices. I investigate the perennial struggle within the Arts Council between responding to artistic activity and setting policy priorities, tracing how this tension has affected funding for new theatre. While new playwriting was an early beneficiary of directed Arts Council policy, I suggest that other forms of new theatre suffered from the Council's erratic growth and disjointed network of panels and committees, ultimately creating a divide between different kinds of theatre-making practice on the basis of their perceived relationship to text.

Chapter Three argues that the relationship between text and performance has frequently acted as a site of contestation at the boundaries of disciplines and fields of knowledge, both within academia and between the academy and the professional theatre sector. This has served to perpetuate some of the misunderstandings of the relationship between text and performance that I address in Chapter One and, I suggest, has again contributed towards a binary between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. Borrowing established frameworks for analysing developments in higher education, I investigate the origins of Drama as a university discipline in England, its evolution in the decades since, and the impact that has been made more recently by the emergence of Performance Studies. My suggestion is that alignment with and

resistance to dramatic texts has variously bolstered the authority of Drama (and/or Performance Studies) as a discipline, reinforcing the perception of a divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre.

Chapter Four explores the important yet overlooked role of theatre criticism in shaping the binary between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. I discuss the position and purpose of popular theatre criticism in England, before examining the current attitudes of theatre critics, both in print and online. Using a sample of theatre reviews from two separate years in the twenty-first century, I identify patterns and conventions within critical responses to new work, analysing how these are again underpinned by flawed assumptions about the playtext and informed by an implicit hierarchy of text and performance. I also look at recent shifts in the critical landscape in England and ask whether these have the potential to change how critics shape the discourse around new work.

Finally, Chapter Five teases out further implications from the preceding chapters by turning to a series of specific examples. This chapter opens with a broad survey of contemporary English theatre-making, demonstrating that the simplifying categories of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' are insufficient to encompass the wide range of current theatre practices, which work with and without text(s) in a

multitude of different ways. I then turn to three more in-depth case studies: writer, director and performer Tim Crouch, independent theatre company Action Hero, and the *Open Court* festival at the Royal Court Theatre. These are each discussed from the perspectives of the four previous chapters: the relationship between text and performance; the ways in which the work has been funded; the work's relationship with higher education contexts; and the critical reception with which it has met. As I aim to demonstrate here and throughout the thesis, there is nothing inevitable or straightforwardly descriptive about the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. It is a binary underpinned by a flawed conceptual understanding of how theatre works and constantly re-enacted by institutional structures that divide and compare work on the assumed basis of its relationship to text.

Chapter One

Rethinking Texts and Performances

Theatre texts are peculiar and troublesome items. They have been understood both as separate literary objects in their own right, studied and interpreted in the same way as novels or poems, and simultaneously as material for performance, with the external space of the theatre inscribed in their structure. Worthen identifies the duality of the theatre text when he writes that '[o]n the one hand the text of the play appears as a single fabric, to have a specific shape, size, and texture, a kind of organic wholeness', but on the other hand, 'in performance the text becomes material for use, used and used up' (*Drama* xiii). This has created a persistent difficulty in theorising the theatre text in its different forms; because of its dual identity, the play presents itself as something of a paradox, an object at once complete and incomplete. Meanwhile, reductive understandings of the nature of playtexts have served to underpin and reinforce an opposition between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. Indeed, the very terminology of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' relies upon a narrow interpretation of playtexts that, I contend, elides much of their inherent complexity.

In retheorising the playtext and its relationship(s) with performance, I am deliberately taking a step back from the contentious notion of authorship. Within play-led producing structures, the playwright is still often understood as the primary 'author' of the theatrical event, whose 'vision' is the driving force that directs the rest of the creative team.[1] Meanwhile, ever since Barthes sounded the death knell of the author in 1967, other theatre-makers have been attempting to subvert and evade the theocratic authorship identified by poststructuralists.[2] Often, moreover, the question of authorship has sat at the heart of debates about the relationship between text and performance and oppositions between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. There is the fraught question, for example, of the extent to which authorship can be shared and who ultimately holds responsibility and authority within a collaborative process, complicated further by the legalities of copyright. I wonder, though, if interrogations of theatrical authorship are in fact misplaced and fail to get to the bottom of how we understand playtexts and their intersection with performance. By focusing too heavily on the

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[1] Simon Stephens, for instance, has discussed how actors are 'used to using the playwright's text as a bible' (vii), while a figure like Arnold Wesker represents the extreme of this belief in fidelity to the author's vision (Wesker). See also the references in footnote 5 below.

[2] See Liz Tomlin for a discussion of this trend in contemporary performance (*Acts and Apparitions* 51-76). Tomlin notes that 'Barthes' conflation of literal author and the metaphorical authorship of meaning … does lend itself to misinterpretation when applied to the field of theatre in which multiple "authorities" combine in the production of the final work, text-based or otherwise' (*Acts and Apparitions* 60), but her proposed solution of adopting Foucault's 'author function' sidesteps the question of intentionality. It should also be noted that there is a longer tradition of subverting the notion of authorship in theatre, which dates back at least as far as the birth of director's theatre at the turn of the twentieth century.

question of who is identified as the author of the live event, we are liable to elide the underlying issues that might lead us to regard authorship as problematic in the first place. The concept of the author, I suggest, stands in for ideas around intention and authority, and therefore it is these ideas that need unpicking.

In this chapter, I outline a series of propositions concerning the ontology of playtexts and their relationship(s) with performance. Reaching across the divide between analytic and continental philosophy, I draw on key concepts from Derrida's theory of language while also borrowing from analytic thinking and attempting to pursue that tradition's clarity of argument. First, I reposition the concept of intention in relation to plays and performances, arguing that artistic intentions are indeterminate, multiple and embedded in creative processes. Here I am resisting both the deference to authorial intention that characterises the play-producing theatrical mainstream and the reflexive dismissal of intentionality among many performance scholars. I then seek to deconstruct hierarchies of text over performance and vice versa by proposing that both playtexts and performances are supplements, in a Derridean sense, for an absent, ideal 'work', to which they refer and defer. I also draw on Derrida's theory of iterability in exploring the relationships of playtexts to different contexts, making the argument that playtexts and performance contexts mutually influence and alter one another.

Finally, I suggest that rather than being 'open' or 'closed', playtexts are necessarily composed of a mixture of determinate and indeterminate elements. Throughout the chapter, I gesture towards the implications these propositions have for theatre practice and demonstrate how a retheorisation of playtexts and performances erodes some of the foundations of the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' binary. While the theoretical discussions in this chapter have implications for *all* playtexts, and therefore I refer to classic texts – with long performance traditions from which I can draw pertinent examples – as well as new texts, for the purposes of this thesis it is the impact on new work that I am ultimately most interested in.

Intention

Despite the volume of literature about artistic intentions, intention in theatre-making remains largely untheorised. In existing studies of literary intention, discussion of intention as it pertains to dramatic literature is marginal or absent,[3] while theatre and performance scholars have generally assumed, ignored or rejected the relevance of theatre-makers' intentions to interpretation.[4] This is another symptom of the playtext's peculiar ontology: dramatic texts are

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[3] For a selection of this literature from throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – both preceding and following Barthes' influential intervention in 1967 – see W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley (1946), E. D. Hirsch (1960), Alfred R. Mele and Paisley Livingston (1992), Colin Lyas (1995) and Kaye Mitchell (2008). Even in Livingston's study of artistic intention across multiple mediums there is not a single mention of theatre.

[4] For one of the few, brief discussions of intention in theatre, see Dan Rebellato's 2013 chapter 'Exit the Author'.

intentionally written to be produced more than once by different interpreters. Debates about how to (or whether it is possible to) determine the 'correct' interpretation of a text based on the writer's intentions, therefore, are not applicable in the same way to dramatic literature. Still, though, as we will see, much theatre-making in England remains wed to a rigidly intentionalist approach. Without entirely denying the relevance of intention to our understanding of plays, I believe that we need to rethink how artistic intentions impact on theatrical practice and do away with a limiting and monolithic notion of authorial intention.

Within new play producing structures in England, the director and creative team are typically perceived to be 'serving' the intentions of the playwright.[5] There are objections that might be made to this statement: many playwrights complain that their plays have been misinterpreted in production, while directors who proclaim to be 'serving the text' may in practice be more interested in their own concept for the production. Nonetheless, while it may be that serving the intentions of the writer is what English theatre *says* it

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[5] For examples of practitioners expressing this view, see Arnold Wesker and the playwrights and directors interviewed in Duncan Wu's 2000 volume on contemporary dramatists. The director's responsibility to realise the intentions of the playwright is also emphasised in English theatre textbooks such as Sally Mackey and Simon Cooper's *Drama and Theatre Studies*, published in 2000, and in several twenty-first century 'how to' guides (see Stephen Unwin, Katie Mitchell and Rob Swain). Meanwhile Harry Derbyshire, writing in 2008, discusses how in English new writing 'the collective process of theatrical production' is 'harnessed in the service of an individual voice' (131).

does, rather than what it consistently *does* attempt to do, this broadly

intentionalist position still privileges playtexts. To clarify what I mean

here by intentionalist, I want to borrow Alfred R. Mele and Paisley

Livingston's spectrum of attitudes towards intention, set out in their

1992 article 'Intentions and Interpretations', within which they identify

four positions: absolute intentionalism, strong intentionalism,

moderate intentionalism, and absolute anti-intentionalism. The

absolute versions of intentionalism and anti-intentionalism involve,

respectively, a belief that a text means only what its author intended

it to mean, or contrastingly that the author's intentions are irrelevant

to interpretation. Strong intentionalism holds that interpretations

should be limited to what the author *could* possibly have intended,

constraining admissible readings to the artist's context; moderate

intentionalism maintains the relevance of authorial intentions to

readings of a text while also allowing for interpretations that go

beyond what the author could have intended (941-44). A moderate

intentionalist, for example, might assign interpretive significance to

an anachronistic allusion that a text calls to mind, whereas strong

and absolute intentionalists would reject this connotation as

irrelevant. Other aspects of the moderate intentionalist's

interpretation, however, would refer to the intentions of the author,

which moderate intentionalism – unlike absolute anti-intentionalism –

holds as meaningful.

Absolute intentionalism and absolute anti-intentionalism are, I suggest, virtually never realised in theatre practice. A production of a play can never mean solely what the playwright intended it to mean because plays are, as I discuss later, in- or under-determinate texts. In performance, the meanings of the text cannot be limited to those intended by the playwright in composing it, because staging must always supply some elements that are absent from the script.[6] The very act of performing a writer's script, meanwhile, implies a relationship with that writer's intentions – what they *intended* to be conveyed on stage – even if most of those intentions are subverted. A script is an instrumental text, directed towards the end of performance(s), and so to create a performance from the starting point of a playtext is to refer to an intentional series of instructions and suggestions. The playwright's intentions are to some degree always relevant to the resulting performance; it was their *intention* that the script be staged, regardless of other intentions about the staging that might be ignored or contradicted. That is not to say that this is a binding intention, otherwise every play ever written would be staged, but it does to an extent determine how we encounter playtexts. Crucially, as I discuss further below, it determines that we read them *as* playtexts – texts for performance.

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[6] A production directed and designed by the playwright might come close to absolute intentionalism, but there are few (if any) circumstances in which every aspect of the staging is under the writer's control.

Productions of playtexts, then, might be loosely classed as

adopting either strong or moderate intentionalist approaches. Strong

intentionalism sets boundaries on interpretation, using the

playwright's reconstructed (possible) intentions – or, if the playwright

is present in the rehearsal room, their self-reported intentions – to

limit the meanings of a play. In the Globe's 'Original Practices'

production of *Hamlet* (2000), for instance, actor Mark Rylance and

director Giles Brock constructed an emotionally unstable protagonist

based on Shakespeare's presumed intentions, as reconstructed from

clues in the play (Adney). A moderate intentionalist production,

meanwhile, would treat some of the playwright's intentions as

relevant and maintain a clear relationship with what the writer was

(believed to be) attempting to achieve, but without allowing these

intentions to rule out other interpretations that speak to, supplement

or even enter a combative relationship with what is offered in the text.

Turning once again to *Hamlet*, an example of a moderate

intentionalist treatment is Ian Rickson's 2011 production at the

Young Vic, which used the anachronistic setting of a psychiatric

hospital to comment on Shakespeare's suggestions of madness. A

theatrical frame that was completely outside the author's possible

sphere of reference thus supported a largely intentionalist reading of

the play.[7] I use the example of *Hamlet* here because it is easiest to

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[7] Here it is worth noting the distinction between a *reader*'s interpretation and a *theatre-maker*'s interpretation. A director will read and interpret the text themselves and then add a further layer of interpretation in the act of presenting that text to an audience. It is therefore possible (as it may be argued was the case in this

discern the distinction between these approaches in two different

productions of a regularly-produced classic play. In England,

moreover, the staging of most new plays could be classed as

adopting a strong intentionalist approach, whereas moderate

intentionalism is more characteristic of productions of classics

seeking contemporary relevance.[8]

I propose that the strong intentionalist tendency in English

new writing is problematic for two principal, intertwined reasons.

Firstly, intention as typically imagined by these theatre-makers has a

rigid and singular character that I believe is misrepresentative of

artistic intentions. Secondly, this oddly monolithic intention is often

conceptualised as a pre-existing blueprint in the playwright's mind.

Together, these assumptions construct intention as something prior

to and divorced from the process of writing: a singular, external 'plan'

that may be discovered and 'served'. Furthermore, a prevalent

version of strong intentionalism which sees the playwright as the

principal source of a performance's meanings undermines the

creative contributions of directors and other artists and implicitly

devalues theatre-making methodologies that do not possess a sole

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instance) for an anti-intentionalist or moderate intentionalist directorial concept to
convey what is essentially a strong intentionalist reading of the play's meaning.
[8] This is also partly the result of a theatre culture in which new plays rarely receive
a second production until many years after their first (if ever). There is therefore a
perceived ethical imperative to grant the playwright 'their' version of the play and to
not misrepresent their intentions, as well as an understandable need to give
playwrights the opportunity to see their work 'on its feet' for the benefit of their
development.

writer and are therefore perceived to lack a strong, guiding 'voice', in turn cleaving these methodologies from 'text-based' practices.[9] The construction of intention as prior to, separable from and singularly authoritative over the playtext (and, by extension, performance) is therefore one that I am keen to dismantle.

First, though, it is necessary to address a question that has repeatedly troubled literary theorists: is an idea of intention *required* for us to derive meaning from artworks? Separating *necessity* and *relevance*, which bleed unhelpfully into one another in much of the literature on this debate, I propose that intention is a *necessary* condition for recognising a piece of theatre *as* theatre (or a playtext *as* a playtext), a proposition that does not commit me to a concomitant belief in the authority of the theatre-maker's (or playwright's) intentions over interpretations. I am inclined to agree here with Colin Lyas's argument that 'to be able even to describe something as a work of art … is to suppose intentional agency' (141). When watching a show, our understanding of it is predicated on the assumption that its makers have intended it as a piece of theatre. If we encountered a safety announcement (an expression of a different intention) or a scurrying mouse (not – we assume – possessed of conscious theatrical intention) on a stage, we would not understand

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[9] Complaints about the lack of a single intending and guiding voice are particularly notable in reviews of 'non-text-based' productions, as I discuss in Chapter Four.

these incidents as theatre unless it seemed to us that they were *intended* aspects of the event created by the theatre-makers. Similarly, when encountering a play on the page we are able to read it as dramatic literature thanks to a combination of the conventions of language and genre and the implied intention of a writer, the latter usually indicated by the attachment of an author's name to the published text. If we did not believe that an intending playwright had conceived a text as a play, then the lines conventionally marked out as stage directions, for instance, would have no meaning. When such conventions are broken, meanwhile, the role of intention becomes even more apparent. A text like Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* (1999), for example, might appear to be a piece of poetry, or even a collection of found textual fragments, were we not aware that she *intended* it to be a play. Even in the case of verbatim theatre, which *is* essentially found text, we understand such plays as theatre texts rather than arbitrary collections of testimonies because of the intentional intervention of an editor.[10]

One counter-argument is that it is possible to imagine scenarios in which meaning is read from texts that clearly have not been produced by an intending author but that nonetheless conform

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[10] This is again where publishing convention plays a role: verbatim texts are typically published with the theatre-maker who collected and edited the contributions named as the author.

to linguistic conventions.[11] The key to repudiating such objections, though, is suggested by Dan Rebellato's assertion that '[i]ntention is a precondition for a *certain type of meaning* to be derived at all' ('Exit the Author' 20, my emphasis). This 'certain type of meaning' can be explicated by borrowing speech act theory's distinction between meaning and force.[12] Meaning, in this sense, refers to the meaning(s) of words as determined by conventional use. When I use a word, I cannot will it to mean anything I like; I use a word in the knowledge of what it means, or what it might mean, in the language in which I am using it. The meanings of individual words can be wilfully subverted, to an extent, but only within the conventional and relational networks of an already established language. The *force* of an utterance, meanwhile, refers to what the words achieve or perform. The semantic content (or possible contents) of a string of words can be ascertained purely by referring to linguistic rules, while the force of a statement cannot. Although a speaker's intention cannot control whether the force of an utterance is successfully conveyed, the very concept of force is dependent upon a notion of intention: we interpret this 'certain type of meaning', rightly or wrongly, because we believe it to be intended. Therefore, while we

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[11] See, for example, Mele and Livingston (933-34). It is interesting that thought experiments imagining intentionless meaning are often rather fanciful, perhaps suggesting how integral intention is to our way of thinking and the lengths to which we must go to attempt to get away from it. Another example is the 'wave poem' (Knapp and Michaels).

[12] This follows from Lyas's suggestion that 'sometimes the term "meaning" is used when we wish to ask … what the force of an utterance was' (145).

may glean meaning(s) of a certain, limited kind from an authorless

collection of inscriptions by applying the rules of language, we cannot

understand those inscriptions as possessing any force. Or, to put it

another way, they do not generate the sorts of meanings that lead

readers towards interpretation. This allows, then, for intentionless

meaning of a sort, while maintaining the necessity of intention for the

interpretations involved in staging a piece of theatre or reading a

play.

Although I believe in its necessity for a 'certain type of

meaning', I propose that common understandings of intention need

to be revised. Artistic intention as typically understood is too simple

and singular, and intentionalist and anti-intentionalist arguments alike

ascribe what I argue is too much internal clarity and coherence to

intentions.[13] Intentions, and thoughts in general, are by their nature

(and to greater and lesser degrees) indeterminate. As a number of

thinkers in the field of philosophy of mind have discussed, mental

images can be distinguished from visual perceptions by their

indeterminate nature:[14] a mental image 'leaves open certain facts

about its object' (McGinn, *Mindsight* 25). I can picture a table, for

instance, without knowing what colour it is, or I can imagine a dog

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[13] Consider, for instance, Wimsatt and Beardsley's definition of intention as 'a design or plan in the author's mind' (469). Mitchell also notes the prevalence of this blueprint model in the literature on intention.

[14] See Rebellato ('When We Talk' 21), Colin McGinn (*Mindsight* 12-39), Daniel Clement Dennett (92-93) and Edward S. Casey (104). This is also something that Ludwig Wittgenstein explores, as acknowledged by McGinn.

without specifying its breed. The imagined object is no less table-like or dog-like because of the lack of these details. While mental imagery and acts of thinking are not reducible to one another, indeterminacy is a shared characteristic of the two mental processes. An intention to express something in artistic form, therefore, can be understood in a similar way to my incomplete mental images of tables and dogs: the outline of an intention can exist without being fully fleshed out. The finer details of that intention are subject to change over time and as required, just as I must add detail to my mental image of a table if someone asks me what colour it is. To imagine intentions as clear and comprehensive, then, is to impose order and completeness on indeterminate thought processes.

Rejecting the blueprint model of a separate, pre-existing and complete intention that we can discover through examining works of art, I suggest that it is more accurate to imagine an interconnected multiplicity of intentions, none fully determinate and each with different implications for interpretation. Consider the intentions a playwright might have in writing a play. The overarching intention is the intentional act of setting out to create something, beneath which is the more specific intention to write a play. It is these two sorts of intention that permit interpretation, allowing us to consider the play an intentional object that was conceived and written *as* a play. Related to these, though, are many other intentions. These include

intentions about the writing: what the characters' objectives are, or the desired emotional impact of a scene. But they may also include intentions that anticipate the play's performance, over which the playwright has limited control. The playwright is, furthermore, likely to have some more abstract, aspirational intentions for the play. Not all of these intentions are equally relevant for those staging the play. The intentions that interpreters are generally more interested in are those concerned with aspects of the writing and their desired effects; these are the intentions that directors often claim to be 'serving'. For clarity, I am adopting Michael Hancher's category of 'active' intentions to describe this complex set of aims.[15]

None of these active intentions, I suggest, are necessarily irrelevant, and equally none of them can determine the meaning of the play. That is, these various intentions *may be* relevant to any given interpretation, but they *cannot* govern the proliferation of meaning. In individual instances, certain active intentions may be judged more relevant than others: assumed intentions that relate to the plot, for instance, might be considered more important than those suggested in the stage directions, or vice versa (or, in other instances, the two may not be separable). It should also be noted that these intentions cannot be definitively discovered by interpreters,

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[15] Writing in 1972, Hancher distinguishes between programmatic intention ('the author's intention to make something or other'), active intention ('the author's intention to be (understood as) acting in some way or other') and final intention ('the author's intention to cause something or other to happen') (829).

who must always make guesses and approximations. Furthermore, an understanding of intentions as multiple, indeterminate and at times even contradictory undermines any simplistic idea of serving them. The 2012 production of *Three Kingdoms*, for example, demonstrates the inadequacy of considering the writer's intentions as one homogenous set of aims that can be collectively fulfilled or discarded. While the active intentions of Simon Stephens' script were seen by some to have been ignored or obscured by Sebastian Nübling's direction, it was equally Stephens' *intention* to collaborate with Nübling.[16] There are also many implied active intentions in the script that Nübling's production did preserve, from character names to the overall narrative arc.

A further move away from the flawed blueprint model is to think of intentions in terms of *doing*. Although I am not convinced by her separation of textual intentions from an intending consciousness, Kaye Mitchell's objection that '[t]he mentalistic conception of intention ignores the practical aspect of intention involved in doing or acting' (17) prompts me to rethink intention in relation to process. Intentions, I contend, are not necessarily prior to acts; they may be considered inextricable from the *doing* of those acts themselves. To support this suggestion I turn, as Lyas does, to Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussions

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[16] Stephens has asserted that the playtext 'is simply *the starting point* of this specific production' (v, original emphasis). I discuss this example further in Chapter Four.

of language and thought in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). It is important to recognise here that Wittgenstein is dealing with thought as a concept and a grammatical construct rather than as a set of processes located in the brain; his interest lies in our use of words, not in psychological phenomena. It does not reveal anything about our use of the word 'think', Wittgenstein argues, to say that it represents an inner mental process. He thus questions the assumption that thought and speech are detachable from one another and that a thought precedes a spoken statement (much as intention is assumed to precede artistic expression). To see how intention might be located in doing, we can reflect on how we typically describe speech and thought. Rarely, I think, would we claim to have formulated a sentence as a specific string of words prior to speaking. We might say we have a basic intention immediately before speaking, which if interrupted we would later be able to recall to someone ('I intended to say…'), but the precise *form* of that intention emerges during the utterance, which constitutes it. Wittgenstein suggests that the 'lightning-like thought' that we understand as preceding a statement 'may stand to a spoken thought as an algebraic formula to a sequence of numbers which I develop from it' (112e). That is, the thought, like the formula, provides certainty that one will be able to go on to solve the problem, but it does not itself express the solution. It might be thought of as the key to the intention rather than the full intention itself. The

statement (or, for my purposes, the line in the play), not the 'lightning-like thought', is the expression of the intention, though the multiplicity of meanings opened up by language means that even here intention cannot be conceived of as complete and transparent.

Similar reasoning may be applied both to artistic intentions and to the ways in which we interpret them. Wittgenstein argues that the image of an unseen mental process which animates and gives meaning to speech does not accord with the circumstances in which we actually say that someone thought or intended something; we attribute thought and intention in line with observable patterns of behaviour, whether embodied or written. In this sense, to talk of a separate set of intentions that are located somewhere in the hidden depths of the brain contradicts the procedures through which we identify intention in the first place. The notion of an inner process, Wittgenstein concludes, has nothing to do with the role of the words 'think' and 'intend' in what he calls our 'language-games'. Active intentions, I suggest, can therefore be thought of as embedded in creative processes in the same way that an intention to say something is embedded in the spoken statement. A more process-oriented understanding of intention has the additional advantage of dissolving the stubborn Cartesian mind-body dualism entrenched in many theories of intention, as well as applying equally to the making-through-doing model of devising as to the isolated writing of the solo

playwright (which, of course, is often far from isolated and is as much a making-through-doing as devising is).

I believe that, rather than comprising a singular, comprehensive blueprint that exists prior to the writing of a play and may therefore be discovered by reading it, artistic intentions can be more accurately described as indeterminate, multiple and contained in creative processes. My conception of intentions thus invites interpreters to adopt a flexible approach to what the playwright may have intended. What I previously described as a strong intentionalist production of a play is not ruled out – a director may choose to treat all presumed intentions (or as many as they can identify) as relevant – but is unseated as the interpretive norm and revealed to be ultimately futile. Indeed, given the array of different, indeterminate intentions involved in a play, the likelihood of ever truly 'serving' the playwright's intentions is vanishingly small, even when – as in many English productions of new plays – the writer is present during rehearsals. Furthermore, when understood as multiple, indeterminate and embedded in process, artistic intentions might cease to be considered the primary possession of a playwright who is interpreted and 'served' by others, and instead become the shared preserve of theatre-makers working in countless different ways, with and without text.

The absent work

Another of the conceptual misconstructions underpinning the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide is an assumed attribution of originary authority to the playtext. Plays, as solo-authored scripts written (usually, but not always) prior to performance, can appear to be the definitive 'work' which different performances merely interpret. Just as the playwright's intentions are commonly seen as a blueprint for the script, the script is then seen as a blueprint for performance, against which any subsequent productions can be judged.[17] This, I contend, is another misunderstanding of the ontology of playtexts: the idea of a complete and authoritative 'work' has become conflated with the individual playtext, the intentions of which many performances strive to fulfil. Several performance scholars, on the other hand, have attempted to invert this relationship, arguing that 'organic unity is achieved *only* in performance, and that the text as written is incomplete' (Carlson, 'Illustration' 8, original emphasis).[18] For them, the performance represents 'the work', the completion of something that is only partial in the playtext. Instead, I argue, 'the work' is a forever absent ideal that cannot be located in either

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[17] See Worthen, who observes that the blueprint is one of the most popular metaphors for describing the relationship of the dramatic script to its performance (*Drama* 8). The same reductive view of the relationship between text and performance is common among scholars who favour 'non-text-based' performance. Carl Lavery, for instance, pejoratively characterises the playtext as 'the dramatic blueprint that performers conventionally strive to actualize and stage with accuracy and fidelity' ('Is There a Text' 37).
[18] Marvin Carlson describes this as 'the theory of performance as fulfillment' and offers a useful overview of its adherents ('Illustration' 8-9).

playtexts or performances. Recognition of this absence may, furthermore, dismantle the stubborn hierarchy of text and performance, with implications for theatre-making of all kinds.

This central idea of 'the work' requires further elaboration. Benjamin Bennett's identification of the necessity of the *idea* of theatre to drama as a literary genre is useful in delineating what I mean by this term. In his 1990 study *Theater as Problem*, Bennett theorised 'the ontological defectiveness of the dramatic text as merely written or printed', describing 'our sense, when we read a dramatic text in a book, that we are not receiving the *whole* work' (61, original emphasis). He argues that what distinguishes drama from other literary genres is the fact that its on-the-page identity is dependent on the external idea of the stage: to understand written drama, we must have some notion of theatrical performance. Bennett continues:

> If we agree that there is such a thing as the 'work' (the opus, the whole culturally effective entity), and that the dramatic text by itself is markedly defective …, then it follows that performance in a theater contributes to *constituting* the very object (the work) of which it is an interpretation. (67, original emphasis)

'Ontological defectiveness' is a phrase I would question, referring to my earlier point that both texts and performances may be understood as at once complete and incomplete. Indeed, if we follow this paradoxical logic of simultaneous completeness and incompleteness, we may want to question the notion of 'the opus, the whole culturally

effective entity' (I will return to this later). What I want to take from Bennett here, though, is his diagnosis of that nagging feeling that – at least in one sense – neither playtext nor performance quite provides an image of wholeness.

When I talk about 'the work', then, I am talking about that elusive completeness that we often sense is absent in both our reading of plays and our viewing of performances, however well they may stand alone. Bennett expands on this sense of absence, noting that when we are reading it the playtext 'markedly fails to represent the whole "work" for us', yet in the theatre,

> when we are confronted with an actual performance that we recognize as a *mere* interpretation, the text … now paradoxically does represent the object of interpretation (the work) after all. (73, original emphasis)

Texts and performances thus point perpetually toward one another, while there remains (or appears to remain) a central absence around which they both circle – a gap that, in an echo of Bennett, I am calling 'the work'. This is by no means a perfect terminology, but it suggests a sense of completeness and canonicity that is pertinent for the use to which I am putting it.[19] 'The work' is, in my usage, a reference both to impossible wholeness and to what Derrida calls

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[19] Although this term inevitably calls to mind Barthes' 1971 essay 'From Work to Text', I do not use 'the work' in the same sense as Barthes, for whom 'the work is held in the hand' (*The Rustle of Language* 57). While Barthes' assertion that the work 'closes upon a signified' (58) is suggestive of how playtexts have often been understood as originary and authoritative, what Barthes describes as the work is still a bounded literary artefact – indeed, its limits are one of the characteristics that separate it from the text (as defined by Barthes).

'pure presence'.

In exploring the absence and ambiguity that I have identified in the relationship(s) between texts and performances, I am particularly interested in Derrida's concept of the supplement, elucidated in his 1967 book *Of Grammatology*. This, I believe, offers a theoretical solution to the problem identified by Bennett of performances seeming somehow to constitute what they interpret. The etymology of the word 'supplement' points to its dual meanings: historically it has referred both to 'something added to that which is already complete' and 'something added to supply a deficiency or make up a whole' (OED, 'Supplement, N.1'). This duality is seized upon by Derrida in his use of the term. For him, the supplement is 'both a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude' (*Of Grammatology* 144) and at the same time 'adds only to replace' (145), filling a gap in that which it supplements. Crucially, Derrida insists that 'this second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first' (145); the supplement's necessity, therefore, is ambiguous, and its status is inherently paradoxical. I want to suggest that we might productively think of both playtexts and performances as supplements – in the Derridean sense – which forever defer the absent 'work'. The supplement is 'maddening because it is neither presence nor absence' (154); rather it has 'the power of procuring an absent presence through its image' (155).

According to Derrida, the endless 'sequence of supplements' reveals a necessity,

> that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception. (157)

We can think of both texts and performances as supplements in this 'infinite chain', acting as 'supplementary mediations' of one another and of 'the work', 'produc[ing] the sense' of completion while always gesturing towards an absence. We cannot think performance without thinking of something that is at once present and not present in the event, be that a 'script' or some other collection of rules, texts, referents; we cannot read a dramatic text without an understanding of theatre and thus of multiple possible supplementary performances. What is forever deferred is 'the work'.

My thinking here owes a debt to Marvin Carlson, who argued for a similar application of Derrida's theory to playtexts and performances in his 1985 article 'Illustration, Translation, Fulfillment or Supplement?'.[20] As an alternative to the theoretical models of illustration, translation and fulfilment, Carlson proposes the supplement as a concept that resolves the tensions inherent in earlier frameworks. While illustration theorists see performance as 'a supplement joined to the already existing plenitude of the written text'

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[20] Rebellato also briefly refers to Derrida's theory of the supplement in attempting to account for the inherent ambiguity of plays ('Writing Writing' 169-70).

and fulfilment theorists have 'stressed the other signification, of performance as supplement in the sense of filling a void' ('Illustration' 9-10), Derrida's dual interpretation of the term allows for both senses at once. Carlson writes that

> a play on stage will inevitably display material lacking in the written text, quite likely not apparent as lacking until the performance takes place, but then revealed as significant and necessary. At the same time, the performance, by revealing this lack, reveals also a potentially infinite series of future performances providing further supplementation. (10)

The supplement, in Carlson's view, 'den[ies] plenitude for either written text or performance' (10) and 'avoids the problems attendant upon privileging either performance or written text' (11). What Carlson does not discuss is 'the work' in the sense that I am employing it here. His model sees texts and performances – each denied plenitude – as supplements of one another, with neither privileged in any kind of hierarchy. I am suggesting, though, that we see 'the work' as the equivalent of the desired but always absent 'pure presence' that Derrida argues never existed in the first place. The supplement, he proposes, compensates for the lack of a kind of full and immediate presence that can never be achieved – that, indeed, relies for its identity upon those very supplements that seem to conjure it. The playtext or performance thus produces the sense of 'the work' while acting as a supplement in its perpetual absence. By using Derrida's model of the supplement as a theoretical lens through which to view texts and performances, we come to see that

'the work' cannot be located in either. This applies equally whether we are looking at a new production of an existing text or at a new playtext that can theoretically be supplemented by countless other productions in the future.

What happens, though, when we apply the above theory of supplementation and 'the work' to devised performances? If we consider Forced Entertainment's durational question-and-answer show *Quizoola!* (1996), for instance, the argument seems to hold. Because it is performed by a different configuration of performers each time and involves a high degree of improvised content, no two versions are identical either with one another or with the collaboratively devised concept for the show, which here takes on a similar identity to the playtext. But what about, say, Forced Entertainment's *The Coming Storm* (2012)? This seemingly chaotic exploration of narrative precisely replicated its apparent onstage anarchy night after night; although the show was produced through a similar process of rehearsal room improvisation to *Quizoola!*, by the time of its performance its structure and details had been fixed. In this instance, it could be argued that the live performance *The Coming Storm* is virtually self-identical with the collaboratively created 'performance score' (for want of a better phrase) *The Coming Storm*. While it is a truism that no two performances are the same, the minuscule differences between one performance of *The*

Coming Storm and another clearly cannot be equated with the differences between two separate productions of a playtext. Is it the case, then, that (some) devised performances possess the rigidity and stability that their text-led counterparts are often accused of? Might it be that 'the work', in these instances, is not absent at all but is embodied, in all its completeness, in performance? While there is a distinction that can be drawn here between different practices, as these examples illustrate, there will always remain a gap between the playtext or performance score and any individual performance. Performance, by its fleeting yet repeated nature, cannot be complete and definitive. Furthermore, devised productions do not rule out the possibility of future reinterpretations by other artists. Though they might not be intentionally written for countless future productions in the same way playtexts are, pieces created without a pre-written playtext still leave traces that can be reconstructed.[21]

Although devised performance and the role of text within it offer an interesting challenge to the theory of supplementation set out above, I maintain that 'the work' represents an absent,

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[21] One example of this kind of performative reconstruction is Deirdre Heddon's recreation of Mike Pearson's *Bubbling Tom* (Heddon). Furthermore, as I discuss again in Chapter Four, more and more so-called 'non-text-based' theatre-makers are choosing to publish documents of their work in various forms, further opening up the possibility that these works could be re-performed by others in the future. This possibility is also nodded to by Pearson's suggestion that '[r]ather than pretending to be a final and complete account of things, a closure, the performance document, an equivalent of the dramatic text, might be in itself fragmentary, partial and encouraging of interpretation' (13).

unreachable and desired-for ideal. In an artform characterised by ephemerality and repetition, the wholeness that the concept of 'the work' indicates is always impossible.[22] Completeness and self-presence of intention can no more be sought in the rehearsal room or live performances of a devised show than in the pages of a playtext. It may be possible, though, to discuss the *degree* to which there exists a gap between the playtext – or, in the case of shows that do not have a pre-existing playtext, whatever constitutes the performance score – and performance(s). In this sense, the peculiarity of the playtext as an object once again becomes apparent. It is, as Rebellato puts it, a 'multiple thing' ('Writing Writing' 172) which opens up the space for countless versions, all of which are held at a distance from the text they interpret. There is also a distinction to be drawn here between different productions (as distinct interpretations of a playtext) and individual performances of those productions, each of which is slightly different and more or less imperfectly represents the production (which might be understood as the ideal version that the creative team has in mind). Each performance thus supplements the production, while the production is one of countless possible supplements for the text – none of which can embody 'the work'.

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[22] There might conceivably be an exception here if a piece is performed just once, but to prevent the future performances that theatre as an artform makes available (the possibility of which would shatter the self-sameness that the ideal of 'the work' suggests), any traces of that performance would have to be destroyed. This seems to be the sort of theatre called for Antonin Artaud, the impossibility of which Derrida has persuasively discussed (*Writing and Difference* 292-316).

What I have primarily sought to disrupt in this section is the authority that accrues to 'the work' when it is mistakenly located either in the text (as the source of performance) or in the performance (as the completion of the text). In essence, I maintain that there are only ever playtexts and performances, all of which are at once complete and incomplete and which endlessly supplement one another. Conceptualising and giving a name to something that is always absent – 'the work' – might therefore seem superfluous. However, I believe that theorising this absence allows us to see the ways in which this false idea of completeness has operated as a shorthand for authority, whether located in the text or in performance, and to unpick the premises of that authority. Understanding 'the work' as an absent, ideal edifice deconstructs the hierarchy of text and performance, as opposed to performance-oriented critiques that have merely upended it, and begins to dissipate the authority that has previously restricted texts and performances alike.

Moreover, while the closeness between playtext/performance score/concept and live performance may vary, and while I allow that there is something particular about the complete-yet-incomplete nature of plays, what the above examples illustrate is that there is far from a clear division between how solo-authored playtexts and collaboratively devised pieces function in (relation to) performance. It

is possible to differentiate between the interaction of text and performance in individual examples, as I have done above, but drawing up any kind of decisive framework that might determine where playtexts end and performance scores begin is an almost impossible task. As I discuss again at the end of the chapter, characteristics that are often imputed to 'writing for performance' in distinguishing it from the playtext can in fact be identified in playtexts, and vice versa. Therefore, without denying differences in the use of text in different theatre-making processes, I suggest that it is more accurate to think of these practices as a wide-ranging spectrum than as two opposing categories of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based'.

Context

As I have already noted, one of the peculiar characteristics of playtexts is that they are written to be performed multiple times in multiple different contexts. This iterability – to borrow another term from Derrida – is inscribed in their essential structure: the possibility of numerous future performances is a constitutive characteristic of dramatic writing. As Rebellato observes,

> a play is an object designed precisely to be placed in a variety of new contexts generating new meanings and associations each time. Good plays, one might say, display maximal iterability. ('Exit the Author' 22-23)

As I argue below, this necessary and inherent feature of all playtexts unsettles the notion of any one context (say, the playwright's context or the context of the original production) commanding authority over

the countless iterations and interpretations that the playtext makes possible. I am also interested here in the relationship between playtexts and specific performance contexts, proposing that there is a symbiotic relationship between playtexts and the various contexts in which they are performed, in which each is altered through its encounter with the other.

I begin by making the case that plays are iterable objects. In doing so, I will demonstrate once again that playtexts are far from the fixed and stable objects that the opposition between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre often implies. Here, as above, I find it useful to draw on Derrida's thoughts about writing and texts. Iterability, according to Derrida, is a necessary part of the structure of *all* language: linguistic signs are characterised by the inherent possibility of repetition. Derrida argues that for written communication to function as such, it must remain readable after the disappearance of both writer and receiver – indeed, writing that was not readable in these circumstances would not be writing. If I write a note that is intended for a particular recipient and it gets lost, for example, it may just as easily be read by someone else who later finds it. Derrida thus conceives of writing as 'an iterative structure, cut off from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the ultimate authority' (*Limited Inc* 8). Writing cannot be controlled by its author because, for it to work *as* writing, it must function in that author's absence,

opening it up to countless different meanings and uses. Writing is, therefore, 'a sort of machine which is productive in turn' (8).

A play, then, might be understood as a particular type of meaning-making machine. Once written, it generates meanings independently of the playwright, both in reading and in performance. Importantly, Derrida's theory of iterability holds even for apparently unique instances of writing: 'iter*ability*, which is not iteration, can be recognized even in a mark which *in fact* seems to have occurred only once' (*Limited Inc* 48, original emphasis). A script written for a one-off event, or a script that is considered (at present) to be unstageable, can therefore be understood as iterable; its medium relies upon the theoretical *possibility* of its repetition.[23] Iterability is a useful concept both because it further elucidates the way in which plays are separable from and beyond the control of their writers, and because it captures the combination of continuity and deviation involved in a play's multiple performances. Derrida states that 'the structure of iteration … implies both identity and difference': in each repetition, there is a 'minimal remainder' that allows us to identify the sign, but it will also be different every time it is repeated (*Limited Inc* 53). Likewise, a play must have a certain self-identity that allows for it to be recognised and repeated, even as each iteration alters it. While

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[23] When I refer here to the unstageable, I am thinking of texts such as Gertrude Stein's *Landscape Plays*. See Martin Puchner on the 'closet drama' (*Stage Fright*).

every production of *Hamlet* is different, for example, there must

remain something that is identifiable as the play that we call *Hamlet*.

Throughout these various iterations, meanwhile, the text itself also

alters, changing in response to new contexts and performance

conditions. To characterise a playtext as the enduring document that

produces various fleeting performances is, in Derrida's way of

thinking, to mistakenly attribute permanence to the written word: he

argues that 'the structure of the remainder, implying alteration,

renders all absolute permanence impossible' (*Limited Inc* 54).

The notion of iterability also returns us to the question of

intention. Derrida seeks not to deny intention or intentionality, but to

displace it as the 'organizing center' (*Limited Inc* 15) of meaning and

to challenge its implication of plenitude and presence. He even

explicitly states that

> the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its
> place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern
> the entire scene and system of utterance. (18)

He notes also that the structure of iterability reveals that intention can

never be fully present to itself; iterability 'leaves us no choice but to

mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than

what we mean (to say)' (62). In other words, meaning is immediately

divided in the moment of writing because of the possibility of its

repetition and alteration, and therefore it is impossible to describe a

writer as simply saying what they mean to say. Or, to put it yet

another way, Rebellato interprets Derrida as saying that 'intention

can only determine the meaning of texts by containing something

that opens texts up to rival interpretations' ('Exit the Author' 23). This

is compatible with my earlier argument that artistic intention *allows*

for meaning but cannot exclusively *govern* it.

A consequence of the iterability of playtexts is that they can be

'cited' and 'grafted' (to use Derrida's terminology) onto countless

different contexts. It is crucial to understand here that Derrida is not

denying the importance and indeed the absolute necessity of

context. When he writes that every sign, in being cited, 'can break

with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a

manner which is absolutely illimitable' (*Limited Inc* 12), he is not

asserting that signs can function *independently* of contexts, only that

they can function *within* a variety of different contexts that are –

theoretically at least – limitless. The ability of writing to be detached

from one context and inserted into others is, similarly and relatedly to

iterability, a *necessary possibility* that is inscribed in the very

structure of signs. What this necessary possibility does mean,

however, is that no one context can be distinguished as the absolute

– and therefore regulating – context of a given text; 'no context can

entirely enclose it' (*Limited Inc* 9). This includes the context of a text's

creator(s), which has often been used by intentionalists to police

interpretations. For the playwright's context in the moment of writing

the play to be 'exhaustively determinable', in Derrida's terms,

> conscious intention would at the very least have to be totally present and immediately transparent to itself and to others, since it is a determining center [*foyer*] of context. (*Limited Inc* 18)

As discussed above, the very nature of iterability and its concomitant division of meaning forbids this presence and transparency.

Different contexts, then, have different impacts on playtexts, with no one context ever able to supply the text's completion (in every context, 'the work' remains absent). Worthen's metaphor of tools and technologies is useful here as a way of conceptualising this relationship between plays and their performance contexts. He suggests that the relationship between the written play and the stage performance may be 'modeled by the relationship between tools and technologies': playtexts, like tools, have an immediate purpose but can be put to many other uses; these uses are, in turn, largely determined and altered by the changing technologies of the theatre (*Drama* 21). A tool's 'instrumental properties may change as the perceived technologies of its use change', and therefore 'tools afford different acts in different technologies, which redefine the *affordance* of the tool' (21, original emphasis). New stage conventions, from advances in lighting technology to changes in acting style, alter what possibilities a given playtext affords and therefore what meanings might be interpreted from it. While the same alteration might be claimed of all language (Worthen, for instance, asks us to regard

reading as another sort of performance that equally changes over time), it is true of dramatic texts in a particular way as a result of their interaction with different stages. This is not to suggest that a play's original conditions of production are entirely irrelevant as soon as it is performed in a different context, which furnishes it with different meanings, but the above discussion demonstrates the futility of attempting to police a play's interpretations according to the circumstances of its composition and initial performance.[24]

One objection here might be that a theory of iterability heralds a slide into relativism, preventing us from differentiating between any of the limitless iterations of a playtext. I believe, though, that this can be answered. In an aside that is often overlooked, Derrida does allow for different *forms* of iteration, raising the possibility of distinguishing between these. He argues that '[r]ather than oppose citation or iteration to the noniteration of an event, one ought to construct a different typology of forms of iteration', although he leaves a question mark dangling over the possibility of exhaustively determining such a typology (*Limited Inc* 18). This suggests that while there is no separating of citation from non-citation, as J. L. Austin attempts to do with his bracketing of 'parasitic' utterances, we might still differentiate

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[24] It may be useful, for instance, for a director to research particular uses of language in an Early Modern play to determine what they suggested at the time of writing and therefore understand what might have been meant by those words in their original context. However, this does not have to restrict the director to *only* what *could* have been meant at that time.

between differing *types* of iteration – between, for instance, the iterability of everyday speech and the particular form(s) of citation involved in a play or a poem. In a narrower sense, this also opens up the possibility of differentiating between approaches to the playtext in a manner similar to that suggested by Mele and Livingston's spectrum of attitudes towards intentionality. To again use the example of a classic text, an 'Original Practices' performance of a Shakespeare play at the Globe, for instance, involves a different sort of iteration from a modern-dress production, while a more interventionist directorial approach is different again.

As well as understanding playtexts as iterable objects, I suggest that we need to think about specific exchanges between text and context as mutually influencing rather than unidirectional. That is, it is reductive to think either of playtexts simply being altered by each new performance context, or conversely of performance contexts simply being shaped by playtexts. Experimental playtexts can require innovative staging solutions, which in turn stimulate new directions in theatre-making, while innovations elsewhere in the performance landscape can challenge and influence the conventions of playwriting. In the case of playtexts that are performed multiple times, meanwhile, each new performance context responds anew to the form and content of the text, and simultaneously the text is altered in each encounter with a new performance context (there is,

as the concept of iterability implies, both sameness and difference in each new iteration). In considering this two-way flow between playtexts and performance contexts, proposed boundaries between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre once again begin to blur, as the artistic influences that seep through the porous barriers between different forms become apparent.

Take Kane, for example, whose debut play *Blasted* (1995) was widely perceived to be a catalyst for the 1990s surge of 'in-yer-face' plays, and whose seemingly impossible stage directions (demanding in *Cleansed* (1998), for instance, flowers that burst through the floor and rats that carry away severed human feet) are an audacious challenge to directors. While there is no denying the experimental nature of her plays, they should be seen within a wider theatrical context. Although there has been much debate about whether or not Kane's plays can be considered postdramatic,[25] what is less discussed is their relationship with the other theatrical forms that have typically been gathered under the postdramatic label.[26] Kane was also a director and performer and described her plays as existing 'within a theatrical tradition' (Rebellato, 'Interview with Sarah Kane' 17). She had little interest in the playwriting of the period in which she was working ('Interview with Sarah Kane' 4-5); instead,

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[25] See, for example, David Barnett and Karen Jürs-Munby.
[26] One exception here is Clare Wallace, who has considered Kane's work within an avant-garde genealogy that includes playwrights as well as artists and theatre-makers working in different forms.

one of her key influences was Jeremy Weller's 1992 Edinburgh

Festival Fringe show *Mad*, which was devised in collaboration with its

cast and had a visceral, experiential quality similar to that Kane

attempted to create in her plays.[27] Even ignoring the playwright's

stated intentions, which I have argued cannot be considered

authoritative, Kane's plays should be considered in the context of

developments in live art and alternative theatre, in which similar

experiments with language, structure and identity can be traced, as

much as in the context of a playwriting tradition. Kane's body of work,

meanwhile, has shifted performance strategies in a way that impacts

upon playwrights and other theatre-makers alike. Experiments across

the whole theatrical landscape, in both text and performance, thus

shape the technologies through which playtexts, new and old, are

staged in their various iterations. As this example and the earlier

theoretical discussion of iterability illustrates, there is always an

exchange between text, performance and context.

Open and closed texts

A new wave of dramaturgically innovative plays in the 1990s and the

twenty-first century, many of which leave crucial aspects of their

staging undefined, has led to the claim that such plays might be

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[27] This influence is documented in Aleks Sierz (*In-Yer-Face Theatre*) and Graham
Saunders ('Sarah Kane's Theatrical Legacy').

considered open texts.[28] These playtexts are often defined as incomplete, leaving gaps in which interpreters can intervene.[29] This view is challenged, though, by the argument I have already made that playtexts are by their very nature at once complete and incomplete. All plays define (or at least suggest) some aspects of their staging while leaving others to be determined by directors, actors and designers, and therefore I propose that it is more precise to discuss playtexts in terms of determinacy and indeterminacy. Nevertheless, we as interpreters still have an intuitive sense that some texts are more 'open' than others. In order to address this intuition and to enable us to distinguish between different textual strategies, I propose a model that includes both 'open' and 'closed' elements (terms that both come with caveats, as I discuss below), allowing for varying balances of determinacy and indeterminacy. This, in turn, has implications for how we conceive of the sorts of text involved in productions that are typically labelled 'non-text-based'.

Often, the concept of the open text is discussed with reference to Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (1989). According to Eco, every work of art is both complete and closed in itself (it is 'a balanced

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[28] Such plays do not determine features like the order of the scenes or the number and names of characters. Examples include Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (1997), Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* (1999) and Stephens' *Pornography* (2007).

[29] See Barnett's 2008 article 'When is a Play not a Drama?', Tomlin's '"And Their Stories Fell Apart Even as I Was Telling Them": Poststructuralist Performance and the No-Longer-Dramatic Text', written in 2009, and Jürs-Munby's 2006 introduction to *Postdramatic Theatre*.

organic whole') and open in the wide variety of interpretations it invites (4). In this respect, Eco's description resonates with the paradoxical completeness and incompleteness of playtexts. However, while all works of art are to an extent open, Eco suggests that some are open 'in a far more tangible sense' (4).[30] He adds that we can think of these open works as 'quite literally "unfinished": the author seems to hand them on to the performer' – by which Eco means not just the literal performer in a play, but the reader/interpreter – 'more or less like the components of a construction kit' (4). At first glance, this appears applicable to those playtexts in which major details are left unspecified, requiring that the director and creative team 'finish' the play. For instance Gerald Rabkin, building on Eco's distinction, suggests that 'interpretation is demanded by the [open] text in order to complete understanding' (144). The question arises, though, as to where openness ends and the 'closed' text begins. All playtexts, no matter how detailed, cannot help but leave some details open to interpreters; language, as Rebellato puts it, 'underdetermines the world' ('Exit the Author' 25). Meanwhile, elements of texts that may initially appear 'closed' will inevitably change in different contexts, as explored in the previous section.

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[30] It is worth noting that Eco is not setting out a theory about how we read all texts, but is claiming to observe something historically particular to the period in which he is writing. The open work for Eco represents a new perspective on the world, which he sees in various strands of contemporary culture.

Similarly, closer examination of existing discussions of open texts reveals that the qualities that seem to set open texts apart in fact characterise *all* plays. David Barnett, for example, identifies a 'no longer dramatic' text that 'suggests itself as a relativized element for performance from the outset and points to its own indeterminacy and status as uninterpreted material' (16). His key argument is that playwrights such as Crimp actively disrupt meaning from within their texts, thus refusing a cohesive dramatic model and 'leav[ing] all possible readings open' (21). We might equally say, though, that *all* plays 'leave all possible readings open'; as has already been observed, playtexts cannot foreclose interpretation. Barnett does acknowledge that 'no longer dramatic' texts are dependent to an extent on their interpretation in performance, but without conceding that this undermines his other points. He concludes that 'postdramatic texts configure themselves in such a way that they openly invite creative approaches', but that this invitation 'is not and cannot be binding' (23). This would seem to dissolve the differences previously identified between texts, none of which can be binding in their invitation to interpreters and all of which are open to multiple readings.

