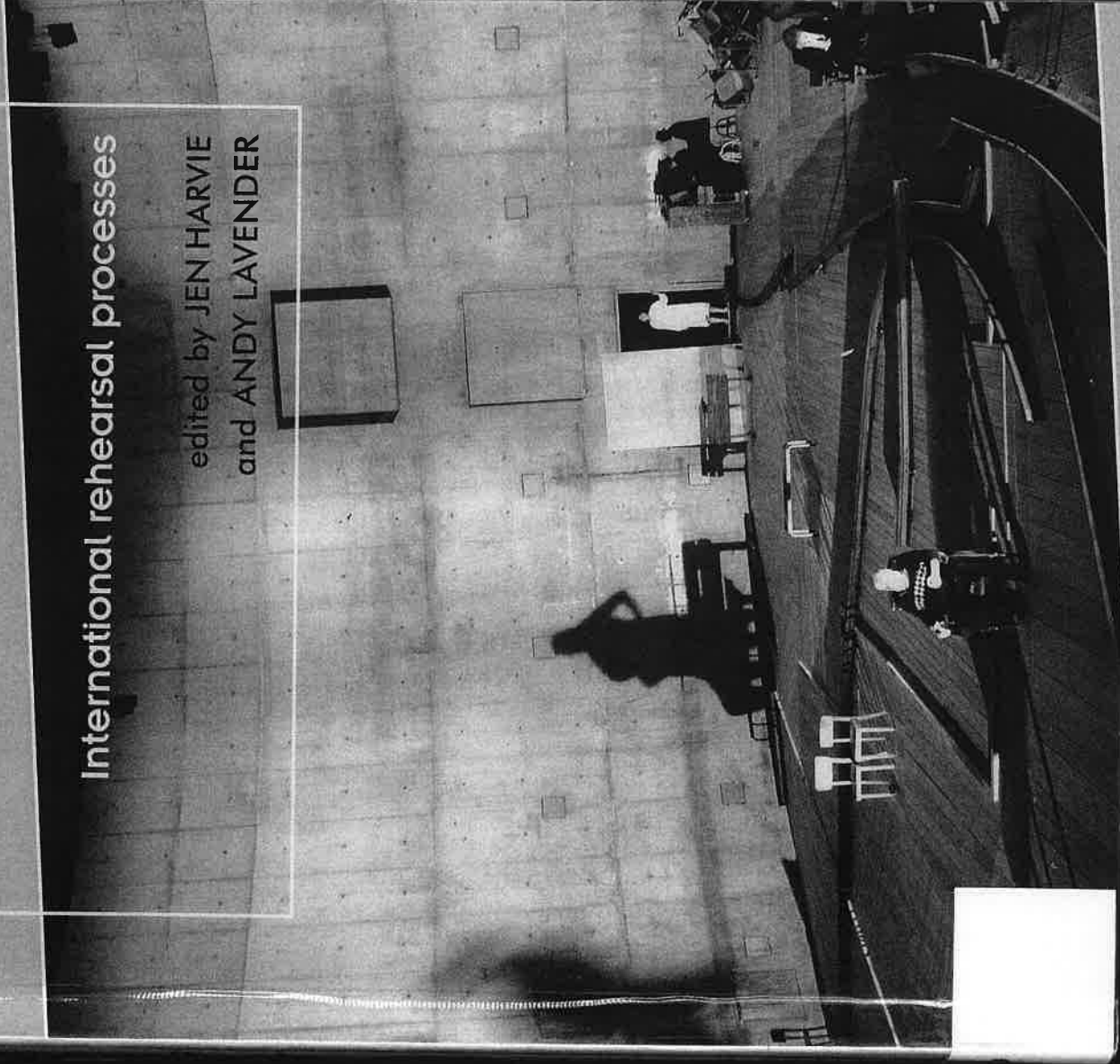


Making contemporary theatre

International rehearsal processes

edited by JEN HARVIE
and ANDY LAVENDER



Jen Harvie

This book aims to reveal what happens in rehearsal in the making of significant contemporary theatre. Rehearsal is understood here broadly as never just the repetition of learned delivery but the *creation* of performance. This book's eleven chapters, each focusing on one company of international stature, therefore describe the work of each creative team, including directors, performers, designers, writers, choreographers, instructors and technicians. And they explore several phases in the creation of new work, from conception and training, through development, preparation and delivery, to reception. Each chapter is written by an eyewitness who has had exceptional insider access to the company's work, in several cases as a participating maker in the process. Thus, the case studies convey the practical details of what happens in rehearsal but also the excitement, tensions and challenges of making innovative theatre for the international stage.

Making Contemporary Theatre aims to give insider access to contemporary rehearsal practices because many of us do not otherwise have that access: we experience theatre predominantly as a created product – a show – but have little opportunity to learn how it is created. Even when we are makers ourselves, it is rare we get to learn firsthand in detail about other makers' methods. This is partly because many practitioners carefully guard admission to their rehearsals, generally to help their companies feel safe to experiment rather than to protect any particular trade secrets.¹ More often, though, as many of the case studies here indicate, gaining access to the development and rehearsal process is simply impractical; it happens in more than one global location, in several languages and over several months or even years. The eleven

chapters here travel with the companies across time, space and a host of different languages, distilling their processes of making and revealing their ambitions, concerns, inspirations, genealogies, methods, rules, preoccupations and curiosities. This insight helps us understand the work of each company, but also the work of theatre more broadly, as both audiences and practitioners ourselves, whether we are professional or would-be theatre-makers, students and/or teachers. Taken individually or collectively, the following chapters offer a range of knowledge, skills and insights which might be applied or combined in different ways to create new ways of seeing and making theatre.

