

The Ideal of Ensemble Practice in Twentieth-century British Theatre,
1900-1968

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January 2015

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own and has not been and will not be submitted, in whole or in part, to any other university for the award of any other degree.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis benefitted from the help, support and advice of a great number of people. First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Maria Shevtsova for her tireless encouragement, support, faith, humour and wise counsel. Words cannot begin to express the depth of my gratitude to her. She has shaped my view of the theatre and my view of the world, and she has shown me the importance of maintaining one's integrity at all costs. She has been an indispensable and inspirational guide throughout this process, and I am truly honoured to have her as a mentor, walking by my side on my journey into academia.

The archival research at the centre of this thesis was made possible by the assistance, co-operation and generosity of staff at several libraries and institutions, including the V&A Archive at Blythe House, the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, the National Archives in Kew, the Fabian Archives at the London School of Economics, the National Theatre Archive and the Clive Barker Archive at Rose Bruford College. Dale Stinchcomb and Michael Gilmore were particularly helpful in providing me with remote access to invaluable material held at the Houghton Library, Harvard and the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Austin, respectively. Special thanks must go to Michael Meredith at Eton College Library, who generously shared both his passion for Edward Gordon Craig and a host of original material, and to Steven Dryden at the British Library Sound Archives, who made previously inaccessible recordings and interviews available to me. Thanks also to the Edward Gordon Craig Estate, the Society of Authors on behalf of the Harley Granville Barker Estate and Arts Council England for allowing me to cite the relevant material.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the directors and practitioners who gave me their time and their invaluable first-hand insight into the reality of attempts to create ensemble companies. Michael Boyd's candour in our interview at the start of my research, when he was attempting to create an ensemble at the Royal Shakespeare Company and experiencing first hand the resistance to it in Britain, pointed me in fruitful directions. Both Jean Newlove and Philip Hedley kindly shared their experience of working with Joan Littlewood at Theatre Workshop and answered my questions on her training methods and her work with actors. Roger Howells's recollections of working at the RSC in the 1960s were similarly useful in giving me a sense of the general atmosphere of the company.

Discussions with my peers and fellow PhD students both within and outside Goldsmiths have proved interesting and enlightening, and I extend my warm thanks to Sophie Jump for her collegiality and generosity in sharing her thoughts on Michel Saint-Denis and the London Theatre Studio with me. I am also grateful to my fellow shire horses in the Sociology of Theatre and Performance Research Group for the numerous stimulating conversations, academic support and friendship that they offered. Thank you also to my friends and family who helped me to maintain my perspective, good humour and sanity.

Finally, my deepest love and thanks goes to my parents, Jacqui and Michael Burt, and my husband, Stuart Stubbs, who continued to believe in me even when I did not believe in myself. I am eternally grateful for their unwavering support, patience and love throughout this process, without which this project would not have been possible.

Abstract

The central purpose of this thesis is to chart the ideal of ensemble theatre in Britain and its development in the country throughout the twentieth century, referring specifically to selected directors. The Stanislavskian model of the ensemble, as exemplified by the Moscow Art Theatre, served this ideal, pursued by Edward Gordon Craig, Harley Granville Barker, Theodore Komisarjevsky, Joan Littlewood and Peter Hall, who are the focus of the argument. Craig and Barker's understanding of ensemble work was significantly influenced by their meetings with Stanislavsky in 1908 and 1914 respectively, while Littlewood and Hall were influenced by his writings on the theatre. Following Stanislavsky, the thesis offers a definition of ensemble as a permanent group based on shared values. The chosen directors are the most representative of attempts to establish ensemble companies in Britain in the twentieth century. They are also landmark cases in the sense that they initiated change in the perception of what a theatre company could be. The thesis argues, however, that the continued domination of the commercial theatre over the art theatre has been an impediment to each director's attempts. Each chapter of the thesis is dedicated to a specific director, and, with the exception of Craig's work at the Moscow Art Theatre, analysis is confined to the directors' work in Britain.

Methodologically rooted within the sociology of the theatre, the thesis maps the progression of ensemble practices in British society. It interweaves extensive archival research with an exploration of the sociological, economic and political factors that underpin both the attempts to establish a permanent company and the resistance to it. The thesis explores the pervasive influence of individualism and commercialism in all areas of British life, arguing that their principles generate a theatre climate that was not conducive to the establishment of a permanent ensemble company and was even antithetical to it. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of culture, and Maria Shevtsova's development of Bourdieu's theory in relation to theatre, provides the theoretical frame of the thesis.

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Introduction

While the growth of ensemble theatre in Europe over the course of the twentieth century is well acknowledged, little attention has been given to its development in Britain. This thesis, by contrast, charts the interest in ensemble theatre shown with great commitment by Edward Gordon Craig, Harley Granville Barker, Theodore Komisarjevsky, Joan Littlewood and Peter Hall, the leading figures in Britain who attempted to establish such a theatre, largely inspired in their endeavour by Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre. This was direct in the case of Craig, Barker and Komisarjevsky and via indirect routes in the case of Littlewood and Hall. The model in all cases was a theatre home and a permanent and closely-knit group founded on shared values that is distinct from the looser idea of teamwork and actors brought together on a project-based remit. The five chosen directors were all committed to the ideals of actor-centred permanency, even playing and the constant interrelation between training and acting that underpin this model, although each demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the term ‘ensemble’ and a different way of working with actors. Craig, for example, acted as an authoritarian in rehearsals and sought an ensemble of disciples, while Barker and Littlewood encouraged a more collaborative approach. This thesis, therefore, identifies the ensemble as an ideal of the British theatre. Further, its chronological structure shows this ideal being passed down and varied from director to director and so traces the ensemble lineage in its various manifestations through the twentieth century. At the same time, the thesis examines key aspects of the British theatre in the context of British society both of which prove to have been unfavourable to ensemble practice. It charts the pervasive influence of individualism and commercialism and the underlying atmosphere of competition that created a climate that was not only not conducive to the creation of a permanent ensemble company but was also antithetical to it. It details such

factors as the perennial worship of ‘star’ actors and individual personalities, the prevailing cultural conservatism, the debate concerning the role of the individual in the collective, and the inescapable economic paradigm in order to set out the historical context necessary for any study of ensemble theatre in Britain, which is not present in previous studies such as the 2004 Ensemble Theatre Conference, whose focus was limited to contemporary work.¹

The five directors are presented here as case studies through which to explore the interest in, and resistance to, ensemble work. They are the most representative of attempts to create ensemble companies during the chosen period and to counter the deeply ingrained conventions of the British theatre, whose focus was ‘star’ actors and box office returns. These directors were the fulcra of the changing perception of what a theatre company could be, and are important historical landmarks in the acceptance of ensemble practice in Britain. Craig and Barker introduced London’s intellectual and social elite to the notion of ensemble playing in the early 1900s through their productions at the Purcell Operatic Society (Craig) and the Court Theatre (Barker). Russian émigré director Komisarjevsky engendered a wider appreciation of ensemble work both in and out of London’s West End through his critically and commercially successful Chekhov productions. Littlewood was the first to achieve any real sense of permanency and continuity, as her Theatre Workshop actors trained and performed together consistently over a number of years. Thus, she came closest to the ideal of an ensemble company, despite the fact that Hall’s Royal Shakespeare Company was the first officially sanctioned (and State-subsidised) ensemble theatre in Britain. Each director used Shakespeare’s plays as both a means of fostering ensemble playing and

demonstrating its artistic benefits to audiences. It is for this reason that particular attention is given to their Shakespeare productions.

Yet, despite facilitating the growing interest in ensemble practice, these directors all failed to create longstanding ensemble companies. Moreover, they were driven out of the British theatre by this failure and the frustration of not being able to counter its established system, with the exception of Hall, who abandoned the ideal of actor-centred permanency. The chronological structure of this thesis shows an important distinction emerging between an ensemble production, where actors are brought together for a one-off production, and an ensemble company that brings actors together as a unified group for a number of years. While British actors, audiences and critics largely accepted and celebrated the former by the late-1950s, the British theatre establishment actively fought against the attempts made by my chosen directors to realise the latter and to use it to replace the dominant ‘star’ system. Thus, this thesis is, fundamentally, a thesis about failure. However, my detailed analysis of the reasons for this failure aims to give significant insight into how the British system operates, highlighting the immutability of its theatre establishment.

The ambitious scope of the subject necessitates separate chapters for each of the main protagonists in this analysis of ensemble practice, with the inevitable links drawn between them. By separating the chapters in this way, concentrated attention is given to each of the chosen directors as opposed to a survey overview of the period. This analysis is inextricably tied to the emergence of the modern theatre director, a role that was established in Britain by Craig and Barker. It begins, therefore, in 1900 with the first production of Craig’s Purcell Operatic Society, which, I argue, was the first

example in Britain of the type of ensemble work that is at the centre of this thesis. My analysis has 1968 for its endpoint since this date marks Hall's resignation from the RSC. On paper, this company realised the goals to which the previous directors aspired and offered actors three-year contracts that ensured a level of continuity. However, in reality, it was still far from the materiality of a permanent ensemble company, as is argued in Chapter Five of this thesis.

This examination of the concept of ensemble theatre acknowledges its origins in the work of the Moscow Art Theatre and shows how this model was transmitted to Britain by Craig and Barker. Craig's work on the company's 1911 production of *Hamlet* brought him into direct contact with Stanislavsky and his actors, while Barker travelled to Moscow in 1914 to meet with the Russian director and to see his company at work. These experiences became key reference points in both men's subsequent writings on the theatre, where Stanislavsky was presented as the antithesis of the commercial and 'star'-oriented British theatre against which they fought. Having said this, it must be noted that this thesis is not a detailed study of Stanislavsky's work or of his theories. To attempt to do so would make its scope too broad and would necessarily involve repeating material already documented in the existing comprehensive analyses of Stanislavsky's work, notably by Jean Benedetti (1982, 1990, 2008) and Rose Whyman (2008, 2013), among others. This thesis focuses instead on the British perception of Stanislavsky's ensemble, and plots how it was passed down as an ideal from the first-hand experiences of Craig and Barker. Of course, this is not to suggest that Stanislavsky and the Russian theatre were the only influences on these directors, or on the British theatre in general. André Antoine and Max Reinhardt, for example, were extremely influential in the pre-1914 period. Perhaps more significant was Bertolt Brecht's

influence on Littlewood and Hall's understanding of ensemble practice, while the arrival of his Berliner Ensemble in London in August 1956 presented a model of long-standing ensemble work that was emulated by such British directors as George Devine, William Gaskill and Laurence Olivier at the National Theatre. However, the limitations of space imposed on this project have necessitated a narrowing of focus, and I have chosen to pursue Stanislavsky as a central thread, given the fact that he influenced all of my directors in one way or another, as became clear from my extensive empirical research.

The same limitations of time and space have necessitated curtailing my examination to focus on the founders of ensemble practice in Britain, as opposed to its inheritors. It is for this reason that the National Theatre is not a central focus of this thesis, but, rather, a counterpoint to the RSC, which predated it by three years. Both theatres were founded upon the ideal of actor-centred permanency, and their intense rivalry to become the foremost ensemble company in the country resulted in the rapid (and premature) expansion of Hall's company and, subsequently, the breakdown of its ensemble sensibility. My analysis also omits Hall's successors at the RSC, including Trevor Nunn, who had his own variation of the idea of the ensemble, and Michael Boyd, who reintroduced the three-year contracts when he became Artistic Director in 2003. By the same token, this thesis is not concerned with ensemble companies that emerged after 1968 as part of the growing alternative theatre movement in Britain: such companies as Shared Experience, founded in 1975 by Mike Alfreds, Cheek by Jowl, founded in 1981 by Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod, Simon McBurney's Theatre de Complicite, founded in 1983, and the Northern Stage Ensemble, founded by Alan Lyddiard in 1998.² While these companies benefitted from the pathbreaking work of my chosen

directors and certainly warrant further analysis, they fall outside the remit of this present project.

Working within the chosen time frame, I have had to act in the manner of all historians and select which figures to focus on and which to exclude in relation to the central theme of ensemble practice. Thus, although the Old Vic Theatre Company was noted for its even playing (particularly in the 1940s), it is not included in this study since it was not founded with the aim to be an ensemble and operated more in keeping with the ‘star’ system. Both Rupert Doone and Michael Chekhov, by contrast, placed the ensemble at the centre of their work at the Group Theatre and Dartington College, respectively. However, neither are analysed in detail here due to the remote nature of these ventures and their limited influence on the field of British theatre. Likewise, my emphasis on the London theatre scene as opposed to regional theatre is fully intentional. All of the directors selected for study worked in the capital city, while its position at the nexus of the British established theatre makes it particularly pertinent to my analysis of the struggle for ensemble. Reference to the Regional Repertory Movement and the work of directors such as Barry Jackson and Alfred Wareing is, therefore, restricted. By the same token, reference to Peter Brook is limited to his work at the RSC. Finally, it should be noted that to dedicate a separate chapter to Michel Saint-Denis’s ensemble work would necessarily involve a certain amount of repetition, given the fact that his experience correlated closely with the issues raised in the final three chapters of this thesis. It suffices to present him as an interlinking thread between these chapters.

The analysis of the selected directors is informed by my extensive archival research and consultation of a wide range of primary materials held at the V&A Archive, the British

Library, the Shakespeare Centre and Library Archive, the National Archives, Eton College Library, the London School of Economics, the National Theatre Archives, Rose Bruford College, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Austin, and Houghton Library, Harvard, as well as personal contact with Jean Newlove, Philip Hedley and Roger Howells for supplementary information based on their first-hand-experiences of working with Littlewood and Hall, respectively. This material is used to ascertain as fully as possible the conditions in which the directors worked and attests to their feelings of triumph and frustration. The data consulted incorporates personal and unpublished material such as diaries and journals, letters, notes and drafts of lectures, as well as a wealth of published written material, comprising theatre reviews, newspaper articles, and personal memoirs. The latter also incorporates recordings of lectures and interviews, including those previously unpublished such as Lucy Burns's series of interviews with past members of the RSC.³

All this material is supplemented by official documentation that sheds light on both the institutional support and institutional pressure that each director faced. My detailed examination of the Arts Council's records, for instance, shows that the Council penalized Littlewood and Theatre Workshop for attempting to counter established conventions and that it purposefully overlooked the company's appeals for financial aid. These various forms of primary material are cross-referenced where appropriate to provide a deeper understanding of the directors and their situations. In the example of Littlewood, again, the Arts Council's reluctance to support the company is considered in the light of the recently released MI5 files, which detail its suspicion of the director's leftist views and its close surveillance of her and her group. By doing so, I argue more forcefully that the Council's funding decisions were politically motivated, a claim that

has been alluded to previously by Littlewood scholars Nadine Holdsworth (1999) and Robert Leach (2006), but not given adequate consideration.

The primary evidence at the centre of this research is analysed and interpreted within the methodological framework of the sociology of the theatre, as pioneered and established by Maria Shevtsova. This field of study is rooted in the premise that theatre is inseparable from the specific sociocultural context from which it emerges and thus rejects the dualistic perception of theatre and society as separate entities.⁴ Shevtsova explains that ‘the conventional dichotomies of theatre *and* society are inadequate from the perspective of the sociology of theatre whose premise of *in* society is irreducible: theatre is social through and through.’ (Shevtsova, 2009: 22; original emphasis) Elsewhere, she clarifies its definition of theatre as a social and cultural practice, explaining that it necessarily ‘incorporates concepts of agency, collectivity, and context – a social practical context in which this artistic, creative practice is done.’ (Shevtsova and Urián, 2002: 2) This collective agency is based on the dialogical relationship between the people involved in the theatre making process, comprising not only the performers, but also audiences, theatre managers, theatre critics, funding bodies, and so on (Shevtsova, 2014: 297-9). This thesis follows Shevtsova’s fully interdisciplinary approach, which moves ‘back and forward across ‘spheres’ so that what is ‘sociological’ is ‘political’ is whatever else collective human action makes it’ (Shevtsova, 2009: 32). As such, it interweaves the archival material with an exploration of the social, cultural, economic and political values that underpinned twentieth-century British theatre to present a fully contextualised examination of the chosen directors.

My analysis of the myriad sociocultural forces at work in Britain distinguishes this thesis from previous studies of the British theatre and marks its significant contribution to the field, as will become clear. While such historical studies are certainly useful in charting the major theatrical changes and shifts, any reference to social or political context tends to be secondary in nature. Norman Marshall and Andrew Davies's surveys of theatre in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example, make only passing references to the relevant political and cultural changes (Marshall, 1947; Davies, 1987). The same is true of edited collections of essays dedicated to specific timespans such as the Edwardian period (Booth and Kaplan, 1996) and the inter-war years (Barker and Gale, 2000). Even those scholars who engage more closely with contextual factors tend to limit their focus to just one, and so are far from the interdisciplinary approach that is at the heart of the sociology of the theatre and this present project. Thus, Tracy C. Davis focuses solely on the relationship between theatre and commerce between 1800 and 1914 (Davis, 2000), while Dan Rebellato and Stephen Lacey limit their examinations of British playwriting in the 1950s and 1960s to the political issues of the time (Lacey, 1995; Rebellato, 1999). A notable exception to this general rule is Michael Baker, who locates the role of the actor in the sociocultural milieu of Victorian Britain and examines its changing social status and growing professionalization (Baker, 1978). This thesis is, therefore, one of the first to attempt a sociology of the British theatre in the twentieth century.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of culture provides a conceptual framework through which to assess the British theatre as a field that changes over time and which is subject to both internal and external forces. Shevtsova was the first to develop Bourdieu's concepts in relation to the theatre, and so this analysis is heavily indebted to her pathbreaking work

in this area while focusing on British theatre, an area that is not of central interest to her research. Following Shevtsova's lead, the Bourdieusian model is here adopted to identify each of the chosen directors' positions in the theatre field, assessing how these positions shaped both their plans to create an ensemble company and their ability to realise these plans. While not wishing to make the thesis or any specific chapter theoretically top-heavy, space is dedicated in Chapter One to the introduction of a number of Bourdieu's key principles in order to establish the frame, which is then developed in the subsequent chapters. My exploration of his concepts thus creates the theoretical spine of this thesis.

Bourdieu's claim that every field is underpinned by the inherent competition and struggle between the dominant and dominated makes him particularly pertinent to this analysis of ensemble practice in Britain. He argues that the various agents operating within a specific field battle for domination, seeking either to improve or to defend their positions in that field's hierarchy. At the centre is the constant struggle between 'those who have made their mark [...] and who are fighting to persist, and those who cannot make their own mark without pushing into the past those who have an interest in stopping the clock, eternalizing the present state of things.' (Bourdieu, 1993: 60) It is, in short, the struggle between the established or consecrated members of the field, who adhere to its rules and fight to maintain its status quo, and the newcomers, who try to subvert or discard entirely the rules so as to offer an alternative. I locate my directors in this struggle and position them on the side of the challengers, where their promotion of ensemble practice is shown to be a direct challenge to the rules or conventions of the British theatre. At the same time, the resistance and opposition that each director experienced shows the theatre establishment fighting back to protect its status quo.

The detailed examination of this resistance focuses on five key principles that underpinned the British theatre and British society at large, and which became the main sites of conflict between the selected directors and the Establishment. Chapter One details Craig's struggle against the commercialism of the British stage and shows how the prioritisation of box office returns over artistry drove him into self-imposed exile in continental Europe. Chapter Two foregrounds the individualism that was at the heart of both the dominant 'star' system and the suspicion that Barker posed a direct threat to the individuality of the actor in his attempt to replace it with an ensemble. The treatment of Komisarjevsky detailed in Chapter Three exposes the xenophobia, and, in particular, the Russophobia, in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s, and the belief that the theatre should not be changed by anyone deemed to be an 'outsider'. The same conclusion is drawn in Chapter Four, albeit with a different focus, where Littlewood's leftism and her commitment to representing the beliefs and concerns of the working classes is placed in stark contrast to the elitism and cultural conservatism of the British theatre. The fact that she was ostracised and denied institutional support highlights the ongoing class and gender bias, and the need to toe the line and reproduce the hegemonic order. Finally, the analysis of Hall in Chapter Five reveals the prioritisation of large-scale institutions in Britain and the need for a group to be institutionally recognised in order to survive in the field. It further argues that any attempt to secure this form of recognition directly contradicted and undermined the fundamental principles of ensemble practice, as was the case with Hall's RSC.

Although the above five principles are examined in separate chapters and in relation to specific directors for the sake of perspicuity, there is no intention to treat them as

hermetic. Rather, the thesis acknowledges the great many overlaps and intersections between these various points of contention in the struggle for ensemble practice and considers them cumulatively. The influence of individualism in Britain, for example, is traced through to Hall's work at the RSC, where he was, like Barker, accused of restricting the freedom of the actors with whom he worked. Likewise, the close observation of the insularity of the established British theatre in Chapter Three sheds light on Arts Council's treatment of Littlewood and, in particular, its suspicion of her interest in Russian art, theatre and politics. It similarly contextualises the references made in Chapters One and Two to the country's detachment from the theatrical changes taking place on the continent at the turn of the twentieth century, including the development of the ensemble, the very name of which reinforced the perception of it as something foreign and, therefore, suspect.

By structuring the thesis in this way, each chapter contributes to a detailed understanding of the British theatre and the various forces at work that made it resistant to the idea of a longstanding ensemble company. The result shows a field that was hostile to change and in which it was incredibly difficult to challenge either the entrenched conventions or the status quo. It also highlights the lack of autonomy in the field, where the custom of evaluating the theatre according to the rules of business and commerce made it impossible for the directors to operate outside the economic paradigm. Finally, it shows that the chosen directors were all forced into a double bind, where to succeed in the field they had to follow the rules of the game, but to follow these rules ultimately destroyed any attempt to create a longstanding ensemble company.

Chapter One

The ensemble as an obedient family: Edward Gordon Craig, 1900–1914

The people whom I ask to work with me must have two particular qualities which are very unique ones. First, obedience; second, enthusiastic loyalty. These two qualities they must all possess, or obtain or develop [...] One really ought to explain a little what one means by enthusiastic loyalty and obedience, for these two things are so little understood nowadays. How best explain in a word? I think the whole idea is summed up in the word “family”. (Craig, 1913a: 25-6)

Edward Gordon Craig was a leading innovator of the British theatre in the early 1900s, and continued to influence it throughout the twentieth century, despite the fact that he staged only a handful of productions during his lifetime. The translation of his published books and articles into various languages helped to communicate his ideas and theories around the world. His 1905 book *The Art of Theatre* was translated into German, Dutch, Russian, Japanese, Hungarian and Danish, while *On the Art of the Theatre*, published in 1911, was translated into French, Italian, Russian, Hungarian, Spanish and Polish. Between 1908 and 1929 Craig published his journal *The Mask*, his most influential collection of writings, which was read by Europe's leading directors, including Sergei Diaghilev and Aurélien Lugné-Poë.

The influence of such work brought Craig a great deal of prestige, and he held a prominent position in Europe's artistic and intellectual circles, where revolutionary directors such as Vsevolod Meyerhold, André Gide, Jacques Copeau and Jean-Louis Barrault praised his work highly, with the latter calling him ‘the perfect artist of the theatre’ (Innes, 1998: 211). Since there already exists an extensive body of theoretical work examining Craig's concepts of staging and lighting design – notably by Denis Babet (1966), Irène Eynat-Confino (1987) and Christopher Innes (1998) – the present examination need not reproduce the salient facts. Instead, it focuses on Craig's work

with actors and his use of ensemble principles, with particular focus on his work with the Purcell Operatic Society between 1900 and 1903, the Moscow Art Theatre between 1908 and 1911, and his attempt to establish a school, or workshop, as it could more accurately be described due to the emphasis placed on collective experimentation and discovery. However, each of these periods of Craig's work is examined within the wider context of ensemble practice in the British theatre, the central focus of this thesis.

Craig, along with Harley Granville Barker, established the role of the director in Britain and introduced the notion of ensemble practice to small sections of the London theatregoing public. Both men's understanding of ensemble work was influenced directly by Konstantin Stanislavsky after they travelled separately to Russia to see the Moscow Art Theatre at work, Craig in 1908, and Barker in 1914. Yet, Craig and Barker held distinct positions within the field of theatre, and each adopted a different definition of ensemble practice and an idiosyncratic method of working with actors. Barker, for instance, believed the role of the director to be that of a collaborator, facilitator, or mediator, as is shown in Chapter Two of this thesis. Craig, however, took the role of disciplinarian, dictating every movement and gesture on the stage. For him, the terms 'co-operation' and 'compromise' were interchangeable and laced with negative connotations. This unwillingness to work with others overshadowed Craig's entire career and prevented him from being a prolific director, which led his critics to dub him '*l'homme qui n'a rien fait*' (*The Times*, 30 July 1966).

The congenial 'family' that Craig refers to above is a notion not easily associated with him. He was a somewhat solitary figure and a man made notorious by his irrational tantrums and demands, who, on a domestic level, had numerous love affairs and

abandoned the resulting illegitimate children, including the designer Edward Anthony Craig and photographer David Lees. Yet, at the centre of Craig's writings, as of his early work in Britain, was the desire for unity within the theatre; the unity of each element working harmoniously to create a single impression, and the unity of the actors working together. Above all else, this unity needed to take place under the guidance of a single vision – that of the stage director, *regisseur*, or, to maintain the metaphor, father. This father figure, or ‘artist of the theatre’, the label Craig used, would be designer and director in one, controlling each production element in order to bring about cohesion. He believed that he needed a committed ensemble of performers willing to follow his directions faithfully in order to achieve his goal of creating an art theatre in Britain that was not subject to the pressures of the box office. Although he rarely used the term ‘ensemble’ himself, it can be inferred from his description of this ideal art theatre, which would include ‘a permanent company of actors, of singers and of dancers, *trained from childhood*’ (Craig, 1983: 45; original emphasis).

Craig’s use of the term ‘family’ to denote his ideal working relationship is indicative of the authoritarian command he sought. While the family is often idealised as a place of loving unity, it was, at the turn of the twentieth century, still a space governed by the ‘law of the father’. Craig clarified his definition of the concept in the same essay from which the opening quotation is taken, explaining the two rules that had to be followed in his family: ‘that father shall know everything about the house, and that the sons shall not pretend to know anything until it comes to their turn to play the father’ (*ibid*, 1913a: 26). Thus, he elicited the accepted innate authority of the senior male figure, which was legitimised by the growing influence of psychoanalysis, and reinforced the patriarchal values of the period.⁵ To work with him, his ‘children’ had to display an unquestioning

devotion, a willingness to submit to his authority and filial ‘obedience’, which he called ‘natural, pretty, and healthy’ (*ibid*). This chapter argues that Craig achieved this level of commitment from a dedicated team only once in his lifetime, when he was working with the Purcell Operatic Society. This near chimerical experience – chimerical as regards Craigian ideals and standards – determined his belief in the need for a single authority figure in a theatre company and a permanent company of trained workers. This belief was later reaffirmed by the power struggle that characterised his collaboration with Stanislavsky, where he was frustrated at not having supreme control of the Moscow Art Theatre during work on his 1912 *Hamlet*, and it influenced his plans to establish a training school for actors.

The art theatre that Craig proposed was antithetical to the established, mainstream theatre in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century, the main purpose of which was to entertain and which was focused largely on commercial success and ‘star’ actors. Craig was, of course, not alone in challenging this dominant theatre, although he occupied a very different position to that of other theatre reformers such as George Bernard Shaw, Elizabeth Robins and William Archer, as is shown below. Even so, his innovations should be considered within the wider context of change that took place in Britain and across Europe, including Russia. In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, a number of pivotal theatres were established, reacting against commercial, ‘assembly-line’ and ‘star’-oriented productions that ‘treated plays as commodities and audiences as consumers of products’ (Kennedy in Booth and Kaplan, 1996: 132). Theatres such as André Antoine’s Théâtre Libre (founded in 1887), Otto Brahm’s Freie Bühne (1889), J. T. Grein’s Independent Theatre Society (1891), Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko’s Moscow Art Theatre (1898), and the Deutsches Theater, which Max

Reinhardt took over in 1904, created geographical flagposts in what came to be known as the Independent or Free Theatre Movement.

Although each venture had its particular nuance, the underlying aim was to create a theatre independent of ticket sales and commercial pressures, which was free to stage new, experimental plays and to foster ensemble playing.⁶ It was believed that the promotion of these ideals would see the theatre surpass the realm of mere entertainment and achieve the status of an art form, alongside music, poetry and the visual arts. It should be noted that although this was not a premeditated movement, it can be seen as a response to emerging theories of psychology, evolution, sociology, and so on, all of which encouraged the examination of life beyond its surface level (Whyman, 2013: 5). It was also a response to the changing theatre conditions at the end of the nineteenth century, namely, the emergence of stage naturalism, as pioneered by writers such as Emile Zola, August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen, psychological realism, and the modern theatre director (Innes and Shevtsova, 2013: 36). The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's Company was another important influence. The Meiningen Company, under the direction of tour manager Ludwig Chronegk, toured extensively across Europe in the 1880s and 1890s and inspired Stanislavsky, Brahm and Antoine with its unity of expression on the stage, its meticulous attention to historical accuracy and its ensemble work (*ibid*: 39-41; Braun, 1987: 16; Stanislavsky, 2008a: 114; Whyman, 2013: 4-5).

The changes in the theatre happened in dialogue with the wider social changes that took place across the world. It is, of course, not possible in a thesis of this size to examine in detail the various social, political, cultural and economic transformations that made the period between the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the First World War

what Eric Hobsbawm calls ‘an era of profound identity crisis’, the cultural and intellectual life of which showed an awareness of ‘the imminent death of one world and the need for another.’ (Hobsbawm, 1994: 10) It will suffice to identify some of the major shifts and movements that emerged in Britain during this period in order to illustrate the extent to which the established, patrician social order was questioned and to create a sense of the need for change that was similarly felt in the theatre.

It was a time when Britain’s supremacy in the world was questioned. Although the rapid expansion of her colonial empire into Africa and Oceania between 1875 and 1914 ensured her position among the leading world powers, Britain faced growing competition from the United States and Germany. The economic advance of these two countries coincided with the industrial decline of Britain, which could no longer enjoy the privilege of being the commercial leader of the world and the only fully industrialised country (*ibid*: 46). Within Britain, liberalism reached its apotheosis during the landslide victory of the Liberal Party in the 1906 election. However, its successful introduction of various liberal policies such as greater electoral democracy liquidated the Party’s power as a political force, resulting in what George Dangerfield calls ‘the strange death of Liberal England’ (Dangerfield, 1966).

At the same time, socialism became a very real economic and political alternative to industrial capitalism (Leach, 1996: 134). Numerous socialist parties were formed during the 1880s and 1890s, many of which conflicted fundamentally with each other. The parties included: J. M. Hyndman’s Social Democratic Foundation (SDF) founded in 1881; the Socialist League in 1884, founded by William Morris and other defectors from the SDF; The Fabian Society, also in 1884, which drew its members from the

upper-middle class intellectual and literary circles; and the Independent Labour Party, which Keir Hardie founded to represent the working classes in 1893, a year after he was elected as the first Labour Member of Parliament.⁷ The Labour Movement was also growing in the country, bringing with it the organization of the waged workers and the staging of numerous mass-movements. The establishment of the Workers' Educational Association in 1903 provided access to education for working male adults, while the growth of trade unionism resulted in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, which was renamed The Labour Party in 1906, to give the unions parliamentary representation (*ibid*: 149).

The growth of the Labour Movement was part of the gradual shift towards democratization in the electoral systems of certain countries around the world, as noted above. In Britain, the Representation of the People Acts in 1867 and 1884, which enfranchised both the urban and rural male working classes, increased the electorate to twenty-nine per cent of men over the age of twenty (Hobsbawm, 1994: 85). However, these small changes were deemed insufficient for movements such as the women's suffrage movement, which challenged the control held by the small, male, elite ruling group over the women in the country. The conflict between women seeking emancipation and the patriarchal establishment became increasingly violent following the creation of the militant Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. Acts of suffragette protest included smashing windows, attacking paintings in galleries and the staging of hunger strikes by those already imprisoned (Purvis, 2000: 136-44). The question of Irish independence and Home Rule also became particularly pertinent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, inspired by the political force of nationalist Charles Parnell and his increasingly influential Irish Parliamentary Party. Irish

nationalists clashed violently with both British forces and unionists as they introduced successfully reforms to weaken the powers of the Protestant Ascendancy elite on such issues as the rights of Irish tenant farmers (Levitas, 2002: 2).

The proponents of these and other movements for social reform were met with strong opposition from those seeking to retain the status quo. The resulting friction and conflict between the old and the new proved to be not only a residual theme of the late-Victorian and Edwardian age, but of Britain throughout the twentieth century. This identity crisis, as Hobsbawm calls it, and some of the ensuing contestations influenced greatly the shape of modern-day Britain, a point Samuel Hynes emphasises in his observations that this period was

like the English Channel, a narrow place made turbulent by the thrust and tumble of two powerful opposing tides. That turbulent meeting of old and new makes the Edwardian period both interesting and important, for out of the turmoil contemporary England was made. (Hynes, 1968: vii)

Mapping the Field

It is useful to draw on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *champ*, or field, in this examination of the conflict between the old and the new with regard to theatre as it provides a theoretical model through which to establish the shape, structure and conditions of the theatre in Britain. The model proposed by Bourdieu sheds light on the relation and the inherent competition or conflict that occurs between various agents operating within a specific field – which, in the example of the theatre, includes actors, directors, critics, theatre venues, audience groups, and so on – as well as the relation between movements taking place in distinct fields. Although the majority of Bourdieu's work on the concept of field focuses on the field of cultural production and its associated subfields – the field of literature, the field of visual arts, the field of poetry, and the

field of music (Bourdieu, 1993; 1996) – he pays little attention to the theatre, positioning it merely as a subfield of the field of literature (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 104). Maria Shevtsova addresses this absence and develops Bourdieu's analysis to include theatre and performance, arguing that 'his theories are extremely pertinent for the study of theatre as a performing art *par excellence*' (Shevtsova, 2009: 83). This present use of Bourdieu to lay out the changing parameters of the field of theatre in Britain is heavily indebted to Shevtsova's work.⁸

Like many of his central concepts, the notion of field is difficult to define, although Bourdieu extracts some of the key elements in the following:

In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97)

For Bourdieu, any social formation is structured by a series of fields – the field of education, the field of economics, the field of religion, the field of cultural production, and so on – that are organized and structured hierarchically within the wider field of power and the set of dominant power relations in a society. The field of cultural production, for example, tends to hold a lower or dominated position in this hierarchy, particularly in relation to the field of economics, although the specific position depends on the social formation or national context in question. Each field comprises a number of positions occupied by agents and it is the objective relations between the positions, or the distribution of available positions, that determines the structure or shape of a specific field.

With each change in the positions occupied, or with the creation of new positions, comes a change in the structure of the field. Hence, Bourdieu's analogy of the field as a football game, where each player takes a particular position with a particular function and plays the game in relation to the other players on the field (ibid: 98). In the field of theatre, for example, the position occupied by a particular director exists in relation to the positions of the various other directors working within the same field.⁹ As Bourdieu notes: 'To think in terms of field is to *think relationally*.' (ibid: 96; original emphasis). This relational model of thinking acts as mediation between agents or positions and, further, between agents and the objective structure within which they reside, the field, and the wider social structure, giving the notion of field its dynamism, where it is constantly changing.

The concept of position operates as part of a tripartite schema with the concepts 'disposition' and '*prises-de-position*', which Shevtsova adapts into a '*champ nexus*' of position-disposition-taking position (Shevtsova, 2009: 91). The position occupied by a director shapes her or his disposition – her or his outlook, expectations and evaluation of the field, or, rather, her or his 'sense of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 120-1). Both the position and the disposition underpin the *prise-de-position*, that is, how the director situates her or himself within the field and takes a position on it. It is the objective relations between these positions that Bourdieu refers to above and which shape the field, creating the objective conditions in relation to which artists create work. Or, as Shevtsova explains, 'how artists work and are distinguished from each other depends on their place in 'the system' of the field and how they define and view their place within it' (Shevtsova, 2009: 91). Further, every field, like every game, has a

set of rules that appears self-evident and is generally followed by members of the field. Bourdieu calls these rules the *doxa* of the field, and it is by adhering to these rules that one reproduces the *illusio* of the field, that is, ‘the collective adhesion to the game that is both cause and effect of the existence of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 167). Thus, a director’s position is also shaped by whether she or he adheres to the rules of the game.

An example is useful here to illustrate the point. Henry Irving was the foremost actor-manager of the Victorian period after staging a series of commercially successful productions at his Lyceum Theatre in the West End, including *The Bells* in 1871. These productions attracted large audiences and brought Irving ‘star’ status and growing levels of power and influence. His position in the field at the turn of the twentieth century was, of course, very different to that of Craig’s, who was unknown, penniless and about to start his rather short-lived career as a stage director. The distinction between these positions influenced the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of each director’s artistic output not only in terms of material resources available to him, but also how it related to the established conventions. Irving, in keeping with the other dominant actor-managers of the time, upheld the *illusio* and perpetuated the two central components of the Victorian theatre, the ‘star’ system and the long run, mounting productions that guaranteed a certain amount of success and so preserved his acquired status. This included extending the run of a popular play – for example, his production of *The Merchant of Venice* (1879) ran for over two hundred nights – and avoiding work that was commercially risky or did not reproduce the accepted conventions such as the penchant for lavish, visual spectacles. Craig, in contrast, planned to dispose of these entrenched conventions altogether.

This brief example illustrates how the concept of field and the *champ* nexus provides a framework that enables one to ‘plot’ the various positions in the field of theatre in Britain and so understand the shifts taking place within it. The position an agent occupies in a field is determined in part by the volume and structure of the capital she or he possesses in relation to the structure of the distribution of the various ‘species of capital’ in that field – economic capital, cultural capital or social capital. The structure of the distribution of capital varies with each field and is one of the ways, Bourdieu argues, that each field is autonomous and follows a logic that is specific and irreducible to the logics that regulate other fields. The field of cultural production, for example, tends to adhere to a logic that is the reverse of the economic field as it values cultural capital, which incorporates cultural knowledge and cultural competence, over economic capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97; Bourdieu 1993: 29–73; 1996: 81–84). The other form of capital that carries particular significance in this field is symbolic capital, which Bourdieu defines as the form taken by any of the other forms of capital when grasped through the categories of perception that recognize its specific logic (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). In terms of the field of cultural production, symbolic capital is gained by accumulated prestige, recognition and honour and is usually bestowed upon an artist by other artists.

Of course, the central division of the field of cultural production into two opposing sub-fields – the field of large-scale cultural production and the field of restricted production – further complicates the structure of the distribution of capital in the field. In essays such as ‘The Market of Symbolic Goods’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 112–41), Bourdieu identifies the fundamental opposition between these two sub-fields:

The field of production *per se* owes its own structure to the opposition between the *field of restricted production* as a system of producing cultural

goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for public of producers of cultural goods, and the *field of large-scale cultural production*, specifically organized with a view to the production of cultural goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods, ‘the public at large’. (ibid: 115; original emphasis)

Both sub-fields adhere to a specific criterion of competition: the field of large-scale production, with its focus on a non-specialist and ‘mainstream’ audience, seeks to conquer the largest possible market, whereas the field of restricted production prizes cultural recognition from a peer group of fellow artists, producers and competitors.¹⁰ The specific value attributed to the various species of capital also differs between the sub-fields: much greater emphasis is placed on cultural and symbolic capital in the field of restricted production, while the field of large-scale production tends to value economic capital as the sign of success in producing work for the ‘public at large’.

