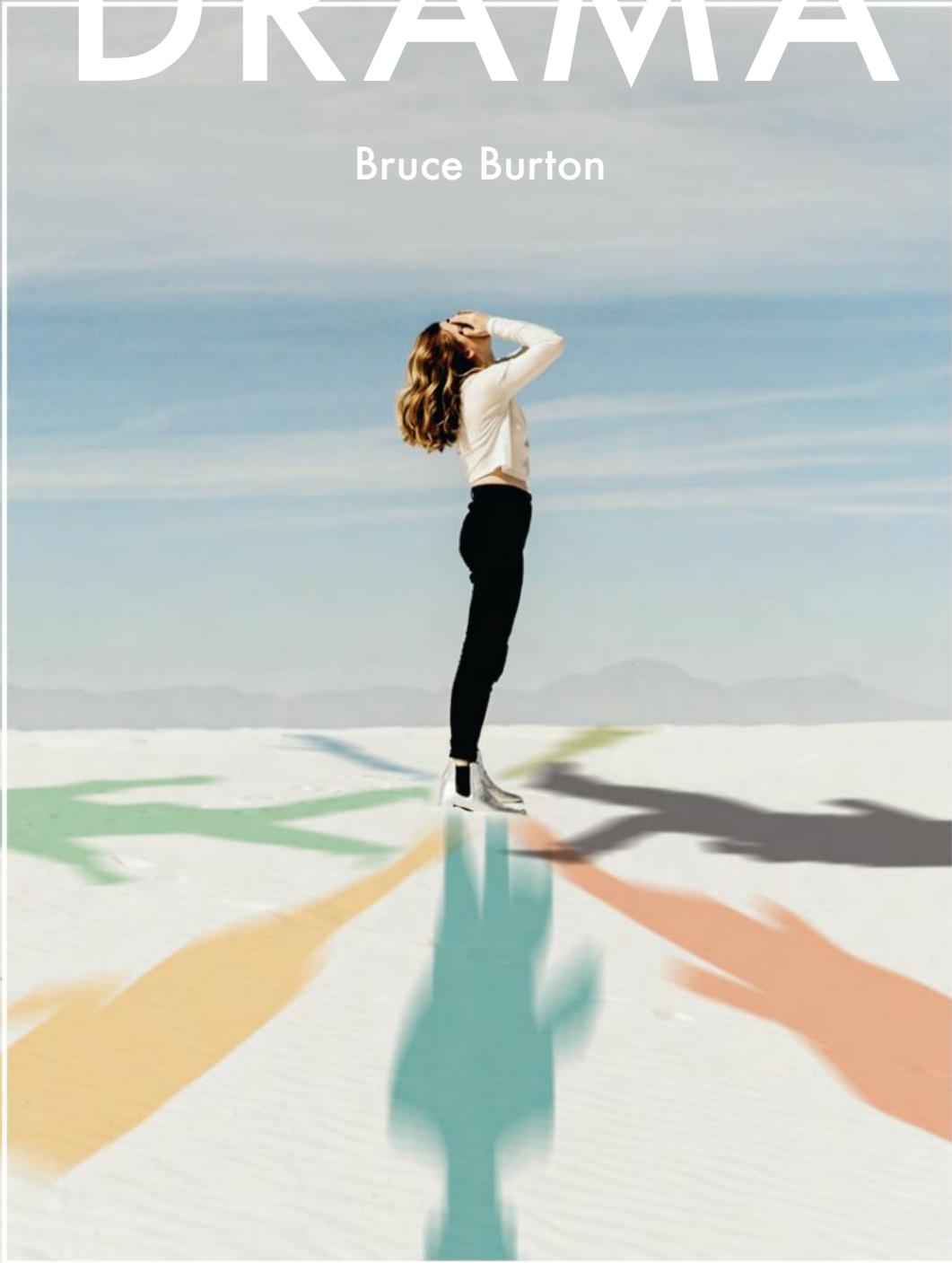


LIVING DRAMA

Bruce Burton



5TH EDITION





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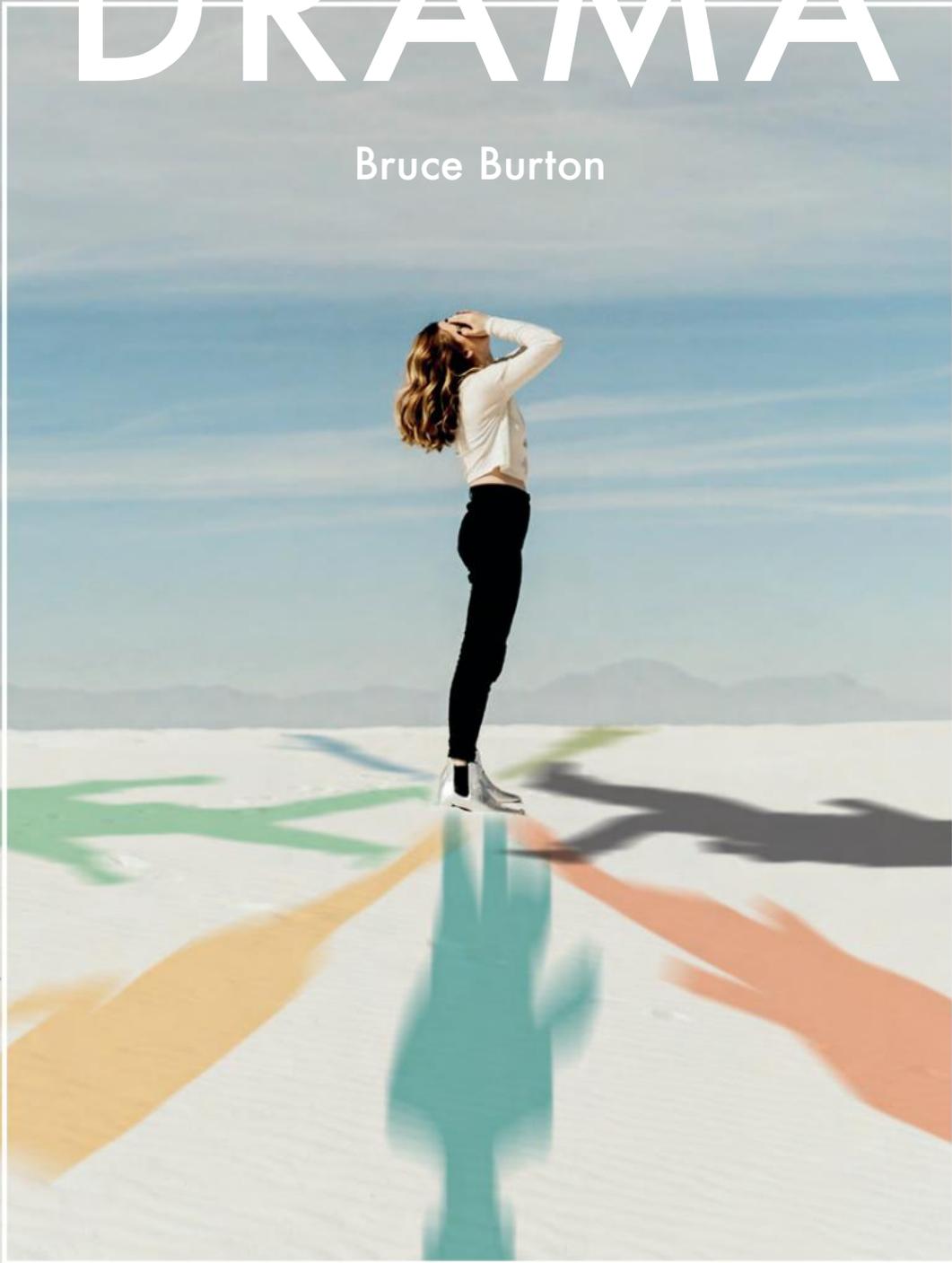
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LIVING DRAMA

Bruce Burton



5TH EDITION

Living Drama
5th Edition
Professor Bruce Burton
ISBN 9780170419987

Senior publisher: Rachel Ford
Project editor: Kathryn Coulehan
Editor: Carly Slater
Proofreader: Julie Wicks
Indexer: Max McMaster
Cover design: Emilie Pfitzner
Text design: Jenki
Cover image: Averie Woodard on Unsplash
Permissions researcher: Liz McShane
Production controller: Christine Fotis
Typesetter: Q2A Media

Any URLs contained in this publication were checked for currency during the production process. Note, however, that the publisher cannot vouch for the ongoing currency of URLs.

Acknowledgements

The publisher would like to credit and acknowledge the following sources for photographs:

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia.

Cengage Learning Australia

Level 7, 80 Dorcas Street
South Melbourne, Victoria Australia 3205

Cengage Learning New Zealand

Unit 4B Rosedale Office Park
331 Rosedale Road, Albany, North Shore 0632, NZ

For learning solutions, visit cengage.com.au

Printed in China by China Translation & Printing Services.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 22 21 20 19 18



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INTRODUCTION

TO THE STUDENT

Drama is an art form that is directly concerned with living; with the way we lead our lives. Through Drama we explore the way human beings think, feel and communicate, learning to understand others and ourselves much more fully.

As a learning experience, Drama is unique. Most of what you learn about the world you live in comes to you second hand, from books, television, film, newspapers, the internet and what other people tell you. Drama is first-hand experience of a special kind. Simply by the use of your imagination and your skills in enactment, you can become different people in different situations, sharing a limitless range of experiences. Drama allows you to take on the role of another person in an imagined situation, so that you perceive and experience the world through different eyes.

Each time you engage in the imaginative world of Drama, you enhance your own sense of self and your understanding of the nature of humanity. This happens equally with characters and situations you create yourself, and when you work with texts from the vast treasure house of the theatre.

For this process of learning to work effectively, you need to acquire all the skills of enactment that are part of the art form of theatre.

TO THE TEACHER

Living Drama has been the standard senior Drama and Theatre Studies text for the past three decades throughout Australia and New Zealand. As with many of the art forms, there has been significant change to the practice of Drama and Theatre during that time, both in the industry and in curricula.

Living Drama 5e (fifth edition) is written to provide a complete Drama and Theatre Studies course for senior secondary students. It is not intended to be prescriptive, nor is it intended to be taught from cover to cover. Given the range of courses available to students and teachers, the book has been written to provide a broad yet deep approach to the core topics and ideals in Drama and Theatre practice. *Living Drama* provides your students with a complete foundation for their senior studies in the unique and complex world of Drama.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this edition of *Living Drama* to my family with all of my love – my wife Andrea and my sons Owen and Heath.

Bruce Burton

The publishers and Bruce Burton would like to thank Wesley Enoch and David Milroy for their contributions to this book. Our appreciation also goes to the many teachers throughout Australia who have contributed to *Living Drama 5e*, with special thanks to Cindy Sykes, Emma Hill, Julie Boyle and Meg Upton.

STUDYING DRAMA AND THEATRE WITH *LIVING DRAMA* 5E



SECTION

1

CHARACTERISATION

- Creating a character
- Representing a character
- Contemporary approaches to characterisation
- New directions in characterisation



SECTION

2

STAGECRAFT AND STAGING

- Stage, costume, lighting and sound design
- Staging a performance
- Staging performance texts



SECTION

3

GROUP AND SOLO PERFORMANCE

Improvising a group performance

Contemporary styles of group performance

Creating a solo performance



SECTION

4

MAJOR TRADITIONS AND HERITAGE STYLES OF THEATRE

The beginnings of Western theatre

Theatre comes of age



SECTION

5

THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN THEATRE

Stanislavski to magical realism

Surrealism, cruelty and the absurd

Expressionism, Brecht and Boal

Theatre of transformation

The theatre of Asia

Theatre in the 21st century



SECTION

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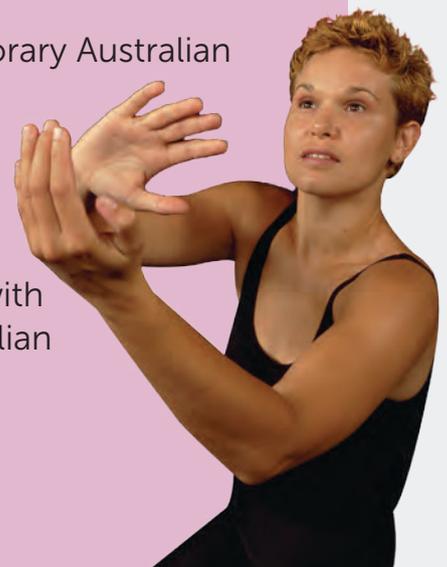
AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

The evolution of Australian theatre

Contemporary Australian theatre

Australian Aboriginal theatre

Working with key Australian scripts



LIVING DRAMA 5E

STUDENT BOOK

Times have changed since *Living Drama* was first published in 1981. The way students and teachers learn and engage with Drama and Theatre has been shaped by the influences of new and established theatre practitioners and theorists. A deepening of the ties with the Asia Pacific and, in particular, Indigenous Australian theatre has developed new traditions and styles of theatre as it has moved into the 21st century. In the last three decades, Australian audiences have cried out to see Australian stories and hear Australian voices on the stage. *Living Drama 5e* (fifth edition) provides students with the opportunity to learn about key practitioners and performance styles, and to engage with key texts from the 1940s through to the first two decades of the 21st century. Theatre worldwide has experienced extraordinary developments in the past 30 years, and the evolution of theatre internationally is explored throughout the book.

Working through *Living Drama 5e*, students will engage with the important foundation skills and knowledge they need for characterisation (Section 1), stagecraft and staging (Section 2), group and solo performance (Section 3), major theatre traditions and heritage styles of theatre (Section 4), the evolution of modern theatre (Section 5) and Australian theatre (Section 6).

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts ...

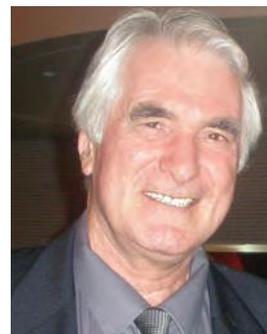
As You Like It, Act II Scene VII, William Shakespeare

Living Drama 5e builds on the strengths of the last four editions, maintaining the same quality and depth of material, but extending it to include:

- industry case studies
- additional script extracts from a broad range of sources including contemporary Australian and Indigenous Australian plays
- workshop activities for every unit in the text to help students engage with the text experientially
- a comprehensive list of suggested texts included at the end of the book for students and teachers to reference as they engage in the study of Drama and Theatre.

BRUCE BURTON

Bruce Burton is one of Australia's best-known Drama and Theatre Study's authors. He has brought to *Living Drama 5e* an extensive knowledge of Drama and Theatre practice from Ancient Greek theatre through to contemporary Indigenous Australian theatre, a deep understanding of the key elements of drama, and a wealth of experience in the fundamental techniques of acting and creating theatre. He has taught Senior Drama in schools in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and London.



Bruce has directed many theatre productions and been responsible for creating higher education drama courses in six universities. He has won three national university awards, including the Australian Award for University Teaching Excellence in the Humanities and the Arts. He is currently Professor Emeritus at Griffith University in Brisbane.

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- **Scaffold**
- **Graphic organisers**
- **Weblinks**

SECTION 1

Characterisation

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INTRODUCTION

At the core of all Drama is the action of a person taking on a role – becoming someone else – and then acting as if they were that character. It was Jerzy Grotowski, one of the most influential theatre directors of the 20th century, who said that all we need for theatre is a face-to-face encounter between a living actor and a live audience. Grotowski knew that it is the actor in character who makes theatre happen; later in this section we will explore his special system for training actors.

Simply stepping into a role and pretending to be someone else is easy enough, and you will have taken different roles frequently in your earlier Drama studies. Sometimes this will just have involved role-taking: performing a few simple actions without really becoming someone different; or role-play: speaking and behaving in a certain way to help develop the drama – perhaps as a doctor, a police officer



or an angry customer. It is much more difficult and complex to actually create a character and function as though the person is real. To bring a character to life for an audience, as the best professional stage and screen actors do, the task is even harder. If the character is to be interesting and credible, and able to interact believably with other characters in the drama, then an actor must appear to become the person they are portraying. This requires speaking, moving, thinking and feeling as they would. At the same time, an actor must be completely in control of the character, consciously applying a range of expressive techniques to their performance and effectively interpreting the text for the audience. Stanislavski and Grotowski gave actors powerful and complete systems for creating characters.

Although realism is still the dominant style of theatre and television acting around the world, a number of other non-naturalistic styles of performance have emerged during the last century, including symbolic theatre, expressionism, surrealism, absurd and multidisciplinary performance. These new styles of theatre are concerned with showing onstage the experiences, thoughts and emotions of human beings, not as they occur in everyday life, but as they occur in our imaginations, dreams and in fictional stories. Actors in these dramas are often required to take on non-human roles such as animals or robots, to act only physically with no dialogue and to interact with staging objects, film projections, recorded sound and extraordinary lighting effects. Different approaches to the performance of a character and new ways of acting have emerged to perform plays written in these styles, and in Chapter 4, a number of ways of representing non-naturalistic characters to an audience are explored.

CHAPTER

1

CREATING A CHARACTER

At the heart of all drama – in the classroom, on stage, on television and on film – are the characters portrayed by the actors. Some of the most powerful drama takes place when we forget that these characters are fictional and we identify with them as human beings and become engaged with their stories in the play or film we are watching. In turn, when we are working on a performance ourselves, we want the roles we play to be as intense and believable as possible.

Constantin Stanislavski's system for training actors is still the most complete and effective structure we have for learning how to create characters. Jerzy Grotowski's work attempted to create extraordinary actors capable of achieving self-knowledge through intense training and dedication.

1.1 CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI'S SYSTEM

Of the major innovators who have influenced the development of drama in the last 100 years, none has been more significant than Constantin Stanislavski. As an actor and more importantly as a director, he transformed the whole nature of theatre as well as having a profound and lasting effect on film and television.

Although he died more than 70 years ago, the style of realistic theatre that Stanislavski developed and popularised is still the dominant performance style on stage and screen throughout the world. The actor training he pioneered still provides the most complete and effective way to achieve realistic characterisation.

Stanislavski did not invent realistic acting. Since the time of the Ancient Greeks, there have been actors who tried to create real, believable characters onstage. Stanislavski's achievement was to develop a whole system of realistic staging and acting that worked, and which could be taught to other people.

Our immediate interest is in Stanislavski's system of actor training, which he developed and refined over a period of 40 years. He used his own theatre, the Moscow Arts Theatre, as the location for his investigations into the craft of acting, and experimented with his own acting in order to try out new approaches to performance. The end result is a coherent set of techniques that we can apply to enhance our ability to create characters based on any script we wish to perform.

Stanislavski once said that there were no small parts, only small actors.



1.1.1 PBS: Constantin Stanislavski
1.1.2 National Theatre: Five truths
Stanislavski

STANISLAVSKI'S TECHNIQUES

Concentration

Stanislavski demanded an incredibly high level of concentration from his actors, both physical and mental. To achieve this, he trained them in a range of concentration and relaxation techniques.

One of the most important techniques involved 'circles of attention'. Actors were taught to begin by concentrating all their attention on a single spot, ignoring everything else. They then widened their focus to include a single object, such as a chair. The circle of attention became wider still to include an area, and finally widened to take in the whole room. At each step, the concentration of the actors had to be total, so that they were aware of everything inside each circle of attention and oblivious to everything outside.



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1.1.1 Imagining the room or space divided by concentric circles helps an actor to develop their concentration. In this case, the actor could begin by focusing on the bowl before widening their concentration using circles of attention.

Physical skills

Throughout his life, Stanislavski emphasised the importance of physical training for actors and used exercises, mime work and dance to make his actors supple, graceful and strong. Towards the end of his life, he became increasingly convinced that physical movement and control were the keys to acting; a theory that Jerzy Grotowski would later develop much further.

Stanislavski argued that on stage, and in real life, some of the strongest human feelings are signalled by small, natural movements. Even complete stillness can be the result of a very strong emotion, as when people are frozen with fear or rigid with barely controlled anger. Every physical movement we make has a reason or cause.

Voice

Stanislavski argued that actors were far more intensely involved in communication than people in ordinary life. They therefore had to be able to use their voices much more effectively. He insisted that his actors do regular voice exercises to improve their diction, projection, resonance and expressiveness.

For Stanislavski, the human voice was an instrument that could be used with great power and beauty to communicate. He particularly used singing as a way of developing the voice.

Emotion memory

Stanislavski demanded that his actors actually experience the emotions of the characters they were portraying. This seems an impossible demand to make. How can a young actor who has never been a mother genuinely feel the joy of a character in a play who has just given birth to a baby? How can an actor who has never deliberately hurt anyone in his life become a vicious killer in a play?

One of Stanislavski's greatest achievements was to solve this problem. It was Stanislavski who developed the use of emotion memory to train actors to remember and experience a whole range of human feelings. When we remember something important, such as a very exciting time in our lives, our hearts actually beat faster and we experience a feeling of excitement all over again.

Stanislavski's actors were encouraged to use this experience of emotion memory all the time. The young actor portraying the mother could use her emotion memory to recreate the joy she felt as a child when she was given something special, such as a new pet or a much-loved doll. The actor portraying the murderer could use the emotion memory of a time when he felt intense hatred or the urge to destroy something.

If we develop the use of our emotion memories through constant practice, we will learn to put ourselves emotionally in another person's place and experience what they are feeling. The more we use our emotion memories, the more sensitive we become, not only to our own feelings but to the emotional lives of everyone around us.

Observation

All of Stanislavski's actors were encouraged to use their powers of observation to learn more about people and their behaviour. He instructed them to watch and listen with real concentration every minute of their waking lives, and urged them to read books, study paintings and listen to music. The more they observed, the more they would learn.



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1.1.2 Observation of people and places is an important part of an actor's training.

It is the skilled and intelligent use of emotion memory that makes it an important acting technique. You should always choose memories you are comfortable exploring, and the feelings you recall need to be controlled and carefully used to give your role a genuine emotional dimension.

Harmony

Both during rehearsals and in performance, Stanislavski insisted that his actors be in harmony with one another. At the Moscow Arts Theatre, he created an ensemble: a group of actors who cooperated together to create superb theatre. An actor might have the main role in one play and only one line to say in the next. Working like this was part of Stanislavski's philosophy.

Onstage, his actors worked together in character, making eye contact with each other and genuinely responding to the actions, words and emotions of the other actors. They were told to completely ignore the existence of the audience and concentrate on working in complete harmony with each other.

In essence, Stanislavski taught people to cooperate together with complete commitment, sacrificing their own ambitions and desires for the good of the whole group.

Analysis

One of the most important skills Stanislavski taught his actors was the ability to analyse human behaviour. As well as rehearsing a play, actors at the Moscow Arts Theatre spent many hours analysing it, discussing each character in detail. Stanislavski pointed out that every character in a play has a particular reason or motive for their behaviour. All the characters are trying to achieve something vitally important to themselves. Stanislavski called this motive or aim the 'super-objective' and his actors were required to study their characters in depth to work out what their super-objectives were.

Once the actors had discovered this, they could understand why their characters behaved as they did. All the actions taken by the characters would make sense because they would be aimed at gaining what the character wanted. For every character, there would be a clear line of action running through the play leading to the character's super-objective.

For example, in one scene a man might be extremely generous and friendly to a woman he has just met, while in the next scene he might threaten her with violence. These actions seem contradictory, but if we know that the man's super-objective is to gain complete control over the woman and make her obey him, then both the friendliness and the violence make sense. They are part of a clear line of action aimed at dominating the other person. An actor taking the part of the man would know how to act both scenes to show that all his actions had the same motive.

Stanislavski did not limit analysis only to plays. He instructed all his actors to analyse themselves as well as the characters they created. Actors were asked to examine their own actions, knowledge and experience, to look inside themselves and discover their own motives and super-objectives. Things they had done in the past were described and analysed, and the actors were able to recognise the lines of action they had taken and to identify their own super-objectives.

Creativity

At the heart of Stanislavski's system is a very simple question: 'What if?' Stanislavski called this question the 'magic if', and he made his actors use it all the time as a stimulus to creativity.

Once they had used all the other techniques we have been studying, the actors then had to ask themselves: 'What if I were this character in this situation? What would I do?' For example, the actor creating the character of Nora in Ibsen's play

Stanislavski called the 'what if' question the 'magic if' because the question took the actors out of everyday reality and into the creative world of the imagination.

A Doll's House must answer the question: 'If I were a young wife trapped in an unhappy marriage, what would I do?'

When a group of actors use the 'magic if' with real skill and total commitment to their characters, all of them become completely involved in the imaginative reality of the play. Everything the characters say and do onstage is real for the actors playing them, and therefore real for the audience watching.

The 'magic if' is not just an important theatrical technique; it is the key to all drama. Anyone can use the 'magic if': it only requires a simple act of imagination. By visualising an imaginary situation and then projecting ourselves into it as different people, we can experience a range of alternative realities, and live a whole world of experiences and emotions that would never have been available. We can effectively become other people, living other lives.

Personalisation

In performance, Stanislavski's actors seemed to become the characters they were acting, until the audience watching believed that the people onstage were real in every way – speaking their own words, feeling genuine emotions, taking important decisions and committing real actions.

Stanislavski insisted that this fusion of the actor with the character must never be total. Actors must always be in control of their creations, so that a part of their consciousness remained separate, observing and directing the behaviour of the character. Stanislavski claimed that actors who really believed they were the characters they played were unbalanced.

What Stanislavski required of actors was the difficult but rewarding skill of personalisation. To achieve it, actors had to use their emotions, observations and experiences to create a character and then become that person as completely as possible onstage. While they were acting, they had to seem to be the character, yet be in complete control of their performance and return to being themselves as soon as the play was over.



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1.1.3 Constantin Stanislavski in the role of Don Juan, 1889

We can use personalisation ourselves to experience the world from different points of view. In a way, it is like stepping in and out of other people's shoes. What does it feel like to be a mother or a father? We can use Stanislavski's techniques to answer that question, creating the character of a parent with total conviction and being that character during an improvisation. At the same time, we can remain ourselves, in control of our creation, and can leave the character behind once the improvisation is over.

If he were alive today, Stanislavski would be particularly contemptuous of some modern film and television actors who believe in their screen images to the point where they lose their own personalities altogether.



WORKSHOP 1.1.1: CONCENTRATION

Exercise 1: In your own room or another room you know well, work on developing different circles of attention. Take a photo of the room and add the circles of concentration (see image 1.1.1). Look at your room and begin by concentrating on the first circle. Look away and write down a description of this circle. Compare your list with the photograph. Once you can accurately recall everything inside the circle, expand to the next circle.

Exercise 2: Place a number of articles on a table or chair – such as pens, keys, coins, a book – and concentrate on them as intensely as you can for a few seconds, observing as much as possible about them. Look away and write down a description of the articles, making it as accurate and complete as possible. Now check how effective your observations were and repeat the exercise.



WORKSHOP 1.1.2: EMOTION MEMORY

Exercise 1: Lie completely still, breathing slowly and deeply. Concentrate on remembering an experience, a dream or a nightmare that involved a very strong emotion. Focus on the feeling, making it build up inside you. Finally, when it is really strong, make a single, controlled movement which expresses the emotion. You can jump to your feet or sit up or simply open your eyes. The important thing is to express what you are feeling in that one movement.

Exercise 2: Practise using your emotion memory, recalling different experiences and the emotions you felt at that time. Try to intensify your experience of the emotion as much as possible.

Exercise 3: Working with a partner, try to develop real empathy between you. Use your emotion memory to generate a strong feeling and see if your partner can sense and experience the feeling too. The more you work with someone like this, the more empathic you will become.



WORKSHOP 1.1.3: OBSERVATION

Exercise: Imagine you were playing the role of an employer who was interviewing someone for a job.

- a Generate a character based on people you have observed, behaving as they would in this situation. (Remember to consider any cultural and social impacts on your character in this situation.)
- b Improvise the interview with a partner, making it as real as possible.



WORKSHOP 1.1.4: HARMONY

Exercise: In small groups, take it in turns to describe an experience that made a strong impression on you. Try to concentrate all your attention on one another as you talk and listen, really sharing the experiences.



WORKSHOP 1.1.5: ANALYSIS

Exercise 1: Analyse your actions. Can you remember some behaviour of your own, carried on over a period of time, that was done for one reason?

Exercise 2: Working in pairs or small groups, generate and then realise an improvisation in which one of the group deliberately follows a line of action towards a particular super-objective. Organise the improvisation to clearly show that everything is done with one motive in mind, so the meaning of your work is clear to the audience.



WORKSHOP 1.1.6: PERSONALISATION

Exercise 1: Ask yourself: 'What if I was unwillingly sent to Australia?' Answer the question, not in words, but by creating a character and imagining the situation; for example, as a convict aboard a convict ship. Use all of Stanislavski's techniques to commit yourself totally to the character you have created.

Exercise 2: Work with a group of students who have done the first exercise. Try to think, speak and behave as the character you have created, and try to totally involve yourself in the imaginative world.



WORKSHOP 1.1.7: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Blackrock

Blackrock is an adaptation of *A Property of the Clan*, which was written for Freewheels Theatre in Education and premiered in 1992. *A Property of the Clan* was inspired by the rape and murder of Leigh Leigh and focused on the effects of the attack on Leigh's peers. The play had an immediate impact and many audiences saw it as a documentary account of the actual attack. In 1994, the Sydney Theatre Company approached Enright to rewrite the 45-minute *A Property of the Clan* into a full-length play. *Blackrock* premiered in 1995 and won an AWGIE Award for Best Play in 1996.

In the following scene, Cherie is mourning the death of her friend when her mother, Glenys and her aunt, Diane, enter. Diane is the mother of Jared, who was friendly with all three boys who committed the crime. The scene is a grim depiction of the anguish caused by the murder and also reveals that Diane has breast cancer.

As you perform this scene, try to capture the reality of the characters and their relationships, and also the painful emotional context of the scene. Try to deliberately apply all of Stanislavski's techniques, as well as the skills you have acquired in both language and voice.

Blackrock by Nick Enright

SCENE 16

[Cemetery. Same evening. CHERIE has the tape-deck. She plays the song, turns it off.]

CHERIE They haven't even got your headstone up yet. We're putting the tree in, but. Tomorrow. None of the guys'd give anything, even the ones that wanted to. Afraid their mates would pay out on them. We got enough, but. Leanne's mum knows someone works in a nursery. It's going to be good. Right beside the netball courts. Your tree, forever and ever.

[She plays the song again.]

There you were, all over the news again last night. It's like they won't let you rest. They wouldn't name Scott and Davo, two minors, they said, just two minors, with blurry bits over their faces. They named you often enough, eh? Put your face, your name all over Australia. Now everyone's talking about what'll happen to them three. But whatever happens, they'll still be alive and you'll still be dead.

[DIANE appears, followed by GLENYS.]

GLENYS Do I have to chain you up like a dog? Grounded means grounded, Cherie. Get in the car.

CHERIE You don't even care what's happened. You heard what those three did to her—

GLENYS Stop going crook on me. It's not my fault!

CHERIE Nothing's anybody's fault. She raped herself. She killed herself. That's what youse all think.

DIANE I don't think that, love.

GLENYS Tell you what I think ...

CHERIE I don't want to know.

GLENYS You douse yourself in kero, then start playing with matches, you can't blame anyone else when you set yourself on fire.

CHERIE Shut up!

[She tries to hit GLENYS, who grabs her hand.]

GLENYS Don't raise your hand to your own mother.

CHERIE You're not my mother! Not if you say that about Tracy. And here, where she can hear you ...

GLENYS She can hear me? You think she can hear you?

[CHERIE nods.]

 Think she can talk to you?

DIANE Let it go, Glenys.

GLENYS I wish she could, Cherie. So she could tell you not to be the bloody idiot she was.

[CHERIE dives at her. DIANE restrains her.]

CHERIE Take it back!

GLENYS It's true. I want you alive, not dead!

[CHERIE breaks and runs away.]

DIANE That was a bit rough.

GLENYS Shut up.

DIANE Well, it was.

GLENYS You're not bringing up a girl. Jared can take care of himself. Cherie's got to learn the way the world works.

DIANE No, Glen. She knows more than we do. She knows this isn't natural. When the old folks cark it at work, they're ready for it mostly. This kid wasn't, she hadn't hardly begun. If she really could talk, she'd be bloody angry!

GLENYS What brought that on?

DIANE I'm crook. And I'm scared. They're going to take this off.

[She touches her left breast.]

GLENYS Oh, Jesus ...
 [She puts her arms around DIANE.]

DIANE I don't want to die.

GLENYS You won't. You won't die. You'll bury the lot of us.

DIANE One thing I was always sure of was my body. Brain's not too crash-hot. But this body ...

GLENYS When is it?

Diane Any day. I'm waiting for a bed. My bag's packed. They gave me a booklet, it says bring pyjamas or a front-opening nightdress ...

GLENYS You told Jared?

DIANE Not yet.

GLENYS And I'm the one that gets the mothercraft lecture.

DIANE I've tried, things keep getting in the way. I don't want to fall apart in front of him. If I don't beat this ...

GLENYS You will. Let's get that one home.

DIANE Say I don't. What'll happen to him?

GLENYS You've done a good job so far. The boy's nearly there.

DIANE Where?

GLENYS Wherever it is they go.
 [They've gone.]

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 Sydney Australia, www.currency.com.au

Extension: Choose a scene from one of the Australian plays below and repeat the activity above. Remember to deliberately apply all of Stanislavski's techniques, as well as the skills you have acquired in both language and voice.

- *Jump for Jordan* by Donna Abela, Currency Press, Sydney, 2014
- *Sugarland* by Rachael Coopes and Wayne Blair, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2015
- *A Man with Five Children* by Nick Enright, Currency Press, Sydney, 2003
- *The Violent Outburst That Drew Me to You* by Finegan Kruckemeyer, Currency Press, Sydney, 2015
- *Michael Swordfish* by Lachlan Philpott, Currency Press, Sydney, 2017
- *Silent Disco* by Lachlan Philpott, Currency Press, Sydney, 2011
- *Black Diggers* by Tom Wright, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2015

1.2 JERZY GROTOWSKI'S SYSTEM

Unlike Stanislavski, who spent his entire life working in the theatre and became recognised worldwide, Jerzy Grotowski was a theatre director for only a comparatively short time. He directed in an obscure theatre in Opole, Poland, between 1959 and 1976 and was not involved in mainstream theatre after that time. He died in 1999.

Grotowski called his approach the 'via negativa' or 'the negative road'. This meant that actors should learn not to do things like act artificially or be self-conscious or inhibited onstage.

Grotowski refused to call the techniques he developed a 'method' for learning how to act. Instead, he developed a series of different techniques that he combined with his own vision of what an actor should be.

Grotowski's impact on the development of new forms of theatre has been profound, both in his style of transformational theatre and in his incredibly intense system of acting. His work has become known worldwide through books by him and about him, and most of all through his influence on some of today's greatest theatre directors, including Peter Brook and Trevor Nunn.

Central to Grotowski's system of training is the idea that acting is not just a job, but a way of life. First of all, he insisted that actors must be prepared to sacrifice years of their lives to receive proper training. Grotowski suggested that actors should begin their training at specialist drama schools at an early age, certainly no older than 14. After finishing school, they should spend another four years as apprentice actors before being allowed to become full members of a theatre company.

Secondly, he made his actors at the Laboratory Theatre go through rigorous physical and vocal exercises every day of their working lives. Finally, he demanded that his actors be prepared to give themselves completely to their art. He asked them to work to eliminate selfishness, egotism, nervousness, vanity and anything else that might prevent the training they were receiving from working.

Grotowski made these demands because he believed, like Stanislavski, that actors must become highly skilled and worthwhile human beings in order to become good actors. However, Grotowski took this idea to an extreme conclusion. He wanted his actors to become so skilled physically and vocally that they could construct a language of sounds and movements that would communicate as powerfully as a great poet does with words. Grotowski believed that when his actors achieved this level of skill, they would create a kind of inner harmony and peace of mind that would make them healthy in both mind and body.

In essence, Grotowski believed that the true nature of acting is a search for self-knowledge. His training was designed to give actors superb vocal and physical skills, and to teach them to break free of the limitations they placed on themselves through ignorance, lack of courage and self-deception. He believed this approach would enable his actors to fulfil their true potential as human beings.

GROTOWSKI'S TECHNIQUES

Obviously, there is no way that we can work through Grotowski's complete system of training. However, we can learn to make valuable use of some of the most important techniques he developed. Grotowski's techniques can teach us all how to concentrate more effectively, how to use our voices and bodies more skilfully and, most of all, how to develop greater self-awareness and sensitivity to other people.



- 1.2.1 A Grotowski chronology
- 1.2.2 Obituary: Jerzy Grotowski
- 1.2.3 National Theatre: Five truths Jerzy Grotowski

Evoking silence

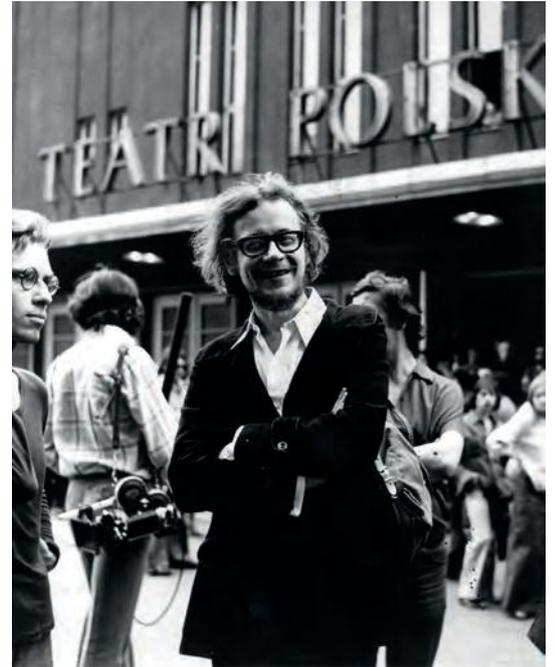
Grotowski stated that an actor must begin by doing nothing. He called this creative passivity. He believed that if a group of actors could remain completely still for several minutes in complete silence, with no outside noises or disturbances, then they would begin to experience an internal silence as well. By making this silence happen, by evoking it, they could learn to concentrate intensely.

As well as using silence to develop concentration, Grotowski also made his actors train and work in total silence except when sounds or speech were essential parts of the activity. He insisted on this, not only to increase the level of concentration, but also to discourage actors from showing off or trying to impress or distract each other.

Physical training

This is the basis of Grotowski's system. His actors had to learn extraordinary physical skills, not the skills of gymnasts and athletes, but a technique of movement that allowed them to control every move they made, even the smallest, in every detail.

In some of the plays he directed, Grotowski made his actors turn their faces into twisted, frozen masks, simply by the use of their facial muscles. At other times, actors were required to contort their bodies into strange, non-human shapes or imitate the movements of different animals.



Getty Images/Keystone

1.2.1 Jerzy Grotowski, 1966

Legs on the Wall, Sydney, 2018. www.legsonthewall.com.au/productions/current/highly-sprung-2/overview/



1.2.2 Being able to manipulate your body is an important part of Grotowski actor training. In this image, actors are performing in *Highly Sprung* by Legs on the Wall. *Highly Sprung* explores the challenges and barriers that a group of people face as they try to start their day.

While Grotowski was profoundly influenced by Stanislavski's system, he also drew on the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold, another Russian theatre director, who emphasised intense physical development as part of his actor training and performance work.

Grotowski claimed that it is our bodies that express everything about us and which react to the world around us. Everything we think and feel is expressed through our bodies, and everything we experience is felt through our bodies. Grotowski was intensely aware of the importance of body language well before it became a popular subject with psychologists and behavioural scientists. He was not concerned with the importance of physical training for these reasons alone. He also wanted to give his actors the creative physical skills to fully express their imaginations and their personalities.

In his later work, Grotowski emphasised physical exercises that involved some kind of contact with a stimulus. He trained his actors in exercises that involved working in a certain kind of space or using a particular object and, most of all, exercises that demanded physical contact with other people. He insisted that his actors learn to respond physically to the world around them with logic and precision in a process of 'give and take'.

Voice

Grotowski believed that actors must have vastly better developed vocal and respiratory systems than the average person. He taught his actors to use total respiration: breathing properly using the lungs, diaphragm, ribs and head in the correct order. When they breathed in and out, his actors had to imagine a column of air filling up their bodies from the bottom of their lungs, all the way up to the tops of their heads.

As well as controlling their breathing, the actors also had to learn to focus their voices as though they were coming from different parts of their bodies. When they did this, they also had to project their voices, aiming them at different places in the room.

Grotowski also taught his actors to make their voices more flexible. They were encouraged to develop the full registers of their voices, from very high to very deep, using them to imitate the voices of little children, adults of both sexes and old people. Actors also had to improve their diction so they could speak with great clarity in a number of different ways, including singing, chanting and reciting poetry.

Finally, the actors were required to learn to imitate all the sounds in the world around them, including the mechanical sounds of machines and motors, the cries and calls of birds and animals, and natural sounds such as thunder or dripping water.

Grotowski truly believed that the voice is the instrument we use to communicate with other people. The more effectively an actor uses that instrument, the better they can communicate.

Contact

As his training program developed, Grotowski came to insist more and more on the importance of contact, particularly contact between human beings. He believed that real harmony in human relationships, on and off the stage, only developed when people really learnt to look at each other and listen to each other. As an example, he gave the simple, everyday occurrence of two people saying 'good morning' to each other. We do this every day as a matter of habit, never really observing the way we say it or the way it is returned. Yet if we learnt to really look at people and really listen to them, even when they say something as simple as that, our observations would tell us a great deal about the way they were thinking and feeling. We would then be able to respond naturally and instinctively to them, not just to what they were saying but to the way they were saying it.

What Grotowski was asking for was the development of a real awareness of others, a real sensitivity to them in everyday contact. Equally, he was asking his actors to be more aware of the impact they had on other people.

It is not easy but it is something we can all learn to do. In all our contacts with other people, we can concentrate on really looking and listening, on being completely aware of them and responding to what we are actually seeing and hearing.

Transformation

In his 'poor theatre', Grotowski aimed always for the simplest possible use of staging, lighting, costumes and special effects. It was then up to his actors to use all their skills to transform empty spaces and simple objects into a range of imaginative worlds. A plain wooden floor became the ocean, while an old bathtub was first used as a bath, then transformed into a church altar and finally into a marriage bed.

Simple items like a chair or a piece of cloth could be transformed a dozen times during the course of a play, representing real objects like an executioner's block, or used as symbols, such as a piece of white cloth worn to represent purity and innocence. This form of transformation has become one of the major staging techniques in theatre today.

To make transformation work, the actors were required to use their physical skills and their voices and, most of all, their powers of imagination, concentration and commitment. As an example, Grotowski pointed to the way the simple wooden cross of the crucifixion has become a symbol of enormous power and meaning because of the Christian faith.

Memory

Like Stanislavski before him, Grotowski emphasised the use of emotion memory to recall an experience and recreate the feelings that went with that memory. But Grotowski went further and demanded total honesty and total commitment from his actors in their use of emotion memory. They had to be prepared to make use of all their memories of past experiences, no matter how private or painful.

This was vital to Grotowski's system for two reasons. First of all, when his actors were performing in a play, they were directed to make full use of their emotional memories to create genuine feelings for the characters they were portraying. When they did this, Grotowski believed that the audiences watching would experience those feelings for themselves and therefore come to understand a great deal more about the characters onstage, and about the human race as a whole. In other words, Grotowski asked his actors to use emotion memory to create genuine empathy between themselves and the audience.



Laboratory Theatre/The Grotowski Institute Archive

1.2.3 Extraordinary physical acting is evident in this scene from *Akropolis*. The costumes for the prisoners in the concentration camp were simply old bags with holes torn in them. The insides of the bags were lined with red material to look like torn flesh. These simple costumes created the illusion of a room filled with identical tortured bodies. They were realistic – concentration camp inmates did wear old remnants of clothing – but they also symbolised the suffering that occurred in the camps.

More importantly, Grotowski believed that when people were trained to remember and re-experience past emotions, without avoiding or suppressing any of their memories, they would come closer to knowing the truth about themselves. For Grotowski, the use of emotion memory was an important path to self-knowledge.

Truth

Grotowski warned his actors to avoid what he called 'the beautiful lie', both onstage and in their everyday lives. By this he meant doing something just because it looked good or because it was what people expected them to do.

As an example, Grotowski described what happened when some actors were asked to sit down and pretend to write something. Many did it artificially, in a way that looked graceful or eye-catching. Others did it because they were told to, without any conviction at all, so that it was impossible to tell what they were meant to be writing or why.

The actors Grotowski trained were encouraged to look for the real truth in any situation or human relationship, and to behave in response to that truth. When they were asked to perform the act of writing, they first had to decide what they were writing, how they felt about it and whether the writing would be easy for them or difficult. Only when they were sure of the truth of their feelings and actions would they do the exercise.

In other words, Grotowski demanded total commitment and belief in every activity, even the simplest exercise. When his actors had learnt this, he expected them to carry that kind of belief and commitment with them at all times. They were expected to look for the real truth in their daily lives and relationships, and act completely honest according to that truth.

Grotowski argued that actors needed to be both disciplined and spontaneous at the same time. This meant that actors should train their bodies, their minds and their emotions. Rehearsal should take place with real commitment and yet be open to imagination and creativity at all times.



WORKSHOP 1.2.1: EVOKING SILENCE

Exercise: Lie on the floor in a relaxed position. Breathe deeply and slowly, using your diaphragm. Now imagine you are lying in the sun on the beach, completely alone, in total peace and quiet. Concentrate on feeling the sun warming your body, your face and your arms.



WORKSHOP 1.2.2: PHYSICAL TRAINING

Exercise 1: The cat: Lie face down, arms and legs spread. Now draw your hands and arms in towards your body. Push with your hands against the floor, lifting your body slowly up, and bring your legs up underneath you. Curve your back up into the air and then stretch forward and back as a cat does.

Exercise 2: Opposing sides: Make one side of your body strong and graceful, with quick, flowing movements. Make the other side slow and clumsy. Mime some simple movements like going for a walk or eating a meal, with one side of you moving smoothly and easily, and the other side stumbling and awkward.



1.2.4 Australian School of
Meditation & Yoga: Cat Pose

Exercise 3: Practise making movements that begin inside your body. Mime pushing something away, feeling the way the pushing movement begins inside your body, then your whole body moves, with your hands actually the last to move.

Exercise 4: Do the same sequence with taking something. The movement begins inside you, your body moves and, finally, your hands reach out to take the object.



WORKSHOP 1.2.3: VOICE

Exercise 1: Grotowski would ask his actors to make their voices come from the tops of their heads and to feel their skulls vibrate with the sound. Try focusing your voice in different areas of your body, such as the centre of your chest, the top of your head and the back of your neck. In each case, place your hand on the area where you are focusing your voice and see if you can feel it resonate, which means vibrating with sound.

Exercise 2: Research and choose two to three tongue twisters. Practice saying them every morning and night to improve your diction and fluency. Once you have mastered the first two to three tongue twisters, choose two to three more to practice with each day.



1.2.5 NIDA Corporate: Tongue Twisters



WORKSHOP 1.2.4: TRANSFORMATION

Exercise 1: Place an empty chair in front of you. Imagine there is someone who is important to you sitting in that chair. Use all your concentration and imagination to make the transformation happen. Now go over to the chair and behave as you would if the person were really there.

Exercise 2: Take a simple piece of cloth and use the power of your imagination to transform it into something else. Make it something that arouses strong feelings in you, such as a present from someone you love, or something that once belonged to a friend who has gone away or died. Focus all your concentration and feeling on the cloth, transforming it into the object you have imagined.

Exercise 3: Work with a group to create an improvisation that uses a few simple objects, such as tables, chairs and pieces of clothing, and transforms them into symbols of enormous significance. A plain table can become the coffin at a funeral, the altar in a church or an executioner's block. The possibilities are infinite, limited only by the imagination and powers of concentration of the group. The improvisation should revolve around the chosen objects.

Exercise 4: Repeat Exercise 3, this time using only a piece of music as your stimulus.



WORKSHOP 1.2.5: TRUTH

Exercise 1: Imagine you have a friend who is living in another city. Sit down and write a letter to him or her. As you do this exercise, concentrate on making that friend real to you, so that the action of writing the letter becomes natural and true.

Exercise 2: Working with a partner, take it in turns to tell each other an important secret, one that is completely fictional. Although the secret is not true, try to make it become real as you tell it. Really communicate with your partner, bringing the secret to life by the power of your imagination and concentration. Make sure that you do not artificially act or perform in any way while you are realising your performance to make your story more believable.



WORKSHOP 1.2.6: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Mrs Petrov's Shoe

This play, first staged in 2001, won the Queensland Premier's Literary Award in that year. It is one of a number of outstanding modern Australian plays by playwrights born overseas who have made Australia their home.

In the following scene, set in the 1950s, nine-year-old Ania and her friend Wendy follow Ania's mother, Nina, as she delivers a parcel to a stranger. Ania imagines her parents are Russian spies and her mother is betraying her father. The scene requires you to create real and believable children without exaggeration or stereotyping, bringing to life their excitement and innocence. Try also to capture the genuine emotion of the characters at the end of the scene, both adult and child.

Mrs Petrov's Shoe by Noëlle Janaczewska

| | |
|--------------|--|
| WENDY | Ania ...? |
| ANIA | Yes? |
| WENDY | What do spies actually do? |
| ANIA | They behave suspiciously. |
| WENDY | What else? |
| ANIA | Isn't that enough? Ok, I'll be Z for zebra. What about you? |
| | <i>[WENDY shrugs.]</i> |
| | We need code names, silly. You can be F for fox. |
| WENDY | I don't like foxes. I'm going to be F for foal. |
| | <i>[ANIA pushes WENDY out of the classroom.]</i> |

ANIA **Let's synchronise watches.**
 [Lights shift to dusk.]
 [NINA leaves the house with her shopping bag.]
 [WENDY and ANIA follow, taking care not to be seen. NINA disappears into the penumbra.]

WENDY **She's disappeared.**

ANIA **What?**

WENDY **Your mum's disappeared.**

ANIA **Lift up that manhole cover.**

WENDY **What?**

ANIA **She must have gone down there. It's the entrance to a secret tunnel.**

WENDY **We can't go down there!**

ANIA **She could have some kind of rocket thing down there. Go on, lift it up.**

WENDY **What if there are rats?**

ANIA **She's probably got a radio transmitter hidden there. Or she could be assembling something.**

WENDY **Like what?**

ANIA **Duh—A new design of sputnik, nuclear missiles—anything.**

WENDY *[Looking at her watch] I've got to be home in 6-and-a-half minutes.*
 [ANIA jumps up, pulling WENDY along with her.]

ANIA **Hurry up, I've got another idea.**

WENDY **Where are we going?**
 [The rattle of a freight train.]
 [Near the railway line they spot NINA, and hide. NINA opens the box.]

NINA *[Whispering] Lothar?*
 [Beat.]
 Gdzie ty jesteś?
 [From the shadows, the silhouette of a man in a gabardine coat (LOTHAR). NINA grabs his hands.]
 Jak sie masz?
 [They move further into the darkness. Light cigarettes, have a whispered conversation. We can't hear what they say, only the faint murmur of their voices.]

WENDY *[Also whispering]* **What are they saying?**

ANIA **Shh!**

[NINA and the man in the gabardine coat kiss goodbye. He disappears back into the shadows. NINA leaves. Once she's gone, WENDY and ANIA emerge.]

[ANIA climbs on WENDY to reach the box. Goes to open it.]

WENDY **Don't touch it! It might be stuff for blowing up the train. It could be booby-trapped.**

[ANIA opens it anyway. Removes its contents. A pack of cigarettes, matches, sandwiches, chocolate and a silver flask, which ANIA opens and sniffs.]

WENDY **What is it?**

ANIA **Vodka. Do you want to try some?**

[WENDY shakes her head. Picks up a roll of toilet paper.]

WENDY **What do spies want with toilet paper?**

ANIA **It's for secret writing, isn't it? You write your message using a kind of invisible ink, and the agents you're sending it to have special chemicals, so they can read it.**

[ANIA removes a scrap of paper, reads it, hands it to WENDY.]

WENDY **X?**

ANIA **That's all it says. You know what this means, don't you?**

WENDY **That man is—**

ANIA **My mother's X.**

WENDY *[Checking her watch again]* **Oh no! I'm late. I've got to go.**

[They return the items to the box. WENDY races off. ANIA picks up a discarded cigarette butt and puts it in her pocket.]

[Shouts of 'ANIA!' and swinging torch beams. People in dressing gowns searching the street.]

NINA **Where the hell have you been?**

JOE **We called the police.**

NINA **I've been out of my mind with worry.**

JOE **They're out there looking for you now with dogs—the cops.**

NINA **Don't ever do that again, Ania. Promise me you won't do that again.**

JOE **Big dogs—German shepherds.**

[JOE and the search party exit.]

ANIA **Mum—?**

NINA **What?**

ANIA **Where's Dad gone?**

NINA **He's had to go away for a little while.**

ANIA **Is it special government business?**

NINA **No.**

ANIA **Then why?**

NINA **He, uh—**
 [Beat.]
 —it's all for the best. Trust me, there, uh—there wasn't really any other choice.

ANIA **Is he ill?**

NINA **No—yes—well, there are people who consider it a kind of sickness—**
 [Starts to get upset] **I know it's hard for you to understand, darling, but I had to call—your father is—how shall I put it—**

ANIA **It's all your fault! You told them to come here and take Daddy away!**
 [She runs off.]

Mrs Petrov's Shoe by Noëlle Janaczewska, published by Playlab, 2013,
<http://www.playlab.org.au/index.php/publications/shop/mrs-petrov-s-shoe-detail>

1.3 PUTTING IT TOGETHER

THE CHALLENGE

The techniques of Stanislavski and Grotowski are theatrical techniques designed to increase our self-knowledge and our understanding of other people.

In this challenge, apply the techniques of Stanislavski and Grotowski in exactly the ways they did. To do this, take an outstanding, realistic play that deals in a profound way with the lives of complex human beings, and study it in detail. Your aim is to get to know the characters in the play as people, to understand who they are and why they behave in the ways they do.

Now comes the real challenge: to become a character from the play, thinking, acting and speaking as that person. However, you will act as that character not in the play itself, but in a situation that could have happened outside the play, before it began or after it was over. To do this well you will need all the skills you have learnt: physical, vocal, mental and emotional.

There are a number of outstanding plays to choose from, but the one that has proved very successful for this challenge is Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, perhaps the greatest Australian play of all and one of the major plays of the 20th century.



WORKSHOP 1.3.1: SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL

Exercise: Your task is to create a complex, appropriate and skilled response to Ray Lawler's play, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*.

Working in pairs or groups, generate and then realise a dramatic scene. It could be based on one of these situations:

- Roo and Barney meeting up in Brisbane before arriving for the seventeenth summer
- Emma and Olive immediately after the departure of Roo and Barney at the end of the seventeenth summer
- Bubba and Olive three years later – the twentieth summer
- Roo and Barney five years later – the twenty-second summer
- Nancy and Olive eight years later – the twenty-fifth summer

Read the play and identify how the dialogue assists the portrayal of realistic characters in developing your scene. You will need to take an imaginative approach, first improvising and then scripting your response. Either create a completely new scene or provide a sequel to Lawler's final scene.

In order to complete this task, you will have to:

- work to create a sense of reality in your scene
- develop a short plot outline
- refer back to Lawler's plot in some way, either through incident or dialogue
- develop dialogue in keeping with the original play
- consider a suitable setting
- create a script for your performance
- make full and appropriate use of all the techniques you have learnt in your study of the work of Stanislavski and Grotowski as you generate the scene.

The scene should be about eight minutes in length and no more than 12 minutes. This depends on the amount of development and the point at which you can effectively end the scene. Scripts are to be presented for consideration in assessing your work.

Extension: repeat the activity above but create a new scene for one of the texts listed below. Follow the same steps as you did for *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*.

Other plays:

- *Brothers Wreck* by Jada Alberts, Currency Press, Sydney, 2014
- *No Sugar* by Jack Davis, Currency Press, Sydney, 1986
- *The Rivers of China* by Alma De Groen, Currency Press, 1987
- *Remembering Ronald Ryan* by Barry Dickins, Currency Press, Sydney, 2014
- *Mrs Petrov's Shoe* by Noëlle Janaczewska, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2013
- *King Hit* by David Milroy & Geoffrey Narkle, Currency Press, 2007
- *Cosi* by Louis Nowra, Currency Press, Sydney, 1992
- *Gary's House* by Debra Oswald, Currency Press, Sydney, 1996
- *Sisters* by Stephen Sewell, Currency Press, Sydney, 1991
- *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker, Methuen, London, 1988

REPRESENTING A CHARACTER

The last one hundred years have produced the most incredible variety of styles and performances in all the history of theatre, and an extraordinary range of theatrical forms have emerged all over the world during this period. Some of these theatrical forms were completely new, involving explorations of dreams and the unconscious mind, and making use of new technology, while others involved adaptations and combinations of traditional forms, including circus, puppetry and opera, to create exciting and innovative performance work such as physical theatre and the musical.

New ways of acting have emerged to perform plays written in these new, non-naturalistic styles that move away from realism and require actors to present characters to an audience, not as ordinary human beings, but as representatives of aspects of human nature or political viewpoints, or real and imagined creatures from the world of nature, or from dreams and nightmares. The most important of these new performance styles were first developed by writer-directors, including Meyerhold's Biomechanics, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and Brecht's epic theatre.

These approaches to performance transformed 20th-century theatre. Although Meyerhold is less well-known today, his belief that movement was superior to speech and his use of Asian acting styles had a profound effect on characterisation. As a theatre practitioner, Artaud achieved almost nothing, yet his theories and techniques have revolutionised modern theatre. Brecht is still acknowledged as one of the major theatre innovators of all time, and the style of theatre and acting he pioneered is still extraordinarily influential today.

2.1 VSEVOLOD MEYERHOLD

Vsevolod Meyerhold was born in 1874 in the Russian town of Penza, and briefly studied law at Moscow University. While at university, Meyerhold became fascinated by theatre and was a founder member of Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre. His career as a stage director began in 1902 and lasted for 37 years. During this time he directed more than 290 productions.

When Meyerhold began directing, he was very interested in realism and was strongly influenced by Stanislavski. However, he quickly began to experiment with symbolic and surreal theatre. From 1910 onwards, at his studio in Saint Petersburg,

Commedia dell'arte is an improvised style of comedy based on stock characters, popular during the 16th–18th centuries in Italian theatres. Actors adapted their comic dialogue and action according to a few basic plots (commonly love intrigues) and topical issues.

Alamy Stock Photo/SPUTNIK



2.1.1 Vsevolod Meyerhold, 1906

Stanislavski invited Meyerhold to his studio workshop in 1905 to help him experiment with non-realistic approaches to theatre. Stanislavski knew that realism did not work for every play, especially the new plays that were emerging at the time.

he worked on the performance style of commedia dell'arte in great depth, exploring how the movement and gesture patterns used in commedia could help demonstrate characterisation. Meyerhold was fascinated by the use of commedia masks and the way the masks created the characters. He also began to investigate the nature of Asian theatre and to include elements of Asian performance styles in his teaching, directing and staging.

In 1921, Meyerhold founded his own free workshop and school, followed by the experimental theatre company called the Vsevolod Meyerhold Theatre. An important part of his development of 'biomechanics' was based on new developments in the world of the 20th century, especially in industry, and the sets of the plays he directed became increasingly mechanical and non-realistic. Onstage, his actors were directed to use machine-like and

robotic movements and to create surreal frozen images. Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* used a set that had a moving structure with platforms and wheels. The actors were directed to move in unison in time to the movements of the mechanical set.

Meyerhold continued to work with his company for 16 years and trained most of the actors who performed with his theatre. Meyerhold was an opponent of the government of Russia (then the Soviet Union) and a number of his productions were critical of its leader Stalin and his dictatorship. In 1938, his theatre was closed down and in 1939 he was arrested and accused of anti-government political activities. He was executed in Moscow on 2 February 1940.

MEYERHOLD'S TECHNIQUES

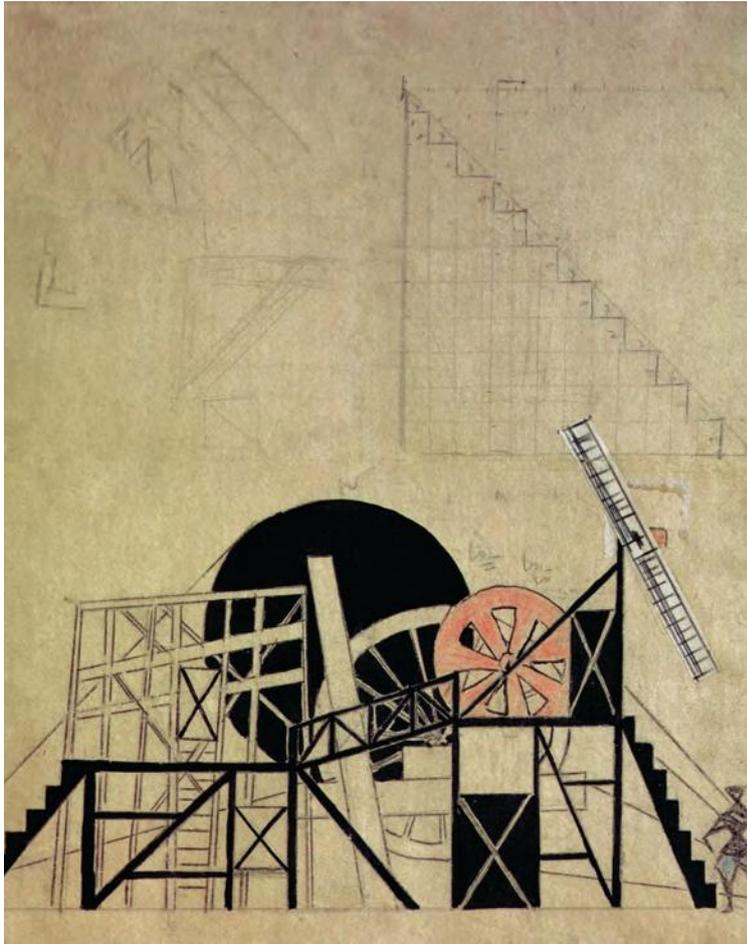
Biomechanics

Biomechanics was developed over the lifetime of Meyerhold's theatre experiments. It was designed as a training tool to help actors create their roles in rehearsal and then to transfer this to their performances onstage. Meyerhold believed that the performance style of realism reduced the ability of actors to fully express themselves. This is because it was based on spoken words, small actions and insignificant behaviour. As a result, he felt realistic acting denied the audience the right to use their imaginations fully. Meyerhold focused on stylised action and on the physical expressiveness of the actor's movements, and he often experimented with frozen images and dramatic tableaux.

To create his acting techniques, Meyerhold concentrated on training in movement rather than speech, and developed ways for his actors to present their characters to the audience physically rather than focusing on creating a realistic character. He attempted to design a whole new way of staging theatre in which his actors were constantly aware of their movements on the stage. This required actors to train their bodies to be able to perform any action in a natural and expressive state.



2.1.1 Prominent Russians:
Vsevolod Meyerhold



Getty Images/Lyubov Sergeevna Popova

2.1.2 The stage design of Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*.

Actors would work through the following sequence of physical exercises in developing a character:

- 1 Make the correct economical gesture or pose for a character.
- 2 Turn it into the largest and most exaggerated form of that gesture or pose.
- 3 Scale it down again.
- 4 Work to develop the rhythm of the character's physical movement.

Meyerhold valued the imagination as an innate ability in actors, but he believed it needed to be released through physical acting approaches. He also trained his actors to be disciplined, to express their emotions physically and consciously and to use their creative imaginations. All performers were part of an ensemble, as Meyerhold stressed that an actor depended on the other actors as they trained, explored and performed in his theatre.

Mechanical and robot-like movement were important parts of Meyerhold's biomechanics. In a number of non-realistic plays that he directed, characters lost their identity and became machine-like. Meyerhold directed the actors in these plays to act and speak like robots. They sometimes wore masks in the scenes where this happened. When the characters recovered their identity or their freedom, the roles were performed much more realistically.

The use of masks was essential to Meyerhold's approaches to acting. Meyerhold believed that the creativity of actors is shown in their movements, which are enhanced and extended by the use of masks. Meyerhold's mask training was

In his early work, Meyerhold used mime improvisations to help his actors develop their skills, and these were often expanded into mime performances for the public. One example involved the actors working on a fully-lit stage but acting as though they were completely in the dark.



2.1.3 A scene from Meyerhold's production of *The Forest*, 1924



2.1.2 Meyerhold's Theatre
and Biomechanics

explored through make-up, hair, hats, scarves and eyeglasses, as well as commedia dell'arte masks. Masks made it possible to explore the physical appearance and nature of a role in rehearsals and then to develop the whole character for performance. Actors were also asked to use their faces to make mask-like expressions. These expressions changed with the different scenes in a play and changes in the character's behaviour.



WORKSHOP 2.1.1: BIOMECHANICS – PHYSICAL

Exercise 1: Mime the action of firing an arrow from a bow. Separate each action so that there are at least 15 separate actions and pause between each step in the sequence.

Exercise 2: Working with a partner, create a number of different freeze frames of extreme action like a stab with the knife. Stylise the freezes and exaggerate them as much as possible.

Exercise 3: Imagine you are someone who is involved in an accident. Work through the sequence of events, beginning with a freeze showing the accident happening as realistically as possible. Now change to a very exaggerated freeze of the same movement, then bring it back about half way. Start moving, showing the impact of the accident on you physically in mime.



WORKSHOP 2.1.2: BIOMECHANICS – MACHINE MOVEMENTS

Exercise 1: Devise a number of freeze frames of robots, exaggerating the physical shape of the robot. 'Switch on' and move and act as the robot, then freeze again in your starting position.

Exercise 2: Working in groups, create a number of different machines through movement and sound. You could do this exercise with one person entering the space at a time and adding to the machine, or in a more organic way.



WORKSHOP 2.1.3: BIOMECHANICS – WORKING WITH A MASK

Exercise 1: Put on a mask and inspect yourself completely from all angles. Try a number of gestures and movements suggested by the mask. Move around the space in the character suggested by the mask.

Exercise 2: Use the furniture and other objects in the room. Interact physically with other actors wearing masks.



WORKSHOP 2.1.4: BIOMECHANICS – IMPROVISATION

Exercise 1: Generate an improvisation of a group of people trapped in a deserted, dark house or lost in the countryside at night. Start with each character in an exaggerated frozen pose, and then create a highly stylised mime that includes the physical movements, accidents and collisions of the characters. Use freezes, slow motion and fast forward movement as well as other stylised action. Add language in the form of individual words, shouts and whispers and also vocal sound effects.

Exercise 2: Generate the following brief improvisations using different forms of movement – as a robot, as an animal, in a nightmare:

- a meal in a restaurant
- at a nightclub
- on the beach.

Rehearse one of the improvisations and realise it as a brief performance to the class. As an audience, respond to the improvisations, deciding which ones most effectively use stylised movement to convey the meaning of the performance.



2.2.1 Antonin Artaud: Practical Approaches to a Theatre of Cruelty

2.2.2 Antonin Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty

2.2 ANTONIN ARTAUD

Antonin Artaud was born in 1896 and died, insane and in poverty, in 1948. All his attempts to create a theatre of magic, beauty and power that would change the hearts of people ended in failure. Yet since his death, Artaud's extraordinary, imaginative ideas have been a major influence in the world of theatre and have given us completely new ways of performing onstage.

From the earliest days as an actor and director, Artaud had been experimenting with new theatrical forms. In 1931, he saw a group of dancers from Bali performing at the Colonial Exhibition in Paris. Their use of movement, music, costume and sound stunned him. All his revolutionary ideas about theatre and about life crystallised into a single dramatic theory that Artaud called the 'Theatre of Cruelty'. He wrote a series of essays, letters and articles about it, which were published in 1938 as a book entitled *The Theatre and Its Double*.



Alamy Stock Photo/Paul Fearn

2.2.1 Antonin Artaud, 1930

ARTAUD'S TECHNIQUES

Visual poetry

When Artaud watched the group of Balinese dancers in 1931, he saw performers using movement, gestures and dance instead of words to communicate with their audience. Combined with music and different sound effects, this stylised movement, which Artaud called visual poetry, had an enormous emotional impact. It communicated feelings about the great human mysteries of creation, growth and death in ways that words could not. This does not mean Artaud wanted to eliminate words altogether, but he insisted that they should only be used when they were totally necessary.

Assaulting the senses

Artaud argued that the great mass of people had been brutalised and desensitised by the world they inhabited. There was no point in appealing to their understanding or intelligence. Artaud wanted the Theatre of Cruelty to hypnotise them as a snake charmer hypnotises a snake, putting them into a trance in which they could be shocked into confronting themselves, their way of life and the meaning and mystery of all existence.

To do this, Artaud planned 'an assault on the senses' – using lights, music and sound in the same way as modern rock concerts do. He believed that the theatre should have all the expensive equipment that filmmakers use and should employ it just as skilfully.

Creating a dream world

Through the use of masks, ritual objects, and traditional and striking costumes, Artaud hoped to remove his audience from their everyday cares and preoccupations. He wanted no scenery in his theatre, just symbolic objects sometimes strangely distorted into nightmare shapes. Combined with the use of movement, lights and music, these things would affect the audience in the way dreams do, working directly on the emotions and the subconscious mind.

Involving the audience

In the theatre that Artaud imagined, the audience would be seated in the centre of the auditorium and the action of the play would take place all around them, and even among them. Instead of being spectators, the audience would be made to feel part of everything that happened.

The skill of the actor

Artaud insisted that actors should be highly trained and able to use their voices and bodies with great skill. Most of all, they must be totally committed to their work, so that the intensity of their emotions is felt by the audience. This is similar to the total involvement Grotowski demanded of his actors. Artaud believed that actors should be emotionally involved in their work and convinced of the truth of it.

Deliberate cruelty

When he used the word 'cruelty', Artaud meant it. Not physical cruelty, which draws blood, but an attack on the emotions designed to shock the audience and totally involve them in the drama. To do this, he suggested the use of violent, terrifying and shocking actions and images, designed to 'pulverise' the audience's feelings.

It is very important to note that Artaud did not intend to use shocking actions or effects purely for their own sake. He meant them to be used as all his techniques were to be used, to change the way people perceived their world.

Improvising the play

There were to be no scripts in the Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud planned to improvise, basing the process on important events, serious human concerns or important themes taken from existing plays. An example he gave was an improvisation based on the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish in the 16th century. Artaud said he would use this to demonstrate the horror of the extermination of one race by another, and to make people feel how destructive religion can be when it is used for the wrong reasons.

Using the techniques

To use the techniques of Theatre of Cruelty properly, you must first begin by looking closely at the world you live in and decide what important elements in it you feel most strongly about, both good and bad. Once you are totally committed to the emotional truth of your perceptions, then you can make effective use of Artaud's techniques to share with other people your own heartfelt understanding of one facet of human life.

Playwright Lally Katz confronts her audiences with the cruelty and unhappiness that can be found in the world, not just with violence onstage, but with frightening and surreal actions and characters.



WORKSHOP 2.2.1: THEATRE OF CRUELTY

Exercise 1: Working in small groups, create a piece of mime, movement or dance that is designed to convey a single strong emotion, such as love, hate, fear or joy, just through the use of stylised movement.

Exercise 2: Using music, sounds, voice (but very few words), extreme physical movement and lights (if available), create improvisations that convey the emotion associated with a certain state of being, such as blindness, loneliness, death, triumph or power.

Exercise 3: Using neutral masks, symbolic costumes (such as white cloth for birth or purity, black cloth for death) and the other techniques already explored, create a dream or nightmare sequence with a strong emotional content. The improvisations must be as unreal and dreamlike as possible.

Exercise 4: Work in pairs. Each pair works out a short improvisation involving a strong emotion. The major aim of the improvisation is to involve an audience directly in both the action and the emotion of the improvisation, so you can use an improvisation from a previous exercise as a starting point. For example, using blindness and the emotional sense of insecurity it creates, you might both improvise being blind and going to the audience for help. Then you might blindfold the audience and make them move around, unable to see, so they can experience the sense of deprivation for themselves. Once you have created your improvisations, join with other pairs to make groups of four and take it in turns to be performers and audience.

Exercise 5: In pairs, work to create a short improvisation based on a personal experience with strong emotional content. You must use Stanislavski's and Grotowski's techniques for achieving total commitment to the improvisation, as well as Theatre of Cruelty techniques. Join your pairs into groups of four and act in turn as performers and audience.

Exercise 6: Working in groups, create an improvisation based on a subject such as child abuse, persecution or brutality, which makes use of violent, terrifying and shocking actions and images to create a strong emotional impact. Remember: the technique must be used with discrimination or it is counterproductive. The improvisations must incorporate Artaud's other techniques as well.



WORKSHOP 2.2.2: CRUELTY IN PERFORMANCE

Exercise 1: Working in groups of four, choose a subject for improvisation which, in Artaud's sense, reflects the violence and unrest of contemporary society; for example, terrorism, poverty, prisoners of conscience, the threat of nuclear war or child abuse. The exercise is to prepare an improvisation on a subject using Theatre of Cruelty techniques as variously and effectively as possible. Use as many resources as possible, such as music, masks, clothing, props and lighting.

Exercise 2: Each group improvises its Theatre of Cruelty, using the rest of the class as an audience. Assess the effectiveness of your group's use of techniques from their impact on the audience.

Exercise 3: As a class, discuss the success of the improvisations and their impact on the audience.

2.3 BERTOLT BRECHT

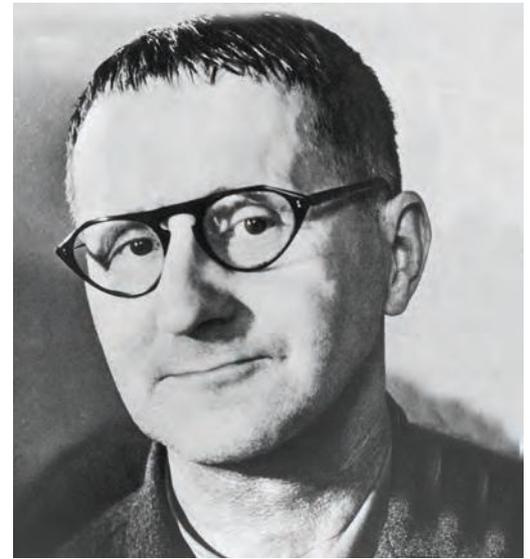
Bertolt Brecht was born in Germany in 1898. In 1917 he enrolled at Munich University as a medical student but was conscripted into the army in 1918, right at the end of the First World War. During 1918, at the age of only 20, he wrote his first play, *Baal*.

Brecht never completed his medical studies. From 1919 onwards, he became increasingly involved in the theatre, as both a writer and a director. By 1924 he was already using some of the techniques that would later become famous, such as actors wearing white face make-up and holding up big signs giving plot summaries before each scene in a play.

By 1927 Brecht was studying the writings of Karl Marx, and between 1927 and 1932 he became increasingly involved in political theatre in Germany. In 1933 Hitler came to power and anyone with communist sympathies was in danger. Brecht fled Germany with his family, living briefly in a number of different places before settling in Denmark. Between 1933 and 1941 he wrote some of his greatest plays, including *Life of Galileo* (1938), *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (1938), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1941) and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941).

As the Second World War spread across Europe, Brecht was forced to flee once more. In 1941 he sailed with his family to America, settling in California. In 1943 he wrote one of his most famous plays, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Although the Second World War ended in 1945, Brecht went on living in America until 1947. In that year he was called before the US Government's House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was investigating the spread of communism in America. Brecht and his wife left America and returned to Europe, living at first in Zurich.

In 1949 Brecht finally moved to communist east Berlin and formed the Berliner Ensemble, which became one of the world's great theatre companies. In 1956, while preparing for a visit to England with his theatre company, Brecht suffered a heart attack. He died on 14 August 1956.



Alamy Stock Photo/ Chronicle

2.3.1 Bertolt Brecht, 1954



2.3.1 Bertolt Brecht

EPIC THEATRE

Brecht called his plays 'epic theatre' – plays that tell a story, usually historical, on a large scale, including a number of people in a series of events over a long period. Brecht used epic theatre as a way of presenting his political views. In the final analysis, his plays are propaganda, made interesting by Brecht's theatrical genius.

Brecht compared his plays to scientific experiments. In them, types of human behaviour were studied to show why they happened and how that behaviour could be improved. The plays tell stories in a way designed to make the audience feel they are simply observers, watching the events happening onstage and making judgements about them. His plays move in a series of independent scenes, sometimes skipping years in time and moving from place to place. Each scene is there to make a particular point about human behaviour for the audience to consider.

In Brecht's epic theatre, the audience became like scientists, sitting back and observing events in a completely detached and logical way. All Brecht's theatrical techniques were designed to make sure this happened.



Getty Images/utstein bild

2.3.2 The Berliner Ensemble performing *Mr Puntila and His Man Matti*, 1949

BRECHT'S TECHNIQUES

At the heart of all Brecht's theatre is the idea of 'alienation' – a feeling of being separated from others. Brecht explained that he meant to take away from a character or an event the things that make them familiar and understandable. The aim was to constantly surprise and challenge the audience, while reminding them that the play they were watching was simply a story being told to make a profound political point.

Staging

Brecht used fragments of scenery and single pieces of furniture to suggest whole locations. A single cut-out of a tree would be used to represent a forest. A plain chair and a bench for the judge represented an entire courtroom. The scenery was often changed in front of the audience, sometimes by the actors themselves, and there was no front curtain in Brecht's theatre.

Costumes were sometimes complete, but often a single item of clothing or a simple prop was all the costume required. For example, an actor portraying a peasant would appear wearing a sheepskin jacket over a plain dark outfit. At the end of the scene he would remove the jacket, put on a helmet and pick up a spear in order to appear as a soldier in the next scene. Frequently, these changes of costume and character were done onstage in front of the audience, reinforcing the idea of alienation.

Lighting

In many of Brecht's plays, the stage was flooded with bright, white light for the entire time, regardless of whether the scene was a summer day or a winter evening.

Narration

Most of Brecht's plays made use of a screen, or large notices, somewhere on or above the stage. The screen or notices gave the audience information about the

play, introduced the scenes and often made comments about the action happening onstage. Sometimes Brecht also used a narrator: an actor who talked directly to the audience, giving them information and hammering home the message of the play.

Songs

The use of song was another alienation effect. By breaking the mood or action of a scene and bursting into song, the actors were reminding the audience that they were watching a play and that the play had a message. The songs were used to comment on the action, to make a particular point about one of the characters or even to briefly summarise the message of the play. Sometimes the actors actually stepped out of character and sang the songs directly to the audience.

Brecht's most famous song, written with Kurt Weill for their musical *The Threepenny Opera*, is 'Mack the Knife'. A version by American singer Bobby Darin hit number one on the charts in 1959. Jazz great Louis Armstrong also recorded a version.

Movement

Brecht was interested in Asian theatre, particularly Japanese and Chinese. He admired it for the skilled use of techniques, particularly physical movement, and the way movement was used to tell a story in a stylised, unemotional way. Brecht encouraged his actors to learn the formal gestures of Chinese theatre and use them in a completely detached way, as though they were doing exercises or watching themselves in a mirror.

Voice

Brecht made enormous vocal demands on his actors. They were required to sing, chant, use mechanical and strange-sounding voices, produce disconnected and non-human sounds, and speak in a range of dialects and class accents.

Often Brecht's dialogue is powerful, simple, poetic and full of emotion, then suddenly it will be broken by strange or dissonant speech or sounds designed to produce alienation. Class distinctions and regional accents are carefully written into the language of the texts and are extensively used as part of the political and social messages of the plays.

Acting

Brecht believed in the idea of the intelligent actor. He wanted his actors to be interested in the world beyond the stage, to know about politics and social change, and to bring this intelligent understanding to the performance of a role. Brecht described the actor's role as being like an eyewitness at an accident. The actor's job was to demonstrate what happened. Actors must not get carried away with their roles in a play and deceive the audience into believing they are watching a real event. Nor must actors try to become any of the characters they are portraying. The actor's job is to demonstrate the words and actions of the character. At no time should the actor or the audience identify with the character.

Brecht actually listed a series of rules his actors should follow:

- Perform with the awareness of being watched.
- Look at the floor and openly calculate their movements onstage.
- Separate voice from movement so that words and gestures are not coordinated.
- Remain uninvolved with the other actors, physically and emotionally.
- Make their own movements onstage when it suits them.



2.3.2 Bobby Darin 'Mack the Knife'
2.3.3 Louis Armstrong 'Mack the Knife'
2.3.4 Villanova Theatre: *Threepenny Opera*

The famous German actor Lotte Lenya told the story of how she asked Brecht for advice about acting in one of his plays. Instead of giving her a list of rules, Brecht simply told her to follow her instincts and go about the business of acting. It seems Brecht himself was aware that his famous theories could only be taken so far.

- Focus their performance, deliberately acting at specific groups in the audience.
- Speak their lines as if they were a quotation or a speech.
- Speak directly to the audience from centre stage.
- Occasionally speak stage directions aloud.
- Be critical of their characters, as though all the actions had happened in the past and they were now judging them.
- Change roles with other actors, both in rehearsal and in performance.
- Stand in front of a mirror and study their gestures.
- Use robotic, mechanical, dreamlike and other non-realistic movements and voice.
- Use opposite styles of acting, such as acting a serious death scene in an outrageous comedy style.

Brecht's plays are a rich and complex mixture of the real and the unreal, of politics and theatre, and must be treated as such. In the same way, his techniques for communicating ideas and concerns can be extremely powerful, especially when used carefully and in combination with other techniques that balance and enhance those of Brecht.



WORKSHOP 2.3.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Mother Courage and Her Children

Brecht has given us the techniques, and the plays, for expressing a whole range of social and political concerns. However, they only work effectively if we can contribute something of our own. We must apply to Brecht's techniques everything we have learnt about human interaction and communication, and about drama as performance. Most of all, we must use our skills to create real, complex characters in worthwhile human situations. When we do this, we will fully realise the value of Brecht's work.

As you work on *Mother Courage*, you should also make full use of all the skills and techniques you have learnt so far. The play follows the character of Mother Courage through 12 years, across the face of Europe and back again, during the Thirty Years' War of 1618–48. Mother Courage owns a wagon that she uses as a mobile canteen, supplying the armies fighting the war. She is like a vulture, living off the war, but unwilling to make any sacrifices herself.



2.3.5 National Theatre: An introduction to Brechtian Theatre

2.3.6 National Theatre: Five truths Bertolt Brecht

Alamy Stock Photo/Photo 12



2.3.3 Brecht (second from left) rehearses *Mother Courage* with three of his major artistic collaborators: Erich Engel (left), Paul Dessau (the composer) and Helene Weigel, Berlin, 1948

Different scenes skip from year to year and country to country, each one showing Mother Courage trying to make a living and losing her three children in the process. At the end of the play, her last surviving child, her daughter Katrin, is shot. Leaving other people to bury her daughter, Mother Courage harnesses herself to the wagon saying she has to get back into business again.

Brecht's intention was clear. He wanted to show the link between war and making money. He described war as a continuation of business by other means. Most of all, on the brink of the Second World War, Brecht wanted to warn ordinary people and small countries that they would suffer terribly if another war broke out. *Mother Courage and Her Children* is Brecht's plea to the world to prevent all wars as 'no sacrifice is too great for the struggle against war'.