This book also aims to redress the fact that there is relatively little published about contemporary *processes of making* theatre – as distinct from books about theatre productions. What has already been published on practices of making theatre focuses predominantly – though certainly not entirely – either on well-established individual companies or directors, or on strategies of directing the sort of text-based theatre that assumes psychological realism as its inevitable mode of performance.² *Making Contemporary Theatre* shares concerns and practices with this existing literature and is indebted to it, but our book seeks a new path, responding specifically to *new* trends in contemporary theatre-making. These trends reveal a persistent questioning of some of the fundamental beliefs that appear to underpin conventional practices of much twentieth- and twenty-first-century theatre-making, such as accepting the director as visionary leader or author/*auteur*, using text as starting point, valuing psychological realism, structuring narrative around conflict, and practising theatre itself as an established set of conventional practices. This is not to say that the theatre-making discussed here rejects the director, writer, texts, psychological realism, narrative or theatrical convention; indeed, it repeatedly returns to and exploits their allure. But it also considers how their seductiveness is potentially coercive as part of a wider examination of their limitations, interrogating their relevance in a twenty-first-century context and exploring how they might usefully be re-deployed through new theatrical forms which Hans-Thies Lehmann has influentially called postdramatic (a term to which I will return).³

Because of this ongoing theatrical trend to interrogate the roles of text and director, many of the chapters examine the methods of groups who devise theatre collectively, often led by or working with a director, but always with self-reflexive attention to the dynamics and ethics of power and authorship circulating amongst all participating makers. The popularity of devising in the work represented here reflects its move within theatre-making from a fairly marginal position in the 1970s to one of significant disciplinary and institutional orthodoxy by the first decade of the twenty-first century. We understand devising to be a method of performance development that starts from an idea or concept rather than a play text; is from the start significantly open-minded about what its end-product will be; and uses improvisation – by performers, but also other creators, including writers, designers, directors and choreographers – as a key part of its process. Its composition often happens concurrently in a variety of creative areas, including live performance, mediation, and the development of props/objects, machinery, texts and images. Processual refining takes place over time and in actual space, so that theatre-making is understood to be

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as plastic and time- and space-oriented as the medium of its output. This relatively recent shift towards devising's received orthodoxy as a theatre-making method reflects a handful of crucial and concurrent changes within theatre culture and beyond. These include scepticism about logocentrism, or the primacy of the word or text; in a related shift, a recognition that it is not only, or even principally, the playwright who creates a performance, but all those who contribute to theatre's multiple arts, including its performance, directing and design; and a parallel recognition that the meanings of performance are produced not just by its 'backstage' and onstage makers, but also by its audience.

Making Contemporary Theatre's focus on devising means it contributes to a growing library of recently published books on devising theatre.⁴ However, where others generally aim to give overview analysis, often referring to many examples, *Making Contemporary Theatre* focuses on offering insight through select case-study examples written through the advantage afforded by rehearsal room witnessing. I discuss what we hope are the advantages of this insider approach in a little more detail below.

A final ambition for this book is that, through exploring contemporary theatre-making practices, it will offer insights into contemporary theatre but also into contemporary culture more broadly. These are points I return to in the final section of this introduction. But first, to give a stronger sense of the detail of the book, I outline our selection criteria and introduce the individual chapters.

Selecting the companies

The first criterion for selection was that companies and/or directors had to be exemplary of current cutting-edge theatre and performance, actively redefining established practices and inventing new ones in the conception, creation, rehearsal and presentation of theatre productions. They had to make theatre that did something new and exciting, received serious critical response and offered fresh rehearsal techniques. The book therefore concentrates on companies which are pioneering emergent creative practices. Sometimes this means the importance of the company itself is emergent, is only well-known in limited circles, or has only been established quite recently (usually after 1990). Sometimes it means the company itself is well-established but is nevertheless committed to ongoing exploration and innovation. While the book is on contemporary theatre, therefore, our particular inflection on the term 'contemporary' emphasises not immediate temporality so much as a focus on innovative, emergent practice. The time span covered by our examples extends back as far as 1997 because we see at that time emerging important practices of theatre-making that became increasingly ubiquitous over the ensuing decade and, at the time of writing, remain innovative in still-interesting ways.

Second, though we concentrate throughout on group practices of theatre-making, we have deliberately selected companies where strategies of leadership vary: for some,

leadership is dispersed; for others, an individual director is clearly in charge. This is representative of the variety of contemporary practice, but it also suggests an emerging tendency in contemporary group-based theatre: after aiming for years (since the 1970s at least) to disperse power, ostensibly in pursuit of democracy, practice appears increasingly to value leadership. What this trend indicates is not always that devised theatre has abandoned the pursuit of democracy, though this may sometimes be the case. More importantly, it suggests that, after decades of attempts at democratic practice which were at best sometimes frustrating and at worst grossly compromised, many practitioners are now exploring strategies for *negotiating* democratic practices and relationships, in recognition that dispersed power is not necessarily democratic power and also that negotiated leadership can facilitate group agency.

Third, we have deliberately aimed to represent an eclectic range of practices, including chapters on physical performance, dance theatre, text-based theatre, multimedia theatre, work at the boundaries of theatre and performance art, and work combining these categories. This eclecticism is partly representative, capturing some of the diversity and multiplicity of contemporary – especially postdramatic – performance practice, which Lehmann has identified as deliberately non-hierarchical in its adoption and mixing of multiple forms of representation.⁵ But our eclectic selection is also designed to reveal the specificity of particular kinds of theatre-making, and to suggest how creative approaches pioneered for one area of disciplinary practice might be – and are – applied across different forms in the emerging patterns and trends of postdramatic performance-making. Indeed, though the work discussed across this book varies in its forms, it is telling to note how much it shares in practices of making and how much this commonality arises from other shared formal characteristics, such as a shift away from linear narrative and towards exploiting all available means of representation in the service of a postdramatic theatre often concerned less with content than with form and with the practices of perception it invites.