A director’s position in the field of theatre (whether in the sub-field of large-scale or restricted production) is thus determined by the volume and structure of capital that she or he possesses and how it corresponds to the power relations of that field, alongside other objective factors such as social and geographical origin. This position exists as a position in the ‘pecking order’ or hierarchy of the field (Shevtsova, 2009: 92). Bourdieu argues that all fields are structured by the fundamental division between the dominant and the dominated, a simplistic binary that he nuances through the concept of ‘fractions’ or heterogeneous social groupings. The agents occupying a position in the dominant fraction of a particular field – those who reside at the top of the ‘pecking order’ – have access to the specific profits at stake in that field. Capital, therefore, is an integral element of the competition that turns the field into what Bourdieu calls ‘the field of struggles’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 30). The struggles he refers to centre on the struggle for domination and control of the interest specific to the field in question,

which, in the field of cultural production, concerns the imposition of the legitimate mode of cultural production (*ibid*: 41). It is the struggle for the power to define what constitutes a legitimate theatre practice, for example, or who constitutes a legitimate theatre director, and, also, the power to delimit the number of agents able to partake in this struggle to define legitimization (*ibid*: 42).

Bourdieu identifies three competing principles of legitimacy in his analysis of this struggle over legitimization (*ibid*: 50–1). First, the specific principle of legitimacy concerns the recognition granted by artists who produce work for other artists. Second, the principle of legitimacy as defined by the tastes of the ‘bourgeois’ and which corresponds to the ‘consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class’ (*ibid*: 51). Finally, the third principle of legitimacy is concerned with the ‘popular’, namely, work that is consecrated by the mass audience. Bourdieu argues that there are also two opposing principles of hierarchization that are in constant competition with each other: the heteronomous principle and the autonomous principle. As the name suggests, the heteronomous principle judges success in accordance with the laws of the field of power and the economic field. The second and third principles of legitimacy are incorporated here, where, in the case of theatre, the success of productions is dependent on economic factors such as the volume of ticket sales, length of performance runs, and any fame or prestige earned from non-specialist agents. The profits at stake tend to be economic or material.

In contrast, the autonomous principle of hierarchization incorporates the first principle of legitimacy. Work is valued in accordance with the logic specific to the field of theatre and, therefore, autonomous from other fields, including the field of power.

Rather than economic markers of success and material profits, the stakes are largely symbolic and in the form of artistic recognition or prestige. Bourdieu states that it is ‘the degree of recognition accorded by those who recognise no other criterion of legitimacy than recognition by those whom they recognise.’ (*ibid*: 38) With its emphasis on attracting larger, more mainstream ‘bourgeois’ audiences and without the need for a specific volume of cultural capital to comprehend the work, the field of large-scale production tends to incorporate the heteronomous principle of hierarchization. In contrast, those in the restricted field tend towards the autonomous principle, seeking recognition and legitimization from other artists.

It is possible to return here to the example of Irving and Craig and develop it further. Clearly, the difference in their positions noted above is understood more precisely as a difference of sub-field to which each belonged, where each adhered to a different criterion of legitimacy. Irving resided at the top of the hierarchy of the field of large-scale production and accumulated large amounts of economic capital by staging work that appealed to audiences consisting largely of the dominant fractions of the dominant class, namely, the middle and upper-middle classes of London. As such, he met the criterion of legitimacy adopted by the sub-field. However, this work was criticised heavily by other cultural producers, particularly those who positioned themselves in the field of restricted production such as Shaw and Archer.¹¹ Craig, by comparison, occupied a position in the field of restricted production and staged work for his fellow artists with little concern about appealing to a mainstream audience and gaining economic capital. It was work praised highly by his peers and contemporaries in the restricted field, and, as such, it adhered to the autonomous principle of hierarchization and secured for him both cultural and symbolic capital.

Bourdieu argues that all players compete with each other to win control of the field, the intensity of which has led Shevtsova to discard his analogy of the field as a game in favour of the field as a ‘battlefield’ (Shevtsova, 2009: 92). In this struggle for domination, each director fights either to increase capital or to change the rules of the game, or *doxa*, and the relative value of the capital possessed. The latter can be achieved by the pursuit of ‘strategies aimed at discrediting the form of capital upon which the force of their opponents rest [...] and to valorize the species of capital they preferentially possess’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 99). This, again, explains the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a director’s practice, whether it be to protect the status quo of the field in which she or he is successful (Irving), or to ‘change the rules’ of the field in which she or he is overlooked (Craig). In doing the latter, Craig was seeking to discredit the importance of economic capital and of ‘star’ actors by creating an anti-commercial and anti-entertainment theatre that focused on ensemble work.

Understanding the continued friction between those adhering to the autonomous principle and those adhering to the heteronomous principle, as well as the changing position of the field of cultural production within the wider field of power, is central to understanding the field of theatre in Britain, as is made clear below and in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. Bourdieu argues that the ‘autonomy of a field of restricted production can be measured by its power to define its own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products.’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 115) Using this gauge reveals that the field of theatre in Britain had little autonomy and was unable to establish its own criteria, as the efforts of Craig, Barker and those other directors who challenged the dominant theatre show. Theirs were attempts to assert the field’s

autonomy and stop it from being treated as homologous with, or even as synonymous with, the fields of power and economics.

The field's lack of autonomy at the turn of the twentieth century was made clear by the extent to which it placed financial concerns at the centre of artistic choices and followed the logic of the field of power that prized economic over cultural capital. The importance placed on economics was interwoven in the commodification and gentrification of theatre in London in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. The restoration of moral respectability to the theatre, which David Garrick began at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in the 1747, gained momentum in the late 1860s (Innes and Shevtsova, 2013: 20). Actor-managers dispelled the belief that theatre was a working-class past time – along with the accompanying accusations of disreputable audiences and morally bankrupt actors – and pursued a more affluent audience, who had a greater amount of economic capital to spend in their theatres. At the same time, the slum clearance and gentrification of central London that took place between 1875 and 1907 and the improvements to London's transport system made it safer and more convenient for wealthier audiences to travel to the theatre from their homes in the suburbs (Hughes, 1981: 1-3).¹² Thus, the West End theatre managers oversaw 'the slow but sure-upper-middle-class takeover of both the theater [sic] and the drama, and the steady rise of theater [sic] into that middle-class respectability it is even now trying so hard to shake off' (Booth, 1976: 224).

The desire to improve the theatre's position in society was also a desire to improve the social status of the actor. Actors were social and artistic outcasts in the early 1800s, where the craft of acting was judged against the 'traditional professions' such as law,

medicine, banking and the civil service and deemed to be an unskilled occupation that was financially precarious and so unable to bestow gentility upon the actor (Baker, 1978: 21). This negative perception of acting was bolstered up by the absence of training schools and means of regulating who became an actor (*ibid*: 25). Indeed, individuals entered the field for any number of reasons irrespective of talent, including familial contacts – nepotism was widespread in the British theatre and a famous relative was great currency for aspiring actors. In order to gain social acceptance, the actor-managers' had to adhere to the social hierarchy of the period that placed nobility at the top, and present themselves as part of the upper classes, which included taking elocution lessons, wearing fashionable clothes, moving in the right social circles, and so on. Their success in elevating the social status of dominant members of the acting profession was demonstrated clearly in 1895, when Irving became the first actor to receive a knighthood, a monarchical sanction that was soon bestowed on other prominent actor-managers, including Squire Bancroft (1897), Charles Wyndham (1902), John Hare (1907) and Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1909).

Andrew Davies explains in detail the numerous changes introduced to signify the theatre's new status as a leisure activity for the dominant social strata, including: required evening dress; higher ticket prices; a later eight o'clock start to allow people to dine beforehand; ticket reservations; increased distance between the stage and auditorium to discourage audience participation; carpeted auditoria and fixed, upholstered and numbered seats; and thick, embossed programmes (Davies, 1987: 25-6). These and other changes excluded the working classes by increasing the amount of economic capital required to partake in this social ceremony, which also reduced its immediacy to the everyday and made the theatre a prestigious and extra-ordinary event.

As a result, Irving and his fellow managers created a division between the respectable, middle-class theatre of the West End and the working-class music halls and revues, where the former was deemed as the legitimate form and the latter was illegitimate. This is a clear example of those dominant imposing their definition of legitimacy onto the rest of the field. The theatre in London became synonymous with entertainment, luxury and leisure, and catered predominantly for a middle-class audience that, according to Henry James in 1877, was ‘well dressed, tranquil, motionless; it suggests domestic virtue and comfortable homes, it looks as if it had come to the play in its own carriage, after a dinner of beef and pudding.’ (James cited in ibid: 27)

The growing profitability of the theatre in the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw a rise in the number of theatres built and managements established, as well as a rise in the number of people entering the acting profession. In London, for example, over fifteen theatres were built between 1868 and 1900, including the Savoy Theatre (1881), the Garrick Theatre (1889), and His Majesty’s Theatre (1897). Of course, the growth of the field intensified the level of competition between managements. This competition, coupled with the expense of staging visual spectacles, encouraged managers to prioritise box office returns and produce only those productions that were guaranteed commercial successes and catered for the widest possible audience. Some turned to bankers, financiers and businessmen for additional financial support, which gave such figures an increasing amount of power and influence in the field. Indeed, the dominant actor-managers benefitted from the processes of ‘gentlemanly capitalism’, whereby wealth and capital was circulated among ‘male homosocial elites [...] designed to reinforce social bonds, limit competition, and enact mutual aid within a closed community.’ (Davis, 2000: 286)

Membership of gentlemen's clubs, political parties, and fraternal organizations brought these managers into direct contact with bankers and enabled them to procure financial support. George Alexander, for example, benefitted from connections he made in the City of London, while Irving was a member of the Reform Club, where he mixed with members of the Rothschild and Goldschmidt/Goldsmit families. As his theatre and business manager Bram Stoker recalled: 'Bankers are of necessity stern folk and unless one can give *quid pro quo* in some shape they are pretty obdurate as to advances. [...] Fortunately, there were friends who were proud and happy to aid [Irving]' (Stoker, 1906: 433). Although Stoker does not stipulate what these banking friends expected in return for their investment, his warning indicates the extent to which Irving and other managers were dependent on figures from the field of economics and so had to adhere to the logic or rules of that field.

The emphasis placed on commerce and profitability meant there was little support for actors, particularly those who were trying to establish themselves within the field. Without the security of a permanent company or a regular income, actors were subject to the pressures of the free market and the principles of *laissez-faire* capitalism, and so their futures were determined by public taste and their ability to meet its demands.

Michael Baker explains:

Alone among artists, the actor was now obliged to present his work to a mass audience, which paid for his services directly and in cash; his livelihood and his success or failure became dependent upon the immediate reactions of this audience [...] In short, the stage was henceforth a trade, providing a service to the public under the same conditions which prevailed in any other sector of private enterprise. (Baker, 1978: 30)

This dependence on the reactions of the audience encouraged a strong sense of competition between actors, who developed distinctive, individualised personalities and

promoted their own celebrity in order to make themselves recognisable and memorable.

The ‘star’ system was predicated on such tactics, and those at the pinnacle were actors who successfully individualised themselves and became synonymous with, and indispensable to, the British theatre and its audience, and so were able to reap the economic rewards. Of course, this practice was antithetical to ensemble work or any attempt to create a unified production that superseded the performance of any one actor, and so it was antithetical to Craig’s plans.

However, the lack of public subsidy for the arts in Britain, another sign of the pervading influence of individualism and *laissez-faire* capitalism, made it impossible for directors to operate outside the parameters enforced by the commercial market, as

Tree noted in December 1891:

It happens sometimes that, in his attempt to evade the quicksands of the Bankruptcy Court, the manager perishes in the stagnant waters of commercialism. It is obvious that a manager should be freed from these sordid considerations, and I believe that in almost every country but England the theatres are State-subsidied. It is an open question, however, whether, in a country in which individualism in all departments has taken strong root, and where State encouragement and interference is looked on askance – whether a national and subsidised theatre would be the ultimate benefit for the community. (Tree, 1892: 33)

Barker similarly explained that even the leading actors of the past were ruined by being forced to adhere to the rules of the commercial market: ‘Garrick fell – Kemble fell – Macready fell [...] It was the prevailing individualism of the doctrine of *laissez-faire* that destroyed instead of amended them’ (Barker, n.d. a: 5). The lack of an independent source of finance made it incredibly difficult to reform the theatre, and only those reforms that proved commercially viable were allowed to succeed, which did not include a permanent ensemble company, as is examined in each chapter of this thesis. Craig struggled with this inability to escape the paradigm of economics and commerce

throughout his life, refusing to make the compromises with the commercial theatre that were necessary for survival, and refusing to bow down to the box office: ‘Remember how little artistic virtue is in the box-office! When we have time I will tell you some things about this same powerful usurper of the theatrical throne – the box-office.’

(Craig, 1905: 41)

Discipline and Obedience in the Art of the Theatre

From an early age, Craig emerged quickly as an iconoclast, setting himself apart from other emerging voices in British theatre. As alluded to above, he rejected the attempts to revolutionise the stage by groups such as the Independent Theatre Society and individuals such as Shaw, Grein, Robins and Archer, calling them the ‘G.B.S. circus’ and their work ‘rather amateurish’ (Craig, 1957: 135). The main problem, for Craig, was that these attempts focused on the literary text at the expense of the other elements involved in staging a production, which tended to be considered of secondary importance or overlooked entirely. In George Moore’s seminal essay ‘On the Necessity of an English Théâtre Libre’, for example, he explained that the ‘first thing to do is get the plays’ (Moore, 1913: 182). However, by seeking only to change the content of the plays staged, these groups simply perpetuated the current theatre system and confined it to its position as a by-product of literature, as opposed to encouraging a complete theatrical renaissance. Craig, in contrast, called for a Copernican-style revolution. As his friend and one-time patron Count Harry Kessler noted:

He does not despise the dramatist, but he protests against the manner in which all theatre people – managers, actors, designers – rely on the dramatist. He wishes to restore the theatre as an independent art. (Kessler cited in Burden, 2004: 453)

Craig believed that a new form would emerge when the conventions of the theatre were dismantled and a level ground was created where each component was considered equal.

This new form would be the ‘Art of the Theatre’, a term he used always with capital letters to stress its importance.

Shevtsova’s claim that social and geographical origin are determining factors in the position occupied by a director – and, therefore, influences the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of her or his work – is corroborated by Craig. As the son of Ellen Terry, a leading actress in Victorian London and Irving’s stage partner at the Lyceum, he was born into an acting dynasty that continued to dominate the British theatre throughout the twentieth century. Thus, his social origin afforded him direct access to Irving, who engaged him as a regular member of the Lyceum company in 1889 to support his early and short-lived aspiration to become an actor.¹³ Craig was aware of the influence that this heritage had on his life and his perception of the theatre:

I belonged to the theatre from the moment I was born – I had not to learn it. I have, therefore, naturally loved and lived theatre everyday of my life since, developing from my early beginnings (Craig, n.d. a: 18)

Yet, Craig was the product of Terry’s affair with the architect Edwin William Goodwin while she was legally married to George Watts, which made him an illegitimate child at a time when the accepted moral norms were very conservative. His very existence broke these moral norms and so he was immediately positioned as something of an outsider in both society and the field of the theatre.

Although they occupied opposing positions in the field of theatre in Britain, Irving was an important influence in Craig’s life and work. In Goodwin’s absence, Irving became a father figure to Craig, and someone whom he emulated throughout his life (Innes, 1998: 30). The lasting influence that Irving had on Craig’s work is evident throughout the latter’s numerous publications, where he elevated Irving as one of the few actors

capable of creating life on stage, as opposed to merely reproducing it: ‘the very nearest approach that has ever been to the ideal actor, with his brain commanding his nature, has been Henry Irving’ (*ibid*, 1911: 12).

The authoritarian command Craig sought from his company mirrored the aspirations of Irving, who believed, from the outset of his career, that he ‘should have a theatre all to himself – where he should be the sole master’ (Bingham, 1978: 120). Irving achieved this when he took over the management of the Lyceum Theatre in 1878. He positioned himself as the patriarch of the large team of workers, which was comprised of a chorus of actors, a thirty-piece orchestra, carpenters, stagehands and so forth. Taking responsibility for each aspect of a production, Irving, or, ‘The Governor’ as some called him, placed team leaders in charge of each ‘department’ who reported directly to him (Hughes, 1981: 16). This organisational structure meant that Irving was always informed of what was happening throughout the theatre, and that he had complete control of the realisation of his artistic vision. Nothing was put on the stage without his approval.

Irving’s theatre was a theatre of individualism. The Lyceum productions were based solely on his interpretation of a play and, with regards to the acting performance, his supporting cast were little more than wallpaper for him to act against. As Terry noted: ‘He was always independent of the people with whom he acted.’ (Terry cited in Bingham, 1978: 129). This independence was apparent in the way he rehearsed his company (Bingham, 1978: 158–9). Irving studied the chosen play for a period of approximately three months prior to the commencement of rehearsals, in which time he planned the intricate details of the production. By the time of the first meeting, the

production was set in his mind. At this first rehearsal, Irving read the play to the assembled company, playing each role and setting the template of what he wanted his actors to reproduce:

He acted every part in the piece he read, and in his mind the tones of his actors' voices, the moves of the characters, the processions, and the order of the crowd scenes were already set. All the actors had to do was to come up to the expectations which lay in his mind. (ibid: 159)

As was the norm in the actor-manager system, Irving established his interpretation and then proceeded to coach his actors to fulfil this vision, while developing his own performance in isolation. This process left no room for dialogue between the master and the actors, or, rather, between the 'star' character and the supporting parts, which often resulted in uneven performances and 'top-heavy' productions.

Irving's aim was to establish an ensemble, however it was not an ensemble in the sense of a unified and collaborative company of actors. Rather, it was an ensemble derived from attention to the pictorial effect, where the various visual elements worked in harmony with each other: 'It is most important that an actor should learn that he is a figure in a stage picture, and that the least exaggeration destroys the harmony of a composition' (Irving cited in Jackson in Brown, 2008: 175). It was this sort of visual, harmonious ensemble that Craig wanted to create in his theatre. It was also one of the ways Irving was influenced by the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's Company. When the company performed in London in 1881, the precisely choreographed crowd scenes and the harmonious integration of acting, lighting and costume to create a single impression was unprecedented, and the Lyceum's 1882 *Much Ado About Nothing* incorporated Meiningen-inspired crowd work (Innes, 1998: 13).

Stanislavsky explains in detail how Chronegk, whom he calls ‘the actor’s terror’, ran his rehearsals like an autocrat, drilling his company for hours in order to achieve the intricate movements of crowds so admired by audiences worldwide (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 114). Irving also acted as a disciplinarian, rehearsing his company rigorously and making the actors perform to a counted and measured rhythm to ensure that each movement was executed precisely (Innes, 1998: 13). Not trusting, or allowing, his subordinates to aid in artistic decision-making, Irving’s word was final. American actor Edwin Booth described him as ‘despotic’, remarking:

He commands all points, with an understanding that his will is absolute law, that it is not to be disputed, whether it concerns the entry of a mere messenger who bears a letter, or whether it is the reading of an important line by Miss Terry. From first to last he rules the stage with an iron will.
(Booth cited in King, 1993: 70)

This was the Lyceum under the iron will of the great dictator that Edward Gordon Craig entered as an apprentice actor. The time Craig spent with his mentor was crucial in shaping his own approach to theatre, and the strong authoritarian control Irving wielded over his company, as well as his belief in the importance of the harmonic composition, made a lasting impression on the boy of seventeen.

Replicating the example set by Irving, Craig stipulated continually the need for a single voice in the theatre, a dominating patriarchal force that controls every aspect of a production and dictates every decision with which, of course, his team of disciplined workers complied. To adopt the Craigan metaphor of the theatre as a war-bound ship, the director must govern ‘his crew’ with great force, bowing before no other figure, and thus eliminating the possibility of a mutinous uprising:

The theatre, unlike the ship, is not made for the purposes of war, and so for some unaccountable reason discipline is not held to be of such vital importance whereas it is of as much importance as in any branch of service. But what I wish to show you is that until discipline is understood in a theatre

to be willing and reliant obedience to the manager or captain no supreme achievement can be accomplished. (Craig, 1911: 172)

Craig argued that the director must be the master of each element of the theatre, but must be ‘a man apart from any of the crafts. He must be a man who knows but no longer handles the ropes’ (ibid, 1905: 48). This insistence on an objective director in place of a subjective actor-director or actor-manager was one of the ways in which Craig distinguished himself from Irving, and it shows clearly the distinctions in the positions occupied by each. Craig saw the implicit danger in attempting to lead a company while continuing to act alongside its members, arguing that ‘a natural instinct will lead him to make himself the centre of everything’ to the detriment of the artwork (ibid). This ‘natural instinct’ would prevent the actor-director from being able to observe the work as a composite whole. A director must forego acting in order to lead a company adequately and to establish the desired unity on stage.

Craig’s autocratic treatment of actors reached its apotheosis in April 1908, when he published his most controversial essay, ‘The Actor and the Über-marionette’, in which he seemingly calls for the eradication of all actors (ibid, 1908: 3-15). He argued that the contemporary actor’s technique relied on ‘impersonation’ and ‘imitation’ as opposed to ‘creation’, and so was a hindrance to the development of the Art of the Theatre. He proposed to replace this actor with the ‘inanimate figure’ of the Über-marionette, which ‘will not compete with life – rather will it go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance – it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit.’ (ibid: 12) Craig did not ever provide a clear definition for the term ‘Über-marionette’, and Patrick Le Bœuf details the various hypothetical definitions of the term that have been proposed by scholars, ranging from a life-sized

puppet manipulated by strings to a highly trained and disciplined actor (Le Bœuf, 2010: 102-14).

It is clear from Craig's choice of the word 'marionette' that he desired a 'being' that was easily manipulated and controlled, which was not subject to its own emotions and feelings and so was an antidote to the despised histrionic actor. At the same time, he wanted to discard photographic realism and so strip away the individuality and personality of the actor, making her or him more akin to an archetypal character. Craig planned to limit and slow down the actors' movements as well as disguise their faces in order to create this effect and to remove all traces of everyday life. Herein lies the importance of the ensemble – it was to provide him with a group of actors that he could train to move and act in this way, and who would go beyond mere imitation and become creators.

Bolstering up the somewhat demagogical image of the theatre director, Craig called for the adoption of the Wagnerian-held position of 'feudal baron', namely, a director who took possession of his own theatre-home, or castle, in which he was the highest authority (Craig, 1905: 50). The popular image of Craig as a stubborn *enfant terrible* is easily recognisable in his declarations that the director should be an overseer. Of course, in order to play the role of supreme ruler, one needed one's own theatre-home, or castle, to govern, together with a group whose obedience and loyalty had been secured. In short, what was required was an ensemble of actors dedicated to each other and committed to following the path clearly set out by the director. The closest Craig came to establishing such a company to perform in his signature style was with the Hampstead-based Purcell Operatic Society.

The Devoted Amateurs of the Purcell Operatic Society

The Purcell Operatic Society opened on 17 May 1900, with its first public performance of Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* at the Hampstead Conservatoire. It was the result of a seven-month period of work for Craig who, alongside friend and composer Martin Fallas Shaw, trained and directed approximately forty amateur performers for the production.¹⁴ From the outset, Craig and Shaw wanted the group to be a long-standing alliance, and it stayed together until 1902, producing three subsequent works. These were: Purcell's *The Masque of Love* in March 1901, staged alongside a revival of *Dido and Aeneas* and Terry in *Nance Oldfield*; George Frideric Handel's *Acis and Galatea* in March 1902, staged, again, alongside a revival of *The Masque of Love*; and Laurence Housman's *Bethlehem* in December 1902. The group disbanded before Craig and Shaw were commissioned to stage the latter, but since a large number of its amateur chorus performed in the production it is considered here as an extension of the group's work (Craig, 1957: 230; Craig, 1968: 124).

The original intention of the Society was to revive the works of Purcell, Handel, Thomas Arne, Christoph Gluck and other lesser-known composers, and so, as *The Daily Telegraph* rightly noted, it appealed to the 'sympathies of the few, not the many' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 1901). It operated as a subscription society and the majority of its members were part of London's social, artistic and intellectual elites, including Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie, Villiers Stanford, Arthur Balfour, Walter Crane, Hamo Thornycroft, Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington (Craig, 1901). At the same time, the productions were restricted to extremely limited runs and staged in small, remote theatres outside central London: three performances of *Dido and Aeneas* at the

Hampstead Conservatoire; six performances of *The Masque of Love* at the Coronet Theatre in Notting Hill; and six performances of *Bethlehem* at the Great Hall at the Imperial Institute, South Kensington. The only exception was *Acis and Galatea*, which had six performances at the Great Queen Street Theatre in Covent Garden, although it, too, was a small theatre that was difficult to find. The Purcell Operatic Society's audiences were, therefore, small and select, and comprised of those 'in the know' rather than members of the general public. Of course, a lack of financial capital dictated Shaw and Craig's choice of venues and performance runs, but, even so, both men's commitment to prioritising experimentation over economic gain positioned the Society in the field of restricted production. This position and the group's refusal to adhere to the rules of the box office and the commercial theatre provided Craig with an invaluable opportunity to develop his practice as a director.

Craig referred to this period as his happiest and, artistically speaking, most successful, where the work produced was 'the best thing I ever did on a stage' (*ibid*, 1957: 235). Such enthusiasm was due to the group's hierarchical structure and the division of labour within it. When Shaw founded the Society in 1899 he placed Craig in charge of all scenic elements, including costumes, lighting and staging. In short, everything that was seen by the audience fell into Craig's domain, and he was given carte blanche, choosing as he saw fit without having to justify his decisions. The nature of the material with which he worked meant that there was also no overlooking author or strict stage directions that Craig was compelled to abide by, making his artistic freedom complete (Innes, 1998: 71). At the same time, a core group of chorus members remained with the Society throughout its short life span, providing Craig with a sense of continuity that allowed him to develop his experiments further (Craig, 1968: 154). Thus, with the

freedom to work as he chose and with a regular company willing to follow his direction, the Society operated much like a studio or laboratory for Craig, where he could test out new ideas and theories. These theories matured over the course of the three-year period, and he was able to realise his aim to unify the various elements of the stage into what W. B. Yeats called a ‘new and distinct art. It is something that can only exist in the theatre.’

(Yeats in *The Saturday Review*, 8 March 1902)

Craig’s positive experience was also intrinsically linked to the performers with whom he worked. He recalled: ‘We had no company of actor-singers and couldn’t engage one because that would require a capital of several thousand pounds’ (Craig, 1957: 226). The lack of substantial financial resources meant that the Purcell Operatic Society, with the exception of two or three lead actors, relied on a group of male and female amateur performers, most of whom were personal friends of Craig, Shaw or Nannie Dryhurst, who became the Society’s Secretary. While it is difficult to ascertain precisely who the Society’s members were beyond the names listed in its souvenir programmes, given its base in the upper-class north London suburb of Hampstead, it is safe to assume that it was a group high in economic, social and cultural capital. Further, these were individuals who had a certain amount of leisure time and were willing to dedicate it to rehearsing relatively obscure opera works.

The amateur status of the performers meant that although the majority were enthusiastic singers, very few had undertaken any previous music training and none had experience in dance. Shaw and Craig, therefore, had to equip their volunteers with the skills needed for the stage. While Shaw cultivated the performers’ musical ability, Craig trained the company rigorously in physical exercises to increase their flexibility, co-ordination and

control and developed a detailed system of notation from which to rehearse the chorus (Eynat-Confino, 1987: 37). On the whole, the company approached these rehearsals and training sessions with a level of openness, complying with Craig's directions without notable apprehension. As an amateur group, participation in the work was, of course, voluntary and came with little personal gain for the individual performers. Those who joined the group, therefore, did so as a sign of their strong faith in Craig and Shaw's work and a commitment to the Society's ideals. Also, the fact that none of the troupe had any previous training meant that Craig did not have to counter bad habits or unfavourable techniques learnt from days spent as apprentice actors. The group was a tabula rasa for him, and he moulded and shaped the performers in accordance with his own plans and designs.

Following the same training regime unified the group further, and established a shared approach to the work and a shared vocabulary of movement, thus establishing the nodes of unity that are essential for ensemble work. Craig marvelled retrospectively at the willingness of his company to experiment and learn new techniques, becoming excellent in their stepping out – and far better than ballet dancers would have been – for they and I together expressed something and what we said was no echo of what the theatres were at that time repeating over and over like parrots. (Craig cited in Innes, 1998: 72)

As is clear from this statement, the Purcell Operatic Society was, for Craig, the company to embody his ideals, and the company with which he could develop a new form of theatre that challenged the established conventions. Although the relationship between Craig and his chorus members was certainly not collaborative, he clearly felt that it was founded on a certain amount of reciprocity, and that the chorus inspired him to make new discoveries.

Among the various discoveries Craig made at this time was a method of developing the dramatic content of Purcell's operas while, at the same time, finding a way to simplify his ideas in order to compensate for the slow speed at which his chorus grasped and retained information. This included breaking elements and gestures down to an almost archetypal level and choreographing slow movements to be performed in synchrony that were more in line with a Greek chorus than a corps de ballet (Innes, 1998: 63). Edward Anthony Craig argues that while the movements his father choreographed were relatively easy for a professional dancer, it was this need to go back to basics and to make everything very simple that gave the work its artistic strength (Craig, 1968: 121). As the critic from the *Hampstead Annual* noted, the result was that 'for the first time, perhaps, those present saw operatic singers using gestures of real dramatic significance' (Greville and Matheson, 1900: 138).

Craig achieved such a standard with his amateurs by taking the time to work slowly and methodically in rehearsals. Both he and Shaw refused to prescribe a set rehearsal period, but, rather, continued working until they reached their goals: 'We decided right away to rehearse and rehearse till the thing was ready – not to limit rehearsals to a fortnight maximum' (Craig, 1957: 226). This commitment to giving a production the required time and space meant that the Society spent between six and eight months developing each of the three operas produced before it was officially discontinued in March 1902.

Working on a production without time restrictions was unprecedented in the British theatre, where the norm was to make a production stage-worthy in the shortest amount of time possible due to the expense of engaging professional actors and the need to satisfy theatre managers eager to make a profit. In contrast, Craig was able to take his time because he was working with amateurs, all of who had a separate source of income

and so were not dependent on a living wage in the way a budding professional actor was.

The amateur company agreed to work for nothing, which reduced the overheads considerably and helped Craig and the Purcell Operatic Society to escape the parameters of the economic market.

Likewise, the amateur status of the company helped to create a feeling of community and to avoid the competitive tensions usually found in a group of aspiring professional actors. As noted above, it was necessary for an actor to distinguish her or himself from the masses in order to succeed in the mainstream theatre of London and to move up the ‘star’-oriented West End hierarchy. The inherent individualism that this system perpetuated centralised the individual actor’s interests at the expense of the production.

As the Society’s chorus members showed no interest in becoming West End idols, they did not have to cultivate a personality to secure recognition from the audience. The chorus members, Denis Bablet argues, were ‘neither slaves to outdated shibboleths nor eager for personal publicity’ (Bablet, 1966: 54). Instead, they allowed Craig the freedom to direct them in any way he chose, which included stripping away the individuality and personality of the performers and making them part of the ensemble of elements created on stage.¹⁵ Of course, similarities can be drawn between Craig’s architectonic ensemble and that of Irving and his fellow actor-managers, who treated supporting actors as merely part of the décor. However, the actor-managers did so in order to elevate their own ‘star’ status, while Craig’s motive was to serve the production. His success in doing so was acknowledged by critics such as Haldane Macfall: ‘No posturing actor took the limelight in order to show off his personality or *advertise his necessity*. The main scheme of the play was the main thing – it was never anything but the main thing’ (Macfall, 1901: 255; emphasis added).

It is difficult to verify these accounts of the unquestioning compliance of the chorus, given that there is little archival evidence of their reactions and their thoughts on the work. One chorus member, Hannah Gutmann, did confirm the friendly relations between the director and his company when she wrote to Craig in 1951 to thank him for the positive experience and to celebrate ‘the atmosphere of the old happy Purcell days with all the enthusiasm that you created in us, when everything one did seemed so worthwhile.’ (Gutmann letter to Craig, 30 December 1951, Eton College Archive) Shaw similarly celebrated the love and devotion felt between Craig and the chorus, and praised the latter’s unique and unparalleled work ethic:

Anything like the enthusiasm and loyalty of this devoted body of amateurs it has never been my good fortune to meet either before or since [...] They had to sing their choruses crawling, leaping, swaying, running – any way that Craig fancied [...] Most of them had no stage experience at all. Perhaps that was as well, for I am sure a Covent Garden chorus would have struck at the first rehearsal. (Shaw, 1929: 26)

Craig also openly acknowledged his affection and respect for the company members, or his ‘friends’, as he called them (Craig, 1957: 229). For example, he dedicated the 1901 revival of *Dido and Aeneas* to ‘the Chorus and a few others these’ (*ibid*, 1901). When he received payment for his work on *Bethlehem*, he split his fee into golden half sovereigns and distributed them amongst his chorus members as tokens of his gratitude for their hard work and devotion (*ibid*, 1957: 229). They, in turn, reciprocated his great esteem and affectionately called the sovereigns their ‘medals’, signifying the great pride they had in the work and their love for Craig and Shaw (Craig, 1968: 165).

Craig was not able to maintain the Purcell Operatic Society, however, and as the abilities and the commitment of its members grew, so, too, did its economic and administrative problems. While Craig and Shaw’s commitment to autonomy created the laboratory

conditions vital for artistic development, it did little in the way of securing the economic capital necessary to operate in the field. The group's long rehearsal periods, its amateur status and the remote location of its productions were not conducive to increasing audience numbers and the productions were all financial failures: *Dido and Aeneas* cost £379 2s 1d to stage in 1900 and took approximately £370 at the box office; *The Masque of Love* cost £534 6s 8d and made £533 6s 4d (Craig, 1957: 226) Although the chorus did not need payment, the pair had various other expenses that they were unable to cover, including rental fees for performance spaces, electricity bills, and so on.

Bourdieu argues that the only way to exist outside of the economic paradigm was to have an external income or inherited economic capital, which 'is one of the most important factors in the differential success of avant-garde enterprises' (Bourdieu, 1996: 84). In the Society's early days, Terry acted as this independent source, covering Craig's various unpaid bills. When she stopped her financial support in 1903 – telling Craig: 'you must *finish* this *bill paying* by yourself [...] my patience is fast going.' (Terry cited in Craig, 1968: 149; original emphasis) – Craig and Shaw had to find an alternative source of income. Like Irving and other actor-managers, they approached wealthy and influential figures in London society for support, although their advances were declined due to the experimental nature of the work and its unprofitability. Among those approached was the soon-to-be Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, whose Private Secretary, Wilfred Short, responded:

[Balfour] has heard, however, from persons in whose judgement he has confidence, that the attempt to turn [*Acis and Galatea*] into an acting drama has been a doubtful success from an artistic point of view; and he is hardly in a position to give substantial aid to further attempts in the same direction. (Short letter to Shaw, 19 March 1902, Eton College Archive)

Unable to raise the required funds, Craig and Shaw disbanded the Society at the end of the *Acis and Galatea* run in March 1902. Craig wrote to a friend immediately after and explained: ‘We are forced to close the theatre. We must reopen or the whole scheme of theatre and art versus theatre and commerce gets a smack in the eye.’ (Craig letter, c. 17 March 1902, Eton College Archive) Craig was not able to reopen the Society and so failed in this attempt to create an ensemble-based art theatre.

The value of the freedom Craig experienced with the Purcell Operatic Society was reinforced by his work on Henrik Ibsen’s *The Vikings of Helgeland* at the Imperial Theatre in April 1903. Terry took over the management of the theatre earlier that year and saw it as an ideal opportunity for Craig to present his ideas to a larger, more mainstream audience. However, while he attempted to direct in the manner for which he had become accustomed the trappings of the professional theatre soon frustrated him. Terry was very much part of the established theatre in Britain and rose to prominence in keeping with the conventions of her time, meaning that she spent years as an apprentice performing in smaller, walk-on roles under prominent actors such as Charles Kean before gradually playing larger, ‘star’ roles. As such, she was inculcated with an understanding of the established system and the importance of making plays that were agreeable and non-confrontational to assembled audiences to ensure that they were commercially successful. She had already warned Craig in 1902 that the only way to fund productions such as those he staged with the Purcell Operatic Society was with long runs, rather than the ‘one-week stands’ for which he opted (Craig, 1968: 144).

Although Terry admired Craig’s work with the Society, she was unwilling to risk her own name and money on similarly experimental work at the Imperial, and she

questioned his choices and his direction throughout the rehearsals for *The Vikings*. At a time when the actor wielded authority over the burgeoning stage director, the supporting cast, which was comprised of established members of the profession and future ‘stars’ such as Oscar Asche and Holman Clark, felt its allegiance lay with Terry and challenged Craig consistently (ibid: 170). This cast’s experience of working in the commercial theatre had trained it to prioritise individual personality in a way that was antipodal to Craig’s aspirations for visual unity and an ensemble performance. Shaw, who wrote the musical score for the production, explained how

all through rehearsals the actors made difficulties. The light was the chief cause of trouble. They complained bitterly that the audience could not see them [...] in those far-off times actors were not educated up to such a pitch of realism and self-sacrifice, and thought that their facial expressions were the most important thing in the play. (Shaw, 1929: 35)

Such protests undermined Craig’s position and created an atmosphere of suspicion and doubt, which prevented him from establishing the level of artistic control that he enjoyed with the Purcell Operatic Society and producing the play as he wished. Craig agreed with Shaw’s assessment of the rehearsal process, making clear his frustration at the lack of discipline in his cast:

My feelings about the *Vikings* are just yours. But I feel convinced that no *Vikings* can be done unless each character will listen to the stage manager and hear what character he is to play [...] You did the *Vikings* – and I did the *Vikings* – and the rest were doing jokes – and never got rid of their skins, much less into any others. (Craig cited in Craig, 1968: 171)

The production received mixed reviews and many of the critics commented negatively on Terry’s performance, arguing that it was a stark contrast from the style of acting that people expected from her: ‘She looks every part a Viking’s bride, but we do not think she is at her best as a virago. Her womanly wiles, her rippling laughter, her sense of fun have no proper chance of employment.’ (*The Times*, 16 April 1903) The *Manchester*

Guardian made similar comments, noting that she appeared ‘visibly distressed’ in some scenes and only succeeded in the performance when she was able to demonstrate ‘her spacious Elizabethan manner, her mobile expression and quick interpretative gesture’ (*Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1903). As Terry feared, the experimental nature of Craig’s work alienated her critics and audience. The reviews also criticised Craig’s failed attempt to achieve the unified impression that proved artistically successful with the Purcell Operatic Society. The critic from *The Daily Telegraph*, for example, accused Craig of combining ‘stirring action and virile passion with a baffling and irritating air of mystery and unreality’, which resulted in an ‘obvious discord between the story told on the stage, and the atmosphere of the mise-en-scene’ (*The Daily Telegraph*, 16 April 1903). Craig blamed this failure on the fact that he was forced continually to fight for artistic control. Terry withdrew the production after just three weeks, replacing it with *Much Ado About Nothing*. Again, Craig directed the production, but, with barely two weeks to stage and rehearse it, he was deeply unhappy with the results. (Craig, 1968: 174)

Perhaps naively, Craig believed that the critical and artistic success of the Purcell Operatic Society productions would encourage theatre managers to invite him to develop new projects. However, he soon realised that his confidence was misplaced and that the emphasis placed on financial returns meant that few theatre managers were willing to risk investing in his experimental work and he became increasingly disillusioned with the British theatre. The emphasis placed on commerce and entertainment suffocated him, and he was outraged and saddened by the field’s inability to support his and other artists’ experiments in theatre art:

I am perhaps more miserable than ever before in my life because I realize the hopeless vanity and folly of [Britain’s] stage, the utter stupidity of

every one connected with the Arts in England, the death-like complaisancy [sic] with which London thinks it is active and intelligent about these matters, the idiocy of the Press which calls every courageous attempt to revive life and art “eccentric,” that lack of comradeship in London [...] The English actors have no chance; their system of management is bad: they get no chance of study or experience, and dare not rebel or they would lose their bread and butter; so they laugh their life away as best they can, that is to say, grimly. (Craig, 1911: 134)

As is clear from this statement, Craig not only believed that the whole system of theatre in Britain had been corrupted by the need to make money, but also that there was little chance of changing this system. Finding it impossible to work in this climate, he turned his back on the British stage in 1904 and went into self-imposed exile.