In the following extract, the year is 1632. Mother Courage has sent her daughter Katrin into town to collect some goods. Katrin cannot speak. Mother Courage mentions in this scene that a soldier injured her when she was little and she has been mute ever since. Her older son, Eilif, is off fighting the war, but her younger son, Swiss Cheese, is already dead, executed by a firing squad. Mother Courage is talking to the chaplain, a shifty insubstantial character who has been living off her, when Katrin enters. Katrin is carrying the parcel of goods she was sent to collect, but she is bleeding from a wound over her eye. Notice how Mother Courage speaks with a working-class dialect, leaving out some words and misusing others.

In scene seven, some time has passed and Mother Courage has been making money. In this brief scene she is full of praise for the war. Brecht shows that Mother Courage is a hypocrite who changes her song when things go well. The words of the song also show how no one can escape the war.

Mother Courage and Her Children by Bertolt Brecht

SCENE 6

MOTHER COURAGE What happened, someone assault you? On way back? She was assaulted on her way back. Bet it was that trooper was getting drunk here. I shouldn't have let you go, love. Drop that stuff. Not too bad, just a flesh wound you got. I'll bandage it and in a week it'll be all right. Worse than wild beasts, they are. [She ties up the wound.]

THE CHAPLAIN It's not them I blame. They never went raping back home. The fault lies with those that start wars, it brings humanity's lowest instincts to the surface.

MOTHER COURAGE Calm down. Didn't clerk come back with you? That's because you're respectable, they don't bother. Wound ain't a deep one, won't leave no mark. There you are, all bandaged up. You'll get something, love, keep calm. Something I put aside for you, wait till you see. [She delves into a sack and brings out Yvette's red high-heeled boots.] Made you open your eyes, eh? Something you always wanted. They're yours. Put 'em on quick, before I change me mind. Won't leave no mark, and what if it does? Ones I'm really sorry for's the ones they fancy. Drag them around till they're worn out, they do. Those they don't care for they leaves

alive. I seen girls before now had pretty faces, then in no time looking fit to frighten a hyaena. Can't even go behind a bush without risking trouble, horrible life they lead. Same like with trees, straight well-shaped ones get chopped down to make beams for houses and crooked ones live happily ever after. So it's a stroke of luck for you really. Them boots'll be all right, I greased them before putting them away.

[KATTRIN leaves the boots where they are and crawls into the cart.]

THE CHAPLAIN Let's hope she's not disfigured.

MOTHER COURAGE She'll have a scar. No use her waiting for peacetime now.

THE CHAPLAIN She didn't let them steal the things.

MOTHER COURAGE Maybe I shouldn't have dinned that into her so. Wish I knew what went on in that head of hers. Just once she stayed out all night, once in all those years. Afterwards she went around like before, except she worked harder. Couldn't get her to tell what had happened. Worried me quite a while, that did. [She collects the articles brought by KATTRIN, and sorts them angrily.] **That's war for you. Nice way to get a living!**

[Sound of cannon fire.]

THE CHAPLAIN Now they'll be burying the commander in chief. This is a historic moment.

MOTHER COURAGE What I call a historic moment is them bashing my daughter over the eye. She's half wrecked already, won't get no husband now, and her so crazy about kids; any road she's only dumb from war, soldier stuffed something in her mouth when she was little. As for Swiss Cheese I'll never see him again, and where Eilif is God alone knows. **War be damned.**

Bloomsbury: Extract from *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht, 1939, Methuen Drama an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing

Scene six ends with Mother Courage condemning war for the way it has destroyed her family. This scene is used by Brecht to show how women suffer in wartime.

SCENE 7

[High road.]

[THE CHAPLAIN, MOTHER COURAGE and KATTRIN are pulling the cart, which is hung with new wares. MOTHER COURAGE is wearing a necklace of silver coins.]

MOTHER COURAGE I won't have you folk spoiling my war for me. I'm told it kills off the weak, but they're write-off in peacetime too. And war gives its people a better deal. [She sings:]

'And if you feel your forces fading.
You won't be there to share the fruits.
But what is war but private trading
That deals in blood instead of boots?'
And what's the use of settling down? Them as does are first
to go.

[Sings:]

'Some people think to live by looting
The goods some others haven't got.
You think it's just a line they're shooting.
Until you hear they have been shot.
And some I saw dig six feet under
In haste to lie down and pass out.
Now they're at rest perhaps they wonder
Just what was all their haste about.'

[They pull it further.]

Bloomsbury: Extract from *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht, 1939,
Methuen Drama an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing

Exercise: Work on these scenes from the play to realise a performance that uses both Meyerhold's and Brecht's techniques. For example, at the start of the scene, when Mother Courage is worrying about Kattrin, actors might perform a highly stylised mime showing what happened to her, with the soldiers moving like robots. For some of the speeches and songs, actors could speak directly to the audience and even step out of character to do this.



Ursula Yovich as Mother Courage in the 2013 Queensland Theatre production, adapted by Wesley Enoch and Paula Nazarski. Directed by Wesley Enoch.

2.3.4 Ursula Yovich as Mother Courage in the 2013 Queensland Theatre Company production, adapted by Wesley Enoch and Paula Nazarski, directed by Wesley Enoch. This adaptation is set in mining towns in a dystopian Western Australia and used an all-Indigenous cast.

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO CHARACTERISATION

The systems devised by Stanislavski, Grotowski, Meyerhold, Artaud and Brecht in the earlier part of the 20th century still profoundly influence the training and the work of actors throughout the world today. However, there have also been many significant developments in the theatre and an important part of these changes has been the emergence of different forms of performance that have led to new ways of acting. Some of these contemporary performance styles are completely new, while others are adaptations of existing forms of performance, including circus and dance, as well as new Asian theatre styles such as Butoh and Suzuki.

In this chapter, we will explore a number of these contemporary forms of characterisation through the work of some major theatre innovators: Anne Bogart, Eugenio Barba, Jacques Lecoq, Tadashi Suzuki and the creators of method acting – Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner and Stella Adler. These directors and teachers either developed new performance styles themselves or popularised new forms of theatre in their work that have become major acting styles in the 21st century.

Two major contemporary theatre practitioners, whose work is having a profound effect on characterisation and performance in the theatre today, are Robert Lepage and Simon McBurney from theatre companies Ex Machina and Complicité. Their work is explored further in the end-of-section case studies.

3.1 ANNE BOGART

Anne Bogart is an American theatre director who developed and adapted her own form of directing performance that focused on the connection between the actor's mind and body. She then combined her approach with the work of Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki, who has created a form of physical performance based on traditional Japanese forms but translated into a very modern style.

Bogart was originally influenced by Grotowski's work. She began teaching at the New York University after she finished her studies in theatre there, developing experimental performance work with her students. She later went to Europe to work in innovative new theatre before returning to New York in the 1980s, where she established a reputation as an extraordinary director. At this time she was strongly influenced by Viewpoints, a new system of modern dance practice and training.



3.1.1 Anne Bogart's Blog

3.1.2 SITI

3.1.3 League of Professional Theatre
Women: Anne Bogart

3.1.4 Stories we tell: Narrative and
empathy

Bogart went to Japan in 1990 to work with Tadashi Suzuki, who had established an international reputation by creating a radical new form of Japanese theatre. Together they set up a company of actors that was dedicated to combining their two approaches to performance and acting. This company, founded in 1992 in Saratoga Springs, New York, but now based in New York City, is named SITI – the Saratoga International Theatre Institute, an ensemble-based theatre company.

International exchanges and collaborations are at the core of SITI's practice, ensuring that performers benefit from cross-cultural influences in dance, music, art and other performance styles. The actor training that SITI offers is one of the most important parts of the company's activities, and actors from around the world, including Australia, have studied with Bogart and Suzuki. The company offers courses for actors in a combination of Viewpoints and Suzuki training, and in composition. They also develop and perform new works.



SITI Company/Bang On A Can All Stars/Termine Photography

3.1.1 SITI Company's *Steel Hammer*, directed by Anne Bogart with music composed by Julia Wolfe from Bang on a Can, premiered in 2014 using recorded music. In 2015, the Bang on a Can All-Stars joined the actors onstage for a live performance.

THE VIEWPOINTS TECHNIQUE

Viewpoints is a technique developed by choreographer Mary Overlie in the 1970s for examining and describing dance performance in terms of six key elements: space, story, time, emotion, movement and shape.

Overlie's Viewpoints were later refined and adapted for theatrical performance by Anne Bogart and another well-known US director, Tina Landau. In their system, there are nine qualities of stage presence divided into two categories: time and space. Sometimes a further three vocal qualities are added: pitch, dynamic and timbre.

The purpose of Bogart's Viewpoints is to help actors work quickly and adventurously, responding spontaneously to ideas and challenges, and using intuition rather than extensive planning to create performance work that is exciting and flexible, and focuses on strong voice and movement.



- 3.1.5 Working in the theatre: Anne Bogart
- 3.1.6 Conversation with Anne Bogart
- 3.1.7 Anne Bogart's 'What's the Story: Essays about Art, Theatre, and Storytelling'

Although these qualities are taught in other practices, Bogart's method also insists on actors being spontaneous and responding in movement the way they feel is right, not simply repeating a learnt pattern or action. For example, you might begin by walking beside someone and then suddenly, without thinking about it, turn away and stop with your back to them. As a new impulse occurs to you, you might turn again and continue to follow them. Bogart describes this intense awareness and response to other performers as 'listening with your whole body'.



WORKSHOP 3.1.1: BOGART'S METHOD

Exercise 1: Working in a group, line up with a half-metre space between you. Move forward in a straight line as though you are moving down a lane and complete a number of simple actions as you move – jumping, squatting, striding, stopping and crouching. As you perform each action, be aware of the people moving around you and respond instinctively to their movements, timing or changing your actions in harmony with theirs.

Exercise 2: Working with a partner, choose a few lines of dialogue from a play and start to perform. You can speak all the lines or just part of them, repeat them or remain silent. Let the speaking of the lines decide your movement, but do not plan in advance or try to think ahead. Instead, respond to your own impulse to speak and move, and to the actions and speech of your partner.

Exercise 3: In a group, generate an improvisation about a dream, but with the following conditions: there must be 10 seconds of stillness, 5 seconds of group speaking and 20 seconds of fast, whole-group movement.

3.2 EUGENIO BARBA



- 3.2.1 Eugenio Barba
- 3.2.2 Odin Teatret
- 3.2.3 Eugenio Barba's interview, 2011

Eugenio Barba is the director of the Odin Teatret in Denmark, and he creates and directs new works as well as researching, teaching and writing about theatre as a scholar.

Barba was born in 1936 in Italy but moved to Norway in 1954 to work and study at Oslo University. He later spent three years with Jerzy Grotowski's theatre in Poland and also travelled to India where he studied traditional forms of theatre. Barba later included the techniques he learnt from Grotowski and Kathakali in the actor training he developed.

In 1964 Barba formed his own theatre company, Odin Teatret (Odin Theatre), in Norway and developed his methods of actor training. Their first production, *Omitofilene*, was performed throughout Scandinavia. In 1966 Barba moved the company to Denmark and renamed it the Nordic Theatre Laboratory/Odin Teatret. Company members come from a dozen different countries and the company has so far created 81 performances and performed in 63 countries. Barba is regarded as one of the most important theatre directors and scholars in the world.

BARBA'S APPROACH: SELF-DEFINITION

Like many other major theatre directors and teachers, Barba believes that the core of acting lies in the use of the body and the ability to express a character through action and through sound. He was also influenced by traditional Asian forms of theatre. He uses improvisation extensively, both in training actors and in creating and staging performances.

The use of exercises to develop physical skills is important in the training Barba uses, but they are only part of the overall development of the individual actor. The exercises are designed to teach important principles about physical acting, such as the use of balance, finding the centre of gravity of the body, controlling opposing tensions and discovering movement patterns that are completely different from daily physical activities. Barba encourages his actors to experiment with their own actions and exercises rather than just doing the same as everyone else because he wants them to find their own abilities, boundaries and rhythms – their unique qualities as performers.

In terms of voice, Barba's actors work on developing their individual voices, rather than just practising exercises. At different times in his work he has taught his actors to use Grotowski's resonator training, and for one play they practised a range of vocal exercises ranging from simple voice work to Chinese opera to chanting and speaking in a made-up language. However, the emphasis is on the actors constructing their own vocal training overall.



Odin Teatret Archives. Photo: Jan Růsz

3.2.1 Odin Teatret in a performance of *Ode to Progress*, 1997



- 3.2.4 Training at Teatr Laboratorium, 1972
- 3.2.5 Physical training at Odin Teatret, 1972
- 3.2.6 Physical training by Odin Teatret
- 3.2.7 Vocal training at Odin Teatret, 1972
- 3.2.8 Vocal training by Odin Teatret
- 3.2.9 What is energy?



WORKSHOP 3.2.1: BARBA'S METHOD

Exercise 1: Isolation: Sit in a chair, arms folded and feet together. Now experiment with a number of movements – using arms, legs, back and head – doing each one separately. After each movement, return to your original position. Now imagine you have been kidnapped and are strapped in the chair, but with your arms and legs free. Repeat the moves you made, but this time as the kidnapped person.

Exercise 2: Opposing body tensions: Stand with your knees bent, your legs wide apart and your arms stretched above your head. Make an S movement through your body, pushing your hips in one direction, your body in the other direction and your arms back the other way.

Exercise 3: Improvisation: Working as a group, imagine you are all trapped in a net. Generate an improvisation in which you work together to break out of the net. Deliberately improvise so that your body movements are different from every other member of the group. Develop a series of individual words and sounds for your role that are also different from other group members.

Exercise 4: Realise the net improvisation as a performance, focusing on expressing your own individual body movement and sound as effectively as possible while working in harmony with the rest of the group.

3.3 JACQUES LECOQ

Jacques Lecoq was born in 1921 in Paris. At the age of 35 he founded L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq, which went on to become the most famous mime school in the world.

Lecoq's early experience as a gymnast and physical education teacher gave him an understanding of movement in space. He also learnt about mime, masks and physical theatre while working with a number of commedia dell'arte companies in Italy. When he returned to France he opened his own theatre school in Paris and he went on to devote most of his working life to this school.

Lecoq was interested in giving a voice to ordinary people in a country that had suffered terribly during the Second World War. His emphasis was on using the actor's body rather than relying on dialogue to create meaning.

Lecoq's school is the world centre for mime training. A large number of international actors and directors who trained with Lecoq have gone on to become major theatre practitioners in their own right, including Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier, as well as members of the Complicité company in the UK, one of the world's great physical theatre companies. Lecoq died in 1999.

LECOQ'S TECHNIQUES

Lecoq aimed to train his actors to investigate ways of performance that suited them best. His training nurtured the creativity of the performer, instead of giving them a set of skills. Lecoq accomplished this by never telling the students how to



3.3.1 École Internationale De
Théâtre Jacques Lecoq

3.3.2 Physical theatre at École
Jacques Lecoq

do what was right but encouraging them to keep trying new approaches to creative expression. The idea of playfulness was central to stimulating creativity, and Lecoq insisted that actors should take risks, play with ideas and be as inventive, generous and open as possible.

He encouraged actors to use what he called replay, in which everyday experiences and situations were explored spontaneously and silently, focusing on expressing the actions of characters as imaginatively and creatively as possible. He also encouraged the transformation of objects in a manner similar to Grotowski, in which a simple object such as a stick could be used to represent a whole range of different things – a gun, an umbrella, a motorbike etc.

Lecoq aimed to have his actors express emotion through the movement of their bodies. He made extensive use of masks, including the 'neutral mask', to isolate the body as the primary means of expressing emotion. Actors would begin with the neutral mask to emphasise their movements, then progressively move to small masks.

Lecoq did not set out to create a complete system of acting and he rejected the idea that his techniques were a 'method'. His life's work was focused on what his books called 'the moving body' and 'theatre of movement and gesture'.



WORKSHOP 3.3.1: LECOQ'S METHOD

Exercise 1: Work in pairs, using a long stick or cane as the focus of your movement. Each of you hold one end of the stick or cane and pull and push it between you. As you move, be sure to keep the same distance from each other. As you develop the exercise, try to work further apart, still using the stick or cane, and freeze completely a number of times during the exercise. Take it in turns to give an instruction to your partner, using the stick to emphasise the word. You might say 'come' and pull on the stick, or 'kneel' and push down on the stick.

Exercise 2: Work in groups, with all of you wearing neutral masks. Imagine your bodies are huge and begin to move around the space, making contact with other members of the group and interacting with them.

Exercise 3: Working in groups, use lengths of cloth and your bodies to create the shape and actions of a single living creature – real or fantasy.

Exercise 4: Working on your own, make a simple body mask out of cloth or other materials to create a living creature. The body mask can cover your whole body or just part of it. Develop the body shape and movement of the creature you have created with the body mask. Now work with a partner and improvise a scene showing the interactions between your creature and your partner's creation.

3.4 TADASHI SUZUKI

More than any other Asian theatre practitioner, Tadashi Suzuki has influenced the development of theatre throughout the world over the past 40 years. Suzuki founded the Waseda Little Theatre of Tokyo in 1965. He was the General Artistic Director of the Shizuoka Performing Arts Centre between 1995 and 2007, and organised Japan's first international theatre festival, the Toga Festival, from 1982 to 1999. Suzuki's book *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki* remains an influential work in theatre worldwide.



- 3.4.1 Tadashi Suzuki Biography
- 3.4.2 Artist talk with Tadashi Suzuki
- 3.4.3 Tadashi Suzuki with Anne Bogart
- 3.4.4 Suzuki Elektra
- 3.4.5 Tadashi Suzuki, *Tale of Lear*

Suzuki's approach blends the forms and traditions of Ancient Greek theatre with Japanese Kabuki and Noh performance styles. Noh is a traditional Japanese form of musical theatre that dates back to the 14th century. It is highly stylised and was traditionally performed for aristocratic audiences, with performers often wearing masks. Kabuki is a Japanese dance drama form that originated in the 17th century. Kabuki makes use of exaggerated and noisy performances and was more accessible to commoners.

The core of his work has been the development and teaching of his rigorous training system, the Suzuki Method, whose principles have also been highly influential in modern theatre. In his actor training, Suzuki demands intense levels of commitment and skill, particularly in physical control of the body.

Many of Suzuki's productions have been of classic European plays, including Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and his most famous production, Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, which toured the world.

SUZUKI ACTOR TRAINING

Although Suzuki's approach to training and performance are influenced by Asian philosophy and Japanese forms of theatre, his collaboration with Anne Bogart in the USA has also informed his practice. Suzuki's training is focused on the actor's awareness and the positioning of the body as well as highly stylised movement. The training is intensely physical and includes elements of traditional Japanese and Greek theatre, ballet and martial arts. The training aims to increase the actor's emotional and physical power and commitment to each moment on the stage. The exercises concentrate on the lower body and the actor's footwork, sharpening breath control and concentration. Suzuki's training focuses on the actor's connection to the earth and to the centre of the body. In particular, Suzuki has developed distinct ways of moving that include stomping, sliding and shuffling. These movements are used as exercises and as ways of moving onstage in performance.

Perhaps the most striking style of movement Suzuki introduced into theatre performance is rhythmic stomping. As a part of traditional Japanese religious ritual, stomping was meant to link the worshipper with the earth.

Suzuki encourages this idea of the actor linking with the earth, but also uses stomping to increase the ability of actors to control their breathing and develop their body strength.

robbie.jack/Corbis via Getty Images



3.4.1 Kabuki and Noh have both had an influence on the work of Tadashi Suzuki. This is a scene from Suzuki's production of *Waiting for Orestes: Electra*, 2012.

Sliding their feet is another technique to help performers make contact with the ground, and it is used extensively in training his actors and in performance. The sliding movement increases the flexibility and strength of actors' muscles, and because it demands serious concentration to perform effectively, sliding also builds focus. The stylised sliding movements developed by Suzuki are used to create intricate patterns of action and this also helps actors to work together as an ensemble.



3.4.6 Suzuki Method: stomping



WORKSHOP 3.4.1: SUZUKI

Exercise 1: Stand in a neutral position, legs comfortably apart and hands by your sides. With your back straight, slowly bend your knees, lifting your arms with hands pointing down. Be aware of the downward pressure of your body towards the earth. Freeze as a statue and hold the position.

Exercise 2: Begin to move, sliding your feet across the floor as smoothly and evenly as possible. Be aware of your contact with the ground. Come to a stop and again become a statue.

Exercise 3: Begin to stomp your feet in a steady rhythm. Make the stomp strong but controlled. Move forward, steadily increasing the tempo and power of the stomping. Freeze again in mid stomp to create an action statue.

Exercise 4: Form two groups facing each other on opposite sides of the room. Play some slow, rhythmic music and begin to move slowly across the room, using the sliding technique. Try to pass smoothly between the people in the other group coming towards you. When each group reaches the other side of the room, turn and repeat the exercise.

3.5 THE METHOD

Method acting is one of the most influential – and controversial – systems of acting. The most important actors, directors and teachers who developed the Method were Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner, and the influence of their work has lived on after their deaths. Despite the fact that Adler and Sanford split from Strasberg and emphasised different aspects of method acting, the core of all their teaching focused on the emotional and psychological dimensions of acting. In this regard, the Method is very different from the other contemporary acting techniques.

The Method was originally based on Stanislavski's system of actor training and adopted many of his principles, including the use of genuine emotion to portray truthful roles and situations. Method actors are also taught to decide on the 'super-objective' that motivates all the behaviour of their character, and to create a subtext in their performance. This subtext involves the unspoken thoughts and motives that lie behind the dialogue and actions of a character.

The Method is different from Stanislavski's system in a fundamental way. Method actors use their own memories, experiences and observations when developing a role; that is, they put themselves into the character. The result is that some method actors give substantially the same performance over and over again in different roles, portraying characters that are all very like them. This is the opposite of Stanislavski's insistence that actors must create unique and believable characters that are authentic for each role in each play.

Daniel Day-Lewis, Christian Bale, Robert De Niro, Heath Ledger, Jim Carey, Joaquin Phoenix, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Nicholas Cage, Michael Caine, Kate Winslet, Dustin Hoffman, Marilyn Monroe, Angelina Jolie and Jessica Chastain have all been reported to have used the Method in at least one of their performances.



3.5.1 Marilyn Monroe outside the Actors Studio, 1956

LEE STRASBERG

Lee Strasberg was born in 1901, in what is now Ukraine, and moved to New York at seven years of age. He left school in 1918 and studied acting at the American Laboratory Theatre, which offered classes based on Stanislavski's system. Strasberg became a professional actor in 1924, and seven years later he helped to establish a new theatre company on Broadway called the Group.

The Group Theatre was something very new in American theatre. It attempted to create exciting and outstanding new plays and performances that had strong social messages. Over a number of years, Strasberg directed for the Group and also became an expert acting teacher. In 1948 he became the director of the Actors Studio, still one of the most famous places for actor training in the

world. During the 34 years until his death in 1982, Strasberg trained 24 Academy Award-winning actors at the Actors Studio, including Dustin Hoffman, Marlon Brando and Paul Newman, and other well-known actors, such as James Dean and Marilyn Monroe.

Strasberg's method

The core of Strasberg's technique centres around the personality of the actor. He believed that actors should understand the psychological motivation of their characters by relating them to their own life. This included inventing a 'backlife' for each character based on the actor's own understanding of what that character was like. When Strasberg asked his actors to create a 'backlife' he was asking them to give each role a history of experiences and relationships that were consistent with the script.

A great deal of Strasberg's actor training was designed to develop the emotional awareness of his actors so that they could use feelings from their own previous experiences in the roles they portrayed. However, Strasberg again focused on the actor making emotions and experiences real to themselves onstage, rather than part of the genuine creation of a fictional character. The idea of his method was to break down the artificiality of acting by encouraging the actor to become so familiar with a character that the role ceased to be distinct from the actor's self. As a result, the personality of the performer became part of the performance.

STELLA ADLER

Stella Adler was born in New York in 1901 into an acting family – all five of her siblings became actors and she grew up acting in plays with her parents. She was influenced by Stanislavski after seeing a production by his Moscow Art Theatre in 1923. Stella Adler joined the Group Theatre in 1931 and worked there with both Meisner and Strasberg. Adler travelled widely and performed around the world,



3.5.1 The Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute

3.5.2 Lee Strasberg on acting

3.5.3 Lee Strasberg film legacy reel

In the 1974 Mafia film *The Godfather II*, Lee Strasberg played the role of gangster Hyman Roth.

living and acting in London, Europe and South America, as well as the USA. She left the Group Theatre briefly and studied with Stanislavski in Paris and her time with him convinced her that American theatre needed to be changed.

As well as being a major theatre innovator, Adler was an outstanding actor, performing with the Group until 1937. She performed in Hollywood films for a number of years before returning to New York to act and direct. In 1949, after some years of teaching elsewhere, she started the Stella Adler Studio of Acting in New York, which still operates today. Adler believed that imagination was crucial to effective acting. She encouraged actors to find the secret and unspoken messages hidden in a play and bring them to life onstage. Among the actors who have studied at the Stella Adler Studio of Acting are Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro and Warren Beatty.

Adler's method

Like Strasberg, Adler emphasised the importance of real emotions. Unlike Strasberg, Adler believed that the emotions created onstage must be authentic to the role being portrayed, not just the actors revealing their own feelings.

This meant that Adler placed great importance on the imagination of the actor in creating characters that were true to the time, place and situation of each play they performed. She insisted that the social, political, historical and geographical background of the characters in every play made them different from the actors playing them, so it was impossible for the actors to rely on their own 'emotion memory'. The only way to create these roles effectively was through the use of the actor's imagination. Her actors were required to research the context of a play in depth and to come to understand their characters through imagining the context of their lives. She developed a number of exercises to stimulate their imaginations.

Adler also insisted on the importance of skilled physical movement to present the action of a play effectively. She stated that in a performance, actions should come first and then words come out of the actions. She encouraged actors to build up an effective repertoire of actions that could be used to express the meaning of a play and the nature of a character.

SANFORD MEISNER

Sanford Meisner was born in New York in 1905. After studying to become a concert pianist, he began a job in theatre, later joining Strasberg and Adler at the Group Theatre. He became disenchanted with the style of teaching at the Group Theatre and spoke to Adler about better ways to train actors. In 1935 he became head of the drama department at the Neighborhood Playhouse, while continuing to act and direct plays produced by the Group Theatre. He also appeared in a number of plays on Broadway.

In 1958 Meisner moved into films, becoming a director with 20th Century Fox in Los Angeles, and acting in a number of films. However, his connection to the theatre remained strong and he returned to the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York to head the drama department, where he remained until 1990. He also founded his own school of acting in 1985, which still operates in California. In 1995 he launched the Sanford Meisner Center, which combines both performance and actor training.



- 3.5.4 Stella Adler: Art of Acting Studio
- 3.5.5 Stella Adler: Awake and dream
- 3.5.6 Stella Adler: You are ONLY the character
- 3.5.7 Stella Adler on Ibsen (1)
- 3.5.8 Stella Adler on Ibsen (2)
- 3.5.9 Stella Adler on Ibsen (3)
- 3.5.10 Stella Adler on Ibsen (4)
- 3.5.11 Stella Adler on Ibsen (5)
- 3.5.12 Stella Adler on Strindberg
- 3.5.13 Stella Adler on Stanislavski Method
- 3.5.14 Stella Adler on Actors' size



- 3.5.15 The Sanford Meisner Center
- 3.5.16 Sanford Meisner: Meisner Technique
- 3.5.17 Sanford Meisner Master Class

Meisner received commendations from three US Presidents and was named 'Humanitarian of the Year 1990' by the Washington Charity Awards.

Meisner's method

Meisner believed that actors had to create genuine emotion in performance, and this emotion needed to come from the truth and meaning of each play and the characters. For Meisner, the creation of a role was fluid and spontaneous, and relied on the relationships between characters and between the actor and the audience. While he believed that actors should create apparently real and believable people onstage, he also insisted that they needed to react and modify their roles in response to the performances of the other actors. Much more than Strasberg or Adler, he emphasised that it was the connection between actors onstage that was vital to the power of any play.

One important way of training actors to respond instinctively and truthfully in performance was Meisner's use of repetition. Actors are encouraged to work in pairs and begin with one actor spontaneously making a comment related to their partner. The partner immediately repeats the comment, and the first actor does the same. As the comment is repeated, it gradually changes in the way it is spoken and eventually in the use of the words. The aim of the technique is to encourage actors to respond truthfully to dialogue and a dramatic situation.



WORKSHOP 3.5.1: THE METHOD

Exercise 1: Working with a partner, make a simple comment such as 'You look happy today'. Your partner repeats the comment about themselves: 'I look happy today'. Repeat the comment a number of times, watching your partner's body language and listening to the tone of their voice. Note the changes in the way they speak the line and in the way you respond to them.

Exercise 2: In pairs, generate an improvisation about two friends having a disagreement in a workplace. Draw on your own experiences and memories as much as possible to create the role and the situation. Now realise the disagreement as a performance to one other group and ask them to respond by identifying how closely your roles mirrored yourself and your partner, and how effective this was in making the performance believable and engaging.

Exercise 3: In groups, generate an improvisation about a group of convicts coming to Australia in 1788. Before you begin improvising, share your knowledge and understanding about the time and place of the First Fleet and the backgrounds and personalities of the convicts – you might need to do some research at this stage. Once you begin the action, respond freely and imaginatively to the situation of the improvisation and to the performances of the rest of the group.

Exercise 4: Research an actor who uses the Method and explore how the actor uses method techniques to develop a character, examining the techniques the actor uses. See if you can identify the reasons why method acting is controversial from the actor's work, and give your own opinion on method acting from your experiences of creating characters.

Exercise 5: Working in small groups, choose a script and discuss how you would stage it using method acting. Work on one scene in detail to perform. Plays by Milk Crate Theatre, such as *Fearless*, are strong socially aware works that would provide an effective challenge.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR CHARACTERISATION TODAY

In the 21st century there have been some exciting and innovative changes in the way theatre is created and staged. These changes have been influenced by developments in technology, innovative use of performance spaces and the blending of different forms of theatre from around the world. In this chapter we look at the work of two of the most important innovators in the theatre today, Robert Lepage and Simon McBurney, who have developed new techniques through their theatre companies Ex Machina and Complicité. The outstanding multidisciplinary theatre created by these companies provides new possibilities for characterisation. Lepage and McBurney have experimented with what could be described as ‘total theatre’, where acting styles, theatrical forms, technology and audience engagement are woven into performances that surprise and challenge both performers and audiences.

Unlike some of the 20th-century directors and acting coaches who developed a particular system or method for creating and representing characters, Lepage and McBurney offer theatre makers exciting ways of developing live performances that require a range of characterisations and types of acting, which are enhanced by imaginative staging and the use of technology.

4.1 ROBERT LEPAGE

Robert Lepage (b. 1957) is a Canadian director, designer, actor, dramatist and playwright. Lepage is an international artist who works in different countries across a number of forms of performance and speaks seven different languages.

He began acting as a teenager in school plays and studied theatre in Canada and later in Paris. His first professional position was with Théâtre Repère in Quebec City in 1982. In 1985 he devised a play using multimedia called *The Dragon Trilogy*, which made him famous internationally, and as a result, he was invited to direct plays in Germany, London and Sweden.

In 1994 Lepage created his theatre company Ex Machina, which he has directed for more than 20 years. Lepage described it as ‘a multidisciplinary company bringing together actors, writers, set designers, technicians, opera singers, puppeteers, computer graphic designers, video artists, contortionists and musicians’.



- 4.1.1 Robert Lepage
- 4.1.2 Robert Lepage: An introduction
- 4.1.3 Robert Lepage on voice, speech and *Lipsynch*
- 4.1.4 Robert Lepage on directing actors, speaking text and emotion
- 4.1.5 Robert Lepage on visual imagination and audiences
- 4.1.6 Robert Lepage: Breaking New Ground: At the intersection of art and technology
- 4.1.7 Playwright and Director Lepage's Unique Creative Style
- 4.1.8 Robert Lepage and Peter Gelb Panel Discussion at MIT

Lepage has not confined his work just to the theatre. He has staged opera performances in a number of countries including 1984, an opera based on George Orwell's novel. Lepage has also directed and acted in films, and in 2010 he was the creator and director of Cirque du Soleil's circus performance *Totem*. He staged tours for a British rock singer, and in 2008 he designed a massive light installation, *The Image Mill*, that projected scenes of Quebec's history onto the side of a building in Quebec City.

The performances Lepage creates are an extraordinary mixture of visual images and powerful storytelling. His use of transformation in the staging of his plays has been compared to the work of Peter Brook, perhaps the greatest director of the 20th century.

Lepage has won numerous honours and awards in Canada and abroad and has been described as the most important theatre maker in the world today. He received the Governor General's Performing Arts Award for outstanding contribution to Canadian cultural life in 2010 and 2011. Lepage was given the prestigious Europe Theatre Prize in 2007 and was made a *Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et lettres* (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) in France.

4.2 SIMON MCBURNEY



- 4.2.1 Simon McBurney
- 4.2.2 Simon McBurney interview

Simon McBurney (b. 1957) is a director, actor, dramatist and playwright who has staged work in numerous countries and directed a range of performance work including opera. As well as directing theatre, he has staged live comedy performances including *French and Saunders Live*. McBurney has also acted in a number of films and television series, including *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows* and *Mission Impossible – Rogue Nation*.

He trained in movement at the Jacques Lecoq school in Paris. In his late teens and early 20s, he travelled widely to Canada, the USA, Greece and France. In 1983 McBurney founded Théâtre de Complicité with Annabel Arden and Marcello Magni, and the company developed a style of improvised physical theatre that increasingly used technology as an essential part of the performances. In 1989 McBurney became the sole artistic director and remains in that position today. The name of the company became simply Complicité.

McBurney aims to create theatre performance that is not being done anywhere else. As with Lepage, his productions draw on international theatre, dance, music, literature and developing technologies. However, McBurney does not necessarily see himself as an innovator. 'There's nothing really original,' he says. 'There's only the question of whether something is alive, and speaking to you.'

McBurney has an international reputation as one of the most original talents in the world of modern theatre. He works instinctively and in close cooperation with everyone around him, frequently changing or even abandoning performance work when he feels it is not working. Much of his theatrical work is driven by his extraordinary range of interests and by his passionate beliefs, but also by the desire to push the boundaries of live performance to the limits.

McBurney's mother gave him a passion for theatre; she wanted to be an actor herself and encouraged him to begin acting at school.



WORKSHOP 4.2.1: LEPAGE AND MCBURNEY

Exercise 1: Working in pairs, improvise a performance about a dream or nightmare that has surreal and fantasy elements. Divide the space into light and dark areas and use simple objects such as chairs and cloths to set the stage, transforming them continuously to provide all the props and sets in the performance.

Exercise 2: Working in groups, improvise a performance about the experiences of refugees escaping from a war. Use images and film projected onto the performance space as the only lighting so it shines on the actors as well as the surfaces of the space. Create the performance through movement and sound, without spoken dialogue.

Exercise 3: In a group, record a soundscape that includes sound effects, music and dialogue for an improvisation about astronauts in space. Use physical theatre to perform the play, and time the movement of the characters to the rhythms of the soundscape.

Exercise 4: Working individually, create an improvisation where you tell a story to an audience about a mysterious or surreal event. Use just one dramatic staging object or a single image projected onto a screen or wall as your setting. Use different coloured single spots to form pools of light surrounded by dark. Record a soundtrack and control it, making it louder and softer and switching it off and on during the performance. As you tell the story, take on different roles which include characters in your story but also a range of other creatures, real and imaginary.

Exercise 5: Research a play created and directed by Lepage and another by McBurney. Compare and contrast the meaning, form, style and staging of the two plays, identifying both the similarities and differences.

Exercise 6: Reflect on your research on the two plays and on the work of Lepage and McBurney as a whole, deciding what you consider are the major contributions they have made to contemporary theatre.

CASE STUDY 1.1 EX MACHINA



C1.1.1 Ex Machina

Many of the plays staged by Ex Machina have been written and directed by Robert Lepage, often in collaboration with other members of the company. The work of the company has explored a range of issues and stories from space exploration, to the bombing of Hiroshima, to the fairy stories of Hans Christian Anderson.

Quills

Ex Machina's *Quills*, set in France, begins during the reign of Napoleon more than 200 years ago. The action takes place in the Charenton Asylum, where the Marquis de Sade is imprisoned for writing books and plays of a violent and sexual nature. De Sade's name has given us the word 'sadism' to describe deliberately harming someone for enjoyment. The original stage play was made into a successful film starring Geoffrey Rush. In Ex Machina's stage production, Robert Lepage himself took the role of the Marquis de Sade.

The staging of the play uses mirrors that both reflect the characters and allow them to be visible behind the mirrors at times. Lines of vertical fluorescent lights form the bars of cells imprisoning the characters, darkness and light, and black and white are used throughout in the lighting, staging and costumes. *Quills* explores the questions of censorship and freedom of expression, and concerns the responsibility of artists for the consequences of their creations



Stéphane Bourgeois

C1.1.1 *Quills* by Doug Wright, directed by Robert Lepage and Jean-Pierre Cloutier, 2016

Playing Cards

Beginning in 2010, Ex Machina began working on *Playing Cards*, a four-part series of plays that Robert Lepage and the company were commissioned to create by some of



ÉRICK LABBÉ

C1.1.2 *SPADES* premiered 9 May 2012, in Madrid at the Teatro Circo Price (Spain)



C1.1.2 *Quills*

C1.1.3 *Quills* announcement (French)



C1.1.4 *Playing cards: SPADES*

C1.1.5 *Playing cards: SPADES* – official trailer

C1.1.6 *Playing cards: HEARTS*

C1.1.7 *Playing cards: HEARTS* – official trailer

the major theatres across Europe, including Stockholm, Madrid, Copenhagen, Zagreb, London Roundhouse and Chalons. The first in the series, *SPADES*, is about war because the spade originally represented the spear or sword of war. It explores the war in Iraq and how both individuals and countries became involved in the war, often against their will, and having no idea where the war would lead.

HEARTS deals with love, *DIAMONDS* represents money and *CLUBS* symbolises the working class and class generally. The series of plays have been performed widely around the world. As with all Ex Machina work, the staging and acting combine stunning visual images with extraordinary transformations of light, props, space and the performers themselves.

The Far Side of the Moon

First performed in Quebec City in 2000, *The Far Side of the Moon* has been performed around the world a number of times over the years. The play examines the relationship between two brothers who are trying to come to terms with the death of their mother. At the same time, the play is about the Russian cosmonaut Leonov and his attempt to adjust to the immensity of space as he leaves his spacecraft. The play makes moving and imaginative connections between everyday life and the immensity and wonder of the universe.

Lipsynch

In *Lipsynch*, Ex Machina uses theatre performance to create an ambitious, nine-hour exploration of the human voice, which Lepage has called the DNA of the soul. In *Lipsynch*, he sets out to show how our voices reveal our true selves in what we say and the way we say it. The play interweaves nine stories that happen at different times in different countries and cultures. The central story, that begins the play and flows through it, involves an opera singer who rescues a baby boy when his mother dies on a plane flight. The singer is on a quest to regain her voice and recapture the voice of her father. Each of the nine episodes is built around personal stories like this, and different members of the audience identify with different stories. *Lipsynch* uses a range of music from rock to jazz to opera and orchestral symphonies, from Bach to Bacharach, to explore a range of human experiences that include conflict in Nicaragua, life in London and the Vietnam War. One of the central musical pieces is Gorecki's haunting Third Symphony, *Symphony Of Sorrowful Songs*, which sets the mood for the saddest of the stories.



C1.1.3 *Lipsynch*: Melbourne, Australia, 2012

ÉRIK LABBÉ



C1.1.8 *The Far Side of the Moon*

C1.1.9 *The Far Side of the Moon*: official trailer



C1.1.10 *Lipsynch*
C1.1.11 *Lipsynch* by Robert Lepage (Ex Machina)

CASE STUDY 1.2 COMPLICITÉ



The Complicité company creates new theatre through a process of collaboration. Complicité is famous for making its work through extensive periods of research and development that brings together performers, designers, writers, artists and specialists from diverse fields to create the works.

The main body of work has been devised theatre pieces and adaptations, and revivals of classic texts. The company has also created opera and worked in other media, including radio productions, and with The Vertical Line, an alternative rock group, in a multidisciplinary installation performed in a disused tube station.

There is a sense of danger, of challenging both the nature of theatre and rules of society in their work. Over the years Complicité's work has evolved into highly stylised pieces of performance, visually stunning and using cutting-edge technology like projected video and digital animation. The performances are often extraordinarily complex while still making use of the absolute fundamentals of theatre – an empty space, stillness, silence and darkness.



C1.2.1 Complicité



ITAR-TASS News Agency/Alamy Live News

C1.2.1 Complicité's *The Encounter* at the Moscow premiere, 2018

Complicité is based in London but tours the world extensively and in 2017 they performed *The Encounter* in Australia.

The Encounter

This play is a striking example of the power and originality of Complicité's work. The play is written and directed by McBurney and is based on Petru Popesco's *Amazon Beaming*, an account of *National Geographic* photographer Loren McIntyre's encounter with the Mayoruna tribe after McIntyre got lost deep in the Amazon. It is a particularly interesting form of verbatim theatre using headphones. *The Encounter* is performed onstage by just one live actor and therefore provides a fascinating model for solo performance work.

Every member of the audience wears headphones, and throughout the play, the audience hears an almost continual soundscape of voices, music, natural sounds such as rain and animal cries and also synthesised sounds. In this way, we hear the sounds of the jungle and the voices of actors speaking the words of people involved in the story. A range of lighting effects and film projections are also used to create the setting and the action.

The play tells the story of how Loren McIntyre, the photographer, was lost in the Amazon jungle in Brazil and lived with a tribe known as the cat people because they inserted thin wooden spikes into their noses to make themselves look like jaguars. In the



- C1.2.2 *The Encounter*
- C1.2.3 *The Encounter* by Simon McBurney
- C1.2.4 The making of *The Encounter* part 1
- C1.2.5 The making of *The Encounter* part 2
- C1.2.6 The making of *The Encounter* part 3
- C1.2.7 *The Encounter*: Sound Designer
- C1.2.8 *The Encounter*: Projection Designer
- C1.2.9 *The Encounter*: Co-Director
- C1.2.10 *The Encounter*: Assistant Director
- C1.2.11 *The Encounter*: Stage Manager

book, the chief of the tribe is telepathic, and this part of the story is told onstage with the actor speaking the words of Loren McIntyre as they are reported in *Amazon Beaming*. While *The Encounter* tells a fascinating, sometimes surreal story, it is also a profound play about the destruction of the natural environment and the future of our planet.

Lionboy

Complicité's production of *Lionboy* toured the world in 2015 and is the first play for children that Complicité has created. It is based on a novel by Zizou Corder and tells a story that has a number of surreal elements. The play is about a boy called Charlie Ashanti who can speak to cats. In the play, Charlie's parents are kidnapped and Charlie rescues them with help from a floating circus and its performing lions.

Lionboy uses a flexible range of theatre forms and techniques, from circus to transformational theatre. Onstage, lengths of rubber hose are transformed into a bucket of eels, and aluminium ladders become the walls of a cage. Boxes and ropes are used by the cast to represent the crowded streets of London and the deck of a ship. Like all of Complicité's work, *Lionboy* experiments freely with the exciting possibilities that live performance provides to tell a story.



photo by Mark Douet

C1.2.2 Complicité's *Lionboy* onstage, 2014



C1.2.12 *Lionboy*
C1.2.13 Complicité:
Lionboy trailer

The Magic Flute

This production of Mozart's opera by Complicité makes use of visually stunning and imaginative staging combined with live sound effects and fascinating and amusing performances. At one point the actors create a flock of birds by flapping pages of the opera score and making bird cries. The opera is a fantasy of magic and true love, and the company's production uses multimedia and digital projections to bring the magic to life onstage, as when, through the use of visual technology, the audience sees the young lovers flying together through space.



C1.2.14 *The Magic Flute*
C1.2.15 *The Magic Flute*:
scenery and Complicité's
Mnemonic

Vanishing Points

Complicité's work does not always touch on the magical and the surreal in their search for different ways of staging important stories. *Vanishing Points* is a powerful exploration of the issue of immigration. The play was created and staged in a gymnasium next to a railway station in London in 2005. As with all of Complicité's work, the use of innovative staging and new technology were crucial to the performance. *Vanishing Points* is a reminder of the role that railways and stations have played in the history of the UK and the importance of railways in the lives of immigrants and refugees. The play is full of the sounds of people on the move: sometimes to a new life and often to oblivion.



Commissioned for the 'John Berger: Here is Where We Meet' season. Presented by artevents in association with Complicité.

C1.2.3 *Vanishing Points*, staged in the German Gymnasium at King's Cross, London, 2005

SECTION 2

Stagecraft and staging

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INTRODUCTION

Before theatre makers can create characters and perform improvisations and texts effectively, it is essential to acquire the knowledge and skills of stagecraft necessary to performance.

The word stagecraft refers to all the technical elements of theatre that enhance the performance. These include the design components of staging, costumes, props and make-up, as well as the technical components of lighting and sound.

Closely related to stagecraft is the actual staging of a play, which requires the application of performance elements to the play on stage. This involves all aspects of performing and combines with the design and technical aspects of stagecraft to bring a play to life.

Stagecraft is also crucial in the interpretation and direction of texts. The artistic directors of plays, films and television are responsible for organising and coordinating all the elements of stagecraft in bringing a text to life and staging a performance.



STAGE, COSTUME, LIGHTING AND SOUND DESIGN

As Grotowski observed, the core of drama is the encounter between the living actor and the live audience. However, the effective use of design and technical elements can make this encounter more powerful and theatrical, realising the full potential of the text and the acting. This chapter examines the different design elements of stagecraft and demonstrates how we can apply them to our performance work. A clear understanding of design and technical stagecraft also enables us to appreciate more fully the performances we watch as audiences.

5.1 THE SPACE

When working on the staging of a play, many contemporary directors and designers look first at the location and shape of the space they will use before they begin designing the stage and the set they will place on it. When Jerzy Grotowski travelled to England, the USA and Australia with his Polish Laboratory Theatre Company, he made sure to perform in a range of spaces, none of which were theatres. The company used halls, cellars and ordinary rooms as their theatres throughout the tours. Grotowski did this because he wanted to break down the barriers between actors and audiences, which are set up by the design of traditional proscenium arch theatres. For Grotowski, staging meant, first and foremost, creating a space in which actors and audiences were in contact with each other.

Peter Brook, one of the most influential directors of the 20th century, believed staging meant finding the space that is most appropriate for the play being staged. *The Ik*, an African play his company created in the 1970s, was staged in the village squares of a number of African villages. Rather than designing a set to fit a stage, Brook often searched for a space that would represent the natural stage and set for his plays. He staged the 8 hour long epic Indian creation story *The Mahabharata* in natural landscapes around the world, including a quarry in Adelaide in 1988. Almost 30 years later, the outstanding contemporary Australian play, *The Secret River*, was staged in the same setting.



5.1.1 Stages: Peter Brook and the CICT in Australia
5.1.2 Neil and Rachel on *The Secret River*

Ningali Lawford-Wolf in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Secret River*, 2017, by Kate Grenville, and adapted for the stage by Andrew Bovell, staged in the Anstey Hill Quarry at the Adelaide Festival, South Australia. Photo: Shane Reid © courtesy of Sydney Theatre Company



5.1.1 *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville, and adapted for the stage by Andrew Bovell, was staged in the Anstey Hill Quarry at the Adelaide Festival, South Australia, 2017



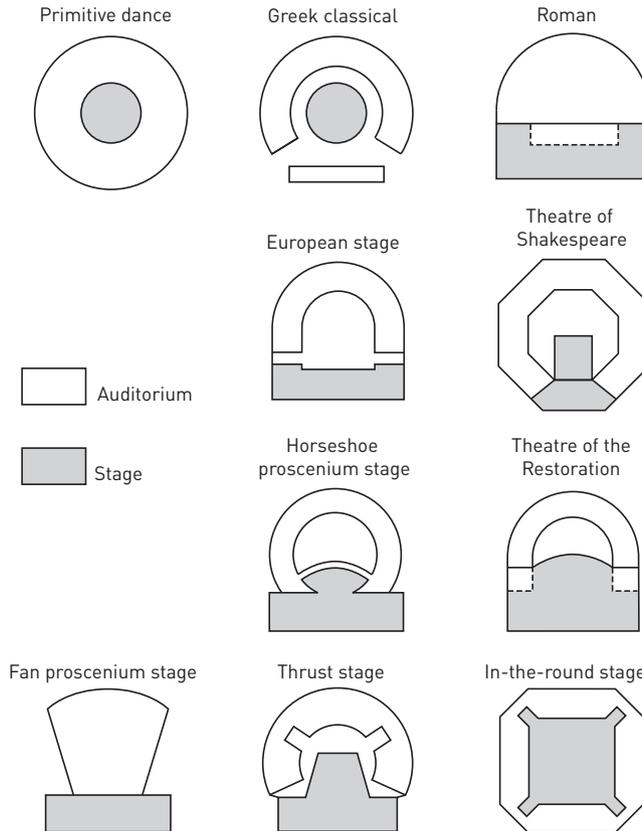
WORKSHOP 5.1.1: NON-CONVENTIONAL THEATRE

Exercise: Working in groups, choose a play that could be staged effectively outside a conventional theatre. Explore your local area to find a location that would provide an interesting space for the performance of the play. Discuss why you chose the space and design the setting for the play in that space.

5.2 THE STAGE

The easiest way to think of the stage is that it is the physical area where a play is actually performed. Creating a stage involves not only the shape of the stage itself, but also the design and construction of the set that occupies it and the placement of props on that set. Where the theatre or performance space is a flexible one, the design of the stage may also include the shape of the auditorium and the positioning of the stage within the performance space.

Over the past 2500 years, since the first plays were staged in Ancient Greece, the shape and function of stages have undergone a number of transformations. The traditional stage shape that is still most common in theatres around the world is the proscenium arch, where the stage is built at one end of the auditorium and the audience sits in rows facing the stage. However, the past century saw a revolution in the design of theatre stages, with the shape becoming much more flexible. Modern performances in the 21st century can occur on thrust stages or revolving stages, and also in theatre-in-the-round, circus tents, open-air amphitheatres and even in the street.



5.2.1 Designing National Theatre: 50 Years on stage

5.2.1 There are a variety of stage types available to a director from the ancient to the modern and any space in between.



WORKSHOP 5.2.1: EXPERIMENTING WITH STAGING

Exercise: Working in small groups, choose a scene from an Australian text that you are familiar with. Choose three to five different stage types from image 5.2.1. Conduct a moved reading for each of the staging types chosen. As a group, discuss how the different stage types changed the way you blocked the moved reading. Write a summary of the discussion.

5.3 THE SET

Just as stages changed radically during the 20th century, so did the sets that occupy the stage. Traditionally, sets were composed of painted canvas flats that were placed at the back and sides of the stage to represent the location of the play, and these flats were then augmented with furniture or other objects appropriate to the play. Interior flats were usually made to be as realistic as possible, with doors and windows that opened and closed, often with real pictures on the walls, and on stage was all the furniture you would find in a real house. If the setting was outdoors, the designer would often place real trees on stage, and sometimes actual sand or grass as well.

There are both classic and contemporary realistic plays being staged today that demand this level of authenticity in the set. However, modern directors and designers are also much more flexible in their use of sets and now employ a range of techniques for setting a performance in a particular location. Screens are often used instead of painted flats, and lighting can be used to colour these screens, or images and films can be projected onto them. Scrimms are also widely used in contemporary theatre. These are curtains made of translucent material so that when lights or projections are shone onto them from the front they act like a screen, but when they are lit from behind the audience can see right through them.

Rather than a whole realistic set on stage, designers will frequently place just one important symbolic object that has a special meaning in the play. In Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the entire set is the wagon in which Mother Courage trundles around Europe, following the war and making a living from it. Because there is no other set, Brecht is able to move in both time and place from scene to scene without having to change the set. Signs, slides or the actors themselves simply tell the audience where and when the next scene is happening. In Peter Shaffer's play about the conquest of Peru, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, the only staging object is a giant golden sun with a platform inside it. This represents not only the sun that the Incas worshipped, but also the gold the Spaniards were seeking.

Before they begin work on the design of a set, designers conduct extensive research about all aspects of the play and the space where it will be staged. In the past, designers used to construct a scale model of their set, experimenting with different possibilities and obtaining the approval of the director (and often the actors) before building the actual set. Today, software programs allow designers to design sets on a computer. These programs are particularly useful because the designer can vary the size and shape of any of the staging at a click of the mouse, and can rotate the set to study it from every angle. Despite this, it is still a very good idea to build a model of the set once it has been designed because a model allows the designer to fully develop their ideas about the staging and set in three dimensions before building it. Most set designers throughout the world still build elaborate set models exactly to scale when they are designing a production.

Often there is no need for a set at all. A bare stage, which Peter Brook describes as 'the empty space', can be transformed into any place at any time by the quality of the text and the acting. Shakespeare's plays epitomise the way a playwright can make a whole world come to life on stage just through the power of words. His play, *Henry V*, has a famous prologue which brings to life the battles and the landscapes that are the context of the play.

The actors, in conjunction with the director, can also create the set of a play simply through the use of their bodies and simple objects. This is the core of the

In Samuel Beckett's masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*, the only set is a single tree, which represents a strange, unknown place where Vladimir and Estragon are doomed to wait.



MS Thr 581. Angus McBean Photograph. © Houghton Library, Harvard University

5.3.1 The murder of the Inca King from *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

'theatre of transformation'. Rather than elaborate sets and props, the actors use their own bodies to create places and objects on stage.

In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* there is a scene in which the Spaniards climb the Andes mountains to reach the city of the Incas. To achieve this effect, the actors portraying the Incas lined the flight of stairs on stage, turned their backs to the audience and lifted the cloaks they were wearing into points above their heads. The cloaks were blue and green in colour with white at the top, so the effect was of a number of mountain peaks rising higher and higher. The actors portraying the Spaniards then climbed the stairs, weaving their way between the mountain peaks until they reached the top. The effect was extraordinary and complex. Not only did it seem that the Spaniards were actually climbing through the mountains but, because the Incas were creating the mountains, it was as though the Spaniards were actually conquering them, which is of course what happened.

The eye-catching stage and set from the musical *Matilda*, uses surreal objects and backdrops to tell the story of an extraordinary girl who uses her vivid imagination and sharp mind to take control of her destiny. Based on a children's novel by Roald Dahl, *Matilda* the musical was written by Rob Howell, choreographed by Peter Darling, with music and composition by Tim Minchin. *Matilda* has been staged in a number of countries by The Royal Shakespeare Company.



Getty Images/Michael Dodge

5.3.2 A scene from the musical *Matilda*, 2016



WORKSHOP 5.3.1: SET DESIGN

Exercise: Choose a play and design a set using just one dramatic staging object, such as the cage in the set for *Matilda* or the giant sun in *Royal Hunt of the Sun*. Create a series of drawings or make a 3D or computer model of the set to show its visual effect and how it works.

5.4 COSTUME AND MAKE-UP

How the actor looks is of crucial significance in the creation of a character. Costume and make-up give a character credibility, both for the actors and for the audience, and are central to developing the context of the play. This is obviously true of plays set in particular historical periods, and when the age and appearance of the character are important. The musical *Cats*, for example, owes a great deal of its success to the extraordinary make-up and costuming that transforms the dancers into cats.



5.4.1 National Theatre:
Fifty Years of Costume

COSTUME

As with all elements of stagecraft, costumes have changed radically in the past 100 years. The elaborate clothing of melodrama gave way to the detailed and believable styles of realism and naturalism at the end of the 19th century. With the growing range of theatrical forms in the 20th century, costume styles became more and more diverse. In the modern theatre, costuming ranges from the most lifelike to the totally abstract. A number of forms of theatre make extensive use of surreal costume, particularly physical theatre, black light theatre and contemporary dance drama. In the image below of *Cirque du Soleil*, you can see how the costumes create strange and fascinating images and are used by the actors as part of the action.

Costume can also have symbolic importance both for the characters and for the text. In *Waiting for Godot* the two central characters are described as tramps in the original text, but in a number of productions they have been dressed as clowns, which changes the perceptions of the audience and therefore affects the meaning of the play.



Alamy Stock Photo/Vibrant Pictures

5.4.1 Cirque du Soleil makes use of surreal costumes as part of its performances.



Getty Images/ANNE-CHRISTINE POUJOLAT

5.4.2 Robert Lepage's *Le Rossignol* combines surreal costumes and giant body puppets to tell the opera.

The extraordinary costumes in the image above are from Robert Lepage's staging of the opera *Le Rossignol*. Lepage transformed the whole visual world of the opera by introducing surreal costumes and giant body puppets.

MAKE-UP

Even in a completely realistic performance where actors are portraying characters of their own age, it is essential to use make-up if theatre lighting is used. This is because bright or coloured lighting can totally change a person's appearance, including 'washing out' a person's features, meaning the audience may be unable to interpret a performer's facial expressions. Therefore, it is necessary to apply make-up to compensate for the impact of the lights.

Straight make-up involves using colour and shading to give the actor a natural appearance under lights on a theatre stage. Character make-up can be extremely elaborate and requires professional skills to apply, but dramatic transformations, particularly in age, can also be achieved quite simply through the use of lines, shading and hair colouring.

As with all the other elements of stagecraft, it is the interpretation of the text and the style of the performance that should determine the design of costume and make-up. The needs of the actors are an even more important factor. The actors must feel that their physical appearance is in harmony with their conception of the character. It is therefore essential for them to have an important role in the design of costume and make-up so that the stagecraft elements enhance the intensity of the actor's performance and the believability of the character.



5.4.3 Make-up can help in creating a character both for the performer and the audience.



WORKSHOP 5.4.1: NEWSPAPER COSTUMES

Exercise: Creating an idea for a costume doesn't need to be a difficult process. Life-size costumes can be made using newspapers and sticky tape, with a member of the class working as the model.

- a Choose one of the characters below:
 - Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*
 - Lady Windermere in *Lady Windermere's Fan*
 - Jimmy Munday in *No Sugar*
 - Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*
 - The Drover's Wife in *The Drover's Wife*
 - Mabel in *M Rock*
 - The Moon and the Sun in *Masquerade*
 - Adele in *Brothers Wreck*
 - Harry in *Black Diggers*
- b Research the character, the time that the play is set in and any other important information.
- c Generate a newspaper costume for your chosen character. You can create the costume in any style or genre as long as you can justify your choice.



WORKSHOP 5.4.2: MAKE-UP DESIGN

Exercise: Like most designers in theatre and film, make-up designers create designs for their characters. Imagine you have been asked to create a make-up design for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The concept is to be presented for three characters but should apply to the whole cast. Before you begin your design, decide on the style of the production; for example, surreal, traditional, modern or any other appropriate style. When generating the design, consider if it is face, face and hands, full body or a combination.

Present your concept to the class.

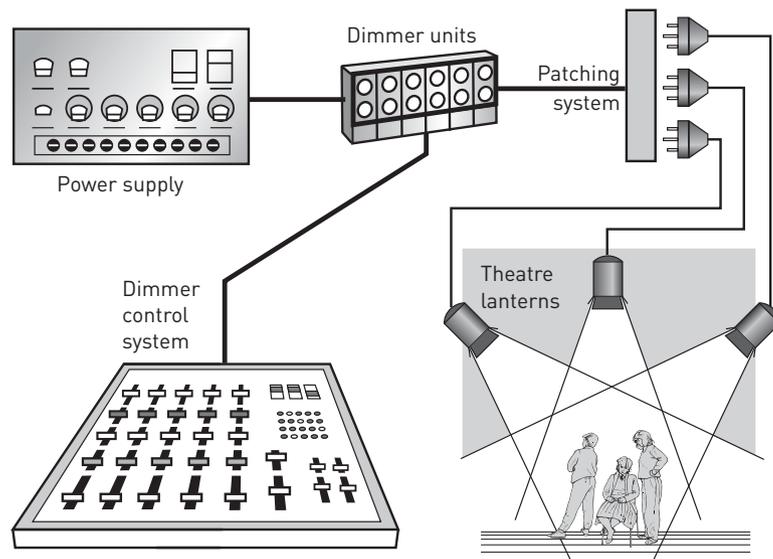
5.5 LIGHTING

Modern lighting rigs in theatres and entertainment centres can be impressively elaborate and hi-tech, capable of dazzling visual effects. Lighting can also be used extremely effectively, but much more simply, to enhance the performance of small-scale plays in the barest of spaces. The basic principles of performance lighting are the same no matter how much or how little equipment and technology are available. Most modern lighting rigs also include laser lights and data projectors.

The wires or channels for the power points are routed through a control or patch panel – just as the wires in our home go through a fuse box – and come out as ordinary power leads with plugs on the ends. In the theatre, we plug these leads into power points on a box called a dimmer rack, which allows us to control each channel separately, deciding which lanterns, lasers and projectors we turn on and how bright they are. Because theatre lighting requires so much electricity, this dimmer rack is connected to a special three-phase power supply that is powerful enough to provide electricity for up to six lanterns for each channel on the dimmer rack, safely providing a total of 2400 watts per channel.

The switching on and off and dimming of lights is done on the lighting board. These boards have slides as well as switches, which allow the lighting technician not only to turn lanterns on and off, but to precisely increase and decrease the amount of illumination from each lantern. The boards also provide a number of special effects such as chase sequences, in which different lights can be set to flash on and off alternately. Modern lighting boards have a sophisticated computer unit that makes it possible to program hundreds of different lighting effects in sequence so that the changes occur on cue. As part of the lighting set-up there will also be at least one computer and data projector connected to the lighting board to allow the projection of images.

Despite all the technology, the basic operating principles for theatre lighting are straightforward. It is how the lighting is used that decides just how effectively it enhances the performance of a play. In designing and using lighting as a part of stagecraft, four functions are fundamental: illumination, location, mood and atmosphere.



5.5.1 The components of a theatre lighting circuit

ILLUMINATION

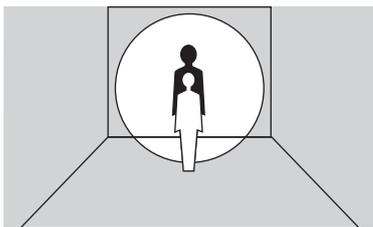
What an audience sees on stage is determined by the placement and levels of lights. It is essential that any performance is effectively and thoughtfully lit so that the audience can see the characters and the action. If there are insufficient lights set at the correct levels, then significant areas of the stage may be dark and the actors will be obscured.

Beyond the functional need of adequate illumination, lighting designers can use lighting to direct the vision and the focus of the audience. The use of spotlights to illuminate characters, action and areas of the stage has the effect of intensifying the focus and enhancing the significance of the spotlighted character or area.

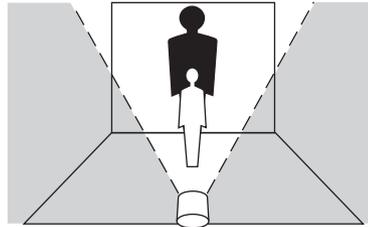
At a basic level, lighting is also essential in the changing of scenes. If the action of a scene ends suddenly and dramatically, then a sudden blackout is highly effective. A quiet conclusion or an anticlimax can be signalled by a slow fade-down of the lights. It is essential not to have long blackouts between scenes, even if there is a need to change sets, because loss of illumination means loss of focus and eventually loss of involvement by the audience in the world of the play.

LOCATION

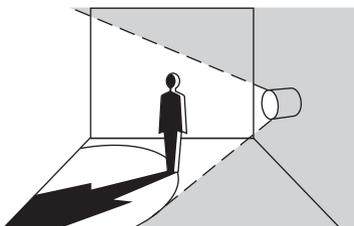
Lighting is important in signalling location in a play, both in place and in time. Bright light with the use of amber colour can suggest a beach location; soft, green, dappled light suggests a bush setting; and dim, shadowy blue light suggests the interior of an abandoned house. The use of different levels of light, and a range of coloured gels, patterned gobos and still or moving images can create an infinite variety of locations, enhancing sets or simply replacing them.



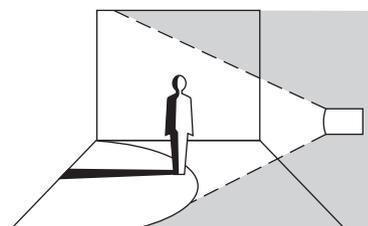
5.5.2 Lighting directly from the front at the same level dramatically highlights the actor and creates intense focus.



5.5.3 Lighting from below with a single light leaves shadows round the eyes and creates a giant shadow.



5.5.4 A backlight from the side gives a certain amount of facial contour and a halo effect in the hair.



5.5.5 A single light from the side, at the same height as the subject, will light only one side of the face, leaving the other side in shadow.

Lighting designers also delineate time by the use of lighting: bright white light for daytime exteriors; dim, blue light for night. Changes in time are signalled by increasing or decreasing the intensity of light, and by fading from one colour to another. The entire passage of day into dusk and then darkness can be suggested by changes in the intensity and colour of light.

Intensity and colour can also be used to suggest surreal and emotional locations as well. For example, red light makes an effective visual background to a nightmare, and soft amber and gold can represent nostalgic memory during a monologue.

MOOD AND ATMOSPHERE

The mood or atmosphere of a play is both intangible and vitally important. Lighting is one effective way of enhancing the mood of a text and, again, it is the placing of lights, the level of brightness and the use of colours and patterns that is important.

The use of film, lasers and computer-generated images is very effective in developing atmosphere and creating surreal worlds on stage. Simply changing the number or direction of the lights makes a significant difference in the image we see and in the mood or atmosphere of that image. If we add a particular colour to the lighting, the effect will be further increased. A gobo pattern, such as bars, would then give the image an even stronger mood.

Bunuba Films

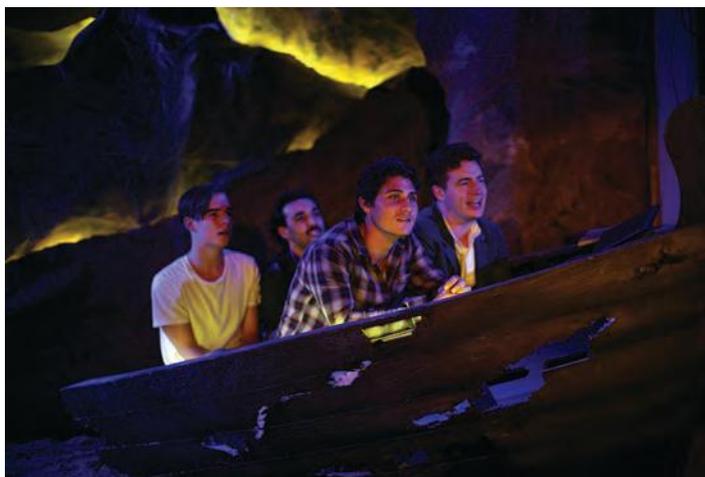


5.5.6 Jandamarra (Damion Hunter) listens to the spirits in the 2011 production of *Jandamarra* performed in Windjana Gorge. The lighting creates an intense focus on the character, and the green colour suggests a strange, surreal world, while the tiny white projections give us a sense of the spirits.



5.5.1 *Jandamarra*: The play
5.5.2 Damion Hunter in *Jandamarra*

Australian Theatre for Young People/Tracey Schramm



5.5.7 In *A Town Named War Boy* by Ross Mueller, the lighting highlights the characters but not like sunlight or artificial light. The yellow colour and the darkness around create a threatening strange atmosphere.



5.5.3 *A Town Named War Boy*
5.5.4 *A Town Named War Boy*: Trailer



WORKSHOP 5.5.1: COLOUR MOODS

Exercise: One way to create moods on the stage is to use colour. Using torches and cellophane or par cans with gels, complete the following exercises to understand the way colour can create mood.

- a In small groups, turn each light and torch on.
- b As you experience each colour, brainstorm the mood or atmosphere that would be created on stage by the colour.
- c Choose one colour and generate a short performance to match the mood. For example, if you choose a red light, you might want to improvise a short fight scene.



WORKSHOP 5.5.2: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Exercise: Working with either *Jandamarra* or *A Town Named War Boy*, choose one scene and identify the location and mood for that scene. Design a lighting concept for the scene that enhances the text.

5.6 SOUND

Just as with lighting, the use of sound in the theatre can be extremely elaborate and stunning in impact. Large-scale musicals and spectacular physical theatre, such as Cirque du Soleil, might use live orchestras, rock groups and recorded sounds in a way that is similar to the soundtracks of films. The musical *Miss Saigon* included the sound effects of a battle being fought and even featured a helicopter landing on stage!

At the other end of the spectrum, some of the great directors of the 20th century, including Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook and Trevor Nunn, used their actors to produce all the sounds heard on stage. This 'theatre of transformation' asks the actors to use only their own skills to provide sound effects – singing, playing instruments, chanting, whispering, imitating animal and mechanical noises, drumming, clapping and using different objects to produce sounds.

No matter how complex or simple the performance, all theatre can be enhanced by the effective use of sound. While live music is played in musical theatre, most contemporary productions use a recorded soundtrack, normally assembled in order on a single disc or sound file. Many directors create a continuous soundtrack that includes music, sound effects, voices, sounds so soft they are almost subliminal, and even silence. This continuous recorded sequence of sounds is known as a 'soundscape', and the skilled use of soundscapes is a feature of innovative theatre.

Most theatres have a sound system that is similar in structure to the lighting system. The sound desk has slides that allow the operator to control the sound coming from a range of sources including DVD, CD and MP3, as well as from microphones and musical instruments. All these sound sources are connected to amplifiers, so the operator can increase and decrease the volume of sound from each source. The soundboard also has controls that modify the quality of sound being broadcast, altering the balance of bass and treble, adding echo and altering the mix of sounds being heard.

The use of recorded sound can enhance any performance. In a highly realistic play, sound effects can be used to reinforce the reality of the setting. If a scene

is set in a forest, the sound of bird calls and the wind blowing helps to make the forest setting real for the audience, while in a totally naturalistic play the actors would need to provide all the sounds that would be heard in the setting.

Sound is also a powerful tool for creating mood and establishing atmosphere. Because music affects the right side of the brain – the hemisphere associated with emotion and creativity – the use of music in the theatre works to stimulate and intensify the feelings of the audience. When music is played before a play begins, it creates a mood that can enhance the emotional impact of the play that follows. Similarly, music playing during a scene can increase or transform the emotional temperature of that scene.

Directors need to be careful in their use of music to generate emotion. In a realistic play, the overuse of music can destroy the audience's belief in the performance, as often happens in films when the music becomes too obtrusive and annoying. This is apparent in some sentimental Hollywood films whose soundtracks are full of sobbing violins, while action films can often assault audience's ears with loud music and sound effects.

Used with discrimination, sound is a potent force in the theatre. Sound effects do not have to be evident to be effective; sometimes subtle, almost subliminal sound can have an enormous impact. The faint background sighing of wind or sea creates an eerie atmosphere, while the soft sound of a heartbeat can generate enormous tension in a drama, particularly when it stops.

Music and sound effects can also be effective in linking scenes, in a number of ways. Music can be used to cover the sounds of the scene change and help to maintain the focus of the audience. Music and sound effects can suggest a change of place or time and help to establish the location of the next scene. Finally, sound can provide an emotional context or a strong atmosphere for the scene.

Monkey Baa Theatre Company



5.6.1 *Pete the Sheep*

5.6.2 *Pete the Sheep*: Trailer

5.6.1 Dance, movement and song were important aspects of Monkey Baa theatre company's production of *Pete the Sheep*. Sound and movement drove the action as well as indicated transition in character.



WORKSHOP 5.6.1: THE ATMOSPHERE AND MOOD OF SOUND

We all react to sound, especially music. How we react is influenced by our background, culture and experiences. Music without words can be particularly evocative and create an additional level of meaning for the audience and the performer.

Exercise: To experience this further, complete the following exercise.

- a** Select a piece of music, preferably without words.
- b** Spread out around the space with several sheets of paper and pencils or marker pens.
- c** As each piece of music plays, draw the scene or mood that you experience as the music unfolds. Start a new piece of paper for each piece of music.
- d** In small groups, discuss your drawings and choose one to be the foundation of a performance.
- e** Generate the chosen performance.
- f** Realise the performance for the class using the selected piece of music.
- g** Respond to the performances of other groups, critically analysing the way the music accentuated or detracted from the performance.

STAGING A PERFORMANCE

Every form of dramatic activity, from a spontaneous improvisation in the classroom to a full-length play on stage, contains crucial staging elements. These elements are the physical building blocks of each drama, giving it a unique shape and form. When we create improvised work, we make use of these elements instinctively and when we rehearse a play, the elements are already present in the text. However, if we wish to achieve genuinely powerful theatrical performance work, it is essential for us to understand what these staging elements are and how to consciously employ them in our dramas.

6.1 TENSION

Tension is the power or force that drives all drama. Unlike the design and technical elements, stagecraft tension is intangible and difficult to define; nevertheless, it is crucial to the success of any performance.

For an audience, the success of a play depends largely on how effectively tension has been deliberately created and directed during the performance. The audience's involvement in the play will be decided largely by the levels of energy and excitement they experience. Really memorable pieces of theatre occur when extraordinary levels of tension build up on stage and then flow into the audience, drawing them fully into the world of the play.

We can harness this powerful and complex form of energy in a number of ways in our dramatic work. The most effective way to learn how to do this is to explore the different uses of tension in sequence: first by creating tension at the beginning of a performance; then by directing and controlling tension throughout; and finally, by resolving it through the use of climax and anticlimax at the end of the performance.

CREATING TENSION

It is absolutely vital to create intense and appropriate levels of tension that will provide the energy and focus that the actors need, and generate excitement and anticipation in the audience, helping them to suspend their disbelief and fully engage with the play. Stagecraft elements such as light and dark, music and sound,

empty space, surprising action, stillness and movement are all effective ways of creating tension through anticipation.

The clearest way to describe tension is to identify it as the energy created on stage when a text is performed. Tension is also the level of excitement generated in an audience.

Creating tension through light and sound

The traditional stagecraft way of creating tension in the theatre is to fade the lights to blackness so that the stage and the audience are in the dark. This always works to generate a sense of anticipation, which is the nervous energy of wondering what will happen next. The use of darkness is also effective in building tension – we have an instinctive fear of the dark and our imaginations work vividly to fill the dark with strange and frightening images. If atmospheric music and sound effects are played in the blackness, the effect is intensified. Blackouts with evocative sound effects are still used frequently for this purpose in the theatre and are a powerful, simple way of building the tension of anticipation.

Victorian College of the Arts: Jeff Busby



6.1.1 Creating tension – note how the lighting and the shapes of the actors create tension.

Use of space

Sometimes just an empty space can create tension. This is particularly so at the beginning of the performance, with single spotlights and areas of shadow intensifying the sense of anticipation. Alternatively, a contemporary technique for creating tension at the opening of a performance is to have the actors on stage, often frozen in a tableau (a dramatic image). The use of tableau is particularly effective because we respond to the frozen image the way we would to a photograph, imagining the story behind it and anticipating the action that will follow.

Movement

A third way to create tension is through unexpected action and rapid changes in movement. If a play begins with the stage completely empty and then a group of actors suddenly streams onto the stage, exploding into action, energy and tension flow with them. If they were then to freeze into complete stillness, the tension would be intensified and would continue to build as we anticipate what might happen next. Early on in Michael Gow's realistic play *Toy Symphony*, the figure of Alexander the Great – in full Ancient Greek uniform, sword in hand –

For the actors and the audience, the first minute or two of any performance is the most significant. In this brief span of time, the whole texture and atmosphere of the play is established for the actors, and the attention of the audience is caught or lost.

suddenly appears in a suburban lounge room. The surprise and the tension is extraordinary. It takes the audience a moment to realise that the figure is coming from the imagination of a character in the play. The surprising appearance of imaginary characters is used a number of times in the play to heighten the tension, sometimes dramatically and sometimes humorously.

Belvoir



6.1.2 Richard Roxburgh in Michael Gow's *Toy Symphony*, Belvoir Street Theatre, 2007. Movement and unexpected action create tension.

CONTROLLING TENSION

Once tension and anticipation have been established in a drama, they must be controlled, manipulated and maintained throughout the performance. Tension can be controlled through the quality of performance, design and technical stagecraft.

When controlling the flow of tension in drama we first rely on the dramatic story we are telling. Whether we are using a script, preparing an improvisation or spontaneously creating a drama, there are four key types of tension within a text that we need to be aware of when structuring a drama.

Tension of the task

This is the job, task or quest the characters in a drama must complete. It can be anything from leaving home to falling in love, committing murder or achieving redemption. There are rules to generating this type of tension.

- The task must be important, both for the characters and the audience.
- It must be difficult for the characters to achieve the task.
- There must be an effective resolution – although the characters might not complete the task, it must still be resolved in some fashion.
- The play must end in a way that is dramatically satisfying.

Tension of relationships

This is normally the heart of any drama, and the way relationships develop in a play and are resolved is crucial to the levels of energy and excitement that are generated and controlled. Very often the task facing the characters in a drama is directly related to their relationships, and even when the task is a physical, political or moral one, the relationships between the characters involved in this task are always important. For example, Macbeth's task is to kill the king and survive as king himself, but it is his relationship with Lady Macbeth that drives both his attempts to complete this task and the play itself.

Tension of surprise

The power of dramatic storytelling is its ability to confront us with the unexpected, surprising us with amazing, fantastic and hilarious experiences that can generate or release enormous amounts of energy and excitement. A theatre maker can also be challenged, taken aback or shocked by a drama they are performing or watching, and made to think again about what they believe and feel. When this happens in drama, a very powerful tension is generated between the creator and audiences' attitudes and beliefs, and the meaning of the drama.

Tension of mystery

Every drama contains some unanswered questions; there are some parts of the story or characters we do not know or do not fully understand. Effective drama uses mystery to build tension for both the actors and the audience, asking them to explain the hidden meaning, solve the problem or answer the question. The tension of mystery can be built throughout a drama, adding more and more twists and challenges, as it often is in comedies. Alternately, a major mystery can be created initially and then revealed, step-by-step, throughout the action of the work.



Alamy/Geraint Lewis

6.1.3 How does this image of the three witches from *Macbeth* create an air of mystery?

TENSION OF THE PERFORMANCE

Tension can also be controlled by the way a drama is performed. Throughout any play, the levels of tension ebb and flow naturally, based on the quality of the performance and stagecraft, and the responses of the audience. It is essential to be aware of this flow and to take control of the level and nature of the energy by building, changing and focusing the tension to make the drama work.

Stanislavski believed that all human beings have a distinctive 'tempo-rhythm' in the way they move, speak, think and behave. He encouraged his actors to create clear and distinctive tempo-rhythms for each character they portrayed.

Rhythm

Tension can be controlled by consciously controlling the rhythm of the play. Every performance has its own flow of energy, just as every character in a play has a distinctive personal rhythm in speech and movement. The rhythm of a play is therefore made up of pace and tempo.

A play can have a smooth, even pace that is either fast or slow. In a slow-paced play, the action is consistently quiet and slow. In a fast-paced play, the action is rapid and energetic. Intense, realistic dramas are often slow-paced, relying on the relationships between the characters and interior emotions, rather than violent action, for dramatic effect. On the other hand, comedies written in the style of farce rely on frantic action and outrageous encounters between the characters to be funny.

No performance piece operates at just one pace and we call the deliberate changes of pace, which give a play its special rhythm, the 'tempo' of the work. Tempo is rather like the beat in a piece of music, which can vary from fast and loud to slow and quiet in ways that give the music rhythm and atmosphere. In the same way, the tempo of a play is the deliberate changes in pace and energy that help to make the performance a coherent and meaningful whole. A scene involving violent action is often followed by one that is quiet and sombre, revealing the consequences of the violence in the previous scene and giving the audience time to absorb the impact of the action. Even in the most frantic comedies, there is a balance between scenes in terms of pace and energy.

By controlling the pace and tempo of a work, and therefore controlling the rhythm of the performance, theatre makers can direct and intensify the tension to make the play more exciting, involving or humorous. This is particularly important in our improvised work where we must create the text, and therefore the tension that drives it, ourselves. However, even the most accomplished plays, written by the greatest playwrights, need to develop a clear rhythm in performance, and this is the responsibility of the actors and the director. By controlling the rhythm of the performance, we control the tension and therefore the impact of the work.

Style

Another way to control the tension in performance is the choice of style and the use of different styles in different scenes. We can greatly intensify the tension of a piece of theatre by performing the play in a different style from the one in which it was written. For example, Brecht's plays are written in an epic style and are structured to alienate the audience from the characters. However, powerful, realistic performances can bring these characters to life, making the plays far more involving and the political messages much stronger. Brecht himself came to realise this later in his career and wrote about the extraordinary tension created on stage by the contradiction between the didactic messages of his plays and the powerful emotions generated when expert actors portrayed the experiences of the characters as though they were real.

When classic Greek plays are performed today, they are often staged and acted realistically, frequently without masks or elaborate costumes, so that the tension of the relationships between characters is more fully realised. Furthermore, the contrast between the ritual form of the text and the realistic performance style creates a tension that can be genuinely creative in its impact.

It is seldom possible, or wise, to totally change the entire performance style of a play, but it is effective and appropriate to change the style of individual scenes

Changing or eliminating the dialogue and using sound, lighting and other stagecraft elements can make a realistic scene surreal. The tension is increased by providing another perspective on the characters and the action, which also surprises the audience and increases their interest and anticipation.

within a play to heighten the tension. It is often worth modifying a humorous scene in a comedy to highlight the serious and real consequences of certain kinds of behaviour. This can intensify the comedy that follows, but also take the audience by surprise, heightening their interest in the play and characters, and building anticipation. Equally, we can relieve the dramatic tension of a sombre play by introducing some comedy in a scene where it is appropriate, increasing the interest and excitement of the audience and also making the characters more real by showing another side to their natures.

RESOLVING TENSION

All drama ends with the resolution of the tension that has been created and controlled, but this can happen in two totally different ways. We use the word 'climax' to describe the end of a play where the action comes to a dramatic and final end, and this is one way to resolve tension. The other is 'anticlimax', where the relationships and the action are not concluded; these are left unresolved, or they simply dissolve away without any special moment of dramatic action.

Climax

In traditional comedy and tragedy, there was always a dramatic climax that released the energy and excitement of the play in a powerful and final way. The Greek philosopher Aristotle, the first theoretician of the theatre, believed that in tragic plays the climax was the moment of catharsis for the audience – the time when the emotions of pity and terror were felt so strongly that people were emotionally cleansed and made healthier. This is the release of tension at its most intense. In comedy, the excitement and joy of an audience at the climax of a play can be equally liberating, with the tension being released through laughter, rather than tears.

Anticlimax

Many plays, particularly contemporary ones, conclude with an anticlimax where nothing dramatic happens and there is a sense of life continuing after the play has finished. In these plays, the tension drains away slowly, rather than being expelled in a single burst. Where human behaviour and human relationships are concerned, an anticlimax can be more believable and more satisfying than a dramatic climax. In our own lives, we know that experiences and relationships usually continue on after something dramatic has occurred. When we see this happen to characters on stage, we accept the truth of it and make the play part of our understanding of the world.

The city of Newcastle in New South Wales was hit by an earthquake in 1989. A really interesting piece of verbatim theatre called *Aftershocks* was created by Paul Brown. *Aftershocks* tells the stories of the survivors of the earthquake in their own words. *Aftershocks* was also filmed for television. Knowing that the earthquake really happened, and that we are seeing and hearing the true stories of the survivors, adds greatly to building the tension in any performance of *Aftershocks*. When we discover what happened to the characters, this tension is resolved most effectively, either in a dramatic climax of death or survival or in the quiet continuation of their lives after the earthquake.