Fourth, the selection is deliberately international, representing a range of European, North American and Asian companies and practitioners which attract international attention from audiences and critics and involve collaboration and presentation on the international theatre festival circuit. Our selection therefore largely ignores theatre which aims to make only local address or is community-based or national (unless it is also international). This international emphasis is necessary given our aim to explore emerging innovative theatre practice. The cutting-edge theatre of contemporary late capitalist culture is increasingly globalised. Its global conditions of production, distribution and reception inevitably influence what this emerging theatre often is: multilingual, emphatically visual, multimedia, and entailing an international, multicultural mix of collaborators. At least partly because the only shared international language it can confidently presume is the language of theatre, this theatre is also frequently self-referential about theatre's practices; in other words, it is metatheatrical, drawing attention not just to its own modes of representation but also to audiences' acts of perception.⁶

A last but not least criterion for selection was access. Writers had to have the kind of privileged access to each company's or practitioner's processes of making theatre which would provide the most illuminating and engaging detail and savour,

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allowing for understanding and analysis of the company's work but also, simply, a sense of it. With thanks to both the companies/practitioners and the writers, *Making Contemporary Theatre* has this privileged access. Admittedly, the degree of each writer's insider access is variable: some writers are academic observers; some, participant-makers. Likewise, the ways different writers have deployed their access varies: some focus more on details, others on the bigger picture. We have deliberately embraced this variety of relationships and approaches in order to explore the range of insights they offer, not least by allowing individual authors to explore how to articulate the work of his or her company most appropriately and dynamically. Across the board, however, we have sought insider, experience-based, close engagement with the work. Critics might argue that this approach compromises our authors' objectivity. This is a deliberate critical turn on our part: we are interested here in exploring subjective, engaged critical approaches rather than ones which privilege a supposed – but also problematic – critical objectivity.

We have aimed to maintain for our readers a direct line to our writers' access, as well as to the *processes* of theatre-making this access conveys, by providing photographs of rehearsals and materials generated in rehearsals – as well as productions – and by offering in each chapter asides in the form of embedded boxes of text. These boxes provide additional detail, extend or summarise examples, and record conversations, reproducing in miniature the kind of multiple, layered exchanges, digressions, red herrings and eureka moments that happen over weeks and months of rehearsal. The photographs, likewise, document multiple stories of rehearsal and development processes. They illustrate each work's evolving relationships to and between particular company histories, spaces, forms of training, people, bodies, languages, images, technologies and scenographies. They demonstrate practical strategies for generating performance and the ways that ideas materially evolve. They show drafts and experiments, some discarded, some reworked and some appearing, virtually unchanged, in the final performance. They document our writers' processes as well as those of the theatre-makers. Graphically, they show us a view which this book is committed to and which we usually cannot see – a view inside the rehearsal room and inside its processes.

Witnessing the companies

In chapter 1, Andy Lavender explores the work of The Builders Association, the New York-based, internationally touring, devised, multimedia theatre company directed by Marianne Weems, focusing on its 2005 production, *Super Vision*. Since forming in 1994, The Builders Association has practically and thematically explored relationships between lived, social experience and technology. *Super Vision*'s thematic engagement with these relationships weaves three narratives about three different and apparently unrelated sets of characters, who each experience a contemporary condition the company calls 'dataveillance', where our lived and ephemeral dalliness generates

a parallel, enduring stream of electronic traces. The company's combined interests and methods produce a visually rich and textured theatricality as well as a resonant thematic investigation of the seductions and perils of our mediated, technological age; but they also entail a host of challenges for the processes of devising. Lavender examines how *Super Vision*'s development inverted conventional theatrical production processes, prioritising the creation of a media-saturated scenography over the creation of character. The process is racked by decisions related to scenography and the use of multimedia. Lavender identifies an artistic ethos committed both to collaboration with artists, designers and technicians from a range of backgrounds, and to a hierarchical structure which is largely flat but is marked by the executive facilitation of the director. Everywhere, relations between the live and the mediated are manifest and in creative tension.

Lou Cope lives and works in Belgium and was invited to observe the development of the work she discusses in chapter 2, Belgian-Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's dance piece, *Myth* (2007), co-produced by Antwerp's prestigious Toneelhuis theatre and London's Sadler's Wells, amongst others. The process of progressing towards – or accumulating – the show begins with a given theme of trauma, but perhaps more importantly with the accretion through training classes of a shared movement vocabulary, much of it from yoga. It clearly aims to preserve the specific movement style, personality and skills of each performer while nevertheless moving towards a fixed group performance. Issues raised in this chapter – about the dynamic relationships between leader and group, generating and fixing material, pragmatic decision-making and abstract thinking, and the value of surprise and accident – resonate throughout the collection. The chapter also implicitly draws attention to concerns shared throughout the collection and contemporary performance studies about how to *write* about or document the *act* of performance which might be seen as evanescent (especially in rehearsal), how to select what to write about, and how to represent the writing not simply as one's own but also as that of its contributing interviewees and subjects.