Craig and the Actors of the Moscow Art Theatre

Craig travelled initially to Germany after his departure from Britain, and spent the four years prior to his engagement at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1908 planning numerous projects and productions. However, the majority of these projects, which included plans for him to direct the Deutsches Theater, failed to come to fruition, largely due to disputes regarding Craig’s level of artistic control (Innes, 1998: 110). Between 1904 and 1908 he worked on only two productions: *Venice Preserved* for Otto Brahm’s Lessing Theater in October 1904 and *Rosmersholm* for Eleanora Duse at the Teatro della Pergola in December 1906. Given the fact that Craig worked primarily as a designer on the productions as opposed to a director, it is not necessary to analyse them here, although it is useful to note that both resulted in frustration for Craig, who, again, felt his authority was undermined.¹⁶

The prospect of working at the Moscow Art Theatre was extremely enticing in the light of these continued power struggles. Having been coerced into inviting Craig by Isadora

Duncan, Stanislavsky proposed that he stage *Hamlet* as the first in a series of collaborations with the Art Theatre, and pledged to give him ultimate authority on the production (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 286). True to his word, Stanislavsky noted soon after Craig's arrival in October 1908 that 'the entire theatre has been placed at his disposal, and I myself, as his closest assistant, have put myself entirely at his command, and I am proud of it' (Stanislavsky cited in Bablet, 1966: 148). Craig corroborated this point in June 1909, writing to a friend:

The entire company, taking their lead from the manager, do *everything* I say. It may be a dream, dear old chap, but by God it's like Heaven after years of Hell [...] Again (for it must fade, it can't be real), it may all be a dream. It is nearer those divine Purcell days than anything I have experienced, though I am a *guest* in this case, and receive a nice salary into the bargain. (Craig cited in Senelick, 1982: 86; original emphasis)

His palpable enthusiasm reveals his belief that he had found once again the ideal working environment to create his Art of the Theatre, and, further, it was one that was free from the economic struggles faced at the Purcell Operatic Society.

Craig's experience at the Moscow Art Theatre strengthened his belief in the importance of ensemble practice, training and permanency, while Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko showed his ideals were achievable. 'Constantin Stanislavsky [sic],' he told readers of *The Mask*, 'has achieved the impossible: he has successfully established a non-commercial theatre' (Craig, 1911: 133). Likewise, Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko had founded a permanent, unified and committed group of actors, who trained and experimented together, followed closely the instructions of its co-directors, and who took their craft seriously as an art form, dedicating time to its development.

These actors were

one and all intelligent about their work, working continuously new plays each day, new ideas each minute [...] They give hundreds of rehearsals to a play, they change and recharge a scene until it balances to their thought:

they rehearse and rehearse and rehearse, inventing detail upon detail with consummate care and patience and always with vivid intelligence – Russian intelligence.

Seriousness, character, these two qualities will guide the Moscow Art Theatre to unending success in Europe or elsewhere. (ibid: 132-3)

Although these aims and ideals seemed to dovetail, and the conditions of work seemed optimal, this sense of optimism was soon replaced by resentment and boredom. There was a fundamental discrepancy in the working habits of Craig and the Art Theatre, and, from the outset, the former's rather erratic behaviour and demands clashed with the pace, methodology and atmosphere of the Moscow theatre. For example, Craig was frustrated by the thirty-nine months spent developing and rehearsing the production. Although he prized such long-running rehearsals when at the Purcell Operatic Society, he had altered his view by 1909, arguing that 'there must be no *pause* between the thought and the act. For a "pause" spoils all my work. Here in Moscow,' he continued, 'there is too long a pause between my thought and the acts of the subordinates [...] the thing grows cold.' (ibid, 1908-10: 117; original emphasis) Believing that the time spent succeeded only in stifling the original artistic impulse, he proposed an alternative: 'Three years makes a work cold. *Three hours* is nearer the ideal. The work would come alive by these means.' (ibid, 1910-11: 325; original emphasis) The ability to work quickly and spontaneously in this way was, after all, one of the main benefits of a long-standing company of actors that were attuned to each other and shared the same ideals.

Craig also acknowledged how his staging methods and use of symbolism were in stark contrast to the psychological realism for which the Moscow Art Theatre had become renowned. His Daybook is filled with critiques of realism written directly after he watched Art Theatre productions such as *Three Sisters* and *An Enemy of the People*. He damned realism's emphasis on physicality in these critiques, as well as its claim to

reveal the soul: ‘What folly – what cruelty – in humanity to demand of the Body the revelation of its enemy [...] What does the body know of the soul?’ (ibid, 1908-10: 10-1) He likewise criticised the Art Theatre’s attempts to stage symbolist works such as Leonid Andreyev’s *Life of Man*, noting condescendingly that the company is ‘admirable when it deals in Realism but which fails altogether when it indulges in attempts to avoid Realism. Then it becomes only clever and never inspired. Inspiration and vision are things denied to the Art Theatre, Moscow.’ (ibid: 6) Yet, rather than work closely with the company in order to bridge this gap of ideas and practice, Craig isolated himself in the small workshop that he was assigned at the Art Theatre. He rarely left this workshop and so, with the exception of his small group of assistants and the Theatre’s directors, he spent hardly any time with the rest of the company.

The discrepancy between Craig and the Art Theatre was made most apparent in his working relationship with the actors, which was particularly problematic. Although he described the company as ‘the best set of actors upon the European stage’ (ibid, 1911: 135), he excluded them from his rehearsal process almost entirely and showed little interest in their work or their contribution to the production, as is examined in detail below.¹⁷ At the same time, the actors were deeply suspicious of his work. The resulting tension highlights a fundamental discrepancy between Craig’s definition of ensemble and that adopted by the Art Theatre, as well as the former’s inability to put his theories of ensemble work into practice.

The lack of attention paid to the actors by Craig when working on *Hamlet* was in stark contrast to that paid to the actors who worked on his previous projects in Britain. His earlier insistence on remaining in close contact with the actors at all times, having full

control of the rehearsals and dictating each movement on the stage, even when met with animosity, was replaced by a certain aloofness. Craig did not direct the rehearsals at the Moscow Art Theatre himself and attended only a small handful over the course of the three-year rehearsal process. Instead, he agreed for Stanislavsky and Leopold Sulerzhitsky, Stanislavsky's friend and assistant director, to work with the actors and lead the rehearsals, following closely Craig's plans and designs. Edward Anthony Craig believed that his father's unprecedented agreement to relinquish control was due to the friendly and trusting working relations established between the English and the Russian parties, where Craig had complete faith that Stanislavsky would follow his instructions to the letter (Craig, 1968: 256). However, this is highly debatable given the difference in their methods, as shown below. Of course, there was also the issue of a language barrier: Craig's lack of Russian meant that he could not speak to the actors directly, and even his conversations with Stanislavsky had to be mediated by translators. Craig's insistence on working predominantly from his new home at the Arena Goldoni in Florence was another factor, as he only visited Moscow sporadically and was absent for the majority of the production process.

While these factors were important, the change in Craig's method of working should also be considered in the context of his changing and often contradictory attitude to actors and their role in productions. It is important to note that he published 'The Actor and the Über-marionette' seven months before he began working on *Hamlet*, and so had already articulated publicly his belief in the need to replace actors with 'creatures' who were easily manipulated and controlled by the director. He made similar comments in his Daybook in 1909 once rehearsals began, explaining that he wished 'to remove *the Actor* with his *Personality* but to leave *the chorus of masked figures*'

(Craig, 1908-10: 77; original emphasis). In short, he had moved beyond the actor, whose role in the Art of the Theatre was limited.

The frustrations voiced in the 1908 essay and in his later comments shaped Craig's work in Moscow, where he focused on his goal of creating an architectural, three-dimensional kinetic theatre that viewed the actors as one of a number of equally important elements. Indeed, he spent the vast majority of his time developing staging devices such as the large, moveable, white screens that were the backbone of his scenic design, and treated actors much like props to be moved around the stage. For example, he blocked the actors' movements for Stanislavsky, Sulerzhitsky and Konstantin Mardzhanov, Stanislavsky's aide, 'by means of wooden figurines he had already cut out,' where he 'would perform a given scene (moving them with a long stick). ... We, that is, Stanislavsky, Sulerzhitsky and I, were supposed to grasp all this, master it and then prepare the actors along these lines for the performance.' (Mardzhanov cited in Senelick, 1982: 101)

Craig simultaneously demanded that the actors used their imaginations to develop their own characters, particularly those playing leading roles such as Vasily Kachalov as Hamlet. In April 1910, in one of his few addresses to the company, he told them 'that the actor has not only to have ideas but has to give them shape, voice and motion, in that he has actually the lion's share of the responsibility.' (Craig, 1910-11: 17) Further, he warned the actors not to become too '*thinkative* – to give their thoughts more freedom' (*ibid*; original emphasis). Once again, Craig was deriding the actor as impersonator and calling, instead, for the Art Theatre actors to create new characters that surpassed representations of everyday life. 'I will not give instructions all the time.

I give full freedom to the artist,' he told the actors, 'You have to unearth your own material' (Craig cited in Senelick: 105). Craig argued that it was for this reason that he kept his instructions for the production deliberately vague, ensuring that it had the space to '*grow*' (Craig, 1910-11: 30; original emphasis). However, he soon concluded that the actors were either unwilling or unable to use their imaginations in this way, largely because 'the stage-managers here have taught [them] to rely less on themselves than on the stage management.' He continued: 'The actors lack initiative – I dislike this although I am in favour of utter subordination. Only an Über-marionette can rise to utter subordination' (*ibid*: 17). Believing the actors to be incapable of being the creators that he sought, Craig turned his back on them.

For their own part, the majority of the actors were deeply suspicious of Craig and his methods. Senelick argues that his engagement as both designer and director caused anxiety and discontent, and that the actors 'fear that Craig's whole approach is contrary both to the MAT traditions and to Stanislavsky's newly developed system.' (Senelick, 1982: 82) His behaviour and his voluntary isolation from the company did little to ease these fears. He spent little time with the actors in either a work or social capacity – Kachalov and Alisa Koonen were among the few exceptions – and so was practically a stranger to them. His insistence on remaining in his workshop when in Moscow, into which the company were forbidden entry, and his hermit-like behaviour perpetuated this suspicion and ill feeling. Konstantin Khokhlov, Horatio in the production, exclaimed:

What is he cooking up there? A few persons tried to steal in, reconnoitre, peep through the keyhole. But Craig was shuffling his dolls and screens in there and had absolutely no interest in those who had to act in the production and incarnate his concepts. He worked in total isolation from us, the actors, and behaved like a conspirator. (Khokhlov cited in *ibid*: 103)

Another actor, Serafima Birman, despaired of Craig's unwillingness to deal with the actors directly or to give clear directions regarding his aims: 'Perhaps we didn't understand Gordon Craig because he never talked to us personally... We had to deal with his demands and not with his dreams.' (Birman cited in *ibid*) Stanislavsky also critiqued Craig's prolonged absences and his deliberate obliqueness, saying that his 'contradictions were often confusing and prevented us from understanding his fundamental artistic goals and, in particular, his demands on the actor' (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 288).

Craig's decision to leave Stanislavsky to follow his deliberately vague instructions rather than direct the actors himself left a space for the production to progress in ways that did not correspond fully to his original design. This was, of course, inevitable, given the fact that Craig and Stanislavsky occupied different positions in the field of theatre and so worked in different ways and for different reasons. Again, the 'how' and 'why' of each director's work was specific to his position. Stanislavsky was aware of this distinction and the fact that Craig's presence would challenge the Art Theatre's actors, which was, after all, why he invited the director. Koonen quotes Stanislavsky's explanation: 'We need Craig – he is a rousing start, he forces us to think, argue, get excited. He will bring 'the water of Life' to our art, which, without these external jolts, might grow stale and antiquated.' (Koonen cited in Senelick, 1982: 82) He felt that the actors had become complacent and comfortable in the work they were creating, while he was the first to acknowledge his own limitations and the fact that Craig was better placed to introduce the company to an entirely new way of creating theatre.

Craig also acknowledged the difference in their approaches, noting retrospectively: ‘All the time we were talking, Stanislavsky was thinking in terms of Chekhov, I was thinking in terms of Shakespeare, and those are the two opposite poles.’ (Craig, 1960: 4) Indeed, Craig placed himself and Stanislavsky in antithetical positions when writing about the *Hamlet* production, casting himself as the pure unspoilt artist and Stanislavsky as an amateur, bureaucratic businessman. He blamed all of the production’s problems on Stanislavsky, claiming, with his usual egotism and failure to appreciate the work of others, ‘I was a professional, born of the stage, and Stanislavsky was an amateur. But I was unaware of this defect in S: [I] expected him to pick up the cue, but he seemed unable to.’ (ibid, 1910-11: 199) He continued to mock Stanislavsky in this way and speak of him as inferior for the rest of his life.¹⁸ When it came to working with actors, Craig described Stanislavsky’s technique as follows: ‘Stanislavsky’s approach is with his hands – his left hand closes tight, he inserts a finger into it and then pretends to hammer it in with his tight palm. Bang, bang, bang.’ (ibid, 1910-11: 27) Of course, Craig’s rather crude description is far from accurate, yet it does reveal his negative perception of the Russian director’s working practice, which raises the question again of why he chose not to direct the rehearsals himself.

In Craig’s absence, Stanislavsky tried to realise his plans, many of which were unachievable, and it was left for him to find alternatives where necessary, which he did in keeping with his own perceptions. Thus, the choices he made differed from those Craig would have made. Tired by the ongoing artistic disputes that arose from these choices, as well as financial disputes and Craig’s constant requests for money, Stanislavsky took on the sole responsibility of staging *Hamlet* in February 1911, limiting Craig’s contribution to matters of design (Senelick, 1982: 129). Stanislavsky’s

decision was also influenced by the growing disinterestedness of Craig, who, from as early as September 1909, believed he had moved beyond the work of the Art Theatre. These feelings intensified in the final year of rehearsals, when he wrote the production off altogether, refusing to attend all but the final rehearsal: ‘why see too often what cannot be corrected and are the faults of conceit’ (Craig, 1910-11: 321). Clearly, Stanislavsky was faced with an impossible task. He had to realise ideals that had not been articulated fully and work with a co-director who focused more on making financial demands than supporting the artistic work, while, at the same time, trying to articulate his own burgeoning theory of acting. Bablet is correcting in asking: ‘In such circumstances, how could the acting be expected to come up to Craig’s standards?’ (Bablet, 1966: 153)

Although Craig was initially positive about the production when it opened in January 1912, calling it an ‘overwhelming success and a fine performance, too, by the actors’, he later accused Stanislavsky of distorting his plans (Craig, 1911-14: 7). He added the following note under a woodcut of one of his envisioned scenes from *Hamlet*: ‘Moscow and Stanislavsky failing to reproduce these [...] Stanislavsky failed to understand’ (*ibid*, 1910-11: 31). Craig was particularly disappointed by the failure to create a kinetic theatre, which was made impossible by the decision to secure the white, moveable screens with heavy weights after one collapsed in rehearsal. These weights necessitated the inclusion of breaks between scenes in order to move the screens into new positions. While Craig blamed Stanislavsky for this incident and for all of the production’s other failures, the latter responded humbly, taking responsibility and explaining that, while he tried everything he could, Craig’s ideals were unattainable at that time:

I had been unable to convey to [the actors] what I felt was new. In searching for it we carried out many experiments [...] [Craig] liked none of them. He protested on the one hand against the conventions which were redolent of normal theatre and, on the other hand, would not accept the humdrum naturalness and simplicity that took away the poetry. Craig, like me, wanted perfection, an ideal, i.e. a simple, profound, inspiring, artistic, beautiful expression of human feeling. I could not give it to him. (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 296)

Once again, Craig failed to achieve his desired unity and harmony onstage. However, unlike his previous experiences, it was not an interfering author or questioning actors who prevented this unity, but Craig's own behaviour. This behaviour reveals that although he wanted to establish a permanent group of actors, it was not an ensemble in the Stanislavskian sense of the word, that is, a 'tight-knit' ensemble working as a collective in dialogue with Stanislavsky as the director (*ibid*: 198). Rather, Craig was seeking to reproduce Irving's actor-manager system, replacing the actor-dictator with the director-dictator, which, again, was a theatre of individualism. His artistic success at the Purcell Operatic Society corroborates this claim, where the freedom he felt came from working with inexperienced amateurs who were unlikely to offer their opinions on creative matters. What he needed, therefore, was another group of amateurs willing to follow his instructions. In short, he needed a school of his own, where he could train students in his methods and so create a group of dedicated followers, or, rather, obedient children.

The School for the Art of the Theatre

At the heart of Craig's plans for a school was the belief that the unified, committed and long-standing group was the ideal space for a director, actor, or artist to develop. The time, space and continuity that came with such a group allowed a new form of theatre to emerge organically:

They say Molière was not a good actor; – what they mean I do not know: that Shakespeare was not a great actor, acted only in minor parts:... maybe. These two were in a theatre – each in ONE theatre only:... did not pop from one to another company; gave time and nature a chance to develop – grew like plants – flowered – bore fruit... (Craig, 1923: 13; original emphasis).

It was with this emphasis on organic growth and the gradual flowering of an artist that he founded his School for the Art of Theatre at his Arena Goldoni in Florence in 1913. Although the school closed after just one year due to the oncoming First World War, it helped Craig to achieve his ideal theatre.

Craig first attempted to establish a school ten years earlier, when he tried to capitalise on the critical success of his Purcell Operatic Society and his own positive experience of work with the group of amateur actors. The school, which was to be called the London School for Theatrical Art, would provide a more formal and permanent setting for him to continue training amateurs, who would become a company performing in his signature style. *The Pall Mall Gazette* noted: ‘His purpose is to prepare [the students] in all that is necessary for their development, and then to provide them with opportunities to exhibit their powers under his direction.’ (*The Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 February 1904) However, Craig had to abandon these plans due to a lack of interest – Maud Douie, a former member of the Purcell Operatic Society, was the only applicant for the school (Rood, 1983: 2).

While many of Craig’s 1904 plans remained central to his school scheme, including a curriculum that reflected his commitment to the Art of the Theatre, the emphasis shifted as a result of his time in Moscow. From approximately 1909, he showed a growing interest in the collaboration that took place within a permanent company and began to formulate ways to encourage a greater sense of communality between members of his

envisioned school. Of course, Craig was loath to acknowledge any influence that Stanislavsky may have had on him given their dispute over *Hamlet* and Craig's insistence on treating him as inferior. However, it is possible to discern traces of this influence from his Daybooks of the period. The vast majority of the notes and ideas in these books concerning his school and plans to form a closely-knit group were written in Moscow while Craig was working with Stanislavsky, indicating that he was inspired by his experiences at the Art Theatre, its atmosphere and his conversations with Stanislavsky and Sulerzhitsky, among others.

In May 1909, for example, Craig noted a conversation he shared with Sulerzhitsky regarding the work of actors, where the latter stated that they 'must be taught to learn, to know by being taught to search.' On the following pages of the book he made his first direct statement about the need for a school that was cut off from the professional stage: 'Let 100 [sic] well equipped actors leave the stage and together form a college for the study of the art in its purest and most fruitful state and the cornerstone of the New Theatre is laid in less than 10 [sic] years time' (Craig, 1908-10: 115). One month later, and still in Moscow, Craig stated again the urgent need to establish 'a college – a university – so that future masters (our children and their children) can get a chance to train – they will discover the lost art, and *then* the future is brighter for all children' (ibid: 131; original emphasis).

Likewise, the Daybooks contain Craig's thoughts on the benefits of communal learning and teaching. In a short essay written in Moscow titled 'Caravans and the Stage', he proposed sending students out to travel as a group in caravans for months at a time, touring the country, developing new work and using the time to grow together and

learn from each other in an environment that was ‘so *free*, so healthy, incessantly *moving* over the face of the globe, but not trotting, not tearing, a round of ‘on we go’’ (ibid, 1910-11: 11; original emphasis). He returned to the idea a year later in 1911, explaining that the students sent out would ‘travel and live in the caravans, cook their own food, make their own plays and act them, make their own beds and sleep in them [...] During spare hours they prepare a journal archiving their work and adventures.’ (ibid: 207) The caravan scheme proposed by Craig, and its aim to teach students to live and work together away from the professional stage, shared similarities with the rural retreats undertaken by Stanislavsky’s company. Stanislavsky noted that on the retreat to Pushkino prior to the opening of the Art Theatre ‘we had to do the cleaning and tidying ourselves, actors, directors, members of the administration, in turn’ and how completing such work together helped the company bond: ‘Gradually, as they got to know each other and work together, everything was ironed out and secure relationships were established.’ (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 164-5) It is possible Craig heard of this retreat while in Moscow and it shaped his own scheme.

Stanislavsky’s influence on Craig’s plans for a school is also discernable in the latter’s published works. In his essay ‘The Second Dialogue’, written in 1910, Craig examines the Art Theatre, revealing his extensive knowledge of the company, which he renames the Constan Theatre after Stanislavsky. He describes in detail the four central tiers of its organisational structure – directors; established actors; junior or supporting actors; and young, student actors – and celebrates the emphasis it placed on constant and communal study:

Yes, their theatre is a school. They are in the theatre from morning till night all year round [...] In Constan the place is crowded all day and night, and if there is a rehearsal, the students are there to witness it; and not giggling and playing the fool, but watching every movement and listening

to every word [...] They are all students. There are the two directors to begin with (the third director occupies himself only with affairs); and these two directors are as much students as any one else. (Craig, 1911: 199-200)

Judging by this description, the Art Theatre came close to Craig's ideal theatre as a space of constant learning and experimentation, where the actors were well disciplined and committed to the work. However, he argued that for it to be able to re-discover the Art of the Theatre, it had to close for a minimum period of five years in order to 'spend that time in making nothing but experiments' and so 'have more time for the pursuit of the Ideal' (ibid: 221-2). He argued that it was not possible to create true art while having to satisfy public demand, and the only way to be free from the constraints of the box office was to exclude oneself from it altogether.

Craig managed to achieve this, albeit briefly, at his School for the Art of the Theatre, which he founded thanks largely to the financial support of British arts patron Lord Howard de Walden, who donated £5,000 to the cause. He modelled his school on the example set by the Moscow Art Theatre in the sense that he wanted it to be 'alive' and in a state of continual evolution, where the students were always searching and learning. He was consistent in his use of metaphors that connoted life, energy and vitality whenever he discussed his school, calling it 'an engine, an organism' that exercises a 'living influence on the Art of the present' (Craig cited in Rood, 1983: 5). His choice of title for the school's manifesto, *A Living Theatre*, is indicative of its emphasis on life and continual development, and its intention to 'make [the theatre's] pulse beat faster and more rhythmically and more vigorously' (Craig, 1913b: 43). It was for this reason that Craig shut his school off from the commercial stage, arguing that such seclusion was necessary to encourage a greater level of commitment, focus and, thus, experimentation from the students. Likewise, he chose to open the school in

Florence rather than London due to the latter's tendency to 'weave around [the enthusiast], ever so gently, cloud upon cloud, fold upon fold of heavy material and atmospheric grey; and gradually the keen grasp slackens, activity becomes passivity and the mesmerism is complete.' (*ibid*: 12)

Craig went further than simply distancing his students from the commercial stage and separated them from everyday life and its distractions altogether. John Nicholson, one of Craig's students, described the school's microcosmic existence and how the building itself created an important physical separation:

The whole work that is going on is shut off from the outside world, the beautiful curves of the Arena not only serving their purpose of "existing beautifully", but practically shutting out all the sound, and enfolding us [in] a semi-circle of quietude [...] It is an interesting and absorbing experience. Once having started to learn in such a vivid and absorbing fashion one wonders whether one will ever want to leave School or have anything to do with anything but the Arena Goldoni and the School for the Art of the Theatre. (Nicholson in *ibid*: 26)

This isolation from the public has led Christopher Innes to draw parallels between Craig's plans and Jerzy Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium and Peter Brook's Centre for Theatre Research (Innes, 1998: 206). Indeed, Craig's school fostered a sense of monasticism, which was reinforced by the rules to which all students had to adhere. Each student was commanded to 'mind his business and be discreet, not to babble outside the School of what work is going on inside' and advised strongly that 'rather than talk of its work, methods, personalities and results, the student should wear a mask of ignorance. He will not prove the School a good one by chattering about it to outsiders, or even to friends and relations.' ('Rules' cited in Rood, 1983: 9) These and other rules established a clandestine atmosphere by enforcing discretion and confidentiality, and by encouraging the students to look inwards at all times. They also established a clear set of guidelines for the students to follow and ideals to which they

could aspire, which helped to establish unity in the group. As Ernest Marriott, another student, noted: ‘There are stricter rules in this school than is usual and yet, at the same time every pupil feels he is “one of the family”.’ (Marriott in Craig, 1913b: 46)

Discipline continued to be used by Craig as the principal means of controlling students, in much the same way as with the Purcell Operatic Society and the planned London School for Theatrical Art. He preceded his account of the school in *A Living Theatre* with a quotation from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power* to demonstrate what was expected of the students:

The most desirable thing of all, however, is, under all circumstances to have severe discipline *at the right time* [...] namely, that a good deal is demanded, that a good deal is severely exacted, that goodness, nay, excellence itself, is required as if it were normal; that praise is scanty, that leniency is non-existent; that blame is sharp, practical, and without reprieve, and has no regard to talent or antecedents. (Nietzsche cited in Craig, 1913b: 43; original emphasis)

Craig saw this type of discipline and obedience in the family unit, and he structured his school upon a strict hierarchy that placed him in the role of the father. Again, he demanded that his students, or children, accepted his authority unquestioningly and established rules to enforce it: ‘Criticism of the school or its members is not allowed, and any breach of this rule will not be lightly regarded [...] ‘Opinions’ are wanted neither inside nor outside the School.’ (‘Rules’ cited in Rood, 1983: 8-9)

Underneath Craig, the students were divided into two sub-divisions. The First Division was comprised of artists and craftspeople from a range of disciplines such as music, scenography, design, photography, and so on, who were all taught by Craig and experimented under his supervision. There were approximately ten students in this division when Craig opened the school, including Nicholson, Marriott, Dorothy Nevile

Lees, and Nino Meo. Although he did not recruit any students for the Second Division before the school closed prematurely in 1914, the idea was for it to be comprised of fee-paying students who were taught by members of the First Division. Thus, the transference of knowledge and skills took place vertically in accordance with the school's hierarchical structure.

However, the school also included a space for collaboration between students that was not present in Craig's earlier schemes and which reveals the influence of Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre. Within the First Division, each member was expected to teach 'the others something of his own particular craft, and who is himself taught something by all the others' (Craig, 1913b: 44). This emphasis on sharing expertise and learning each other's skills not only supported the creation of the Art of the Theatre, but also meant that knowledge and information was transmitted horizontally as well as vertically. As with Stanislavsky's theatre, the intention was to create a school where everybody learnt all of the time: 'Rather than a school merely for teaching persons who come in and go away, it must be a school of experiment, so that we ourselves who work in it may find out what we want to learn.' (Craig in *The Observer*, 23 June 1911) Likewise, there was a stronger advocacy of community at the school in Florence. While Craig was not able to realise his plan to send the students off to work, live and experiment together in caravans, he did encourage them to share their leisure time and gave them opportunities to do so. For example, he provided the students with a bus, which they used on Sundays to take expeditions to different parts of the Tuscan countryside (Bablet, 1966: 167). By creating a strong community within the school in this way, the students would not need to socialise with anyone external to it, which reinforced the sense of seclusion and insularity.

The aspects of Craig's school noted above highlight its similarities to Shevtsova's description of the Russian 'theatre-home'. The latter, established at the Moscow Art Theatre by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, was based upon 'common artistic goals and perceptions [...] that would require the sustained care and loyalty of its members' (Shevtsova, 2004: 5). Craig had been seeking a theatre-home, and a theatre family, since the beginning of the 1900s and his work with the Purcell Operatic Society, although he did not use this terminology at the time. His struggles at the Moscow Art Theatre was a symptom of his growing acknowledgement of the importance of a theatre-home and his cuckoo-like intrusion on a home that was not his own. He explained retrospectively: 'It is clear that I felt that I needed *my own craftsmen* with me – men who could speak English and were to some extent students of what I had done since 1900 and what I usually required of them when at work on a stage.' (Craig, n.d. b: 4; original emphasis) He finally found his theatre family and his theatre-home with the School for the Art of the Theatre, however, like so many families across Europe, it was cut short by the tragedy of war.

The school closed on 5 August 1914. By this time many of Craig's students had left Florence to enlist and fight in the army, including Marriott and Neo, both of whom were killed in action (*ibid*, 1911-14: 213). Craig's decision to close the school was also dictated by economic necessity. On the outbreak of war de Walden withdrew his funding for the school, claiming: 'I have no money myself being now in a position where little is needed [...] I will endeavour to do what I can to help you, but Heaven knows how destitute we shall be if this little trouble continues for some years' (de Walden cited in Craig, 1968: 295). Craig met this decision with his usual animosity and

sense of injustice, and complained how de Walden ‘ungenerously took away all help and left me with Arena rent on my hands [...] £400 a year to me could not have hurt him.’ (Craig, 1911-14: 75)

The School for the Art of the Theatre was Craig’s last substantial attempt to create an ensemble company and a theatre-home. Following its closure, he focused on articulating his theories on the theatre in numerous books, articles and essays. His failure to create an ensemble theatre in Britain and to oppose successfully the established commercial system, and his inability to survive in the field without playing by the rules of the game (as seen by his self-imposed exile from it), indicates the strength of these rules and conventions. The inability to change them meant that Craig could only ever provide Britain with brief, restricted examples of ensemble practice and a hypothetical model of an ensemble company. However, this hypothetical model and his writings on the subject proved to be incredibly influential and were taken on by both his contemporaries and those directors that followed him. Barker, for example, acknowledged Craig’s influence on his own practice, and declared publicly ‘I owe him (we all should) a great debt of gratitude. I gladly acknowledge it.’ (Barker in *Daily Mail*, 26 September 1912) Craig not only anticipated many of Barker’s own innovations, particularly with regard to Shakespeare playing, but he also introduced him indirectly to Stanislavsky’s theories, as is examined in the following chapter. Likewise, directors such as Peter Brook and Peter Hall acknowledged the importance of Craig’s theories in shaping their own ideas about the theatre and the ensemble, as is seen in Chapter Five of this thesis. As a result, Craig continued to exert an influence on the British theatre throughout the twentieth century (albeit indirectly), where he was formative in establishing ensemble practice as an ideal in the country.

Chapter Two

The ensemble as a model of collectivism: Harley Granville Barker, 1904–1914

It is because plays are produced there when they are ready – are born, not aborted as Stanislavsky [sic] says – that they are living things, that their power over the audiences (such audiences sitting to such fare) is the amazing power of interpreted life.

It is because that Moscow stage is not an arena where some “leading man” carries all before him, not a hothouse where the “leading lady” seduces an excited public, that it is not a Russian play thing, but a power in Russia and a part of Russia’s true power in the world. (Barker, 1917: 661)

It is, perhaps, ironic that Edward Gordon Craig was the only British director to have worked alongside Konstantin Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre, given the fact that Harley Granville Barker’s artistic practice and ideals as an actor, director and playwright were more closely attuned to those of the Russian director. While Craig stripped away the individuality of the actor in order to create visual harmony on the stage, both Stanislavsky and Barker believed that the actor, and her or his personality, was vital to the theatre-making process. The latter argued that ‘it is the power of the actor [...] to elucidate the character in the terms of his personality that gives the thing that apparent spontaneity of life which is the drama’s particular virtue.’ (Barker, 1923: 62)

Both men also believed that the director should work in relation to the actor as a collaborator, facilitator or, to adopt Stanislavsky’s metaphor, a midwife who ‘guides the rightness of the birth in the right direction’ (Stanislavsky cited in Innes and Shevtsova, 2013: 64). Barker wanted his rehearsals to be journeys of discovery shared between him, in the role of the director, and the actors, who were given the space and freedom to develop their own performances. It was for this reason that he wanted to create a permanent ensemble company performing in repertory, which would provide

the actors with the security of belonging to a group bound together by a common spirit while also ensuring variety in the roles performed. While Barker's attempts to reform the stage were located within the wider Independent Theatre movement that sought to effect change in the British theatre, he distinguished himself from this multifaceted movement by emphasising the art of acting. He argued that a new form of theatre and a new method of acting had to be developed to meet the demands placed on the actor by the emerging, socially reflexive drama of Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Anton Chekhov, and others. Barker believed the actor must not be subordinated to the dramatic text 'because, for all the dramatist's importance, acting is not only the original art of the theatre, it remains its peculiar foundation' (Barker, 1922: xi). Rather, the art of writing and the art of acting had to develop together and in dialogue with each other.

Again, there are parallels to be drawn between Barker's plans for a permanent ensemble company and the theatre-home created by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko at the Moscow Art Theatre. Barker used this same metaphor to describe his ideal theatre, explaining that a 'civilised man needs a home; a sensitive nature needs change. To complete the civilisation of the drama homes are needed for it; for its sensitive interpretation there must be constant change.' (*ibid*, 1909: 491) He spent a decade trying to create a theatre-home for himself in Britain, first in his path-breaking seasons at the Court Theatre with John Eugene Vedrenne between 1904 and 1907, and on four subsequent occasions, including his intermittent season of Shakespeare productions at the Savoy Theatre between 1912 and 1914.¹⁹ Although each attempt ended in failure for Barker, he succeeded in introducing the notion of ensemble practice to small pockets of the London and British theatre scene, as is argued below. As a result, he reduced the domination of the 'star' system, albeit only fractionally. This was

particularly true with his seasons at the Court Theatre and the Savoy, which are the focus of this chapter.

Barker experienced Stanislavsky's theatre-home briefly when he travelled to Moscow in 1914 to see the Art Theatre at work. During his week-long visit he attended performances of *The Cherry Orchard* and *Three Sisters*, as well as Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire*, Goldoni's *La Locandiera* and *L'Oiseau Bleu* by Maurice Maeterlinck, and spent time discussing rehearsal techniques and actor training with Stanislavsky.²⁰ The experience was revelatory for him. The conditions that Stanislavsky faced in Russia at the turn of the century were similar to those experienced by Barker and Craig in Britain, namely, a 'theatrical profession [that] was, on the one side, in the hands of barmen and in those of bureaucrats on the other.' (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 159) By 1914, Barker had resigned himself to the fact that any attempt to improve on these conditions would fail, admitting that the 'rough and tumble stage work in London had driven me not only to accept the limitations of my trade but to exaggerate them, sometimes, forgetting my dreams, almost to boast about them.' (Barker, 1917: 659) Stanislavsky, however, showed him that it was possible to achieve these 'dreams' and to create an ensemble theatre that prioritised art and the creation of life on the stage over financial profits and crowd-pleasing spectacles.

Barker was inspired by Stanislavsky's work at the Moscow Art Theatre – 'I had not believed till then that there could be perfection of achievement in the theater [sic]' (ibid) – and he adopted it as the model to which to aspire. Unlike Craig, Barker acknowledged openly Stanislavsky's influence on his work after 1914 and the debt that he owed to the Russian director. He had all but retired from practical work on the stage

by this point, and so this work consisted largely of books, articles, essays and lectures in which he theorised on the need to reform the British theatre and the importance of ensemble work. In all, he used the Moscow Art Theatre as the major point of reference and heralded it as the model to be followed.²¹ The paramount example is Barker's manifesto for the future of theatre in Britain, *The Exemplary Theatre*, in which he describes the ideal method of staging a play, stating: 'Much of what follows, indeed, was suggested to me by my memory of a talk with Stanislavsky [sic]' (*ibid*, 1922: 230). Stanislavsky confirmed to Barker the ideas that he had already begun to formulate in Britain and provided him with the conceptual tools with which to realise these ideas.

Barker's trip to Moscow was not unprecedented. Rather, it was part of a growing awareness of the Art Theatre and a growing interest in its work. Craig's notoriety meant that his engagement by the Moscow Art Theatre in 1908 aroused the attention of the more progressive sections of the British theatre press. "'Hamlet' is to be produced by Mr Gordon Craig at the Moscow Art Theatre,' *The Observer* noted, 'the one theatre in Europe which is equal to producing Europe's great play, as a play, imaginatively, and not as a gallanty show or a star-performance.' (*The Observer*, 31 December 1911) The company's stature and its ensemble principles were stated as a matter of fact here, implying either that they were common knowledge or that the unnamed journalist believed that they should be. Further, she or he stressed the distinction between the Art Theatre and the British mainstream theatre: 'It is alive enough to meet the swiftly growing demands which its efforts have created [...] It sets us on our mettle, and it makes us realise that the theatre in England at its best stands at the point where Stanislavski [sic] began ten years ago' (*ibid*).