6.1.4 The young cast (18–20 years old) of the revival of *Aftershocks* in Newcastle, 2014



WORKSHOP 6.1.1: WORKING WITH TENSION

Exercise: Work in groups to prepare an improvisation about an earthquake happening in your city. Develop the improvisation in three scenes.

In the first scene, create tension using the techniques that have been outlined in this unit. In the second scene, develop tension through both the story and performance techniques. Finally, resolve the tension in the final scene in the most appropriate way for your drama.



WORKSHOP 6.1.2: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Aftershocks

Exercise: Read the play *Aftershocks* and choose three scenes. Analyse the way that tension is used in each of the scenes. Compare and contrast the way tension is used in *Aftershocks* with the way tension is used in the documentary drama you created. After reviewing *Aftershocks* are there any changes you would make to your own performance? Explain.

6.2 FOCUS

In drama, the element of focus is central to all aspects of performance. As with tension, focus occurs naturally in drama. By identifying and consciously enhancing the different points of focus in operation in the theatre, we can greatly increase the power and impact of our work.

The word ‘focus’ means where attention is directed. The first point of focus is the text, which includes the key characters, action, dialogue and meaning of the written text. The second point of attention or focus is the performer’s focus, which involves all the performance factors, including acting and stagecraft, as well as the interpretation of the text itself. The third point of focus belongs to the audience and their experience of the play.

FOCUS OF THE TEXT

Whether we are creating our own play, working on a text as an ensemble of actors or watching a performance as an audience, the key to our appreciation of the drama is our understanding of the playwright’s focus. Every performance text is unique and the focus taken by the individual playwright is therefore unique, no matter how similar plays may be in subject matter or style.

The key focus of many texts is the impact on an audience – to make them laugh or cry, or feel shocked or elated – and the performance succeeds to the extent that it achieves this impact. The prime purpose of the situation comedies and melodramatic soaps that dominate our television screens is to keep the audience watching week after week. These texts focus on entertainment, and the writers specifically script the episodes to be constantly funny, surprising or full of tension. As a result, the characters, the situations and the events often change radically or develop in the most unlikely directions; realism, authenticity and credibility are not important ingredients. This is completely legitimate as the purpose of these series is entertainment, and the form of each episode is constructed to achieve this focus.

The first concern when dealing with a performance text as creator, director, actor or audience is to identify the particular focus of the playwright. We need to work out what narrative we want to explore or what the text means, and how this should be achieved in performance. This is just as crucial for the texts we create as those we perform or view. If we decide the focus is real life and the message is tolerance and understanding for those who are different, the focus will probably require a realistic style of performance, with believable interpretation of the characters. If the focus is the world of the mind, imagination and emotions, the play is more likely to contain surreal events and characters in strange and unreal settings.

Realistic focus

In many works of performance, both on stage and in film, the focus of the text or the intent of the playwright is to depict real life. The purpose of realistic texts is to enable us to understand more about our own lives through sharing part of the lives and experiences of other human beings in the theatre. The writer, director and actors work to create the illusion that we are watching actual people going about

their everyday lives. Many significant modern Australian plays, including *Sisters*, *Hotel Sorrento*, *The Club* and *Blackrock*, have as their central focus the portrayal of real and recognisable characters who reveal something important to us about being Australian and being human.

There are also a number of plays that are basically realistic but that use non-realistic and surreal sequences and devices to provide an additional focus. The Indigenous plays *The Seven Stages of Grieving*, *Box the Pony*, *Black Diggers* and *Brother's Wreck* demand the audiences' empathy and understanding for the characters and their lives while also challenging the audience to see these characters through a new perspective. The audience is drawn into the interior world of imagination and becomes involved in the personal stories of the central characters. The focus of these texts is not just the lives of the characters and their connections to the audience, but the inner selves of the characters and the meanings these have for each of us.

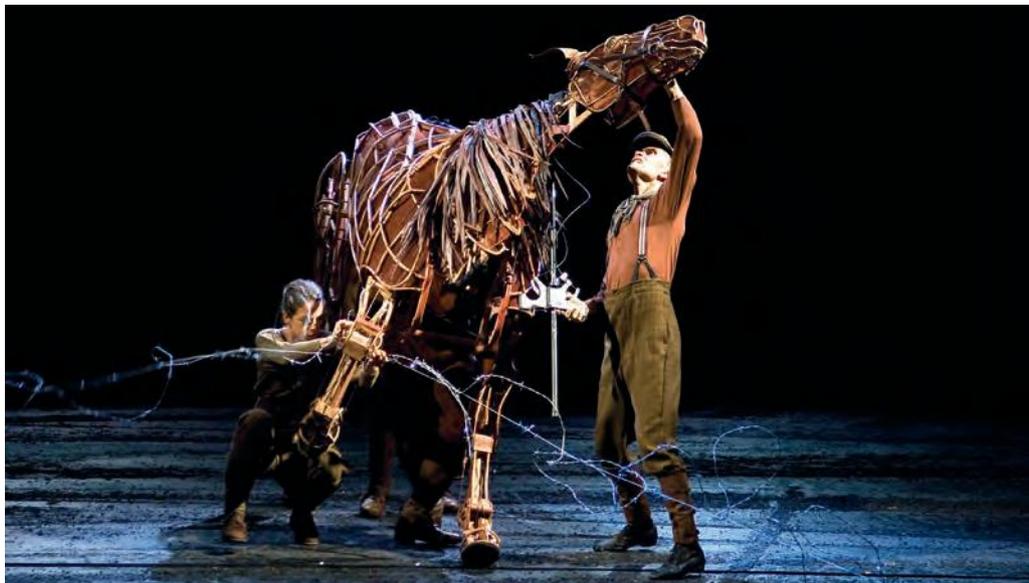
Surreal focus

Dramatic works can also have a surreal focus. There is a strand of surreal theatre that focuses on individual experience and its relevance to our own lives. These plays are concerned with the interior world of the characters – their dreams, their subconscious thoughts and their emotions. Australian plays, such as *The Black Sequin Dress* and *Mr Melancholy*, have brought to life the minds of the characters, rather than their everyday lives. A number of black light theatre and puppetry companies, such as the Handspring Puppet Company in Cape Town, South Africa, and Compagnie Philippe Genty in France, attempt to do the same by representing on stage all the magical and weird imaginings and dreams to be found in people's minds.

There are also two central strands of surrealist theatre that have as their focus, not just individual real experiences, but the whole nature of humankind and the way societies operate.



6.2.1 *War Horse* on stage



Alamy Stock Photo/Geraint Lewis

6.2.1 The play *War Horse* uses astonishing life-sized puppets, created by the Handspring Puppet Company, working with live actors to tell the story of an extraordinary bond between a young recruit and his horse in the First World War.

FOCUS OF THE PERFORMER

This form of focus has two components. The first is the focus of the actors on the performance itself. The second is the actor's direction of their focus as characters in the play. Theatre makers must make conscious and effective use of focus on stage, both in terms of their own character and to direct the focus of the audience. To achieve this, theatre makers need to work in harmony with the other actors and the director to achieve a cohesive and effective focus.

Direct focus

In terms of the way actors direct their attention as a character, they can focus directly on an important character or object, using body language and movement to look or move straight towards the centre of focus. Attention and emotional states can also be directed intensely but more indirectly, so that a character may be the centre of the focus, even if an actor is not facing or moving directly towards them.

Counter-focus

On the other hand, actors sometimes deliberately create counter-focus on stage because a number of important characters or important actions are happening at once. In this case the performers need to carefully balance the shifts of focus to achieve the effect they want, which could be the confused swirl of a battle, the sudden explosions of movement or dialogue in a crowd conflict, or the bizarre action and interaction of a dream. A performer can also use counter-focus if they wish to show one character isolated or in disagreement with the others, in which case there will be two separate points of focus at different places on the stage.

FOCUSING THE ACTION

There are a number of specific techniques that allow us to focus the action of the drama more effectively. These include space, places of meaning, repeated patterns, props and delivery (language).

Space

Within the performance space we can use different levels to focus the action. We can shift focus by changing levels and lighting or by blacking out different levels. We can also use different focal points on stage to intensify or reduce focus, such as moving to the front and centre of stage to heighten focus or using the back corners of the stage to create areas of very low focus.

Places of meaning

By positioning the action in a particular location or a place of special meaning, the focus of the drama is increased and intensified. Setting the action under the sea or in a church or temple gives a specific focus to the action.

Repeated patterns

The creation of particular patterns of movement, gesture, sound and action can create rituals that provide special focus.

Props

Objects on stage also provide a strong centre of focus, particularly when they suggest action, such as a gun, or special meaning such as a cross or a valentine.

Delivery

Very often, how lines are spoken can be just as important as the meaning of the words. A whisper, a shout, a scream or a laugh can provide strong focus on a character or the action.

FOCUS OF THE AUDIENCE

Focusing the attention of the audience in the theatre has all the same characteristics as focus on film and television. In film and television, focus is controlled by the camera moving out for wide shots and in for close-ups or to frame a particular character or action. On stage, it is the actors who move closer and further away from the audience and direct the focus of attention.

This is the third form of focus in the sequence and essentially it is a product of the focus generated by the text and the performers. It also includes the way stagecraft elements, such as lighting, staging and costume, are used to direct the focus of the audience.

Focusing on meaning

This form of focus needs to be deliberately developed and controlled in the theatre to ensure that a performance has the maximum impact possible. There must be an interesting and valid interpretation of the text, and this must be presented so that the audience is fully involved in the play. It is essential to choose the appropriate style of realism or surrealism in interpreting the text and creating characters. In other words, the focus of the text – its meaning, its concerns and its form – should be made as clear and vivid as possible for the audience. We can place our own interpretation on the text and be highly creative as directors and actors in our staging of a play, as long as we focus our interpretation for the audience so that they understand and engage with the play.

Focusing on action

During rehearsals, it is equally crucial for the director and actors to decide how and where the focus of the audience will be directed. There will be times when this focus should be wide, taking in everything that is happening on stage and even in the entire theatre. At other times, they will want the focus of the audience to narrow down to just one character or even one spot on stage. They will need to use movement, the placement of actors and objects onstage, and perhaps stage design and lighting to achieve both wide and narrow focus.

As actors, the way to direct the focus of the characters is a vital element in directing the focus of the audience. This is not just about visual focus – where the audience is looking – but also where its interests and sympathies are focused. Once we are involved in the performance of a text, all the forms of focus we employ work to capture and direct the focus of the audience.



WORKSHOP 6.2.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

The Crucible

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* explores the hysteria that led to the Salem witch trials in America in 1692. In the play, a group of teenage girls accuse people in the town of Salem of being witches.

Exercise 1: In small groups, read *The Crucible*. Then, take the focus of the play and give it a modern time frame. Justify the time you have chosen in a short paragraph.

Exercise 2: Continue working in your group. Create a drama about the consequences of 'witch-hunting' and making false accusations against people who are different. Decide on the focus of your text, and then use all the techniques for developing focus we have explored in this chapter to present your improvisation.

6.3 TIME AND PLACE

Time and place are the physical dimensions of stagecraft that provide the locations for all dramas. Every event in our lives, and every action on stage, occurs at some time and in some place.

TIME

Dramas can be located in different time frames. These time frames are time past, time present and time future. There are also different ways that time can pass in a play, including real time, selective time and flexible time.

Time frames

It is essential to be aware of the time frame of a play – past, present or future. This is because when a drama happens it is usually a vital part of the context of the narrative and the action. However, it is also important to remember that dramatic action can move freely between different time frames and different types of time. In some plays, such as absurdist works, the action occurs in an indefinite or undefined moment in time.

Time past

Setting a play in a time frame from the past allows the drama to explore any moment from the whole of human history. Time past involves using our imagination to go back in time and act, or believe as an audience, that we really are in a different time. This means the audience can relive, or recreate, the past. Using a past time frame allows us to see another time through modern eyes, as well as to provide interesting perspectives on the present. Playwrights from the Ancient Greeks to Shakespeare to Brecht used past time frames in their work to challenge and comment on the political and social contexts of their own time.

Time present

Contemporary dramas often deal with the relationships, experiences and feelings of people like us and, in this way, help to illuminate our own lives. We frequently use our own time frame to explore and understand people, situations and issues that are important to us here and now. Setting a drama in the present also makes it possible to explore, question, challenge or affirm the world as we know it. Equally, modern plays from other cultures and countries offer the chance to experience imaginatively the lives of people we otherwise might never encounter.

Time future

It is interesting how few plays are set in a future time frame, despite the opportunity this offers to imagine and represent possible directions for our world and humankind. One reason for this may be that the future, or science fiction, is and will remain a major film genre. This is because the technical resources available to filmmakers make it possible to create amazing future worlds, such as in *Avatar*. Some plays have made use of future time frames, moving a few years into the future in the final scenes of a realistic play to show how particular events and trends in society might develop. An example of this is Stephen Sewell's *It Just Stopped*.

Using time

As well as being set in different time frames, dramas can also use time in different ways within a play.

Real time

In real time, the drama takes place in the actual time of the action. A five-minute improvised argument between characters would last five minutes on stage, and one hour in the life of a character would take one hour of stage time. Time passes on stage just as it does in real life.

The Australian play *Ninety*, by Joanna Murray-Smith, uses time in a very effective and clever way. The female character has exactly 90 minutes to convince her ex-husband to take her back, which is exactly the length of the play. When it was staged in Melbourne in 2008, the entire stage revolved very slowly, just like the big hand of a clock, marking out 90 minutes.

Melbourne Theatre Company. Jeff Busby Photography



6.3.1 Melinda Butel and Kim Gyngell in a Melbourne Theatre Company production of *Ninety*, 2008

Selective time

This is the most widely used form of dramatic time in the theatre. Selective time means that only the most significant moments are focused on in a play. From scene to scene the action can jump ahead days, weeks or even years, so that only the most interesting and important incidents and encounters are represented on stage. In this way, selective time can be used to concentrate intensely on key experiences, and a person's entire life can be portrayed through a series of dramatic snapshots.

Flexible time

This form of dramatic time is used particularly through the medium of flashbacks, where previous incidents in a character's life are re-enacted on stage. Many contemporary plays use flexible time to move both forward and backward in the lives of the characters, building dramatic tension. Within a drama we can also pass time flexibly, by slowing it down with slow-motion action or speeding it up so that events happen very quickly.

PLACE

The element of place identifies the physical location of all dramas. Just as there are three time frames used to describe when a play occurs, we can also identify three types of place frames to describe where the action of a drama happens.

Specific place frames

Locating dramas in specific and recognisable locations provides an immediate and clear context for the action. Many dramas are located in recognisable, common places such as a character's kitchen, an office where several characters work or a restaurant where characters meet loved ones. Specific place frames are found most often in realistic plays where the lives of the characters are strongly connected to the place where the action occurs. For example, in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the action is predominantly set in George and Martha's lounge room.

In the past, where a number of specific locations were identified in a play, these were represented by the scenery onstage being changed for each location. Modern designers often place the set and props for a number of different locations in the same space, dividing the performing area so that the characters move from set to set when they change locations. Multimedia projections are increasingly being used to identify specific locations. This allows the action of the play to be continuous, with the images of different places simply projected on screens or on stage to change the location.

General place frames

General place frames are used to identify a kind of environment, rather than a specific place. A drama about drought could be set in a dry riverbed anywhere in Australia, just as one about recent bushfires could be located in a bush setting that could be any bushfire danger zone. General place frames can also include places that we are all familiar with – verandas, footpaths, cafes – but the actual nature and location of the place is not important because it is only a background to the action. In this case, it is usually not important to represent the location realistically, but simply to identify it through text, action or another indicator. With plays containing a number of general place frames, it is possible to perform in an empty space and indicate changes of location with a staging object or multimedia projection.

Mood and atmosphere place frames

Many dramas require a particular mood or atmosphere as part of the location of the action. This can be achieved by the use of stagecraft resources and other theatre techniques. Light and sound are particularly effective for creating the world of dreams, nightmares and the surreal. They can also suggest a location, and its atmosphere, at the same time. A prison cell can be delineated by the projection of bars of light on stage and the sound effects of doors being slammed and locked. Film and computer-generated images are especially effective in establishing mood and atmosphere and suggesting surreal, fantastic locations.



WORKSHOP 6.3.1: WARM-UP – TIME AND PLACE

Exercise: A group forms a circle; one student moves to the centre and begins performing an action or talking in a role or both. Another member of the group steps in and begins to act in a way that changes the action and where it is occurring. Modify this so that the person beginning nominates a time and place for what they are doing. Their actions should fit in with the time and place they nominate – for example, a bushranger robbing a bank would not be appropriate for a modern time frame. When the next member of the group joins the improvisation, they should change the time and place frames. The following members of the group do the same when they enter. The teacher can also name the time and place frames for the game, changing them as each group member enters.



WORKSHOP 6.3.2: IMPROVISATION – TIME AND PLACE

Exercise: Working in groups, create a time and place improvisation, using time and place as effectively as possible. For example, a drama about the First Fleet might be structured in three scenes.

Scene 1: Crime and punishment, showing the crime that was committed and the criminal being caught and sentenced to transportation.

Scene 2: Life on board the convict ship for the convicts and the soldiers.

Scene 3: In modern time, where a film is being made about the First Fleet

6.4 SYMBOLS

Drama is about making meaning. Whenever we create our own drama, work with a text or watch a play, we are exploring an aspect of the experience of being human and making sense of it. Plays can tell an exciting story, make us laugh or cry, draw us into a strange or fantastic world, or swamp us with strange, abstract images. Whatever the form of the drama, its purpose is to increase our understanding of ourselves and our world.

Drama, like other art forms, makes meaning in a special way through the use of symbols. The meaning communicated through the unique language of the arts can be more complex and more powerful in its impact than the written or spoken word, or visual images in photographs or on television. The ability to create effective drama texts, to communicate fully with an audience in performance and to appreciate drama as spectators depends on a theatre maker's ability to use and understand symbols in the theatre.

A symbol can be anything we give a special meaning to – an object, a word, a picture or even an action. We use symbols all the time in our everyday lives, and they play an important part in our experience of the world. By its very nature, drama involves the use of symbols. Because all theatre is fiction, involving heightened action and showing life intensified, everything that happens on stage carries special meaning. Every word that is spoken has been chosen for the message it conveys; the set and every object on it is important to the play, and everything about the characters is significant.

Symbols are a way to give importance to key elements in our lives and, symbols in turn, provide one of the key elements of drama. By giving special significance to everything on stage, symbols help to give real meaning to the dramas we create and watch. Some types of symbols regularly used in drama include objects, costumes, sounds, movements and characters.

SYMBOLIC OBJECTS

Some symbols we use have a universal meaning that everyone understands – a gold wedding ring is the symbol of marriage and, in a way, represents all the important emotional, legal and practical implications of being married. The Christian cross is not only a symbol of the crucified Christ but also represents the whole Christian religion itself. In each case, the simple object is loaded with a meaning and significance that would require millions of words to convey. Symbols can change their meaning with time, so the skull and crossbones that used to represent pirate ships now warns us of poisons and dangerous chemicals.

Bell Shakespeare: Rob Maccoll



6.4.1 Robert Alexander and John Bell in Bell Shakespeare's 2008 production of *Anatomy Titus Fall of Rome: A Shakespeare Commentary*, which uses symbols in the form of blood and books.

SYMBOLIC COSTUMES

Another design element that has particular symbolic power is costume. Realistic and representational costumes tell us a great deal about the characters who wear them. Costumes can also have important wider meanings within the context of a play. In Shakespeare's works, the crowns worn by different kings symbolise the power and special status of kingship. This is why Macbeth craves the crown of Scotland: it will make him more than an ordinary mortal. It is also why Richard II finds it so difficult to give up his crown to Henry Bolingbroke.

In the theatre, masks have been used as symbolic costuming going back as far as Ancient Greece. Modern theatre continues to use masks in a variety of interesting symbolic ways – from the frozen facial expressions of Grotowski's theatre to the elaborate horses' heads of *Equus*.

SYMBOLIC SOUNDS

Many symbols we use in the theatre are neither words nor pictures, but sounds and actions. The beating of a heart can be used as a symbol of life, as can the sound of breathing. Music has the power to convey symbolic meaning, and soft, gentle violins carry the sense of peace and romance just as clearly as loud, clashing drums and brass suggest conflict. The sound of waves breaking gently on a beach conveys a totally different message from the howling wind of a cyclone. These different sounds each generate a whole world of images and emotions in us; they communicate with us on a deep and powerful level. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* concludes with the slamming of a door as Nora walks out, leaving her husband and children behind. This single sound symbolises the finality of her departure, and the audience knows there is no hope of her returning.

SYMBOLIC MOVEMENTS

Any action in itself can have symbolic meaning. A simple gesture like shaking a fist at someone clearly conveys a message and a threat, while stretching out an open hand to someone is a universal symbol of friendship and help. Moreover, raising both hands in the air conveys a message of surrender in almost every culture.

SYMBOLIC CHARACTERS

Perhaps the most significant factor of all, in terms of symbolic meaning in drama, is the characters themselves. Because drama presents life heightened and intensified on stage, the characters created by the playwright and performed by the actors mean something and have a purpose beyond merely representing people. Characters in the theatre have a symbolic dimension, expressing a particular idea, representing a belief or providing us with a different perspective on human experience.

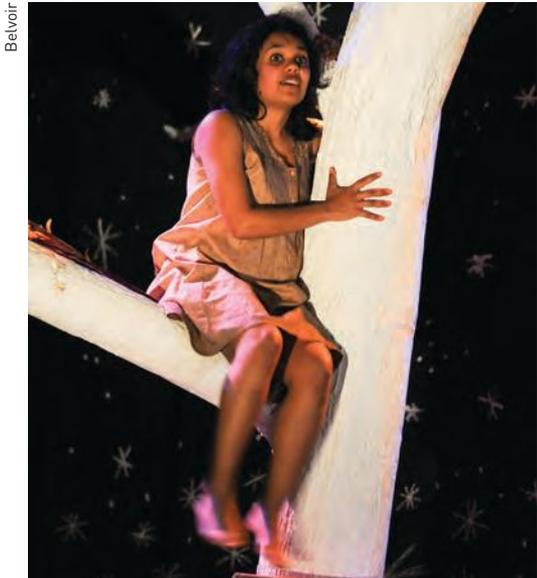
This is just as true in comedy as in tragedy, and this can be seen most clearly in *commedia dell'arte*. In that form of comedy, stock characters symbolise particular aspects of human nature, such as greed, stupidity and arrogance, which we laugh at but also recognise as existing in our own personalities. Il Capitano combines boasting and vanity with complete cowardice, just as Il Dottore is always a greedy,

pompous bore who thinks he knows everything. At times we have all behaved in ways similar to the characters in commedia, and they symbolise for us in vivid and exaggerated form the follies and weaknesses we all share.

Even in the most realistic dramas based on real people and events, characters take on symbolic significance beyond their individual selves. In many plays, the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist becomes a battle between the good and evil inherent in human nature. *A Man for All Seasons*, written by Robert Bolt and first performed on stage in 1960, is based on real historical events and people living at the time of King Henry VIII. Even so, the character of Sir Thomas More comes to symbolise all the best human traits – faith, integrity, honesty and intelligence. His opponent in the play, Cromwell, is portrayed as genuinely evil; he has no values or beliefs, beyond ambition and personal desires. The conflict between these characters symbolises on stage the struggle between good and evil, and it is left to the audience to decide how far they would be prepared to go to stand up for their own beliefs.

In a similar way, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is based on historical fact, but the key protagonist in the play, John Proctor, also represents the human qualities of honesty and faith, opposed to the prejudice, selfishness and malice of many of the people of Salem.

The Australian play *Yibiyung* by Dallas Winmar is about the Stolen Generations of Indigenous children. Winmar based the central character of Lily, whose real name was Yibiyung, on her grandmother. *Yibiyung* comes to symbolise all the children who were stolen and struggled to survive.



6.4.2 A scene from *Yibiyung* at Belvoir Street Theatre, with Miranda Tapsell, 2008



WORKSHOP 6.4.1: THE AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY

Exercise: Working in groups, create an improvisation about what it means to be Australian. Use as many symbolic devices as you can, including objects, masks, sounds, movements and symbolic characters to present a narrative about Australian identity and your understanding of its meaning in our society at present.

STAGING PERFORMANCE TEXTS

The key context for any dramatic performance is the text. Usually, the text is written as dialogue that can be learnt and then spoken as the characters in the play. Play texts also contain stage instructions that give a guide to at least some of the action required in the performance. When you improvise your own plays, you actually create a new text made up of both words and actions. Moving beyond play texts, any written text can provide you with the basis for improvised performance work; the whole field of literature, including novels and poems, generates rich opportunities to develop interesting performance work.

In the past, the word 'text' meant words that were written down, and this is the traditional dictionary definition. However, in today's postmodern world, 'text' is now used to describe anything by which meaning is communicated, so a painting or a piece of music can be considered a text, as can a piece of mime or dance. This is an important definition for us because in the modern theatre words are no longer the only form of text. Contemporary drama includes a range of performance forms that may use no words at all. These forms include physical theatre such as Butoh, circus such as Cirque du Soleil, black light theatre and puppetry such as Compagnie Philippe Genty, Aboriginal dance drama such as the Bangarra Dance Theatre, and the whole area of performance art, which blends visual art with drama.

7.1 DIRECTION

The direction of a play actually involves all the other aspects of stagecraft and staging. The director has become in some ways the single most important person in both the staging of a play and the making of a film. The job of the director is difficult and complex and involves fulfilling a range of different roles.

THE DIRECTOR AS COORDINATOR

The director is the chief organiser in any production team. This means making important decisions about the organisation of all facets of the work before beginning to actually direct the play. The director must guide the decision-making

about all elements of the production and approve the rehearsal schedule, the design of the stage and costumes, the use of lighting and sound, and the overall use of the performance space.

Every performance piece needs clear coordination, either by an individual or through joint decision-making. Inevitably, and logically, this duty falls upon the director or directors.

THE DIRECTOR AS TEACHER

The most intense and involving function the director is asked to perform is to help the actors develop their characters. Rehearsing the play is a journey of discovery in which the actors learn more about the characters and, in the end, about themselves as people. A director who is able to inspire a company with a vision can make this voyage of discovery possible for the actors in rehearsal.

An essential part of directing the actors is the job of building and sustaining a sense of ensemble. To achieve this, the director must first establish a working process in which the actors are conscious of being valued and feel secure. All the actors must feel that their contribution is important and that they are able to make suggestions, experiment with ideas and take risks. The final decisions regarding the nature of each individual actor's performance must rest with the director in order to preserve the unity and quality of the play. How these decisions are made and communicated can determine the value of the experience for the actor and the general health of the ensemble.

Most of the great directors of the last 100 years, from Stanislavski onwards, were teachers as well as directors, and many of them saw their teachings of theatre as more important than directing plays.

THE DIRECTOR AS INTERPRETER

It is the director's prime responsibility to bring to life the playwright's text on stage. This means becoming deeply familiar with the script and working to interpret the playwright's vision and realise it fully. Many directors believe that they should be as faithful as possible to the script, avoiding any changes and asking themselves constantly how the playwright would want a particular scene or character directed.

Skilled directors who see themselves as interpreters of the playwright's words also make themselves familiar with other plays by the same writer and with anything that playwright has written about the theatre. They also ask their actors and designers to fully research the playwright's work and the background to the particular play in order to make the performance as faithful as possible.

THE DIRECTOR AS CREATIVE ARTIST

As well as directing the script and interpreting the action, modern directors often operate as creative artists. This can involve imposing a particular style on the performance of a play or film, such as turning a realistic play into a surreal one,

or a serious drama into an absurd comedy. Straightforward social realist plays are often transformed by directors into political theatre by using Brechtian techniques, such as slides containing political messages that comment on the action and having the actors talk directly to the audience.

Other directors update or change the context of plays, setting them in different periods or different cultures from the ones in which they were originally set. This is particularly common with Shakespeare's plays, a notable example being Australian director Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which he set among the street gangs in modern-day Los Angeles.

Directors who see themselves as creative artists also feel free to cut, alter and even totally transform the texts of the plays they are directing. These directors might remove scenes from plays, change the order of the scenes and introduce new text from other sources – including writing it themselves. For the past 40 years, Ariane Mnouchkine in France has worked collaboratively with her company, totally transforming both classic and modern plays through the use of improvisation, music, dance and imaginative design, as well as Asian and African theatre forms. The Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki has gained an international reputation for his use of Japanese performance forms in radical adaptations of classic Western theatre, especially Shakespeare. Some of the most influential directors of the modern era have also created their own plays from other sources, working in collaboration with a range of creative artists including writers, musicians and choreographers. The musical *Cats* was devised by a creative team headed by English director Trevor Nunn and based on the poems of T. S. Eliot. In France, Peter Brook worked with his company of actors and writers to develop the extraordinary nine-hour stage play *The Mahabharata* using the Indian creation myth of the same name as his inspiration. In the USA, Robert Wilson creates theatre that blends drama and performance art. His 1998-piece, *Monsters of Grace*, was based on a 13th-century Sufi poem and used music and three-dimensional film technology. When a director works on a play text, or creates one of their own, they need to be aware of the possibilities open to them as directors in actually creating the performance through stagecraft and not merely staging it.

THE DIRECTOR AS AUDIENCE

Whether we operate as the interpreter of a play or the creator, there is another function we must perform as a director. This is the vital role of being an audience before the play is publicly performed. Remember that the actors cannot see themselves acting, so they have no way of knowing how effectively they are communicating with an audience.

During the rehearsal period the director must take time to step back from involvement in the work and become 'an audience of one'. This involves being the audience for run-through rehearsals of the play, treating them as though they were real public performances, and watching and listening to find out if the performance is working as a piece of theatre. The director must first check all the technical and functional aspects of stagecraft and performance and make any necessary changes.

Because they are the coordinator of all aspects of the production, the director has both the power and the responsibility to structure the performance in order to make it a worthwhile experience for the audience. The 20th century has often been described as the century of the director because it was during the last century that the director became the most important individual in the making of theatre.



7.1.1 Neil Armfield (O) (b. 1955) is one of Australia's leading directors, working in theatre, opera and film. Neil was a co-founder and subsequent artistic director of Belvoir Theatre. In the theatre, Neil has focused on Indigenous plays as well as productions of classic plays.



WORKSHOP 7.1.1: DIRECTING POETRY

The Hollow Men

Poetry can provide a script for performance that can be as powerful as a theatre or film script. TS Eliot's *The Hollow Men* is a five stanza poem that is said to be influenced by the work of Dante.

Exercise: In small groups, complete the following directorial tasks:

- Find a copy of the poem *The Hollow Men*.
- Research the background of the poem, the time in which it is set and any other relevant information.
- Research any existing performances of the poem or performances that make reference to the poem.
- Create a directorial concept for a performance of *The Hollow Men*.
- Present your directorial concept to the rest of the class as if you were pitching your idea to potential producers/backers for your production.

7.2 DECONSTRUCTING A TEXT

French director Antonin Artaud described the theatre as a mirror or double of real life, able to reflect what our society and our lives are like, but also able to change the way we live by changing the way we see ourselves and our world. This is the double purpose of all drama, whether it happens in the classroom or the theatre, whether it is funny or serious, historical or modern. When we work with a performance text, we become more fully aware of the richness and diversity of human experience, but also more aware of the common bonds that unite us all.

The first reading of a text, on the page or in the theatre, is therefore for dramatic meaning, to discover what the play has to say about people and the world they live in. This involves first of all working out the playwright's intention or message. This could be a clear political or social statement such as we find in the works of ideological dramatists such as Brecht. The essential meaning of the play could be religious, as in classic Greek theatre, or strongly philosophical, as in Shakespeare's tragedies. In realistic theatre, the central concern of many plays is psychological – an exploration of the causes of individual human behaviour. In surreal theatre, the emphasis of the creator is often on what lies beyond reality and our everyday lives, or what is found beneath the surface of those lives in dreams and the irrational.

Recent research has shown that people under the age of 25 very often experience the performance of a play quite differently from people that are older.

Of course, each of us receives and understands the playwright's message differently, according to who we are and to our individual level of experience and understanding. Very often, our understanding of a text is strongly influenced by our beliefs, and certainly the extent to which we enjoy reading, seeing or performing a play can depend on the extent to which we are in sympathy with the dramatist's point of view. Nevertheless, in our culture we do share common assumptions and knowledge about ourselves, about our society and about theatre. This shared culture helps us to construct shared meanings from any work of drama we experience, which balance our personal and subjective responses to a text.

As well as the dramatist's stated concerns, a play text also carries a range of messages that are part of the context of the play and not necessarily intended by the dramatist at all. The time and the place in which any play is written strongly influence the nature of the play. Particular forms and styles of theatre dominated during different periods of history. The subject matter and the meaning of plays in each historical period strongly reflected the society and values of that period – and sometimes strongly challenged that society and its values.

When theatre makers perform or watch any play, they need to be aware of the hidden messages inherent in the text, and this is just as true of a play written this year as one of the classics. When deconstructing a text, it is important to look for the cultural meaning of the play as well as the playwright's meaning, and then the personal response. The plays of Anton Chekhov tell us a great deal more than he actually intended about the lives of middle-class Russians at the end of the 19th century – the way they lived, their values and attitudes and their relationships with each other. This historical context is not only interesting for its own sake but gives each play a strong sense of reality and vitality in performance. At the same time, certain behaviours that Chekhov took for granted in his plays, such as the treatment of the peasants and the inferior position of women, we now recognise as part of his time and his culture – Russian society more than 100 years ago. When you work on a play such as *The Cherry Orchard* you therefore need to bring a consciously critical approach to the cultural context of the play. This means that you need to decide whether you simply accept and portray the values and behaviours contained in the text, or challenge them in performance through your interpretation of the text.

In essence, deconstructing a text means working out the three levels of meaning. The first is the playwright's meaning, which is the central concern or message of the play conveyed through the characters, dialogue and action as scripted by the dramatist. The second level of meaning is personal and involves the knowledge, understanding and beliefs that each individual reader, actor and

member of the audience brings to the play. The final level of meaning is the cultural meaning: those contexts, attitudes and values that are apparent in the play and are part of the time and place in which it was written.



Phillip Hinton, Jeanette Cronin and Jane Phegan in *Letters to Lindy* by Alana Valentine, commissioned and produced by Merrigong Theatre Company. Photo by Lisa Tomasetti.

7.2.1 How do you read this scene from the Australian play *Letters to Lindy*, written by Alana Valentine?



WORKSHOP 7.2.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Letters to Lindy

Exercise: Read the extract below from *Letters to Lindy* by Alana Valentine and determine the playwright's meaning, the personal meanings and the cultural meaning.

Letters to Lindy by Alana Valentine

Act one

ANONYMOUS: [FIGURE 3] You murdered Azaria and your husband knew you planned the murder because you made a black dress to bury her. You should both be ashamed of yourselves. Some witnesses of yours should be charged with telling lies.

No dog or dingo was involved. Just you too [sic]. God will punish you both. The welfare should take all your kids away from you as your sons will hate you both in years to come they won't trust you as they know you are liars.

Thou shalt not kill. Dozen dingoes were also shot for your lies. Azaria won't rest in peace because her mother was too weak to tell the truth.

You made a lot of money from your baby's death and now you are using your new baby to get out of prison. You both belong to Satan. You are not Christians. You are both weak. Stop using young babies to get your own way. Better people are still in prison not using the public for money also the media for money. You both should grow up and work for your living.

LINDY: I thought we'd start with the comic relief. Yeah. That's what I used to call the nasty letters. Because I must have received, oh, at least twenty thousand letters just up to the point of when I got out of jail, and then more afterwards and then all the emails of course. I'm still getting about one thousand emails a year. Two out of three are apologies. But the nasty ones were always just a bit different. Some of them even gave me the giggles, I got the giggles with Meryl Streep over one of them because there was a woman who wrote and told me she wouldn't spend any time on me and wouldn't be supporting me. Meryl got an identical letter and in both of them she sent a black bootie with red ribbons. So Meryl asked me if I would like hers to have a pair and I said sure. This woman who said she wouldn't spend any time on me actually provided me with a lovely pair of black booties. So.

LINDY is now holding a lovely pair of black booties, with red trim.

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7.3 RECONSTRUCTING THE TEXT

Once a text has been deconstructed for meaning, it then needs to be reconstructed as a piece of theatre with all the complex interweaving of characterisation, form, style, dramatic elements and elements of production. A play can read extremely well on the page and yet lose all its energy and interest, as well as its meaning, in performance. The text must come to life on stage to work as a piece of theatre.

As well as bringing a text to life, it is also important to make it meaningful. To do this you need to identify and then balance the three levels of meaning which belong to that particular text. If the playwright's meaning is overwhelmingly important, the production will concentrate on the characterisation and action to make sure the message is clear. For example, time and place are almost irrelevant in Samuel Beckett's plays, and the cultural context is far less important than the grim existential message – life is absurd and there is no god, no meaning and no future.

If the playwright's message is simple and straightforward, and it is the cultural meaning of the play that is interesting, then the focus will be on the stylised performance and stagecraft elements which enhance that cultural context. Restoration comedy is most noted for its clever satire of human follies and the way the plays create the extraordinary society of Restoration England, and this is what gives the plays their vitality and meaning on stage.

On the other hand, a theatre maker's personal beliefs and understanding might lead them to challenge the cultural context of a play that you might find personally unacceptable in some way. A director can function as a creative artist, transforming the period or the context of a play and working with the actors to reinterpret the characters and their relationships. Having deconstructed the cultural context of a play, a director might therefore decide to make the unacceptable hidden messages and assumptions as apparent and obvious as the playwright's intended message. The reconstruction of the text might change the time, place, characters, dialogue or even the sequence of the play to achieve your intention.



WORKSHOP 7.3.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Exercise 1: Choose one of the texts below. Conduct a moved reading of the play and determine the textual, cultural and personal meaning of the text. Use this information to write a short reflection on how you would direct a new production of the chosen play.

- *Ruby Moon* by Matt Cameron
- *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen
- *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne
- *Eisteddfod* by Lally Katz
- *Moth* by Declan Greene
- *Stolen* by Jane Harrison
- *Sugarland* by Rachael Coopes and Wayne Blair
- *The Chosen* by Lachlan Philpott

Exercise 2: Choose one scene from the play you worked on in Exercise 1. Deliberately reconstruct and perform the scene to create a completely different context and meaning from the original scene.

CASE STUDY 2.1: STEPHEN CURTIS – DESIGNING *THE DROVER'S WIFE*



The Drover's Wife. Belvoir Street Theatre Company, 2016. Upstairs Theatre

Written by Leah Purcell, from a short story by Henry Lawson

Director: Leticia Cáceres

Set Designer: Stephen Curtis

Costume Designer: Tess Schofiel

Lighting Designer: Verity Hampson

Every production is unique, and every time I begin the process of designing a new production I start from scratch, assuming nothing – literally with a blank page. But my pencil is hovering in anticipation! My first read of the script sets my imagination going. This first read is so important. I read the script through in one go, with my phone switched off and no distractions so I can totally immerse myself in the world of the play: when and where it is set; who the characters are and what they think and do (and why); the mood and atmosphere; the shape or structure of the drama; its tone; its themes; key moments of theatrical action and images that stick in my mind. Most of all I'm letting my emotional response to the script come to the surface. When I understand how the script feels I can then move on to explore what the script means and how it works.

On *The Drover's Wife* all this careful, quiet reading and thinking happens before my first conversation with my director Leticia. When we first talk it's by phone as we live in different cities – most of our process needs to be by phone and Skype, which means that I need to be very organised. I already have in front of me pages of questions about the script, so nothing is forgotten, and some early design sketches and carefully prepared visual references that we share by email. We talk for a couple of hours about theatre, about politics, especially the politics of colonial dispossession which is at the heart of *The Drover's Wife*, and we talk about the play itself, working from the outside in. We both love the script – this is important! But we know it won't be easy or straightforward to stage; Leah has written what seems like a naturalistic script – with a settler's hut, kero lanterns and lots of 'real' detail, but with powerful, poetic images and language which break the naturalism. The production also will be staged on the Belvoir thrust stage with the audience sitting on three sides of the stage, almost in the action – not great for naturalism, but excellent for very intimate focused action.

Our first task is to explore the way we want the play to work: naturalism, heightened poeticism, abstraction? We explore lots of possibilities. We share a lot of visual references from nature, photography, paintings, historical collections, and through a process of experimentation and trial and error these gradually help us to establish a visual language – a common language of textures (stained canvas and raw split



Stephen Curtis

C2.1.1 Stephen Curtis, Set Designer

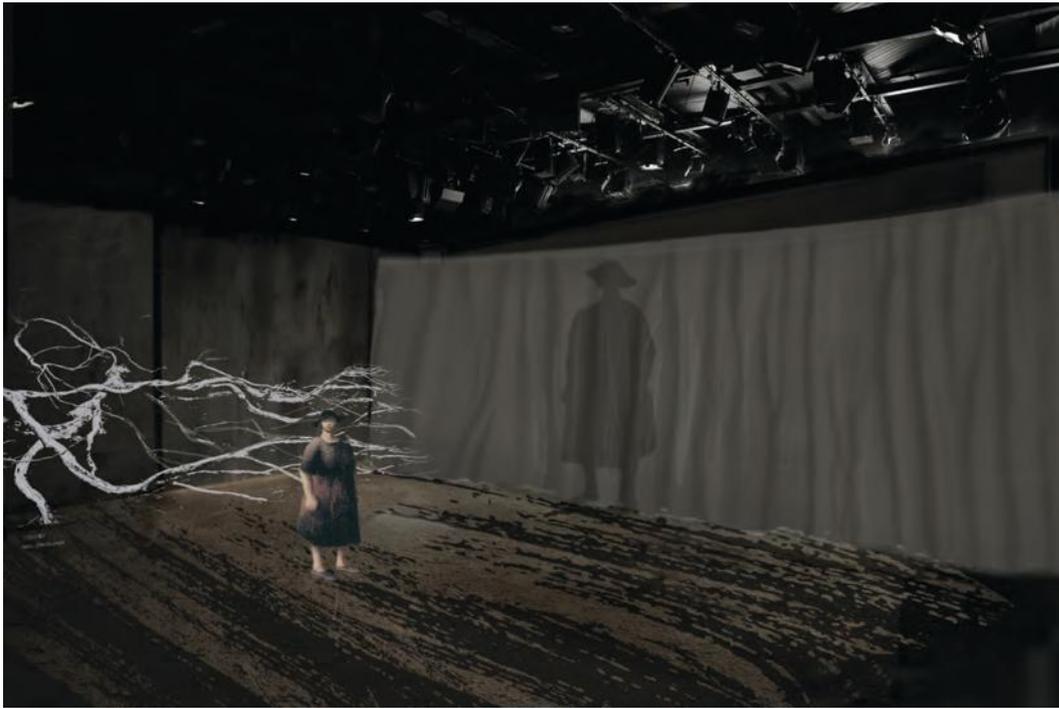


C2.1.1 Stephen Curtis HLA

C2.1.2 Stephen Curtis NIDA

C2.1.3 *The Drover's Wife*

C2.1.4 Staging Ideas



Stephen Curtis

C2.1.2 A rendering of the set design for *The Drover's Wife* by Stephen Curtis.

timber), a palette of colour and tone (washed out ochres, inky blues and greys), the quality of light (grotesque shadows and romantic golden afternoon light on tree trunks) and key action (especially the sweeping of the campsite to obliterate evidence of the violence and crimes that have been committed). The visual references we share make it easy to see what each of us is thinking. Leticia loves one of my references in particular: a tree stump chopping block with an axe embedded in it. We agree we can build the production around this object. It encompasses the threat of violence that underscores the play – the axe can really be used in the fight scenes, and the stump can be placed centrestage as a focused place to sit and play scenes. This object settles the question for us; the production will be poetic, with just a few objects to set the scene, and each object must have a poetic, expressive or symbolic 'split personality' so it can be at some moments beautiful and at other moments brutally violent or threatening.

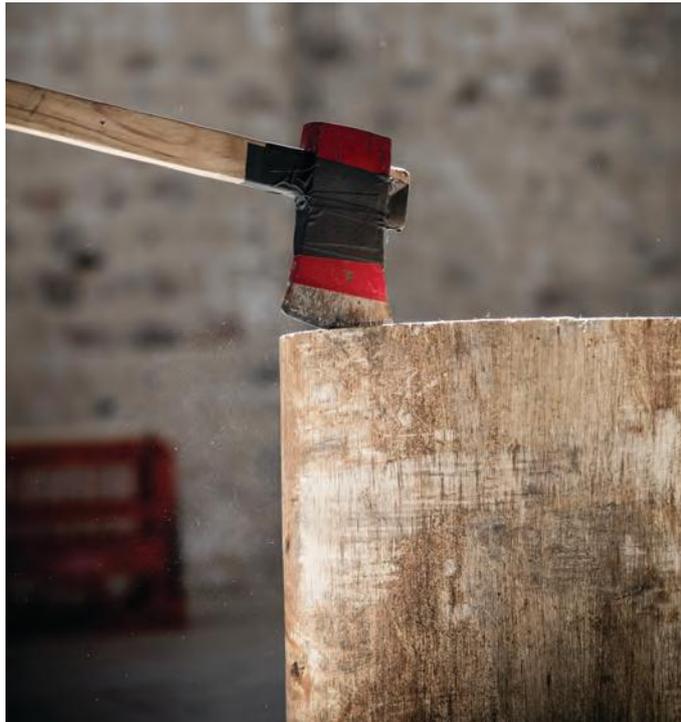
Using my drawings, Photoshop renderings and scale models, we play around with a range of objects to explore their potential in the storytelling. In the model it is easy to put things in, move them around and take them away – it is the perfect tool for Leticia and I to start experimenting with how scenes might be staged, and using the scaled figures of the characters to explore the dynamics of the space. We settle on just a few set elements: a stained canvas curtain that provides an entry to the hut and can be swept aside at the end of the show in a Brechtian theatrical gesture for the snow-storm finale; a dead tree lying like a corpse on the edge of the space (evoking the early settlers violent clear-felling of the land) provides a place for the cast to sit and a less exposed place to stage the rape scene; a layer of fine dirt on the floor that will provide a surface where every movement of the play's action will leave a tell-tale sign, to be swept clean at key

moments; and of course the chopping block centrestage.

We share all of this material with our other designers – Tess and Verity – and their feedback and their own research feeds into the final development of the set design, just as the set design informs their own design thinking. I make a finished scale model, draw up a floor plan and do detail drawings of set and prop elements for the production team to work from, so everyone can see what we are thinking, what the production will look like and how it will work.

It was a key moment in my process when Leticia and I shared our conception of the show with Leah who not only wrote the script but was also to play the lead role of the drover's wife. We were a bit nervous of course, because the set design did not literally follow the naturalistic style of Leah's stage directions and descriptions, but the scale model, renderings and references were a great way for us to communicate with Leah, and then later to the rest of the cast what we were thinking and why. Leah looked... and listened... and asked some really insightful questions... and then declared: 'It's great! I can't wait to start!...That axe...!' Already she was starting to imagine herself in the world of the play.

One of the joys of designing for theatre is the way the director and actors inhabit the set in the rehearsal room and discover new potential – such as when the swagman hid in the folds of the curtain in the blackout before the show started and made a scary surprise entrance, seemingly out of nowhere, in the first scene of the play. Inevitably some ideas that we developed during the design process are found to not work or are not needed, and new solutions evolve out of the theatrical language



The Drover's Wife, Belvoir. Photo by Brett Boardman

C2.1.3 A scene from *The Drover's Wife* showing the chopping block.



Stephen Curtis

C2.1.4 A rendering of the set design for *The Drover's Wife* by Stephen Curtis.

that we established through the design process. Other ideas become more and more important as the production evolves as well. The pared back, expressionistic simplicity of the production grew stronger as we worked together during rehearsals. I was always advocating for doing more with less, so the all-important axe was also used to break the iron collar around the aboriginal refugee Yadaka's neck, creating a very powerful dramatic moment.

The designers are always on hand to help find solutions to the unique challenges that are part of making any new theatre production. It's our role to make sure that every detail works – technically, dramatically and aesthetically. One element on *The Drover's Wife* that took the combined input of the designers, costume and props makers, performers, stage management and director was the moment when the heavily pregnant drover's wife's water broke on stage. This effect needed to work easily and reliably, and to spectacularly add to the drama of a scene where the drover's wife is trying to defend herself from an attack. Tess and I worked closely together, leading the whole team to a successful resolution.

During the last week of rehearsals in the theatre, every element of the production comes together for the first time: lighting, sound, costumes, props, set and performance are combined and integrated – 'teched' to make sure every element works together in every single moment. The designers are crucial in this process. The layer of dirt on the stage was one design element that we were only able to rehearse within these final days. Some stage action was tricky, the dirt was a bit slippery when the floor got wet when the water broke (which we solved by adding sand to the mix), while other moments were spell-binding such as when Yadaka danced and kicked up dust, leaving a distinct ceremonial pattern of foot gestures in the dirt as a kind of visual storytelling. For me this is theatre design at its best – helping the director and actors make theatre magic; helping to tell the story, shape action, focus a special moment, build an intense dramatic atmosphere and contribute layers of meaning to the production, helping to make a rich experience for the audience.



Leah Purcell in *The Drover's Wife*, Belvoir. Photo by Brett Boardman.

C2.1.5 Leah Purcell in the Belvoir Street Theatre production of *The Drover's Wife*.

Stephen Curtis: 'Case Study 2.1:
Stephen Curtis – designing *The Drover's Wife*'

SECTION 3

Group and solo performance

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most complex but also rewarding tasks in drama is to create a performance text yourself and then develop it into a complete piece of theatre, either as part of an ensemble or individually as a solo performance. To achieve this task successfully, you need to have the expressive ability to create interesting and credible characters. Secondly, you must be able to call on a range of knowledge and skills related to design and staging.

The process of improvisation requires you to experiment freely with ideas, situations and characters. It is vitally important to be willing to accept the work of others freely and to be creative in offering possibilities for dramatic development yourself.

Spontaneity is a key ingredient in all drama but particularly in improvisation. It is vital that you react immediately and imaginatively when you are involved in dramatic situations and creating a character. Cooperation is just as essential as spontaneity in group devised drama and you must cultivate the skill of working with others to develop a meaningful, worthwhile piece to which everyone contributes.



You can use an almost limitless range of existing texts as starting points for creating and making plays through improvisation. Anything that communicates meaning can be considered a text, from plays, novels, stories and poems to television programs, online resources, films, paintings, photographs, sculptures and music – the list is extensive. These texts can bring a greater range of viewpoints and understanding to your work, as well as providing you with a limitless range of dramatic situations and characters.

If you have an interest or concern that you wish to explore in drama, you can begin by researching that interest or concern to find as many relevant texts as possible. These texts can become the starting points, or pretexts, for your work or you can weave segments from different texts into your play building. By drawing on the lives and experiences of different people from contrasting times and places that are revealed in these texts, you can work in ensembles to build plays that explore interesting themes and concerns.

IMPROVISING A GROUP PERFORMANCE

All great theatre innovators used improvisation to help actors develop performance skills, and in many cases, created new plays through improvisation. Stanislavski asked his actors to improvise on their characters, giving them a backstory (a personal history) and improvising scenes not in their script, revealing something about their characters. Grotowski required his actors to improvise by exploring their characters through physical movement, identifying an animal or bird that represented an element of their character and moving as that creature and incorporating that movement into their performance. Artaud devised totally improvised plays where actors began with an idea, story or characters and then created the play.

The process of improvisation requires theatre makers to experiment freely with ideas, situations and characters. It is vitally important to be willing to accept freely the work of others, and to be creative in offering possibilities for dramatic development yourself.

Spontaneity is a key ingredient in all drama, but particularly in improvisation. It is vital to react immediately and imaginatively when involved in dramatic situations and when creating a character. Cooperation is just as essential as spontaneity in group devised drama, and it is important to cultivate the skill of working with others to develop a meaningful, worthwhile piece of drama to which everyone contributes.

One of the most complex but also rewarding tasks in drama is to create a performance text yourself and then develop it into a complete piece of theatre, either as part of an ensemble or individually as a solo performance. To achieve this task successfully, a theatre maker needs to have the expressive ability to create interesting and credible characters. Secondly, a theatre maker must be able to call on a range of knowledge and skills related to design elements and staging.

8.1 THE NATURE OF DRAMATIC IMPROVISATION

Improvisation is a completely natural activity and is simply an extension of the way children play. All children have the ability to pretend they are someone else, or to pretend they are in a completely different place, and then to behave as though what they are pretending is real.

This kind of imagined play is the beginning of improvisation. When an actor improvises, they imagine that they are someone else, that they are experiencing a particular situation or that they are living in an imaginary environment. True improvisation begins when an actor starts living the life of another person or behaving as though they are really living in a different place or in different circumstances.

By applying the techniques of improvisation to texts, stories or materials from other periods in history and from other cultures, you are also able to share imaginatively in the lives and experiences of other people and other societies that are very different from your own.



WORKSHOP 8.1.1: INDIVIDUAL IMPROVISATION

Exercise: Working individually, devise an improvisation involving a character being interviewed or interrogated. Give your character a back story that is relevant to the dramatic situation you are improvising (e.g. someone in a job interview who is desperate for employment, or an innocent person arrested by the police who is being questioned).



WORKSHOP 8.1.2: GROUP IMPROVISATION

Exercise: Working in groups, create an improvisation based on a play, devising a new scene that is not in the original and that reveals something about the characters that is authentic to the original text. To start the improvisation, begin by conducting a moved reading of a chosen scene. Choose one character in the scene and improvise what happened to the character before the chosen scene or what happens to the character after the chosen scene.

8.2 SPONTANEOUS IMPROVISATION

It can be difficult to be spontaneous, that is, to respond immediately and positively to a new situation without hesitation or embarrassment. Most people, even professional actors, find spontaneous improvisation very difficult. They find it almost impossible to become a different person in a different situation without having time to plan or prepare.

The ability to be spontaneous, always open and ready to accept new experiences, is obviously an extraordinarily valuable skill to have as an actor. We are all born with it and as children we all have an intense desire to explore the world around us, and to react with complete naturalness to all the experiences we encounter.

As people grow up, they become more self-conscious and learn to dislike doing certain things and to be afraid of attempting others. Most of all, people acquire an awareness of embarrassment, which prevents them from trying anything that might make them appear stupid, peculiar or inadequate. Because of this self-consciousness, people tend to 'block' people when they approach them, instead of responding to them. This happens all too often in our daily lives, as well as in improvisations.

BLOCKING

Blocking is a way of physically or verbally saying ‘no’ to people. It denies them the development of their conversation, imagination or emotions, by being negative about it.

Consider the following simple example. A friend approaches you with great enthusiasm and asks, ‘How do you like my new jeans?’ You reply, ‘They don’t fit you properly.’ Whatever your motive for being so negative, the effect is to block your friend’s enjoyment and to spoil their pleasure in sharing that enjoyment with you.

OFFERING AND ACCEPTING

In improvisation, as in life, you learn to offer and accept, not to block. When you respond spontaneously and positively to everyone, you become much more intellectually and emotionally alive. You need to learn to offer your own ideas, reactions and feelings freely and openly and to accept what other people offer with complete willingness. If you can learn this skill in spontaneous improvisation, you can use it as a life skill too.

Actors who are really skilled at spontaneous improvisation seem to be almost telepathic and are able to respond instantly and openly to everything that happens in devised dramas and in performances. They have learnt not to limit their imaginations and emotions.

POSITIVE BLOCKING

There will be times while creating an improvisation when it is not working, or a context that has been created causes disagreements or conflict between people. Instead of simply saying ‘no’ in an improvisation, it is important to try to use ‘positive blocking’ to change what is happening to make it more acceptable or effective. Positive blocking involves accepting what is happening while attempting to redirect or refine the drama or the situation.

Positive blocking allows an actor to change a situation by introducing new possibilities and provides people with the opportunity to modify what they are saying or doing. It is part of being positive and spontaneous, having the self-confidence to respond to other people and other performers in ways that respect their contribution while affirming the actor’s own contribution.



WORKSHOP 8.2.1: IMPROVISING IN PAIRS

Exercise: Working in pairs, begin an improvisation in which you choose the character you want to be and start to behave as that person. Your partner should accept your character and the situation, and then respond to it. For example, if you choose the role of a parent who is angry with a child, your partner should accept the role of the child and respond to your anger as a child would.



WORKSHOP 8.2.2: POSITIVE BLOCKING IN PAIRS

Exercise: In pairs, work on some spontaneous improvisations that involve positive blocking. You could choose to be asking something unreasonable or causing an argument or behaving badly. In each case your partner should reply 'Yes, but ...' and try to resolve the situation.



WORKSHOP 8.2.3: GROUP IMPROVISATION

Exercise: Work in a group of four or five and create an improvisation, beginning with just one person starting to improvise, then the rest of the group joining in one by one. When you join in the improvisation, you should accept what has already happened and try to offer a character and some actions that will help the improvisation to develop.

Extension: Try building a number of improvisations in this manner. Make each improvisation completely spontaneous, choosing only the order in which each of you will enter the improvisation. Plan nothing else beforehand.

8.3 ROLE-BASED IMPROVISATIONS

During a person's lifetime they will live out a number of different roles; for example, as children, brothers and sisters, parents, workers, employers, friends, neighbours and so on. Some of the roles a person will choose for themselves, such as when they take a particular job, form a friendship or marry. Other roles are given to people, particularly during childhood and adolescence.

There are many other 'fantasy' roles a person would love to experience but might not be able to, such as film star, sporting hero, top model, millionaire or successful artist. Also, there are roles that are not yet available to a person, such as parent, teacher, employer or public figure.

Improvisation allows people to explore all these ideas. In improvisation, actors take on a different identity and try to act the way they believe that person would actually behave. Taking on a different role requires a high level of commitment. It is not enough in a family improvisation just to do what a father or mother does. If an actor chooses to take on the role of a parent, then they must endeavour to think and feel as parents really do in particular situations. When improvising the situation of parents in conflict with their children, it is essential to try and see the situation from the parents' point of view, and to empathise with the way they are feeling.

It is essential to avoid caricature in improvisation. It can be tempting to exaggerate certain characteristics when creating a role, or to imitate performances from film or television. Real human beings are far more interesting and complicated than a caricature. Role improvisation requires an actor to use their knowledge of human behaviour and all of their experiences, intelligence and emotions to become a different person – someone believable and complex, who behaves in a way that is consistent with the role created.

Improvisation is like taking off one mask – your own – and putting on a different one.

Successful actors and theatre makers are able to use improvisations to explore a multitude of unfamiliar experiences they would never have the opportunity to encounter in reality. When an actor imaginatively creates an extreme role, like that of a world leader or a person condemned to death, they extend both their imaginative range and their understanding of the world.

It is equally important that actors and theatre makers show a genuine level of commitment when exploring roles that are familiar to them, such as the roles of child or parent, student or teacher. An intense level of involvement in role improvisations like these will allow an actor to correct mistakes that they made in the past and prepare for future experiences.

ROLE REVERSAL

Psychologists regard role reversal as a very valuable way of helping people to understand the reasons others behave the way they do (developing empathy), and to become more aware of their own behaviour.

The technique of role improvisation is extremely valuable in heightening your sense of self, and in making you more aware of your relationships with others. One way of using it to develop sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of people around us is role reversal, where an actor deliberately takes on a role opposite to their normal one. For example, in an improvisation involving families an actor who has only known the role of child may create the role of a parent; in school situations an actor who has only known the role of student would become the teacher; in work situations an actor who has only known the role of employee would improvise the role of the employer. In order to extend their range, an actor should consciously and deliberately take on roles like these, which are opposite to their own, as often as possible. Role reversal challenges an actor to extend their skills of characterisation and helps them to develop the valuable quality of empathy. Additionally, role reversal makes an actor see the world from another person's point of view, and very often this other point of view is the opposite to the actors own.

An extreme example of role reversal occurs in Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*. Viola disguises herself as a man to protect herself after a shipwreck leaves her stranded, a young woman alone in a strange land. In the adventures that follow, she learns a great deal about the way men think and behave, as they treat her as a young man. She also makes some important discoveries about the way women sometimes behave towards men.

Alamy Stock Photo/Geraint Lewis



8.3.1 In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Viola reverses her gender role and presents as a man. Amanda Drew as Olivia (left) and Rebecca Hall as Viola (right) in a 2011 National Theatre production (UK), directed by Peter Hall.



WORKSHOP 8.3.1: ROLE IMPROVISATION

Exercise: Working in pairs, improvise roles you would really like to experience. Begin by sitting side by side. Imagine you are passengers on a plane. Close your eyes and take a number of deep, slow breaths. Concentrate on creating your role, deciding your name, age, job, position or status, where you are travelling to and why. Take your time, creating your role as completely as possible. When you are ready, you and your partner should begin talking to each other in character, acting as strangers who have just met on the plane.



WORKSHOP 8.3.2: IMPROVISING CONFLICT

Exercise: Working in pairs, improvise situations that you have both experienced which involved some conflict, such as an argument with a friend, a fight with a brother or sister, or a clash with an adult. Make the roles you create as real as possible, and in your improvisation, see if you can resolve the problem by understanding how the other person felt.



WORKSHOP 8.3.3: ROLE REVERSAL

Exercise: In pairs or small groups, explore some role reversal situations in which you take on roles such as teachers, parents, police, doctors, employers or other adults. Also experiment with situations in which behaviour is reversed such as a group of girls treating one boy the way groups of boys may behave towards a girl on her own.

8.4 CREATING A GROUP PERFORMANCE

Ensemble play building is improvisation at its most complex. It involves a group working together cooperatively to manipulate the elements of drama to create believable characters, narrative structure, subtext and characters.

Operating as an ensemble to improvise a play is all about cooperation and teamwork. The skills of spontaneous improvisation are essential here, particularly being open to new ideas and experiences, and being able to use both acceptance and positive blocking. A true ensemble is one in which each member of the group works in harmony with all the others towards the achievement of a worthwhile performance.

There are a number of ways to use the process of improvisation to build an ensemble performance.



8.4.1 OzFrank: *Up Jumped the Devil*



Up, Jumped the Devil, OzFrank Theatre, 2009. Photographer: Michael Dare. Image courtesy QPAC Museum

8.4.1 Australia's Frank Theatre (also known as OzFrank), which uses Suzuki and other Asian theatre techniques, worked as an ensemble to create a performance by interpreting eight songs by Australian musician Nick Cave.

USING TEXTS

One way is to use a group of interesting texts that all deal with a similar experience. This is a very effective way of creating an improvised play. For example, a number of Australian plays deal with the relationships between sisters – Stephen Sewell's *Sisters*, Hannie Rayson's *Hotel Sorrento* and Louis Nowra's *Radiance*, among others. Tom Wright's *Black Diggers*, Sandra Eldridge's *The Unknown Soldier* and Ross Mueller's *A Town Named War Boy* all explore the theme and experiences of soldiers during the First World War. These texts provide a range of fascinating and challenging narratives, characters and contexts that could be used in devising a play.

IMPROVISING SCENES

Another way to develop an improvised play is to build the performance step by step, beginning with a single idea and then improvising each scene, developing a text and the actual performance at the same time.

The improvisation could begin with a single character, a location, a time frame, an element of drama such as tension, a symbol or even just a single word or action.

USING A CONCEPT MAP

A third approach is to use a concept map structure. Begin by taking a large piece of paper and drawing a circle in the middle, big enough to write in the title and subtitle of the play. Each member of the ensemble does this individually on their own sheet of paper. The circle is left empty for the moment while brainstorming all the ideas for a play, writing down words and phrases, or even making sketches about characters, situations, settings, action, style, costumes and music.

Next, look at each other's brainstorming notes and add anything that might fit in with the concepts on each sheet of paper. Then return to your paper, underline or highlight the words, phrases and sketches that appeal to you and that offer opportunities for narrative development and dramatic tension.

Join these underlined or highlighted words and phrases together by lines. If possible, use different coloured lines for different elements of the drama, such as themes, characters, plot, styles and stagecraft.

Synthesise everything on your concept map into a title and subtitle for your ensemble play. The title needs to be something brief and dramatic to catch the attention. The subtitle should provide some information about the play, perhaps briefly summarising the plot or describing the main character. Your title and subtitle are now written in the empty circle; for example, 'Mind Games: She manipulated everyone she met – until her victims struck back!'

The next stage in the concept mapping is for the ensemble to select some key ideas to begin improvising into a text. This can be done by simply choosing a concept map that everyone particularly likes, or taking ideas and possibilities from a number of maps and weaving them together into a mosaic. Similarly, there might be one title and subtitle that stands out, or the ensemble might combine a number of possibilities.

For example, one member of the ensemble might have conceived of setting the play in a space station above the Earth in the future, where the station is a transit stop for people travelling to the planets. Characters from a number of other concept maps could be woven into this setting. An idea from another concept map, such as a dream predicting the future, could also be used.

As each possibility is introduced into the chosen central concept, it can be improvised to see how well it integrates into the text. In this way, the play is built not scene by scene, but concept by concept until there is a complete text that has been created cooperatively through the sharing of ideas.



WORKSHOP 8.4.1: GROUP SPONTANEOUS IMPROVISATION

Exercise 1: In a group, create a piece of spontaneous improvisation. You may begin with an idea, an object or a piece of music, but that is the only preparation you are allowed. Start improvising, making sure you offer and accept, and use positive blocking in response to the action that takes place in the improvisation. Try to help the improvisation build, and work on establishing and developing your role in it.

Exercise 2: Generate a polished improvisation based on the spontaneous one. You can work on the original situation you created, extending and structuring it, or you can take the characters you created and place them in a different situation. Focus on the key elements of drama in your work.

CONTEMPORARY STYLES OF GROUP PERFORMANCE

A major form of theatre that has become increasingly important in the 21st century is group devised performance. Some of the most interesting and exciting theatre companies in the world today create and stage their own unique plays. Sometimes existing texts are used, including classic heritage plays, but they are reshaped and transformed to communicate with modern audiences. Very often new plays are completely created by the theatre company working together as an ensemble. They experiment with characterisation, stagecraft and all the elements of drama to make meaning and stage work that has a dramatic impact on an audience.

In Chapter 4, we explored in detail the work of two of the most significant international companies, Ex Machina and Complicité. Look again at their work for inspiration and ideas for your own group ensemble work. The extraordinary theatre they create is original and group devised. Where texts such as stories, music, film and plays are used, they are transformed in performance. Some of the plays these companies have staged use one style, while others draw on multiple performance styles for their impact.

This chapter provides an overview of some of the major styles of contemporary performance that are particularly valuable for group ensemble performance and concludes with a case study of a verbatim theatre project that is a model of effective group performance.

PUSH Physical Theatre from 'The Natural World', 2014.
Photo by: Angela Johnson



9.1.1 Push Physical Theatre from the USA combines circus and dance with fascinating visual illusions like this one.

9.1 PHYSICAL THEATRE

Physical theatre is a style of theatre that focuses on the movement of actors on stage rather than dialogue, and puts the human body at the centre of the performance process. However, within this style, an extraordinary variety of plays have emerged in recent years that include dense dialogue, visual media, music, a range of performance spaces, abstract and surreal staging, and stunning lighting and sound effects. Physical theatre has become one of the most exciting and increasingly

popular forms of live performance in the 21st century and offers an enormous number of possibilities for improvised group performance.

Physical theatre has strong links to traditions going back to the beginnings of performance, including the Aboriginal corroboree and traditional African storytelling. The plays of Aristophanes in ancient Greece used elements of physical theatre, including clowning, to create humour, as did *commedia dell'arte* in the Middle Ages. Modern physical theatre has also been strongly influenced by the art forms of mime and dance.

In the 20th century there was an increasing focus on the body of the actor through the use of movement, rhythm and space. We have already explored, in Section 1 on characterisation, how the major theatre innovators throughout the century emphasised the fundamental importance of physicality and the movement of the body in creating performance, including Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Grotowski, and more recently, Barba, Lecoq and Suzuki.

Increasingly, theatre companies began to experiment with a more physical type of theatre to get away from the limitations of realistic and naturalistic drama. In the 1980s high energy, strikingly visual theatre emerged that combined strong stagecraft elements with choreography and physical imagery, and in the 1990s young experimental companies developed a unique style, fusing physical theatre, dance and text. The technique of using the bodies of the actors to create the entire physical setting of a play also became a major staging element in physical theatre.

A form of performance that has increasingly influenced physical theatre in the last 20 years is the modern form of circus, seen at its most powerful in the work of Cirque du Soleil. This kind of circus is entirely performed by acrobats, dancers and singers, and the physical skill of the performers is breathtaking. The stagecraft is also extraordinary in the use of stage design, lighting and sound. Within the structure of demonstrating acrobatic expertise, these circus performances weave in stories and human relationships. They are, in fact, physical theatre, and the extraordinary success of Cirque du Soleil is an indication of the popularity of modern physical theatre.

A number of Australian circus companies have also established national and international reputations. Circa, founded in Brisbane in 2004, has performed in 39 countries to over one million people and is one of the most exciting and innovative physical theatre companies in the world. Solid State Circus Company, founded in 2011, performs particularly in schools and remote communities, and has staged hundreds of performances around Australia.

Most modern physical theatre is created through improvisation, rather than the performance of a script. It is an important and exciting form of ensemble theatre making. Physical theatre is increasingly revolutionising the live performances of dance, opera and even realistic text-based plays.



9.1.1 Cirque du Soleil
9.1.2 Solid State Circus

Getty Images/John Phillips



9.1.2 The extraordinary acrobatic skill of Cirque du Soleil performers.



WORKSHOP 9.1.1: SOLO MOVEMENT SKILLS

Exercise 1: Working individually, create a number of short movement sequences beginning and ending with a freeze. Try developing a range of very different movements – animals, robots, the flow of waves, people at work and also completely surreal movement.

Exercise 2: Observe the movement of an animal and develop a movement sequence based on the essential elements of its movement. Now observe a robot and develop a movement sequence based on its movement. Juxtapose the mechanical movement with the animal one, transitioning from one to the other a number of times and beginning and ending with a freeze.



WORKSHOP 9.1.2: CONTACT IMPROVISATION

Contact improvisation involves beginning a drama by making physical contact with your partner or the other members of a group. The movement begins with the initial contact and flows from there. Each movement after the initial contact depends on the actions and reactions of the participants.

Exercise: Work with one or more partners, and start with the palm of your hand pressing against theirs. Begin to move in harmony with your partner, maintaining the palm-to-palm contact and creating a range of shapes and moves with your bodies. Try different ways of responding to your hand contact and the movement of your partner, for example:

- absorb the impulse by your partner, blending your movements and palm pressure with them
- resist or ignore the contact, pushing or pulling with your hand and blocking or contradicting the physical movements your partner makes
- respond to your partner, developing and enhancing the movement so that a whole physical improvisation grows out of the initial contact.

Perform one of the contact improvisations for another group and ask them to provide feedback. Use the feedback to refine the improvisation.



WORKSHOP 9.1.3: IMPROVISATION

Exercise: Working in a group, create an improvisation about miners trapped underground. Concentrate on using physical movement and the actions of the miners to portray the narrative. For example, members of the group could form the walls of the mineshaft, represent different objects such as the miner's tools and create the movement of rocks falling or the mine cage moving up and down.

9.2 VERBATIM THEATRE

Verbatim theatre first emerged in Britain in the 1960s, evolving from documentary theatre and becoming a major theatre genre internationally. Verbatim incorporates the words of actual people, as spoken in private interviews or on the public record, into drama. It involves researching and recording real stories from people's experiences. The research and recordings are then curated and scripted into a performance. Verbatim draws on realism, documentary theatre, Brechtian ideological theatre and a range of other performance influences.

KEY THEATRICAL FEATURES

Some key theatrical features that distinguish verbatim theatre from other forms of theatre are the creative process, elements and conventions, presentation techniques, critical analysis and responsible practices.

Creative processes

In verbatim theatre, the creative processes and sources come from a wide variety of fields including journalism, historical analysis, politics, philosophy and psychology. Interviews with people who were witness to or participants in the event being portrayed are an essential part of the creative process.

Elements and conventions

Verbatim theatre draws from a variety of theatre and drama education practices where the focus is on both experiencing and learning.

Modern presentation techniques and technologies

Verbatim theatre can be presented in a 'traditional' format, or include techniques of interdisciplinary theatre to enhance the impact of the drama.

The critical analysis processes

A key component of verbatim theatre is that the playwright and the play reflect on and evaluate both the quality of the work and its impact on the community it represents on stage.

Responsible practices

Safe, ethical practices in relation to verbatim material, its collection, archiving and presentation must be considered by a verbatim playwright before they begin their work.

POWER OF VERBATIM THEATRE

The power of verbatim theatre is its ability to bring personal stories to life onstage and link these stories to universal themes – life, relationships, a sense of community, race and the nature of existence. It offers audiences (and the actors) the chance to see the impact, and the consequences, of events and actions on real people.

There is a quality about performing a verbatim-based character which extends this uniqueness not only to the stage action but also to the audience interaction. Verbatim theatre extends the demands of performance beyond naturalistic performance skills to include rapid changes of character and transformation of time and place, as well as the Brechtian technique of speaking directly to the audience both in and out of character.

Verbatim is also a form of theatre that is particularly valuable in bringing together a group of performers and the community they live in, using theatre to engage, entertain, inform and sometimes heal a community.

VERBATIM THEATRE AND THE COMMUNITY

There has been extensive recent research into verbatim theatre in a number of countries including in Spain (2016), England (2014), Canada (2013) and Australia (2010). This research indicates that verbatim theatre provides real opportunities to build a sense of community between people because it provides the opportunity to share stories, ideas and understanding. Our modern digital age fragments our communication with others and even threatens our own sense of identity. Verbatim theatre allows both the performers and the audience to explore their understanding of themselves and others, and the importance of being part of a community.

One of the first Australian verbatim plays, *Aftershocks* by Paul Brown, told the story of the 1989 Newcastle earthquake. The performances of the play in the city helped the community of Newcastle to share their experiences of the earthquake and come to terms with the trauma they experienced.

Alana Valentine's play *Run, Rabbit Run* was first staged in 2004, and explores the controversy that occurred when in 1999 the National Rugby League attempted to close down the South Sydney Rabbitohs team as part of streamlining the League. The Rabbitohs had a proud history and had won more premierships than any other team. The play is based on interviews with those who led the campaign and with the grassroots supporters, and reveals the importance of communities and the success that comes from community involvement.

Embers, first staged in 2006, tells the story of the catastrophic Victorian bushfires of 2003. Playwright Campion Decent travelled to numerous townships affected by the fires, where he interviewed scores of farmers, firefighters, families, council workers, volunteers and pub owners. He then shaped their stories into *Embers*. The play tells their stories of the tragedy, but also celebrates the courage and determination of those who survived and rebuilt.

Beyond the Neck by Tom Holloway revisits the Port Arthur massacre. It was first staged in Hobart in 2007 and was also performed in London in 2015. The massacre occurred at the Port Arthur historic site in Tasmania in 1996, when Martin Bryant shot and killed 35 people and injured 23. The playwright conducted in-depth interviews with the survivors to create the play.

Letters to Lindy was first performed in 2016. The play explores the story of Lindy Chamberlain, who was wrongly sent to jail in 1982 for the murder of her baby Azaria Chamberlain at Uluru, despite giving evidence that a dingo had taken her child. She was released from prison in 1986 and eventually pardoned. The case became a worldwide sensation and Lindy received over 20 000 letters. Playwright Alana Valentine used these letters and interviews with Lindy Chamberlain to tell the story.



9.2.1 *Letters to Lindy*: Seymour theatre

9.2.2 *Letters to Lindy*: ABC interview

9.2.3 *Letters to Lindy*: Alan Valentine



Photo by Lisa Tomasetti. Used with permission from Merrigong Theatre Company and Alana Valentine

9.2.1 Glenn Hazeldine, Jeanette Cronin and Phillip Hinton in *Letters to Lindy*.

HEADPHONE VERBATIM THEATRE

A development in the staging of verbatim theatre in recent years has been the use of headphones. Like verbatim theatre, headphone verbatim begins with taping and subsequent transcription of interviews done with people as part of research into an event, a particular place or an area of human experience. The interviews are conducted by playwrights or the actors.

Two different approaches to the genre of headphone theatre have emerged over the past two decades. The first involves having every member of the audience wear headphones throughout the performance so that they can hear a range of sound effects, words and music while watching the actors onstage. In this way, the voices of the people actually involved in the event can be heard as their stories are portrayed onstage. If we were performing *Aftershocks*, the play about the Newcastle earthquake, we could give the audience headphones so that they heard the sounds of the earthquake all around them as it is being portrayed onstage through staging and lighting. Complicité's extraordinary production of *The Encounter*, explored in the case study in Section 1, used headphone verbatim to bring to life the sounds of the Amazon jungle and the voices of the people whose stories were being told in the play.

The alternative approach to headphone verbatim theatre is to have the actors wear headphones in both the rehearsals and the performances. The actors hear the voices of the people who were interviewed by the playwright in the creation of the play. The actors repeat the words they hear as immediately and exactly as possible, including every stammer, pause and repetition. The effect for the audience is to make the play seem more authentic, as though they are listening to and watching the people themselves, and not just to actors speaking lines.



- 9.2.4 Roslyn Oades
- 9.2.5 *Stories of Love and Hate*
- 9.2.6 *I'm Your Man*
- 9.2.7 *I'm Your Man: Sydney Festival Part I*
- 9.2.8 *I'm Your Man: Sydney Festival Part II*



WORKSHOP 9.2.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Cyberbile

Cyberbile, by Alana Valentine, was created from the interviews with students, parents and teachers in relation to cyberbullying.

Exercise: Analyse and discuss the extract below, the first scene of *Cyberbile*, with a focus on the development of character and narrative. Using the insights developed in the analysis and the discussion, choose one of the characters and develop a performance for the class.

Cyberbile by Alana Valentine

CHARACTERS

Figures 1–12 These include cyberbullies, cybervictims, parents and teachers. When the figures reappear in the script they are never the same character they were previously so, in truth, the figures could be played by many more than 12 performers, at the director's discretion, or the 12 specified. Similarly the figures are often non-gender-specific and may be changed by small alteration of pronouns, though with some of the figures this may not be appropriate.

Celine, 16

Oriana, 16

Terri, 16, may be played by a female or male performer

SCENE ONE

Figure 1: I was... I guess I was sitting at my computer and I was replying to an email and I just typed one word that was stronger than I usually use and the word was 'slut' and I just typed it and it felt good to use a stronger word and I sent it off and nothing happened and it sort of just went from there. I would describe it that... as I started using stronger and more forceful words on the screen... like I found this total word for it which is vitriol and that's what it's like... like by shooting this vit into the email then the less there was in me. Like it was as if the second I saw this nasty shit appear on the screen then I had ejected something out of my own body and I have to tell you that felt good. And so I found myself actually looking for situations where I could like overreact and just really spill that bile out of me. Mostly anonymously. I guess it's not so different to wanting to march in the streets or dye your hair green, it's just about being really verbally rebellious yeah? Like everyone knows you're not supposed to but it honestly feels really good. Just to shoot off stuff like that. Like it's venom. And it's just in you and then it's just... out of you.

Figure 2: Yeah, I've really liked it when Formspring has got particular to certain schools and to people you know because I like to watch the reaction. Like even if people are really upset it's not like I'm heartless, it's just that I'm more kind of absorbed by watching their reaction than caring about what they're going through. Which sounds harsh but I don't mean it like that. I mean it like... it's like being in a story or a show or something and you're the one pulling the strings. Like you can't pretend that that sort

of power is not cool. It's way cool. You write something and then in the real world, in people you see, it's affected them. Really big-time. And you're probably thinking that I'm some sort of psycho but I'm not. I just did it once... like unintentionally did it once, wrote something that really upset someone and I felt bad about that but then, I dunno, I just stopped feeling bad and just started being fascinated by what a big reaction it was and so I wanted to do it again. It gave me something to look forward to, which I know is pretty lame. But it did. I bet I'm gonna get in trouble for admitting all of this.

Figure 3: This whole thing about cyberbullying... I am just so over it because... because I like to use the internet to say what I think and if that's gonna be labelled bullying then I'm up for that.

I mean you hear girls say that someone online told them that they were fat or ugly and they're really devastated by that and I mean honestly I just have no tolerance for that kind of indulged, overprotected princess behaviour. If it takes little old me to give them a reality check then so be it. Some of these girls are such wimps, it's like they sue the school for breaking a fingernail you know. 'Oooh, someone said I looked bad in that dress last night. I'm being cyberbullied.' get over yourselves. I have written that to girls online. I tell them how lame they are. Because they need to get real about how privileged they are and how trivial their concerns are. I bully girls online because they need to stop being such a pack of wimps. And if they don't want to know the truth then they shouldn't go online and look into their profile. You know?

Cyberbible by Alana Valentine, copyright © Alana Valentine. Reproduced with the permission from Currency Press Pty Ltd, Sydney Australia, www.currency.com.au



WORKSHOP 9.2.2: ANALYSING A VERBATIM TEXT

Exercise: Choose a verbatim text, for example, *Aftershocks*, *Run Rabbit Run*, *Embers*, *Beyond the Neck*, *Letters to Lindy* or another recent verbatim play. Identify the characteristics of verbatim theatre in the play. Identify the community being represented and the story being told. Analyse the narrative structure of the play, and the use of the elements of drama. Present the analysis as a short written report.



WORKSHOP 9.2.3: CREATING A VERBATIM TEXT

Exercise: Working in pairs, interview each other about an event or experience in your lives, recording the interview. Use the interview to devise a short piece of verbatim theatre based on this interview. In the performances, you should, wherever possible, use the exact words of the person you interviewed; however, you may change the order of sentences and phrases in order to effectively use the elements of drama; for example, to create dramatic tension. In changing the order of sentences and phrases in the text, you should not change the meaning of the text. Perform the piece for another member of the class, preferably not the person you interviewed, and ask them to analyse the performance with reference to the elements of drama. Revise the performance based on the feedback received. Perform the revised piece for the class.



WORKSHOP 9.2.4: AUDIENCE HEADPHONES AND FOUND SOUNDS

Exercise: Choose a monologue from one of the verbatim plays listed below. Read through the monologue and identify the sounds that could be used to enhance an audience's experience of a performance of the monologue. Record the sounds using found sound sources; for example, an explosion could be replicated by blowing up and popping a paper bag, a slap could be replicated through body percussion. Practice performing the monologue with the found sounds. As you rehearse, mark down the timing for each sound so that they can be edited together. Create a single audio file of the recordings to be played through the audience's own device during a performance of the monologue. Perform the monologue with the found sounds played through the audience's own device, with the audience listening to the found sounds on their headphones.

Suggested texts:

- *Talking to Brick Walls* by Claire Christian & The Empire Arts Impact Ensemble, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2014
- *The Violin Player* by Catherine Fargher, Australianplays.org, Hobart, 2009
- 'Stories of Love and Hate' in *Acts of Courage* by Roslyn Oades, Currency Press, Sydney, 2014
- *Apocalypse Perth* by Kate Rice, Australianplays.org, Hobart, 2008
- 'Grounded' in *Cyberbible & Grounded* by Alana Valentine, Currency Press, Sydney, 2013
- *Run Rabbit Run* by Alana Valentine, Currency Press, Sydney 2004
- 'CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)' by Version 1.0 in *Staging Asylum*, Currency Press, Sydney, 2013



WORKSHOP 9.2.5: HEADPHONE VERBATIM WITH FOUND SOUNDS

Exercise: Working in groups of three to five, identify a group in your local community who you would like to create a verbatim performance piece with. This could be a traditional group such as members of the local nursing home, refugees, immigrants or veterans. Or this could be a non-traditional group such as the local croquet club, a group involved in citizen science, young people who have lost a local recreational venue or a sporting team that has had a victory.