Tomlin, meanwhile, cites the example of a performance text of hers that she felt had been misread by its director, who interpreted it as a 'dramatic' work. Explaining how the text was created with the

aim of unsettling meaning, Tomlin weakens her argument by stating that when such a text is 'merely words on the page … there is little to distinguish such text from that which conventional analysis would assume to be a reliable guide to identity' ('Poststructuralist Performance' 61). The point that Tomlin ends up making here is that this text – just like any text – can be interpreted and performed in any number of different ways. A similar observation is made by Rebellato, who notes that '*Attempts on Her Life* is both a strikingly influential innovation in dramaturgy and the most typical play in the world' ('Exit the Author' 25). Crimp's set of 17 scenarios, with its absence of narrative and unassigned lines of dialogue, appears astonishingly open, yet indeterminacy is a constitutive characteristic of *all* plays.

Others have attempted to circumnavigate the problem of written drama's indeterminate relation to performance by arguing, conversely, that plays are complete and can only be transformed into theatre through a process of breaking open. In his 2011 article 'Drama and Performance: Toward a Theory of Adaptation', Martin Puchner outlines 'three conceptions of dramatic literature and its theatrical performance': the play as 'a set of instructions given by a writer to actors' ('Drama and Performance' 293); the script as 'an incomplete artwork' (295); and the dramatic text as complete and performance as a process of 'transformation and adaptation' (295). Puchner favours the latter, because '[w]e do not have to ascertain

what the text fixes and what it does not fix … in this third model the

text is complete, without gaps, and must be adapted in its entirety'

('Drama and Performance' 296). This process also has the

advantage of placing emphasis on the adaptors rather than on the

playwright, loosening the authority that is often attributed to the

writer. Puchner adds that this theory of adaptation applies to *all* texts

that might be transformed for the stage (novels, for instance, as well

as plays), which he sees as another point in its favour. This, though,

would seem to minimise distinctions between plays and other literary

texts, any of which might be adapted for the stage. Puchner's theory

thus denies the ontological strangeness of the playtext, sidestepping

its reliance on the external context of the stage.

Chris Goode, a theatre-maker who has written extensively

about his own practice and the wider theatre ecology, also employs a

construction of playtexts as closed (and therefore in need of being

'broken' by a director) and theatre as open, in his case to set up a

distinction between playwriting and what he calls 'writing for theatre'.

Writing in 2007, he argues that the latter 'emerge[s] out of a

conversation between many voices' and 'allows for … the turbulence

of the travel between stage and audience' ('What's It All About

Albee?').[31] This imagining of plays as closed objects, however, once

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[31] Goode does admit that the control and repeatability he identifies in plays can also be found in 'devising' contexts, using the example of Forced Entertainment's precise and repeatable use of 'failure' ('What's It All About Albee?').

again ignores the way in which 'language underdetermines the world' (Rebellato, 'Exit the Author' 25). Playtexts, while existing as separate and therefore in some sense complete objects, cannot construct a complete dramatic world, and therefore the liveness that Goode celebrates must always intervene in the gap between text and performance. As Rebellato similarly counters, Goode's distinction between plays and writing for theatre is 'unstable' because a play is 'complete on its own and it is complete in performance' ('Writing Writing' 170-71). Goode's argument that 'form for playwrights is secondary to content' and that therefore the content of the play can be tipped into 'different containers' (a playtext, a production, a video recording) without losing its essence also underestimates the complexity of plays and the alteration which, as discussed above, is involved in each new iteration of any given playtext ('What's It All About Albee?').

We cannot, then, think of playtexts as either open or closed. As seen in the above examples, the defining features of so-called open texts can in fact be identified as characteristic of *all* texts written for theatre. Yet there is still an understandable desire to differentiate between what we might think of as more 'conventional' plays and those dramaturgically experimental plays with which I opened this section. The solution to this seemingly intractable problem, I suggest, is to understand plays as comprising a varying mixture of open and

closed elements. In any play, there will be details that are determinate on the page and those that are indeterminate. Usually, determinate details include things like the number and names of characters and the settings for each scene (these are the conventions from which those texts that are often described as 'open' depart). But even in the long and detailed stage directions of a playwright like George Bernard Shaw, there are elements of indeterminacy. The play cannot specify *everything* about its enactment. On the other hand, even the most apparently open plays have certain fixed parameters. While the text of *Attempts on Her Life* may seem unfixed, it is still organised into those 17 scenarios, of which Crimp specifies only the first may be cut entirely. Eco likewise nods to the interplay of determinate and indeterminate elements when he writes that '[t]he *possibilities* which the work's openness makes available always work within a given *field of relations*' (19, original emphasis). Indeterminacy is only possible within certain determinate limits. It is important to add that I am discussing determinacy in the playtext as written – that is, the aspects of staging that (we assume) the writer seeks to determine. These same elements are not necessarily fixed when that text is then received in different contexts or performed in different interpretations; all texts are, as I have already argued, iterable and therefore subject to change.

The balance of determinacy and indeterminacy and what we mean by these two opposing categories also shifts in relation to different performance contexts. In contemporary English theatre culture, for instance, it is widely accepted that the integrity of the playwright's dialogue is more important than the integrity of their stage directions. There are some significant exceptions: Samuel Beckett's Estate, for example, insists that every last line of his plays is to be considered determinate and non-negotiable (though even in this most extreme of cases, there of course remains a degree of indeterminacy).[32] Furthermore, the balance of determinacy and indeterminacy does not necessarily dictate what theatre-makers may do with a playtext in performance. Seemingly closed aspects of a text can be broken open: directors can cut characters, shift locations or chop up and rearrange a play's scenes.[33] It is useful to think in terms of a balance between determinacy and indeterminacy, though, because this provides a conceptual framework for discussing what any individual play does and does not specify on the page. But all playtexts allow for multiple different interpretations. How, then, to conceive of the possibilities that the playtext does and does not

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[32] As Holger Schott Syme helpfully points out, 'even as controlling a text as, say, Beckett's *Not I* does not prescribe the exact length of pauses; the quality of voice; the sound of breath; the exact light levels in the theatre; the shape of the actor's mouth; the precise accent; the cultural resonance of that accent; the cultural resonances of the specific actor's voice; the levels of heat in the theatre; the behaviour of the audience; the noises from elsewhere in the theatre, the auditorium, and the outside; the smells in the theatre; and so on — but all of those and many more are unavoidably part of the show' (Syme).

[33] The ability of directors and dramaturgs to make these changes will depend on the contractual agreement for performance (which may state that the whole text must be performed) or whether the play is out of copyright.

afford? Cathy Turner has offered the compelling analogy of prime numbers, suggesting that the playtext opens up 'an infinite set of possibilities, but it's not a set containing all possibilities' (Love, Symposium). In one sense, the possibilities are limitless, but these possibilities do not stretch out in all imaginable directions.

This interplay of determinacy and indeterminacy can be identified in *all* texts for performance, again blurring the boundaries between what Goode calls 'playwriting' and 'writing for theatre'. What David Overend, for instance, has described as a 'relational performance text' would be better understood as a playtext that contains a relatively great degree of indeterminacy, thus opening it to the relational processes that he documents. As Overend himself notes in his 2011 PhD thesis, his concept of the relational performance text depends upon established boundaries and 'a negotiation between "script" (as the predetermined, written, fixed structure of the performance), and "divergences" or "detours" (as relational and process-based)' (45). In this respect, it is no different from more conventional-looking playtexts. Similarly, John Freeman's definition of 'performance writing' as 'provisional, contextual and unfinished' (*New Performance* 21) could as easily describe the 'dramatic writing' to which he opposes it. Even Mike Pearson's appealing conceptualisation of devised performance as 'constituting a kind of stratigraphy of layers: of text, physical action, music and/or

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soundtrack, scenography and/or architecture' (24), any one of which

'may from time to time bear principal responsibility for carrying the

prime narrative meaning whilst the others are turned down in the

composition' (25), does not in the end definitively distinguish it from

the performance of pre-written playtexts. However, Ben Payne has

helpfully suggested that

> [o]ne attraction of the term 'writing for performance' is that
> it appears to allow writing to directly engage with other
> performing art forms, free from the historical and ideological
> associations of 'plays' and 'playwrights'. (28)

Struggle as they might to maintain a definitive theoretical separation

from the playtext, terms like 'writing for theatre', 'writing for

performance' and 'relational performance text' are perhaps best

understood as attempts to break with both the literary connotations of

written drama and with some of the misunderstandings of the

relationship between text and performance discussed throughout this

chapter. While in theory all texts are at once complete and

incomplete and they all involve a mixture of determinate and

indeterminate elements, it is worth acknowledging the historical

dominance of an attitude towards dramatic writing which sees it as

mostly determinate, as reflected in the textual conventions of many

plays. It is against such an attitude that the alternatives with which I

opened this section are positioning themselves. There has perhaps

therefore been a need to distinguish such 'experimental' texts from

playtexts that replicate the conventions of the dominant model, but

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my hope is that a reconceptualisation of the theatre text would eventually eradicate such a need.

Ultimately, all theatre texts are – as Worthen has repeatedly stressed – texts *for use*. When we understand them as such – and when we break down some of the limiting assumptions that surround the playtext, as I have done in this chapter – the theoretical foundations of a binary between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre begin to look shaky. As I have attempted to demonstrate above, playtexts are not the stable, authoritative items that the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide suggests, and the distinction between these texts and other forms of writing for performance is far from clear-cut. However, the beliefs about intention, authority and creative responsibility that I have begun to unsettle are deep-seated and ripple through a number of the institutions that have contributed to and continue to perpetuate the dichotomy between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. It is to these institutions that I turn in the rest of the thesis. The following chapters evidence the claims made here about popular misconceptions of the relationship between text and performance, extend discussion of the implications of such misunderstandings, and occasionally point towards the possibility of change.

Chapter Two

The Arts Council: Money, Policy and Priorities

As the previous chapter identified, there remain a number of conceptual difficulties and misunderstandings surrounding the relationship between text and performance, which underpin the perceived 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide in the English theatre sector. Turning to one of the sector's key institutional frameworks, this chapter investigates patterns of subsidy over time and how these have impacted on new theatre-making in England. My central argument is that since its establishment in 1946 the Arts Council has played a crucial role in shaping the English theatre landscape and in contributing to the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' practices, both through active policy interventions and responsive funding decisions. The focus throughout is on funding for new work, though it should be noted that this is just one component of the overall subsidy received by English theatre organisations (and, at some points in time, a relatively small component). It is also important to bear in mind that playtext-led production structures have typically dominated in the areas of subsidised theatres' repertoires that I do not discuss below, such as revivals, and therefore these structures represent the established norm from which other practices have been seen to deviate.

Many of the inconsistencies in funding and policy that have contributed to the scission of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work in the subsidised sector are, I suggest, rooted in the Arts Council's early history and institutional organisation. From its 'improvised and tentative' (Sinclair 29) wartime beginnings in the form of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), state subsidy developed in a somewhat piecemeal fashion. The sums of money the Council was distributing were small at first,[1] limiting the number of organisations it could subsidise, and as its funds and clients expanded over time it evolved in a largely ad hoc way. From the beginning the organisation operated as a top-down hierarchy. At its apex were the Chairman and Secretary-General, who together with up to 18 other Council members were ultimately responsible for decision-making. This Council was advised by artform-specific panels of unpaid members, each with a Chairman who sat on the Council, who were in turn informed by subcommittees. Everyday management and administration, meanwhile, was largely the responsibility of the Secretary-General and the staff of Arts Council officers. Recommendations for funding were made by panels and committees and in theory were passed to the Council for approval, though in practice it was typically the finance department who ultimately determined how much money was distributed; '[p]anels

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[1] In the year 1945/46, the total grant-in-aid was £235,000 (ACGB, *Annual Review 1945-1946*).

proposed, finance disposed' (Sinclair 144). Officially, the panels were only ever advisory, though their decision-making power varied depending on the Council's leadership. This led to internal tensions and conflicts, most notably in 1985 when half of the Drama Panel resigned because they felt their views were being ignored.[2] Finally, in addition to the central Arts Council, regional bodies had varying responsibilities for distributing subsidy.[3]

This structure was, Andrew Sinclair has suggested, 'devised for a smaller and less complex operation of arts subsidy' (203) than that which evolved over time, and it certainly came under strain as the Arts Council expanded. Furthermore, a recurring issue for the Drama Panel has been insufficient funds, forcing difficult and sometimes essentially arbitrary choices about what should and should not receive support, while communication between the Panel and the Council has varied in its success. There is a crucial question, then, as to how far the Arts Council has actively directed theatre policy. In 1978, the Drama Panel noted that '[p]olicy had emerged

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[2] Malcolm Griffiths has also suggested, based on his own experience of the Drama Panel, that in the mid-1970s there was a drift within the Arts Council towards more internal administration and decision-making, diluting the influence of the advisory panels and committees (Griffiths). This, though, was contradicted by the then Secretary-General Roy Shaw, who insisted that 'so far as drama is concerned, members of the Drama Panel *are*, to a large extent, the Arts Council. It is *they* who make the recommendations which the Council … almost always accepts' (87, original emphasis).

[3] Variously constituted as Regional Offices, Regional Arts Associations and Regional Arts Boards, the power and responsibility of these bodies fluctuated over the years. Though they played an important role in the overall system of subsidy, for reasons of scope they are excluded from this chapter, which focuses on central policy-making.

not as a codified statement but as a distillation from minutes and recommendations' (*ACGB/43/4 - Minutes of the 198th Meeting*). Malcolm Griffiths, who sat on the Drama Panel in 1975/76, has similarly stated that '[i]t is the administrative decisions which determine the policy, not a stated, publicly accountable policy which makes the Arts Council work as it does' (3). This haphazard and cumulative approach to decision-making has led to the common belief that the Arts Council did not have any clear policy, especially in its early decades. As Jane Woddis points out, though,

> there are of course many statements of value and intent, and many decisions taken, regarding the funding, organisation, distribution and purpose of the arts. (63)

Whether or not they can be taken to constitute policy, the Arts Council's decisions were undoubtedly a shaping force on the post-war English theatre ecology. For instance, the Council quickly established a precedent whereby the initial level of subsidy set the bar, and subsequent policy was to continue funding at or above that level.[4] Although this showed a laudable commitment to long-term funding, it also meant that the Council's hands were somewhat tied by decisions made early in its existence. By the time reappraisal was

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[4] Lord Eccles, Minister for the Arts 1970-1973, stated that '[o]nce you started a subsidy, you had to keep a client on the books' (Sinclair 186). Former Assistant Drama Director Dennis Andrews has similarly explained that when applications to the Arts Council were considered, this was done 'within a context that subsumes the past as much as it reflects the present', adding that existing companies were 'given first consideration' (88). In 1986, meanwhile, the Cork Report observed that funding allocation 'appears to be established by historical experience and commitment as much as any systematic reappraisal of what is the appropriate level' (Cork 10).

introduced in the 1980s, certain patterns had already been instituted,

and in periods of hardship the Arts Council's tendency was to protect

established institutions and scale back its support for new work.[5] The

contemporary make-up of English theatre has therefore been

determined, at least partly, by historical commitments.

Today, as a result of devolution and the necessity of

absorbing cuts from government, the Arts Council (now Arts Council

England) is a much smaller organisation than it once was.[6] It is

currently comprised of an Executive Board, a National Council and

five Area Councils. The Board is the organisation's executive

decision-making body, while the National Council decides on policy

and priorities. Policy is tailored to different parts of the country,

meanwhile, through the Area Councils, the members of which

collectively make decisions on National Portfolio applications.[7]

Considering its changes in organisation, Kate Dorney warned in

2013 that 'Arts Council England is now so small that it has no

institutional memory' (Sierz, 'Giving Voice'). If past funding patterns

and decision-making processes are not recorded and interrogated,

the Council will have no opportunity to learn from its own history. As

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[5] In 1974, for instance, it was warned that 'it will be extremely difficult to find support for new activities to which the Council has not already pledged funds' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1973-1974* 10); the Council even described itself as 'the prisoner of its existing obligations' (17).

[6] The Arts Council underwent a series of organisational reviews and restructures from the 1980s onwards and its current structure came into operation on 1 July 2013.

[7] See the Arts Council England website.

John Bull has noted, most existing studies of the Arts Council are partial, based largely on annual reviews and the testimony of former members and employees.[8] Only recently has the Arts Council's archive been catalogued and made available, and even now it comprises an overwhelming quantity of material, posing a challenge for any researcher seeking to scrutinise it.

Although I have undertaken extensive research within the archive, its huge scope and labyrinthine structure prohibit a full investigation of all the material, as do restrictions on the availability of certain folders. Therefore, while I have been able to construct a more comprehensive narrative of the funding of new theatre than most earlier studies, there are still gaps. The archive ends in 1994 at the point the Arts Council was devolved, so following this there is less available evidence of internal decision-making. Another difficulty is posed by the annual reviews, which – while containing a wealth of useful information – are inconsistent in their format and the financial data they provide. Furthermore, although I have looked in detail at the minutes of the Drama Panel and various committees, these official records cannot account for the many unofficial conversations

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[8] Examples include Andrew Sinclair (1995), Robert Hutchison (1982) – who had partial access to the Arts Council's records, but only at the organisation's discretion – and Richard Witts (1998). Both Hutchison's and Witts' studies are also personal views of the Council, written from the positions of employee and committee member respectively. More detailed accounts of Arts Council operation and decision-making can be found in the *British Theatre Companies* series, which benefitted from access to the archive.

that may have influenced decisions. My hope, nonetheless, is that this chapter can build on the archival work done by the academics involved in the *Giving Voice to the Nation* project and suggest further avenues for future research.

Given the huge scope of the Arts Council's funding commitments over the seven decades of its existence, providing a full picture of new theatre subsidy is a challenging task. In reconstructing funding patterns and priorities, I have largely focused my attention on records of the Council's decision-making processes, public and internal statements of its intentions, and reports investigating the impact of the Council's funding. Alongside this, I have looked at eight snapshots of the Arts Council's theatre portfolio in 1946, 1956, 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, 2006 and 2016, to which I refer at various points in order to demonstrate where and how the organisation has chosen to direct its funds over time.[9] These years have been chosen not for their particular significance in the history of arts funding, but as a set of random, equally spaced samples, allowing for a long-term, zoomed-out overview of funding trends over the decades. My approach has been to collate and compare the available funding data in each of these years, looking at overall theatre funding figures, the composition of the Arts Council's theatre

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[9] The funding figures to which I refer have been drawn from the Arts Council's annual reviews and its publicly available spreadsheets of funding commitments. Full details of funding distribution in these eight years can be found in Appendix A.

portfolio – both in terms of the organisations funded and the division of clients into different funding streams receiving different proportions of the total sum available – and changes to the funding received by organisations and schemes (such as the Arts Council's new writing schemes) over time.

While I will draw on specific comparisons later in the chapter, the bigger picture is one of an expanding list of clients and a proliferating number of different funding streams and priority areas, followed by a more recent simplification of funding avenues. In 1946 and 1956, the vast majority of the limited funding available was distributed to theatres and companies who were only differentiated from one another by the amounts they received. Notably, the first significant specialised funding stream to appear in these snapshots is 'Promotion of New Drama' in 1956, receiving £2,361 (the seventh highest sum in that year's funding breakdown).[10] By 1966, the new drama funding stream had been joined by a training scheme, but the separation of clients into different streams and levels of funding is not fully evident until the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1976 annual review, clients are clearly broken down into national companies, regularly funded companies, project-funded companies, bursaries (including new writing) and touring companies, with an implicit hierarchy and an

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[10] In this year, small sums were also set aside for 'Theatre Planning' (£149), 'Travel Grants for Producers' (£125) and 'Theatre Grid Scheme' (£115), but none of these compares to the amount distributed to new drama and it is questionable whether, at these funding levels, they can be considered funding streams *per se*.

increased number of small grants at the lower end,[11] while the

funding streams in 1986 (national companies, building-based

companies, touring companies, projects and theatre writing

schemes) are broadly similar. By 1996 there was even greater

fragmentation of the theatre portfolio, as I discuss in more detail later

in the chapter, whereas this system was increasingly streamlined in

the following two decades. In 2016, funding was divided into just two

categories: National Portfolio Organisations and Grants for the Arts,

both of which are outlined in my Introduction.

In the rest of this chapter, I investigate the perennial balancing

act within the Arts Council between responding to artistic activity and

setting policy priorities, tracing how this tension has affected funding

for new theatre. While new playwriting was an early beneficiary of

directed Arts Council policy, I suggest that other forms of new theatre

suffered from the Council's erratic growth and disjointed network of

panels and committees. The narrative I have pieced together from

the archive is one of difficult decisions, internal conflicts and a

complex mixture of calculated and reactive policy-making. Decisions

are, of course, made by individuals, not homogenous institutions,

and therefore to discuss 'Arts Council decision-making' is somewhat

reductive. However, by scrutinising the many policies and statements

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[11] Although some project-funded clients received higher levels of funding than
some of the regularly funded clients in this year, the lowest level of regular funding
was £7,500, while project funding ranged all the way from £44,723 down to £75.

of individuals over the years it is possible to construct a picture of the Arts Council, its accumulated decision-making mechanisms, and the ways in which it as a collective body has influenced new theatre-making in England.

Response or initiation?

Precisely how public subsidy should support new theatre has been a subject of continual debate. Especially in its early years, the Arts Council stressed its official role as a body that *responded* to artists and organisations – a role that I contend has been somewhat undermined by its intervention in the theatre sector. The tension between response and initiation goes back to the Royal Charter, under which the Arts Council was established to 'increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public' and 'to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts' (Appendix A in Sinclair 401). The Council thus had 'the double duty of diffusing the arts as well as stimulating new expressions in them' (Sinclair 96), the latter of which suggests active involvement.[12] My argument is that, despite its remit as a responsive funding body, the Arts Council has introduced policy that has initiated or strongly encouraged specific theatrical developments, particularly in the area of new playwriting.

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[12] As early as 1952, the annual review was attempting to strike a compromise between the 'self-government' of subsidised arts institutions and the Arts Council's 'attention to the policy of these bodies' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1951-1952* 9).

A certain ambivalence about its policy-making role permeates the Arts Council's annual reviews.[13] In 1972, the Council addressed its competing aims, insisting that 'the key word in any description of its function must be "response"' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1971-1972* 11) – an emphasis that may well have been intended to deflect blame from the organisation, which has faced persistent criticism of its decisions. The following year, the same sentiment was echoed, with an acknowledgement of the necessity of responding to new work (ACGB, *Annual Review 1972-1973* 30). There was an apparent shift in 1976, though, when the body announced 'a move towards a more explicit cultural policy, into which, when finances permit, initiation as well as response will increasingly be fitted' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1975-1976* 7-8). This was partly a reaction to contracting funds following a long period of expansion, which in the following years would force the Arts Council to be more strategic in its distribution of money.[14] In a 1981 memorandum, the Council stated that it 'responds with subsidy, advice and encouragement to initiatives being taken to promote the arts', yet it was also 'ready to take or promote initiatives of its own where it identifies substantial

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[13] It should be noted that, while useful as evidence of the public image the Arts Council was attempting to construct, these annual reviews are not necessarily reflective of the Council's day-to-day operation.

[14] The grant-in-aid for 1975/76 was £28,850,000, representing a 22.56% increase on the previous year, but high levels of inflation made it closer to standstill funding in real terms. The mood was reflected in the title of that year's annual review: 'The arts in hard times' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1975-1976*).

gaps in existing provision' (Sinclair 427).[15]

One area in which the Arts Council has led rather than responded is the support of new plays. The level of this support, I argue, was such that it actively shaped the landscape of post-war English theatre. Before advancing this argument, though, it should be reiterated that for the first 22 years of the Arts Council's existence English theatre was still subject to censorship. The role of the Lord Chamberlain's office meant that new work was necessarily new *scripted* work; a commitment to subsidising new theatre was therefore automatically a commitment to subsidising new playwriting. As Helen Freshwater notes, '[u]nder this system, the practice of improvisation was effectively criminalized', with companies such as Theatre Workshop receiving fines for deviating from licensed scripts ('Anti-Theatrical Prejudice' 55). The practice of censorship thus 'placed textual shackles on the British theatre' (54) and restricted the Arts Council to funding artists who could provide pre-written scripts. In some respects, then, the emphasis on new playwriting might be understood more as a product of censorship than of subsidy. Nonetheless, I suggest that the Arts Council's mission to find new playwrights contradicted its official policy of response and was

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[15] Also in the 1980s, the Ilkley Letter – which asked clients what would happen to them if their subsidy was withdrawn, cut or increased – marked 'an end to the tradition of response in favour of ruthless selection' (Sinclair 266). Writing in 1982, meanwhile, Hutchison sees the Arts Council shifting from a pattern of response to more fully articulated policy (Hutchison).

reinforced as a funding priority long after the end of censorship in 1968 and the subsequent rise of devised and improvised work. Censorship was doubtless a factor here, but I do not believe that it alone can account for the Council's new play policy.

The Arts Council's initial approach to new writing consisted of 'an implicit policy of approval and encouragement' (Woddis 150); in its annual reviews, for instance, premieres of new plays were considered worthy of special mention. In 1948, a proposal for the encouragement of new dramatists marked the beginning of a long focus on new plays, the dearth of which was initially bemoaned.[16] Looking back from the vantage point of 1965, the Council described a 'sense of hopelessness about our theatre which prevailed in the 'fifties' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1964-1965* 25) – an apparent hopelessness that served, perhaps, as a useful justification for the Arts Council's interventionist emphasis on new plays. In 1952, the Drama Panel moved to address this perceived gap in the national repertoire by establishing a subcommittee to oversee 'a more ambitious scheme to assist new drama' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1951-1952* 37).[17] This scheme initially involved a guarantee against

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[16] In 1951, for instance, the Arts Council was disappointed by the response to its new play competition as part of the Festival of Britain (ACGB, *Annual Review 1950-1951*). Two years later, it was still felt that '[t]here is a dearth of new plays of quality' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1952-1953* 42); the following year's results were 'unspectacular and a little disappointing' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1953-1954* 39).
[17] The subcommittee had several different names over the years: the New Drama Sub-Committee, the New Writing Committee, the Theatre Writing Committee, the

loss for theatre managements producing promising new plays, alongside a small number of bursaries for playwrights.[18] Four years later, a turnaround appeared to be starting – or, at least, the Arts Council was attempting to stimulate a turnaround, insisting that '[n]ew writers for the theatre have never had a better opportunity than now' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1955-1956* 42). By 1961, the Council was describing its work encouraging new playwrights as 'a lead and a practical contribution' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1960-1961* 23).

There is evidence that the Council was interested not just in supporting individual productions or playwrights, but in substantially changing the English theatre ecology. Reporting on its new play schemes in 1957, the Arts Council explained that 'they create a climate and establish the conditions which make the writing of plays attractive and rewarding' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1956-1957* 25). Surveying the improved outlook for new plays, it insisted that 'the Council's Scheme must take some credit for this' (37). Two years later, the Council reasserted that the apparent renaissance in new drama 'springs from seeds carefully disseminated from St. James's Square, as a deliberate act of policy' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1958-1959* 11).[19] The growth of new playwriting was therefore framed as a

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Theatre Writing and Bursaries Sub-Committee. For ease of reference, I will subsequently refer to it as the Theatre Writing Committee.

[18] The Council's new writing schemes later included additional funds to support residencies, commissions and writers' workshops.

[19] St. James's Square was the location of the Arts Council's headquarters.

success for the Council, which emphasised its proactive approach, advancing this as a key example of policy-making and actively seeking publicity for its playwriting schemes on several occasions.[20] The Council was clearly keen to make its role in the apparent renewal of playwriting known among the sector (possibly as a tactic to shore up its own position), which in turn may have stimulated further writing activity and cultivated the impression that new plays were a central part of post-war English theatre culture.

One prominent beneficiary of playwriting policy was the English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court Theatre, founded in 1956, which established an influential template for the support of new writing. This example illustrates the Arts Council's active role in promoting new plays and its favouring of new writing institutions. As Rebellato notes, '[t]he aims of the English Stage Company (ESC) dovetailed beautifully with the policies of the Arts Council' (*1956 and All That* 65), while there is evidence to suggest that the goals of the two organisations were developed in tandem (Storey). The ESC's founding artistic director George Devine had substantial contact with William Emrys Williams, Secretary-General of the Arts Council, prior

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[20] For example, at a Drama Panel meeting in 1958, '[t]he Chairman hoped it might be possible to persuade one of the leading daily or Sunday newspapers to publish a survey of the five years' work by the Council for the promotion of new drama' (Drama Panel, *ACGB/43/1 - Minutes of the 69th Meeting*), while in 1960 the Drama Director proposed that a brochure should be published illustrating the achievements of the New Drama Scheme (TWC, *ACGB/40/126 - Minutes of the 40th Meeting*).

to the establishment of the ESC and during a period of strategising

for the funding body.[21] Following lengthy correspondence, in which

the two men discussed their visions for the future of the country's

theatre, Williams proposed that 'innovation and new writing should

become a key rationale for state subsidy' (Storey 368). This link

between state subsidy and new writing endured, and the ESC was

held up as an exemplar for the burgeoning sector of subsidised

playwriting. For the Council, the ESC 'promise[d] to provide the

contemporary English theatre with the sort of playhouse which has

long been recognised as the model structure for a creative theatre'

(ACGB, *Annual Review 1956-1957* 26).[22] The Royal Court was not

just another subsidised venue; it was a symbolic model of what could

be achieved through subsidy and a site of experimental intervention

in England's playwriting sector. It also arguably stimulated playwriting

growth elsewhere: 56 of the 78 guarantees against loss offered

between 1952 and 1959 were made from January 1957 onwards

(ACGB, *Annual Review 1958-1959* 12), indicating an upsurge of new

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[21] This followed an earlier, abortive attempt to secure funding from the Arts Council in 1953. Despite praise for Devine's proposed scheme from key members of the Council, the project stalled when the Royal Court building could not be secured. For more on the pre-history of the ESC, see Philip Roberts (*The Royal Court Theatre* 1-16) and Taryn Storey.

[22] Special mentions for the theatre recur in subsequent Arts Council literature, and by 1961 the Council was stating that 'the English theatre … would be infinitely the poorer without this adventurous and provocative management' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1960-1961* 25). The ESC was also singled out for praise in the Arts Council-commissioned report *The Theatre Today*, which concluded that 'its purpose and methods … justify a higher rate of support than the average' (ACGB, *The Theatre Today* 32). By 1970, the ESC was receiving an annual grant of £98,050 – the highest level of drama subsidy after the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company (ACGB, *Annual Review 1969-1970*).

plays deemed to be of quality immediately following the establishment of the ESC.

In addition to its schemes, the Arts Council highlighted the responsibility of subsidised theatres to develop and stage new plays, thereby positioning the support of playwriting as a central aim of drama subsidy. At the first meeting of the Theatre Writing Committee (TWC) in 1952, it was stressed that '[a]ll repertory companies in receipt of a normal Arts Council grant should be reminded that helping new authors was considered part of their work' (*ACGB/40/126 - Minutes of the 1st Meeting*). It was subsequently emphasised that the Council 'directly subsidises theatres on the grounds that they follow a deliberate policy of supporting new work' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1958-1959* 12) and that '[a] company's policy towards new plays is part of its annual application and is taken into account when assessing the subsidy to be offered' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1976-1977* 18-19). In 1967, furthermore, the TWC decided that theatres receiving revenue grants of over £30,000 would no longer be eligible for guarantees against loss except for particularly ambitious projects. Following the earlier injection of support, it was made clear that new plays should now be a core part of such companies' work (*ACGB/40/126 - Minutes of the 74th Meeting*). A paper later circulated to the TWC reiterated that its schemes 'should do more than merely prop up the policies of the theatres', urging that

theatres be encouraged to develop writers (*ACGB/40/126 -*

Discussion Paper). By the 1970s, support of new writing seems to

have become an accepted responsibility of state subsidy; Assistant

Drama Director Dennis Andrews includes the need for a new writing

allocation in the Drama Panel's pre-established priorities in 1977,

stating that 'there is an obvious need for supplementary help from

the Arts Council' (89).[23]

Although there are not conclusive figures available for the

number of new plays produced in the years following the introduction

of the playwriting schemes, Colin Chambers and Mike Prior believe it

likely that 'more new plays were produced during the 1970s than in

any preceding decade' (21). At the start of the 1980s, the Arts

Council's new play schemes appeared to be vindicated by the fact

that '[r]ecent or contemporary plays dominate the regional theatre's

programme while the classical repertoire accounts for only one play

in eight' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1980-1981* 10). Furthermore, while it

is difficult to prove that subsidy was creating rather than responding

to demand, the steep increase in the number of companies receiving

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[23] In 1980/81, the expectation that new playwriting should be a core part of companies' work was reinforced with the controversial transfer of responsibility for new writing funds to subsidised theatres. Although this responsibility was initially neglected, causing complaints from the writers' unions, the Arts Council later required that companies submit their new writing expenditure on an annual basis, with the outcome of the expenditure analysis playing a role in recommendations about the level of subsidy to be offered the following year (Everett). In 1987 the Theatre Writers' Union observed that '[o]f the 34 theatres earmarked writing funds in 1986/7, 20 spend more than their earmarked figure' (TWU 28).

support for new plays implies an environment in which staging new work was increasingly attractive. In 1959/60, the Arts Council offered 21 guarantees against loss for new plays (ACGB, *Annual Review 1959-1960*); ten years later, the new drama allocation was supporting 39 companies (ACGB, *Annual Review 1969-1970*), and by 1974/75 91 companies were receiving funding to stage new plays (ACGB, *Annual Review 1974-1975*). Among those receiving new drama funding in 1974/75 were companies such as Hampstead Theatre Club, Foco Novo and Soho Theatre Company, all of which were founded in the years after the instituting of the Council's new play schemes and the establishment of the ESC, and were therefore perhaps responding to a more hospitable environment for new plays. By 1974, according to the Arts Council, new plays were 'a generally accepted feature of most companies' programmes' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1973-1974* 26). Although the annual review may be exaggerating the case in order to justify the Council's championing of playwriting, it is clear that by the end of the Arts Council's third decade new plays were a firmly enshrined priority of theatre subsidy.

While it could be argued that the Arts Council's commitment was to new work in general (which because of censorship was effectively new *writing*), the emphasis on *playwrights* specifically suggests an interest in the creation of dramatic literature over and

above a simple desire to generate more new theatre.[24] This

emphasis, it should be noted, was consistent with broader cultural

discussions at the time about the need for more serious plays, thus

reinforcing the notion that playwriting was at the vanguard of

theatrical renewal in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By the time

censorship was abolished, moreover, playwriting had become fixed

as a funding priority, as will be seen in the Arts Council's later

struggles to accommodate devised and performance work.

Furthermore, the figures across the funding snapshots I have

examined suggest a clear and consistent upward trend in funding for

new plays, which often outstripped increases elsewhere, as well as

consistently rising ahead of inflation.[25] For instance, the total sum

awarded across the theatre writing schemes in 1966 (£18,972) was,

in real terms, a five-fold increase on the £2,361 spent a decade

earlier, representing a growing commitment from the Arts Council.[26]

This was during a decade of considerable overall expansion in

theatre subsidy, but as we will see below, a commitment to new

writing (with some short-term fluctuations) has remained a consistent

part of the Arts Council's funding strategy – much more so, I suggest,

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[24] The emphasis on playwrights also continued after the end of censorship. In the 1974 annual review, for instance, the Arts Council boasts of 'this country's remarkable record in finding new playwrights in the past fifteen years' (*Annual Review 1973-1974* 16). Discussing the support of experimental new work and its crossover into the mainstream, meanwhile, the Council asserts that '[a]t the centre of this process stands the playwright' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1978-1979* 15).

[25] See Appendix A.

[26] Over this ten-year period, inflation averaged 3% a year. All inflation figures and real-terms income calculations in this chapter are sourced from the Bank of England.

than the many other forms of new work that emerged from the late 1960s onwards.

A victim of its own success

The Arts Council has been described by more than one commentator as 'a victim of its own success', an assessment that is especially pertinent when considering the funding body's approach to new theatre.[27] Thanks in part to substantial grant-in-aid increases throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, alongside other factors such as the end of censorship and the growth of the counter-culture, more and more new companies emerged and demand for subsidy grew exponentially.[28] There is a persuasive argument that this growth in the number of theatre companies in England 'would not have been possible without the fact of public subsidy' (Bull, 52), but the way in which that subsidy was directed generated problems as well as opportunities. Initially, the Arts Council sought to fulfil its responsive role and meet the increased demand, encouraging and offering support to new developments across the English theatre sector. Because of its historical commitments, though, the Council found

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[27] See John Elsom (*Post-War British Theatre* 129) and Lizbeth Goodman (187), writing in 1979 and 1991 respectively. Sinclair also reports that Peter Palumbo, Chairman from 1988 to 1994, 'believed that the arts in Great Britain were the victim of their own success' (313). The Council itself recognised in 1975 that its 'increasing inability to respond adequately to the splendid demand it has helped to create is one reason why people involved in the arts now look at it with a more jaundiced eye' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1974-1975* 26).
[28] The Arts Council's allocation grew from £2,730,000 in 1963/4 to £7,200,00 in 1967/8.

itself in the difficult position of trying to foster innovation while continuing to support existing clients. As the then Assistant Drama Director Dennis Andrews explained in 1977, the Drama Panel could only fund new companies with the sum left over after its pre-established priorities (which soon included the playwriting schemes) had been fulfilled (88-89). How the Arts Council dealt with emerging theatrical forms, meanwhile, was a source of ongoing debate and confusion, with a lack of coordination across the organisation hindering its responsiveness to experimentation. This haphazard response, I suggest, is a key contributing factor behind the later schism between different kinds of new work.

One area in which confusion and division can be witnessed is the new play schemes. While there was some flexibility in how playwriting was defined by the Arts Council, attempts to widen the remit of the TWC were often dogged by assessment difficulties. Committee members repeatedly struggled to appraise applications for part or wholly devised shows, with standard procedure being to assess applications through script reports. In 1967, in response to growing numbers of submissions from alternative theatre-makers (including an application from Jim Haynes' Arts Laboratory for funding to present a season of experimental plays), the Assistant Director of the Drama Panel stated that 'an increasing problem was the consideration of "blue-prints" of scripts which could only exist,

prior to performance, in an unfinished state' (TWC, *ACGB/40/126 - Minutes of the 76th Meeting*) – referring, presumably, to texts that changed significantly in rehearsal or included elements of improvisation in performance. This is a telling indication of how scripts were typically seen: as finished artefacts, judged in isolation from performance, rather than as documents that are at once complete and incomplete. Later the same year, though, it was decided by the Committee that 'it would be wrong to make a definite ruling that plays should not be considered unless they were in script form' (TWC, *ACGB/40/126 - Minutes of the 77th Meeting*), and in 1973 the category of '[u]nscripted or improvised work' joined the criteria for the theatre writing schemes (TWC, *ACGB/40/125 - Scheme for the Promotion of New Drama 1973/74*).[29] When the schemes for 1975/76 were announced, the guidelines stated that the Committee would consider '[p]rojects involving ensemble play-making and which are not based on the work of a single author', but that grants would only be offered 'if the project is ultimately scripted, and of sufficient merit and interest to warrant further production by another company' (TWC, *ACGB/40/126 - New Writing in the Theatre*). The ambivalence displayed here is typical of the Committee's approach to work that did not fit conventional templates,

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[29] This change is also likely to reflect the end of censorship in 1968, which finally allowed companies to stage works that did not have a pre-written script. The TWC's policies prior to 1968 must therefore be understood in the context of the Lord Chamberlain's office, but in the 1970s this was no longer a factor behind the Arts Council's frequent insistence on pre-written scripts.

which it tentatively attempted to assess, hampered by some of the

reductive understandings of playtexts addressed in the previous

chapter.

This uncertainty caused problems for theatre companies not

working with solo-authored, pre-written playtexts, often with the effect

of excluding other ways of working from the remit of new writing.

Although the TWC did consider going to see 'non-scripted plays' and

making retrospective funding offers based on recommendations, as

discussed for instance at a meeting in 1969 (*ACGB/40/126 - Minutes

of the 84th Meeting*), in many instances it failed to account for

alternative approaches to text. At a meeting in 1979, for instance,

concerns were raised over a number of productions recommended

for guarantees which, it transpired, were co-written (*ACGB/40/126 -

Minutes of the 172nd Meeting*), while later that year the Writers'

Project Grant – which had funded collaborative and/or experimental

writing projects, among other things – was abandoned. As physical

theatre grew in popularity during the 1980s, the TWC expressed its

worry that 'by not acknowledging the need for a writer to steer the

text [physical theatre companies] were undermining the craft of

theatre writing' (*ACGB/40/126 - Minutes of the 38th Meeting*),

thereby effectively dismissing the 'craft' of devising. Correspondence

in this decade, meanwhile, repeatedly raised the fraught question of

copyright in relation to collaborative projects.[30] Across these

examples, the Committee's definition of writing for theatre struggles

to accommodate collaborative writing, shared authorship and/or

devised text.

Similarly bewildering to the Arts Council were the theatrical

experiments developing outside the mainstream in the 1960s and

1970s.[31] The funding body, as Steve Gooch allows, 'was not slow –

by its own standards – to respond to the new developments of the

Fringe' (45).[32] Discussions about alternative theatre began in the

early 1960s, but at first there was no coordinated way of responding

to applications that challenged the Arts Council's usual categories

and expectations. There were regular disagreements between

subcommittees, for example, about which part of the Drama

Department should be responsible for funding new alternative theatre

ventures. Unlike the case of new playwriting, the approach was

responsive rather than interventionist – the Council was 'always

[30] A letter from drama officer Ruth Mackenzie, for example, advises that 'it is generally unacceptable for contracts to propose anything other than the writer's complete ownership of the copyright' (Mackenzie).

[31] I will henceforth refer to these practices as 'alternative theatre', which Sara Freeman notes is the term preferred by most practitioners ('Towards a Genealogy'). This term was also formalised and popularised by Sandy Craig in his 1980 book *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*, which later appeared on many university reading lists. Other terms commonly used to describe this work include experimental, fringe, underground and avant-garde.

[32] While I am considering alternative theatre within a specifically English context, it should be acknowledged that American companies like the Living Theatre and Cafe La Mama were an important influence and that several of the earliest alternative companies in England developed out of the Arts Lab set up by the American theatre-maker Jim Haynes. See Peter Ansorge (22-37).

firstly acted upon before it became active' (Bull, 56). The first mention

of 'Fringe and experimental companies' in an annual review,

described as 'a lively, if sometimes ephemeral growth', arrived in

1967 with a recommendation for continued support 'to be given in as

flexible a way as possible' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1966-1967* 25),

and in 1969 the New Activities Committee was established to

investigate this work. Two reports were produced, one of which – the

majority report – 'asserted that "new activities" surrounded us,

described them with approbation', and urged the Arts Council to offer

its support (ACGB, *Annual Review 1969-1970* 9). The second report

more cautiously recommended that applications 'should be

channelled through orthodox routes', arguing that 'some of what was

claimed as the discovery of the new activists was, and for a long time

had been, already a part of the artistic scene' (*ibid.*). An Experimental

Projects Committee (EPC) was accordingly formed, soon followed by

the establishment of the Experimental Drama Committee (EDC) in

1971.

The developments on the alternative theatre scene to which

these new committees responded were perceived as opposed to

existing artworks and institutions by both the artists involved and by

the Arts Council, immediately setting up a distinction between

different kinds of new theatre. The construction of alternative theatre

as oppositional may, of course, have allowed the Council to

strategically underplay its claims to subsidy. The organisation's

response certainly reinforced the difference between this new work

and the mainstream (which now included new playwriting). The New

Activities Committee, for instance, found 'an indifference to existing

forms and traditional methods of provision' among experimental

practitioners and concluded that the 'normal methods of assessment

… can hardly be applied' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1968-1969* 11).

The typical narrative told about the emergence of alternative theatre,

meanwhile, is one of aesthetic and ideological opposition; Catherine

Itzin's assertion in 1980 that 'the significant British theatre of 1968-

1978 was primarily theatre of political change' (x) is representative of

the prevailing view, which often collapses political and artistic

resistance to the establishment.[33] But as Thomas Postlewait

cautions, when discussing oppositional artistic movements there is a

danger of fitting the historical narrative to a pre-determined context of

aesthetic and political rebellion, thus distorting the significance of

events.[34] Postlewait also warns that a vague idea of the political

context as an overarching system encourages a binarised

understanding of theatrical events as either supporting or subverting

central power. In the case of the Arts Council, which might be seen

as a component of one such overarching system, it is never this

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[33] See also Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling (17), Alex Mermikides (105), Alison Oddey and Kathryn Syssoyeva.
[34] Postlewait notes this in the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century avant-garde artists, whose achievements 'depend in great measure upon their roles as rebels with a cause, a cause that provides us with a cultural context for the events we study' (64).

straightforward. The Council itself, despite representing the establishment in the eyes of many alternative theatre-makers, recruited artists from the alternative theatre movement to its committees, at the same time as distributing funds on which supposedly oppositional theatre-makers relied.[35] In Raymond Williams' terms, these alternative practices might be seen as 'emergent', challenging the status quo, yet to greater and lesser degrees they were also either co-opted by the 'dominant' culture or became successful by playing by its rules. The relationship between 'establishment' and 'opposition', therefore, is a complex one.[36]

Soon after the EDC was formed, in 1971, concern was expressed that 'there might be a danger of the allocation of Experimental Drama money becoming increasingly detached from the mainstream of drama allocations' (EDC, *ACGB/43/36 - Minutes of the 4th Meeting*). The two-track funding system that some of the Committee feared was largely what transpired, though more due to inconsistency and poor planning than to a concerted effort to prise apart different kinds of work. There was no long-term strategy for dealing with alternative theatre; as early as 1975, the EDC observed that '[i]t was felt that the experimental area had been allowed to

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[35] Alternative theatre practitioners who sat on Arts Council committees included Roland Miller, while the People Show's Jeff Nuttall authored a report for the EDC in 1973.

[36] Ansorge suggests, indeed, that the alternative theatre movement was quickly accepted by the establishment, which was problematic for theatre-makers who were claiming to reject the 'system' (77).

develop without the long-term financial implications being taken sufficiently seriously by the Council' (*ACGB/43/36 - Minutes of the 49th Meeting*). As discussed below, alternative theatre companies were funded on an ad hoc basis, often underpinned by the assumption that their activities were a temporary disruption to traditional theatre models. Another difficulty concerned definitions. In 1967, the Arts Council's Royal Charter was revised, with 'the fine arts' being changed to 'the arts'. This reflected the desire of many within and without the Council to democratise access to the arts, but still did not define what the arts did and did not comprise. This was to cause ongoing problems for the Council, particularly in its response to new experiments that pushed the boundaries of traditional artforms. Debates about what precisely counts as 'experimental' abound in the minutes of the EDC, as do concerns about what is and is not 'art'.

Meanwhile the Arts Council was erratic in its distribution of applications among different committees, which I suggest seeded later divisions. There was much discussion, for instance, about the overlap between the EDC and the TWC: it was questioned whether, for example, companies receiving grants from the former could apply for guarantees from the latter to help pay their writers. The result was that new plays were supported, somewhat haphazardly, out of the

allocations of both.[37] It is not necessarily problematic that playwriting

was supported in different ways – indeed, it suggests that divisions

on the basis of text had not yet hardened – but this does

demonstrate an immediate imbalance between the treatment of new

plays (which had multiple funding avenues open to them) and of

theatre not originating in pre-written scripts.[38] Meanwhile the cross-

artform collaboration of companies like the People Show 'challenged

funding streams designed for drama' (Peterson 157), leaving the

company's members 'anxious about being outside what they saw as

prioritized categories of text-based theatre' (159). Another area that

lacked clarity was the relationship between the EDC and the EPC. In

a meeting of the former in 1972, John Ford highlighted parallels

between the two and argued that it was 'illogical for their policies to

be at odds with each other' (EDC, *ACGB/43/36 - Minutes of the 11th

Meeting*). The relationship between different committees continued to

be a subject of debate, producing frequent calls for better

communication and collaboration, but very little in the way of

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[37] Lunchtime theatres, for example, primarily came under the remit of the EDC, even though one Committee member described them as 'small versions of the English Stage Company' (TWC, *ACGB/43/36 - Minutes of the 14th Meeting*). Or consider a company like Portable Theatre, which was labelled alternative theatre yet was also regarded by the Arts Council as 'crucial to the burgeoning ecology of British new writing' (Megson, 'Portable Theatre' 174).

[38] There was also the danger, as the Assistant Drama Director put it in 1973, that 'an applicant spent more time deciding who to aim at than how to draw the bow' (EDC, *ACGB/43/36 - Minutes of the 25th Meeting*). On some occasions, however, this confused system did benefit companies not producing new plays; Gillian Whiteley, for instance, suggests that Welfare State benefitted from funding across a number of Panels and committees thanks to the interdisciplinary nature of its work.

concrete steps towards such cooperation.[39]

In 1966, the Arts Council was funding 61 theatres, companies and organisations; by 1976, this number had risen to 174. The listing of these companies in the 1976 annual review, meanwhile, separates clients into distinct groups: the national companies (two), regular clients (59), project-based clients (96) and touring companies (15). While Inter-Action had by this point gained ongoing funding, following the EDC's recommendation that 'since they were doing more than anyone else in the field of new drama, they should be subsidised to the greatest extent possible within the limits of the New Drama resources' (EDC, *ACGB/43/36 - Notes of Meetings*), most alternative practitioners were funded on a project-by-project basis. This project funding ranged all the way from £44,723 (a sum greater than that received by several of the companies on revenue funding) for The Combination down to just £75 for an organisation called Maximus Actors' Arena, illustrating the range of different grants awarded. In total, £660,659 went to project-funded companies in 1976, compared with £6,561,876 for regularly funded clients (including the national companies). Project funding thus represented almost 9% of the Arts Council's total Drama budget – a significant proportion, but still a minority within the overall portfolio. The project-funded client list in

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[39] These problems persisted: in 1994 Forced Entertainment among others were advised by the Drama Department to find funding from elsewhere in the Arts Council, illustrating the continuing difficulty of defining this work as theatre (Etchells xv).

1976 is an eclectic mix, including both new writing companies (e.g. Foco Novo, Soho Theatre Company) and practitioners experimenting across artforms (e.g. Welfare State, Pip Simmons Theatre Group). This supports the accounts of some of those who participated in and/or observed the alternative scene in the 1970s, who have stressed the co-existence and overlap of new plays and physical or improvisation-based theatre (Ansorge; Itzin). Some companies were directly attacking dramatic literature, but the alternative theatre movement as a whole was not (yet) defined according to its relationship with text.

There was doubtless a commitment on the Arts Council's part to support alternative theatre, and by 1975 it was highlighted as 'an area of exceptional growth' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1974-1975* 20). Significantly, though, 'the Arts Council's support to experimental companies had always been on a different basis to that for repertory theatres' (Drama Panel, *ACGB/43/3 - Minutes of the 136th Meeting*), as suggested by the way in which different clients were grouped in the 1976 annual review. This had benefits as well as drawbacks. In the early years of subsidy for alternative theatre companies, the Drama Panel accepted 'the lack of any formal administrative structure along with the probability that many of them will wind up when the impulse which brought them together ebbs' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1970-1971* 49). However, whereas other grants were

generally offered on an ongoing basis, for alternative theatre groups 'each case was re-assessed annually' (EDC, *ACGB/43/36 - Minutes of the 14th Meeting*), creating uncertain funding conditions for those companies. Furthermore, the assessment of applications by the EDC, as its own members (a number of whom also sat on the Drama Panel and other committees) regularly observed, 'involved an extremely high level of scrutiny' (EDC, *ACGB/43/36 - Minutes of the 48th Meeting*). This was, on the one hand, necessary to distinguish between a growing number of companies competing for an over-subscribed funding allocation. On the other hand, however, it meant that applications submitted by such companies were subjected to greater examination than the ongoing funding arrangements of many larger, more established organisations.

Part of the difficulty arose from the fact that the proliferation of alternative theatre challenged the Arts Council's established policy of supporting 'a limited number of institutions where exemplary standards may be developed' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1955-1956* 21). This highlights another fraught binary: between raising standards and encouraging new growth. The Arts Council's mission from the beginning was to 'raise and spread' the arts in Britain, but the emphasis soon fell on the former over the latter. In the year 1948/49, the Council 'agreed to concentrate on the needs of its old-established associate companies rather than to allow its limited funds

to be dispersed in new directions' (ACGB, *Annual Review 1948-1949*

7), a policy of quality over quantity – and the established over the

new – that was to continue for many years.[40] The emergence of

alternative theatre generated a tension between that small selection

of 'excellent' organisations (for the Arts Council at this time,

'excellence' often meant the established and prestigious) and theatre

companies who were developing experimental new work, as

captured in the 1973 annual review:

> Choices have to be made, but there is the continuing obligation to sustain the Council's existing clients … Given this, we have to be ready to detect and respond to the quality and vitality in the work of new applicants. (ACGB, *Annual Review 1972-1973* 30)

The tension was ongoing and unresolved.