Having acquainted its readers with the name and prestige of the Moscow Art Theatre, *The Observer* examined the company in more detail. Seven months after the *Hamlet* premiere, it published an interview with Michael Lykiardopoulos, named as secretary to Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, that celebrated the Art Theatre's 'profound influence on dramatic thought throughout Europe' and outlined its aim 'to bring art into life, and life into art.' (*The Observer*, 11 August 1912) The article acted as a comprehensive introduction to the company and provided detailed information about its repertory, the technical capabilities of the theatre, the number of actors and workers engaged, and the co-operative system upon which it was based, where the actors were all shareholders. The *Manchester Guardian* published a similar article nine months later, which used the artistic success of the Art Theatre to expose the failures of the British system: 'For rich and poor alike the theatre is an integral, vital part of public life [...] One doubts if we in England can ever attain this altitude.' (*Manchester Guardian*, 20 May 1913) It argued that the company's superiority was due to its commitment to the ensemble ideal and its rejection of the 'star' system:

[It] is run by a co-operative society of which the actors themselves are the shareholders. No member of the company receives a salary above £500 a year, and there are no "stars." A play is not produced to suit a particular actor, but each actor is fitted to the part he best can fill. For instance, one may see Kachaloff [sic] playing Hamlet one night and the next a twenty-line part in a play of Tourguénieff [sic]. The result is that internal dissensions are unknown, and the company is never broken up except by death or illness. (*ibid*)

The article's tone portrayed the Art Theatre as a utopian working environment and, like Barker, elevated it as an ideal to which British theatre artists should aspire. The presence of these and other articles in national newspapers indicates that knowledge of Stanislavsky was starting to circulate amongst certain sections of the press and to be communicated to their reading public.

Actors, writers and artists from within the British theatre also contributed to the sense of Stanislavsky's ideas being 'in the air' at the beginning of the 1910s. The Moscow Art Theatre spent the early part of 1906 performing in Europe, including brief visits to Vienna, Prague and Poland, and an extensive tour across Germany, where it performed in front of prominent figures such as Eleanora Duse, Gerhardt Hauptmann and Max Reinhardt. The success of the tour introduced Stanislavsky's ideas to the West and established for the first time the company's international reputation and influence (Benedetti, 1990: 159; Smeliansky in Senelick, 1992: 46). Critics and audiences were, for the most part, astounded by the company's ability to present truth and reality on the stage, and to create fully formed, three-dimensional characters. Jean Benedetti explains how in 'a short space of time the reputation of the Moscow Art Theatre spread throughout Europe and beyond', introducing to people a 'new way of thinking about acting and directing, a new concept of the nature of the theatre itself. It opened up a range of possibilities.' (Benedetti, 1990: 159) Although the company did not perform in Britain, the strength of this reputation reached across the continent and instigated an interest in Stanislavsky.

Aleksey Bartoshevich has already detailed this growing interest in the company and the attempts made to familiarise British audiences with its work, and so it is only necessary to restate three pertinent examples to illustrate the point (Bartoshevich in Miles, 1993: 20-8). First, prominent figures such as Herbert Beerbohm Tree, the leading actor-manager of the period, travelled to Moscow to see the company at work and report back on the experience. On return from his trip in January 1913, Tree told the Annual General Meeting of the Actors' Association that 'there was a great sense of camaraderie on the part of the actors [...] it was in every sense of the word an art

theatre' (Tree in *The Stage*, 13 February 1913). Second, producers such as Herbert Trench were given permission to replicate Stanislavsky's design and production plans. Bartoshevich argues that Trench's 1909 production *The Blue Bird* was an exact replica of Stanislavsky's 1908 *L'Oiseau Bleu* (Bartoshevich in Miles, 1993: 24), although there is no acknowledgement of the Art Theatre in its souvenir programme (Trench, 1910). Such productions gave audiences in London the opportunity to experience, albeit unknowingly, the visual aspects of an Art Theatre production. Barker and Lillah McCarthy (his first wife) planned to stage *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1913 and *The Times* reported that they 'received an intimation from the Art Theatre, Moscow, that the version, scenery, and costumes used in the Russian production will be placed at their disposal' (*The Times*, 11 August 1913). Although these plans were not fulfilled, it shows that Barker was already in contact with the Art Theatre before his trip to Moscow in the following year.

Third, and most important, there were numerous attempts to bring the company to London, with invitations coming from influential figures such as H. G. Wells, Trench and Tree. In 1911, for example, the latter announced to the audience of His Majesty's Theatre that in the following season

we may have as our guests foreign comrades of distinction, among whom I hope to include the troupe from the Art Theatre of Moscow [...] this is the truly national theatre, for it is a co-operative brotherhood of which the actors themselves are the shareholders, and it produces a dramatic art of the highest order. Small wonder, for theirs is an art which is warmed by the enthusiasm of the artists, and is watered by the tears of the people. (Tree cited in *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 July 1911)

Tree continued to pursue the company for the next two years, repeating his desire to bring it to London. However, Stanislavsky declined these and all other invitations to perform in the country, stating that 'we have no repertoire for a foreign tour [to

Britain]’ (Stanislavsky cited in Bartoshevich in Miles, 1993: 23). As a result, British audiences had to rely on secondary accounts of the Art Theatre and the artistic achievement of its ensemble, while both audiences and practitioners in cities such as Berlin, Paris and Vienna were able to experience first-hand the company at the height of its influence and see Stanislavsky’s theories in action. The long-term repercussions that this absence had on the British understanding of ensemble practice are identified and examined in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

The discovery of Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre at this time is tied closely to the growing interest in other areas of Russian culture that began in the upper echelons of British society in the 1880s. The changing diplomatic and political relations between the two countries that underpinned this growth of interest are examined in Chapter Three in order to contextualise Theodore Komisarjevsky’s position in the British theatre as a Russian émigré. It suffices to note here, as Rebecca Beasley and Philip Ross Bullock do, that the British interest in Russia was a result of the need to learn more about a country that was perceived first to be an enemy, following the Crimean War and the threat Russia posed to British-owned territories in central Asia, and then an ally, after the signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente in 1907 (Beasley and Bullock, 2013: 5).

At the turn of the twentieth century, members of the social and cultural elites of Britain were able to see the work of Russian artists from various fields. For example, new translations by Constance Garnett and Aylmer Maude made the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Aleksandr Pushkin and Anton Chekhov more readily available, while the arrival in Britain of Anna Pavlova in 1910 and Sergei Diaghilev’s

Ballets Russes in 1911 introduced London audiences to Russian ballet. These performances were met with such acclaim that the Ballets Russes were invited to perform at King George V's Coronation Gala on 26 June 1911. Other examples include: the visual arts, particularly at prominent exhibitions such as Frank Cuter's first Allied Artists' Association show in 1908 and Roger Fry's Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in October 1912; and music, including the British premieres of works such as Sergei Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No. 1* (1900) and Sergei Prokofiev's *Scherzo for Four Bassoons* (1916), as well as Fyodor Chaliapin singing *Boris Godunov* at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in June 1913.²²

It was within this context and this growing awareness of Russian culture that Barker emerged as a director and formulated his ideas about ensemble practice and his plans for a future theatre. It is highly likely, therefore, that these plans were informed by the interest in Russian theatre and art and by the ideas that were circulating at the time, namely, the notion of a theatre-home as demonstrated to continental Europe by Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre. Barker was, therefore, influenced by Stanislavsky whether consciously or subconsciously before he travelled to Moscow in 1914. However, this is not to suggest that Stanislavsky was the only influence on Barker's life and trajectory; rather, he should be considered as one of a myriad of influences. Another important influence was, of course, his position in the field of theatre in Britain, and, in particular, his membership of the Fabian Society, which shaped his plans for an ensemble company fundamentally.

The Fabian Society and Habitus

As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, the Fabian Society was part of the growing socialist movement in Britain, although it was not directed at the proletariat like other contemporary socialist groups such as Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party. Rather, from its outset, with its early meetings held in the private drawing rooms of its members, the Society was a coterie and drew its members from the upper echelons of the British society. It was composed of individuals who all possessed substantial cultural, educational, social, and, in some cases, political and economic capital. Prominent Fabians included Sidney and Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, Sydney Olivier, Annie Besant, Graham Wallas and H. G. Wells. The intention was to motivate a gradual change in the societal structure from the top down by permeating existing social institutions to which members had access as opposed to agitating the workers directly. Thus, the Society was largely reformist and the phrases 'gradualism' and 'permeation', as well as 'evolution, not revolution', became inextricably linked to Fabian principles at this time.

Barker became a Fabian in 1903 at the age of twenty-six, a year before he began his seasons at the Court Theatre with Vedrenne, and sat on its Executive Committee from 1907 until his departure from the Society in 1912, two years before he retired as a director. His decision to join the group showed his increasing social and political consciousness, as well as the influence of his friend and mentor Shaw. Barker had met Shaw at the Stage Society, which he joined in 1900 and which brought him into contact with a number of other prominent Fabians, including Frederick Whelan (the Stage Society founder), Janet Achurch, Charles Charrington, and Olivier. As Ian Britain argues, the Stage Society was formed under 'Fabian influence' and its early audiences

were composed largely of Fabians and the intellectual coterie to which they belonged (Britain, 1982: 173). There is, therefore, little doubt that Barker's membership to the Stage Society encouraged him to join the Fabian Society. The exact role Barker played in the latter is unclear due to a number of conflicting reports regarding his position in the group and the absence of detailed information of his involvement in the Society's archives.²³ Regardless, his membership is significant in that it positioned him within a group of like-minded individuals at the forefront of the socialist movement in Britain for the majority of the time he was active on the stage. The resulting constant and intimate contact with this group shaped his practical work in the theatre.

The extent to which Barker's political outlook as a member of the Fabian Society permeated his work as a playwright, and informed plays such as *The Voysey Inheritance* and *Waste*, has already been discussed at length by eminent scholars (Morgan, 1961; Salmon, 1983; Innes, 1992). However, there has been no attempt to analyse how these same political views influenced his directorial practice. As I have argued elsewhere, Barker's growing dissatisfaction with the political system in Britain existed hand-in-glove with his growing dissatisfaction with the commercial system upon which the British mainstream theatre was predicated (Burt, 2012: 307-8). Indeed, his proposed solution for what he considered to be the problems of the theatre correlated with his solution for the problems of Edwardian society. He believed that the inherent injustice and inequality of society could be reformed through the collective action of all people of good will, and so echoed the Fabian message that 'the civilised way of getting along is the way of corporate action, not individual action' (Griffith, 1993: 255). Likewise, he believed that the failures of the commercial theatre and the 'star' system could be remedied by collective action, this time in the form of a

permanent ensemble company. As such, it is vital to consider Barker's political position when analysing his work as a director.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is central to understanding the interpolation between politics and art in Barker's life, and provides the link between his political disposition as a Fabian and his artistic practice, showing how, whether consciously or not, the former influenced the latter. Bourdieu defines habitus as a system of transposable dispositions that are produced by 'the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence' that structure a person's outlook, her or his expectations, and her or his action (Bourdieu, 1992: 53). By 'class of conditions of existence' Bourdieu is referring to such formative factors as the volume and structure of capital that a person possesses, her or his family environment and upbringing, and her or his position in the field. Hence, the principles of *champ*, or field, and habitus are closely interwoven (Shevtsova, 2009: 102). Bourdieu argues that a definitive aspect of habitus is its 'capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products' (Bourdieu, 1992: 53). In short, this transposable system of dispositions generates particular cultural practices, or products, and the judgement of these and other practices. As well as structuring the generation of cultural practices, it is also structured by these practices. Habitus is, therefore, founded upon a central dialogical model, which, Maria Shevtsova explains, makes it 'a frame in terms of which people perceive and act [that] is not fixed for all time. It is acted upon by social agents.' (Shevtsova, 2009: 102)

This dialogical or relational model means that habitus is always socially constituted and thus acts as a mediation between the objective and the subjective. The habitus of an

individual agent, for example, negotiates the objective conditions of a particular field – its structure, doxa, and so on – with her or his subjective response to it, that is, how she or he takes position in the field or ‘plays the game’. A person’s habitus, which is shaped by such factors as class affiliation and economic conditions, is also structured in dialogue with both the collective habitus and the individual habitus of other social agents, and through the action and interaction of these agents. It is through this concept of habitus that Bourdieu asserts that the individual is always social and collective and that the ‘habitus is a socialized subjectivity’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126). The definition of habitus offered here is focused largely on the habitus of an individual agent. However, Shevtsova rightly argues that Bourdieu’s concept can also refer to ‘the dispositions of social agents taken as a group (thus we could speak of a group habitus) and to the dispositions incarnated in or interiorized by the presence of a field in its distinction from another field’ (Shevtsova, 2009: 103). It is the dialogue between the first and second forms of habitus – the individual and the group – that is most pertinent to this examination of Barker’s position in the Fabian Society.

Shevtsova has defined a social group as composed of individuals grouped by a commonality of interests, namely, shared values, shared perceptions and expectations, a shared ethos, and thus habitus that share a number of structural affinities – social, economic, political and cultural (*ibid*, 2014: 302). The Fabian Society was founded upon such commonalities: its members were drawn predominantly from Britain’s intellectual and cultural elites and were unified by the desire to reform society along collectivist lines, as well as a shared interest in art and literature, including Russian culture in its various forms.²⁴ The group habitus, or the shared ethos, is created by this homogeneity of the conditions of existence and is, therefore, shaped by each individual

member. At the same time, the group habitus structures the habitus of the individual members, manifesting itself not only in the shared values, but also in the practices produced by members of this group. In other words, the structuring-structured dialectic of habitus brings the latter into existence and accounts for it, as well.

Bourdieu continues, explaining that the group habitus is ‘what enables practices to be objectively harmonized outside of any strategic computation’, and that the affinity between habitus in a social group ‘is capable of generating practices that are convergent and objectively orchestrated outside of any collective “intention” or consciousness, let alone “conspiracy”.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 125) In short, the influence that the group habitus had on the individual habitus of its members meant that any two members of a said group could produce work with strong similarities without any direct intention or interaction. Here lies the significance of Barker’s membership of the Fabian Society. In the absence of a detailed explanation of this process in Bourdieu’s own writing, Shevtsova articulates the dialogical relations between the group and the individual by extrapolating from his concept of the ‘interiorization of the exterior’, emphasising again the socialized subjectivity of habitus. ‘We could argue,’ she asserts, ‘that objective conditions become subjective (personal, individual) when social agents interiorize, incorporate and embody them through their habitus *symbiotically*.’ (Shevtsova, 2009: 103; original emphasis)

Further, it is ‘the socialized subjectivity of habitus that, in the field of theatre, undergirds the choices made by its practitioners’ (*ibid*). As a member of the Fabian Society, then, Barker interiorized its group habitus through his own habitus, and

incorporated its ethos, its dispositions, and its expectations into his practice.

The size of the Fabian Society and the speed at which it expanded in the early 1900s makes any attempt to establish its group habitus problematic. Over 1,700 people joined the Society between 1904 and 1909, and it had approximately 2,462 members by 1909, 32 per cent of whom were women. This total included its 1,277 members based in or around London, 343 members based elsewhere in Britain, and members from its provincial and university societies (Pease, 1916: 139). The scale of the Society meant that it incorporated a range of heterodoxies, which often led to internal ruptures and disputes.²⁵ Having said this, there were fundamental principles shared by all members and its group habitus was in some ways established by the ‘Basis of the Fabian Society’, the declaration of intent that all individuals signed in order to gain membership. This ‘programme’, as outlined in the ‘Basis’, had at its centre a socialist disposition that incorporated plans to eliminate individual and class ownership of land and utilities, replacing it with collective ownership:

The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in Land and of the consequent individual appropriation, in the form of Rent, of the price paid for permission to use the earth [...] The Society, further, works for the transfer to the community of the administration of such industrial Capital as can conveniently be managed socially. (‘Basis’ in Pease, 1916: 201)

As is clear from this declaration, the Fabian Society rejected the ideology of individualism and its subsidiary principles of proprietary rights, *laissez-faire* and the importance of competition.

The pervasive influence of liberalism and individualism in Britain in the nineteenth century is a well-acknowledged fact, although Alan Macfarlane contests the traditional narrative that dates the gradual breakdown of closed, integrated communities and

kinship groups to the rise of capitalism and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.²⁶

In contrast, he argues that English society embraced individualism from as early as the thirteenth century, which distinguished it from other countries in Europe, including Scotland (Macfarlane, 1978). Herbert Spencer became an increasingly popular and influential proponent of individualism in the second half of the nineteenth century, publishing essays such as ‘The Proper Sphere of Government’ (1843), ‘The Social Organism’ (1860) and ‘The Man Versus the State’ (1884). In these and other essays, he developed a theory of society that came to be known as social Darwinism in the twentieth century as it used similar principles of evolution that his contemporary Charles Darwin was developing in the field of biology, albeit with significant nuances. Society, in Spencer’s view, is an organism and so developed in the same way as any other natural organism, namely, through the process of evolution, which transformed it from an ‘undeveloped mass’ into a ‘complex body of mutually dependent workers’ (Spencer, 1982: 385). In its developed and complex form, society is little more than an aggregate of autonomous individual units, and the rights of these individuals should always supersede those of any larger constituent group. ‘The corporate life,’ Spencer argues, ‘must here be subservient to the lives of the parts, instead of the lives of the parts being subservient to the corporate life.’ (*ibid*: 397)

It is the innate competition between these individual units and the struggle for survival that improves society and propels it forward, where weaker or less able members are bypassed and eventually die out, leaving a stronger, fitter social organism. The ‘survival of the fittest’ – the Spencerian phrase often attributed mistakenly to Darwin – is the natural process by which society evolves and develops (*ibid*: 109). Spencer condemned any attempt made by the State to intervene in this process such as the

creation of legislations that ensured the sustenance of the poor, the infirm and the unemployed. These legislations served only as a hindrance to society's progress:

Men who are so sympathetic that they cannot let the struggle for existence bring on the unworthy the sufferings consequent on their incapacity or misconduct, are so unsympathetic that they can, deliberately, make the struggle for existence harder for the worthy, and inflict on them and their children artificial evils in addition to the natural evils they have to bear! (ibid: 113-4)

Spencer's proclamation that one should let nature take its course without interference, a clear demonstration of the *laissez-faire* sentiment, underpinned his theories and his belief that the State posed a major threat to individual liberty, a belief that he articulated most clearly in 'The Man Versus the State'.

While Spencer taught of a necessary struggle between the State and the individual, the Fabian Society, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb in particular, argued that co-operation could rule in society, with each individual occupying her or his place and working together for the good of the group (Beilharz and Nyland, 1998: 13). Sidney Webb used Spencer's ideas as the starting point for his own theory of society's evolutionary process, although he believed it would result in a socialist as opposed to an individualist state (Webb, 1890: 4-10). Further, he rejected Spencer's definition of society as merely the aggregate of its autonomous individual units, and so rejected his belief that society is of secondary importance to the individual, claiming:

It was discovered (or rediscovered) that a society is something more than an aggregate of so many individual units – that it possesses existence distinguishable from those of any of its components. A perfect city became recognised as something more than any number of good citizens – something to be tried by other tests, and weighed in other balances than the individual man. The community must necessarily aim, consciously or not, at its continuance as a community: its life transcends that of any of its members; and the interests of the individual must often clash with those of the whole. (Webb in Shaw, 1908: 56)

Webb also rejected the cultivation of the individual personality that individualism promoted, and the claim that commitment to corporate life was antithetical to an individual's development and evolution. In contrast, Webb argued that submission to a social group, which fostered the development of all society, would bring the individual greater riches: 'We must abandon the self-conceit of imagining that we are independent units, and bend our jealous minds, absorbed in their own cultivation, to this subjection to the higher end, the common Weal.' (*ibid*: 58)

The Fabians likewise repudiated the individualists' claim that competition was an innate and natural part of human life and the mainspring of progress. The fundamental problem with Spencer's celebration of competition is that it was founded upon the fallacy that all individuals were born equal and were able to compete with each other freely. Not only did individualism fail to address the inherent inequality in British society, but the prioritisation of competition actually perpetuated the problem. It was an issue that was particularly pertinent at the turn of the twentieth century, when the gap between the rich and the poor, or the dominant and the dominated, was widening rapidly. Shaw called economists such as Spencer ignorant for failing to realise the very real suffering that happened amongst the lower classes and for their belief that

Nature had provided an all-powerful automatic regulator in Competition; and that by its operation self-interest would evolve order out of chaos if only it were allowed its own way. They loved to believe that a right and just social order was not an artificial and painfully maintained legal edifice, but a spontaneous outcome of the free play of the forces of Nature [...] No student ever gathers from a study of the individualist economists that the English proletariat was seething in horror and degradation while the riches of the proprietors were increasing by leaps and bounds.' (Shaw, 1908: 164-5)

As Shaw argued, the dominated strata of society – the poor, infirm, or whom Spencer calls 'good-for-nothings' (Spencer, 1982: 113) – had no opportunity to enter into the

competition and so little opportunity for social mobility. They were, instead, confined to their position of subservience and destitution. William Clarke made similar criticisms in relation to industry and trade, and noted that the free competition promised by ‘individualist devotees of *laissez faire*’ was a myth. Industry was monopolised by conglomerate companies, and the only individuals forced to compete were the dominated fractions, ‘the small shop-keeps, trembling on the verge of insolvency, and the working-men, competing with one another for permission to live by work.’ (Clarke in Shaw, 1908: 84)

Webb believed that the struggle for survival posited by Spencer, and the competition between individuals, encouraged an inherently self-centred attitude in all citizens, where the emphasis was placed on personal success over the success of the community. It also focused individuals’ attention on obtaining personal rewards as opposed to producing for the benefit of the larger social group. The result, in the case of industry, was the increased production of the commodities guaranteed to sell rather than of those that were required for the well-being of society. ‘The whole range of the present competitive individualism manifestly tends,’ Webb claimed,

to the glorification, not of honest personal service, but of the pursuit of personal gain – not the production of wealth, but the obtaining of riches. The inevitable outcome is the apotheosis, not of social service, but of successful financial speculation, which is already the bane of American civilization. With it comes inevitably a demoralization of personal character, a coarsening of moral fibre and a hideous lack of taste. (Webb, 1896: 15)

He argued that this was an inherently flawed system that allowed people, both as individuals and as collectives, to be subordinated to the accumulation of economic capital. In short, competition was detrimental to both the individual and the social organism at large. It was on this basis that he argued that it was not the mechanism by

which society progresses, and that evolution was not an example of competition in action. Rather, the development and improvement of society came only as a result of co-ordination and co-operation, which ensured that the social organism was fit for all to live in: ‘We have to learn to substitute consciously adapted co-ordination for internecine competition, if the Organism which will prove to be the “Fittest to Survive,” is to be also the best.’ (Webb, 1890: 83)

While there were numerous ways in which Barker’s work as a director reflected the habitus of the Fabian Society, his appropriation of its rejection of individualism is most pertinent to understanding his plans for a permanent ensemble company.²⁷ It is possible to identify the criticisms noted above in his rejection of the ‘star’ system, with its inherent celebration of competition and the individual personality. Indeed, the language that he used to describe his ideal theatre carried traces of the evolutionary model of progress promoted by Webb. For example, in his plan for a National Theatre, co-written with William Archer in 1907, Barker argues:

A permanent company, formed, so to speak, by natural selection and survival of the fittest, used to each other’s methods and working in harmony, may be trusted to give a far sounder performance of any play than the most brilliant ‘scratch’ that can be got together. (Archer and Barker, 1907: 33)

It was this unified group, where its members were familiar with each other and worked together, that Barker tried to establish at the Court Theatre between 1904 and 1907, and throughout the rest of his working life.

Teamwork and Co-operation at the Court Theatre

The Vedrenne-Barker seasons at the Court Theatre opened officially on 18 October 1904 with a matinee performance of Euripides’s *Hippolytus* in a new translation by

Gilbert Murray. From the outset, the management's division of labour was clear: Vedrenne took on the role of business manager and took charge of the administrative and financial matters, while Barker acted as artistic director. In this capacity, the latter had the ultimate artistic control of the season. He planned and selected the repertoire of plays to be performed each season and directed the majority of the productions, the only exception being Shaw's plays, which the Irish playwright directed himself. The emphasis of this repertoire was staging unfamiliar or experimental plays that would not otherwise be produced in the commercial theatre, including work by European writers such as Maurice Maeterlinck and Henrik Ibsen, Murray's translations of the Greek classics, and the new school of writers in Britain that, apart from Shaw, also included John Galsworthy, Elizabeth Robins, and St John Hankin. Shaw was the most prominent of this latter group – just under half of the all the productions staged in the Vedrenne-Barker seasons were written by him, and these seasons were fundamental in establishing his reputation as a dramatist (Woodfield, 1984: 79). Of course, the focus on new writers and experimental plays was not unprecedented, a point that Barker acknowledged publicly at a dinner held in his and Vedrenne's honour in 1907. He reminded the audience that the pair

are standing on the shoulders of other men. Our work is but a continuation of that begun by Mr Grein and the Independent Theatre, and by that body to which I am always inclined to refer to as my father and mother called the Stage Society. (Barker and Vedrenne, 1907: 11)

Similarly, these seasons pre-empted the work of George Devine and the English Stage Company, who re-established the position of the renamed Royal Court Theatre as a home for new writing in the 1950s. Again, the emphasis was on creating a platform for new writers and foregrounding plays that were often controversial and critiqued society, as is examined in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The seasons were structured on a semi-repertory basis of short runs, with a fixed number of performances for each production. As these were all new plays, they were first given a run of six to eight matinee performances. These matinees were the focus of the season and gave Barker the space to try out the new work and gauge the audience's response. Those plays that received a positive response were then transferred to the evening bill for a maximum run of three weeks (Woodfield, 1984: 77). Of course, this programme of weekday matinees excluded workers from attending, although Barker had originally intended to create a theatre that was accessible to all and tried to keep ticket prices as low as possible (Kennedy in Booth and Kaplan, 1996: 136). At the same time, he had no intention of creating a populist theatre at the Court or catering for the 'general public'. This non-populist approach was evident in the audience, where, as Mario Borsa observed in his 1908 survey of the British theatre, 'the "great British public"... artless, coarse-minded and dull-witted – does not frequent the Court; the entertainment there is not to its taste' (Borsa, 1908: 112). Rather, the Court Theatre under Barker became 'the Mecca for every serious playgoer' and its audience was composed of figures high in cultural, economic and social capital, including society women, intellectuals, and prominent politicians such as Arthur Balfour and Herbert Henry Asquith (Anon, 1907: 397). This middle and upper-middle class demographic reflected the theatre's geographic position on the boundary of the wealthy boroughs of Chelsea, Kensington and Belgravia, and it included the same public that attended both Fabian and Stage Society meetings. Indeed, Barker actively encouraged fellow Fabians to attend his Court productions, and asked Pease to circulate promotional material among the London members of the Society (Barker letter to Pease, 19 April 1904, Fabian Society, A/6/1).

Barker's dual aims of creating an ensemble company at the Court and running the seasons on a repertory basis dovetailed into an attack on the established system and its treatment of actors. In particular, it was an attack on the 'star' system, the long run and the actor-managers who perpetuated them, as well as an attempt to restore art to the theatre and thus challenge the popular perception of it in Britain as solely a form of entertainment or a leisure activity. The *New York Times* summarised this position as follows in 1915:

[The] keynote of Mr Barker's own work as a producer and as a playwright has lain always in his conception of the theatre as a community product. He is against the star system. He is against the "long run" system. He is against what he calls the "rampant individualism" of the ordinary commercial system of play producing. He is against the separation of the arts of the theatre. And the theatre, to Granville Barker, is perhaps the most important of all possible agencies as a social expression and a social instrument. (*New York Times*, 31 January 1915)

Barker believed that the even playing of an ensemble company and productions that centred on truth as opposed to visual spectacle would make clear the theatre's function in society and its ability to critique and comment on contemporary issues.

The 'star' system, as noted in Chapter One, gave precedence to famous names and faces, which created a hierarchy amongst actors and which foregrounded the 'star' personality in a production at the expense of the other elements. Actor-managers such as Tree and Henry Irving embodied this system and organized their companies with a substantial level of self-promotion, placing their own interests ahead of the rest of the company. Edwardian author Leonard Merrick, under the pseudonym Stanley Jones, criticized such actor-managers, who did not 'allow the members of his company to increase their experience, to improve their reputation, to become his own possible rivals.' (Jones, 1899: 20) The first concern of the actor-manager, by contrast, was to

‘find a play in which he shall have a good part, and the second to look to it that nobody else shall have so good a part as himself.’ (ibid: 21) George Moore also bemoaned the ill-effects of this system that treated the supporting actors as little more than props or “sticks”, whose ignorance and stupidity serve to bring the star into prominence.’ (Moore, 1913: 175) He explained that the unevenness in the acting and the incongruity of the production elements that was the result of this system worked only to distort the meaning of the play, leaving it ‘mutilated and disfigured *as a musical work would be if the musicians did not play in tune.*’ (ibid; original emphasis)

Other critics acknowledged the importance placed on personality, including Max Beerbohm, who told readers of *The Saturday Review* in 1901: ‘The great actor must have a great personality, and that personality is the starting point for everything.’ (Beerbohm, 1968: 159) This focus affected the work of the actors in two central ways. First, it encouraged them to create roles based on their personalities in order to both exploit and perpetuate their own celebrity status, regardless of the intentions of the playwright. Beerbohm, again, noted that a great actor made little attempt to become a new, unrecognisable character, but rather, tried

merely to absorb the part into himself – to reveal himself through it [...] [A great actress] may play tragedy one night, and comedy the next, and be equally fine in both; but in both she will frankly be the same woman, seen from different angles of herself. (ibid)

Second, the precedence placed on the individual fostered an intensely competitive atmosphere that trained actors to ensure their own success at the expense of both the production and their fellow actors. Those individuals or ‘stars’ who resided at the top of the acting hierarchy were not only guaranteed future work, but also received a larger income than supporting actors. In order to ascend this hierarchy and reap these rewards, an actor had to make her or himself distinctive in the field and create attention-grabbing

performances in all productions. This need to become an ‘audience favourite’ encouraged actors to adopt ‘the practice of up-staging their fellows and engaging in a sort of contest with spectators designed to win applause from climactic passages throughout the play’ (Baker, 1978: 36). Again, there is a strong sense of Spencer’s fight for survival, where only those actors who could adapt to and master the system would succeed.

Barker condemned the emphasis placed on the individual and the ‘dog-eat-dog’ attitude of survival that encouraged actors to perform ‘star’ turns, believing that such individualism made it impossible to create the ‘unity of effect’ to which all productions should strive. ‘The theatre is not the place for the unchecked expression of a dominant individuality,’ he argued, ‘and any attempt to make it so is a step towards its destruction. Much could be learned, no doubt, from seeing a theatre glorified and destroyed by an individual genius.’ (Barker, 1922: 121) A major part of the problem was the convention in the commercial theatre to limit rehearsals periods as much as possible in order to cut overheads and maximise profits. These hurried rehearsals were not conducive to establishing a trusting atmosphere amongst actors brought together for the first time, which made it difficult for individuals to commit to the collective and so surrender any previously acquired symbolic power. Barker warned:

To surrender this personal power to whatever unity of effect can be gained in three weeks’ work or so among a strange company might be to lose it all together, and to get nothing in exchange – so thinks the theatre-wise actor (*ibid*: 223).

Instead of committing to the group, the actor worked separately and developed her or his own performance that demonstrated this power or ‘personal charm’, ‘exercising it, though, as often as not directly upon the audience rather than primarily on the play.’ (*ibid*) The permanency of Barker’s envisioned ensemble company, by contrast, created

a level of continuity, trust and familiarity within the group that enabled its members to work together as a team.

The security of being part of a permanent company would also elevate the actor from the demoralising position of casual labourer and the accusations of ‘vagabondage’, and rescue her or him from ‘the strangling effect of that boa-constrictor, the long run’ (Barker and Vedrenne, 1907: 12). The long run was a common method by which managers capitalised on a popular and commercially successful play, exploiting the public interest by extending runs to in excess of three hundred consecutive performances. They also offered the actor a respite from the pressures of working in the free market of the commercial theatre, and provided her or him with a guaranteed income for a number of months. However, just as Barker warned that these long runs made productions stale and lifeless, so he argued that forcing an actor to play the same role repeatedly succeeded only in turning her or him into an automaton and stripping any sense of truth or spontaneity from the performance. ‘Who can play Hamlet or Macbeth or Juliet or Rosalind or Othello or Lear eight times in a week with nervous force, inspiration and spontaneity? The thing is impossible’ (Barker, 1909: 12).

Barker, of course, was not able to implement a full repertory system at the Court and had to run his seasons on a short-run system, as outlined above. Similarly, he was not able to create a permanent company at the theatre, although he did have a core group of regular players, including long-term collaborators who returned to work with him at the Court repeatedly and so provided him with a certain level of continuity. This group included McCarthy, Lewis Casson, Edith Wynne Mathinson, Dorothy Minto, Edmund Gurney, Norman Page, and Edmund Gwenn, the majority of whom were engaged

simultaneously in West End theatres to supplement the low wages at the Court. Barker was still pursuing a career as an actor at the time and was a semi-regular performer in the Court's first two seasons, although he acted almost exclusively in Shaw's plays and so did not direct the work himself.²⁸ Thus, Hesketh Pearson's decision to include Barker in his analysis of British actor-managers at the turn of the twentieth century is misleading (Pearson, 1950). Rather, Barker spoke out against the practice of actor-managers – arguing, 'I do not believe that is possible for a man to play his best and produce his best at the same time' (Barker and Vedrenne, 1907: 12) – and used the seasons to establish the role of the objective director.

As director, Barker developed an approach to rehearsals that harnessed a sense of ensemble and collaboration even among actors brought together for a particular production. His aim was for the actor to take an active role in the creative process and for the rehearsals to be a shared exploration of the material in order to arrive at a unity of intention. The director acted as a facilitator in this working relationship, probing and provoking the actors while overseeing the harmonious collaboration of the diverse elements of the production in much the same way as the conductor of an orchestra. Likewise, he sought to impress on his actors the importance of the collective at all times. 'The whole', he asserted, 'is greater than the part, the play and its interpretation than its interpreters, the theatre itself than any member of it' (Barker, 1919: 2). Barker's warning of the destructive force of a dominant individuality applied to both actors and the director, and while Craig used the analogy of a fearless sea captain, Barker followed the Fabian model of a democratic committee, casting his director as its chairman.

In this role of chairman, the director was the ultimate leader of the group with the final approval on all decisions. However, Barker argued that the power that accompanied this position was strictly limited, and the director should never be a disciplinarian: ‘the teamwork of a well-practised company serves the cause better than the most brilliant temperamental despotism with the most spirited and loyal support’ (*ibid*: 3). The actor must have the space to explore the material and develop her or his own performance, under the guidance of the director, in order for these performances to be organic and to keep the production ‘a healthy living body’ (*ibid*, 1922: 182). For this reason, rehearsals needed to be a corporate venture, where the director was a catalyst for the experiments of the actors. Of course, the more familiar a group was with each other the more a director was able to leave the actors to develop work together, and the less she or he had to drill the actors and dictate the actions. This was another reason why Barker commended actor-centred permanency in companies. Similarly, he insisted on a minimum of six weeks’ rehearsal to ensure there was time for the actors to work slowly together and develop the production organically (Macowan, 1954: 7), although he was unable to enjoy such a rehearsal period at the Court. His excessive work load, opening on average a new play every three weeks, and the fact that most of the actors were also playing in the West End meant that Barker often began rehearsals with thoroughly prepared production plans, leaving little room for the actors’ interpretations and discoveries. His work method was also very new to the actors, where the ‘star’ system’s focus on the individual, competition and repetition discouraged any sense of teamwork or experimentation. As a result, Barker was forced, on occasion, to become more dictatorial than he would like, unable to rely on the voluntary contributions of the actors.

One of the main ways he was able to counter the inherent individualism in the British theatre was by emphasising the importance of each and every character in a play. Unlike the actor-managers, who centred rehearsals on the leading actors and largely ignored the supporting cast, Barker dedicated time and attention to every actor regardless of the size of their role. He made it clear that each character was vital to the narrative and so should be performed with the same level of respect, care and commitment, telling Cathleen Nesbitt, Perdita in his 1912 *The Winter's Tale*: ‘There is no such thing as a part too small to be played well’ (Barker cited in Nesbitt, 1975: 257). Barker echoed unknowingly some of the founding aphorisms of the Moscow Art Theatre in this statement – including: ‘There are no small parts, only small actors’; and: ‘Today, Hamlet, tomorrow, an extra, but as an extra he must be an artist’ (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 162) – and used it to counter the top-heavy productions of the actor-manager system. For example, Barker treated popular ‘stars’ such as Ellen Terry and Mrs Patrick Campbell in the same way as everyone else when they performed at the Court, rather than elevating them above the rest of the company and exploiting their symbolic power to increase audience numbers (Jackson, 1972: 130). The result was even and balanced productions, where the ‘unity of tone, the subordination of the individual, the genuine striving for totality of effect [...] the abolition of the ‘star’ system – all were noteworthy features of these productions’ (Henderson, 1911: 368).

Barker’s rehearsals were divided roughly into three main stages. The first stage focused on table work undertaken by the full company and discussions about the text, where a sense of familiarity and egalitarianism was established between the actors, as well as a shared understanding of the play. During these early rehearsals, Barker read the entire play to the assembled company with the aim to give each actor a sense of it as a whole

rather than to indicate how the lines should be delivered, as Irving and Shaw did (Bingham, 1978: 159; Woodfield, 1984: 78-9; Dymkowski, 1986: 33). Likewise, Barker sent each member of the company a full and complete script before rehearsals began so that all could get a sense of the totality of the play and how each character fitted into its structure. This practice was radical in the British theatre of the early 1900s, where cast members traditionally received cue scripts that consisted solely of their lines and cues, which presented the play as fragmentary with little regard for its through line (Leiter, 1991: 40). In contrast, Barker's actors discussed the play, its meaning, its interpretation and its intention together as a committee, to use his analogy again, and arrived at a mutual understanding of the material.²⁹

Barker believed that corporate study of this nature was vital in rehearsals. He argued that 'co-operation was the first and last law of the theatre', and that it was impossible for an actor to know and understand her or his part without also knowing and understanding the play as a whole, which could only be achieved with corporate study (Barker, n.d. b: 12). Any attempt to work in isolation created discord in both the production and the company, which was 'an offence against the commonality of intent implied in all acting.' (*ibid*) Communal study, by contrast, encouraged the actors to become absorbed in the play and in tune with each other, which also enabled them to play a more active role in the second stage of the rehearsals and limited the need for Barker to dictate the action (*ibid*, 1919: 4).

This second stage involved active and physical work on each scene of the text. Barker preferred not to work from an intricate production plan of precisely choreographed movements, and argued that the director should plan only the bare skeleton of action,

leaving the actors to ‘flesh it out’ and develop the ‘backbone’ of the production as a committee (*ibid*). Casson recalled how Barker encouraged the actors to explore the characters for themselves in collaboration with each other:

We started rehearsing without being told more of our characters than the stage directions told us, to see what the actors themselves first made of them. Then he would start moulding us in the direction he wanted, using every device of witty illustration and metaphor to stimulate the actor’s own imagination. (Casson cited in Jackson, 1972: 132)

As Casson explains, the impetus was on the actors interpreting their own characters, while Barker’s task was to stimulate their creative imaginations. He understood that to force his own definitive interpretation of a character or the play onto an actor resulted only in a constricted performance and mechanical acting. Instead of dictating to his actors, he wanted to establish a unity of intention among them, so that ‘they make of the saliency of the moment a knot, so to speak, into which they may tie, simply and surely, those strands of the play’s purpose that they severally hold’ (Barker, 1922: 236). By doing so, he also allowed space for the production and the actors’ performances to develop over the course of the run.