Prepare for and conduct a series of interviews with the group about an event that is of importance to them. Use the interviews to create a script about the people and the event. The script should use the same words as the interviewees but can appear in a different order, as long as the meaning of the interview is not changed.

Create a found sound audio track to accompany the performance. Rehearse the script and the found sound recording, making adjustments to the found sound audio as needed. Perform the script with the audience listening to the found sounds through their own devices using their headphones.

9.3 MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERFORMANCE

Throughout history, theatre performance has drawn on a range of different art forms, beginning with choral singing and dance sequences in the plays of ancient Greece. Visual art and sculpture have been widely used to create settings and as staging objects, and music, song and dance have been an integral part of many styles of theatre over the centuries.

The real revolution in multidisciplinary theatre has come during the past 50 years with the introduction to the stage of film, video, computer images, digital lighting and sound, and modern technology. Contemporary performances draw on these forms of media and blend them with elements of ballet, opera, circus, puppetry and other genres of performance to create an experience that has been described as total theatre.

One of the major influences on modern multidisciplinary theatre has been the cinema. This has partly been due to the use of film and cinema technology, but it has also involved the use of cinema techniques, which are very different from conventional theatre staging. These include short, rapid scenes that begin and end abruptly, instant changes of location and sudden shocking action.

The possibilities for creating exciting and challenging multidisciplinary performances are almost limitless and do not necessarily require elaborate and expensive equipment and staging.



Getty Images/Brook Mitchell

9.3.1 Spectacular lighting and technology effects for Water Theatre at the 2016 Sydney Vivid Festival.

BLENDED PERFORMANCE

Blended performance involves the deliberate use of a range of art forms in the one play. This approach is not confined to multidisciplinary theatre, as we have already seen in our exploration of physical theatre, and it is not new to the world of theatre either. Both Brecht and Artaud introduced elements of Asian theatre performance into their work, and 20th-century surreal and expressionist plays often had sets and staging that drew directly from the visual art that was most influential at the time.

However, in modern multidisciplinary performances, elements of mime, dance, opera, circus, puppetry and black light theatre, visual art, music and media are often

interwoven in a seamless whole, rather than one performance style having another style added to it. It is this combination of a range of art forms with technology and digital media that defines multidisciplinary performance. An example of blended performance is *The 7 Stages of Grieving* by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman.

PROJECTION

The projection of films, videos, photographs and computer-generated visuals onto a screen on stage is an exceptionally effective way of setting a scene, helping to tell a story, creating dramatic images and generating action. Modern multidisciplinary performances often project images onto the stage itself, including the bodies of the actors. Used in conjunction with dance, mime or circus performance and linked to a music soundtrack or a soundscape, this use of projection produces remarkable dramatic effects.

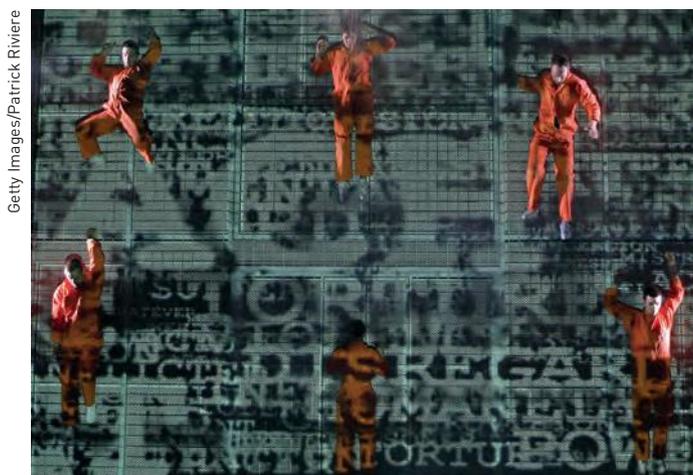
Nick Enright used projection in 2002 in the play *A Man with Five Children* and Sue Smith used projection in 2014 in *Kryptonite*.

VIDEO FEED

A number of modern multidisciplinary plays have used the technique of technicians in the audience or even the actors onstage videoing the action of the play as they perform it. These video images are then fed to a data projector and shown on a screen or on the stage and the bodies of the actors in real-time. The effect is extraordinary for the audience, who are watching both the live performers and their projected images at the same time.

SOUNDSCAPES

It is multidisciplinary theatre that has realised the full potential of sound as a part of live performance. We have always had sound effects and music on stage in many styles of theatre, but the idea of complete soundscapes that run throughout an entire performance and blend sound effects, voices, music and computer-generated sound is new. When soundscapes are combined with a range of new technologies and a variety of art forms and performance styles, we get the effect of total theatre.



Getty Images/Patrick Riviere

9.3.2 *Honour Bound* incorporates physical theatre, surreal staging and a wide range of media to tell the story of David Hicks and his imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay detention camp.



WORKSHOP 9.3.1: MULTIMEDIA PLAYS

Exercise: Working in groups, choose a scene from a scripted play that you are familiar with or want to explore, and develop it as multimedia theatre. Use all or some of the dialogue or song but improvise a range of stylised movement to complement the dialogue. Record or create a soundscape that runs throughout the scene. For example, if using *Mother Courage*, you could include drum beats, explosions, gunshots, cries, animals such as horses and other sound effects including music. For your performance try to use lighting and projections, both still and moving. You could also film the action and project it onto the stage as a live feed.



WORKSHOP 9.3.2: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Exercise: Choose one of the following texts:

- *The 7 Stages of Grieving* by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman
- *A Man with Five Children* by Nick Enright
- *Kryptonite* by Sue Smith
- a multidisciplinary text of your choosing.

As a group choose one scene. Discuss the use of multimedia effects; for example, soundscape, video feed or projection. Create a plan to develop the required multimedia. Create and edit the multimedia. Present it to the class and discuss how you decided to create the multimedia, and the editing process that you went through.

9.4 BLACK COMEDY

The traditional styles of comedy that have entertained audiences for thousands of years are still popular today, some greatly changed from their ancient beginnings, some still immediately recognisable, such as farce, satire and comedy of manners. A new style of comedy has also evolved on film and in the theatre which has been called both dark humour or black comedy, and it has a strong appeal for modern audiences.

Traditional comedy can be broadly placed into three main categories: farce, comedy of manners and satire.

FARCE

This broad style of comedy involves exaggerated characters, absurd situations and frantic action. At its most physical it is called slapstick. It was extremely popular in ancient Greece and Rome, and reached its height as commedia dell'arte in the 15th and 16th centuries. Farce enjoyed a resurgence again in late 19th-century France, before reappearing once more in the slapstick silent films of Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, and Charlie Chaplin. Farce has remained a major style of comedy, not only on stage, but as the basis of many hugely successful American situation comedies on television.

COMEDY OF MANNERS

Originating in ancient Greece in the plays of Aristophanes and Menander, this style of comedy reached its height during the Restoration in England in the 17th century. The plays reveal the absurdities and faults in human behaviour, frequently portraying real and believable people but ruthlessly exposing their failures and weaknesses. In the 20th century, comedies of manners were among the most popular plays in commercial theatre, first in the works of Oscar Wilde, and later in the century in plays by Alan Ayckbourn in England, Neil Simon in the USA and David Williamson in Australia. This style of comedy is still very popular on stage, and modern playwrights are using this form of humour to address contemporary issues. A contemporary example of the comedy of manners is by Ayad Akhtar, a Pakistani American playwright whose play *Disgraced* won a Pulitzer Prize. It was the most staged play in America in 2015 and was a huge success at the Sydney Theatre Company in 2016.

Sachin Joab and Shiv Palekar in Sydney Theatre Company's *Disgraced*, 2016. Photo: Prudence Upton © courtesy of Sydney Theatre Company



9.4.1 *Disgraced* on stage at the Sydney Theatre Company, 2016

SATIRE

This style of comedy is particularly savage in attacking the follies of famous people and recognisable stereotypes. The aim of satire is to show the audience the lack of ideals, the corruption and the dishonesty of influential people such as politicians and celebrities. While satire invites us to laugh at the figures, real and fictional, who are being mocked, it is also attempting to bring about change by asking us to challenge and reject harmful and criminal behaviour.

Bertolt Brecht used satire in many of his plays for political purposes, most notably in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, which was set in Chicago in the 1930s. The play focuses on a protection racket in the local fruit and vegetable markets established by a hopelessly incompetent gangster called Arturo Ui. However, Brecht is really satirising Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany in his portrayal of Ui. The play shows how Ui, like Hitler, becomes a powerful, murderous dictator. *Keating! The Musical* is a successful satire of Paul Keating, the Prime Minister of Australia between 1991 and 1996. The musical follows Keating from his ascent to the leadership through to his eventual electoral defeat and is still revived on stage today. *Shane Warne The Musical*, created by Eddie Perfect and directed by Neil Armfield, depicts



- 9.4.1 *Keating! The Musical*
- 9.4.2 *Shane Warne The Musical: part I*
- 9.4.3 *Shane Warne The Musical: part II*
- 9.4.4 *Donald: The Musical*
- 9.4.5 *Donald: The Musical – When I Grow Up*

the rise and fall of Australian cricketer, Shane Warne. The finale includes the song 'Everyone's a bit like Shane' in which the audience is asked to identify the characteristics that they share with Shane Warne. There is even a satirical sketch by Tim Minchin which has been performed in Australia and America recently called *Donald: The Musical*, satirising the US president Donald Trump.

THE EVOLUTION OF BLACK COMEDY

Although it is a very modern form of humour, black comedy grew out of satire, so its origins date back to the comedy of the ancient Greeks. Elements of black comedy can be found in the plays of Shakespeare, such as the porter scene in *Macbeth*, and the play *Cymbeline*.

In the theatre, black comedy is most often an exploration of human violence, selfishness, cruelty, lust and greed. Black comedies confront violence and cruelty in ways that are both shocking and playful, and the use of dark humour can be used as both a heightening of tension and a release of tension to create catharsis – a way of relieving horror and misery.

While black comedy treats the conventions of society with exhilarating contempt in the use of vile language and appalling action on stage, these shocking and confronting elements are actually used to heighten a play's serious message.

Perhaps the clearest and most illuminating exploration of black comedy is through the work of Joe Orton.

JOE ORTON: BLACK COMEDY IN ART (AND LIFE)

Orton was born in 1933 and was murdered in 1967. He wrote seven plays in four years, and his work was both praised and condemned. *Entertaining Mr Sloane* was described by one critic as the best first play he had ever seen, but at the same time it was attacked as being a 'dirty' play. His next play, *Loot*, won the award as the best play of 1966 and was a major success.

Orton's play *What the Butler Saw* was only staged after his death. It is set in a mental hospital and deals with incest, madness, birth and death. At the end there is no return to goodness or morality and the characters feel no guilt or remorse for their actions.

The word 'Ortonesque' was coined to describe works of black comedy that combined a dark, cynical view of the world with savage humour.

The plot of *Loot*

Hal and Dennis rob a bank by breaking through the wall of the funeral parlour where Dennis works. They hide the money in a coffin that contains the body of Hal's mother, who has just died. The play involves the constant moving and hiding of the corpse from a corrupt police inspector who accepts a bribe of some of the stolen money to keep quiet. Meanwhile, Dennis is trying to convince Fay, who was the dead woman's nurse, to marry him. Hal and Dennis get away with the robbery and Dennis is free to marry Fay.

For Orton, nothing was sacred – he wanted to shock society and purify it, like Artaud, but dark humour was Orton's weapon, not direct cruelty.

The black comedy film *Death at a Funeral* has strong echoes of Orton's *Loot*, with bodies being moved around, live people being put in coffins and guests at

the funeral behaving in apparently insane ways. Interestingly, Neil LaBute, the American playwright noted for his own black comedy stage plays, actually made a remake of this film in America in 2010.

Alamy Stock Photo/Geraint Lewis



9.4.2 A revival of *Loot* in New York in 2014.



WORKSHOP 9.4.1: IMPROVISATION

Exercise 1: Working in a group, improvise a drama set in a restaurant. In the drama, either the waiter or one of the diners is extraordinarily careless and clumsy. This carelessness and clumsiness causes chaos and eventually the death of someone. Try to capture the dark humour of the situation by the way the damage keeps escalating despite attempts to stop it, and in the selfish, cowardly and cruel behaviour of the characters involved.

Exercise 2: Improvise a drama where a group of parents are together with their children – in the park, at a sporting event or at the beach. Create a black comedy about the way they are totally uncaring of the children, which leads to disaster, because they are trying to impress or dominate each other, and are more interested in their possessions or appearance or the game being played than in their children.



WORKSHOP 9.4.2: SCRIPTING A SONG FOR A CONTEMPORARY COMEDY

Exercise: Working in groups, research a satirical Australian musical such as *Keating! The Musical* or *Shane Warne The Musical*, and identify how song is used to reveal the personality of the character to the audience and advance the narrative.

- a Choose a political figure and identify an important event in relation to them.
- b Create a song that reveals the personality of the character to the audience and would potentially advance the narrative of a musical you might create.
- c Perform for another group and seek feedback. Refine the song based on the feedback and perform it for the class.

CASE STUDY 3.1: VERBATIM THEATRE IN THE CLASSROOM



Verbatim theatre allows young theatre makers to create and stage your own performances, assists you to develop knowledge and understanding about your community, and challenges you to form mature judgements about important social issues and ethical considerations. It offers you the chance to create improvised group performances that demand the full range of your characterisation and performance skills.

The Verbatim Theatre Unit in the Senior Drama curriculum at Mirani State High School in rural Queensland has run for three years in a row. Mirani is a small regional town located in the Pioneer Valley, 36km north-west of Mackay. The town had experienced a decline in community organisations and events such as the Mirani Lantern Parade and the closure of the local not-for-profit newspaper, Platypus Press.

Creating a verbatim play in the classroom

The process the Mirani students have developed to create, devise and stage their play provides a very useful structure to follow.

The verbatim unit began with the students studying a verbatim play text such as *Cribbie*, which explores the physical destruction of a community, the true meaning of community and the long memories communities create. The text that is chosen also provides a model of verbatim theatre.

The unit was called 'Belonging', and students engaged in a number of process drama activities that allowed them to share stories of their own upbringing and life in the valley. They were then given a brief where they had to 'save' Pioneer Valley. They decided to stage a performance that showcased the voices and history of the valley, with the message that every community member is important and carries stories worth sharing.

As part of a script writing assessment task, students visited Nanyima Aged Care facility in Mirani in small groups, interviewing several residents over a period of four to six weeks. The students then transcribed the recordings of the interviews, and improvised and scripted scenes based on the transcriptions. These scripts were given to the residents for their responses and approval before being rehearsed and performed to them. The residents responded enthusiastically to the performance.

Devising, scripting and performing their verbatim play *Belonging* was an extraordinary experience for the students. One student wrote: 'The verbatim unit really solidified to me that drama has a real world impact. It actually both challenged and strengthened my connection to drama. It was unlike anything that I've ever done.'

Another student observed: 'During the performance to the residents, it suddenly hit me: these people had actually lived what we were performing. During the process of writing the scripts, I didn't realise how much this would mean to the residents until you see their faces while performing.'

CREATING A SOLO PERFORMANCE

Solo performance can be a very challenging form of theatre. The entire performance is the individual responsibility of one actor. It allows the actor to create an extraordinary relationship with the audience and to explore an exciting range of approaches and styles that have evolved in solo performances over recent years. By choosing the appropriate context and style for the work, an actor or theatre maker can create a solo performance of extraordinary vitality and power.

10.1 FORMS OF SOLO PERFORMANCE

MONOLOGUES

Audition pieces generally tend to be monologues. Monologues are chosen for the challenge that they provide the actor.

Monologues are by far the most common form of solo performance. Traditionally, a monologue will occur within a play and is therefore not strictly a solo performance. Monologues involve a character or a narrator talking to someone else who is silent. This can be another character in the play, the audience or an imagined or invisible listener.

Almost every play ever written contains monologues, and they are particularly important as models for solo performance because much of the best playwriting in the history of the theatre occurs in monologues.

Monologues and soliloquies can form part of a multimodal performance. They can be filmed or recorded as audio or can be spoken in conjunction with digitally generated images and dramatic film sequences

SOLILOQUIES

Like monologues, soliloquies involve characters speaking alone in plays that normally contain a number of characters. In a soliloquy, the character is not talking to anyone else but is thinking aloud and, in the process, revealing their deepest thoughts and feelings. Soliloquies are not nearly as common as monologues in plays but can be vitally important in revealing to the audience, and to the actor playing the role, the true nature of the character. They were a major feature of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Some of the greatest speeches Shakespeare ever wrote are in the form of soliloquies – most notably of all, perhaps, Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy. As with monologues, soliloquies provide a performer with

the greatest possible challenge in becoming a competent solo performer who can create a single character with real depth and impact through a written text.

MONODRAMAS

These are true solo performances in the sense that there is only ever one actor on stage. The text of a monodrama can contain any number of characters – all performed by the same actor. A number of characters can appear on stage one after another, with the solo performer changing costumes and characters rapidly. This occurs in a number of monodramas that are biographies of real people, often entertainers.

In some monodramas there is a central protagonist and all the other characters are imaginary, existing only in the mind of the protagonist who talks to them and often takes on their roles. Other monodramas have characters that are memories recalled by the protagonist, who interacts with them and acts them out as though they are there. The challenge with a monodrama is to create a range of characters that are all different and credible, and to make the interactions between the characters believable.

Monodramas were particularly popular as a dramatic form in the 1970s. Two memorable Australian monodramas of the time were *A Stretch of the Imagination*, written by Jack Hibberd, and *The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin* by Steve J Spears. Among the most exciting performance texts to emerge in Australia in the past three decades have been the monodramas written and performed by female Aboriginal performers such as Deborah Mailman (*The 7 Stages of Grieving*) and Leah Purcell (*Box the Pony*). These monodramas are intensely modern in their action and concerns, but draw extensively on traditional Aboriginal storytelling for their form.

STORYTELLING

This is a form of solo performance that has a long history in cultures around the world. There has been a revival of storytelling in the theatre, most notably in African theatre and in Aboriginal performance work in Australia. The storyteller acts as both narrator and actor, telling the story to the audience and taking on roles, often two or more at the same time. Songs and dances are an integral part of storytelling, so the solo performer must be multitalented. The recent work of Aboriginal solo performers clearly demonstrates how vital and engaging this form of storytelling can be in the theatre.



Sourced: Shakespeare, W. *Hamlet*. 'To be, or not to be, that is the question'. c. 1870. [Photograph] Retrieved from the Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/94514318/>

10.1.1 'To be, or not to be' is one of the best-known soliloquies ever performed or written. Edward Thomas Booth spoke these lines as Hamlet c. 1870.

Australian Theatre is notable for the number and quality of monodramas that have been staged, including:

- *Boy Girl Wall* by Matthew Ryan and Lucas Stibbard
 - *What is the Matter with Mary Jane?* by Sancia Robinson and Wendy Harmer
 - *Bombshells* by Joanna Murray-Smith.
-



WORKSHOP 10.1.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Hamlet

Hamlet's famous soliloquy is from Act 3 Scene 1 of the play where he contemplates suicide.

Exercise: Try developing a solo performance of this speech that catches the rhythm of the language, makes clear the meaning of the soliloquy and brings life and energy to the performance.

For example: 'To be, or not to be, that is the question' – Hamlet is questioning if it is better to be alive or dead.

Start this opening section with a contemplative tone; don't put the voice or energy too high or there is nowhere to go in the performance.

Hamlet by William Shakespeare

ACT 3

SCENE 1

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing end them? To die—to sleep,
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep.
To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub,



WORKSHOP 10.1.2: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Red Sky Morning

Red Sky Morning is three monologues that take place at the same time on the stage. The monologues are told by three members of the same family who struggle to communicate with each other.

- Working in groups of three, develop the piece below, focusing on the use of timing, space and characterisation to create three monologues.
- Perform the piece for another group and use the feedback provided by the group to refine the performance.
- Perform the piece for the class.
- After the performance, write a short reflection on your experience of creating three simultaneous monologues in a group. You may like to reflect on your experience of creating a monologue or monodrama on your own and juxtapose this with the group experience.

Red Sky Morning by Tom Holloway

CHARACTERS

M, mid 40s male

W, mid 40s female

G, late teens girl

PLAYWRIGHTS NOTES

Stage directions are in italics.

Lyrics sung or spoken are in italics.

Lines said simultaneously are in bold.

M

I think about her and—

**I think about her
and me and our daughter.**

My daughter is, well, she's
bloody beautiful.

Bloody...

I want to...

Time goes.

Slowly.

I don't move.

W

I think I. That I have
these dreams of...

**I dream about him
and me and our daughter.**

I think
Am I...

I want to...

Is this right?

And...

Yes.

I sleep.

G

We see G.
*Her eyes close and
her head drops for a second.*

G: I

Umm.

I'm in bed

Yeah.

And it's, hold on...

Yeah.

**I've been sleeping all
Night and dreaming,
You know... kind of...
I think I've had these real,
well, nice dreams because I**

wake up I'm...I'm all...
I'm hugging my pillow like
it's... like I've been kissing
it. And I don't want to wake
up because I'm sure the
dream I was just having was
real, real nice and...

A dog or two and a...

W opens her eyes

M opens his eyes

What...

I sleep.

Wait. What time is it?

It's real early.

Wait a sec.

I...

God. Is it...

I don't even...

No.

No.

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WORKSHOP 10.1.3: SCRIPTED SOLO PERFORMANCE

Exercise: Using one of the suggested scripts below, or another text of your choosing, develop a three- to five-minute solo performance. In developing the performance, focus on characterisation, place, space and timing to engage with the audience.

- *Highway of Lost Hearts* by Mary Anne Butler, Currency Press, Sydney, 2014
- *The 7 Stages of Grieving* by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, PlayLab, Brisbane, 1996
- *What is the Matter with Mary Jane?* by Wendy Harmer and Sancia Robinson, Currency Press, 2015
- *A Stretch of the Imagination* by Jack Hibberd, Currency Press, Sydney, 1978
- *Mother* by Daniel Keene, Currency Press, Sydney, 2015
- *Bombshells* by Joanna Murray-Smith, Currency Press, Sydney, 2001
- *Lake Disappointment* by Lachlan Philpott & Luke Mullins, Currency Press, Sydney, 2017
- *Chasing the Lollyman* by Mark Sheppard, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2015
- *Blue Bones* by Merlynn Tong, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2017
- *Chinese Take Away* by Anna Yen, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2002
- *Not Like Beckett* by Michael Watts, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2007

10.2 PHYSICAL SOLO PERFORMANCE

Solo performances do not have to be word- or character-based. The explosion of physical theatre in the past 20 years has spread into solo performance, with actors creating and performing dramas that rely on mime, body language, dance and other movement forms to communicate. In this form of solo performance, the actor's body becomes the text, telling stories, creating mood and atmosphere and making meaning. From the classic mime of Marcel Marceau to the extreme physicality of Butoh, movement offers a vast range of possibilities for solo performance.

Many word-based plays also contain crucial solo movement sequences, sometimes in tandem with a monologue, but often in physical form only. This is particularly true of the absurdist playwrights whose plays attacked the meaninglessness of language and its abuse as a means of communication.



10.2.1 a Leah Purcell in *Box the Pony* as herself **b** Leah Purcell as Stef. In the performance of the monologue, physical action, song and dance contribute to the development of character and the narrative.



WORKSHOP 10.2.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Australian solo performance

Exercise: Choose a play text that includes a form of solo performance – monologue, soliloquy, storytelling, monodrama, physical solo performance or another variation.

Experiment with the speech you have chosen and see if you can include techniques from multidisciplinary theatre and other modes, such as the use of headphones.

Finally, work to create your own piece of solo performance, applying as much as possible of your learning about performance from this section.

You could choose from:

- *Box the Pony* by Leah Purcell
- *The 7 Stages of Grieving* by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman
- Sophie from *Jump for Jordan* by Donna Abela
- Will from *Once in Royal David's City* by Michael Gow
- Nina or Erica in *Sugarland* by Rachael Coopes and Wayne Blair.



SECTION 4

Major traditions and heritage styles of theatre

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INTRODUCTION

Drama as a performing art is only a few thousand years old. We can put a precise date to the first actual theatrical performance as we know theatre, which took place in Ancient Greece in 534 BCE. The earliest surviving play we have is *The Persians* by Aeschylus, which was first performed in 472 BCE. The use of drama to express the different facets of human existence, however, is very ancient indeed. The way every society in history has used drama tells us a great deal about the people in that society, their relationships with each other and the world around them.

Theatre is one of the great art forms that are part of our heritage and our culture. The manner in which theatre developed in the past and the way it operates today provide us with invaluable skills and vital insights into the nature of the society in which we live.



THE BEGINNINGS OF WESTERN THEATRE

11.1 THE NATURE OF THEATRE

Neolithic communities were faced with terrible natural threats to their existence from fires, floods, droughts, cold, earthquakes, storms and savage animals. These ancient cultures believed that many of these natural forces were gods. They feared and worshipped these gods, developed ceremonies and rituals that offered sacrifices to them, and begged them for help and protection.

These ancient ceremonies and rituals had many of the features of what we now call 'theatre'. For thousands of years, humans used masks and costumes to imitate their gods, and dressed in animal skins or painted their own skin to represent the animals they hunted. Among many tribes, the priests or medicine men used special effects such as fire, smoke, strong smells and music to create theatrical effects as part of their religious ceremonies.

Two kinds of dramatic ceremonies or rites developed over hundreds of thousands of years. The first were solemn rites, which involved praying to the gods, appealing for help or begging forgiveness. Solemn rites were the beginnings of the serious plays now known as tragedies. The second were joyful rites, which were celebrations giving thanks to the gods for good fortune, such as a successful harvest. Joyful rites were often spontaneous expressions of happiness and were the first stirrings of the theatrical form we call comedy. So we can say that since the beginning of humankind, drama has been used in public performances as an essential part of human experience.

The earliest written records that describe religious ceremonies using some kind of dramatic performance date back to 3000 BCE. The Sumerian civilisation that developed in Mesopotamia (the area around modern-day Iraq) held festivals in spring and autumn each year, and the celebrations included different kinds of performances. The Babylonians, whose culture was greatly influenced by the Sumerians, celebrated the new year with processions, recitations and pantomime performances.

Of all the early civilisations before the Greeks, it was the Egyptians who left behind the most detailed accounts of their use of drama. A number of the pyramids, some of them dating from 2400 BCE, have writing on their walls that could almost be described as play scripts. One of these scripts, named the *Abydos Passion Play*, was performed regularly by the priests, with the official responsible

for staging it between 1887 and 1849 BCE leaving behind a detailed description. This myth was acted out by the Egyptians in order to worship their god – a public performance that was also a religious ceremony.

The *Abydos Passion Play* told the story of the death of the god Osiris, who was torn to pieces and his limbs scattered. In the story, Isis, Osiris' wife, and Horus, their son, gathered the limbs together and reassembled the god.

The theatre as we know it today began 2500 years ago in Ancient Greece. Within a century, Greek theatre achieved heights that have only been reached a few times since in the history of the theatre. The great Greek tragedies have inspired writers ever since and are still performed today. Some of them are among the greatest plays ever written. The incredible achievement of Greek theatre was to give us everything that is still fundamental to theatre today. We may have developed technical resources that the Greeks never dreamed of, but the whole nature of theatre was essentially created in Greece in the fifth century BCE.



WORKSHOP 11.1.1: RESEARCH

Exercise: Choose a modern Australian play and see if you can identify some essential elements of the play that are found in all theatre. The most obvious one is the fact that the play you have chosen deals with human beings and the way they live their lives. What other essential elements of theatre can you identify?

11.2 GREEK THEATRE

Greek theatre grew out of the celebrations held at religious festivals. The festivals honoured the nature god, Dionysus, who was particularly associated with wine. A number of major festivals were held every year, including the Lenaia in winter and the Anthesteria in spring. The most important of these was held in Athens in April and was known as the City Dionysia.

In the early festivals, an important part of the celebration was the performance of a hymn sung by a chorus of townspeople. Originally it was a hymn to honour Dionysus, but over the years the hymns developed and changed, telling the stories of other gods as well, such as Zeus, the most powerful god, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Poseidon, the god of the sea. The hymns also began to describe the adventures of legendary Greek heroes such as Jason and the Argonauts.

The chorus hymns were called tragedies from the Greek word *tragōidia*, literally meaning 'goat song'. At the start of the festival a goat was sacrificed to the god Dionysus and at the end of the festival a goat was given as a prize to the best chorus. These tragedies were powerful and serious stories, some describing how the gods punished men for defying them, particularly by showing pride, called *hubris* in Greek. Other tragedies recounted the stories of great battles, such as the destruction of Troy or the war against the Persians. However, these performances were still religious ceremonies rather than theatre, and so were hymns and not plays.



- 11.2.1 An introduction to Greek Theatre
- 11.2.2 Modern interpretations of Greek Chorus
- 11.2.3 Women in Greek Theatre

It's because of Thespis that actors are often referred to as 'thespians'.

The man who has been given the credit for turning them into theatre was a chorus leader named Thespis. Thespis took the revolutionary step of leaving the chorus and taking on the character of the god or hero in the story. In character, he talked to the chorus, creating a dialogue with them. Not surprisingly, he became the first man to win a prize at the dramatic festival of the City Dionysia in 534 BCE.

During the fifth century BCE, the City Dionysia became a major event in the lives of the people of Athens, attended by most free people in the city, as well as by representatives from the other states of Greece. To enter the competition, a writer had to submit three tragedies or one comedy. The tragedies were performed on the first three days of the festival, and the comedies on the fourth day. Prizes were awarded to the best tragedy, the best comedy, the best production and, in later years, the best tragic actor. There were often more than 15 000 people in the audience, both men and women, although there has been some historical debate about whether women attended – evidence suggests they did.

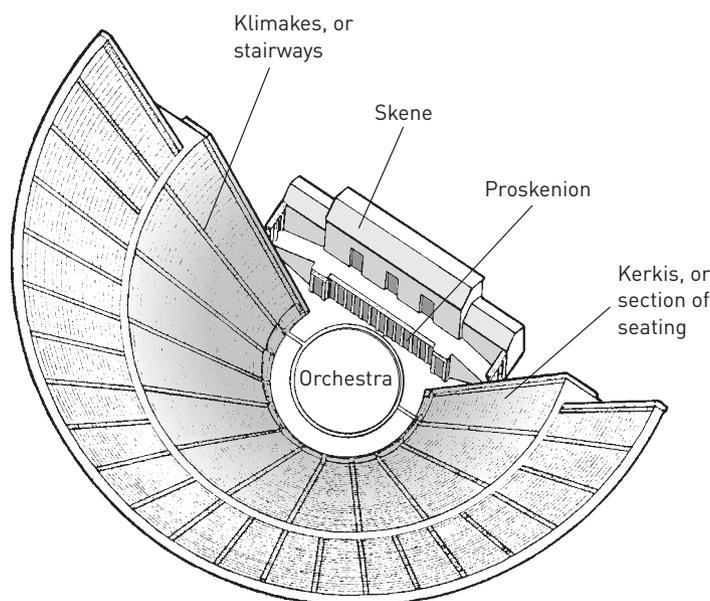
THE GREEK STAGE

It is from the word skene that we get the modern word 'scene'.

Before there were any theatres, the first performance spaces were just large dancing areas called orchestra in Greek. A wooden dressing room was built at the back, called a skene.

The theatres built by the Greeks were open-air, cut into hillsides in a curve, and the largest could seat 20 000 people. Because of their design, these amphitheatres had outstanding acoustics and an actor standing in the centre of the circular, floor-level stage could be heard from any of the seats.

The skene at the back of the stage had special revolving panels attached to it, with pictures painted on the panels so that they could be turned to create different scenes during the play. There were huge doors in the centre of the skene, with smaller ones on either side, and these were used for exits and entrances. Behind the skene was a crane that was used to lift up the actor playing a god and 'fly' him onto the stage. There was also a machine for making the sound of thunder, and a movable platform or cart that could be wheeled on for indoor scenes.



11.2.1 The design of a typical Greek stage

GREEK ACTORS

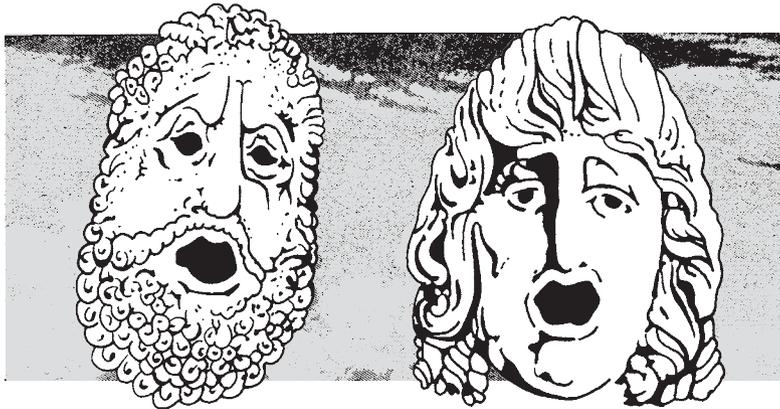
Just three male actors made up the acting cast of a Greek play, playing up to 10 characters between them – male and female. The chorus numbered 15 for a tragedy and 24 for a comedy.

Everyone on stage wore masks: simple ones for the chorus and much more elaborate ones for the actors. The masks were made of wood, cork or linen, and showed the age and sex of the character as well as their dominant emotion: pride or anger for a king; rage or suffering for a daughter seeking revenge. We know that there were at least 30 different kinds of masks, some of them used for generations.

Because they wore masks, Greek actors needed superb vocal skills. They were required to speak with the voices of many different characters – men and women – and convey a whole range of emotions through just the spoken word. It has been suggested that some of the masks acted like megaphones, with the mouthpieces carefully carved to amplify the human voice.

The actors also had to be physically strong and fit. Many of the costumes for the tragedies were extremely elaborate and heavy, and some were actually hung on frames that fitted over the actors' shoulders. The costumes included a headdress, called an onkos, which made the actor look larger and more impressive. There were also built-up boots, called cothurni, to make the actor taller. These costumes were extremely heavy and restricting, so there was very little action onstage in the tragedies. The murders, battles and triumphs took place offstage and were described by the chorus or an eyewitness.

In comedy, frantic action was part of the play. Comedy actors needed to be acrobats and be able to tumble, fall, engage in desperate chases and act out mock fights. Their costumes – soft slippers called socci, flesh-coloured tights and a short jacket – allowed them complete freedom of movement. Their masks were grotesque and exaggerated.



11.2.2 Sketches of two Greek tragedy masks, one male and one female. Note the emotions etched on the faces.

GREEK PLAYS

Thousands of plays were written and performed during the golden age of Greek theatre from 500 to 300 BCE. Of all those plays, less than 50 have survived in their complete form. At the beginning of the first century CE, the library at Alexandria

In Greece, acting was an honourable profession and it was quite common for a son to follow his father as an actor.

in Egypt contained scrolls of thousands of plays by Greek playwrights as part of its collection of approximately 750 000 scrolls. The destruction of the library is a mystery. Some historians think Julius Caesar burned the library in an attack on Alexandria in 48 CE. Others think it happened in 415 CE when Christian monks murdered Hypatia, a brilliant pagan female philosopher, and burned her body in the library. The Muslim invasion of Alexandria in the seventh century has also been blamed.

Today, the work of just five men is all that is left: the three great tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and two writers of comedy, Aristophanes and Menander.

Aeschylus was the first great writer of tragedies. Born around 525 BCE, he was a soldier as well as a poet and fought at the famous battle of Marathon. He died in 456 BCE and of his 80 or 90 plays, only seven complete works survive.

It was Aeschylus who introduced a second actor onto the Greek stage and required his two actors to play a number of different parts. These innovations made dramatic conflict and the development of character possible for the first time. His plays were essentially religious in nature, dealing with the relationships between people and the gods. They were, and still are, great drama, written in powerful and striking language.

The playwright who followed him was Sophocles. Again, only seven of his 90 or so plays survive. Sophocles was born around 506 BCE and lived to the age of 90. As a dramatist, he was extremely successful, winning 18 prizes for his plays during his lifetime.

Sophocles introduced a third actor into performances and increased the number of characters in his plays. He also reduced the importance of the chorus; in his work the dialogue and action of the play were more important than the voice of the chorus. Unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles was more interested in human relationships than the effect of the gods on people. His plays involved carefully developed plots and complex characterisation. In his two great plays about King Oedipus, he investigates the causes of human actions and the nature of suffering through the character of Oedipus.

The last and most realistic of the tragic writers was Euripides, who was born around 484 BCE and died in 406 BCE. Of the 92 plays he wrote, 18 survive. He introduced the idea of a prologue – a spoken introduction to a play – and relegated the chorus to a very minor role, using them mainly to fill in the breaks between scenes.

The plays Euripides wrote are complex and modern, and are often revived today. They are unusually realistic, no longer just pure tragedy but with elements of comedy and even melodrama. Several of the plays deal with different forms of human madness. Most interestingly, Euripides wrote about women – their relationships, their place in society and, most of all, their beliefs and passions. The plot of his play *Electra* concerns Electra's revenge on her mother for the murder of her father. The core of the drama revolves around Electra's intense emotions and her relationships with her father, mother and brother.

The great comedy writer whose work has survived is Aristophanes (448–380 BCE). We have access to 11 of the 40 plays he wrote, most of them named for the disguises used by the chorus in the plays, such as *The Wasps*, *The Birds*, *The Clouds* and *The Frogs*.

These comedies are an extraordinary mixture. They contain clownish action and bristle with insults, obscenities and personal attacks on people Aristophanes knew. Yet they also incorporate real wit and brilliant, savage satire. Most of the comedy has dated and does not translate well, but some of the real humour of the plays still emerges on stage, even today.

The other comedy writer whose work has endured was Menander (342–292 BCE).

Only five of his plays have survived and they are incomplete. They are comedies of manners, dealing with family matters such as missing children or a lost fortune, and the main character is usually a cunning servant.

By the time Menander was writing, the golden age of Greek theatre was over. The next phase in the history of the theatre belonged to the Romans. Unfortunately, this was a time of decline and finally death for classical theatre.



WORKSHOP 11.2.1: AGAMEMNON

Agamemnon, by Aeschylus, is set around the events of the Trojan War. Agamemnon goes to Troy as the leader of the Achaeans. When he returns from Troy, he is murdered by his wife's lover, Aegisthus. The play is set before Agamemnon returns, just as Troy falls. In this opening scene, the chorus provides the audience with a background to the story.

Exercise:

- Identify points where the script can be said in unison, as duets and as solo parts.
- Identify actions that would enhance the words spoken by the chorus; for example, when saying 'Ten years have passed' you may move your arms like a ticking clock.
- Rehearse and realise your performance for the rest of the group.
- After watching the performances, discuss how playing with the 'voice' of the chorus as well as the use of movement added to or detracted from the audience's interpretation of the scene.

WHO'S WHO OF THE TROJAN WAR

Achaeans (Greeks)

Atreus: father of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae

Agamemnon: commander of the Achaeans

Menelaus: brother of Agamemnon

Helen: wife of Menelaus, kidnapped by Paris

Trojans

Priam: King of Troy

Paris: son of Priam

Agamemnon by Aeschylus

CHORUS

Ten years have passed since the strong sons of Atreus,
Menelaus and Agamemnon—both alike
Honoured by Zeus with throned and sceptred power—
Assembled and manned a thousand Greek ships
And, with the youth of Hellas under arms,
Sailed from these shores to settle the scores with Priam.

Then loud their warlike anger cried,
As eagles cry that, wild with grief,
On some steep, lonely mountainside
Above their robbed nest wheel and sail,
Plying the airy waves, and bewail
Their wasted toil, their watchful pride.
Till some celestial deity—
Zeus, Pan or Apollo—hears on high
Their screams of wordless misery,
And pitying their unhappy state

(Since air is heaven's protectorate),
Sends a swift Fury to pursue
Marauding guilt with vengeance due.

So against Paris' guilty boast
Zeus, protector of guest and host,
Sends Atreus' sons for harsh redress
Of his and Helen's wantonness.
Now Greece and Troy pay equal debt
Of aching limbs and wounds and sweat,
While knees sink low in bloodstained dust,
And spears are scraped as they are thrust.
Things are as they are now; their end
Shall trace a fate that none can bend.
In vain shall Priam's altars burn;
Vainly his rich libations flow
To gods above and powers below.
No gift or sacrificial flame
Can hope to soothe or turn
The wrath of heaven from its relentless aim.

We were too old to take our share
With those who joined the army then.
We lean on sticks—in strength not men
But children—so they left us here.
In weakness youth and age are one;
The sap is weak in unripe bones
As in the withered. The green stalk
Grows without thorns. So, in their grey
And brittle years, old men must walk
Three-footed, weak as babes, and stray
Like dreams lost in the light of day.

Agamemnon by Aeschylus



WORKSHOP 11.2.2: ANTIGONE – TWO ADAPTATIONS

Antigone is the final play in Sophocles' *Oedipus Trilogy*. The traditional staging of *Antigone* takes place in Thebes, in front of the palace. A siege has taken place in Thebes and both Polynices (the invader) and his brother Eteocles (the defender) are dead. Polynices and Eteocles have been killed by each other as part of the curse of Oedipus. Creon, Oedipus' second-in-command and Antigone's uncle, decrees that Eteocles, as the defender of Thebes, is to be buried with full honours, while Polynices is to be left above the earth to rot. This outrages Antigone who reveals to her sister, Ismene, that she intends to bury Polynices as the law of the gods is more important than the law of man. Afraid of Creon, Ismene refuses to help Antigone, angering her sister who rejects Ismene and buries Polynices in



- 11.2.4 *Antigone*: An Introduction
- 11.2.5 *Antigone*: Creon and Antigone
- 11.2.6 *Antigone*: The Ancient Greek Chorus
- 11.2.7 *Antigone*: Religion and Modern Context
- 11.2.8 *Antigone*: Heightened Language

secret. This leads to a series of events that explores Sophocles central theme: the struggle between the will of the individual to do what is 'right' against the power of judicial law.

Exercise 1: In small groups read the beginning of the prologues from the adaptations of *Antigone* by Damien Ryan and Jane Montgomery Griffith

Discuss how the settings of these adaptations of *Antigone* are similar to or different from the traditional staging of an Ancient Greek play.

Discuss your expectations for each production of *Antigone* based on the extracts below.

Exercise 2: Read either a traditional or a modern interpretation of *Antigone* and choose one speech delivered by the chorus. Rehearse the scene as if it was to be performed on a traditional stage. Perform the scene for the class.

Extension: Antigone defies the order of Creon as she believes that doing the right thing is more important than following Creon's law. Discuss contemporary examples where an individual or group of people believe that doing what is right is more important than following judicial law. Create a series of freeze frames that depict one of these examples.

Antigone, an adaptation for Sport for Jove by Damien Ryan

A contemporary world. A decimated city.

A bathtub. Midnight. Stillness. Two sisters. Both exhausted. Heavy pressure in the room. Things are happening slowly here.

ISMENE sleeps in the bathtub. ANTIGONE is watching her. Silence. She wakes her sister.

ANTIGONE: [Whispering] Xipna. Xipna.

[Violently] Xipna!

[ISMENE is startled. Lies back again.]

Kimithikes?

I can't either.

You look good though... for no sleep.

You looked like you were dreaming. Going into a dream... coming out of a dream. What were you dreaming about?

Antigone/Cyrano De Bergerac by Damien Ryan, copyright © Damien Ryan. Reproduced with the permission from Currency Press Pty Ltd, Sydney Australia, www.currency.com.au

Antigone, an adaptation by Jane Montgomery Griffiths

SCENE 1

The mechanics of clinical death. A conveyor belt or mechanised means of corpse disposal: society's means of closing its eyes to the messy business of bodies and death.

ANTIGONE sits for a long time with a corpse. We cannot know if it is the corpse of one of her brothers. ANTIGONE would plunge her hands into its wounds and plug its holes with herself, if she could. If she could, she would stretch the cadaver's skin to cover her flesh melt to mingle with the liquefaction of the dead. If she could. But she can't. Her pain at her impotence is palpable.

ANTIGONE sings in Greek—a lament, a mission statement.

ὄρατ' ἔμ', ὦ γᾶς πατρίας πολίται, τὰν νεάταν ὁδὸν
στείχουσιν, νεάτον δὲ φέγγος λεύσσοισιν ἀελίου,
κοῦποτ' αὔθις.

ἀλλὰ μ' ὁ παγκοίτας Ἴιδας ζῶσαν ἄγει
τὰν Ἀχέροντος

ἄκταν, οὔθ' ὑμεναίων ἔγκληρον, οὔτ' ἐπινύμφειός
πῶ μέ τις ὕμνος ὕμνησεν, ἀλλ' Ἀχέροντι νυμφεύσω.

The machine cranks up. ANTIGONE, in the dark. She bonds with the corpse of her dead as she will when she hangs herself.

Antigone by Jane Montgomery Griffiths, copyright © Jane Montgomery. Reproduced with the permission from Currency Press Pty Ltd, Sydney Australia, www.currency.com.au

11.3 ROMAN THEATRE

The Romans left us one enduring element in the development of performance drama – the magnificent theatres they built throughout Europe and North Africa, some of which still survive today. The Romans copied the Greek style of amphitheatre, but often built on flat ground rather than on hillsides. The outsides of the theatres were surrounded by enormous stone walls. The stone stage of the Roman theatre was raised up quite high and had an elaborately decorated wall at the back of it, often two stories high. There was a curtain that could be raised and lowered from a trough at the front of the stage.

Very few of the plays written in Roman times have survived. Most were copies or adaptations of Greek works. The two noted writers of Roman comedy, Plautus and Terence, both took their inspiration from the works of Greek playwrights, particularly Menander. Plautus simply adapted Greek plays, giving them Roman characters and settings. Terence, a freed slave from Africa, had more originality and his plays are genuine comedies of manners. The serious writing of tragedies was rare in Rome.

Real theatre, even the comedies of Plautus and Terence, was not what the mass of Romans wanted. By the first century CE, Roman theatres were being used not to show life on stage but to give spectators the sight of death. Roman citizens flocked

The greatest Roman tragedian was the philosopher Seneca, who wrote his plays to be read or acted only in private performances.

to the theatres to watch gladiators killing each other, and to see Christians being fed to lions or set on fire and burned to death. In the Colosseum in Rome, animal fights were common, and gladiators, slaves or criminals would often fight animals to the death. One of the most spectacular animal fights that was recorded at the time was between an elephant and a rhinoceros.



Alamy Stock Photo/North Wind Picture Archives

11.3.1 A Gladiator fights a lion as a form of entertainment.

Over time these spectacles became more extravagant and more violent. A number of theatres throughout the Roman world, including the Colosseum, were actually used to stage sea battles. On one occasion the theatre of Dionysus in Athens, then under Roman rule, was sealed and flooded. Inside, a sea battle between real ships took place, with the sailors fighting and killing one another.

For a time, there were some noted actors in Rome performing in the early comedies, but as the theatre degenerated into violent spectacles, the whole craft of acting became discredited. The popular form of theatre that survived was the mime-comedy entertainment. These mimes were crudely performed and usually obscene, telling gross stories of drunkenness, greed and adultery. They often included dances and acrobatic performances by half-naked girls. By the reign of Emperor Nero, these crude mime performances were being used to attack Christianity, which was rapidly spreading throughout the Roman Empire. A clown would act out the birth and death of Christ, performing the most outrageous and obscene actions.

It is hardly surprising that when Christianity became the dominant religion in Rome in the fifth century CE, theatrical performances were banned. This ban was soon in force throughout the Christian world. The magnificent theatres built by the Romans had become the tombs of classical theatre.

For almost a thousand years the theatre was silent. Its memory was kept alive by wandering bands of singers, acrobats and dancers who appeared at festivals. They often included short comedy scenes in their performances. However, these performers were officially banned by the Christian church, and they lived a risky, homeless life. When the theatre did emerge again, it was in the most surprising of places.



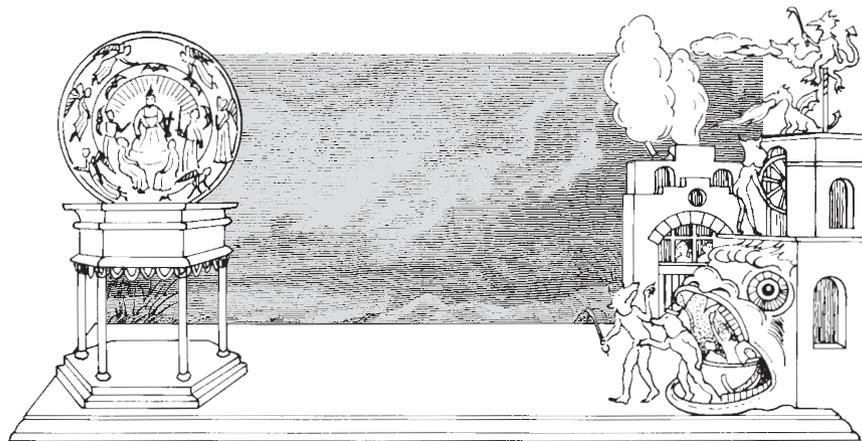
WORKSHOP 11.3.1: ROMAN THEATRE

Exercise: Using the internet and other resources, search for quotes, plays and other material from Seneca the philosopher. Using your research, create and perform a two- to three-minute performance.

11.4 MEDIEVAL THEATRE

Ironically, the Christian church that banned the theatre in the fifth century was responsible for its development between the ninth and 14th centuries. During this period, a form of religious theatre developed inside churches throughout Europe. It began with short scenes that told of the life and death of Christ, acted out by the priest and choirboys.

Over the centuries, more scenes were added and other people were allowed to act in them. They were performed in front of the altar: on the right-hand side was a door or a miniature house representing Heaven, and on the left-hand side was Hell. These scenes eventually developed into full-length pageants that included Bible stories and the lives of the saints, as well as the life of Christ. All the available space inside the church was used for the performance, and the congregation sitting in the pews was the audience.



Shakespeare used the idea of trade guilds staging plays in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which the group of tradesmen, including Quince the carpenter, Snug the joiner and Bottom the weaver, rehearse and stage their play for the Duke of Athens.

11.4.1 A medieval stage with Heaven on one side and Hell on the other.

Just as the Greek theatre had developed from religious festivals, so a whole new theatre emerged throughout Europe, growing out of these church pageants. This form of theatre grew further when the pageants were performed outside the churches. Once they were acted in towns, the pageants were taken over by the local authorities and acted by local townspeople. The actors were members of trade guilds. These guilds were composed of men who all worked at the one job or craft, so there were blacksmiths' guilds, tailors' guilds, carpenters' guilds and so on. Each guild was responsible for staging one scene, usually a scene associated with their work. For example, the shipbuilders' guild would stage and perform the scene that told the story of Noah's Ark.

In some countries these religious plays were staged on the steps of the church; in others, the town square was used. However, in certain countries, particularly England, the scenes of the plays were mounted on carts and paraded through the town. Each cart would stop at a particular place, the actors would perform the scene, and the cart would move on. The audience remained where they were, waiting for the next cart to arrive and present the next scene.

There were two kinds of medieval plays. The first was the 'miracle play'. A number of these plays were grouped together in a cycle and together they told the whole Bible story of humankind, from Adam and Eve up to the Last Judgement. The whole cycle might be performed every four or five years, or perhaps only once in 10 years, depending on the local authorities. However, particular scenes were often performed each year at the appropriate time, such as Christ's crucifixion at Easter time.

The second kind of play was the 'morality play'. This was really an illustrated sermon about good and evil, and aimed to teach common people about the power of evil, and how to avoid it and achieve salvation.

Many medieval plays were well written, exciting and dramatic and some are performed even today, notably the York Cycle in England and the famous Passion Play at Oberammergau in Germany.



WORKSHOP 11.4.1: A MODERN MORALITY PLAY

Exercise: Working in groups, improvise a modern morality play that explores a modern issue such as greed and materialism, the behaviour of celebrities, corruption or another negative facet of our society, where the 'evil' characters are caught out and punished.

11.5 COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

While a new theatre was emerging from the churches of Europe, a totally different kind of drama had appeared in Italy. Commedia dell'arte means 'comedy of the professional players', and it was totally an actor's theatre.

STAGING COMMEDIA PLAYS

Professional companies of Italian actors wandered all over Europe in the 16th century, bringing commedia dell'arte to every country including England. They performed wherever they could find an audience – in the street, in pubs, in houses and in palaces.

Commedia dell'arte owed everything to the actors. Not only did they work without theatres, but they also had no scripts. The plays were all improvised around the outlines of a few simple stories.

THE ACTORS

Each actor in the company always played the same character throughout his career, and he knew a number of long speeches off by heart, which he would adapt and

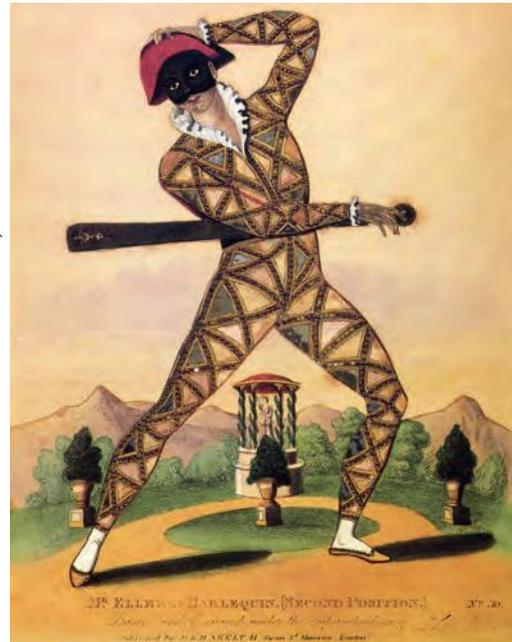
use in different performances. For example, the doctor, who was a stock character in commedia performances, often had long speeches showing off how clever he was. The speech would be rambling and use words incorrectly to encourage the audience to laugh at him. The comedy actors in the company, the *zanni*, were experts in a range of long comedy routines called *burles*. These routines could involve singing and dancing, as well as telling jokes. Modern stand-up comedy routines have many features of these *burles*. Commedia performers also had their own special comic tricks, known as *lazzi*. A performer might have developed a *lazzi* for his character who often pretended to have a heart attack. The character would jump in the air, then freeze in a twisted pose, then grab his heart and start shaking, fall to the floor, then suddenly sit up and call for help and go into great detail about the pain and fear he's experiencing.

As far as we know, commedia was the first form of European theatre that allowed women to act on stage. We have written records that in 1566 a female commedia performer named Vincenza Armani appeared in a play in Italy, almost a century before women began acting in London theatres. There is some evidence that commedia troupes actually had female performers as early as the 1540s.

COMMEDIA CHARACTERS

All the actors wore masks, except the young lovers, and these masks represented the same group of characters who appeared in every play. The plots usually revolved around the attempts of the young lovers to meet or marry. The heroine's father or guardian was Pantalone, who tried to stop her escaping with her young man. His elderly friend was always the lawyer, Il Dottore, and there was always a cowardly, boastful soldier, Il Capitano.

The best known of all the stock characters were the comic servants. Once the play had started, it was their job to keep the action flowing. They could introduce any tricks or comedy routines into the play they wished, and develop the story in any direction, as long as they brought the action back to a point where the plot could be picked up and continued. The most famous of these comic servants was Arlecchino, whom we know as Harlequin, and the best-known female servant was Colombino, or Columbine.



11.5.1 Harlequin in a stylised pose

COMMEDIA COMPANIES

There were anywhere between five and 25 actors in a commedia company, and they had to be dancers, singers, acrobats and mimes as well as actors. Moreover, they needed to be incredibly quick-witted to improvise as they went, and be able

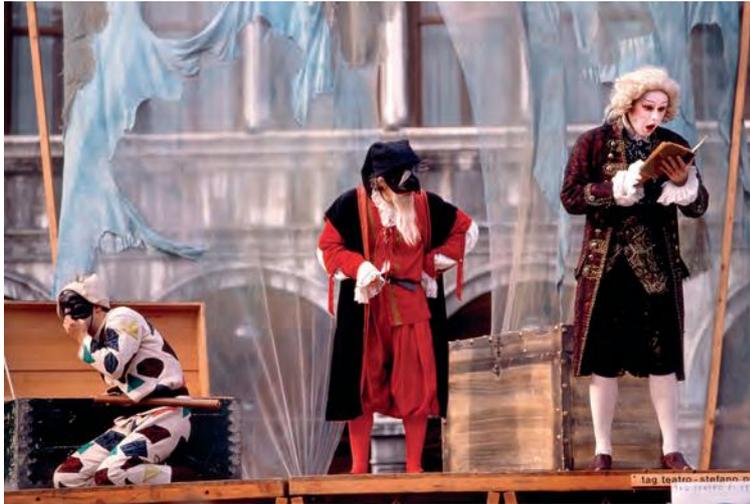


11.5.1 The Met: Commedia dell'arte

to communicate in several different languages. There were no playwrights or directors. At each performance, the company manager would announce the title and plot of the evening's performance, giving a brief scenario about three pages long to the performers. Remarkably, 800 of these scenarios still exist today in museums, and they each give the plot for the play and the character entrances and exits, but no dialogue.

The commedia dell'arte performers were truly professional actors and, long after the companies had disappeared, their influence lived on in the plays of Shakespeare and Molière, and in 'Punch and Judy' shows.

Alamy Stock Photo/PirTravel



11.5.2 A traditional commedia dell'arte performance with the actors in traditional costume and masks.



WORKSHOP 11.5.1: COMMEDIA COMEDY ROUTINES – STRING WALKS

Exercise 1: Stand in a line at one end of the space. Imagine you have a piece of string attached to your big toe. As you cross the space, allow your big toe to lead you across the space. When you reach the end of the space, imagine the piece of string has moved to your knees and as you cross the space again, your body is being led by your knees. Repeat the process using other parts of your body, such as your elbow, your stomach, your nose etc.

Exercise 2: Imagine a character based on the string walks. Walk through the space, introducing yourself and talking to the other characters in the space.



WORKSHOP 11.5.2: COMMEDIA COMEDY ROUTINES – CREATING A LAZZI

Exercise: When creating your own scenarios, have the character do something mundane – brushing their hair, reading the newspaper, eating a piece of fruit – then SOMETHING HAPPENS! (Their hair gets caught in the brush, they read something shocking in the paper, they choke on a little bit of fruit ...)

Come up with five to seven reactions that occur one after another, getting more and more ridiculous.



WORKSHOP 11.5.3: COMMEDIA STOCK SPEECHES

Exercise: Below is a stock speech from the commedia dell'arte play *The Servant of Two Masters*. Rehearse and then perform the speech with as much vocal expression and physical action as possible.

Goldoni wrote *The Servant of Two Masters* in 1743 at the request of the actor Sacchi, who would play the role of Truffaldino. The comic scenes were left to the actor's own invention in the original version and Goldoni later incorporated Sacchi's improvisation in the script when he printed the play in 1753.

Truffaldino is the servant to Be trice, but he feels mistreated and agrees to be servant to Florindo as well. He must serve two masters but receives two wages, and it is Truffaldino's tricks and stratagems that drive the comedy of the play. In this monologue he has secretly opened one of his master's letters and tries to re-seal it with chewed bread.

The Servant of Two Masters by Carlo Goldoni

Truff. Upon my word, I hope he is not going away. I want to see how my two jobs will work out. I'm on my mettle. This letter, now, which I have to take to my other master—I do not like to have to give it to him opened. I must try to fold it again. [Tries various awkward folds.] And now it must be sealed. If I only knew how to do it! I have seen my grandmother sometimes seal letters with chewed bread. I'll try it. [Takes a piece of bread out of his pocket.] It's a pity to waste this little piece of bread, but still something must be done. [Chews a little bread to seal the letter and accidentally swallows it.] The devil! it has gone down. I must chew another bit. [Same business.] No good; nature rebels. I'll try once more. [Chews again; would like to swallow the bread, but restrains himself and with great difficulty removes the bread from his mouth.] Ah, here it is; I'll seal the letter. [Seals the letter with the bread.] I think that looks quite well. I'm always a great man for doing things cleanly.

The Servant of Two Masters by Carlo Goldoni, translated by Edward J Dent,
Cambridge University Press, 1928



WORKSHOP 11.5.4: IMPROVISING COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

Exercise: Working in groups, improvise a modern commedia dell'arte scene using as many of the techniques of commedia we have explored as possible.

THEATRE COMES OF AGE

The first 2000 years of Western theatre saw an extraordinary period of live performance in Ancient Greece, then the decline and disappearance of theatre from Europe for almost a millennium. Theatre reappeared through religious storytelling associated with the church and then as broad comedy performed by travelling commedia dell'arte companies.

Out of these humble beginnings an explosion of theatrical activity developed that spread throughout Europe and to the new worlds of America and Australia. The four centuries between 1500 and 1900 saw the performance of some of the greatest plays ever written. There were also remarkable creative developments in the styles of theatre being performed and the staging of plays. In this period, the foundations of modern theatre were established and theatre became the major art form it is today.

12.1 ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

The second great age of theatre, following almost two thousand years after the Greeks, blossomed in England under Queen Elizabeth I (reign. 1558–1603). Elizabethan England in the second half of the 16th century was a country full of life, energy and new ideas.

During the period of the miracle and morality plays in England, groups of professional actors had developed. These acting troupes were usually part of the households of rich and powerful men, often the leading noblemen in the country, and gave performances of short comedies and longer chronicle plays that told stories from English history. The plays were often acted on platforms set up in the courtyards of pubs or inns. This was the beginning of the Elizabethan theatre.

THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE

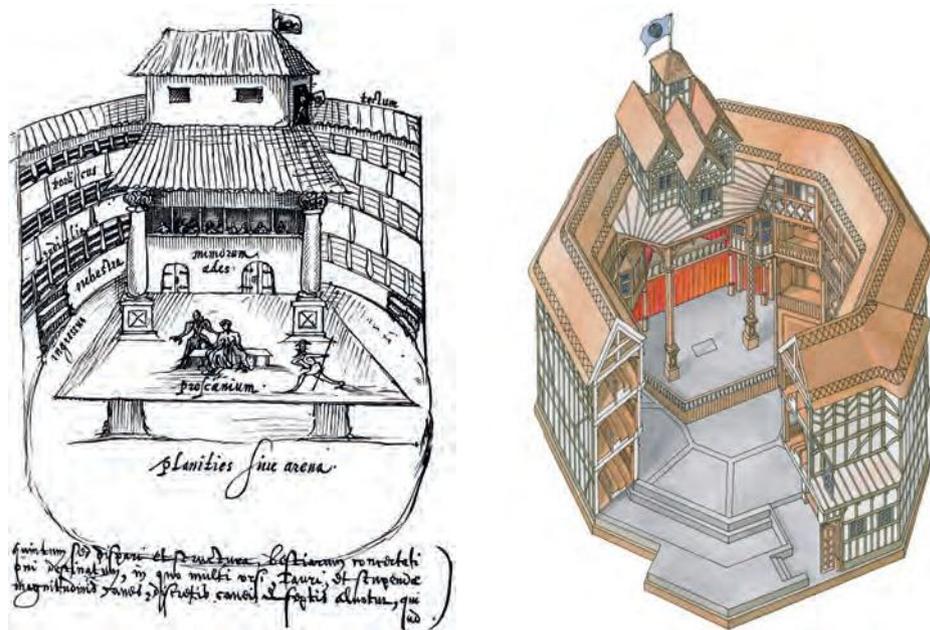
The first playhouse, simply named 'the Theatre', was built in London in 1576 by a carpenter and part-time actor named James Burbage. His son, Richard Burbage, became the first great English actor. A whole succession of playhouses followed: The Curtain, The Rose, The Swan, The Globe, The Fortune and The Hope.

A faithful reconstruction of the Globe Theatre has been built on Bankside near the River Thames in London, as close as possible to the site of the original Globe Theatre in Shakespeare's time. The New Globe was completed in 1997, and stages performances of Shakespeare's plays.

The only surviving picture that exists to show what Elizabethan playhouses looked like is a drawing of *The Swan*, which was done by a Dutchman visiting London.

All the Elizabethan theatres were built of wood in a hollow circle: the stage was located in the centre and the area where the spectators stood was open to the air. The stage was a raised platform that extended out so that the audience could stand on three sides of it. Built into the circular walls of the theatre were two or three galleries where the rest of the audience could sit on benches or stools.

At the back of the stage was a wall with doors or curtains leading to the backstage area. There was a gallery above used by musicians or for scenes such as the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. Behind and above the stage were the dressing rooms and a tower containing machinery that was used to create stage effects, such as storms.



12.1.1 Elizabethan theatres: **a** The Swan Theatre in London; **b** a reconstruction of the second Globe Theatre, built in London in 1614

ELIZABETHAN ACTORS

Elizabethan theatres were run by professional managers who expected to make a profit. The acting companies were composed of people who made their living from acting, like the commedia companies in Italy before them, and they sometimes toured around the country, just as the commedia actors did. Some companies worked for salaries paid by the managers, while others owned their own playhouses and shared the profits from their acting. All the theatre companies had noble and powerful men as their patrons. Elizabethan men who owned no land and had no master were treated as rogues and vagabonds.

There were no women in the theatre companies. Boys played the roles of young women such as Juliet, and the comedians in the company acted the roles of older women. Actors had to be able to sing, dance and play musical instruments as well as act, because songs and dances were often part of Elizabethan plays.

The costumes worn by the actors came mainly from discarded clothes given to them by their wealthy patrons. These costumes would have seemed magnificent to the ordinary people watching the plays. Of course, the costumes would all have been clothes of the period so, depending on the play, suitable extras were added – a breastplate and sword for a Roman, a turban for a Turk and so on.

The life of an actor was not easy. Theatres were prohibited from the city of London itself and had to be built on the south bank of the river among the brothels and bear pits. Playhouses often burned down or were closed for long periods because of the plague, riots or freezing winters. When this happened, the actors were forced to tour, performing in the courtyards of inns or, if they were fortunate, in the houses of noblemen.

There was almost no scenery on the Elizabethan stage and the audiences were large and rowdy, eating and drinking as they watched the plays. Elizabethan plays contained dozens of scenes that flowed rapidly, often jumping years in time and hundreds of kilometres in place. The actors had only the power of language to help them, and they needed enormous physical energy and skilled voices to bring to life the great tragedies and comedies of the age. We have diaries and letters from the time that describe how the famous actors Edward Alleyn and Richard Burbage were able to move an audience to tears and make them totally believe in the events and characters they created on stage.

ELIZABETHAN PLAYWRIGHTS

Christopher Marlowe

The Elizabethan period was a time of great plays and great playwrights, which are still at the heart of the theatre today. The first outstanding English playwright was Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), born the same year as Shakespeare. Marlowe began work in the theatre some years before Shakespeare and his influence was to prove vital on the playwrights who followed, including Shakespeare himself, especially in the structure of their plays and the use of language.

Marlowe was a university graduate and a poet as well as a playwright. He was the first to write plays in the flexible, powerful ‘blank verse’ that became the language of the Elizabethan theatre. His play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, the story of a man who sells his soul to the devil, is a fascinating piece of theatre full of superb dramatic poetry and is still performed in theatres throughout the world. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe retells the story of Faust, a doctor, who makes a pact with the devil to obtain knowledge and power in exchange for his soul. Mephistopheles is the devil’s intermediary in the play who grants Faust his every wish, but in ways that deceive or disappoint him. The play shows Faust as an arrogant and self-indulgent man whose intellectual ambitions are futile, self-destructive and absurd. The contemporary warning ‘be careful what you wish for’ is at the heart of the play.

Marlowe might have even equalled Shakespeare as a writer if he had lived long enough, but his life was short, extreme and violent. A spy and a professed atheist, Marlowe made public statements declaring his rejection of the rules of respectable society and challenging the existence of God. Some of his brief life was spent in prison, and he died in a pub brawl at the age of 29, stabbed through the eye.

In blank verse, each line is made up of a number of pairs of syllables (often five) with alternating stress. The lines do not rhyme (hence ‘blank’). For example: ‘You stars that reign’d at my na-ti-vi-ty’.

Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson (1572–1637) began his working life as an apprentice to a bricklayer. Jonson was a quarrelsome, frustrated, outspoken man, often in trouble and occasionally in prison. However, the comedies he wrote have made a lasting contribution to the theatre.

Jonson's plays such as *Volpone* are savage, clever comedies about human behaviour. *Volpone* satirises human greed and tells the story of a wealthy man who tries to get richer still by pretending to be dying, obtaining valuable gifts from people in return for promising to make each of them the heir to his fortune. Jonson's plays ruthlessly reveal the stupidity and greed of human beings and show how petty people can be. Yet they are genuine comedies and their portrayals of human weakness are hilarious as well as savage. They work by exaggerating the stupidity and bad behaviour of the characters to make them laughable and then show how they are made to suffer the consequences of their behaviour.

William Shakespeare

Foremost of all the Elizabethan writers was William Shakespeare, who was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. He married there at 18, went to London and worked as an actor and playwright. He eventually retired to Stratford and died there in 1616.

Shakespeare wrote for a popular audience who paid to be entertained. Many of the characters in his plays were written for particular actors in the company. During his time as a playwright, he churned out plays at a rate of about one every nine months. As far as we can tell from the few historical records, *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* were all first performed in the three-year period between 1604 and 1606.

Shakespeare's plays are dramatically stunning, but they also offer profound reflections on the very nature of being human. The conflict between ambition and duty that troubles *Macbeth* is a universal one, and his action in killing the king is a conscious crime against humanity, the kind of crime we have learnt a great deal about in the last century. Yet, there is more to the play: it is also a study of guilt and the madness associated with this emotion. The character of Desdemona in *Othello* is an extraordinarily modern woman for her time. She is intelligent, compassionate and liberated, and defies her father to marry the man she loves. In Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night*, romantic love, which is only about the physical appearance of people, is shown to be less important than the true nature of men and women and the central character who proves this to be true is Viola, a remarkably lively and resourceful heroine.

One of the defining features of Shakespeare's genius was the way he acknowledged the humanity and worth of people from different cultures at a time of deep prejudice. *Othello*, the Moor, is a tragic hero and an individual of extraordinary power. Yet in Elizabethan England, black Africans were mainly thought of as slaves.

The theatre that followed after Shakespeare was inevitably less powerful. There were fine actors, but none as talented as the actors in Elizabethan theatre. There were talented playwrights, but none to equal Shakespeare or Jonson. Only one new theatre, The Hope, opened after 1600.



12.1.1 Shakespeare at the National Theatre

12.1.2 National Theatre: *Othello* by William Shakespeare

12.1.3 Director Nicholas Hytner on *Othello*

12.1.4 *Othello*: Representations of race

12.1.5 *Othello*: Behind the Lines

John Webster

One outstanding writer did emerge in the early part of the 17th century and that was John Webster (1580–1634). His two great revenge tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, are dark, violent, powerful pieces of theatre. Their central characters are both women – intelligent, powerful, independent women who are capable of both great and terrible actions. This was the first time that great tragic plays were actually named after women and portrayed them as the main protagonists since the Ancient Greek plays.

There were other playwrights of importance during the Elizabethan era, including Robert Greene and Thomas Kyd.

THE END OF THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

The whole of English theatre came to an abrupt end in 1642 when the English Civil Wars began. The playhouses were closed and acting was forbidden. As long as Cromwell and his Puritans were in power, the theatres stayed closed.



WORKSHOP 12.1.1: ROMEO AND JULIET

Today if we see a production of a Shakespearean play, it is staged within modern performance conventions, and often set in today's world or in a recent time frame and in modern dress.



Alamy Stock Photo/Photo 12

12.1.2 Harold Perrineau as Mercutio and Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film version of *Romeo and Juliet*

Exercise 1: Below is an extract from *Romeo and Juliet*. Working in groups, create a performance of this script either as a traditional Elizabethan performance or a modern re-interpretation. Use your performance to interpret the meaning of this scene, using the forms and elements of drama. Your interpretation will depend on the choice of performance style, which will reveal the social and cultural influences of the time and style you have chosen, either Elizabethan or modern.

Share your performances and discuss how the different interpretations revealed different aspects of the characters and the play.



12.1.6 *Romeo and Juliet*: Baz Luhrmann Interview

12.1.7 *Romeo and Juliet*: Leonardo DiCaprio Interview

12.1.8 *Romeo and Juliet*: Claire Danes Interview

12.1.9 Baz Luhrmann looking back on *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

ACT 3, SCENE 1

[Enter TYBALT and others.]

BENVOLIO By my head, here come the Capulets.

MERCUTIO By me heel, I care not.

TYBALT Follow me close, for I will speak to them.
Gentlemen, good-den: a word with one of you.

MERCUTIO And but one word with one of us? Couple it with something; make it a word and a blow.

TYBALT You shall find me apt enough to that, sir, an you will give me occasion.

MERCUTIO Could you not take some occasion without giving?

TYBALT Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo.

MERCUTIO Consort! What, dost thou make us minstrels? An thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but discords: here's my fiddlestick; here's that shall make you dance. Zounds, consort!

BENVOLIO We talk here in the public haunt of men;
Either withdraw unto some private place,
And reason coldly of your grievances,
Or else depart; here all eyes gaze on us.

MERCUTIO Men's eyes were made to look, and let them gaze;
I will not budge for no man's pleasure, I.

TYBALT Well, peace be with you, sir. Here comes my man.

[Enter ROMEO.]

MERCUTIO But I'll be hanged, sir, if he wear your livery.
Marry, go before to field, he'll be your follower;
Your worship in that sense may call him man.

TYBALT Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford
No better term than this: thou art a villain.

ROMEO Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee
Doth much excuse the appertaining rage
To such a greeting. Villain am I none;
Therefore farewell; I see thou know'st me not.

TYBALT Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries
That thou hast done me; therefore turn and draw.

ROMEO I do protest I never injur'd thee;
But love thee better than thou canst devise
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love:
And so, good Capulet—which name I tender
As dearly as mine own—be satisfied.

MERCUTIO O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!
Alla stoccata carries it away. *[Draws.]*
Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?

TYBALT What wouldst thou have with me?

MERCUTIO Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives; that I mean to make bold withal, and, as you shall use me hereafter, dry-beat the rest of the eight. Will you pluck your sword out of his pilcher by the ears? Make haste, lest mine be about your ears ere it be out.

TYBALT I am for you. *[Drawing.]*

ROMEO Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up.

MERCUTIO Come, sir, your passado.

[They fight.]

ROMEO Draw, Benvolio; beat down their weapons.
Gentlemen, for shame! Forbear this outrage!
Tybalt! Mercutio! The prince expressly hath
Forbid this bandying in Verona streets.
Hold, Tybalt! Good Mercutio!

[TYBALT under ROMEO'S arm thrusts MERCUTIO in, and flies with his friends.]

MERCUTIO I am hurt.
A plague o' both your houses! I am sped.
Is he gone, and hath nothing?

BENVOLIO What, art thou hurt?

MERCUTIO Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch; marry, 'tis enough.
Where is my page? Go, villain, fetch a surgeon.

[Exit page.]

ROMEO Courage, man; the hurt cannot be much.

MERCUTIO No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve. Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this world.

A plague o' both your houses! Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death! A braggart, a rogue, a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic! Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm.

ROMEO I thought all for the best.

MERCUTIO Help me into some house, Benvolio, or I shall faint.
A plague o' both your houses!
They have made worm's meat of me.
I have it, and soundly too—Your houses!

[Exeunt MERCUTIO and BENVOLIO!]

Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare.



WORKSHOP 12.1.2: CYMBELINE

Below is an extract from *Cymbeline*. In the extract, Guiderius and Arviragus speak over the body of a woman, who they presume is dead. They are not aware that the woman is their sister and she is not dead, only drugged.

Exercise: Generate and realise two performances using the extract below. The two performances must come from two different styles; for example, you could choose to do this in the style of a Greek chorus and then non-naturalistically as surreal or physical theatre.

Cymbeline by William Shakespeare

ACT 4, SCENE 2

GUIDERIUS Fear no more the heat o' th' sun
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

ARVIRAGUS Fear no more the frown o' th' great;
Thou are past the tyrant's stroke.
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the reed is as the oak.
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this and come to dust.

GUIDERIUS Fear no more the lightning flash,

ARVIRAGUS Nor th' all-dreaded thunder-stone;

GUIDERIUS Fear not slander, censure rash;

ARVIRAGUS Thou hast finished joy and moan.

BOTH All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee and come to dust.

GUIDERIUS No exorciser harm thee!

ARVIRAGUS Nor no witchcraft charm thee!

GUIDERIUS Ghost unlaid forbear thee!

ARVIRAGUS Nothing ill come near thee!

BOTH Quiet consummation have,
And renowned be thy grave.

Cymbeline by William Shakespeare.

12.2 THE GROWTH OF EUROPEAN THEATRE

SPAIN

Theatre in Spain developed in parallel with Elizabethan theatre. Playhouses similar to those in England were in Spain in the 1570s and 1580s. Spanish theatre was greatly influenced by commedia dell'arte and, most of all, by the Catholic Church.

The leading Spanish playwright of the period, Lope de Vega (1562–1635), wrote over 1200 plays and 750 of these have survived. They all reflect the values of Christianity and particularly the teachings of Catholicism.

FRANCE

The great age of French theatre began in 1637 with the play *Le Cid* by Pierre Corneille. The theatres built in France were quite different from the English and Spanish ones. They were completely roofed over and were originally just large rooms with a stage at one end, lit by candles. It was the French who set up the first national theatre in the world, the Comédie Française, in 1680. Its aim was to encourage the development of French artistic expression, especially in the theatre.

In these French theatres were performed the works of three great playwrights: Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine, who wrote mainly tragedies, and Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, better known as Molière, one of the greatest comic playwrights of all time. The genius of these writers lay in their observation of human passions, faults and suffering. Their plays had enormous power and vitality that comes through when they are performed today, even in translation.

Corneille

Pierre Corneille was born 6 June 1606 in Rouen, France, and died on 1 October 1684 in Paris. He trained in law and for 22 years held the position of King's counsellor in the local office of the Department of Waterways and Forests. Corneille's early plays were comedies and he became recognised as a successful comic playwright. However, he began experimenting with the writing of tragedies with *Médée* in 1635. He then wrote *Le Cid*, based on the life of an 11th-century Spanish hero, which explores the conflict between passionate love and family loyalty. It is commonly regarded as the most significant play in the history of French drama and proved an immensely popular success. However, it was heavily criticised for not obeying the rules of traditional tragedy, and performance of the play was banned. Corneille then wrote three major tragedies, all set in Ancient Rome – *Horace*, *Cinna* and *Polyeucte* – which re-established his reputation as a major playwright. In his tragedies, willpower and self-control are glorified and his heroes display heroic energy in meeting or mastering the challenges they face. Altogether, Corneille wrote almost 40 plays, both tragedies and comedies, although it is his tragedies that had the greatest influence on the development of theatre.

Racine

Racine's full name was Jean-Baptiste Racine and he was born in provincial France in 1639 and died on 21 April 1699, in Paris. When he was 18 he went to study law in Paris and became a poet and playwright. Racine is regarded as the greatest writer of tragedies in French theatre. Most of his plays were set in Ancient Greece and Rome, often based on myths and legends or classic Greek plays. *Andromache* is based on the story of the Trojan queen whom the Greeks take as a hostage after the fall of Troy but who survives the kings who take her. *Iphigenia* is based on a play by Euripides, perhaps the greatest of all the ancient Greek playwrights, and tells how Agamemnon, one of the Greek kings sailing to attack Troy, sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to the gods so they will send winds to enable the Greek war fleet to sail to Troy. In Euripides' play, Iphigenia is actually sacrificed, but Racine changes the story so that she survives. Like Webster, the Jacobean playwright in England, Racine wrote a number of plays with female protagonists who demonstrate courage and goodness in a violent world.

Molière

Molière is the pseudonym for Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, who was born in Paris, France in 1622 and died in 1673. His parents sent him to good schools to be trained in law, but Molière fell in love with the theatre and devoted his entire life to the theatrical profession. He probably received a law degree in between 1641–1642, but then joined three other people to form a theatre company called L'illustre Théâtre. He became one of the greatest comedy actors of his time, and also gained experience in managing and directing. When he turned to writing, he established a reputation as one of the greatest comic geniuses the world has seen. He gained an international reputation for his style of social comedy, which we know as comedy of manners, still a major comic form today. In his plays, he portrayed many aspects of his society with savage humour, such as *School for Wives*, which satirised the inadequate education given to girls of rich families. Some of his greatest comedies used humour to attack the worst characteristics of various types of people such as hypocrites in his play *Tartuffe*, and misanthropes (people who hate humankind) in his play *The Misanthrope*. He was still acting in a production of *The Misanthrope* the night he died.



WORKSHOP 12.2.1: WORKING WITH MOLIÈRE

Exercise: Work in groups to find a play by Molière and choose a scene for investigation. Decide to what extent and in what ways the characters and plot of the play are still relevant in today's society and improvise on the scene to reveal these elements.

12.3 RESTORATION THEATRE

In England there was a fresh burst of theatrical activity after Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660. New indoor theatres were built and a remarkable new genre of theatre of comedy developed. The playwrights William Wycherley, William Congreve, George Farquhar and others wrote brilliant comedies of manners. Their plays were clever and witty, but they were also savage satires on the behaviour of wealthy English socialites.

William Wycherley

William Wycherley was born in 1641 in London and died there in 1716. He studied at Oxford University but did not graduate. His first play, staged in 1671, was an immediate success. His most famous play, *The Country Wife*, based on some of Molière's plays, was staged in 1675 and was seen as scandalous and sexually explicit, and was banned from the stage a number of times in following centuries. It was his second last play. In his later years he became ill and spent time in prison for debt.

George Farquhar

George Farquhar was born in Ireland in 1678 and died in London in 1707. He studied at university in Dublin and had a brief career as an actor before seriously wounding a fellow actor on stage with a real rapier by mistake. His first play was successfully staged in 1699, and in 1706 *The Recruiting Officer* was staged, one of the most important Restoration plays, and the first play ever staged in Australia (in 1789). His last play, *The Beaux' Stratagem*, another major work, was staged the year he died.

William Congreve

William Congreve was born near Leeds in England in 1670 and died in London in 1729. His first play, staged in 1693, was an immediate success. The comedies that followed were equally popular and established Congreve as a leading playwright. Ironically, his greatest play, *The Way of the World*, staged in 1700, was a complete failure with the audience, and Congreve never wrote another play.

Congreve's play *The Way of the World* is generally regarded as the most outstanding of all Restoration plays. The characters are sophisticated and witty and treat love and wealth as a game they play, using deceit, dishonesty and elaborate schemes to obtain wealth, marry the person they want and achieve a position in society. Unlike many other plays of the period, however, in this play true love wins out and the play ends with the young lovers Mirabell and Millamant becoming engaged, but not before every character in the play has been involved in cheating and lying to get what they want.

PERFORMING RESTORATION COMEDIES

To perform the Restoration comedies, an elaborate performance style evolved which demanded both effective characterisation and exaggeration of character. Actors in the plays also used stylised body language and physical movement, and particularly the skilled use of voice. The pace of performances was quick and speeches were often delivered directly to the audience. Elaborate gestures were important, such as men bowing and kissing a woman's hand, and women

curtseying and using fans to flirt or send clear messages like snapping a fan shut to show anger. For the first time in England, women were allowed to act onstage and a number of famous actresses emerged. It is interesting to note that women had been performing in commedia dell'arte plays in Italy a century before this.

LATER RESTORATION PLAYWRIGHTS

There were two important playwrights who came later and also wrote comedies that developed from the Restoration style. The first was Oliver Goldsmith, whose one famous play was *She Stoops to Conquer*, first performed in 1773. The second was R.B. Sheridan, whose plays *The Rivals* (1775) and *The School for Scandal* (1777) are still frequently performed.