Catherine Alexander is an associate director with one of the UK's most influential contemporary theatre companies, the London-based, highly visual, Lecoq-trained, multimedia Complicite. Founded in 1983 and now led solely by director Simon McBurney, the company is known internationally for such productions as *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* (1994–96) and *Mnemonic* (1999). In chapter 3, Alexander writes about its 2003–4 UK/Japan co-production, *The Elephant Vanishes*, which was based, ultimately, on three short fictions by the contemporary Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. Drawing on her rehearsal notebooks, memories of the time and interviews with participating artists, Alexander explores how the company faced the challenges of selecting sources, developing script, casting internationally, and working across English and Japanese languages and theatre cultures, with their different forms of training, approaches to collaboration, and hierarchies. Like several other writers throughout this collection, she also observes how the company responded to the accidental, found conditions of rehearsal.

Sara Jane Bailes has been observing the work processes and productions of New York-based Elevator Repair Service (ERS) since 1997, and she writes in chapter 4

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about their work on a number of shows since then, from *Cab Legs* (1997) through *Total Fictional Lie* (1998), *Highway to Tomorrow* (2001) and *Room Tone* (2002) to *Gatz* (2006). In contrast to a perceived tendency in some contemporary experimental theatre to be sombre and self-consciously distanced, the work of ERS is distinctively gleeful, thrashing, absurdist and almost tactile in its engagement of the audience, and yet at the same time, as Bailes puts it, 'tamed by a fierce precision' (p. 82). It presents a curious dialectic, expressing both the 'introspective neuroses and self-assured attitude of New York City' (p.83), and accommodating pragmatics and aesthetics, flexibility and control, and preparation and accident. Work is devised by the group, often drawing on canonical American cultural texts. But it does not adapt those sources in conventional ways. A sequence of movement sampled from *The Shining*, for example, is re-cut and repeatedly recurs in unexpected ways. Detailed dances and soundtracks are core features of ERS's work and Bailes explores how these are composed – like all elements of their shows – through a combination of both carefully planned preparation and accident. For ERS, 'miscomprehension' is deliberate, a way of re-understanding the world.

Alex Mermikides observed one of the UK's most internationally famous experimental theatre companies, Sheffield-based Forced Entertainment. Founded in 1984 and directed by Tim Etchells, the company has continuously explored contemporary social experience, focusing on the kinds of stories we tell ourselves in order to try to make sense of the world, and how we tell these stories, particularly through theatre. Making work that is both big and bold and small and intimate, Forced Entertainment's shows include *200% and Bloody Thirsty* (1987), *First Night* (2001), *Bloody Mess* (2004) and *The World in Pictures* (2006). Focusing in chapter 5 on *The Travels* (2002), Mermikides examines the company's interest in exploring the dynamic, potentially intimate and easily abused relationship between performers and their audiences; the capacity of theatrical conventions to produce both deadness and exhilaration; the fruitfulness of applying rules to generate performance; the challenges of composing a final show from a surfeit of devised material; and the benefits of working as a sustained group. She focuses on authorial control of Forced Entertainment's group-devised work, exploring how the company's members combine elements of a director- or auteur-led system with a commitment to collective creation.

Lourdes Orozco also explores the dynamic tensions between director and company in the work of director Rodrigo García, who was born in Argentina and is now based in Spain. Orozco focuses in chapter 6 on the 2006 production of his company, La Carnicería Teatro, *Une façon d'aborder l'idée de méfiance (One Way to Approach the Idea of Mistrust)*. García combines an established creative team (manager, designers and so on) with performers he has not worked with before, embedding his work in the stability of continuity while injecting fresh ideas as well as what he seems to see as a productive anxiety. The dualism – or paradoxical nature – of this approach informs his work in other ways too: alone, outside rehearsals, he produces text and storyboard images, while in rehearsals he works with the team on actions and images; projected text conveys one message while onstage action seems to convey another; and work is grounded in the real – including references to multinational companies and globally recognised disasters – but is also replete with

apparently abstract or non-referential texts and images (a turtle making slow progress across the stage, a performer balancing live chickens). Orozco explores how *Une façon* produces multivalent meanings through practices of casting, development, working with different performers, editing, design-integration, production and touring. As in so many other chapters which deal with intellectually ambitious work, she notes that rehearsals are nevertheless pragmatic, concentrating on actions and how best to frame images, not principally discussing abstract ideas; and she suggests how the failure to attend to the pragmatic business of re-rehearsing scenes for touring can undermine them. She also implicitly questions the balance in Garcia's work between representing the abuse of power in contemporary culture and the risk of reproducing that abuse in microcosm through a somewhat autocratic mode of directing.

Adam Broinowski has been a member of the Japanese 'body-theatre' company Gekidan Kaitaisha since 2001 and in chapter 7 he discusses the making of its show from the same year, *Bye Bye: The New Primitive*, in which he performed. The company's work comes out of the Japanese dance form of *ankoku butoh* which emerged after the Second World War. *Butoh* poses a social critique of the violence of the nuclear attack on Japan through a bleak visual aesthetic, acute kinetic control and, perhaps most importantly, the ambiguity of its bodies – rendered at once primitive through their muscular, non-verbal but clear articulation of feelings, and other-worldly, through the use of white body paint and slow, de-naturalised movement. Broinowski demonstrates how the detailed physical preparation of their bodies is foundational to the work of Gekidan Kaitaisha's performers, allowing, only subsequently, a choreography and performance to be generated. And he explores how the body signifies socially in Gekidan Kaitaisha's performances in general and *Bye Bye: The New Primitive* in particular, especially as a site of socially imposed violence.

