

Creating a Personal Approach to Theatre Directing

Can a conventional hierarchical rehearsal room in the UK be reimagined by the role of a new contemporary theatre director, and how does identifying as a feminist impact it?

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“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun.” - Mary Lou Cook (quoted by TheCreativeStack, 2012).

Introduction

In a survey released in 2023 by Stage Directors UK, it revealed that the percentage of women-identifying theatre directors in the workforce had increased from 56% to 57.9% since roughly 2017 (SDUK, 2023, p.7), whilst on the surface this is positive, closer inspection will reveal a more prominent issue, that despite a majority of women in the workforce, women are still systemically underrepresented in the British theatre industry, particularly post-pandemic.

The Women in Theatre Survey was conducted in 2021 to specifically investigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women in theatre. At this time, this was the only survey to not only focus on women in theatre, but also the impact that the pandemic had on them. It revealed that 86% of the surveyed women working in UK theatre were worried that gender inequality would increase post-pandemic, supported by gender discrimination making up 13.98% of the issues faced mid-pandemic, with a severe decrease in freelance work opportunities during the pandemic taking the vast majority with 74.41%. It later revealed that 61% had thought about or were currently considering leaving working in theatre post-pandemic (Women in Theatre Survey, 2021, p.14-18).

An update in 2023 revealed that only 6% of the women surveyed felt that there was an increase in opportunities for women in theatre, and that 63% of women were looking for policies to be changed, particularly by the Arts Council of England (Women in Theatre Survey, 2023, p.1), who's women-identifying applicants had only a 40% success rate 2022/2023 in comparison to a pre-pandemic 58% success rate in 2018/2019. (Arts Council of England, 2023, p.21). Having first of all trained as an actor, my experience has been made up of student and amateur performances, my education and observation of the creative industry come purely from a post-pandemic perspective, as I have been in my most developmental and experimental stages of my career since 2021. This 'version' of the industry is all I know, and with the Coronavirus pandemic being six years ago, it is severely disappointing to see that statistically, the industry remains unsatisfactory for young, emerging female creatives such as myself, looking to develop a career.

As an aspiring, young, female-identifying theatre director, my ambition is sparked by the idea of change. My understanding of the role of a director comes from my expectations when first entering a rehearsal space as an actor, which Anne Bogart captures perfectly by saying that “actors and directors together [are] constructing a framework that will allow for endlessly new currents of vital life-force, emotional vicissitudes and connection with other actors” (Bogart, 2001, p.46). I have been inspired by the specific methods and language choices that directors have brought into the spaces I have worked in. However, this hasn't always been the case, and this is where my ambition comes in. I want to reimagine the way a traditional, hierarchical rehearsal room in a 'post COVID-19' British theatre industry operates and demonstrate how my identity as a feminist could lead that.

With the 'director' category being “the most searched in the credits section on Spotlight.” (Raymond, 2024), there is no denying the importance of a director in a room. But I will be challenging this by exploring collective creativity, starting with my personal definition of feminism made up of relevant sources and discussions with contemporary, feminist theatre directors, combined with inspiration plucked from primary and secondary data, creating my

own amalgamation of approaches to directing – including the upholding of a safe space and exploration of adaptability. I will collaborate closely with actors in a workshop environment, evaluating my theories and exploring how collaboration could create a more productive, inspirational rehearsal process. Through this, I will develop my confidence not only as an emerging creative in the industry, but as a young woman, reflecting on this by figuring out how I can use my identity as a form of empowerment, and how I can encourage others to do so, too.

Research and Investigation

Feminism: History in Relation to Theatre

There is no singular definition of feminism but put simply, the feminist movement strives towards all genders having equal rights, opportunities, and ending gender discrimination, and the evolution, or ‘waves’ of the feminist movement, as they are currently understood, have been in development since the late 19th century. The appearance of sub-movements during the second wave instituted what is known as ‘Radical Feminism’, the belief that only a complete dismantlement of the patriarchy can bring liberation, in association with the acknowledgement of intersectionality within oppression (Soken-Huberty, 2022), how those systems of oppression “reinforce each other” and why solutions that are “just as interconnected” are absolutely necessary (UNWomen, 2025). The feminist movement now sits in its fourth wave – continuing with the advocacy of empowerment and individuality from third-wave feminism in the 90s, only this time further reckoning second-wave intersectionality, by paying closer attention to the oppression of transgender and LGBTQIA+ rights, as “all forms of oppression must be addressed in order to achieve true liberation for women” (Right to Equality, 2023).