12.3.1 *The School for Scandal* at Edinburgh Festival, 2009



Getty Images/Robbie Jack

12.3.1 The Comedians Theatre Company's production of *The School for Scandal* at the 2009 Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Oliver Goldsmith

Born in Ireland in 1730, Goldsmith died in London in 1774. He studied medicine in Edinburgh but did not graduate. Goldsmith began writing essays and then turned to poetry and novels. Goldsmith's first play was staged in 1768, and his second play, *She Stoops to Conquer*, staged in 1773, was immediately successful. It is one of the most frequently revived comedies from the early 18th to the late 19th century because of its farcical action combined with fascinating, vivid and humorous characterisations.

Richard Brinsley (RB) Sheridan

Sheridan was born in Ireland in 1751 and died in London in 1816. His plays were classic comedy of manners theatre. Sheridan studied law and as a young man fought two duels with a Welsh squire who wanted to marry Elizabeth Linley, the woman Sheridan loved. Sheridan won the first duel, then was badly wounded in the second, but survived to marry Elizabeth. Sheridan's first play was *The Rivals*, which contained the memorable character Mrs Malaprop who continuously uses the wrong words in conversation. His most famous play, *The School for Scandal*, is regarded as a masterpiece of comedy of manners, with extraordinarily clever satire and interesting, engaging characterisation, especially the characters of Lady Teazle and Mr Surface.

THE DECLINE OF RESTORATION THEATRE

By the end of the 1700s, the time of great playwrights and great theatre was over, not only in England but throughout Europe. Middle-class sentimental plays were popular everywhere as the 18th century drew to a close. Their heroes were honest, middle-class merchants who behaved well at all times and were a credit to their nation and to civilisation.

If the plays were poor, the actors were not. This was the time of the first great actor-managers who ran their own theatre companies and played the leading roles. David Garrick was perhaps the most famous and introduced a much more natural style of acting to the English theatre, as well as improvements such as concealed stage lighting and superb scenery. He also ended the centuries-old custom of allowing spectators to sit on the stage during performances!

In Germany, another great actor, Friedrich Schröder, became the first German to perform Shakespeare's plays in translation. Schröder had an enormous influence on German theatre, particularly in the way he trained his company to act with more skill and naturalness.

The brilliant style of humour known as 'comedy of manners' that characterised Restoration theatre is still a major form of theatre today. The plays of Alan Ayckbourn in England, Neil Simon in the USA and David Williamson in Australia are modern comedies of manners that have been extraordinarily successful on stage.

THEATRE IN THE 'NEW WORLD'

By the year 1800, theatre was enormously popular, not only in Europe but also in the 'new' countries of America and Australia. The first playhouse had been built in America in 1716 and by 1800 New York was the centre of American theatre.

The first theatrical performance in Australia was given on 4 June 1789, just 18 months after the First Fleet arrived. It was a production of the comedy *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar, performed by a group of convicts. From then on, there were regular theatrical performances until 1800, when the governor banned stage productions temporarily.



WORKSHOP 12.3.1: RESTORATION THEATRE

Exercise: Choose a Restoration play that you find interesting and workshop a scene from the play, using the elaborate physical and vocal style of Restoration performance. If it is possible, stage and perform the scene in full Restoration style. Here are just a few suggestions:

- *The Way of the World* by William Congreve, Act Two, Scene Six
- *The Beaux' Stratagem* by George Farquhar, Act Five, Scene Two
- *The Rivals* by RB Sheridan, Act Three, Scene Three
- *The Country Wife* by William Wycherley, Act Two, Scene One

12.4 MELODRAMA

When the first theatre opened in Australia in Sydney in 1832, it immediately began to stage the type of play that was already dominating theatre everywhere else – the melodrama.

Melodrama in theatre and literature involves narratives that have exaggerated plots designed to excite the emotions of readers and audiences. Most melodramas do not have any significant character development or complex character interaction. The storyline in a traditional melodrama can be described as simple and stereotyped. The name melodrama comes from the Greek *melos* meaning music, and *drama*; music is a major feature of melodramas on stage.

The first melodramas were written and performed in France. Their playwright, Guilbert de Pixérécourt, said he wrote plays for people who could not read. The melodramas that dominated 19th-century theatre were a mixture of violence, romance and tear-jerking sentiment, with short scenes full of action. The plays used spectacular settings, stage effects and music to increase their impact.

Melodrama swept through the theatre world, dominating the stages of every country for almost a century. Thousands of melodramas were churned out by writers everywhere. Although great plays, such as the works of Shakespeare, were often revived, they did not fill the theatres as melodramas did. The popularity of melodrama led to the building of new theatres worldwide. In London, for example, there were only 10 theatres operating in 1807, but by 1870 there were 30.

THE STRUCTURE OF A MELODRAMA

The stories of melodramas all involved an evil villain, an innocent and long-suffering heroine and a brave and honest hero. After numerous wicked actions, the villain was always defeated and goodness always triumphed.

MELODRAMA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF STAGECRAFT

Gas lighting replaced candles in theatres, beginning with the Lyceum Theatre in London in 1803. This meant that stage lighting could now be really bright and properly controlled. There were just two disadvantages: the burning gas produced an unpleasant smell and it caused many fires.

Melodrama demanded spectacular scenery and stage effects, and as a result, there were rapid advances in stage design during the 19th century. Some of the effects created on stage included forest fires, earthquakes and volcanoes. Costumes became more and more elaborate, but also much more historically accurate.

THE ACTOR-MANAGER

Melodrama, like Restoration theatre, saw the dominance of the actor-manager, the man who owned his own theatre company and often his own theatre, directed the plays and acted the leading roles. The other actors were often relegated to being just mobile stage scenery, their lines ruthlessly cut from the play. One of these actor-managers was notorious for removing every scene from Shakespeare's plays in which his own character did not appear. Yet the greatest of these men, including Charles Kemble, Charles Kean and Henry Irving, were outstanding actors. The 19th century also saw the appearance of superb actresses such as Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry and the French actor Sarah Bernhardt.

During the period of gas illumination in theatres in Europe and America, more than 400 theatres burned down.

THE BEGINNINGS OF REALISM

Although melodrama dominated world theatre, it was not the only type of play being performed. In each country, classic plays were revived, and in different places throughout Europe there were experiments in more realistic types of staging and writing. Perhaps the most famous innovator was George II, the ruler of the Duchy of Saxe-Meiningen in Germany. He took control of the state theatre company in 1866 and created a style of ensemble acting in which actors worked together with dedication and discipline unlike anything that had been seen before. The company toured Europe between 1874 and 1890, and had a powerful influence on the next great period of theatre.



WORKSHOP 12.4.1: DESIGN FOR A MELODRAMA

A number of melodramas about Ned Kelly were written and performed in Australia, including *The Kelly Gang* by Dan Barry, *Outlaw Kelly* by Lancelot Booth, *The Kelly Gang; or the Career of Ned Kelly, the Ironclad Bushranger of Australia* by Arnold Denham and *Ned Kelly* by Harry Leader and Bernard Espinasse.

Exercise: Imagine you are a theatre designer for the staging of a Ned Kelly play. Research the story of Kelly and create a series of concepts for one of the elements of production (lighting, set, costume) for a performance of a Kelly play.



12.4.1 NFSA: *The Story of the Kelly Gang*

12.5 REALISM AND THE THEATRE OF IDEAS

The last half of the 19th century was a time of enormous change in the world, and writers began to emerge whose plays reflected these changes and their effects on society. The comic strip unreality of melodrama was washed away by a flood of superb plays that dealt with the real problems and concerns of people, and which used dialogue that sounded like everyday speech.

REALISTIC PLAYS

The first of the new playwrights to emerge was Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) from Norway. He wrote a series of plays that were brilliant, detailed portraits of life in a small town, as well as fascinating studies of individual human behaviour. Two of his most famous plays, *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*, show the lives of women trapped in destructive marriages. Hedda destroys both herself and the people around her, while in *A Doll's House*, Nora finds the courage and willpower to leave her husband and children. Ibsen's writing was extraordinarily modern for depicting the lives of women.

Ibsen's plays caused a storm of protest in a number of countries before they were accepted. *A Doll's House*, in particular, was widely criticised as an attack on

family, marriage and decency in the patriarchal societies of Europe at the time. Hedda's suicide at the end of *Hedda Gabler* was condemned as shocking and disgraceful, and a terrible example to married women.

Ibsen's plays were followed by the works of another Scandinavian playwright, August Strindberg (1849–1912) of Sweden. His plays *The Father*, *Miss Julie* and *The Dance of Death* are bitter, grim and powerful studies of people who are in despair. *The Dance of Death*, in particular, is merciless in its picture of a disintegrating marriage in which the husband and wife hate each other.

In England, George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), a great supporter of Ibsen, wrote a number of plays dealing with social problems such as slums and prostitution, using humour as his weapon. Many of his plays were comedies of manners, which satirised the behaviour of society at the time. *Pygmalion*, which was made into the Broadway musical and subsequent film *My Fair Lady*, is the hilarious story of a working-class cockney girl who is transformed into a society lady while mocking the attitudes and behaviour of the middle class. Other plays had comic elements but were also savage attacks on cruelty, violence and evil. *Heartbreak House* shows the greed and inhumanity of people who supported and made money out of the First World War.

In Ireland, two great playwrights emerged: John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey. Their plays are authentically Irish in their characters and use of language but are concerned with universal human problems. Synge's short play *Riders to the Sea* is the greatest one-act tragedy ever written – the grim story of the endless deaths at sea of the poor fishermen of the western isles of Ireland.

The new realism took root everywhere including Russia. There, a doctor named Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) wrote a series of fascinating, intimate studies of middle-class families who felt the world around them changing but were unable to cope with it. *The Cherry Orchard*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters* and *The Seagull* are superb realistic plays. They were also vital in the development of the new theatre of realism. Chekhov concentrated primarily on mood and characters, showing that they could be just as important in creating effective theatre as complicated plots or dramatic action. The inner lives and conflicts of his characters were the focus of his plays, and this form of psychological drama became one of the major threads of 20th-century theatre.

THE REALISTIC STAGE

At the time that Chekhov's first plays were produced in Russia, a young actor named Constantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) was working to change the old, melodramatic style of acting in the Russian theatre. In 1898 Stanislavski founded the Moscow Arts Theatre with the aim of making the theatre more real and believable.

Stanislavski insisted that everything that happened on stage must appear to be real. The fantastic, painted backdrops of the old melodramas were abandoned, and solid walls and doors appeared on stage. Real rooms were created with all the furniture and belongings people would find in their own homes. A great deal of care was taken to make sure that the characters' costumes were completely authentic, and lighting and sound effects were also as realistic as possible.

NATURALISM

Although this term is often used interchangeably with realism when talking about the theatre, the naturalistic movement had a separate dramatic development with its own philosophy and characteristics.

Émile Zola (1840–1902), the great French novelist and playwright, first outlined the elements of naturalism in 1873. He argued that all drama should be based on scientific observations of human behaviour and should exactly reproduce real life on stage. The first naturalistic plays did this, putting on stage a 'slice of life' that attempted to exactly duplicate the behaviour of ordinary people in their daily lives. This meant that a two-hour play depicted just two hours in the lives of the characters, and the actors tried to become those characters, living rather than performing them. The audience were observers and for them it was like looking through an invisible 'fourth wall' of someone's house, watching people go about their lives.

Because naturalistic acting involved 'living' the life of the character, many of the rules of traditional acting were broken. Actors could perform with their backs to the audience, mumble or whisper lines and use violent language and actions.

During the last 20 years of the 19th century, a number of genuinely naturalistic plays were staged, and in this period a number of major playwrights wrote plays that were strongly influenced by naturalism, including Strindberg, Chekhov and Gorky. However, naturalism in its strictest form as a 'slice of life' was not inherently interesting or dramatic enough for audiences. Naturalism was soon absorbed into realism, which still aimed to make plays appear real, but used a range of dramatic techniques to intensify life onstage. Most importantly, realistic plays focused only on the most dramatic moments of the action and moved flexibly through time and place. In performance, realistic plays also increasingly used non-naturalistic techniques including music, lighting and simplified or symbolic staging to heighten the drama.



12.5.1 Two productions of Chekhov plays by the Moscow Arts Theatre: a scene from *Uncle Vanya* (above) and the final scene from *The Seagull* (below). Both productions were by Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko.

Both images: Sputnik



WORKSHOP 12.5.1: HEDDA GABLER

Exercise: The introduction to Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is extremely detailed. Source a copy of the text and read the introduction. Read the introduction a second time, this time taking notes about important features of the set. Sketch a set design, ensuring all items in the description are covered.



WORKSHOP 12.5.2: PERFORMING NATURALISTICALLY

Exercise 1: Choose one of the following Australian plays, or a play of your own choice, and rehearse and perform the scene identified in a naturalistic style.

Exercise 2: In small groups, reflect on the experience of naturalistic plays from the point of view of an audience member.

Exercise 3: Based on creating a performance, watching other performances and the discussion in Exercise 2, write a short reflection on the challenges of creating a truly naturalistic performance.

Suggested scripts:

- *Sugarland* by Rachael Coopes and Wayne Blair
Scene Three – School Classroom – Afternoon pp. 17–26
Scene Twelve – The Gorge – Afternoon pp. 52–64
- 'Halal-el-Mashakel' by Linda Jaivin in *Staging Asylum* edited by Emma Cox
Scene One pp. 127–30
Scene Three pp. 132–3
- 'Windmill Baby' by David Milroy in *Contemporary Indigenous Plays*
Scene Three: The Broadcast pp. 178–9
Scene Six: Errol Spills the Beans pp. 189–91
- *A Town Named War Boy* by Ross Mueller
Scene Five pp. 9–12
Scene Thirteen pp. 30–1
- *Letters to Lindy* by Alana Valentine
Marilyn Nolan [FIGURE 1]: 17th February 1986 pp. 3–4
Judy [FIGURE 2]: 3 Oct, 1980 pp. 4–5
Lindy pp. 16–17
Gordon [FIGURE 1] pp. 34–5

CASE STUDY 4.1: SPORT FOR JOVE



Who is Sport for Jove?

Sport for Jove (SFJ) Theatre was founded by Damien and Bernadette Ryan in 2009, initially performing outdoors in Sydney's west over the summer months, before developing a full year cycle of plays and education work. Terry Karabelas joined the company in its first season as Co-Artistic Director with Damien, and a repertory cast of young performers have been, and remain, the heart of the company's development. The Company Manager is Cat Dibley and she and Damien look after the day-to-day running of the company, along with its chairperson Gordon Stalley and Finance Director Gai Strouthos.



SPORT FOR JOVE
THEATRE CO.

Where is Sport for Jove based?

Sport for Jove Theatre has its headquarters in Surry Hills in Sydney, and is resident theatre company at the Seymour Centre. From there it performs throughout New South Wales and beyond, with a particular focus on bringing professional theatre to audiences in Western Sydney.



All images on page: Sport for Jove Theatre Company Ltd

C4.1.1 **a** Damien Ryan (Managing Director and Managing Artistic Director) and **b** Bernadette Ryan (Director)



- C4.1.1 Sport for Jove
- C4.1.2 Sport for Jove: Education
- C4.1.3 Sport for Jove: Gallery

SFJ makes the old new again, tackling classical works and theatre of language and poetry and bringing large ensemble plays to new audiences in a unique style. It is acclaimed for its physical dynamism, clarity, accessibility, music and sense of invention and originality. The company's summer outdoor Shakespeare festivals have become an essential part of Sydney's cultural calendar and are revered by audiences and critics alike. Shakespeare, Marlowe, ancient Greek works and modern classics are among the works SFJ has created in the past eight years, along with a commitment to bringing new Australian works to the stage. SFJ also demonstrates a great commitment to giving young artists a platform to explore and present their work alongside professional veterans. Education is a huge part of SFJ's artistic mission, performing for and discussing theatre with many thousands of Australian students every year.

An Interview with Damien Ryan

What is Sport for Joves' approach to theatre making?

SFJ is a repertory theatre company, committed to offering audiences access to the lost tradition of 'playing in rep' – an exciting perspective on storytelling and the versatility of the actor's and designer's art. It is an 'actor's company', a place where actors can feel they create and possess the work. SFJ believes theatre should be a transportive and transformative medium, elevating audiences beyond naturalism or realism into a live engagement with poetry, heightened language and ensemble imagery.

How do you approach a text?

Firstly, the text is everything and releasing the inherent spirit of that text is always our hope when the first audience is sitting in front of the play. I try to imagine what the writer felt when they finished the play, what it meant to them to communicate something of value to them. I mine the text in enormous detail, reading it and re-reading it for every aspect of its structure, the style and minute detail of its language, its imagery and why it operates the way it does, defining what is at stake in the play, moment by moment and looking at the story from every character's perspective. I then do copious amounts of research – into the play's origins and the context of the writer's work, into the world the play is exploring (such as the 'New World' and the 'age of discovery' in Jacobean England for Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or the advent of democracy and the nature of theatre in Greece for Sophocles' *Antigone*). Research is the most inspiring way to develop ideas for any production, in my experience.

I look for and explore, in rehearsal and in design, the contemporary resonances of the play – what it might mean to us now; why are we staging the play at this moment? However, the word 'relevance' is never a huge concern. The secret to relevance, in my opinion, is seeking, in every moment, the most human concerns of a play, the fundamental behaviours of people, their relationships, their contradictions and impulses and revealing them as clearly and powerfully as possible in performance. A play that tells the truth about human beings, staged for other human beings, can never be irrelevant.

I study other art forms such as painting, music, poetry, photography and film for influences and perspectives on the ideas in the play and I bring these influences into the rehearsal room to expand the imaginative richness of the world we are creating for the actors.

Rehearsals are then a process of pulling the mystery of the play apart on the floor with a group of actors. We support them in every choice and encourage them to be bold and confident in their work. We always serve the text and search for the dramatic

shape of each scene, the rhythm of the text and what each character is risking or fighting for in the story. We then put the pieces back together again as clearly, accessibly and inventively as possible, while hopefully restoring the essential 'mystery' again in performance. Every great play is ambiguous in its meaning, offering multiple perspectives, provoking questions rather than supplying answers, and every great production must illuminate those questions rather than taming the play or simply telling the audience what to feel.

What are the challenges and rewards of using classic/traditional texts?

Classical texts tend to use heightened language – poetic forms with strong reliance on metaphor, assonance, alliteration and rhythm and mythological references that are not easily appreciated by contemporary audiences – along with non-naturalistic conventions of storytelling such as soliloquy, and even supernatural elements. These are both a challenge and a huge thrill for actors to tackle.

Shakespeare, for example, asks actors to play given circumstances that take on hugely imaginative proportions, well beyond the typical experience of our lives – seeing floating daggers before our eyes, resigning our crowns to usurpers, seeing magical creatures in the woods, speaking to ghosts, playing a statue that comes to life and reclaims a long-lost daughter, falling in love with one's enemy, taking a sleeping potion and waking in a tomb, flying or raising a terrifying tempest – the list goes on. To realise these ideas on stage every night in front of an audience takes extraordinary imagination, emotional depth and great technique. It is the language that expresses the size and extremity of that emotion and the struggle the character is experiencing. The actors have to find ways to express that poetry and meet that level of extremity while telling the 'truth' –



Sport for Jove Theatre Company Ltd/Seiya Taguchi

C4.1.2 *All's Well That Ends Well*, 2014

convincing the audience that the impossible or improbable is actually happening. The reward for making these apparently far-fetched ideas work on stage is the effect you can have on audiences – people in the theatre gravitate to big ideas and to profound human challenges, seeing people overcome immense obstacles and, unlike film, the theatre isn't necessarily an abstract art form, we don't have the ability to realistically shift from the battlements of Hamlet's castle overlooking a vast drop to the sea, to the interior bedrooms of the palace – we have to ask an audience to join us on an imaginative journey. When we successfully carry them along with this extraordinary language and the size of the ideas, it is a thrilling experience.

Making classical works feel fresh and new is the greatest and most rewarding task in tackling them, they still have so much to say, but we need to open the door to them for a new audience every time we stage them.

What role does improvisation play in the development of performances?

Improvisation is of huge benefit to any text and is often used in the rehearsal room, even with classical works, to explore character and the given (and sometimes extraneous) circumstances of a scene, the events that may have occurred before the play began or after, or before the crisis that ignites a scene. It is used to explore the subtext of a scene, the relationships through physical impulses or paraphrasing poetic language into your own words. We often ask actors to play a scene immediately after reading it, without script in hand, simply playing the conflicting objectives of the scene without reliance on remembering the text. This can be a useful way early in rehearsal to find what a scene is truly about at its core and the basic needs of each character in the scene, then returning to the text with these discoveries in mind. Improvisation is never about creating a product; it is a process of discovery. It is not something actors should feel nervous about. There should only be support and openness in the work and there are no wrong choices.

What role does collaboration between director, producer, actor and designers play in the development of performances (helping students to understand the collaborative nature of the theatre)?

Collaboration is everything. A play must not be micro-managed by a director. A director is there to support the actors in creating the world of the play, and the designers, producer and crew are a huge part of that process. It is extremely important that a director listens to the multiple perspectives a group of artists may have about a text, consulting, researching and exploring many options in devising the work. Theatre is a tribal art form; it takes a community to put on a play. On the rehearsal floor, a director's job is to support a process where actors take ownership of the play – a writer does not, after all, write a play thinking about the 'director', they write it thinking about actors who will embody their characters, speak their lines and play their actions. A director needs to listen to, learn from and guide the actors as they immerse themselves in the play. It is the actors who will transact with an audience on the night. A director is the 'first audience member', ensuring the play engages and makes sense.

How do they overcome obstacles in the rehearsal period (helping students to build resilience in their own theatre making)?

Obstacles are the best things about rehearsals, remember that. A good play will be challenging, how dull if it were not! The best solutions to overcoming obstacles are always being open and collaborative about what the challenge is so that everyone is working together. Research will almost always provide the new ideas that can help break through a wall in the rehearsal room, there is a world of inspiration out there and we can't remain insular – look around, think outside the box; you will find beautiful perspectives that open up things that are not working for you. Sometimes it is liberating for everyone in the room when a director does not pretend to know 'the answers' when they don't, actors love the responsibility of solving problems together. But in the end, there is simply no other alternative to working hard, working very, very hard. Making theatre is not easy and involves huge reserves of energy and perseverance. Obstacles are necessary and make our work better if we don't let them beat us!



Sport for Jove/Seiya Taguchi

C4.1.3 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2018

SECTION 5

The evolution of modern theatre

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INTRODUCTION

The period from 1900 to today produced the most incredible variety of styles and performances in the history of theatre. An extraordinary range of theatrical forms emerged all over the world during this period: some were completely new while others were revivals of traditional forms given a new life and character.

There have also been exciting and innovative changes in the way theatre is written and staged through the use of technology, innovative approaches to performance spaces, and the blending of different forms of theatre from around the world. On the whole, however, contemporary theatre practice still uses the main features of theatre as a performance art, exploring the human experience through realism.

Among the amazing variety of theatre activity in the 20th century, the dominant form of the past 100 years has undoubtedly been realism.



The core of realistic theatre is the creation of believable characters and situations that give the illusion of real life. The audience must believe in what they are seeing and hearing. They must become involved in the play by accepting the performance as a true representation of human experience and thereby empathising with the characters. In order to do this, the audience must suspend their disbelief. In suspending their disbelief, audience members know they are in a theatre watching a play, but they accept that the plot and the characters are believable and therefore 'real'.

One question facing theatre makers and practitioners in the 21st century is whether the dominance of realism will continue, or whether new performance styles will evolve or be created to transform the stage.

STANISLAVSKI TO MAGICAL REALISM

Realism as a theatrical movement actually began in the 19th century with a number of attempts to move away from the exaggerated melodrama that was dominating the stages of the world. These tentative attempts to develop a more believable form of theatre were fully realised when a young Russian named Constantin Stanislavski decided to form his own theatre company.

The theatrical revolution sparked by Stanislavski met a deep need in human beings. Through realistic performance, people are given an insight into the lives of fellow human beings that is normally not available to us. Throughout the 20th century, realism became more and more dominant in every form of drama, and this dominance continues into the 21st century despite the emergence of a fascinating range of non-realistic forms.

13.1 STANISLAVSKI'S LEGACY

Stanislavski's real name was Constantin Sergeyeovich Alekseyev and he was born in Moscow on 17 January 1863. His father was very wealthy and gave his son a private education that included frequent visits to the opera and theatre, as well as lessons in acting, singing and dancing. By the age of 14, Constantin was acting in plays in a theatre built by his father on their country estate. He took his stage name of Stanislavski from an actor he met in amateur theatre in 1885.

After finishing his education, Stanislavski started a group called the Society for Art and Literature. Between 1888 and 1897 he directed and acted in a number of the group's productions. During this early period of his life, Stanislavski became increasingly unhappy with the melodramatic style of acting that was in fashion, not only in Russia but throughout the world. As a result, he arranged to meet with a successful playwright and teacher of theatre named Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko to discuss ways of reforming Russian theatre. The meeting took place in a restaurant on 22 June 1897 and as a result they established the Moscow Arts Theatre, which aimed for a new truth and realism in the theatre. The opening production on 26 October 1898 was a tremendously popular success. The historic meeting between Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko lasted 18 hours!

In December, Stanislavski produced a play by Anton Chekhov called *The Seagull*. The play had been a complete failure at its first production three years earlier in St Petersburg. However, under Stanislavski's direction it became world famous and marked the beginning of a revolution in the theatre that made the Moscow Arts Theatre the most renowned and influential company in the world.

While Stanislavski was completely responsible for training the actors and directing the plays at the Moscow Arts Theatre, Nemirovich-Danchenko was the administrator and also chose most of the plays that the company performed in its early years. He also advised Stanislavski on the interpretation of the plays and the problems of staging them.

In 1889, Stanislavski married Maria Perevoshchikova (stage name Lilina), who went on to become a great actor with the Moscow Arts Theatre.

Getty Images/Heritage Images



13.1.1 The Moscow Arts Theatre Company, 1889. Anton Chekhov is reading *The Seagull* to members of the company. Stanislavski is seated on his right.

In 1906, as well as working as an actor and director, Stanislavski began to develop a system for training actors. In 1912 he established the First Studio, an experimental theatre for improvising plays and developing acting techniques. For the rest of his life, Stanislavski continued to work on his system for training actors as part of his involvement in the theatre.

Between August 1922 and September 1924, the Moscow Arts Theatre toured Europe and America, with Stanislavski both directing and acting. The tour made the man and his work world-renowned, and in 1924 his autobiography, *My Life in Art*, was published in London.

On 29 October 1928, Stanislavski suffered a heart attack while acting in Chekhov's play *The Three Sisters*. This forced him to give up acting, and for the rest of his life, he concentrated on directing, teaching and writing books that described his techniques for training actors. The first two books, *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*, focus on the vocal, physical and emotional skills an actor must develop. The third book, *Creating a Role*, sets out in detail how to construct a character for performance on stage.

Stanislavski, who died in Moscow on 7 August 1938, was the single most influential director in the history of theatre. Stanislavski's achievement, and his great legacy, was to develop a whole style of realistic staging and acting techniques that could be taught to other people.

STANISLAVSKI'S SYSTEM

Stanislavski applied a scientific approach to acting. He constantly observed, questioned and experimented with his own work. Every time he trained, rehearsed or went on stage, he was experimenting. The system he developed taught actors how to use skill, discipline and willpower to achieve inspiration. His aim was to train actors to be truly creative people, and the techniques he discovered through observation and experimentation allowed actors to achieve the kind of inspiration that realist acting requires.

At the core of Stanislavski's system is his insistence that actors must believe everything that is happening on stage. Most of all, they must believe in what they are doing themselves so that acting a part becomes the extraordinary experience of living the life of another person. Stanislavski called this the 'theatre of living experience' and to achieve it, actors need intensive training and complete self-control.

Throughout his life, Stanislavski continued to develop the techniques required to teach actors to achieve this experience. When he was directing a play, the stage often resembled a classroom. The actors were put through an enormous range of exercises, and new techniques were invented and tried. Plays were analysed in depth as the actors worked on creating their characters.

The aim of all the techniques was the same: to develop actors who had creative intelligence, complete self-discipline, perfect control over their voices, diction and physical movement, and the ability to create and experience the whole range of human emotions. Stanislavski urged his students and admirers not to blindly copy his system, but to develop their own methods as well. He insisted that he was not the only source of truth about acting and the theatre. In an interview with American director Harold Clurman in 1934, Stanislavski concluded by saying: 'After all my years of study and work in the theatre, I have come to the conclusion that I know nothing about it'.

Stanislavski's dedication to the theatre was total. He believed that it was important to society, brightening the dark lives of poor people and teaching them important truths. To Stanislavski, actors were people who had the vitally important job of educating society, and his commitment to this job never faltered. He worked ceaselessly, rehearsing and teaching throughout the day, then arriving at the theatre in the evening hours before the performance to prepare himself.

Stanislavski demanded the same dedication from his actors, and they were sometimes banned from the theatre for days just for being a few minutes late for rehearsal. In rehearsals, he would keep saying 'I do not believe you' if an actor's performance was not real enough. The actor would be forced to repeat the scene until Stanislavski was satisfied. Sometimes this would take hours. He would accept nothing less than complete emotional truth. Stanislavski applied the same standards to himself.

After the communists seized power in Russia in 1917, Stanislavski continued to direct plays and work as he had always done. In the late 1920s, he was under tremendous pressure to stage plays that he regarded as worthless communist propaganda. He refused, even though it could have meant being sent to one of Stalin's work camps (gulag) where millions of Russians were dying. In the end, this integrity was rewarded, not punished. Perhaps because Stanislavski was so admired throughout the world, the communists decided that his system of training actors and directing plays was scientific, and so fitted in with communist philosophy. By the time of his death, Stanislavski was as honoured in his own country as he was elsewhere.

An actor once asked Stanislavski to demonstrate a piece of acting technique, and then interrupted Stanislavski's demonstration by calling out, 'I don't believe you!'. Instead of being angry, Stanislavski simply replied, 'Really? Then I shall have to work on this at home'.



WORKSHOP 13.1.1: REFLECTION

Exercise: Working individually, write a short reflection on how you attempt to achieve realism on the stage. Share your reflection with another member of the class.

13.2 SELECTIVE REALISM

As the 20th century progressed, a number of major playwrights emerged whose writing was essentially realistic, but who were much more flexible in the way they presented real life on stage. In their plays, telling a story in sequence became far less important as time and place became fluid. Some of these playwrights also intermingled elements of the emerging forms of surrealism and expressionism in their realistic plays. The most significant of these selective realists were the three American playwrights Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.

EUGENE O'NEILL

Unquestionably one of the great playwrights of the 20th century, O'Neill used a range of styles in his writing, which is probably unequalled by any other writer in the past 100 years. Writing at the rate of almost one play a year for 20 years, he created a number of masterpieces ranging from expressionism in *The Hairy Ape*, through to a rewriting of classic Greek theatre in *Mourning Becomes Electra* and the pure naturalism of *A Long Day's Journey into Night*.

Getty Images/Robbie Jack



13.2.1 Helen Mirren (as Christine Mannon) and Tim Pigott-Smith (as Brigadier General Ezra Mannon) in the production *Mourning Becomes Electra* at the National Theatre, London, 2003

O'Neill varied the degree of reality he presented in his plays and also frequently employed non-realistic elements to suit the context of a particular play. While he drew on a range of theatrical influences, O'Neill also made extensive use of his own personal experiences in his writing. Despite the extraordinary range of styles in his plays, all O'Neill's work demands realistic acting in the form developed by Stanislavski, but also requires the actors to be flexible in their creation of character.

ARTHUR MILLER

Miller's writing was also an attempt to write modern plays that were true tragedies in the classic sense: plays that were real and personal, but also had universal meaning.

Most of Miller's work is strongly realistic in nature and requires the creation of totally believable characters on stage. The influence of Ibsen is apparent in Miller's use of social realism. However, in the play *Death of a Salesman*, there are flashbacks and other flexible uses of the realistic form, and the set is expressionistic in style – the skeleton of a house where the actors walk through the walls. By contrast, *The Crucible* uses a formal language structure that Miller invented for his 16th-century characters, and a scene in which a group of girls pretend to be possessed by the devil demands highly stylised movement.

Miller's plays were a powerful challenge to the political and social structures of America in the 1940s and 1950s, dealing with subjects such as businessmen profiteering from the Second World War and the persecution of people suspected of being communists by the House Un-American Activities Committee.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Perhaps the most poetic of realist writers, Tennessee Williams also used a range of styles within a basically realist framework. Williams's first successful play, *The Glass Menagerie*, is a memory play using flashbacks and an expressionist set. His greatest play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, appears to be relentlessly realistic, yet it is also a powerfully symbolic play with layers of meaning emerging from its structure.

Williams's trademark is the use of long monologues spoken by his characters, which reveal their innermost thoughts and feelings. It is the personal suffering and sense of loss of these characters that are the heart of Williams's writing. Their monologues appear realistic and true to the characters, effectively catching the rhythms of speech distinctive to the southern states of the USA. However, they are in fact brilliantly constructed and extraordinarily poetic in their impact and require acting of the highest order.

OTHER SELECTIVE REALIST PLAYS

In the 1940s and 1950s, selective realism dominated the theatre and a number of outstanding works of theatre were staged. In England, John Osborne's plays combined intense realism with powerful monologues reminiscent of Tennessee Williams. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, by Ray Lawler, first performed in 1955, contained the elements of naturalism, poetic monologue and symbolism characteristic of selective realism.

Selective realism remains a potent force in the theatre of reality. The majority of plays being staged in mainstream theatres in England, Australia and the USA are still written in this form today. However, this dominance is being challenged by the latest evolution in realistic theatre.



WORKSHOP 13.2.1: ANALYSING TEXT

Exercise: Choose one of the playwrights and texts below. As a class:

- Conduct a muted reading of the first scene in the play.
- Discuss how the playwright has used selective realism in the play.

Eugene O’Neil

- *A Long Day’s Journey into Night*
- *The Hairy Ape*
- *Mourning Becomes Electra*

Arthur Miller

- *The Crucible*
- *Death of a Salesman*

Tennessee Williams

- *The Glass Menagerie*

Ray Lawler

- *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*

13.3 MAGICAL REALISM

In the second half of the 20th century, theatre became increasingly complex with playwrights and directors freely mixing different forms of theatre within a single play. It is hard to put a single label on many modern performance works – the word ‘eclectic’ is often used to describe plays that include a blending of styles. There is one blend, however, which can be clearly identified as belonging to the theatre of reality, and that is magical realism.

Emerging in the 1960s as part of the theatre revolution that accompanied the hippie counterculture movement, these plays are basically realistic but have a completely non-realistic element in them, which is used by the playwright to transcend or move outside everyday reality. Surreal dream and nightmare sequences are often used in magical realist plays, and these dreams are often more important in the play than apparently real events. The appearance of supernatural characters, such as ghosts, gods and spirits, is also common and ordinary characters often have extraordinary powers, such as the ability to read minds, to heal or to see into the future.

MAGICAL REALISM IN AUSTRALIA

Australian playwrights have written a number of plays that use magical realism including *Away* by Michael Gow, *Stories in the Dark* by Debra Oswald and *Masquerade* adapted by Kate Mulvany. In each of these plays, ordinary people are affected by magical events.

Magical realism requires credible and intense acting. The suspension of disbelief is just as important in this style of realism as it is in totally naturalistic plays. It also demands of the actors and the audience both emotional commitment and imagination in responding to the intermingling of realism and ‘magic’ on stage.



13.3.1 *Away*

13.3.2 *What I wrote*: Debra Oswald



13.3.3 Sydney Festival: *Masquerade*



Griffin Theatre Company's *Masquerade* by Kate Mulvany, based on the book by Kit Williams. Photo by Brett Boardman, 2015.

13.3.1 In *Masquerade*, Tessa and Joe (in the background) read a fairy tale and as the play develops, the magical world they read about intertwines with their own



WORKSHOP 13.3.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Away by Michael Gow

Away was written in the 1980s but is actually set in the 1960s, when Australia was embroiled in the Vietnam War and was about to be changed forever as the hippie movement reached our shores. The action of the play follows three families who 'go away' on holidays to the beach for Christmas in 1967.

The lives of the members of each family are changing as the holiday begins, just as Australia was changing at that time. Coral and Roy are a couple whose son has just been killed in Vietnam and Coral is unable to accept his death. Roy is the principal of the local high school where the children of the other two families have just been involved in a performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the following scene, Coral wanders on stage after the school play is over, thinking about the performance and remembering her dead son.

Exercise 1: Read the text carefully and identify just how realistic it is in style. Is it totally realistic or an example of selective or magical realism?

Exercise 2: Realise and generate the extract, making the character as real and believable as possible, but using a staging and performance style appropriate to the degree of realism in the particular text.

Away by Michael Gow

ACT 1 SCENE 2

[Outside. CORAL, alone.]

CORAL When that woman woke up and saw that donkey at her feet I thought my heart would break. I had to wipe away tears. To wake up and find something you want so badly. Even an animal. And then she woke up again and saw her husband and loved him. That boy! In that blue light the shadows on his face and neck were like bruises. He looked so sick yet so wonderful, so white, so cold and burning. 'What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?' I kept saying it over and over in the dark. All these children, having fun, playing and me sitting there in the dark wiping away tears. I could hardly watch them. Their legs and arms painted gold. And that boy's hair, so black. And his smile. 'What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?' Is it better for them to die like that? Looking like gods? Burning, gold, white. What's that word they always say in those plays? Alas?

[She sighs.]

Alas.

In the scene below, Coral and Roy arrive home after the school play and he tries to convince her that it is time to end the mourning and bitterness over the death of their son.

ACT 2 SCENE 3

ROY Please, please stop doing it to me. I didn't send him. He had to go. Would you rather not pay the price for the life we have? We could just lie down in the street, defenceless, and let whoever wanted to come and take what we have. Would that have been better for you? Would you have been happy then? Jesus, Coral, you're too selfish. We were picked out to pay. I can't help that. We've paid. I can't bring him back. So we have a duty to go on with what we have. Maybe we should even be proud? We're living in a country with one of the highest standards of living on Earth and we have shown ourselves willing to defend that standard.

Away by Michael Gow, copyright © Michael Gow. Reproduced with the permission from Currency Press Pty Ltd, Sydney Australia, www.currency.com.au



WORKSHOP 13.3.2: AWAY

Choose another scene from *Away* by Michael Gow; for example, Act 2, Scene 1.

Exercise 1: Read the text carefully and identify just how realistic it is in style. Is it totally realistic or an example of selective or magical realism?

Exercise 2: Realise and generate the extract, making the character as real and believable as possible, but using a staging and performance style appropriate to the degree of realism in the particular text.



WORKSHOP 13.3.3: MAGICAL REALISM IN AUSTRALIAN TEXTS

Choose a contemporary Australian script that uses magical realism. Either choose one you are familiar with or one of the suggestions below.

- *When the Rain Stops Falling* by Andrew Bovell, Currency Press, Sydney, 2008
- *Life Without Me* by Daniel Keene, Currency Press, Sydney, 2010
- *Masquerade* by Kate Mulvany, Currency Press, Sydney, 2015
- *Gwen in Purgatory* by Tommy Murphy, Currency Press, Sydney, 2010
- *Stories in the Dark* by Debra Oswald, Currency Press, Sydney, 2008
- *The Trolleys* by Sarah West, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2015
- 'Cinderella' by Matthew Whittet in *Downstairs at Belvoir Volume 2*, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2014

Exercise 1: Read the text carefully and identify how magical realism is used in the text.

Exercise 2: Realise and generate the extract, making the character as real and believable as possible, but using a staging and performance style appropriate to the degree of magical realism in the particular text.

SURREALISM, CRUELTY AND THE ABSURD

The most startling, original and often dramatic movement to emerge in the theatre in the 20th century was undoubtedly surrealism. The word ‘surreal’ means beyond or outside normal reality and that is exactly what surrealism in the theatre involves – experiences and characters that are strange and extraordinary. In surreal plays, everyday events and characters are distorted and fractured so that they appear completely unpredictable, weird or sometimes even totally bizarre and incomprehensible.

14.1 SURREALISM: THEATRE OF DREAMS

At its heart, surrealism is concerned with exploring the irrational and hidden side of human experience – our dreams and nightmares, our subconscious mind and our deepest emotions. This means that surreal plays seldom have clear storylines, recognisable settings or predictable action, and the characters are neither normal nor realistic. Instead, we are taken into dream worlds where chaos and absurdity dominate, and the plays affect us as dreams do, disturbing our view of the world and challenging our understanding of reality.

The surrealist movement began in the early part of the 20th century with an attempt by painters and writers to reveal the interior world of the mind, particularly our subconscious mind and most of all our dreams. The surrealists were strongly influenced by Freud’s psychoanalytical theories and his emphasis on the significance of dreams in revealing our true selves.

Some genuinely surreal plays were staged between 1900 and 1930. These plays used strange, puzzling images and movement on stage, fragmented and incomprehensible dialogue, and had plots that were often confusing or impossible for audiences to understand. However, the most interesting surreal drama at this time was happening on film, and a number of extraordinary silent films were made that were authentically dreamlike and unreal, including *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* and *The Blood of a Poet*.

The development of surrealism spanned the whole of the 20th century and its impact on the theatre, and on cinema, has been highly significant. Whole styles of

writing and performance grew out of the surrealist movement, including theatre of cruelty and the absurd. The other most significant, non-realistic forms of theatre that have developed in the past century – ideological theatre and the theatre of transformation – were both profoundly influenced by the surrealist movement. It is now extremely common for most plays, even the most realistic, to contain surreal elements in their writing, direction or design. The use of dream sequences has become particularly popular in modern plays as a way of showing what a character is actually thinking and/or feeling.

There are also a number of creative and exciting theatre companies throughout the world today that are truly surreal in their performance work, including Philippe Genty's company in France, Zen Zen Zo in Australia and Robert Wilson in the USA. In addition, much of the experimentation in multimedia theatre at the moment is focused on using light, film, computer imaging and sound to create stunning surreal experiences for the audience.

SURREALISM IN AUSTRALIA

Two Australian surreal playwrights are Jenny Kemp and Daniel Keene. Jenny Kemp's *The Black Sequin Dress* was first staged in 1996. In the play, a woman enters a nightclub and slips and falls. The nightclub becomes a surreal underworld and she is falling into madness. The play takes us into a world of memories, desires, dreams, fantasies and myths.

Daniel Keene is a multi-award-winning playwright who has written plays in a number of genres including surrealism. Keene's surreal plays include *Life Without Me* and *Oedipus Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, and the monologues *O Jim*, *A Foundling* and *Kafka's Breath*.

Black Sequin Productions: Jeff Busby



14.1.1 A scene from Jenny Kemp's *The Black Sequin Dress*.

SYMBOLISM

From the crown in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to the slamming of the door in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the use of symbols is common to all plays, and is one of the unique features of the theatre.

Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg experimented with making symbolic objects and characters a central part of their plays, so that an important non-realistic

element was introduced into the text. The title of Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken* suggests something beyond normal realism, and in fact the play is strongly symbolic in form. Two of Strindberg's plays, *A Dream Play* and *Ghost Sonata*, were dream fantasies exploring the nature of reality and illusion. This symbolism marked the beginning of surrealist drama.

At exactly the same time that Ibsen and Strindberg were turning away from realism in their plays in the first decade of the 20th century, two outstanding theatre designers were also experimenting with symbolic form in their designs of sets, lighting and costumes. Adolphe Appia (1862–1928), in Europe, designed for opera rather than theatre, but he wrote extensively on the whole field of stage design and his writing had a profound effect on theatre design. Appia believed that the design of sets, lighting and costumes should not be realistic but symbolic, representing the atmosphere of the play, the nature of the action and the emotions of the actors. He used ramps and platforms to create a set, rather than flats and furniture, and his lighting designs concentrated on darkness and light, and powerful colours to symbolise the feeling of the play.

Working at the same time as Appia, but independently of him, the Englishman Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) created a number of designs for theatres in different parts of Europe which also concentrated on light, colour and texture rather than traditional stage design. Craig used different stage levels and screens to replace flats and furniture, and his designs for each play were based on the atmosphere and feeling that the play generated, not the actual location or period. All Craig's designs were intended to create visual symbols that would help to convey the meaning of the play.

A number of major stage directors also began experimenting with symbolism in the period from 1900 to 1915. In Russia, Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) conducted a series of experiments in what he called 'anti-realistic theatre', and symbolist acting and staging were a significant part of these experiments. Stanislavski himself invited Craig to Moscow to design the Moscow Art Theatre's production of *Hamlet* in 1912. The collaboration was not a happy one, with Stanislavski rejecting or changing many of Craig's symbolist designs. However, the production of *Hamlet* did run for 400 performances and influenced other directors and designers to introduce symbolist elements into their work.

EARLY SURREALISM IN FRANCE

In 1896, just as symbolism was entering the writing and directing of plays, an extraordinary piece of theatre was staged in France which had an important impact on the development of surrealism. Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* was about the murder of the King of Poland, but that is



Alamy Stock Photo/John Warburton-Lee Photography

14.1.2 The French manager from Jean Cocteau's *Parade* was designed by Picasso.

where all connection with reality ended. The actors performed the play as if they were puppets. The performance style involved wild caricature and extreme satire unlike anything seen on stage before. The set was painted with bizarre illustrations of the inside and outside of a room, with palm trees, a snake and a skeleton hanging from gallows all visible. A number of the characters in the play were portrayed by life-sized puppets made of cane, which were eventually thrown off the stage.

There were only two performances of *Ubu Roi* and they caused a storm of controversy. The play was not staged again in Jarry's lifetime. However, it had a profound effect on those who saw it and others who read the script. Two French artists in particular, Guillaume Apollinaire and Jean Cocteau, subsequently wrote plays that used many of the surreal elements Jarry had woven into his play. Most significant of all, when Antonin Artaud founded his theatre of cruelty in 1927, he named it the Theatre Alfred Jarry.



WORKSHOP 14.1.1: SURREALISM

Exercise 1: Working in groups, create a realistic improvisation about an accident in which someone is injured, using believable dialogue and action.

Exercise 2: Now recreate the improvisation as a nightmare, using surreal sounds and body movements. Have some members of the group take on non-human roles, such as objects that come to life, machines or strange creatures.



WORKSHOP 14.1.2: SURREAL ANIMALS

Playwrights have used animals to create surreal plays from the time of Aristophanes (*The Frogs*, *The Birds* and *The Wasps*) through to modern musicals such as *Cats* and *The Lion King*. These animal characters satirise human behaviour, creating moments of humour.

Exercise: In small groups, generate a performance that satirises one aspect of human behaviour through the use of animal characters. You can heighten the surrealism by incorporating a dream sequence and/or symbolism.

14.2 THEATRE OF CRUELTY

Antonin Artaud's extraordinary, imaginative ideas have been a major influence in the world of theatre and have given us completely new ways of staging and performing plays.

Antonin Artaud was born in 1896. From his earliest days as an actor and director, Artaud experimented with new theatrical forms. All his revolutionary ideas about theatre and about life crystallised into a single dramatic theory that Artaud called the 'theatre of cruelty'. He wrote a series of essays, letters and articles about it, which were published in 1938 as a book entitled *The Theatre and Its Double*.

Artaud's theories had a profound influence after his death, but in his lifetime he had very little chance to put them into practice. In 1927 he formed his own theatre

company with the writer Roger Vitrac. Their theatre opened on 1 June 1927 with a one-act play by Artaud and a full-length play by Vitrac. Lack of success and money quickly put an end to this theatre. In 1935 he was able to raise the money for a play he wrote and directed, and in which he acted the leading role. The play was a critical and financial failure.

The rest of Artaud's life was spent largely in poverty and despair, marked by long periods of mental illness. All his attempts to create a theatre of magic, beauty and power that would change the hearts of people ended in failure. In many ways, his was a failed life, yet his legacy changed the world of theatre and left us with ways of seeing and communicating that enlarge our understanding of ourselves and others.

Artaud saw the world he lived in as one in desperate need of change, a world of people all mad, desperate and sick. It is important to remember that Artaud's perception of the world was not uncommon in Europe in the 1930s. His generation had lived through the First World War – 'the war to end all wars' – in which some 15 million people had died. They had already experienced the Great Depression, when the economies of the world's richest nations had suddenly disintegrated in 1929, leaving tens of millions of people unemployed, homeless and hopeless. Worst of all had been the rise to power of ruthless dictators – Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler, Franco – who threatened to destroy human liberty and world peace.

Artaud's view of the world as being full of lies, aimlessness, meanness and hypocrisy closely echoes the philosophy of existentialism. This philosophy was based on the writings of various philosophers, including the Frenchman Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote plays as well as novels and philosophical works. Sartre believed that human life has no intrinsic meaning. He totally denied the existence of any God, any reason for living and any pattern to human life. We are born with nothing and return to nothing. Sartre argued that human beings must face up to the pointlessness and absurdity of their lives, and then they will be free to take actions and make decisions that reflect the terrible reality of existence.

While Artaud shared this view of the world, he believed that it was possible to change that world through his theatre. Artaud saw a direct connection between the theatre and life: he thought of them as mirrors, or 'doubles', each reflecting the other. If civilisation was sick, then so was the theatre that reflected it and both must change. Artaud believed that if the world of theatre could be transformed by him, then the outside world, which he found so desperate, would also be altered by his theatre of cruelty.

To do this, Artaud planned 'an assault on the senses' – using lights, music and sound in the same way as modern rock concerts do. Rather than use scripts, Artaud planned to improvise his theatre of cruelty plays, basing them on important political and social issues happening in the world. He also suggested drawing on themes from major plays from the past.

Artaud wanted to create a dream world on stage using only masks, striking costumes and symbolic objects distorted into surreal and nightmare shapes. He wanted to place the audience in the centre of the auditorium with the action of the play happening all around them.

Although he never had the chance to realise his visions on stage, a multitude of playwrights, directors and theatre companies have drawn on his ideas ever since his death to bring their work to life and to challenge audiences.

Artaud said: 'The true purpose of the theatre is to create myths, to express life in its immense universal aspect'. He believed that theatre could be used to reveal the truth about human existence.



14.2.1 Antonin Artaud as Jean-Paul Marat during filming of *Napoléon vu par Abel Gance* in 1925.



WORKSHOP 14.2.1: ARTAUD INSPIRED PERFORMANCE

Artaud wanted to change the world through theatre using masks, striking costumes and symbolic objects distorted into surreal and nightmare shapes.

Exercise: Working in small groups, choose a topic or idea that is of political or social importance. Create a short three- to five-minute performance using the style of theatre of cruelty.

14.3 THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Artaud never achieved his creative vision of a radically different type of theatre. However, after his death, a new form of playwriting emerged which was profoundly influenced by his ideas. It was called the 'theatre of the absurd'.

In fact, a number of very different dramatists and plays were associated with this title, and there were actually two waves of absurdist writing in the decades following the Second World War. The first wave appeared in the 1940s and early 1950s, while the second wave began in the late 1950s and continued through to the early 1980s. There were significant differences in writing style, in subject matter and in types of performance between the two waves, and even between plays in each wave.

Whatever the differences, these two waves of absurdist theatre share common fundamental characteristics. First of all, absurdist theatre was essentially a genre created by a number of outstanding playwrights. Secondly, the plays all express similar strong and individual views of the world as a meaningless and threatening place for human beings to live in. In performance, the plays use a

range of startlingly original theatrical techniques that all work to communicate to audiences the playwrights' grim visions of life. In all the absurdist plays, the influence of early surrealism and the theatre of cruelty are clear and pervasive.

THE FIRST WAVE

Three major dramatists dominated the early development of absurdism. They were Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco and Jean Genet. All three men were profoundly influenced by the ideas of Artaud and by the existential philosophy of Sartre. Like Sartre and Artaud, the absurdist playwrights believed that all life was meaningless and totally random. Their plays show human beings struggling to cope with their lives in a hostile world, and in many cases simply waiting to die.

One of the reasons for the absurdist's bleak view of the world was the Second World War. The deliberate extermination of millions of Jews by the Nazis, the deaths of some 60 million people in the fighting and the use of nuclear weapons to end the war led to a widespread sense of disgust and despair, which surfaced in the first wave of absurdist plays.

Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett, the greatest of all the absurdist playwrights, is also one of the most significant playwrights of the 20th century. His plays are a despairing portrait of inadequate and often desperate human beings struggling to survive, or facing death, in a world that is bewildering and hostile. However, Beckett's extraordinary use of language transforms his plays into moving, profound and often even comic masterpieces. He weaves unique and powerful poetry out of an amazingly simple and spare use of words.

Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* was voted the most important play of the 20th century in a survey of 800 leading theatre workers conducted by Britain's National Theatre in 1998.

Eugène Ionesco

On the surface, Ionesco's plays are much funnier and less grim than Beckett's work, but there is a darker layer underneath. Simple objects, such as chairs, take on a bizarre and threatening life of their own, and everyday events and experiences slide into nightmare and surreal madness for Ionesco's characters.

Jean Genet

In Genet's plays, the characters struggle to control themselves and each other in a world that is chaotic and dangerous. Many of Genet's characters are trapped inside their own bizarre fantasies, living out their dreams and nightmares, and unable to distinguish between reality and illusion.

THE SECOND WAVE

The plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet had a profound impact on the development of Western theatre in the second half of the 20th century. Part of that impact produced a second wave of playwrights whose work was essentially absurdist in form, although

quite different from the first wave, and often very different from each other. The key figures in this second wave were Harold Pinter, Edward Albee and Tom Stoppard.

Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter's work is fascinating for its use of language, and of silence. In his plays, characters are trapped in despairing and meaningless lives and often live them out in a single room. The entrance of a stranger is always a threat, and in his early plays often led to violence. All the characters use words not to communicate but as weapons of attack and defence, and as a means of avoiding the truth. Long pauses and absolute silence are common in Pinter's plays, as communication breaks down completely.

Edward Albee

Like Pinter, Edward Albee writes about the fear and danger of living in a hostile world, a world where people hurt rather than help each other. Albee uses comedy like a scalpel: to dissect his characters and reveal the truth about them. His plays also have tragic overtones, unlike those of the other absurdist, because many of his characters have worthwhile or likeable elements; these, however, are destroyed by others or by the characters' inability to deal with reality. Only some of Albee's plays are absurdist in form.

Tom Stoppard

Many of Tom Stoppard's early one-act plays are hilariously funny, and his characters are often genuinely engaging and sympathetic. However, they still inhabit a world that is mystifying, threatening and often nightmarish. Like Pinter,

Stoppard is deeply concerned about the importance of language and the inability of humans to use words to communicate with each other. His two outstanding, full-length absurdist plays are *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Jumpers*. His later plays have been much more eclectic in style.

Melbourne Theatre Company: Shane Reid



14.3.1 Alison Bell in the 2015 MTC production of *Betrayal* by Harold Pinter. In *Betrayal*, Emma has been having an affair with Jerry, the best friend of her husband, Robert. The play begins at the end of the affair and works backwards to the start of the affair.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD TODAY

Absurdist theatre did not end with the second wave of dramatists. Rather, it became an integral part of world theatre. It is hard to identify a modern play that is exclusively absurdist, but many of the important plays of the past decade have contained strong absurdist elements, and many outstanding contemporary playwrights use absurdist ideas and techniques in

their work. Sam Shepard in the USA, Caryl Churchill in England and Michael Gow in Australia are major dramatists whose work has been profoundly influenced by absurdism.

Surrealism, from its original dreamlike form through Artaud's theatre of cruelty to absurdist drama, has been a major movement over the past century and has now become a fundamental element in modern theatre. As we move into the 21st century, we are seeing an increasing number of important new plays that weave powerful surreal elements into their basic form, and some of the most exciting theatre companies currently operating worldwide are essentially surreal in nature. If the last 100 years saw the birth and growth of surrealism, this century is likely to see its full flowering.



WORKSHOP 14.3.1: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett was born in Ireland but lived most of his life in Paris. His play *Waiting for Godot* was first produced in 1953. Fifteen years later, Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in recognition of his status as a writer, proof that the theatre of the absurd was a major force in world literature.

Waiting for Godot provoked a storm of criticism when it first appeared, for a number of reasons. Practically nothing happens during the entire play, it does not tell a story in the conventional sense and it is full of pauses and silences, strange uses of language and peculiar people.

It begins and ends with two old tramps waiting under a tree on a country road. Their names are Vladimir and Estragon, and they are waiting for Mr Godot. Another pair of characters, with the unlikely names of Pozzo and Lucky, appear and vanish. At the end of Act I, a boy enters and tells the tramps that Godot cannot come today, but will come tomorrow.

Act II repeats exactly the same pattern. Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot, attempt suicide (again) and encounter Pozzo and Lucky. The conversations are different, their suicide attempts use other methods and the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky has changed, but in essence the situation is the same. At the end of the final act, the same boy appears with the same message as in Act I.

Almost nothing happens, yet the play is extraordinarily rich and thought-provoking. If Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for God, then the play seems to hold out some hope of salvation. Yet that hope is very uncertain. Godot never appears and, even if he did, what would he give them?

On another level, the play can be taken as a direct expression of Sartre's ideas. We see that Vladimir and Estragon cannot bear to face the truth that there is nothing to wait for, no purpose or meaning in their lives. In one of the most famous speeches in the play, Pozzo cries out '... they give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more'.

In the end, *Waiting for Godot* defies simple explanation, and this is part of its power. The play is fundamentally concerned with the mystery of human existence, with our struggle to understand our lives and with the conflict between freedom and necessity. Below is part of the last scene of the play.

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett

ACT 2

[ESTRAGON draws VLADIMIR towards the tree. They stand motionless before it. Silence.]

ESTRAGON Why don't we hang ourselves?

VLADIMIR With what?

ESTRAGON You haven't got a bit of rope?

VLADIMIR No.

ESTRAGON Then we can't.

[Silence.]

VLADIMIR Let's go.

ESTRAGON Wait, there's my belt.

VLADIMIR It's too short.

ESTRAGON You could hang on to my legs.

VLADIMIR And who'd hang on to mine?

ESTRAGON True.

VLADIMIR Show all the same. [ESTRAGON loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles. They look at the cord.] It might do at a pinch. But is it strong enough?

ESTRAGON We'll soon see. Here.

[They each take an end of the cord and pull. It breaks. They almost fall.]

VLADIMIR Not worth a curse.

[Silence.]

ESTRAGON You say we have to come back tomorrow?

VLADIMIR Yes.

ESTRAGON Then we can bring a good bit of rope.

VLADIMIR Yes.

[Silence.]

ESTRAGON Didi.

VLADIMIR Yes.

ESTRAGON I can't go on like this.

VLADIMIR That's what you think.

ESTRAGON If we parted? That might be better for us.

VLADIMIR We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. *[Pause.] Unless Godot comes.*

ESTRAGON And if he comes?

VLADIMIR We'll be saved.

[VLADIMIR takes off his hat (LUCKY'S), peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.]

ESTRAGON Well? Shall we go?

VLADIMIR Pull on your trousers.

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR Pull on your trousers.

ESTRAGON You want me to pull off my trousers?

VLADIMIR Pull ON your trousers.

ESTRAGON *[Realising his trousers are down.] True.*

[He pulls up his trousers.]

VLADIMIR Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON Yes, let's go.

[They do not move.]

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett, Faber & Faber, London.

Exercise 1: Experiment with performing this scene in a range of styles – physical theatre, puppetry, black comedy, monodrama.

Try shifting between the different styles of performance from moment to moment in the scene.

Exercise 2: Working in pairs, create a modern setting and context where two people are waiting for something important to happen.

- Two people trapped in an elevator between floors that never moves and no one ever comes.
- A couple waiting at the altar to be married and no one else turns up.
- A computer game where two players are caught up in the game and can't exit from it.

EXPRESSIONISM, BRECHT AND BOAL

The second major form of non-realistic theatre to emerge in the 20th century was the theatre of reform – theatre whose basic purpose is to change the political and social structures of our world. A number of very different styles have developed under the reform umbrella. The three most significant have been: German expressionism, which began the movement; Bertolt Brecht's particular form of theatre, which he referred to as epic; and the more recent work of the Brazilian director Augusto Boal.

15.1 EXPRESSIONISM

This style of theatre began as a reaction to realism and reached its peak in Germany after the First World War. Playwrights such as Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller wrote plays in which the characters were not real people but symbols of good and evil, power and oppression, the elite and the socially disadvantaged. The dialogue they spoke expressed this lack of reality quite deliberately. The expressionist stage was bare, lit by shafts of white light against a black background. It often featured machinery, such as metal bridges that moved up and down or vast flights of stairs and platforms. The English actor, director and designer Edward Gordon Craig designed extraordinary expressionistic sets that influenced stage designers throughout the century.

Expressionism was replaced in Germany by the political theatre of Bertolt Brecht, which has become one of the major styles of contemporary theatre throughout the world. In the past 30 years, conventional political theatre has evolved into a powerful tool for social change in Africa, Asia and South America in 'theatre for development' and 'liberation theatre'.

Just like surrealism, expressionism began as a revolt against realistic theatre in the early years of the 20th century, and it was similarly influenced by developments in visual art. As with surrealism, expressionism also attempted to explore the experiences of dreams and the subconscious.

There is another important similarity. Expressionism grew and evolved throughout the 20th century, mainly due to the work of major innovators, and expressionist plays and expressionist ideas and techniques are now found in

Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* inspired many expressionist playwrights as well as painters.

the theatre worldwide. However, contemporary forms of expressionism are very different from its early beginnings and quite distinct from current styles of surreal drama.

Expressionism emerged as a theatrical form in Germany between 1890 and 1920, and it was responsible for a number of outstanding silent films, including Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. It was very much a drama of protest, glorifying youth, freedom and the individual, and attacking the strict nature and grim mechanisation of German society in the early part of the 20th century. The characters tended to have titles like 'The Mother' and 'The Worker', rather than names, and they each represented a social group rather than an individual. This strongly political nature has remained a fundamental feature of theatre of reform throughout its history.

However, the early expressionist plays also had a strongly surreal side – dreams and nightmares were important elements – and some of the first plays were almost entirely surreal in atmosphere. By 1920, however, this surreal element of expressionist theatre had largely disappeared, replaced by strong social and political themes and an emphasis on historical stories that were used to criticise current power structures and social realities.

It is worth noting that expressionist theatre did not just appear in 1900. A number of major plays written during the 19th century sowed the seeds of expressionism, most notably the work of Georg Büchner, who died in 1837. His extraordinary works *Danton's Death* and *Woyzeck* contained many expressionist elements and were strongly political in subject. It was the staging of these plays in Germany in 1902 and 1912 that inspired German writers, directors and actors to experiment with expressionist techniques and ideas.

Getty Images/Imagno



15.1.1 Expressionism on stage: the 1920s New York production of Ernst Toller's *Man and the Masses*.

A number of expressionist playwrights emerged in the period from 1900 to 1920, most notably Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller. Their plays made expressionism an international movement in the theatre and influenced some of the 20th century's greatest playwrights, including Eugene O'Neill in the USA and Sean O'Casey in Ireland. However, by that time, another German playwright and director had begun working whose plays would transform expressionism into epic theatre.



WORKSHOP 15.1.1: RESEARCH

Exercise: Choose one expressionist playwright, for example, Georg Kaiser, Eugene O'Neill, Sean O'Casey or Ernst Toller. Research their work, and the country and period in which their work is set. Identify and discuss how the chosen playwright's work expresses the early expressionist ideals of protest, glorifying youth, freedom and the individual and/or attacking the strict nature and grim mechanisation of society.

15.2 BERTOLT BRECHT: EPIC THEATRE

Born in Germany in 1898, Bertolt Brecht was 16 years old when the First World War began. This war, which killed 15 million people and ruined Germany, had a profound effect on him as a person and an artist.

Brecht served briefly in the army before the war ended in November 1918 and he saw its consequences for ordinary people after Germany was defeated. After the war, Brecht became involved in political activity and was attracted to the doctrine of socialism, which swept Europe after the communist Russian Revolution in 1917. However, Brecht saw the consequences of an attempted communist takeover in Bavaria when he was living there in 1919, which resulted in chaos and a crackdown by the army. These events led him to believe that revolution should be the result of intelligent thought and scientific investigation, and this conviction applied to his involvement in theatre as well as politics.

At the same time as his political interest was awakened, Brecht became increasingly involved in theatre. He was initially attracted to naturalistic theatre through the work of Gerhart Hauptmann in Germany and Emile Zola in France, because it focused on the lives of everyday people. However, in his first play, *Baal*, which was written in 1918, Brecht experimented with the new style of expressionist theatre; his next play, *Drums in the Night*, was also expressionist in form.

Brecht directed for the first time in 1922, but he was so arrogant as a director and so rude to the actors that he was replaced. He was later allowed to contribute to the rehearsals of *Drums in the Night* and his next play, *In the Jungle*, which opened in Munich in May 1923.

Brecht became increasingly interested in the writings of Karl Marx and was influenced by Helene Weigel, the left-wing actor who bore Brecht's first child. While politically Brecht was increasingly drawn to communism, in the theatre he continued to experiment with form, and his first major success as a playwright came in 1928 with the staging of a musical *The Threepenny Opera*. This play, based on John Gay's 1728 play *The Beggar's Opera*, is a savage satire on the middle class and contains many of the major elements of epic theatre. The play blames capitalist society for the existence of the criminal underworld that is the setting of *The Beggar's Opera*. The music, written by Kurt Weill, is a blend of jazz, folk and modern music and, ironically, it was part of the enormous emotional appeal of the play. This was the opposite of Brecht's intention because he believed the 'epic theatre' he was creating should speak objectively to the intelligence of the audience.

Brecht was profoundly influenced by Asian theatre and culture. He based a number of his plays on traditional Asian stories and legends, and incorporated Chinese acting techniques into his productions.

EPIC THEATRE ON STAGE

On stage, Brecht's plays were nearly all historical narratives that blended large-scale stories with the striking dramatic techniques he used to train his actors. The exceptions to this were the texts he wrote in which Nazi Germany was the background, or target, of the plays. Brecht took his plots from European history, from Asian myths and from other classic plays. All his works were fiction – history and fact were transformed to suit his purpose, which was to make the audience become scientific observers who would form intelligent opinions and make rational judgements on the behaviour of the characters and the action of the play, relate these to the social and political context of the real world, and then work to change that world.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Brecht left Germany to live with his family in Denmark until 1941. This was the period when most of his greatest plays were created.

Life of Galileo (1938)

This play is based on Galileo's (1610) discovery that the Earth moves around the Sun, which was in total opposition to the teachings of the Church, that the Earth was the centre of the universe. Galileo was condemned by the Church, forced to recant and spent the last part of his life under house arrest. In Brecht's version, science is not a wonderful way of discovering and changing the world, but an instrument used by the powerful and the rich of the world to suit themselves. Everyone in the play is corrupt or vulnerable. Galileo's daughter is reduced to being his jailer; her wealthy fiancé is in love with his wealth and his land, not her; and Galileo is not a hero but a fallible and frightened man.

Mother Courage and Her Children (1939)

Mother Courage and Her Children remains perhaps the greatest anti-war play ever written and is still staged throughout the world today (see Chapter 2).

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui (1941)

Brecht's famous attack on Hitler and the Nazi Party, this play is a savage satire and a chilling reminder about how easy it is for tyrants to gain power. It is set in the vegetable markets of Chicago in the USA in the 1930s, at the time of the Great Depression. Arturo Ui, a local gangster, seizes control of the cauliflower trade and then attempts to take over the entire city. Ui is a completely laughable character at first, and the whole plot of taking over the cauliflower business is laughable. However, Ui is increasingly revealed as a complete psychopath, and he relentlessly murders anyone who stands in his way. In the most chilling scene in the play, he is coached by an actor to be a more effective public speaker; as the scene progresses, Ui is transformed into a terrifying imitation of Adolf Hitler giving a speech. The play ends in mass murder.

In 1941 Brecht sailed to the USA to escape the German armies sweeping across Europe. He settled in California and went on living in the USA until 1947, writing just one great play during that period.

The Good Person of Szechwan (1943)

In this play, Brecht is concerned with the question of just what makes a person good. The protagonist is actually a young prostitute, called Shen Te, who tries

desperately to follow the rules for good behaviour taught by the gods, who actually appear in the play. The other citizens of Szechwan are hypocrites who pretend to be respectable and moral but take every opportunity to abuse Shen Te and cheat each other. The only way Shen Te can protect herself is to disguise herself as a man. She pretends to be a powerful male cousin named Shui Ta. To be a good person, Shen Te has to pretend to be someone she is not.

Getty Images/Robbie Jack



15.2.1 The National Theatre in the UK staged an exceptional, modernised production of *Mother Courage* in 2009.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle (1944)

This play was the most overtly communist of all Brecht's work and the prologue was not printed in the USA while he was living there. The prologue and the play ask the question: who should own the land and the means of production – capitalists with the money to buy farms and factories, or the farmers and workers who actually produce the food and machines?

In the prologue, two groups of peasants gather to argue who should own the valley where they live. The story of the chalk circle is then told, about a civil war centuries ago when the Governor's wife was forced to flee and left her child behind. A servant called Grusha finds the child and cares for it. After much suffering and sacrifice to ensure the safety of the child, the war ends. The Governor's wife returns and demands the child back. Grusha is brought to a court presided over by Azdak, who places the child in a chalk circle and tells the two women to take him if they want him. The women struggle over the child but Grusha lets the Governor's wife win the tug of war because she is afraid the child will be hurt. Azdak then gives the child to Grusha because she has looked after it and proved she loves it more.

Brecht returned to Berlin in 1949 to stage *Mother Courage and Her Children* with his wife, Helene Weigel, in the title role. This was the beginning of Brecht's own theatre company, the Berliner Ensemble, which is still one of the world's great theatre companies. Brecht devoted all his time and energy during the 1950s to the ensemble and on staging his own plays. He died in 1956.



WORKSHOP 15.2.1: EPIC THEATRE

Exercise 1: Working in groups, create a short improvisation about a current political or social issue, such as global warming, terrorism, child slavery in the developing world or another issue you choose. Set the action of the piece in a different cultural setting from your own.

Exercise 2: Rehearse and perform your improvisation, applying the Brechtian performance techniques from Chapter 4.



WORKSHOP 15.2.2: REALISING A BRECHTIAN PLAY

Exercise: Choose one of the plays mentioned in this unit and generate a short (two- to three-minute) performance. Make sure you are true to the political or social viewpoint that Brecht is putting forward as well as identifying appropriate Brechtian performance techniques (see Chapter 4).

15.3 AUGUSTO BOAL: THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

Brazilian Augusto Boal is one of a number of influential theatre directors who emerged from outside Europe and the USA. Boal called his form of theatre the 'theatre of the oppressed', and it is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it involves the use of theatre as a weapon of social and political reform and marks the next major evolution of this form of theatre following Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. Secondly, Boal's techniques have become a central component in 'theatre for development', a major theatrical movement now widespread in Asia, Africa and South America, which operates very differently from traditional Western theatre. Thirdly, Boal did not work with written texts but used theatre to actively involve the audience as part of the creation and performance of plays, so his form of theatre breaks down the traditional barriers between actor and audience.

Augusto Boal was born in Brazil and began to develop theatre of the oppressed during his time as director of the Arena Theatre in Sao Paulo between 1956 and 1971. At that time, most theatre companies in Brazil modelled their work on the style of European theatre companies. However, Boal set out to create a form of theatre that was special to his country, and which dealt with local issues and the concerns of native Brazilians. To do this, he invented a new type of theatre he called 'theatre of the oppressed'.

This system involved some techniques that were radical for Brazilian theatre in the 1960s. Boal got his actors to swap roles, to wear masks on stage and to mix fact and fiction in the plays they created. In particular, Boal used an actor to be the Joker, who would operate as a kind of master of ceremonies, introducing the play, providing information and explaining what was happening to the audience. This technique of the Joker later became one of the key features of 'forum theatre'.

During the 1960s there were two military coups in Brazil, the first in 1964 and a much more repressive one in 1968. The military dictatorship that seized power in these coups clamped down on all resistance and brutally suppressed human rights in Brazil. Boal decided to use the Arena Theatre to challenge this repression and also to encourage a demand for democracy. To achieve these aims, he experimented with a range of new types of theatre and, in particular, tried to find ways to actively involve audiences in the theatre experience.

In 1971 Boal was arrested on the orders of the military dictatorship, jailed and tortured. He was released after three months but was warned that if he continued his political activities he was a dead man. He moved to Argentina and lived and worked there until 1976. During his five years in Argentina he continued to develop his theatre of the oppressed. He was convinced that the theatre could help to free people from the political, social and economic forces that kept them poor, repressed and unhappy. He set out to achieve this goal by developing three new forms of theatre: image theatre, invisible theatre and forum theatre.

However, the government of Argentina became more repressive during the early 1970s, and Boal found himself increasingly restricted and persecuted in his work. He devoted his time to writing about theatre of the oppressed, rather than directing, and finally left Argentina in 1976 to settle in France for 10 years.

In Paris, he set up a Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, and he also travelled widely in Europe and North America, popularising his work. As he did so, he realised that people in the developed world suffered from oppression just as much as the poor of Brazil, but their oppression was psychological, happening inside their own heads. Boal began to use theatre of the oppressed to deal with these emotional and personal oppressions.

In 1986, there was a change of government in Brazil and Boal returned to set up a Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, as a partner to the one in Paris. He developed a theatre program for the poor children in the city with funding from the government and private business, but this funding was later withdrawn. Boal continued his work under increasingly difficult circumstances and in 1992

decided to stand for election, partly in protest at what was happening in Brazil. He won a seat as a legislator, and out of this experience came his ideas for his next experiment in the theatre of reform: 'legislative theatre', which was designed to use theatre to actually change the law.

By 1996, 19 permanent theatre groups had been formed and 13 new laws had been passed as a direct result of their work. Boal, however, lost his legislator's seat in the 1996 elections and was no longer able

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15.3.1 Augusto Boal in New York, 2008

to work in the same way. Nevertheless, his work continued through direct links between the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed and pressure groups, such as doctors and students, who are working for change through the use of theatre.

Theatre of the oppressed is now one of the most widely used forms of theatre for development. Boal continued to travel widely, not just between the two centres in Paris and Rio de Janeiro, but all around the world until his death in 2009.

Augusto Boal travelled to Australia in 1995 to run workshops and demonstrate his techniques to teachers and theatre workers.

TYPES OF THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

Image theatre

Boal designed image theatre so that people could explore their experiences without the need for language. He believed that creating freeze-frames, mime movements and improvisations based on the oppressions in their lives allowed them to express those oppressions and understand them more deeply than by speaking about them. Furthermore, once they had shaped these images, they could try to change them, inviting others to help them, and in this way learn to deal effectively with the issues in their lives.

The essential features of image theatre are as follows:

- 1 The participants use drama to explore their own experiences, feelings and oppressions. They also work with each other to develop a greater understanding of and empathy for the lives of others.
- 2 Each performance begins with a freeze-frame created by the groups of participants.
- 3 The images are silent ones – no words are used.
- 4 The meaning of the freeze-frame is analysed by the other groups, who suggest titles and themes. In particular, the person being oppressed in the freeze-frame is identified and the nature of the oppression is discussed.
- 5 This freeze-frame is then worked on by members of the groups and other individuals who act as sculptors to mould and change the frozen bodies.
- 6 This continues until a real image is achieved. This is a freeze-frame showing a form of oppression that everyone agrees portrays the situation in its reality. An image of immigrants, for example, showed how poor people coming to Sweden from other parts of the world struggled to survive. The freeze-frame showed one man reaching out for help, another working very hard and a young black woman lying on the ground in despair.
- 7 Other groups and individuals now change the freeze-frame, moving the frozen people to try to create an ideal image – showing the situation as it should be, with no oppression. In the immigrants example, this involved members of another group freezing in positions showing how they would help the immigrants.
- 8 The real image is then created once more, and each spectator makes a change to the real freeze-frame to try to bring it closer to the ideal.
- 9 The freeze-frames are brought to life, moving in slow motion to create a series of moving images showing how the oppression could be overcome.
- 10 Different transitions from the real image to ideal image can be tried, both as a series of freeze-frames and as slow motion and normal action.

Invisible theatre

This is a form of public theatre in which the actors perform a play they have prepared in a public place such as a shopping mall, a crowded train or a city square, but the people watching do not know it is a play. It arose partly out of the difficulty Boal encountered in actually staging plays while living in Argentina. Boal's intention in inventing invisible theatre was to provoke violent reactions from the public involved, and then try to get them to discuss their reactions. For example, a group of actors might act out a scene in a busy street in which one of them is a black woman and the others pretend to harass her. She would appeal to people passing by to help her while the other actors would encourage the passers-by to join with them and torment her. Finally, the actors would reveal that it was a performance and try to get the public to reflect on their reactions.

Invisible theatre is, by its very nature, highly problematic. Boal himself admitted that his actors were actually placed in danger on a number of occasions because the public believed it was real and did not know that they were seeing theatre. Just as seriously, in a number of invisible theatre performances the actors actually encouraged the people who became involved to behave badly and even illegally. Understandably, in some cases, the public involved did not calmly reflect on what had happened once they knew it was a play, but were angry and actually threatened the actors with violence.

In fact, Boal's use of invisible theatre appears to actually oppress the people it involves, since it keeps them ignorant of the truth and allows them to be manipulated by the actors who hold the knowledge and the power. In a way, invisible theatre is a denial of the true essence of theatre, which is a shared journey of discovery between the actors and the audience.

Unlike Boal's other forms of theatre, invisible theatre is not widely used because of strong reservations about its morality and its usefulness.

Forum theatre

Unlike invisible theatre, forum theatre does work to actively empower all those involved, both actors and audience, and it has become a major form of theatre for development in the 21st century.

In forum theatre, a group of actors perform a play for an audience. The play involves a situation in which an individual is oppressed by a group of people who have some kind of power over the protagonist. The play is acted through once while the audience watches. It is then performed again, but this time any member of the audience can call out 'Stop!' and enter the play at any stage to replace the protagonist and try to end the oppression, or at least modify it. The actors performing the play try to continue the action exactly as it happened the first time so that the oppression continues and the play ends exactly as it did the first time.

Forum theatre is the most widely used form of theatre employed by non-government organisations in developing countries in their attempts to improve the health, welfare and social conditions of millions of people.

The spect-actors

There are no passive spectators in forum theatre, but rather what Boal calls 'spect-actors', the members of the audience who are invited to step into the forum play and change it. Any member of the audience can step in at any time to take on the role of the oppressed person, and it is possible for every spect-actor to have a turn.

The spect-actors also frequently contribute to the creation of the original play. Often the actors base their play on the experiences of a member of the audience who has suffered some form of oppression. The different approaches taken by members of the audience to deal with this oppression can help the person whose story was originally used. Boal called this use of a forum to explore real issues faced by members of the audience a 'rehearsal for reality'.

The Joker

Forum theatre performances are controlled by a kind of master of ceremonies that Boal names the Joker. By this he means the Joker in the pack of cards, the highest card that controls all the others and can change the game at any time. The Joker introduces the play at the start, explains anything that is unknown or confusing, instructs the actors to run the play each time and invites the audience to intervene.

Magic

It is also the Joker's responsibility to identify when 'magic' is used and to stop it happening. Magic occurs in forum theatre when a member of the audience steps into the play and says or does something that is totally out of character, or completely contradicts what has been happening. For example, if a spect-actor took the role of a quiet, shy person who was being bullied, and then suddenly made this character extraordinarily aggressive, this would be magic. Equally, if a character was suffering terrible deprivation through being poor, it would be magic for a spect-actor to step into the role and declare that they had just won Tattsлото.

Because the word 'magic' suggests something special and exciting, many actors and teachers use an expression such as 'As if' when challenging the authenticity of an intervention in a piece of forum theatre.

Since Boal first devised forum theatre almost 50 years ago, different groups in different countries have adapted it in various ways. One major modification is to allow the spect-actors to take the role of any character in the play, not just the protagonist. This allows much more sophisticated and often more realistic solutions to be explored. Very often the person being oppressed has no power to change things, but the people around them can influence events, and those responsible can sometimes modify their behaviour.

Another modification is to use forum theatre to explore a particular problem in a structured way. This was done as part of the international Drama and Conflict Resolution (DRACON) project, and later in the Acting Against Bullying project. John O'Toole and Bruce Burton used forum theatre in schools in Sydney and Brisbane to teach students conflict and bullying management techniques. Senior drama students created forum theatre plays structured into three scenes. The first scene showed 'latent conflict' – the beginning of a conflict between people before it had become obvious. The second scene showed 'emerging conflict', where the clash between the main characters had become serious and was more apparent. The final scene ended in 'manifest conflict', where the characters were totally hostile and opposed to each other, often in full physical battle, and where the conflict was obvious to all. The drama students then taught Year 8 and 9 students in the schools about bullying and conflict management and performed these forum theatre pieces to them. The students were invited to step into the plays, taking any character's place, to see if they could manage the bullying or conflict situation. Many of them did so very successfully.

Not only schools, but community groups, homeless people, prisoners in jail and cultural minority groups have all used forum theatre to explore and better

manage their oppressions. Throughout Africa and Asia, forum theatre has become a vital part of theatre for development, which aims to empower communities in underdeveloped countries to deal with the economic, social and political problems that confront them.

Legislative theatre

Using his position as a politician and working through the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal formed contacts with a number of different community groups, introducing these groups to image and forum theatre. The groups were encouraged to create plays that are parables – performances with a political or social point, similar to the work of Brecht. The groups then visited each other, sharing their theatre performances and also performed at political demonstrations and festivals.

Once people had become sensitive to an issue through the use of theatre, a meeting was held – Boal referred to this as ‘the chamber in the square’. At this meeting, people discussed what laws might be passed to deal with the issue raised by the theatre pieces. Finally, an amendment or a new law based on this discussion was presented to the parliament, often by Boal himself.

A successful example of legislative theatre at work was when a group of people over 60 created a play about an elderly person being wrongly treated by an inexperienced doctor. As a result, a law was passed that forced hospitals to offer specialist treatment by doctors and nurses trained in geriatrics.

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15.3.2 Augusto Boal at a workshop in New York, 2008



WORKSHOP 15.3.1: IMAGE THEATRE

Exercise 1: In a group, form a large circle and have one person step into the centre and take up the position of someone experiencing the particular oppression you have chosen to explore, such as slavery, unemployment, racism, discrimination or another serious form of suffering. One by one, join the freeze-frame, silently taking up a position as someone involved in the oppression in one way or another, on either side or as an observer.

Exercise 2: Form small groups of three or four and stand in circles facing in towards each other. A topic for an image is named – a straightforward oppression such as

bullying, teasing, harassment or exclusion. Each group must immediately form a frozen image of this oppression with one of the group members as the oppressed person. It must be done spontaneously and without any conversation.

Hold your freeze-frames and look around to observe the images of the same subject created by the other groups.

Exercise 3: Form an image of an oppression that you have experienced or learnt about with yourself as the victim. Share and discuss these individual images, identifying the type of oppression and its impact on the victim.

Exercise 4: Use the same oppression you identified above as the subject, but this time create the image with yourself as the oppressor who caused the situation. Again discuss the images, analysing the behaviour of the oppressor.

Exercise 5: Working in groups, create a piece of image theatre following Boal's 10 steps. Choose a form of oppression that your group is concerned about and which has serious consequences for the people involved. As well as working on your own image, contribute to the work of other groups as spectators and also as participants where necessary.



WORKSHOP 15.3.2: FORUM THEATRE

Exercise 1: Working in groups, decide on a newspaper headline about a social problem or issue, such as discrimination or street kids. Form a freeze-frame that would make a dramatic photograph to go with the headline. Create your freeze-frame for the rest of the class, speaking the headline aloud while you are frozen.