Aleksandar Saša Dundjerović has written widely on the work of eminent Quebecois director Robert Lepage and his company, Ex Machina. Although Lepage also directs film, opera and other forms, he is best known for the work he also puts most focus on himself, his highly visual, multimedia, devised theatre work, including the solo performances in which he initially stars – such as *Elsinore* (1995), *The Far Side of the Moon* (2000) and *The Andersen Project* (2005) – and group shows – for example, *The Dragons' Trilogy* (1985), *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* (1994), and *Lipsynch* (2007). In chapter 8, Dundjerović observes the development and initial public performances of *Lipsynch*, co-produced by Ex Machina with Northern Stage, Newcastle, and the small UK touring company Théâtre Sans Frontières. What *Lipsynch* might represent in the development of Lepage's work, importantly, is both a more explicit acknowledgement than that made previously to initial audiences of the provisional nature of performances they are seeing, and an explicit invitation to them to participate in the creative process by feeding back responses on their experiences of the work-in-progress. *Lipsynch* demonstrates a shift in Lepage's strategies for negotiating what all artists discussed in this collection also have to manage: a balance between processes of creativity and audience expectations, between creation and production, and between the creative work of the company and the perception and meaning-making of audiences. Dundjerović here details the application of the cyclical RSVP method of group-devised performance-making in the development of *Lipsynch* as an

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Sarah Gorman has Maxwell and his company observed development rather an anomaly in the writes plays – not abst tional stage directions a flict, including *House* ((2005), and *Ode to the* peer experimenters is a are, however, achieved strategies which many and as masking the w tive. Gorman examines Maxwell's simultaneous acting techniques, a rej She argues that Maxwell than the fictional presence a compelling emotional identifies as Method as how he does this in rel psychology, on action

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exploration of voice; the creative benefits of this method for contributing performers and other artists; Lepage's relationship to the role of director as *auteur*; Ex Machina's sensitive and continuous integration of technology and story; and the relationship of Lepage and his company to the particular politics of Quebec, as well as to the politics of global migration and intercultural exchange.

Sarah Gorman has written extensively about the work of director Richard Maxwell and his company, New York City Players (NYCP), and for chapter 9 she observed development rehearsals for their 2006 show *The End of Reality*. Maxwell is rather an anomaly in the context of contemporary experimental theatre because he writes plays – not abstract or collaged performance 'texts', but plays, with conventional stage directions and dialogue rich with linguistic specificity and emotional conflict, including *House* (1998), *Drummer Wanted* (2001), *Joe* (2004), *Good Samaritans* (2005), and *Ode to the Man Who Kneels* (2007). What he does share with many of his peer experimenters is a keen interest in the pleasures of onstage reality-effects which are, however, achieved without using conventional strategies of psychological realism, strategies which many contemporary experimenters see as producing a non-real effect and as masking the work of ideologies through a normalising or humanist perspective. Gorman examines the significant challenge presented to many of his actors by Maxwell's simultaneous engagement of realist text and rejection of psycho-realist acting techniques, a rejection that strips many actors of a learned and valued method. She argues that Maxwell works to keep his actors in the theatrical present – rather than the fictional present, or fictional psychological past – and to help them produce a compelling emotional *reciprocity* amongst themselves on stage, rather than what she identifies as Method acting's emphasis on emotional *productivity*. She demonstrates how he does this in rehearsal and performance through concentrating on tasks over psychology, on action over acting, on reality-effects over realism.

Peter Eckersall has been dramaturg with Not Yet It's Difficult (NYID), based in Melbourne, Australia, since the company was established in 1995. NYID makes multimedia performance that is both politically and aesthetically self-reflexive about its position in a multimedia age. The 2004 production of *Blowback* that Eckersall examines in chapter 10 posited a future in which dissidents in an Australia occupied by US forces seek to destabilise those forces by hacking into state media. The power of the media's representational forms and cultural saturation is explored through multiple onstage cameras and projections which allow audiences to experience the dissonance between multiple live events and their mediated images, a dissonance illustrated vividly in the simultaneous and/or juxtaposed performance of a soap opera scene and violent military interrogations caught by surveillance cameras. Eckersall details the complex onstage action of this show, including how it wraps around the audience to incorporate them as witnesses and citizens in its represented future. He describes how the company combines set strategies for composing the show with an openness to devising processes, participants' contributions and change. The company's core trio of director, dramaturg and designer collaborate throughout the process, integrating their expertise into all aspects of the work. Its productions consistently address political issues through combining content and forms which are conventionally recognisable as political with practices which engage and compel viscerally, sensually.

For our final chapter, Zoë Svendsen attended rehearsals of Belgian director Luk Perceval's 2006 production of Chekhov's early play, *Platonov*, at Berlin's Schaubühne am Lehninerplatz where Perceval has been director-in-residence since 2005. This is the only chapter in the book which deals with the production of a classic play. This representation is important because the example is not atypical – innovative directors and companies are frequently called on to produce classics with their proven saleability (where new plays are comparatively risky) – but also because it demonstrates that innovation thrives in producing classics too, and that classics can powerfully address contemporary feeling. Perceval is interested in conveying a sense of the real but not through the arguably stale tropes of psychological realism. Like Maxwell, he pursues a heightened sense of the real through an approach to acting which focuses on the actor's present – rather than a character's psychological past – and through a performance aesthetic which is pared down, bare, forcing focus on actors and text. To rehearse, Perceval applies a somewhat formalist approach, described in Svendsen's chapter as both an exoskeleton and a scaffold. But what he seeks in production is some sort of meaningful (if uncomfortable) familiarity, neither an alien formality nor the faked real of much psychological realism, with its actually unrealistic degree of eye contact, movement and focus on interiority.