Barker similarly avoided blocking physical actions, believing that, if the actors were absorbed in the play and had a shared understanding of it and the intentions of the characters, then their instinctual movements would be both meaningful and truthful. ‘The action is so *unimportant*,’ he told Nesbitt, ‘if an actor has an emotional or mental conflict to cope with he should never have to think ‘Should I move there?’ [...] He should move when his instinct prompts him, not when mine does.’ (Barker cited in Nesbitt, 1975: 192; original emphasis) Perhaps most significantly, he was willing to alter his interpretation of the play at any time during the rehearsals in response to the

discoveries and the ideas of the actors, establishing an actor-director dialogue that was unprecedented in British theatre at the time.

The final stage of rehearsals came as the separate scenes were brought together and the production took on a life of its own. It was here that the actor-director relationship was crucial, as the director took on the role of the ‘ideal audience member’, as Barker termed it, harmonising each of the manifold elements into a unified whole (Barker, 1919: 4). Barker positioned himself in the auditorium to watch the action on the stage and the work of the actors, and allowed, where possible, for the production to develop organically:

To sit while the action of a play grows, goes its own way, not insisting on this or that – for in art as in life how many good roads to a given point are there – caring only that the roads are good, testing sympathetically step by step that the way *is* its own; that in a real sense is to produce. (*ibid*; original emphasis)

Again, his emphasis was on finding ways to stimulate the actor’s imagination as opposed to forcing particular changes, and he worked by a process of elimination: ‘His simple rule at this stage will be that though in the last instance he may veto, say definitely what is not to be done, he must never dictate what is to be done’ (*ibid*). He acted much like an editor here, and pruned those elements deemed superfluous to the action and teased out others that needed development, suggesting ways for the actor to do so.

However, Barker warned against any attempt at finality in the acting performances, arguing that to create a definitive and unchanging performance resulted in mindless and automatic repetition, which was the antithesis of acting. In contrast, he tried to find ways to keep the production alive at all times and to make sure that the actors were

fresh and spontaneous. Again, he took inspiration from Stanislavsky, who showed him how to retain an element of spontaneity in productions:

[Stanislavsky] says to study a play, and to study a part, and not merely to learn it mechanically, you should do this: You should first study the characters; then when you come to the actual studying of the things and you want to learn the work with other people, you should set up in your mind certain milestones in that character and that part. (Barker in *The New York Times*, 21 March 1915)

These milestones became the fixed points of rendezvous that the actors had to perform each night, but which gave them the space to improvise between these points. '[Stanislavsky] said if you will do that and you will get that fixed, then you need never become mechanic, you will find that your performance is really spontaneous; and if the performance that I saw there is a test, it is certainly very wonderful.' (ibid) Another technique that Barker used was to introduce unexpected physical obstructions on the stage for the actors to negotiate as a way of surprising them and maintaining spontaneity once the production had opened: 'It's good for them to have something difficult to manage; keeps them awake.' (Barker cited in Macowan, 1954: 7) These and other techniques encouraged the actors to be alert and truthful in their performances at all time.

To all intents and purposes, Barker succeeded in his aim to create a nucleus of actors founded upon the principles of ensemble practice, which offered an alternative to the 'star' system and which demonstrated the artistic abilities of a unified company. His rehearsal methods were met with praise and commendation from those actors who worked with him closely, and the Court became something of a theatre-home, marked by a strong sense of mutual love and admiration. Mathinson spoke on behalf of the actors, who she called her 'dear comrades', at Barker and Vedrenne's honorary dinner

in 1907, describing the pair as the ‘beloved friends and fellow-workers’ of the actors before painting an almost idyllic picture of life with the company:

At the Court Theatre there have been no rancours, no jealousies, no groans of the ill-paid and sweated in our midst; sanely and surely there has been realised among us there a very real and a very precious sense of human brotherhood and sympathy, firmly based on economic equity and artistic opportunity [...] that’s why we players love them (Mathinson cited in Barker and Vedrenne, 1907: 20).

McCarthy gave a similar account two decades later, explaining how the absence of the hierarchy that prioritised the ‘star’ role and ignored smaller parts made the Court one of the only theatres in London where actors were willing to perform in smaller roles:

Any of us would cheerfully take a small role, for we knew that even so we should not have to be subservient, negative or obsequious to the stars – for, as I have said, there were no stars. We were members of a theatrical House of Lords: all equal and all Lords. Edmund Gwenn was Baines, the butler, in ‘The Return of the Prodigal’. Only a few weeks before, he had played a great part – that of the immortal ‘Enery Straker in ‘Man and Superman’. But as the butler, in a lesser part with little to say, he was allowed so much space that his performance was as it had been in the bigger part of ‘Enery Straker (McCarthy, 1934: 90).

Barker’s method of treating the entire company as part of a composite whole limited the competitive tension between actors who felt the need to vie for the director’s attention, and so encouraged actors to work together and commit to the group.

Theatre critics and other actors also noted the positive effects of Barker’s working method and praised his achievements at the Court. Beerbohm, an early supporter of the venture, noted in 1905 that ‘the acting at the Court Theatre seems so infinitely better than in so many other theatres where the same mimes are to be seen.’ (Beerbohm, 1968: 403-4) Continuing his review, he explained that the reason for the elevation in the acting standards was due to Barker’s insistence that his actors play as an ensemble and follow closely the intentions of the playwright:

[The] mimes at the Court are very carefully stage-managed, every one of them being kept in such relation to his fellows as is demanded by the relation in which the various parts stands to one another – no one mime getting more, or less, of a chance than the playwright has intended him to have. (ibid: 404)

Desmond MacCarthy also compared favourably Barker's work at the Court with that of other managements. He argued that the ensemble principles with which Barker imbued his companies had shown audiences that 'the English could act after all', although these same actors continued to struggle when working in other theatres: 'Yet, strange to say, these actors, when they appeared in other plays, on other boards, seemed to sink again to normal insignificance.' (MacCarthy, 1907: 2)

Indeed, the success of Barker's ensemble highlighted the flaws in the 'star' system and showed the London theatregoing public that an alternative was possible:

When will other London managers learn that the dramatist who is worth his salt needs the co-operation of every part, however small, in order to drive his meaning home; that we want to see plays, not to have our attention riveted perpetually on the same personality for three hours at a stretch? (ibid: 7)

The anonymous critic for *The Green Room Book* similarly celebrated Barker's success in introducing an alternative method of production and his success in 'creating a school of acting' at the Court (Anon, 1907: 398). Hesketh Pearson gave a sense of the notoriety of his work at the time, noting that 'his companies are always best for what is known as "team work" in London. Even his "stars" have taken their proper place in the planetary system; they haven't been allowed to dazzle the lesser constellations out of existence.' (Pearson, 1921: 12) Even the dominant actor-managers such as Tree praised Barker and emphasised the general feeling that his seasons were a watershed moment in the development of British theatre in the twentieth century. 'I have never come away from any of these productions,' he explained at Barker and Vedrenne's honorary

dinner, ‘without a feeling that here, indeed, was an institution in which the art of the theatre was worthily striven for.’ (Tree in Barker and Vedrenne, 1907: 14)

The critical and artistic success of Barker’s seasons is clear from these and other comments, and his work at the Court established him in the field, while also inaugurating the role of the director and the notion of ensemble practice in the British theatre. Of course, the Court’s geographic location in Sloane Square made it easier for him to counter the established conventions and introduce such innovations. Not only were the overheads and expenses considerably less, but Barker also benefitted from working away from the intensively competitive atmosphere of the West End, where each production was in direct competition with at least ten others. The advantage of this location was made clear when Barker and Vedrenne moved the seasons to the Savoy Theatre on the Strand in September 1907. The intention was to run the seasons in the same way while taking advantage of a larger and more centrally located theatre that would bring both a more substantial and diverse audience and more money.

Supporters such as Oliver Lodge were confident that ‘the spirit will survive the transition, and there will be a reincarnation at the Savoy, carrying with it not only a memory of the past but the full character and personality which we have known hitherto.’ (Lodge in *ibid*: 20) However, the season proved to be both a commercial and artistic failure. In particular, Barker failed to recreate the sense of ensemble playing and spontaneity between the actors that was so successful at the Court. Instead, his productions were criticised as lacklustre and slow moving, performed by actors ‘of various ages and schools, and they act in various keys, with no effect of unity’ (Beerbohm, 1968: 482). The season closed in March 1908 after just five months,

leaving Vedrenne and Barker virtually bankrupted (Woodfield, 1984: 87). The failure of the Savoy season echoes the failure of Craig's *The Vikings of Helgeland* at the Imperial Theatre. Both Barker and Craig were able to challenge the conventions of the established system when confining their work to restricted theatres and restricted audiences at the Court and the Purcell Operatic Society, respectively. The problem came, however, when these men attempted to produce the same work in the West End – the epicentre of the commercial system in Britain – and to a more diverse audience with varying levels of cultural capital that applied a different principle of legitimation to their work. Both cases highlight a double bind in the British theatre: in order to make the money necessary to sustain work that challenged the conventions one needed to move to the West End, yet the move to the West End made it impossible to challenge conventions and destroyed the work. This double bind threatened all other attempts to create an ensemble company in the twentieth century, as is shown in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

The Ensemble in Barker's Shakespeare Productions

Barker returned to the Savoy Theatre in 1912 and staged a series of three Shakespeare productions over a two-year period, which proved to be his last substantial work as a director on the British stage. *The Winter's Tale* opened in September 1912; *Twelfth Night* followed two months later; and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* opened on 6 February 1914 after a year-long hiatus. He aimed to free Shakespeare from the shackles of stage illusion and spectacle to which he had been bound by the dominant actor-managers of the time, as epitomised by Tree's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1911, where live rabbits were seen hopping around the stage. More significant for this present analysis was Barker's challenge to the actor-managers' use of the plays as vehicles to

display their talents and perpetuate their ‘star’ status. These managers often cut, edited and rewrote the texts in order to create a central ‘star’ character in keeping with their practice of staging productions that orbited around a leading role. Christine Dymkowski gives the example of Irving’s *Romeo and Juliet*, where he removed scenes that established the Montague-Capulet feud, as well as important crowd scenes in an attempt to centralise the two leading characters (Dymkowski, 1986: 20). Barker, by contrast, placed equal importance on all characters and created productions that had ‘the sovereign virtue of being alive’ (*The Times*, 23 September 1912).

Barker was not alone in condemning these uneven and ‘star’-centred productions that cared little for Shakespeare’s intentions. He was influenced by William Poel, who ‘shook complacency’ and began the reaction against the established practice ‘with fantastical courage’ (Barker, 2009: 3). Poel rejected the actor-managers’ ‘mutilation’ of Shakespeare’s texts and their habit of placing themselves before the play in question, allowing their desire for applause and the preservation of their ‘star’ personality to determine all artistic choices:

[It] was the same in Garrick, Mrs Siddons, and all the ‘stars’ of the period, and consisted of an entire disregard of the fact that the business of these actors was to interpret the author, not to re-write his plays the better to set off their own talents and re-create parts as Mrs Siddons did that of Lady Macbeth, candidly confessing that her personality was not suited to portray the character Shakespeare had drawn. (Poel, 1920: 7)

Poel, by contrast, insisted that the texts should be left intact. Further, he argued that Shakespeare’s secondary characters were vital to the narrative and so should be performed with the same care, attention and detail as the leading roles. Any Shakespeare production that relied on ‘stars’ necessarily failed because ‘with Shakespeare there are often a number of parts needing first-rate actors to do justice to them, and if all are not

skilful the whole play suffers.' (ibid: 8) Although Barker disagreed with Poel's attempt to reproduce exactly the conditions in which Shakespeare's plays were first performed – 'We shall not save our souls by being Elizabethan' (Barker, 1912: iv) – he acknowledged how this work prepared the stage for his Shakespeare productions.³⁰ He understood that the shock that Poel's productions induced was essential, noting that 'anything less drastic and provocative might have been passed over with mild approval' and so would fail to instigate the necessary change (ibid, 2009: 4).

The Savoy productions demonstrated the same qualities that distinguished Barker's work at the Court, namely, a commitment to realising the playwright's intention, the creation of truth on the stage, and the even playing of every member of the company. In the pursuit of balanced productions, Barker not only restored the texts to their original state, but he also transformed the way in which the characters were performed and the text was delivered. He, like Poel, stressed the centrality of verse and argued that Shakespeare used it as the primary means of emotional expression (ibid: 14). However, he rejected the common practice of speaking the verse in a slow, overstretched and rhetorical manner as if it was a piece of literature, where soliloquys became little more than a display of the 'star' actor's elocutionary prowess. Barker taught his actors to treat the texts as pieces of living theatre and perform the dialogue truthfully as opposed to poetically. He believed it was more important to relay the emotion of the lines than the exact meaning of each word. '[The audience] don't have to understand with their ears,' he told Henry Ainley, in the role of Leontes, 'just with their guts. You are really just babbling in a rage and anguish, it's a primitive emotion. You can accelerate and accelerate, just sounding vowels.' (Barker cited in Nesbitt, 1979: 65) Such instructions

restored a sense of pace and ‘liveness’ to the plays and made clear their relevance for contemporary audiences.

A commitment to ensemble playing and a willingness to forego ‘star’ turns was essential to the success of Barker’s productions and his ability to create this sense of truth and contemporaneity. He approached the rehearsals in much the same way as he did at the Court, using them as a space for collective study of the play to create a sense of unity and egalitarianism. Indeed, his rehearsal method and his work with the actors was very similar to that outlined above, and he, again, worked closely with all the actors in order to assert the importance, and individuality, of each character in the world of the play. For example, Barker named each of Titania’s fairies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in order to provide the actors playing the roles with a sense of character and to affirm their position as valid members of the company. At the same time, he engaged established actors to play small roles that were often overlooked. Clearly, this practice was in direct contrast to the ‘star’ system. Barker was able to engage Nigel Playfair, who played Paulina’s Steward in *The Winter’s Tale*, by assuring him that ‘you will find the part worth it’ (Barker cited in Nesbitt, 1975: 62), while other prominent actors similarly knew that to take such small roles would not make them subordinate to the leading actors. Rather, the actors were given the space and opportunity to create three-dimensional characters and to bring a new significance to scenes that were usually ignored entirely. Playfair, for example, brought his experience, commitment and artistry to bear on the exchange between his character and Autolycus in Act V Scene II, which raised the standard of a scene that was often cut by actor-managers, who deemed it superfluous and ‘a bore’ (*ibid*). In this sense, Barker was successful in

his quest to stage productions where all the characters were vital to the narrative, and where the actors approached every role with seriousness and dedication.

It is no surprise that Barker's iconoclastic productions and his attack on the entrenched conventions of Shakespeare playing upset the more conservative sections of the British theatre press. *The Daily Express* claimed that he 'has killed Shakespeare as completely as Herr Reinhardt killed Sophocles in the production of "Oedipus Rex [sic] at Covent Garden.' (*Daily Express*, 23 September 1912) However, amid criticisms of Barker's unconventionality came praise for the quality of the ensemble playing. All three productions were commended for the overall unity of effect, which proved that an alternative to the 'star'-centred and top-heavy productions was possible. *The Observer* critic celebrated the absence of 'the usual causes of complaint in modern productions of Shakespeare' in Barker's *The Winter's Tale*, including 'the over-emphasis in the acting which leads to a disproportion and the mangling of the text' (*The Observer*, 22 September 1912). Other critics praised Barker's peculiar ability to foster performances that were truthful and which elevated the actors: 'How often did we see at the Court people who had fooled for years in the old mechanical way suddenly become, under Barker, real actors. And he is still doing it. Did Ainley ever *act* as now at the Savoy?' (Cosway in *The New Age*, 16 January 1913; original emphasis) *The Times* reviewer similarly emphasised the 'liveness' of the performances and the actors' ability to work together as a group, which created an 'air of improvisation about [Barker's] work; you feel that he might vary his effects from night to night.' (*The Times*, 23 September 1912).

Other critics observed the artistic strength of the ensemble-driven interpretation of *Twelfth Night*, which successfully brought 'out the humanity, the naturalness of the

characters' (*The Observer*, 17 November 1912). Rehearsals that focused on creating truth on the stage helped the actors to avoid the conventional practice of treating characters such as Malvolio, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek as one-dimensional caricatures, while the insistence on collaboration at all times dissuaded the actors from competing with each other for laughs. The result was the creation of real and recognisable 'human beings' rather than mere 'comedians', which further testified to the success of Barker's method: 'It is a tribute to the artistic unity of a production when in discussing it we talk of parts, not of actors.' (ibid)

The company's success at creating believable 'human' characters was also observed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 'It is the same thing with [the clowns] as it was with Sir Toby Belch and his fellows,' *The Observer* noted in 1914, 'By being kept in proportion and played quite naturally they rouse roars of laughter while they are before us, and leave us longing for more of them.' (*The Observer*, 8 February 1914) The *Manchester Guardian* similarly praised the actors for performing the characters simply and honestly, and without the 'elaborate encrustation of comic business which has been built up by actors burlesquing their own profession.' (*Manchester Guardian*, 7 February 1914) Critics also noted commented approvingly on Barker's close work with the fairies, who were, for many, the most memorable elements of the production (*The Times*, 7 February 1914). When Barker took the production to New York in 1915, critics similarly celebrated the sense of egalitarianism in the production and the creation of 'a no-star performance with all its parts as nicely adjusted as bits in a mosaic' (*New York Times*, 21 February 1915). Once again, Barker successfully encouraged the audience to re-evaluate the smaller characters in the play, and to consider Shakespeare's work as a composite whole rather than a 'star' vehicle.

These reviews and others attest to the path-breaking nature of the Barker's productions. His iconoclasm prepared the ground for future innovators of Shakespeare such as Theodore Komisarjevsky, Joan Littlewood, Peter Brook and Peter Hall, in much the same way as Poel had prepared the ground for his work. Of course, the success of the productions was dependent on the willingness of the actors to follow Barker's direction. The fact that many of the Savoy actors had worked with him previously, including Playfair, McCarthy and Ainley, meant that they were already attuned to his methods and so were more likely to commit to the group and the production as a whole. However, not everybody agreed with Barker's prioritisation of the ensemble or his rejection of the 'star' personality. In January 1913, *The New Age* published an article by an actor claiming to have worked with Barker on *The Winter's Tale* that attacked his method of directing, arguing that it subordinated the actors and posed a serious threat to their personal freedom and individuality.

The Threat to Individuality

Written under the pseudonym 'An Actor' and titled 'Mr Granville Barker's Gramophones', the article centred on Barker's treatment of actors in rehearsal and accused him of authoritarianism.³¹ It included a detailed account of rehearsals under Barker in which 'An Actor' depicted him as a condescending bureaucrat, who forced his interpretation of the play on to the actors and who dictated every movement and gesture:

The actor for Mr Barker is nothing more than a gramophone record made during rehearsal by Mr Barker himself, and the more faithfully the nightly reproduction the more affectionately does Mr Barker pat "the actor" upon the back [...] in the Barker factory there is only one record: a boss record, upon which are registered the brain-waves of Mr Barker [...] The Barker disc is then pressed firmly upon the plastic

matter, and when the contriver has retired into the stalls in order to observe the result, he perceives with pride upon the facsimiles of his impressions. ('An Actor' in *The New Age*, 9 January 1913)

In his description of the rehearsals, 'An Actor' constructed a false binary that placed Barker, along with all other directors, in opposition to the actors and locked in a constant power struggle. This actor-director binary was at the centre of the subsequent debate that took place in the pages of *The New Age* for a period of approximately two months (*The New Age*, 9 January – 27 February 1913). Cary Mazer rightly notes that the accusations made by 'An Actor' and others were indicative of the wider debate regarding the role and function of the director in the British theatre and her or his relation to the actors (Mazer, 1984: 7-8). However, these accusations should also be considered in the light of the growing tension between the individual and the collective.

The work of prominent British philosophers such as Spencer, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill and the continued influence of liberalism in Britain in the early twentieth century, as epitomised by the Liberal Party's landslide victory in the 1906 general election, perpetuated the belief in the paramountcy of personal autonomy. Indeed, both Spencer and Mill argued, albeit with their own nuance, that individuality was the most important aspect of human existence, and that any attempt to interfere with the pursuit of one's instincts and desires, whether by another individual, a social group or the State, should be rejected and fought against. Mill's theory of individualism, as outlined in his influential 1859 essay 'On Liberty', is particularly useful in contextualising 'An Actor's' comments, given the fact that the latter echoes a number of its key arguments.

The essay focused on the ongoing struggle between liberty and authority and outlined the limits of the power that can be exercised legitimately over the individual by society. In short, it is Mill's attempt to assert the rights of all people to exhibit their individuality without interference. His argument is founded on the premise that the freedom of choice, opinion and action are necessary requirements for both human well-being and a civilised society, and that they are tied inextricably to the progress and development of the individual. He believed that each person 'is the proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily, or mental and spiritual' and so should be free to act autonomously (Mill, 1998: 17). Further, one's validity and worth as a human being is predicated on this ability to make free choices and so individual liberty should be protected at all times. For this reason, the power of governments to intervene in the individual's choices must be strictly limited and warranted only if it is to prevent harm to others.³² 'The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society,' he argued, 'is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.' (ibid: 14)

Mill observed that the above doctrine was directly opposed to the 'general tendency of existing opinion and practice' in the mid-nineteenth century, which accepted increasingly the right of society to encroach on the rights of the individual and to compel her or him to conform to its notion of 'personal excellence' (ibid: 17). The resulting threat to personal liberty was not only exercised on individuals by the State, through the creation of rules and civil penalties, but also by society itself through the 'tyranny of the majority'. The latter refers to the social tyranny enacted by the public that coerced an individual to conform to customs or rules that were taken to be self-

evident and self-justifying. Failure to conform to these customs carried with it a social stigma and was punished by exclusion and ostracism, the threat of which reinforced the rules. While Mill acknowledged that customs played a role in the individual's maturation, he argued that to conform to them blindly precluded the exercise of individual choice: 'He who does anything because it is the custom makes no choice' (ibid: 65). Customs, therefore, prevented the individual from using the faculties of perception and discernment, which, in turn, hindered her or his development:

If the grounds of an opinion are not conclusive to the person's own reason, his reason cannot be strengthened, but is likely to be weakened, by his adopting it: and if the inducements to an act are not such as are consentaneous to his own feelings and character (where affection, or the rights of others, are not concerned) it is so much done towards rendering his feelings and character inert and torpid, instead of active and energetic. (ibid)

The result of this social tyranny and this oppressive consensus was the eradication of any form of individuality, and thus all that constitutes a human being for Mill.

It is this threat to individuality and the transformation of humans into compliant carbon copies that resonates with 'An Actor's' attack on Barker. His choice of language in the article and his subsequent contributions to the debate described Barker as exercising a tyranny over his actors that stripped away both their individual personalities and their capacity to make artistic choices. He claimed that Barker failed to meet the basic artistic needs of the actor – who 'must be allowed to be spontaneous. He must be given SPACE' – and created, instead, a system of directing that was 'the inhibition of impulse' ('An Actor' in *The New Age*, 9 January 1913). Part of this inhibitive system was Barker's regular lectures to the company, which served only to make each actor 'deeply conscious of his own limitations and of the supreme genius of Mr Barker' (ibid). This treatment hindered the actors' progress and development by not allowing

them to exercise their initiative or their creative faculties in the same way that social customs hindered the individual's progress.

Indeed, 'An Actor's' declaration that 'every artist must be unique or he is not an actor' corresponded to Mill's assertion of the importance of individuality ('An Actor' in *The New Age*, 23 January 1913). 'Human nature,' Mill argued:

is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing. (Mill, 1998: 66)

'An Actor' accused Barker of treating his actors in this way, ignoring their agency as humans and turning them into machines, or gramophones. The result was the creation of 'a new and automatic type of actor', who reproduced the instructions and directions unquestioningly ('An Actor' in *The New Age*, 9 January 1913). William Sidney Butt, who also claimed to have worked under Barker, corroborated 'An Actor's' accusation of despotism in rehearsals, and explained how: 'The artist (sic) in a Barker production is nothing more nor less than an automaton; a thing moved from behind by the wires which are manipulated by Mr Barker' (Butt in *The New Age*, 23 January 1913). Likewise, John Francis Hope, the paper's drama critic, called Barker's rehearsal method 'a tyranny, and a degradation of the individual' (Hope in *The New Age*, 6 February 1913), and declared: 'I object on general grounds to the subordination of one personality to another' (*ibid*, 12 February 1913). In these and other examples, Barker is placed in opposition to the actors and his method is seen as a polemic against the creative individual.

'An Actor' acknowledged the link between Barker's artistic practice and his political practice. He likened Barker's authoritarianism to Webb's envisioned socialist society in

the original article, and argued that his threat to the actor mirrored the threat posed by Fabianism to the freedom of the individual: ‘Mr Barker is the Sidney Webb of the theatre. Mr Webb’s vision of a society of flesh and blood puppets may be compared with Mr Barker’s vision of a theatre for human marionettes. Both are bureaucratic ideals.’ (‘An Actor’ in *The New Age*, 9 January 1913) The anti-Fabian undertone of this initial article suggests both the political position of ‘An Actor’ and the political motives behind its publication in *The New Age*. The magazine was founded in 1907 by two Fabians, Holbrook Jackson and Alfred Richard Orage, although they quickly dissociated it from the Fabianism represented by Webb and the ‘Old Gang’. By 1909, prominent members of the Society were criticized in its editorials and leading articles (Britain, 1982: 17). Thus, the attack on Barker’s method of directing – described as ‘the Fabian method’ – was a loosely veiled attack on the Fabian politics outlined by Webb.

This attack was founded upon a central discrepancy in understanding the relationship between the individual and the collective. Mill, ‘An Actor’ and his supporters all argued that the individual and the collective were largely incompatible, and that freedom was only achieved with the supersession of the group by the individual. The principles of collectivism and commitment to a group were interpreted as subordination and the imprisonment of the individual. Even those who wrote to *The New Age* in support of Barker perpetuated this perception of the individual freedom and the collective as diametrically opposed to each other. ‘An Artist’ explained that in all ‘perfect art, as in real life, character or individuality is eliminated. Type is represented, character is suppressed.’ (‘An Artist’ in *The New Age*, 6 February 1913) Herman Ould similarly argued that an actor must be ‘ready to sink his own personality in the general effect’ and to follow the instructions of the despotic director in order to create strong

group work (Ould, *The New Age*, 13 February 1913). Both examples make it clear that an actor's personal liberty must be sacrificed for the good of the group and the production, and that it was impossible to commit to a group and maintain one's individuality.

Barker and Webb, by contrast, argued that freedom came as the result of collectivism. By first committing and subordinating themselves to the welfare of the group, individuals had the space for the highest possible development of their own personality. Moreover, Webb argued that such individuality was developed in relation to the other citizens of the social organism rather than in competition with them, creating a sense of harmony and co-operation that was free from power struggles or attempts made by one individual to dominate others. In short, healthy citizens were created through the creation and maintenance of a healthy social organism:

Though the social organism has itself evolved from the union of individual men, the individual is now created by the social organism of which he forms a part: his life is born of the larger life; his activities, inextricably interwoven with others, belong to the whole. Without the continuance and sound health of the social organism, no man can now live or thrive; and its persistence is accordingly his paramount end.
(Webb in Shaw, 1908: 57)

Barker similarly argued that the actor experienced a stronger sense of freedom in performance through an ensemble, where the individual personalities were developed not in competition with each other, but in harmony, which was why he insisted on collective work in rehearsals.

Thus, Barker's plans for an ensemble was an attempt to create a harmonized company through which the individuality of each actor could emerge, as opposed to an attempt to suppress the individuality of the actor and replace it with the individuality of the

director, as ‘An Actor’ claimed. ‘The symphonic effect must be one made by the blending of the actors’ natural voices,’ Barker argued,

and by contrasts that spring from their conflicting emotions which their mutual study of the parts spontaneously engenders. Even over things that seem to need the exactitude of orchestration the scheme of the play’s performance must still, as far as possible, grow healthily and naturally into being, or the diversity of the various actors will not become unity without loss of their individual force. (Barker, 1922: 226)

In this sense, Barker wanted to give his actors the freedom that was not possible in either the commercial theatre, with the domination of the actor-manager, or the art theatre proposed by Craig, who wanted to eradicate the individuality of actors altogether.

Other actors who worked with Barker verified his belief that an actor’s individuality would be developed within the framework of a unified group and so contradicted the account of ‘An Actor’. McCarthy, for example, noted that the actors were empowered by the ‘originality and discipline’ of his productions and that they ‘felt no constraint. On the contrary, we enjoyed a larger sense of freedom; for author and producer alike encouraged the actor to let himself go.’ (McCarthy, 1934: 90) Nesbitt, who would have worked alongside ‘An Actor’ on *The Winter’s Tale*, celebrated the space given to the actors and their inclusion in the creative process:

Barker had the gift of galvanising the whole cast. Everyone trusted him, everyone turned themselves inside out for him [...] I think one of the reasons Barker was so wonderful to work for was that in many ways he gave his actors such freedom. He was not one of those directors who does a lot of homework with a set of puppets, and then says to the actors ‘I have you standing stage left on that line and moving stage centre on this.’ He worked *with* his actors. (Nesbitt, 1975: 62; original emphasis)

Critics in both Britain and North America also acknowledged the space given to each actor in productions that were unified and coordinated, but within which ‘every major

and nearly every minor personage had the individuality that the player's imagination and skill, as well as the producer's must lend to it. (*Boston Evening Transcript*, 3 February 1915).

The debate initiated by 'An Actor' highlights the strength of the opposition Barker faced from a theatre system that forced the actor and the playwright, and then the actor and the director, into a dichotomous relationship that left little room for his ideal of co-operative action and unity. Contributors on both sides of the debate depicted the director and the actor as eternal enemies, where, Norman Fitzroy Webb argued, the actor 'will fight tooth and nail for the "stage", as he has made it: an institution in which the actor is everything and the play is nowhere' (Webb in *The New Age*, 23 January 1913). Barker believed the director's role to be that of a mediator, a position that was not polemical to the actor; rather it was 'at the center [sic] of a perennial conflict between the actor and the playwright' (Mazer, 1984: 12). Yet, for those writing in *The New Age*, he was just one in a long line of individuals who challenged the actor and tried to win control of the field. These were the deep-seated ideological principles that opposed Barker's plans to establish an ensemble company and made his position in the field of theatre in Britain untenable.

Barker's Departure from the British Stage

The 1914 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Savoy was Barker's last significant work on the British stage. Britain declared war on Germany within six months of the production's premiere, which put an end to his plans to work through Shakespeare's canon and to continue his practical experiments in Shakespeare playing. By the time the war was over, he had retired from directing almost entirely, acting only

as an advisor on a handful of productions, including Harcourt Williams's production of *The Voysey Inheritance* in 1934, Michael Macowan's *Waste* in 1936, and Casson's *King Lear* in 1940. He also became the founding Chair of the British Drama League and discussed plans for an international theatre society and studio with Stanislavsky, Jacques Copeau and Firmin Gémier in Paris in 1924, although these plans were not pursued after this initial meeting (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 407). His interest in the theatre, however, became increasingly theoretical, and he focused on his scholarly work, publishing numerous articles and books such as his *Prefaces to Shakespeare* series and lecturing around the world.

Of course, Barker did not realise his aim of creating a permanent ensemble company before his premature retirement from the stage, although he successfully introduced actors, writers, critics, and audiences to the notion of ensemble playing. Similarly, his attempt to establish a repertory system set a precedent for the regional theatres that constituted the Regional Repertory Movement, the origin of which was influenced by the Vedrenne-Barker seasons at the Court. The movement began with Annie Horniman's Gaiety Theatre in Manchester in 1907, and soon included theatres such as Alfred Wareing's Glasgow Repertory Theatre, founded in 1909, Basil Dean's Liverpool Repertory Theatre in 1911, and Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1913. The aim was to elevate the regional theatre from its dominated position in the field through the development and promotion of new, regional writing. A subsidiary aim was the creation of a permanent company of actors capable of performing a repertoire of plays that rotated twice a week, although none of the theatres achieved this aim. Similarly, although the majority of the theatres received initial praise for their unified and co-operative acting styles, they soon fell prey to the same

trappings of the commercial theatre and the ‘star’ system, with audience members favouring certain actors such as Casson and Sybil Thorndike at the Gaiety over others (Davies, 1987: 56).

In many ways, Barker anticipated the Regional Repertory Movement, having learnt first hand that it was impossible to establish a repertory theatre in the capital given the huge overheads and the price of rent. He stated at his honorary dinner:

The theatre manager cannot stand up against the ground landlord. Therefore, and as a Londoner, I sincerely regret it, I think we must look for the first repertory theatre of the new order in Manchester or Birmingham, or some such centre where either price of land is not so enormous or where the municipality or some public body will have public spirit enough to nullify this difficulty. (Barker and Vedrenne, 1907: 12)

He was an adamant supporter of the movement and, in particular, Wareing’s Glasgow Repertory Theatre. He lectured on the benefits of a civic theatre to commemorate its opening in 1909, and returned a year later to direct John Masefield’s *The Witch* and reprise his role of John Tanner in Shaw’s *Man and Superman*, despite having retired from acting in 1906 (Rowell and Jackson, 1984: 26).

Likewise, Barker provided the regional theatres with valuable resources; many of the actors who worked with him and were trained to work as an ensemble went on to play important roles in the repertory theatres of Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow.³³ Casson, for example, was a member of Horniman’s Gaiety company for over two years and succeeded Ben Iden Payne as its artistic director in 1911, before leaving to become director of the Glasgow Repertory Theatre in 1913 (Rowell and Jackson, 1984: 35) Indeed, in the absence of a permanent company of his own, Barker’s theories regarding the importance of ensemble practice were transmitted and disseminated by the actors

with whom he worked, including those who were not part of the Regional Repertory Movement such as Nigel Playfair and John Gielgud. These actors secured Barker's legacy in the absence of any tangible evidence such as a school, a theatre, and so on, and made him 'someone whose influence, if not whose name, has resonated throughout the entire century' (Eyre and Wright, 2001: 28).

The reason for Barker's retirement from directing remains something of a mystery. The popular narrative was that he forsook the theatre for a life of comfort and money with his second wife Helen Huntington, a North American heiress who apparently despised the theatre and forced Barker to sever all ties with it, including his friendship with Shaw (Shaw, 1946; Salmon, 1983: 261). However, there were other important reasons, namely, his exhaustion at being embroiled in the daily battle to assert the social necessity of theatre in a field centred on entertainment and economic turnover. Like Craig, Barker understood the dilemma between money and art that was faced by all directors working in Britain, and his retirement from the British theatre was a public declaration that he no longer wanted to play by the rules of the game or make the necessary artistic compromises in order to 'succeed' in the field. Barker explained his position in a letter to Gielgud in 1937, who faced the same dilemma himself. The clarity with which Barker articulates the issue makes it useful to quote the letter at length:

For distracted – if I guess right – you must be, between two aims: the one, which is really forced on you, a personal career, the other, the establishing of a theatre, without which your career will not be, I think you rightly feel, all that you proudly wish it to be. It was Irving's dilemma; he clung on to one horn of it for a number of glorious years; then he was impaled on the other and it killed him. It was Tree's; and he would have died bankrupt, but for *Chu Chin Chow*. [...] I won't say that there too was my dilemma, because I never had such a career in prospect, I should suppose. But I pinned my faith to the theatre solution; and finding it – with a war and a "peace" on – no go, I got out

[...] And so it is, you see, that the question (for me) opens up: no longer for me a practicable question, therefore, I can still say *theatre or nothing* and not suffer. For you a devilishly practical one; so, who am I to counsel you? Only I'd say: do not expect to pluck more than a few grapes from thistles, and don't expect them always to be of the best quality! (Barker cited in Purdom, 1955: 252; original emphasis).

The centrality of the ‘star’ system, or the ‘personal careers’ of actors, and entertainment in the field of theatre in Britain made it impossible for both Barker and Craig to create their envisioned ensembles or to work independent of the economic paradigm of the commercial theatre. At the same time, the disruption of the First World War ended their last attempts at such an ensemble theatre – Barker with Shakespeare and Craig with his school – and destroyed the artistic momentum that each had built up. The field changed significantly over the course of the war, as commercial interests and competition intensified and took an even greater hold. The result was a field in which it was increasingly difficult to produce work that challenged conventions or the dominant criterion of legitimacy, as Theodore Komisarjevsky discovered when he entered the field in 1919.

Chapter Three

The ensemble and the Russian émigré: Theodore Komisarjevsky, 1919–1939

An actor who is an artist of the theatre must realise that unless all concerned in a play form an idealistic unity and their work is directed by an expert, their artistic individualities will subjugate each other and only serve for the destruction of the work as a whole. (Komisarjevsky, 1936a: 18)

Theodore Komisarjevsky arrived in London in September 1919 as one of a number of émigrés who travelled to Britain in the first two decades of the twentieth century. His approach to directing and his work with actors was underpinned by his belief in the importance of ensemble playing, a belief informed by his first-hand experience of the Russian theatre and his observation of the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko at the Moscow Art Theatre. This belief shaped his work in Britain and his original intention to establish his own theatre studio, where, like Edward Gordon Craig, he would be the singular ‘expert’, training a nucleus of actors to be sympathetic to his methods and his aims. Although he failed to realise this aim during the seventeen years that he lived and worked in the country, he was able to show theatre audiences the benefits of ensemble playing and thus continue the work begun by Harley Granville Barker before the First World War. Komisarjevsky also influenced a number of actors who worked with him closely, including John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft, who both interiorized his exaltation of ensemble practice and pursued the ideal of an ensemble company for the majority of their lives.

Komisarjevsky’s belief in the need for a prized individual to lead the group was rooted in his anti-democratic political disposition, which became increasingly pro-authoritarian over the course of the 1930s. He outlined these political beliefs in his 1936 book, *The Theatre and a Changing Civilisation*, in which he denounced

democracy and majority rule, arguing that history had shown that the social advance of the human race depended not on committees but on ‘the minds of single individuals who were able to surround themselves with able adepts’ (*ibid*: 16). Vladimir Lenin became a case in point for Komisarjevsky. The latter mistakenly believed that the new Soviet Russia was founded upon strict democratic principles and so cited Lenin’s decision to overturn these principles in the 1920s as proof of the failure of democracy (*ibid*: 17). Indeed, he praised the doctrines of Lenin, Adolf Hitler, and, in particular, Benito Mussolini, and welcomed

Fascism, Communism and Nazism as powerful forces which will help to open up the road towards a new life of cultured, disciplined *individuals*, united in corporations under the leadership of enlightened men for social, scientific and artistic work. (*ibid*: ix; original emphasis)

Komisarjevsky conflated communism with fascism in his eagerness to celebrate the ‘idealism’ of the European dictators, overlooking the fundamental differences between their approaches. He thus focused on the alleged convergence of the doctrines, namely, the promotion of authoritarian control and the right for a small and supposedly superior elite to rule over the mass majority.