Exercise 2: Now improvise a play with action and dialogue that shows how this problem or issue arose. Make sure you have more than one scene in your play, and that you clearly show the development of the situation; for example, a group of people continuously tormenting someone who is different until that person cannot bear it any longer, or a teenager leaving home after a fight with her parents and then refusing to return despite what happens to her on the streets.

Exercise 3: Choose one member of your group to be the Joker and rehearse the play a number of times until you are confident in your character and the situation.

Exercise 4: Perform the play as a piece of forum theatre to an audience. The Joker explains to the audience that the play will be performed straight through the first time and then a second time when the audience can join in to try to help the situation.

Exercise 5: The Joker needs to explain to the members of the audience that they can replace any of the actors in the play at any time on this second run-through by calling 'Stop' and taking over the character. However, they must not introduce impossible elements into the play or totally change the character – this is magic and the Joker will not allow it to happen.

Exercise 6: As you perform your forum theatre, remember that you must try to stick to the original action and the nature of the characters as much as possible, whatever changes are introduced by the spect-actors who come into the play. However, if one of the spect-actors does manage to make a real difference to the situation, you should respond in character.

Exercise 7: After the forum performance has finished, discuss what happened with the audience, identifying why particular efforts to change the situation succeeded or failed.

THEATRE OF TRANSFORMATION

The three major theatrical forms of the 20th century had their beginnings more than 100 years ago and evolved throughout the century. The fourth significant development in Western drama emerged in the second half of the century and had its beginnings in the work of Polish stage director Jerzy Grotowski in a small town in southern Poland.

This startling new form was extensively influenced by all the others, and in some ways involves an amalgam of realism, surrealism and ideological theatre. However, it also has a unique identity of its own and this can be seen most vividly in the work of its two most influential exponents, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook. Their contribution to drama is best described as 'theatre of transformation'.

Grotowski modified and intensified Stanislavski's system of acting with the aim of assisting people, not just actors, to discover the truth about themselves through drama. Brook's commitment to realistic acting and believable characterisation has been just as lifelong and intense, and he has directed some of the greatest performances of the 20th century.

Yet both men were also inspired by Artaud's theatre of cruelty, and both experimented with many of Artaud's techniques for shocking and mesmerising an audience. They were also influenced by expressionism and Brecht's use of epic theatre. Like Brecht, they both worked to create new plays that had strong political and social messages, and they made extensive use of Brechtian techniques such as a narrator, actors changing roles during the play and the use of simple objects to replace whole sets and locations.

However, the transformational theatre they created is not just an amalgam of other forms. At its heart is a highly original and challenging use of actors in ways that create not only characters but also whole imaginary worlds. Both men believed that the essence of drama is the interaction between live actors and a live audience, and that the unique power and mystery of theatre is found in that encounter on stage.

In performance, the actors are asked to transform themselves and the acting space into the world of the play, representing not just all the characters, but the entire context of the play – the locations, the sounds, the whole world of the drama. In one scene an actor might represent an important character, while in another scene she may simply be one of a group of actors making the shape of the wall of a room. Later in the play, she may use a simple wooden chair as a throne, while in the

following scene she may become an executioner, using the chair as an execution block. She may also be required to create sound effects, sing and narrate lines from the play.

In short, the theatre of transformation works through the actors who transform the imagination of the audience by transforming themselves on stage.

16.1 JERZY GROTOWSKI: POOR THEATRE

Born in Poland, Grotowski began his career as an actor. In 1959 he set up the Laboratory Theatre in Opole, a town in south-east Poland. The choice of name for his company – ‘laboratory’ – was quite deliberate. Grotowski used his actors to study the way theatre worked, and to experiment with new techniques in acting and staging.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the Laboratory Theatre made a few brief trips overseas, mainly to England and the USA, but the company also visited Australia. These visits made Grotowski and his methods world famous. However, in 1976 he moved away from directing and staging plays altogether. Instead, he worked intensely with small groups of people, helping them to develop self-awareness and self-realisation, using the transformational techniques he had pioneered. Grotowski called this work ‘para-theatre’, and he continued to develop its use while living in both the USA and in Italy. He died in 1999.

Despite moving away from mainstream theatre in 1976, Grotowski’s contribution to drama has been enormous. As we saw in Chapter 1, his system for training actors is the most demanding and intensive one ever devised. Furthermore, his concept of ‘poor theatre’ has revolutionised the direction and staging of 20th-century theatre.

Grotowski’s aim was to do what films and television could not – bring the audience face-to-face with living characters and live action. He directed the action of the play so that it happened all around the audience, often so close to them that the actors were inside the spectators’ personal space, close enough to touch them.

POOR THEATRE

Grotowski created a complete and intense form of training to give actors the power to develop powerful and believable characterisations. He also gave the world a way of directing and staging plays that has been one of the major influences in theatre ever since.

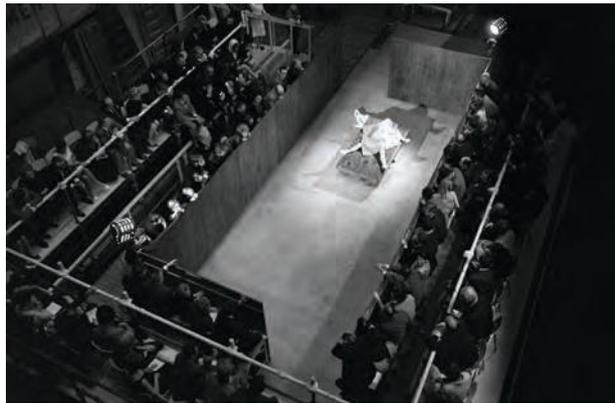
From the start, Grotowski realised that theatre could never compete with television and films in the use of technical equipment, lighting, music, costumes, make-up and special effects. He set out, therefore, to eliminate all these things from the plays he directed, creating a theatre of poverty, or poor theatre, where the only important elements involved were the actors themselves and their special relationship with the live audience.

To make this live relationship more intense, Grotowski abandoned the traditional style of theatre building, with its raised stage and auditorium full of rows of seats. Instead, he staged his plays in old buildings and sometimes even in ordinary rooms, with small audiences of between 40 and 100 people. The actors and the audience shared the same space; there was no special stage or acting area. For example, in the play *Kordian*, set in a lunatic asylum, Grotowski filled a large room with beds, and the actors playing the lunatics occupied the beds. All around

the room a number of chairs were placed, filling up the spaces between the beds. The audience sat in these chairs and so the action of *Kordian* happened all around them. When Grotowski directed Christopher Marlowe's play, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, Grotowski used a number of large wooden tables as the setting. At one table sat the actors playing the main characters. The other tables were shared by the audience and the other actors. The action of the play took place around the tables and sometimes on top of them.

In some of his early productions, Grotowski tried to involve the audience in the action of the play. These experiments were a failure because the audiences refused to respond to pressure from the actors to participate. Grotowski decided that audiences should not be involved actively, but should be allowed to be spectators, watching the action but taking no part in it. In all his later productions, Grotowski arranged the space he was using so that the audience would be as completely involved as possible, but only as spectators observing what was happening.

Getty Images/AFP/Stringer



16.1.1 Spectators surround the stage of *The Constant Prince* on 22 June 1966 at Odéon Théâtre de l'Europe in Paris.

The plays Grotowski chose to direct were mainly classic works, including Greek, Shakespearian and famous Polish plays. He wanted his actors to have the experience of creating great and powerful characters who commit actions of enormous, and often terrible, importance. He believed that performing great roles in great plays helped to develop his actors, both in their professional work and as human beings.

Grotowski directed plays that dealt with important issues, particularly those he saw as the great myths that human beings all share, such as religion. In a number of his productions the central protagonist is a Christ-like figure who is tormented or crucified. In his famous production of the play *The Constant Prince*, the prince actually rises from the dead. However, Grotowski also believed that religion was in a stage of inevitable decline throughout the world, and this had helped to throw our society into a state of crisis. These beliefs were reflected in his productions, particularly in his direction of the classic Polish play *Akropolis* by Stanislaw Wyspianski.

In the original play of *Akropolis*, all the action takes place inside Krakow's Wawel Cathedral, the most famous church in Poland. When Grotowski staged it, he made the setting the concentration camp at Auschwitz, where more than a million people – mostly Jews – were exterminated by the Nazis. The characters in the play became prisoners about to be sent to the gas chambers. Without changing one word of dialogue, Grotowski changed the whole meaning of the play, bringing the past face-to-face with the worst of the modern world.

Grotowski did this because he wanted to confront his audience with the question: 'If you had been one of the people put in a concentration camp, would you have been able to keep your culture and your sanity, or even your humanity, or would

you have become an empty human shell with nothing left inside?’ He believed that the purpose of theatre was to confront people with the truth about themselves and ask questions like this. He argued that the audiences who came to his plays were spectators in search of the truth about themselves and their purpose in life.

Grotowski’s poor theatre made incredible demands upon his actors. In fact, he used the plays he directed quite deliberately to put into practice his latest research into acting techniques.



WORKSHOP 16.1.1: THEATRE OF TRANSFORMATION

Exercise 1: Working in pairs and using neutral masks, if possible, complete the following exercises:

- a Mirror each other’s movements in slow motion.
- b Create a series of freeze-frames depicting situations that show both of you asleep, then unconscious and, finally, dead.
- c One member of the pair performs a number of body language postures, gestures and movements, and their partner repeats the movements.
- d Create a movement piece showing an intense relationship between two people in which movement reveals the emotions hidden by the neutral masks.

Exercise 2: Working in groups, create the following improvisations:

- a Use a single item of clothing or a pair of boots. Each member of the group in turn puts on the clothing and moves and talks as the character suggested by the clothing. The other members of the group respond to the character that is being created.
- b Improvise a group ritual that uses vocal sounds, individual words, singing, whispering, stamping and clapping to create a soundscape.
- c Use a poem or a song as the pretext for an improvisation, creating a series of freeze-frames to visualise the poem or song. Now, moving rapidly in a circle, each member of the group speaks just one word in turn about the poem or song. Use the words to build a performance.



WORKSHOP 16.1.2: GROUP PLAYMAKING

Exercise:

- a In groups, write a story about a character who takes a journey in search of something vitally important.
- b One member of the group reads the story while the rest of the group create freeze-frames to illustrate key events in the story.
- c The groups now dramatise the story in movement and dialogue, with the narrator introducing scenes and emphasising key moments.
- d Groups rehearse and perform their quest stories using transformational theatre. Items of costume identify the characters, simple objects are transformed a number of times to provide the setting, and the actors take on all the roles and also become living scenery.



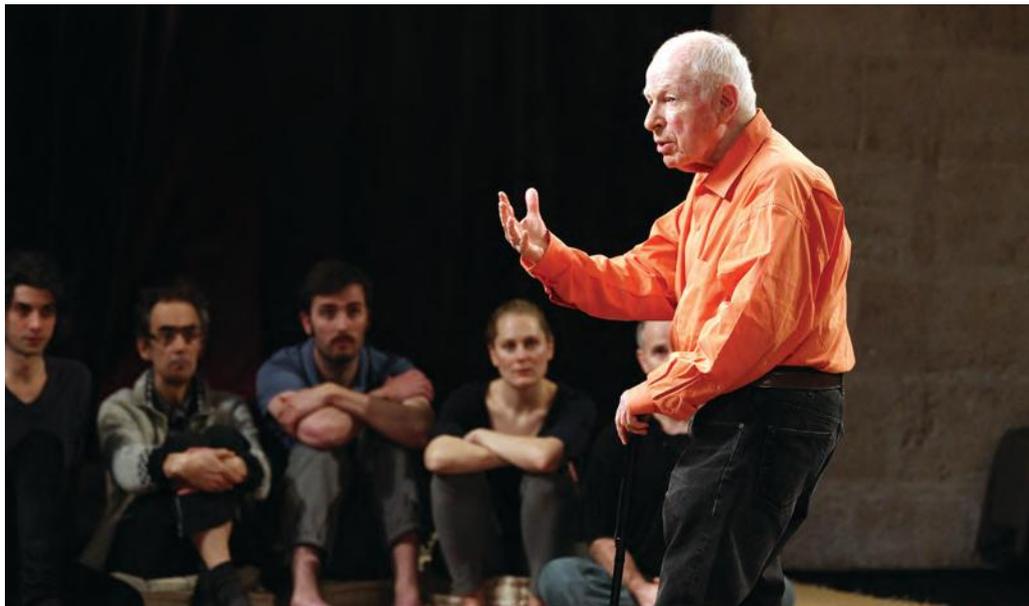
WORKSHOP 16.1.3: WORKING WITH TEXTS

Exercise: Choose one scene from a classic text, such as one of the witches scenes from *Macbeth*, and create a piece of transformational theatre that would communicate with any audience anywhere.

16.2 PETER BROOK: WORLD THEATRE

The most influential of the great theatre directors of the 20th century still working and directing today is Peter Brook. For the past 50 years, he has been involved in developing a form of theatre that intermingles texts, styles and actors from all over the world in his attempts to create a genuinely universal form of theatre. This work has produced some unique pieces of performance, including *The Ik*, *The Conference of the Birds* and, most notably, *The Mahabharata*, one of the 20th century's greatest theatrical works. Brook's quest for a world theatre has also generated serious criticism from major theatrical figures in Asia, who see his use and transformation of classic Asian texts as appropriating their culture and distorting it for his own purposes.

Alamy Stock Photo/Everett Collection Inc



16.2.1 Peter Brook in *The Tighrope*, 2012

Peter Brook was born in London in 1925 and his early ambition was to be a film director. In fact, he has continued to make films throughout his life, including an outstanding movie version of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and the stunning six-hour film of *The Mahabharata*. However, the stage is where he is a legend.

At the age of only 21, he directed a number of Shakespeare's plays at Stratford-upon-Avon, followed by major operas at Covent Garden. In 1951 he travelled to Berlin and met Bertolt Brecht. Although Brook held opposing political views

and beliefs to Brecht and disagreed with his whole theatrical philosophy, he was spellbound by the strangeness and dazzling theatricality of Brecht's work as a director.

For the next decade, Brook lived alternately in London and Paris, directing a range of films and also travelling widely. In the early 1960s he joined the Royal Shakespeare Company to form a theatre research unit which he called the Theatre of Cruelty, in honour of Artaud. Working with a company of actors, he experimented with a range of exercises, activities and performance texts in an attempt to discover ways of re-igniting theatre with the kind of burning intensity Artaud had demanded.

In 1964 Brook directed, and later filmed, the play *Marat/Sade* by Peter Weiss. This extraordinary play combines the political nature of Brecht's work with the impact of Artaud's cruelty; Brook's direction managed to interweave these two forms into a powerful piece of theatre. This was followed by a devised play called *US*, a savage attack on US involvement in the Vietnam War.

In 1970 Brook created a seminal piece of theatre in his direction of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Focusing on the theme of magic, he deliberately chose the formula of the magic of the circus and the stage magician, as opposed to Shakespeare's fairies and spells. The set for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a white box. The actors were trained to use trampolines, juggle and perform sleight of hand. At the same time as the action was physicalised in this way, intense concentration was given to speaking the language on a quiet, intense, intimate level, intensifying the atmosphere of magic and secrets. This astounding piece of theatre profoundly influenced the direction of drama throughout the Western world, both in the development of physical theatre and in the move to focus on intense intimacy in the acting and speaking of Shakespeare.

In the same year, Brook moved permanently to Paris and set up his International Centre for Theatre Research. Through intense improvisation over a period of years, Brook and his group of actors from Europe, Africa and Asia developed an extraordinary level of performance skill. They travelled widely, taking their ensemble performance to many parts of the world, performing for free in locations such as parks, village squares, church halls and even on wasteland outside towns and villages, but never in theatres.

During these travels, the company set out to learn as much as possible about the theatrical forms of the places they visited and worked to integrate these forms into the ensemble. One play the company created from their experiences in Africa was *The Ik*, which dealt with the impact of famine on a tribe called the Ik. The company studied photographs and films showing the Ik suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Using transformational theatre techniques, the actors then created a play that was performed in a number of African villages.

A key example of transformation in *The Ik* was to use a pair of boots to represent a character. When an actor or a member of the audience put on the boots, they became that character.

In 1973 Brook began work on *The Conference of the Birds* with dramatist Jean-Claude Carrière. The play they developed was based on an ancient Persian poem and the characters in it are birds in search of their lost king. The birds in the play symbolise different aspects of human behaviour, and their search is actually a journey of self-discovery.

Brook heard about Grotowski's work in Poland and brought Grotowski to England to work with the Theatre of Cruelty company. Brook was profoundly influenced by Grotowski, particularly his concentration on the dedication of the actor, and on the discovery of truth through theatre.

In his direction of *The Conference of the Birds*, Brook made intensive use of transformational techniques, particularly in rehearsing the actors. The actors were encouraged to experiment with making bird sounds and bird movements as a way of finding their characters, and in performance their use of voice and movement was a blend of bird and human.

In the mid-1970s, Brook's company finally found a permanent home in an abandoned theatre called the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris. Located behind a major railway station, the theatre had been empty for more than 20 years and was in terrible disrepair. Brook insisted on keeping the ruined appearance of the building and turned it into a flexible performance space, where the battered walls and scarred floors provided a setting for a range of fascinating theatre experiments.

Brook has attempted to create a genuinely intercultural theatre, drawing on plays, performance styles and actors from around the world. The most memorable of these experiments was *The Mahabharata*, a nine-hour adaptation by Brook and Carriere of one of India's classic creation myths. It tells the story of an epic war between a group of brothers and their cousins, which also involved the gods. In the myth, this battle took place at the beginning of the world and profoundly influenced the development of human history.

The Mahabharata is Brook's clearest attempt to create a world theatre. The text is Asian, the writer French, the director English and the actors came from all five continents of the world. The performance style is a blend of Western character creation, Eastern song and movement, and African ritual dance and chanting.

In 1993 Brook staged *The Man Who*, a play as different from *The Mahabharata* as it is possible to be. This intensely personal, small-cast play was inspired by a book about mental illness by neurologist Oliver Sacks. Brook and his actors worked intensively with patients and doctors in mental hospitals, and then used transformational theatre to create the play. In his book *Threads of Time: Recollections*, published in 1998, Brook wrote: 'Theatre is not just a place, not simply a profession, it is a metaphor. It helps to make the process of life more clear'. More than any other director of the 20th century, Brook attempts to make the experience of living clearer to people on a world scale.

In 2008 his production of *The Grand Inquisitor* toured the world. The play is set in Spain in the 16th century during the Inquisition. In the play, Christ returns to the world and is immediately arrested and questioned by the Grand Inquisitor, who is the only character who speaks. This outstanding piece of theatre was directed by Brook and performed by Bruce Myles with the extraordinary intensity and total focus that is Brook's hallmark as a director.

In 2011, Brook handed over the directorship of the company, but Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord continues to stage productions directed by Brook, and his international company continues to tour productions throughout the world. His latest production *The Prisoner*, was staged at the Bouffes du Nord theatre in Paris and the National Theatre in the UK. The performances he directs are distinguished by minimalism, creating the empty space on stage that allows the actors the freedom to live, breathe and share with each other and the audience the world of the play.



WORKSHOP 16.2.1: DREAMING STORIES

Exercise: Research an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Dreaming story that could be performed as a piece of world theatre. Improvise and perform the Dreaming story, using realistic acting for some of the characters but also incorporating stylised movement, singing, music and important symbols.



WORKSHOP 16.2.2: THEATRE SPACES

In the 1970s Brook began working at Bouffes du Nord in Paris, an abandoned theatre. Brooke kept the theatre in a state of disrepair and used the space to create and produce experimental theatre.

Exercise: Explore your school and local area and identify an area that could be used as a theatre space. Brainstorm all the kinds of performances, both scripted and group devised, that could take place in the space. For example, an abandoned building could be used to stage a production of *Stories in the Dark* by Debra Oswald, or *Parramatta Girls* or *Eyes to the Floor* by Alana Valentine. A building that is abandoned and in a forest setting could be used to stage a production of *Children of the Black Skirt* by Angela Betzien, *Masquerade* by Kate Mulvany or *A Midsummers Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare.

THE THEATRE OF ASIA

When we use the word 'theatre', we tend to mean the form of European theatre that began with the Greeks 2500 years ago, developed further in Europe and spread to America and Australia more than two centuries ago. In reality, there is an infinite variety of theatre forms in our world; every culture that has ever existed has developed its own, unique performance art.

Many of these indigenous forms of drama still exist and are experiencing a revival of interest. It is increasingly common for theatre practitioners throughout the world to weave elements of indigenous dramatic forms into their work. For example, the styles of dance drama distinctive to the First Nation peoples in Australia, North and South America and the peoples of African countries have all been extensively copied and modified in a range of Western theatre performances.

In the past 100 years there has been an explosion of new theatrical activity in many of the countries of Asia. New theatre companies have emerged to adapt, radically alter and even totally transform existing forms such as Chinese opera, Noh and Kabuki theatre. Western theatre forms such as expressionism, epic theatre, surrealism and absurdist theatre have also become part of these innovations.

On a world scale, the theatre of Asia is the largest and most diverse in the world. More than half the world's population live in the continent of Asia, and thousands of different traditional theatre forms still exist among the many different nations and cultures of Asia. The most dominant and significant of these traditional forms have been Xiqu, which we know as Chinese opera; wayang kulit, the Javanese shadow puppetry of Indonesia; and the three classic forms of Japanese theatre – Noh, Bunraku and Kabuki.

17.1 CHINESE OPERA

This form of performance has undergone a number of transformations in the past 2000 years. The form of Xiqu that is most popular in many parts of the world today is Peking (now Beijing) opera. Beijing opera was created in 1790 by a group of actors who combined spectacular acrobatics and martial arts with music and singing. While this is the most popular form of Chinese opera, there are still hundreds of variations performed today.

Chinese opera was very popular in Australia more than 150 years ago due to Chinese immigration to the Australian goldfields. Between 1858 and 1869 there were

14 Chinese opera companies touring in different parts of Australia. Their audiences included people from many different cultures and countries.

In Chinese opera, the plays are based on well-known stories from Chinese history and mythology, very like the plays of the Greek and Elizabethan periods of theatre. Chinese opera texts do not divide into tragedy and comedy but freely combine both. The texts are often very long, and it is unusual for a whole play to be staged in one performance. Instead, individual acts from a number of different plays are staged in one night, often loosely linked by a single theme, such as love and marriage or war and honour.

The emphasis in Chinese opera is not on the unfolding of the plot, because the stories are already well known to the audience. There is no attempt to create the sense of reality that is the hallmark of Western theatre. Instead, each actor announces their character when they enter, and often explains to the audience the background to the story and the problems the characters are facing. The villains in Chinese opera traditionally tell the audience their plans and confide their innermost secrets.

There is no scenery and props are symbolic rather than realistic, so a flowered carpet is used to represent a garden, and a chair can be turned on its side to represent a rock. A paddle moved backwards and forwards by a character symbolises the rowing of a boat. Stage managers actually bring props on during the action and sometimes adjust the actors' costumes in the middle of a scene.

Above all else, Chinese opera is a matter of acting skill. Dramatic focus and tension come from watching the expertise of the actors. They are skilled in a combination of singing, speech, acting and martial arts. The characters they play are character types, and actors often spend their entire career portraying just one character, very like the actors did in *commedia dell'arte*. Historically, Chinese opera companies were either all male or all female, and some single-sex companies still exist. However, since 1911 male and female actors have worked together on stage and portrayed their own sex.

Despite the highly stylised nature of Chinese opera, and the spectacular costuming and acrobatic movement, there is also a strong emphasis on emotional honesty in the acting. The intense commitment and focus of the actors, as well as their talent, achieves the transformation of simple objects and the creation of an imaginary world on a bare stage.



Getty Images/Xiao-ming

17.1.1 Chinese opera production



WORKSHOP 17.1.1: THEATRE OF A THEME

Exercise: Chinese opera productions generally perform excerpts from a number of operas based on a theme. Working in small groups, choose a theme and identify three to five scenes from Australian theatre that you would use to create a performance.

17.2 WAYANG KULIT

Wayang kulit dates back to 860 CE on the island of Java, making it one of the oldest story-telling traditions in Asia. Its name comes from the Indonesian words *wayang*, meaning ‘puppet’, and *kulit*, meaning ‘leather’, which is what the puppets are made of. In wayang kulit, the puppets are moved behind a translucent screen lit from the back, so the audience sees the characters as silhouettes.



Getty Images/BartCo

17.2.1 A dalang with two puppets.

The puppets are carved out of buffalo leather and attached to bamboo sticks. All the puppets used in a play are usually operated by one man, the *dalang*, who is a combination of storyteller, actor and singer. One *dalang* can have up to 300 puppets. The stories are a blend of religious stories, myths and historical facts. Performances can last from dusk to dawn, and are frequently staged at festivals, weddings and other celebrations.



WORKSHOP 17.2.1: TRADITIONAL STORY IN PUPPETS

Exercise: Working in pairs, choose a traditional story from any culture with which you are familiar. Imagine you are going to perform a production of the story for preschool audiences. Devise, rehearse and perform a production of the story using shadow puppets.

17.3 TRADITIONAL THEATRE IN JAPAN

NOH

This ceremonial form of drama was perfected more than 600 years ago by a father and son team who wrote and performed most of the 240 surviving Noh plays. The form of a Noh play is always the same. There is a central character, known as ‘the doer’, who may be a man, but can also be a woman, god, ghost or animal. The actor portraying this role wears a mask. This protagonist, ‘the doer’, is challenged in some way by a second character, ‘the waki’, who is always a man.

Actors in Noh theatre are always male and train for just one of these roles; they normally portray that role throughout their acting careers. The performance form is a combination of highly stylised dancing and chanting that requires a high level of expertise.

All Noh stages are identical – about five metres wide and made of polished wood supported on huge earthenware jars so that when the actors stamp their feet the sound resonates like a drum. The only scenery is a tree painted on the

rear wall, which is made of wood. There is always a four-piece orchestra at the rear of the stage and a chorus of six to 10 singers, and there is continuous musical accompaniment to every performance. By Western standards, Noh performances are almost totally static and the pace of the action is incredibly slow. It has always appealed to a minority audience and in Japan today it is a highly specialised theatrical form. Nevertheless, Noh plays continue to be staged and have an impact on current theatrical developments, not only in Japan but worldwide.

BUNRAKU

The second major form of theatre to emerge in Japan after Noh was Bunraku, the Japanese form of puppet theatre that has influenced puppetry around the world. Bunraku began in the 16th century in Japan with companies of puppeteers acting out stories. These puppeteers accompanied wandering storytellers who went from place to place, entertaining people with chanted stories of battles and romances, just like the minstrels and troubadours of England and Europe.

Bunraku was transformed by the work of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725), who wrote an enormous number of plays, both historical and domestic, especially for puppet theatre. Some of his domestic plays are still staged by puppet companies in Japan today and are still extremely popular.

Bunraku puppets are basically hand puppets and the puppeteers dress all in black and operate their puppets on stage. Originally the puppets were quite small but today they are about two-thirds of life-size and are beautifully made and elaborately costumed.



17.3.1 In Bunraku puppetry, the operator handles the puppet in full view of the audience.

KABUKI

Kabuki was actually invented 400 years ago by a Japanese priestess, named Izumo Okuni, as a form of dance drama with an all-female cast. After a tour of Japan in 1603, Okuni built a theatre in Kyoto which opened the following year. In 1629 the Japanese government decided that the performances had become too erotic and banned women from performing in Kabuki; it remains an all-male theatrical form today.

Although traditionally only men have been allowed to perform in Kabuki, on very special occasions such as private festivals, women can now perform.

Kabuki is one of the world's great traditional theatre forms and the name effectively describes the form: *ka* means 'song', *bu* means 'dance' and *ki* means 'skill'. Kabuki actors train from childhood in singing, dancing, acting and physical agility. The male actors who portray females are also trained in stylised feminine movement and gestures. Leading Kabuki actors all come from a small group of families who dominate Kabuki theatre; the fathers in these families pass on their skills to their sons. The sons initially learn the lines and the stylised movement sequences, or *kata*, exactly as their fathers and grandfathers performed them, but then add their own variations as they become more expert – with permission from their fathers.

Kabuki is first and foremost performance theatre. The scripts are often anonymous, and actors have made alterations and additions to them over the years. Many of the plays were taken from the puppet plays of Bunraku or from Noh theatre and there are three basic types. One group of plays tells stories based on historical events, another group involves domestic dramas of love and honour, while the third are dance dramas set in the supernatural world of spirits or involving animals. These dance dramas are the most popular Kabuki plays in Japan today.

The staging of Kabuki is spectacular. The theatres are large (often with over 2000 seats) and today are very similar to Western theatres, with seats in rows in the auditorium and balconies. In the past, however, the audience used to kneel on mats or straw on the floor. Kabuki stages are huge and have a revolving section, an invention that was used in Japan long before it was introduced in Europe. There is a thrust stage or runway at stage right, which rises back into the audience and above their heads; this is used for exits, entrances and dramatic scenes.

Kabuki is a very visual form of theatre – the scenery and costuming are elaborate and colourful but not realistic. Huge painted backdrops and sets are raised and lowered, or moved in and out on the revolving stage, and coloured cloth is used extensively. A black backdrop comes down for night, and blue cloth is spread on the stage to symbolise water. The costumes are based on the period in which the play is set; historical plays have particularly extravagant costumes. Often these costumes are changed on stage suddenly and dramatically in front of the audience with the help of special assistants dressed in black.

Kabuki continues to be enormously popular in Japan, and despite some experiments in modernising the form using electronic music and experimental lighting, it is traditional Kabuki that still enthral audiences.



WORKSHOP 17.3.1: RESEARCHING JAPANESE PERFORMANCE STYLES

Exercise: Choose from Noh, Bunraku or Kabuki and research: the history, stylistic and performance techniques, significant plays and playwrights, political and social themes expressed in the plays and any other important information. Present the research in any form you think is appropriate.

17.4 NEW DIRECTIONS IN ASIAN THEATRE

In China, rigid government control prevented the development of major new theatrical forms, and Chinese opera itself was almost destroyed by the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. However, China now has a major theatre company performing a modern repertoire of plays – the Hong Kong Repertory Company, which became part of China’s cultural legacy following the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997. In China itself theatre is popular in the major cities like Beijing, including Chinese opera and Chinese folk theatre, and imported theatre ranging from musicals like *Wicked* to Suzuki’s production of *The Trojan Women*.

In Japan, the traditional forms of theatre have continued to flourish, but there has also been an explosion of involvement in theatre, both mainstream and experimental. Mainstream American and British plays, and particularly musicals, are especially popular and more than 40 a year are performed in Tokyo alone, usually translated into Japanese.

A fascinating range of experimental and avant-garde theatre is also being performed in Japan. Influential Japanese directors, such as Tadashi Suzuki and Yukio Ninagawa, have staged a number of Western classics including *Macbeth*, *Medea* and *The Tempest* using Japanese movement and acting styles.

In his direction of plays, Suzuki uses a performance style that synthesises the movement he developed in his actor training with martial arts, Kabuki and Noh. His aim is to make connections between Japanese and European theatre, and he has worked extensively on adaptations of Greek myths and plays, including *The Trojan Women*, *The Bacchae* and *Clytemnestra*.

Other directors such as Kobo Abe have experimented with genuinely surreal forms of theatre. Playwrights including Juro Kara and Oriza Hirata have written plays that combine the intense energy of physical theatre with strong political and social criticism. More realistic, psychological plays have become popular in the past decade. At the same time, Butoh has become influential as an exciting new form of explosive physical theatre.

BUTOH

Butoh began as a form of experimental performance art in Japan in the 1960s. This was a time of student protest on issues including the presence of US military troops in Japan, the Vietnam War and the restrictions of traditional Japanese culture.

There were demonstrations in the streets and theatre groups sprang up performing protest pieces. Butoh emerged from this period of unrest. The founder of Butoh was Tatsumi Hijikata, a young dancer who felt that Japanese dance was simply copying Western styles and forms. His aim was to develop a distinctly Japanese form that focused on the human body



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17.4.1 Butoh in performance

through unconscious improvised movement. Butoh can be translated as ‘earth dance’, and it has developed as a striking new form of physical theatre practised by actors and mimes as well as dancers. Butoh has strongly influenced other forms of theatre performance throughout the world.

Butoh performers wear little or no costumes, their heads are usually shaved and their bodies are painted white. The performances involve violent and distorted movement and often contain confronting images, disturbing content and angry attacks on the nature of modern society. In many ways, Butoh is a form of theatre of cruelty that Artaud would have recognised and applauded. A number of contemporary Australian companies – including Frank Theatre (also known as OzFrank) and Zen Zen Zo, both based in Queensland – have been influenced by modern Asian theatre, especially the physical style of Butoh.

CONTEMPORARY THEATRE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

In many Asian countries, often in defiance of government restrictions, young companies are finding new voices. Many of these experiments blend traditional Asian forms of theatre with Western dramatic elements and combine the theatre practice of different Asian countries. An example of this is the contemporary Thai play *Girl of the Soil*, staged by a group of Thai theatre companies as part of the 2009 Bangkok Theatre Festival. In the play, Mali, a teenage girl living on a farm in the north of Thailand, comes to Bangkok to search for her own identity in the modern world. She becomes involved in political activism but is soon disenchanted with the city and eventually decides she wants to grow organic rice. *Girl of the Soil* was originally written by the Japanese playwright Hideki Noda more than 10 years ago and has been adapted by the Thai director Nikorn Saetang. The actors who performed the play at the festival came from five different theatre companies, and the play involves extensive use of physical theatre movement, both Western and Eastern. The play explores many of the key issues facing Asia today – the migration to the cities, the desire of the young to be part of the modern world, political oppression and environmental sustainability. These issues are common themes in the theatre of many Asian nations.

In Indonesia, a new theatre company, Teater Satu, is challenging both traditional performance and official censorship. Since 2008, the company has collaborated with Hivos, an international organisation that houses various programs from all around the globe in order to address issues such as women’s empowerment, freedom of expression and sustainable food. Teater Satu’s 2016 play *Dongeng Untuk Nala* (The Tale for Nala [Nala means ‘heart’ in Javanese]) explores what happens when people lose their beliefs and their morality and become brutal, greedy and intolerant.



WORKSHOP 17.4.1: CREATING CONTEMPORARY ASIAN THEATRE

Exercise: Choose one country in Asia and research contemporary social or political issues that the country is dealing with. Choose one issue and create a performance, based on the issue that uses one or more of the performance styles identified in this chapter.

THEATRE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The first two decades of the 21st century have seen extraordinary developments and transformations in the performance of plays on stage. We have already explored some examples of these in the previous sections on characterisation, stagecraft and performance. At the same time, the fundamental nature of theatre, of live actors performing for a live audience, continues to thrive around the world, despite the impact of cinema, television and, more recently, the internet.

In this chapter, we will briefly explore the key features of contemporary Western theatre in four countries – Britain, France, Germany and the USA, where live performance continues to be a fundamental part of their cultures. The evolution of theatre in Australia will be investigated in depth in Section 6.

Chapter 18 concludes with a description of some of the most important and popular forms of theatre around the world. Some of these, such as realistic plays and musicals, have a long history. Others, such as physical theatre and multidisciplinary performance, have evolved much more recently to become major theatrical forms in the 21st century.

18.1 WORLD THEATRE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

BRITAIN

In many ways, Britain remains the theatre capital of the world in terms of the quality and number of plays staged each year. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the National Theatre maintain a level of excellence unmatched anywhere else. In the case study of *Complicité* in Section 1, we explored how this company has become one of the most outstanding multidisciplinary performance groups in the world.

There has also been a resurgence of playwriting in Britain, particularly in the genre of violent confrontational plays dealing with forbidden subjects and dysfunctional behaviour. The work of Sarah Kane was the impetus for this genre.

Her plays depict rape, murder and cannibalism. The title of Kane's last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, refers to the time of early morning often associated with depression and suicide. The play was staged in 2000, shortly after her suicide. A number of other significant playwrights are associated with this genre of play, including Mark Ravenhill (*The Cut* 2006, *Candide* 2013), David Harrower (*Blackbird* 2005, *Sweet Nothings* 2010), Patrick Marber (*The Musicians* 2004, *Don Juan in Soho* 2017) and Martin Crimp (*The City* 2008, *In The Republic of Happiness* 2012).

At the same time, a number of established British playwrights are continuing to work, including Alan Ayckbourn, Caryl Churchill and David Hare. Recently, some much younger playwrights have emerged whose plays deal with the experience of late teenage and early adult life. Polly Stenham was only 19 when she wrote *That Face*, which won a number of awards and was staged internationally.

FRANCE

France has more than 400 theatres that are subsidised by the government and five national theatres. The Comédie Française remains the most celebrated and recognised theatre in France, as it has been for hundreds of years. A number of new playwrights are emerging, including Pierre Nothe, whose latest play is *The Story of a Woman*, first staged in 2017.

A very different modern theatre company in France with an international reputation is Théâtre du Soleil (the Theatre of the Sun), which has been in existence for more than 50 years. It is run by Ariane Mnouchkine, one of the most influential female directors in the world. She works with the commitment to developing new works of theatre, sometimes using improvisation, sometimes starting from classic texts.

GERMANY

In Germany, a number of directors and playwrights are creating innovative new theatre that is both exciting and controversial. The director Frank Castorf is known as a 'text destroyer' because he radically alters and distorts the texts of plays he stages. When he tried to direct Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 2004, the changes he made were so radical that he was refused permission to stage the play by Williams's estate.

The work of Helena Waldmann has been deeply influenced by the time she has spent in places such as Afghanistan, Iran and Palestine. Her 2009 production *Burka Bondage* exposed the parallels between the burka, the gown that Muslim women wear to completely cover their head and body, and bondage, a Japanese technique for binding women.

Young German playwrights, like the new wave of German directors, are working across national boundaries and cultures in the creation of new work. In 2009 a project was set up in which young playwrights from Germany and Israel wrote short plays on the theme of identity, which resulted in collaborative performances by Israel's HaBima company and Germany's Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus. The plays focused on the countries' identities and the connection between them.

USA

While the musical remains the most popular style of theatre in America, a number of established playwrights have continued to produce new plays. The best known is David Mamet, who has written a number of successful film scripts as well as plays. Julie Taymor became famous for her direction of *The Lion King* and continues to direct major musicals and operas. Suzan-Lori Parks established a reputation as one of the USA's leading black playwrights in the 1990s, and she has continued to produce new work, including writing one complete short play every day for a year: the resulting series, *365 Plays/365 Days*, was produced by 700 theatres around the world.

A number of younger Asian-American playwrights have also emerged, some writing plays that deal with their experiences or the wider reality of contemporary America, while others have focused on life in Asian cities such as Manila in the Philippines.

Robert Wilson, the most famous experimental director in the USA, continues to create and direct plays that are concerned with human communication and the use of language.



WORKSHOP 18.1.1: HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Exercise: Choose one country and create an annotated timeline of the changes in theatrical style since the turn of the century. Write one to two paragraphs describing how each change has developed and influenced new kinds of theatre.

18.2 MAJOR DIRECTIONS IN MODERN WORLD THEATRE

THE WELL-MADE PLAY

Despite all the innovations and experiments of the last 100 years, despite the spread of digital technology and the emergence of physical theatre and performance art, the most popular and the most widely performed style of theatre is still the traditional stage play, performed in acts and scenes and involving characters speaking dialogue. It may be that this will continue to be the fundamental shape of live theatre, as it has been for 2500 years.

FESTIVALS

There has been an explosion in the number of theatre festivals being staged around the world each year. These festivals can range from local community celebrations to city, state and even national events. Many of these festivals provide the opportunity to see performance work from around the world that would not

otherwise be available. Festivals also enable theatre artists to write, stage and perform new work that would not otherwise be funded. In Europe alone there are over 300 drama festivals each year.

THE MUSICAL

Stage musicals are among the most popular style of theatre around the world. In the 21st century there have been some major changes in the way musicals are written and in the musicals being performed. Over the past decade, many of the musicals staged internationally have been revivals. These large, spectacular productions tour across countries and even across continents. The most popular contemporary musicals tend to be biographies of rock musicians (*The Jersey Boys*, *Kinky Boots*) or feature their music, such as *Mama Mia* (ABBA) and *Across the Universe* (the Beatles). Some are popular stage versions of musical films such as *The Lion King* and *Billy Elliot*. Even *Wicked*, the most popular of contemporary musicals, is actually a prequel to the classic musical *The Wizard of Oz*. *Matilda*, co-written by Australian Tim Minchin, is based on the children's book by Roald Dahl. Contemporary musicals can also be political and social satires, such as *Keating! The Musical* by Casey Bennetto or *Shane Warne The Musical* by Eddie Perfect.

Getty Images/James D. Morgan



18.2.1 *Matilda the Musical* featuring the original Australian cast

PHYSICAL THEATRE

The new theatres built for Cirque du Soleil in Las Vegas cost hundreds of millions of dollars and are the most elaborate in the world.

The explosion of physical theatre in modern theatre has already been reviewed in Section 3. The extraordinary success of Cirque du Soleil is indicative of the popularity of modern physical performance, and its influence on Western theatre has been profound. In addition, major elements of physical theatre styles from Asia are transforming the performance of even the most text-based and realistic plays. There is every likelihood that the impact of physical theatre will increasingly revolutionise live performance.

PUPPETRY AND BLACK LIGHT THEATRE

One of the oldest forms of theatre – puppetry – continues to be a major theatrical form in Asia in the traditional shadow puppetry of the wayang kulit. However, it is also developing in new and exciting ways in a number of countries. Professional puppetry companies have emerged in Europe, Japan, the USA and Australia, blending traditional hand and rod puppets, marionettes and large body puppets with modern black light technology. One of the best-known companies is the Philippe Genty company in France, which has been operating for more than 30 years. Handspring Puppet Company, based in South Africa, has presented performances in more than 30 countries and created the horse puppets for the play *War Horse*. The play toured the UK in 2017–18, more than 10 years after it was first staged.



Alamy Stock Photo/Geraint Lewis

18.2.2 Handspring's *War Horse* puppets

MULTIDISCIPLINARY THEATRE

Modern theatre is increasingly blending digital technologies with elements of physical theatre, ballet, opera, circus, puppetry and other genres. At its best, this creates a new form of theatre that defines multidisciplinary performance.



WORKSHOP 18.2.1: CREATING A CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

Exercise: As a whole class, decide on the plot and characters for a piece of theatre that would appeal to a young, modern audience. Structure the text of your play into a number of separate scenes. Divide into groups, with each group taking responsibility for one scene of your play. Your group is responsible not only for the narrative and action, but also the performance style of the scene. Each group improvises their scene using one major 21st-century performance style, such as realism, musical, multimedia, physical theatre, eclectic or any other major contemporary style you choose. Perform your collage of theatre styles to an outside audience.

SECTION 6

Australian theatre

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INTRODUCTION

Theatre performance in Australia is just over 200 years old. However, Australia has the oldest form of performance: Aboriginal corroborees. Corroborees have been performed for over 60 000 years. By contrast, the school subject of Drama is very new, only emerging in Australia in the 1970s.

A distinctive style of Australian drama, identified through plays that reflect our society and our diverse culture, has developed over the last two centuries, including the emergence and evolution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre, which has become an extraordinarily significant and distinct part of the Australian theatre landscape.



9780170419987

THE EVOLUTION OF AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

Over the past century, many playwrights, directors and theatre companies have deliberately set out to capture and develop uniquely Australian characters and situations on stage. These efforts have not only reflected the Australian culture of the time but have actually helped to shape it, particularly in the last half of the 20th century. The aggressively masculine ‘ocker’ plays of the 60s and 70s, written by white Australian males, created a stereotype that many young men consciously took as a model. At the same time, these plays were a valid representation of Australian society during that period in history.

By way of contrast, the last decade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century saw the appearance of a number of outstanding plays by female playwrights. This section reveals how a succession of powerful plays dealing with relationships and the role of women have not only reflected the way our culture has changed since the 1970s but have also provided an articulate voice for women. It should be noted, however, that the percentage of plays written by women that are staged in Australia has remained at just over 20 per cent in this century.

19.1 THE BEGINNINGS

The first theatrical performance in Australia was given on 4 June 1789, just 18 months after the First Fleet arrived. The production was a comedy that had been successful in England called *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar. The actors were convicts and it was performed in a mud hut with an audience of about 60 people. Admission was paid with whatever the convicts could afford, including wheat, rum, tobacco and chickens.

This first theatrical performance became the subject of Thomas Keneally’s book *The Playmaker*, which in turn was the basis of the outstanding modern play *Our Country’s Good*, written in England by Timberlake Wertenbaker and performed widely throughout Australia. Wertenbaker’s play shows the convicts rehearsing *The Recruiting Officer* and explores the way their involvement in theatre changes their lives.



Mark Anolak

19.1.1 Production of *Our Country's Good* by The Stirling Players, Adelaide, 2016

The first theatre in Australia was opened in 1796 by Robert Sidaway, a convict. The theatre seated 120 people and admission was one shilling. It was closed two years later on the order of Governor Hunter, probably because of the pickpocketing and burglary associated with it. Sidaway opened another theatre in 1800 but it did not survive.

There were two early plays written about the bushranger and convict Michael Howe, who was shot and killed in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1818. For the first half of the 19th century, bushrangers were one of the favourite subjects of Australian plays, including *The Tragedy of Donohoe* by Charles Harpur, *The Bushrangers* by Henry Melville and *The Bandit of the Rhine* by Henry Evan Thomas. In fact, the very first play written by an Australian resident was *The Bushrangers* by David Burn. The play was first performed in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1829 but was not published or performed in Australia until 1971.

In 1833 the first permanent theatre, the Theatre Royal, was built in Sydney by Barnett Levey, and seated 1000 people. Levey presented nearly 400 shows during the theatre's lifetime, mainly melodramas and farces, with occasional operas and Shakespearean plays. As many as five different plays were performed each week. Local performers such as dancers, singers, musicians and acrobats were also employed to entertain the audiences, who were often noisy and disruptive, sometimes throwing fruit and other objects onto the stage as signs of their disapproval. Elsewhere, overseas plays began to be staged in Hobart; amateur theatricals were performed in Perth during the 1830s; the first play staged in Adelaide opened in 1838; and Melbourne saw its first plays in 1842.

Some early plays about Australia were written in France and England by people who had never been to Australia. These plays included lions, tigers and hyenas in their portrayals of Australian wildlife.

In the early days of Sydney's development, Aboriginal corroborees were performed regularly. They were also the first form of public entertainment in Perth after it was founded in 1829. This ancient form of performance was therefore part of the birth of theatre in Australia.



WORKSHOP 19.1.1: SOLO PERFORMANCE

Exercise: Working individually, devise a solo performance that creates the character of a bushranger or early settler. The solo performance could be a monologue, soliloquy, storytelling or physical theatre.



WORKSHOP 19.1.2: GROUP PERFORMANCE

Exercise: Working in groups, devise a drama about the experiences of the convicts in the early days of settlement.

19.2 MELODRAMA

As in the rest of the world, theatre in Australia was dominated by melodrama throughout the 19th century. Plays were written very quickly to a formula, like many of today's television shows, and included sensational situations, stereotyped heroes and villains, and tragic events resolved by happy endings. Most of the melodramas presented in Australia were imported plays that had been successful overseas. Among the most popular were *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a play about the evils of Negro slavery in America; *The Flying Dutchman*, about a ghost ship whose crew were doomed to sail the seas forever; and *Black-Eyed Susan*, where a young sailor tries to protect his wife from abuse by a senior officer and is court-martialled.

There were some strong Australian melodramas and comedies written in this period, particularly by convicts. Edward Geoghegan wrote *The Hibernian Father* and an operetta, *The Currency Lass*, while James Tucker created the comedy *Jemmy Green* about an innocent London girl who suffers terrible misfortunes in Australia. There was even an early attempt at tragedy: Charles Harpur's *The Tragedy of Donohoe*, adapted from his collection of poems *The Bushrangers, a Play in Five Acts* (1853). This was the first Australian play published in book form in Australia. It portrayed the notorious bushranger Jack Donohoe as a tragic figure and was written in blank verse in imitation of Shakespeare.

Towards the end of the 19th century, Australian plays became increasingly popular but theatre managers were often unwilling to stage them unless they were successful in London first. Nevertheless, Walter Cooper's *Colonial Experience* (1868), Arch Murray's *Forged* (1873) and Francis RC Hopkins's *All for Gold* (1877) were all popular. *All for Gold* toured Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Canada, and was the first play of Australian origin to be licensed by the Lord Chamberlain in England.

Hopkins went on to write a number of other successful plays, as did George Darrell, whose play *The Sunny South* was immensely popular in Australia and England. Alfred Dampier, who produced and starred in Hopkins's plays, was one of the few managers to consistently stage Australian plays in the 1880s and 1890s; in particular, the stage adaptations of the novels *For the Term of His Natural Life* and *Robbery Under Arms*.

The producer of the largest number of plays in Australia at this time was JC Williamson, who had moved to Australia from the USA in 1879. His company staged plays throughout Australia and New Zealand and by 1906 it employed 650 people, including 187 actors. However, almost all the plays staged by Williamson came from overseas and had been previously successful, especially in London.

As the 20th century began, theatre was alive and well in Australia. There were five theatres in Sydney, five in Melbourne, three in Brisbane, two in Adelaide and two in Tasmania. The *Theatrical Holiday Book* for 1885 listed 62 playwrights

in Australia, each averaging two or three plays to their credit, and a number of Australian plays had been successful overseas. The main problem was in convincing theatre managers in Australia to stage the Australian plays.



WORKSHOP 19.2.1: RESEARCH

Exercise: Conduct research into the first theatre that was established in your state, including the first play performed there. If the play was Australian, how did it reflect the social situation of the time? If the play was from overseas, analyse what style of theatre it represented.



WORKSHOP 19.2.2: SCRIPTED PERFORMANCE

Exercise: Work on the script of a 19th-century melodrama, designing the staging and costuming, and performing chosen scenes from the play.

19.3 EARLY 20TH CENTURY

As Australia became a nation in 1901, there was an increasing desire for a national Australian theatre that reflected the distinctive nature of life in Australia. The *Bulletin* magazine had been running a campaign for years and the emergence of a school of Australian painters, the development of a political consciousness through the trade union movement and the establishment of the Australian Labor Party all encouraged the supporters of Australian theatre.

Australian writers were inspired by the growth of national theatre in other countries, such as Ireland, the emerging 'new realism' of playwrights such as Ibsen and Chekhov, and the work of Constantin Stanislavski. A group of these writers, including Louis Esson, attempted to create a distinctive style of Australian drama, with little success. Audiences responded with much more enthusiasm to comedies and romances, usually set in the bush, than they did to serious realistic dramas about people living in the cities. The most popular plays in the early 20th century were light comedies such as *On Our Selection* by Steele Rudd and *The Sentimental Bloke* by CJ Dennis. While these plays provided amusing, popular entertainment, they relied on caricature and exaggerations of Australian speech to generate the humour.

An increasing number of amateur theatre groups around the country attempted to stage serious and experimental Australian plays, including the Adelaide Repertory Theatre, the Pioneer Players in Melbourne and the Community Playhouse in Sydney. The 1920s and 1930s also saw the emergence of the socialist 'new theatres' in various states.

Another interesting development in this period was the appearance of plays that dealt with events and concerns that were specific to a particular area. Alexander Turner in Western Australia created definite characters in a particular environment, while George Landen Dann in Queensland wrote about the problems confronting Aboriginals in that state. His play *Fountains Beyond* was the first Australian play to

CJ Dennis's poem *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* was turned into a stage musical and first staged in 1961. It became the most successful Australian musical of the 20th century in terms of the number of performances and the fact that there were two cast recordings, a television production, a ballet and continuous revivals around Australia for the rest of the century.

have an Aboriginal person as its protagonist and to look at the issue of Aboriginals as fringe dwellers.

The popularity of radio in the 1930s also led to an increasing number of Australian dramas being broadcast and the ABC encouraged new playwrights to submit radio plays. There were a number of plays dealing with the Eureka Rebellion at this time – both on radio and on the stage – just as there had been bushranger and Ned Kelly plays 50 years earlier.



NAA: A1200, L40570

19.3.1 A 1961 production of *The Sentimental Bloke*.



WORKSHOP 19.3.1: THE SENTIMENTAL BLOKE

Exercise: Working from the poem *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, devise a performance that uses a broad comedy style such as farce or slapstick to create the performance.



WORKSHOP 19.3.2: DEVELOP A MUSICAL

Exercise: Choose some modern songs around a theme and use them to create a comic or romantic musical like *The Sentimental Bloke*.

19.4 WOMEN WRITERS

In the first half of the 20th century, women writers in Australia had a much greater influence on the development of their nation's theatre than women in England or America. Australia's female playwrights provided a range of new insights and perspectives on our culture through their drama.

KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD AND BETTY ROLAND

The play *Brumby Innes*, by Katharine Susannah Prichard, won a best Australian play award in 1927. The central character, Innes, is a drunk and a racist who exploits the Aboriginal workers on his cattle station and the play attempts to condemn this racist abuse.

The Touch of Silk by Betty Roland, first performed in 1928, tells the story of a French girl named Jeanne who meets an Australian soldier in France during the First World War. After the war she comes to Australia to live on his farm. There is a drought, and when Jeanne buys some silk underwear from a travelling salesman, her husband is angry about the waste of money. When Jeanne goes off to a dance with the salesman, her husband follows her and kills the man. In the end, Jeanne confesses to adultery with the salesman to save her husband. Jeanne is an interesting, believable and complex character, and her dilemma in the play tells us a great deal about Australian attitudes to women in the 1920s. Betty Roland wrote a number of other plays, including *Are You Ready Comrade?*, a powerful piece of political theatre, and *Granite Peak*, a play set in Central Australia.



19.4.1 Katharine Susannah Prichard

19.4.2 Betty Roland

Melbourne Theatre Company: Jeff Busby Photography



19.4.1 Valerie Lehman and Nicki Wendt in *The Touch of Silk*, 1988

The Touch of Silk was the first of many Australian plays to deal with the clash of cultures between native-born Australians and foreigners, migrants and refugees. Perhaps the most outstanding is *Norm and Ahmed*, by Alex Buzo, first staged in 1967, about an encounter between an Australian man and a Pakistani student. At the end of the play, Norm beats Ahmed almost to death. The play continues to be performed and to shock and challenge audiences. Alana Valentine's *Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah* (commissioned by the Alex Buzo Company and staged in a double bill with *Norm and Ahmed*, 2009) is described by Valentine as a 'portrait of Afghani Muslim women, who are articulate, highly educated, deeply spiritual and enraged by the way Australian and global media paint them as oppressed, meek and silent'.

CATHERINE SHEPHERD AND DYPHNA CUSACK



19.4.3 Catherine Shepherd
19.4.4 Dymphna Cusack

Catherine Shepherd, another significant writer, lived and worked in Hobart. All her writing deals in some way with the need for self-realisation. *Daybreak* is set in Hobart during convict times and explores an attempt to rebel against the establishment of the day. *Jane, My Love* is another historical play set in Tasmania with Lieutenant Governor Franklin and his wife Jane as central characters. Rather than playing the passive role of governor's lady, Jane fought for more humane treatment of convicts and became a champion of the arts and women's education, despite attacks from the Hobart establishment.

Dymphna Cusack went to Sydney University before becoming a teacher. Her plays are sharp social commentaries that support the underdog, and therefore have a very Australian flavour. *Morning Sacrifice* is set in a girls' high school with an all-female cast: the staff of the school. The school is revealed as elite, snobbish and hypocritical. The play was successfully revived by the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1991. Cusack's plays *Shoulder the Sky* and *Eternal Now* both deal with experiences of those at home during the Second World War who had to cope with the traumas and dislocations it caused.

ORIEL GRAY AND MONA BRAND



19.4.5 Oriel Gray
19.4.6 Mona Brand

Two important women writers associated with the left-wing New Theatre were Oriel Gray and Mona Brand. Gray's play *Had We but World Enough* deals powerfully with racial discrimination in a small town when a school teacher casts an Aboriginal girl in the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in an Easter play. Brand won international success in 1948 with her play *Here Under Heaven*, which also deals with racism, this time on a sheep station in Queensland during the Second World War.



WORKSHOP 19.4.1: AUSTRALIAN FEMALE PLAYWRIGHTS

Exercise: Choose a play that is written by a female playwright before 1970. Explore the social and personal contexts that are revealed in the play. Perform a scene from the play which is particularly interesting in its portrayal of either women or men – or both – in the society at the time.

Suggested plays:

- 'Burst of Summer' by Oriel Gray in *Plays of the 60s: Volume 1*, Currency Press, Sydney, 2000
- 'Sky Without Birds' by Oriel Gray in *Plays of the 50s: Volume 1*, Currency Press, Sydney, 2004
- *The Torrents* by Oriel Gray, Currency Press, Sydney, 2016
- 'This Old Man Comes Rolling Home' by Dorothy Hewett in *Plays of the 60s: Volume 2*, Currency Press, Sydney, 2000

- *Brumby Innes/Bid Me to Love* by Katharine Susannah Prichard, Currency Press, Sydney, 1969
- *The Touch of Silk* by Betty Roland, Currency Press, Sydney, 1974
- 'The Multi-Coloured Umbrella' by Barbara Vernon, in *Plays of the 50s: Volume 2*, Currency Press, Sydney, 2005

19.5 AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMES OF AGE

RUSTY BUGLES

Rusty Bugles by Sumner Locke Elliott was first performed on 21 October 1948 and marked the beginning of a revolution in Australian theatre. It is set in an army camp in the Northern Territory in 1944 and shows a group of soldiers waiting for the war to end – they are bored, frustrated and stressed. The play features strong characters and the conflicts between them. The dialogue is free-flowing, authentic Australian speech that is superbly structured. The play was immensely popular and influential, and was even prosecuted by the police for the use of obscene language!

As a result of the increasing interest in Australian theatre generated by plays such as *Rusty Bugles*, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was set up in 1954. The Trust raised £90 000 from donations and received a grant of £30 000 from the Commonwealth Government. The aim of the Trust was to establish a distinctively Australian artistic scene in drama, opera and ballet. In its first year of operation, the Trust achieved an overwhelming success with its presentation of the play *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*.

'THE DOLL'

On 11 January 1955, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust presented its first Australian production, Ray Lawler's play *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. The play had shared first prize in the Playwrights Advisory Board 1954 competition with Oriel Gray's *The Torrents*. 'The Doll' went on to become a worldwide success and one of the most influential and celebrated of all Australian plays. *The Torrents* disappeared into obscurity while *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* raised the profile of Australian theatre around the world.

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll remains one of the most important Australian plays. It explores one of the major concerns of modern realistic theatre: the need for people to have dreams to sustain them, and the way these dreams can also be destructive. Roo and Barney are two Queensland canecutters who come to Melbourne every year during the off-season; Olive is the woman who waits for Roo each year. After years of these meetings, Roo has decided that he wants to settle down and get a steady job, which shatters Olive's sense of their relationship. Roo taking an office job in the city destroys Olive's romantic vision of him as a sun-tanned outback hero who flies down to her each year like a god. More universally, the play explores the end of the great Australian myth of the maverick outback



19.5.1 'An ever-changing idiom'
a response to *Summer of the
Seventeenth Doll*

Aussie male. Lawler uses language in a way that is colourful and entirely appropriate to his characters but also conveys the profound and complex meaning of the play.

Twenty years later, Lawler was commissioned by the Melbourne Theatre Company to write two more plays that were prequels to *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. These plays told the story of the main characters before the events of *The Doll*, and the three plays together are now called *The Doll Trilogy*. *Kid Stakes* was first staged in 1975 and *Other Times* in 1976.

Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust



19.5.1 The original cast of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*: from left: Ray Lawler, June Jago, Carmel Dunn (at the piano), Roma Johnston, Noel Ferrier and Fenella Maguire, November 1955

THE SHIFTING HEART

Richard Beynon's *The Shifting Heart* seemed to confirm that Australian drama had come of age. Like 'The Doll', *The Shifting Heart* is set in a Melbourne suburb – this time Collingwood instead of Carlton – and deals with an Italian immigrant family. On Christmas Eve, the son, Gino, goes to a dance and gets into a fight. He returns home but goes back again, this time carrying a knife. He is badly injured and rushed to hospital but dies. Maria, his sister, blames all Australians – including her husband Clarry – for Gino's death because of their prejudice against Italians. However, the play ends with Maria and Clarry being reconciled and naming their new son Gino.

The Shifting Heart is a devastating attack on Australian racism and attitudes to migrants, but it is also full of warmth and humour. The characterisation is excellent and even the more stereotyped Italian characters seem interesting in an Australian setting.

BURST OF SUMMER

Oriel Gray's *Burst of Summer* was first staged at the Little Theatre (now St Martin's) in Melbourne. The central character in this play is Peggy, an Aboriginal girl who returns to her small country town after starring in a film. The play deals powerfully with racism and its effect on the victims. Other plays to confront the issue of the treatment of Aboriginal people at this time were Barbara Stellmach's *Dark Heritage*, set in Queensland, and David Ireland's *Image in the Clay*.



WORKSHOP 19.5.1: REALISING A HERITAGE PLAY

Exercise: Choose one Australian play mentioned in this chapter that has taken your interest. Find a copy of the play or an extract. Generate and realise a performance of the chosen play. In your performance, aim to be true to the style of writing of the play.



WORKSHOP 19.5.2: REALISING A CONTEMPORARY PLAY

Exercise: Choose a contemporary play that deals with similar themes or concerns to the heritage play you performed. Compare the way the two plays explore the theme or concern, exploring both the ideas and perspectives of the plays and their genres and performance styles. For example, *Rusty Bugles* (1948) and *A Town Named War Boy* by Ross Mueller (2015) both deal with the behaviour of young men in wartime. Oriel Gray's *Burst of Summer* (1959) and *Kill the Messenger* by Nakkiah Lui (2015) both deal with the racism faced by Aboriginal Australians.

CASE STUDY 6.1: CURRENCY PRESS



C6.1.1 Currency Press

Who is Currency Press?

Currency Press is proud to be Australia's foremost publisher of the performing arts and its oldest active independent publisher. We publish many of the major Australian playwrights, including: Van Badham, Angela Betzien, Alex Buzo, Andrew Bovell, Matt Cameron, Patricia Cornelius, Wesley Enoch, Jack Davis, Nick Enright, Michael Gow, Alma De Groen, Jane Harrison, Dorothy Hewett, Jack Hibberd, Tom Holloway, Lally Katz, Daniel Keene, Ray Lawler, Michelle Law, Suzie Miller, Tommy Murphy, Joanna Murray-Smith, Louis Nowra, Lachlan Philpott, Hannie Rayson, John Romeril, Melissa Reeves, Stephen Sewell, Katherine Thomson, Alana Valentine and David Williamson. Our list includes plays, screenplays, professional handbooks, biographies, cultural histories, critical studies and reference works.

Where is Currency Press based?

Since 1998, Currency has been at 201 Cleveland Street, Redfern. Currency Press was founded by Katharine Brisbane and Philip Parsons and from 1971–1981 Currency was run from their home at 87 Jersey Road, Woollahra. In 1982, after a brief period of extension to 89 Jersey Road, a legacy enabled the purchase of a three-storey former draper's premises at 330 Oxford Street, in nearby Paddington. Currency then moved to Cleveland Street in 1998 where it is situated today.

How does Currency Press select books for publication?

Unlike drama publishers in other countries whose basic income is derived from a much longer history of world drama, Currency Press relies heavily on a rapidly expanding list of contemporary Australian writers. We also publish some genre plays of the colonial period and a handful of works from the first half of the 20th century written for amateur performance.

Currency judges the artistic merit of a play by a number of criteria. We only consider contemporary plays for publication if they have had a production by a professional theatre company, which ensures a certain standard of writing. We then examine whether the play has something unique to offer the reader, both in terms of its structure and its content, and also to our evolving culture and voice.

Our plays reflect who we, as Australians, are at a particular point in time and our unique voice. From the cancutters in Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* to William Thornhill in Andrew Bovell's adaptation of Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, Jada Alberts' resilient and beautiful family of *Brothers Wreck* and Lally Katz's amazing Hungarian-Australian Ana in *Neighbourhood Watch*, our theatre holds up a mirror and shows us who we are in all our diversity and how we got here.

What are the challenges and rewards of publishing historical/traditional texts?

Currency Press gets its name from *The Currency Lass* by Edward Geoghegan, which in 1844 was the earliest recorded play written in Australia with a local setting. We only need to look at John McCallum's history of Australian playwriting *Belonging* to see the number of plays written in Australia in the late 19th and early 20th century that have been, for the most part, forgotten. Getting these plays into print gives them another life and introduces them to a new audience.

The challenges come in providing the reader with the context that makes sense both of the language used in plays written in the early 20th century, and the theatrical traditions from which they stem. To use a recent example, *Brumby Innes* by Katharine Susannah Prichard (written in the 1920s) was considered revolutionary at the time in the use of Indigenous language. By today's standards, however, the depiction of Indigenous characters and the appropriation of Indigenous culture can make for some quite uncomfortable reading. In a new edition of the play, we added new introductions which provide historical context that shows the play for what it is – a milestone that marks a shift in thinking and a reminder of how literature can be the catalyst for change.

In 2016 Currency published a new edition of *The Torrents* (first performed in 1956) by Oriel Gray. In this case, publishing the new edition felt like righting a historical wrong. There were a number of excellent Australian female playwrights in the 1940s and 1950s, unknown to nearly all but theatrical historians. In publishing this new edition, we are hoping to introduce a contemporary audience to the play and, it is hoped, prompt a revival of interest, not just in Gray's work, but in the other, rather prolific, female playwrights of the era.

What are the challenges and rewards of publishing new texts?

With the exception of books that are published as part of the Current Theatre Series (which are published to coincide with the performance), Currency only accepts for consideration plays that have already had a professional production. This means that by the time it comes for publication, the playwright has had the opportunity to see the play on stage, to see what works (and doesn't) and to make appropriate amendments. For plays that are published to coincide with the production in the Current Theatre Series, the biggest challenges come from the scheduling – we leave it as late as possible to go to the printers to enable the playwrights time to make any changes that occur during rehearsals. The deadlines can be daunting, to say the least.

And the rewards of publishing new texts? Giving the plays a life beyond the production, contributing to Australian culture and supporting Australian writers, to name but a few!

Currency Press, Sydney, 2018

CASE STUDY 6.2: PLAYLAB



C6.2.1 Playlab

Who is Playlab?

Playlab builds theatre that matters.

In 1972, Playlab was formed in Brisbane by playwrights as a way of supporting each other to develop their work. From 1978, Playlab started to publish new Australian plays in order to extend their life, profile the playwrights and increase opportunities for further productions. Since then, Playlab has continued to evolve, growing into a national organisation dedicated to the development and promotion of new writing for theatre.

Since 2012, artistic director, Ian Lawson, has led a small but dedicated team as the company has enjoyed an unprecedented period of growth. In direct response to the groundswell of quality playwrights in Australia, Playlab has evolved into a new-writing theatre company, making the organisation unique nationally as the only company to work from idea, through development, onto stage and into publication.

As a new-writing theatre, Playlab provides playwrights with a supportive space that aids creative risk, while for audiences, it offers challenging and robust ideas-based work that speaks to the diversity and politics of contemporary Australia.

Where is Playlab based?

Playlab is based in Brisbane with programs that span nationally. Playlab has a large, affordable rehearsal room, which is available to independent artists, when not in use, for their own development programs, readings and rehearsals. Playlab is building a catalogue of imaginative, diverse and excellent productions performed in partnership with iconic Brisbane venues such as Brisbane Powerhouse and La Boite Theatre.

What style/s does Playlab work in and why does Playlab work in this/these style/s?

Playlab has been supporting, interpreting and reflecting Australian culture through the lens of theatre for over 45 years. Playlab is a new-writing theatre and as such text is at the centre of what we do. We believe new writing has the power to change perspectives by expanding our understanding of the past, challenging our present and speculating about our future. We believe that the development and sharing of Australian stories is vital to a healthy, progressive and socially-just society.

As to style, Playlab is open to developing, presenting and publishing work in almost any style. The only requirement is a narrative, and this doesn't mean it has to have words, as Playlab considers text to also be dramatic, non-verbal action and image.

What is Playlab's approach to theatre making?

Playlab's development programs offer a pathway for a play to move from inception to the stage. From the emerging playwright's program 'Incubator', into 'Alpha Processing', then 'Beta Testing' and onto production, the pathway provides multiple entry points for work at any level of readiness, for playwrights of any experience.

At the centre of Playlab's process is the clarification and articulation of a work's controlling idea, that is what is the playwright wanting to communicate and why? This includes identifying the intended audience for a work. Following this is an exploration of the most appropriate form, structure and style to communicate the idea to this audience. This is conceptual work that moves through discussion, synopsis, treatment, beat sheet and drafting. The 'Alpha Processing' program is focused on this early stage process, which if executed well, fast tracks a work into a place where more time can be focused on the nuances of the story. If a play is already in draft form, the questions are generally the same, but the process would vary depending on the needs of the work.

Testing a developing work with actors in a workshop situation and in front of an audience via a reading are two vital stages of development. Lifting a work off the page and into three dimensions immediately informs the playwright and dramaturge if the dramatic action, language, turning points, climax etc. are working and if anything needs attention; it can be unpacked and possible solutions discovered and tested. At each stage, a new draft is the end point, allowing critical reflection

The objective of Playlab's process is to ready a work for the stage as completely as possible so that rehearsal can be just that – rehearsal, and not a creative development, giving the work and production its greatest chance of success.

An interview with Ian Lawson

As a director/dramaturge, how do you approach a text?

First and foremost, my process is to serve the vision of the playwright. Engaging dramaturgically with the playwright and text brings an understanding and clarification of all elements of the story, from controlling idea and structure through to character wants and needs, flaws, language, symbols, tensions and, importantly, the dramatic questions the work asks an audience. I'm more interested in character driven work than plot driven, where the transformation (or not) of a protagonist is an emotional journey that embodies confronting universal desires, fears and frailties within a specific and idiosyncratic set of given circumstances. Audiences actively (and subconsciously) seek out a connection to a story and character when the world of the play is unfamiliar in any way.

Researching the landscape and focus of the work through reference material, including imagery, brings greater understanding and leads the way to conceptualising the production. Directorially, the articulation of the spine of the work (a positive active sentence that I want the audience to take away with them when they leave the theatre, closely related to the controlling idea) is where I usually begin.

Design in all its forms (set, costume, lighting, sound etc.) follows and marks the opening of the process to collaboration. Working with the creative team, Playlab seeks to frame the dramatic action with a world that fulfils the obligations of the text, creates atmosphere and honours the style of the work.

Casting opens the process to further collaboration, with the selection of actors an opportunity to bring fresh ideas, energy and perspectives – as such I try to keep my mind open to offers and not fixate on a singular idea of each character. In rehearsals, I work with the actors to harness their creativity by defining the world their characters are operating in (given circumstances and stakes particularly), exploring character through choice and identifying their external wants and subconscious needs. Subtext is hugely important as it brings tension and texture to scenes, so having a difference between the external actions of a character and their internal wants (conscious) and/or needs (unconscious) is privileged – we rarely say what we want. I endeavour to run as many

times as possible during a process as this brings ownership, nuance and confidence to the actors, and allows me to refine and shape the work as a whole to ensure that world is seamless, the arc of the narrative compelling and the meaning imbedded.

What are the challenges and rewards of creating new texts?

New writing for theatre is what Playlab loves to do. There are plenty of challenges but there is no reward without risk. A major challenge is to continually identify works of imagination, quality and currency. This is somewhat mitigated by focusing on and investing long-term into a playwright who possesses creativity and a sociopolitical point of view, so they and their work reach their full potential. Other challenges include losing perspective on a work as it develops and consequently overlooking weaknesses. Perspective is an ally. This is countered by involving outside eyes in the process. Too short a timeline from conception to the stage are best avoided, but if there is no other choice, then resourcing properly and retaining perspective are essential. Time in a process is an absolute asset.

The rewards of creating new work are innumerable. From seeing the growth in young playwrights, to helping playwrights achieve excellence. Creating something from the ground up is much more rewarding than just interpretation because of the aim to communicate a new idea, an idea of real currency to your community to affect change. One of the most exciting times is when you have your first audience; watching them engage with a story and sensing how it is working is very special. Additionally, when an audience sees an element of themselves on stage in a fresh way, theatre can transcend itself and become a cultural event.

Playlab/Dylan Evans



C6.2.1 The poster for *Blue Bones*, produced by Playlab, 2017

What role does improvisation play in the development of performances?

Improvisation is an exploratory tool that can be utilised both in the development of a work and in a rehearsal period to make discoveries. In the process of creatively developing a new work, Playlab will commonly use it to unlock possibilities for a playwright when they are blocked, or to test ideas when they are unsure. It is a three dimensional extension of the magical 'what if...?', that can illuminate a way forward.

In a rehearsal process, the focus of improvisation is much more on connecting actors to story and truth, by building a character's backstory, developing a shared history, exploring objectives or defining style

How do they overcome obstacles in the rehearsal period? (helping students to build resilience in their own theatre making)

There are no obstacles, just opportunities. Obstacles breed creative thinking and it is a mistake to think that they all have to be overcome immediately (though some do). Remember that rehearsal is a process, so you can return to problematic areas again and again – end gaming is the enemy of creativity and truth, so patience is required. Theatre is a collaborative medium, so teamwork is essential to overcome obstacles and build a collective logic for the world of the play to grow from and be a reference to which obstacles are measured against. Tools like textual analysis, improvisation and research can be utilised to gain perspective and knowledge. Challenges are part and parcel of making theatre. If the creation of art doesn't challenge us – doesn't push us ahead – then excellence will always elude.



Playlab/Justine Walpole

C6.2.2 *Blue Bones* premiered at Brisbane Powerhouse on the 5 May 2017

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

Australian drama has come a long way since that day in 1789, more than two centuries ago, when a group of convicts stepped onto a makeshift stage in a mud hut. Since the 1960s, there has been a continuous expansion in the number and size of audiences and theatre companies, and an extraordinary increase in the quality, variety and scope of Australian plays

20.1 THE 1960s

The term 'ocker' has been used since the 1960s to describe the stereotype of a rough, loudmouthed male who speaks with a broad Australian accent. The term is a variation on the name Oscar and originated in a groundbreaking television sitcom from the 1960s, the *Mavis Bramston Show*.

This decade saw an explosion of playwriting and performance greater than anything that had occurred in Australia before. A fascinating variety of plays were staged, but increasingly, characterisation was dominated by the portrait of the 'ocker' male, and this caricature, created by male writers, dominated the stage for a number of years.

In 1960, the Adelaide Festival of the Arts was staged for the first time. It has since gone on to become a major arts festival, held every year, and has given rise to regular arts festivals in most major Australian cities. Some cities also stage special events such as comedy and world theatre festivals.

Television broadcasts began in Australia in 1954 and were firmly established by 1960. From the very beginning, the ABC regularly broadcast plays on television, while ABC radio continued to support the writing of new drama.

A play that had been rejected by the Board of Governors of the Adelaide Festival in 1960 became the first major play of this era to achieve international acclaim. *The One Day of the Year*, written by Alan Seymour, opened at the Palace Theatre in Sydney on 26 April 1961. Set in the Cook household before, during and after Anzac Day, the play is a powerful study of attitudes to Anzac Day, to war itself and to the whole myth of the 'bronzed Anzac'. It is also an exploration of family relationships, which gives it a universal appeal.

AUSTRALIAN WRITERS

The 1960s saw the emergence of a number of significant Australian writers.

Patrick White

Best known as a novelist with works spanning almost 50 years, Patrick White also wrote more than 10 plays between 1935 and 1987, four of which were produced in the early 1960s. All his plays were innovative works of theatre when they were first staged, achieving moments of striking, non-realistic drama, and challenging our attitudes to sexuality and life. White became the first Australian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and the Sydney Theatre Company gives an annual 'Patrick White Playwrights' Award to a new Australian play.



20.1.1 Patrick White

Thomas Keneally

In 1968 Thomas Keneally, another renowned novelist, wrote *Childermas*, a symbolic play dealing with the plight of children in Vietnam. This was one of the first plays to confront the topic of the war in Vietnam and Australia's role in it. Keneally's novel *The Playmaker*, about the staging of the first play in Australia, was the inspiration for Wertebaker's play *Our Country's Good*.



20.1.2 Thomas Keneally

Dorothy Hewett

Born in Perth in 1923, Dorothy Hewett attended university in Western Australia and was a member of the Communist Party until 1968. Her first play, *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*, is a drama of family life containing a moving, affectionate portrait of the alcoholic Laurie, a wife and mother. In 1971, Hewett's play *The Chapel Perilous* caused a furore in Perth because its central character, Sally Banner, was seen as rebellious and promiscuous by audiences at the time.



20.1.3 Dorothy Hewett

Jack Hibberd

The first play by Jack Hibberd, a Melbourne doctor, was *White with Wire Wheels*, a savage comedy about four young Australian males and their sexist, materialist attitudes. Hibberd's wedding comedy *Dimboola*, in which the members of the audience become the wedding guests, has been enormously successful since it was first staged in 1969.



20.1.4 Jack Hibberd

Alex Buzo

Alex Buzo, born in Sydney in 1944, wrote his first play in 1967. In 1968, *Norm and Ahmed* was staged at the Old Tote Theatre in Sydney. This one-act play shows two men meeting on a street at midnight: Norm, a middle-aged Australian and Vietnam veteran, and Ahmed, a Pakistani student studying in Australia. The play ends with a violent reaction from Norm to Ahmed's foreign reserve and different attitudes.



20.1.5 Alex Buzo

Buzo went on to become a major writer. He produced a number of plays that dealt with the dominance of brute force and materialism in Australian society. In *Rooted*, the rich, virile Simmo never appears on stage, yet he dominates the play. In *The Front Room Boys*, the bosses control the lives of the office workers in the 12 scenes, one for each month of the year, while in *Tom* the real villain is big business. Buzo also wrote *Coralie Lansdowne Says No*, a much more individual psychological study, while *Martello Towers* and *Makassar Reef* are about finding one's place in the world and facing up to the sometimes unsavouriness of life.

THEATRE ACTIVITY

Alongside the appearance of new playwrights came a rapid growth in theatre activity. By 1965, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was sharing out more than \$2 million among the arts in Australia, although only \$374 000 went to the theatre. At the same time, the Australian Council for the Arts was established by the federal government to distribute money to the arts. A number of new theatre companies were formed, including the Australian Performing Group based at the Pram Factory in Melbourne, and the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation, which was established in 1969 to encourage cultural traditions and arts among Aboriginal Australians. The Canberra Repertory Society staged a number of new plays, including Ric Throssell's *For Valour*, a tragic portrait of a forgotten hero of the First World War.

In 1966, over a dozen new Australian plays were given professional productions, the most in any year up until this time in Australian theatre. One was Alan Hopgood's *Private Yuk Objects*, a comedy about the prospect of going to fight in Vietnam. Hopgood had previously written a very popular comedy about Australian Rules football, *And the Big Men Fly*.

In 1963, the Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP) began as a series of meetings. ATYP was originally an interim name for the company. The first production, in 1964, was an adaptation of Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* – *Goldsmith Examined*. The production toured metropolitan schools in Sydney. In December of 1964, the first commissioned play was Barbara Vernon's *Hullabaloo Belay! The Whitby Adventure*, which premiered at the St James Playhouse and toured regional New South Wales in 1965. The play looks at the life of James Cook before the voyage to Australia. In the formative years of the company, ATYP's productions were performed by adults for young people.



WORKSHOP 20.1.1: SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Exercise: Choose one of the plays explored in this section and discuss how the work gives us perceptions and insights into the period when the play was created.

20.2 THE 1970s

PLAYWRIGHTS

David Williamson

In 1970, the first play by Australia's David Williamson appeared. He has now been writing plays for 50 years and is the most produced playwright in Australian theatre history. His most popular plays are his satirical comedies, but he has written a very broad spectrum of plays that draw on a range of genres of playwriting. At the heart of his plays is the need for a more tolerant and generous society. Even some of the most deeply flawed characters in his most savage comedies are struggling to lead a better life.



20.2.1 David Williamson

Born in Melbourne in 1942, Williamson lectured in engineering at Swinburne College of Technology before becoming a playwright. *The Coming of Stork* depicts four young people sharing a flat. It was first performed in 1970 at La Mama Theatre in Melbourne, where many new Australian plays were first seen.

In the following year, two major works by David Williamson were staged. *The Removalists* portrays an ageing, cynical police sergeant called Simmonds, and his naive young constable, Ross. They agree to help a woman called Fiona leave her drunken husband, Kenny. However, in a fit of rage, Ross attacks Kenny and beats him to death. To avoid being blamed for Kenny's death, the two policemen bash each other so that they can claim that they killed Kenny in self-defence. This play is Williamson's most serious work – a powerful indictment of official violence and corrupt authority.

By way of contrast, *Don's Party* is a cynical black comedy portraying a group of people at a party on the eve of the 1969 federal election. The play mocks the failure of their dreams and ruthlessly depicts the breakdown of their marriages. While the storyline and characterisation are thin, the language is sharp, revealing and very funny. Williams wrote a sequel to *Don's Party*, called *Don Parties On*, which was first staged in 2011, exactly 40 years after the original. The context of this sequel is the federal election of August 2010.

Another Williamson play, *Jugglers Three*, staged by the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1972, deals with a returned Vietnam veteran. Violence and the disintegration of marriage are again Williamson's concerns.

Williamson wrote prolifically during the 1970s, producing more plays about family relationships, such as *What if You Died Tomorrow?* and *A Handful of Friends*. There were also some biting comedies about different types of organisations and bureaucracies. *The Department* satirises the workings of a college engineering department, while *The Club* is a hilarious, cutting comedy about an Australian Rules football club. All Williamson's plays were popular successes and a number have been performed overseas.

John Romeril

John Romeril, who became writer-in-residence at the Pram Factory, wrote a number of plays, most significantly *The Floating World* in 1974. Set on a cruise ship travelling to Japan, the play evokes the horrors of the Second World War through the memories of its central character, Les Harding. The final monologue of the play is extraordinarily confronting, as Les describes the horrors he experienced in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. Romeril also created some satirical work, much of it improvised, for the Australian Performing Group.

Alma de Groen

Born in New Zealand, Alma de Groen lived and wrote in Australia from 1973 onwards. Her play *Chidley*, which premiered in 1976, was based on the life of William Chidley, an eccentric reformer, and is an adventurous, amusing piece of theatre. In contrast, *Going Home* examines the failure of a group of Australians living abroad to find success or happiness.



20.2.2 ABC: Interview with John Romeril

20.2.3 Currency Press: Interview with John Romeril



20.2.4 Alma de Groen



20.2.5 Currency Press: Interview on Jim McNeil

20.2.6 Prison playwright Jim McNeil's inside jobs get a fresh outing

20.2.7 The prose of a con

Jim McNeil

Jim McNeil wrote a number of plays about life in prison – from prison. Sentenced to 17 years' jail for armed robbery and wounding a policeman, his plays about jail included *The Chocolate Frog* and *The Old Familiar Juice*, both one-act plays, and the full-length plays *How Does Your Garden Grow* and *Jack*. All of his plays deal with believable, interesting characters and show prison as a reflection of society itself. Sadly, McNeil died soon after his release from jail.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT PLAYS OF THE 1970s

Ray Lawler's *Kid Stakes* and *Other Times* tell the story of Roo, Barney, Olive and Nancy up to the beginning of the *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. However, these later plays are slight pieces of work in comparison with 'The Doll', written more than 20 years previously.