The discourse surrounding the existence of ‘patriarchal/male gaze’ originates from Laura Mulvey’s criticism of image creation within cinema (Mulvey, 1975), focusing on the combination of cinematographic and narrative tendencies of mid-twentieth century films, which, despite being a seemingly outdated source, Professor of English and Writing Studies Kim Solga compares to theatre, “the absolute control over the cinematic gaze maintained by a film’s cameras and editing can never be replicated in live performance” (Solga, 2016, p.22). Then, conversely prompting the statement that the ideological assumptions that “always” lie behind the image creation within theatre still “inevitably guide our eyes and focus our perpetual faculties” (Solga, 2016, p.23), proposing the analysis of how feminist performances expose and redirect the ideologies of ‘male gaze’, particularly by exhibiting feminist activism through their work using strategies inspired by the practices of Bertolt Brecht, a German experimental director and practitioner during the 1900s. Brecht aimed to demonstrate “social and economic circumstances shaping characters’ experiences and choices on stage” whilst imagining audiences as active, politically aware spectators that would leave the theatre engaged, ready to spark debate and support social change in their own worlds (Solga, 2016, p.33-34). Sphinx Theatre Company has pioneered advocacy and inspiration of women in the arts for over fifty years. ‘A Berlin Kabaret’, a performance piece inspired by the work and journey of Bertolt Brecht, made up of songs and documentary testimonies, “which reflect personal and political dilemmas that feel as sharply relevant as they did when they were first written” (Sphinx Theatre, n.d) is just one example of their impact on the industry. ‘The Sphinx Test’, developed by Sphinx Associate Rosalind Phillips, is a strategy for the exploration and expansion of women’s roles on stage, it prompts its users to consider the value of a female character, by asking questions such as “is there a woman driving the action?” or “does the character avoid stereotype?” (Sphinx Theatre, n.d).

What is particularly interesting, are the differences between equality, diversity, and inclusion within the industry. “Diversity is about representation. Equity focuses on fair access and opportunity. Inclusion is about how people feel and contribute” (PeopleInsight, 2025). These concepts are certainly connected but distinct and cannot function without one another in a creative, practical working environment, such as a rehearsal room. It is vital that my work as a director is equal, diverse, and inclusive – not just as a policy compliance, but to challenge those policies and to positively influence decision-making, creation, and collaboration, as a diverse, fair, and inclusive space makes for deeper, more exciting discoveries.

Feminism is intersectional, everyone involved in a theatrical rehearsal process has different encounters with privilege and oppression. A diverse rehearsal room isn’t just about physical attributes; I believe that it’s about life experience and perspective that can educate others; challenging systemic oppression with art and embracing diverse experiences as learning opportunities strengthens our craft. To me, equity is about offering all creatives the chance to display their experiences and uniqueness and apply that to their work. Inclusion is about maintaining safety in these instances, as actors exploring their vulnerabilities may need support in being able to articulate their character’s thoughts and separating themselves from their work. These are my personal morals that will be upheld in a rehearsal space; I consider these non-negotiable, contemporary feminist beliefs that will influence my directorial approach, which I am yet to discover.

Creating a Directorial Approach: Female Theatre Directors (Secondary Data).

In the 1950s, a concept was drawn from the filmmaking world labelled ‘auteur directing’. It was the idea that a director’s creative vision was the sole drive of the film, making them the ‘primary author’ and that this approach could be easily carried over to the theatrical world (Marsden, 2022, p.17). Whilst this is something that with my limited knowledge of filmmaking, could be deemed applicable to that specific process, I believe that a theatrical rehearsal process requires much more collaboration and discovery and rehearsal preparation is a key way of structuring that, and is as imperative as the performance itself, as I suspect that preparation allows for the time to embrace a script’s complexities analytically, breaking the text down before bringing it back together again and adding life to it physically with actors in the space.

Katie Mitchell.

Katie Mitchell is a highly esteemed and influential theatre and opera director in the British theatre industry, and has been for over 30 years, directing over one hundred performances. (Royal Ballet and Opera, n.d). Recently, Katie was left no choice but to leave her work in directing opera due to severe misogyny in both the repertoire and workplace, stating that she knows this wouldn’t be the case “if she was a male” and is demanding a “systemic revolution” to ensure certainty of safety in the workplace (Chambers, 2025).

In preparation for rehearsals, Katie Mitchell demonstrates a number of valuable techniques created by herself that help organise initial responses to text as a director in preparation for the rehearsal process.

‘Facts and Questions’ is a simple technique that has proven itself useful in separating the information found within the text into facts – the “non-negotiable elements of the text ... main clues that the writer gives you about the play” and questions – ways of “notating the areas of the text that are less clear or that you are simply unsure of” (Mitchell, 2009, p.11). Organising information in this manner encourages an objective relationship with the material and avoids

any premature attempt at interpreting the play, as facts allow actors to establish what are known as 'given circumstances', which British theatre director Mike Alfreds defines as "any facts, events and conditions that influence the situation taking place" which are there to "influence the characters in some pertinent way (for us to discover) or to throw more light on them" (Alfreds, 2007, p.71). Whilst this is a perceptive point from Alfreds, I believe given circumstances can be subjective, as using Katie's 'Facts and Questions' exercise will provide the opportunity for conductive research that could influence the given circumstances of a character with something that doesn't appear in the script, but is subjectively decided upon.

Katie emphasises the importance of research during the preparation period, which some of the questions asked in the previous method may require. A particular research method I find valuable in this instance is using a collection of stimuli that help communicate the sense of the play to the actors, from still images to film references. Katie explains that "many actors think visually and may respond more to images than words" and that this tool is universal when discussing ideas with designers, too. (Mitchell, 2009, p.17). Research is proven valuable beyond character and design, as Katie explains the usefulness of understanding the writer in the context of the play, that basic facts – for example, events in a writer's life at the time of writing – gives an idea as to why the play was written. As part of my developing approach, I am interested in collaborating with the different sectors of a theatrical process to better understand their ideas, and communicating with a writer, understanding their reasons for writing their play and their character development seems like a fulfilling and collaborative way to interpret a piece of writing.