The hierarchical structure that Komisarjevsky praised in the political regimes of Mussolini and Hitler was the same hierarchical structure that he sought to establish in his theatre companies. Further, he echoed Mussolini’s statement in *The Doctrine of Fascism* in his claim that the only acceptable form of democracy was an ‘organised, centralised and authoritative’ democracy (*ibid*: 18; Mussolini, 1933: 30). There is no evidence that he took such an extreme position, either politically or artistically, when he first arrived in Britain, and it is possible to hypothesise that his frustration at the British theatre system led him to reject the committee-led rehearsal method proposed by Barker. Of the latter he argued that ‘no useful work can be achieved by a

conglomeration of people’ and that actors should work as a collective of individuals in ‘a unity, a corporation, based on idealistic principles and [...] led by a single brain.’ (Komisarjevsky, 1936a: 18)

It was the restructuring of the theatre system in Russia in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 and what Komisarjevsky perceived to be a shift towards greater democracy and to proletarian hegemony that motivated his departure from the country. He objected to the attempt made by the Theatre Department of the Commissariat of Enlightenment to transfer control of each theatre from its director to a committee comprised of representative theatre employees, which, according to Komisarjevsky, could include a cloakroom attendant, a cleaner, a cellist and a property master (*ibid*, 1929: 11). The director’s authority was undermined as a result, and she or he was answerable to a group of people who were ‘usually entirely ignorant of how to run a theatre’ (*ibid*). At the same time, Komisarjevsky felt displaced socially by the new system. The symbolic capital that he inherited from his father, Fyodor Komissarzhevsky, and his half-sister, Vera Komissarzhevskaya, not only gave him access to the upper echelons of pre-1917 Russian society, but it also established him in the field of theatre (Borovsky, 2001: 234).³⁴ However, he complained that this name isolated him in the theatre and wider society after 1917, as theatre workers and committee members questioned his authority and told him repeatedly ‘that I was “not worthy to direct a Theatre in a Bolshevik country, being of a noble family.”’ (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 12) Having become frustrated at the limitations imposed on him, he left Russia permanently in August 1919.

Yet, Komisarjevsky faced similar limitations after his arrival in Britain, as he attempted to work in a theatre climate that was still insular, isolationist and Anglocentric. While the growing interest in cultural movements taking place in Europe encouraged a greater level of receptivity for non-British artists, Komisarjevsky was one of the only foreign directors attempting to establish a permanent position in the theatre at the time. He was, therefore, treated as an exotic novelty. Even his name isolated him in 1920s Britain and, finding it hard to pronounce, friends and colleagues shortened it to the more manageable ‘Komis’. Komisarjevsky’s experience was similar to Michel Saint-Denis’s, who moved to London from France in 1935 (thus later than Komisarjevsky) and opened the London Theatre Studio in 1936. However, the former’s alienation in the field was exacerbated by the fact that he was a Russian living in a society that was still largely Russophobic, as will be clear below. His nationality became a decisive factor in the opportunities available to him and, as this chapter argues, limited his efficacy in the field and his ability to create an ensemble company.

Although numerous scholars have already examined the fluctuating tension between Britain and Russia over the course of the nineteenth century, it is useful to summarise the main points here in order to create a sense of the climate that Komisarjevsky entered in September 1919. John Howes Gleason charts the origins of Russophobia in Britain to the early 1800s and the expansion of both the British and the Russian empires, which turned the two previously remote countries into neighbours and rivals (Gleason, 1950). Competition over land in central Asia and India created an undercurrent of Russophobic sentiment, which was marked by bouts of anti-Russian hysteria in the wake of disputes such as the Crimean War and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 (Hughes, 2009: 199). The British public became increasingly aware of Russia

as a result of this rivalry, which stimulated the growing interest in, and celebration of, its culture by the educated classes, as noted briefly in the previous chapter. The despotism of the Tsarist regime, as reported by Russian revolutionaries in London such as Peter Kropotkin, reinforced the stereotype of Russia as an alien, tyrannical and oppressive country, which became a popular trope in the representations of it on the British stage and in literature (Neilson, 1995: 84-96; Senelick in Beasley and Bullock, 2013: 25-31). The brutality of the anti-Jewish pogroms in the 1880s and the violent suppression of the 1905 revolution, including the Bloody Sunday massacre, caused shock and outrage in the British press.³⁵ Prominent socialists and intellectuals such as George Bernard Shaw similarly denounced the Russian government publicly. Shaw called the Tsar's Russia 'the open enemy of every liberty we boast of' before declaring that 'my heart is with [...] the Russia of Tolstoy and Turgenieff [sic] and Dostoieffsky [sic], of Gorki and Tchekoff [sic], of the Moscow Art Theatre and the Drury Lane Ballet, of Peter Kropotkin' (Shaw, 1914: 43).

The perception of Russia in Britain was further influenced by the major diplomatic realignment at the beginning of the twentieth century and the signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente in August 1907. Although the formal alliance between the two countries did not end the suspicions or antagonisms – many Britons protested against Tsar Nicholas II's visit to Britain in 1909, for example – it established a context for the development of greater Anglo-Russian relations. Fiona Tomaszewski examines the various attempts made to foster support for the alliance, which included a propaganda campaign to improve public opinion of Russia (Tomaszewski, 2002: 144-55). These attempts intensified after the outbreak of World War One. Russophiles such as Stephen Graham, Rosa Newmarch and John William Mackail educated British readers on

Russian culture in order to promote greater sympathy for the Russian people and to make the country ‘appear as a palatable ally in the fight for ‘civilisation’ and ‘liberty’’ (Hughes, 2009: 204). The celebration of the indefinable ‘Russian soul’ in these and other works resulted, again, in Russia being cast as the ‘unknown other’, although the intention was to show that its distinction from Western Europe was not a sign of inferiority.

Relations between the two countries shifted again in 1917 after the Bolshevik Revolution. Winston Churchill, the then Secretary of State for War and an outspoken Russophobe, spearheaded the brief British and Allied intervention into the Russian Civil War on the side of the White Army, despite protests from various sections of the British left wing (Keeble, 2000: 51). Over the course of the next three years, the British press reported closely on the reign of terror that followed the attempted assassination of Lenin in August 1918, and filled British newspapers with warnings of the growing ‘Red peril’ and the ‘Bolshevik menace’ (*The Mirror*, 29 November 1919; 16 January 1920; *Evening Standard*, 11 October 1919; 14 October 1919; 5 January 1920). Newspapers such as *The Times* demonized the Bolsheviks repeatedly, describing the ‘picture of ruin left by the ‘toll of Bolshevik atrocities’ and included detailed accounts of the ‘Bolshevist blood lust’ in quick succession (*The Times*, 27 February 1919; 4 April 1919; 26 May 1919; 28 May 1919; 9 January 1920). Similarly, *The Manchester Guardian* interviewed men returning to Britain from Russia, all of whom ‘spoke with great bitterness of the Government, and nearly all were still under the shadow of a fear’ (*The Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1920).

The same Russophobic attitude was present in a number of the plays staged in Britain at the time that depicted Bolsheviks as ‘touchstones of depravity’ (Nicholson, 1999: 5). Steve Nicholson examines such plays at length, including *The Bolshevik Peril*, which was first staged in 1919 in Tredegar, Wales and which depicts a Russian Bolshevik’s attempts to destroy a community by agitating local workers and seducing their wives (ibid: 31-3). Likewise, *The Silver Lining*, which was staged at the Ambassador’s Theatre in 1921 in aid of Russian refugees, depicts the destruction of the Soviet Union by British soldiers, while Barry Jackson’s production of *Yellow Sands*, in which an English Bolshevik renounced his political beliefs for love, ran for over six hundred consecutive performances at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in 1926, making it the most successful production of the 1920s (ibid: 45). These plays, like the newspaper articles mentioned above, were used as propaganda to discredit communism as an alternative to the capitalist hegemony. They also perpetuated the suspicion and fear of Bolshevism that continued to shape British attitudes to Russia throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

It is highly likely that Komisarjevsky was aware of the anti-Bolshevik attitude in Britain, which influenced how he presented himself to the British public and described the conditions of post-revolutionary Russia. In an early interview with *The Manchester Guardian*, for example, he was cast as an outspoken opponent of Lenin and a ‘fugitive from Russia and the Bolshevik regime’, who fled the country with his wife and ‘escaped with nothing but their lives.’ (*The Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1920) Although Komisarjevsky later nuanced this account, stating that he left Russia for a holiday in Western Europe in search of ‘mountains of pastries, sacher and linzer torten’ (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 13), it served the purpose of positioning him as one of a number of Russian artists ‘driven into exile as a result of the Red Terror’ (*The Times*, 22

November 1919). Indeed, *The Times* assured readers that Komisarjevsky was ‘not a “freak” nor a violent revolutionary.’ (*The Times*, 21 February 1920)

In *Myself and the Theatre*, published in London in 1929, Komisarjevsky described in detail the social and economic hardships faced by Muscovites after 1917. In particular, he emphasised the climate of fear created by the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation, commonly known as the Cheka. He recalled:

The perpetual fear, however, for one’s very existence, made all these [economic and lifestyle] inconveniences seem comparatively trivial. The country was full of Cheka spies – even one’s own brother was not above suspicion [...] and these spies were ready to condemn the most innocent action as a crime against the Revolution, the inevitable punishment for which was death. At night, people listened to every sound that broke the silence in the street outside, dreading to hear the rumble of a motor-van, as it was in these vehicles that officials of the Cheka arrived to arrest the citizens. (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 4)

By confirming the suspicions of the Red Terror and the low quality of life voiced in the British press, Komisarjevsky distanced himself from the Bolshevik regime and positioned himself on the side of the British, thus signalling that he posed no threat to the British public.

The majority of critics and commentators treated Komisarjevsky’s nationality as the defining feature of his work as a director, despite his attempts to distance himself from post-revolutionary Russia. The adjectives ‘Russian’ or ‘foreign’ became the standard prefix for any noun used in interviews, reviews and analyses of his productions, particularly when he worked on the plays of Chekhov and Shakespeare, which are the focus of this chapter. Actors, colleagues and journalists referred repeatedly to his ‘old Russian touch’ and called him a ‘Russian magician’ or, as Alexei Bartoshevich notes,

‘Lenin without the beard’ (Bartoshevich in Senelick, 1992: 104). The fact that both his friends and critics used this lexicon demonstrates the extent to which a preoccupation with national identity was entrenched in the British theatre. Komisarjevsky was frustrated by the emphasis placed on his nationality, which marked him as distinct from the rest of the field and, therefore, as an outsider. In 1922, he accused the British people of being ignorant of anything that happened beyond the country’s borders, telling *Teatr*, the Russian-language periodical based in Berlin: ‘Everything foreign is considered beyond the compass of English life. It is not theirs, so it is alien.’ (Komisarjevsky cited in Borovsky, 2001: 324) In order for his work to be accepted, he had to change the very structure upon which the British theatre was founded. However, it was a field that was very resistant to change, as has already been shown in the first two chapters of this thesis.

Entering the Field of Theatre in Post-war Britain

The British theatre of the 1920s was very different to the theatre Komisarjevsky had left behind in Russia. Four years of warfare had shaped it significantly, where the conditions of wartime London saw the competition of the mainstream theatre intensify and even more emphasis being placed on making money and appealing to the largest possible audience. War had also brought to an end numerous attempts to create an alternative to the established system, including many of the regional repertory theatres and Barker’s plans for an ensemble company. It is possible to understand these shifts and their impact on the field by returning to Pierre Bourdieu. To recapitulate briefly, Bourdieu argues that the structure of a specific field is determined by the objective relations between the positions occupied by agents within that field. Any change in the positions, or the creation of new positions, brings a change in the structure of the field

(Bourdieu, 1993: 32). There was a significant change in the agents playing in the field in Britain over the course of the war period, which resulted in a shift in the power relations upon which the field was structured and, therefore, the opportunities available within it.

The actor-managers who dominated the London and, in turn, the British theatre throughout the nineteenth century and into the first decade of the twentieth century were largely replaced by business managers and financiers by the end of the First World War, who now occupied the dominant position. The dominance of these figures of business meant that the field was judged even more closely in accordance with the logic of the fields of power and economics than it had been previously. These changes perpetuated the lack of autonomy in the British theatre already acknowledged in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, and made it more difficult to work outside the confines of the box office. William Poel, a forthright critic of the growing heteronomy of the British stage and its dependence on the fields of business and economics, was one of many leading theatre professionals who called for resistance to this new status quo. He attacked openly the dominance of the bankers and businessmen and blamed them for destroying the British theatre:

The play-producing centre for the British Empire is London, and the men who control the output walk the pavement of Threadneedle Street [...] All the methods by which the theatres thrive on the continent are ignored by London managers because they are interested only in one class of play, the one which is likely to appeal to the indiscriminating in all parts of the English-speaking world. In other words, managers are out to produce revues, farces and sensational melodramas, because they are the kinds of play which are marketable over the largest area of the world's surface. (Poel, 1920: 10)

Herbert Reginald Barbor and Huntly Carter were two other figures who published books and essays in the first half of the 1920s that rejected the theatre's reduction to entertainment and argued that it had a crucial role to play in society.³⁶

The intervention of bankers and business magnates into the London theatre had steadily increased since the closing decades of the nineteenth century, when actor managers such as Henry Irving requested financial support from such figures. As Barbor explained in 1924: 'Finance offered the helping hand and Art greased it with golden unguent. But the palm, well-oiled though it was, still itched as only the palm of Finance can itch [...] Finance decided not merely to assist but to control.' (Barbor, 1924: 9-10) This shift in the balance of power was the result of two main changes in the field. First, the war period marked the disappearance of a number of actor-managers due to death, old age or absence abroad. Herbert Beerbohm Tree died in 1917, George Alexander died in 1918, while Frank Benson moved to France temporarily to help with the war effort. Second, there was a change in both the size and the demographic of audiences, which made the theatre an attractive business proposition. Although there was a certain amount of fluctuation during the four-year period, the general trend was an increase in audience numbers, and newspapers reported repeatedly on the breaking of box office records.³⁷ In September 1918, for example, *The Stage* celebrated the achievement of the London theatres during the war, calling it 'remarkable, in as much as no one, four years ago, could have foreseen the success which, on the whole, has attended the playhouses in the West End.' (*The Stage*, 19 September 1918)

Although there is little statistical evidence available to show exactly which social groups were populating the theatres, contemporary accounts suggest that these audiences now included a wider spectrum of social classes, as well as those who had not attended the theatre previously. In 1916 *The Observer* declared that the increase in audience numbers was due to ‘the presence of the military in great numbers and the improved financial conditions of the working classes’, for whom, at least, becoming members of the new audience was a possibility (*The Observer*, 2 January 1916). *The Manchester Guardian* corroborated this point later in the same year (*The Manchester Guardian*, 31 August 1916). Likewise, George E. Morrison, the critic of *The Morning Post*, noted retrospectively: ‘To millions who rarely or never visited the theatre before, the war had made it a solace almost as familiar as their newspaper or their pipe. In becoming a nation of warriors we may have also become a nation of theatre-goers’ (*The Morning Post*, 13 February 1919). Clive Barker supports this inference in his observation that ‘the theatre began to appeal to a lower middle-class audience’ during the war (Barker in Barker and Gale, 2000: 17).

As the actor-managers began to vacate their theatre homes without leaving theatrical heirs or family members keen to continue their legacy, bankers and entrepreneurs purchased the theatres, perceiving them to be good financial investments. The new owners tended to view the theatre as impersonally as a factory, a chain of shops or any other asset that they owned and treated it accordingly (Marshall, 1947: 15). Existing within the parameters of the free market, London theatres ‘became the source of non-speculative income, with the search for stages becoming desperate as speculators jockeyed to have a foot in the West End’ (Barker in Barker and Gale, 2000: 7). Disinterested in producing work, the financiers leased the venues to managements who,

in turn, sub-let the property, thus beginning a cycle of sub-leases that resulted in an uncontrollable rise in the ground rents of theatres. This sharp increase became a major problem of the time, as reported by an anonymous journalist in *The Referee*:

Some years ago I instanced several striking examples of the heavy increase of theatre rents to successive tenants and sub-tenants. Any change since then has been for the worst – that is to say, for the tenant. A small theatre now running a revue started its first rental at something like £80 per week. A theatrical firm acquired the house and put it up to £110 for the next incomer. He, on sub-letting, charged £150 a week, and the next man who wanted it had to pay £200! [...] Can you wonder, then, that so many managers, coming fourth, or fifth in the list of renters, lose even on plays that appear to be successes? Also can you wonder that some “brick and mortar” managers make such big fortunes? (*The Referee*, 5 December 1915)

The result was the growth of both absentee landlordism in the theatre and the business of theatre profit rentals. Barbor denounced openly the ‘cut-throat’ finance of this mercenary system, or ‘racket’, as he called it, which left the theatre ‘a prey on the one hand of the real-estate shark, on the other, of the prostitute of theatric art.’ (Barbor, 1924: 33) On both counts, any notion of art in the theatre was subordinated to the need to make money.

Theatrical trusts were formed at this time to purchase each theatre as it came on the market. Following the precedent set by North American trusts such as Charles Frohman’s Theatrical Syndicate and the Shubert Organisation, managements in Britain bought multiple theatres in order to establish large chains or amalgamations across the country (Barker in Barker and Gale, 2000: 8). The most famous and successful of these multiple theatre managers were Oswald Stoll, Alfred Butt, and George Grossmith Jr and Edward Laurillard, all of whom were backed by a large body of investors and speculators.³⁸ The theatrical interests of the country became centralised as a consequence, and the control of the majority of the theatres was in the hands of a few

men. Carter attacked these multiple theatre managers at length, and argued that, whether business managers, impresarios or showmen, these figures acted first and foremost as financial middlemen, seeing theatre as an investment and placing business and profit before all other concerns (Carter, 1925: 18).

Carter described these trusts as being ‘constructed by capitalists, financiers, speculators and profiteers for the purpose of capturing and controlling the theatrical market’, and they succeeded in driving up the price of rent further for their own financial gain (*ibid*: 17). Unable to meet the growing economic pressure, more actor-managers were ousted from their theatres, and the trusts held the monopoly over the London theatre within a short period of time and ‘secured the control of everything and the meek submission of everybody in the theatre.’ (*ibid*: 18) Carter also accused the British Government of compounding the problem by failing to recognise the social value of the theatre and to support it accordingly:

Of all the follies committed by the English Government of 1914, none was worse than the neglect to check the efforts of the English Theatrical Trust to dominate the whole financial interests of the theatre. And none was of more far-reaching consequences as to the effect on the mind and spirit of the English people. It was equal to making financiers, speculators, and profiteers the sole guardians of theatrical expression in particular in London. (*ibid*: 17)

The lack of State support made it almost impossible to offer an alternative to the established commercial theatre, and to survive in the field without adhering to its rules.

In order to meet the rising expenditures of ground rents that reached ‘scandalous heights’ (Godfrey, 1933: 118), the tenants who leased the theatres had to minimise risk and limit productions to those that were commercially viable and guaranteed large box office figures. Within this highly competitive theatrical climate, where success or

failure was determined solely by box office sales, the theatre became synonymous with commerce and entertainment:

The public has for so long seen theatrical amusements carried on as an industry, instead of as an art, that the disadvantage of applying commercialism to creative work escapes comment, as it were, by right of custom. So easily, indeed, do people acquiesce in what is actual, that questions affecting the value of methods as apart from those of custom are overlooked. Even managers do not fully grasp the disastrous effect upon taste of providing entertainments, for the uneducated, devoid of artistic purpose. (Poel, 1920: 9)

The damaging effect of the financiers' domination that Poel observed here resulted in a change in the taste and the expectations of the audience, or, rather, a change in the habitus of the British theatre institution.

Maria Shevtsova explains that the habitus of a particular field or institution – her example being the field of opera – is established through the institutionalisation of the habitus, values or dispositions of those occupying the dominant position in that field (Shevtsova, 2009: 104). For example, the exaltation of the ‘star’ performer that was at the foundation of the British theatre institution during the Victorian and early-Edwardian period was a consequence of the domination of the actor-managers, all of whom were ‘stars’ and so promoted the ‘star’ system. As the positions in, and the power relations of, a field shift and change, so the habitus changes, which, in turn, changes the ‘space of artistic possibles’ in the field (Bourdieu, 1993: 32). It is important to understand the habitus of a particular field at any time, Shevtsova argues, as it reveals the ‘institutionalized ways of doing and seeing in the creative process.’ (Shevtsova, 2009: 104) This institutionalized disposition plays a dual role in shaping the theatre, as it ‘affects the way a work is created (and, thus, the decisions made by practitioners) and, at the same time, affects our understanding of such ideas as ‘tradition’ and ‘convention’ which are used to explain works of the theatre’ (*ibid*).

The shift in the field of theatre in Britain that placed financiers in the dominant position necessarily brought about a shift in its habitus, and it was the values of this new group that became institutionalised. Under the control of the financiers, who, in contrast to the actor-managers, treated the theatre largely as a means of reaping profits, questions of revenue and financial return were considered to be of primary importance. These issues became interiorized and accepted as part of the theatre's habitus by the other agents in the field – fellow managers and business figures, but also by certain artists, critics, actors, audience members, and so on. Again, the 'star' system was promoted, but this time its primary purpose was to attract the largest possible audience and ensure high ticket sales rather than promote the 'star' actor, which became a subsidiary concern. Of course, as Shevtsova argues above, this change in the field affected the understanding of what constituted the traditions and conventions of the theatre. To return to Poel's quotation, the practice of judging creative work through the rules and logic of commercialism became the custom, and the perception of the theatre as a business rather than an art form became an unquestioned convention.

A consequence of the widening social demographic of the audience was the need for theatre managers to stage productions that appealed to a socially heterogeneous public, where the educational and cultural capital of the audience was more or less irrelevant to their ability to 'consume' and understand the work. The result was an increase in the number of farces, sentimental comedies and melodramas – or what theatre critic James Agate called 'pieces of pure treacle' (Agate, 1926: 30-1) – as well as revues, variety performances and book musicals, where the wealthy middle class sat cheek by jowl with servicemen, officers and working women (Deeney in Barker and Gale, 2000: 71).

Three of the most financially successful productions of the war period were *Chu Chin Chow*, *Romance* and *A Little Bit of Fluff*, all of which succeeded in attracting an all-encompassing audience by providing escapist entertainment that was familiar and reproduced long-established conventions.³⁹

The need to guarantee commercial success also saw the perpetuation of the ‘star’ system and the long run, both of which were enacted with even greater force during the war. Production runs reached unprecedented lengths during this period: *Chu Chin Chow*, *A Little Bit of Fluff* and *Romance* all ran for over one thousand performances, which was a feat celebrated by the press of the time.⁴⁰ *The Stage* celebrated the record set by the former, calling its run of over two thousand performances ‘a gallant one’ (*The Stage*, 24 January 1918). At the same time, the commercial and popular appeal of ‘star’ actors made them almost indispensable to managements trying to fill their theatres. Managers agreed to pay larger salaries to leading names in a bid to secure their accompanying public appeal, which reinforced the economic and artistic divide between the ‘stars’ and the supporting actors that was present in the actor-manager system. Further, with the growing popularity of cinema, managers increasingly cast film ‘stars’ such as Dorothy Dalton in leading roles in order to capitalise on their large fan bases. Journalists acknowledged that ‘the fame acquired by a film “star” was of great use when she played a leading a part on the legitimate stage’ (*Daily Mail*, 9 April 1920). Again, the individual personality was celebrated and exploited.

While *The Stage* celebrated the high-ticket sales and the long production runs as symptoms of the health of the British theatre, a number of other writers and critics believed they were indicative only of the degradation of the stage. John Palmer, the

influential theatre critic of *The Saturday Review*, published numerous articles throughout the war condemning the British theatre, which, he argued, had become ‘a needless and unhygienic indulgence for the numerous class of pleasure seekers who have continually to choose between being bored by themselves and being bored by the strange professional activities of the diversely salaried mummers.’ (*The Saturday Review*, 31 October 1914) Barbor similarly accused managers, speculators and ‘prostitute’ producers of having ‘lowered the standard of drama, and exploited the lowest intellectual level’ in order to cater for the widest possible audience and so ‘conform with the requirements of his cut-throat finance.’ (Barbor, 1924: 33) Such a ‘prostitute producer’, he continued, ‘took the view that “Trash always sells,” and set himself to sell trash to all possible comers at the highest price. One part of that price was the virtual ruin of the English stage.’ (ibid: 34)

Critics complained vehemently of the standardisation in the theatre brought on by the Trust system and accused it of flooding the stage with carbon copied pieces of patriotic ‘fun and filth’ (Carter, 1925: 64). Benjamin William Findon, editor of *Play Pictorial*, observed with regret the domination of the London theatre scene by ‘empty-headed revue[s] with a plentiful display of uncamouflaged ladies [...] pieces which are all thighs and no brains, black silk stockings and bare busts!’ (Findon, 1919: 7) Agate assessed the situation in 1926 and noted: ‘Roughly speaking, three-fourths of the London stage is closed to persons possessed of the slightest particle of intellect or the least feeling for the drama.’ (Agate, 1926: 113) The main cause of concern was the effect this standardisation had on public taste. William Archer deplored the tendency for ‘decent and intelligent’ people to take ‘a perverted pride in accepting with apparent relish any sort of nauseous trash that is put before them in the guise of entertainment.’

(Archer, 1916: 261) He declared that this degradation of the theatre was ‘humiliating alike to our national and to our personal self-respect’ (*ibid*).

The continued dominance of both the financiers and the system of profit rentals, as well as the need to meet the every-increasing overheads, dissuaded any sort of experimentation in the field and reduced any opportunity for autonomy to an absolute minimum. As Barbor observed in 1924:

Today the initiative and ability of scores of capable *regisseurs* and hundreds of players are crippled by this heritage of top-heavy financial obligation. To a great extent the mastery of the theatre has passed away from actor-manager and artistic producer – even from the showman as such – into the hands of the real-estate shark. Experiment in new directions, trial of plays of certain aesthetic but problematic commercial value is practically impossible. (Barbor, 1924: 34-5)

Komisarjevsky observed with similar contempt the mercantilism of the British theatre and the tendency to confine it to an economic paradigm. He rejected the perception of theatre as a business to be conducted according to the principles of *laissez-faire* capitalism, arguing that such a view was peculiar to Britain and was not something that he had experienced previously. ‘I cannot recall any Russian theatrical Director who, like his colleagues in the West, regarded his profession as a gamble [...] the so-called “commercial” theatre was quite unknown in Russia’ (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 36).

Bartoshevich and Victor Borovsky cite numerous letters and articles written by Komisarjevsky to friends and colleagues in Russia in which he lambasted repeatedly the complete absence of art in the British theatre, and attacked bitterly its frivolity and its banality (Bartoshevich in Senelick, 1992: 103-4; Borovsky, 2001: 324-5, 338). He was particularly shocked by the profiteering in the British theatre and the artistic timidity of directors willing to forego their own art and stage ‘pot boilers’ to satisfy commercial demands.

The shock that Komisarjevsky experienced when he first encountered the commercial disposition of the British theatre indicates a discrepancy between his habitus – shaped, of course, by his experiences in Russia – and the habitus of the British theatre institution. Bourdieu argues that when an individual encounters the social world in which her or his habitus was cultivated – when she or he encounters the social context with the same values, expectations and dispositions – that world and its shared values are taken as ‘natural’. ‘It is because the world has produced me,’ Bourdieu explains, ‘because it has produced the categories of thought that I apply to it, that it appears to me as self-evident.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 128) It follows, therefore, that an individual experiences a rupture when she or he encounters a social world that does not share the same values. Here, the individual habitus exists in conflict with the dominant habitus of the field. The rupture between Komisarjevsky’s habitus and the institutionalised habitus of the British theatre manifested itself not only in his writings and correspondence, but also in his work with actors. Gielgud recalled the director beginning rehearsals for *The Seagull* in 1936 with a ‘long talk to us before the first reading decrying the methods of the British theatre in general and West End actors in particular’ (Gielgud, 1963: 88). This attempt to identify and confront what he saw to be the errors of the theatre system was a characteristic of Komisarjevsky’s work in Britain, as is seen below.

The claim that there was a difference between the habitus of the British theatre and that of the Russian theatre is supported by the experience of two other Russian artists who visited Britain during the 1910s. Like Komisarjevsky, ballet dancers Vaslav Nijinsky and Yekaterina Geltzer complained of the commercialism of the British stage and the

tendency to prioritise economic concerns over artistry. In 1914, Alfred Butt cancelled Nijinsky's contracted eight-week engagement at the Palace Theatre after the dancer was absent for three performances due to illness, which, Butt claimed, was 'detrimental to the success of the engagement'. Nijinsky was appalled at this treatment, and told *The Manchester Guardian*:

I made the greatest efforts to make my productions at the Palace Theatre thoroughly artistic, and I cannot help expressing my surprise that an attempt should have been made to treat an artist in my position in this way. (Nijinsky cited in *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 March 1914)

Nijinsky had communicated a similar disinterest in the commercial theatre and its financial rewards to the newspaper three years previously: 'What is money? [...] I have been offered huge sums to do a music-hall turn, but I utterly refuse to be sandwiched between acrobats and performing dogs.' (Nijinsky cited in *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 July 1911) Geltzer said that she was 'puzzled at the frivolity and, more still, at the commercial spirit of the British stage' in the same article (Geltzer cited in *ibid*). Further, she explained the differences between the Russian and the British theatres, and anticipated a number of the frustrations that Komisarjevsky was to face:

The managers of the theatres here are kind and generous [...] but they forget that one is an artist. In Russia it is so different. There art comes before all else [...] In private life it is expected that a great actress or dancer will dress quietly. If she goes about in elaborate Paris frocks people think she is a frivolous person who does not realise the serious character of the artistic life. I am told that there are English actresses who have the dresses which they wear at balls and parties described in newspapers. That would be fatal for the reputation of a Russian actress. (*ibid*)

Geltzer's belief that the precedence placed on an actor's public persona or celebrity status undermined her or his position as an artist resonated closely with Komisarjevsky's views. He, too, criticised the emphasis placed on the personalities of 'star' actors and the threat it posed to any attempt to create a unified theatre.

Komisarjevsky was heralded as an antidote to this business-centred and ‘star’-oriented commercial theatre by certain section of the press, who celebrated his arrival as significant for the future of theatre in Britain. In 1920, *The Manchester Guardian* called the director a hope for those ‘boldest believers in British art [who] will hardly reckon today amongst our great days.’ (*The Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1920) Komisarjevsky reinforced the art-business binary later in the same article, where he aligned himself firmly with the former by invoking his cultural heritage, and thus took position on the field of theatre in Britain: ‘In Russia [...] we do not make of art a business; we care for it because it is art.’ (Komisarjevsky cited in *ibid*) Elsewhere, he was introduced to readers as ‘one of Russia’s greatest producers’ (*The Times*, 15 January 1920) and a man ‘well known and much valued in the drama and kindred arts of the old Russia.’ (*The Observer*, 18 January 1920) While it is true that these reports exaggerated his position in the Russian theatre, they successfully imbued him with a certain amount of symbolic capital, which helped to introduce him to the field and strengthen his position in it.

Despite the growth of interest in the Russian theatre and, in particular, Stanislavsky over the course of the 1910s, Komisarjevsky was the first Russian director to work in the British theatre. Stanislavsky’s absence from Britain, for reasons outlined in the previous chapter, left Komisarjevsky the space to capitalise on this growing interest, and he soon became the exclusive authority on the Russian theatre. He was cast repeatedly as an interpreter or mediator between the Russian and British theatres, where critics praised his ability to translate the celebrated ‘Russian soul’ for British audiences (*The Observer*, 18 January 1920). Indeed, Alan Bott reported that by 1936

the British experience of the Russian theatre came almost exclusively through Komisarjevsky, who had ‘for many years laid down the law for everything Russian on the English stage’ (*The Tatler*, 24 June 1936).

Komisarjevsky’s association with individuals in possession of large volumes of symbolic capital also strengthened his position in the field. He profited greatly from his ‘relationship’ with Stanislavsky, in much the same way as a number of other Russian émigré directors and performers, who, Laurence Senelick explains, ‘tended to capitalize on their association, however fleeting, with the Art Theatre’ (Senelick, 1997: 150). Komisarjevsky’s status as the authority on Russian theatre extended to Stanislavsky, for whom he became a spokesperson, which was ‘a charade he upheld with panache’ (ibid: 156). He presented – or, rather, misrepresented – Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ in newspaper interviews, in discussions with actors, and in his own writing.⁴¹ Komisarjevsky’s fundamental error was to reduce Stanislavsky’s approach to a pedantic psychological realism and to accuse him of negating the importance of the imagination, thus ignoring his extensive work in this area (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 138; Stanislavsky, 2008b: 60-85). The interviewer from *The Observer* noted:

The naturalism (or realism, as some call it) of Stanislavsky [sic] had its great successes, but it had its great limitations. Theory growing, in the Russian way, like a gourd, brought the position to this: that no actor could express on stage any emotion which he had not felt in his own life. At that point theory, as M. Comesarjevsky [sic] saw, had gone mad [...] M. Comesarjevsky [sic], seeing that this sort of naturalism had run into the shallows, started to combat its effects in the only sensible way, by providing something better. (*The Observer*, 18 January 1920)

Having highlighted the so-called flaws in Stanislavsky’s ‘system’, Komisarjevsky presented his own approach, based heavily on the imaginative capabilities of the actor, as an alternative and a way of ‘providing something better’. Thus, he created a false polemic between Stanislavsky’s work and his own.

Komisarjevsky also embellished the details of his relationship with Stanislavsky in an attempt to increase his own cultural and symbolic capital and thus his status in Britain. He claimed responsibility for saving the Moscow Art Theatre in the immediate post-revolution period, stating that he convinced Olga Kameneva, then Head of the Theatre Department at the Commissariat of Enlightenment, to ‘ask Lenin for the transfer of the Art Theatre into care of the State Theatres Department, which he decreed after all, thus saving it from liquidation.’ (Komisarjevsky, n.d.: 8) In his 1929 autobiography, he recited an occasion when Stanislavsky ‘came to my Theatre to persuade me to become a producer at his own’ (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 138). In reality, it was Komisarjevsky who had requested to join the Art Theatre on a number of occasions and was turned down by the directors, who believed he was ‘not one of our sort’ (Senelick, 1997: 156). Of course, Komisarjevsky’s narrative placed him in a position of power and authority over Stanislavsky. In both instances, Komisarjevsky was presented to the British theatre-going public as a rival, or as an alternative, to Stanislavsky, but who was, importantly, on an even footing with him.

Komisarjevsky associated himself with members of London’s intellectual and cultural elite soon after his arrival in Britain. He established the Lahda Society for the celebration of Russian music, drama and art in January 1920 with Albert Coates and two fellow Russian émigrés – the tenor and opera stage director Vladimir Rosing and the ballet dancer Laurent Novikov.⁴² Likewise, he counted prominent figures such as Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Charles Ricketts and St John Ervine among his friends and colleagues (Komisarjevsky, 1951: 247). Perhaps the most prominent of his friendships was with George Bernard Shaw, whom Komisarjevsky met in 1921.

Borovsky describes Shaw as ‘one of the very few people to whom the secretive and cautious director would turn for advice’ (Borovsky, 2001: 426), although there exists little evidence in the archives that attests to a deep friendship. However, Shaw was a potentially powerful ally for Komisarjevsky. As an outspoken and critical Irishman, he was an outsider in the British theatre and British society, but had established a position for himself through his provocative work and behaviour. He used his subsequent influence to promote the work of other outsiders, including Komisarjevsky, whom Shaw called ‘the best theatrical director in Europe’, a recommendation that secured his engagement at the Theatre Guild in 1922 (Shaw cited in *Evening Standard*, 1 September 1922). Yet, despite the support from such figures, Komisarjevsky understood the disadvantage of his position as a ‘foreigner’ and outsider to the theatre institution. This realisation, in turn, encouraged him to find a group of like-minded individuals with whom he could work and create his envisioned synthetic theatre.

A Theatre of Synthesis

Komisarjevsky described his ideal theatre as follows:

An artistic Theatre must be a repertory Theatre and must have a definite idealistic policy in the production of its plays, which would make the public accept that particular Theatre [...] It must have a permanent company of good, enthusiastic and vital actors, who would demonstrate the ideas of the producer, understand and like his methods of working, be trained by him into a harmonious team and who would be willing to work on a *co-operative* basis. In such a Theatre expenses must be reduced to a minimum and fortunes cannot be spent, as in the “commercial” Theatre, on quite unnecessary “star” actors, on different useless employees, mostly indulging in a “dolce far niente,” on extravagant publicity and on “beautiful spectacular productions.” (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 41; original emphasis)

As is clear from this statement, he believed that a permanent company of actors, working together as a ‘harmonious team’, was essential in order to create a truly ‘artistic theatre’, which, for Komisarjevsky, meant a ‘synthetic theatre’. Underlying his

work as a director was the search for a synthetic union of the distinct art forms of the theatre, which would be brought together in a single production and underpinned by a strong rhythmic score (ibid, 1989: 17). He wanted his productions to be examples of total artwork, where the various components – including costume, props, scenery, lighting, sound and music – were unified in much the same way as Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* or Craig's Art of the Theatre (ibid, 1936a: 21). The actors played an important role in creating this synthetic theatre, hence the need for their work to be unified. Above all else was the single brain of the director, Komisarjevsky, who brought together and harmonised the disparate elements in the same way as a conductor.

As a director of both theatre and opera, Komisarjevsky's work with actors was underscored by a strong sense of musicality. He believed that every production was founded upon a central rhythm, or inner life, to which all the characters and the events of the play were connected. This rhythm was the central unifying feature of any play, and so the actors had to understand it in order to be able to 'feel' the playwright's text and achieve the necessary symmetry between the emotional and the physical movements (ibid, 1929: 144). It was the task of the director and the actors to locate the rhythm of the play and form a synthesis between it and the acting performances. Komisarjevsky believed it was essential for a company of actors to work and train together over an extensive period of time, thus becoming 'in tune' with each other, in order to achieve this task. The British system, he argued, failed to train actors to feel rhythm or to consider the work as a composite whole and, in contrast, encouraged the actors to 'live their parts only when they speak, with the result that the rhythm of the play is continually being interrupted.' (ibid, 1989: 17)

Komisarjevsky spent a great deal of time in rehearsals working with the notion of rhythm in order to counter this lack of rhythmic sensibility, and it became a definitive feature of his rehearsal method and how he treated actors. A journalist observing his rehearsals of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1926 noted that ‘he was not so much producing as *conducting*. The musical analogy was perfect.’ (*The Sketch*, 6 October 1926; original emphasis) Komisarjevsky adopted the same analogy to describe his work, and he likened a production to a symphony in which each actor, like each musical note, played a vital role. ‘I begin to hear each actor as a series of *notes*,’ he explained in the same article, ‘together, the actors form a fugue, running concurrently or in opposition, in harmony or discord – a fugue which I never allow myself to lose.’ (Komisarjevsky cited in ibid) He created a musical score for each production in order to create this fugue, and, according to Gielgud, he would ‘orchestrate scenes’ around the aural quality of the dialogue, phrasing the action around a series of pauses ‘the timing of which he rehearses minutely’ (Gielgud, 1974: 65). Having created the score, he used his ‘acute musical sensitiveness’ to guide and support the actors as they developed performances that established the ‘closely patterned rhythm flowing backwards and forwards between characters’ (ibid: 88).