The shunting of alternative theatre from committee to

committee, meanwhile, contrasts with the continued commitment to

new playwriting, which was consistently represented (if not always

adequately funded) by a dedicated subcommittee. In 1976, the EDC

was dissolved and the Projects Committee was established, taking

on many of the same clients while becoming responsible for a

growing volume of applications that could not find a home elsewhere.

While some of the EDC's clients were also transferred to the new

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[40] Looking back on its first ten years, the Arts Council reiterates this stance, interpreting the terms of its Royal Charter 'as implying the support of a limited number of institutions where exemplary standards may be developed' (*Annual Review 1955-1956* 21), and by 1962 it describes the 'essence' of its policy as 'sustain[ing] the best possible standard of performance at a limited number of permanent institutions' (*Annual Review 1961-1962* 14).

Standards and Reassessments Committee, which dealt with ongoing clients, the Projects Committee was a significant channel for alternative theatre in the following years. It was increasingly over-subscribed and regularly struggled to meet the demand from new companies.[41] In the mid-1970s, the Arts Council's officers expressed concern about the levels of funding for experimental and small-scale companies, which they claimed were at the triple disadvantage of being unlikely to attract money from patrons or sponsors, of being scrutinised by the Arts Council more than larger organisations, and of being the last priority when it came to funding allocations (Hutchison 76). There was little change to the situation, though, and by the 1980s the Projects Committee was dealing with several diverse strands of work: arts and disability, cultural diversity, experimental, theatre for young people, regional company development, working with a writer, potential franchise companies, new national touring development, mime and small-scale touring. This hodgepodge of schemes is illustrative both of the Arts Council's ad hoc approach to new work that it struggled to categorise and of the competition faced by alternative theatre companies seeking funding.[42]

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[41] To illustrate the gap between demand and available funds, for 1977/78 the Projects Committee requested £723,800 to cover its predicted needs and received just £165,000. By comparison, the TWC requested £150,000 and received £125,700 (Andrews 89) – a smaller overall sum, but more adequate to its needs. It should also be remembered that new playwriting was being supported through the funds allocated to subsidised theatres as well as through the TWC.

[42] Though given their desire to cross artforms and defy definitions, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Arts Council struggled to keep up with alternative theatre-makers.

Inadequate funds from central government continued to intensify this competition and disadvantage alternative theatre companies. While funding levels from 1979 are disputed because of disagreements about the level of inflation and therefore the real terms increase or decrease in subsidy (Peacock 44), Panel and committee minutes bear out a sense of embattlement in the 1980s. The decade was characterised by constant discussion about how the Arts Council was to both meet existing commitments and encourage experimentation with limited funds at its disposal. In 1987, the Drama Panel noted that the Projects Committee had become a catch-all for new Arts Council initiatives, and that 'whilst the Committee welcomed these initiatives, without expanding resources, it felt it was not able to provide adequate assistance' (Drama Panel, *ACGB/43/6 - Minutes of the 279th Meeting*). The Independent Theatre Council (ITC) had complained in 1983 about the 'restrictive framework of inadequate funding for Projects' (ITC), and by the end of the decade the Arts Council itself admitted that '[d]emand for funding under this scheme is so great that twice as many projects could be justifiably funded' (*Annual Review 1989-1990* 13). The expansion that was initially supported by the funding body meant that over time it struggled to continue subsidising the many companies it had enabled to develop, while corporate sponsorship – which the Arts Council increasingly

encouraged[43] – failed to make up the shortfall (especially for experimental companies who did not appeal to sponsors). At a conference in 1990 titled 'Theatre under Threat?', there was a consensus among attendees that limited sponsorship and inadequate Arts Council funding were 'encouraging a competitive atmosphere between companies which is harmful to the work … and is threatening to divide the theatre community within itself' (Goodman 189). Despite its many positive efforts, the Arts Council's initial promotion of a select few centres of excellence, coupled with its erratic approach to new developments, was gradually driving a wedge between practices that would later be defined as 'text-based' and 'non-text-based'.

'Text-based' vs 'non-text-based'

As Liz Tomlin has observed, over the last three decades an opposition between conservative mainstream and radical fringe has transmuted into a binary between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre, underpinned by a now misplaced ideological investment in the radicalism of the latter. I agree with her that we cannot consider alternative theatre practices as an 'ideologically coherent movement purely on the basis of their shared opposition to a particular, and

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[43] By 1982, for instance, the Arts Council was stating that it 'warmly supports moves to encourage business sponsorship of the arts' (*Annual Review 1981-1982* 7).

strategically defined, model of dramatic theatre' (*Acts and Apparitions* 49); the loosely grouped collection of companies and artists that constituted the alternative theatre movement was united more by a shared rhetoric of opposition than by a coherent set of ideological principles or aesthetic practices. The calcifying of this rhetoric into a straightforward opposition to the playtext misrepresents the wide array of practices that once fell under the banner of alternative theatre, which included new writing companies (such as Foco Novo and Portable Theatre) alongside theatre-makers who largely rejected solo-authored playtexts (such as CAST and Welfare State).[44] By the mid-1980s, this once heterogeneous fringe was becoming divided between

> the alternative 'tradition' of political theatre that championed new playwrights and the re-avant-gardization of British theatre through … visual and physical experimentation (Freeman, 'Gay Sweatshop' 138)

Although the movement from an eclectic range of alternative work to a more narrowly defined (though not narrow in reality) set of 'non-text-based' practices is not reducible to Arts Council policy, subsidy did influence the evolution of the English theatre ecology in important ways during this period.

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[44] The Unfinished Histories archive, which attempts to preserve the history of the alternative theatre movement from the perspective of its practitioners, reflects this diversity in its definition of alternative theatre as involving 'a process of questioning or experimentation about all or some elements of the nature of theatre: its audiences, makers, languages, working and decision-making processes, performance spaces – taking them outside the mainstream' (Croft).

The move towards a divide based on form and (perceived) relationship to text rather than on politics began during the competitive, under-funded 1980s and was exacerbated by funding initiatives in the 1990s that – intentionally or unintentionally – seemed to pit playwriting against 'visual' and 'physical' theatre. By 1986, the total number of funded theatre organisations had fallen to 142, reflecting both the demise of some of those alternative theatre companies funded in the 1970s and a tightening of Arts Council funds. While total theatre spending had risen significantly since 1976, the percentage increase of 224% compares to an 888% rise between 1966 and 1976. This was also a decade of high inflation, thus reducing this increase in real terms.[45] In the 1986 annual review, funded organisations were divided into national companies (2), building-based (38), touring (21), projects (39), theatre writing schemes (38 companies, plus bursaries and royalty supplement guarantees) and other (2). There was now a clear divide between the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company and everyone else, with the two national companies receiving more than the rest of the portfolio combined. This would appear to demonstrate my earlier point about the Arts Council's emphasis on the established and prestigious, especially in times of financial hardship. There was also a considerable decrease in the number of companies under the project-funded heading. Some of this can be accounted for by

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[45] Between 1976 and 1986, inflation averaged 9.4% a year (Bank of England).

companies disbanding or being absorbed into other funding streams (such as Welfare State, Foco Novo and Red Ladder, which were now classed as touring), but it does suggest a decreased commitment to the new and experimental.

A significant shift occurred with the introduction of non-building-based franchise funding in 1989/90 (following the subsidising of Tara Arts, Forkbeard Fantasy, Talawa and Quicksilver on similar terms in the preceding years), which allowed for a slight rearrangement of Arts Council priorities at a time of otherwise constrained funding. Under this new system, revenue-funded middle- and small-scale touring companies were put on fixed-term franchises which they had to reapply for every three years alongside project-funded companies, thus offering the opportunity for theatre-makers who had long relied on project-by-project subsidy to join the pool of franchise-funded clients (Brown, Brannen and Brown). By 1997/98, the effect of the franchise system was a net growth from 22 to 37 companies funded on this basis. Based on the categories assigned to franchise-funded companies by Ian Brown, Robert Brannen and Douglas Brown, the largest net gains over this period were in the areas of mime (an increase of six companies) and experimental, black theatre and children's theatre (net gains of three companies each) (384). Franchise-funded new writing, meanwhile, remained at an effective standstill.

Discussing the demise of Gay Sweatshop, which benefitted

from the franchise system in the 1980s but then fell apart in the

1990s when faced with a choice between new writing and

experimental performance, Sara Freeman argues that in the 1990s

'[c]ompanies were increasingly sorted by their focus on new writing,

the identity groups they addressed or their formal preoccupation'

('Gay Sweatshop' 145).[46] Certainly, on the evidence of the franchise

funding decisions, class-based politics was on the wane, replaced by

groups addressing more identity-led issues. Moreover, as writers like

David Hare and Howard Brenton increasingly worked with the major

subsidised theatres, 'new writing approaches initially central to

alternative practice became mainstream … while non-text-based

work became the cutting edge' (Freeman, 'Gay Sweatshop' 137).

There was a corresponding increase in aesthetic rather than political

opposition, with the work of new companies in the growing area of

physical theatre (a key beneficiary of franchise funding) frequently

distinguishing itself in contrast to the solo-authored play.[47] As

Freshwater noted in 2008, 'physical theatre's relationship to text has

remained central to existing discussions of its definition' ('Physical

Theatre' 172). While recognising its shortcomings, Simon Murray and

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[46] Freeman suggests that it was Gay Sweatshop's move away from new writing, which had formerly consolidated its status, that lost the company its Arts Council funding ('Gay Sweatshop' 150).
[47] Brown, Brannen and Brown clarify that the companies to benefit from franchise funding in the category of mime could mainly be described as creating 'physically based performance work' (384).

John Keefe see the terminology of 'physical theatre' as a 'distancing strategy' from theatre that was perceived to be 'outmoded and laboriously word based' (13). Like earlier deployments of terms such as 'alternative' and 'experimental', 'physical theatre' was (at least initially) a badge of resistance against the (text-led) mainstream.[48] It may also be linked to the Arts Council's growing array of funding categories. Franc Chamberlain suggests that '[a]s practitioners we may label our work in response to funding categories' ('Gesturing Towards' 118), a possibility that is echoed by Phelim McDermott (203). This can be seen in the case of Complicite, Trestle and Trickster, who pragmatically aligned themselves with mime rather than theatre and joined forces to apply pressure to the Arts Council (Fry). In 1989, thanks to the franchise funding system and following the transfer of mime from Dance to Drama, both Trestle and Complicite joined the Arts Council's portfolio at the expense of Foco Novo and Joint Stock, suggesting a slight shift away from new writing (ACGB, *Annual Review 1988-1989*).

This particular reallocation of funding seemed to some to be representative of a widening gulf between word-based drama and

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[48] Franc Chamberlain, for instance, considers physical theatre 'a heuristic term, useful for getting out of the gravitational pull of certain normalizing fields' ('Gesturing Towards' 120) and considers that it may have been '[s]omething which was marked out in opposition to mainstream theatre where the task of the actor was to interpret the text under the eye of an (often) literature-trained director' ('MAG' 132). Phelim McDermott, meanwhile, sees physical theatre as 'a reaction to a perceived over-intellectualised approach to performing and the historical emphasis on text as the primary source of creating theatre' (203).

new forms that were more interested in physical and visual

experiment. Writing in 1988, playwright David Edgar drew a

distinction between

> the literary, cerebral, intellectually rigorous but visually dry
> work of the university-educated political playwrights of the
> 1960s and 1970s, and the visually stunning, but
> intellectually thin experiments of the performance artists in
> and from the art schools. (Bull, 97)

Bull argues that this divide was not, for Edgar, absolute, but that

many interpreted it to be so and that this divide would 'become

central to what is now a very contemporary debate about text-based

and non-text-based performance' (97). Neil Bartlett agrees that in the

1980s there were

> a pretty absolute set of divisions between plays and
> formally innovative work; between building-based 'theatre'
> and project-funded touring/arts centre/small-scale
> 'experimental theatre'. (112)

There was further evidence of an emerging rift at a 1988 conference

titled 'Theatre in Crisis', during which a debate opened up about the

differences between 'visual and verbo-centric theatre' (Lavender

214). This was apparently echoed at the 1992 Birmingham Theatre

Conference, at which Edgar reported 'a contest between the

advocates of the individually written theatre text … and the

collaborative ethos of live art' (*State of Play* 20).

This supposed 'contest' can be partly ascribed to a sense of

threat on the part of playwrights. Over time, the evident commitment

to new writing could not keep pace with the number of new

playwrights emerging, much as Arts Council funding was overtaken

by the proliferation of alternative theatre companies. One result of

this over-abundance of writers and companies, stimulated at least in

part by state subsidy, was a misplaced suspicion of devising

methodologies. From the 1980s onwards, playwrights can

increasingly be seen expressing concerns about the perceived threat

from devised work. The Theatre Writers' Union's (TWU) 1987 survey

of companies in the West Midlands, for example, complained that of

the 42 new plays presented over a three-year period 'no less than 36

… were either "devised" or written by company members, and only

two of the companies commissioned writers in the normal way', a

situation that the Union intended to 'ameliorate' (TWU 10-11). The

Union was also concerned that 'the habit of small-scale companies

evading their responsibilities to employ (and pay) writers by

"devising" shows' (43) was spreading to the regional reps, not

considering that the use of devising methodologies might be an

aesthetic rather than a financial choice.[49] This concern belies the

support that new writing continued to receive in otherwise straitened

times. Between 1986 and 1996, total theatre funding increased by

just over 11% overall (a real terms increase closer to 6%, after

accounting for inflation), whereas theatre writing funds in 1996 were

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[49] That said, there may have been a financial element to some of these decisions
to devise, as by this time the TWU had been successful in negotiating writers' fees
that would have been beyond the means of some small-scale companies. For
more details of the rights negotiated by the TWU, see Edgar (*The Working
Playwright*).

almost double what they had been a decade previously (without even

taking into account the earmarked amounts included in theatres'

overall subsidy).

New Arts Council initiatives focused on collaboration and

formal innovation in the 1990s offered additional support for

companies not producing solo-authored playtexts, but in a way that

further encouraged the division of this work from a perceived text-led

mainstream. One area of expansion in the 1990s was

'collaborations', which implies cross-fertilisation of different practices.

Arts Council funding for cross-disciplinary initiatives more than

doubled between 1994-95 and 1995-96 (*Annual Review 1995-1996*),

and by 1998 this pot of money and the Combined Arts allocation

together accounted for £17,943,500 of Arts Council spending

(*Annual Review 1997-1998*).[50] By the late 1990s, furthermore, the

Arts Council was listing '[n]ew forms and collaborative ways of

working' as one of its five key priorities (*Annual Review 1998-1999*

2). Theatre-maker Amanda Hadingue, however, has observed the

dangers as well as the advantages of exploiting this new policy

emphasis:

> we were marginalising ourselves again as weirdos doing
> something unclassifiable on the fringes that had nothing to
> do with the great traditions of British drama – playwrights,
> actors and plays. (Hadingue)

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[50] The total grant-in-aid this year was £181,600,000. As a comparison,
£27,162,000 was spent on Drama and Mime (ACE *Annual Review 1997-1998*).

These schemes, while welcome, were primarily responding to novelty and innovation; ongoing support was by no means assured, and such grants still firmly placed the companies funded (the likes of Blast Theory, Forced Entertainment and Gob Squad) outside of 'proper' drama. While arts policy from the mid-1990s onwards undoubtedly offered new opportunities for some, it also contributed towards a deepening of divisions that had formed in the preceding years.

By 1996, theatre was being parcelled out into multiplying categories, reflecting the new initiatives and priorities that the Arts Council was beginning to put into place. In that year's annual review, theatre organisations were listed under 17 different categories. Touring, for instance, was divided up into a series of priority areas, such as cultural diversity, disability, mime and new writing. Interestingly, the ESC had its own separate category of 'regularly funded organisation', which sat just beneath the national companies (after which it received the most funding) and above the 'fixed-term funded organisations'. This is, perhaps, indicative of its unique value in the theatre sector in the eyes of the Arts Council, which kept it under central control as other building-based companies were devolved to regional funding bodies. There is also evidence in this annual review of a much clearer commitment to alternative and experimental work: companies such as Complicite and Welfare State

had become fixed-term funded organisations, while experimental,

mime and small-scale were all sub-categories of national touring.

This supports my suggestion that new work perceived to be outside

the text-led mainstream was increasingly being defined in formal

terms as mime, physical theatre or experimental.

Theatre-makers perceived to be 'doing something

unclassifiable on the fringes' saw new funding avenues opened to

them in these years, but they continued to be defined against the

text-dominated mainstream. Despite numerous, noted areas of

crossover, in 1995 it was still agreed that 'it was the correct approach

to deal with new work and new writing in separate sections' (Drama

Panel, *ACGB/43/8 - Minutes of the Drama Policy Working Group*).

Experimental theatre practitioners, promoters, venues and

academics also raised concerns in the mid-1990s that '[e]xisting

schemes for new writing are (no doubt unwittingly) weighted against

experimental theatre', because writers who worked closely with a

company to integrate other elements with the text or who developed

their writing as part of a solo performance practice were effectively

'ineligible for funding under the current new writing scheme' (ACE, *A*

Synopsis 58). Another complaint voiced by respondents to the same

Arts Council consultation concerned 'the lack of relationship between

[the departments of] Drama and combined Arts', which it was felt

shared little communication within the Arts Council (ACE, *A Synopsis*

61). The same problems discussed earlier in this chapter – confusion and lack of coordination between different sections of the Arts Council, a narrow definition of new writing by those administering subsidy – seem to have continued, further dividing new work based on a reductive understanding of its relationship with text.

New theatre in the new millennium

The early twenty-first century represents another key period of concentrated new playwriting policy, in which the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide became increasingly entrenched. At the start of the new millennium, the Arts Council seemingly resolved its old tension between response and initiation by emphasising 'research, advocacy, the development of national policy and major new initiatives' (*Annual Review 1999-2000* 5); in its own words, the Arts Council 'no longer simply gives out money' (*Annual Review 1999-2000* 7), explicitly taking on responsibility for cultural policy. This coincided with a £25 million funding boost (a 72% increase in the theatre budget) under the New Labour government and with the recommendations of the Arts Council commissioned report *Roles & Functions of the English Regional Producing Theatres*, popularly known as the Boyden Report.[51] One of the major outcomes of the post-Boyden funding injection was the growth of a new play

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[51] This report began as an investigation into English regional theatre but ended up advancing a vision for the wider theatrical ecology.

development culture, following the report's suggestion that theatres 'use dedicated resources to provide development support for new writing' (41). Towards the end of the century's first decade, two reports were commissioned to assess this investment in theatres' new writing policies: the British Theatre Consortium's (BTC) *Writ Large* and *New Writing in Theatre 2003-2008* by Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand. Also published in the same year was Anne Millman and Jodi Myers' *Theatre Assessment 2009*, which investigated the overall impact of increased funding on the theatre sector. All three reports, as well as observing a remarkable shift away from the established repertoire, confirm that new writing was a major beneficiary of the £25 million uplift.

The data collected in *Writ Large* showed that 'new writing' was the largest single category of productions across the theatres surveyed by the BTC for the years 2003-2009, representing 47% of all shows, and that 'devised work and physical theatre remain a minority component' (8).[52] In smaller-scale theatre, meanwhile, new writing 'appear[ed] to have undergone a period of renaissance', and increased funding had 'enabled a wider variety of new writing/new work to take place in an extraordinary mix of venues across the

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[52] The 47% of the repertoire of reporting theatres and companies that consisted of new writing included not just new plays, but also new adaptations and translations, as well as 'some devised work' (BTC 6). This broad definition of new writing was responding to the remit of capturing the full range of work writers were doing in the theatre in the early twenty-first century.

country' (Dunton, Nelson and Shand 3). This can be understood as a result of targeted resources. The authors of *Writ Large* found that 'there is a concentration of new plays in the national companies and the major regional repertory theatres' (BTC 55) – in other words, in those established theatre institutions that have been consistently funded over a long period and that benefitted from considerable uplifts in the twenty-first century.[53] In addition to the extra sums awarded to theatres producing new plays, new writing received support from the Arts Council's managed funds: £270,000 in 2003/04 and £100,000 in the subsequent four years (Millman and Myers 77). New writing also received the highest levels of investment through Grants for the Arts, the Arts Council's new funding programme for artists and organisations outside the regularly funded portfolio (Millman and Myers 77). The new money created new support mechanisms for playwriting within theatres.[54] All of the twelve institutions save one interviewed for *Writ Large* described new writing as 'core' to their work, and all bar two had 'what might be loosely described as a literary department of some sort' (79).[55] The BTC's larger questionnaire, meanwhile, found that 36 of the 60 respondents had a new writing policy, 23 had a literary department, 43 read

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[53] 83% of the additional money for theatre in these years went to producing organisations and companies (Millman and Myers 21).
[54] For a more detailed account of this new play development culture, see Jacqueline Bolton ('Capitalizing').
[55] The interviewees included representatives from new writing companies such as the Royal Court and Paines Plough, as well as regional theatres that have not necessarily had a consistent commitment to staging new plays.

unsolicited scripts and 54 offered development activities for

playwrights (68). The report concludes that '[t]he promotion of new

writing in the repertoire is a major success story both for English

theatres and the Arts Council' (8), recognising the significant role of

subsidy.

Still, however, the playwrights interviewed for these reports felt

threatened by the rise of other forms. *Writ Large*, for instance,

observed a worry among writers that Arts Council policy was moving

away from the written text, while Millman and Myers' report reveals a

consensus that emphasis had shifted away from 'new writing' and

towards 'new work' (76-77). Among the 'concerns' of playwrights

listed in the introduction to *Writ Large*'s historical context, meanwhile,

is 'an emerging trend towards collectively-written plays, excluding

freelance writers from the process' (BTC 3). Contrary to perceptions

of a swing towards devised work, though, *Writ Large* found that '[t]he

overwhelming majority (77%) of theatre works produced are plays'

(6). This also runs counter to playwrights' belief that Arts Council

policies that 'advocated new, collaborative methods of playmaking'

following the Boyden Report were 'privileging devised, performance-

based work over individually-written new plays' (4). Nonetheless, the

vocabulary of 'threat' and 'challenge' recurs again and again in the

feedback from playwrights surveyed in these reports. The authors of

Writ Large do point out that '[s]ome of the concerns expressed by

playwrights … appear not to be justified' (11), observing the disjuncture between playwrights' perceptions and the BTC's findings about the industry. They are still keen, though, to stress the success of new writing and the comparatively niche status of devising, thereby reinforcing a sense that that the two are in competition with one another.

Edgar's feeling that 'fashionable opinion has turned its back on text-based theatre' ('Shock of the New Play') perhaps gets to the heart of this persistent discontent among playwrights.[56] The Royal Court's literary manager Chris Campbell likewise reported in 2012 that the playwrights he worked with 'feel undervalued, they feel that they are being represented as old-fashioned, out of touch, a bit square and a bit dull' (Goode, 'Series 1: Episode 6'). Such complaints echo Mark Ravenhill's analysis of the theatre landscape in the early 1990s, when 'it wasn't cool to be a writer' and '[t]he figure of the playwright had taken a battering' (310) – mainly, he argued, from physical theatre and devised work. While there was a shift throughout the 1990s and 2000s towards greater acceptance and encouragement of various kinds of experimental and collaborative theatre-making, this generated defensiveness among playwrights who felt that the innovation of other theatre-makers was being celebrated at the expense of playwriting – at the same time as,

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[56] It is worth noting that Edgar was one of the authors of *Writ Large*.

contrary to perceptions, new writing continued to receive a greater share of funding and support. As an indirect outcome of the Arts Council's public emphasis on innovation on the one hand and its funding of an expanded new writing infrastructure on the other, English theatre had become divided on the basis of its perceived relationship with text. Theatre-makers were now required, as Tomlin argued in 2009, 'to categorize themselves, for strategic development purposes, as either playwrights or non-text-based artists' ('Poststructuralist Performance' 58).

The BTC's two subsequent repertoire reports offer further evidence both of the relative health of new theatre in the twenty-first century and of a continuing divide on the basis of text. A survey of the 2013 British theatre repertoire found that, for the first time, new work had overtaken revivals, representing 58% of all productions, 64% of all performances, 63% of all seats sold, and 66% of box office (BTC et al. 3). This seemed to be confirmed by the figures for 2014, with new work constituting 62% of all theatre productions, 63% of all box office income and 64% of all theatregoing (BTC et al. 3). Within the headline figures of the 2014 survey, there is also evidence of a notable increase for what it designates 'devised theatre': this category saw a 10% increase in numbers of productions, a 16% increase in performances, a 31% increase in attendances and a 48% increase in box office income (BTC et al. 3). The authors add,

however, that this success is 'heavily concentrated in a few very successful shows, with the top 20 devised productions taking 87% of all devised work's box office' (4), suggesting that just a small proportion of these companies – the likes of Punchdrunk, Complicite and Kneehigh – have broken through to the mainstream.

Drilling down further into the numbers, the BTC finds that of the 16% of the straight theatre repertoire that were devised shows, 15% were collaboratively created without a named writer and 1% were collaboratively created with a named writer. In a footnote, the authors explain that they are 'interested to trace the amount of work that crosses over between the traditionally isolated realms of devised work and playwriting', concluding that the 1% of shows they identify 'might be considered to partake both in the performance and the new writing traditions of British theatre' (14). This suggests that there is still a relatively small overlap between these typically opposed practices, at least in the organisations surveyed by the BTC.[57] Or perhaps, as these distinctions were made according to the self-definition of the companies surveyed, it indicates the continuing influence of the perceived divide between writing and devising, or 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' practices. Indeed, the categories themselves risk reinforcing differences that are not borne out in

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[57] The BTC's repertoire reports represent an incomplete (if impressively large) picture of the British theatre ecology as a whole, taking into account only those organisations that are members of the Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre (247 venues in total), which excludes many smaller companies.

practice, as the reports' authors have acknowledged (6). For all the cross-pollination observed by commentators, meanwhile, in 2014 it was still the case that 'individually-written new theatre form[ed] the majority of work presented on British stages' (47).

Another significant funding trend in the twenty-first century has been the rebalancing of the overall theatre budget and the large sums going to the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company. By 2006, around a third of theatre funds (not including the separate funding stream of Grants for the Arts) were awarded to these national companies, a proportion that remains roughly the same in 2016. The distribution across national touring (84 companies), regional producing theatres (64), presenting theatres (27) and small and mid-scale regional touring companies (23) in 2006 suggests an increased emphasis on the touring sector, from which much experimental new theatre originates. The greatest share of money, though, was still received by building-based producing theatres, which were awarded a total amount (£44,740,000) more than two times greater than the combined sum distributed to touring companies (£17,826,000). In 2016, the Arts Council's National Portfolio consisted of 168 theatre organisations, while there were well over 1,000 successful Grants for the Arts applications in the category of theatre. This represents a diverse range of practitioners, though the historical priorities of the Arts Council remain reflected in

a portfolio that still includes many familiar and long-established

organisations among the highest funded companies. Of the top 30

organisations in the 2016 National Portfolio, 23 were already

regularly funded in 1976.

The Arts Council has, in many respects, an impossible job. As

it recognised early on,

> our work can never be done. We have no single, definitive
> 'target' whose achievement will complete our mission …
> There will always be room for improvement, because
> perfection is unattainable. (*Annual Review 1962-1963* 4).

Without unlimited funds at its disposal, the Council will always be

forced to make difficult decisions and will always face criticism. The

basis on which its decisions are made, though, still deserves

interrogation. Indeed, it might be argued that when money is

restricted and the process of applying for it is therefore competitive,

the principles behind its distribution require more scrutiny than ever.

This applies as much to historical funding commitments and

decision-making processes, which have moulded the present

subsidised theatre ecology, as to current National Portfolio

deliberations. While many impacts of subsidy are indirect and

accidental, as I suggest was the case with the Arts Council's

treatment of alternative theatre, other areas – such as new

playwriting – were more actively shaped by funding and policy than is

often recognised. By attempting to understand these outcomes –

whether inadvertent or targeted – it may be possible for the Arts

Council to respond *and* initiate more effectively in future.

An examination of funding and policy over time, as undertaken in this chapter, also demonstrates that the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work is far from inevitable. Just as this dichotomy is founded on theoretical assumptions that can be unsettled, its presence throughout the structures of the English theatre sector is the product of a complex, multi-layered set of choices, responses and processes, rather than being a simple reflection of divergent theatre-making practices. It is my argument that the policies and decisions discussed above have constricted and misrepresented the work of practitioners, eventually forcing theatre-makers to identify as either 'text-based' or 'non-text-based' in order to access support and resources. While I do not believe that this bifurcation of practices was an intended outcome of Arts Council policy, it is important to recognise the role of subsidy in influencing and perpetuating the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide, thus challenging any notion that this binary has emerged as a straightforward result of deviating practices. It may also be time to relinquish the idea that the Arts Council was ever purely responsive, allowing us instead to investigate and challenge the funding body's policy-making, both then and now. This is the sort of investigation that the academy is ideally positioned to carry out, but first – as I explore in Chapter Three – it is necessary to examine how higher

education contexts have similarly driven a wedge between so-called

'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre.

Chapter Three

Drama/Theatre/Performance in the Academy

In September 2013, as part of *Giving Voice to the Nation*, a conference was held at the University of Reading to consider the relationship between new writing and state subsidy. Despite the event's aim to bring together academics, practitioners, funders and policy-makers, however, it ended up highlighting some of the divides that persist both between and within these communities. Delivering a provocation, David Edgar objected to what he perceived to be the academy's 'profound ideological hostility to playwriting and playwrights' and suggested that the principal fault line in contemporary British theatre had been drawn between 'dusty, out-of-date, text-based drama' and 'vibrant, popular up-to-the minute theatre based on devised scripts' (Merrifield). A number of issues were at stake: the status of the playwright and the solo-authored play; the assumed ideological positions of both 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre; and the biases and orthodoxies of academia, as opposed to those of the theatre industry. This chapter interrogates some of the divisions underlined by Edgar's provocation, arguing that the relationship between text and performance has frequently acted as a site of contestation at the boundaries of disciplines and fields of knowledge, both within the academy and between the academy and the professional theatre sector. I want to suggest that this in turn has

perpetuated some of the reductive assumptions about theatre texts that I interrogated in Chapter One and has reinforced the perceived binary between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre in another context.

Partial and reductive though Edgar's view may be, the academic hostility towards playwriting that he identifies is not entirely imagined. There is a complex inter-relationship between academic institutions and the professional theatre sector in England. Often, mainstream professional contexts are 'conceived as distinct from, if not opposed to' research institutions (Bolton, 'Fretting at Textual Fetters'), generating hostility and/or indifference.[1] At the same time, though, other practitioners – typically those whose work has been considered 'non-text-based' – are nurturing an increasingly close relationship with universities, who often employ these practitioners to teach on their courses and support their work in various formal and informal ways.[2] The 2016 *Analysis of English Theatre* found,

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[1] Theatre-makers, for instance, often speak or write about their work in a register that is concertedly non-academic. Richard Eyre, to take just one example, insists that 'theatre resists theory' (Eyre and Wright 8). In an educational context, meanwhile, practitioners such as Nicholas Hytner have protested against the intrusion of 'theatre theory' into training (1). Bolton also discovered perceptions of a schism between academy and industry in her interviews with contemporary practitioners (*Demarcating Dramaturgy* 106-08). As I discuss later in this chapter, academics have in turn neglected much mainstream, text-led theatre.

[2] Universities such as Kent and Chichester, for instance, offer support to graduate and associate companies, members of whom are involved with undergraduate teaching. Only one of the companies supported by these two universities in 2015 characterised their work as text-led, with the others using adjectives such as 'contemporary', 'participatory', 'physical', 'collective' and 'devised' to describe their practice, and several also identifying their work with live art. See University of Kent and University of Chichester.

furthermore, that 'Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have in the last forty years been fertile ground for emerging theatre artists and companies' (BOP Consulting and Graham Devlin Associates 38), supporting Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling's observation that several 'generations' of devising theatre companies have now formed out of university Drama departments, each influencing the next (227-28). This creates a feedback loop of companies, as those from earlier generations inspire and often teach the next set of aspiring theatre-makers, who in turn enter the industry and return to teach new students. One consequence of this is a general perception among the English theatre sector that students are studying 'the work of companies that, in the past, might have been considered as alternative', and that within universities there is 'a focus on performance rather than mainstream theatre' (Millman and Myers 76).

In this chapter, I turn once again to recent history in an attempt to understand the situation that I have begun to outline above and the broader implications this has for attitudes towards text and performance. Borrowing established frameworks from education studies to understand the development of disciplines in higher education, I investigate the origins of Drama as a university discipline in England, its proliferation and fragmentation, and the influence of the US-led model of Performance Studies. I explore how, throughout

this evolution, alignment with and resistance to dramatic texts has variously bolstered the authority of the emergent discipline, leading to another version of the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' dichotomy that was witnessed in the English subsidised theatre sector. Here I take my lead once again from W. B. Worthen, who claimed in 1995 that assumptions about the relationship between text and performance 'structure some of the fault lines that run through the various disciplinary and institutional formations that claim the study of drama/theatre/performance today' ('Disciplines of the Text' 14).[3] Much of the existing literature on Drama and/or Theatre Studies and/or Performance Studies (the nomenclature, as I discuss further below, is complicated) as a university discipline – including Worthen's article – is primarily focused on its development in North America, where Drama was established as a degree subject significantly earlier than in England and where Performance Studies as a new discipline or sub-discipline first asserted itself.[4] To date there has been less analysis of Drama as an academic subject in England, where its autonomous disciplinary status is relatively recent.[5] This chapter aims to contribute to understandings of Drama in the English academy, clarifying and at times problematising the

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[3] Worthen's argument is made primarily in relation to North American universities, but I believe that it also holds in an English context, albeit in slightly different ways.
[4] See, for instance, Shannon Jackson, Jill Dolan ('Geographies of Learning') and Jon McKenzie.
[5] A notable exception here is Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis's 2004 book *Drama/Theatre/Performance*.

place of text and performance in the discipline's evolving conception of itself as a legitimate field of knowledge.

Drama as a discipline

As a relatively young discipline, established in 1947 with the founding of its first dedicated department at the University of Bristol, Drama has repeatedly sought to demonstrate its legitimacy within the existing university system. Throughout this process, the disputed relationship between text and performance has played a central role, often reinforcing the popular misconceptions that I addressed in Chapter One. Before exploring this process, though, it is necessary to clarify what precisely an academic discipline is and to acknowledge some of the contested accounts of how disciplines operate within higher education. As sociologist and higher education specialist Paul Trowler notes, writing in 2012, '[i]t is difficult to pin down a common definition of "disciplines" in the literature' ('Disciplines and Academic Practices' 5). How an academic discipline is described and delineated depends upon many other factors, such as the field, the institution and the wider context of higher education. Broadly speaking, though, disciplines can be understood as organised around knowledge and methods or as socially constructed entities. I favour an understanding of the epistemological and the social as inextricable, as does Trowler, for whom 'the significant unit of analysis lies in *practices*' ('Disciplines and Interdisciplinarity' 31,

original emphasis). According to Trowler, the practices carried out by academics are often largely determined by the structures (both epistemological and institutional) within which they operate, but individuals can also influence and challenge these structures. This strikes me as an apt framework for analysing Drama in the academy, whose disciplinary character has been moulded by the pressures of institutional legitimacy and authority – as well as by pre-existing collective understandings of what constitutes knowledge – but which has also been significantly shaped by the decisions and actions of individual academics. This is, again, where Raymond Williams' notions of the 'dominant' and the 'emergent' are useful, accounting for both the hegemony of the overarching system and the small changes and acts of resistance that are possible within that system.

Whether disciplines are still an accurate unit of differentiation within the twenty-first-century university, however, is a matter of debate. There is a general consensus among those researching higher education that disciplines, while remaining an important organising idea within academia, have declined in influence as other forces increasingly impinge on the lives of universities, departments and academics.[6] The influential terminology of academic tribes (disciplinary communities) and territories (disciplinary areas of

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[6] These forces include the increasing role of management, the globalisation and marketisation of higher education, and the introduction of assessment exercises such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

knowledge) disseminated by higher education specialist Tony Becher

in 1989 now appears to reduce the complex contemporary landscape

of disciplines, sub-disciplines and various practices of inter-, cross-

and trans-disciplinarity. More recent research has found that

academics' disciplinary affiliations are complex and shifting,

confounding the apparent simplicity of Becher's 'tribes' metaphor.[7]

Still, though, disciplines play an important structural role both within

and across institutions, for the purposes of, for example,

undergraduate courses and research excellence evaluations.

Furthermore, while the notion of tribes and territories may have

limited applicability today, there is still something useful in Becher

and Trowler's argument that

> the ways in which academics engage with their subject
> matter, and the narratives they develop about this, are
> important structural factors in the formulation of disciplinary
> cultures. (23)

Whether or not disciplines are, strictly speaking, the principal

organising units within universities, the ways in which academics

individually and collectively conceive of the field in which they

research and teach – influenced and reinforced by stories the

discipline tells and has told about itself – will affect their day-to-day

practices and in turn sculpt the future shape of that field. It is

therefore my suggestion that narratives about Drama in the academy

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[7] See the various contributions to Trowler et al.

– within which discussions of text and performance are prominent – have played an important role in its disciplinary formation.

It is also worth briefly contextualising the place of Drama within the university sector as a whole, taking into account Becher and Trowler's suggestion that 'the location of an academic tribe within the flow of power relations will have important effects on the "shape" of its disciplinary knowledge' (37). In terms of disciplinary power, all variants of Drama, Theatre Studies and Performance Studies are fairly low in higher education hierarchies.[8] Typically, those disciplines which have a firmer centre and an agreed set of methodologies are those which are able to accrue more power within the academy; this is characteristic, for instance, of those disciplines commonly identified as the 'hard sciences'. Drama, by contrast, may be understood as a loosely knit disciplinary community, containing within it many different methodological approaches and theoretical allegiances. As I discuss later, there are some who contend that the discipline has fragmented in recent years and that Performance Studies as an independent discipline has now separated from Drama. Although I am not convinced that this is the case, such debates are indicative of the disciplinary looseness of Drama in the academy and begin to suggest some of what is at stake – in terms of

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[8] The place of Drama as a discipline has become even more threatened in recent years as Conservative government policy and rhetoric has emphasised STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects at the expense of the humanities and arts in both secondary and higher education.

power, reputation and resources – in drawing up and policing disciplinary boundaries. I am inclined to believe, as Worthen does, that 'boundary wars are as much a contest of authority and power as of "truth" or "method"' ('Disciplines of the Text' 14). I will return to these considerations of disciplinary formation, evolution, interaction and authority throughout the chapter.

The history of Drama as a discipline (or, initially, a sub-discipline) reveals some of the ways in which the relationship between text and performance has been integral to its definition. Prior to the development of Drama as an autonomous discipline, its presence in the academy was largely as a subset of literary study – a lineage that unsurprisingly foregrounded the authority of the dramatic text. While 'the literary consideration of drama has been shadowed, and vexed, by drama's concrete materiality' (Shepherd and Wallis 31), the theatrical consideration of plays has also been shadowed and vexed by drama's status (albeit marginal and contested) as literature. The relationship between Drama and English Literature can be characterised as what Becher and Trowler call parturition, a process by which 'new fields develop from older ones and gradually gain independence' through a process of developing 'distinctive methodological approaches, conceptual and theoretical frameworks and their own sets of internal schisms' (14). This process implies both continuity and difference. Theatre scholars repeatedly describe

the relationship between English Literature and Drama as one of

antagonism and fraught separation, in which the latter has fought to

differentiate itself from the former,[9] while others note the lingering

influence of English Literature on Drama teaching.[10] A literary

conception of drama thus haunts the study of theatre in the

academy, in some instances as a tradition to be resisted and in

others as a still-influential disciplinary forbear.[11] In both cases, the

status of the playtext is of central importance.

Some of the anxieties around text and performance that would

later trouble the emerging academic field of Drama can be identified

in an enquiry conducted by the University of Oxford. In the 1940s, a

team of academics observed the teaching of Drama in US

universities to investigate whether the separate study of Drama

should be formalised at Oxford. Their report, published in 1945,

highlights concerns that were to follow Drama in its subsequent

efforts to attain academic legitimacy. The Oxford Drama Commission

concluded that the model of university Drama in the US was not

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[9] See Philip Roberts ('The Drama of an English Department' 56), Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (5) and Liz Tomlin ('Poststructuralist Performance' 57).

[10] See Stephen Bottoms ('In Defence of the String Quartet' 30). Bottoms also suggested in 2009 that the separation of performance from literature 'is still regularly being re-performed' ('Editorial' 1), which can be seen in some academics' resistance to dramatic texts in the last couple of decades.

[11] There are also persistent institutional intersections and exchanges between English Literature and Drama, which often share close disciplinary homes within universities (e.g. the many combined schools/faculties of English and Drama), and across which individual academics regularly travel. My own academic trajectory – from an undergraduate degree in English Literature to a Masters in Theatre and Performance to a PhD in a Department of Drama and Theatre – is fairly typical in this respect.

appropriate for Oxford, as it failed to offer 'enough of the element of rigorous intellectual discipline' (Smith et al. 9) – an assessment that later Drama departments would have to overcome. One crucial question, meanwhile, was whether practical involvement in acting was necessary for students to understand the plays they were studying. Some of those the Commission spoke to were concerned that acting in plays displaced students' critical attention to the scripts they were performing, a concern with which the Oxford delegation appeared to agree. While the visit to US universities convinced the Commission that 'much is lost if drama is studied with little or no attempt to bring home to the student the fact that a drama is primarily something which is acted' (Smith et al. 13), they concluded that it was not necessary for students themselves to act in plays. This recommendation sharply divided theory from practice (a binary that I will investigate in greater detail later in the chapter) and did not entertain the possibility that critical analysis could be embedded in practical activity. The authors of the report added that students should have the opportunity to see plays 'performed in ways which brought out their full significance and illustrated the conditions conceived by the author for their performance' (Smith et al. 13); the principal aim of live drama in the curriculum, as they understood it, was to illustrate the playwright's intentions. The university theatre that the report recommended was likewise proposed as an 'instrument for illustrating the study of the plays' (Smith et al. 16),

lodging authority with the words on the page. Ultimately, then, the teaching of Drama was judged unnecessary because the (literary) dramatic text was understood as the authoritative object of study, the meanings and interpretations of which performance merely augmented.[12]

Although the University of Oxford decided not to establish Drama as an independent subject, just two years after the publication of the Oxford Drama Commission's report a Department of Drama was founded at the University of Bristol. In 1948, Oxford graduate Glynne Wickham was appointed as head of the new department and quickly worked to establish an identity for the discipline, a process which both resisted and reinforced some of the earlier assumptions about drama as an object of academic study. To attain full disciplinary status, Drama had to prove both its connection to and difference from existing fields such as English Literature, Classics, History and Modern Languages. Investigating this project of self-definition, Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis discuss the intriguing idea that 'drama, when it is trying to be intellectually "respectable" (Wickham's word), ceases to be a discipline' (11). Intellectual

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[12] It should be noted that, despite not establishing Drama as a separate academic discipline, Oxford (along with Cambridge) has contributed significantly to the professional theatre sector through its prominent student drama societies, which have produced many of England's highest profile actors, writers and directors. Many of these practitioners bring with them a literary understanding of theatre, as Bolton has suggested of directors emerging from the Leavisite tradition at Cambridge (*Demarcating Dramaturgy* 174-85).

respectability for a nascent discipline usually means conforming to established academic standards and conventions, but in the case of Drama this is paired with an anxiety that fitting too neatly into pre-existing models will undermine the argument that theatre needs to be studied as a separate discipline. Given this anxiety, the subject had to walk a precarious tightrope on its journey to legitimacy, taking on just enough of the academic 'respectability' of already established fields while stressing the characteristics that made it distinct.

At Bristol, there was therefore both an insistence on the *singularity* of Drama and a desire for it to be studied alongside other disciplines. In Wickham's many notes, articles and speeches during his time at Bristol, the word 'autonomous' regularly appears, signalling the anxiety that surrounded the subject's battle to be accepted as a discipline in its own right. Yet Wickham also emphasised the ways in which Drama is related to other academic disciplines, asserting that 'no department within a university can ever afford to be so arrogant as to regard itself as a self-contained commune responsible only to itself' (*GW/AC/124/1 - Fifty Years of Drama*). At a time when specialisation in higher education was a growing trend, in the department at Bristol there was an intellectual investment in interdisciplinarity and a desire to create an 'informed balance' between 'instruction in historical fact, in critical theory, and in practical creativity' (Wickham, *Drama in a World of Science* 85). By

the late 1950s, undergraduate courses incorporated dramatic literature from Aeschylus right through to the twentieth century, alongside historical stagecraft, stage architecture and production structures, dramatic theory, radio, film and television, and practical classes on voice, movement, mime, stage design and technical skills – a list that illustrates the impressive breadth of the subject created by Wickham and his colleagues (*GW/AC/539 - Lecture and Seminar Lists*).

This curriculum, however, faced challenges, which again underline the contested relationship between text and performance. In his 1979 study of the development of Drama in higher education, pioneering Drama lecturer Martial Rose states that 'Drama was continually under scrutiny and even challenged as to whether it was a genuine subject at all' (13), while Wickham recalls encountering a 'surprising degree of scepticism' in the first year of Drama teaching at Bristol (*GW/AC/124/1 - Fifty Years of Drama* 5). Indeed, throughout Wickham's speeches and statements there is an acute awareness of Drama's disciplinary fragility and the scholarly hierarchies in which it was attempting to locate itself, suggesting that the new department was not easily accepted by the existing institutional framework. These experiences support Becher and Trowler's claim that 'emergent disciplines must face the competitive demands of those which are already established' (172). In the department's early years,

criticism and suspicion were largely directed towards the relationship between the study of plays on the page and their practical performance, echoing the concerns of the Oxford Drama Commission. There was 'no hesitation about accepting dramatic literature as an authentic art form', but there was 'considerable doubt about admitting theatre studies as an art' (Rose 9). For many at the time, drama was '*ancillary* to literary studies', necessary only to illustrate what could not be fully understood on the page (Coghill 48, my emphasis). This attitude firmly locates authority with the playtext – conceived of as the authoritative and originary 'work' – in ways that I resisted and refuted in Chapter One.

Speaking at the 1951 Symposium on 'The Responsibility of the Universities to the Theatre', literary scholar Nevill Coghill – who was one of the members of the Oxford Drama Commission and had taught Wickham at Oxford – stated that drama has a '*particular* contribution to make within the field of literature', but maintained the opinion of the Commission that 'the drama is a less rigorous intellectual training than literature' (47, original emphasis). Coghill's comments about what he calls the 'style' of a play, meanwhile, are suggestive of the intellectual landscape into which the Drama Department at Bristol was attempting to intervene. Coghill explains that literary style can be defined as '[t]he way in which a writer handles words', but dramatic literature poses a problem because

'unless a reader is endowed with a faultless three-dimensional imagination he cannot read the real style of a play off a printed page' (43). Performances, then, are for Coghill a way to enhance the understanding of plays and make the 'style' of playwrights legible. This problematically assumes, of course, that production is primarily a vehicle for the writer's intention and that, furthermore, it is possible for a complete and faithful rendering of this loosely defined 'style' in performance. These are assumptions that I unpicked in Chapter One, but that were pervasive in both academia and the professional theatre sector when Drama was first establishing itself as an academic discipline.

Recourse to the established study of dramatic literature was therefore a possible way of appeasing Drama's critics. Although remaining committed to a broad and interdisciplinary curriculum, the department at Bristol framed many of its activities as ultimately facilitating a better understanding of dramatic texts, in what I suggest was a strategic move to attain both 'respectability' (through the recognised dramatic canon) and autonomy (via the various arts of theatrical production) within the academy. While practical performance work was, in Wickham's opinion, an indispensable part of the courses offered at Bristol, it was generally in the service of studying playtexts. In his suggested programme for 1950-1952, for instance, Wickham listed one of the key purposes of the practical

work in the General Degree course as being '[t]o illuminate the academic study of dramatic literature', while one of the five grounding assumptions for the Special Degree programme was that 'for the literary material to be properly understood a limited amount of illustrative practical work is essential' (Wickham, *GW/AC/448 - a Suggested Programme*).[13] An emphasis on dramatic literature may have been expedient in these documents, which were presumably aimed at academic colleagues and might well have played a negotiating role in securing support for the still vulnerable department. Whether or not these official principles are a fair reflection of teaching practice, though, they nonetheless illustrate the authorising role played by dramatic texts in the subject's early legitimising discourses. Drama had successfully broken away from literature by arguing for the necessity of performance, but it still frequently relied upon an essentially literary understanding of dramatic texts to justify its newfound place in the academy.

Performance Studies and the 'broad spectrum'

The expansion of Drama as a discipline introduced new intellectual concerns and new disciplinary boundaries to control and legitimise, leading to further contestation around the role of the text. From its

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[13] Until it gained Single Honours status in 1968, drama was available to undergraduates at Bristol either as one of four subjects in the General Degree of BA or as part of a Special Degree alongside Classics or Modern Languages. This again suggests that for several years drama was required to prove itself before being accepted as a full and legitimate discipline.

foundation in 1947 until 1961, Bristol was the only university Drama

Department in England. During a period of general university

expansion in the 1960s, though, a wave of other departments

followed: at Manchester in 1961, Hull in 1963, Birmingham in 1964

and Exeter in 1968. Building from this modest base, the academic

field of Drama quickly grew, and by the time the Cork Report was

published in 1986 there were over 70 Drama departments in

universities across the UK (Cork 47). Drama also rapidly developed

as a subject in the polytechnic colleges that were created in the

1960s. Under the binary system then in place, the courses at these

colleges had a more vocational emphasis than their university

counterparts, further blurring the edges of the discipline. Despite this

rapid expansion, though, there was an ongoing need to argue for

Drama's legitimacy as a discipline. Leading figures within the new

Drama departments in the 1960s and 1970s were concerned with

'clarifying the discipline's position, *distinct* from its mother-discipline

of English, but definitely *within* a predefined university-humanities

sector' (Francombe 178, original emphasis), reiterating the delicate

balance between differentiation and conformity. Writing in 1974,

Michael Richards noted that 'drama needs to justify itself on its own

merits, though it continues to find itself in an anomalous position in

the existing university structure' (55). Almost 30 years after the

creation of the first university Drama department, the subject was still

perceived as an outsider that had to fight for its place within the

hierarchy of academic disciplines – with significant implications for how the field chose to frame itself.[14]

Wickham's response to both the growth of Drama as a field and the challenges it faced within the university sector was to advocate clearer disciplinary boundaries and to cleave to the study of dramatic texts. By the late 1970s it was his belief that theatre scholars needed to be firmer 'in defining both the perimeters of a subject and the several particular areas of study contained within them' (*GW/AC/045 - a Revolution* 119). Claiming that polytechnics 'were directly encouraged to adopt a more radical approach in drawing up their curricula for validation' and had more freedom than their university counterparts, he expressed concern that some of these courses had 'developed into sectarian cults with a mystical rather than a pedagogical basis and improvisation rather than formal texts as common factors' (*BDD/GW/019/1-2 - Gulbenkian Foundation File*). Definitions of Drama, he added, had

> been extended to include minority areas of interest and activity with little more than an applied dimension in common and, in some cases, an implicitly if not explicitly hostile attitude to both subsidized and commercial professional theatre practice. (*BDD/GW/019/1-2 - Gulbenkian Foundation File*)

Although his defensive attitude towards the discipline he had such a central role in establishing perhaps exaggerates these

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[14] University drama also faced further threats in the 1980s, when the University Grants Committee proposed cuts to drama courses.

developments, what Wickham was observing was the increasing

bifurcation of different kinds of theatre-making in England and the

beginnings of the academic hostility towards the theatrical

mainstream that Edgar was later to complain of. While it is important

not to simply conflate the mainstream with 'text-based' theatre, we

have already seen – both in Edgar's comments and in the previous

chapter – that the 'subsidized and commercial theatre practice' to

which Wickham refers is largely characterised by productions and

processes which prioritise the playtext. The implicitly pejorative

reference to improvisation, meanwhile, suggests that Wickham still

saw 'formal texts' as the unifying force behind Drama as a university

discipline, even as other departments deliberately widened the

subject's scope beyond the staging of plays.

By the 1990s Wickham was also concerned about the

fragmentation of the discipline, which according to him

> began early in the 1970s with attempts to politicise the
> curriculum – a process that placed large question marks
> over the priority hitherto accorded to both dramatic literature
> and theatre history in university Departments of Drama.
> (*GW/AC/124/1 - Fifty Years of Drama* 20)

One of the major culprits of this fragmentation and subdivision, to his

mind, was a new intellectual import from across the Atlantic:

Performance Studies. The 1997 Colston Symposium, marking 50

years of the Drama Department at Bristol, was symbolic of this shift,

opening with a lecture by Richard Schechner titled 'What is

Performance Studies and Why Should You Know About It?'.

Originating under Schechner at New York University (NYU) in 1980,

Performance Studies eschewed a focus on canonical dramatic works

in favour of what Schechner calls the 'broad spectrum', which

includes 'entertainments, arts, rituals, politics, economics, and

person-to-person interactions' (Schechner, 'A New Paradigm' 9).