In addition to preparation, Katie provides vital material about building the relationship between a director and production team – "meetings and discussions will generate a shorthand that will make your working relationships smoother and more efficient" (Mitchell, 2009, p.75-76). In my work, I am looking to develop a language that is universal for everyone during a creative process, this includes production members; as mentioned previously, an appealing way of achieving this appears to be through using visual examples and collaborative research, engaging in conversations and production meetings with the different aspects of design, using shared visual, sound, and lighting ideas and analysing why these particular examples have more impact than others.

Establishing a language of a creative process and introducing it to the actors in a rehearsal space allows for clarity and precision and is important to me as a new director – "it will be a stable reference point for actors and supply them with steady goals to aim for" (Mitchell, 2009, p.125). I am aiming to communicate positive observations to my actors and provide feedback that is constructive but ultimately create a space where they don't need to rely on my notes to be able to progress. Self-reflection and critique become a short-term ability, and soon enough, they are able to self-direct in a more precise, long-term, individual manner.

As an actor, I appreciate receiving thorough notes, both positive and constructive, so as an inclusive, new director, I will make an effort to give each actor at least one note for their work, it is important to validate and acknowledge everyone, especially in a group setting, as all actors are aware of the work their peers are doing, and are present when hearing about changes that may be made to performance. Actors are diverse, and so they receive and process notes in diverse ways, which I will work to accommodate to those needs and ensure every actor has absorbed their notes effectively.

With initial responses to the text, this builds towards the play having a 'concept,' which Katie defines as "something that the director imposes on a play" (Mitchell, 2009, p.47). This concept typically comes from ideas that underpin the text and consist of nothing more than roughly three or four separate sentences that make up the major ideas of the play. With these ideas established, visual stimuli created, and a shared language in development, the rehearsal process can begin.

Nancy Meckler.

Nancy Meckler is an American-born theatre director and dramaturg, with an abundance of celebrated work in the UK. In her book, 'Notes from the Rehearsal Room: A Director's Process,' Nancy talks briefly about her experience identifying as a woman in the theatre industry – "I can cite numerous occasions of being ignored or rejected when there was most likely an unconscious bias against women" (Meckler, 2023, p.5). To confront this, Nancy spent over twenty years as Artistic Director for 'Shared Experience Theatre', a company that sought out female employees from every creative sector, including designers, writers, and board members, as Nancy states "I find women are particularly open to collaboration and this was a deeply collaborative environment" (Meckler, 2023, p.5).

Similarly to Katie Mitchell, Nancy discusses the development of a play's 'concept.' "Defining what the play is about in one sentence is for me an essential starting point," and that with this definition comes the development of a concept, which Nancy explains helps guides choices and decision-making throughout the preparation process (Meckler, 2023, p.27). Nancy's approaches to preparation for direction, like Katie's, are well-established and inspiring to a director, her methods are appropriate building blocks in the personal establishment of a directorial approach.

It is clear that there is an evolution in the way directors structure their rehearsals, Nancy saying that "it can be confusing for a company when I invite open collaboration in the rehearsal room" (Meckler, 2023, p.86). This is supported by Robert Marsden, who uses terms such as "traditional structure" and "historical working conditions" (Marsden, 2022, p.79) when discussing the rehearsal environment that a director creates and later advocating for the creation of new methodologies, "I encourage graduates creating their own companies not to appropriate the rehearsal structure of others but create new ways of working" (Marsden, 2022, p.79).

Nancy goes on to examine her own use of a rehearsal structure and states that scheduling is a unique process for each director, but argues that it is still imperative, even if it requires "constant adjustment" (Meckler, 2023, p.90). To prevent as little scheduling problems as possible, Nancy looks towards a 'script map,' which she defines as "a physical picture of the play and all its elements" (Meckler, 2023, p.90). Breaking the script down into each section is upheld as useful for planning ahead and accommodating to actor's schedules, a script map makes clear what rehearsals are necessary to complete the play efficiently.

Joan Littlewood.

When it comes to pioneering British theatre in the mid-20th century, Joan Littlewood stands as the "Mother of Modern Theatre", and through her company 'Theatre Workshop', Joan focused on untraditional and radical methods to produce political theatre pieces that represented working-class lifestyles (Royal Shakespeare Company, n.d).

Joan Littlewood's approaches to directing were different to the likes of Katie Mitchell's and Nancy Meckler, but as an aspiring director I find that fascinating. Joan often rejected the idea of preparation before a rehearsal process and considered actors her "equal partners" who could "explore possibilities" and be "adapt to change," which Nadine Holdsworth says is aligned with Joan's socialist political stance, rejecting hierarchical structures for shared responsibility (Holdsworth, 2006, p.48-49). However, like Nancy and Katie, Joan valued improvisation as an exercise for discovery during rehearsal, extensive improvisation would develop atmosphere and tone of scenes, usually made up by improvising dialogue, then replacing improvised dialogue with scripted text to ascertain what was most effective (Holdsworth, 2006, p.67).