Training the actors to listen to and follow the rhythm of the play was one of the methods by which Komisarjevsky fostered the unity between actors that was essential for ensemble work. He argued that actors in a company must be ‘innerly connected with each other’ if they are to play together as an ensemble, which, in turn, ensured that each performer acted ‘in keeping with the mood and general idea of the scene’ (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 123-4). The actor established an inner contact with the other actors by including them in her or his ‘circle of imagination’, Komisarjevsky’s phrase

that bore a striking similarity to Stanislavsky's 'circles of attention' and his insistence that actors must 'learn to look and see, listen and hear onstage' (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 93). Komisarjevsky similarly encouraged his actors to see and feel each other on the stage and to create a dialogue, where the 'actions of one must stimulate the imaginations and be answered by the reactions of the other.' (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 125) Yet, the emphasis he placed on the 'single brain' and the need for actors to submit to the authority of the director as the 'single expert' apparently contradicted and undermined these calls for unity and dialogue in the ensemble. He argued, however, that the actors' submission to the director's concept must always be voluntary and, further, argued that the director should never become a disciplinarian or drill-sergeant. In contrast, the director acted as a guide or spiritual leader, inspiring the actors and forming an interpretive unity of their individualities (*ibid*, 1936a: 19).

Of course, such a working relationship depended on a mutual and sympathetic understanding between the director and the actors, where the actors trusted the director and followed her or his plans willingly, and where the director was open to the discoveries of the actors and adapted production plans accordingly (*ibid*, 1929: 160). This trust developed over time as the actors became more familiar with the director and her or his methods. It was for this reason that Komisarjevsky prized actor-centred permanency in companies, where actors worked and trained together under a director 'and lived with him in the same idealistic atmosphere for quite a long time and formed what is in art called a "School".' (*ibid*, 1936a: 19) He took this notion of the 'school' literally and, like Stanislavsky, argued that 'a theatre of ideas needs interpreters who have been brought up on the ideas and on the methods of that particular Theatre.' (*ibid*, 1929: 82) He wanted to create a school, or studio, of his own in Britain that would be

‘a laboratory for actors’ and a space that allowed his company to ‘work together for a long time, more or less irrespective of productions, experimenting with new methods and so forth.’ (*The Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1932) He had previously achieved this aim in Moscow with his Free School of Scenic Art, founded in 1910, where he worked closely with its students for four years before presenting their work to the public as the Vera Komissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre.

Komisarjevsky wanted each actor to undergo a programme of constant training at his envisioned studio in order to hone her or his body to become an instrument responsive to the rhythm of the performance and to the actors on the stage. He wanted to train and cultivate ‘universal actors’, namely, actors who were masters of every means of technical expression and who were the embodied synthesis of the various elements of the actors’ art (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 144). The training programme at his Moscow school included plastic, rhythmic and movement exercises to develop the body, as well as exercises in improvisation to develop the actors’ imagination, which helped to improve their concentration and keep them alert on the stage (Sayler, 1920: 182). It is highly likely that any studio he founded in Britain would have followed a similar programme. By increasing the actors’ awareness and responsiveness to one another, the sustained training helped to establish those inner connections between actors essential for ensemble playing.

Another consequence of actors training together extensively was the creation of a sense of teamwork that countered the selfishness and the careerism of the ‘star’ system. Komisarjevsky denounced the egotism of the ‘star’ performer in much the same way as he denounced the despotism of the director-dictator, and he rejected any claim that an

actor-manager could be the single expert needed to lead the group. He argued that the actor-managers of the nineteenth century served only ‘the interests of their own self-exhibitionism and their pockets’ (Komisarjevsky, 1936a: 11), and that the work of these ‘cabotin’ actors centred on self-preservation as opposed to the creation of good theatre:

Team-work or the play mean little to him, his only desire is to exhibit *himself* to the greatest possible advantage, thereby nullifying the efforts of others. When he finds that certain aspects of his “personality” and a few stage tricks please the audience and therefore pay well, he exploits them for all he is worth over and over again until he is incapable of anything else. (*ibid*, 1929: 39; original emphasis)

The time he spent working in Britain showed him the dangers of a theatre system that celebrated the egotism and vanity of ‘star’ actors, whose desire to display their personalities led to the mutilation of the text (*ibid*: 154). Likewise, the inherent individualism of the system created competition between actors in a company, which made it impossible to create the unity and synthesis that he desired.

In contrast to the selfishness of the ‘cabotin’ actor, the teamwork of actors committed to each other and to the director removed the need for self-preservation and encouraged the actor to think of the production and the group above her or himself. Komisarjevsky wanted to establish such a team in Britain by creating a studio to train actors in his methods, in much the same way as he had done in Moscow. Unfortunately, a lack of financial support meant that he was unable to replicate this earlier achievement, and his pedagogical practice in Britain was confined to rehearsals, private tutorials with actors and a brief period of teaching at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in 1927 (Borovsky, 2001: 426-8).⁴³ However, in the absence of a studio or a permanent company, Komisarjevsky developed a rehearsal method that encouraged ensemble playing amongst actors brought together for a short period of time. Further, his work

on Chekhov's plays, particularly at the Barnes Theatre in 1926, demonstrated the benefits of ensemble playing to British audiences and brought him into contact with a number of like-minded actors, with whom he worked repeatedly.

The Chekhovian Ensemble at Barnes

Komisarjevsky staged six Chekhov productions in Britain, including *Uncle Vanya* at the Court Theatre in November 1921 and *Ivanov* at the Duke of York's in December 1925, both of which were staged for the Stage Society, and *The Seagull* at the New Theatre in 1936. He was praised for the general standard of the acting achieved in all of the productions, which 'brought Komisarjevsky renown and Chekhov a permanent place in the English repertory' (Senelick, 1997: 55). Of particular significance was his work at Philip Ridgeway's Barnes Theatre in 1926, where he directed *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*.⁴⁴ The Theatre was one of a number of Little Theatres opened in the post-war period to provide an alternative to the commercial West End and was thus located artistically and geographically on the periphery of the mainstream theatre. This position encouraged an audience largely comprised of a coterie of intellectuals and artists who were more receptive to Chekhov's ideas (*ibid*). Indeed, Komisarjevsky's three productions were staged as part of a season celebrating Russian writers and, in particular, Chekhov; Komisarjevsky also staged Leonid Andreyev's *Katerina* and Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* as part of the season. Ridgeway engaged him after A. E. Filmer's mediocre opening production of *The Seagull*, realising, as Senelick argues, that 'staging Chekhov required special qualifications and perhaps a touch of exoticism' (*ibid*: 143). As a result, Komisarjevsky was soon seen as the person best equipped to translate Chekhov and make sense of the plays that had previously confused British actors, audiences and critics.

Alfred Wareing's *The Seagull* at the Glasgow Repertory Theatre in November 1909 was the first of only a handful of Chekhov productions staged in Britain prior to Komisarjevsky's Barnes season, the majority of which were artistic and critical failures.⁴⁵ A central cause for complaint amongst the critics was that Chekhov presented a distinctly Russian world that was, therefore, incomprehensible to British audiences. In its criticism of the Stage Society's *The Cherry Orchard* in 1911, for example, *The Daily Telegraph* complained that Chekhov's presentation of 'a social life, a set of characters, so different from those which we habitually meet, was, and must be, a shock to a well-regulated and conventional English mind.' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 1911) However, George Calderon, the Russophile and Russian translator who worked closely on Wareing's 1909 production, believed that this 'shock' was caused by failures in the British system as opposed to the distinctly Russian nature of the material. He argued that Chekhov's method of writing was 'centrifugal' rather than self-centred, and so the plays required 'centripetal' acting that was focused on creating a unity of impression. The overbearing 'star' system in Britain, by contrast, trained actors 'to indulge their natural propensity to make the parts they play "stand out", like the choir-boy whose voice "was heard above the rest."'

(Calderon in Emeljanow, 1981: 101)

Calderon also argued that the practice of leaving space for 'star' performances encouraged actors to perform only when speaking lines, and so they were unable to maintain an inner life on the stage when they were not directly involved in the action. He warned, 'it is the very opposite of this cataleptic method that is required for the acting of Chekhov. His disjunctive manner is defeated of its purpose unless the whole

company keep continuously alive' (ibid). The critics echoed Calderon's comments and criticisms. When reviewing the 1912 production of *The Seagull* at London's Little Theatre, the anonymous critic for *The Times* noted:

[Chekhov] is not concerned to tell us a story of one, two, or three people which starts, develops and ends – something simple, which can be played by two-three stars only moderately supported. He is concerned to show us a family, a social class, a nation. In 'The Seagull' [...] the smallest character is no less important than the largest [...] So certain first-rate performances, like a scene of Miss Gertrude Kingston's with Mr Maurice Elvey [...] could not make the play as a whole nearly as interesting as it should have been. (*The Times*, 1 April 1912)

The tradition of ignoring or overlooking those in secondary roles in Britain was thus incongruous with the style of acting that Chekhov's plays required.

Indeed, the fundamental problem of the production, like others staged at the time, was the lack of unity amongst the actors brought together for the first time, which made it appear uneven, unbalanced and largely nonsensical. The production was widely reprimanded by critics such as Palmer due to the domination of Gertrude Kingston and Lydia Yavorskaya as Arkadina and Nina respectively, which obfuscated Chekhov's intentions. Palmer: 'In the Adelphi Society's productions neither Kingston nor [Yavorskaya] seemed to realise that her individual part was important only in correlation with the rest [...] they succeeded in completely upsetting the balance and rhythm of the play.' (*The Saturday Review*, 13 April 1912) Continuing his review, Palmer, like Calderon, explained that the 'star'-worshipping conventions that were so ingrained in the British system did little to foster the ensemble playing that was essential to successful Chekhov productions: 'It was not possible to be angry with Miss Kingston, for the whole tradition of British acting, which she so admirably adorns, was against her in this particular venture.' (ibid)

The success of Wareing's Glaswegian production of the play reinforces Palmer's point. It was one of the only Chekhov productions to receive positive reviews at the time, due, in part, to Calderon, who lectured both the actors and the audience on Russian culture and so prepared them for the play (Senelick, 1997: 31-2). At the same time, it was staged at a repertory theatre with a regular group of actors who were already familiar with each other and committed to the principles of ensemble work. The result was a production in which 'the ensemble was so perfect that it would almost seem invidious to select individual names' (*Glasgow Herald*, 3 November 1909). *The Stage*, likewise, congratulated the actors, noting that 'it says much for the company that they presented so good an ensemble.' (*The Stage*, 4 November 1909)

Komisarjevsky's Chekhov productions were similarly successful due to his commitment to ensemble practice and to creating a unified impression, which ensured even and balanced work that was intelligible to British audiences. He created this unified impression during the rehearsal period, where he encouraged the actors to work together to maintain the underlying rhythm of the play. There were two main phases of these rehearsals. First, the 'sitting' phase was centred on establishing a shared understanding of the play, and the actors read the play together and discussed it as a group, paying attention to the motive and thought process of each character. Gielgud recalled discussing *Three Sisters* with the rest of the company for a number of days and described how Komisarjevsky 'allowed us all to flounder about for several rehearsals trying to discover characters for ourselves.' (Gielgud, 1974: 88) These group discussions prompted the actors to make discoveries in concert with each other rather than in isolation, which allowed for a greater exploration of the relations between characters.

Second, the ‘walking’ phase occurred when the actors were ready to physicalize their study of the characters and develop movements and gestures. Komisarjevsky rejected the practice of using a set of pre-planned movements for this second phase of the rehearsals, preferring to give the actors the space to develop their own performances (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 163-4). Like Barker, he believed that the extensive period of communal study enabled the actors to work together and develop their own movements, making the director’s work a matter of composition rather than dictation. At Barnes, however, Komisarjevsky used an intricate plan of movements, gestures and even the rhythmic quality of vocal interchanges between characters. According to Gielgud, again, the ‘walking’ rehearsals for *Three Sisters* began with the company following blindly a series of lines chalked onto the floor that marked ‘the groupings, entrances and exists all most accurately planned – though at first we could none of us imagine why we were being shuffled about in such intricate patterns of movement.’ (Gielgud, 1963: 87)

Komisarjevsky’s decision to impose a production plan was, perhaps, understandable given the context in which he was working. He had not trained the actors with whom he worked at Barnes and, although they were sympathetic to the ideal of ensemble practice, they were not used to his rehearsal method, which was asking them to go against the ingrained conventions in Britain. At the same time, he depended on the productions being successes in order to demonstrate the necessity of ensemble playing and the benefits of his synthetic theatre. Without the time needed to train and educate the actors – he had only five weeks to rehearse *Three Sisters*, for example – it was necessary for Komisarjevsky to dictate the actions to ensure the desired synthetic

effect. He believed that the success of the productions corroborated his decision, explaining that had the work ‘not been completely harmonious the play might have seemed thin and even meaningless to the audience, as indeed, it did during rehearsals to the majority of the actors until they observed the final result’ (Komisarjevsky, 1929: 172).

Critics commended Komisarjevsky’s success at creating ensemble productions at Barnes that were noted for their pictorial and rhythmical unity. *The Sketch* praised his ability to express the underlying emotions of the plays through ‘[the actors’] grouping, not as individuals, but as a whole.’ (*The Sketch*, 6 October 1926) Likewise, *The Manchester Guardian* celebrated the transformation of individual actors into ‘a company attuned to common music’ (*The Manchester Guardian*, 18 February 1926), while *The Observer* argued that the ‘harmony achieved by M. Komisarjevsky between the settings, the acting and the luminous spirit of the play is beyond all praise. His art has the appeal of music’ (*The Observer*, 21 February 1926).

Other critics praised the internal ensemble that Komisarjevsky fostered, where the actors were united through the inner contacts noted above and a shared understanding of the work. Ivor Brown advised the readers of *The Saturday Review* to ‘journey over the Hammersmith Bridge [...] because you will see English players suddenly becoming greater than themselves and proving their fineness of spirit by their sensitive reaction to fine issues.’ (*The Saturday Review*, 27 February 1926) J. T. Grein similarly applauded Komisarjevsky’s work and how he ‘created the atmosphere; he imbued the actors with the spirit of the author. Thus a remarkable *ensemble* was achieved.’ (*Illustrated London News*, 27 February 1926) The majority of critics agreed that the collective standard of

acting achieved by Komisarjevsky had seldom been seen on the British stage. *The Times* extolled the virtues of his system and the remedy it offered for the ills of the ‘star’ system: ‘At no time during the play does any of the actors bring off a personal *tour de force*; at no time is any part allowed to seem greater than the whole.’ (*The Times*, 18 February 1926)

The actors were themselves enthusiastic in their praise of his work as a director. Gielgud credited Komisarjevsky with teaching him of the need to develop a character ‘in proper relationship to the other actors under the control of the director’, which influenced his subsequent work as both an actor and a director (Gielgud, 1974: 68). Ashcroft also celebrated his ability to encourage ensemble playing and to create the inner contacts between actors that instilled the belief that ‘the whole is more important than the part’, which, in turn, established a group identity and encouraged teamwork (Ashcroft cited in Billington, 1989: 53). She married Komisarjevsky in 1934 and, although they divorced soon after, she continued to call him the ‘master’ from whom she learnt that the ‘combination of great texts, fine acting, imaginative lighting and design could raise theatre to an exalted, almost spiritual level’ (*ibid*: 21). He introduced her to Chekhov’s work and to notion of a permanent ensemble company, the ideal of which became a driving force in her life, as is seen in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Komisarjevsky’s final Chekhov production in London, *The Seagull* at the New Theatre, opened ten years after the success of his Barnes season. Again, the majority of the critics marvelled at the ensemble work of the actors and claimed: ‘Better team work than in this revival of the Russian play has never been seen on the London stage.’ (*Illustrated London News*, 30 May 1936) While the productions at Barnes were

performed to a largely restricted audience, the New Theatre's position in the heart of the West End was much more accessible and, therefore, encouraged an audience that was less exclusive. The success of the production – it played for over one hundred performances – arguably marked Chekhov's transition from the restricted theatre of Little Theatres and subscription societies to the mainstream theatre of the West End. Brown, for instance, predicted that 'unless the New Theatre is forcibly closed in the face of public demand, Chekhov [sic] will begin to rival Shakespeare as the West End's new best-seller.' (*The Observer*, 24 May 1936) Likewise, and more pertinent to the focus of this thesis, it marked the growing acceptance of ensemble practice by the mainstream commercial theatre.

The presence in London of the Moscow Art Theatre Prague Group and Michel Saint-Denis's Compagnie des Quinze, two prominent European ensemble companies, also fostered this growth of interest in ensemble practice. The Prague Group staged a month-long season at the Garrick Theatre in April 1928 with a repertoire that included Ostrovsky's *Poverty is No Crime*, Tolstoy's *The Power of Darkness* and Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and *The Cherry Orchard*. The company returned in November 1931 with a season at the Kingsway Theatre, which, again, included *The Cherry Orchard*. Senelick rightly argues that the presence of the Prague Group's Chekhov productions gave critics something with which to compare Komisarjevsky's 1936 production, and 'this time Komis' [sic] penchant for romanticism came under attack.' (Senelick, 1997: 160) However, what is more significant for this present analysis is the excitement generated by the ensemble playing of the actors. Critics were astonished by the 'quality of collective understanding conveyed to the audience in a group of performances so fused in imagination that they give an impression of one performance, not of an

aggregate of personal achievements.' (*The Times*, 12 April 1928) W. A. Darlington similarly celebrated the company's teamwork and how the 'acting of the smallest parts was carried out with the sincerity and care for detail as that of the most important', which resulted in 'a miracle of co-ordination.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 1928) He echoed these comments three years later, noting his pleasure 'to see a theatrical team of such quality giving a performance as perfectly co-ordinated' (*Daily Telegraph*, 25 November 1931).

Saint-Denis's company received a similar reception when it staged André Obey's *Noé* at the Arts Theatre Club in June 1931. Saint-Denis believed that the actor was liberated through the interchange of ensemble acting and trained his company, which was formed out of the Copiaux, his uncle Jacques Copeau's company, to work together as a team. Critics heralded the high standard of acting by each member of the company, particularly August Bovério in the role of Noah. St John Ervine noted: 'The pleasure that he and his colleagues give is indescribable.' (*The Observer*, 14 June 1931) *The Stage* similarly called it a 'finely acted' production, where the actors gave 'sincere', 'excellent', 'powerful' and 'admirable performances' that were well co-ordinated (*The Stage*, 18 June 1931). Due to the success of the production and the high demand for tickets, the company's run was extended by a week before being transferred to the larger Ambassador's Theatre, where Obey's *Le Viol de Lucrèce* was added to the bill, and then the New Theatre for an additional two weeks (Baldwin, 2003: 50). Such was the level of praise bestowed on Saint-Denis and the French company that they returned to London annually for the next three years.

Both groups gave London audiences the opportunity to see established ensemble companies perform in the West End. The success of their productions, and of Komisarjevsky's work at Barnes and elsewhere, meant that by 1936 these West End audiences were more aware of ensemble practice, which made them favourably disposed to the latter's production of *The Seagull*. Komisarjevsky also benefitted from working with actors on this production who were more receptive to notions of ensemble playing, including those with whom he had worked previously.⁴⁶ As a result, he did not have to dictate movements and actions with the same minute precision as when he was at Barnes, and, as noted by one journalist, he allowed the actors to find their own performances: 'He is the quietest of producers. I have never heard him give an 'intonation', or say how a line should be spoken. He will discuss what the character is thinking or feeling, and leave it to the actor to work it out.' (*The Observer*, 10 May 1936) Ashcroft recalled how Komisarjevsky established a sense of unity amongst the actors, which encouraged 'a great feeling of ensemble. There were no stars... It was a lovely atmosphere.' (Ashcroft cited in McVay in Miles, 1993: 84)

Although Komisarjevsky managed to banish any sense of the 'star' system from his rehearsal rooms, the New Theatre's position in the West End meant that the production continued to be judged according to the logic of the commercial theatre. While the company was praised for its ensemble performance, it was widely accepted that the large ticket sales were due to the 'star' actors who performed in the production. Edith Evans (Arkadina), Ashcroft, and Gielgud were all well-known and popular actors by 1936, and, in an article titled 'It's the Star Cast that Matters', the critic from the tabloid newspaper the *Daily Sketch* claimed: 'People won't go to see this play, but they *will* go to see the star cast probably forever and ever.' (*Daily Sketch*, 21 May 1936; original

emphasis) Gielgud was credited with drawing in the large audiences, and *The Mirror* noted that his ‘numerous admirers’ flocked to see him in a play that was ‘hitherto a somewhat acquired taste.’ (*The Mirror*, 21 May 1936) Bott made similar comments in his review of the production for *The Tatler*:

It implies no belittlement of *The Seagull* itself, nor of the excellent acting from Miss Edith Evans, Miss Peggy Ashcroft, and the rest, to say that it is mainly Mr Gielgud who is packing the New Theatre from the stalls to gallery [...] Give anybody else the same brilliant colleagues in this play, and the same production by M. Komisarjevsky, and the ticket agencies would halve their orders for seats in advance. This fact remains, even though Mr Gielgud is not here the outstanding performance. (*The Tatler*, 24 June 1936)

Gielgud was, himself, suspicious that Komisarjevsky bowed to the expectations of the commercial theatre and directed Trigorin as a romantic lead in order to capitalise on the actor’s recently acquired ‘star’ status. He explained retrospectively that Komisarjevsky’s decision was informed by ‘his idea that the London public would certainly expect me to be glamorous at all costs.’ (Gielgud, 1963: 89) Bott similarly noted the discrepancy between the character of Trigorin and Gielgud’s performance, where he reinforced audience’s expectations by playing him as a ‘yearning, youngish lover, sincere in appreciation of proffered sweetness. It is Gielgud as his romantic public would have him; but it denies Trigorin’s callous attitudes in the last Act’ (*The Tatler*, 24 May 1936). Regardless, the large numbers of people who went to see Gielgud experienced a company working together as an ensemble and were able to see the artistic benefits of such work.

The success of this production and his previous work on Chekhov, as well as his work on other Russian writers, reinforced Komisarjevsky’s position as the foremost interpreter of Russia. However, this position restricted his movements in the field of

theatre in Britain and, as Gielgud noted, he ‘complained that managers only asked him to direct Russian plays’ (Gielgud, 1963: 88) and ‘resented being acclaimed pre-eminently for his direction of Russian plays.’ (Gielgud in *The Times*, 21 April 1954). This tendency to assess his work in the light of his nationality was a major factor in how his work at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was received by the British public.

The Russian ‘Invasion’ at Stratford

Komisarjevsky’s first professional Shakespeare production was *The Merchant of Venice* in July 1932, which was the first in his series of productions at the newly reopened Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon between 1932 and 1939.⁴⁷ In *The Merchant of Venice*, as in all his productions, he shocked audiences and critics alike with his iconoclastic design and his insistence on ensemble playing. However, what unsettled commentators most was his nationality, which was the focus of discourse on the productions. It was one thing for a director to revolutionise Shakespeare playing in Stratford – his home country that had, until recently, been dominated by the conservatism and idolatry of Benson – but that this director was foreign was something much more problematic. Critics attributed all of Komisarjevsky’s successes or failures to the fact that he was Russian and, therefore, alien to the tradition of the British theatre. Indeed, they apparently ignored the fact that he had lived and worked in the country for nineteen years and became a naturalized British subject in 1932, the year that he began working at Stratford. A suspicion spread through certain sections of the British theatre that this so-called inherently Russian director would ‘Russianize’ Shakespeare, and, as Richard Mennen argues, his presence in Stratford was ‘tantamount to an invasion.’ (Mennen, 1979: 388)

Many critics believed that Komisarjevsky's success with Chekhov where other directors had failed was because he was Russian and, therefore, able to decipher the plays that appeared illogical to British eyes and ears. Brown, for example, praised Komisarjevsky's 'Russian hands' that successfully 'stirs the sparks in [the actors'] English bodies and translates them in fullness to the Russian world of fitful moods, swift ecstasies, and menacing life weariness.' (*The Manchester Guardian*, 18 February 1926) Komisarjevsky, himself, criticised the belief that Chekhov was distinctly Russian and, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the stifling insularity that underpinned such accusations. He complained that British actors and directors 'looked at Russian plays first of all for what was specifically national, and diligently reproduced every possible feature of Russian everyday', which resulted in the eradication of the plays' universal humanity (Komisarjevsky cited in Borovsky, 2001: 325). Of course, it has already been well documented that while critics believed Komisarjevsky presented an authentic 'taste' of Russia, he modified and adapted Chekhov's text to present heavily Anglicised versions of the plays that appealed to the tastes and expectations of a British audience (Emeljanow, 1987: 56-66; Senelick, 1997: 156-60). Even so, he was forced into the role of 'cultural middleman', where, as Bartoshevich explains, he acted 'as an interpreter explaining the content of his own culture in his own personal language.' (Bartoshevich in Senelick, 1992: 107)

As Chekhov was taken to be distinctly Russian, so Shakespeare was believed to be distinctly British and, therefore, the exclusive property of British actors and directors. Komisarjevsky acknowledged this overriding sense of ownership in 1922, when he accused the British theatre of rejecting

all continental stagings of Shakespeare with orgulous contempt.
Shakespeare is an Englishman. Shakespeare productions are an English

tradition [...] If an Englishman breaks with this tradition he may be forgiven. But a foreigner – never! (Komisarjevsky cited in ibid: 109)

The fact that the critics had largely accepted Barker's innovative method of staging Shakespeare by the time of his final Savoy production in 1914 proves Komisarjevsky's point. His critics, by contrast, remained vocal throughout the seven years in which he worked at Stratford. Further, the criticism levelled at him was much stronger than what Barker faced, and it was full of condescension and personal attacks. The critic from *The Referee* argued that it was inconceivable that he, as a Russian, could appreciate the intricacies of Shakespeare's language: 'Clearly a Russian can no more understand Shakespeare than an Englishman can understand Tchekov [sic]' (*The Referee*, 20 February 1927). Such comments created a binary that placed Shakespeare and England on one side, and Chekhov, Russia and Komisarjevsky on the other.

This binary shaped Komisarjevsky's position in the field fundamentally. As has already been noted, Bourdieu argues that an agent's position and movements in a particular field is determined by the volume of capital she or he possesses in relation to the forms of capital that are prized in that field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). The field of British theatre in the 1930s was marked by the same latent xenophobia and isolationism that was present during the Victorian period, when 'splendid isolation' was the watchword that shaped the British public's attitude towards Europe and the rest of the world (Hynes, 1968: 307). Komisarjevsky's Russian identity and the symbolic capital he accumulated as the exclusive authority on Russian theatre did little to improve his position in this field; rather it confined him to the dominated position of the 'outsider'. As a foreigner he was allowed access to particular areas – especially with regards to his native playwrights – but not others. His Shakespeare productions, therefore, broke the rules of the field, and, as Borovsky notes, 'the very presence of a

Russian director in English theatre's holy of holies remained a puzzling phenomenon throughout those years.' (Borovsky, 2001: 385) Ralph Berry similarly identifies the 'deep-seated antipathy to the new' in the British theatre at the time that prevented Komisarjevsky from achieving his aims: 'The playing of Shakespeare was not to revolutionised by a Russian émigré. So Komisarjevsky was allowed to succeed, but only on terms.' (Berry, 1983: 84)

Of course, the suspicion that Komisarjevsky would disrupt the long-standing tradition was well founded. He admitted openly that he wanted to revolutionise Shakespeare playing in the country: 'The business of digging artistic corpses out of cemeteries doesn't interest me, and from my point of view has no value, as far as the *living* theatre is concerned.' (Komisarjevsky, 1936b: 10; original emphasis) Yet, in a decade marked by the growth of nationalism, Shakespeare was clung to ever tightly as a symbol of the golden age of Britain. The Prince of Wales reminded the assembled crowd at the ceremonial opening of the rebuilt Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1932 that 'Shakespeare was above all an Englishman' (Howard in Barker and Gale, 2000: 45). Thus, to attack the conventions of Shakespeare playing was to attack the very foundations of the British identity.

The perpetuation of these conventions by actor-managers such as Irving, Tree and Benson meant that they were deeply rooted in the British theatre by the 1930s, which left little room for innovation. The few directors who attempted to break with this tradition – including Barker, Barry Jackson, and Terence Gray – were positioned on the periphery of the field, while productions in the mainstream theatre were full of 'cut-and-dried conventional methods of staging Shakespeare, so that it was absolutely

inconceivable for them to have [...] a new look.' (Ashcroft cited in Borovsky, 2001: 389) Komisarjevsky's production of *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, was the first new interpretation of the play since Irving's 1879 production (Mennen, 1979: 386). In no place were the traditions more ingrained than in Stratford-upon-Avon and the annual Shakespeare Festival at the Memorial Theatre. Benson dominated the Festival between 1886 and 1919, and, even after his retirement, his legacy continued to overshadow the Stratford theatre, which became 'a depository for the dry bones of the Bensonian convention.' (*Weekend Review*, 30 July 1932)

It was in a bid to break away from Benson's stranglehold on Stratford and the associated accusations of archaism and provincialism that William Bridges-Adams, his successor as Festival director, invited Komisarjevsky to be a guest director. He told him: 'I knew you would bring an un-English genius to bear on two plays in which English producers were beginning to go stale.' (Bridges-Adams cited in Borovsky, 2001: 404) Komisarjevsky was shocked by the 'stale' Shakespeare productions he saw in Britain in the 1920s, which showed no signs of the innovations taking place on the continent. Like Barker, Craig and Poel before him, he rejected the 'star'-centred productions of the actor-managers, which resulted only in turning Shakespeare's plays into museum pieces that showed no signs of life onstage:

Look at 'Hamlet'! Nobody here seems to realise that 'Hamlet' is a *play*. They've all forgotten the story because they are so hypnotised by the personality of the actor who is playing Hamlet. But the story is there – a wonderful story. The producer could make that story come to life. Why doesn't anybody try? (Komisarjevsky cited in *The Sketch*, 6 October 1926; original emphasis)

Komisarjevsky's productions, by contrast, treated the actors as a group and foregrounded the relations between the characters in order to bring the plays to life on

the stage. He focused on creating unified and synthesised productions in much the same way as he did when working on Chekhov.

Of course, the actors had a very different relationship to the plays at Stratford, which influenced how Komisarjevsky worked with them. Chekhov's plays were almost entirely unfamiliar to the actors he worked with at Barnes and so he had the freedom to implement his own interpretation. The actors at the Memorial Theatre – many of whom were 'Old Bensonians' – knew Shakespeare's characters and plays in depth, having performed them previously on numerous occasions. In his quest to stage new and radical interpretations of these plays, Komisarjevsky was asking the actors to confront their own traditions and perceptions and to transform them entirely. In order to do so, he had to gain the actors' trust and sympathy. He wanted to take the time in rehearsals to create a sense of community in the group and to allow the actors to come to a shared understanding of the play and their roles in it. At the beginning of rehearsals for *The Merchant of Venice* he told the *Birmingham Mail*: 'I believe that we ought to be together for ten days or a fortnight before we begin to read the play, just studying the period and the possibilities and getting to know one another.' (Komisarjevsky cited in *Birmingham Mail*, 7 July 1932) In reality, the logistics of work at the Memorial Theatre meant that he was only ever given between six and nine rehearsals with the company for each production. He called the resulting work the 'incomplete "sketches"' of what he could achieve in more favourable circumstances (Komisarjevsky, 1936b: 10).

One of the changes to which the actors had to adapt concerned characterisation. Komisarjevsky restored lines and scenes usually omitted from the traditional 'star'-

centred productions in order to place greater emphasis on characters usually treated as secondary and unimportant. Thus, characters such as Gobbo and Portia became more central in his production of *The Merchant of Venice*, while the tradition of playing Shylock as the sympathetic, tragic hero, as established by Irving, was overturned to encourage even playing in the company (Mennen, 1979: 394). These decisions were met with strong opposition from some of the actors. Randle Ayrton, Shylock in the production, was a ‘formidable actor out of F. R. Benson’s stable’ who usually played Shylock in keeping with the Irving tradition. Fellow cast members noted how he was ‘horrified by Komis’s “antics”’ and was extremely uncompromising during the initial rehearsals, although he had accepted Komisarjevsky’s ideas by the first performance and agreed that his direction enhanced his performance enormously (Drake, 1978: 102).

Other actors were more immediately open and responsive to Komisarjevsky’s methods. *The Times* reported that the Memorial Theatre company was ‘said to be finding new zest in the interesting departure from tradition which Mr Komisarjevsky is introducing at rehearsals’ (*The Times*, 21 July 1932). Fabia Drake, who played Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, called Komisarjevsky an inspiring leader. She celebrated the amount of space he gave her to develop her own characters and his ability to penetrate to the heart of a problem and inspire with the actors with a single phrase such as ‘not sentimental – physical’:

Now that one phrase lifted me right over what was becoming a stumbling block. My mood, voice, pace, actions, everything was indicated. The whole conception of the scene became charged with a new vibrancy. But... the whole interpretation was left to me, so that nothing came between me and Portia, only she became a much more vital and much more exciting Portia than my own imagination had been able to discover unaided. (Drake cited in Mennen, 1979: 393)

She observed him work with other actors in a similar way and called him a ‘springboard’, where his deep knowledge of the theatre inspired the actors, but left them ‘completely free to develop along their own lives and through the medium of their own personalities.’ (Drake cited in Borovsky, 2001: 420)

A number of critics also praised the sense of freedom in Komisarjevsky’s productions and the ensemble work of the company. The critic from the *Birmingham Mail* commended the even playing of the actors in *The Merchant of Venice*, stating: ‘Mr Komisarjevsky, coming freshly into contact with the Festival Company, has evoked the best and most spontaneous from almost every member, without allowing anyone to predominate’ (*Birmingham Mail*, 26 July 1932). *The Manchester Guardian* made similarly positive observations: ‘From Mr Randle Ayrton’s Shylock down to the merest super [...] there are few discordant notes.’ (*The Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1932) Likewise, *The Times* in 1938 applauded the attention Komisarjevsky placed on each character, which had ‘the incidental advantage of allowing the Festival company to shine collectively.’ (*The Times*, 13 April 1938)

Yet, while these and other critics celebrated the collective work of the company, negative attention was centred on Komisarjevsky’s nationality. Many critics saw the engagement of a Russian director at Stratford at a time of growing fear and suspicion of the Soviet Union and communism as a national insult. *The Daily Express* complained: ‘It is typically English that we should have to employ a Russian to interpret *our* national dramatist’, although the unnamed journalist did not explain why this was a ‘typically English’ trait (*The Daily Express*, 20 April 1933; original emphasis). Even those critics who wrote largely positive reviews of his work retained

an element of cultural superiority. Thus, *The Manchester Guardian* commended Bridges-Adams's 'courage' in engaging Komisarjevsky, before reasoning that 'even if it has taken a foreigner to bring [Shakespeare] to us, that foreigner is one who has chosen England for his home' (*The Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1932). This final comment implied that his work was only acceptable given his status as a naturalised British subject.

Opposition to Komisarjevsky's presence at the Memorial Theatre came from every direction, including the Theatre's Board of Governors and, in particular, its Chairman Archibald Flower, a direct descendant of Charles Flower, who founded the original Memorial Theatre in 1879. Bridges-Adams underwent a lengthy battle with the Board in order to secure Komisarjevsky's engagement as a guest director, and he only succeeded after threatening to resign. However, even after he was engaged, the relations between Komisarjevsky and the Board remained slightly antagonistic, and, as Borovsky explains, Flower's letters to him carried an air of condescension (Borovsky, 2001: 398).

In addition to the resistance Komisarjevsky faced from actors working at Stratford, he was also subject to hostility from prominent actors external to the Memorial Theatre such as Oscar Asche, who felt the need to defend the long-established traditions of Shakespeare. In a letter to the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, titled significantly "Natural' Shakespeare", Asche argued: Shakespeare's plays should be presented without freak scenery and costumes, the products of foreign minds.' (*Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 12 May 1933) He accused the Memorial Theatre of setting a bad example by engaging Komisarjevsky and turning its back on English artists: 'Surely

there are English producers – and I would be only too honoured to make one of them – who could be invited as “guest producers”?’ (ibid) Again, a Russian director was seen as unable to understand the essence of Shakespeare and stage his plays accordingly. The traditionalist audiences of Stratford echoed this sentiment and asked repeatedly ‘is it Shakespeare?’ In one of a number of outraged letters written to the local press, an angry audience member declared that ‘Komisarjevsky’s play (call it not “Macbeth”) is the worst attempt at Shakespeare’ (ibid, 5 May 1933) In another letter, his *Macbeth* was called a ‘monstrosity’ and ‘an insult to the “immortal memory” that Stratford has cherished for so long.’ (ibid, 12 May 1933)

The critics were equally as insistent on making direct connections between the successes or failures of the work and Komisarjevsky’s ‘foreign ways’ and his supposedly alien status. Alan Parson’s reviews for the *Daily Mail* were laced with condescension, as he remarked how ‘vastly interesting [it is] to see how a foreign producer views a familiar Shakespeare classic’. He felt the need to remind Komisarjevsky of the importance of language in the plays repeatedly and always in a patronising manner: ‘some, perhaps old fashioned, people consider Shakespeare’s verse of more importance than any trivial tricks of production.’ (*Daily Mail*, 26 July 1932) Similarly, the *Daily Express* argued that his attempt to stage *The Merchant of Venice* ‘failed in miserable confusion’ and was unrecognizable from Shakespeare’s play: ‘All the company tried to make it Shakespeare, but Komisarjevsky made it Stratford’s crazy night.’ (*Daily Express*, 26 July 1932) *The Scotsman* argued that Komisarjevsky ‘imposed a foreign element upon one of the most of English of comedies’ in his production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (*The Scotsman*, 18 April 1935). The *Carlisle Journal* concurred, noting: ‘Komisarjevski [sic] brought his own

modern Russian ideas to this robust Elizabethan comedy' (*Carlisle Journal*, 11 July 1935).

The most severe criticism was levelled at Komisarjevsky's *Antony and Cleopatra* at the New Theatre in October 1936. The combination of a Russian director and a Russian actor in the role of Cleopatra, Eugenie Leontovich, was anathema to the critics, who complained vehemently of the latter's inability to pronounce Shakespeare's verse 'properly'. Charles Morgan filled his review with cruel impersonations of her delivery of lines such as 'O, wither'd is the garland of war', which he claimed was delivered as: 'O weederdee de garlano devar' (*The Times*, 15 October 1936). Agate was among the most severe, titling his review 'Anton and Cleopatra. A tragedy by Komispeare'. He bemoaned Komisarjevsky's incomprehension of the play's significance to 'the English ear and mind', as shown by his willingness to present a different interpretation of the play: 'I do not think that foreign producers, however distinguished, should permit themselves to take such liberties.' (*Sunday Times*, 18 October 1936) It is significant to note that this production opened just four months after Komisarjevsky's acclaimed production of *The Seagull* in the same theatre. The success of the latter – which Agate called a 'triumph' and 'endlessly beautiful' (*The Sunday Times*, 24 May 1936) – and the almost complete failure of the former reinforces the Shakespeare-Chekhov binary noted above.