Integral to the discipline as defined by Schechner, meanwhile, is its

interdisciplinarity. In one sense this can be seen as a continuation of

the avowed interdisciplinary approach established by Wickham at

Bristol, but Performance Studies also sought to make a decisive

break from Drama, which often meant a concomitant break from the

dramatic text. Despite his Department of Performance Studies at

NYU being born out of the Graduate Drama Department, Schechner

strategically omitted Drama from the long list of disciplines that he

claimed had influenced Performance Studies, which included Social

Sciences, Feminist Studies, Gender Studies, History,

Psychoanalysis, Queer Theory, Semiotics, Ethology, Cybernetics,

Area Studies, Media and Popular Culture Theory, and Cultural

Studies (*Performance Studies* 2). Much as Drama had distinguished

itself from English Literature, Performance Studies was carefully

emphasising its difference from Drama.

While Performance Studies has a claim to disciplinary status

in the US today, in England its impact is more diffuse. In a 2005

special issue of *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, Jane Bacon

and Franc Chamberlain described their sense that

> something new is happening in the United Kingdom and
> that it does not yet have a name: it knows it is neither the
> Performing Arts collectively nor any of them individually,
> and that it is not the same as Performance Studies in the
> United States. (187)

The theme of the issue, which explored the place of Performance

Studies in the UK, is an indication of the identity crisis the discipline

was (and arguably still is) having. Although many individual

academics working in English universities would probably

characterise their research as falling within the bounds of

Performance Studies, most of them are still based in departments

that are identified with some combination of Drama and Theatre

Studies (occasionally with 'Performance' as a second or third term in

the title of departments and/or degrees) and few courses explicitly

align their teaching with the Performance Studies label.[15] I would

argue, therefore, that Performance Studies has not (yet) broken with

Drama to form its own separate discipline in the English context. The

international influence of this emerging field, though, has created a

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[15] Excluding vocational acting and technical courses, in 2016 there were 82 undergraduate Drama courses on offer in England. 22 of those courses contained the word 'Performance' in their title, often alongside 'Theatre' or 'Drama'; none of them were called simply 'Performance Studies'. By contrast, 48 degree titles contained the word 'Drama' and 38 contained the word 'Theatre'. These figures are based on a survey I conducted in October and November 2016 using a combined search of the UCAS course database and universities listed on the Standing Committee of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) website. The survey does not include joint honours degrees except at those universities where drama or performance is only available alongside another subject.

new, internal disciplinary fault line in the English academy, with dramatic texts once again playing a contested role.

The most persistent of Performance Studies' legitimising discourses is its antithetical pairing of marginality and expansiveness, which serves to doubly inscribe its opposition to written drama. Performance Studies often executes a seemingly paradoxical double manoeuvre: it positions itself as a marginalised, liminal discourse,[16] existing on the fringes of legitimised academic activity, at the same time as it claims an almost universal application for its methodologies, characterising the discipline as 'an interpretive grid' that can be laid upon 'almost any sort of human activity, collective or individual' (Carlson, *Performance* 208). What the two sides of this pairing share is a sidelining of dramatic texts. In asserting marginal status, Performance Studies places itself in opposition to the perceived orthodoxies of play and playwright; in promoting the 'broad spectrum' approach, it makes a conscious move *away* from the performance of scripts and *towards* the role of performance in multiple other fields and scenarios. As Stephen Bottoms pointed out in 2003, 'theatre is now categorized as the acting out of dramatic literature in a purpose-built building, whereas performance is taken to encompass pretty much anything and

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[16] The assertion of liminality has become such a familiar trope within Performance Studies that in 2001 McKenzie influentially dubbed it the 'liminal-norm'.

everything else' ('The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid' 173). At the same

time, as Bottoms adds in a 2011 chapter on the same subject,

> 'performance' represents *both* a vastly expanded field (a broad spectrum) of popular, traditional, and everyday performance behaviours *and* a narrowly defined field of experimental or avant-garde art. ('In Defence of the String Quartet' 27-28, original emphasis)

This creates a situation whereby drama is excluded on two fronts,

while being defined paradoxically as '*both* culturally irrelevant *and*

the dominant culture that must be challenged' (Bottoms, 'In Defence

of the String Quartet' 28, original emphasis). Written drama is, for

Schechner, the 'string quartet of the 21st century' ('A New Paradigm'

8) and therefore approaching obsolescence, yet it is also portrayed

by advocates of Performance Studies as the orthodoxy they are

resisting.

As a result, an ideologically loaded binary has opened up, in

which Drama is 'aligned with the dominant, with the canonical, and

with disciplinary singularity while performance studies is aligned with

the marginal, with the anti-canonical, and with disciplinary multiplicity'

(Jackson 24). Liz Tomlin has similarly noted the familiar move in

Performance Studies whereby theatre is figured as the demonised

'other' to which performance is opposed (*Acts and Apparitions*). The

dramatic texts that constitute this etiolated theatre, meanwhile, are

'construed as vessels of authority, of canonical values, of hegemonic

consensus' (Worthen, 'Disciplines of the Text' 14). This rigid

characterisation of the dramatic literature to which advocates of Performance Studies are opposed relies upon assumptions of stability and singularity that I debunked in Chapter One but that have carried over into the new (sub-) discipline. Imported to an English context in which a perceived divide was already widening between different practices, it is easy to see how this binary between theatre and performance might translate into an opposition between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. The misplaced belief of many in the radicalism of 'non-text-based' practices that I identified in the previous chapter is, I therefore suggest, underpinned by the influential discourses of Performance Studies as well as by the oppositional rhetorics of the alternative theatre movement.

One outcome of this binary is the (by no means universal) academic disinterest in playtexts with which this chapter opened. It is perhaps unsurprising, given the fashionable vocabulary of liminality and radicalism that Performance Studies has accrued, that academics working within what is still described in England as Drama or Theatre Studies would want to 'buy into the potency of Performance Studies' (Bottoms, 'The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid' 182) and align themselves with practices perceived to be innovative and oppositional. The overview reports released following the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008 and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 attest to this shift in the academy, with both

emphasising an increase in research that investigates experimental theatre practice.[17] Bottoms, who sat on the RAE panel in 2008, notes that he

> encountered vast swathes of research concerned with performance and 'non-text-based' theatre, but comparatively speaking, very little work concerned with literary drama or playwriting. ('Editorial' 2)

This led him to conclude that 'a largely reflexive disinterest in dramatic literature and theatre history has become the new orthodoxy' ('Editorial' 2). In teaching, meanwhile, experimental practices have increasingly claimed a larger place on the curricula of many university drama departments, perhaps reinforced by the feedback loop of devising companies described by Heddon and Milling (227-28). Performance Studies might not have attained independent disciplinary status in England, but its literature, its discourses and its resistance to dramatic texts have all gained increasing sway in English Drama departments.

As well as the potentially negative implications it has for the relationship between academy and industry, as seen in Edgar's comments, the neglect of plays and playwrights that has resulted from the influence of Performance Studies threatens to deprive and undermine the teaching of these areas. While the study and teaching

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[17] The overview report for 2008 noted that 'over the period there has been a great increase in the range, breadth and diversity of research in experimental theatre practice and contemporary performance studies' (RAE), while the 2014 research exercise found 'a significant focus on experimental performance practices operating outside the mainstream/subsidised sectors' (REF).

of experimental practices remains important and should not by any means be abandoned, I largely agree with Bottoms that 'we need to begin questioning the magnified "elitism" of our obsessing over a tiny sector of experimental performance practice' (*Demarcating Dramaturgy* 33). If what are often seen as conventional, text-led theatre practices are overlooked or maligned within universities, then Drama degrees and their students risk becoming more and more detached from the majority of professional theatre practitioners and theatregoers, reinforcing a sense of difference and division. The concern is that new generations of graduates end up simply perpetuating the same divisive narratives of 'text-based' versus 'non-text-based', rather than exploring the many different ways in which text(s) can enter into theatre-making practice. Adopting Schechner's vocabulary, Bacon and Chamberlain helpfully suggest that

> [i]f we took the broad spectrum approach seriously we wouldn't simply be concerned with what's new and unfamiliar, but also in looking at what was old and familiar with, perhaps, new eyes. (184)

To be genuinely 'broad', Schechner's much-cited spectrum should have room for dramatic texts and mainstream production practices, as well as for experimental performance and social ritual. Instead, though, proponents of Performance Studies in both the US and England have largely pursued disciplinary legitimacy through an opposition to written drama that reinscribes existing divisions.

Theory and practice

Among the early anxieties to plague Drama as a discipline was 'a nervousness, in the context of text-based university humanities departments, about both craft and vocational training' (Shepherd and Wallis 9). Speaking in 1951, Wickham noted that he was frequently asked two questions about the department at Bristol: '[a]re you just another acting school?' and '[a]re you an offshoot of the Department of English that deals with Dramatic Literature?' (*GW/AC/706 - Untitled Talk*). The department insisted that it was neither, but the questions themselves are revealing. They point to the double life of drama, in performances and in texts, catered for by acting schools and literature departments respectively. The implied difficulty in conceiving of an intellectual existence for drama and theatre outside of these two distinct educational contexts reveals once again how a division between text and performance has been deeply embedded within English cultural institutions. The challenge for Drama in universities was to remain recognisably different from both drama school training and the literary study of dramatic texts, thus bringing together practice and theory and placing the relationship between texts (the object of literary analysis) and performances (the core of drama school training) at the centre of disciplinary debate.

Although debates about the balance between theory and practice in Drama education and training have frequently acted as a

site of contest in the misleadingly binarised relationship between text

and performance, as I will explore throughout the rest of the chapter,

it is important to point out here that I am not suggesting that theory

and practice map in any way onto 'text-based' and 'non-text-based'

theatre. While theory and practice have each, in different contexts

and at different times, been (perhaps strategically) aligned with both

text and performance, it is my view that theory and practice are

mutually reinforcing and that theoretical and practical approaches are

equally important for all kinds of theatre. It is also worth noting that

the picture of Drama in higher education that I have been building

throughout this chapter is complicated by the presence of

conservatoires, which have sometimes positioned themselves as

completely practical and have cast universities, contrastingly, as

wholly theoretical. It is clear, however, that all practice is underpinned

and guided by theoretical assumptions – whether conscious or

unconscious – and that practice, though it takes different guises, has

played a crucial role in university Drama departments from the

beginning. What the rhetoric surrounding theory and practice reveals,

though, is another locus of anxiety around text and performance.

The balance of theory and practice in Drama teaching was

already a concern when the Oxford Drama Commission undertook its

trip to the US in the 1940s. In this context theory implied the literary

study of playtexts, while practice typically referred to the various

theatrical arts involved in making performances. The curriculum that the Commission found at US universities included 'speech, acting, play-directing, stagecraft, play-writing, appreciation of the theatre, history of the theatre' (Smith et al. 4). This curriculum was, the authors of the report note, 'not designed to equip the student thoroughly either for play-acting or for play-production or for play-writing' (4); the emphasis was – as it likewise became in England – on academic study rather than vocational training. Still, though, the report notes the possible criticism that US Drama teaching is 'unduly vocational' (8), which seems to implicitly refer to its emphasis on the practical skills of theatre-making. At the 1951 Symposium at the University of Bristol, there were similar objections to what was perceived to be the more vocational American tradition (James), against which university Drama in England sought to differentiate itself. However, as the Oxford Drama Commission itself recognised, '[i]t is not easy … to be quite clear in regard to the difference between a university course which is vocational and a university course which is not' (Smith et al. 8). If Drama courses were not to be simply a specialised branch of English Literature, some engagement with performance practice was required, but it is unclear at what point the inclusion of practical teaching makes a course 'vocational' rather than 'academic'.

This remained a fraught question for the Drama Department at the University of Bristol. It was Wickham's desire that 'the hands … be reunited with the heart and with the head' (*Drama in a World of Science* 51), but the intended marriage of theory and practice was not straightforward. The balance between academic and vocational training was a frequent subject of discussion, with Wickham and his colleagues repeatedly stressing that their courses were *not* intended to train students for the professional stage. At the first National Student Drama Festival in 1956, Professor Beare (speaking on behalf of Bristol) made it clear that 'it was not the intention to give students the idea that by taking a degree, partly in drama, they would be qualified for a career on the professional stage' (Rodford). In another speech on drama and education, Wickham was unequivocal in his belief that 'a drama department, to be worthy of the name, must never be just another dramatic academy' (*GW/AC/690 - Drama and Education*). The department's prospectus, meanwhile, was at pains to stress that its aims 'are not the same as those of the Dramatic Academies and Theatre Schools, which offer primarily a professional and vocational training' (University of Bristol, *BDD/PM/000001 - Prospectus*).

The uneasy relation of theory and practice was another cause for concern about Drama's disciplinary legitimacy and its compatibility with established university mechanisms. Surveying UK

Drama departments in 1974, Richards found that '[w]hile academically-qualified lecturers can be absorbed with comparative ease into the existing university structure', this was 'less true of staff who offer practical and technical skills' (56), creating an internal divide between academic and practical staff.[18] Meanwhile, as Rose points out, the study of dramatic literature was 'more amenable to assessment procedures' than practical performance (13). Clive Barker has similarly observed the problems encountered by the meeting of theory and practice during his time teaching Drama at the University of Birmingham. He notes that the intention of the Birmingham department was not 'to train professional actors, but to make it clear what the demands are of putting theory and study into practice', adding that '[t]he problems of doing this are enormous' (56). Study and practical work were, he reports, largely kept separate within the curriculum during his time at the department between 1966 and 1973. His attempted marriage of theory and practice, in which work that would usually be considered academic was 'directly linked to practice and possible action' (60) through a workshop-led strand of the degree which involved additional contact hours, had to be abandoned because of the intense demands it placed on both students and teachers. Intriguingly, this short-lived 'practical option' looks similar in some ways to Performance Studies as conceived by

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[18] In the department at Bristol, for instance, a staffing dichotomy emerged between academics and practitioners (Rose).

Schechner: while the students taught by Barker worked on canonical dramatic texts, their study and training was not aimed towards the usual end goal of a production, and important aspects of the course involved studies of clowning and ritual. However, existing university structures of assessment and value struggled to accommodate Barker's process-led approach, and emphasis soon returned to the culminating performance of dramatic texts.

One source of the tussle between theory and practice, as already noted, is the fact that theatre in the academy exists alongside the vocational training on offer from drama schools and conservatoires. Drama schools are explicitly geared to equip students for the professional stage, with courses that focus primarily on the development of practical acting skills such as voice and movement. As the Drama Department at Bristol was teaching similar skills, albeit in a different context, it is unsurprising that it was asked to assert its difference from a training system that had successfully been in place since the turn of the twentieth century.[19] As more university Drama departments were established, meanwhile, drama schools were likewise keen to assert their unique status as training

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[19] The balance of theory and practice was further complicated by the polytechnics, which were intended as universities' more vocational counterparts. Drama, therefore, was served by conservatoires providing vocational training, universities offering academic instruction, and polytechnics offering something between the two.

institutions.[20] Ben Francombe suggests, for instance, that the

Conference of Drama Schools placed emphasis on the link between

training and jobs in order to 'remove itself legitimately from the

established higher-education sector' (177), in a mirror image of the

assertions of legitimacy from the nascent university Drama

departments, which specifically did *not* offer training for an acting

career. Potential overlaps between academic and vocational training

have therefore largely been effaced in favour of hard distinctions.

The 1975 Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation enquiry into actor

training, for instance, advocated the maintenance of a clear divide

between drama school training and the non-vocational (or less

vocational) courses on offer at universities, polytechnics and

colleges.[21]

Debates about the relationship between universities and

drama schools continue today, though with shifted emphases and,

accordingly, different implications for approaches to text and

performance. Initially, the vocational training of drama schools

represented the performance side of the text/performance dichotomy,

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[20] There was also an economic dimension to this concern, as drama schools were independent, fee-charging institutions, unlike the publicly-funded universities where students were eligible for grants to support their study. There was therefore a danger, from the drama schools' perspective, that students would take the less expensive option of a university Drama degree. In recent years, the raising of university tuition fees has levelled this difference to an extent.

[21] The authors of the report recommended that drama schools be brought under the publicly-funded umbrella of further and higher education, but were keen to 'assert vociferously the distinction within our education system between the vocational drama training provided in drama schools and the proliferation of non-vocational performing arts courses' (58-59).

but today drama schools largely serve the text-led mainstream while universities produce more so-called 'non-text-based' practitioners, highlighting differing perceptions of the theatre sector for which these institutions are preparing students. In recent years, the gap between universities and drama schools has been narrowed in some respects by the ability of the latter to award degrees, while it is John Freeman's perception that (perhaps partly as a result of the polytechnic colleges becoming universities in 1992) 'preparation for the professional stage has crept into the imagination of many students, lecturers and programme managers' ('Performance Studies' 79).[22] Certainly this fits into the broader pattern of increasing emphasis on vocational training since the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 and Dearing Report of 1997, and it can be witnessed in strategic moves by universities to explicitly link undergraduate teaching and professional careers.[23] Freeman's concern, though, is that this movement will lead university teaching to imitate traditional drama-school training, which he suggests typically places 'an emphasis on narrative engagement through character and plot, linked to the centrality of the written script' ('Performance Studies' 80). Drama school acting courses usually culminate in

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[22] There are also institutions that now combine academic research and conservatoire-style training, such as the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the recently merged University of Surrey and Guildford School of Acting.
[23] Becher and Trowler likewise identify 'an increasing emphasis in government policy and rhetoric on the vocational functions of HE, in terms both of its role in supplying qualified students for the professions, industry and commerce and in terms of its research function' (5).

showcases and/or productions based on the realisation of playtexts, with training largely geared towards text-led production structures.[24] Here Freeman is identifying a different attitude towards the playtext at drama schools – where the actor's skill is harnessed to fulfil the playwright's 'vision' – as opposed to universities – where texts are often subjected to interrogation and experimentation. Again, the relationship between text and performance is a site of contestation at the borders between disciplines and institutions.

I am not sure, however, that Freeman's fears about a drama school model of training seeping into university Drama are entirely warranted. While in some respects the pedagogical aims of drama schools and university Drama departments have moved closer together, with many universities placing greater emphasis on preparation for the professional theatre, the theatre for which they are training students differs in significant ways. Thanks to the influence of Performance Studies, as discussed above, universities have largely embraced a more 'experimental' curriculum and the theatre-makers they produce typically form companies in the independent sector after graduation, creating work that is often

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[24] There are significant exceptions to this characterisation of drama schools, including institutions such as Rose Bruford and East 15, which have taken a more experimental approach to training. Another institution that sits somewhat outside (or perhaps between) the training contexts discussed in this chapter is Dartington College of Arts (now subsumed into Falmouth University), whose pedagogical approaches are discussed by Simon Murray and John Hall.

categorised as 'non-text-based'.[25] The drama schools, on the other

hand, still primarily understand their role as training actors for

mainstream theatre – which remains, as we saw in the previous

chapter, largely text-led.[26] Crucially, Francombe suggests that

university Drama departments are 'setting out to serve their own

industry' (183) – an industry arranged around experimental,

independent theatre companies (which have often formed out of

university and art school cohorts) – while the text-led mainstream

continues to recruit its actors from drama schools in overwhelming

numbers.[27]

What emerges from this discussion of Drama in English

universities is a discipline riven by differences in theory, methodology

and pedagogy, in which distinctions between departments,

institutions and areas of study are still often articulated with reference

to a binarised understanding of text and performance. In their

position as generators of knowledge and discourse and in their role

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[25] Heddon and Milling, for instance, cite Forced Entertainment (formed at the University of Exeter) and Stan's Cafe (founded by two graduates of Lancaster University) (228). Other, more recent examples include curious directive (University of Warwick), Accidental Collective (University of Kent), non zero one (Royal Holloway), Action Hero (Bretton Hall, University of Leeds), Made in China (Goldsmiths) and RashDash (University of Hull).
[26] Based on her experience as a teacher, Catherine Alexander observes that 'actors coming out of traditional conservatoire settings are often really uncomfortable with improvising and working independently to devise material' (Kapsali 223), highlighting a significant divide in the teaching methods and outcomes of universities and drama schools. She adds that industry agents 'don't want [actors] to do experimental work, and devised work' (Kapsali 223), which she suggests has influenced the curricula of drama schools.
[27] Freeman, for instance, cites a report which found that 86% of professional actors had received drama school training ('Performance Studies' 79).

preparing students for the professional theatre sector, these institutions can therefore be seen to be reiterating flawed assumptions about playtexts and reinforcing a perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' practices. While it is important to acknowledge that this cannot be claimed of all individual courses or universities, and that curricula are constantly shifting as a result of the increased mobility of academic staff, higher education as a whole restates many of the same divisions as the theatre sector it serves and critiques. This may also explain why, to date, universities have struggled to challenge the binary between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work in the theatre industry. In the final section of this chapter, I begin to consider some of the ways in which Drama as a discipline might move beyond these divisions.

Training and craft

In further considering the relationship between theory and practice within Drama research and pedagogies in England, I want to pick up on Shepherd and Wallis' use of the term 'craft' in relation to university Drama teaching. Typically, craft is understood as practical, and allied – as it is by Shepherd and Wallis – to vocational rather than intellectual pursuits. Actors, for example, will often talk about honing their craft, while the theatre sector careers fair Theatre Craft focuses on behind-the-scenes 'crafts' such as stage management and lighting design (Theatre Craft). I wish to suggest, however, that

sociologist Richard Sennett's reconceptualisation of craft as an activity that *unites* theory and practice in his 2009 book *The Craftsman* might offer a useful framework for thinking about these dual aspects of Drama as an academic discipline and about the relationship of each to theatre texts. Craftsmanship is particularly productive in thinking about training and education, which involve the same gradual accumulation of skill that craft both requires and enables. That ongoing process of skill-building, furthermore, can be seen as involving elements of theory and practice simultaneously. Understanding and doing, for Sennett, are closely intertwined in the work of the crafts(wo)man – or at least they should be. He questions Hannah Arendt's sharp separation of *Animal laborans* (the human being as blindly absorbed worker, fixated on the 'how') and *Homo faber* (the human being as reflective and engaged in the work of making a life in common, asking not 'how?' but 'why?'), suggesting that reflective and even ethical engagement can be embedded within the working processes of craft: 'thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making' (7). Sennett argues that 'when the head and the hand are separate, it is the head that suffers' (44).

While Sennett's disagreement with Arendt is primarily an ethical one, concerning the morality and responsibility tied up in human uses of technology (one of his examples is the creation of the atomic bomb), the division of practical craft from intellectual

engagement has other resonances in the context of theatre-making and the place of Drama in the academy. All too often, the line separating craft and theory falls between performance, understood as embodied, instinctive and ephemeral, and the text, seen as the product of an inspired mind and the object of serious study. Refuting this separation, I am inclined to agree with Sennett that '[e]very good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking' (9). This link between creating, thinking and doing has intellectual affinities with my discussion of intention in Chapter One. With reference to Wittgenstein, I argued that intentions are inextricable from actions; rather than being understood as separate from and authoritative over playtexts, for example, intentions are embedded in the creative processes that produce playtexts. In the context of Drama training and education, meanwhile, Sennett's repeated marriage of hand and head echoes Wickham's desire to unite hands, heart and head in the curriculum of university drama.

I wish to apply Sennett's understanding of craft to the tension between practice and theory in university Drama, making the argument that by bringing together head and hands we might also begin to erase specious distinctions between text and performance and between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' practices in the academy. In doing so, I turn to the recent growth of practice-as-research, a set of methodologies that 'fus[e] … the creative and the

cognitive' (Freeman, *Blood, Sweat & Theory* xiii).[28] The rise of

practice-as-research represents another way in which university

drama departments are 'increasingly vocationally aware' (Lacey 113)

and has again shifted the discipline and its perception of itself.

Although practice-as-research might appear to be the perfect

marriage of theory and practice, resolving earlier tensions, it has

faced scepticism from some quarters and has raised fraught

questions around assessment and dissemination.[29] It has sometimes

been argued, as Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean note, that the

application of theory to practice somehow diminishes or even

damages creativity. Their riposte to this, though, is significant for this

discussion: they object that 'such arguments reinforce the

mystification of the creative artist and romantic ideas about the

spontaneity of the creative process' (25). The implication is that the

intertwining of practice, theory and pedagogy might, by contrast,

*de*mystify creative processes. Sennett proposes something similar.

Throughout *The Craftsman*, he deliberately avoids reference to

creativity; the word, he suggests, 'carries too much Romantic

baggage – the mystery of inspiration, the claims of genius' (290).

While I do not share Sennett's wish to banish the term 'creativity', I

find his attempt to 'draw craft and art together' (290) useful in this

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[28] For clarity, I refer throughout the rest of the chapter to 'practice-as-research', but scholars in this area also frame their work as 'practice-based research' or 'practice-led research', terms that are sometimes used interchangeably with 'practice-as-research' and sometimes refer to distinct sets of research methodologies.
[29] See, for example, the discussions on the SCUDD mailing list compiled by Peter Thomson in 2003.

context. The demystifying to which I refer does not equate to simplifying; I maintain the complexity and multiplicity of creative intentions, which cannot easily be isolated and discovered. Instead, I am interested in the *processes* – or craft – of theatre-making. By understanding playwriting, for instance, in terms of craft – that is, in terms of thought and creativity embedded in active processes – it might be possible to move away from notions of isolated genius or pre-existing blueprint, both of which elevate playwrights and playtexts over collective theatre-making.

If practice-as-research can lift the shroud of mystification from theatre-making, at least to some extent, then it follows that it may offer productive insights into the processes of practitioners working in a variety of different ways, with and without text.[30] Historically, though, the majority of practice-as-research projects in Drama departments have not engaged interrogatively with the practice of playwriting.[31] As Heike Roms suggests – using a set of terms heavily freighted with the sort of ideological associations I discussed earlier – practice-as-research tends to appeal more to 'artists involved in

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[30] Although the insights provided by practice-as-research remain contested, for reasons of scope I am bracketing off the question of whether or not practice-as-research methodologies offer privileged access to creative practices. Instead, for the purposes of investigating how current research paradigms influence discourses around text and performance, I am following through the implications of a position sometimes adopted by advocates of practice-as-research.

[31] My focus here – as it has been throughout the chapter – is on Drama departments specifically. There is an important differentiation to be made in this context between practice-as-research in this discipline and practice-as-research in connected disciplines such as Creative Writing, where there is greater inclusion of playwriting.

innovative, interdisciplinary aesthetic practices such as live and

performance art' who are 'often already engaged in research-based

approaches' (59). Although there are notable instances of

playwrights conducting practice-as-research,[32] these have typically

been overshadowed within the field by projects that explore other

forms of practice.[33] Academic discussions of practice-as-research,

meanwhile, have largely revolved around questions of assessment

and documentation which all assume that the practice in question is

live performance.[34] The exclusion of playwriting from many academic

conceptions of practice is also reinforced by a discourse that, in

questioning the validity of written analyses as a means of

disseminating practice-as-research, has set up an opposition

between practice (typically understood as *performance* practice) and

writing.[35] As well as problematising the means by which practice-as-

research is documented, the reiteration of this binary between writing

and practice severs playwriting from notions of embodied creative

activity, with the characteristics attributed to either side of the binary

(authority and stability on the one hand, transgression and

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[32] Gordon Ramsay, for example, has written about his experiences of practice-as-research as a playwright.

[33] In the 2010 collection *Blood, Sweat & Theory*, for instance, just one of the twelve practice-as-research case studies is concerned with playtexts. Playwriting as practice-as-research is also absent from the projects, case studies and conference contributions in Bristol's five-year research project *Practice as Research in Performance* (2001-2006). Even if these absences are seen as indicative of the biases of the researchers involved, it suggests that dominant conceptions of practice-as-research within the field have largely excluded playwriting.

[34] For a useful overview of the debates historically clustered around practice-as-research, see Angela Piccini's 2004 article 'An Historiographic Perspective on Practice as Research'.

[35] For examples of this opposition, see Piccini (196) and Thomson (164).

ephemerality on the other) mirroring those typically imputed to text and performance.

When we fail to understand playwriting as a practice, we are in danger of falling back on old ideas about the completeness and authority of the individually-written text (as discussed in Chapter One) which divide playwrights from other theatre-makers. Another intellectual mechanism that can serve to exclude playwriting from practice-as-research is the belief – contrary to the above suggestion that practice-as-research might shed light on creative processes – that performance practice is ineffable, and therefore its insights cannot be expressed in words. Ineffability, which forms the foundation of many of the arguments in favour of practice-as-research,

> is premised on the notion of embodiment as an existential condition: one in which the researcher's performing (doing) body is the subjective source for experience. (Freeman, *Blood, Sweat & Theory* 3)[36]

Yet writing is also an embodied process informed by tacit skills, experience and understanding, even if what it produces takes the form of words.[37] A failure to recognise this leads back to another version of the Cartesian mind-body dualism rejected in Chapter One,

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[36] As Piccini notes, '[t]he creation of embodied knowledges is frequently invoked by creative practitioners as the fundamental epistemological contribution of PAR to the HE sector' (192).
[37] Indeed, even traditional academic research is embodied, which as Piccini observes presents a difficulty when attempting to differentiate practice-as-research (193).

in which writing is firmly aligned with the life of the mind. Although the

discourse that supports practice-as-research is deeply invested in the

idea that knowledge can be embodied, therefore disrupting the

separation of thought and physicality, this knowledge has still

typically been conceived of as distinct from (because it is set in

opposition to) forms of knowledge expressed through traditionally

academic, written outlets.[38]

Encouragingly, though, there is evidence to suggest that

conceptions of practice-as-research within the field are changing. For

example, the intersection of playwriting and text with other forms of

performance practice has been or is being explored in the (practice-

as-)research of scholars such as Cathy Turner, David Overend,

Michael Pinchbeck and Deborah Pearson, while programmes like the

practice-based PhD at the University of Birmingham now explicitly

include playwriting as a form of practice-as-research.[39] Further

investigation of the evolving practice-as-research sector is needed to

yield solid conclusions about its impact on understandings of the

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[38] Notions of embodied knowledge are now prevalent within theatre and performance studies. The International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR), for instance, has an Embodied Research working group, while the work of scholars such as Diana Taylor and Phillip Zarrilli has been influential in the field.

[39] Cathy Turner's work with Wrights & Sites explores writing in relation to place; David Overend's practice-as-research has developed what he calls a 'relational theatre practice', one important element of which is the performance text; Michael Pinchbeck's practice-as-research investigation of dramaturgy included the creation of his body of work *The Trilogy*, which will shortly be published as a set of playtexts; and Deborah Pearson's practice-based PhD thesis, completed in 2016, reframed narrative preoccupations through her own writing and performance practice.

relationship between text and performance in academia, but certainly – as noted above – much of the literature that has been published on practice-as-research in Drama to date constructs a discourse that implicitly separates playwriting from other forms of theatrical practice.

The term 'craft' is also frequently applied to the teaching of playwriting, but typically in ways that maintain its difference from other forms of theatre-making pedagogy in the academy. In any attempt to discuss playwriting as an activity that might be taught, there is a delicate balance between imagination, technique and collaboration; the writer's individual 'vision' is offset by the gradual acquisition of necessary skills and the process of developing a play with a range of other artists. In order to argue for the relevance and centrality of the playwright to contemporary English theatre, there has often been a drive to separate playwriting from academic study and ground it in the practical teaching of skills and technique – in *craft*. Here, notions of practice shift from the process of making a performance to the process of making a text. Playwriting pedagogies have thus occupied a somewhat ambivalent place within the disciplinary structures outlined in this chapter. Although the University of Bristol introduced a playwriting fellowship in 1955, it was not until the late 1980s that playwriting instruction found a formal place in the academy. In another iteration of the theory versus practice debate, playwriting courses have commonly been conceived

of by their tutors as vocational rather than academic; Edgar

described the MA in Playwriting Studies that he founded at the

University of Birmingham in 1989 as an 'outgrowth' of industry

playwriting groups, oriented more towards the professional theatre

sector than towards academia (*How Plays Work* xi). The practice-

focused course was, as he puts it, 'always a playwriting group

located in a university, rather than a university course about

playwriting' ('Playwriting Studies' 101). Meanwhile, these courses

and the burgeoning genre of playwriting guides that has grown

alongside them stress the technical building blocks of craft that are

essential in constructing a play.[40]

Yet too much emphasis on craft and the development of

practical skills risks welcoming the suggestion that playwriting is not

such a unique skill after all; that writing is something that can be

learned by anyone, or that can be done by groups of people in the

rehearsal room (fears that we saw expressed by playwrights in the

previous chapter in response to the growing popularity of devising).

As playwright Steve Waters observes, 'there is an anxiety-status

embedded in the very designation of the writer for the stage' which is

tied up with the idea of playwriting as 'a craft not an art' ('How to

Describe an Apple' 137). The association of playwriting with craft is

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[40] See, for instance, Edgar (*How Plays Work*), Steve Waters (*The Secret Life of Plays*), Noël Greig and Lisa Goldman.

therefore often perceived as a problem for writers with literary aspirations, who want to be taken seriously as artists. Hence the near-ubiquitous notion of the writer's *voice,* which has to speak distinctively by itself before technique can begin to hone it.[41] Explaining the idea of the writer's voice, Aleks Sierz cites previous Royal Court literary manager Graham Whybrow's suggestion that '[i]f you can identify [a] writer from one page then they have a distinctive voice' (*Rewriting the Nation* 50). Voice, then, is a marker of individuality, something that sets a playwright apart. In contemporary English culture, it suggests idiosyncratic inspiration and creativity, which by extension connote ideas of art – a term that, as Sennett notes, is often set in opposition to craft.[42]

These twin discourses of voice and craft have thus served to defend the solo-authored playtext and the individual playwright against perceived threats from 'non-text-based' theatre-makers, asserting their difference both from collaborative processes of

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[41] Literary departments and playwriting groups, for instance, often proclaim to be seeking out 'new voices', while playwriting guides typically marry an emphasis on the writer's voice with techniques to develop their craft. University courses deploy a similar rhetoric in promoting their courses: Essex promises students the opportunity to 'hone and develop your own unique voice' and 'nurture your understanding of the playwright's craft' (University of Essex), City University sets out to help writers 'explore their ideas' and 'develop their craft' (City University London), and Royal Holloway allows writers 'to explore your own voices and style while also examining conventions that have been used – and broken' (Royal Holloway).

[42] Sennett notes that 'art seems to draw attention to work that is unique or at least distinctive, whereas craft names a more anonymous, collective, and continued practice' (66), a distinction that speaks to the common divide between individual playwrights and collective devisers. Maggie Inchley has also written about the emphasis on 'voice' in English new writing.

creation and from the – in the opinion of some playwrights –

obfuscating intellectual fashions of the academy. As a corrective to

this, I propose that Sennett's understanding of craft as rooted in

process and collaboration offers alternative ways to understand what

is often referred to as the *craft* of playwriting. All craft, he argues,

offers possibilities for expression, while all art requires practice and

technique: '[i]n terms of practice, there is no art without craft' (65).

The two concepts, therefore, are not necessarily irreconcilable; the

real issue is our restrictive cultural understanding of craftsmanship,

which cleaves one from the other in much the same way as theory is

often divorced from practice.

While playwriting guides and courses do have recourse to

craft as *technique*, as observed above, the discourse around

playwriting rarely addresses craft as *process*. The latter, rather than

the former, is stressed by Sennett, who sees the two as inextricably

linked: there can be no technique without the process and the

practice that produce skill. Curiously, though, process is largely

neglected in literature on playwriting. Another sharp dividing line can

be drawn here in the existing scholarship. Studies of theatre

companies are often deeply invested in those companies' working

processes and rehearsal practices, using observation,

documentation and interview to reconstruct the journey that

individual productions took from initial idea to opening night.[43] This

level of attention to the minutiae of process is largely absent from

comparable studies of playwrights, which tend to focus more

narrowly on the plays themselves. The playwright's biography might

play a role in the analysis, and writers are often asked about the

origins of their initial ideas, but the day-to-day process of writing a

play seems to be of much less interest to scholars than the day-to-

day process of making a play in the rehearsal room. This may simply

be because there is more external and therefore observable

decision-making involved in devising processes, whereas the largely

(though of course not entirely) internalised set of choices involved in

writing a solo-authored play is less accessible to researchers. Here is

where an intersection with the methodologies of practice-as-research

may offer reflexivity to playwriting processes, though further research

is necessary to determine what this might look like in practice.

Greater scholarly attention to theatre-making processes of all kinds,

furthermore, might enable a more productive dialogue between

different ways of working.

Such a dialogue could have positive implications for theatre

training of all varieties. As well as the perceived (if not necessarily

substantiated) threat to 'new writing' posed by the widespread

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[43] See, for example, the essays in collections edited by Jen Harvie and Andy
Lavender and Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, both published in 2010.

teaching of devising techniques, other forms of theatre-making also stand to suffer from dual-tracked approaches to training and development. As Tomlin points out, the absence of emphasis on written text for performance in universities has a knock-on effect in the devised practice that emerges from these institutions, potentially confirming the belief of some in the new writing sector that 'the best writing is never produced within such processes, but only within a so-called "playwright's theatre"' ('Pedagogy to Dramaturgy' 120).[44] If approaches to text are taught only on playwriting courses and not within devising methodologies, this risks once again separating writing from performance, as playwrights simply learn from pre-established (written) models and devising theatre-makers are denied the opportunity to develop the textual elements of their practice. The alternative possibility suggested by Tomlin – that collaborative ways of working may open up 'innovative aesthetic possibilities' ('Pedagogy to Dramaturgy' 121) – is an exciting one, but this is also in danger of underestimating the innovation of which individual writers are capable, thereby reversing the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' binary rather than dismantling it and rejecting its premises.

I want to conclude this chapter by looking briefly at an experimental example of writer development that I believe offers a

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[44] The Royal Court's literary manager Chris Campbell, for instance, believes that 'the single writer has a reach of creativity which is beyond collaborative creation' (Goode, 'Series 1: Episode 6').

potential model for bridging some of the gaps discussed above, as well as illustrating the challenges involved in such an attempt. Disavowing the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide, Cathy Turner's *Writing Space* project intended to 'nurture theatre and performance writing across an expanded field' (Turner, 'Writing Space' 1). Over the course of two weekends at the University of Winchester in 2008, practitioners from a range of artistic backgrounds joined Turner to self-reflexively consider their writing practices.[45] Significantly, Turner specifies that

> this was not a place for 'skill-sharing', or 'script-doctoring', but for examining starting points, assumptions, inspiration, puzzles and challenges in a way that suggested relationships and contrasts between ways of working. ('Writing Space' 11)

Writing Space was also revealing, though, of the experience and expectations of Drama students. During the second weekend, when the texts written by participants were performed by first year undergraduates, it was observed that the students employed 'a methodology somewhere between devising and drama'; they were drawing on a range of performance strategies to make sense of the texts they were given, not necessarily discriminating between different practices (Turner, 'Writing Space' 8). Turner notes, however, that all the texts challenged the students' assumptions about what

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[45] The *Writing Space* participants were Steve Waters, Emma Bennett, Michael Pinchbeck, Clare MacDonald, Stacy Makishi, Tanya Ronder and Sarah Dickenson. During the first weekend, they shared ideas around the theme of 'narrative', providing stimuli for short performance texts that were performed and discussed on the second weekend.

constitutes a playtext, illustrating the prevalence of such

assumptions. Later using Claire MacDonald's prompt for

performance (written during *Writing Space*) as a teaching tool with

another set of students, meanwhile, Turner suggests that their

bemused response

> reveals why even students who can create complex devising structures can struggle with reading or writing a performance text that does not conform to the presumed 'rules' of playwriting. ('Learning to Write Spaces' 115)

Turner's experience with her students points to a split between

two different ways of thinking about text in the theatre-making

process: as fleeting, fragmentary material to be played with and often

discarded in devising practices, or as a guide for performance

governed by rules and conventions. This binary narrows the

possibilities for texts that fail to fit neatly into either category and for

theatre-makers seeking to borrow from different traditions. But the

exploration and open dialogue of *Writing Space* suggests a different

way of developing both texts and theatre-makers – one that

universities might be uniquely placed to facilitate, and one that could

nurture rather than discourage the cross-pollination of practices that

is already beginning to take place. With this in mind, I want to

suggest that we follow Sennett's thinking and consider *all* theatre-

making in terms of craft. This need not entail rejecting the belief that

such work is art – the ultimate fear of those who attempt to sustain a

balance between voice and craft in the teaching and advocating of

playwriting. As Sennett notes,

> [h]istory has drawn fault lines dividing practice and theory, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user; modern society suffers from this historical inheritance. (11)

It is not an inheritance that we can just cast off, but it is equally not one to which we must remain chained. Instead, we might aim to unite crafts(wo)man and artist, seeing the craft, technique and perseverance in the individual act of writing as much as the artistry and inspiration involved in collective theatre-making.

Throughout the different research and pedagogical contexts addressed above, the theatre text keeps reappearing as a battlefield, 'a site of negotiation between constructed orderliness and forces which would challenge it' (Shepherd and Wallis 21). The text and its relationship with performance have often been invoked to bolster boundaries between disciplines. Dramatic literature has been both seized upon and vehemently rejected in the service of academic legitimacy; the binary logic of text versus performance has repeatedly mapped the edges of disciplines including English Literature, Drama and Performance Studies; and the old, unresolved relationship between theory and practice has alternately excluded and preserved the solo-authored playtext in different contexts. My suggestion, therefore, is that these higher education contexts have contributed to the creation and reinforcement of a perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' practices in the English theatre sector, in

the process reiterating many of the misunderstandings of text and performance that I discussed in Chapter One.

A change in perspective, though, might enable an understanding of theatre texts as common ground. *Writing Space* offers one, small-scale example of how this could be achieved. The significance of such a shift, furthermore, stretches beyond the boundaries of the academy. Universities are the sites that prepare new practitioners for professional theatre, as well as educating many of those who will go on to programme and fund that practice, and thus the explicit and implicit attitudes embedded in their pedagogies are likely to trickle down into the industry. Moreover, the higher education sector is becoming an important source of support for the arts, with collaborations between universities and the theatre sector increasing in recent years (BOP Consulting and Graham Devlin Associates). As arts funding from elsewhere constricts, it is possible that the role universities play in supporting new theatre will increase, making it more important than ever to stimulate dialogue between higher education institutions and the theatre sector, and to better understand the nature of evolving relationships between industry and academia.[46]

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[46] One promising recent attempt at such a dialogue was 'Incubate: Propagate', a set of consultations in May and June 2017 that asked the key question: 'How might policy makers, academics and producers work better together to support and sustain the quality, innovation and aesthetic and demographic diversity of emerging theatre and performance practice in the UK?' (Tomlin, 'Incubate: Propagate').

Chapter Four

Critical Reception

Theatre criticism, as Irving Wardle puts it, 'completes the circle of public attention' ('Thieves and Parasites' 4). After a show has been funded, made and performed, theatre critics mediate its reception, performing an economic role in selling tickets and making judgements that shape theatre-makers' reputations. As I go on to argue, they play a crucial part in the reception of new shows and constitute an important but under-examined factor behind the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre in England. Through a re-investigation of theatre criticism's functions and analysis of a selection of reviews, this chapter advances a case for the importance of theatre criticism in both understanding and unpicking the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' binary. I suggest that reviews play a central role in framing the public discourse around new theatre and that conventions embedded in the act of reviewing have perpetuated some of the flawed conceptions of the theatre text that I overturned in Chapter One.

My methodological approach in this chapter is two-pronged: I interrogate the intellectual frameworks of theatre reviewing, with reference to existing accounts and theories of criticism, and I analyse a wide range of theatre reviews from the twenty-first century. In order

to isolate a manageable sample of reviews, I have chosen to focus

on responses to new theatre at a range of subsidised venues in two

specific years: 2007 and 2012.[1] I agree with critic and blogger

Andrew Haydon that these years represent both key flashpoints in

the critical debate around 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre

and significant markers in the development of online theatre criticism.

Criticism from these two years therefore offers particularly rich

material for analysis. 2007 was the year in which the *Guardian*

published a series of 'critics vs bloggers' articles, reflecting a sense

that criticism was increasingly taking place beyond the pages of

newspapers.[2] Interestingly, Haydon locates as 'the moment that it

became obvious that something big was going on' an online debate

about the interpretation of plays sparked by Edward Albee's

comment that 'interpretation should be for the accuracy of what the

playwright wrote' ('Online Theatre Criticism' 141). This highlights one

of the most regularly discussed issues within the theatre blogging

community of the 2000s: the relationship between texts and

performances and the perceived divide between 'text-based' and

'non-text-based' theatre. In 2012, there was a fresh wave of debate

about the relationship between texts and performances – much of it

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[1] See Appendix B for full details of the sample. My aim in selecting venues was to encompass a relatively broad range of scales, locations and programming agendas. Within the sample, there is greater coverage of theatre in London than across the rest of the country, which reflects the geographical imbalance of theatre reviewing (and funding) in England.

[2] See Michael Billington ('Who Needs Reviews?'), Lyn Gardner ('Blogging Saved Critics from Extinction') and Natasha Tripney ('Blogs and Reviews Should Be Best Friends').

prompted by the production of *Three Kingdoms* that I discuss below.[3]

To confirm that the reviews from these two years are not anomalies, I

have also gathered a smaller, secondary sample of criticism from

2006 and 2011, which I cite to support my observations at various

points in the chapter.[4]

In compiling and analysing this body of reviews, several

methodological issues arose. The corpus of print reviews to which I

refer has been assembled from *Theatre Record*, which reprints

national newspaper reviews on a fortnightly basis. However, there is

no comparable resource which collects online reviews, and therefore,

while I have attempted to be as comprehensive as possible, the

sample of online writing that I have collected is subject to limitations,

gaps and biases – the latter either as a result of my own unconscious

partialities or as a consequence of selective search engine

algorithms. Furthermore, several relevant theatre blogs are now

inaccessible either due to expired web domains or because their

authors have shut them down. My research has also been repeatedly

thwarted by broken hyperlinks, severing what were once multiple

lines of communication between different individuals writing about

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[3] Other key articles on the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide from this year include Alex Chisholm and Kat Joyce. I also contributed to this discussion ('A Tissue of Quotations').

[4] This sample consists of reviews of productions at a new writing theatre (the Royal Court), a venue known for presenting work produced through various theatre-making methodologies (Battersea Arts Centre), and a major subsidised venue outside London (the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester).

theatre online. These experiences demonstrate the urgent need to address how internet criticism is preserved for future generations of scholars, critics and theatre-makers. One of the advantages of online theatre criticism is that it has the potential to diversify the previously select, homogenous group of canon-formers; if this discussion simply disappears, then the authority of print critics is what will live on in the archives.[5] Nevertheless, the sample that I was able to compile comprises a significant number of reviews from several different publications, both in print and online.[6] In approaching this body of criticism, I am less interested in individual responses than in identifying recurring tendencies that are indicative of the intellectual frameworks supporting theatre criticism as an institution. Where I do quote from individual reviews, this is to provide indicative examples of wider patterns emerging from the sample, further instances of which I cite in my footnotes. By observing these patterns, I analyse some of the problematic assumptions underpinning the judgements of theatre critics and suggest the role these have played in reinforcing the binary between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre.

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[5] Michelle MacArthur has also addressed this problem, noting that 'the current shift in reviewing practices has yet to be followed by a corresponding shift in archival practices' (256).
[6] The sample includes reviews of 97 productions over the two years, taken from 48 different publications and blogs. See Appendix B.

The discourse of criticism

Before proceeding any further, I should clarify what I mean when I refer to 'theatre criticism'. Noël Carroll offers a partial definition when he states that 'the critic is a person who engages in the reasoned evaluation of artworks' (7). His emphasis on evaluation in his 2008 book *On Criticism* aligns with the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of criticism as '[t]he action of criticizing, or passing judgement upon the qualities or merits of anything' ('Criticism, N.'), and is largely characteristic of the sort of criticism I am discussing here. Theatre criticism as practised in newspapers, magazines and, more recently, websites and blogs, typically judges the success of productions; indeed, this is what distinguishes criticism from related forms of commentary.[7] My focus in this chapter is on what might be described as popular criticism, as opposed to the academic criticism discussed in the previous chapter. This is a field to which I have privileged access, having worked as a theatre critic for several years, writing for a personal blog, online theatre publications, and newspapers and magazines. I therefore have direct experience of the frameworks I am attempting to critique, which has been both a benefit and a drawback. While my professional experience has

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[7] Arts criticism can also be found on broadcast media, but I am excluding this from the scope of the chapter. While television and radio have the potential to reach larger audiences than print, broadcast theatre criticism is not practised regularly in the same way as newspapers and magazines routinely review new openings (and much of it can be categorised as preview or feature content rather that criticism per se). Therefore, while radio and television coverage can have a considerable effect on the public reputation of a few individual shows, I do not consider it to have a comparable overall impact on the theatre sector.

afforded me useful insights into the processes and functions of

theatre criticism, I am also conscious of the danger of being too

personally entangled in my research subject and have attempted as

much as possible to step back and survey the field dispassionately.[8]

In order to establish some of the specific conditions of

contemporary theatre criticism in England, it is worth offering a brief

historical overview of the form.[9] The theatre review's origins lie in the

eighteenth-century periodical and it has remained primarily

associated with newspaper journalism.[10] Mainstream print criticism,

furthermore, has changed little since the middle of the twentieth

century, when Kenneth Tynan became 'the model of a modern major

critic' (Rebellato, *1956 and All That* 118). Whereas previously there

had been 'a close affinity between the audience and the critic'

(Rebellato, *1956 and All That* 117), Tynan was more interested in the

future of the art form. This meant, among other things, championing

a particular kind of playwriting (much of it emanating from the Royal

Court) that he believed was pushing the form forwards. As Tynan

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[8] I should stress, though, that I do not consider my own reviews exempt from the following analysis; I have often had recourse to many of the habits discussed in this chapter.

[9] For more detail on the historical development of theatre criticism, see Charles Harold Gray, Paul Prescott, Terry Eagleton and Mark Fisher (*How to Write About Theatre* 11-28).

[10] There are some important exceptions: the magazines *Encore* (1954-1965) and *Plays and Players* (1953-1997) were both influential outlets during the 1950s and 1960s; listings magazines *Time Out* (1968-) and *City Limits* (1981-1993) have provided coverage of London's theatre scene, including its fringe and alternative offerings; and the theatre sector's trade publication *The Stage* has published industry-focused content since 1880.

explains in the introduction to one of his collections of criticism, he

started writing reviews to capture great performances, but from the

mid-1950s onwards he found himself more and more concerned with

playwriting (*A View of the English Stage* 11-13). Accordingly, the first

half of the collection is given over to performances in classic revivals,

while the second half is preoccupied with new drama. This shift, I

would suggest, is metonymic: a new generation of critics – many of

them inspired by Tynan – saw the playwright rather than the actor as

the heart of English theatre. As Ian Herbert notes,

> [t]he 'seventies generation [of critics], most of whom went
> on into the 'eighties and 'nineties, were as firmly wedded to
> the idea of writers' theatre, and with it directors' theatre, as
> their predecessors had been to the star theatre that
> survived the war. (240)[11]

For the rest of the twentieth century, this model of criticism continued

largely unchanged, while Tynan has remained an influential model.[12]

Recently, though, there has been another major shift. Over the last

couple of decades, theatre criticism has increasingly been conducted

online, while newspapers have grappled with the question of how to

generate revenue from digital content.[13] This has led to repeated

claims of a 'crisis' in criticism and has prompted reviewers, theatre-

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[11] As implied by Herbert here, English theatre criticism has also been characterised by the longevity of its reviewers (Billington, for instance, has been reviewing for the *Guardian* since 1971), which has ensured the virtually unchallenged perpetuation of certain approaches to theatre.

[12] Sheridan Morley has stated that Tynan 'made many of us want to be critics' (Stefanova 29), while Benedict Nightingale suggests that 'at the time I started we were all under the influence of Kenneth Tynan' (Stefanova 29). These sentiments are echoed by Michael Coveney (Stefanova 28) and Ian Shuttleworth (Stefanova 30).

[13] For more on the development of online theatre criticism in England, see Haydon ('Online Theatre Criticism').

makers and academics to reflect on the purpose of theatre criticism

in the twenty-first century.[14]

I am primarily interested in theatre criticism as it pertains to

wider industry and academic discourses about theatre-making in

England. Considered on a show-by-show basis, the impact of

criticism on ticket sales is impossible to measure accurately without

being able to ascertain how many audience members bought tickets

as a result of reading a review, as well as somehow assessing how

many more potential spectators stayed away because of negative

notices. I think there may be something, though, in Wardle's

assertion that critics – while not necessarily able to make or break

shows at the box office – 'have the capacity to narrow public

response by telling readers what to expect' (*Theatre Criticism* 92).