Alongside her conventional practices of improvisation, to find a delivery of a line, Joan would turn to 'via negativa' – a Latin phrase derived from Christian Theology used to explain what God is by focusing on what he isn't (Waschenfelder, 2024), which Polish theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski later transferred into theatre – "via negativa – not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks" (Grotowski, Barbra and Brook, 1968, p.17). To achieve via negativa, Joan often practised an exercise involving the continual repetition of a line or a phrase from the chosen text, in which each 'inappropriate' delivery would be dismissed, until a valid form of intonation or emphasis emerged (Holdsworth, 2006, p.69). This could be compared to American actor and teacher Sanford Meisner's work surrounding living truthfully within acting, and his exercise involving repetition encouraging actors to listen and react to one another by stating a truthful observation of a physical attribute and repeating it back and forth. Meisner describes it as being – "attached to something outside of yourself" by focusing on listening and reacting accurately, rather than focusing on the delivery the line (Meisner and Longwell, 1987, p.24). As an actor, I have previously found Sanford Meisner's work to be inspiring, it is fulfilling to experience and demonstrate truth within performance and I would like to use this to inform my direction. I believe that Meisner's exercises are beneficial for helping actors develop truth within their performances, but perhaps in a more experimental, workshop-style environment, that ultimately Joan Littlewood's philosophy regarding 'via negativa' achieves.

Anne Bogart.

To explore movement within a rehearsal, I turn to Anne Bogart. Anne Bogart is an American theatre and opera director. Her work on 'The Viewpoints Book' alongside Tina Landau has been influential to actors and directors for years, encouraging the exploration of movement within a rehearsal space and its impact throughout a performance. The Viewpoints are described as a philosophy translated into technique – "things we do naturally and have always done, with greater or lesser degrees of consciousness and emphasis" (Bogart and Landau, 2005, p.7). In this instance, Anne Bogart chooses to focus on the physical viewpoints in connection with time and space as opposed to the vocal viewpoints, which evidently are connected to sound.

For actors, the viewpoints inspire and create instinctual physical responses to time and space within rehearsal using bodily awareness. The viewpoints educate actors about the term "writing on your feet," using movement controlled by impulses and intuition as the language of theatre (Bogart and Landau, 2005, p.12). For directors, Anne uses the word 'Composition' to describe the method of creating theatrical work, stating that "we use composition during rehearsal to engage the collaborators in the process of generating their own work around a source" (Bogart and Landau, 2005, p.12).

The viewpoints and composition offer a non-hierarchical, alternative to what are deemed conventional approaches to acting and directing. Anne Bogart praises the discovery of language

and stage through collaboration and collectively addressing what arises in rehearsal. There is a sense of wholeness through this approach, as the viewpoints provide actors with the abilities to listen with their bodies and “communicate back with equal depth” (Bogart and Landau, 2005, p.20).

Creating a Directorial Approach: Female Theatre Directors (Primary Data).

The primary data for this study was obtained by networking with female-identifying, Welsh-based, influential theatre directors, each at various stages in their careers, through surveys made up of considerably curated questions.

When asked, ‘in trying to hold not only an open and positive but a safe creative rehearsal space, what directorial methods do you use to encourage the best responses from your actors?’, Chelsey Gillard, an established Welsh, queer, female-identifying theatre director was the first to respond (See Appendix A.1); “I feel very strongly that theatre is not therapy” she continues, “mainly it’s about keeping a lot of openness and honesty in the room meaning that everyone feels empowered to speak up without fear or repercussions” (Gillard, 2025). Similarly, Lynne Seymour, female-identifying actress and director based in Wales, unknowingly agrees with Chelsey (see Appendix A.2), affirming “I am always clear that rehearsals and the acting process is not a form of ‘therapy’” (Seymour, 2026).

In support of this, Equity - “the performing arts and entertainment trade union” (Equity, n.d), have created a ‘Safe Spaces Statement’ that, in summary, asks companies to demonstrate their commitment to creating a space that is free of bullying and harassment, welcomes and celebrates differences, kindness, and politeness, and expresses that speaking out in these uncomfortable situations is validated and taken seriously, finalised with “together, we can create a safe space” (Equity, n.d).

Creating a safe rehearsal space reverts back to the importance of understanding intersectionality, which Chelsey supports passionately – “I really think that having a lot of diversity of experience in a room makes everything so much deeper and more exciting” (Gillard, 2025), something that Chelsey connects with herself, having aspects of her identity that are marginalised; however, she goes on to state that “what you do with the cards you are dealt is more important ... in areas where you have privilege (I’m white and currently have a position of power) find ways to be generous and uplift others who don’t have the same privilege” (Gillard, 2025). This perhaps acknowledges the existence of ‘intersectional privilege’, a combination or overlap of social identities that make a person subject to unearned advantages, while other identities leave them subject to prejudice – a white woman is subject to sexism, but a black woman is subject to sexism and racism (The University of Edinburgh, 2024).

Samantha Alice Jones is a Welsh-based, female-identifying theatre director who has experienced marginalisation in her career, and in a conversation with her (see Appendix A.3) she states that identifying as a female has shaped her career “but not necessarily in a positive way” (Jones, 2026). Like the other participants, Samantha expresses the need for safety in rehearsals, “I am also aware of my tone, body language and verbal language when working in the space to allow for empathy and understanding” (Jones, 2026). This is cemented by the previously discussed rehearsal ideologies of Katie Mitchell, who is known for her promotion of the importance of having a shared language between the cast and production team, “it is essential that everything that happens in the rehearsal room is communicated clearly to all the relevant people” (Mitchell, 2009, p.110).