Jack Hibberd's play *A Stretch of the Imagination* was a daring piece of theatre, with just one character on stage, the 80-year-old Monk O'Neill reminiscing about his life. First performed in 1972, this play is often revived, creating an effective portrait of the end of an Australian myth.

The year 1973 saw another Hibberd play, *Captain Midnight VC*, about a part-Aboriginal army officer. *A Toast to Melba*, which premiered in 1976, was an episodic biography of Dame Nellie Melba, the famous opera singer.

Other playwrights of the 1970s include Barry Oakley, whose work was performed at the Pram Factory, most notably *Bedfellows*, a 1975 domestic comedy about marriage. Ron Blair's monologue play *Christian Brothers* is a marvellous portrait of a Catholic teaching brother, while Peter Kenna returned to Australia from England to create another Catholic play, *A Hard God*. This work examines the gulf between man and God, and between the different generations in a family.

THEATRE MOVEMENTS

Large and small

The 1970s saw a tremendous growth in drama in Australia, both in the size of established theatres and in the appearance of new ones. It was the decade of major expansion in the building of new theatres. The Adelaide Festival Theatre was the first state arts centre to open (1973), followed by the Sydney Opera House. During the 1970s, arts centres opened or buildings were begun in every state and territory. These new 'palaces of culture' were occupied by heavily subsidised state theatre, ballet and opera companies that received funding from the Arts Council and from state governments, with sums of close to \$1 million going to the largest companies by the end of the decade.

At the other end of the scale, small theatre companies blossomed and began performing in a range of buildings converted into theatres, including churches, halls, schools and cafes. In Ipswich, Queensland, an incinerator designed by renowned architect Walter Burley Griffin became an intimate theatre seating about 80 people; it opened as the Incinerator Theatre in 1969 and is still in operation today.

Theatre in Education

Children's theatre and Theatre in Education (TIE) became an important part of the theatre scene in the 1970s, with individuals such as mime artists and small companies of actor-teachers visiting primary and secondary schools.

Aboriginal theatre

In Sydney, the Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre staged a number of Aboriginal plays, including *The Cake Man* by Robert J. Merritt in 1975. Jack Davis emerged as an important Aboriginal playwright during this decade, with four plays: *The Steel and the Stone*, *The Dreamers*, *Bitter Bit* and *Kullark*. (The evolution of Aboriginal theatre is explored in depth in Chapter 22).

Australian National Playwrights' Centre

Playwrights were encouraged by the development of the Australian National Playwrights' Conference, which began in 1973 and took place each year in Canberra, giving rehearsed readings of a number of previously unperformed plays.

The casualties

There were some theatrical casualties during the 1970s as well. The Old Tote Theatre Company, the largest in Sydney, went into decline and was finally replaced by the Sydney Theatre Company. The Australian Performing Group at the Pram Factory, the actor's cooperative responsible for staging so many new plays during the 1970s, was a spent force by the end of the decade. However, Anthill, the Australian Nouveau Theatre under the direction of Jean-Pierre Mignon, would soon emerge to balance this loss. In retrospect, the 1970s was the most vibrant decade to date in the development of Australian drama.



WORKSHOP 20.2.1: SCRIPT ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE

Exercise: Choose three scenes from plays by significant playwrights of the 1970s – Williamson and two of Romeril, DeGroen, Hibbard and McNeil. Identify the styles of performance and the nature of the social commentary in each scene, and then workshop and perform them.

20.3 THE 1980s

During the 1980s, the established theatres and well-known playwrights continued to flourish; however, a range of new theatres emerged, accompanied by a surge of new writing for the stage.

The large, subsidised theatre companies in each state and territory continued to expand and increase the number of plays performed and the size of their audiences. As well as presenting 'classic' plays, such as an annual Shakespeare and a regular source of successful, contemporary overseas plays, the state theatre

companies also showed an increased interest in staging new Australian plays and in rediscovering plays from earlier decades. The Melbourne Theatre Company, for example, successfully revived Betty Roland's play *The Touch of Silk*.

The standard of acting, direction and design also improved dramatically in the established theatres as new directors, many with overseas experience, were appointed and visiting overseas companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company challenged levels of local performance. The vitality of the smaller theatres in each state also had a revitalising effect on the larger companies.

ESTABLISHED PLAYWRIGHTS

David Williamson consolidated his place as Australia's most successful playwright. His play *The Perfectionist* (1982) was another savage comedy about marriage, but with a fresh, feminist viewpoint. *Sons of Cain* (1985) focused on newspaper journalists and the menace to Australian society of drugs such as heroin.

Alex Buzo continued to write plays, such as *Big River* (1980), a historical play set at the beginning of the century, and *The Marginal Farm* (1983), set in Fiji and dealing with Australian colonialism and, more universally, with growing up.

Ron Blair wrote *Marx*, a dramatic biography of Karl Marx, as well as a number of other plays. Patrick White, who had contributed *Big Toys* in the 1970s, wrote *Signal Driver* for the 1982 Adelaide Festival, and followed it with *Netherwood* in 1983. Thomas Keneally continued his concern with the plight of Aborigines with *Bullie's House*, which examines the gulf between white society and Aboriginal life.

Peter Kenna, whose play *A Hard God* had been so successful in the 1970s, produced two more plays about its central character, Joe Cassidy. *Furtive Love* and *An Eager Hope* are both bitter plays about human isolation, the nature of sexuality and, in particular, Joe's homosexuality.

A large number of experimental, TIE and alternative theatre companies developed (and often disappeared) during the decade across Australia. One of the most interesting was Handspan in Melbourne, a company that utilised puppetry, black light theatre, music, acting and multimedia. Their production of *Four Little Girls*, written by Pablo Picasso and directed by Arietta Taylor, was one of the highlights of Australian drama in the 1980s.

EMERGING PLAYWRIGHTS

Of equal interest and importance during the 1980s was the emergence of a number of new playwrights in Australian theatre.

Ron Elisha

Born in Israel in 1951, Elisha came to Australia as a young boy and became a doctor. His plays deal with the Jewish experience of suffering, persecution and the search for identity. His most powerful play to date, *Einstein*, depicts the life of the famous scientist through a series of flashbacks remembered by the old man just before his death, in particular, his involvement with the development of the atom bomb.



20.3.1 Interview with Ron Elisha

Jack Davis

Jack Davis established himself as a major Aboriginal playwright; the staging of his First Born Trilogy – *No Sugar*, *The Dreamers* and *Barungin* – was one of the significant theatrical events of the decade. Aboriginal theatre and the work of Jack Davis are explored in more detail in Chapter 22.

Louis Nowra

Born in Melbourne and educated at Melbourne University, Louis Nowra wrote a stream of plays in the 1980s, all of them concerned with power and violence, yet often lyrical and romantic in part. *The Golden Age*, first performed by the Playbox Theatre in Melbourne in 1985, deals with the discovery of a lost group of people who have been living in the wilds of Tasmania for many years. Francis, the central character, chooses to stay with the last of the forest people who are dying rather than return to ‘civilisation’. The analogy with the treatment of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people is explicit.

Michael Gow

Michael Gow emerged as a major playwright in this decade, with *The Kid* (1983), *Europe* (1987), *On Top of the World* (1987), *1841* (1988) and *All Stops Out* (1989). His best-known play, *Away*, was first staged in 1986 and is a modern classic of Australian theatre. *Away* was performed at the 1988 International Festival of Performing Arts in New York, and the play continues to be performed in Australia, including a major revival by Sydney Theatre Company and Malthouse Theatre Melbourne in 2017.

Stephen Sewell

Stephen Sewell, a Sydney-born playwright, wrote a number of plays set in other countries, including *Traitors*, set in Russia in the 1920s, and *Welcome the Bright World*, located in postwar Germany. *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, first performed in 1983, is set in Australia and deals with a number of major issues in a huge, rambling play. His next play, *Dreams in an Empty City*, is a savage attack on the greed and corruption of modern Australia.

Many other new plays and new playwrights and a diversity of new and innovative theatre companies contributed to the richness and variety of Australian drama in the 1980s.

After the powerful political plays written by Sewell in the mid 80s, his play *Sisters* (1991) was in total contrast. It explored the intense relationship between two sisters reuniting after their parents’ deaths.



20.3.2 Michael Gow

20.3.3 ‘Robin Shall Restore Amends’ a response to *Away*



20.3.4 Stephen Sewell



WORKSHOP 20.3.1: RESEARCH

Exercise: Choose one of the major playwrights of the 1980s and research the themes and issues and the historical, social, cultural and political contexts of the playwright’s work. Investigate the forms, styles and conventions of performance in the staging of their plays.



WORKSHOP 20.3.2: TEXT INTERPRETATION

Exercise: Choose one of the major plays of the 1980s. Choose a really important and challenging extract from the play and perform it, using relevant acting techniques, characterisation, performance styles and spaces.

20.4 THE 1990s

In the last decade of the 20th century, Australian playwriting continued to display the extraordinary growth and dynamism that had characterised the previous three decades. Towards the end of the decade, there was a strong sense that theatre in Australia had come of age, with a richness and diversity in the new and established work being performed.

The beginning of the 1990s was not a promising time for some theatre companies. The worsening economic situation following the financial crash of 1988 led to a serious cut-back in funding and in audiences. The major casualty was the Nimrod Theatre in Sydney, which closed its doors after a long period as one of the most exciting and innovative venues for new theatre in Australia. Other losses were Anthill in Melbourne and The Hole in the Wall in Western Australia, both of which were irreplaceable in terms of the quality and originality of their work. In

Melbourne Theatre Company: David Wilson



20.4.1 Lydia Miller in the Melbourne Theatre Company's 1990 production of *Capricornia*, a play written by Louis Nowra and adapted from Xavier Herbert's epic novel about racial conflict in the Northern Territory in the 1930s.

Melbourne, the Church Theatre also went dark after more than a decade of providing a venue for both amateur and professional companies to develop and perform their work.

In the face of the economic downturn, the established companies were less inclined to take risks with new local work or avant-garde plays from overseas, preferring to stage the traditional repertoire of 'classic' plays, and plays that had already been successful in London and New York.

During the 1990s, established playwrights, including David Williamson, Michael Gow and Stephen Sewell, continued to write plays that were staged by the large state theatre companies. These companies increased in size, as did the level of their subsidies, although the need to attract larger and larger audiences

limited their ability to take risks. Louis Nowra's *Capricornia* (written in 1988) was performed widely around the country in the early 1990s, confirming his status as a major playwright.

The 1990s saw the emergence of a number of playwrights who were immigrants, refugees or the children of new arrivals. They came from a range of countries and cultures, including Vietnam, Cambodia, Russia, Bosnia, Serbia, Iraq and Iran. The decade also saw the emergence of a number of young, exciting and original talents, including Nick Enright, whose play about rape, *Blackrock*, is specifically targeted at teenage audiences. *Aftershocks*, by Paul Brown, also deals with a real event, the Newcastle earthquake, and was originally written for that community. In contrast, Darryl Emmerson's chamber musical *The Pathfinder* is an exquisite biography of the poet John Shaw Nielson, using his poetry as the lyrics of the songs. In every city in Australia, new writers and new plays continued to appear in increasing numbers as the century drew to a close.

EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE COMPANIES

Part of the new maturity of Australian theatre in the 1990s could be seen in the emergence of new companies working in alternative theatre forms. Some of these were strongly influenced by overseas forms of performance, such as Butoh and Suzuki, physical theatre from Japan, but still managed to create a distinctively Australian style.

Physical theatre performance had been strong for two decades in Australia through the work of Circus Oz and the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, but took a new lease on life at the end of the 1990s, partly influenced by the extraordinary worldwide popularity of Cirque du Soleil. One particularly interesting company to emerge was Vulcana Women's Circus, a feminist circus troupe in Brisbane. Monkey Baa Theatre Company began life in 1997, when three actors, Eva Di Cesare, Sandra Eldridge and Tim McGarry met in a Darlinghurst cafe. The company's first production was an adaptation of Tim Winton's novel *The Bugalugs Bum Thief*. The cast travelled the production around Australia during 1998 and performed to over 15 000 young people. From 1998 to 2017, the company has produced 18 works for young people aged 3–18.

WOMEN IN THEATRE

The most exciting and significant development of the 1990s was signalled early in the decade by the staging of a number of superb new plays by women playwrights, beginning in 1990 with *Hotel Sorrento* by Hannie Rayson, *Atlanta* by Joanna Murray-Smith and *Diving for Pearls* by Katherine Thomson. This marked the re-emergence of women playwrights as a potent force in Australian theatre after almost 50 years of male domination. Women had created some of the most interesting and powerful drama in the first half of the century and in the final decade, there was an extraordinary explosion of writing for the theatre by women.

While many of the plays of the 1990s have women as their central characters and are strongly feminist in their concerns, they also explore male–female relationships, the nature of Australian society and, ultimately, the experience of being human. They are characterised by their diversity of style, their intense focus on contemporary Australian life and by the sheer quality of the writing.



- 20.4.1 At home with acclaimed playwright Hannie Rayson
- 20.4.2 Hannie Rayson
- 20.4.3 'What Goes Around Comes Around' a response to *Hotel Sorrento*

Hannie Rayson

Hannie Rayson co-founded Theatreworks, a community theatre group in Melbourne. Her first successful play was *Hotel Sorrento* (1990), which examines how a family struggles to come to terms with their relationships to each other and the experiences that have shaped their lives. The play suggests, by implication, that this is a dilemma the whole nation also faces. Her other plays include *Falling from Grace* (1994), *Scenes from a Separation* (1995) co-written with Andrew Bovell and *Competitive Tenderness* (1996).

Hannie continues to create new work, while *Hotel Sorrento* has become an Australian classic. Her more recent works include *Life After George*, *Inheritance*, *The Glass Soldier* and *The Swimming Club*.

Rayson's commitment to plays that engage with social issues was most evident in her controversial 2005 work *Two Brothers*, an attack on the asylum seeker policy of the Howard Government. Her play *Extinction* (2015) has a strong wildlife conservation message.

Katherine Thomson

Katherine Thomson began her theatrical career with ATYP. In 1991, her play *Diving for Pearls* was premiered by the Melbourne Theatre Company. It is a savage investigation of the impact of economic rationalism on people, and also a study of the inability of individuals to realise their dreams.



- 20.4.4 In Conversation with Katherine Thomson

Tobsha Learner

Originally born in London, Tobsha Learner divides her time between living in the UK and Australia. A number of her plays were staged here in the 1990s, including *The Glass Mermaid*, *The Gun in History* and *Seven Acts of Love*. Learner's play *Wolf*, first performed in 1992, is a fascinating mix of realism and surrealism, with apparently real people transforming into wolves and the characters of fairy tales. The set is a kitchen, the centrepiece of which is a table that bleeds. The play is an exploration of sexuality in actuality, and in dreams, stories and rituals.



- 20.4.5 Tobsha Learner

Jenny Kemp

Jenny Kemp founded her own independent ensemble called Black Sequin Productions and created a series of genuinely surreal plays that take us into the minds and the subconscious of her characters in plays such as *Call of the Wild*, *Still Angela* and *Remember*. *The Black Sequin Dress* used multimedia techniques to achieve a series of dreamlike sequences that take the audience on a bizarre journey into the interior, emotional self of the central character.



- 20.4.6 Black Sequin Productions

Margery Forde

Margery Forde is a Queensland playwright, actor and director whose writing has been particularly eclectic. *Snapshots from Home* (1997) used letters written by soldiers overseas and their wives at home, and other documents such as newspapers, to explore wartime experiences. *X-Stacy* (1999) tells the harsh and confronting story of the death of a girl from a drug overdose and its impact on her family.



- 20.4.7 Margery Forde

Debra Oswald

Debra Oswald writes extensively for the stage, television and film, and her first play *Dags* (1987) was an extremely popular comedy about adolescence. In the 1990s two of her plays were staged: *Lumps* (1993) is a comedy about a relationship between a doctor and a hypochondriac; *Gary's House* (1996) tells the story of a couple battling with each other as they try to turn a dream into reality. The dialogue is written as the ordinary spoken language of a group of inadequate and inarticulate people who struggle with the challenges of living.



20.4.8 Debra Oswald

20.4.9 'In Love With Storytelling' a response to *Stories in the Dark*

Joanna Murray-Smith

Joanna Murray-Smith emerged as one of Australia's most prolific and significant playwrights. She had seven plays staged during the 1990s, including *Atlanta* (1990), *Love Child* (1993), *Flame* (1994), *Honour* (1995) and *Redemption* (1997). A number of her plays have been produced around the world, and *Honour* has been staged in over two dozen countries. Murray-Smith's plays dissect the behaviour of people in difficult social situations and under stress in their relationships. Her dialogue is distinguished by the sharp, fragmented use of language.



20.4.10 Interview with Joanna Murray-Smith

Other female playwrights from the 1990s

A number of women playwrights of the 1990s also produced work from an ethnic background. Tes Lyssiotis draws extensively on her Greek heritage to explore the impact of family relationships in differing cultures in plays such as *The Forty Lounge Cafe*. Anna Broinowski's *The Gap* emerges from her bi-cultural experiences of living in Japan and Australia. The play is written in both English and Japanese, and depicts the encounter between an Australian tour guide and a young Japanese woman about to take her own life at The Gap in Sydney.

One other strand of female writing was particularly exciting and significant in the 1990s, and that was the plays written by female Aboriginal playwrights that were performed throughout Australia. The Sydney Festival of the Dreaming was pivotal in staging some of these plays, including *Black Mary* by Julie Janson and, most notably, *Box the Pony* by Leah Purcell. *The 7 Stages of Grieving* by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman was originally the creation of the Kooemba Jdarra Company in Brisbane, although it has now been seen throughout Australia. These plays gave a new voice to Australian drama that was both passionate and compelling.



WORKSHOP 20.4.1: PERFORMANCE AND REFLECTION

Exercise: Choose a play from the 1990s to research and workshop. You might choose to work with a very realistic play such as *Hotel Sorrento*, *X-Stacey* or *Gary's House*, or a play that combines non-naturalistic threads with realism, such as *Atlanta*, or even a completely surreal play such as *The Black Sequin Dress*. Once you have explored and performed the play, write a reflection on what you learnt about the social and cultural experience of Australians during the 1990s from the play.

20.5 THE 21ST CENTURY

A 2010 investigation by the Australian Arts Council found that more people are attending live theatre in Australia than ever before. The large festivals held each year in most capital cities are growing and flourishing, providing opportunities both for new work and for a taste of world theatre. The popularity of large-scale, imported musicals is greater than ever before as well, although the trend towards revivals and biographies of musicians continues to dominate the musical stage.

THEATRE COMPANIES

In Brisbane, the opening of the \$5 million Powerhouse complex in May 2000 was the forerunner of another new trend in cities and regional towns across Australia: the refurbishment and conversion of old buildings into theatres and arts complexes. To a large extent, this trend reflects the new interest in and commitment to community-based theatre and provides essential grassroots support for the growth of Australian theatre.

The large state companies continue to provide a mainstream diet of standard works and popular new plays, but there has also been an increased willingness to support new Australian work and to develop innovative approaches. In an interesting cross-over from the film industry, celebrated actor Cate Blanchett and her playwright husband Andrew Upton became directors of the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) for the period between 2008 and 2015. A huge new theatre was built for the company inside an old warehouse on Sydney Harbour opposite the Wharf Theatre and was named the Roslyn Packer Theatre. Kip Williams took over as artistic director of STC at the end of 2016, with his first season program in 2018.

At the other end of the scale, small, independent theatre companies continue to emerge and grow, and stage remarkable work. In 2016, Griffin Theatre Company (established in 1979) won awards for best play and best direction in Australia for *The Bleeding Tree* by Angus Cerini. Griffin is an independent theatre company based at The Stables in Sydney and dedicated to staging new Australian work.

In another significant first for Australian theatre, in 2010 Wesley Enoch was appointed artistic director of the Queensland Theatre Company, the first Aboriginal person to direct a major state company. Wesley is now the director of The Sydney Festival.

In terms of opening the doors to international theatre, Andrew Ross, the artistic director of Brisbane Powerhouse, staged the first world theatre festival in Australia in 2010. This very small-scale event was followed by a much larger one in 2011, which brought a range of performance work to Australia from a number of different countries.

There has also been a trend towards theatre for particular audiences. At its most commercial this can be seen in the growth of corporate theatre, where plays are commissioned and staged at conferences and board meetings. At the other end of the spectrum, there has also been a revival of community theatre with local theatre companies, large and small, performing hundreds of plays and musicals across Australia each year in venues ranging from large modern commercial venues to school halls, club auditoriums and theatres recycled from power stations, incinerators and many other old buildings.



20.5.1 Brisbane Powerhouse
20.5.2 Sydney Theatre Company



20.5.3 Griffin Theatre Company

An example of a small, experimental performance group that has grown into a major international company is Circa. Since 2004 Circa has been pushing the boundaries of performance, creating multidisciplinary work that blurs the lines between different forms of performance and staging. In 2016 Circa won the national award for the best physical theatre performance in Australia for *Il Ritorno*, a re-telling of the Ulysses myth using opera, circus, dance and theatre. Circa performed in 39 different countries across six continents and in 2017, Circa not only performed on tour around Australia but in England, Romania, France, The Netherlands and Scotland. In 2018 there was also a major tour of the USA as well as extensive touring again in Australia.



Alamy Stock Photo/Luke MacGregor

20.5.1 Circa's *Closer*, Underbelly Festival Southbank, London, 2016

PLAYWRIGHTS

The quantity and quality of new Australian work continues to develop, and the range of forms, styles and subject matter confirms the maturity of Australian theatre. There is now, for the first time in our history, a significant canon of Australian plays by a number of Australian playwrights. Diverse voices and cultures are also now being recognised, which is promising for the vitality of Australian theatre.

It is impossible to survey all the playwrights who have made a contribution to our theatre in the 21st century. A number of already established authors have continued to produce significant works of theatre, while new writers are also emerging to create interesting and often innovative theatre pieces. David Williamson continues to write popular comedies of manners, including *Dream Home* (2015) and *Credentials* (2017). Joanna Murray-Smith's recent work has been staged extensively both in Australia and overseas and includes *Three Little Words* (2017) and *L'Appartement* (2019).



20.5.4 Daniel Keene

Daniel Keene

Daniel Keene is a contemporary Australian playwright who has established an international reputation, with plays that have been performed throughout Australia and overseas, particularly in France. He has won a number of literary awards for his plays, which include *All Souls*, *Cho Cho San*, *Silent Partner*, *Low*, *Terminus*, *The Architect's Walk* and *The Ninth Moon*. His 2015 play *Mother* is a powerful monodrama that was written for actor Noni Hazlehurst.



20.5.6 Andrew Bovell

20.5.7 *Back from the edge*

20.5.8 'Still Waters' a response to *The Secret River*

20.5.9 'Pulling Rabbits Out of Hats' a response to *Speaking in Tongues*

Andrew Bovell

Andrew Bovell writes for both stage and screen. The film *Lantana*, which was adapted from his stage play *Speaking in Tongues*, won Best Screenplay at the 2003 London Critics' Circle Film Awards and is one of greatest contemporary Australian films. *Speaking in Tongues* was performed continually for some years, with seasons in more than 20 countries. In 2008, Bovell's play *When the Rain Stops Falling* premiered at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts and was immediately recognised as major work of theatre. His outstanding play *The Secret River*, based on the novel by Kate Grenville, won six major national awards when it was first staged in 2013 and continues to be performed around Australia. *Things I know To Be True* is a physical theatre musical first staged in 2016.



20.5.10 Matt Cameron

Matt Cameron

Matt Cameron is another playwright whose work has had a significant impact on Australian theatre in the last 20 years. *Mr Melancholy* (1995) won the ANPC/New Dramatists Award, was widely staged in Australia and had a New York production. *Tear from a Glass Eye* (1998) won the Play of the Year Award and was produced in Melbourne and in London, where he was nominated Most Promising Playwright. *Footprints on Water* (2000), *Ruby Moon* (2003) and *Hinterland* (2004) all won awards, and *Poor Boy* (2009) was selected by the Melbourne Theatre Company to open the Southbank Theatre.



20.5.11 Tommy Murphy

20.5.12 *Up close and personal with Tommy Murphy*

Tommy Murphy

Tommy Murphy is the author of a number of plays, including *Strangers in Between*, *Holding the Man* (based on the book by Timothy Conigrave) and *Gwen in Purgatory*. His plays are characterised by humour and lively theatricality. He has won numerous awards and there have been productions of his work staged in New York, San Francisco and London's West End. *Mark Colvin's Kidney* (2017) dramatises a friendship between a journalist and a businesswoman.



20.5.13 Angela Betzien

Angela Betzien

Angela Betzien has also emerged as an interesting new playwright with an individual vision. Her play *Hoods*, which was staged at the Sydney Opera House, tells the story of three children who wait in their car for a mother who never returns. *The Dark Room* is a haunting psychological thriller set at a run-down motel on the edge of a military town. A number of her plays are written in the genre of Australian Gothic, which is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Lally Katz

Lally Katz is another playwright who is pushing the borders of live theatre with her work. She is a core member of Stuck Pigs Squealing Theatre Company, for which she's written *The Black Swan of Trespass*, *The Eisteddfod* and *Lally Katz and the Terrible Mysteries of the Volcano*. These works have toured extensively and won several awards. *Neighbourhood Watch*, first staged in 2011, was nominated for a number of awards and has been adapted by Katz for film. Her recent plays include *Criminology* (co-written with Tom Wright) and *Goodbye New York, Goodbye Heart*, which premiered in New York. Two recent plays, both first staged in 2017, are *Minnie and Lirez* and *Atlantis*.



20.5.14 Lally Katz

20.5.15 The truth about Lally Katz

Declan Greene

Declan Greene is based in Melbourne and is a writer and director who has won a number of awards and had his plays staged around Australia and in London and Washington. His 2010 play *Moth*, which explores themes of friendship, bullying and mental illness, had a particularly powerful impact on young audiences. He co-runs the independent theatre company Sisters Grimm, which creates all their own work, and their 2017 play *Calpurnia Descending* had a critically acclaimed season at the Sydney Theatre Company.



20.5.16 Declan Greene

20.5.17 About Declan Greene

Noëlle Janaczewska

Among the many newer writers whose work is invigorating contemporary theatre is Noëlle Janaczewska, who has investigated the clash between cultures in Australia in some of her plays. *Songket* deals with the story of a Hmong migrant who is accused of raping a young textile designer, and explores different cultural notions of love and cultural diversity. *This Territory* takes as its context the 2005 Australia Day riots in the Sydney suburb of Cronulla between young Anglo-Australians and Lebanese. *Mrs Petrov's Shoe*, about a family of European migrants set in the 1950s, won the 2006 Queensland Premier's Literary Award. She describes her 2016 play *Good with Maps* as a monologue/performance essay.



20.5.18 Noëlle Janaczewska

Lachlan Philpott

Lachlan Philpott's parents ran a theatre company when he was young and he became a theatre writer, director and teacher. His play *Bison* was published in 2010 and had sellout seasons in Adelaide, Belfast, London, Melbourne and Sydney. He continues to work with a number of theatre companies around the world. In Australia, *Bustown* was performed by the ATYP in 2009 and is set in a dystopian future. *Silent Disco* premiered in 2011 and is a story about high school communities and the webs of relationships shared in schools. *M Rock* (2013) uses magic realism to tell the story of a girl who disappears overseas and her grandmother who goes to find her. Lachlan became the artistic director of Playwriting Australia in 2018.



20.5.19 Lachlan Philpott

Alana Valentine

A prolific writer, Alana has won a number of major awards over the past two decades in both Australia and the UK. Her version of *The Ravens* won the BBC International Play Award in 2014 and was staged in the USA in 2017. As well as numerous stage plays, she has written for radio and for Bangarra Dance Theatre, most notably its production of *Bennelong*. Her best-known work includes *Parramatta*



Riverside Theatre/Heidrun Löhr

20.5.2 *Parramatta Girls* performed by Riverside Productions at Lennox Theatre, Parramatta, 2014



20.5.20 Alana Valentine

20.5.21 'Soft Revolution' a response to *Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah*

Girls (2007), set in the Parramatta Girls Home for delinquent and homeless girls in the 1960s, and *Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah* (2010). Her recent plays have included a number of verbatim plays, including *Letters to Lindy* (2017), about the Lindy Chamberlain letters and the musical *Barbara and the Camp Dogs* (2018).

Tom Holloway



20.5.22 Tom Holloway

20.5.23 Interview with Tom Holloway

Tasmanian-born playwright Tom Holloway is based in Melbourne, and his work has won a number of awards. His verbatim play *Beyond the Neck* (2007) was based on interviews with people affected by the Port Arthur massacre. It was staged in London and played to full houses in Tasmania. *Love Me Tender* (2010) is based on a Euripides play and explores family relationships and love at a time of terrible bushfires. *Forget Me Not*, staged by Belvoir Street Theatre in 2013, concerns the true story of the 3000 or so British child migrants who were told they were orphans and sent to Australia between 1945 and 1968.

AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC

The development of Australian Gothic as a significant new theatrical style has been most evident in the work of Stephen Carleton. In particular, his 2004 play *Constance Drinkwater and the Final Days of Somerset* contains all the elements of mystery, supernatural events, isolation, danger and melodramatic action that characterise the genre. It is set in 1899 in the Far North Queensland settlement of Somerset, which is collapsing under the battering of storms. A mysterious disease has killed all but two of Constance's children and the arrival of two strangers leads to a final catastrophe. Another recent example of this genre is Mary Rachel Brown's 2006 play with a contemporary setting which is actually entitled *Australian Gothic*.

In the play, Clair, a political activist, is held without charge and interrogated by an ASIO officer. A sense of danger and isolation combined with an atmosphere of mystery and threat permeate the play. Other Gothic plays include *The White Earth*, adapted for the stage by Shaun Charles and Andrew McGahan from his novel of the same name. First performed in 2009, it is a grim story of obsession and paranoia. Angela Betzien has written a number of Australian Gothic plays, including *The Children of the Black Skirt*, set in a surreal, nightmare orphanage. More recently, *The Hanging*, first performed in 2016, concerns the sinister disappearance of two girls in the Australian bush.



WORKSHOP 20.5.1: PERFORMANCE

Exercise: As a performance group, choose a play that interests you from among the extensive list of plays discussed in this chapter. Rehearse and perform a scene or extract from the play that you believe is particularly characteristic of the play as a whole.



WORKSHOP 20.5.2: RESEARCH

Exercise: Research and write an essay which compares a play from the 1960s–1980s with a modern play. Explore the similarities and differences in subject matter, social contexts, characters and styles of performance.

CASE STUDY 6.3: STEPHEN SEWELL



Writing the play

Writing began for me as a way of understanding and changing the world. One of the first thing suffering people do is to write about their suffering. This centrality of suffering has become for me an important guide in both my own work and my appreciation of others. As a teacher of writing, one of the first things I say is that writing is not a career, it's a curse, and that what we are doing with our writing is finding ways of dealing with our pain.

This doesn't condemn us to grim, turgid dramas full of angst; though that being said, it also doesn't prevent us from writing great tragedy, if it so suits us. The broad decision is whether what you're writing is comedy or tragedy, the two major forms first identified by Aristotle two and a half thousand years ago. This is really a formal and temperamental decision of the writer about how best to reach their audience with what it is they are trying to say. Australian comedy is known worldwide for its pitch black humour, while many people would be surprised by how frivolous our (very few) tragedians are. It seems the way Australians deal with their pain is through humour, though you don't have to be an expert in literature to appreciate that.

One of the first things for a new writer to understand is that the reason we want to write is that we are trying to heal ourselves and that writing is part of the cure. Once you understand and accept that, a lot of things become much easier. No writer should be frightened or ashamed of using their own lives as a source of material, for if told truthfully, honestly and with insight, the most mundane elements of ordinary life reveal themselves as the miraculous moments of eternity they are. What we have to do as writers is shake off the sense of our own, and our fellow sufferers, basic inconsequentiality and realise ourselves in our monstrous, majestic glory. Every single person reading this has within them the capacity to be a saint or a demon, and sometimes both at the same time, and writing allows us to open the door on those possibilities and peek in, whispering to the audience as we do so, 'Have a look at this...'

The hardest thing about writing is writing, so the first thing you should do is just start writing. Not planning what you're going to do, not researching, not plotting it out on index cards, but writing. Every day, if possible. The more you write, the easier it becomes. For a first draft, you don't even need to know what it's about when you start off. One of the glories of writing is following whatever whim takes you and discovering what's just around the corner. The rule at this stage of the writing process is to write, not read. Indeed, reading what you've written is forbidden. Not only can't you read what you've written, you can't talk about it either. Talking will dissipate whatever creative spirits you've been able to stir up. This process of writing your first draft is essentially very private and one of communing with your own spirit. Try not to think too much but do set time aside in your day to simply muse by yourself. What you're looking for is the character or snippet of dialogue that suddenly fills you with excitement. It's like you're a solitary fisherman patiently sitting on the edge of a dark pool, trying to tempt whatever is lurking there to suddenly emerge and bite. And it will, because it really is the monster beneath the surface which has lured you there, looking for its means of escape.

But what if you're no good? What if you're a terrible writer? What if everyone discovers what you really think of them, and hate you? These questions and others like them will occur again and again as you write, and every time they do, you know you're close to 'the gold', that little piece of truth that makes the whole exercise worthwhile. Our egos repress the painful things that our unconscious offers up and the process of writing, at least at this crucial point, is one of tricking our conscious selves into lowering its guard and letting the

bitter truth emerge. No creative writer worth their salt knows what they're writing about until much later, sometimes many years later, and sometimes never. Never trust what a writer has to say about their own work, because they don't know.

After this first draft of the material, the process becomes increasingly technical and craft driven. The first draft of emotional truth is then crafted and turned into a work of art, or something like that. Actually, I'm not sure anyone could properly describe what writers, or at least writers for performance like myself, do as art. If it is an 'art', it is what I call a 'dirty art', made grubby by all the hands that turn it into something that can be presented on a stage or screen. What playwrights and screenwriters do is to turn their own anguish, fear and pain into something that someone can sell a ticket to. No use complaining about it because that's what it is.

How do you know when you've finished your first draft? Hopefully when those magic words 'The End' suddenly erupt from your unconscious and you feel a great wave of relief, but if not, Andy Warhol's filmmaking rule might work just as well. When asked when they should stop shooting one of his many movies, Warhol is reputed to have asked 'How much does it weigh?'. If the film feels met the required weight, it was finished. A 'finished' first draft play or screenplay will be anything between 13 000 and 20 000 words, which should take no more than two months to write. Remember, you're not editing or reading this, it's just straight writing, so if you hit that mark, you're probably 'finished'

The next step is the interminable rewrite. There is a saying in the film industry that is just as applicable to the stage: 'You don't write, you rewrite.' In fact, you never stop rewriting, and if your work continues to live, it will continue to be rewritten even long after you're dead. The stage especially is a place where works maintain their vitality through constant reinterpretation and editing – with Shakespeare being the prime example – so there's little point being precious about it, and while Beckett is famous for his strict control of *how* his work is produced, you'd be a brave and determined playwright to follow in his footsteps. Which is not to say that writers have to be pushovers, on the contrary, the writer is the only real advocate the script has, so if there is a role for the writer in the rehearsal process, it is as the defender of the script. It was Beckett's understanding of how 'unpalatable' his works were that caused him to take the hardline he did. He didn't want his work sentimentalised into trite empty bromides, which he knew the natural instincts of commercially minded producers would tempt directors toward, so he attempted to nip it in the bud. What happens to Beckett's work after the passing of his copyright control will be an interesting thing to watch.

Writing and rewriting means many drafts; as many as needed. Of course, people can overwrite and many fine plays and screenplays have been destroyed by the constant tinkering of well-intentioned people. It can take time for all the subtleties and nuances to finally surface in a script, and even then, we are sometimes confronted by the dilemma of needing to choose between a mad, outrageous first draft full of energy and bravado and a much more polished final draft that lacks the urgency and drive of the earlier one.

How do you know when to stop? You don't. Someone just takes it away from you and puts it on. Or not. But the work of writing doesn't end, and so you start another one, hoping that this time you'll get it right. 'Writing is easy,' was one of Hemingway's aphorisms, 'You just sit at a typewriter and bleed.'

Two of my plays cited in this book demonstrate more or less each of the above points. *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, ostensibly about the struggle for power within a political party, reaches deep into my own personal history and confusion and anger. I wrote it driven by the need to tell 'absolutely everything', and though thrilled by every production I've ever seen, I always leave the theatre feeling like an abject fake and failure. The same with the other play mentioned in these pages, *Sisters*, written for my friends, Dina Panozzo and Morna Seres. Where did it come from? Love, anger, fear? Horror and desire? I don't know from where. We are creatures of passion bound for disappointment. I wanted to understand and change the world, but fear I've done neither.

ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

Aboriginal theatre has a significant and complex role in contemporary theatre in Australia. Aboriginal plays and performances both document and celebrate aspects of Aboriginal history and culture and make them accessible to all Australians. Plays by Aboriginal writers often provide a profound insight into the nature of race relations and the treatment of the Aboriginal peoples of this nation. They also remind us of the essential humanity of all Australians, regardless of ethnicity or culture, and challenge the racist attitudes that still persist in Australian society. Most of all, Aboriginal theatre is part of the universal art form of theatre, and writers, directors and performers contribute to this essential area of human experience.

The earliest live performances, most often based on movement and chanting, occurred thousands of years ago in indigenous communities throughout the world. In Australia, corroborees have been performed for perhaps 60 000 years, possibly even longer. Contemporary Aboriginal theatre, in the form of scripted work staged by companies of performers, really commenced in the 1960s as part of the wave of new Australian theatre.

The first Aboriginal play to be widely recognised was *The Cherry Pickers*, written by Kevin Gilbert in 1968. Since then, hundreds of plays have been written by Aboriginal Australian artists, and a number of important playwrights, directors and performers have emerged. More than 20 Aboriginal theatre companies have existed during this time and have staged performances throughout Australia and internationally.

One of the dominant concerns of Aboriginal theatre is to explore the nature of Aboriginal identity and the connection between traditional and contemporary experience. As an important part of this search for identity, many Aboriginal plays have explored the importance of family and community to the individual, and the individual's responsibility to their family and their community.

21.1 KEY TEXTS IN ABORIGINAL THEATRE

Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers* was first performed in its final version in Sydney in 1972, and like many of the Aboriginal plays that followed, it was deeply concerned with family and community. The play depicts the lives of a group of itinerant

Aboriginal fruit-pickers who return each year to the farm owned by a white family. Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man*, a play about life in an Aboriginal settlement, generated strong empathy for the characters and a belief in the lives of the family. This was the first Aboriginal play to receive a main stage production, and in 1982, it was staged at a festival in the USA.

During the 1970s a number of Aboriginal performance groups emerged, creating new works and also performing the new Aboriginal plays that were appearing. A political revue called *Basically Black* was performed in 1972 at the Nimrod Street Theatre in Sydney and dealt with a traditional claim to land ownership. Out of this performance came the Black Theatre in Redfern, Sydney, which in 1976 staged the tragedy *Here Comes the Nigger* by Gerry Bostock, in which a group of Aboriginals are beaten up by two white thugs.

A number of plays by Aboriginal playwright Jack Davis were particularly significant in this period of Australian theatre. *Kullark*, meaning 'home', deals with the early settlement of Perth and the way the treatment of Aboriginal people still reflects some of those early attitudes. *The Dreamers* shows us Aboriginal Australians living in squalor and despair as their Aboriginal past is lost. *No Sugar*, set in the 1930s, depicts Aboriginal people being forced onto reserves. It was first performed at the Perth Festival in 1985 on open ground with the audience moving among the actors as they performed the forced removal of the Aboriginal community. Davis subsequently wrote *Barungin*, which was combined with *The Dreamers* and *No Sugar* to become a trilogy of plays performed together over two nights in Melbourne in May 1988. Entitled *The First Born Trilogy*, the staging of this trilogy was a major watershed, not just in Aboriginal theatre, but in Australian drama.

One of the first of the female Aboriginal writers to emerge was Sally Morgan, whose play *Sistergirl* toured throughout Australia. The play deals with dying, and the relationship between an old Aboriginal woman and a decaying Irishwoman who share a hospital ward for alcoholics.

Richard Walley's 1987 play *Coordah* portrays urban Aborigines, or Nyoongars, in conflict with alcohol and the law. Roger Bennett's play about his father's life as a boxer, *Up the Ladder*, first staged in 1990, was performed regularly during the 1990s. Bennett then wrote a musical, *Funerals and Circuses*, which was first performed at the Adelaide Festival in 1992. This musical play is concerned with the consequences of a mixed marriage in a country town and combines violence and comedy.

Aboriginal plays of the 1970s and 1980s dealt with the very real issues of racism, discrimination and deprivation that were faced by Aboriginal people – issues that are still relevant today. Many of the Stolen Generations of children who were taken away from their parents in an attempt to assimilate them into white society are still alive today, and the consequences of those government policies continue to affect their descendants. Discrimination, poor health, land rights and unemployment remain significant issues affecting many Aboriginals.

While most Aboriginal plays dealt with hardship, misery, poverty, discrimination and even death, they were not relentlessly grim or tragic. The Aboriginal Australian playwrights who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s used humour extensively in their works; the humour balances the seriousness of their plays and actually increases their impact. The humour seen in many of the plays is not contrived comedy but is distinctively Aboriginal, deriving from performance traditions and skills, particularly mime and impersonation.

Bran Nue Dae

The use of humour is particularly evident in *Bran Nue Dae*. This was the first Aboriginal musical and by far the most famous and successful. First staged in 1990, the musical is set in Broome, Western Australia and tells the story of Willie, a 15-year-old Aboriginal boy who is sent away to school in Perth but returns to his spiritual home and his girlfriend in Broome. The play confronts a number of serious Aboriginal issues but does so with humour and fantasy. It was written by Jimmy Chi and his band Kuckles. The musical won a number of major awards and was staged throughout Australia.

Like *Bran Nue Dae*, the Aboriginal plays of the 1990s focused increasingly on the emotional and spiritual life of their characters. A number of these plays were created and performed by Aboriginal women, heralding a new era of Aboriginal theatre. Eva Johnson's monodrama *What Do They Call Me?* tells the stories of three women whose lives have been shaped by the consequences of the Stolen Generations. Another 1990s monodrama, Ningali Lawford's *Ningali*, explores the playwright's search for identity. These plays use performance to focus on the power of theatre as a healing process.



Alamy Stock Images/AF archive

21.1.1 A scene from the film adaptation of *Bran Nue Dae*, 2010. The film earned more than \$7 million at the box office in Australia, making it one of the most successful Australian films

The 7 Stages of Grieving

An extraordinary and compelling play in this new form of Aboriginal monodrama was *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, created by Deborah Mailman and Wesley Enoch, then director of the Kooemba Jdarra Aboriginal Performing Arts in Brisbane. First performed by Deborah Mailman in 1993, this play was the most structurally innovative Aboriginal play up until that time, using free verse, film images, a variety of storytelling forms and powerful symbolism. On stage the character of the Aboriginal woman enacts experiences from her life, experiences which reflect the personal histories of Aboriginal people throughout Australia. While the play is concerned with grieving, it is also alive with humour and sometimes joy – a celebration of survival. An extract from the play appears at the end of this section on Aboriginal playwrights.

Up the Road

John Harding's play *Up the Road* was first staged in 1991 and was further developed by director Neil Armfield at Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre in 1997. For the first time in an Aboriginal play, the protagonist was a successful middle-class Aboriginal person. When the character, Ian Sampson, returns to his home town after a decade for a family funeral, he is confronted by family issues, the consequences of his actions as a Canberra bureaucrat and the reality of his own Aboriginality as he becomes aware of his connection to family and land.

Box the Pony

An extraordinary monodrama created and performed by an Aboriginal actor is *Box the Pony*, written and performed by Leah Purcell with Scott Rankin as her co-writer. This play was first staged in 1997 at the Festival of the Dreaming in Sydney. Its reputation and success continues to grow here and overseas so that it has become one of the most important Australian plays of the new millennium. *Box the Pony* is the apparently simple story of Leah Purcell's own life as told by her. It is a powerful and moving account of an Aboriginal woman's triumph over her personal past and the past of her people. This means it is also the story of Aboriginal dispossession, despair and survival. It uses traditional Aboriginal storytelling, but in exciting new ways, blending songs, transformational theatre and multiple roles. An extract from *Box the Pony* appears at the end of this section.

Stolen

One of the most powerful Aboriginal plays dealing with the Stolen Generations is Jane Harrison's *Stolen*, and the play is further discussed in Case Study 6.4 of the Ilbijerri Theatre Company later in this chapter. *Stolen* premiered at the Playbox Theatre in Melbourne in 1998 and has been staged throughout Australia and in the UK, Hong Kong and Tokyo. The play tells the stories of five young Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their parents and placed in institutions where they were trained as domestic servants and for other menial jobs. No one knows how many thousands of Aboriginal children were taken from their parents and put in homes and institutions during the time the policy of breaking up families operated between 1814 and 1969. Very few records were kept, and many that did exist were destroyed.



WORKSHOP 21.1.1: NO SUGAR

No Sugar by Jack Davis was first produced in 1985 in Perth for the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. This powerful Australian play exposes the racist nature of white Australians and the ways in which Aboriginal Australians were marginalised in Australian society. The play is set in the Great Depression, highlighting the growing inequity between white and Aboriginal Australians in relation to power and equality.

The opening scene of Act 1 is set in Northam at the Government Well Aboriginal reserve. In the scene we are introduced to Jimmy Munday, the protagonist, and the Millimurra family.

Exercise: Conduct a moved reading of the following extract from *No Sugar* and then complete the following:

- a Identify the key dramatic elements of the play.
- b Discuss what the key dramatic elements of the play reveal about the Aboriginal experience.

No Sugar by Jack Davis

ACT 1

SCENE 1

[Government Well Aboriginal Reserve, Northam, morning, 1929. SAM Millimurra prepares mugs of tea, lacing them generously with sugar. He passes one to JOE who is absorbed in the special centenary edition of the Western Mail. GRAN and MILLY sort clothes for washing. DAVID and CISSIE play cricket with a home-made bat and ball. JIMMY sharpens an axe, bush fashion.]

DAVID **Bowl overarm!**

CISSIE **I can't.**

DAVID **Well, try.**

[She does, clumsily. JOE bashes the paper into shape and reads aloud falteringly, His father, SAM, listens with great interest.]

JOE **'The—blood—was stirred ... as if by a trumpet ... by the histor-ical ...**

[CISSIE bowls again. DAVID bashes the ball out of sight.]

DAVID **Woolah! Don Bradman.**

[DAVID and CISSIE scamper after the ball.]

JOE **'... Headed by a tab-leau...**

MILLY **David, where you goin'? Gimme that shirt, it's filthy.**

[DAVID removes it and inspects it but continues after the ball. He and CISSIE exit.]

JOE **'... Commemorating the pioneers whose lives ...**

GRAN [To JIMMY] **James, you put that bucket a' water on?**

JIMMY **Yeah, Mum, boilin' and waitin' for you by now.**

JOE ... **'Were a steadfast performance of duty in the face of difficulty and danger. With them was a reminder of the dangers they faced, in the shape of three lorries ... carrying Aborigines.**

[They all stop what they are doing and listen.]

... **Aborigines, incong ... incongruously ...**

SAM **Come on.**

JOE All right! '... Dancing ... to a brass-band'
 [SAM laughs.]

SAM Koorawoorung! Nyoongahs corroboreein' to a wetjala's brass band!

JIMMY Ah! That beats everything': stupid bloody blackfellas.

GRAN Ay! You ... dawarra you mirri up and get them clothes down the soak, go on!
 [JIMMY gets up, but can't resist a final word.]

JIMMY You fellas, you know why the wetjals marchin' down the street, eh? I'll tell youse why. 'Cause them bastards took our country and them blackfellas dancin' for 'em. Bastards!
 [He nicks his finger with the axe and watches the blood drip to the ground. GRAN gives him a piece of cloth for it.]

MILLY Don't worry, if you woulda been there you woulda been right with 'em.

JIMMY No bloody fear I wouldn't have.
 [He drives the axe savagely into a log.]

GRAN Eh! Now you take them clothes down to the soak, you 'ear me?
 [JIMMY reluctantly obeys, DAVID and CISSIE return with the bat but no ball. David wears his shirt inside out.]

DAVID You're the fielder; you're supposed to chase it.

CISSIE Well, you shouldn't hit it so hard.

DAVID Yeah, well it's lost now.

MILLY Come on, you two, get to school. [Reaching into a pocket] Here's twopence, you can buy an apple each for lunch.
 [She gives it to them.]

DAVID Aw, can't I have enough for a pie?

MILLY It's all the money I got.

CISSIE Aw mum, Old Tony the ding always sells us little shriveled ones and them wetjala kids big fat ones.

JOE Here's thrippence each.
 [JOE flips them sixpence.]

DAVID Aw, thanks, Brudge.

MILLY Where's that shirt?

DAVID [Tapping his chest] 'Ere.

MILLY Take it off.

DAVID But it's clean on this side.

MILLY Come 'ere.
[She tugs it off him and swaps it for a clean one.]
 And you go straight down to the soak after school. *[To SAM and JOE]*
 And you fellas, we got no meat for dinner or supper; you'll have to go out and get a couple of rabbits.
[GRAN and MILLY exit. JOE continues to read to himself.]

SAM Ba, ba, what else?

JOE 'The page ... page ... page-ant pre-sented a picture of Western Australia's pre-sent condition of hopeful optimum-optimis-tic prosperity, and gave some idea of what men mean when they talk about the soul of the nation.'

SAM Sounds like bullshit to me. Come on, let's get these rabbits.
[JOE springs to his feet and walks off. Dogs bark.]
 Bring Ruffy and Moonie; don't bring Spring, he's too slow.
[JOE returns with a dowak. He picks up the camp oven.]

JOE Allewah wilbra, gunny barminy barkiny.
[He mimes throwing the dowak at a rabbit and runs off after his father.]

woolah shout of praise

koorawooroong an expression of disbelief

wetjala white person, a corruption of the English 'white fellow'

dawarra bad mouth

allewah watch out

wilbra rabbit

gunny me, I

barminy strike

barkiny bite

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WORKSHOP 21.1.2: THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING

The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman was first staged in 1995 and has been performed many times ever since, both in Australia and internationally. In 2017 a production staged by Sydney Theatre Company, The Queensland Theatre Company and Grin and Tonic toured Australia.

In the following scene, The Woman explains the nature of Aboriginal kinship to the audience, using a pile of red earth as a metaphor, and then, in one dramatic gesture, shows how it was all destroyed.

Exercise: Working individually, conduct a moved reading of the following extract from *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and then complete the following:

- Identify the ways symbolism and storytelling are used to engage the audience in The Woman's story.
- Share your findings with another person in the class
- Write a short reflection on the power of symbolism and storytelling as dramatic conventions.

The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman

17 HOME STORY

The Woman takes several handfuls of red earth, making a large pile on the floor.

Now, I want to tell you a story. I'll tell you how it was told to me. Now it's very complex, I get it wrong sometimes, I'm no expert but I'll try and explain it the best way I can, so you'll have to stay with me. It's all got to do with family culture and language and stuff. Are you with me?

This pile here is the land, the source, the spirit, the core of everything. Are you with me on that?

The Woman makes a circle around the pile.

And this one here is about culture, family, song, tradition, dance. Have you got that?

Then came the children. Every one has their place. Now this is where it gets complicated, so you'll have to stay with me.

The Woman makes eight smaller piles around the larger pile within the circle.

You always have to marry within your own skin.

If I was part of this pile here, that would mean this pile would be my mother ... because you always follow the line of the woman. And this pile could be my father ... or this one. Which makes this one and this one here my grandparents and cousins.

Now if I was to marry, I couldn't marry from the same pile because they would be my brothers and sisters. But I could marry this pile here because they're my cousins, which makes this pile my children, because you always follow the line of the woman. Are you with me?

I'll explain that again.

This mob and this mob can marry because they're grandparents and cousins. You can't marry this mob because they're your brothers and sisters and you can't marry this mob or this mob because they're your children. Cause you always follow the line of the woman.

You can't marry this one, this one or this one because that's like marrying your father.

The only ones I could marry are ... wait a minute. This mob and this mob can marry because they're grandparents and cousins. You can't marry this mob because they're your brothers and sisters and you can't marry this mob or this mob because they're your children. Cause you always follow the line of the woman. You can't marry this one, this one or this one because that's like marrying your father. The only ones I could marry are this mob or this mob. Are you with me?

The Woman gathers up the smaller piles and relocates them on the white fringing that defines the performing area.

Now imagine when the children are taken away from this. Are you with me?

The Woman flays her arm through the remaining large pile and circle, destroying it.

The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, Playlab, 2002



WORKSHOP 21.1.3: THE DROVER'S WIFE

The Drover's Wife by Leah Purcell begins with the drover's wife alone and pregnant in a shack in the bush. She finds Yadaka, an injured Aboriginal man, in her yard. He is wearing a convict collar and has been accused of a number of murders. Initially she is terrified, but he cares for her during the stillbirth of her child, and she gives him food and shelter and some of her husband's clothes and tries to help him get away. A genuine, human bond forms between them. In this scene, the bond is strengthened as they share stories about their families, and the fact that Yadaka never knew his white father while the drover's wife never knew her mother. Yadaka reveals to the drover's wife that her mother was Aboriginal. This destroys the relationship as the drover's wife refuses to believe the truth, unable to overcome her blind racism.

Exercise: Conduct a moved reading of the following extract from *The Drover's Wife* and then complete the following:

- Identify the key dramatic elements of the play.
- Discuss what the key dramatic elements of the play reveal about the Aboriginal experience.
- Discuss how the relationship between the two characters is conveyed on the stage (see image 21.1.3).

The Drover's Wife by Leah Purcell

SCENE SEVEN

DROVER'S WIFE *appears, shawl wrapped around her.*

You leaving'?

YADAKA: Yes, missus.

DROVER'S WIFE: Off into the shadows of the night, eh.

YADAKA: Said I would.

She takes him in.

DROVER'S WIFE: A pair of boots and ya could pass for a decent man.

YADAKA: [*indicating his clothes*] This alright? Being seen in your husband's clothes.

DROVER'S WIFE: You worked for me and I paid ya in clothes, his clothes.
Old clothes. That's what ya say. It's the truth.

Beat.

YADAKA: I should ... [*leave*].

DROVER'S WIFE: Wait.

YADAKA: Yes?

Beat.

DROVER'S WIFE: I'll wax ya hair so it stays straight. Water will dry and ya curls will ... sit.
*She gets the wax. He sits on the chopping block. She runs the wax through his hair.
He closes his eyes, enjoying the pampering.*

Beat.

Full moon.

YADAKA: Good to walk by.

DROVER'S WIFE: Messes with a woman's head.

YADAKA: Interested in what ya just saw.

DROVER'S WIFE: Just a dream.
Ya features are quite fine.

YADAKA: White father.

DROVER'S WIFE: Ya know him?

YADAKA: I don't think my mother even knew him.

Beat.

DROVER'S WIFE: I didn't know my ma.

Beat.

YADAKA: You got any family?

DROVER'S WIFE: No. Just my children. Before them just my da. Just me and him. Just us.
My da would say, we are all the family we need.

Beat.

She died givin' birth to me.

YADAKA *looks knowingly at her, he knows this story.*

YADAKA: It's you.

DROVER'S WIFE: I beg ya pardon.

YADAKA: On the night you were born, Ginny May, that old woman that's been helping you. She held you while your da cried over ya mother's dead body.

DROVER'S WIFE: What?!

TADAKA: Ya mother, she's black.

She slaps him!



The Drover's Wife by Leah Purcell, copyright © Leah Purcell. Reproduced with the permission from Currency Press Pty Ltd, Sydney Australia, www.currency.com.au

21.1.2 *The Drover's Wife* Belvoir Theatre production, 2016 with Leah Purcell and Mark Coles-Smith

21.2: MAJOR ABORIGINAL PLAYWRIGHTS AND DIRECTORS

JACK DAVIS

Born in Western Australia in 1917, Davis lived on Aboriginal settlements as a boy, then worked as a stockman and later became involved in Aboriginal welfare. His plays are a significant contribution, not just to an understanding of Aboriginal perspectives, but to Australian drama overall, in particular, *The First Born Trilogy*.



21.2.1 Jack Davis

JANE HARRISON

Jane Harrison was born in New South Wales in 1960. Her first play *Stolen* was commissioned by the Ilbijerri Theatre Company in 1992. After writing *Stolen*, Harrison wrote *On a Park Bench* and *Rainbow's End* (Rumbalara). In 2006 Harrison won the Theatrelab Aboriginal Award for *Blakvelvet*.



21.2.2 Jane Harrison

21.2.3 Q & A with Jane Harrison

JIMMY CHI

Born in Broome in 1948, Jimmy Chi, along with his band Kuckles, is best known for the stage musical *Bran Nue Dae*, which was first performed in 1990 and won the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award in the same year. In 1991 the play won the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Drama Award. When the film version of the play premiered at the Melbourne International Film Festival in 2009, it won the Audience Award for Best Film. The success of the musical has been credited with being influential in the creation of the Black Swan Theatre Company and in promoting the careers of Aboriginal actors Ernie Dingo and Leah Purcell.



21.2.4 Jimmy Chi

RICHARD FRANKLAND

Richard Frankland was born in south-west Victoria in 1963. Frankland has worked in film and theatre, and was the first Aboriginal director to win an Australian Film Industry Award for *No Way to Forget*. The film *Harry's War* (1999) was based on the true story of Frankland's uncle, who was a soldier on the Kokoda Trail in the Second World War. Frankland has written two stage plays, *Conversations with the Dead* (2002), which was staged at the United Nations in 2004, and *Walkabout* (2005).



21.2.5 Richard Frankland

DALLAS WINMAR

Dallas Winmar is a Western Australian writer. Her first play, *Skin Deep*, staged in 2000, explores the lives and experiences of two women, one called 'black' and the other called 'white'. The play was commissioned by the Kooemba Jdarra Theatre Company for their 2000 program.



21.2.6 Dallas Winmar

Winmar was then commissioned by Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre in 2000 to write *Aliwa*, which was jointly awarded the Kate Challis RAKA Award in 2002 (together with Jane Harrison's *Stolen*). *Aliwa* tells the story of a family who battle with the authorities when they attempt to split them up and relocate the children to government settlements. *Yibiyung*, Winmar's third play, follows her quest to discover the truth about her grandmother, who was part of the Stolen Generations.

DAVID MILROY



21.2.7 David Milroy

21.2.8 Interview with David Milroy

David Milroy was born in Perth, Western Australia, and was artistic director of Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre. His writing includes *King Hit*, *Runumuk*, *Windmill Baby* and *Waltzing the Wilarra*. *King Hit* was written in 1997 with the boxer Geoffrey Narkle, and tells the story of Narkle's life as a fighter and his battle to overcome the exploitation, alcoholism and despair that threatened to destroy him.

Milroy was also musical director for *Sistergirl* and *Dead Heart* for the Black Swan Theatre, and for the Perth Theatre Company's production of *Wild Cat Falling*. He co-wrote and directed Sally Morgan's hit play *Cruel Wild Woman* and *Barking Gecko*'s production of *Own Worst Enemy* for the Festival of Perth. His play *Windmill Baby* won a number of awards, including the 2007 Kate Challis RAKA Award for Aboriginal Playwrights and the Patrick White Award. The play is a poetic and humorous story set on an abandoned cattle station in the Kimberley region.

LEAH PURCELL

I believe very strongly in Aboriginal spirituality. I believe in my ancestors and I believe that they have given me my ability to be a storyteller, a song woman, a performer.

With my story, 'Box the Pony', I never, ever wanted it to be the therapy ... the therapy lesson that sort of happens when you do write your own one-person show. But of course, when you go through and you have to write about issues, you sort yourself out.

Leah Purcell, 'Queen Leah', *Australian Story*, ABC Television, June 2002



21.2.9 Leah Purcell

Leah Purcell is an actor, playwright, director and musician as well as the artistic director of the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts. As a stage actor, her first role was in *Bran Nue Dae* in 1993. In 1995, Leah became a host on the pay TV RED Music channel, followed by a television acting role on *Police Rescue*.

In 1997, Purcell wrote and performed in *Box the Pony* following a successful stage and film career, including performances in *The Marriage of Figaro*, *King Lear* and *Nowhere* (stage), and *Lantana* and *The Proposition* (film). In 2005 Purcell returned to writing and was short-listed for the NSW Film and Television Office's New Feature Film Writers Scheme. Her film, which is about netball, is in development. In 2008, Purcell won a Helpmann Award for her performance in Wesley Enoch's play *The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table*.

Purcell has pursued a successful career as a director and actor on stage, in film and in television. She won a national acting award for her performance in the TV drama *Redfern Now* in 2013, and was nominated for a Logie for Most Outstanding Actress for that performance. Purcell directed *Brothers Wreck* by Jada Alberts,

another Aboriginal playwright and actor. In 2016 she directed an episode of *The Secret Daughter* and appeared in the series *Janet King* between 2013 and 2017.

In 2016 Purcell wrote and starred in a new play, *The Drover's Wife*, based on Henry Lawson's famous short story, but reimagined as an Aboriginal and feminist work of theatre. The play was described as the most important new Australian play written that year and went on to win a host of prizes at the 2016 Sydney Theatre Awards, and in 2017 won the Victorian and NSW Premiers' Literary Awards.

WESLEY ENOCH

Wesley Enoch is the leading figure in contemporary Aboriginal theatre. He is a major playwright and a leading theatre director. A number of his plays have been crucial to the development of Aboriginal theatre and to Australian theatre overall. He has been artistic director of Kooemba Jdarra Aboriginal Performing Arts, artistic director of the Ilbjerri Theatre Company, a resident director with the Sydney Theatre Company and artistic director of the Queensland Theatre Company. Enoch has been the director of the Sydney Festival since 2017.

His play *Black Medea*, first staged at the Sydney Theatre Company in 2000, is based on Euripides' *Medea* but gives the original Greek tragedy an Aboriginal perspective and an Australian setting. A young Aboriginal woman leaves her home in the desert, denies her culture and forgets her family to follow her wealthy lover living in the city. She finds herself trapped in a loveless marriage to a drunken husband. When she attempts to leave with their young son, her husband makes her promise that she will never take their child from the house.

The 7 Stages of Grieving, created with Deborah Mailman, is a solo performance where the actor tells stories from the life of an Aboriginal woman. Many of the stories came from Mailman's own experiences and in the play they encompass humour and joy as well as grief and pain. At the heart of the play is the need for audiences to share and understand Aboriginal experiences and the need for reconciliation.

The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table won the 2005 Patrick White Playwrights' Award. It premiered in Tokyo in 2006 and the following year was produced by



21.2.10 Wesley Enoch



Getty Images/Patrick Riviere

21.2.1 Margaret Harvey and Aaron Pedersen in *Black Medea*.

Sydney's Griffin Theatre Company and Hothouse Theatre Company. The play is a celebration of four generations of one family and their survival as Aboriginal Australians, just as the table in the play survives through the years. Although the play addresses the past of dispossession and the Stolen Generations, it also looks to the future with confidence and some optimism.

Another major work directed by Enoch is *Riverland*, the story of Aboriginal artist Ian Abdulla, written by Scott Rankin. It interweaves the flooding of the Murray River in 1956 with the lives of a contemporary urban Aboriginal family. The production celebrates the re-creation of the human spirit and a family's sense of place in the land. *Riverland* draws its inspiration from the artwork of Abdulla, whose paintings depict the Murray River and his childhood memories of growing up along its banks. In 2010 Enoch became the artistic director of the Queensland Theatre Company, the first Aboriginal head of a state theatre company in Australia.

The play *Black Diggers* by Tom Wright was directed by Enoch in 2014 at the Sydney Opera House and was the triumph of that year's Sydney Festival. The play explores the story of the 800 Aboriginal soldiers who fought for Australia in the First World War but whose sacrifice was ignored after the war was over.

Jamie Williams/Sydney Festival



21.2.2 Hunter Page-Lochard (foreground) in *Black Diggers*, STC, 2014

JADA ALBERTS



21.2.11 Jada Alberts

Jada Alberts is from the Top End of Australia and is a playwright and actor who has also written extensively for television. Her play *Brothers Wreck* (2014) was nominated for Best New Australian Work at the Sydney Theatre Awards and tells the story of a young man whose family and community save him from despair after the suicide of his cousin. Alberts co-wrote *Elektra/Orestes* (2015), a modern version of the Greek plays, with Anne-Louise Sarks for Belvoir.

NAKKIAH LUI



21.2.12 Nakkiah Lui

Nakkiah Lui wrote her first play at 16 and won the Dreaming Award national arts prize at 25. Her plays *This Heaven* (2013) and *Kill the Messenger* (2015) both tell the stories of Aboriginal people who die due to maltreatment and neglect. In 2018 she had two plays staged by the Sydney Theatre Company, a revival of her successful comedy *Black is the New White*, where truths are revealed at a dinner party, and the world premiere of *Blackie Brown: The Traditional Owner of Death*, a violent but hilarious tale of revenge.



WORKSHOP 21.2.1: RESEARCHING A PLAYWRIGHT

Exercise: Choose one major Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island playwright and research the contribution that person made to Australian theatre in terms of Australia's cultural and social contexts and in the development of significant new theatre performance.

21.3 ABORIGINAL PERFORMANCE COMPANIES

Over the past 50 years a number of Aboriginal theatre companies have been established, concentrating on staging a range of different performance work. Some of these performances were based on traditional songs, dances, music and stories, and created a form of theatre that was uniquely Aboriginal. Much of this work was aimed at particular communities to share, and preserve, their culture and heritage. A fascinating range of new work also emerged during the past half-century that integrated traditional Aboriginal performance elements with European stage conventions to explore the nature of Aboriginal experience, past and present, and to perform these stories to audiences throughout Australia and worldwide. Some of the most successful companies also created new and often experimental theatre that was a significant part of the growth of Australian theatre as a whole.

However, most of the Aboriginal theatre companies established in the past 50 years had very short life spans (which is the fate of most new theatre companies around the world). It is extraordinarily difficult to found a theatre company and to find the artists that have the skills, and the energy, to bring it to life. It is a constant challenge to raise the ongoing funding needed, to find the right performance venues, to stage established works that attract an audience and to create worthwhile new works.

Although some important Aboriginal theatre companies are now defunct, their contribution remains in the plays they created and staged, and the major Aboriginal theatre workers who emerged from these companies.

NINDETHANA THEATRE

The first major Aboriginal theatre company was Nindethana Theatre, founded in 1972 in Melbourne. The company's most significant achievement was to stage a production of *The Cherry Pickers* by Kevin Gilbert in 1972.

THE NATIONAL BLACK THEATRE

The National Black Theatre emerged in Redfern in New South Wales in 1972, performing plays, dance, activist poetry, biting satire and street theatre with strong political and social messages. During its five years of operation, the company gave a powerful voice to the Aboriginal struggle for recognition and reconciliation, and a number of important playwrights, including Kevin Gilbert, Robert Merritt and Jack Davis, worked at the theatre.

KOOEMBA JDARRA

Established in Brisbane in 1993, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts produced contemporary performances that were staged both here and overseas. In 1995 under the direction of Wesley Enoch, the company premiered *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, written by Enoch and Deborah Mailman and performed by Mailman. The play has been one of the most significant of all Aboriginal plays and was the first of the great female monodramas that have enriched Australian theatre. Despite the success of this play, and other work staged by the company, Kooemba Jdarra became inoperative in 2008.

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

One remarkable exception to the short lives of Aboriginal performing arts companies has been Bangarra Dance Theatre. Bangarra was founded in 1989, and Stephen Page has been the artistic director since 1991. Bangarra has become world renowned as an exceptional, contemporary dance company whose work has been continuously successful in Australia and overseas. Bangarra's stunning blend of Aboriginal dance, ballet, contemporary physical theatre and authentic storytelling was seen throughout the world when the company performed at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Sydney Olympics.

Bangarra/Daniel Boud



21.3.1 Bangarra Dance Theatre's 2017 production of *Bennelong*.



WORKSHOP 21.3.1: RESEARCH

Exercise: Choose one of the companies listed in this section, or another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander theatre company. Conduct research to identify: the history of the company, the works produced by the company and the social and political importance of the works.

CASE STUDY 6.4: ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY



Ilbjerri describes itself as Australia's leading and longest running Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Company. The company was founded in 1990 in Melbourne by a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to create and stage work that explored the nature of Aboriginal experience. Ilbjerri is particularly focused on telling the stories of Aboriginal history that have been forgotten or suppressed, but also in exploring the present and the future through stories told on stage. The company declares its mission is 'to remind audiences of every person's need for family, history and heritage'.

The success of Ilbjerri has been remarkable. Every year the company tours plays nationally to cities and regional and remote locations across Australia and the world. Since 2010 Ilbjerri has staged 17 new works and performed 530 times in 256 venues to 85 218 people. For the last 16 years Ilbjerri Theatre Company has also hosted the annual Victorian Indigenous Performing Arts (VIPA) Awards, which celebrate extraordinary achievements by Indigenous artists from across the state.

While the company is dedicated to telling Indigenous stories, Ilbjerri is also committed to providing Indigenous artists with a range of opportunities. These include the Ilbjerri Writers Residency, a year-long position for a small group of Aboriginal writers to enable them to create new work. Wesley Enoch was one of the artists who was mentored by Ilbjerri and directed the first ever performance of *Stolen* in 1998. Enoch went on to



C6.4.1 Ilbjerri Theatre Company

C6.4.2 Ilbjerri Theatre Company: Production



Newspix/Bob Barker

C6.4.1 *Stolen*, Riverside Theatre, Parramatta, 2016

become artistic director between 2003–06. Other Aboriginal artists who have been a part of Ilbijerri are Richard Frankland, Jack Charles and Rachael Maza, who is currently the artistic director of the company.

Stolen, by Jane Harrison, was commissioned in 1992 and first performed in a 1998 co-production with Playbox Theatre. The play tells the story of five young Aboriginal children, part of the Stolen Generations, who are taken from their families and forced to forget their family, their culture and their heritage. In 1994 *Stolen* was performed at the Malthouse Theatre in association with Playbox Theatre Company as part of the Melbourne Festival. Since then it has been staged around Australia and performed overseas, and has been seen by almost 150 000 people.

Jack Charles v The Crown premiered in 2012 and was nominated for the Helpmann Awards for Best Direction of a Play and Best Male Actor in a Play. This monodrama is very similar in structure to *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *Box The Pony*, and tells the story of the life of Jack Charles, performed by Charles himself. Jack Charles is a musician, an elder and an activist, but for much of his life he was an addict, a thief and a convicted criminal. Accompanied on stage by a three-piece band he tells and performs the story of his extraordinary life.

Beautiful One Day is a work of documentary theatre that was first co-produced with Belvoir in Sydney in 2012. It deals with events on Palm Island in northern Queensland in 2004 when an Aboriginal man died in custody and the police station was then torched. The play explores the unresolved issues arising from those events for the community, but also celebrates the life of that community. *Beautiful One Day* was later staged in the UK at the Southbank Theatre in London as part of the 2015 Origins Festival of First Nations.

Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country is a remarkable piece of verbatim theatre work first staged in 2011. The text for the verbatim theatre is taken from the official testimonials of both Indigenous and European people at the 1881 Government Inquiry of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve. The play tells the story of the Aboriginal people of Coranderrk Reserve in central Victoria, who waged a sustained campaign for justice, land rights and self-determination. Despite having created an award-winning farm, they were targeted for removal from the land. Their lobbying of government, with their white supporters, triggered the Parliamentary Inquiry in 1881. In 2012 it was staged in the Playhouse at the Sydney Opera House and has been widely performed since then. In 2017 the play was seen by audiences across Australia, including Melbourne, regional Victoria and New South Wales, Canberra, Toowoomba and Darwin as part of a national tour.

CASE STUDY 6.5: YIRRA YAAKIN THEATRE COMPANY



C6.5.1 Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company

Yirra Yaakin means 'Stand Tall' in Noongar language, and the company is based in the heart of the Noongar Nation in the south-west of Western Australia. Yirra Yaakin is Australia's largest Aboriginal-led theatre company, and has as its mission to produce and present world-class contemporary Aboriginal theatre that is both entertaining and educational

The scope of the company's work has been extraordinary. Since it was established in 1993, Yirra Yaakin has delivered over 1000 workshops; performed 800 shows; undertaken 43 tours; commissioned over 50 new Australian works; employed over 400 Aboriginal arts workers; and facilitated 45 000 workshop participants. Leading playwrights who have worked with the company include Dallas Winmar, Mitch Torres, David Milroy and Sally Morgan. The company's plays have been seen by over 400 000 audience members, and internationally, Yirra Yaakin has toured to 13 countries on six continents. The company has also created 20 youth-focused performances during its lifetime.

In recognition of the quality of the company's work, Yirra Yaakin has won 23 awards, including Best Overall Partnership in the State Business Arts Awards, Excellence in Community Partnerships, the Prince of Wales Trophy for Outstanding Community Service and the Indigenous Facilitators Prize at the Sidney Myer Awards.

Yirra Yaakin has also achieved a number of unique performance milestones. It was the first Aboriginal company to produce a major music theatre production – in 2011 at the Perth International Arts Festival the company performed the world premiere of the first musical to be staged by an Aboriginal company. Yirra Yaakin was also the first Aboriginal company to translate and perform Shakespeare sonnets in an Aboriginal language (Noongar) in 2012 at the Globe Theatre Stage in London.

A measure of Yirra Yaakin's remarkable growth, and the energy of the company, is the fact that in 2017 alone, they staged four major productions that had all been created by the company.



Image by Kate Pardey, Courtesy of Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company and State Theatre Company South Australia.

C6.5.1 *Sista Girl*, South Australian State Theatre Company, 2017

Sista Girl was presented by Yirra Yaakin and the State Theatre Company of South Australia. It tells the story of two young women, born from different mothers, who meet face to face for the first time in hospital at the bedside of their dying father. The play deals with the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and explores universal questions of identity, grief and the complex nature of family.

Conversations with the Dead was written by playwright Richard Frankland, who was an investigator with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The play tells the tragic story of Jack, a young man who is involved in the Aboriginal Deaths Inquiry. Jack is unable to reconcile his work with the consequences of the deaths he is investigating, and with the anger and pain of the Aboriginal families who have lost relatives.

Boodjar Kaatijin was staged in association with the Western Australian Museum and was created as a piece of Theatre in Education for young audiences. The play tells four stories based on Noongar knowledge and creation stories, and incorporates puppetry and masks with storytelling. *Boodjar Kaatijin* is the third installment of the successful Kaatijin series of new works created for younger audiences.

So Long Suckers was based on real-life stories about the destructive effects of alcoholism on Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The central characters are the Three Wise Men, and when the play opens they are drunk, lost, handcuffed, bewildered and don't even know each other. Like Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot*, they are trapped in a bleak landscape and in unreliable memories. As the play progresses, they begin to find their real identities and the possibility of escape. *So Long Suckers* premiered in Perth and then toured in Western Australia and nationally. The performance incorporated original live music, movement and storytelling, and was a cross-cultural art form collaboration between Yirra Yaakin and Bunuba Cultural Enterprises (*Jandamarra*) from Broome.



Image by Simon Pynt. Courtesy of Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company and Bunuba Cultural Enterprises.

C6.5.2 *So Long Suckers*, Yirra Yaakin and Bunuba Cultural Enterprises, 2016

WORKING WITH KEY AUSTRALIAN TEXTS

This chapter contains a selection of extracts from some of the most important Australian plays of the past 80 years. The extracts provide an insight into the unique flavour of each play and offer you the opportunity to apply everything you have learnt about drama in your studies to the performance of one of these significant texts.

- 1 Read the text extract – and if possible, the whole play – and research the background to the play, including the historical, social and cultural influences that shaped the text.
- 2 Identify the meaning of the play, the theatrical genre and the original performance style.
- 3 Rehearse the performance of the extract, making decisions about the performance techniques and staging based on your research.
- 4 Share your performances with each other.
- 5 Discuss the key similarities and differences between the extracts from different decades and explore whether they reveal a distinctive Australian theatre form.

The extracts are arranged in chronological order, beginning with a scene from *Morning Sacrifice* by Dymphna Cusack, one of the first important Australian plays by a female playwright. The plays that follow clearly show the development of Australian theatre decade by decade up to the present.

22.1 THE 1940s: MORNING SACRIFICE BY DYMPHNA CUSACK

Dymphna Cusack was one of the most important Australian writers of the period around the Second World War, both as a playwright and as a novelist. She was a leading figure in the group of women playwrights who made a major contribution to Australian theatre in the first half of the 20th century. *Morning Sacrifice* is one of her best plays and has been republished and revived a number of times since its first performance in Western Australia in 1942.

The action of *Morning Sacrifice* takes place in the staffroom of an all-girl high school in 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. The action presents the daily routine of the teachers as they go about their work, but the play progressively reveals the personal clashes and viciousness that embroil all the women in a kind of petty warfare that is a warning of the world war to come.

In the following extract, the deputy headmistress, Miss Kingsbury, attempts to force the other teachers to submit their exam results by the next morning. When she meets opposition, she targets Sheila, the youngest and most vulnerable of the teachers. By the end of the play, Sheila is driven to suicide by Miss Kingsbury's relentless campaign of destruction, which is motivated by the latter's personal jealousy of the younger woman and her sexual repression, but also by the human desire to dominate and destroy others, which was about to provoke a world war.

Morning Sacrifice by Dymphna Gusack

ACT 2, SCENE 1

[MISS KINGSBURY enters, carrying a list. She raps quite unnecessarily on the desk to call their attention, then smiles enchantingly and deprecatingly at them. MISS BATES gallops to her with a chair, which she accepts graciously.]

KINGSBURY I am sorry, ladies, to disturb your little chat; Miss Woods is unable to come over herself. I have some information she asked me to give you. The first is about exam results. She would like to have all the exam results in by tomorrow morning. Is there anyone who has not quite completed hers?

[MRS MACNEIL and SHEILA raise their hands.]

We shall forgive you, Mrs MacNeil. We know you have a good excuse. But what about Sheila?

[SHEILA stands. She begins to speak ... then stops.]

SHEILA I ...

KINGSBURY [sweetly and relentlessly] Tomorrow morning, dear?

SHEILA Yes, Miss Kingsbury.

KINGSBURY Splendid.

[GWYN scowls at SHEILA as she sits down.]

GWYN [whispering to SHEILA] Tell her you can't do it, you little fool.

[SHEILA shakes her head. MISS KINGSBURY looks up at the whisper.]

KINGSBURY Gwyn—dear!

GWYN Sorry, Miss Kingsbury.

KINGSBURY Miss Woods also wishes me to speak about the result sheets. She would like those in tomorrow, if possible.

[General consternation.]

SOLE That is rather a rush, isn't it, Miss Kingsbury? People have been so busy with corrections ... and now, the inspectors ...

KINGSBURY It will not affect you, will it, Miss Sole? You have no sheet to do, I think?

SOLE No, fortunately—but ...

KINGSBURY Then perhaps someone more vitally concerned would give us her opinion. Miss Bates?

BATES Oh, yes, Miss Kingsbury, I can have mine done.

KINGSBURY Thank you, Miss Bates. Miss Hammond?

HAMMOND Can't have mine done. Still waiting for Second Year results from Miss Ray.

KINGSBURY Oh ... I had forgotten. How many others are still waiting for results?
[All except SHEILA, MISS BATES and MISS SOLE raise their hands.]

KINGSBURY T'ch—dear me. Well, I have just to inform Miss Woods it cannot be done. Of course, it is not a matter of life and death—but—I did hope. Never mind. You will do your best, won't you, Sheila dear?

SHEILA *[murmuring almost inaudibly and her head sinks lower.]* Yes, Miss Kingsbury
[GWYN puts a hand over hers and squeezes it warmly.]

BATES *[whispering virtuously to MISS HAMMOND]* It is a shame to be held up like this.
Morning Sacrifice by Dymphna Cusack, copyright © Dymphna Cusack. Reproduced with the permission from Currency Press Pty Ltd, Sydney Australia, www.currency.com.au.

22.2 THE 1950s: SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL BY RAY LAWLER

'The Doll' is one of the most important plays in Australia's theatrical history and one of the great plays of 20th-century world theatre.

In the following scene, which is the climax of the play, Roo tells Olive that after 17 years, he is not going north to cut cane for the winter. He asks Olive to marry him but she refuses, accusing him of destroying her romantic dream of her man flying south with the sun to her each year like an eagle. The scene encapsulates all the great themes of the play. We have the bronzed Aussie hero revealed in reality as an ordinary man. In Olive, we see how our dreams can sustain us in our daily lives, but also prevent us from growing and maturing. In the final clash between Roo and Olive, we witness the terrible gulf in communication and understanding that can occur between men and women.

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler

ACT 3, SCENE 1

OLIVE This is where I collect, ain't it? In cold, hard cash, Roo—seventeen summers—what are they worth?

ROO *[topping her]* Will you stop your bitchin' long enough for me to tell you somethin'? Barney's the one that's going away on Monday, not me. I'm stayin' right here.
This quietens her.
 Talkin' money that way. It's rotten!

OLIVE I forgot. You're the sort that likes to pay off with a swanky present. Not to leave the money on the mantelpiece, underneath the clock.

ROO [*shocked*] Now look, Olive, that's enough. I know you've had a bad spin, and I know you're all on edge, but we've never been as low and cheap as that, ever.

OLIVE Well, we are now. Low and cheap's just how I feel.

ROO Because of me?

OLIVE You, Barney, the whole damn lay-off. Even Pearl—the way she looked at me this mornin' when she told me I didn't know what livin' was.

ROO That's a fine thing to let worry you. The way Pearl looks.

OLIVE You didn't see her. And it's more than lookin'—it's havin' another woman walking round, knowin' your inside and sorry for you, 'cause she thinks you've never been within cooe of the real thing. That's what—what hurts—

Her control gives way and she starts to cry, trying vainly to fight back the tears. ROO responds to her struggle with infinite love and pity.

ROO Oh, hon.

He moves towards her, an act of sympathy that completes her downfall.

OLIVE It was all true. Everythin' I told her was true, and—she didn't see any of it—

ROO Honey, not your fault. You did your best—

OLIVE But if she could have seen—just somethin'—so she'd know—

ROO Maybe she did.

OLIVE No. No, she didn't. It was all different.

She collapses against him, shaking with sobs, and he soothes her with great compassion.

ROO Well, that old Pearlie. She couldn't tell, anyway. 'S not her cup of tea—never was. Come on now, stop your cryin'. What we'll do—we'll forget she ever came here—

He sits with OLIVE, cradling her protectively in his arms.

'S all over. All that silly part of it is over—you don't have to worry any more.

'S over—ssh, now—ssh.

Under his ministrations, she gradually calms to lie unquestioningly in his embrace, the two of them as close as they have ever been in their lives. Then OLIVE seeks to gain control of herself, although still racked by an occasional deep catch of breath.

OLIVE Ooh. Oh, I can't believe it—

He kisses her hair, and she struggles to sit up.

Ought to have a—a hankie somewhere.

She finds one in her sleeve to mop her eyes and ROO watches her with teasing warmth.

ROO Got to say, I never knew any cryin' woman looks worse than you do.

OLIVE No. And I was goin' to be so—cool and hoity-toity. *[She sniffs and sensibly mops up further, before embarking on a remorseful confession.]* Roo, those butterflies—they did fall to pieces when I touched 'em.

ROO I believe you.

OLIVE But some of the other things—the dolls and that—I could've put 'em back. But I was mad at you, and I wouldn't.

ROO Doesn't matter.

OLIVE Yes, it does. I'll do it tonight. The coral, and—I might be able to get the butterflies fixed up a bit.