Critics have a less immediately tangible but nonetheless important

influence on the expectations of both audiences and others within the

professional theatre sector, framing the ways in which new work is

publicly discussed. Beyond their direct readerships, critics exert

influence via theatres' marketing departments, who frequently quote

from reviews. The terms in which such reviews are expressed can

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[14] This perceived 'crisis' is not addressed any further in this chapter. For more detail, see the 2016 collection of essays edited by Duška Radosavljević (*Theatre Criticism*), in which the economic challenges facing criticism are repeatedly discussed. A sense of crisis has undoubtedly contributed to antagonism between print critics and the (often unpaid) bloggers seen by some to be threatening the profession, but my interest here is in the differences (and continuities) of approach between print and online criticism.

therefore set expectations for individual shows and shape the way in which companies and theatres are perceived by the public. Critics are also frequently engaged in wider cultural discourse, whether through other forms of writing such as features and interviews (whereby a form of evaluation through selection is in operation by both critics and their editors) or through their involvement in public discussions, academic conferences and/or industry panels. Furthermore, reviews are often quoted in Arts Council funding applications as supporting evidence of the quality of theatre-makers' work, and therefore have an indirect impact on what does and does not get subsidised.[15] In all these instances, critics wield an authority that is not easily measurable but that has a considerable cumulative impact.

In academic contexts, meanwhile, reviews act as both historical record and incomplete testimony. Tynan described the critic's dispatch as 'a letter addressed to the future; to people thirty years hence who may wonder exactly what it felt like to be in a certain playhouse on a certain distant night' (*Theatre Writings* 119). Theatre criticism preserves (at least to a degree) ephemeral performances, forming an important archival resource.[16] The

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[15] Anecdotally, emerging theatre companies have told me that getting their work reviewed favourably was a crucial first step in being able to obtain a grant from the Arts Council.
[16] The degree to which performance disappears or persists through documentation is an ongoing academic debate within the field. The key literature includes Peggy

accounts of performances that we receive through reviews, though, can never precisely convey 'what it felt like to be in a certain playhouse on a certain distant night'. Theatre criticism is hemmed in by the limitations of its form: its analysis is constrained by the editorial conventions of the publications in which it appears, the timescale in which it must be produced, and the sheer communicative difficulty of rendering performances in words. As Michael Billington notes, 'one's role is partly defined by a set of pragmatic circumstances: the paper one writes for, the amount of space, the length of one's deadline' (*One Night Stands* xii). The agenda of 'newsworthiness', moreover, favours certain theatre-makers over others: big institutions will always be more worthy of headlines, and when smaller companies occupy column inches it is typically for their novelty.[17]

These limitations, though, have not always been taken into consideration by scholars. Indeed, theatre criticism as a form has rarely been subject to sustained analysis.[18] As David Roberts notes, the review 'has tended to command [scholars'] respect to the extent of its author's ability to "capture the flying moment and bring it down

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Phelan (1993), Matthew Reason (2006), Philip Auslander (2008) and Rebecca Schneider (2011).

[17] In a 2015 article, Matt Trueman discussed how news-driven criticism 'tends towards hegemony' ('Choosing What to Review').

[18] Important exceptions include Radosavljević's volume (*Theatre Criticism*) and Yael Zarhy-Levo's 2001 and 2008 studies of how critics shape the reputations of theatre-makers (*The Theatrical Critic; Theatrical Reputations*).

to paper'"; when it seems as though critics have captured some essence of an ephemeral performance, their reports are seen as valuable historical resources ('Making the Word Count' 332). Reviews are typically consulted by theatre historians as evidence of absent past productions, used to reconstruct lost performances and/or make inferences about a show's initial reception.[19] As well as influencing the immediate reputation of individual productions, therefore, the judgements of critics have the potential to shape the canon through their use as archival documents. There is, as Matthew Reason has argued, a permanence to the review which can lend it a canonising power: criticism 'is archived, it is recoverable' ('Conversation and Criticism' 245). This is not to suggest that reviewers alone determine the dramatic canon; I am inclined to agree with Yael Zarhy-Levo that shows join the canon 'as a result of the gradual convergence of many and varied mediating factors' (*Theatrical Reputations* 52), of which criticism is just one.[20] Nonetheless, many of the shows that we now consider theatrical landmarks of the last century are regularly discussed with reference to their reviews, which paved the way for future critical attention. Often, as in the case of the premieres of plays such as John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and Harold Pinter's *The*

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[19] As Thomas Postlewait notes, 'theatre reviews often serve as our sources for the meaning of the theatrical event. We quote the critics as if they are the arbitrators … Their assessments are major sources for reconstructing a theatrical event, but surely this is too easy, too reductive' (13).
[20] Other 'mediating factors' include broadcast media, journalists, publishers, artistic directors, funding bodies and academics.

Birthday Party (1957), the fame of these shows was assured through a mixed critical response that included a small number of impassioned raves. While such shows may not have had unanimous critical approbation, though, the discourse generated by reviewers constitutes one of the factors that determine what Thomas Postlewait sees as the accepted, unquestioned importance of certain theatrical events: '[i]t has to be written about; its importance is unquestioned. Only the interpretations change' (249). Such reviews can also set the tone of the subsequent discourse around a practitioner, as did Harold Hobson's review of *The Birthday Party*, noting the enigmatic and menacing qualities that were to become associated with Pinter in later critical assessments (Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre Criticism* 85).[21]

It is important, therefore, to interrogate the judgements that contribute – significantly, but not solely – to the evolving canon of plays and productions, determining what is included and excluded and on what terms. This involves adopting a certain scepticism towards the canon itself. Such scepticism has been prevalent since the mid-twentieth century, influenced by postmodernism, feminism and critical theory, but it has more recently experienced something of a backlash. In his study of criticism, Carroll cites the familiar

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[21] Zarhy-Levo has theorised this process as the formation of a 'playwright construct' (*The Theatrical Critic*).

argument that agreement on the quality of artworks is manufactured by the ideological nature of canon formation, but he dismisses this claim by crudely paraphrasing it as '[t]he canon is nothing short of a conspiracy' (Carroll 38).[22] A challenge to the process of canon forming, however, does not require a belief in 'conspiracy'; rather, I suggest that there are hidden – often unconscious – biases, prejudices and power imbalances which determine, to a greater or lesser degree, which artworks enter the canon. While I accept Carroll's reasoning that '[t]he canon seems quite diverse and, in any event, it is always expanding, often in unpredictable directions' (38), it has nonetheless been historically shaped by a small pool of influential figures, most of whom share characteristics such as race, gender, class and education.[23] There is also a subtle but crucial difference to be articulated here between a relativist belief that all works of art are equal – which I reject – and a desire to challenge elitist views that certain forms and genres are *inherently* more valuable than others. I am thinking here in particular of the implicit opinion of several prominent theatre critics that solo-authored plays

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[22] Mark Brown, writing in 2010, is similarly critical of what he calls 'the faux radical, postmodern myth that there is something inherently "democratic" in the idea that all art works and genres are of equal value' ('Between Journalism and Art' 179), while in his 2001 book Billington reductively rails against 'the insidious cultural relativism which argues that value-judgements are suspect, the canon of acknowledged masterpieces is an elitist conspiracy and that everything is as interesting as everything else' (*One Night Stands* xiv).

[23] English theatre critics, for example, have typically been white, male, middle-class and university-educated, usually with a background in subjects such as English or History. In 1999, Ian Herbert observed that '[o]f all the fifteen daily and Sunday newspapers … all but two have male first-string critics … All but one of the gentlemen are over forty … and almost all hav[e] been educated at either Oxford or Cambridge' (241).

are fundamentally superior to theatre created through collective processes of devising (an opinion to which I return later). Furthermore, a belief in quality does not need to be jettisoned to recognise that the canon has been influenced by a relatively homogenous set of cultural arbiters and is therefore likely to reflect a limited range of aesthetics and experiences. For these reasons, I suggest, criticism deserves further scrutiny.

Carroll divides the operation of criticism into seven components, which I find useful in carrying out this scrutiny. These seven parts are description, classification, contextualisation, elucidation, interpretation, analysis and evaluation. Any piece of criticism, to be defined as such in Carroll's terms, must contain one of the first six components plus some kind of evaluation. I have already introduced evaluation and I will come back to classification and contextualisation (which I consider together) later in the chapter. Elucidation, interpretation and analysis return us to questions of intention, as these critical operations have typically been undertaken with reference to what the artists were intending to communicate; according to many critics – and to Carroll – the critic's role is to elucidate, interpret and analyse the artists' *intended* meaning. I discuss the ways in which theatre-makers' (and primarily playwrights') intentions have been considered in reviews in more detail below.

For now, it is worth briefly dwelling on what I mean by description, which I refer to repeatedly throughout my analyses of reviews. Description 'gives the reader something concrete to hold onto cognitively' (Carroll 86). It is, in a sense, prior to all the other operations of criticism, as a critic usually needs to specify *what* they are contextualising, analysing, evaluating, and so forth. Allowing that full descriptions of artworks are unfeasible, Carroll suggests instead that critics aim for 'adequate' descriptions, which are 'selective out of necessity' (88). Description, therefore, has two principal functions: it provides basic information about the work of art (this could involve details such as what it looks like, what it depicts, its narrative) and it identifies the aspects of that work of art that the critic considers most worthy of contemplation. This second function, as we shall see, has significant implications for what is valued in our critical culture. If what is described in reviews is what merits analysis and, subsequently, what is preserved in the archive, then we should remain sensitive to what criticism is including and excluding. This is what I aim to do throughout the following discussion. First, I turn to one much-debated production as a means of introducing and beginning to analyse some of the recurring habits displayed by critics when discussing text and performance.

The case of *Three Kingdoms*

Among the events that mark 2012 as a significant year for the development of theatre criticism and its intersection with debates about 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre is what Haydon calls 'a defining moment for the theatre blogosphere: the coverage of *Three Kingdoms*' ('Online Theatre Criticism' 144). This production attracted an unprecedented level of critical debate, much of which circled around the relationship between the playtext and its performance, and it is already becoming a mythologised episode in recent English theatre history. The show, which has been singled out by several commentators as a landmark moment in both theatre-making and theatre criticism in England, was a co-production between the Lyric Hammersmith, the Munich Kammerspiele and Estonian theatre company NO 99, and emerged out of a collaboration between English writer Simon Stephens, German director Sebastian Nübling, Estonian designer Ene-Liis Semper and actors from all three theatres. Beginning as a detective story, the three-hour show became increasingly abstract and disorientating, building layer upon layer of non-naturalistic theatrical effects: animal heads, strange renditions of pop songs, accumulating stage mess. As several critics noted, many aspects of the production departed from Stephens' script, with Nübling and his team adding new scenes, deleting others, and even inserting a character (the 'Trickster') who

appears nowhere in the text. While there is much about the reception

of *Three Kingdoms* that is distinctive and worthy of analysis, I believe

that aspects of the debate around the production and how it has

since been interpreted require a closer look.

Accounts of *Three Kingdoms* and its reception are

characterised by an emphasis on antagonism, which threatens to

obscure the complexity of responses. For instance, Duška

Radosavljević selected *Three Kingdoms* as a case study for her 2013

book *Theatre-Making* because of its 'particularly controversial

reception' (*Theatre-Making* 110). Analysing print reviews of the

production, Radosavljević argues that British beliefs about the

'literariness' of theatre were 'implicit in protestations against sensory

excess, the obscuring of the "play's meaning" and the directorial

intervention leading to "self-indulgence"' (*Theatre-Making* 110),

before contrasting the print reviews with their online counterparts.

Finding in favour of the latter, Radosavljević concludes that

> the most important outcome of the controversy around the
> *Three Kingdoms* reception … was the way in which the
> blogosphere managed to outweigh the mainstream press in
> the depth of insight and its intellectual enquiry. (*Theatre-
> Making* 118)[24]

Christopher Balme, meanwhile, is interested in *Three Kingdoms*

because it represents 'the novel situation of an institutional

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[24] Radosavljević has since repeated her assessment of the critical response to
Three Kingdoms as being characterised by 'a very clear dividing line between two
camps' (*Theatre Criticism* 2).

separation between "established" press and "informal" bloggers' (69).

For him, writing in 2014, the show's critical reception marks a challenge to conventions of theatre criticism that he perceives to be outdated. Similarly to Radosavljević, Balme's conclusion is that 'the critical establishment rejected the play and particularly the production in terms of a narrow set of formal categories', while the online discussion 'pushed the debate wide open' (72-73). Finally, Haydon states that with the arrival of *Three Kingdoms* '[a] new generation had found their *Look Back in Anger* moment' ('Online Theatre Criticism' 145) – the online critics had something to fight for. The parallel with Osborne's famous debut in 1956 is striking; there is already a distinct whiff of myth-making about discussions of *Three Kingdoms* and the critical debate it stimulated. As Haydon observes, only slightly exaggerating, '[t]hat *Three Kingdoms* represented a paradigm shift is now a commonplace' ('Online Theatre Criticism' 145).[25] While there is truth in the critical divide stressed in these accounts, it was not quite as simple as the battle narrative suggests, and this narrative has the potential to overshadow other, more important questions about how critics understand and respond to contemporary theatre-making.

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[25] In a 2015 article Karen Fricker also cites *Three Kingdoms* as a 'key moment' for the blogosphere, echoing the above accounts (42).

The sense that *Three Kingdoms* and its divided critical response somehow echoed the premiere of *Look Back in Anger* is not entirely a retrospective imposition. At the time, there was a feeling of being involved in a struggle that was not unlike how critics have described the mid- to late 1950s.[26] In her summary of the show's reception, Maddy Costa opened with the suggestion that '[w]hat's fascinating about this dichotomy is how clearly it's split between newspaper critics who … are resistant to the work, and online writers who embrace it fervently' ('Three Kingdoms'). Matt Trueman reiterated this divide on his blog:

> Last week, … with unprecedented universality and vehemence, internecine warfare broke out amongst critics. In the blue corner, yawning, the mainstream, print critics; in the red, spitting rage, those of us writing online. ('On Disappointment')

There was also a combative edge to some of the online reviews of the show, accompanied by a passionate sense that *Three Kingdoms* represented the direction in which English theatre should be pushed. Daniel B. Yates, for instance, suggested that '[a]s the characters pummel the walls with boxing gloves it's as if they are literally assaulting the domestic comfort of British theatre' and closed his review with the bold claim that *Three Kingdoms* is '[o]ne of the best

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[26] Wardle, for example, describes a meeting with Tynan in which the pair 'imagined our glorious march against the philistines and the oncoming victory when the citadels of the West End would go up in flames' ('Thieves and Parasites' 121). It was a time when '[y]ou were under pressure to take sides' (Wardle *Theatre Criticism* 89); at the end of 1956, Tynan wrote that 'from the Royal Court there issued a distinct sound of barricades being erected' (*A View of the English Stage* 199).

pieces of theatre, anywhere, you are likely to see this year' ('Three Kingdoms').

Although it has been overstated, meanwhile, there was certainly an implicit distaste in several of the print reviews for Nübling's approach to Stephens' text, largely based upon a hierarchical understanding of text and performance. Henry Hitchings sharply separated play and direction and complained that 'the qualities of [Stephens'] writing are often masked by the polyglot production' ('Three Kingdoms' 508), while for Dominic Maxwell 'it feels as if Nübling is wilfully obstructing the story' ('Three Kingdoms' 508). Billington, whose review expressed frustration at the difficulty of ascertaining what Stephens was 'trying to tell us', made it clear that he disapproved of Nübling's staging when he described it as 'grossly self-advertising' and suggested that it is 'always trying to tell us how idiosyncratically clever it is' ('Three Kingdoms' 509). The underlying assumption here is that direction should sacrifice its own cleverness for that of the playwright. Casting play and production as opposing forces, meanwhile, Claire Allfree concluded that 'Stephens's script ultimately loses out in the battle between words and stagecraft' ('Three Kingdoms' 509). Paul Taylor, despite praising the production's 'powerful way of evoking the sense of horrified dislocation felt by the two British detectives in the piece', objected to 'the director interposing his own look-at-me ego between the subject

and the audience' ('Three Kingdoms' 510). These responses all express an implicit belief in the supremacy of Stephens' text, which was seen to be 'masked' or 'obstructed' by Nübling's direction.

Other print critics, though, were more receptive to the collaboration between Stephens, Nübling and the rest of the creative team, recognising how their contributions combined to create the overall theatrical experience. Sarah Hemming, for instance, noted how 'the combination of Stephens' salt wit and Nübling's surreal physicality produces some vivid expressions of the loneliness and dislocation of travel' ('Three Kingdoms' 509), while Andrzej Lukowski offered 'immense credit' to Semper and considered Stephens and Nübling as a collaborative pair, concluding that the director 'imbues [the script] with a beautifully watchable rhythm' ('Three Kingdoms' 510). Several of the print reviewers' criticisms, meanwhile, were more balanced than a straightforward attack on Nübling's direction. In an attempt to dispel some of the antagonism between online and print critics, Ian Shuttleworth argued in his *Theatre Record* editorial that most reviewers questioned the directorial choices in *Three Kingdoms* not because they were unconventional but because 'they didn't work theatrically' ('Prompt Corner' 503). Although there is evidence of a certain hostility towards Nübling's approach, as noted above, Shuttleworth is right in asserting that there were other reasons for the reservations of some critics. The most regularly

repeated criticism across the print reviews was that the show was too long, while critics such as Hitchings, Maxwell and Dominic Cavendish ('Three Kingdoms' 509) questioned the treatment of the female characters, which later became a focus of online debate.[27] While frequent accusations of 'excess' or 'indulgence' read as dismissive and might be underpinned by a belief that Nübling is somehow obscuring Stephens' text, most of the critics did have praise for elements of the direction, admitting for example that '[t]here's a stunning theatricality in Nübling's interpretation' (Hitchings, 'Three Kingdoms' 508), or that 'Nübling has an exciting way with a theatrical space' (Maxwell, 'Three Kingdoms' 508). Other reviewers stated that 'Nübling creates some startling images' (Billington, 'Three Kingdoms' 509) and that the director's 'theatrical imagination is capable of great economy' (Allfree, 'Three Kingdoms' 509). It was not as simple, therefore, as an outright rejection of *Three Kingdoms* by print critics on the basis of its directorial intervention.

The online reviews, meanwhile, although able to offer long, detailed and passionate analyses of the production, did not always move as far away from the underlying binaries and assumptions of their print counterparts as the image of opposing sides suggests. Bloggers did identify several of the ways in which *Three Kingdoms*

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[27] See, for example, Love ('Three Kingdoms'), Tripney et al., Haydon ('Three Kingdoms and Misogyny') and Sarah Punshon.

subverted English critical orthodoxies. Megan Vaughan's review, for instance, concisely captured both the dominant preference for direction serving text and the challenge that *Three Kingdoms* posed to this: '[t]hey say that you shouldn't really notice a show's direction but Three Kingdoms was *directed to fuck*' ('An Incitement', original emphasis). Meanwhile I and a number of other online writers posited that *Three Kingdoms* deliberately frustrated any attempt to pin down a single, straightforward meaning and that this formed the kernel of the discomfort it provoked in some critics. Having opened with the suggestion that *Three Kingdoms* 'sticks two fingers up, as it were, to the well made review', I noted that the production 'frustrates the very British aim of getting to the bottom of what a play is "saying"' ('Three Kingdoms'), while Miriam Gillinson saw the show's adoption of the murder mystery genre as a return to 'theatre's basic roots' – the search for meaning – while deconstructing the detective work conducted by critics and audience ('Three Kingdoms'). Haydon similarly suspected that 'this might be what other critics have objected to: the fact that, on one level, the play does stop "making sense" altogether', noting that 'if someone believed their job was to pin down and explain, then this sort of thing is inevitably going to get on their wick' ('Three Kingdoms'). The frustration identified here can certainly be observed in the response of critics like Billington, who commented on the difficulty of determining what Stephens was 'saying'.

However, the central relationship between text and performance – which was at the core of some of the print reviewers' criticisms of *Three Kingdoms* – was subtly reconfigured rather than radically questioned by online critics. Despite their enthusiasm for the theatricality of Nübling's production, nearly all the online responses that defended *Three Kingdoms* against the perceived assault of the mainstream press did so on the basis that the direction was *not* undermining Stephens' intentions. Rebellato made this point persuasively, using the perception that Nübling had 'obscured [the play's] plot by piling all sorts of irrelevant and shocking imagery on top of it' to reveal an insight into 'our peculiar new writing culture' ('Three Kingdoms'). As he pointed out, 'the play was written *for* Sebastian Nübling', with the expectation that he would cut and shape it, and therefore 'Nübling has been doing the good old-fashioned British thing of respecting the playwright's intentions' ('Three Kingdoms', original emphasis). Rebellato also argued, along with several other online critics, that Nübling's images were drawn from – rather than imposed on – Stephens' text. In Rebellato's case, the argument supports the conclusion that we as a theatre culture have skewed ideas about how plays work: *Three Kingdoms* is used as a reminder that – contrary to what some of the reviews might suggest – plays 'can't be performed properly; they are always interpreted' ('Three Kingdoms'). Rebellato also helpfully points out the gap

between what several of the critics saw as a director interfering with a play and the reality of Stephens' long-standing collaboration with Nübling.

In other online responses, though, the defence seems to be built on some of the same beliefs about texts and performances that led the print critics to contrasting judgements. Jake Orr, for instance, challenged the suggestion that Nübling's direction represented a 'rebellious act', arguing that the production 'sees brutal and vivid imagery working in both a harmonious and disruptive way with Stephens's dialogue' (Orr). Trueman, meanwhile, suggested that

> Nübling might be auteurial, but not one of his decisions detracts from Stephens's text at all. Rather, they bring it thrillingly, vividly to life, while drawing out its essential, underlying contents with a stunning clarity. ('Three Kingdoms')

In his later reassessment of the show, he put the point even more firmly, insisting that '[e]verything in Sebastian Nübling's production is born out of Simon Stephens's text' ('Further Reflections'). Gillinson similarly posited that '[i]t's as if Nübling has transported all the ambiguity of Stephens' script directly onto the stage' ('Three Kingdoms'). These analyses thus fit the production to the orthodox English model of serving the writer's intentions, albeit on transformed terms. While it is true to assert that Nübling's direction did not violate Stephens' intentions (Stephens *intentionally* wrote the play in collaboration with Nübling, with whom he had worked on several

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previous occasions), the implication is that the production is somehow excused from the charges of (some) print critics on these grounds. What these arguments therefore maintain is the privileged intentionality of Stephens as playwright and the implicit hierarchy of text (which 'births' the images of a production) and performance (those images brought to life). Haydon got closest to abolishing this hierarchy when he described the production as 'the most organic synthesis of directorial vision and text imaginable' ('Three Kingdoms'). Here, rather than the direction either imposing itself on or emerging out of the text, the two are seen as equal parts of a larger collaboration.

While atypical in terms of the volume and intensity of the responses it provoked, the premiere of *Three Kingdoms* highlights several recurring critical habits, conventions and debates which are relevant to the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre. In reviews of *Three Kingdoms*, we can witness tendencies underpinned by the assumptions about playtexts addressed in Chapter One: an investment in the playwright's privileged intentionality, a hierarchical understanding of text and performance, a lack of appreciation for the meanings generated by non-textual elements of a production, and an implicit disapproval of directorial intervention and collective creation. The fierce debate between print and online critics, meanwhile, seems at first glance to

map roughly onto the contours of the 'text-based' versus 'non-text-based' divide, with print reviewers complaining about the mistreatment of the playtext and bloggers defending theatrical experiments that exceeded the play on the page. But this antagonism, which has been inflated by subsequent commentators, serves to conceal some of the continuities between the assumptions of print and online critics about the relationship between text and performance. In the rest of this chapter, I offer further analysis of the critical tendencies identified above, as well as addressing the conceptual foundations of these habits and their possible implications for theatre-makers.

The play's the thing

One of the principal ways in which reviewers reinforce misunderstandings about the relationship between text and performance and perpetuate the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre is through dedicating most of their critical attention to the text. Many reviews of new plays read as though they could have been written with almost exclusive reference to the script, with non-textual elements of the production typically subordinated to an analysis of the playtext and its ideas. Several critics have indeed openly stated their commitment to writing about the playtext, particularly when reviewing new work. Wardle, for instance, states that '[t]he play's the thing, if it is a new play, so we

can let it devour most of the space' (*Theatre Criticism* 123). Billington

likewise believes that '[i]f one is wrestling with a new play one is

bound to give primacy to the dramatist' ('The Role of the Theatre

Critic' 4), while John Gross agrees that '[c]ritics should spend more

time on the play – its nature, literary qualities and idea, than on the

production in general' (Stefanova 89). This habit is underpinned by a

belief both in the authority of the text, which is seen as the main

source of meaning, and in the privileged intentionality of the

playwright.

It is hard to disagree with Carroll that 'our practices of critical

appreciation would appear to be underwritten substantially by

intentionalism' (142); many critics would, I suggest, concur with

Carroll that the intentional creation of the artist is the proper object of

criticism. Carroll reasons that 'the activity of the artist is guided by

intentions that have certain ends-in-view, and those ends-in-view

imply a certain range of value or disvalue' (50). The designs or

intentions of the artist are thus viewed as a guide to the work's

success – or, as Mark Fisher puts it, critics need to establish what

the theatre-makers intended in order to assess whether or not they

achieved their intentions (*How to Write About Theatre* 20-25). While I

agree that artists' intentions bear some relevance to the act of

interpretation, as I discussed in Chapter One, my concern is that –

particularly when applied by critics with a literary education – this

position tends towards the rigid, monolithic conception of writerly intention that I previously debunked. Theatre critics appear, based on the available evidence, to agree that the purpose of interpretation is to 'discern the communicative intentions of the creator of the work' (Carroll 139-40), but in most instances these 'communicative intentions' are reduced to a narrow elucidation of what the playwright is attempting to 'say'. That is, critics are primarily interested in the intentions of the *playwright*, rather than the intentions of the rest of the creative team, and this interest in the writer's intentions is typically limited to content (the 'message' or 'meaning' of the play).

Existing research into the conventions of theatre criticism supports my suggestion that reviews of new plays are disproportionately concerned with the text. Using a corpus of reviews gathered from 26 different publications, Roberts has made the only attempt to date to quantitatively analyse the language used by theatre critics, identifying patterns of word frequency and sentence structure.[28] In his 1999 study, he found that the critical vocabulary of newspaper reviewers was dominated by what he calls 'New Critical terminology', which was 'at the expense of anything which has emerged from academic drama criticism over the past thirty years' ('Making the Word Count' 336). The New Critical movement in

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[28] This methodology has its limitations, as it cannot fully account for the many different, nuanced uses of language, but in conjunction with the sort of textual analysis I am undertaking in this chapter it could usefully extend and develop this area of research.

literary theory was focused on the close reading of texts, which were understood as autonomous, internally complex objects (an understanding that is inherently problematized by the complete-yet-incomplete nature of written drama), and so the adoption of this vocabulary by critics perhaps implies attention to the playtext rather than to the whole theatrical experience.[29] An in-depth investigation of the use of one particular word, meanwhile, also yields tentative evidence of a bias towards the playtext in productions of new or recent plays. Roberts found that in reviews of Shakespeare, Chekhov and Ibsen, 'more than 90 per cent of instances of "world"' – typically referring to the 'world' of the play – 'are associated with the directorial or design concept which has been brought to the play', while '[f]or post-war drama, the figure is less than 25 per cent' ('Making the Word Count' 337). He suggests that this pattern indicates an assumption about the remoteness of classic plays, which are seen to demand directorial or design choices that make their contemporary relevance apparent to audiences. I would add that it also potentially tells us something about how critics think about the treatment of classic plays in production as opposed to new plays in production. The far more regular association of 'world' with

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[29] This is also perhaps indicative of the literary educational backgrounds of the reviewers in question, as Roberts himself suggests. Wardle has likewise claimed that '[m]ost English reviewers have a text-based education, and correspondingly treat the text as their first priority' (*Theatre Criticism* 76). Radosavljević also suggests that '[a]s a result of their training, twentieth-century newspaper theatre critics, like many of their predecessors, could be seen to have displayed a literary bias in their appreciation of theatre' (*Theatre Criticism* 9-10).

direction and design when writing about well-known, classic plays

suggests that critics see these texts as open to directorial

experimentation, whereas productions of new plays are, perhaps,

expected to be more 'faithful' to the script.[30] In other words, the

'world' of a classic play can be constructed by the director, but the

'world' of a new play is determined by the writer.

The reviews in my sample likewise illustrate that when writing

about new work, critics tend to see it as their duty to pass a verdict

on the play and the success of the playwright's presumed intentions,

around which the contributions of other theatre-makers are seen to

revolve. This can be witnessed, firstly, in the balance of description in

reviews. The descriptive function of criticism, while not explicitly

evaluative, 'grounds' the operations of interpretation, analysis and

evaluation (Carroll 88). What critics choose to describe, then,

contains an implicit judgement. When critics dedicate most of their

space to the play, the production is usually relegated to a short

paragraph or even just a one-line sketch, with the design and

direction offered only a couple of adjectives. The implication is that

non-textual elements offer a limited contribution to theatrical

meaning, thus entrenching the hierarchy of text over performance.

Aleks Sierz's review of *Constellations* (2012), in which he writes that

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[30] This aligns with my point in Chapter One about the different kinds of
intentionalism applied to different kinds of text within mainstream English
production structures.

'Michael Longhurst's surefooted production is both entertaining and deeply moving' ('Constellations'), is typical of this glancing analysis. Or take this paragraph from Hitchings' review of *The Effect* (2012):

> Goold directs with clarity and wit, eliciting acting that is boldly physical yet also often achingly delicate. There's a slick design by Miriam Buether, which converts the Cottesloe into the waiting room of a smart private clinic, as well as suggestive projections by Jon Driscoll and some haunting music by Sarah Angliss. ('The Effect' 1213)

Here and elsewhere, the contributions of the director and design team are compressed into a couple of sentences which provide little clear sense of how they affected the theatrical experience.[31]

Typically, the visual appearance of productions is barely mentioned in reviews. Only when reconfiguring the auditorium in unusual ways or corresponding to some element that critics perceive to be belonging to the text does design receive sustained attention. Responses to *My Child* (2007) at the Royal Court, for example, comment upon how Miriam Buether's design transformed the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs into a cross between a London Underground carriage and a bar, though there is little attempt to analyse the meanings that this choice made available.[32] Foregrounding the text, Fiona Mountford states that the production is

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[31] This confirms Fisher's suggestion – which his 'how-to' guide endorses – that when reviewing new plays, critics 'relegate acting, directing and design to brief mentions, so they can get their teeth into what the dramatist is saying' (*How to Write About Theatre* 166-67).

[32] See Spencer ('My Child' 566), Billington ('My Child' 566), Nightingale (566-67), Hemming ('My Child' 567) and Allfree ('My Child').

'just what Mike Bartlett's thundering script … needs', without explaining *how* Buether's design and Sacha Wares' direction are fitting for this play ('My Child' 566). Seldom is design conceived of as central to the overall meaning(s) and effect(s) of a production.[33] Instead, the impression a reader usually receives is of a plot, an argument or a set of ideas, to which elements such as set design and lighting are barely relevant accessories. This tendency appears again and again.[34] The limited space afforded to direction and design is partly symptomatic of the restricted word counts available to print (and some online) critics, but there is nonetheless a notable imbalance between the space usually dedicated to playtext and narrative as opposed to other elements of the production.

Consistent with the assumption that play and playwright should be prioritised in productions of new writing, critics frequently praise direction that they perceive to be 'serving' the text.[35] There is a widespread belief among reviewers that the work of playwright and

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[33] Examples of similarly shallow and fleeting comments on design in my secondary sample include Edwardes ('Yesterday Was a Weird Day' 134), Bassett (267), Jones (1465), Spencer ('Wastwater' 359) and Shuttleworth ('The Acid Test' 560). More often, though, the design is not mentioned at all.

[34] For further examples, see Alkayat (130), Billington ('The Reporter' 194), Marlowe (326), Bayes (604), Sierz ('The Effect'), Shilling (1274) and Ramon. This is also a recurring feature within my secondary sample. See, for instance, Billington ('The Winterling' 266), de Jongh ('The Winterling' 266), Hewison (434), Hickling (528), Morley (706), Hitchings ('The Heretic' 123), Billington ('Wastwater' 358), Edwardes ('Wastwater' 361), Maxwell ('The Acid Test' 561) and Mountford ('The Village Bike' 725).

[35] This reflects the emphasis in English production structures, which – as discussed earlier – typically prioritise the intentions of the playwright when staging new writing.

director should be almost indivisible, with the latter subordinate to the intentions of the former. When seemingly 'showy' direction is commended, meanwhile, it is because it avoids the familiar charge of imposing itself on the text. Considering Rupert Goold's production of *The Effect*, for example, Mark Shenton writes that

> [a]t first I wondered if the director was dressing a conventional play in an unconventional treatment but the intensity of the approach amplifies instead of diminishes its power. ('The Effect' 1214)

Likewise, Maxie Szalwinska concludes that 'Goold, hardly the most invisible director, is almost self-effacing, toning the razzle-dazzle right down' (1215), while Gillinson praises how Goold has 'done a fine job of massaging this play, never stamping his mark on the production' ('The Effect'). Other productions praised in this way are 'lucid and restrained' (Peter, 'Leaves of Glass' 560) or 'beautifully responsive to the musicality of the play's patterning' (Taylor, 'The River' 1148). In other instances, critics conclude that the direction 'does [its] very best to support and unlock this piece' (Gillinson, 'Leaves of Glass'), or 'seems designed to let the writing showcase itself' (Trueman, 'Goodbye to All That').[36] Wardle's suggestion that directors of new writing succeed when they 'fade from the scene, leaving no fingerprints behind' (*Theatre Criticism* 125) thus appears to be

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[36] Other examples include Marmion (327), Clapp (177), Nathan ('Blink' 919), Hemming ('The Effect' 1213). Similar tendencies can also be seen in my secondary sample. Kate Kellaway, for instance, praises a production for being 'without gimmicks' ('The Winterling' 266), while Alastair Macauley celebrates the way that director Ian Rickson 'has honoured new plays by making them lucid and natural, eloquently rendering their phrasing' (267). See also Wolf (573), Taylor ('93.2 Fm' 977) and Purves (1119).

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consistent with the view of most contemporary critics, confirming

Haydon's assertion that 'critics reviewing a new play will generally

credit most of what happens on stage to the writer, and assume that

the director was simply "serving the text"' ('Can You Spot'). Across

the reviews I have examined, meanwhile, directorial choices are

more often mentioned when those choices are being criticised than

when they are considered effective, again with the implication that

successful direction of new writing is invisible direction.

A more in-depth example illustrates some of the interpretive

implications of this emphasis on the playtext. *Ten Billion* (2012),

written and performed by scientist Stephen Emmott and directed by

Katie Mitchell, has a debated claim to theatrical status and as such

provides a particularly interesting case study for analysis. This piece

was considered by most critics – who could not see past the

conventions of the text – to be a lecture rather than a piece of

theatre. The question most frequently asked in reviews was 'is this a

play?'.[37] Mountford, for example, asserted that '[i]t's not theatre in

any real sense but a lecture' ('Ten Billion' 812); Lukowski agreed that

'"Ten Billion" is neither a play nor a work of fiction, but rather a

monumentally sobering one-hour lecture' ('Ten Billion' 813). Other

critics concluded that 'it is not in any normal sense theatre'

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[37] The question of what counts as a play is one that has dogged theatre criticism for decades: in 1955, *The Times* greeted the British premiere of *Waiting for Godot* with the puzzled words 'is it a play?' (Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre Criticism* 69).

(Hemming, 'Ten Billion' 813), or 'Ten Billion isn't quite a play' (Brown, 'Ten Billion' 814). Billington's review challenged this perspective, describing the distinction between play and lecture as 'nonsensical' and arguing that '[t]heatre is whatever we want it to be and gains immeasurably from engaging with momentous political, social or scientific issues' ('Ten Billion' 813).[38] Notably, though, theatre is only defended as 'whatever we want it to be' when the show in question is deemed to be directly addressing important issues; when critiquing 'non-text-based' work, as we will soon see, Billington has been much keener to defend the boundaries of what theatre is and is not.

A more nuanced alternative view of *Ten Billion* was presented by Trueman, who argued that '[w]hat we watch is 100% lecture and 100% theatre at the same time, and it absolutely thrives on the duality' ('Ten Billion'). He suggested that the naturalism of Mitchell's staging, with its connotations of theatrical illusion, was at odds with the factual content of Emmott's words, setting audiences in a 'mode of doubting' ('Ten Billion') that reflected popular attitudes of denial when confronted with climate change. Considering the show as a holistic piece of theatre, rather than words written by a scientist that just happen to be spoken on a stage, Trueman's review thus draws out some of the complexities of what Mitchell's production might be

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[38] This is consistent with Billington's long-held preference for work he judges to be politically or socially engaged.

doing and the readings that it makes possible – readings that would not be possible were this same content presented in a university lecture hall.[39] By focusing narrowly on the playtext, as this example demonstrates, reviewers impoverish the critical discussion around new productions. Often, what we as readers receive is more an analysis of a script – which is already likely to be preserved in a published version – than a reflection and critique of the whole theatrical experience. As well as having troubling implications for the archival memory of such productions, the critical orthodoxy of foregrounding play and playwright serves to reinforce the perception that the intentions of the individual writer are central to a show's meanings, and consequently to set this playwright-led theatre apart from shows where there is no pre-written text or single identifiable writer.

Criticisms of devising

The same critical assumptions discussed above have frequently led critics to dismiss 'non-text-based' productions, which are often seen to lack the guiding voice of an individual playwright and which typically employ an abundance of non-textual theatrical techniques that reviewers are apt to neglect. Within my sample, there are a greater number of reviews of productions of solo-authored, pre-

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[39] I previously discussed some of these ideas in my MA thesis (*The Writer's Theatre?*) and in a blog post about *Ten Billion* and its follow-up *2071* ('Theatre as Argument').

existing playtexts than of other theatre-making practices, reflecting both the continued dominance of play-led processes in the English theatrical mainstream and, possibly, a bias towards this work on the part of critics and arts editors.[40] Where there are responses to productions that did not begin with a pre-written playtext, these works are often distinguished from their 'text-based' counterparts in a comparison that almost invariably favours the latter. This has the consequence not just of undermining such work and potentially affecting the theatre-makers' future reputations, but also of reductively categorising new work as either 'text-based' or 'non-text-based', thereby eliding the diversity and innovation of much of the English theatre ecology.

Categorisation is, as Carroll recognises, a common and perhaps inevitable critical manoeuvre. It is impossible to identify general evaluative criteria against which all works of art, or even all pieces of theatre, can be judged. An artistic choice that might be judged hilarious in a comedy, for example, is likely to be deemed inappropriate in a gloomy psychological drama. Carroll suggests, though, that critics circumnavigate this problem by referring to 'general enough' criteria, which are specific to the category (or categories) into which any individual artwork falls. According to

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[40] Here there is, again, an intersection with funding and production structures, as much so-called 'non-text-based' work is produced by independent touring artists whose short runs at each venue are often considered ineligible for reviews according to current editorial guidelines.

Carroll, these categories help critics to identify an artist's intentions and determine the standards against which artistic achievements are judged. Zarhy-Levo has similarly proposed that when assessing new playwrights, 'reviewers typically locate them in light of their affiliation with, or divergence from, recognized and established theatrical trends or schools' (*Theatrical Reputations* 123). Sometimes, when new work subverts tradition to the extent that it struggles to find a place within pre-existing categories, critics coin new categories, creating what Zarhy-Levo describes as a

> feedback loop between the phenomenon and its naming, whereby a phenomenon is first assigned a descriptive label designed to familiarize new, incoherent elements; this in turn contributes to the phenomenon's acceptance. (*The Theatrical Critic* 3)

My concern, though, is that there is a danger of critics too readily classifying work according to rigid and inaccurate categories. It is unsurprising that critics should draw on past experience when encountering novelty (I do it all the time when I review new shows). But when existing categories are seen as a reliable guide to artistic success, it is all too easy to view and respond to new work with a narrow set of expectations. There is, as Wardle recognises, a risk that the chosen category 'assume[s] the authority of a trades description formula, with the effect that you ignore everything in the play that does not correspond to it' (*Theatre Criticism* 92). This can be seen in some critics' tendency to use a few high-profile theatre companies – the likes of Punchdrunk, Shunt and Complicite – to

stand in for 'contemporary performance' or 'non-text-based' theatre,

under which they group a wide range of heterogeneous work on the

basis of its perceived opposition to playwriting.[41] It is crucial, though,

to recognise that these few examples are not representative of all

theatre that does not begin with a solo-authored playtext. For a start,

these companies all work in distinct ways and produce very different

shows from one another.[42] Furthermore, they are only the most

visible examples of a diverse array of theatre-making. Focusing on

them as representatives of 'non-text-based' theatre, therefore, elides

a huge range of other work, while allowing that work to be summarily

dismissed on the basis that the shows of these select few companies

have – according to certain critics – failed to deliver.[43] Contrary to

Carroll's insistence that evaluative criticism is not prescriptive, I

would suggest that such repeated dismissals of 'non-text-based'

work on the basis of a narrow category definition constitute a form of

policing of theatre practice.[44]

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[41] See, for example, Billington (*State of the Nation* 395-97), or Spencer in Stefanova (151).

[42] Even to note the superficial similarity between Punchdrunk and Shunt, pointing out that both companies take audiences outside of the auditorium and immerse them in the theatrical event, is to ignore the strikingly different terms of audience engagement in the shows of these two companies.

[43] Similar arguments have been made – specifically in response to Billington's tendency to bundle together 'non-text-based' theatre in this way – by Chris Goode ('All You Get') and Andy Field ('Curious Dichotomies').

[44] Michael Anderson provides another possible reason for the reductive categorising of 'non-text-based' theatre, suggesting that 'the dispersed nature of the alternative theatre is not simply an inconvenience for the critic who wants to tackle this work or that, but something that actually prevents the vital comparative aspect of his craft from coming into play' (450). In other words, the critical discourse around work not starting from a solo-authored playtext is impoverished by the relative lack of a documented alternative tradition of theatre-making, whereas text-led theatre is preserved in published playtexts.

I would also question Carroll's assertion that critics evaluate the effects of an artwork 'irrespective of whether or not those effects were generated by certain tried and true routines' (26). Throughout the reviews I have analysed, there is often an automatically pejorative attitude towards productions that have been generated through devising and/or collaborative practices, based primarily on the perceived flaws of the process itself rather than on the theatre it produces. Sometimes, for instance, critics employ a rhetorical move whereby a piece of 'non-text-based' theatre is praised on the basis that it transcends what are seen to be the inherent failings of the form. This can be illustrated using the example of *Water* (2007), a show devised by theatre company Filter. Billington opens his review of the production with the statement that '[d]evised theatre, at its worst, often leads to narrative and political flabbiness', preceding and qualifying the praise he goes on to give the show ('Water' 1272). Charlotte Loveridge makes a similar point in her review:

> [i]mprovised theatre often concentrates on mood and effect but sometimes eschews or neglects classical story-telling. Not so Filter, who impressively combine innovative atmospherics with a powerful plot and involving characters. (Loveridge)

Taylor, meanwhile, writes that '[t]he stories in devised pieces of this kind can seem prefabricated to suit the themes, but Water makes us feel the emotional turbulence on our pulses' ('Water' 1273). While the reviews were largely positive, they framed their praise within a

general mistrust or disapproval of devising as a theatre-making

methodology, undermining a whole sector of theatre practice at the

same time as praising one supposedly exceptional example of it.

This is, moreover, an exemplary case of the grouping of

heterogeneous theatre practices under the single heading of 'devised

theatre', with which certain features and defects are collectively

associated.

As in the reviews of *Water* above, 'non-text-based' theatre is

often damned with faint praise by critics.[45] Its success, as well as

being perceived to subvert the innate flaws of its form, is sometimes

taken to indicate the poor condition of playwriting rather than the

health of devising. Also reviewing *Water*, Spencer writes that

> [i]n a weak year for new plays, devised theatre has led the
> way, with first Complicite and now a company called Filter
> coming up with work that dazzles the eye, enchants the ear,
> and stimulates both the mind and heart. ('Water' 1272)

The implication here is that devised theatre is plugging a gap left by

negligent playwrights, again casting these as opposing practices.

There is a similar suggestion underpinning Spencer's review of *Can*

We Talk About This? (2012):

> it says something about the timidity of our theatres and our
> dramatists that this daring debate about Islamic extremism,
> multiculturalism and freedom of speech is being presented
> by the dance and physical theatre company DV8, rather

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[45] There are also examples of this in my secondary sample. Jonathan Gibbs, for
instance, judges that devised comedy *Something Fishy* (2006) has 'none of the
laboured amateurishness that can taint these kinds of things' (1286).

than by a more conventional stage outfit. ('Can We Talk About This?' 264)

In other instances, the devising or collaborative process in general, rather than any specific failings of the work in question, is used to support negative judgements. Discussing a piece that Anthony Neilson created with members of the Royal Shakespeare Company ensemble in 2007, for example, Sierz writes that '[b]ecause it arose from a long process of devising, God in Ruins is rather uneven' ('God in Ruins' 1469).[46] Repeatedly, the latent suggestion is that devising – even when it produces theatre that is judged to be successful – is somehow inherently inferior to playwriting.

Another frequent criticism of devising is that it results in empty spectacle, a view best illustrated by the responses to Kneehigh's *A Matter of Life and Death* (2007) at the National Theatre.[47] Following the above pattern of attributing certain, pejorative features to devised work, Spencer claimed that he was 'growing tired of devised shows that often seem more like an acrobatic display than a piece of real drama' ('A Matter of Life and Death' 574). Billington complained about the show's 'lack of narrative dynamic' ('A Matter of Life and Death' 575), while Nicholas de Jongh objected that 'Rice's production keeps subordinating sense to meaningless spectacle' ('A

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[46] De Jongh ('God in Ruins' 1469) and Taylor ('God in Ruins' 1471) also criticised *God in Ruins* along similar lines.

[47] This production's critical reception prompted the National Theatre's artistic director Nicholas Hytner to question the homogenous profile of the national critics, famously dubbing them 'dead white males'. See Ben Hoyle.

Matter of Life and Death' 575). The damning reference to spectacle

is a repeated one: de Jongh goes on to criticise Rice's 'eagerness to

compose flamboyant but vacuous stage pictures' ('A Matter of Life

and Death' 575), Christopher Hart writes the production off as a

display of 'gaudy spectacle and even silliness' (575), and Simon

Edge describes it as 'another example of the National Theatre's

current obsession with style over substance' ('A Matter of Life and

Death' 577).[48] These critiques recall Billington's rejection of what he

calls 'visual theatre' in his 2007 book *State of the Nation*. He writes

that

> [t]o create a separate area of theatre that is primarily
> 'visual', and to endow it with a sanctified purity as many of
> its apologists do, is simply to create a meaningless ghetto.
> (*State of the Nation* 396)

He adds that such work 'rarely does anything to change the situation,

stir one's conscience or alert one to the injustices of the wider world',

instead merely offering 'a mildly titillatory sensory experience' (*State*

of the Nation 396). The implication behind these accusations of

'spectacle', 'style over substance' and 'titillatory sensory experience'

is that such work, because of its lack of a central creative force in the

form of a playwright, can only create visual and sensory pleasure,

rather than 'chang[ing] the situation' – something that, according to

these critics, seems to be the sole preserve of individual writers.

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[48] This bears some resemblance to the critical response to Kneehigh's *Cymbeline*,
which Radosavljević argues divided critics 'along the text- or performance-bias'
(*Theatre-Making* 58).

This, of course, misunderstands the complex ways in which theatrical

events make meaning through both textual and non-textual

elements, reinforcing the hierarchical view of text and performance

that I am working to dismantle throughout this thesis.

Finally, the critical reception of DV8's 2012 show *Can We Talk*

About This? offers an interesting set of responses to the marriage of

movement and (in this case, verbatim) text, both illustrating the

reductive effect of undermining the contribution of different, 'non-text-

based' theatrical registers and suggesting how critics might take a

more holistic approach to productions. Several critics saw the

choreography as a distraction: 'to my eyes,' Spencer writes, 'the

stylised movement that accompanied the play's riveting verbal

content adds almost nothing', adding that it 'serves as a distraction

from the scary urgency of what is being said' ('Can We Talk About

This?' 264); Shenton similarly expresses the reservation that '[i]n

Newson's highly stylised, utterly committed treatment, the overlaying

of so much information can sometimes be difficult to take in' ('Can

We Talk About This?' 266); Kate Kellaway concludes that 'mostly,

the dance distracts' ('Can We Talk About This?' 266). Embedded

within these complaints of distraction is a suggestion that

choreography is unable to illuminate the show's questions about

extremism, freedom of speech and political correctness; several

critics seem to feel that movement can only get in the way of the

'real' content, which is carried by the verbatim text. One critic even proposes that the material would be better served in a more conventional, text-led format: 'I left wanting to see the subject tackled by characters and plot. In other words, by a proper play' (Nathan, 'Can We Talk About This?' 265).

Other reviewers, though, suggest that the production 'works best when the spirit of the dance is at odds with the words' (Edge, 'Can We Talk About This?' 264). Others still interpret the movement as an expression of 'individuals' difficulties in articulating problems' (Hemming, 'Can We Talk About This?' 264) or a 'subtext of hesitancy, indecision, unease' (Gilbert 266), making nuanced attempts to 'read' the choreography. In these responses, there is a hint of how criticism might interpret the entire theatrical experience, not just the 'play', although there remains some tentativeness in describing and analysing DV8's use of movement. The word 'stylised' appears again and again in these reviews, supporting Helen Freshwater's argument that even when critics are positive in their assessments of 'physical' or 'visual' theatre there is often a dearth of precise vocabulary for critiquing the non-textual elements of a performance ('Physical Theatre').[49] There is a question, then, of how deeply these critical conventions are ingrained and whether the

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[49] Gardner has also suggested that 'many critics have failed to develop the vocabulary to deal with work which is visual and because it makes them uneasy they avoid engaging with it' (Stefanova 47).

current shifts in the reviewing landscape are beginning to dislodge them. This is the question that I will begin to address in the final section of this chapter.

Bloggers vs critics

In his defence of the canon, Carroll shifts the burden of proof onto what he calls the 'conspiracy theorist', who has

> failed to show that it is not possible for some critics to transcend their real-world political affiliations and interests, and to evaluate the artworks before them on the basis of good reasons. (40)

It is not only a question of individual prejudice that is at stake here, though. There is also the question of the largely invisible biases and conventions embedded in reviewing as a genre of writing, formed over many years and reinforced by the homogenous profile of critics as a group. I therefore agree with Roberts that we need to pay more attention to the unspoken principles and habits that characterise theatre criticism, 'in order to grasp just how complex and, ultimately, unreliable a form it is' ('Towards a Study' 129). This is what I have attempted to do throughout this chapter. Roberts has suggested, furthermore, that reviews contain 'distinctive linguistic structures which impose a pattern on their subject and on everyone else's understanding of it' ('Towards a Study' 129). This pattern, several features of which I have observed above, is remarkably resilient and threatens to carry over into the new discursive spaces of online theatre criticism.

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So far in this chapter, I have discussed print and online criticism side by side. It must be acknowledged, though, that the growth of reviewing on websites and blogs has substantially changed the landscape of English theatre criticism. I think that, where the question of approaches to text and performance is concerned, the impact of online criticism can be overstated, but the space opened up by the internet potentially offers new possibilities for challenging the critical tendencies discussed above.[50] To illustrate this, I turn to a few examples that tentatively support Haydon's suggestion that online critics are distinguished by their 'appreciation not only of text, but also design and dramaturgy' ('Online Theatre Criticism' 146). Gillinson's review of *Lovesong*, for instance, uses an opening description of the design ('[h]uge yellow blocks line the back of the Lyric stage') to explore the show's themes, illustrating in the process how visual elements create theatrical meaning. Gillinson suggests that '[t]hese are the walls and shared moments that have held this couple together for so long' and that in between them 'sprawls an endless blackness, hinting at the memories that are beginning to fade and the death that wife, Maggie, will be embracing all too soon'

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[50] There is a distinction to be made here between reviews of or responses to individual performances and the broader discussions of issues facing the theatre sector that have also frequently taken place across the blogosphere. While there is not space for a full discussion of the latter in this chapter, conversations between bloggers have played an important role in highlighting and debating the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' dichotomy. See, for example, the blogs by Goode and Field cited above.

('Lovesong'). Lois Jeary's review of *We Hope That You're Happy*

(Why Would We Lie?), meanwhile, intertwines descriptions of

performances and staging with interpretations of the show's ideas.