Though this book by no means identifies a singular method or system for making contemporary theatre, it does identify shared trends, patterns and ideas. Can these be summarised? In our postscript (which is also a programme), we attempt the task.

Thinking through theatre

The work explored in this book highlights contemporary theatre-making's most urgent artistic and ideological concerns and conditions. Here, I address two of them: the work's relationship to global and local markets, communities and sensibilities; and the work's practice – in both developmental and production phases – as postdramatic theatre.

Global and local markets of production

Devised theatre's meanings are necessarily influenced by its conditions of production and presentation and, as already noted, the work is consistently presented in international festival contexts. This indicates not only its perceived high quality as product – which persuades festival programmers the work is marketable, distinct and artistically and economically viable. It also indicates certain shared characteristics which the work typically reproduces through development specifically for these production contexts. For one, the work is consistently promoted as not only excellent but innovative; it reproduces innovation and engages – often self-reflexively – in an economy which commoditises and possibly fetishises the new. Second, because the work is made to tour, its design aesthetics are frequently marked by an apparent fluidity and quasi-

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minimalism which reflect materially what the work also means to represent thematically as its (international) fluency and adaptability. Third, the fact that it is made for different audiences in different geographical locations, often different languages and sometimes different cultures means that it must work across slightly more abstract registers than might otherwise be the case. Thus, the stuff of cultural exchange is often worked in the fabric of the content; the shows are often 'about' transculturalism or boundary crossing. Where the 'local' is presented, it is as a function of something other than itself; the concrete political determinants of whatever 'local' is put before us are often used like case studies which illustrate more broadly recognisable categories of experience or relationships between people, places and issues.

That said, there are noticeable cultural specificities to the work included in this book, and these too importantly determine its meaning. For instance, the shows from New York feature – and deal with – irony in a way that is foreign to, say, the Japanese production which is grounded in *butoh*, a specifically East Asian form. The body-focused improvisation-base of Cherkaoui, Garcia and Complicite has a distinct European inheritance, while Perceval's directing responds partly to the unique history and mandate of his theatre, Berlin's Schaubühne am Lehninerplatz. Likewise, Forced Entertainment's deliberate false amateurism – or apparent lack of skill – responds to its situation in Sheffield, where a manufacturing industry based in skilled labour has been shot to pieces in a period just a little longer than Forced Entertainment's lifetime. Ex Machina's metropolitan multiculturalism arises from and responds to its production in Quebec, at a nodal point of continental language differences and explicit political and cultural debate about what it means to be at once North American, European, transatlantic and global. NYID uses its position in the antipodes to explore an artistic sensibility which might resist US military and media global hegemony. These distinctive colourings in part enable the work to have its specific character (it is grounded, not rootless). But in a more globalised market, the influence and interpenetration of ideas and practices as this work comes together at festivals establishes a number of productive tensions and crossovers between, for example, Eastern and Western thought and practice, dance and theatre forms, modes of improvisation and writing, and focus upon story or action. Practices and preoccupations brought together from different sites in globally sourced casts and international festivals produce both tensions and new hybrid practices; for example, Eastern training practices of yoga and body-awareness become foundational to more than half the work here, and co-production on single shows frequently spans multiple continents. The performance practices and outcomes explored in this book illustrate how the forces of contemporary culture are, dynamically, at once globalising and localising.

Postdramatic theatre

Partly as an outcome of being devised and globally produced, the work is postdramatic, bearing out Hans-Thies Lehmann's analysis of trends in avant-garde theatre practice from the late 1960s on.⁷ Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* has encountered some significant negative criticism.⁸ But we find some of its key ideas profoundly resonant in relation to the work we discuss here, particularly the phenomenological

turn it takes in theatre/performance criticism, paying attention to what's in the theatre space and in interaction with an audience, allowing us to be more precise in our calibrations of the medium-specific form and effects of theatre, and its affects for spectators. We also think it is potentially distinctive from ideas of postmodern theatre, particularly in crediting audiences with a form of political engagement instead of the potentially continuously open contingency-verging-on-apathy that some have seen as a symptom of postmodern theatre. Further, we think that its characteristic aesthetic effects result often directly from its processes of creation, something that Lehmann does not extensively explore.

First, what is postdramatic theatre? Broadly, it no longer focuses on the dramatic text; more than this, it is not principally defined by (but may also play with) both character as it is conventionally understood through psychological realism, and narrative in its conventional linear organisation around conflict. In place of dramatic theatre's drama-focused narrative emphasis, postdramatic theatre focuses on theatre, emphasising the visual (for our media age) and sacrificing a sense of coherent narrative synthesis 'in order to gain, in its place, the density of intensive moments',⁹ particularly moments of *theatrical* intensity. Lehmann's book gathers a critical discourse and frame of reference that facilitates discussion of theatre precisely as theatre, cognisant of how movement, rhythm, architectonics, aural elements and so on all contribute to the fabric of the event. Postdramatic theatre, Lehmann contends, 'becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information'.¹⁰ In all aspects of this description we can recognise the work discussed here in this book.