Lynne Seymour reflects on her experiences as a woman in the industry, “I knew that to make my way in the world I had to call out sexism and push the boundaries of what women were ‘allowed’ to do ... I’m not only representing myself but all women” (Seymour, 2026). This is reflected in the illusion of the industry being a meritocracy – “a system structured around advancement of people who are selected on the basis of individual achievement” (Littler, 2019, p.24). This system has been debunked as an “ideological myth” by sociologist Jo Littler, who also refers to meritocracy as a “competitive, linear system ... used to create the idea of a level playing field that does not exist” (Littler, 2019, p.50). Once again advocated by Katie Mitchell, in conversation with Rosemary Waugh, in which she states, “theatre is not a meritocracy ... gender is often a feature of why women get jobs, why women don’t get jobs” (Mitchell, 2023, p.42).

When asked ‘how should we begin to encourage emerging directors to feel empowered by their identity and challenge what is arguably a systemic problem?’, Lynne highlights “personally, I think we need to empower other women to work alongside us so that we can slowly shift the ‘universal way of working’ to a more empathetic, collaborative process with the project being the focus – not the personalities” (Seymour, 2026), which is supported by Samantha, who suggests, “there could potentially be not just 1 artistic director making the creative decisions for the building, but to have a creative collective to ensure diversity of creative vision” (Jones, 2026). The Royal Shakespeare Company seem to be pioneering this concept, firstly having co-artistic directors Daniel Evans and Tamara Harvey, who are also members of a larger Board that is comprised of fifteen members, all participating in “leading and steering the company” (Royal Shakespeare Company, n.d). Further pushing the boundaries of collective creativity, Daniel and Tamara invite creatives who have committed and contributed their livelihoods to the RSC to become what they call ‘Honorary Artists,’ consisting of actors such as Dame Helen Mirren, and Sir Patrick Stewart OBE, and ‘Associate Artists’ consisting of previously mentioned Katie Mitchell and Nancy Meckler.

In contrast to Samantha, Chelsey Gillard, who is an artistic director herself discusses the negotiation of a balance between ‘artistic director’ and ‘artist’, “that can be difficult to navigate” she continues, “but ultimately being Artistic Director gives me a different kind of freedom and I’m having the opportunity to make bigger scale work than I previously had access to” (Gillard, 2025).

Finally, I asked the participants ‘was there a particular moment in your career where you started noticing confidence in yourself as a director, both with the kind of creative decisions you have to make and in general?’ Each of the interviewed women noted different moments that were impactful for them, “when I worked with safe people” being a highlight for Samantha (Jones, 2026), she also discusses the impact in saying no to jobs that didn’t serve her – “that allowed for greater confidence in the work I wanted to do” (Jones, 2026). Lynne discusses her work with an all-male cast, “I used that opportunity to educate those male actors ... [I] was able to build conversations around feminism and female representation in the arts” (Seymour, 2026). Finally, Chelsey underpins it all as “a confidence that I have done the work beforehand” (Gillard, 2025), reflecting on the experience directing a piece for her own theatre, “it was everything I imagined in my mind and more” (Gillard, 2025).

It has been invaluable to have conversations and build connections with relevant, feminist, directors, particularly in the Welsh theatre scene. Through analysis, it is interesting to see that, despite answering at different stages in their careers, the women had similarities and overlaps in their answers; that the practices that they follow appear to stem from their subjective experiences of both success and intersectional prejudice within the industry. Each of their

approaches to defining a safer, more empowering rehearsal environment was varied, but centred around the value of a diverse, open, and educational rehearsal setting focused on collection and collaboration.

Development, Application, and Collaboration

Theory into Practice: Workshopping Facilitation.

‘Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.’ By Alice Birch is a feminist play made up of scenes that explore the experiences that shape women in the 21st century, and boldly asks “what’s stopping us from doing something truly radical to change them?” (Birch, 2016). The scene titled ‘Revolutionize the Work. (Engage with it.)’ was chosen by myself specifically for this project (see Appendix B.1), as I was focused on working with a published script, following a non-linear storyline, featuring characters open for interpretation and depth. This scene in particular follows two characters, male and female, in which the female character is telling the male character, that she will no longer be working on Mondays.

The immediate response to the text was in favour of its recognition towards intersectional feminism and representation throughout this piece, and looking at it from a directing perspective gave me the chance to apply my personally developed, feminist-influenced rehearsal philosophy. The preparation phase began with research, both for an understanding of the play and the inspiration for its creation; an interview conducted for ‘What’s on Stage’ in 2016, led Alice to discuss the inspiration for writing her play, which came from the emotional response to a commission for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2013, which Alice described was “to respond to the provocation that well behaved women seldom make history. The phrase made me quite angry.” (Birch, 2016). She later states that she wrote the play in “about three days straight” (Birch, 2016). I connected with Alice’s response and understood her reasons for writing the play and wanted to incorporate that into my direction. For personal inspiration, previous productions of this piece inspired a visual mood board (see Appendix B.2), which could be used in creative conversations with actors and designers. When casting this piece, I decided based on a specific criterion, in which I selected actors who I felt like would be willing to work on an honest, collective, experimental level with me as their director, and with each other as actors. Chris and Betsy, graduate acting students, were suited for the male and female characters respectively in this instance (See Appendix B.3).