She recounts the songs and dance moves that are performed 'under

pretty pink party lights' and describes how Jess Latowicki's 'eyes are

absorbingly dead throughout', extracting from this a political

comment on '[h]ow numb we've become' (Jeary). These and other

examples of online criticism – including some of the responses to

Three Kingdoms – exhibit a more analytical attention towards non-

textual elements of performance than many of the reviews cited so

far in this chapter, with an implicit understanding that these are as

crucial to the creation of meaning and affect as the text that is

typically foregrounded by their print counterparts.[51]

It helps to be precise, though, about the nature of the potential

contained in online criticism and, contrastingly, its limitations at

present. Radosavljević argues that online, where the hierarchies and

restrictions imposed by publishers no longer apply, 'we have been

freed to revert to more personal, more creative and more

conversational means of expression' (*Theatre Criticism* 18). Vaughan

similarly describes digital criticism as 'the freedom to be different',

adding that 'implicit in that is an obligation to be different, for the sake

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[51] For other examples, see Tripney ('Lovesong'), Wicker, Yates ('Morning') and Trueman ('You'll See Me'). Trueman's response to *Ten Billion*, discussed above, is also illustrative of the more nuanced discussions of dramaturgy and design that can sometimes be found in online criticism.

of a healthy culture of discourse, now and in the future'
(Radosavljević, *Theatre Criticism* 24). Vaughan's own blog rigorously
fulfils that obligation, with posts that make full use of the creative and
technological possibilities of writing online.[52] In doing so, her criticism
largely breaks out of the conventions of print reviewing – including
those conventions that prioritise text over performance. Similarly, the
intensely personal tenor of Costa's blog or the anecdotal and
experiential approach of the West End Whingers displaces focus
from the playtext, instead stressing the emotional journey of a
production and the personal context (whether serious or irreverent)
within which it sits. Other online reviews, meanwhile, have attempted
to break free somewhat from the structures of language, using visual
rather than (or as well as) textual forms of response.[53] These forms,
in eschewing words, seem inherently to reflect the design of
productions and/or the feelings they provoked more than, or in
addition to, their narrative or argument.[54]

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[52] Vaughan's experiments in online criticism have included an emoji review,
'choose your own adventure'-style performance responses using the interactive
digital storytelling tool Twine, and various approaches to text beyond the formal
conventions of print reviewing. See Vaughan ('Synonyms').

[53] See, in addition to examples on Vaughan's blog, Alice Saville, David Ralf and
The Gif Review.

[54] This recalls Wardle's suggestion that 'the shared condition of living by the written
word gives [critics] a basic foothold in the playwright's world' (*Theatre Criticism* 96).
If the written format of conventional reviews is a factor in critics' emphasis on the
play (i.e. the written component of performance), then it may be that criticism that
is incorporating more non-textual elements will be more likely to comment on other,
non-textual aspects of the production.

The possibility, represented in the above examples, of subverting convention and thereby circumventing a model arranged around the playtext is a consequence of the self-publishing enabled by the internet. On blogs, theatre critics are no longer beholden to word counts and editorial expectations. As Trueman has proposed, the internet presents the possibility of conceiving of criticism as a 'team sport', in which no one critic is under the old obligation of telling readers everything they need to know about a production ('Criticism as a Team Sport'). Freed from this obligation, Trueman suggests, each critic can pursue whatever they find most interesting, in the confidence that readers can find out about other aspects of the show from other reviews. One feature of Trueman's argument that I would question, though, is his suggestion that critics have ever been expected to truly cover all bases. Rather, as seen in the reviews cited throughout this chapter, the expectation – at least when writing about new work – seems to be that critics will outline what the show is about, what its writer is attempting to do, and (typically in a swift concluding paragraph) how the direction, design and acting have achieved (or not achieved) the playwright's intentions. This is, as we have seen, the model typically followed by print critics and advocated by those critics in 'how-to' guides and reflections on their profession; indeed, I suspect that many critics believe that this approach *is* covering all bases, which is part of the problem. In theory, at least, it is this model that online reviewing is freed from. Released from the

demand for newsworthiness that drives reviewing in journalistic

contexts, meanwhile, bloggers can choose to review what interests

them, presenting an opportunity to shift what is and is not part of the

discourse.[55]

Despite this potential, though, reviewing on blogs and

websites has been clouded by the emergence of another unhelpful

binary. Online criticism has often been reductively characterised as

antagonistic, creating an opposition between critics and bloggers that

is not only an inaccurate reflection of the critical ecology in the

twenty-first century, but that has also occasionally led to partisan and

indiscriminate allegiances to certain types of new work, sometimes in

place of the nuanced analysis that online writers might be able to

offer. Even relatively early in its life, online theatre criticism was

characterised by heterogeneity – certainly in comparison to the

editorial restrictions and near-identical backgrounds typical of the

print media.[56] Individual blogs were largely defined by personality,

while online review sites could replicate the newspaper model at the

same time as adding greater breadth and/or depth to their coverage.

But, as Haydon points out,

> the differences between these blogs and sites and their
> diverse aims and functions were overlooked in a series of

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[55] Vaughan, for instance, describes herself as 'blogging about a very particular mix of theatre: experimental, emerging, esoteric, European' ('Crowdfunding').
[56] It is worth noting that, despite the way in which blogging has opened criticism to many new voices, most of those writing about theatre are still white, middle-class and university educated. It is important, therefore, not to overstate the diversity of online reviewing.

> 'Bloggers versus Critics' articles … bundling all online writing up into one homogenous category, held up as the opposite to 'Professional criticism'. ('Online Theatre Criticism' 140)

Bloggers, in turn, often felt that they were fighting a battle against the ingrained tastes of print critics, who were similarly homogenised in attacks on what were perceived to be their out-of-date views. The example of *Three Kingdoms* is only the most vociferous episode in this ongoing debate.

There is a danger, though, that in stressing the divide between print and online critics, a new set of tastes simply becomes entrenched and one's attitude to the work in question becomes a partisan badge of loyalty rather than a nuanced analysis of what happened on stage.[57] I have certainly been aware anecdotally of the perception that critics writing online are prone to cheerleading for work that is considered 'non-text-based' or, in the case of a production like *Three Kingdoms*, is perceived to depart from the conventions of 'text-based' theatre.[58] This perception allows for the analysis of such shows to be dismissed, while the distracting image of critics and bloggers locked in battle can allow for the quiet

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[57] Freshwater has raised a similar concern in relation to reviews of Complicite's work. She suggests that 'Complicite's association with an "anti-text" position is produced, in part, by those who admire their work' ('Physical Theatre' 180-81), but that this is at odds with the actual role of text in the company's work. Freshwater therefore argues that the approach of even supportive critics 'militates against a genuine appreciation of Complicite's achievements, and elides the complexity of the relationship between text and movement' ('Physical Theatre' 190).

[58] Haydon has also noted such perceptions, identifying 'two main issues currently facing the contemporary critic. Firstly the issue of what to do with one's taste, and secondly the accusation of "an entrenched position"' ('Of Taste').

perpetuation of other binaries. Although the conversation about

theatre that has developed online has much to contribute to the art

form, and has in many ways opened criticism to new perspectives

and approaches, the apparent break between print and online should

not cause us to ignore the continuities between the two, which

include pervasive assumptions about the relationship between text

and performance. I therefore suggest that attention needs to be paid

to those conventions and assumptions embedded in print criticism

that persist online. Again echoing Raymond Williams, we should be

cautious about celebrating the 'emergent' characteristics of a form

that bears many of the hallmarks of an older, still 'dominant' critical

tradition.

    While online criticism is partly characterised by the

technological possibilities afforded it and by the distinct form of the

blog, which has its own associated tropes,[59] it has also inherited

many of the conventions of its print predecessor. Significantly, two of

the earliest outlets for online theatre criticism, *British Theatre Guide*

and *WhatsOnStage* (both established in 1997), largely modelled their

reviews on those of the print media. Despite the formal challenges

offered by some bloggers, much online criticism, both on magazine-

style websites and individual blogs, perpetuates the conventions of

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[59] Jill Walker Rettberg notes that blogs are seen to be characterised by a 'personal tone' and defines the medium as being typically subjective and social (30-35).

print – including those conventions that have reinforced flawed assumptions about playtexts and performances. Across my sample, in addition to the examples already cited above, there are numerous instances of online reviews foregrounding play and playwright at the expense of other aspects of the production, underpinned by a belief that staging should 'serve' text.[60] More interestingly, several of the reviews reflect on and dissect critical conventions that they nonetheless struggle to entirely break free from. This can be seen, for instance, in the online responses to *Three Kingdoms*, which engage in a sort of meta-criticism as they enter dialogue with one another and with the print reviews, while unwittingly perpetuating some of the assumptions about text and performance that are embedded in newspaper criticism. Elsewhere, in his review of *Morning*, Haydon adds an aside in which he observes his own reductive use of reviewing conventions, noting that ongoing discussions about text and collaboration are 'desperately in need of a new critical vocabulary to support and articulate them' ('Morning').

I am not sure that this new critical vocabulary has yet emerged, but some of the previously referenced characteristics of blogging offer reason to be tentatively optimistic about the potential of online criticism. Karen Fricker proposes that

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[60] See, for example, Haydon ('Landscape with Weapon'), Field ('Alaska'), Trueman ('Constellations'), Gurtler and Trueman ('The Witness').

layering interpretation and arguments upon each other, offering counter-readings and new angles, online dialogue about a theatre production becomes a site for the proposal and refinement of interpretation and response. (42)

Blogging is – or at least can be – dialogic in nature, eroding some of the implicit authority previously held by critics. This also offers an opportunity for ingrained assumptions to be discussed, reflected on and challenged, and for online reviewers to move away from a model based on newspaper readership to one that acknowledges the multivocal nature of the internet and the consequent freedom from providing neat, authoritative judgements. There is some evidence of this in the latest generation of theatre bloggers, several of whom deliberately resist – to varying degrees – the formal conventions of print reviewing.[61] It remains to be seen whether the evolution of online writing about theatre, which is still in relative infancy, will ultimately break away from the assumptions and habits built up by its print predecessor.[62] What this chapter's examination of recent English theatre criticism again demonstrates, though, is that the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre is not an inevitable or straightforward reflection of practice. It is, instead, constantly re-enacted in the criticism that feeds wider

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[61] See, for example, James Varney, Harry R. McDonald, Florence Bell and Eve Allin. These writers subvert reviewing conventions through strategies such as prioritising personal and/or sensory experience, displacing notions of critical judgement, using a stream-of-consciousness writing style, and interspersing text with videos, images and gifs.
[62] This is also likely to be influenced by the financial sustainability (or unsustainability) of online criticism in the future, which lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

discourses. In the following chapter, we will see how this reinforcement of reductive attitudes towards the playtext, alongside the previously discussed contexts of Arts Council funding and higher education, impacts on contemporary theatre practice.

Chapter Five

From Theory to Practice

Having reconceptualised the relationship between text and performance and analysed how a misrepresentation of this relationship is embodied in and perpetuated by Arts Council funding, higher education and theatre criticism, in this final chapter I turn briefly to practice. While my approach in previous chapters has deliberately eschewed the more common scholarly attention to practitioners, arguing that the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work has been shaped by various theoretical and institutional contexts, here I want to make more explicit the impact of this divide on theatre-makers, with the intention of illustrating rather than extending my central argument. It will not be possible within the scope of one chapter to explore all the ways in which practitioners are affected by flawed assumptions about theatre texts and the attendant bifurcation of theatre-making, but my aim is to ground the theoretical and institutional analysis of the rest of the thesis in some of the more immediate and specific conditions of contemporary theatre practice. This analysis of practice also nods towards some of the implications that my research might have for the subsidised theatre sector, which I discuss further in the Conclusion.

I begin by taking a brief look at the English theatre ecology in 2017, illustrating the diversity of approaches to text and suggesting some of the ways in which work is still affected by a 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide. I then examine three individual case studies in greater detail. With the intention of representing three distinct forms of practice, each of which sits within a different professional context, I have chosen to focus on a writer, director and performer (Tim Crouch), an independent theatre company (Action Hero), and a season at an established new writing theatre (*Open Court* at the Royal Court). The work of these companies and practitioners is discussed from the perspectives of the four previous chapters: the relationship between text and performance; the ways in which the work has been funded; the work's relationship with higher education contexts; and the critical reception with which it has met. I have also chosen these three case studies because, in various ways, their practice challenges or engages with the role of text in contemporary theatre-making, thus underlining how the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' dichotomy distorts the relationship between text and performance.

The theatre ecology today

As noted in the Introduction, it is difficult to capture a full overview of the theatrical landscape in England today. The BTC's 2014 repertoire report provides a sense of the scope:

> In 2014, our theatres presented 59,386 performances of 5,072 separate shows, attracting 33,121,360 theatre visits, at the 274 venues that make up SOLT/UKTheatre's membership (BTC et al. 3)[1]

This, furthermore, represents only a partial picture of professional theatre-making, excluding many smaller venues that are not members of SOLT or UKTheatre. It is clear, then, that analysing such a huge body of production information will be impossible within the limits of this chapter. I have instead compiled a snapshot by collating productions of new work performed in 2017 at 15 Arts Council NPOs of varying sizes.[2] Although limited, this selection of venues is representative of the wide range of regularly-subsidised theatres in England, from the National Theatre on £17,217,000 a year in 2017 right through to the Theatre In the Mill with its annual funding of £40,271, and it covers all of the Arts Council's geographical funding areas.[3] A brief analysis of this snapshot, as undertaken below, demonstrates the range of different approaches to text in English theatre-making today, which cannot be characterised by a simple dichotomy between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work.

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[1] It should be noted that this data includes theatre across Britain, not just in England. However, over 80% of the productions captured by this repertoire report were performed in England (BTC et al. 30).

[2] Listed in descending order of funding received, these venues are the National Theatre, the Royal Exchange Theatre, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Sheffield Theatres, Theatre Royal Plymouth, Battersea Arts Centre, Soho Theatre, Oxford Playhouse, The Dukes Playhouse, Harrogate Theatre, Bike Shed Theatre, Camden People's Theatre, Tobacco Factory Theatres and the Theatre In the Mill. Together, these organisations represent just under a tenth of the total number of theatre NPOs in 2015-18 and almost 30% of the total sum awarded to theatre. The full sample of new work performed at these theatres in 2017 can be found in Appendix C.

[3] I have chosen to focus on venues rather than theatre companies in order to capture the greatest breadth of work possible within a limited sample.

Nonetheless, the way in which much of this theatre-making is funded, programmed and discussed remains coloured by a divide based on a perceived relationship between text and performance.

Carl Lavery suggested in 2009 that 'the text – or quite simply language – is a core element in new performance' ('Is There a Text' 37). As he recognises, this is not only the case in productions of individually-authored new plays. Indeed, a glance at theatre practice in 2017 reveals all manner of texts, from commissioned solo-authored plays to verbatim works; from collectively devised shows to seemingly 'open' performance scores; from autobiographical solo shows to co-written scripts. Among the London-based venues I have looked at, the widest range of approaches to text can be found at Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) and Soho Theatre, where what might be considered more 'conventional' plays have been programmed alongside solo shows, verbatim plays and pieces devised through various processes. It is notable that BAC, which in 2013 stated that it did 'not see the future of theatre as traditional plays performed by actors in purpose-built theatre spaces' and explained that 'most of the work at BAC is devised – it does not start life as a script' (Battersea Arts Centre), presented solo-authored plays by writers like James Fritz and Julia Samuels over the course of 2017. Soho Theatre, meanwhile, has expanded its definition of 'new writing' – with which it has long been associated – by welcoming more and

more work that did not necessarily start life as a pre-written script. Its

programme for 2017, for example, included theatre-makers such as

Sh!t Theatre, RashDash and Ursula Martinez, whose work is often

classed as 'non-text-based' theatre or performance art, alongside

playwrights Vicky Jones, Charlotte Josephine and Stacey Gregg.

A survey of performances in 2017 also supplies evidence of a

shift in the Royal Court's identity. While all the productions were of

individually-written plays, justifying the venue's claim to be a 'writer's

theatre', the breadth of writers, texts and processes challenges the

narrow set of expectations generally associated with the label of

'text-based' theatre that is often affixed to the Court's work. The

theatre's most prominent experiment with what it meant to be a

writer's theatre in 2017 was The Site, a temporary theatre space

which was framed as 'an experiment in design, collaboration and

process' (Royal Court Theatre). The starting point for the season in

this space was not a set of scripts but a design created by Chloe

Lamford, in which five playwrights were invited to 'rethink how we

create, present, and watch plays' (Royal Court Theatre). Rather than

bringing in fully-formed scripts at the start of rehearsals, writers were

encouraged to experiment, creating the work in close collaboration

with actors and other creatives. Elsewhere in the Royal Court's

programme, similarly collaborative approaches to text underpinned

formally experimental productions like Simon Stephens and Imogen

Knight's *Nuclear War* (for which Stephens wrote text that could be

performed through either speech or choreography) and Alice Birch's

and Katie Mitchell's *Anatomy of a Suicide*. The programme also

included theatre-makers who would not necessarily consider

themselves (or be considered) as playwrights: Complicite's Simon

McBurney, writer-performer Shôn Dale-Jones, and Unlimited Theatre

founder member Chris Thorpe. All these theatre-makers have spent

much of their careers creating work in collaborative companies and,

despite having writing practices, might typically be considered to

occupy the 'non-text-based' side of the perceived divide in English

theatre.[4] This would all suggest that the self-reflexive questioning of

new writing initiated by artistic director Vicky Featherstone during

Open Court (which I discuss later) has continued, reflecting wider

shifts across the theatre ecology and shoring up my central claim that

the seemingly opposed categories of 'text-based' and 'non-text-

based' are essentially spurious.

This sense of change, however, should not be overstated.

Main stages remain dominated by individually-authored plays and

writer- or text-centred production structures, while other ways of

working are often confined to smaller spaces. At the National

Theatre, works which took what might be considered a more

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[4] Complicite in particular has frequently been held up as an example of 'non-text-based', devised or physical theatre, despite the central role of text in its shows and the publication of several of its scripts.

experimental approach to text, such as Improbable's improvised *Lost Without Words* or Rob Drummond's audience-voting *The Majority*, were programmed in the smallest auditorium, while shows that would typically be classed as 'non-text-based' overwhelmingly appeared in the studio spaces of theatres outside London.[5] The programmes of these regional studios, which hosted several of the same shows across the year, offer a window on the independent small-scale touring circuit in England.[6] Here, a clear divide opens up between scales and types of new work, again supporting Amanda Hadingue's suggestion that devising theatre-makers have been marginalised as 'weirdos doing something unclassifiable on the fringes that ha[s] nothing to do with the great traditions of British drama' (Hadingue). Typically, new plays are either commissioned or found and developed through theatres' literary departments. Compared with shows developed via other avenues (and often described as 'non-text-based'), these plays have a better chance of being seen on main stages and tend to receive longer runs, making them more likely to be reviewed by national press.[7] Meanwhile a wide range of other

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[5] This is also affected by the typically higher number of revivals performed on the main stages of these regional venues than on those of their London counterparts.

[6] Within my sample, 46 shows appeared at two or more venues over the course of the year. With the exceptions of the National Theatre's tour of *My Country: A Work in Progress*, Bristol Old Vic's production of *Pink Mist* and 1927's *Golem*, these were all small-scale studio shows.

[7] This is often true of plays that are developed in-house for studio spaces as well as those developed for main stages. Compare, for instance, the three-week runs of Bruntwood Prize-winning plays *Wish List* and *How My Light Is Spent* in the Royal Exchange Studio with the typical two to four nights that touring shows spent in the venue, or even the four-night run of Powder Keg's *Bears*, a devised show that was developed at the theatre.

shows, usually on a small scale and considered in some respect 'experimental', are developed by independent theatre companies (often supported on a project-by-project basis through Grants for the Arts) and toured to multiple venues around the country, spending only a few nights – or sometimes just one performance – at each, with various financial arrangements.[8] Often, this distinction between production models – conventional, in-house producing structures on the one hand and independent, experimental processes on the other – has been mapped onto a perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based'.

However, the small-scale touring shows included in the snapshot that I have taken are diverse in terms of style, process and use of text. This can be demonstrated by comparing just a few examples that I myself have seen, either during 2017 or earlier in their touring lives.[9] A show like *Scorch* (2015) by Stacey Gregg is typical of much small-scale new writing, in that it is written for one performer but otherwise conforms to a similar model of production to the larger-scale plays seen on stages at the Royal Court and National Theatre. Other solo shows, meanwhile, have been created by writer-performers, who may work with text to varying degrees.

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[8] As Bryony Kimmings and the 'I'll Show You Mine Movement' highlighted, the financial deals offered to touring artists vary and often fail to cover the costs of the show (Kimmings).

[9] It is not uncommon for shows on this scale to tour for years, and indeed these long tours are often a crucial part of companies' financial models. Where the year is given in parenthesis, this is the year of the first performance.

One example is *Heads Up* (2016) by Kieran Hurley, a piece of solo storytelling that is linguistically dense but also integrates sound and lighting as crucial elements in the narrative. Unlike the process whereby a script is written by a playwright and then interpreted by a director, designers and actors, Hurley conceived the whole theatrical event in collaboration with directors Julia Taudevin and Alex Swift, composer John McCarthy and lighting designer Malcolm Rogan.[10] Compare this, then, with Daniel Bye's *Instructions for Border Crossing* (2017), similarly conceived for Bye to perform, but relying upon numerous contributions from the audience. Here text plays a crucial role in structuring the live event and setting the parameters for audience interaction, but it also leaves many aspects of the event flexible and undefined. In shows like RashDash's *Two Man Show* (2016) and Nic Green's *Cock and Bull* (2015), meanwhile, text has been built into the work as just one of many intertwined stage languages, all created through a devising process. *Two Man Show* marries almost naturalistic domestic scenes with sequences of music and expressive movement, all of which create complex layers of meaning. The text in *Cock and Bull* has been lifted from Conservative Party speeches, but it is fragmented and remixed in a show that also uses music and choreography, transforming the nature of the words

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[10] Solo shows written by their performer are common among the touring shows in my survey. Other examples include *The Red Shed* (2016)*, Infinity Pool* (2016)*, All The Things I Lied About* (2016)*, Labels* (2015)*, How to Die of a Broken Heart* (2016)*, Team Viking* (2016)*, Portrait* (2015)*, Living With the Lights On* (2016) and *Heartbeats & Algorithms* (2015). See Appendix C.

through their delivery and the movements they are paired with. Finally, the collectively devised and written text of Breach's show *Tank* (2016), which combines documentary reconstruction with storytelling and direct address, has been published as a script (as has *Two Man Show*), translating a process associated with so-called 'non-text-based' work into the central symbol of 'text-based' theatre.

This series of examples begins to reveal the inadequacy and inaccuracy of the categories of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based', which fail to account for the many different approaches to text in English theatre. Furthermore, while it may seem easier to define 'text-based' theatre than its counterpart, even those productions starting with a solo-authored playtext have a varying set of approaches to text and its relationship with performance. Alongside the already cited examples at the Royal Court, we might consider the different approaches to text in *My Country; a work in progress* (2017), a combination of verbatim and poetry that came out of an extensive research process; Inua Ellams' *Barber Shop Chronicles* (2017), which emerged over several years from fragments of research and observation after starting as an attempt to write poems about the interactions between African men in barber shops; and the epic theatrical language of D C Moore's *Common* (2017) – all staged at the National Theatre. Or take the two new plays programmed on the main stage of the Royal Exchange this year: *Fatherland* (2017),

though involving playwright Simon Stephens, was a close

collaboration with Frantic Assembly's Scott Graham and Underworld

musician Karl Hyde, with text drawn from interviews, while

Parliament Square (2017) was individually written by James Fritz for

the 2015 Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting. Furthermore, as discussed

in Chapter One, any text for theatre – regardless of the process

through which it was formed – is inherently open to countless

alternative interpretations.

      Despite this theoretical openness, the patterns that can be

observed across this sample of new theatre-making in 2017 suggest

how funding and discourse, alongside other factors, restrict work in

practice. To borrow once again from Raymond Williams' vocabulary,

potentially 'emergent' practices are limited within the 'dominant'

culture of the English theatre sector. One striking observation is the

sheer volume of small-scale new work, particularly in the studios of

regional theatres and spaces that host short runs such as BAC and

Camden People's Theatre. Often this work is clustered into festivals,

such as Oxford Playhouse's Offbeat Festival, maintaining a

separation from main stage shows and limiting the number of

performances. It is also worth looking at how this work is sustained.

Most of the companies producing this work are project-funded and

will also rely on fees and/or box office from venues to support their

output.[11] This is consistent with the Arts Council's long-standing

policy of prioritising the funding of theatres over that of individual

artists, an arrangement that locates power and money with venues –

many of which have inflexible production structures that do not adapt

well to processes that differ from their norms.[12] In 2015-18, almost

80% of the Arts Council's National Portfolio funding was distributed to

building-based producing theatres, with just over 20% going directly

to artist-run companies and festivals. Within these regularly-funded

venues, there is still a sharp distinction between main stage shows

created within long-established production structures (which largely

assume the starting point of a pre-written, individually-authored

script) and studio shows that have been made externally through

different processes and toured in, often comparatively cheaply.

Throughout the following case studies, we will see in more detail how

these patterns affect theatre-makers, as well as how some of these

institutional structures are being tentatively resisted and/or shifted by

practices that might be considered 'emergent'.

Tim Crouch

Writer, director and performer Tim Crouch has deliberately positioned

his work in the space between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-

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[11] The precarity of this arrangement was recently discussed in an article by Lauren Mooney, and it also emerged as an issue in research I conducted in 2013 for the theatre producers Fuel ('What Can We Do').

[12] For example, Maddy Costa has documented the difficulties the West Yorkshire Playhouse encountered with accommodating Chris Goode's working practices during the 2012 Transform Festival ('Chris Goode').

based' theatre, insisting that what he writes are plays while also

drawing on influences from performance art and visual art. His first

play, *My Arm* (2003), was conceived as 'a provocation; it was a

challenge to a dominant culture in theatre that [he] felt was missing

the point' (Ilter 398). Made after Crouch's experience of working first

as a member of a devising company and then as a freelance actor,

the show was an attempt to subvert and ultimately break out of

industry conventions that Crouch has explicitly characterised as

artistically and intellectually limiting.[13] Following the success of *My*

Arm, Crouch has established himself as an individual theatre-

maker,[14] working both inside and outside of the established

organisational frameworks of the English subsidised theatre sector.[15]

His work has become influential and much-discussed, with the critical

discourse around his plays often returning to a preoccupation with

the ways in which they challenge common conceptions of both

dramatic theatre and live art. But rather than these shows

transcending binaries of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' or theatre

and performance, as Radosavljević has suggested (*Theatre-*

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[13] Crouch remembers, for instance, becoming 'depressed about psychologically and realistically motivated rehearsal processes' (Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making* 217).

[14] Although Crouch works regularly with collaborators, most notably Andy Smith and Karl James, his work is typically associated with his name and his reputation is largely predicated upon his individual identity as a writer and performer. This is, perhaps, an indication of the cultural prestige still attached to authors in England.

[15] As I discuss below, Crouch has both received commissions from large cultural institutions and made his work independently with support from the Arts Council through Grants for the Arts.

Making), I want to argue that Crouch's work highlights the

inadequacy and restrictiveness of these opposed categories.

As I have suggested elsewhere, Crouch's work 'underlines the

slippages between text and performance that are present in any

piece of theatre' (*An Oak Tree* 2). In Chapter One, I argued that

there is always a gap between playtexts and performances, and that

the former can never fully determine the latter. Many English

productions of new plays, however, seek to elide that gap and

present a version of the text that 'serves' the presumed intentions of

the playwright as seamlessly as possible. Crouch's work, by contrast,

draws attention to the overlaying of text and performance, the

mechanisms of control that he exerts as a writer, and the elements of

live performance that remain out of his control. In *My Arm*, for

example, the transformation of words into theatrical illusion is

stripped back, as randomly selected objects from the audience are

used to stand in for characters in the narrative. Throughout *An Oak*

Tree (2005), a show in which Crouch performs alongside a new,

unprepared second actor each night, the action slides back and forth

between meta-theatrical discussion and narrative conflict, with the

real and the represented often coinciding or overlapping. In *The*

Author (2009), these boundaries between reality and representation

are even blurrier, as Crouch plays 'Tim Crouch', the writer of a

fictional play that he describes to the audience. In these works and in

his other plays for adults, *ENGLAND* (2007), *what happens to the hope at the end of the evening* (2013, co-written with Andy Smith) and *Adler and Gibb* (2014), the ways in which language 'underdetermines the world' (Rebellato, 'Exit the Author' 25) are frequently made apparent.[16] Although this underlining of theatricality is not unique to Crouch, it is significant that his practices draw from discourses and techniques more usually (though not exclusively) associated with 'non-text-based' theatre (such as a questioning of character and representation and an active involvement of the audience), while at the same time he adamantly discusses his shows as plays, proposing that we should 'expand our definitions of what a play is' (Ilter 402). All his texts, furthermore, have been published and made available for others to perform, fitting while also challenging the orthodox model of dramatic production.[17]

   In *An Oak Tree*, the Hypnotist character (played by Crouch) responds to the second actor's question '[h]ow free am I?' with the intriguing statement that '[e]very word we speak is scripted but

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[16] Crouch has also written several plays for children, which operate in a slightly different register. While there are concerns that extend across the works for adults and young people, for reasons of clarity and scope I am limiting my attention to the shows listed above.

[17] Crouch has stated that he never wrote [the plays] thinking about other people doing them', but he has been willing to relinquish control of the published scripts (even when he has strongly disagreed with others' interpretations of them), adding that '[i]t's not my business to control how somebody responds to an idea' (Love, Symposium).

otherwise –' (Crouch 21). Elsewhere, Crouch has explained this

seemingly paradoxical co-existence of freedom and restriction:

> I really want you as an audience to know that every word I speak is scripted, and that's not reductive or prohibitive or restrictive in any way, I think it's quite the opposite, it's actually super freeing. (Love, Symposium)

What he is pointing to here is the mixture of determinacy and

indeterminacy that I have suggested characterises *all* plays. A script,

as Crouch recognises, does not preclude interpretive freedom; while

it specifies certain things, it leaves others up for grabs. David Lane

suggests that 'the dramaturgy of [Crouch's] scripts increasingly

resembles that of an open performance score' ('A Dramaturg's

Perspective' 139), recalling the claims about 'open texts' previously

addressed, but we might more accurately say that Crouch's work

displays a relatively high degree of indeterminacy within certain

determined outlines. In a play like *An Oak Tree*, the formal structure

of Crouch feeding lines to the second performer is fairly fixed. Within

this structure, though, there is flexibility and unpredictability –

enhanced by the presence of an unrehearsed actor. *An Oak Tree*

also implicitly refutes the authority of 'the work' by embedding the

play's endless supplementation at the core of its dramaturgical

structure. As I argued in Chapter One with reference to Derrida,

playtexts and productions are continually supplementing one another

and deferring the ever-absent 'work'; no single production can

foreclose the possibility of further, countless supplementary

performances. For the form of *An Oak Tree* to be successful, the

show must have a new, unrehearsed actor in every performance, and it is therefore always pointing towards the inherent impossibility of any definitive version of Crouch's text. The characteristics discussed here (indeterminacy, openness to interpretation, supplementation) are common to *all* playtexts, but Crouch brings them to the fore of his work.

Paradoxically, by unmasking the representational logic of all plays and foregrounding the relationship between text and performance, Crouch's work has been seen to depart from the conventions that it underlines. Indeed, when he first wrote *An Oak Tree* the publisher Faber and Faber rejected it with the objection that it was not a play. While it is hard to deny that Crouch is doing something distinctive, I believe that it is a mistake to classify his work as 'non-text-based', postdramatic or any of the other labels set in opposition to 'text-based' theatre. I agree instead with Stephen Bottoms that Crouch's work 'offers a powerful reinvigoration of dramatic traditions' ('Authorizing the Audience' 67). By showing us an actor transforming into a character (in *An Oak Tree* and *Adler and Gibb*), or by exposing the representational logic whereby one thing stands in for another (*My Arm*), or by reminding audiences that they are always engaged in an active relationship with what they are watching (*The Author*), Crouch lays the workings of theatre as a form bare while never neglecting narrative, a component that is at the core

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of much drama. Rather than rejecting a text-led dramatic tradition,

Crouch's shows can be more accurately characterised as continuing

a dialogue with that tradition. Writing and the idea of the individual

author remain central to the work, yet it is uncovering and thus in a

sense subverting many of the conventions typically associated with

'text-based' theatre.

Commenting on the creative freedom enabled by his practice

since 2003, Crouch has said that 'there's all that big matrix of

economics around the art form that I'm excited about not doing'

(Love, Symposium). This, though, is disingenuous; his shows exist

within the economics and funding dynamics of the theatre sector just

as much as the more conventional production structures he is

eschewing. While his decision to write his own shows has freed him

from certain restrictive aspects of life as a jobbing actor, the shows

still need money to get made. Crouch's work is unusual, however, in

that it has been presented in contexts ranging from art galleries to

fringe venues to new writing theatres – again suggestive, perhaps, of

the in-between nature of his shows, which do not fit easily into either

text-led producing structures or live art contexts.[18] His practice has

also received financial support from a range of sources, in some

instances commissioned and produced by prestigious subsidised

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[18] Organisations that have supported Crouch's work in England and beyond include the Royal Court, Battersea Arts Centre, the Traverse Theatre, the Fruitmarket Gallery, the Almeida Theatre, the National Theatre, Whitechapel Gallery and Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles.

venues such as the Royal Court (which hosted both *The Author* and

Adler and Gibb) and in others relying upon Arts Council project

funding.[19] Crouch therefore sits interestingly between the two

subsequent case studies, fitting neither the model of the new writing

industry nor that of the independent touring company/artist. This has

largely been to his advantage, granting him flexibility while allowing

him to benefit from certain aspects of mainstream support, though his

position – as we will see when turning to Action Hero – is unusual.

It is worth noting, furthermore, that Crouch's experience in the

theatre industry prior to 2003 encompassed both small-scale touring

and large subsidised venues. After graduating from the University of

Bristol in the 1980s, Crouch toured for several years with the political

theatre company Public Parts. He explains: 'we worked together, we

made improvised and devised work that was scripted eventually and

which toured to community and arts venues' (Ilter 398). As an actor,

by contrast, Crouch worked at venues including the National Theatre,

therefore experiencing a range of the different scales, approaches to

text and economic structures that can be found across the English

theatre sector. Although he has often employed a rhetoric of

breaking free from such structures, his work since 2003 could be

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[19] Crouch has received £12,750 of Grants for the Arts funding for *An Oak Tree* in 2004; £4,500 for research and development on *ENGLAND* in 2007; £19,975 for *ENGLAND* at Whitechapel Gallery in 2009; £28,014 for a tour of *The Author* in 2010; £8,803 for organisational support connected to *An Oak Tree* in 2015; £15,000 for re-versioning *Adler and Gibb* for touring in 2015; and £65,000 for *Adler and Gibb* in 2016 (ACE).

seen instead as finding new and surprising ways to work *within* these institutional mechanisms, whether that be staging a piece of writing in the middle of an art gallery or pushing at the edges of conventional definitions of a play as part of a commission for the Royal Court. The awkward fit of his work in both 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' professional contexts, moreover, might say more about the reductive bifurcation of English theatre practice than about his particular style of theatre-making.

Crouch's training and education, meanwhile, straddle the different institutional contexts discussed in Chapter Three. As already mentioned, he studied drama at the University of Bristol, where he 'quite quickly discovered the more experimental methodologies' (Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making* 216) and where he formed Public Parts. But at the age of 29 Crouch retrained at drama school, which he perceived to be a necessary step towards gaining employment as an actor. He has stated, furthermore, that his education 'was to study writers and literature', with a firm emphasis on individual authorship, adding 'I can't disentangle myself from that' (Love, Symposium). Indeed, in a surprising echo of some of the critics discussed in the previous chapter, Crouch has suggested that 'ideas can coalesce in one person more purely in a way than they can if they are negotiated amongst a group of people' (Love, Symposium). This perhaps explains his attachment to the notion of a play, despite his affinities

with devising and live art. Crouch also had a further foray into higher education shortly before writing *My Arm*, when he started a PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London. Explaining why he abandoned this, he said, 'my brain didn't fit into performance theory; I'd come from a relatively traditional background, and I couldn't see how those things applied to what I was doing' (Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making* 216-17). There is again an ambivalence both towards the dramatic text and towards live art and performance theory that rejects that text, as well as a suggestion that higher education and training structures in England do not quite have a place for Crouch, who falls between opposing attitudes to theatre texts.

Despite this, in recent years Crouch's work has received increased scholarly attention. The academic discourse around Crouch's work has been preoccupied with its affinities with conceptual art, the relationship it creates with audiences, its challenge to theatrical conventions, and its playful treatment of theatrical representation.[20] The rapid uptake of Crouch's work in academic contexts and the sustained engagement with its formal challenges to conventional theatrical models are both suggestive again of the way that the relationship between text and performance continues to dominate our consideration of English theatre-making.

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[20] See, for example, Jack Belloli, Bottoms ('Authorizing the Audience'; 'Materialising the Audience'), Cristina Delgado-García, Lane ('A Dramaturg's Perspective'), Emilie Morin, Radosavljević (*Theatre-Making*) and Rebellato ('Tim Crouch').

Crouch's work excites particular interest among scholars, I suggest, because it does not appear to fit into the narratives and categories of contemporary English theatre. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that we find a chapter on Crouch in a volume on contemporary playwriting (Rebellato, 'Tim Crouch'), while elsewhere his work is couched in contemporary art discourses. His plays are hard to categorise within the dominant terms of English theatre culture and therefore get claimed by scholars with different theoretical, ideological and aesthetic allegiances, while all academic assessments recognise Crouch's tendency to break theatrical 'rules'.

Similar preoccupations, though with differing emphases, characterise the response of reviewers to Crouch's work. When *My Arm* premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2003, critics immediately noted its deconstruction of familiar theatrical devices. Lyn Gardner, for instance, wrote that the show 'plays with the convention of the shared experience of theatre' ('My Arm' 1108), while Kate Stratton described it as 'an intriguing Pirandellian deconstruction of character and art, and the point at which real life ends and the script takes over' (1109). Other critics have similarly commented that Crouch's work 'plays with the conventions of theatre' (Hemming, 'An Oak Tree' 147) and 'exposes the workings of theatre' (McGinn, 'An Oak Tree' 148), with Robert Shore even suggesting that Crouch 'throws the gauntlet down to traditional drama in various ways designed to

provoke reflection on the nature of theatre itself' (656). Meanwhile

some have questioned, as Faber and Faber did, whether Crouch's

shows can be considered plays. John Peter, for instance, began his

review of *An Oak Tree* thus: 'Tim Crouch's "play" is about the theatre.

Please note the quotation marks' ('An Oak Tree' 148). He later

added that '[s]ome people will do anything to avoid writing a real

play, possibly because they're not sure they can' (148), supporting

my point about the critical valorisation of playwriting as a superior

craft to other forms of theatre-making. Less pejoratively, Simon

Holton's review of *what happens to the hope at the end of the*

evening also contains the word 'play' within quotation marks,

followed up with the qualifier 'if such a word can be applied to this

piece' (Holton), while Stewart Pringle describes *Adler and Gibb* as 'a

play which is pretty much anti-play' (Pringle).[21]

The recurring concern with whether or not Crouch writes

plays, whether expressed by critics, publishers, scholars or the writer

himself, is indicative of the narrow parameters within which the

relationship between text and performance is still frequently

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[21] The critical reception to *Adler and Gibb* bore some interesting similarities to that for *Three Kingdoms*, with print critics attacking the play's lack of clarity and formal experimentation (Hitchings, 'Adler and Gibb'; Cavendish, 'Adler and Gibb'; Maxwell, 'Adler and Gibb'; Billington, 'Adler and Gibb') while online writers defended it (Trueman, 'Adler and Gibb'; Haydon, 'Adler and Gibb'; Foster; Rebellato, 'Adler and Gibb'). The main difference in these responses is that whereas discussion of *Three Kingdoms* largely revolved around the director's approach to the text, here the criticism of the writer/director focused on whether or not form obscured content, framing a similar objection in different terms.

(mis)understood. But Crouch's success, achieved through a flexible and canny negotiation of the divergent funding and production structures of the English theatre sector, perhaps suggests that attitudes are beginning to change. The growing interest in how Crouch's work challenges the theatrical status quo both reveals how restrictive the opposing 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' labels can be and implies a desire to move beyond those reductive categories. Crouch's practice is 'emergent', then, in the sense that it opposes while existing within a 'dominant' culture, and in Williams' terms its interrelations with the 'dominant', with the 'residual' and with other 'emergent' elements may well be part of a 'whole cultural process' (121) that is slowly moving us from one period of theatrical production to the next. At the same time, though, Crouch's work is deeply invested in traditional notions of authorship and has arguably garnered cultural capital as a result – at least partly – of Crouch's self-identification as a playwright.

Action Hero

As Russ Hope stresses, '[a]n Action Hero production begins without a text' (258). In this respect, the 'non-text-based' label might be considered apt for this case study. Yet writing is a crucial part of the company's practice and several of their shows share a fascination with text and its relationship with performance. In the durational six-hour piece *Slap Talk* (2013), for instance, the endless insults the two

performers hurl at one another test the limits of language and

exhaust its violence, while frequently highlighting – much as Crouch's

work does – the slippages between text and performance.[22] Their

2015 show *Wrecking Ball* takes an interest in the potentially

controlling nature of text a step further by putting words into audience

members' mouths, while a concern with the connections between

narrative, language, quotation and performance is evident in earlier

works *A Western* (2005), *Watch Me Fall* (2009), *Frontman* (2010)

and *Hoke's Bluff* (2013). The Bristol-based performance duo's

interest in text is, they explain, 'fuelled by the ways in which

language exists in the live space' (*Action Plans* xxv). Here I will

consider some of the ways in which text appears in Action Hero's

work, as well as discussing how a bifurcation between 'text-based'

and 'non-text-based' theatre has been limiting for the company.

James Stenhouse – one half of Action Hero alongside Gemma

Paintin – says that as a company they talk a lot about

> the tyranny of the script, and how in a more conventional
> theatre structure the script's pre-written by someone and
> then they give it to a director and some actors and then they
> read it out and the audience watch it – what the power
> structures are within that. (Stenhouse)

These are power structures that Action Hero wish to resist;

Stenhouse adds that, especially in the company's early work, 'we

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[22] I have written in more detail about this particular piece elsewhere ('The Violence of Language').

were really pushing against theatre as a thing' (Stenhouse). Similarly to Crouch, Action Hero's work draws from both live art and theatre influences, and the company has a somewhat combative relationship with institutional theatre structures in England. We can also witness here the same ideological investment in the radical nature of 'non-text-based' performance discussed in previous chapters. Although Action Hero 'have been writing for our work right from the beginning,' Paintin states that '[i]t's probably quite a recent thing that we had thought about our work in terms of writing' (Pearson 178), and elsewhere Paintin and Stenhouse have described themselves as 'afraid of "plays"' (*Wrecking Ball* 6). This is perhaps indicative of a desire to frame the company's work within a live art and/or devising context with which they feel more comfortable and with which their shows were quickly identified by theatres, funders and critics. The company's fear of plays and 'the tyranny of the script', meanwhile, points to the pervasive nature of assumptions that the playtext is somehow inherently authoritative.

Despite Paintin and Stenhouse's reticence to describe their practice in terms of writing, text is present from early in the process of making an Action Hero show, refuting any notion that their work is 'non-text-based'. Hope recounts how, in early rehearsals for *Frontman*, Stenhouse 'hands [Paintin] pieces of text that he would like her to speak, and chooses music for her to respond to. She

improvises based on fragments of text' (261). Paintin and Stenhouse

have increasingly been exploring this aspect of their practice,

working with a playwright in early workshops for *Hoke's Bluff* and

setting out to write the script of *Wrecking Ball* before working on it in

the rehearsal room – a reversal of their usual process. According to

Action Hero, it was 'the first time we set out intentionally to write a

play' (*Wrecking Ball* 6), and throughout marketing materials the show

was pointedly referred to as a 'play'. In a striking similarity with

Crouch's work, the company describes *Wrecking Ball* as being 'about

theatre' (*Wrecking Ball* 6), adding that the show is about 'the power

an artist holds and the ways in which well-meaning people might

abuse that position of power unintentionally' (*Wrecking Ball* 7). The

story of a photographer exploiting a female celebrity is used as an

analogue for the potentially manipulative power of the script, implicitly

challenging the normative attribution of authority to playtexts. Both

the play's narrative and its form demonstrate abuses of power – the

twisting of someone else's actions, or the scripting of their behaviour

– that might be imputed to the 'authoritative' playtext. Throughout the

show, meanwhile, a repeated emphasis on spontaneity is set in

conflict with the scripted nature of the event. After the audience has

seen the physical object of the play and one spectator has been

asked to read from it, Stenhouse's character insists 'I'm not reading

from the script anymore, the script is bullshit' (*Wrecking Ball* 51), but

it is clear that this too is scripted. The whole piece is something of an

argument with scripted drama, perhaps underestimating the extent to which all playtexts are open to interpretation and alteration, but nonetheless highlighting the power that has accrued to the text in mainstream English production structures.

Referring to the company's earlier work, Lavery describes Action Hero's dramaturgy as a 'dramaturgy of quotation', noting the ways in which they graft 'speech, images, gestures, and situations' from popular culture onto their shows ('Introduction' xvii). In this way – to return to Derrida – Action Hero play with the *iterability* of language. By placing the rhetoric of the daredevil (*Watch Me Fall*) or the high school sports movie (*Hoke's Bluff*) within the frame of theatre, the company shifts its meaning. In this respect, similarly to Crouch, Action Hero's shows use their form to articulate something that is common to *all* theatre: text, whether in a film or a book or a play, is always iterable and can thus be cited in different contexts, becoming altered in the process. Action Hero's dramaturgy is also one of controlled indeterminacy, again like Crouch's. The shows have a distinct structure, within which there are openings for improvisation and audience interaction. *A Western*, for instance, cast audience members as various characters in the unfolding drama, while *Wrecking Ball* asked spectators to read parts of the script, playing with their agency – or lack thereof. The company explains that '[t]hose gaps we're asking the audience to fill are perhaps the

most interesting parts of performance for us and its [sic] perhaps what distinguishes performance from other art forms' (Lavery, 'Action Hero' 454). This possibly explains their eagerness to avoid any association with literariness; they are interested in what the live art of theatre *specifically* can do, as opposed to what can be achieved by words on a page.

Unlike the fixed rehearsal periods of new writing theatres, Action Hero's creative processes are typically protracted, flexible and squeezed in around other work. *Frontman*, for instance, took 18 months to develop and much of it was made while the company was also touring *Watch Me Fall* (Hope 259). This way of working is partly by choice and partly a product of financial necessity. Without regular funding, the company has had to develop new shows while bringing in income from existing ones. This potentially restricts the ambition and scale of the work, which must be capable of being developed while on the road with limited resources. There are ways in which Action Hero push against or subvert the institutional and financial frameworks of the English theatre sector: Stenhouse provides *Slap Talk* as an example of a show that was not commissioned and that he and Paintin made on their own timescale to give themselves the freedom they felt the piece required. But this was only possible, he explains, because they were able to subsidise the rehearsal process by touring their show *Hoke's Bluff* at the same time (Stenhouse). The

issue – as it was for many of the companies that emerged as part of

the alternative theatre movement in the 1960s and 1970s – is around

long-term sustainability and the development of larger-scale, more

ambitious work, which is difficult without regular funding or

institutional support.

It was also economics that dictated Action Hero's early

movement from live art to theatre contexts, soon after they started

making work together in 2005. Stenhouse recalls:

> When we started out, there were a lot of live art contexts
> around and it was quite easy for our work to fall into those
> categories and there was support for that work. But then
> over the years that's kind of dwindled and also there's no
> money in live art at all, so for us to sustain a practice we've
> been pushed more towards theatre spaces, and I think
> that's had an effect on our work. (Stenhouse)

Stenhouse suggests, further, that 'there is a sense of the

infrastructure dictating what work comes out' (Stenhouse). Although

a frustration with this infrastructure and its failure – from Action

Hero's perspective – to reward the company's work might be

colouring his remarks here, a pragmatic need to attract funding

undoubtedly influences artists' choices. In a panel discussion

including Action Hero, for example, Kieran Hurley recalled how he

'realised that if I tried to do exactly the same things I was doing

anyway, but called myself a playwright, I would get paid a lot better'

(Pearson 184). Fellow panel member Bryony Kimmings, whose

practice similarly sits between performance art and writing, agreed

with this analysis. Stenhouse, meanwhile, has suggested that Crouch has enjoyed greater success than many others working in similar ways because he publishes his texts and calls himself a playwright; the work thus 'fits more into that literature canon' (Stenhouse). This all lends weight to the idea that the role of playwright carries more capital, both cultural and financial, than that of theatre-maker. It should be noted that one of the reasons for the better payment of playwrights is that writers have effectively unionised since the 1970s, winning a series of rights that are enshrined within agreements with theatres. I would also suggest, though, that playwrights fit more neatly and recognisably into existing, text-focused production processes and that this partly accounts for the situation described above.[23]

That said, Stenhouse stresses that, when making applications to the Arts Council, he has 'never felt like I've had to push what my ideas are into a box to be ticked' (Stenhouse). He suggests instead that the problem is that most funding goes to theatres rather than directly to artists, and that those subsidised theatres are under-paying and inadequately supporting the theatre-makers who tour to their venues. While artist development and payment practices vary widely from venue to venue, the NPO figures cited earlier certainly

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[23] For more details on the rights won for playwrights by writing unions, see David Edgar (*The Working Playwright*).

support Stenhouse's complaint about the distribution of funding, and

recent campaigning has exposed the poor deals that many theatre-

makers receive.[24] Action Hero has benefitted from Grants for the Arts

funding, receiving support for a number of successive projects,[25] but

operating under this project-funded model for several years has its

restrictions. As the company noted on its blog,

> [m]anaging a career based on project funding and touring the shit out of everything you've ever made also takes a phenomenal amount of planning, reporting and accounting but you don't have the resources to help you do it and you don't get paid to do most of that work. ('National Portfolio')

Their experience illustrates the disadvantages of working as an

independent company, without the resources and infrastructure that

large, building-based companies are able to provide. However,

Paintin and Stenhouse have been just as keen as Crouch to work

within the English theatre sector on their own terms. While their DIY

attitude was initially a 'practical approach', they insist that 'it is

absolutely our wish to control the means of production, to try and do

as much as we can ourselves' (Damian Martin). If the downside of

working as an independent company is a relative lack of support and

resources, an attraction is the ability – within the material restrictions

associated with small-scale, project-funded theatre – to make work

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[24] For a useful summary of discussions around artist support, see Artsadmin.
[25] Action Hero were awarded £3,640 for initial R&D in 2007; £8,486 for touring *A Western* in 2007; £4,900 for *Watch Me Fall* in 2008; £14,925 for the *Watch Me Fall* tour in 2009; £18,819 for *Frontman* in 2010; £15,228 for the *Frontman* tour in 2011; £9,955 for *Hoke's Bluff* in 2012; £14,995 for *Extraordinary Rendition* in 2014; £38,899 for touring *Hoke's Bluff* in 2014; £10,460 for *Wrecking Ball* in 2015; £28,011 for the *Wrecking Ball* tour in 2016; £9,968 for *Oh Europa* R&D in 2017; and £8,775 for *Jumbotron* R&D in 2017 (ACE).

free from the often rigid internal structures and expectations of large subsidised organisations.

In many ways, Action Hero is typical of the small-scale theatre-making that has emerged from universities over recent decades. Stenhouse and Paintin met while studying at Bretton Hall, which has since been absorbed into the University of Leeds.[26] Stenhouse explains the influence of this education on their practice:

> At university, the course we did was called Theatre and it was a really wide-ranging course, so we did kind of everything, and I think that's fed into our work now. But there was quite a strong radical agenda, I guess, on that course, that meant we were … drawn more towards the performance art end of the spectrum. (Stenhouse)

This supports the common perception that universities are producing more experimental theatre-makers, with Action Hero slotting neatly into Heddon and Milling's narrative of the feedback loop of devising companies (227-28). It is also worth noting Stenhouse's description of the course as having a 'radical agenda', which translates into a focus on performance art rather than scripted theatre; again, 'non-text-based' theatre is automatically aligned with the radical. Since leaving university, meanwhile, Paintin and Stenhouse have retained a close relationship with academia. Their work is often seen in academic contexts and they themselves have taught students at the

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[26] Bretton Hall was established as a teacher training college specialising in the arts and later became affiliated to the University of Leeds, which validated its degrees. The two institutions merged in 2001 and what became the School of Performance and Cultural Industries moved from Bretton Hall to the University of Leeds campus in 2007.