Part of the value of this theatre-focused perspective is that it pays proper attention to theatre's many meaning-making systems. Beyond this, for Lehmann, it offers social value for its spectators, who are invited to practise 'evenly hovering attention',¹¹ interpreting not in a linear fashion through obvious narrative or argument, but unpredictably, cumulatively, postponing the production of meaning and discovering gradually how different aspects of the performance relate and meanings evolve. Thus, we see in postdramatic theatre a consistent metatheatricality which produces for the audience a self-conscious '*politics of perception*'.¹² We are no longer addressed as in a dramatic theatre which claims to speak to (and construct) us as a unified mass, and which ignores our differences; but nor are we addressed as in a postmodern theatre which might have all its audience members producing individual, always provisional meanings in an abandonment of the politics of any shared group understanding or identification, let alone responsibility. Instead, we are constructed as 'a common contact of different singularities who do not melt their respective perspectives into a whole but at most share or communicate affinities in small groups'. Postdramatic theatre's potentially 'perturbing strategy of the withdrawal of synthesis', Lehmann argues, tenders 'the offer of a community of heterogeneous and particular imaginations'.¹³ 'Theatre', he claims, 'becomes a "social situation" in which the spectator realizes that what s/he experiences depends not just on him/herself but also on others'.¹⁴ Thus, like what is conventionally understood as postmodern theatre, postdramatic theatre is contingent and usefully recognises differences (of interpretation, culture, and so on). But it also

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eschews the political apathy postmodern theatre is so often accused of; instead, it engages the political responsibility of audience members to interpret, make sense and form at least some (political) affiliations.

Meaning in this postdramatic theatre is open but not infinitely so; in fact, it demands attention to a set of repeating thematic concerns, many of which are self-consciously political, though not in ways we might have expected from previous generations of so-called political theatre. Noticeably, the work reflects on relationships of contemporary culture to theatre's particular qualities. It considers theatre as a communicative art, exploring reality, spectacle, media, technology, creativity, craft, the body, stories and images. It attends to theatre as a communicative act, addressing violence, authority, the past, anxiety, trust, intention, accident, aesthetics, politics, cooperation, resistance, communication, intimacy, emotion, ethics and pleasure. And it considers theatre as an industry, embedded in globalisation, commodity culture and economic markets. In other words, postdramatic theatre – including the work discussed in this book – engages deliberately and self-reflexively with theatre's aesthetic practices and forms, the ways it offers itself for perception. As the examples in this book make clear, this engagement is always explicit in rehearsal and remains so in production. Indeed, one of the things this book demonstrates is how the characteristic aesthetic effects and thematic concerns visible in postdramatic theatre *production* are a result of its characteristic *processes of creation*.

Throughout, the practitioners explored here demonstrate a concern with power – but this is a concern not to reproduce what many of them might consider a failed political theatre focused on content, but rather to produce a theatre attentive to its own ambivalent relationship to the power of its forms and the ways those forms affect audience perception, the audience's construction of meaning and the constitution of an audience as an individual and/or a member of a group. This theatre pays consistent attention to fixing meaning or leaving it open; in other words, to authorship, its democratic dispersal and autocratic control. Repeatedly, we see an ambivalent embrace of the – persuasive and manipulative, exhilarating and frightening – power of the representational techniques of storytelling, spectacle and technology: most theatre discussed here is devised but it never rejects text; many of the companies highlight the media's exploitation of spectacle and technology, but they exploit it too; and although some companies focus perhaps more on the physical or the textual, most of them thoroughly integrate both, rejecting redundant understandings of the physical and the intellectual as separate. Consistently, the companies work not to erase their conditions of production by portraying these as an 'empty space' but to highlight how each show is literally made by the conditions of its production – the dimensions and found furniture of rehearsal spaces, the limits of rehearsal time, the challenges of international touring, the genuine social dynamics within the company, and the shared experience of makers and audience in the theatre. Repeatedly, we see a rejection of conventional theatrical practices of psychological realism for producing a 'real' theatre, but we also see an urgent seeking for other methods of producing something that feels genuinely important in different ways, that trades in authenticity and that deserves our attention now – perhaps 'more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information'.¹⁵ This is postdramatic theatre that

is working out its ambivalent relationships to dramatic theatre, that is committed to purging or at least questioning what makes dramatic theatre redundant, but also to acknowledging and indeed expanding what makes theatre itself meaningful, effective and affective.

We observe in this collection a range of productions that are comfortable with eclectic sourcing and referencing, working with metaphor, metanarrative and metatheatre, but presenting broadly coherent worlds and narratives – perhaps a slightly more synthesised theatre than Lehmann would have. This is a theatrical theatre that is post-dramatic and beyond postmodernism, that moves from the postmodern paradigm of performance towards a newer paradigm of presentation – that is still in-the-moment, but witting, organised, made for phenomenal engagement, spectatorial consumption and cognition; that can include representation, rather than hoping to supersede it, as in some postmodern theatre, or be effaced by it, as in much realism. As part of this shift, we observe a turn from narrativity to thematicity – the pieces we include still put some narration and narrative in play, but are usually strongly organised around a core of thematic concerns.

A significant, repeating feature of postdramatic theatre is that it encourages (or even necessitates) synaesthesia, the audience's gradual recognition and pulling together of correspondences across the work. We can see the origins of this produced effect in the processes witnessed throughout this book. Dispersed and multiple processes of creation become constitutive of the work in more ways than one – they are its process of making, and they remain in its product, requiring from its audiences a quality of 'evenly hovering attention'. Process has become more evidently defining and determining in postdramatic theatre – and it betokens a mode of production that alters the fixity of what is produced, so that the contingency of the end-product is a function of the easier (re)turn to process in the making. There is a shift in the nature of relationships between participants, though neither director nor author is 'dead'. Rather, our productions suggest that the nature of the creative *transaction* has evolved. We observe working processes that entail multiple inputs on a more level basis, usually with a director as facilitator – so creation is distributed, 'evenly hovering', but nevertheless facilitated. It entails openness but within programmatic parameters. In resonance with certain aspects of digital culture, it depends upon networks of connections between participants that can be variously made and remade; it is therefore differently generative than much theatre that has gone before – it inherently enables plural, simultaneous strands of development and the more evidently organic growth of the whole. Theatre-makers within such a culture work both collectively and semi-autonomously. This is nothing new, except that foregrounded here is the more immediately relational aspect of their work, always contingent, always capable of reiteration, always part of an ongoing transaction.