As a character and rapport building exercise, inspired by Joan Littlewood’s improvisation work, I asked the actors to create a scene surrounding a boss and an interviewee, in which they engage in a natural conversation and play the scene out as a traditional interview would. As the actors began the scene, I took note of the way in which they interacted, specifically from the interviewee’s perspective, how she was made to feel in space and how her status was explored in ways that effect the scene. What I was looking for through this exercise, was for the actors to make character discoveries, opening them up to new choices that would relate to the chosen scene, but through the application of the scene’s context in an improvised scenario rather than immediately working through the text with table work. Reflecting on this exercise as a collective by asking the question ‘what did the dynamic feel like?’ to both actors prompted a discussion about status, which is deemed as a “useful term” by practitioner Keith Johnstone, (Johnstone, 2018, p.28). Betsy poignantly stating that she felt her character was made to feel equal in the space by Chris’ character, but she was aware of the social contrasts they shared, with Chris agreeing. This method of providing feedback and observation to the actors became comfortable for me, as I had found that converting constructive criticism, or ‘notes’ into questions for the

actors gave them the freedom to reflect on their performance, provide each other and myself with clarity on their choices, and make discoveries through self-reflection and discussion.

The purpose of asking them to perform the scene once more, whilst altering the circumstances for each character was to further match what is interpreted through Alice Birch's writing and aid in making deeper character discoveries. The word 'heightened' was used as a note to the actors and is an example of the shorthand that is established during a rehearsal process. Heightened is a word that I have heard commonly used in rehearsal environments and has proven itself useful for applying more 'drama' to a scene or situation, something I was aiming for the characters to find within their improvisation. I decided upon asking Chris' character to treat this interview as a day-to-day process for him, that his only job was to determine whether Betsy's character was suited for the company or not, not to necessarily make her feel comfortable in the space, whereas Betsy's character's livelihood depended on getting this job, so the interview process meant a lot more to her. Watching this play out, as expected, I noticed changes in each character's behaviour; Betsy's I felt was more desperate, she took on the notes I gave appropriately, as her character's lower status started to show from within, contrasted perfectly by Chris, who converted his high status, powerful character, into what I observed as someone who deemed using his powerful energy as a waste of time.

Applying this character-building work then to the text, after an initial walkthrough of the dialogue, the actors discussed the status of their characters, in this context. Chris in particular bringing forward his identity as a straight man and how that influenced his character choices, as well as both actors collaborating and agreeing that the status is interchangeable between the characters throughout the scene, felt like a breakthrough from a directing perspective. It was positive to see that the notes, the style in which I presented them, and the language I used had been understood and applied appropriately to the actors' work; to ascertain this, there was an opening for the participant actors to provide anonymous feedback on their experiences in the rehearsal space, in which one response (see Appendix C.1) stated "I like working with people on an equal playing field" (Anon, 2026), whilst another (see Appendix C.2) said "I felt like my thoughts and opinions were respected in the space" (Anon, 2026).

Simulating a closed-rehearsal, workshop-style environment ensured safety of both the actors who were generously opening themselves up to experimentation and myself as a first-time director, experimenting with feedback and observation methods. Having confidence in my ability to facilitate the space was difficult at times but working with responsive and open-minded actors encouraged a positive environment, later reaffirmed by comments such as "it felt fun and engaging" and "Nicole immediately made it clear and safe for us to place our input" (Anon, 2026).

Working with New Writing: What If Cymru?

When working with an unpublished script that was ongoing development with a new writer, Nancy Meckler's concept forming practices for this piece was key. Asking questions such as "what does the play want to say?" (Meckler, 2023, p.12) prompts important conversations about expectations from the writer, from the audience, and from myself, as Nancy puts it, "the best collaboration is one in which both sides are heard" (Meckler, 2023, p.15). Betsy Downes, writer of the play, expressed her need for wanting to educate audiences on the feelings of hatred and fear, and the dangers those feelings can possess, in connection with the prolonged history of Welsh culture being suppressed. Her alternate storyline whereby the Welsh invade England to dominate the throne recognises the inevitability of becoming addicted to power, influenced by

historical accuracies, nevertheless incorporating a rewrite of feminine figures to be headstrong and politically intelligent whilst still embracing their identity as women. With both a male protagonist and antagonist of the story, Betsy felt it important that this piece be directed by a woman who wouldn't challenge or lessen her story in any way.

Previously conducting a rehearsal preparation process created a sense of familiarity when constructing a visual mood board for this piece (see Appendix D.1). It was through the sharing of this mood board with Betsy that we better understood each other's creative ambitions, therefore building a concept of what the final performance would look like. Research and Development processes (R&Ds) are a crucial portion of the creative progression of theatre, typically funded by the Arts Council of Wales, who fund the expansion of "high-quality arts experiences that help creative individuals and organisations engage with and connect to the public" (Arts Council of Wales, 2021). As Betsy was in the drafting phase of her script writing, it was decided that an R&D-style performance would be best suited for this collaboration and, from my directing standpoint, my aim for this R&D would be to encourage the actors to treat this process as an experiment, everyone is present to support the writer in discovering what works and what doesn't, "a space for curiosity, not certainty" (May, 2025). The scale of this project also allowed for collaboration with the designing aspect of theatre, lighting design in particular and as suggested by Robert Marsden, "directors should work together with as many creatives as possible to build the world" (Marsden, 2022, p.59). Similar to collaborating with a writer, sharing visual ideas with a lighting designer was the strongest way of communicating creative visions that were now laced with the writer's contributions. Whilst actors can be left to interpret, from this experience it seemed that designers need concise, clear communication.