University of Chichester, passing on their methods and attitudes to new generations of theatre-makers. In this respect they are fairly typical of their peers in the independent sector, several of whom also work across academia and the theatre industry, reinforcing perceptions of a link between university Drama and 'non-text-based' practice.[27]

Despite their relationship with theatre academia, Action Hero are conscious of the danger of being 'excluded from a theatrical canon that primarily exists in written form' (*Action Plans* xxv). In an attempt to escape this fate while not compromising the importance of live performance to their work, they have published *Action Plans*, a volume of experimental texts that attempts to capture aspects of the company's practice. In their introduction, Paintin and Stenhouse stress that '[t]he 6 pieces in this book should not … be read as "scripts". Instead they are an attempt at re-presenting the live moment on the page' (*Action Plans* xxv). They add that the book is 'less about producing traditional playtexts and more about finding ways in which contemporary performance practices can live on the page' (*Action Plans* xxv).[28] The text of *A Western*, for instance,

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[27] Examples include Brian Lobel, who alongside making his own work is a reader in theatre at the University of Chichester, and Forest Fringe's Andy Field and Deborah Pearson, who have both completed PhDs and have taught at Royal Holloway, University of London.

[28] In recent years, the specialist publisher Oberon Books has published several 'experimental' texts by theatre-makers who would not typically be classed as playwrights. As well as *Action Plans*, these include performance texts by

consists of spare, evocative scene descriptions, while *Watch Me Fall*

is recorded as lines of text underneath strips of images compiled

from the photographs taken by audience members on disposable

cameras as part of the show. The only text in the book that simply

preserves the words of the performance is *Slap Talk*, which

condenses the show's six-hour autocue into small text printed without

any margins; the performance of the writing on the page reflects, in a

different form, the show's linguistic assault on the audience.

Wrecking Ball, by contrast, was published as a standalone playtext

and follows the textual conventions of dramatic literature – if only to

implicitly challenge those conventions in the ways discussed above.

Paintin and Stenhouse describe it as 'a script in inverted commas'

(*Wrecking Ball* 9).

The question might be posed, though, as to whether Action

Hero's texts can be considered both complete and incomplete in the

way I have suggested is central to the ontology of the play. Their

shows have not been documented with the intention of others

interpreting them; even with *Wrecking Ball*, though Action Hero note

that 'you could stage your own version of this play if you wanted to',

they stress that their interest

> isn't in whether or not the play is remounted by another
> company, and how another director might serve us, the

Ontroerend Goed, Deborah Pearson, The TEAM, Breach Theatre, RashDash and
Sh!t Theatre.

writers, faithfully through their rendition of this text. (*Wrecking Ball* 9)

In this sense, the texts might be understood more as documents of live events than as scripts in the way we typically understand them. Yet as the iterability illustrated in the company's own work demonstrates, documents such as these inevitably open up the *possibility* of future, supplementary versions, regardless of their creators' intent. Therefore, although such texts may be shifting our understanding of what a play looks like (just as innovations in playwriting and publishing have repeatedly done over time), I do not believe that they ultimately challenge its ontology.

Finally, then, I turn to the critical reception of Action Hero's work. Stenhouse suggests that there is a danger, when making work that fails to be defined as 'new writing' and is largely taking place outside London, that artists 'fall out of [critical] conversations' (Stenhouse). His suggestion is supported by the relatively meagre attention paid to Action Hero's work by mainstream criticism. Gardner is the only print reviewer who has consistently written about Action Hero's shows, with most of the company's other reviews being found online or in festival publications at the Edinburgh Fringe. In the few reviews that the shows do receive, meanwhile, discussion rarely moves much beyond basic description of what has happened on stage, possibly suggesting a hesitance when it comes to analysing visual metaphors (much as we saw with the lack of vocabulary for

physical theatre in the previous chapter).[29] The aspect of the

company's work that is most frequently commented on by critics is its

use of quotation and American pop culture references, though again

this is rarely explored in much detail.[30] In another similarity with

Crouch's work, some critics have also suggested that Action Hero's

work is interested in investigating – and in some instances

challenging – the workings of performance. Trueman, for instance,

discusses the company's 'ontological enquiries about the nature of

performance' ('Frontman'). Anneka French agrees that 'it is the

artifice of film and television, or performance more generally, that is

revealed and explored' in Action Hero's work (French), while William

Drew suggests that in both *Frontman* and *Hoke's Bluff* there is 'an

aesthetic investigation of the most overblown aspects of

performance' (Drew). Overall, though, mainstream critical

engagement has been fairly sparse and shallow, reinforcing Action

Hero's (self-)perceived outsider position.

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[29] See, for example, Gardner's review of *Watch Me Fall* ('Watch Me Fall' 1180), in which she describes various sequences from the show without expanding on their possible meaning.

[30] Noting how it is 'studded with familiar images', for example, Gardner suggests that *A Western* 'gets to the heart of the frontier attitudes that shaped the thinking of modern America' ('A Western'). Trueman has discussed the 'perfect balance of gentle cynicism and naive eagerness' ('Watch Me Fall') in Action Hero's approach to American mythology, which a number of critics also noted in reviews of *Hoke's Bluff*. Ed Frankl suggests that Paintin and Stenhouse 'recast the sentimental platitudes [of the high school sports movie] by delivering them straight' (Frankl), while Dorothy Max-Prior notes the love that the show expresses for the genre it is skewering, describing *Hoke's Bluff* as 'a double bluff that places both the company and its audience simultaneously on the inside and on the outside looking in' (Max-Prior).

At the time of writing, Action Hero is in a moment of transition.

In the latest round of funding, the company achieved NPO status for

the first time and will receive funding of £92,000 a year between

2018 and 2022. While this sum is relatively small compared to the

amounts received by large, building-based institutions, it is significant

given the size of the company, and it might signal a modest shift in

how the Arts Council is approaching the support of independent

artists. Action Hero publicly stated the terms on which it applied for

funding, explaining that

> we made a very conscious decision to write an application
> that didn't misrepresent who we are and the work we do as
> a small artist-led collaboration making contemporary
> performance. ('National Portfolio')

There is, perhaps, a recognition on the part of the Arts Council that it

needs to do more to support these small artist-led ventures, rather

than delegating this responsibility to regularly-funded theatres. Of the

25 new theatre organisations added to the National Portfolio in this

funding round, 14 were artist-led, independent companies and two

were organisations working to produce, support and promote the

work of independent artists.[31] This has slightly altered the overall

balance of building-based organisations (now accounting for 76% of

the theatre portfolio, rather than 80%) and other recipients (now at

24%). While practices cannot be mapped straightforwardly onto

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[31] It should be noted that some of these companies, such as Red Ladder, had been regularly funded by the Arts Council in the past and regained funding in this round. Most of the additions, however, were joining the portfolio for the first time.

production contexts, this shift is significant for companies like Action Hero who have chosen to make their work outside the conventions of mainstream producing theatres, eschewing structures such as the four-week rehearsal process and the differentiation of creative roles between writer, director, designers and actors. Previously, the company's choice to work in this way had aligned them with 'non-text-based' theatre despite the role of text in their shows, and had granted them freedom at the expense of long-term financial security. Like Crouch's, theirs is a narrative of resisting from within, both adapting to and adapting structures that restrict how their work is viewed and supported. The perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre has frequently been restrictive for the company, both in terms of the production and the reception of its work, but there are tentative indications that – partly thanks to Action Hero's own theatre-making and campaigning – the funding structures that previously hemmed in its work are starting to become more flexible.

Open Court at the Royal Court

As noted in Chapter Two, the English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court quickly became something of an exemplar for subsidised playwriting, and in many ways the theatre remains symbolic of 'text-based' theatre and a production model built around the intentions of the playwright. Even in this bastion of new writing, though, the

categories of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' are problematic,

failing – as we have already seen – to fully reflect the practices the

theatre supports. To explore some of the ways in which the Royal

Court's work today is affected by the institutional structures

discussed in earlier chapters, I am focusing on one particular season:

Open Court, the summer festival curated by playwrights that was

programmed by Featherstone when she took over as artistic director

in 2013. The six-week event was a bold statement of intent, with a

programme that represented the company's past and its possible

future(s). Although this festival might be considered somewhat

anomalous within the ESC's programming, it both brings together

and disrupts several of the theatre's key programming strands over a

short period in a way that makes it ripe for analysis. It also

established certain directions in the programming that have

continued to be pursued in the years since, as seen in the theatre's

2017 productions.

When Featherstone took over as artistic director of the Royal

Court in 2013, her objective to preserve the organisation's status as

'the writer's theatre' was made immediately clear in her opening

statement, in which she praised the theatre's 'tireless championing of

the playwright' ('Royal Court Announces'). While Featherstone's

appointment was seen by many as having the potential to shake up

the building,[32] her rhetoric was largely one of continuity. However, by beginning her tenure with *Open Court* – a playful and self-reflexive festival of work which questioned what being a 'writer's theatre' might mean – Featherstone simultaneously unsettled existing orthodoxies around text and playwright. Writers were the headline: for the duration of the festival, control was handed over to the artists whom the theatre has made it its mission to serve.[33] The programme they curated with Featherstone, though, challenged the identity of new writing with a diverse collection of events. At the centre of the festival was a series of weekly rep productions: performances of new plays rehearsed by an ensemble of 14 actors and four directors in just one week. This was intended as an experiment in ensemble practice, a revival of the now mostly defunct tradition of regional rep, and a challenge to time-intensive writer development processes. The weekly rep shows were staged in the downstairs theatre, while other events popped up across the building. These included intimate readings of plays by their writers, a lucky dip programme of 'Surprise Theatre', topical evenings of rapid-response plays, 'found' plays scattered around the building, a live soap opera streamed online,

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[32] When the appointment was announced, Gardner suggested that Featherstone was 'exactly what the Royal Court needs to keep its radical edge' ('Vicky Featherstone'), while Cavendish later asserted that the Royal Court 'is going to be radical under [Featherstone's] aegis' ('Vicky Featherstone').
[33] The festival was programmed by over 140 writers, including prominent Royal Court regulars such as Mark Ravenhill, Simon Stephens, Caryl Churchill, Lucy Kirkwood and Leo Butler.

and workshops for both professional and aspiring playwrights of all ages (Featherstone, 'Summer 2013').[34]

The festival can thus be seen as reinvigorating and broadening what writing for theatre might mean. In her role at the Royal Court, Featherstone has been keen to defend the term 'play' and its scope, stating 'I feel very strongly that a play can look like anything' (Unpublished Interview). She suggests that 'sometimes the word "play" is something that people want to rail against', but her response is that 'a play can be anything' (Unpublished Interview). Here she echoes Crouch, who has consistently stretched the often narrow definition of what a play can be in English theatre culture. One thing Featherstone is firm on, though, is her interest in 'a singular voice that then the other artists who come to it interpret' (Unpublished Interview). In terms of its representation of the relationship between text and performance, then, *Open Court* – and Featherstone's tenure at the Royal Court more broadly – is somewhat ambivalent. By widening popular understandings of what a play might be, Featherstone's programming has challenged the narrowness of the 'text-based' label and to some extent revealed the arbitrariness of the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide, which

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[34] The *Open Court* programme was not an entirely unprecedented move for the Royal Court and recalled its *Come Together* festival in 1970, which Ruth Little and Emily McLaughlin have described as 'a playful and provocative attempt ... to unite both the Upstairs and Downstairs spaces in the Court, and to reflect the flourishing avant-garde theatre culture beyond the building' (138).

dictates that a practitioner like Chris Thorpe is a playwright at the Court and a devising theatre-maker elsewhere. Yet, at the same time, Featherstone's rhetoric maintains the centrality of the writer's intentions to the production process in a way that perpetuates some of the previously addressed misunderstandings around text and performance.

Discussing the significance of *Open Court*, Vicky Angelaki argues that 're-instating playwrights to the limelight was not a step backwards to assumed hierarchies, but a step forward'. She claims that

> [b]eing a playwright in Open Court terms meant identifying their own expectations, visions and shortcomings; responding to the social climate and making timely repertoire decisions; becoming an artistic director; a curator; a director; a storyteller; a performer. Writers were assigned multiple responsibilities, becoming accountable and integral to the spectating community. ('(up)Setting the Scene' 476)

While this opens up the creative process and disrupts the neat assigning of different roles that characterises conventional production structures, it also gives increasing power to the playwright, who in this formulation becomes many things at once. The danger is that this further elides the work of other theatre-makers, whose contribution is already often minimised in text-led processes. *Open Court*'s fast turnover and lack of polish was also double-edged. On the one hand, the rough and ready presentation of new plays foregrounded their liveness and emphasised their

existence as performance rather than writing. But on the other hand, in Caryl Churchill's words, 'if a play is done more or less at once, as it was written, though it may be rougher there is less danger of innovation being blunted by too much advice' (Featherstone, 'Summer 2013'). Here Churchill is highlighting immediacy, yoking this to the writer's intentions, which are not 'blunted' by the involvement of others. The implication is that the text is paramount and communicates most powerfully to an audience when performed 'as it was written'.

Something similar is suggested by Angelaki of *Open Court*'s series of play readings by writers, in which she claims 'barriers collapse and the text achieves a state of complete, unimpeded immediacy' ('(up)Setting the Scene' 482). She goes on to argue that the experience of hearing playwrights reading their own plays 'created a depth of images that was both rigorous and absorbing, bringing yet more layers to the text. The play took flesh' ('(up)Setting the Scene' 482). Angelaki's final metaphor, of the play taking flesh through the reading, is particularly intriguing. It is an image more often applied to theatrical production: performances are frequently described as giving flesh to the bare bones of the text. But if the playwright herself is best positioned to give animation to the skeleton of the play, then where does this leave performance? There is an implicit suggestion here that the immediacy of these play readings

allowed audiences to experience the texts as they were intended, in their 'complete, unimpeded' form, feeding into notions of the privileged and authoritative nature of the writer's intentions and bolstering the common rhetoric of 'serving' the play. If, however – as I have argued – intention can never be fully present to itself and writers always 'mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what [they] mean (to say)' (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 62), this is a false illusion of presence, built around the myth of the playwright's authority. A performance of a playtext can never be 'complete' or 'unimpeded', even when read aloud by its author.

The proximity of writer, text, performance and audience was a repeated concern throughout *Open Court* and the surrounding discourse. According to Angelaki, who specifically cites collaborations between Crouch and Smith and between Martin Crimp and Katie Mitchell, *Open Court* 'attacked the separation of text from performance', demonstrating that 'text and performance are embedded in one other [sic], not viable as binaries' ('(up)Setting the Scene' 485). The programme demonstrated that even unadorned readings are performative, while acknowledging the writing involved in non-narrative, non-verbal moments of performance. In some ways, therefore, *Open Court* disrupted old hierarchies. In refuting the perceived binary between text and performance, though, there was often a concomitant effort to increase the closeness between *writer*

and performance. During the festival, I sat in on some of the workshops facilitated by Anthony Neilson, who was encouraging other playwrights to explore his process of developing writing through improvisation with a group of actors. He explained to me that the removal of the director from this process was about establishing a direct relationship between writer, actors and designers, thus 'forging a tighter unity between the vision of the work and its individual parts' (Love, 'Embrace the Shame').[35] Although this process does involve a collaborative role for the actors, who potentially have a greater impact on the text than in other play-led production structures, Neilson is clear that for him this way of working is primarily about facilitating his own creative voice without the mediation of a director. Like the 'immediacy' of the playwright performing their script for an audience, this approach removes the interpretation of direction with the aim of more faithfully transmitting the writer's intention. Although this approach to text is not necessarily problematic in itself (and it might be noted that it is similar, in many ways, to how a theatre-maker like Crouch works), its claim to offer audiences a more immediate and faithful experience of the playwright's 'vision' misrepresents the complex relationship between text and performance and underestimates the openness and multiplicity of all theatre texts.

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[35] Despite the involvement of actors during the writing of his plays, which invites comparisons with devising processes, Neilson has always insisted that he remains the sole author of the texts.

The experiments of *Open Court* should also be seen in the context of the new writing industry. The Royal Court remains a key recipient of Arts Council funding and is the highest funded specialist new writing theatre in England.[36] It was also at the centre of the new play development boom discussed in Chapter Two, boosted by additional funding following the Boyden Report in 2001 (and thus continuing to align its practices with the aims of the Arts Council). This funding led to a proliferating culture of writer development that *Open Court* was, to some degree, resisting. Key figures involved in the festival, including Churchill and Neilson, framed its short rehearsal periods and immediacy of response as an antidote to what many had come to view as the *over*-development of playwrights and plays. Neilson, for instance, complained that he sees 'a lot of plays that get the life rewritten out of them' (Trueman, 'Open Court'), a critique that was beginning to gain traction around the time Featherstone took over at the Royal Court. Shortly prior to *Open Court*, Jacqueline Bolton argued that developmental procedures in the new writing industry were 'underpinned by particular assumptions regarding the form(s) and function(s) of plays and, indeed, the roles

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[36] In the last three funding rounds, the ESC has received the fourth highest level of theatre funding, behind the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Exchange (all of which present new writing as just one component of a mixed programme). The ESC received NPO funding of £2,297,916 for 2012/13; £2,301,893 for 2013/14; £2,311,234 for 2014/15; and funding of £2,311,234 a year between 2015 and 2018, which is being sustained at the same level for 2018-22 (ACE).

and responsibilities of a playwright' ('Capitalizing' 219). Typical

development processes in new writing, she suggested, encourage

linear narrative, psychological realism and an emphasis on dialogue

and character over non-verbal forms of theatricality. Bolton was also

critical of 'the industry's continued focus upon, and energetic

affirmation of, the "unique vision" of an individual writer', expressing

concern that

> a pervasive rhetoric of individuality and originality serves to downplay, or even erase, the contributions of collaborating practitioners such as directors, actors and designers. ('Capitalizing' 221)

Alex Chisholm, writing in her role as associate director (literary) at

the West Yorkshire Playhouse at around the same time, similarly

suggested that 'the "New Writing" play, like the "Well Made Play"

before it, exists as some sort of ideal to which new writers are

supposed to aspire' (Chisholm). In her view, 'we are teaching a very

particular set of aesthetic values predicated on creating a very

particular kind of play' (Chisholm).

There was, then, a sense of spreading discontent with the new

play development industry in the period directly preceding *Open

Court,* to which the festival itself was responding. In an interview with

Featherstone about what she was attempting to achieve at the Royal

Court, Trueman outlined the situation when she took the reins:

> The Court was undoubtedly successful … but writers had become frustrated by constrictive development processes. New writing felt somewhat staid and homogeneous. The

devised versus text battle was still raging. 'There was a danger that when we talked about the most exciting new movements in theatre, they didn't include plays or writers,' she says. Featherstone's job was to change that – and pronto. ('Holding Court')

Open Court might therefore be read as an opportunity to shake things up and to demonstrate what might be possible without the long development processes that had come to characterise new writing. These processes and the surrounding rhetoric had also – as Trueman alludes to with his reference to the 'devised versus text battle' – served to further separate new writing from other forms of theatre-making. Although the festival was in many ways a unique event, enabled by a gap in the programming and the arrival of a new artistic director, it recast the theatre's long-standing commitment to the playwright while setting the tone for later changes.

Featherstone's programming has continued to challenge the image of new writing captured in Bolton's and Chisholm's accounts above, as seen in the diverse range of productions in 2017, while she has also shifted some of the ways in which the theatre works. Emphasis has moved away from the training ground of the writers' groups, which at one point provided a steady flow of work into the theatre, and Featherstone has programmed a number of unsolicited scripts.[37] In contrast with the over-development and under-production that had

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[37] I have written elsewhere about the Royal Court Young Writers' Programme in the earlier years of the twenty-first century ('A Culture of Development'). Featherstone has explained that since she took over 'we don't have that [sic] same really avaricious young writers' programmes we used to have' (Unpublished Interview). For more detail on the Court's staging of unsolicited scripts, see Trueman ('It Arrives in an Envelope').

become associated with the new writing industry, Featherstone is keen to stage as much of the work that the Royal Court develops as possible, insisting that if you commission a playwright 'you should really clearly be believing that that play is going to be programmed' (Unpublished Interview). Despite all these changes, though, she notes that it can be 'really hard for the internal structures to bend' to accommodate different ways of working (Unpublished Interview), supporting the earlier suggestion that long-established subsidised theatres often have inflexible organisational mechanisms.

Another significant context to which *Open Court* was responding (as also hinted at in the quotation from Trueman above) was the perception that radical innovation was the exclusive preserve of 'non-text-based' theatre. According to Featherstone, playwrights at the time 'felt like they were less interesting … than theatre-makers' (Unpublished Interview), a suggestion also made by the Royal Court's literary manager Chris Campbell shortly before Featherstone's arrival (Goode, 'Series 1: Episode 6'). She was keen to disprove this, arguing that

> if writers are given the space, they are as inventive and challenging and creative as anybody that is given a scratch night at BAC, it's just actually the convention that we work with them in is here's a commission, write a play, we put a play on. (Unpublished Interview)

This can be interpreted as an instance of structures, conventions and discourses determining how work is seen and understood. Thanks in

part, I would suggest, to the Arts Council's growing emphasis on innovation and to the Performance Studies-influenced narrative of scripted drama as an outdated orthodoxy, there is a perception among some that text-led theatre is incapable of offering novelty and experimentation. This has in turn led many playwrights to develop a misdirected suspicion of devising methodologies, which have been seen as a threat to 'text-based' theatre. Meanwhile, as Featherstone points out, the process through which playwrights create work is largely dictated by the structures of the theatres that commission them. *Open Court* was responding to the sense (largely attributed to the 'non-text-based' camp) that playwrights could not be 'inventive and challenging and creative', but by giving writers the space to experiment the festival revealed – as Featherstone's above comment suggests – that much of the difference between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre can be traced to institutional rather than artistic factors.

While the novelty of the festival format (at least in the context of the Royal Court) ensured that *Open Court* was covered by several news stories and features,[38] the rapid turnover was a challenge to traditional reviewing. Many of the performances in the festival were one-offs, while even the rep shows were only on for a week, making

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[38] See, for instance, Claire Allfree ('Open Court'), Dominic Cavendish ('Vicky Featherstone') and Charlotte Higgins.

them ineligible for reviews according to the editorial guidelines of most daily newspapers. The critical response, therefore, was more typical of an independent touring show than of a standard production at the Royal Court: there was sparse print coverage, while most criticism took place online. For those who did write about *Open Court*, meanwhile, it presented an unusual context for reviewers; as Haydon notes,

> you judge something differently when it's been programmed for a week, or for one night, than if it stands for six weeks of what a building wants to tell people. ('Mint')

Rather than judging individual performances, reviews tended to assess the endeavour as a whole, and most framed *Open Court* within a wider narrative about the Royal Court and its purpose as a theatre. My review, for instance, opened with the image of Lamford's design for the weekly rep shows: a giant wooden crate that fell open to reveal the setting of each new play. I suggested that '[i]t's hard to imagine any better visual metaphor for what is happening at the Royal Court under new artistic director Vicky Featherstone' ('Open Court'), observing how the festival was transforming and opening out the theatre's processes. Paul Taylor similarly described the festival's events as 'mould-breaking' ('Mint'), while Haydon went as far as calling *Open Court* a 'Royal Court revolution' ('New Court') and Philip Fisher predicted that it would 'herald a new era at the new writing theatre' ('Death Tax'). There is a sense of change and challenge in all these reviews, to an extent repeating the critical assessments of

Crouch's and Action Hero's work as exposing and subverting the conventions of English theatre. Once again, this might say more about both the theatre industry and the expectations of critics than it does about the shows being discussed.

Trueman makes an interesting distinction in his review when he writes that '[t]his is new writing as live performance, not staged literature' ('Open Court, Week Two'), with the implication that the latter had previously been the purview of the Royal Court. The seemingly enhanced liveness of *Open Court* prompts him to ask a question, which his review leaves open: 'do we go to the Royal Court to see a play or a performance?' ('Open Court, Week Two'). Here he echoes (knowingly or not) Featherstone, who insisted in an interview about *Open Court* that '[i]t's not just about literary texts that sit on a shelf' (Allfree, 'Open Court'). This seems like an obvious point: when we see a play in production we are by definition watching a piece of performance rather than (or as well as) encountering a work of literature. These comments say a lot, though, about the literariness that still clouds perceptions of playwriting in England, especially at a theatre known for its commitment to new writing. It would also appear that this literariness dies hard. Despite the emphasis on liveness and unpredictability, the reviews of the weekly rep shows had a tendency to focus almost entirely on the text, often reading – similarly to many

of the reviews cited in the previous chapter – more like analyses of written plays than live performances.[39]

This example, like those of Crouch and Action Hero, suggests that there are ways of challenging the perceived 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide from within existing institutional structures. There is also a growing sense that institutions themselves are beginning to respond to these challenges, as seen (if only to a limited degree) in the announcement of the latest round of Arts Council NPO funding. It is these challenges and the corresponding shifts in the sector that I would suggest have led scholars like Radosavljević to discuss such work in terms of 'transcend[ing] previously held binaries' (*Theatre-Making* 5) and to suggest that these practices 'may well soon call for a change to the current structures of professional theatre production' (194). To talk about transcending binaries, though, is to implicitly accept the terms of those binaries, allowing that there are (or have been) two distinct ways of approaching the relationship between text and performance which certain theatre-makers are now rising above. My argument is that practitioners like Crouch, in failing to fit into the categories of either 'text-based' or 'non-text-based' theatre, reveal the flawed premises of the binary itself, which is underpinned by a misunderstanding of theatre texts.

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[39] See, for instance, Haydon ('Death Tax'), Trueman's comments on *Death Tax* ('Open Court, Week Two'), Haydon ('Pigeons') and Sierz ('Mint').

Meanwhile, although such 'emergent' practice might well be shifting 'dominant' structures of production, it is also shaped by those same structures, which affect how the work is funded, staged, seen and discussed. As observed throughout this chapter, as well as in Chapters Two, Three and Four, misunderstandings of the relationship between text and performance continue to underpin numerous professional theatre contexts, creating restrictive conditions for theatre-makers who work with text in a multiplicity of different ways. While Crouch, Action Hero and the Royal Court have all enjoyed success (to greater and lesser degrees and on differing scales) within existing institutional structures, the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide has led to misrepresentations of their practice and, in the cases of Crouch and Action Hero, dictated some of the contexts and funding conditions in which their work has been presented. For other theatre-makers – as touched upon at the start of this chapter and as suggested by some of the reductive contexts outlined earlier in the thesis – the bifurcation of English theatre practice has had much more damaging effects. A two-track culture of theatre production and reception has stifled many theatre-makers' ambition, deprived them of critical attention, and often left them struggling to financially support their work. In the previous chapters, I have interrogated the institutional structures in which misunderstandings of theatre texts have been perpetuated, as well

as proposing how we might usefully reconfigure our conceptions of text and performance to more accurately reflect the relationship between them. In the Conclusion, I offer some further suggestions about how we might move beyond the limitations outlined above, as well as indicating the significance of this research for both theatre academia and the professional theatre sector in England.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have paid attention to the ways in which a misrepresentation of the relationship between text and performance has impacted upon theatre practice in England. My principal intention has been to offer an alternative view of the perceived divide between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre, which has dominated discussion of the English theatre sector in recent years. I have argued that this divide is underpinned by mistaken assumptions about the nature of the playtext and its relationship to performance, which have permeated the institutional contexts of funding, higher education and theatre criticism. It may be that there is something unique about the ontology of the pre-written playtext, in its completeness and incompleteness, that does not apply in quite the same way to theatre texts produced through other processes, yet the research undertaken in this thesis supports my proposition that the relationships between *all* kinds of texts and performances are distorted and reduced by the definition of practices as either 'text-based' or 'non-text-based'. It is possible to identify differences in practitioners' uses of text, as I did in the previous chapter, without aligning these different practices with one or the other side of a simplifying binary.

My research has led me to the conclusion that the perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' theatre is misrepresentative both of English theatre practice and of the nature of texts and performances. As witnessed in Chapter Five, a diverse range of approaches to text can be identified within the English theatre sector, while Chapter One exposed the conceptual flaws embedded in the ways practitioners and theorists in England (and beyond) have typically thought about playtexts and their relationship to performance(s). Despite this, as discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four, a crudely dichotomised understanding of the role of text in theatre-making practices has informed and continues to inform the ways in which funders, scholars and critics approach new work in England. Although 'emergent' practices have to an extent challenged these orthodoxies, and there is some evidence of a shift away from categorising new work as either 'text-based' or 'non-text-based', a 'dominant', bifurcated theatre culture continues to place limitations on many theatre-makers – even, in some cases, as they attempt to move beyond this dichotomy. In these final pages of the thesis, I reflect on my research and its implications, considering the extent to which it might be possible to move beyond the constraints I have identified and analysed.

The most significant contribution made by this research, which underpins the rest of my work here, is the retheorisation of the

relationship between text and performance undertaken in Chapter One. This analysis accounts for what W. B. Worthen calls 'the drama's two lives' (*Drama* xii), on the page and on the stage, challenging many of the assumptions about playtexts that have shaped English theatre practice, institutions and discourses. Armed with an understanding of theatre texts as open and iterable, existing as simultaneously complete and incomplete entities that cannot command interpretive authority over performance (nor performance over text), we can begin to question, subvert and maybe even restructure the institutional frameworks that have been built upon earlier misrepresentations of the relationship between text and performance. While this theoretical investigation may seem abstracted and somewhat detached from the messy realities of practice, the shared ways in which we conceptualise texts and performances sit beneath and inform how theatre practice is funded, programmed, staged and discussed, as the rest of the thesis has explored. A shift in understandings of theatre texts is therefore an important step towards shifting the professional contexts in which those texts are staged.

I have also argued for the significance of Arts Council funding, higher education and theatre criticism in shaping and perpetuating a perceived divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work and, in doing so, reiterating problematic assumptions about the

relationship between text and performance. Theoretical and practical understandings of text and performance have thus been intertwined throughout this investigation. The 'text-based'/'non-text-based' divide cannot be dismantled without also dismantling the conceptual framework underpinning it, but likewise it is necessary to address the institutional structures, both historical and contemporary, that have contributed to the emergence and reinforcement of this binary. Doing so reveals, as reiterated in the preceding chapters, that a distinction between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work is not inherent or inevitable, but rather it is historically and contextually determined. This recognition then establishes the potential for re-evaluation and challenge in the future.

In the process of re-examining the contexts of Arts Council funding, higher education and theatre criticism, I have consulted a series of under-explored archives, drawing attention to and analysing previously overlooked material. The Arts Council archive in particular offers a wealth of information for researchers looking to investigate how subsidy has historically been distributed, while the hundreds of back issues of *Theatre Record* constitute a valuable but largely neglected archive of critical responses to British theatre over the last three decades. As I discuss further below, I see my work in these archives as only the beginning of what I hope will be a sustained scholarly engagement with this material. Although my examination of

previously uninvestigated records represents a further contribution to the field, I am also cognisant of the limitations of this research. Within the bounds of this project it was necessary to take a selective approach to archival material, leading me in the case of the Arts Council to prioritise records of panel and committee decision-making and policy over individual company archives, and in the case of the many thousands of reviews preserved in *Theatre Record* to isolate only a limited sample. Therefore, despite consulting a considerable volume of material in the course of my research, I am conscious that there are further insights to be gained from these vast collections of records.

In conducting this research, I have remained mindful of the practical implications my findings might have for the subsidised theatre sector in England. While a significant aspect of this thesis is its conceptual re-examination of the relationship between text and performance, this was always undertaken with a view to revealing how misunderstandings about theatrical texts affect how work is made and received. Throughout this research, I have repeatedly stressed that the divide between 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' work is *perceived*, seeking to reiterate that it does not reflect binarised approaches to text in practice. There is, however, a very real set of distinctions between how different work is supported, staged and discussed, with very real material effects for theatre-

makers, as explored in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five. As well as unpicking the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' binary, with the implicit argument that these misleading and divisive terms should be abandoned, my research might therefore suggest specific changes within the theatre industry that could transform the experiences of practitioners.

Although I have not directly addressed programming and development structures within theatres, these doubtless have a role in breaking down the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' binary. For instance, it may be that, as Jacqueline Bolton suggests,

> [d]ramaturgical analyses based upon more inclusive notions of 'text', as well as more nuanced approaches to 'authorship', advance holistic approaches to theatre-making which can erase a specious distinction between allegedly text-based and non-text-based processes. (*Demarcating Dramaturgy* 256)

Some institutions have already taken measures to erase this 'specious distinction', such as the Bush Theatre's widening of the way it makes work with artists. Whereas previously the Bush was known for supporting new plays, it now works with a number of theatre-makers whose processes do not begin with pre-written scripts.[1] This sort of development, along with the increasingly flexible production processes seen at the Royal Court, suggests how

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[1] The theatre's associate artists, for instance, have included devising companies ANTLER, Sh!t Theatre and Gameshow (Bush Theatre).

theatres themselves can shift understandings of text and its role in making performance.[2] Even seemingly minor developments, such as the current move in the sector away from the nomenclature of the 'literary manager' in favour of the 'dramaturg', might be early indications of a wider cultural transformation.[3] If theatres are to completely do away with the 'text-based'/'non-text-based' dichotomy and the associated differences in how new theatre is treated, however, this will require a reconsideration of several central aspects of how venues function: the ways in which new work is found, supported and programmed; how different artists are paid; the structures in place for developing and rehearsing individual productions; the length of runs for different shows; and the ways in which work is marketed to the public and presented to the press. Many – if not all – of these are dependent on funding, which I will go on to discuss.

Furthermore, if one logically follows through my arguments about the relationship between text and performance, there are also potential legal and financial implications related to copyright and licensing. Given my conclusion that playtexts cannot control

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[2] Lucy Tyler's 2017 research into new play development has similarly discovered a shift in working practices and a greater emphasis on collaboration.

[3] 'Literary manager' is a title specific to Anglophone theatre cultures which implicitly places emphasis on the *literary* qualities of dramatic texts, whereas 'dramaturg' suggests an approach influenced by practices in continental Europe which are not necessarily as beholden to the authority of the playtext. See, for example, Bolton's comparison of dramaturgical practices in England and Germany (*Demarcating Dramaturgy*).

performances, it is worth asking whether legal protections that guard

the integrity of playwrights' scripts are in fact reinforcing the hierarchy

of text over performance and should thus be reconsidered. Likewise,

copyright and royalty arrangements are typically based on

conventional, text-led production structures which credit the

playwright as sole author, and therefore these may be due a rethink.

Within the theatre sector as it currently operates, copyright and legal

protections are a necessary and hard-won safeguard for writers who

– despite the assumed authority of their texts in many processes –

are often in positions of little power or financial security. Gradually,

though, revised understandings of text might transform production

structures in ways that could free both playwrights and

directors/theatre-makers. If playwrights developed closer and more

(creatively and financially) secure ongoing relationships with theatres

and companies, for instance, we could perhaps envisage a situation

in which credit and therefore copyright become more commonly

shared[4] – although such a dramatic change in production structures

would require further research and consideration before being put

into practice.[5] Or if second productions became more common, there

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[4] Consider, for example, the royalty arrangements negotiated between Frantic Assembly and playwright Bryony Lavery, who share creative and financial credit for the shows on which they have collaborated (Smith 242).

[5] It would be necessary, for instance, to investigate the possible negative side effects of a new copyright arrangement for both playwrights and theatres. One consideration might be what recourse writers have if a play of theirs is used in a context to which they morally or ethically object; another is how new copyright rules might apply to companies who have previously held collective ownership of their plays but not made these texts available for performance by other theatre-makers.

might be less pressure on the first production of a new play to faithfully convey the playwright's 'vision'. Meanwhile, publishers have a role to play in reformulating the identity of drama on the page, as suggested by the innovations of Oberon Books. As briefly noted in Chapter Five, Oberon now publish the texts of several artists whose work might previously have been considered 'non-text-based', and in doing so they have experimented with different ways in which performance might be represented in textual form (*Action Plans* is just one example of this experimentation). Publication also preserves this work for future generations, opening the possibility for it to be performed again by other theatre-makers and to enter the canon in a way that has previously proved difficult, if not impossible, for theatre and performance that leaves few archive-friendly material traces.

Turning to the areas that this thesis has specifically addressed, I hope that this work might prompt more reflection on the role of the Arts Council within the English theatre ecology. Although there is no easy way of distributing limited subsidy, and there will always be winners and losers in any funding arrangement, I think it is time the Council questioned the efficacy of channelling the majority of its money through large, long-established venues with often inflexible internal production structures. Although institutions such as the National Theatre and the Royal Court have provided an important showcase for many independent artists and hold an important place

within the theatrical landscape, which should not be forgotten or sacrificed, setting aside a greater share of National Portfolio funding for smaller, more nimble companies could shift the entire ecology. Scholars, meanwhile, could further investigate the implications of existing patterns of funding distribution and examine in more detail the ways in which the Arts Council and its clients support independent artists. Moreover, there is much more research to be done in the Arts Council archive, excavating the funding decisions and processes of the past and applying these insights to our current system of subsidy. My intention is that the research pursued here might point to areas of further enquiry for other scholars – for instance, the support given to alternative theatre-makers or the ways in which a movement towards more pro-active funding policy impacted upon the English theatre landscape in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This research could, furthermore, extend my aim of nurturing greater dialogue between academia and the professional theatre sector.

I hope I have also shown that there is scope for self-reflection among those of us working in higher education. Scholars might begin to question the typically isolated investigation of playtexts and devised performances, instead bringing different theatre-making methodologies side by side in their research (as the likes of Duška Radosavljević and Sarah Sigal have already done). Ideally, this

would extend to practice-as-research, where there is an opportunity to contemplate, question and expand what we mean by both 'practice' and 'research'. There is also room, I believe, to rethink the demarcation of different practices in undergraduate curricula and to reconsider the intellectual hostility that has often existed between proponents of Drama and those of Performance Studies. In practice, this might mean more undergraduate degree modules that teach plays and other forms of theatre practice side by side and/or more closely integrate practical and theoretical approaches in learning and assessment. It might additionally mean a greater openness to dialogue from those with strong disciplinary allegiances to Drama and Performance Studies respectively, allowing for recognition of what the two fields share and how both have at times underestimated the complexity of the relationship between text and performance.

I am also conscious that my chapter on theatre criticism is by necessity a bounded contribution to what remains an under-theorised area. While my analysis has yielded important insights into how critics typically discuss text and performance and has opened up previously unexplored avenues of investigation, further research is required to ascertain the full implications of online reviewing and to theorise theatre criticism as a singular form of writing about performance. Megan Vaughan's forthcoming volume on theatre

blogging for Bloomsbury Methuen Drama will be addressing this gap,

and along with Radosavljević's 2016 collection of essays perhaps

indicates a desire among the academic community to consider

seriously the role of criticism within the theatre ecology.[6] I would

suggest that future research in this area might valuably augment

historical studies and textual scrutiny with the sort of quantitative

linguistic analysis pioneered by David Roberts in the 1990s. While

quantitative approaches can lack nuance, if paired with close,

analytical attention to the text of reviews then this methodology might

give us a better idea of broader patterns across theatre criticism. As

reviewing increasingly moves online, creating digital archives for the

purpose of such analysis is a more and more realistic proposition –

and a necessary one, as evidenced by the methodological difficulties

faced in the form of broken links and defunct web pages.

Finally, ever-evolving digital technology has the potential to shift

our relationship with theatre texts. As I discussed in Chapter One, the

affordances of texts change in new contexts. One major shift over the

period in question that I have largely neglected until now (with the

exception of noting the emergence of online criticism) is the

increasing dominance of the digital. Noting the growing availability of

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[6] Although it is worth noting that both Vaughan and Radosavljević, like me, have careers that traverse academia and theatre criticism.

digitised Shakespeare, whether in the form of filmed performances or

ebooks, Worthen observes that

> [d]espite the tired claims that performance is always opposed to writing, here performance is delivered through the same medium as writing, the screen, and is technically identical to writing, composed of bits of binary code. (*Drama* 7)

Here, then, oppositions between text and performance have the

potential to melt away, dispersing into countless 0s and 1s. This

promises to be another rich area for future research. While digital

versions of playtexts have, to date, largely reproduced the

conventions of the printed page, the digital environment multiplies

the possibilities for how we encounter written texts, in ways that

might well disrupt the perceived authority of the playtext. Now that

multiple editions, annotations, and recordings of performance(s) can

all exist in the same digital space, it may finally become easier to

conceptualise plays as multiple, mutable things.

   In attempting finally to reject the binarised terms that this

research has addressed, it is worth questioning the very possibility of

formulating a lexicon that could successfully account for the complex

relationship between text and performance and for the multiplicity of

ever-evolving theatre practices. At a one-day symposium I organised

in September 2015 to explore some of the ideas addressed in this

thesis, Andy Field suggested that what was really being discussed

on a panel about moving beyond the 'text-based'/'non-text-based'

divide was

> the nuances and the contradictions and the complications and the messiness and the personalities of any development process suffering under the weight of institutions. (Love, Symposium)

His contention was that 'every single creative process ever is going to be too complicated or too nonsensical to be able to be described neatly by the institutions that are attempting to do so' (Love, Symposium). It might be suggested, then, that any vocabulary is as insufficient as the next, and that the displacement of the terms 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' will therefore not necessarily benefit theatre-makers and the broader theatre ecology in the long term. Field ultimately understood this ongoing cycle of formulating and revising critical vocabulary as a somewhat futile process, positing it as a 'slightly fictional attempt to describe impossible patterns' (Love, Symposium). As I have argued throughout this thesis, however, such 'fictional attempt[s]' to describe practice have material implications; the inaccuracy of institutional vocabularies becomes problematic when those vocabularies become part of the arsenal of justification for supporting, funding or promoting certain practices over others. This is, essentially, why I believe that it remains important to contest the terminology of 'text-based' and 'non-text-based'.

At the same time, there is a need to be alert to the possibility of vocabulary clouding more important questions. Speaking at a conference held by the British Theatre Consortium (BTC) in 2015,

Chris Goode declared his own disavowal of what he called 'the phoney "writers versus devisors" [sic] war', in pursuit not of more accurate terminology but

> because beneath that argument is another, by no means exactly congruent with it, about form, and about the social promise of theatre, and about what theatre can and can't do with completeness, and with authority, and with its own power and glory. And beneath that argument is yet another, about what making is, about how we turn momentary events and particular relations into tradeable commodities, or how we can choose not to do that. And that's an argument that's only just beginning. ('Unpublished Conference Speech')

By dismantling binarised definitions, therefore, we may afford ourselves the opportunity of digging deeper, of addressing the ideological underpinnings and implications of individual pieces of theatre rather than becoming burdened and blinkered by the baggage of inherited terms. Tomlin similarly argues that

> [r]adical practice should be based, not on its simplistic opposition or otherwise to dramatic form, or on the reification of its own totalising conclusions, but on a self-reflexivity which can serve to always and already destabilise its own particular claims to authority. (*Acts and Apparitions* 12)

In keeping with Tomlin's demands for self-reflexivity, any new terminology must thus admit to its own flaws and be alert to shifting contexts, with the flexibility to shift alongside these.

Beneath my analysis of the terms 'text-based' and 'non-text-based', the ways in which they (mis)represent theatrical texts and the material impacts of the divide they name in different institutional

contexts, there has been a recurring discussion of the ideological stakes involved. As mentioned at various points throughout the thesis, scholars, commentators and practitioners have frequently aligned themselves with one or the other side of this perceived binary on the basis of the work's supposed ideological characteristics. Advocates of Performance Studies, for instance, have often understood so-called 'non-text-based' work as inherently radical and its 'text-based' counterpart as inherently reactionary. This reductive linking of a performance's perceived relationship to text with a particular ideological stance simplifies both the complexities of text and performance and the various ways in which form and aesthetics can be imbued with politics. There are therefore two potentially freeing dimensions to a possible move beyond the divisive rhetoric of 'text-based' versus 'non-text-based'. One is material: theatre-makers will no longer find themselves and their work restricted by a two-track system of funding, development and reception. But revealing the flawed premises of a 'text-based'/'non-text-based' dichotomy may also have the further advantage of allowing more precise and rigorous ideological analysis of different pieces of theatre, rather than an automatic alignment with the radical or the reactionary based on a simplified politics of form.

As I stated in my Introduction, seemingly abstract terms can have tangible effects for practitioners. The critical terminologies that

we as scholars and commentators apply to theatre may be always and inevitably flawed, but – as my research has demonstrated – they have repercussions nonetheless. We should, I suggest, remain alert to these repercussions and open to a continual reassessment and reformulation of our vocabulary in response to such impacts on theatre-makers, as well as in response to changing ideological contexts. This thesis has advanced one such reassessment with regard to the binarised terms 'text-based' and 'non-text-based', which have dominated and polarised discussion of English theatre-making in recent years. My interventions across the fields of philosophy, funding, academia and criticism illustrate the inaccuracy of this perceived binary and the conceptions of text and performance on which it is founded, as well as the restrictive effects it has had on practitioners. In disseminating a more rigorous and complex theoretical discussion of the relationship between text and performance than other existing studies, and in analysing the institutional contexts in which a divide between so-called 'text-based' and 'non-text-based' processes has opened up, it is my aim that this research will contribute to the breakdown of the terminology it has critiqued and clear the way for a more nuanced critical consideration of the role that text plays in contemporary English theatre-making.

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Appendix A

Arts Council funding snapshots

The below Arts Council funding data from the years 1946, 1956, 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, 2006 and 2016 is used as an illustrative sample of the subsidised portfolio over time and is referred to at various points throughout Chapter Two.

Sources: Arts Council annual reviews and Arts Council England website.