ROO *[softly]* Y'know, a man's a fool to treat you as a woman. You're nothin' but a kid 'bout twelve years old.

OLIVE Try tellin' that to the mob at the six o'clock swill.

ROO 'S true, just the same.
They kiss gently.
Have you really got to go to the pub today?

OLIVE Yes. I ought to.

ROO Take the day off, and we'll go for a picnic somewhere. Just the two of us?

OLIVE I'd like to. *[Rousing herself]* But there's Pearl away already, and I said I'd sling a line to Clintie for her. Ooh—I know what I must look like, just the same. *[She rises to fetch her handbag and then move to the mantelpiece mirror, with a bright alternative suggestion.]* Why don't you and Barney come down to the pub for the afternoon?

ROO He's goin' to the races with the boys.

OLIVE Oh. *[Inspecting her face in the mirror]* Talk about the 'Wreck of the Hesperus'—
She opens her handbag and fishes for cosmetics to mend the damage.
Is it the boys he's nickin' off with on Monday?

ROO Yeh. Up the Murray for the grapes.

OLIVE *[getting compact and lipstick from her bag]* It'll be funny without Barney around. Couldn't you get him to stay?

ROO He needs a job. And he won't take one in the city.

OLIVE Well, I don't blame him for that.
She realises, too late, that this is a mistake and, shoving her handbag under her arm, she somewhat nervously starts to repair her ravaged appearance.
Would you like to go off with him? Up the Murray, and that?

ROO No.

OLIVE 'Cause if you would—I mean, I wouldn't mind it. Just this once.

ROO *[rising]* Are you tryin' to get rid of me?

OLIVE *[watching his image in the mirror]* No, but other times you've always left together, you and Barney. Doesn't seem right.

ROO We've talked it over. He's goin' off, and I'm stayin' here.

OLIVE *[suspending her making-up]* Well—how will you meet up together for the season, then?

ROO Say we don't? Barney'll get along. He's a good right hand. Him and this young Dowd—looks as though they could team up together.

OLIVE *[turning to stare at him]* But you, Roo—what'll happen to you?

ROO Nothin'. I'm not goin' back, Ol.
He moves towards her.
Not for this season, or any other.
He draws her away from the mirror, taking the handbag and lipstick from her unresisting grasp.
Let me get rid of these for a minute—
He puts her belongs aside.

OLIVE You're not going back?

ROO Look—*[tenderly, taking her stiffened body in his arms]*—seventeen years in comin'. Pretty late, I know—and what I'm offerin' you is not much chop, but—I want to marry you, Ol.
There is a frozen second before she answers, backing slowly away from him and shaking her head in rejection.

OLIVE No.

ROO Olive—

OLIVE You can't get out of it like that. *[With rising intensity]* I won't let you—

ROO Olive? What the hell's wrong?

OLIVE You've got to go back. It's the only chance we've got—

ROO Stop that screamin', will you?

OLIVE You think I'll let it all end up in marriage? Every day—a paint factory? You think I'll marry you?!

ROO *[appalled, shouting back]* What else can we do?! You gone mad, or somethin'?! First you tell me that I've made you low, and now look—you dunno what you want!

OLIVE I do. I want what I had before!
She rushes to attack him physically, beating savagely at his chest with her fists.
You give it back to me—give me back what you've taken!

ROO [grabbing her wrists] 'S gone. Can't you understand? Nothin' left to give you—all that stuff is gone—

OLIVE [struggling with him] I won't let you, let you do it. Kill you first—

ROO Kill me, then.

He throws her from him so that she falls to the floor, and he lashes her with words that hurt him as much as her.

But there's no more flyin' down out of the sun—no more eagles.

OLIVE tries to twist away from him, but ROO goes to his knees beside her on the floor, striking at it with his hand.

This is the dust we're in. And we're gunna walk through it like everyone else, rest of our nothin' lives.

She gives a rasping cry, doubling over on herself as though cradling some inner pain; grief-stricken, almost an animal in her sense of loss.

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22.3 THE 1960s: THE ONE DAY OF THE YEAR BY ALAN SEYMOUR

First staged in 1960, this play caused a sensation with its representation of the drunkenness and disorderly conduct that accompanied the celebration of Anzac Day. At a deeper level, it challenged the celebration as a glorification of war. The play also anticipated the gulf that was to grow between parents and their children in the 1960s as a new teenage culture swept the world. The play was particularly significant because it was concerned with the uniquely Australian tradition of Anzac Day, but its social theme was the universal one of the generation gap between parents and children.

In the following scene, Hughie, his girlfriend Jan, his Mum and Wacka, a family friend and original digger from Gallipoli, have been watching Hughie's father in the Anzac Day march on television. Hughie and Jan plan to expose what they see as the hypocrisy of the whole Anzac legend by taking photographs of the drunkenness and bad behaviour that follows the march and publish the photos in their university magazine. The scene clearly shows the conflicting attitudes to Anzac Day and the gulf between the older and younger generations.

The One Day of the Year by Alan Seymour

ACT 2, SCENE 2

WACKA Get the walk, will ya? Get the walk on it!

MUM Cocky? Look at him!

[And suddenly they all burst into laughter. Just as suddenly HUGHIE'S laughter stops. He looks at the picture, a battle of feelings inside him, and chokes up. MUM and WACKA don't see. JAN, still laughing, looks up at HUGHIE as he turns away quickly.]

MUM He's gone. *[She sits back.]*

JAN What is the matter, Hughie?

HUGHIE Right as rain. *[Covers up quickly.]* Gee, he looked an old idiot, didn't he?

MUM *[who has been laughing to herself, stops]* No, he didn't.

HUGHIE *[recovering]* Well, you were laughing.

MUM It was just the shock, seeing him, plain as day. I wasn't laughing at 'im.

HUGHIE Well, I was! *[But the feelings are still mixed.]* He looked such a big aleck, marching along as though he'd won both wars single-handed. It was—pathetic.

JAN Oh, they all are.

MUM *[huffily]* Turn it off, Wack.

WACKA Ay?

MUM Haven't y'seen enough?

WACKA *[looks from her to JAN, gets up reluctantly, goes to set]* Oh. Yeah, yes, Dot. It's all the same. *[He switches it off.]* Good seein' yr mates, but.

MUM It was very nice. Pity more people don't appreciate it.

WACKA Oh, they still get a good rollup. Well ... *[He stands about uncomfortably.]*

JAN Are we going?

HUGHIE Suppose so. Do we still want to do this?

JAN I want to do it very much. Don't you?

HUGHIE *[slight hesitation. Nods.]* It's just not as easy for me as I'd thought. I'll get the camera. *[Moves away, turns suddenly to face her. She has turned to watch MUM and WACKA. He turns and goes to his room.]*

[A silence. MUM sits drumming her fingers on arm of couch. WACKA goes up to windows, pulls up blinds. He begins to whistle softly 'Take me back to dear old Blighty'. JAN watches him, smiles, relaxes.]

JAN Mr Dawson seems bright today.

MUM *[indignantly]* He is not. He 'asn't 'ad a drink.

JAN That's what I mean. The other night he had had a drink and he seemed very quiet.

MUM No one gets a look-in when Hughie's Dad's around.

JAN Mrs Cook ... Hughie thought I was rude the other night. I was too. I'm sorry.

MUM *[embarrassed]* Hughie's dopey. It was all right. *[WACKA comes down.]* Hughie's friend reckons she likes you better sober.

JAN *[laughs]* I didn't say that, really. But this is your day, isn't it?

MUM Oh, don't start him on that, get enougha that from Alf.

JAN But isn't it? You were there. Do you still remember it, Mr Dawson?

WACKA *[nods shyly]* Yeah.

JAN [prompting him] What do you remember?

WACKA Not much. It was a long while ago. [Silence again.]

JAN Were you at the actual first landing? On this very day?

WACKA [nods] Yeah. Thought about it this morn'n'. Before sunup. Just about the time we started up them rocks.

MUM What was y'thinkin' then, love?

WACKA 'Ow do I know, it was years ago.

MUM No, I mean th's morn'n'.

WACKA Oh. [To JAN] I was standin' in that door lookin' at the sky, I was miles away, dreamin' about it. And I 'eard the Last Post. Dinkum, I thought they was comin' for me.

MUM Hughie had the service on on 'is wi'less.

JAN Hughie did? I thought he hated Anzac Day.

MUM Hughie? Hughie hate—? Why should he?

JAN Well, all it stands for. [She looks at them as though they will understand. They don't.]

MUM Such as what?

JAN The same old clichés in the newspapers year after year. All the public hoo-ha—it's so damned—

[MUM and WACKA exchange a look. She sees they are not with her, struggles to explain.]

I mean—I'm sorry—but—to us, to the people coming on, there's something quite—offensive in the way you all cling to it. Not Mr Dawson, it really happened to him, he knows what he feels today and why, it's not just because it's expected. But with so many people it's—

MUM It's what?

JAN [shrugging] Well, isn't it all rather phoney? [HUGHIE is back.]

HUGHIE Right? [No one speaks. He looks around.] What's up?

MUM It's on again. [She looks at JAN with the old disapproval.] [HUGHIE crosses quickly, gets Jan to her feet.]

HUGHIE Best we get going.

WACKA [looking at the camera] Going for a picnic?

HUGHIE What? No. [Grimly] A little job. A job I've been promising myself I'd do for years. [To JAN] But I'd feel happier if you weren't so—[He stops.] Come on.

[They start to go out.]

MUM [calling after them] What time'll you be home?

HUGHIE Expect me when you see me. Don't save tea.

JAN 'Bye.

MUM I wish someone in this house'd tell me occasionally where they're goin' and when they'll be back.

WACKA What's the job? What was he talkin' about?

MUM I don't know. What was she talkin' about?

WACKA [*shakes his head*] Didn't foller it. Didn't get a word. Never do when she starts.

MUM Hughie's the same when he gets goin'.

WACKA Gawd, we must be gettin' old, Dot.

MUM [*grimly*] Either we're old—or they're terrible young.

[*Lights fade.*]

Harper Collins Publishers Australia: Extract from *The One Day of the Year* by Alan Seymour

22.4 THE 1970s: THE REMOVALISTS BY DAVID WILLIAMSON

First staged in 1970, *The Removalists* established Williamson as Australia's leading playwright and is one of the most important pieces of Australian theatre ever written. It is distinctively Australian in its use of language and in its characters, and its portrayal of police brutality and corruption is savage and memorable. It was the next really outstanding Australian play to follow 'The Doll', and profoundly influenced playwriting in this country.

In the scene that follows – the climax of the play – Ross, the young constable, has just lost his temper and beaten a man called Kenny very badly. Kenny has complained of pain behind the eyes but appears to be recovering. The cynical, experienced Sergeant Simmonds is lecturing Ross about his temper as the scene begins.

The Removalists by David Williamson

ACT 2

SIMMONDS I think the first thing you've got to do, Ross, is to take stock of your weaknesses and face up to them. I think it's just as well we've discovered this flaw in temperament of yours at an early stage because now that we know about it we can be sure that we won't place you in a situation in which you'll lose control. At least, not until we know you've got it beaten.

[*During SIMMONDS'S speech ROSS'S eyes pass to KENNY and they fix in horror as he sees that Kenny is sitting bolt upright with a frozen look of terror and pain in his eyes. He has just suffered a massive and catastrophic cerebral haemorrhage as a result of his injuries. His can drops to the floor. ROSS gets to him just as he topples off his chair, and lowers him to the floor. ROSS and SIMMONDS are thrown into a state of panic akin to, but worse than, the previous one. Worse still because they enter it from the almost soporific sense of relief that KENNY'S death has just shattered. For the rest of the play ROSS is hysterical and SIMMONDS borders on this condition.*]

ROSS Jesus, Serg. He's dead. He's really dead this time. You can tell. Oh Jesus!

SIMMONDS You've done it now Ross. He's really dead. I didn't like the sound of it when he mentioned his eye. Pressure at the back of the eye is bad news, Ross. I thought we might've been in trouble.

ROSS Why didn't you take him to the hospital then? Why didn't you take him to the hospital if you knew that?

SIMMONDS They couldn't've done anything for him, Ross. Not a man who dies as quick as that. You must've hit him with a bloody pile driver. He's dead, Ross. There's no doubt about it. He's dead!

ROSS I know he's dead! Look at the poor bastard's eyes. He was scared out of his mind. Look at his bloody eyes! We should've taken him straight to hospital, Serg!

SIMMONDS [*defensively*] They couldn't've done a thing for him. I can tell you that right now. Couldn't've done a thing! Not for someone who dies as quickly as that. He was either very bad or O.K., Ross, and if he's very bad then there's no sense taking him to hospital. Get into casualty with a body on your hands? I'm not crazy, Ross. I'm not callous but then again I'm not stupid and there's an important distinction there.

ROSS Let's get a shotgun and make it look like suicide. Shoot his head off. Shoot out his bloody eyes.

SIMMONDS For Christ's sake, Ross. Don't start that again. You're going to have to face the consequences, I'm afraid. You're going to have to face the consequences.

ROSS You've got to help me, Serg! I'm no killer. I didn't join the force to kill. [*ROSS pleads, grabbing SIMMONDS by the collar.*] For Christ's sake, Serg! You've got to help me!

SIMMONDS [*backing away*] I'm not helping anybody, boy. You did it!

ROSS [*pleading, hysterical*] You're in it too Serg! You're in it too! You let him die.

SIMMONDS [*shouting*] He would've died in any case!

ROSS [*advancing on SIMMONDS and pleading*] You're in it too Serg! You've got to help me!

SIMMONDS [*hysterical too*] I've got nothing to do with it! [*He pushes ROSS away vigorously.*] I've got nothing to do with it!

[*ROSS stands there, momentarily calmed by SIMMONDS'S violence. Suddenly he runs up to SIMMONDS and hits him.*]

ROSS [*hysterical*] Sorry Serg, but you're in it too!

SIMMONDS You mad bastard! What do you bloody think you're doing?

ROSS [*hitting him again*] If we both get smashed up it'll look like Kenny went berserk!

SIMMONDS [*trying to get away*] You bastard Ross! You cowardly bastard. You'll get a stinking report from me. Mark my words!

ROSS

[hysterical] **Hit me back, Serg! Hit me back! We'll get off! Kenny went mad and beat us both to a pulp. Hit me where it bruises. Go on Serg! You know how to bruise a man! Go on!**

[ROSS advances on SIMMONDS, attacking him viciously. SIMMONDS fights back. As the play closes, the fight almost takes on the air of a frenzied ritual of exorcism.]

[End.]

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22.5 THE 1980s: THE GOLDEN AGE BY LOUIS NOWRA

Louis Nowra's plays remain among the most popular works of Australian theatre and are regularly studied and performed. A number of his plays are light comedies, based on Nowra's own life and experiences. However, *The Golden Age*, first performed in 1985, is very different. It is a powerful, symbolic piece of theatre about the discovery of a lost colony of people in Tasmania. Generations of this colony have been living in total isolation for a century since emigrating from England. *The Golden Age* was one of the first, and most impressive, Australian Gothic plays and it remains a major work of theatre. The treatment of this lost colony is a powerful metaphor for the treatment of Aboriginal Australians.

In the play, the people of the lost colony have developed their own language and culture based on the world of 19th-century England. They are discovered just before the Second World War and are taken back to modern civilisation, where they are unable to adapt. They are placed in an asylum and only one of them survives. In the play, the members of the colony are regarded by almost everyone as primitive and even simple-minded, yet the 'civilised nations' in the play are busy fighting a world war in which millions of people will be slaughtered.

In the following scene, Francis, the young man who has just discovered the lost colony, is starting to fall in love with Betsheb, who later becomes the sole survivor of the colony and returns to the wilderness with Francis. In this early scene, the differences in language and experience between them make it impossible for them to communicate.

The Golden Age by Louis Nowra

ACT 1, SCENE 11

[The bush, night. BETSHEB sits alone on the ground and examines the contents of a rough cloth bag. FRANCIS enters and watches her surreptitiously. She takes out and examines a watch, then a book and then a small compass; finally, she takes out a large lizard. She stares at it intently and hisses at it, her tongue flicking in and out at it. She seems mightily intrigued by this reptile.]

FRANCIS [quietly] **Betsheb.**

[BETSHEB doesn't turn around. She seems to have already known FRANCIS was nearby. She puts the lizard back in the cloth bag.]

BETSHEB [*quietly, almost to herself*] **Francis.**
 [*He comes over and sits down beside her.*]

FRANCIS I couldn't sleep.
 [*Silence. FRANCIS notices the objects.*]
These are mine. [*Picking up the watch*] **A watch.** [*Winding it*] **It tells the time, tells us how old we're getting.**
 [*He holds it her ear.*]
See? Can you hear it? 'Tick, tick, tick', like a heartbeat.
 [*He picks up the compass.*]
Compass. See the arrow? [*Indicating*] **North is that way. Somewhere that way is Hobart.** [*Sardonically*] **Somewhere. And this ... this is a book.**
 [*She nods as if she knows.*]
The Structure of Single Span Bridges.

BETSHEB **Book.**

FRANCIS **You know it's a book?**
 [*She nods.*]

BETSHEB [*pretending to read, turning the pages quickly*] **Thy word.**
 [*BETSHEB stands and motions to the sky.*]
Rain, rain, go thy way,
Come a-back ne'er a day.
'Ate the olcer sky. No end. No end. Adorate the shiny brocade sky,
glommen time. Queenie Ayre say in ancient glommen, King David see the
brocade, lubilashings o' shiny in ancient glommen. The sky 'e see, is me
goldy brocade. See?
 [*She stands and spins slowly, staring up at the sky as if intoxicated by it and her words. We hear distant thunder.*]

FRANCIS **The last waltz, madame.**
 [*He grabs her. She starts as if woken from an intense reverie.*]
Dance. Dancing. Follow me. Arm here. [Singing waltz melody] Da, da, da ...
That's right, that's right, turn here, now a step here ... Right ...
 [*She quickly picks it up.*]
My mother forced me to learn dancing so I would be able to mix in the
proper circles at university.
 [*Suddenly he kisses her. She tries to pull away.*]
No!
 [*He holds on to her roughly and kisses her again. She bites him on the lip. He grimaces in pain. She pulls away. Francis puts a finger to his lips and spots blood on it. Betsheb is apprehensive.*]

I only wanted to kiss you.

[Pause.]

You do it with Mac, why not with me?

[Silence.]

I want to break through to you and I don't know how. I don't even know if you're stupid or crazy or whatever.

[He walks towards her.]

Don't run away. [Smiling] I can smell my heart burning.

[She moves towards him and presses her forehead tightly against his.]

BETSHEB Me burstin' brain. Me burstin' brain. See?

[He doesn't understand.]

FRANCIS You're hurting.

[But she desperately wants him to understand.]

BETSHEB Break 'n' crack int' thee.

[She abruptly pulls away and looks at the sky, disappointed by Francis' lack of understanding. There is a loud roll of thunder.]

As you can see, Nowra has invented a language for the lost colony. Here is his translation of Betsheb's words.

BETSHEB [pretending to read, turning the pages quickly] Thy word.

['This is your book.']

'Ate the olcer sky. No end. No end. Adorate the shiny brocade sky, glommen time. Queenie Ayre say in ancient glommen, King David see the brocade, lubilashings o' shiny in ancient glommen. The sky 'e see, is me goldy brocade. See?

['I hate the sky when it looks dark and threatening. There seems to be no end to the darkness when it's like that. No end. I adore the shiny, starry sky at night. Queenie Ayre says that back in the old times, King David saw shiny, starry sky. There were incredible numbers of stars back in ancient times. The sky they saw is the same golden starry sky I see.']

BETSHEB Me burstin' brain. Me burstin' brain. See?

['My head feels like it's exploding. My head feels like it's exploding. See?']

BETSHEB Break 'n' crack int' thee.

['I want to crack and break your skull and get directly through to you.']

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22.6 THE 1990s: HOTEL SORRENTO BY HANNIE RAYSON

This play, first staged in 1990, is as significant in the development of Australian theatre as *The Removalists* was 20 years before it. It marked the re-emergence of women playwrights as a potent force in Australian theatre after almost half a century of male-dominated work, and established Hannie Rayson as a major and very popular playwright.

Hotel Sorrento investigates the relationships between three sisters who meet for the first time in many years at the Victorian seaside town of Sorrento following the death of their father. Hilary, a widow, lived in Sorrento with her father until his death. Pippa, the youngest of the sisters, has been pursuing a successful career in New York. Meg has flown in from London, where her latest novel has just been short-listed for the Booker Prize, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in the world.

There are fierce tensions between the three sisters. Meg's novel is strongly autobiographical and contains intimate details of the lives of the whole family. Hilary is bitter about the lack of help and support she received from her sisters over the years, and the fact that Pippa had an affair with her husband shortly before he died.

The play is an exploration of the attempts by the sisters to accept the past and reconcile the conflicts between them, allowing them to move on in their own lives and in their relationships with each other.

In the following scene, which begins Act 2, the tensions are present between the sisters but are never mentioned. As you work on the text, use your understanding of body language to convey the intense, repressed emotions the sisters are feeling.

Hotel Sorrento by Hannie Rayson

ACT 2, SCENE 1

[The three sisters are sitting at the end of the jetty. Over to their right, EDWIN is paddling in the shallows. The atmosphere is infused with a sense of melancholy.]

HILARY Do you remember the Sorrento fair?
[Both PIPPA and MEG nod in recollection.]
Remember the year the fortune teller came?

MEG He wasn't a fortune teller, was he?

HILARY What was he then?

PIPPA He was a 'world renowned' palmist and clairvoyant. Punditt Maharaji.

MEG That's right. It was written on the caravan. Punditt Maharaji.

HILARY What did he tell you? Do you remember?

MEG Not really. Something like 'You are going to be rich and famous and travel vast distances across the sea'.

[They smile.]

HILARY What about you Pip?

PIPPA Er ... rich and famous and travel vast distances. Something highly personalised like that.

HILARY Do you know what he said to me? He said I was one of three.

PIPPA That was a good guess.

MEG What else?

HILARY That was it. The Rixon kids threw stones at the caravan and he went off after them.

PIPPA I don't think you got your shilling's worth.

[They muse over the memory. In the distance PIPPA sees TROY walking alone at the top of the cliff. He is looking out to sea.]

There's Troy.

[The other women look in that direction. They watch silently. There is a change in mood.]

Still looking for Pop.

[Silence.]

MEG Poor kid. The sea will never give up its dead.

HILARY He's a different boy isn't he? He's just clammed up. He loved Dad so much. They had something very special those two. It's not fair is it?

[Silence.]

People are always dying on him.

PIPPA He's a survivor Hil. He is.

HILARY Yeah ... but at what cost?

[Pause. MEG looks at her penetratingly. HIL looks away.]

PIPPA What do you mean?

HILARY He feels responsible this time.

[Silence.]

MEG Yes. I know what that's like.

[They stare out to sea. MEG waits for a response. None is forthcoming.]

I think I'll go for a walk.

[PIPPA and HILARY say nothing. MEG makes her way over to EDWIN.]

PIPPA She can't concede, can she, that anyone else could be hurting as much as she is? She's like a child.

[Silence.]

You think I'm still an angry young thing, don't you? You may think this is bullshit, but I'm different when I'm away. I'm a different person. If you met any of my friends in New York and you said, 'Pippa's such a cot case isn't she?' they wouldn't know what you were talking about.

HILARY I don't think you're a cot case.

PIPPA Oh, I am. I know I am. But only when I'm here.

HILARY Must be in the water.

PIPPA I really did want people to see how much I'd changed. I was really looking forward to coming home you know. But people don't want to see that do they? They don't want to see what's new about you. They're suspicious of that. It's like you've reneged on who you are. And that's fixed. That's immutable. You are who you are and if you try and change, you must be faking. Bunging on an act. But over there people think differently. In fact, if you're not working to make positive changes in your life, they think you're in deep shit.

HILARY Yeah. So I hear.

PIPPA You're cynical about that, aren't you?

HILARY No. I'm just not so sure that people actually do change.

PIPPA Everybody has the potential. It's just whether we choose to take up on it or not.

HILARY Sounds like propaganda to me. I think I'd rather be saying, 'OK, this is who I am. Like it or lump it. May as well get used to it, and make the best of it'.

[PIPPA makes no response. She looks out to sea.]

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22.7 2000–2010: WHEN THE RAIN STOPS FALLING BY ANDREW BOVELL

This play was first staged at the Adelaide Festival in 2008 and it has quickly become acknowledged as a genuinely great Australian work of theatre. It has been staged throughout the country, and a production opened in London in May 2010 and another on Broadway in March 2011. It was staged in Chicago in 2013 and won four awards. Recent Australian stagings include the New Theatre Sydney in 2015, the Judith Wright Centre in Brisbane in 2016 and Melbourne in 2017.

When the Rain Stops Falling is an extraordinarily powerful and complex piece of storytelling in which the actions of the past resonate into the future and the audience is challenged to reflect on how much control we have over our lives and our destinies.

The elements of time and place are brilliantly manipulated to show us four generations of people on stage at the same time, and the action of the play flows seamlessly between 1959 in London through to 2039 in Alice Springs. At the centre of the play is a young man, Gabriel Law, who is trying to discover what happened to his father, Henry, who left their home in London to go to Australia and vanished years before. His mother Elizabeth refuses to talk about him. The only clues are some postcards from Australia that Gabriel finds, the last one sent from Uluru. Some of the scenes that flow through the play show us Henry and Elizabeth together, and begin to flesh out the mystery of why Henry left England and disappeared.

Gabriel travels to Australia to solve the mystery of Henry's disappearance, and encounters a young woman called Gabrielle who works in a roadhouse. Her parents have both died by suicide – several years apart – after the death of their eight-year-old son. The similarity of the characters' names is significant in the play; Gabriel and Gabrielle form a bond and travel to Uluru together, but Gabriel dies. The tragedy is directly connected to the mystery of the vanished Henry, who was the stranger who actually killed Gabrielle's brother. Gabrielle discovers she is pregnant only after Gabriel's death. In the future we see their son, now grown up and also called Gabriel, waiting in Alice Springs to meet his son Andrew after years without contact.

At different times we see characters of different generations on the one stage, looking through the same window and eating at the same table, so that past and future continually haunt the present.

The play deals with the persistence of suffering, both within families and in the global degradation of our environment. The harm we do each other and the harm we do our world are connected in the forces that drive us to damage the things we should love. The other thread that runs through the play is the search for the absent. All the characters are missing an emotional centre and are looking for lost fathers, husbands, sons and lovers. At the end of the play, all the characters are gathered together on stage in a resolution that is both powerful and exceptionally moving.

The play begins with a bizarre event: on a rainy day in Alice Springs in 2039, a fish falls from the sky. At the end of the play, the rain finally stops. These signs suggest that the pattern of events that began in London in 1959 have finally ended, and that perhaps the harm we have done to our world through the destruction of the environment can also come to an end.

In the following scene, Gabrielle rings Elizabeth to tell her she is carrying Gabriel's child. After years of suffering caused to her by Henry, and the effort of denying and concealing the truth that he was a killer, Elizabeth is incapable of any warmth or care for Gabrielle or her grandson.

When the Rain Stops Falling by Andrew Bovell

[FOUR ROOMS
1968 1988 1988 2013

Each superimposed upon the other. A telephone is ringing.

ELIZABETH sits at the table with a bottle of wine and a glass before her as the YOUNGER ELIZABETH enters and proceeds to set the table for two.

The OLDER ELIZABETH rises and moves forward to answer the phone.]

ELIZABETH YES?

[Silence. The YOUNGER ELIZABETH hesitates, plate in hand.]

Who is this?

[The YOUNGER GABRIELLE enters.]

GABRIELLE My name is Gabrielle York... I'm calling from Adelaide in Australia ...
There's been an accident ... I'm sorry ... Gabriel has been killed.

[A silence between them as she contains the dam of emotion threatening to break.]

Are you there?

ELIZABETH Yes, I'm here ... I'm still here.
[Beat.]

GABRIELLE They said he didn't suffer.

ELIZABETH Did they? ... How would they know? [Beat.] He mentioned you in a letter. He said that he thought you were someone he could love and who might love him in return. Did you love him or was it just wishful thinking on his behalf?

GABRIELLE Yes ... I think I loved him.

ELIZABETH I'm not sure it's something one thinks. It's something one knows, surely.

GABRIELLE I loved him.

ELIZABETH Did he know that he was loved?

GABRIELLE I don't know ... I never told him.

ELIZABETH Nor did I ... I often meant to but these things, these moments, they slip away. It's terrible but you reach a time in your life when you realise that you have very little to say to your children. I had very little to say to Gabriel. Of course having nothing to say is just another way of having so much to say that you dare not begin. [Beat.] Could I ask you to arrange a funeral? I don't think I could go to Australia. It's such a long way.

GABRIELLE Yes, I can do that ... I know how to do that.

ELIZABETH I'll send money, of course. I have some put away. I think a cremation would be best.

GABRIELLE If that's what you want ... I can send the ashes to England.

ELIZABETH I think it's better if they stayed there, don't you? I'm sure you will find the right thing to do with them.

[The OLDER GABRIELLE enters carrying the urn containing GABRIEL'S ashes. Through the following she places it on the table and takes a bowl of soup and takes a place at the table.]

GABRIELLE There's something I should tell you ... I'm pregnant.
[Beat.]

ELIZABETH Would you like me to send money for you to take care of that as well? ... I'm not meaning to be cruel.

GABRIELLE Aren't you?

ELIZABETH How old are you?

GABRIELLE Twenty-four.

ELIZABETH Think carefully before you make your decision. You're very young and bringing up a child on your own is a heavy price to pay for a brief affair with a melancholic English boy. The decision is yours, of course.

GABRIELLE I know that ... I wasn't asking your permission. If it's a boy I will call him Gabriel.

ELIZABETH Do you think that's wise? It would be tragic if every time you said your son's name you were reminded of what you had lost.

GABRIELLE I asked him once if he hated you ... He said that he tried. But he couldn't. On the contrary, he said ... I knew then how strong he was ... to love someone who was incapable of being loved.

ELIZABETH Don't presume so much.

GABRIELLE I'm not talking about you. *[Beat.]* I have to ask you about Gabriel's father. *[Beat.]* I had a brother. He was taken from the beach by a stranger in 1968.

[Silence.]

Please.

[Silence.]

Talk to me.

ELIZABETH Did Gabriel know?

GABRIELLE Yes. It was the last thing he knew.

[ELIZABETH slowly disconnects the line.]

GABRIELLE Wait ... Don't go ... Don't leave me.

[Beat. ELIZABETH walks away from the phone call.]

ELIZABETH I had a fall. In the street. Every woman's worst fear, of a certain age. A turning point into decline. But when I fell I thought I heard a man scream. That's what made me stumble, I'm sure. A scream. And for a moment, I thought it was the future screaming at me. *[Beat.]* Sometimes I feel like I'm getting smaller. Sometimes I feel like I'm just nothing at all. But then I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror and I see that I am still here. *[Beat.]* I'm still here. *[Beat.]* I'm still here.

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22.8 2010–2020: THE SECRET RIVER BY ANDREW BOVELL

The Secret River by Andrew Bovell is based in the novel by Kate Grenville, which won a number of literature prizes in Australia and overseas. The novel has sold over 100 000 copies and has been translated into 20 different languages.

The Secret River stage play was first performed by the Sydney Theatre Company in 2013 and won six Helpmann Awards. It was staged widely throughout Australia in 2016, and in 2017 the play was performed in a quarry at the Adelaide Festival.

The play is set in 1813–14, and tells the story of William Thornhill, his wife Sal and their two sons, Willie and Dick. Thornhill was sent to Australia as a convict, and the family try to start a new life farming on land on the Hawksbury River. The land Thornhill claims is the home of a family of Dharug people. Thornhill and almost all the other settlers on the Hawksbury refuse to acknowledge that the

Dharug people have any rights to the land they have lived on for many centuries. Initially, Thornhill and his wife try to avoid conflict, as the younger boy, Dick, makes friends with some of the Dharug boys.

However, tension and violence increase between the settlers and the Dharug, resulting in a terrible massacre of almost all the Dharug family, a massacre in which Thornhill takes part. The play ends with Thornhill as the wealthy landowner he dreamed of being but distanced from his wife and alienated from his younger son.

The play has an Aboriginal narrator, Dhurrumbin, and we see the story of disposition from both sides of the cultural divide. On stage the Aboriginal characters speak the Dharug language, so the audience is confronted, as the Thornhill family was, with not being able to understand. At the same time, we are made aware that the Dharug family are in the same situation. The play works to give us a deeper understanding of our history and confronts the consequences that are still present.

The Secret River by Andrew Bovell

ACT 1, SCENE 3

In the following scene, Thornhill and his sons have been digging the ground on what they claim is their land to plant corn. They dig up and throw away the yams that the Dharug people use for food. Three Dharug men, Yalamundi, an elder, and Ngalamalum and Wangarra, arrive and try to stop them, but there is a complete barrier, both in language and culture, between them.

[Sal appears having heard the commotion from the camp. She stifles a gasp and sums the situation up in a single glance.]

SAL: Willie here... give them this piece of pork...look sharp.

[WILLIE runs to her and takes the wrapped piece of pork and then takes it to his father. THORNHILL holds it out to them. YALAMUNDI makes no gesture to take it. THORNHILL then offers to NGALAMALUM. The younger man accepts the offer. He holds it in his hand.]

THORNHILL: It's food mate. You eat it.

DICK: Don't think he follows you, Da.

[THORNHILL demonstrates eating.]

THORBNHILL: Tastes good mate..

YALAMUNDI: Byalla-dabada dah [Don't eat it].

THORNHILL: No, it's good food. Salt pork.

[NGALAMALUM puts the pork down on the dirt. He smells his fingers, wrinkles his nose and wipes his hand on his thigh as WANGARRA moves the pork further away with his foot.]

[Then YALAMUNDI makes a clear move and walks over to the dug patch and seizes the spade.]

WILLIE: Oy! Gives us that back, you thieving black!

SAL: Willie!

[WILLIE tries to grab it back. The old man wrenches himself free. He shouts angrily ... the same word over and over again.]

YALAMUNDI: Gu, gu, gu. Biyal. [Stop, stop, stop. No.]

Willie: Give it here. You thieving black.

THORNHILL: Leave it be, Willie.

[THORNHILL approaches and slaps YALAMUNDI hard in the shoulder. Once, twice, three times. And with each time.]

No! No! No! Not my sons.

[The old man's face closes down into its creases of shadow. His hand reaches around and gets the curved wooden club from the string at his waist.]

[In an instant NGALAMALUM and WANGARRA have their spears raised and ready to throw. SAL runs forward and gathers the boys into a tight embrace to shield them.]

[A tight-wound moment is held.]

[Then YALAMUNDI gives a grunt of disgust and turns away, dropping the spade on the ground. He disappears into the forest.]

[NGALAMALUM runs forward until the point of his spear is at THORNHILL'S face. SAL screams. He pushes THORNHILL in the chest then slaps him three times hard in the shoulder as THORNHILL had done to YALAMUNDI]

NGALAMALUM: Biyal, biyal, biyal. [Stop, stop, stop.] Wurrawarra. [Go away.]

[The meaning is clear. Even a dog would understand it. And then they go. The THORNHILLS are silent. Stunned. Breathing.]

SAL: You said they'd gone.

THORNHILL: More than a dozen times I've been here. I swear. Camped at this very spot. Never seen a sign of them.

SAL: 'Cause you weren't looking, Will. You didn't want to see no sign.

DICK: They just don't want us to dig up their taters, Da, that's all.

THORNHILL: And what would you know about it?

[Beat.]

SAL: You two wait up at the camp.

[The boys leave.]

There's no shame in backing out of this.

THORNHILL: I'm not backing out of anything.

SAL: Go back to Sydney ... make our pile from there. You still got the boat.

THORNHILL: You think a couple of skinny blackfellas waving a stick in my face worry me?

SAL: I'm frightened Will. Not for myself ... you know that. But for the boys.

THORNHILL: Nothing's going to happen to those boys.
[Beat.]
It's a misunderstanding, that's all. It'll work out.

SAL: If you say so, Will.
[She leaves.]
[Thornhill remains alone.]

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AAP Image/Heidrun Löhr

22.8.1 *The Secret River* staged by the Sydney Theatre Company, 2013

CASE STUDY 6.6: AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (ATYP)



Who is ATYP?

Australian Theatre for Young People is the national youth theatre company. We exist to connect young people with the professional theatre industry, locally, regionally and nationally. It's the principle on which the company was founded in 1963. It's what drives us today.

ATYP helps young people find their voice and together, inspire all Australians. We believe that an involvement in theatre builds better people. Theatre develops confidence, creativity and community. It challenges us to reflect on and better understand ourselves and our society. Young people are a vital part of that society.

Where is ATYP based?

ATYP is based on the Wharf in Sydney's iconic Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. From 2020 the company will move into a purpose-built home on Pier 2/3, designed to support and showcase the best in theatre with young people locally, nationally and internationally. ATYP's base offers young people a 200-seat theatre, two workshop and rehearsal spaces as well as meeting spaces, offices, dressing rooms, hang-out spaces and a presence in a world-class arts precinct that includes Sydney Theatre Company, Bell Shakespeare Company, Bangarra Dance Theatre and the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

From our home at the Wharf, ATYP runs programs across Australia. As the national youth theatre company, we take care to ensure we work in partnership with like-minded companies and not compete with them. The company's full program of activities includes touring professional productions, commissioning and developing plays for young actors, delivering masterclasses and workshops in collaboration with local companies and venues, school residencies and workshops, and running one of Australia's most comprehensive online engagement initiatives that includes live streaming productions and a suite of resources to help young people tell their own stories.

What style do ATYP work in and why do they work in this/these style/s?

ATYP is proudly a playwright's theatre company. Each year the company has a minimum of six new works for young actors under development. We believe that the first play a young person reads or performs should have been specifically developed for their age group, and each play we develop should be given the same artistic rigour and reflection as would be expected from an adult production.

While the majority of ATYP's productions are script-based, the company works across all theatrical forms. ATYP is dedicated to telling stories that reflect the ideas, interests and experiences of young people today. We will work in whatever theatrical form is best suited to the story being told, whether that be music, movement, dance or drama. Our work needs to give the audience an insight into the world as experienced by a young character. The creative rationale for our work is simple: in order for it to be as good as it can be, young people must be integral to the performance. If a play can be better performed by older actors, it should be. If the relationship between a child and an adult is

integral to a story, make sure they are played by a child and an adult. Don't compromise because it is 'youth theatre'. Treat young artists and audiences with the same respect as adult theatre.



Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP)/Tracey Schramm

C6.6.1 Asha Boswarva and Monica Kumar in *Cassie and Saoirse* from *Intersection*, a show case of monologues and short scenes by young writers.

What is ATYP's approach to theatre making?

ATYP productions rely on the collaboration between professional artists and young people. In every ATYP process, whether it be a workshop, residency, commission or production, young people's experiences and ideas need to be central to the creative process. The company specialises in combining a supportive youth theatre process with professional theatre practice. This consistent philosophy underpins everything we do.

As an artistic director, how do you approach a text?

As the artistic director of the company, I need to ensure we are establishing processes for young people to inform our creative programming and to ensure those processes result in action. For example, established plays that are submitted to the company need to be read and reviewed by a youth steering committee, the Atypical Advisors, who assess their suitability for programming. The youth steering committee ranks the works based on which plays they think should be presented.

All new plays commissioned by ATYP include a clause in the contract stating that the script development process must include workshops with young people to gather feedback. The playwright must then demonstrate how young people's feedback has informed the resulting draft. ATYP has developed a range of workshops and reflection activities to ensure the text remains true to its intended artists and audiences.



C6.6.2 Elena Foreman and Dubs Yunupingu in *Sugarland*.

What are the challenges and rewards of using classic/traditional texts?

Generally ATYP tends not to perform traditional or classic texts because they have not been written with young people in mind. With little exception, traditional texts were created for adult actors to entertain adult audiences. This means the works will never be as artistically successful with young people as they can be with adults. So while the process of delivering those productions is rewarding for participants, young actors are always portraying characters far away from their own experiences. In many cases they are also being asked to express themselves with dialogue and text that they don't fully understand. The challenge within this context is to give the classic text specific relevance and connection to the young artists performing them. The more deeply an artist understands the specific context of their character, what he or she wants in any given moment and what is at stake, the more likely they are to give a compelling performance.

What are the challenges and rewards of creating new texts?

It's very hard to tell a good story. There is a reason we tend to perform the same plays over and over – because it is very difficult to get the characters, language, themes and story right. There is no simple solution to identifying original ways of capturing the imagination of your audience without them feeling like they have seen this situation before or that they know what is going to happen. Each play that ATYP commissions has between one and three years of development to ensure it is original, engaging and offers something unexpected. When you are successful in this process you create a work that offers an insight into the world through another person's eyes.

What role does improvisation play in the development of performances?

Improvisation is an important tool both for the development of new work and for the rehearsal room. This is equally true whether working off a text or devising performance. When working with text the actors can feel like they know exactly what their character

can expect because it's written on the page. When this happens, their performance tends to appear contrived, without dramatic tension or the potential for surprise. This becomes deadly boring for audiences. Improvisation opens actors up to the range of choices a character could make at any given moment.

In devising new work, improvisation is a vital tool for generating ideas, exploring character and building ensemble within a cast. The potential for performers to throw themselves into the unknown and use their skills, impulses and intuition to make creative choices is key to artistic development.



Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP)/Tracey Schramm

C6.6.3 Joshua Brennan, Edward McKenna and Brandon McClelland in the original production of *A Town Named War Boy*.

How do they overcome obstacles in the rehearsal period?

Key to overcoming obstacles during the rehearsal is clear, honest, constructive communication. A director should have the capacity to examine the obstacle, the nature of the difficulty in overcoming it, and then deconstruct it in such a way that it can be addressed in small, clear objectives for the artists involved. The key to this process is trust. It's through overcoming the obstacles that the most important learning happens.

When working from a script we begin each rehearsal process spending a number of days sitting around a table deconstructing and analysing the play. During this process we look to identify what we think the major obstacles in telling the story will be. What are the key elements that need to be represented by each character? What do we need to be mindful of? We identify and name as many of the obstacles as we can as early in the process as possible and then agree upon the elements we think will help overcome them. The more clearly a creative team can articulate their objectives and concerns, the more likely they are to realise them.

Australian Theatre for Young People

CASE STUDY 6.7: MONKEY BAA



Who is Monkey Baa Theatre Company?

Established in 1997, by Eva Di Cesare, Sandra Eldridge and Tim McGarry, Monkey Baa Theatre Company has been creating inspiring, award-winning theatre for young audiences for 21 years, and has adapted over 15 classic Australian stories for the stage. Some of Monkey Baa's plays have been published and are available from Currency Press and Playlab.

Monkey Baa's vision is to be a theatre company that exhilarates young minds, hearts and imaginations. It is Australia's widest-reaching touring company, having conducted over 25 national tours to 135 regional and remote communities across every state and territory of Australia, four international tours and over 2500 performances – engaging with 1.2 million young people.

Monkey Baa believes that theatre should be an integral part of every young person's life, providing a pathway towards a better understanding of the world we inhabit, both individually and collectively.



Monkey Baa Theatre Company

C6.7.1 Entrance to Monkey Baa Theatre Company, Sydney

Where is Monkey Baa Theatre Company based?

Monkey Baa Theatre Company is located at its home base in the Lendlease Darling Quarter Theatre in Sydney, New South Wales.

As the Creative Directors of the company, what is your approach to theatre making?

Our theatre making always begins with collaboration, whether we are working on adaptations or new works. It generally takes about 18 months to create a new work, from the initial ideas, to the adapting/writing process, to the rehearsal period and the opening. Within that time, we may collaborate with young people in classrooms or through feedback showings. We generally have one or two creative development weeks where we bring in a dramaturge in the first week and then go away and do rewrites of the script. We then do a second creative development week with the whole creative team, the director and ideally the actors. Overall, it's a long collaborative process where everyone's ideas weave together.

Generally speaking, we rehearse for four–five weeks on a new work, and we ideally have elements of the set, costumes and props in the rehearsal room from day one. This allows for the actors to begin delving into the world of the text and to form relationships with important objects as much as with one another.

Can you describe the process of adapting *Pete the Sheep* for the stage?

There were three of us adapting Jackie French's book *Pete the Sheep*. We began as we always do by musing and bashing ideas and thoughts about as a team. Early on in this creative development we were very fortunate to be able to spend some time on a property in the countryside close to Jackie, which meant that we could share responses to the book with her and any early ideas that we had. It also meant that we could go out and meet some of the local shearers and visit a shearing shed so that we had a real sense of the world of the play that we were creating. This approach proved to be invaluable. We knew from this musing week that we were on the right track in deciding that the piece would be staged as a musical. A picture book adaptation always presents questions regarding form and style, as the text is usually minimal, with the pictures doing a lot of the work in the telling of the story. In *Pete*, we felt that the sound and energy of shearing itself had to be a part of the



Monkey Baa Theatre Company

C6.7.2 In the adaptation of *Pete the Sheep*, the sense of being in a shearing community is reflected in the set and the costuming.

A picture book adaptation always presents questions regarding form and style, as the text is usually minimal, with the pictures doing a lot of the work in the telling of the story. In *Pete*, we felt that the sound and energy of shearing itself had to be a part of the

piece and that decision helped us to expand on the joy and really capture the pathos of the tale. We also extended our collaborative process by trialling our ideas on the floor in drama workshops with students from two primary schools in Sydney. During these workshops we read the book and chatted to the students about our ideas, then we gave them some outlines of scenes that we had put together. They then went away and rehearsed and added their own thoughts and then presented their devised scenes to the rest of the class. This was gold for us as we learnt very quickly what was not going to work and what was!



Monkey Baa Theatre Company

C6.7.3 In *Pete the Sheep* the actors play multiple roles, including the shearers, the dogs and the sheep.

As a company, how different was the process of creating *The Unknown Soldier*?

With *The Unknown Soldier*, it was quite a different process for us as it was a 'new' written work and not an adaptation. Basically, Sandie had an idea that she wished to explore about connectivity and the theme of the past impacting on the present. The company also wished to present a work for the centenary of WWI and to honour those that had served. Sandie undertook an enormous amount of research into WWI and through that research she realised that she needed to engage with service people of today, to build the world of the play further and to enrich the characters. The weaving of PTSD into the play came about from interviews with soldiers and that had a tremendous impact on the play by bringing a deeper relevance to today. As a text-based work, the play went through the same creative development process that all of our work goes through. Sandie went away with dramaturge Tim for a week of rewrites on a property with no internet interference and came back with a much more focused and clarified work. The se ond

development week involved the director Matt Edgerton, the dramaturge and the other actor coming together and working around the table on the text. The creative team then joined us and worked on further unlocking the world within the play. Ideas were shared about the potential for shadow play, paper and written letters etc. From this collaboration came the kernel of the design concept. We had a showing with returned service people and young people who all gave invaluable feedback for the rewrites. All up there were 13 drafts written of *The Unknown Soldier* and six for *Pete the Sheep*.

As directors and theatre makers, how do you approach texts?

When directing a text, it always begins with the 'slog work' of going through the play and uniting the work and breaking down the beats, then noting all the sound, lighting, set, costume, prop and character directions written in the text. We then add any loose ideas that the textual analysis may have inspired. Next, we look at the themes that are evident in the piece, the crisis points that exist, as well as figuring out what drives the central protagonist and what obstacles they face. It is really important to be patient throughout this process, as sometimes you can't immediately answer all the questions that arise, and you have to wait for the rest of the creative team to come on board. In the beginning stages we do a lot of research into the world of the play by sourcing paintings, articles, images, books, letters, architecture, movies and any other inspirational artefacts.

Even when we are adapting a new work we apply the same process of rigorous research. For example, when adapting a picture book for the stage we often begin by looking at what's on the page and start by breaking down the information. With *Pete the Sheep*, we looked at each page and asked ourselves a series of questions regarding the given circumstance, including: who, what, where, why and how? Most importantly, for a stage adaptation we need to look for the drama and the tension. With *Pete the Sheep* we explored how big the stakes were for Shaun in starting a new job and then being fired on the same day, and how much it cost him to stick by his little buddy Pete. The illustrations were as illuminating as the text in answering these questions.

In *The Unknown Soldier*, Sandie had to wear two hats; one as the writer, and the other as an actor in the performance. It became very clear that in order to act in the play she had to remove the writer's hat, as it was difficult to wear them both at once. Even though she had written the play, in rehearsal it was important for her to approach the text as she would any other text as an actor, by discovering what her character really wanted and whether there were any obstacles in her way. It's always important to look at the given circumstances and do that pre-rehearsal task where you write down everything that your character says about themselves in front of others and on their own, what others say about your character in front of their face and behind their back, as well as what your character says about others to their face and behind their back.



Monkey Baa Theatre Company

C6.7.4 In *The Unknown Soldier*, Sandie Eldridge was both a creator and a performer of the work.

What are the challenges and rewards of creating new texts?

The first challenge with adapting a book to the stage is that you don't want to just put the book onto the stage. Ideally you want to bring something else, something extra, perhaps something that the writer hasn't seen. Often the clue to what that extra something is lies in what first attracted you to the book and the essence of the story that you have interpreted. You have to remember that it's a play you're creating, it's not the book, though with that said it's important not to veer too far away from the original story as audiences often have a pre-existing connection to the book. It is then a matter of exploring the ways and means of theatricalising the story, whether that's through ballet, opera, a musical or perhaps a series of monologues physicalised on stage. There are many creative challenges that arise throughout the process, such as working out how to adapt an inner monologue in a book, or how to bring a descriptive passage to life on the stage in order for the audience to digest a character's emotional state.

The challenge with theatre for young people, as with all theatre, is to never be 'boring', and the rewards are as with any powerful theatre experience; when an audience gets it, when they share the story and the experience with one another and connect with what's happening on stage, that's what makes the whole process so rewarding.

With theatre for young people you also want to keep the action going and make sure that the performance isn't too long. Really young people get restless sitting in a chair for too long, no matter how riveting the action is. For example, with *Pete the Sheep* it was imperative for us to keep the play under 50 minutes, while still ensuring that the story was clear and engaging for the audience. When an audience of young people are all laughing together at a sheep with a new hairdo singing a 'Doo Wop' song, it is absolutely joyous. Theatre is such a powerful collective medium.

With *The Unknown Soldier* in particular, the biggest challenge for Sandie was knowing when to stop researching and start writing and not get lost down a rabbit warren of ideas. As with any new work you have to be ruthless. As a writer, Sandie had to lose one character, Albert's mother, who at the end of the day didn't serve the play as she didn't move the action forward and her function was covered by Grace. It was a challenge letting go of her. The day that she wrote Albert's death was also really hard, she cried and cried. As a writer you become emotionally attached to the characters that you are creating as they are real people to you.

The rewards in young people's theatre are great, as the audience members are so responsive; both vocally and physically, and you can feel the immediacy of their reactions. In *The Unknown Soldier* you knew the audience was really with you when you heard people crying when Albert died, and laughter on the line when Charlie eats the biscuit in the second last scene and says 'hmmmm yum', you knew then that they had been with you all the way.



C6.7.5 Sandie Eldridge and Felix Johnson in *The Unknown Soldier*.

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Ultimately, for us at Monkey Baa, both the challenge and the reward lie in us wanting to give young people great theatrical experiences. We are aware that for some young people this might be their first time in the theatre and you don't want it to be their last. This is a huge responsibility as the young audience members of today are also the practitioners and audiences of tomorrow! You want to be able to share the love and joy of theatre.

What role does improvisation play in the development of your performances?

Improvisation generally plays a significant role in our creative development weeks when we are experimenting with a text and want to explore the given circumstance and stakes around a scene. We may ask the actors to improvise around the text to see what discoveries can be found. We also use improvisation in our workshops with young people when we are developing a work with their creative input. For example, we may ask them to create a scene improvising around what they think happens as the page turns or between the pages of the picture book we are adapting. With *Pete the Sheep* we had the school students improvising scenarios that we built up for them, which allowed them to explore the roles of sheep, dogs and shearers. It was powerful to see how the students embodied the imagined world of the text. Discovery is always the vein of gold with improvisation. You will always take one little nugget away that can be built upon in the work.

In the rehearsal room for *The Unknown Soldier*, we improvised around what might've happened before the start of the play. For example, we explored the train journey to Angela's house with Angela and Charlie. As actors, this really gave us a strong body and emotional memory to start the first scene with. We also improvised around the last scene at The Sydney Anzac Memorial. We met at the memorial and enacted the scene there in situ but we also riffed around it, walking and playing our characters around the park. This was a beneficial way for us to build the sensory world of the play, and it gave us something to further investigate in the rehearsal room.

How do you overcome obstacles in the rehearsal process?

Obstacles are such an important part of the rehearsal process, it really is a matter of working together as a team to solve the problem, whether that be design changes, cast changes or losing time due to marketing requirements etc. There are so many adjustments that have to be made on the floor at any given time. Monkey Baa's ethos is that of collaboration, we join forces right from the beginning of our creative process so that opening up the room to input is an inherent part of solving and surmounting our obstacles. We believe that no idea is a bad idea, and we love to view the creative process as constantly evolving as we are all continually adding and subtracting ideas to build on the work. An idea always leads to another idea, another direction and a different way of doing or looking at a problem or obstacle. You have to remain really flexible in the rehearsal room and the best way to embrace that is to be very prepared. We live by the book that you can never be too prepared, whether as an actor or director. Preparation allows you to trust yourself to be open, and an open heart is a vital component of the creative process and spirit. You also need to be ready to admit when you may have made a mistake and welcome fresh and new ideas. At the end of the day it's all about the work serving the play or the book, and making the best piece of theatre you can. Remember, theatre is a collaborative art form, that's what's so wonderful about it.

By Sandie Eldridge and Eva Di Cesare, Creative Directors of Monkey Baa Theatre Company

LIST OF PLAY EXTRACTS

| | |
|---|---------|
| <i>Agamemnon</i> by Aeschylus | 143–44 |
| <i>Antigone</i> by Damien Ryan | 145 |
| <i>Antigone</i> by Jane Montgomery Griffith | 146 |
| <i>Away</i> by Michael Gow | 185 |
| <i>Blackrock</i> by Nick Enright | 11–13 |
| <i>Cyberbille</i> by Alana Valentine | 120–21 |
| <i>Cymbeline</i> by William Shakespeare | 160 |
| <i>The Drover's Wife</i> by Leah Purcell | 277–78 |
| <i>The Golden Age</i> by Louis Nowra | 300–2 |
| <i>Hamlet</i> by William Shakespeare | 132 |
| <i>Hotel Sorrento</i> by Hannie Rayson | 303–5 |
| <i>Letters to Lindy</i> by Alana Valentine | 97–98 |
| <i>Morning Sacrifice</i> by Dymphna Cusack | 290–91 |
| <i>Mother Courage and Her Children</i> by Bertolt Brecht | 37–39 |
| <i>Mrs Petrov's Shoe</i> by Noëlle Janaczevska | 20–23 |
| <i>No Sugar</i> by Jack Davis | 272–74 |
| <i>The One Day of the Year</i> by Alan Seymour | 295–98 |
| <i>Red Sky Morning</i> by Tom Holloway | 133–34 |
| <i>The Removalists</i> by David Williamson | 298–300 |
| <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> by William Shakespeare | 158–59 |
| <i>The Secret River</i> by Kate Grenville and Andrew Bovell | 309–11 |
| <i>The Servant of Two Masters</i> by Carlo Goldoni | 152 |
| <i>The 7 Stages of Grieving</i> by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman | 275–76 |
| <i>Summer of the Seventeenth Doll</i> by Ray Lawler | 291–95 |
| <i>Waiting for Godot</i> by Samuel Beckett | 196–97 |
| <i>When the Rain Stops Falling</i> by Andrew Bovell | 306–8 |

SUGGESTED PLAYS

CHAPTER 1: CREATING A CHARACTER

Akropolis by Jerzy Grotowski
Black Diggers by Tom Wright
Blackrock by Nick Enright
Brothers Wreck by Jada Alberts
Cosi by Louis Nowra
A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen
Gary's House by Debra Oswald
Highly Sprung by Legs on the Wall
Jump for Jordan by Donna Abela
King Hit by David Milroy and Geoffrey Narkle
A Man with Five Children by Nick Enright
Michael Swordfish by Lachlan Philpott
Mrs Petrov's Shoe by Noëlle Janaczewska
No Sugar by Jack Davis
Our Country's Good by Timberlake Wertenbaker
A Property of the Clan by Nick Enright
The Rivers of China by Alma De Groen
Remembering Ronald Ryan by Barry Dickins
Silent Disco by Lachlan Philpott
Sisters by Stephen Sewell
Sugarland by Rachael Coopes and Wayne Blair
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler
The Violent Outburst That Drew Me to You by Finegan Kruckemeyer

CHAPTER 2: REPRESENTING A CHARACTER

Baal by Bertolt Brecht
The Caucasian Chalk Circle by Bertolt Brecht
Fear and Misery of the Third Reich by Bertolt Brecht

The Good Person of Szechwan by Bertolt Brecht

Life of Galileo by Bertolt Brecht

The Magnanimous Cuckold by Fernand Crommelynck

Mother Courage and Her Children by Bertolt Brecht

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui by Bertolt Brecht

The Threepenny Opera by Bertolt Brecht

CHAPTER 3: CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO CHARACTERISATION

Fearless by Mirra Todd

Macbeth by William Shakespeare

Ode to Progress by Odin Teatret, 1997

Ornitofilene by Jens Bjorneboe

Radio Macbeth by SITI

The Trojan Women by Euripides (Tadashi Suzuki)

Waiting for Orestes by Tadashi Suzuki: Electra, 2009

CHAPTER 4: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR CHARACTERISATION TODAY

CLUBS by Ex Machina

The Dragon Trilogy by Robert Lepage (writers: Marie Brassard, Jean Casault, Lorraine Côté, Marie Gignac, Robert Lepage and Marie Michaud)

DIAMONDS by Ex Machina

The Encounter by Simon McBurney (Complicité)

The Far Side of the Moon by Robert Lepage

HEARTS by Ex Machina (writers: Louis Fortier, Reda Guerinek, Ben Grant, Catherine Hughes, Kathryn Hunter, Robert Lepage, Marcello Magni and Olivier Normand)

Lipsynch by Frédérique Bédard, Carlos Belda, Rebecca Blankenship, Lise Castonguay, John Cobb, Nuria Garcia, Marie Gignac, Sarah Kemp, Robert Lepage, Rick Miller and Hans Piesbergen

Lionboy by Zizou Corder (adapted by Marcelo Dos Santos)

The Magic Flute (Complicité)

1984 by Robert Lepage

Quills by Doug Wright

SPADES by Ex Machina (writers: Sylvio Arriola, Carole Faisant, Nuria Garcia, Tony Guilfoyle, Martin Haberstroh, Robert Lepage, Sophie Martin, Roberto Mori)

Vanishing Points by John Berger, Anne Michaels (Complicité)

CHAPTER 5: STAGE, COSTUME, LIGHTING AND SOUND DESIGN

Black Diggers by Tom Wright

Brothers Wreck by Jada Alberts

Cats by Andrew Lloyd Webber

The Drover's Wife by Leah Purcell

Henry V by William Shakespeare

The Ik by Colin Higgins and Denis Cannan

Jandamarra by Steve Hawke

Lady Windermere's Fan by Oscar Wilde

Le Rossignol by Igor Stravinsky (Robert Lepage)

The Mahabharata by Jean-Claude Carrière

Masquerade by Kate Mulvany

Matilda by Rob Howell and Tim Minchin

A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare

Miss Saigon by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg

Mother Courage and her Children by Bertolt Brecht

M Rock by Lachlan Philpott

No Sugar by Jack Davis

Oedipus Rex by Sophocles

Pete the Sheep by Eva Di Cesare et al.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun by Peter Shaffer

The Secret River by Kate Grenville and Andrew Bovell

A Town Named War Boy by Ross Mueller

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett

CHAPTER 6: STAGING A PERFORMANCE

Aftershocks by Paul Brown

Black Diggers by Tom Wright

Blackrock by Nick Enright

The Black Sequin Dress by Jenny Kemp

Box the Pony by Leah Purcell

Brothers Wreck by Jada Alberts

The Club by David Williamson

The Crucible by Arthur Miller

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen

Equus by Peter Shaffer

Hotel Sorrento by Hannie Rayson

It Just Stopped by Stephen Sewell

A Man for All Seasons by Robert Bolt

Mr Melancholy by Matt Cameron

Ninety by Joanna Murray-Smith

The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman

Sisters by Stephen Sewell

Toy Symphony by Michael Gow

War Horse by Nick Stafford

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? by Edward Albee

Yibiyung by Dallas Winmar

CHAPTER 7: STAGING PERFORMANCE TEXTS

Cats by Andrew Lloyd Webber

The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov

The Chosen by Lachlan Philpott

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen
The Drover's Wife by Leah Purcell
Eisteddfod by Lally Katz
Letters to Lindy by Alana Valentine
Look Back in Anger by John Osborne
The Mahabharata by Jean-Claude Carrière
Monsters of Grace by Robert Wilson and Philip Glass
Moth by Declan Greene
Ruby Moon by Matt Cameron
Stolen by Jane Harrison
Sugarland by Rachael Coopes

CHAPTER 8: IMPROVISING A GROUP PERFORMANCE

Black Diggers by Tom Wright
Hotel Sorrento by Hannie Rayson
Up Jumped the Devil by OzFrank
Radiance by Louis Nowra
Sisters by Stephen Sewell
A Town Named War Boy by Ross Mueller
Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare
The Unknown Soldier by Sandra Eldridge

CHAPTER 9: CONTEMPORARY STYLES OF GROUP PERFORMANCE

Aftershocks by Paul Brown
Apocalypse Perth by Kate Rice
Beyond the Neck by Tom Holloway
'CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)' by Version 1.0 in *Staging Asylum*
Cyberbible by Alana Valentine
Cymbeline by William Shakespeare
Disgraced by Ayad Akhtar
Donald: The Musical by Tim Minchin
Embers by Campion Decent

The Encounter by Simon McBurney (Complicité)
Entertaining Mr. Sloane by Joe Orton
'Grounded' in *Cyberbible/Grounded* by Alana Valentine
Honour Bound by Gillian Slovo and Victoria Brittain
I'm Your Man by Roslyn Oades
Keating! The Musical by Casey Bennetto
Kryptonite by Sue Smith
Letters to Lindy by Alana Valentine
Loot by Joe Orton
Macbeth by William Shakespeare
A Man with Five Children by Nick Enright
Mother Courage and Her Children by Bertolt Brecht
The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui by Bertolt Brecht
Run, Rabbit Run by Alana Valentine
The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman
Shane Warne: The Musical by Eddie Perfect
Stories of Love and Hate by Roslyn Oades
Talking to Brick Walls by Claire Christian & The Empire Arts Impact Ensemble
The Violin Player by Catherine Fargher
What the Butler Saw by Joe Orton

CHAPTER 10: CREATING A SOLO PERFORMANCE

Blue Bones by Merlynn Tong
Bombshells by Joanna Murray-Smith
Box the Pony by Leah Purcell
Boy Girl Wall by Matthew Ryan and Lucas Stibbard
Chasing the Lollyman by Mark Sheppard
Chinese Take Away by Anna Yen
The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin by Steve J Spears
Jump for Jordan by Donna Abela

Hamlet by William Shakespeare
Highway of Lost Hearts by Mary Anne Butler
Lake Disappointment by Lachlan Philpott and Luke Mullins
Mother by Daniel Keene
Not Like Beckett by Michael Watts
Once in Royal David's City by Michael Gow
Red Sky Morning by Tom Holloway
The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman
A Stretch of the Imagination by Jack Hibberd
Sugarland by Rachael Coopes and Wayne Blair
What is the Matter with Mary Jane? by Sancia Robinson and Wendy Harmer

CHAPTER 11: THE BEGINNINGS OF WESTERN THEATRE

Abydos Passion Play
Agamemnon by Aeschylus
The Birds by Aristophanes
The Clouds by Aristophanes
The Frogs by Aristophanes
Antigone & Cyrano de Bergerac by Damien Ryan
Antigone by Jane Montgomery Griffith
Antigone by Sophocles
A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare
The Persians by Aeschylus
The Wasps by Aristophanes

CHAPTER 12: THEATRE COMES OF AGE

Andromache by Jean-Baptiste Racine
Antigone by Sophocles
The Beaux' Stratagem by George Farquhar
The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov
Cinna by Pierre Corneille

The Country Wife by William Wycherley
Cymbeline by William Shakespeare
The Dance of Death by Henrik Ibsen
A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen
The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster
The Father by Henrik Ibsen
Halal-el-Mashakel by Linda Jaivin
Heartbreak House by George Bernard Shaw
Hedda Gabler by Henrik Ibsen
Horace by Pierre Corneille
Iphigenia by Jean-Baptiste Racine
The Kelly Gang by Dan Barry
The Kelly Gang; or the Career of Ned Kelly, the Ironclad Bushranger of Australia by Arnold Denham
King Lear by William Shakespeare
Le Cid by Pierre Corneille
Letters to Lindy by Alana Valentine
Macbeth by William Shakespeare
Measure for Measure by William Shakespeare
Médée by Pierre Corneille
The Misanthrope by Molière
Miss Julie by Henrik Ibsen
My Fair Lady by George Bernard Shaw
Ned Kelly by Harry Leader and Bernard Espinasse
Othello by William Shakespeare
Outlaw Kelly by Lancelot Booth
Polyeucte by Pierre Corneille
Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw
The Recruiting Officer by George Farquhar
Riders to the Sea by John Millington Synge
The Rivals by RB Sheridan
Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare
The School for Scandal by Richard Brinsley Sheridan
School for Wives by Molière
She Stoops to Conquer by Oliver Goldsmith
The Seagull by Anton Chekhov

Sugarland by Rachael Coopes and Wayne Blair
Tartuffe by Molière
The Tempest by William Shakespeare
The Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov
A Town Named War Boy by Ross Mueller
The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe
Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare
Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov
Volpone by Ben Jonson
The Way of the World by William Congreve
The White Devil by John Webster
Windmill Baby by David Milroy

CHAPTER 13: STANISLAVSKI TO MAGICAL REALISM

Away by Michael Gow
Cinderella by Matthew Whittet
The Crucible by Arthur Miller
Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller
The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams
Gwen in Purgatory by Tommy Murphy
The Hairy Ape by Eugene O'Neill
Life Without Me by Daniel Keene
A Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill
Masquerade by Kate Mulvany
A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare
Mourning Becomes Electra by Eugene O'Neill
The Seagull by Anton Chekhov
Stories in the Dark by Debra Oswald
A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler

The Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov
The Trolleys by Sarah West
When the Rain Stops Falling by Andrew Bovell

CHAPTER 14: SURREALISM, CRUELTY AND THE ABSURD

Betrayal by Harold Pinter
The Birds by Aristophanes
The Black Sequin Dress by Jenny Kemp
The Blood of a Poet by Jean Cocteau
The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari by Robert Wiene (written by Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer)
Cats by Andrew Lloyd Webber
A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen
A Dream Play by August Strindberg
A Foundling by Daniel Keene
The Frogs by Aristophanes
Ghost Sonata by August Strindberg
Hamlet by William Shakespeare
Here to Stay by High Performance Radio
Jumpers by Tom Stoppard
Kafka's Breath by Daniel Keene
Life Without Me by Daniel Keene
The Lion King by Irene Mecchi and Roger Allers
Macbeth by William Shakespeare
When We Dead Awaken by Henrik Ibsen
Ubu Roi by Alfred Jarry
Oedipus Doesn't Live Here Anymore by Daniel Keene
O Jim by Daniel Keene
Parade by Jean Cocteau
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead by Tom Stoppard
Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett
The Wasps by Aristophanes

CHAPTER 15: EXPRESSIONISM, BRECHT AND BOAL

Baal by Bertolt Brecht
The Beggar's Opera by John Gay
The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari by Robert Wiene
The Caucasian Chalk Circle by Bertolt Brecht
Danton's Death by Georg Büchner
Drums in the Night by Bertolt Brecht
The Good Person of Szechwan by Bertolt Brecht
In the Jungle by Bertolt Brecht
Life of Galileo by Bertolt Brecht
Man and the Masses by Ernst Toller
Metropolis by Fritz Lang
Mother Courage and Her Children by Bertolt Brecht
The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui by Bertolt Brecht
The Threepenny Opera by Bertolt Brecht
Woyzeck by Georg Büchner

CHAPTER 16: THE THEATRE OF TRANSFORMATION

Akropolis by Stanislaw Wyspianski
Children of the Black Skirt by Angela Betzien
The Conference of the Birds by Jean-Claude Carrière
The Constant Prince by Jerzy Grotowski
Eyes to the Floor by Alana Valentine
The Grand Inquisitor by Marie-Hélène Estienne and Peter Brook
The Ik by Colin Higgins and Denis Cannan
Kordian by Jerzy Grotowski
The Mahabharata by Jean-Claude Carrière
Macbeth by William Shakespeare
The Man Who by Marie-Hélène Estienne and Peter Brook
Marat/Sade by Peter Weiss

Masquerade by Kate Mulvany
A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare
Parramatta Girls by Alana Valentine
Stories in the Dark by Debra Oswald
The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe

CHAPTER 17: THE THEATRE OF ASIA

The Bacchae by Euripides (adapted by Tadashi Suzuki)
Clytemnestra adapted by Tadashi Suzuki
Dongeng Untuk Nala (The Tale for Nala) by Teater Satu
Girl of the Soil by Hideki Noda
Macbeth by William Shakespeare (adapted by Tadashi Suzuki)
Medea by Euripides (adapted by Tadashi Suzuki)
The Tempest by William Shakespeare (adapted by Tadashi Suzuki)
The Trojan Women by Euripides (adapted by Tadashi Suzuki)
Wicked by Winnie Holzman

CHAPTER 18: THEATRE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Across the Universe by Julie Taymor, Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais
Billy Elliot by Lee Hall
Blackbird by David Harrower
Burka Bondage by Helena Waldmann
Candide by Mark Ravenhill
The City by Martin Crimp
The Cut by Mark Ravenhill
Don Juan in Soho by Patrick Marber
4.48 Psychosis by Sarah Kane
In the Republic of Happiness by Martin Crimp

The Jersey Boys by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice
Keating! The Musical by Casey Bennetto
Kinky Boots by Harvey Fierstein
The Lion King by Irene Mecchi and Roger Allers
Mamma Mia by Catherine Johnson
Matilda by Rob Howell and Tim Minchin
The Musicians by Patrick Marber
Shane Warne: The Musical by Eddie Perfect
The Story of a Woman by Pierre Notte
A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams
Sweet Nothings by David Harrower
That Face by Polly Stenham
365 Plays/365 Days by Suzan-Lori Parks
War Horse by Nick Stafford
Wicked by Winnie Holzman
The Wizard of Oz by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Jeremy Sams

CHAPTER 19: THE EVOLUTION OF AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

All for Gold by Francis RC Hopkins
Are You Ready Comrade? by Betty Roland
The Bandit of the Rhine by Henry Evan Thomas
The Bushrangers by David Burn
The Bushrangers by Henry Melville
Black-Eyed Susan by Douglas William Jerrold
Brothers Wreck by Jada Alberts
Brumby Innes/Bid Me to Love by Katharine Susannah Prichard
Burst of Summer by Oriel Gray
Colonial Experience by Walter Cooper
The Currency Lass by Edward Geoghegan
Dark Heritage by Barbara Stellmach
Daybreak by Catherine Shepherd
Eternal Now by Dymphna Cusack
For the Term of His Natural Life by Alfred Dampier

Forged by Arch Murray
Fountains Beyond by George Landen Dann
The Flying Dutchman by Richard Wagner
Granite Peak by Betty Roland
Had We but World Enough by Oriel Gray
Here Under Heaven by Mona Brand
The Hibernian Father by Edward Geoghegan
Image in the Clay by David Ireland
Jane, My Love by Catherine Shepherd
Jemmy Green by James Tucker
Kid Stakes by Ray Lawler
Kill the Messenger by Nakkiah Lui
Morning Sacrifice by Dymphna Cusack
The Multi-Coloured Umbrella by Barbara Vernon
Neighbourhood Watch by Lally Katz
Norm and Ahmed by Alex Buzo
On Our Selection by Steele Rudd
Other Times by Ray Lawler
Our Country's Good by Timberlake Wertenbaker
Robbery Under Arms by Alfred Dampier
Rusty Bugles by Sumner Locke Elliott
The Recruiting Officer by George Farquhar
Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah by Alana Valentine
Shoulder the Sky by Dymphna Cusack
Sky Without Birds by Oriel Gray
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler
The Secret River by Kate Grenville and Andrew Bovell
The Sentimental Bloke by CJ Dennis
The Shifting Heart by Richard Beynon
The Sunny South by George Darrell
This Old Man Comes Rolling Home by Dorothy Hewett
A Town Named War Boy by Ross Mueller
The Torrents by Oriel Gray
The Touch of Silk by Betty Roland
The Tragedy of Donohoe by Charles Harpur
Uncle Tom's Cabin by George Aiken

CHAPTER 20: CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

Atlantis by Lally Katz
Aftershocks by Paul Brown
All Stops Out by Michael Gow
And the Big Men Fly by Alan Hopgood
Atlanta by Joanna Murray-Smith
Australian Gothic by Mary Rachel Brown
All Souls by Daniel Keene
The Architect's Walk by Daniel Keene
Away by Michael Gow
Barungin by Jack Davis
Bedfellows by Barry Oakley
Big River by Alex Buzo
Big Toys by Patrick White
Bitter Bit by Jack Davis
Black Mary by Julie Janson
Box the Pony by Leah Purcell
Blackrock by Nick Enright
The Black Sequin Dress by Jenny Kemp
The Blind Giant is Dancing by Stephen Sewell
The Bugalugs Bum Thief by Tim Winton
The Black Swan of Trespass by Lally Katz
Bennelong by Alana Valentine (Bangarra Dance Theatre)
The Blind Giant is Dancing by Stephen Sewell
Bison by Lachlan Philpott
Bustown by Lachlan Philpott
Beyond the Neck by Tom Holloway
Bullie's House by Thomas Keneally
The Bleeding Tree by Angus Cerini
The Cake Man by Robert J Merritt
Call of the Wild by Jenny Kemp
Calpurnia Descending by Sisters Grimm
Credentials by David Williamson
Capricornia by Louis Nowra
Captain Midnight VC by Jack Hibberd
The Chapel Perilous by Dorothy Hewett

Chidley by Alma de Groen
Childermas by Thomas Keneally
The Chocolate Frog by Jim McNeil
Christian Brothers by Ron Blair
The Club by David Williamson
The Coming of Stork by David Williamson
Cho Cho San by Daniel Keene
Criminology by Lally Katz and Tom Wright
Constance Drinkwater and the Final Days of Somerset by Stephen Carleton
The Children of the Black Skirt by Angela Betzien
Competitive Tenderness by Hannie Rayson
Coralie Lansdowne Says No by Alex Buzo
Dags by Debra Oswald
The Department by David Williamson
Dimboola by Jack Hibberd
Diving for Pearls by Katherine Thomson
Don Parties On by David Williamson
Don's Party by David Williamson
The Dreamers by Jack Davis
Dreams in an Empty City by Stephen Sewell
Dream Home by David Williamson
The Dark Room by Angela Betzien
An Eager Hope by Peter Kenna
Einstein by Ron Elisha
Europe by Michael Gow
The Eisteddfod by Lally Katz
Extinction by Hannie Rayson
Falling from Grace by Hannie Rayson
Flame by Joanna Murray-Smith
The Floating World by John Romeril
For Valour by Ric Throssell
Four Little Girls by Pablo Picasso
Footprints on Water by Matt Cameron
Forget Me Not by Tom Holloway
The Front Room Boys by Alex Buzo
The Forty Lounge Cafe by Tes Lyssiotis
Furtive Love by Peter Kenna

Gary's House by Debra Oswald
The Gap by Anna Broinowski
The Glass Mermaid by Tobsha Learner
The Glass Soldier by Hannie Rayson
Going Home by Alma de Groen
Gwen in Purgatory by Tommy Murphy
Goodbye New York, Goodbye Heart by Lally Katz
Good with Maps by Noëlle Janaczewska
The Gun in History by Tobsha Learner
A Handful of Friends by David Williamson
A Hard God by Peter Kenna
Hotel Sorrento by Hannie Rayson
How Does Your Garden Grow by Jim McNeil
Hinterland by Matt Cameron
Holding the Man by Tommy Murphy
Hoods by Angela Betzien
The Hanging by Angela Betzien
Hullabaloo Belay! The Whitby Adventure by Barbara Vernon
Inheritance by Hannie Rayson
Il Ritorno by Sergio Pierattini
Honour by Joanna Murray-Smith
Jack by Jim McNeil
Jugglers Three by David Williamson
The Kid by Michael Gow
Kid Stakes by Ray Lawler
Kullark by Jack Davis
Life After George by Hannie Rayson
Lumps by Debra Oswald
Low by Daniel Keene
Lally Katz and the Terrible Mysteries of the Volcano by Lally Katz
Letters to Lindy by Alana Valentine
Love Me Tender by Tom Holloway
Love Child by Joanna Murray-Smith
Mother by Daniel Keene
M Rock by Lachlan Philpott
Mr Melancholy by Matt Cameron

Mark Colvin's Kidney by Tommy Murphy
Minnie and Lirez by Lally Katz
Moth by Declan Greene
Mrs Petrov's Shoe by Noëlle Janaczewska
Makassar Reef by Alex Buzo
The Marginal Farm by Alex Buzo
Martello Towers by Alex Buzo
Marx by Ron Blair
Netherwood by Patrick White
Norm and Ahmed by Alex Buzo
No Sugar by Jack Davis
The Ninth Moon by Daniel Keene
Neighbourhood Watch by Lally Katz
The Old Familiar Juice by Jim McNeil
The One Day of the Year by Alan Seymour
This Old Man Comes Rolling Home by Dorothy Hewett
Other Times by Ray Lawler
Our Country's Good by Timberlake Wertenbaker
On Top of the World by Michael Gow
Poor Boy by Matt Cameron
Parramatta Girls by Alana Valentine
The Perfectionist by David Williamson
The Pathfinder by Darryl Emmerson
Private Yuk Objects by Alan Hopgood
The Removalists by David Williamson
Ruby Moon by Matt Cameron
The Ravens by Alana Valentine
Remember by Jenny Kemp
Redemption by Joanna Murray-Smith
Rooted by Alex Buzo
Scenes from a Separation by Hannie Rayson and Andrew Bovell
Seven Acts of Love by Tobsha Learner
She Stoops to Conquer – Goldsmith Examined by Oliver Goldsmith (adapted by Owen Weingott)
Signal Driver by Patrick White

Sisters by Stephen Sewell
Snapshots from Home by Margery Forde
Sons of Cain by David Williamson
Silent Partner by Daniel Keene
Speaking in Tongues by Andrew Bovell
The Secret River by Kate Grenville and Andrew Bovell
Strangers in Between by Tommy Murphy
Songket by Noëlle Janaczewska
Silent Disco by Lachlan Philpott
Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah by Alana Valentine
The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman
The Steel and the Stone by Jack Davis
Still Angela by Jenny Kemp
A Stretch of the Imagination by Jack Hibberd
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler
The Swimming Club by Hannie Rayson
Three Little Words by Joanna Murray-Smith
Terminus by Daniel Keene
Tear from a Glass Eye by Matt Cameron
This Territory by Noëlle Janaczewska
The Touch of Silk by Betty Roland
A Toast to Melba by Jack Hibberd
Two Brothers by Hannie Rayson
Tom by Alex Buzo
The Golden Age by Louis Nowra
1841 by Michael Gow
Traitors by Stephen Sewell
Welcome the Bright World by Stephen Sewell
What If You Died Tomorrow? by David Williamson
When the Rain Stops Falling by Andrew Bovell
The White Earth by Shaun Charles and Andrew McGahan
White with Wire Wheels by Jack Hibberd
Wolf by Tobsha Learner
X-Stacy by Margery Forde

CHAPTER 21: ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

Aliwa by Dallas Winmar
Barungin by Jack Davis
Basically Black by the National Black Theatre and the Nimrod Street Theatre
Beautiful One Day by Ilbjerri Theatre Company
Black Diggers by Tom Wright
Blackie Brown: The Traditional Owner of Death by Nakkiah Lui
Black is the New White by Nakkiah Lui
Black Medea by Wesley Enoch
Blakvelvet by Jane Harrison
Bran Nue Dae by Jimmy Chi
Brothers Wreck by Jada Alberts
Boodjar Kaatijin by Ian Wilkes
Box the Pony by Leah Purcell and Scott Rankin
The Cake Man by Robert Merritt
The Cherry Pickers by Kevin Gilbert
Conversations with the Dead by Richard Frankland
Coordah by Richard Walley
Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country by Giordano Nanni and Andrea James
Cruel Wild Woman by Sally Morgan
Dead Heart by Nick Parsons
The Dreamers by Jack Davis
The Drover's Wife by Leah Purcell
Elektra/Orestes by Jada Alberts and Anne-Louise Sark
Funerals and Circuses by Richard Walley
Here Comes the Nigger by Gerry Bostock
Jack Charles v The Crown by Jack Charles et al.
Kill the Messenger by Nakkiah Lui
King Hit by David Milroy
King Lear by William Shakespeare
Kullark by Jack Davis
Lantana by Andrew Bovell

The Marriage of Figaro by Pierre-Augustin
Caron de Beaumarchais
Ningali by Ningali Lawford
No Sugar by Jack Davis
On a Park Bench by Jane Harrison
Own Worst Enemy by Barking Gecko
Rainbow's End by Jane Harrison
Riverland by Wesley Enoch and Scott Rankin
Runumuk by David Milroy
The 7 Stages of Grieving by Wesley Enoch and
Deborah Mailman
Sista Girl by Elena Carapetis and Alexis West
Sistergirl by Sally Morgan
Skin Deep by Dallas Winmar
So Long Suckers by Peter Docker
Stolen by Jane Harrison
The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table by
Wesley Enoch
This Heaven by Nakkiah Lui
Up the Ladder by Richard Walley
Up the Road by John Harding
Walkabout by Richard Frankland
Waltzing the Wilarra by David Milroy
Welcome to Nowhere by Angus Cerini, Zoey
Dawson, Daniel Keene, Fleur Kilpatrick
and Morgan Rose
What Do They Call Me? by Eva Johnson
Wild Cat Falling by Alan Becher
Windmill Baby by David Milroy
Yibiyung by Dallas Winmar

CHAPTER 22: WORKING WITH KEY AUSTRALIAN TEXTS

The Golden Age by Louis Nowra
Hotel Sorrento by Hannie Rayson
Morning Sacrifice by Dymphna Cusack
The One Day of the Year by Alan Seymour
Pete the Sheep by Eva Di Cesare et al.
The Removalists by David Williamson
The Secret River by Kate Grenville and
Andrew Bovell
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler
Sugarland by Rachael Coopes and Wayne Blair
A Town Named War Boy by Ross Mueller
The Unknown Soldier by Sandra Eldridge
When the Rain Stops Falling by Andrew Bovell

SUGGESTED READING

Bowerbird: The art of making theatre drawn from life by Alana Valentine

The Complete Brecht Toolkit by Stephen Unwin

The Complete Stanislavski Toolkit by Bella Merlin

Games for Actors and Non-Actors by Augusto Boal

Staging Ideas by Stephen Curtis

Verbatim Staging Memory & Community by Paul Brown (ed)

Verbatim Techniques in Contemporary Documentary Theatre by William Hammond and Dan Steward (eds)

The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki by Tadashi Suzuki

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OVERVIEW

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