A rehearsal structure was compulsory for this project, as the level of work had risen, as well as the number of actors in the cast. Nancy Meckler's 'Script Mapping' method mentioned previously could've proven itself useful here but due to the fast-paced nature of working through the script in time for the performance, rehearsing chronologically felt like the more appropriate choice. In fact, when the participants were asked if there was a particular rehearsal structure that they were used to adhering to, (see Appendix D.2) the majority of the responses felt like there wasn't one set way of working, one participant in particular stating, "no. I feel that every show I've been in has been unique" (Anon, 2026).

Rather than reinstate the notion of an 'auteur director', I turn to what Robert Marsden names 'the invisible hand', which facilitates and guides a company through a creative process, that is heavily reliant on collaboration, where there is certainly a balance between a production that grows up and out of the play, and my own artistic ambition (Marsden, 2022, p.61). A cast compiled of actors who are demographically varied and diverse made for great learning opportunities, as they brought depth and excitement into the space, as well as requiring distinct levels of involvement from me. During rehearsals, I observed how some of the actors took on board the idea of self-direction, by following their instincts, and only looking to me for notes and suggestions, whilst others required a more hands-on approach, (see Appendix D.2) expressing, "I would have liked to know what the director thought needed more work or polishing up, and to have been asked/directed to work on that spot" (Anon, 2026). Reflecting on this, it is clear that an actor was looking for a more traditional rehearsal method and involvement from me, which I did not always provide to their standard. I was looking to engage actors in collective creativity before surveying what their initial expectations of me would be prior to beginning the rehearsal process, ultimately effecting their action in the space. Knowing this, it would be inclusive of me to make an effort to become aware of an actor's personal expectations in the

space, as well as sharing my expectations of an actor, to ensure that everyone involved is accommodated for.

That being said, the response to a collaborative research and development process was overall positive, and the engagement and open-mindedness that was received from the actors was reassuring of my research, theories, and confidence towards a collaborative directing project. It was helpful to be provided with constructive feedback that accurately depicted how my work as a director was received, as theories needed to be evaluated and questioned in order to improve them.

Working with New Writing: Dyn Bach.

Dramaturgy is the practice of theatrical composition, through which the dramaturg assists in shaping the narrative of a storyline, by offering contextual insights, clarified as “best friend to the writer” (Chakrabarti, 2023). ‘Dyn Bach’ is a one man show, written and performed by Thomas Rees; the story follows a young man from Maesteg, an area known to be deprived, dealing with the loss of a crucial figure in his life, his grandfather; this powerful monodrama, blended with elements of Verbatim Theatre, centres around how male figures in a boy’s youth, can impact the way he understands manhood as an adult, and when asking Thomas to define the concept of the play, he created, ‘a story of a Welsh boy learning to become a man’. Thomas and I collaborated dramaturgically to condense his script into an approximately 40-minute performance, exploring what could be the most impactful scenes for an audience but still demonstrate a meaningful story and character throughline.

The process of ‘catharsis’ originates from Greek Theatre, particularly Aristotle, who depicted catharsis as an essential emotional release from an audience, whether that be through comedy or tragedy; the audience identify with the content of the play and the moment of catharsis has a “cleansing effect” (Alley Theatre, 2024). This emotional release was aimed to be achieved through the story of Dyn Bach, using its elements of Verbatim Theatre and recently developed notion of ‘Life Story Theatre’, which co-author Alison O’Connor shares “imagining a society where everyone has the opportunity to have their life story witnessed with compassion and care has inspired us to write this book” (Diamond, O’Connor and Baim, 2025, p.4). These practitioners in particular are expressive in their importance of facilitating life story theatre, “the facilitator’s way of being needs to reflect and honour the integrity of this process” (Diamond, O’Connor, and Baim, 2025 p.157). Prioritising emotional as well as physical safety was important in this instance, creating opportunities for informal check-ins as opposed to at the beginning and end of each rehearsal implied that it was less of a policy compliance, and more of a moral obligation, which Thomas himself brought up in a feedback session (see Appendix E.1), “it was important to me that I tackle the rehearsal process in a way that was comforting and supportive, which you did throughout” (Rees, 2026).

During a first-hand experience at directing a performance with only one actor on stage at all times, it was appropriate to focus on physicality, to which Anne Bogart’s established viewpoints were effective. The setting of the play takes place at a church, in which Dyn Bach, the main character, explores physically, but verbally transports the audience to his personal reminiscent areas of Maesteg. ‘Architecture,’ encouraged Thomas to explore his physical environment and how his awareness of it affected his movement, as well as his ‘Spatial Relationship’ to the minimal set that stayed with him onstage, once aware of these possibilities, Thomas’ exploration became “less polite but more dynamic of extreme proximity or extreme separation” (Bogart and Landau, 2005, p.10-11). It was paramount to Thomas that the audience

experienced catharsis, so exploring the physical differences between Dyn Bach at a funeral and Dyn Bach at home, made an impact.