The devising modes witnessed here literally make postdramatic theatre. At the same time, these modes were necessary to postdramatic theatre and so it made them, to articulate a theatre sympathetic to the latter-day understanding of culture as lacking either grand narratives or answers, but committed nevertheless to some form of 'social situation' which acknowledges our connections and mutual responsibilities for making our knowledges and the realities of our experiences.

Notes

- 1 Giving access to influential directors in *A Hidden Contempo*
- 2 Important directors' Cook, *Di* (London: *Contact* 1996); Galloway (London: *and Bro* *Re:Direct*, David Tu 1) (London: *The Seducer* Press's D Suzuki, a Practitioner detailed in *Shakespeare*
- 3 Hans-Thies Rautledge
- 4 This includes *Guide* (Routledge) Katie Nicolson (Abingdon: *A Critique* *The Gutter* Continuum *Handbook* *Devising* Kaye (ed.) (New York: Routledge) *Brook, F* (ed.), *T* (ed.), *Universities of* *Gam* *Theodor* 1996). 1 Michèle (Abingdon: *Repair*: Claudia Routledge

Notes

- 1 Giving access to theatre rehearsals has long been an industry taboo. Susan Letzler Cole's influential 1992 collection of essays based on observations of ten directors' processes, *Directors in Rehearsal*, is subtitled *A Hidden World* and cites objections to giving rehearsal access to outsiders by both George Bernard Shaw and Molière (Cole, *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* [London: Routledge, 1992], pp. 2–3). Based on the evidence of *Making Contemporary Theatre*, however, this taboo may be fading.
- 2 Important texts focusing on directing include: David Bradby and David Williams, *Directors' Theatre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988); Cole, *Directors in Rehearsal*; Judith Cook, *Directors' Theatre: Sixteen Leading Directors on the State of Theatre in Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989); Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage (eds), *In Contact with the Gods? Directors Talk Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst, *On Directing: Interviews with Directors* (London: Faber, 1999); Shomit Mitter, *Systems of Rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook* (London: Routledge, 1992); Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle Cody (eds), *Re:Direction: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); David Tushingham, *Food for the Soul: A New Generation of British Theatremakers (Live: 1)* (London: Methuen, 1994); and, in part, Susan Letzler Cole, *Playwrights in Rehearsal: The Seduction of Company* (London: Routledge, 2001). See also Cambridge University Press's *Directors in Perspective* series (which includes texts on Robert Wilson, Tadashi Suzuki, and Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil), and Routledge's *Performance Practitioners* series (which includes short books on Jacques Lecoq and Mnouchkine). A detailed history of past rehearsal practices in England is Tiffany Stern's *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).
- 3 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).
- 4 This includes: Tina Bicat and Chris Baldwin, *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide* (Ramsbury, England: Crowood Press, 2002); Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Leslie Hill and Helen Paris, *The Guerilla Guide to Performance Art: How to Make a Living as an Artist* (London: Continuum, 2nd edn, 2004); Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart (eds), *Devising in Process* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2010). See also Nick Kaye (ed.), *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), Andy Lavender, *Hamlet in Pieces: Shakespeare Reworked by Peter Brook, Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001) and Caridad Svich (ed.), *Trans-global Readings: Crossing Theatrical Boundaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). Some useful examples are developed in Chris Johnston, *House of Games: Making Theatre from Everyday Life* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1998) and Theodore Shank (ed.), *Contemporary British Theatre* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2nd edn, 1996). Useful books on and/or by individual artists, directors and companies include: Michèle Barrett and Bobby Baker (eds), *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Stephen Bottoms and Matthew Goulish (eds), *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Claudia Castellucci et al., *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Robert Lepage and Remy Charest, *Robert Lepage: Connecting Flights*,

trans. Wanda Romer Taylor (Toronto: A. A. Knopf Canada, 1998); Paul Clements, *The Improvised Play: The Work of Mike Leigh* (London: Methuen, 1983); Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Andrew Quick, *The Wooster Group Work Book* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007); and David Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988).

5 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, pp. 86–7 and 111–12.

6 That said, we have focused on broadly experimental productions (rather than commercial or demotic work), as these seemed most evidently to engage with innovation in both form and process and to be more readily influential in the field of new theatre-making. We do not gainsay the developments in content generation, delivery and brand management of larger-scale international theatre, including the marketable touring shows of Cirque du Soleil and cloned versions of mega-musicals from the stables of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh. But discussion of these works is for a different book.

7 *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann's book-length analysis, first published in German in 1999 and in English in 2006 (with several other translations in between), ranges principally across European, North American and Australian theatre and performance, including Tadeusz Kantor, William Forsythe, Heiner Goebbels, Robert Wilson, Sarah Kane and Heiner Müller. Given the longer arc of his survey, Lehmann inevitably embraces earlier postmodern work than we do, but our geographical scope is similar.

8 In her 2008 review in *TDR: The Drama Review*, for example, Elinor Fuchs suggests the book problematically proposes a generalising and colonising grand narrative, subsumes performance to theatre, and lays claim to the term 'postdramatic' in some spurious ways; she also takes issue with the book's translation, copy-editing and editing in English translation (Fuchs, review of Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Jüri-Munby, *TDR: The Drama Review* 52:2 [T198, 2008]: 178–83).

9 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 83.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 185, italics original.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

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