1946

Total grant-in-aid: £235,000

Grants and Guarantees – Associated Companies etc	£5,687.00

Losses sustained by Companies specially engaged for CEMA Tours	£10,145.00
Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith	£5,765.00
Drama Department Salaries	£2,588.00
Regional Organisers (apportionment)	£2,555.00
Miscellaneous Drama Expenses	£1,413.00
Amateur Scottish Community Drama Association	£500.00
South Wales and Monmouthshire Council of Social Service	£500.00
Maddermarket Theatre	£200.00
Toynbee Hall	£100.00
Travelling Repertory Theatre	£100.00
TOTAL	£29,553.00

1956

Total grant-in-aid: £820,000

Company	Funding
Old Vic Trust Limited – Waterloo Road	£15,000.00
Royal Victoria Hall Foundation	£10,000.00
Mobile Theatre Limited	£5,000.00
Nottingham Theatre Trust Limited	£3,500.00
Old Vic Trust Limited – Bristol	£3,000.00
English Stage Company Limited	£2,500.00
Promotion of New Drama – Commissioning Fees and Awards	£2,361.00
The West of England Theatre Company Limited	£2,000.00
Birmingham Repertory Theatre Limited	£2,000.00
Oxford Repertory Players Limited	£1,500.00
Salisbury Arts Theatre Limited	£1,350.00
Leatherhead Theatre Club	£1,000.00
The Cambridge Arts Theatre Trust	£750.00
Chesterfield Civic Theatre Limited	£500.00
Ipswich Arts Theatre Trust	£500.00
Colchester Repertory Company Limited	£500.00

Guildford Theatre Club Limited	£500.00
The Hornchurch Theatre Trust Limited	£500.00
Pioneer Theatre Limited (Theatre Workshop)	£500.00
Sheffield Repertory Company Limited	£500.00
Canterbury Theatre Trust Limited	£500.00
Council of Repertory Theatres	£350.00
Northampton Repertory Players Limited	£274.00
The British Centre of the International Theatre Institute	£250.00
Derby Little Theatre Club Limited	£250.00
Lincoln Theatre Association Limited	£150.00
Theatre Planning	£149.00
Travel Grants for Producers	£125.00
Theatre Grid Scheme	£115.00
The Playhouse, Kidderminster	£39.00
The Elizabethan Theatre Company Limited	£17.00
TOTAL	£55,680.00

1966

Total grant-in-aid: £3,910,000

Company	Funding
National Theatre Board	£188,000.00
Royal Shakespeare Theatre	£93,273.00
English Stage Company	£50,555.00
Belgrade Theatre Trust	£30,760.00
Nottingham Theatre Trust	£26,879.00
Oxford – Meadow Players	£24,900.00
Bristol Old Vic Trust	£23,758.00
Birmingham Repertory Theatre	£22,650.00
Mermaid Theatre Trust	£21,000.00
Sheffield Repertory Company	£19,120.00
Lincoln Theatre Association	£18,811.00
Prospect Productions	£17,154.00

Century Theatre	£15,200.00
Liverpool Repertory Theatre	£14,275.00
Cheltenham Everyman Theatre	£12,000.00
Yvonne Arnaud Theatre	£10,250.00
Renaissance Theatre Trust	£9,750.00
Leicester Theatre Trust	£9,675.00
Stoke on Trent – Studio Theatre	£9,229.00
Northampton Repertory Players	£9,050.00
Salisbury Arts Theatre	£8,690.00
Leatherhead Repertory Company	£8,521.00
Ipswich Arts Theatre Trust	£8,040.00
Colchester Repertory Theatre	£8,000.00
York Citizens' Theatre Trust	£7,208.00
Training Scheme Bursaries and Expenses	£7,049.00
Hornchurch Theatre Trust	£7,000.00
Oldham Repertory Theatre Club	£7,000.00
Derby Playhouse	£6,800.00
Bromley Theatre Trust	£6,510.00
Canterbury Theatre Trust	£6,220.00
Dene Productions	£5,600.00
New Drama Bursaries and Expenses	£5,232.00
White Rose Theatre Trust	£4,837.00
Farnham Repertory Company	£4,438.00
Chesterfield Civic Theatre	£3,700.00
Crewe Theatre Trust	£3,500.00
Watford Civic Theatre Trust	£3,460.00
Malvern Festival Theatre Trust	£3,000.00
Newstage	£2,779.00
New Theatre (Kingston)	£2,500.00
Richmond Theatre	£2,200.00
Plymouth Arts Guild	£2,035.00
Hampstead Theatre Club	£1,675.00
Scarborough Theatre Trust	£1,567.00
Loughborough Theatre Association	£1,500.00
Rosehill Arts Trust	£1,450.00
New Pembroke Theatre	£1,000.00
Margate Stage Company	£1,000.00
Richmond – Georgian Theatre	£1,000.00
Torbay Theatre	£950.00
Manchester Library Theatre	£775.00
The Arts Theatre of Cambridge	£700.00

Repertory Players	£535.00
New Shakespeare Company	£500.00
Oxford University Theatre	£500.00
St Edmundsbury Theatre Royal	£500.00
Unity Theatre Society	£500.00
Council of Repertory Theatres	£350.00
International Theatre Club	£306.00
Liverpool Everyman Theatre	£300.00
British Centre of the International Theatre Institute	£250.00
Scunthorpe – Civic Theatre	£100.00
TOTAL	£766,066.00

Total New Drama funding: £18,972

1976

Total grant-in-aid: £28,850,000

Company	Funding
National Theatre Board	£1,931,500.00
Royal Shakespeare Theatre	£951,000.00
English Stage Company Limited	£196,738.00
Nottingham Theatre Trust Limited	£177,303.00
Birmingham Repertory Theatre Limited	£172,245.00
Crucible Theatre Trust Limited	£162,750.00
Bristol Old Vic Trust Limited	£162,000.00
Leicester Theatre Trust Limited	£135,942.00
Mermaid Theatre Trust Limited	£97,750.00
Liverpool Repertory Theatre Limited	£97,269.00
Thorndike Theatre Limited	£94,769.00
York Citizens' Theatre Trust Limited	£89,000.00
Belgrade Theatre Trust Limited	£87,400.00
Leeds Theatre Trust Limited	£85,950.00
Tyneside Theatre Trust Limited	£85,753.00
Young Vic Company Limited	£83,000.00
Pioneer Theatres Limited	£80,500.00
Greenwich Theatre Limited	£77,815.00
Anvil Productions Limited	£72,175.00
Caryl Jenner Productions Limited	£70,279.00
Colchester Mercury Theatre Limited	£69,000.00

Merseyside Everyman Theatre Company Limited	£66,995.00
Northcott Devon Theatre and Arts Centre	£63,350.00
Hornchurch Theatre Trust Limited	£63,000.00
Octagon Theatre Trust Limited	£58,750.00
Cheltenham Everyman Theatre Company Limited	£57,096.00
Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Management Limited	£55,000.00
The Royal Exchange Theatre Company Limited	£55,000.00
Theatre Centre Limited	£54,000.00
Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire Theatre Trust Limited	£52,055.00
Cambridge Theatre Company Limited	£49,500.00
Derby Playhouse Limited	£49,000.00
Harrogate (White Rose) Theatre Trust Limited	£49,000.00
The Duke's Playhouse Limited	£48,753.00
Farnham Repertory Company Limited	£48,500.00
Ipswich Arts Theatre Trust	£45,404.00
Lincoln Theatre Association Limited	£41,500.00
Salisbury Arts Theatre Limited	£41,000.00
Inter-Action Trust Limited	£39,750.00
Camden Playhouse Productions Limited	£39,310.00
Watford Civic Theatre Trust Limited	£36,000.00
Worcester Arts Association Limited	£35,000.00
Hampstead Theatre Club Limited	£33,148.00
Oldham Repertory Theatre Club	£33,000.00
Worthing and District Connaught Theatre Trust Limited	£33,000.00
Scarborough Theatre Trust Limited	£32,550.00
Northampton Repertory Players Limited	£32,000.00
Canterbury Theatre Trust Limited	£31,125.00
Billingham Forum Theatre	£31,000.00
Gateway Theatre Trust Limited	£30,000.00
Plymouth Theatre Trust Limited	£30,000.00
Manchester Young People's Theatre Limited	£29,752.00
National Youth Theatre	£29,750.00
Crewe Theatre Trust Limited	£29,500.00
Chesterfield Civic Theatre Limited	£29,000.00

Southend Palace Theatre Trust Limited	£22,500.00
New Shakespeare Company Limited	£22,000.00
Chichester Festival Theatre Productions Company Limited	£20,000.00
Alexandra Theatre Limited	£16,500.00
Horseshoe Theatre Company Limited	£15,000.00
Spectrum Theatre Trust Limited	£14,450.00
Polka Children's Theatre Limited	£12,000.00
Churchill Theatre Trust Limited	£7,500.00
TOTAL	£6,561,876.00
The Combination Limited	£44,723.00
Half Moon Theatre Limited	£38,100.00
Galactic Smallholdings Limited	£35,600.00
Alternative Theatre Company Limited	£31,515.00
Belt and Braces Roadshow Company Limited	£31,250.00
Wakefield Tricycle Company	£30,638.00
7:84 Theatre Company (England) Limited	£29,950.00
Pip Simmons Theatre Group Limited	£25,000.00
West London Theatre Workshop	£21,850.00
Avon Touring Company	£20,950.00
King's Head Theatre Productions Limited	£20,000.00
Red Ladder Theatre Society	£18,950.00
Foco Novo Limited	£17,563.00
Common Stock Theatre Company Limited	£17,500.00
International Fringe Limited	£14,400.00
Soho Theatre Company Limited	£13,850.00
Oval House	£13,250.00
British Theatre Association	£12,250.00
Broadside Mobile Workers Theatre	£11,300.00
Richmond Fringe Limited	£11,068.00
Hull Truck Theatre Company Limited	£11,050.00
Lumiere and Son	£10,750.00
Black Theatre of Brixton	£10,200.00
Recreation Ground Theatre Company	£10,000.00
General Will Limited	£9,620.00
Incubus Theatre Company	£9,250.00
Temba Theatre Company	£9,200.00
The People Show	£9,000.00

Natural Theatre Company	£8,500.00
Jean Pritchard Management Limited	£8,275.00
L.T.G. Adventures Limited	£7,500.00
British Theatre of the Deaf	£7,240.00
Major Road Theatre Company	£7,200.00
Women's Theatre Group	£7,000.00
Friends Roadshow	£6,250.00
Overground Theatre Club	£5,575.00
Interplay Trust	£5,300.00
Triple Action Theatre Group	£5,075.00
North West Spanner Theatre	£5,050.00
Clown Cavalcade	£4,990.00
Sidewalk Theatre Company	£3,150.00
Salakta Balloon Band	£2,800.00
Sal's Meat Market	£2,550.00
Eastend Abbreviated Soapbox Theatre	£2,500.00
Theatres Advisory Council	£2,500.00
British Theatre Institute	£2,200.00
Theatre At New End Limited	£2,165.00
Association of British Theatre Technicians	£2,000.00
Black Theatre Workshop	£2,000.00
TQ Publications Limited ('Theatre Quarterly')	£2,000.00
Pentameters	£1,800.00
Mikron Theatre Company Limited	£1,700.00
Drum Arts Centre	£1,000.00
Quipu Productions Limited	£1,000.00
Stirabout Theatre Company	£1,000.00
Greek Arts Theatre Club	£985.00
Drumbeat Productions	£900.00
Pub Theatre Company	£862.00
Polish Social and Cultural Association Limited	£600.00
Council of Regional Theatre	£500.00
Forestage Company	£500.00
National Council of Theatre for Young People	£500.00
The Keskidee Centre	£488.00
The Africa Centre	£475.00
Covent Garden Community Theatre Workshop	£450.00

Dockwalloper Productions	£450.00
Solent Song and Dance Company	£437.00
Procreation	£400.00
Second City Theatre Company	£400.00
Road Gang	£350.00
The Wordplay Company	£350.00
Adhoc Theatre Company	£325.00
Society for Theatre Research	£275.00
Birmingham Arts Laboratory Limited	£250.00
Cecropia Company	£250.00
Grasshopper Theatre Company	£250.00
Roland Jaquarello Productions	£250.00
Shared Experience	£250.00
Southtown Theatre Limited	£250.00
The Artaud Company	£225.00
Moubray Productions	£225.00
Grapefruit Productions	£200.00
Monstrous Regiment Limited	£200.00
Scorpio Productions	£178.00
Basement Theatre Limited	£177.00
Wimbledon Pub Crawlers	£176.00
Red Pike Company	£175.00
Westway Productions Limited	£174.00
Theatre Despatch	£160.00
The Bite Theatre Group	£150.00
Stuart Kerr Productions	£150.00
Theatre 84 Limited	£150.00
Tim Stockil Productions	£150.00
William Roberts and Nicolette Lee	£150.00
Insight Productions	£100.00
Maximus Actors' Arena	£75.00
TOTAL	£660,659.00
Bursaries	£34,980.00
Touring	
Prospect Productions Limited	£165,000.00
Actors Company Productions Limited	£93,000.00
Theatre North	£10,224.00
Lancaster Orbit Limited	£9,803.00
Travelling Playhouse Limited	£9,500.00

Gate Theatre	£5,463.00
Richmond Theatre Productions Limited	£3,000.00
Scarab Theatre Limited	£2,900.00
Paines Plough	£2,675.00
York Arts Centre	£2,110.00
Plymouth Arts Centre	£2,040.00
Gay Sweatshop	£1,950.00
Theatre Roundabout Limited	£1,700.00
University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	£1,145.00
Birmingham Arts Laboratory Limited	£925.00
TOTAL	£311,435.00
THEATRE TOTAL	£7,568,950.00

1986

Total grant-in-aid: £106,050,000

Company	Funding
National Theatre Board	£6,955,200.00
Royal Shakespeare Theatre	£5,392,000.00
TOTAL	£12,347,200.00
Building-based companies	
Theatre Royal (Plymouth) Limited	£611,000.00
Crucible Theatre Trust Limited	£611,000.00
Royal Exchange Theatre Company Limited	£610,500.00
Leicester Theatre Trust Limited	£543,500.00
Bristol Old Vic Trust Limited	£519,626.00
English Stage Company Limited	£505,808.00
Birmingham Repertory Theatre Limited	£430,500.00
Nottingham Theatre Trust Limited	£428,625.00
Liverpool Repertory Theatre Limited	£404,850.00
Manchester Young People's Theatre Limited	£279,000.00
Tyne and Wear Theatre Trust Limited	£279,000.00
York Citizen's Theatre Trust Limited	£274,500.00
Anvil Productions Limited	£249,000.00
Belgrade Theatre Trust Limited	£247,000.00
Leeds Theatre Trust Limited	£247,000.00

Young Vic Company Limited	£225,000.00
Northcott Devon Theatre and Arts Centre	£217,000.00
Merseyside Everyman Theatre Company Limited	£211,600.00
Caryl Jenner Productions Limited	£204,250.00
Pioneer Theatres Limited	£191,250.00
Colchester Mercury Theatre Limited	£185,000.00
Half Moon Theatre Limited	£175,000.00
Wolsey Theatre Company Limited	£155,000.00
Salisbury Arts Theatre Limited	£147,500.00
Octagon Theatre Trust Limited	£140,000.00
Gloucestershire Everyman Theatre Company Limited	£140,000.00
Greenwich Theatre Limited	£135,500.00
Nuffield Theatre Trust Limited	£125,000.00
Alternative Theatre Company Limited	£117,830.00
Oldham Coliseum Theatre Limited	£113,500.00
Hampstead Theatre Limited	£109,500.00
Polka Children's Theatre Limited	£102,500.00
Watford Civic Theatre Trust Limited	£101,500.00
Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire Theatre Trust Limited	£100,000.00
Palace Theatre Trust (Southend-on-Sea) Limited	£89,500.00
Soho Theatre Company Limited	£73,500.00
Richmond Fringe Limited	£63,775.00
Oval House	£55,500.00
TOTAL	£9,420,114.00
Touring companies	
Cambridge Theatre Company Limited	£271,000.00
Theatre Centre Limited	£180,100.00
Shared Experience Limited	£97,500.00
Galactic Smallholdings Limited	£97,000.00
Avon Touring Theatre Company Limited	£96,650.00
Joint Stock Productions Limited	£96,500.00
Temba Theatre Company Limited	£85,000.00
Black Theatre Co-operative Limited	£81,675.00
Foco Novo Limited	£76,000.00
The Red Ladder Theatre Company Limited	£73,000.00
Paines Plough Limited	£71,000.00

Actors Touring Company	£70,000.00
Monstrous Regiment Limited	£66,500.00
Women's Theatre Group Limited	£64,525.00
Lumiere and Son Theatre Company Limited	£61,000.00
IOU Limited	£55,000.00
Natural Theatre Company	£52,000.00
Major Road Theatre Company	£50,000.00
The People Show Society	£43,000.00
Eastend Abbreviated Soapbox Theatre	£36,000.00
Spectrum Theatre Trust Limited	£36,000.00
TOTAL	£1,759,450.00
Projects	
The Medieval Players Limited	£61,000.00
Tara Arts Group	£61,000.00
Theatre of Thelema Limited	£55,000.00
Kaboodle Productions Limited	£47,000.00
Cheek by Jowl Theatre Company Limited	£46,000.00
Impact Theatre Co-Operative	£42,000.00
Hesitate and Demonstrate Limited	£40,000.00
Hidden Grin	£39,000.00
TNT Theatre Co-Operative Limited	£33,500.00
Forkbeard Fantasy	£33,000.00
Rational Theatre Company Limited	£30,500.00
Inner City Theatre Company	£30,000.00
Bristol Express Theatre Company	£27,400.00
DAC Theatre Company	£25,550.00
Gay Sweatshop	£22,000.00
Northern Studio Theatre	£22,000.00
Theatre of Black Women	£20,500.00
Remould Theatre Company	£19,250.00
Meeting Ground Theatre Company	£18,840.00
Covent Garden Community Theatre	£18,250.00
L'Overture Theatre Trust	£14,800.00
The Perils	£14,500.00
Pop-Up-Theatre	£13,800.00
Double Exposure Theatre Company	£12,500.00
Burnt Bridges Theatre Company	£12,200.00
Pete Brooks	£10,400.00
Theatro Technis	£10,300.00

Options Limited (TIE)	£10,038.00
Mikron Theatre Company Limited	£10,000.00
Oily Cart Theatre Company	£9,400.00
Rent-a-Role Drama Service	£8,700.00
Fusion	£7,000.00
Dr Foster's Travelling Theatre	£6,500.00
Theatre of Fact	£5,600.00
Luke Dixon Productions	£5,000.00
Sphinx Theatre Company	£4,500.00
Double Edge Theatre Company	£2,500.00
Intimate Strangers	£2,500.00
Spare Tyre Theatre Company	£2,400.00
TOTAL	£854,428.00
Theatre Writing Schemes	
Bursaries	£57,500.00
Royalty Supplement Guarantees	£20,889.00
Library Theatre Company	£3,800.00
Merseyside Young People's Theatre Company Limited	£2,250.00
The Duke's Playhouse Limited	£2,125.00
Peterborough Arts Council	£2,125.00
Metro Theatre Company	£2,025.00
Stein Productions	£2,000.00
North West Playwrights Co-Operative	£1,600.00
Graeae Theatre Company Limited	£1,540.00
Campaign for Equal Opportunities in the Arts	£1,500.00
New Midlands Dance Company	£1,500.00
Warminster Arts Centre	£1,500.00
Cornwall Project 86	£1,483.00
Padgate Recreation Centre and Drama Studio	£1,200.00
Pentabus Theatre Company	£1,016.00
Age Exchange Theatre Company	£1,000.00
Big Bird Music Theatre	£1,000.00
Durham Theatre Company	£1,000.00
Flying Tortoise Theatre Company Limited	£1,000.00
Northumberland Theatre Company Limited	£1,000.00
Pentameters Theatre Company	£1,000.00
Pocket Theatre	£1,000.00

7:84 Theatre Company (England) Limited	£1,000.00
Yorkshire Theatre Company	£900.00
The Combination Limited	£875.00
Forest Forge Theatre Company	£800.00
Magic Roundabout Theatre Company	£750.00
Touch and Go Arts Collective	£750.00
Chats Palace Limited	£700.00
Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company	£600.00
Playwrights' Co-operative	£600.00
Bruvvers Theatre Company	£500.00
Eastern Angles Theatre Company	£500.00
Kneehigh Theatre Company Limited	£500.00
Sedgemoor Theatre Company	£500.00
Theatre Writers Union	£350.00
Public Parts Theatre Company	£315.00
Platypus Theatre Company	£300.00
Colway Theatre Trust Limited	£260.00
TOTAL	£121,253.00
Other subsidies	
British Theatre Association	£16,000.00
Puppet Centre Trust	£6,000.00
TOTAL	£22,000.00
THEATRE TOTAL	£24,524,445.00

1996

Total grant-in-aid: £191,133,000

Company	Funding
National Organisations	
Royal National Theatre Board	£11,167,000.00
Royal Shakespeare Theatre	£8,470,000.00
TOTAL	£19,637,000.00
Regularly Funded Organisation	
English Stage Company	£911,000.00

Fixed-term Funded Organisations	
Cambridge Theatre Company (Method & Madness)	£501,500.00
Oxford Stage Company	£484,100.00
English Touring Theatre	£465,500.00
Theatre Centre	£277,100.00
Tara Arts Group	£174,700.00
Shared Experience	£153,200.00
Paines Plough	£147,000.00
Galactic Smallholdings (Welfare State International)	£140,000.00
Black Theatre Co-operative	£137,300.00
Theatre De Complicite	£135,700.00
Red Ladder Theatre Company	£132,700.00
Actors Touring Company	£131,200.00
Trestle Theatre Company	£127,000.00
Gay Sweatshop	£118,900.00
Red Shift Theatre Company	£114,800.00
Theatre of Thelema (Quicksilver Theatre)	£114,700.00
The Sphinx (Women's Theatre Group)	£112,700.00
David Glass New Mime Ensemble	£110,000.00
Cheek By Jowl Theatre Company	£106,700.00
IOU	£105,500.00
Bath Arts Workshop (Natural Theatre Company)	£104,000.00
Actors Cabal (Compass Theatre Company)	£103,500.00
Black Mime Theatre Company	£102,500.00
Open Hand Theatre Company	£100,000.00
Right Size	£97,000.00
Forkbeard Fantasy Theatre Company	£96,700.00
Pop Up Theatre	£95,500.00
Gloria Theatre	£89,100.00
People Show	£88,100.00
Kaboodle Productions	£86,600.00
Oily Cart Company	£84,500.00
International Workshop Festival	£26,600.00

TOTAL	£4,864,400.00
Middle Scale Touring	
Cambridge Theatre Company (Method & Madness)	£50,000.00
English Touring Theatre	£50,000.00
Oxford Stage Company	£50,000.00
TOTAL	£150,000.00
National Touring – Cultural Diversity Projects	
Fifth Amendment	£10,000.00
Hathi Productions	£26,811.00
Maya Productions	£34,000.00
Mu-Lan Arts	£17,933.00
Nubian Nights	£11,594.00
Tamasha Theatre Company	£36,250.00
TOTAL	£136,588.00
National Touring – Disability Projects	
Graeae Theatre Company	£100,000.00
Mind The Gap	£42,853.00
Show Of Hands Theatre Company	£37,951.00
Strathcona Theatre Company	£44,220.00
TOTAL	£225,024.00
National Touring – Experimental Projects	
Andrew Alison	£32,000.00
Forced Entertainment Theatre Co-operative	£49,182.00
Insomniac	£29,685.00
Monkey in Heaven	£11,000.00
Semblance	£18,217.00
TOTAL	£140,084.00
National Touring – Mime Projects	

Brewery Arts Centre	£13,000.00
Brouhaha	£9,500.00
Commotion	£14,500.00
London International Mime Festival	£73,577.00
Mime Action Group	£33,000.00
Rejects Revenge	£12,675.00
Tottering Bipeds	£19,900.00
Women's Work	£2,600.00
TOTAL	£178,752.00
National Touring – New Writing Projects	
Kneehigh Theatre Trust	£19,830.00
Quondam Arts	£12,044.00
TOTAL	£31,874.00
National Touring – Puppetry Projects	
Cornelius & Jones	£5,386.00
Doo Cot	£27,800.00
Faulty Optic, Theatre of Animation	£13,180.00
Festival of International Animated Theatre	£10,000.00
Puppet Centre Trust	£2,000.00
TOTAL	£58,366.00
National Touring – New National Touring	
Nigel Charnock	£25,376.00
Clean Break Theatre Company	£22,650.00
Dodgy Clutch Theatre Company	£16,000.00
Foursight Theatre	£28,324.00
Hijinx Theatre Co-Operative	£5,800.00
Theatre Sans Frontieres	£21,000.00
Volcano Theatre Company	£17,542.00
Wild Iris Theatre Company	£30,311.00
TOTAL	£167,003.00

Regional Black Theatre Initiative	
Black Theatre Forum	£10,000.00
Leeds Theatre Trust	£25,700.00
Leicester Theatre Trust	£10,000.00
Nottingham Theatre Trust	£20,000.00
TOTAL	£65,700.00
Small Scale Touring	
Lip Service	£10,000.00
London New Play Festival	£4,400.00
Magnificent Theatre Company	£37,900.00
Not The National Theatre	£16,000.00
Pan Project	£7,200.00
Scarlet Theatre	£20,155.00
Strathcona Theatre Company	£18,569.00
The Wrestling School	£17,130.00
Y Touring	£12,600.00
TOTAL	£143,954.00
Small Scale Venue	
BAC	£7,100.00
Blackfriars Arts Centre	£9,800.00
Brewery Arts Centre	£9,800.00
Cambridge Drama Centre	£9,800.00
Cornwall Promoters' Consortium	£10,000.00
Dorset Promoters' Consortium	£10,000.00
Dovecot Arts Centre	£9,800.00
Drill Hall Arts Centre	£7,500.00
The Green Room	£9,800.00
Havants Arts Centre Company	£7,000.00
Komedia Productions	£9,800.00
Leeds Metropolitan University	£9,700.00
Live Theatre Company	£9,800.00
Nottingham County Council	£10,000.00
Oval House Christ Church (Oxford) United Club	£7,000.00
Pegasus Theatre	£9,800.00
Southampton Community Arts Centre Company	£9,400.00
Trinity Centre	£8,100.00

Trinity Theatre and Arts Association	£9,000.00
Unity Theatre	£9,800.00
Warwickshire Community Arts	£10,000.00
Watermans Arts Centre	£7,000.00
TOTAL	£200,000.00
Theatre Writing – Bursaries	£58,500.00
Theatre Writing – Commissions or Options Awards	£107,203.00
Theatre Writing – National Prizes	£6,000.00
Theatre Writing – Resident Dramatist Attachments	£48,000.00
Theatre Writing – Theatre Translators	£14,200.00
TOTAL	£233,903.00
Unallocated	
Arts Board South West	£8,500.00
Association of Professional Theatre for Children	£5,000.00
Directors Guild of Great Britain	£5,000.00
Everyman Theatre	£2,250.00
Geese Theatre Company	£4,750.00
London Arts Board	£7,500.00
Tara Arts Group	£1,500.00
TOTAL	£34,500.00
Youth Arts	
National Association of Youth Arts	£24,000.00
National Youth Theatre of Great Britain	£20,000.00
World Student Drama Trust	£12,000.00
TOTAL	£56,000.00
THEATRE TOTAL	£27,234,148.00

2006

Total grant-in-aid: £408,678,000

Overall allocation:

Regularly funded organisations	£300,805,000.00
Grants for the Arts – individuals	£8,866,000.00
Strategic funding and activity	£22,803,000.00
Creative Partnerships	£12,373,000.00
Other restricted funds	£7,554,000.00

Theatre breakdown:

RSC and NT	£31,352,000.00
National touring companies (84)	£15,562,000.00
Regional producing theatres (64)	£44,740,000.00
Presenting theatres (27)	£2,263,000.00
Small and mid-scale regional touring companies (23)	£2,264,000.00
TOTAL	£96,181,000.00

2016

Company	Funding
NPO	
Royal National Theatre	£17,217,000.00
Royal Shakespeare Company	£15,447,000.00
Royal Exchange Theatre	£2,332,000.00
English Stage Company Ltd	£2,311,234.00
Leicester Theatre Trust Limited	£1,914,029.00
Birmingham Repertory Theatre Limited	£1,833,953.00
Young Vic Company	£1,760,143.00
Chichester Festival Theatre	£1,740,214.00
Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse	£1,649,977.00
Northern Stage Company	£1,562,496.00
Leeds Theatre Trust Limited	£1,508,104.00
Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited	£1,354,807.00
Unicorn Theatre for Children	£1,303,884.00
Sheffield Theatres	£1,279,865.00
Bristol Old Vic And Theatre Royal Trust Limited	£1,228,381.00
Theatre Royal Plymouth	£1,185,500.00

Pioneer Theatres Ltd	£1,105,506.00
Lyric Theatre Hammersmith	£1,100,000.00
The Southampton Nuffield Theatre Trust	£974,349.00
Belgrade Theatre Trust (Coventry) Limited	£942,215.00
Stoke-On-Trent and North Staffordshire Theatre Trust Limited	£932,401.00
Contact Theatre	£916,435.00
Hampstead Theatre	£874,607.00
New Wolsey Theatre	£853,028.00
Salisbury Arts Theatre Ltd	£844,289.00
Hull Truck Theatre	£790,680.00
Palace Theatre Watford Ltd	£790,571.00
Colchester Mercury Theatre Limited	£777,378.00
Northampton Theatres Trust Ltd	£766,417.00
Tricycle Theatre Company	£729,519.00
Battersea Arts Centre	£693,897.00
English Touring Theatre	£679,794.00
Headlong Theatre Ltd	£679,794.00
Almeida Theatre Company Ltd	£675,499.00
Stephen Joseph Theatre	£637,715.00
Live Theatre	£626,723.00
Octagon Theatre Trust Limited	£614,060.00
Cumbria Theatre Trust	£604,067.00
Oldham Coliseum Theatre	£604,067.00
Soho Theatre Company	£603,478.00
York Theatre Royal	£587,254.00
Polka Theatre	£570,219.00
Graeae Theatre Company	£564,399.00
Donmar Warehouse Projects Ltd	£504,619.00
University of Derby Theatre Ltd	£500,000.00
Alternative Theatre Company	£495,281.00
Oval House	£475,527.00
London International Festival of Theatre	£452,608.00
The Watermill Theatre Ltd	£450,386.00
Out of Joint	£426,352.00
Oxford Playhouse	£379,474.00
Talawa Theatre Company	£372,144.00
Hackney Empire Ltd	£368,514.00
Theatre de Complicite Education Ltd	£363,622.00
Kneehigh Theatre Trust Ltd	£354,672.00
National Centre for Circus Arts	£341,867.00

Pilot Theatre Company	£329,720.00
Paines Plough	£315,620.00
Tamasha Theatre Company Ltd	£314,465.00
Gate Theatre	£306,330.00
National Youth Theatre of Great Britain	£305,769.00
New Perspectives Theatre Company	£302,745.00
Arcola Theatre Production Company	£301,738.00
Pegasus Theatre Trust Limited	£299,973.00
Rifco Arts	£295,404.00
Oily Cart Company	£286,576.00
Havering Theatre Trust	£277,032.00
The Robert Pacitti Company Limited	£266,708.00
The Dukes Playhouse Limited	£256,190.00
Forced Entertainment Ltd	£255,394.00
Northern Broadsides	£255,287.00
Theatre Hullabaloo	£250,318.00
Cheek By Jowl Theatre Company Ltd	£245,677.00
Theatre Alibi	£241,597.00
Theatre-Rites Ltd	£240,389.00
Theatre Centre	£240,000.00
Punchdrunk	£226,304.00
Frantic Theatre Company Ltd	£221,189.00
Eastern Angles Theatre Company	£220,402.00
Gecko Theatre Ltd	£220,402.00
Stagetext	£218,773.00
Half Moon Young People's Theatre	£217,451.00
Improbable	£216,533.00
Clean Break Theatre Company	£216,195.00
Actors Touring Company	£207,773.00
Tara	£207,194.00
Travaux Sauvages Limited t/a Wildworks	£206,189.00
Travelling Light Theatre Company	£202,000.00
Fevered Sleep	£201,160.00
Fuel	£201,160.00
London International Mime Festival	£201,160.00
Nofit State Community Circus Ltd	£201,160.00
M6 Theatre Company	£199,320.00
Kali Theatre Company	£196,500.00
HighTide Festival Theatre	£191,654.00
Pentabus Arts Limited	£187,332.00
Company of Angels	£186,063.00

IOU Theatre	£185,000.00
Ockham's Razor	£181,044.00
Tutti Frutti Productions	£178,703.00
Vocaleyes	£175,810.00
Told by an Idiot Ltd	£168,214.00
Unlimited Theatre Company	£166,119.00
20 Stories High	£162,905.00
Deafinitely Theatre	£162,110.00
Quarantine	£160,928.00
Cardboard Citizens	£160,000.00
Stan's Cafe Theatre	£156,865.00
New International Encounter	£153,323.00
Eclipse Theatre Company Ltd	£151,017.00
Interplay Theatre Trust	£151,017.00
dreamthinkspeak	£150,927.00
Spare Tyre Theatre Company	£150,870.00
Youth Music Theatre UK	£150,000.00
Lawrence Batley Theatre	£148,531.00
Tiata Fahodzi Ltd	£146,500.00
Theatre Peckham	£142,924.00
Duckie	£142,492.00
Harrogate Theatre	£140,909.00
The Live Theatre Winchester Trust	£134,158.00
Kazzum Arts Project	£128,000.00
Mimbre	£125,773.00
Exeter Northcott Theatre Company Ltd	£125,000.00
Mercury Musical Developments	£124,467.00
Horse And Bamboo Theatre Company	£123,632.00
Coney Ltd	£122,828.00
Action Transport Theatre Company	£120,696.00
Clod Ensemble	£120,696.00
Extant	£119,000.00
Emergency Exit Arts	£117,924.00
Upswing	£115,667.00
Kaleider Limited	£110,000.00
Theatre Company Blah Blah Blah	£107,326.00
Perfect Pitch Musicals Ltd	£107,092.00
Theatre Bristol Ltd	£106,985.00
Academy for Contemporary Circus and Physical Theatre t/a Circomedia	£106,552.00
November Club	£100,678.00
Zendeh Productions	£100,678.00

Red Earth Theatre Limited	£100,580.00
Vital Xposure Limited	£100,580.00
Open Clasp Theatre Company	£100,000.00
Slung Low	£99,671.00
Art Asia Trust Ltd	£95,827.00
Miracle Theatre Trust Ltd	£95,000.00
New Theatre Royal Trustees (Portsmouth) Ltd	£92,952.00
MAYK Theatre Ltd	£90,000.00
Albert & Friends Instant Circus	£88,000.00
Sixth Sense Theatre Company	£87,937.00
Tangle Limited	£85,000.00
Project Phakama UK	£83,101.00
The Ashton Group Theatre	£80,494.00
Collective Encounters	£80,015.00
Acta Community Theatre Ltd	£80,000.00
North Devon Theatres Trust	£77,446.00
Blind Summit Education	£75,435.00
Chol Theatre	£75,000.00
The Bike Shed Theatre Ltd	£75,000.00
Collar & Tie Limited	£71,383.00
Greentop Community Circus Centre	£70,475.00
Camden People's Theatre	£70,000.00
Talking Birds Theatre Company Limited	£67,228.00
Redbridge Drama Centre	£65,000.00
Lawnmowers	£60,998.00
Tobacco Factory Arts Trust	£60,348.00
National Student Drama Festival	£56,543.00
Tipp Centre	£54,000.00
Theatre In The Mill	£40,271.00
Albatross Arts Project	£40,232.00
TOTAL	£99,606,736.00
Grants for the Arts - Theatre	£18,229,659.00
THEATRE TOTAL	£117,836,395.00

Appendix B

Theatre criticism sample

Below are details of all the productions reviewed in the sample of theatre criticism that I used as the basis of my analysis in Chapter Four. Having isolated the selection of theatres listed below, I examined reviews of all new shows in those venues in the years 2007 and 2012. The reviews I discuss in the chapter are sourced from *Theatre Record* and various online publications (see Bibliography).

Theatres

Battersea Arts Centre (London)
Royal Court Theatre (London)
National Theatre (London)
Birmingham Repertory Theatre
Lyric Hammersmith (London)
Liverpool Everyman Theatre
Soho Theatre (London)
Plymouth Theatre Royal/Drum
Royal Exchange Theatre (Manchester)

Productions – 2007

Low Life, Battersea Arts Centre
Gone Too Far!, Royal Court
The Reporter, National Theatre
The Eleventh Capital, Royal Court
The End of Everything Ever, Battersea Arts Centre
Nine Years, Battersea Arts Centre
Whiter Than Snow, Birmingham Rep
Bulletproof Soul, Birmingham Rep
Mr Sole Abode, Lyric Hammersmith
Leaves, Royal Court
Saints and Superheroes, Battersea Arts Centre
The Electric Hills, Liverpool Everyman
Earfull, Battersea Arts Centre
Landscape with Weapon, National Theatre
Unplanned, Battersea Arts Centre
That Face, Royal Court
Leaves of Glass, Soho Theatre
My Child, Royal Court
A Matter of Life and Death, National Theatre
Alaska, Royal Court

Speed Death of the Radiant Child, Plymouth Drum
The Christ of Coldharbour Lane, Soho Theatre
The May Queen, Liverpool Everyman
The Five Wives of Maurice Pinder, National Theatre
Longwave, Lyric Hammersmith
Baghdad Wedding, Soho Theatre
Pretend You Have Big Buildings, Royal Exchange
Monster, Royal Exchange
Playing God, Soho Theatre
Moonwalking in Chinatown, Soho Theatre
Stockholm, Plymouth Drum
Pure Gold, Soho Theatre
The Masque of the Red Death, Battersea Arts Centre
Intemperance, Liverpool Everyman
Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, Battersea Arts Centre
Water, Lyric Hammersmith
Joe Guy, Soho Theatre
Last Easter, Birmingham Rep
Magic War, Soho Theatre
Casanova, Lyric Hammersmith
The Human Computer, Battersea Arts Centre
God in Ruins, Soho Theatre

Productions – 2012

Lovesong, Lyric Hammersmith
Shallow Slumber, Soho Theatre
Travelling Light, National Theatre
Constellations, Royal Court
The Gatekeeper, Royal Exchange
What I Heard About the World, Soho Theatre
In Basildon, Royal Court
Goodbye to All That, Royal Court
Mustafa, Soho Theatre
We Hope That You're Happy (Why Would We Lie?), Battersea Arts Centre
Mayday Mayday, Battersea Arts Centre
Horse Piss for Blood, Plymouth Drum
Can We Talk About This?, National Theatre
7 Day Drunk, Soho Theatre
Vera Vera Vera, Royal Court
Made Up, Soho Theatre
Berlin Love Tour, Birmingham Rep
Black T-shirt Collection, National Theatre
Make Better Please, Battersea Arts Centre
The Girl with the Iron Claws, Soho Theatre
Belong, Royal Court
Three Kingdoms, Lyric Hammersmith

Chair, Lyric Hammersmith
Touched… Like a Virgin, Soho Theatre
Boys, Soho Theatre
Egusi Soup, Soho Theatre
The Witness, Royal Court
The Last of the Haussmans, NT
Utopia, Soho Theatre
Birthday, Royal Court
Get Stuff Break Free, National Theatre
The Coming Storm, Battersea Arts Centre
The Match Box, Liverpool Playhouse
You'll See (Me Sailing in Antarctica), National Theatre
Ten Billion, Royal Court
John Peel's Shed, Soho Theatre
Ark-ive, National Theatre
Blink, Soho Theatre
Brand New Ancients, Battersea Arts Centre
Motor Vehicle Sundown, Battersea Arts Centre
Morning, Lyric Hammersmith
Love and Information, Royal Court
Black Roses: The Killing of Sophie Lancaster, Royal Exchange
Ding Dong the Wicked, Royal Court
This House, National Theatre
The Astronaut's Chair, Plymouth Drum
The River, Royal Court
NSFW, Royal Court
The Kingdom, Soho Theatre
People, National Theatre
The Effect, National Theatre
Held, Liverpool Playhouse
Arab Nights, Soho Theatre
Hero, Royal Court
In the Republic of Happiness, Royal Court
Hymn/Cocktail Sticks, National Theatre

Appendix C

Selected openings of new work in 2017

Below is the sample of productions used to provide a limited overview of the contemporary English theatre ecology at the start of Chapter Five. The sample focuses on what I would define as new work, broadly excluding revivals, adaptations, musicals and operas, although the often inter-disciplinary, genre-crossing nature of contemporary theatre makes such distinctions difficult to maintain. The authors of the 2013 and 2014 repertoire reports encountered similar difficulties of categorisation, settling on the label 'straight theatre' to describe the theatre work they were most interested in analysing (BTC, UKTheatre and SOLT; BTC et al.). Although this terminology is not perfect, the range of work it designates in those two reports aligns closely with the criteria I have used to collate the below sample of theatre-making.

Sources: Arts Council England website and theatre websites/brochures.

National Theatre (Arts Council NPO funding: £17,217,000 pa)

Us/Them, Dorfman Theatre, 16 January – 18 February
Dublin Oldschool, Dorfman Theatre, 24 – 31 January
Ugly Lies the Bone, Lyttelton Theatre, 22 February – 6 June
My Country: A Work in Progress, Dorfman Theatre, 28 February – 22 March
Lost Without Words, Dorfman Theatre, 4 – 18 March
Consent, Dorfman Theatre, 28 March – 17 May
Common, Olivier Theatre, 30 May – 5 August
Barber Shop Chronicles, Dorfman Theatre, 30 May – 8 July
Mosquitoes, Dorfman Theatre, 18 July – 28 September
The Majority, Dorfman Theatre, 11 – 28 August
Beginning, Dorfman Theatre 5 October – 14 November

Royal Exchange Theatre (Arts Council NPO funding: £2,332,000 pa)

Going Viral, Studio, 6 – 7 January
Cathy, Studio, 12 – 14 January
O, Studio, 21 January
Bin Laden: The One Man Show, Studio, 9 February
Growing Pains, Studio, 10 – 11 March
Cock and Bull, Studio, 16 – 18 Mach
Daniel, Studio, 22 March
The People Are Singing, Studio, 6 – 8 April
How My Light is Spent, Studio, 24 April – 13 May
Cartoonopolis, Studio, 16 – 17 May
Margate/Dreamland, Studio, 2 – 3 June
Bears, Studio, 14 – 18 June
What if I Told You?, Studio, 19 – 20 June
Fatherland, Theatre, 1 – 22 July
Co:LAB Festival, Studio and Great Hall, 21 – 23 July
Two Man Show, Studio, 23 September
Bin Laden: The One Man Show, Studio, 5 – 7 September
Cosmic Scallies, Studio, 27 September – 14 October
Parliament Square, Theatre, 18 – 28 October

Royal Court Theatre (Arts Council NPO funding: £2,311,234 pa)

Wish List, Theatre Upstairs, 10 January – 11 February
Escaped Alone, Theatre Downstairs, 25 January – 11 February
a profoundly affectionate, passionate devotion to someone (-noun),
Theatre Upstairs, 28 February – 1 April
The Kid Stays in the Picture, Theatre Downstairs, 11 March – 8 April
Nuclear War, Theatre Upstairs, 19 April – 6 May
Lights Out, The Site, 17 – 19 May
The Ferryman, Theatre Downstairs, 24 April – 20 May
Manwatching, Theatre Upstairs, 10 – 20 May
It's All Made Up, The Site, 24 – 26 May
B. S., The Site, 31 May – 2 June
The Space Between, The Site, 8 – 10 June
The Unknown, The Site, 8 – 10 June

Killology, Theatre Upstairs, 25 May – 24 June
Anatomy of a Suicide, Theatre Downstairs, 3 June – 8 July
Bodies, Theatre Upstairs, 5 July – 12 August
The Duke, Theatre Upstairs, 6 – 15 September
Me & Robin Hood, Theatre Upstairs, 4 – 16 September
B, Theatre Downstairs 28 September – 21 October
Victory Condition, Theatre Downstairs, 5 – 21 October
Minefield, Theatre Downstairs, 2 – 11 November
Bad Roads, Theatre Upstairs, 15 November – 23 December
Goats, Theatre Downstairs, 24 November – 30 December

Birmingham Repertory Theatre (Arts Council NPO funding: £1,833,953 pa)

Backstage in Biscuit Land, The Door, 17 – 21 January
LOVE, Studio, 24 February – 11 March
Eurohouse, The Door, 26 – 28 January
Wrecking Ball, The Door, 2 – 4 February
Stories To Tell In The Middle of the Night, The Door, 9 – 18 February
All The Little Lights, The Door, 22 – 28 February
Pink Mist, Studio, 23 – 25 March
Bucket List, The Door, 17 – 20 April
An Evening With An Immigrant, 22 April
Hitchhiker's Guide to the Family, 24 April
With A Little Bit Of Luck, The Door, 24 – 27 April
Between the Two, The Door, 3 – 4 May
Ten Storey Love Song, The Door, 5 – 6 May
I Want Love, The Door 9 – 10 May
Am I Dead Yet?, 11 – 13 May
My Country: A Work in Progress, Studio, 16 – 20 May
Tank, The Door, 23 – 25 May
Joan, The Door, 26 – 27 May
Am I Dead Yet?, The Door, 11 – 13 May
Stadium, Theatre, 9 – 17 June
Free Admission, The Door, 15 – 17 June
The Whip Hand, The Door, 5 – 16 September
A Dangerous Woman, The Door, 21 – 23 September
As a Tiger in the Jungle, Studio, 22 – 23 September
I Knew You, The Door, 29 September – 7 October
Freeman, The Door, 9 – 11 October

Notorious, Studio, 20 – 21 October
My Beautiful Black Dog, The Door, 20 October
Hearing Things, The Door, 21 October
Delightful, The Door, 26 – 28 October
Baby Daddy, 2 – 4 November
(sorry), The Door, 9 – 11 November
And The Rest of Me Floats, The Door, 13 – 14 November

Sheffield Theatres (Arts Council NPO funding: £1,729,865 pa)

Cathy, Studio, 10 – 11 January
O No!, Studio, 9 February
The Red Shed, Studio, 10 – 11 February
Letters to Windsor House, Studio, 24 February
Heads Up, Studio, 16 March
What We Wished For, Crucible, 19 – 22 July
Of Kith and Kin, Studio, 15 September – 7 October
Living with the Lights On, Studio, 6 – 7 November
REMOTE, Studio, 9 November
The Claim, Studio, 22 – 23 November
Team Viking, Studio, 24 November
Instructions for Border Crossing, Studio, 30 November

Plymouth Theatre Royal (Arts Council NPO funding: £1,185,500 pa)

Spillikin, The Drum, 31 January – 4 February
Be Brave and Leave for the Unknown, The Drum, 7 – 11 February
Tank, The Drum, 21 – 25 February
Infinity Pool, The Drum, 28 February – 4 March
Mixed Grill, The Lab, 6 – 7 March
The Here and This and Now, The Drum, 9 – 25 March
The Far Side of the Moon, The Lyric, 16 – 18 March
Wail, The Drum, 28 March – 1 April
The Star Seekers, The Drum, 4 – 8 April
All the Little Lights, The Drum, 18 – 22 April
National Theatre Connections Festival, The Drum, 25 – 29 April
Golem, The Drum, 10 – 13 May

Ready or Not, The Drum, 16 – 20 May

A Brimful of Asha, The Drum, 23 – 27 May

Lies, The Drum, 7 – 24 June

Whey Down South, The Lab, 12 – 15 July

Bin Laden: The One Man Show, The Lab, 20 – 22 July

Groomed, The Lab, 24 – 26 July

The Bearpit, The Lab, 27 – 29 July

Fix, The Drum, 5 – 9 September

Derailed, The Drum, 12 – 16 September

Frogman, The Drum, 19 – 23 September

Me & Robin Hood, The Drum, 26 September – 7 October

Girls, The Drum, 10 – 14 October

Two Man Show, The Drum, 17 – 21 October

The Secret Keeper, The Drum, 31 October – 4 November

A Reason to Talk, The Drum, 16 – 25 November

Battersea Arts Centre (Arts Council NPO funding: £693,897 pa)

Control, 31 January – 4 February

I Told my Mum I was Going on an R.E. Trip…, 9 – 11 February

Bucket List, 13 February – 4 March

Ground Control, 17 February

Fire in the Machine, 22 February – 4 March

Denmarked, 22 February – 11 March

Live Before You Die, 23 – 25 February

Show Me The Money, 1 – 2 March

The Red Shed, 6 – 11 March

E15, 13 March – 1 April

Tank, 13 March – 1 April

Castle Rock, 15 March

Putting The Band Back Together, 16 – 17 March

Heads Up, 20 March – 1 April

Dark Corners, 5 – 22 April

Boat, 5 – 8 April

Key Change, 10 – 29 April

The Talk, 12 – 13 April

Salvation: A Shamanic Striptease, 13 – 15 April

Bubble Shmeisis, 20 – 21 April

Ross & Rachel, 25 April – 13 May

Derailed, 30 – 31 May
Light, 31 May – 17 June
Infinity Pool, 7 – 10 June
Rituals for Change, 14 – 24 June
Dirty Work (The Late Shift), 27 June – 1 July
Extravaganza Macabre, 4 – 29 July
Often Onstage, 6 – 8 July
Give Me Your Skin, 14 – 17 July
Doppeldänger, 9 – 14 October
Rendezvous In Bratislava, 12 – 14 October
People of the Eye, 17 – 19 October
Sleeping Trees at the Movies, 17 – 21 October
Ugly Chief, 31 October – 18 November

Soho Theatre (Arts Council NPO funding: £603,478 pa)

Only Bones, 23 January – 4 February
Police Cops, 9 – 11 February
Two Man Show, 20 February – 4 March
Made in India, 8 – 25 March
Don't Wake the Damp, 20 – 25 March
The Boy Who Kicked Pigs, 21 – 24 March
He Had Hairy Hands, 22 – 25 March
Triple Threat, 28 March – 22 April
NT Connections, 29 March – 1 April
Expensive Shit, 4 – 22 April
All The Things I Lied About, 18 April – 6 May
Cuncrete, 18 – 22 April
The Lounge, 25 April – 20 May
In Tents and Purposes, 9 – 10 May
Letters to Windsor House, 11 – 13 May
BLUSH, 16 May – 3 June
Free Admission, 9 June – 1 July
Groomed, 13 June – 1 July
The Scar Test, 5 – 22 July
Touch, 6 July – 26 August
Finding Nana, 24 – 25 July
Scorch, 1 – 12 August
Foreign Body, 16 – 18 August
How to Die of a Broken Heart, 25 – 26 August

How (Not) to Live in Suburbia, 29 August – 2 September
Half Breed, 11 – 30 September
Twist, 2 – 4 October
The End of Hope, 10 October – 11 November
Hear Me Raw, 17 – 21 October
Rattle Snake, 24 – 28 October
Am I Dead Yet?, 7 – 18 November
The Butch Monologues, 21 – 25 November
Wild Bore, 21 November – 16 December
Night's End, 27 November – 2 December

Oxford Playhouse (Arts Council NPO funding: £379,474 pa)

Boxed In, Studio, 5 January
I Stop to Understand, 7 January
To She or Not to She, 9 January
Heartbeats & Algorithms, 10 – 11 January
Dancing Bear, Dancing Bear, 14 January
Black is the Color of My Voice, 21 January
600 People, 10 February
Pink Mist, 14 – 18 February
Silver Lining, 21 – 25 February
Every You Every Me, Studio, 17 – 18 March
The Unbuilt Room, 20 – 22 March
All the Little Lights, Studio, 29 – 30 March
In Tents and Purposes, Studio, 31 March
Bright Sparks, Studio, 1 April
Heads Up, Studio, 3 April
Letters to Myself, Studio, 4 April
Hidden, Studio, 5 – 6 April
From Shore to Shore, offsite, 23 – 24 May
Out of This World, 6 – 7 June
Golem, 13 – 17 June
Between the Two, Studio, 19 – 20 June

Offbeat Festival 23 June – 2 July:
What If the Planes Fall Out of the Sky?
Orange Juice
#TORYCORE

ROOM
Though Lovers Be Lost
Mr Mineshaft
Cow
Hervé
Unconditional
Collector of Tears
The Class Project
Sometimes I Smile Politely
Richard Carpenter's Close To You
A Hundred Different Words for Love
Finding Mr Paramour
She's a Good Boy
Frank and Leni
Signs
Mine
Just a Few Words
Planet Earth III
The Deep
Ballistic
Mercutio and Tybalt
Confessions of a Sex Addict
We Are Ian
I'm the Hero of This Story
Wrecked
The Fourth Dog
Searching Shadows
What We Leave Behind
Hip
The Ocean Queen
The Submission
I'm Standing Next to You
Four Corners
6 Women
Todd & God
Ladylike

White Feather Boxer, 7 – 8 September
The Wipers Times, 18 – 23 September
Remote, 25 September

Things I Know to be True, 27 – 30 September
Instructions for Border Crossing, 28 – 30 September
How to Die of a Broken Heart, 3 October
People, Places & Things, 11 – 14 October
Frogman, 4 – 6 October

Dukes Playhouse (Arts Council NPO funding: £256,190 pa)

Made in India, 2 – 4 March
Sailing Away, 3 April
We Could Be Heroes, 17 – 18 May
The Suitcase, 27 – 29 September
Blackout: Tales from Storm Desmond, 13 October – 3 November
How to Win Against History, 19 October
Not About Heroes, 24 – 25 October

Harrogate Theatre (Arts Council NPO funding: £140,090 pa)

Butterfly, 15 February
The Eulogy of Toby Peach, 16 February
Getting Better Slowly, 17 February
A Place Called Happiness, 18 February
Narvik, 14 – 18 March
Offside, 24 – 25 March
Spring Reign, 12 – 13 May
Life By The Throat, 19 – 20 May
Hopeless Romantics, 23 – 27 May
Scary Shit, 3 June
What If I Told You, 1 June
Elephant & Castle, 7 June
Something Terrible Might Happen, 8 June
Confabulation, 9 June
Declaration, 10 June
Golem, 21 – 14 June
Magic Circle, 25 – 28 July
Marching on Embers, 29 – 30 September
Mobile, 19 – 22 October

All In, 25 October
Seaside Terror, 26 – 28 October
The Book of Darkness & Light, 16 – 17 December

Bike Shed Theatre (Arts Council NPO funding: £75,000 pa)

From Devon With Love Festival, 17 – 28 January
Sunked, 16 – 17 July
Monster, 20 July
The Class Project, 26 – 30 September
Fix, 12 – 21 September
Labels, 22 – 23 September
Out, 9 October
All the Things I Lied About, 3 – 7 October
Happiness Ltd, 10 – 21 October
The Star Seekers, 23 – 28 October
Bin Laden: The One Man Show, 24 – 28 October
Where Do All the Dead Pigeons Go?, 31 October – 4 November
To Those Born Later, 7 – 8 November
The Hartlepool Monkey, 7 – 8 November
Fiction, 7 – 10 November
Portrait, 9 – 10 November
An Evening with an Immigrant, 11 November
Twenty Something, 14 – 18 November
The Claim, 28 November – 2 December

Camden People's Theatre (Arts Council NPO funding: £70,000 pa)

Morale is High (Since We Gave Up Hope), 25 – 26 January
5 Encounters on a Site Called Craigslist, 25 – 26 January
Dancing Bear, Dancing Bear, 27 – 28 January
Alphabet, 27 – 28 January
Worst. Date. Ever., 14 February
No Filter, 15 February
September 11th, 15 – 17 February
Boris & Sergey, 16 – 17 February
The Castle Builder, 17 February

Celebrity Bound, 29 – 30 March

Free Lunch with the Stenchwench, 30 March – 1 April

Kitchener + Waterloo, 31 March – 1 April

What If I Told You?, 4 – 5 April

The Class Project, 6 – 8 April

Am I Pretty?, 6 – 8 April

Word, 11 – 15 April

20B, 11 – 12 April

Kill Climate Deniers, 13 – 15 April

Flag, 18 – 19 April

The Gran Show, 18 – 19 April

Faslane, 20 – 22 April

Elephant & Castle, 20 – 22 April

Phroot Sahlad, 25 April

Gimme, Gimme, Gimme More: Love!, 25 April

Bridle, 26 April

Oh Yes Oh No, 26 April – 11 May

Spill: A Verbatim Show About Sex, 27 – 29 April

Your Sexts Are Shit: Older Better Letters, 4 May

Coming Clean: Life As a Naked House Cleaner, 4 – 6 May

Pecs: Let's Talk About Sex, 5 May

What Tammy Needs to Know About Getting Old and Having Sex, 6 May

Sex and Puppets, 7 May

The Conversation, 9 May

Snowballing, 10 –11 May

Come With Me, 12 May

Walk Pause Walk, 12 – 14 May

Hard C*ck, 13 May

Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer, 13 – 14 May

Kings Cross (Remix), 16 – 27 May

Macbetti, 16 – 20 May

Academy for Women, 21 May

Digs, 23 – 24 May

Binary Optional, 25 – 26 May

This Really is Too Much, 27 – 28 May

Dennis of Penge, 28 May

Observation Without Comedy, 30 May

Divided, 31 May – 2 June

7 Elle(s), 10 June

Moonhead & The Music Machine, 16 June

The Iconoclasts, 18 – 19 June

'Appily Ever After, 14 – 15 July

Salvation: Shamanic Striptease, 12 September

Bullish, 12 – 30 September

Pecs: The Gender Agenda, 15 September

The Fems, 16 September

Drag Me to Love, 19 September

Man Up!, 19 September

Non-Binary Electro House, 21 September

Shorty, 22 September

Journey from Man to Woman, 23 September

Masculine Expressions of My Creative Prowess, 26 September

If Britney Could Get Through 2007 We Can Get Through This, 26 September

Oi, Cissy!, 29 September

As We Like It, 30 September

Who Murked Basquiat, 3 October

DollyWould, 3 – 5 October

An Essay on Reality II, 4 – 5 October

Just Don't Do It, 6 – 7 October

Queens of Sheba, 10 – 14 October

Anyone's Guess How We Got Here, 10 – 28 October

Incoming/Exodus, 17 – 21 October

I'll Have What She's Having, 24 – 26 October

The Bee Project, 31 October – 1 November

Fog Everywhere, 31 October – 11 November

FFS!!, 3 – 5 November

Floods, 9 – 11 November

Superposition, 14 – 15 November

Tanja, 15 – 18 November

Stuntman, 16 – 17 November

It's Okay, I'm Dealing With It, 18 – 19 November

Lite, 19 November

SISU, 28 November

There But for the Grace of God (Go I), 5 – 9 December

[Working Title], 6 – 7 December

The Bearpit, 8 – 9 December

Man on the Moon, 12 – 13 December

Anne Meets Jeffrey, 13 – 14 December

We've Got Each Other, 14 – 16 December
Mr Mineshaft, 15 – 16 December
The Book of Darkness & Light, 19 – 20 December

Tobacco Factory Theatres (Arts Council NPO funding: £60,348 pa)

The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak, 25 – 28 January
The Castle Builder, 21 – 25 February
We Are Ian, 2 – 4 March
Eat the Poor, 5 March
The Road to Huntsville, 14 – 17 March
Letters to Windsor House, 21 – 25 March
Posthumous Works, 11 – 14 April
The Marked, 11 – 13 May
A Brimful of Asha, 16 – 20 May
Sirens, 1 – 3 June
While We're Here, 9 – 10 June
Infinity Pool, 14 – 17 June
Eurohouse, 14 – 17 June
Translunar Paradise, 4 – 8 July
Goldilock, Stock & Three Smoking Bears, 20 – 28 July
Bristol Festival of Puppetry, 1 – 10 September
Team Viking, 11 September
Heather, 13 – 16 September
Two Man Show, 13 – 16 September
Instructions for Border Crossing, 17 September
Living With the Lights On, 18 – 22 September
The Truman Capote Talk Show, 24 – 26 September
How to Win Against History, 2 – 11 November
Up Down Man, 8 – 18 November

Theatre In The Mill (Arts Council NPO funding: £40,271)

Night Light, 27 – 28 January
The Class Project, 3 February
SURPRISE!, 25 February
Prison Game, 2 March
Atlantis, 18 March
Homeless in Homeland, 7 April

Butterfly, 26 April
Kicked in the Sh*tter, 6 May
What If I Told You, 8 June
The Crows Plucked Your Sinews, 1 July
An Evening with an Immigrant, 8 July
Free to Stay, 13 October
The Class Project, 27 – 28 October
TANJA, 10 November
Bussing Out, 25 November