Paired with this, Bertolt Brecht developed the 'Alienation Effect,' which occurs when the audience of a play are presented an event, and are expected to "challenge received opinions about what is being shown" (Unwin and Jones, 2014). Dyn Bach's audience were made out to be guests at his grandfather's funeral, directly addressing and labelling them as memorable members of the Maesteg community by Dyn, himself, breaking the illusion of a 'fourth wall' and keeping audience members active and listening. Whilst Brecht often pushed for a lack of emotional connection with a character during an alienated performance, Dyn Bach was written using real stories to be purposefully recognisable, relatable, and encourage a connection with the audience, something that we knew was not to be avoided via Brechtian methods. To push this further, projection was used in showing a collection of video recordings both from Maesteg and Thomas' personal life, staged as part of the funeral's order of service to highlight the importance of grandad in Dyn Bach's life (see Appendix E.2). This in itself is a juxtaposition, as Brecht praised the use of projection for alienation, whereas the projection was used in this context to connect the audience to Dyn. Similarly, as noted above, Dyn Bach's set and use of props were kept minimal; this was, as Brecht practiced, for "visual impact" (Unwin and Jones, 2014), it connoted the props as characters themselves; Dyn Bach's book for example contained information and definitions of words he had learned from the important figures in his life, which throughout the duration of the performance, particularly in moments of uncertainty, was often something that he would turn to for guidance.

Working closely with Thomas to develop a character as impactful as Dyn Bach was fulfilling and to watch the final performance was a confidence boosting moment for myself as a director. Thomas' feedback, "you were able to work collaboratively and dramaturgically alongside me to piece scenes together that allowed audiences to connect, grow and learn," was reaffirming of the passion behind the project we collaborated on together (Rees, 2026).

Conclusion.

It is clear that the intricacies of the British theatre industry are changing; for decades, female-identifying theatre directors have been influencing rehearsal room philosophies with confidence, in hopes of beginning a revolution that ultimately seeks equality and awareness of intersectionality. Post COVID-19 pandemic however, women are increasingly stepping back from their jobs due to the neglect of the government and their industry.

Through my work, I have been inquisitive of the skills required to be a theatre director, influenced by feminist ideologies that maintain empathy, safety, and inclusivity. I worked to achieve a comprehensive understanding of my chosen discipline, whilst remaining aware of the limitation of knowledge within this field of research, meaning that I could make critical evaluations and provide justifications based on the evidence my research presented, arguments against it, and my own assumptions about the topic. My questions were pertinent in aiding the development of my personal career ambition to become a contemporary theatre director that aspires to reimagine the way a conventional rehearsal room is led. By conducting research for recognised, female, theatre directors across the UK, I have collated methodologies that whilst the individual deems a useful resource for directing, I have deemed ambiguous, it was made clear that each director from both primary and secondary data presented their own personal approach to directing a rehearsal room, which was dependent on their varied level of

experience, but would often overlap in their agreement that the quality of treatment within the industry, particularly towards women who direct or are artistic directors, needed modification.

Working practically on three different collaborations provided insight into transferable skills needed for a career in directing. Diversity of experience in the working space made for deeper discoveries and enrichment and brought out a new approach towards facilitating a rehearsal room each time, I acknowledged that I was adapting my approach to suit individual's needs, whilst also asking them to embrace a new tradition within the space, and to abandon their previous rehearsal room assumptions and ultimately creating an open space where collaborators felt like they could ask for clarification and provide me with constructive feedback.

I have since been networking with notable, Welsh-based theatre companies to discuss my contributions towards this project beyond its conclusion, in which I have been offered an opportunity to shadow director Ffion Wyn Bowen in her work of 'Dosbarth Miss Prydderch a Lleidr y Lleisiau', a Welsh-language children's theatre production that will be touring across Wales. Working this closely with members of a professional theatre production will offer endless insights into collaborative conversations using a shared language as well as having in-person learning experiences with Ffion, understanding her approaches to directing using problem-solving and decision-making and gaining a connection by asking questions and working practically, as opposed to an online questionnaire.

In closing, yes, a conventional, hierarchical rehearsal room in the UK can be reimaged by a new, contemporary theatre director, and using feminist identity as empowerment is a fulfilling way to do so. There are limitations in my knowledge, there is ambiguity, but what is fundamental is that there is advocacy for change, a change that starts with people, and I now have the skills and awareness to make an impact in a systemic revolution.

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Appendix A:

A.1 - [Chelsey Gillard Interview 22.12.25.docx](#)

A.2 – [Lynne Seymour Interview January 2026.docx](#)

A.3 – [Samantha Jones Interview - February 2026.docx](#)

Appendix B:

B.1 - [Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again. Script Extract.docx](#)

B.2 - [Revolt Moodboard.pptx](#)

B.3 – Directing Workshop Video: <https://youtu.be/3RaQDSv9mOY>

Appendix C:

C.1 - [Directing Workshop Anon 1.docx](#)

C.2 - [Directing Workshop Anon 2.docx](#)

Appendix D:

D.1 - [What if Cymru - Moodboard.pptx](#)

D.2 - [What If Cymru Questionnaire Transcript.docx](#)

Appendix E

E.1 - [Thomas Rees Feedback Transcript.docx](#)

E.2 – Dyn Bach Slate Video: <https://youtu.be/40f-fP05Rw0>

AI Acknowledgement

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.