Komisarjevsky's critics were, to an extent, correct in their assessment of his intention to 'Russianize' Shakespeare. His predilection for ensemble practice was a key aspect of his habitus, which was, of course, formed largely in Russia, and it underpinned his desire to replace 'star' personalities with ensemble playing and the synthesis of

individual actors. In short, he was attempting to introduce Russian practices into the British theatre and, in particular, into Shakespeare productions. The critic for the *Yorkshire Post* inadvertently identified this attempt in his scathing review of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. He aligned himself with the ‘sober Shakespeare lovers’ and sympathised with the Memorial Theatre actors, who

were asked to carry out “business” and distort familiar characters in a manner that comes natural only to players such as those who people Russian Art Theatres. This production should be renamed “The Merry Wives of Moscow”. (*Yorkshire Post*, 20 April 1935)

Komisarjevsky was, indeed, trying to bring a sense of art and ensemble into the productions, but for this critic and others, the introduction of such practices was something to be feared and resisted.

Komisarjevsky rejected the inherent nationalism that underlined the claims that his Shakespeare was distinctly Russian and, therefore, at odds with the British tradition. *Play Pictorial* invited him to write an article on Russian productions of Shakespeare in 1936, and he took the opportunity to propose a more cosmopolitan attitude that acknowledged the interdependence of all countries in the world:

I am afraid there aren’t any purely Russian methods of producing or acting, just as there aren’t any genuinely British ones [...] nationalism is a product of limited minds. A cultured person, remaining nationalistic in spirit, is cosmopolitan in all other respects. Free education, whether scientific or artistic, modifies the national traits of individuals, brings all nations into closer mental relationship, and unites them in a family striving all together for the spiritual progress of the world. (Komisarjevsky, 1936b: 10)

He made his case by highlighting how even those deeply entrenched conventions of Shakespeare playing taken to be inherently British were always influenced by foreign ideas and experiments:

In England, those productions of Shakespeare which, since Tree and Irving, are accepted as “legitimate” and “British”, show obvious signs of

the influence of the nineteenth-century German historical productions, of the French *mise-en-scene*, of the Sardou-Sarah Bernhardt-Rostand School, of the methods of Max Reinhardt, etc. Even the truly English Elizabethan methods, as used on the English stage of to-day, are not truly English. (ibid)

By highlighting the fundamental inaccuracies of any claim for a purely British Shakespeare, Komisarjevsky criticised openly the assumed cultural superiority of British audiences and critics, and the tendency to reject innovations from supposed ‘outsiders’.

Saint-Denis’s similar experience of alienation in the field bolsters up this claim for an innate bias against foreign directors. He staged only two Shakespeare productions in Britain: *Macbeth* at the Old Vic in 1937 and *Twelfth Night* in 1938 as part of the London Theatre Studio’s season at the Phoenix Theatre. Neither production enjoyed critical or commercial success, which Saint-Denis attributed to his French nationality. He was aware of how his national identity made him an anomaly in the field, as he told students at Harvard in 1958: ‘I am an authentic foreigner. You have noticed it already; I speak in broken English. I’m not proud of it.’ (Saint-Denis, 1958: 1) Like Komisarjevsky, he believed that this anomalous position counted against him and his Shakespeare productions, arguing that the tradition of staging Shakespeare in Britain ‘is so bound up with the roots of English life and art that it is difficult for a foreigner to succeed with him. This difficulty is real and deep.’ (ibid, 1961: 36)

Yet, while Saint-Denis believed that the failure of *Macbeth* was due to the insularity of the British theatre, which ‘made every innovation suspect, especially in Shakespeare’s domain’ (ibid: 37), he was not subject to the same xenophobic treatment as Komisarjevsky. None of the critics from the major national newspapers made reference

to his nationality or questioned his ability to understand the plays, as they had with Komisarjevsky in the previous year. A key reason for the discrepancy of this treatment of a foreign director was the presence of Laurence Olivier, whose performance as Macbeth was the production's decisive factor and the focus of the reviews. As the 'star', the production was seen to be his property or vehicle, where any success (or failure) was attributed to his work. While Komisarjevsky took sole responsibility for his productions, Saint-Denis's 'ownership' of *Macbeth* was never considered, and so his nationality was not an issue. The fact that Olivier was the focus of attention is entirely consistent with the 'star' system and in keeping with the British tradition, as noted in the previous chapters of this thesis. At the same time, this example reinforces both the feeling of isolation experienced by foreign directors in the field, as well as the claim that Komisarjevsky's Shakespeare productions were subject to particular scrutiny and ridicule.

Exile from the Field

Komisarjevsky's frustration at the critics' refusal to accept him as part of the British theatre institution, and their refusal to view his work as anything other than that of an outsider's, led to his migration from Britain to North America in 1936. Borovsky explains that his xenophobic treatment at the hands of the British theatre left him with a chronic morbid complex regarding his identity. In a letter to Anthony Quayle in 1949 he explained that

during the seven or so years of my work at Stratford-upon-Avon [...] my productions, in spite of their success with the British public, enhancing the reputation of the National British Memorial Theatre, had been constantly (to my mind quite senselessly too) labelled as 'foreign', 'Russian' and what not, by the majority of the critics and other 'knowing' people. (Komisarjevsky quoted in Borovsky, 2001: 424-5)

His position as an ‘outsider’ prevented him from realising his planned studio and ensemble company, and it limited his effectiveness in the field. He experienced a great deal of resentment towards Britain, and he felt that his time in the country was a ‘colossal failure’ because he had been ‘perpetually an alien [...] alien physically and alien spiritually, in spite of the truly great work I have done for the *English Theatre*.’ (ibid: 413; original emphasis) He was frustrated by the immutability of the British theatre and the xenophobia that stopped him from ever feeling ‘at home’ or establishing a legacy for himself. This lack of legacy was made clear to him when he saw the Old Vic Company perform in North America in 1942:

I think now I have been overestimating myself as an artist while I was in England. They have been treating me as a curiosity, and not as a necessary element in the English Theatre. The Vic production demonstrated... that they haven’t learnt anything from me and didn’t think it was worthwhile to learn. Well, the Lord bless their simplicity. That’s all. (ibid: 436)

However, Komisarjevsky’s ‘otherness’ also produced some positive results. The rupture between his inherited habitus and the institutionalised habitus of the theatre in Britain afforded him the space to assess the work that had been frozen by years of tradition and convention in a new light and to provide stimuli for change. This was, after all, why Bridges-Adams invited him to the Memorial Theatre, becoming his *machine de guerre*, whose function was to ‘tickle the liver of Stratford.’ (Bridges-Adams cited in Borovsky, 2001: 390) Likewise, although Komisarjevsky did not leave a direct legacy in the form of a studio or a company, he had an indirect influence on actors and other directors. In 1940, Stephen Haggard, Konstantin in the 1936 *The Seagull*, observed the shift in the British theatre since Komisarjevsky’s arrival: ‘Everywhere a new team spirit has become apparent, a new faith [...] It is the faith that the whole is greater than the part, and it is in direct contradiction to the last two

centuries of English theatrical tradition.' (Haggard cited in Hassall, 1948: 147) Indeed, Komisarjevsky's promotion of ensemble practice throughout the 1920s and 1930s created a climate that encouraged greater team work between actors and the establishment of such groups as Rupert Doone's Group Theatre, which was founded in 1932 to 'train together and create an ensemble based on sound artistic principles.' (Sidnell, 1984: 49) Likewise, the 1944-45 Old Vic season at the New Theatre, led by Olivier and Ralph Richardson, was noted for its unified performances, which perhaps showed signs of Komisarjevsky's influence. However, the Theatre's system of changing the company each year meant that it was not possible to build on the success of this season.

Komisarjevsky's influence is most evident in Gielgud's work and his attempts to create his own ensemble company. He also led the Old Vic Company in 1929 and 1930 and staged a season of work at the Haymarket Theatre in 1944 to promote ensemble playing. However, his most successful season was at the Queen's Theatre in 1938, for which he brought together a company of actors, including those who had worked with Komisarjevsky such as Ashcroft, Quartermaine, Devine, Frederick Lloyd and Alec Guinness. The group was committed to work together as a unified ensemble for the whole season and was praised highly by the critics, who declared that 'the company act together in rare concord and with such remarkable unselfishness that their work may be praised collectively without the pains of a selective catalogue' (*The Times*, 29 January 1938). *The Observer* echoed this praise: 'To treat the cast adequately I ought to print the name of every member of it, placing a large star beside each name.' (*The Observer*, 27 February 1938) Gielgud invited Komisarjevsky to direct the group's *Three Sisters*,

but he declined. Saint-Denis took his place and brought his own understanding of ensemble practice to bear on the production.

Many critics and commentators believed that the group came closest to a British ensemble company in the early twentieth century and, as the *Daily Telegraph* observed, it was celebrated as ‘one of the most capable companies of actors ever assembled upon the English stage.’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 10 February 1938) However, once again, the company disbanded after just one season, due, largely, to Gielgud’s work commitments. The Queen’s Theatre season and those other examples noted above demonstrate clearly that the notion of an ensemble production was readily accepted by British actors and audiences by the outbreak of the Second World War, thanks largely to the work of Komisarjevsky, Craig and Barker. However, the fact that the ensemble work did not continue after one season shows that there was still a resistance to the notion of a permanent ensemble company. Gielgud, himself, explained that while the idea of a semi-permanent company was attractive ‘in actual practice I dread committing myself for more than a few months ahead.’ (Gielgud, 1974: 189) Furthermore, he admitted that it was not possible to exist outside of the ‘star’ system entirely, and that, regardless of the periods of ensemble work, ‘the star must always exist’ (ibid, 1963: 108). The tension between the ensemble production and the ensemble company characterised the development of ensemble practice after the Second World War and, in particular, Joan Littlewood’s attempt to establish an ensemble company at Theatre Workshop. Like Komisarjevsky, she was an outsider in the field, and she faced severe punishment when she refused to play by the rules of the game.

Chapter Four

The ensemble in training: Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop, 1945–1961

I think that the worship of the genius producer is deadly. I think that age should go. One sees it becoming mummified all around one, the brilliant producer who arranges these patterns in a balletic fashion. That is all very entertaining and beautiful, but we are in the age of community. My belief is in the genius of each person, and this form of collaboration can reveal something unique that is greater than any one producer superimposing on a cast. (Littlewood, 1964)

Joan Littlewood was forthright in her rejection of the rules of the game, including the importance placed on individual ‘star’ personalities. She believed in the primacy of the unified and collaborative ensemble, and developed a method of working with actors to create such ensemble work that was radical in Britain due to its emphasis on collaboration, training and research. The centrality of these three elements was signalled in the name of Theatre Workshop, the company she founded with Ewan MacColl in 1945, in the wake of the Second World War (Holdsworth, 2006: 13). As the numerous analyses of Littlewood and her role in Theatre Workshop have already shown – including Goorney (1981), Leach (2006), Melvin (2006), Holdsworth (2006, 2011) and Littlewood’s own interpretation of the events (1994) – her iconoclastic approach to theatre making made her one of the most influential and controversial British directors of the twentieth century. She attacked the genteel conservatism of the British theatre throughout her career, and battled violently against the entrenched conventions from her position on the periphery of the field.

A closer examination of Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of field and position-taking are useful for understanding Littlewood’s rejection of the established mainstream theatre fully, as well as the strength of the opposition that she faced. In his insistence that one ‘thinks relationally’ about the field, Bourdieu argues that all agents are positioned in

relation to each other and exist within ‘a universe of contemporaries with whom and against whom they construct themselves.’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 70) The fundamental dominant-dominated division upon which all fields are structured is similarly interdependent, where the work produced by those dominant in the field is always shaped by the presence of the dominated, silent and excluded fractions, and vice versa (ibid: 71). In the field of theatre, therefore, a director is always defined in relation to the other directors in the field and, at the same time, defines her or himself against these directors and thus takes a position in the field.

Littlewood provides a clear case study of a director taking position. A director’s position-taking, or *prise-de-position*, is how she or he assesses the field, ‘situates it, places herself/himself in it and takes position on it, as she/he might take, say, a political or moral one’ (Shevtsova, 2009: 91). In other words, an individual actively situates her or himself by taking position and making a choice from the space of possibles available, choosing to do one thing and refusing to do another (Bourdieu, 1996: 88). It is the act by which a director defines her or himself in relation to another through negation: I am x because I am not y. This need to define oneself against another, and the resulting tension between positions, generates the competition or struggle that Bourdieu believes is inherent to all fields. The result, for Bourdieu, is a field divided into a series of antithetical pairings, the fundamental one being between the dominating elite, ‘whose strategy is tied to continuity, identity and reproduction’, and the challengers or newcomers to the field, ‘whose interest is in discontinuity, rupture, difference and revolution.’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 157)

Although all of the directors examined in this thesis positioned themselves on the side of the challengers, Littlewood was the most vocal and forthright. Her approach to training is just one example of how she took position in the field in opposition to its dominant positions and dominating institutions. By developing a training programme that confronted and attacked the conventions of the established mainstream theatre directly, Littlewood refused to adhere to the *doxa* or rules of the field. However, as Bourdieu forecasts, the Establishment fought back in its bid to uphold the status quo, thus invoking Shevtsova's analogy of the field as a battlefield (Shevtsova, 2009: 92). While Littlewood chastised institutions such as the Arts Council of Great Britain for its elitism and nepotism, the Council punished her by refusing to provide her company with adequate funding, as is examined in detail below.

This chapter focuses specifically on Littlewood's training programme at Theatre Workshop, which is an area of her work that has been largely overlooked by the Littlewood scholars noted above. For this reason, this chapter is confined to her work with the company prior to her temporary departure in 1961 and, in particular, to the three-year period following its move to the Theatre Royal Stratford East in 1953. This was a period of intensive work for the actors and the full implementation of Littlewood's training programme, and it marked the 'golden age' of the company, when it came closest to being a permanent ensemble company (Goorney, 1981: 98). The training programme broke down soon after this period due to various commercial pressures. The notion of Theatre Workshop as a permanent ensemble similarly vanished, and was replaced by a loose alliance of actors brought together for a particular production. Harry H. Corbett explained in 1961: 'The company [now] really consists of no more than four people; it is more of a nucleus of actors.' (Corbett quoted in *The Times*, 10 July 1961) It

is, therefore, intentional that only a limited amount of attention is here given to *Oh What A Lovely War*, staged in 1963 and commonly described as Theatre Workshop's seminal production. It is true that this piece was staged as an ensemble production, where the actors worked together to generate material. However, it was a far cry from Littlewood and MacColl's original intention to create an ensemble company training together and working collaboratively on a repertoire of productions, and it is this longstanding ensemble company that is at the centre of this chapter.

Littlewood rejected the figure of the director-dictator and any attempt to enforce a pre-conceived production plan onto the actors. In contrast, she encouraged the actors to develop their own ideas and to work in concert with each other to create a production that was truly a collective endeavour. In rehearsals, she acted as a coach, responding to the actors' discoveries and removing obstacles as opposed to dictating orders. She did not ever produce a definitive account of her approach to directing, rehearsals or training because there was no definitive method – it was constantly changing in response to the actors. However, it is possible to glean a general sense of the training from accounts produced by Theatre Workshop actors such as Howard Goorney and Clive Barker.⁴⁸ Her approach to training was also institutionalised by East 15, the drama school founded in 1961 by company members Margaret Bury and Jean Newlove to 'train actors in Theatre Workshop methods' (*The Times*, 17 August 1961). Although Littlewood never taught at the school herself, Bury based the classes on notes taken during rehearsals with her and created a curriculum that was 'the closest one could get to orthodox Joan' (Hedley, personal interview, 8 October 2013). The opening of East 15 meant that Littlewood was, and remains, the only British director to have a school founded in her name and to perpetuate her methods.

Training was of central importance to Littlewood because it equipped the actors with the tools needed to perform in the present. She argued that theatre was not something that was planned and polished in the rehearsal room to be reproduced each night verbatim. Rather, it existed in the dialogue that took place between the stage and the auditorium and so was always open to change (Holdsworth, 2006: 73). Littlewood's actors, therefore, had to be able to respond to the reality of this live moment and to the watching audience by improvising and taking risks on the stage, as opposed to simply repeating previously fixed performances. Of course, such work demanded a great deal of trust between the director and the actors, and between the actors themselves, which is why she insisted that the actors worked together as an ensemble over an extensive period of time.

The training also facilitated the creation of an ensemble company with a composite mind, that is, with a shared physical language, a shared understanding of the work and a shared approach to theatre. Littlewood believed that the constant training of the body, the mind and the voice by the group working together helped to establish these nodes of unity, creating an overriding sense of the ensemble with a clear group identity. At the heart of this group identity was the commitment to egalitarianism. In direct contrast to Edward Gordon Craig and Theodore Komisarjevsky's insistence on the need for a single brain to lead a group of actors (Craig, 1911: 172; Komisarjevsky, 1936a: 18), Littlewood shied away from any attempt to set her apart as the 'genius director' (Goorney, 1981: 100). In her company, actors, writers, directors, designers and technicians all played an equally important role in the development of both a single production and the company as a whole. For Littlewood, the collective always came before the individual.

The clear discrepancy between how Littlewood and Komisarjevsky interpreted the term ‘ensemble’ was rooted in a difference of political stances. While Komisarjevsky’s rather fascist tendencies permeated his celebration of the prized individual or genius director, as seen in the previous chapter, Littlewood’s leftist disapproval of the rigid class system in Britain and its oppression of the working classes shaped her calls for a theatre that promoted egalitarianism. Her antipathy towards the Establishment, which was to remain with her throughout her life, was shaped by her experience of growing up in Stockwell amidst the social and economic turmoil of the 1920s and 1930s. She witnessed first hand the abject poverty and slum-like living conditions endured by the working classes at a time when the country was hit by mass unemployment, averaging at 12 per cent during the 1920s and rising to 23 per cent in 1932 in the wake of the 1929 Wall Street crash and the resulting global economic slump (Hobsbawm, 1995: 90-3). Events such as the General Strike of 1926, the introduction of the Means Test, and the mass Hunger Marches that characterised the 1920s and 1930s politicised Littlewood. By the time she enrolled at RADA in 1932, she believed strongly in the need for a socially committed theatre that would reflect the realities of the period and speak directly to, and for, the working classes. It would be a theatre for the people and a place that was accessible to all.

However, at RADA, Littlewood found herself surrounded by girls who were all ‘debs or rich Americans acquiring an English accent. I was the only outsider.’ (Littlewood, 1994: 68). The school at that time was treated as an alternative finishing school and catered only for the upper strata of society. Littlewood’s account of her time there is punctuated by clear examples of the elitism and snobbery promoted by the school, where she was

alienated repeatedly due to her working-class background: ‘A titled girl approached me one day. “It must be a frightful bore to be poor,” she said.’ (*ibid*: 69) Artistically, she found the work to be ‘utterly devoid of purpose, of intellectual stimulation and engagement with her background or the experiences of many during this period’ (Holdsworth, 2011: 5). She soon realised that the training at RADA did little more than reproduce the conventions of the mainstream theatre and, frustrated by its disconnection from the social issues of the time, she left the school after less than a year.

Her meeting with MacColl – then named Jimmie Miller – in Manchester in 1934 reaffirmed for her the political and artistic ideas that had begun to flourish in London. MacColl was, at that time, ‘possessed by a terrible sense of urgency’ and a ‘need to create a political theatre that would help change the world where we found ourselves constantly in danger of drowning’ (Goorney and MacColl, 1986: xxi). He was already a declared Marxist, a member of the Young Communist League, and, inspired by the agit-prop work of the Soviet and German Blue Blouse groups, he had begun to produce work affiliated to both the British and International Workers’ Theatre Movements (MacColl, 1990: 169; Paget, 1995: 213-4; Leach in Pitches, 2012: 110-3). To this end, he founded the Red Megaphones in 1931, which became Theatre of Action in 1934, in order to take agit-prop theatre to the working-class communities of northern Britain to foster political and financial support for striking workers. The aim was to create ‘a theatre which consciously made itself *useful* in the class struggle’ (Leach in Pitches, 2012: 113; original emphasis).

Since they held similar political and artistic views, the first meeting between Littlewood and MacColl was spent sharing ideas and discussing plans for a new and ‘real’ theatre:

Our views, we found, coincided at almost every point. We were drunk with ideas, lightheaded with talk and lack of sleep and each of us jubilant at having discovered an ally. [...] We continued our talking marathon right through the next two or three nights. (MacColl, 1990: 211)

Both believed adamantly in the importance of the working class and the principles of collectivism, arguing that society should work to protect the most vulnerable. Littlewood joined Theatre of Action shortly after this meeting, before she and MacColl founded Theatre Union in 1936, the group which emerged from the pair's work for the Manchester branch of the Peace Pledge Union and which was the precursor of Theatre Workshop.⁴⁹ The group positioned itself on the left and created work to assist in the struggle against 'an ever-increasing danger of war and fascism' (Goorney and MacColl, 1986: xxxix). Among the productions staged were *Fuente Ovejuna* in 1939, produced to promote the Communist efforts in the Spanish Civil War, and *Last Edition* in 1940, a living newspaper piece that critiqued the politics of appeasement in the run up to the Second World War. These and other productions established a political aesthetic that would be identifiable in Theatre Workshop's early work.

Of course, Theatre Union was not the only theatre group to comment on political issues. The Unity Theatre movement saw the creation of a number of amateur theatre clubs across Britain, the most prominent being its branches in London, formed in 1936, and Glasgow, which was formed in 1941 and had close links to the Left Book Club Theatre Guild. These groups were formed to foreground working class issues for working class audiences and thus to counter the British mainstream theatre's avoidance of the social problems of the time (Leach, 2006: 31-4). The monopolisation of the British theatre by businessmen and multiple theatre managers outlined in the previous chapter continued throughout the 1930s and into the war period, where entrepreneurs such as Hugh

‘Binkie’ Beaumont and Prince Littler replaced Alfred Butt and Oswald Stoll. Beaumont’s company, HM Tennent Ltd, flooded the British stage with productions that demonstrated ‘an obsession with glamour, a refusal to stage works that glanced at contemporary life or political concerns [...] and a continual representation of [the] upper-middle-class’ at the expense of the working class (Shellard, 1999: 7). Like these other groups, Theatre Union wanted to create a populist theatre that spoke directly to ‘that section of the public which has been starved theatrically’ (Goorney and MacColl, 1986: xliv). Its objective was to take the theatre to the people and to bypass the class-based commercial theatre of London, which saw the company touring around the country and living a gruelling nomadic existence before finally settling in Stratford, East London in 1953.

A core group from Theatre Union – Littlewood, MacColl, Goorney, Gerry Raffles, Rosalie Williams – remained in contact after the group disbanded in 1942 and reformed as Theatre Workshop in April 1945.⁵⁰ The presence of this strong nucleus of artists who had collaborated together previously helped to unify Theatre Workshop as a group with a number of shared values and objectives such as the desire to create ‘a theatre with a living language, a theatre which is not afraid of the sound of its own voice and which will comment [...] fearlessly on Society’ (Goorney, 1981: 42). This shared ethos did, of course, change over time and with the arrival of new members and the departure of old ones, not least when MacColl left the group informally following its move to Stratford, which also signalled a departure from the earlier political commitment.⁵¹

As noted in Chapter Two of this thesis, Bourdieu argues that the habitus, that is, the values, perceptions and aspirations, of a particular group is structured by the shared

values and affinities of its members. This group habitus, in turn, structures the habitus of the individual members of the group, manifesting itself in the perpetuation of these shared values (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 125). The political commitment that was, in the beginning, at the centre of Theatre Workshop's habitus not only encouraged new members to join, but also engaged existing members in the political issues of the time. Corbett, who joined the company in 1952, explained: 'We gained a lot, not just the ability to play plays [...] I learned about Zionism and Judaism, about politics, about the East German situation. One learned in a curious sort of way, through songs, through meeting all sorts of people.' (Corbett cited in Goorney, 1981: 191-2) Again, this political awareness shaped the productions it staged. Its pro-communist and pro-working class values were clearly identifiable in works such as *Uranium 235* in 1946, *The Travellers* in 1952, and *Oh What A Lovely War* in 1963, the latter being the apotheosis of the group's anti-war sensibility. Similarly, early productions such as *Johnny Noble* in 1945 and *Landscape with Chimneys* in 1951 promoted the ideal of the geographically and socially close-knit community (Holdsworth, 2011: 128-36).

This democratic disposition also influenced how the group worked together. As Robert Leach argues, Littlewood's company needed to work together as a community in order to promote the ideal of egalitarianism and demonstrate how these communal values could be put into practice (Leach, 2006: 49). She was successful in this aim for a while, and the group operated as a co-operative in much the same way as Theatre Union had done so previously, which included economic parity between all members. The very foundation of the group depended on the original members pooling their personal savings and demobilisation money (Goorney, 1981: 40). What little money was raised from performances was shared equally among all members to prevent the establishment

of any economic hierarchies, in stark contrast to the practice of West End managers like Beaumont, who paid ‘star’ actors exorbitant fees to secure their services. When money was short, as was the case more often than not, the company suffered together. Jeanne Goddard, who joined the company in 1946, recalled: ‘Nobody complained as everybody was treated alike, including Joan and Ewan.’ (Goddard cited in Goorney, 1981: 58)

As a co-operative, everyone had a role to play in the rehearsals, on the stage, and in the daily running of the group. For example, each member had a particular job to perform in the perpetual rigging and de-rigging as they toured from town to town (Goorney, 1981: 48). Likewise, Littlewood set each person a specific research task during the early stages of rehearsals, which she or he had to report on to the group so as to establish a shared understanding of the play. Each member also had the right to participate in the policy-making process and weekly company meetings were held. However, these meetings became more of a formality after 1953, when Raffles, Littlewood’s life-long partner, became Theatre Manager and increasingly took control of all managerial decisions, while Littlewood and John Bury took charge of the artistic work (*ibid*: 97; Barker, 2003: 99). The co-operative nature of the group offstage was identifiable in the work that they created onstage. Irving Wardle noted retrospectively that this ‘egalitarian ensemble’ demonstrated that ‘the creation of fine work on stage is inseparable from the creation of a freely co-operating collective.’ (*The Times*, 3 December 1970)

Individual members such as Kristin Lind similarly praised the ensemble work and the strength and security that came from being part of a group:

Nothing has meant more to me than the hard working years with Theatre Workshop. Our work and life together articulated the values I had always believed in, and suddenly belonging to a group, fighting together towards the same aim, gave meaning to both theatre and life. This group

solidarity is a necessity. Theatre is never one man's work. It was the togetherness that mattered. (Lind cited in Goorney, 1981: 194)

This group solidarity was fostered by financial necessity, where lack of money forced the group to 'seek an inner strength, a comfort in each other's company' and to live communally on a number of occasions, including when it first took up residence in the Theatre Royal Stratford East (Goorney, 1981: 192). Although the close proximity of the group gave rise to a number of personal clashes, the overriding sense of purpose and the commitment to the group's objective tended to diffuse such disputes (*ibid*: 47). Such was the level of commitment to the collective, that its members were often willing to sacrifice personal gain for the good of the group:

I remember being so happy with this life [...] when [Joby] Blanshard came in and told me we were all going to have a pound each that week, I didn't wanr to take mine [...] I felt it was such a privilege to be allowed to work in such an atmosphere, as long as I was fed and housed, I didn't need to be paid! (Goddard cited in *ibid*: 58)

In contrast to the inclusivity experienced within the group, Littlewood and Theatre Workshop were excluded and marginalised in the field of theatre in Britain. As an illegitimate child brought up in a working-class neighbourhood, Littlewood did not have the necessary social and economic capital to gain entry into the money- and class-oriented British theatre of the 1940s and 1950s, where work continued to be created by and for the middle and upper-middle classes, as is shown below. She was an outsider in the field, like Komisarjevsky before her. Furthermore, she was a woman working in an exclusively male profession. 'You must realise the awful shock this was: to work with a woman,' Corbett explained, 'it was unknown in the profession, unbelievable, it was going against the laws of nature.' (Corbett cited in Goorney, 1981: 189) Finally, she was outspoken politically and treated those she opposed in a rough and abrasive manner at a time of growing political consensus and conformity. It is easy, therefore, to see how

Littlewood did not fit into the genteel middle-class old boys' club that was the theatre, a milieu into which she was certainly not welcomed.

The Artistic Landscape After 1945

Although the mainstream British theatre retained its cultural conservatism well into the 1950s, there was a sense of optimism in the immediate post-war period that this old order could be challenged. This atmosphere of hope reflected the general mood felt across British society. The landslide victory of Clement Attlee's Labour Party in the 1945 general election demonstrated the electorate's desire for 'radical change, to see whole areas of British life transformed by a new administration which would build upon the questioning of the conventional beliefs and attitudes induced by the war.' (Davies, 1987: 138) The hope for a fairer and more equal society was galvanised by the emergence of the Welfare Society. Eric Hobsbawm examines the shift towards a mixed economy in the wake of the Second World War, as British economists such as John Maynard Keynes encouraged greater regulation of the financial market and State intervention in a bid to avoid the mass unemployment and economic hardship of the 1930s (Hobsbawm, 1995: 267-72). The resulting social reforms, including the founding of the NHS in 1948, provided greater support and protection against poor health, disease and various other social ills. In the theatre, the increased intervention of the State manifested itself in a system of public subsidy and the creation of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946, thus formalising the Treasury's war-time support for the arts in the shape of the Council for Encouragement of Music and Art (CEMA).

The creation of the Arts Council had a profound effect on the field of theatre in post-war Britain, particularly when one considers Bourdieu's claim that the dominant groups in

the field of cultural production have the power to impose a definition of legitimate artistic practice (Bourdieu, 1993: 42; 1996: 224). The arrival of the Arts Council signalled a shift in the ‘pecking order’ of the field and challenged the dominance of the businessman and financiers, and the definition of legitimacy that was dependent on economic factors such as ticket sales, length of performance runs, and so on. It brought with it the opportunity for an alternative criterion of legitimisation to be adopted. With its institutional backing, the Arts Council occupied a dominant position in the field, and it had the power to validate directors or theatre companies through the distribution of grants or subsidies. As a non-commercial unit administering public funding, the Council was in a position to free artists from the need to produce work that was a guaranteed commercial success by providing them with a safety net that allowed them to experiment with new ideas. This signalled a sea change for many working in the British theatre, including Littlewood and Theatre Workshop, who believed that they would be able to establish a new and innovative theatre in this climate (Goorney, 1981: 41; Leach, 2006: 47).

Post-war optimism in Britain soon turned to despair and disappointment amid a sluggish economy, toughening austerity measures and increasingly difficult living conditions. The hope that Labour’s election victory would introduce a political and social revolution proved unfounded, as the Party did little to change the status quo and, by contrast, focused on ‘reassurance and acclimatisation’, which ‘brought about the greatest restoration of traditional social values since 1660.’ (Howard, 1963: 30-1) The economic changes noted above removed much of the Left’s ammunition against capitalism, while the Conservative Party’s return to power in 1951 and the economic boom of the 1950s encouraged a new age of consensus. Hobsbawm, again, argues that this prosperity, the

shift to full employment, and the rise of consumerism depoliticised the working classes: ‘Prosperity and privatisation broke up what poverty and collectivity in the public place had welded together.’ (Hobsbawm, 1995: 307) Further, he notes that the rise in living standards during the 1950s discredited communism as an alternative to capitalism and, instead, encouraged conformity: ‘The mood of the booming decade was against the Left. This was not a time for change.’ (*ibid*: 283)

The same growing consensus and resistance to change was felt in the British theatre, as Harold Pinter pithily observed: ‘You had to conform, there was a great, great deal of conformity about’ (Pinter cited in Leach, 2006: 99). Although CEMA’s wartime initiatives helped to make the theatre more accessible and, as Anselm Heinrich argues, encouraged a new perception of its social and educational value (Heinrich, 2010: 63-7), there was little change in the status quo in the post-war period. The theatre was still dominated by Noël Coward’s brand of upper middle-class entertainment and monopolised by Beaumont and Littler, who, by the early 1950s, controlled just under 50 per cent of West End theatres and 70 per cent of the main non-London theatres (Davies, 1987: 138). Not only did the Arts Council fail to provide smaller groups with the means to supplant such monopolising companies, but it also actively helped Beaumont and others to retain their dominance. For example, Beaumont struck a deal with Keynes, Chairman of CEMA and then the Arts Council, that allowed him to evade the heavy Entertainment Tax with the full support of the Council (Witts, 1998: 99-103; Rebellato, 1999: 53-4; Billington, 2007: 32-5). The Arts Council’s tendency to favour such established, mainstream companies over the ‘alternative’ groups was rooted in its artistic policy, as shaped by Keynes, and marked a sharp departure from the original aims of CEMA.

In Heinrich's detailed analysis of CEMA, he identifies its two initial aims as being to provide financial support to amateur arts societies and to decentralise the theatre by financing tours that took it to 'remote rural areas as well as industrial centres' (Heinrich, 2010: 63). However, these aims shifted after Keynes took the chair in 1941 and, in particular, when it transformed into the Arts Council. Increasingly, the focus was on celebrating 'excellence' in the arts, improving 'the standard of execution', and rewarding professional, building-based theatres situated within metropolitan centres at the expense of regional or community-based work (Hutchinson, 1982: 44-59). The Council argued that it was more beneficial for it to 'devote itself to the support of two or three exemplary theatres which might re-affirm the supremacy of standards in our national theatre.' (Arts Council, 1950-1951: 34) Thus, it adopted the policy of 'few, but roses', whereby the distribution of funding was centralised on a small handful of leading cultural institutions. Delegates at the 1948 British Theatre Conference complained bitterly of these centralised activities and the Council's ineptitude at challenging the monopoly held by commercial managements (Davies, 1987: 148).

Of course, the Council was, itself, very much a part of the British theatre Establishment, and, as Robert Hutchinson argues, its organisational structure meant that a 'select group of mice were given a lot of responsibility for distributing the cheese. Vested interests were fully involved in the Arts Council's decision-making from the outset' (Hutchinson, 1982: 27). Membership of the Council's Drama Panel was dominated by key figures from the commercial West End, including Beaumont and Coward. The homogeneity of its members meant that the Panel embodied the established way of making and perceiving theatre, leaving little room for anything else. The criterion of what constituted

a legitimate artistic practice reflected this socially and culturally determined taste and, therefore, ensured a level of self-preservation, where those organisations that perpetuated the values of the Establishment were rewarded with grants and subsidies. The Council also had the power to exclude any company that threatened the status quo or did not meet the criterion by rejecting funding applications. The result was the widespread adoption, inculcation and reproduction of those policies valued by the Council – metropolitanism, professionalism, and ‘high’ culture – by groups desperate for funding.

A key requirement for Arts Council funding was the demonstration of a good business structure. Each funded organisation had to submit to the Council routine budgets, balance sheets and reports on ‘weekly box office returns and at the end of the run of each production we shall want a statement showing the result’ (Letter to Raffles, 26 November 1958, Arts Council, ACGB/34/68). Assessment of future grant applications was based largely on this information and what it revealed about the company’s financial position. Dan Rebellato interprets this practice from a Foucauldian stance, arguing that the Council used this information as a means of monitoring and controlling its beneficiaries (Rebellato, 1999: 48-50). However, it is also possible to understand it from a Bourdieusian perspective. The fact that a theatre was required to provide evidence that it was a sound business investment shows the Arts Council applying the logic of the fields of business and commerce, and the field of power, to the field of cultural production. To recapitulate briefly, Bourdieu argues that each field should be subject to its own laws, with the field of cultural production tending to invert the rules of the field of power by emphasising cultural over economic capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97; Bourdieu, 1993: 29-73; 1996: 81-4). By assessing the ‘success’ of

a beneficiary theatre through its financial returns, the Arts Council prized economic over cultural capital, which meant that directors and practitioners were, once again, confined to an economic paradigm and subject to the free market with little autonomy.

The pre-war status quo in the British theatre and the need to conform was similarly demonstrated by the continued presence of the Lord Chamberlain and theatre censorship. The Lord Chamberlain's Office banned groups from addressing the social and political issues of the time, and thus confined the theatre to benign entertainment, by refusing a license to any work that was deemed to 'represent in an invidious manner a living person, or a person recently dead' or to 'be calculated a breach in the peace' (Shellard, 1999: 9). The process of obtaining a license centred on the assessment of a submitted play script, which not only reaffirmed the priority of the text over the production, but insisted on 'pre-determined output, 'standards', and the definitive final product' (Holdsworth, 1999: 5). In this way, the Arts Council and the Lord Chamberlain demonstrated an institutionalised perception of theatre that focused on the text, replicated the values of the upper classes and the Establishment, adhered to the laws of business, and promoted conformity. Of course, this definition of legitimate theatre was entirely antithetical to Littlewood's own practice. She wanted to create a theatre that was counter-hegemonic and which challenged the Establishment by promoting the working class and her own left-wing politics. She also challenged the notion of theatre as a fixed product and text-centred through her use of improvisation and her treatment of the text as a fluid and malleable substance to be altered in response to the needs and discoveries of the actors. Littlewood understood that if she was to succeed in these plans for a cultural revolution that went against all the conventions of the field, she had to start at the bottom and question the very notion of training in the British theatre.

The Changing Context of Training: Michel Saint-Denis

It is necessary to pause here and consider, by way of a parenthesis, other attempts to innovate actor training in the 1930s and 1940s so as to understand fully the context in which Littlewood was working. It was noted at the end of the preceding chapter that there was a growing appreciation of ensemble practice in Britain by the mid-1930s, despite the fact that the ‘star’ system continued to dominate the mainstream theatre. Komisarjevsky’s ensemble productions, John Gielgud’s seasons at the Queens and the Haymarket Theatres, and the presence in London of the Moscow Art Theatre Prague Group and Michel Saint-Denis’s Compagnie des Quinze all encouraged ensemble playing. These events coupled with the publication of Elizabeth Hapgood’s translation of Stanislavsky’s *An Actor Prepares* in 1936, through which his methods were made available to Britons for the first time, arguably contributed to a re-evaluation of actor training.

Rupert Doone, for example, developed a system of training actors at his Group Theatre that was derived from the principles of classical ballet and which created a shared rhythmic movement that encouraged unified performances and a sense of the ensemble. The initial plan was for the training to be continuous, taking place both in the group’s space in London and in rural retreats in the Suffolk countryside, which Doone believed would be conducive to artistic development (Sidnell, 1984: 53). However, a lack of financial support necessitated the Group widening its membership and operating as a subscription society with over two hundred members by 1933, which meant that it could not establish a close-knit ensemble or sustain a comprehensive training programme. Michael Chekhov’s system of training actors at

his Studio at Dartington College was heavily influenced by his time at the Moscow Art Theatre and its First Studio, where he learnt of ‘the idea of studio as a laboratory, theatre as a community and a home’ (Byckling, 2002). He moved to Britain in 1936 to open the Studio and led the actors in a series of psychophysical exercises to train their bodies to become responsive to the impulses of the imagination. Unfortunately, the Studio closed after just two years and was relocated to Connecticut amidst fears of the impending war. Furthermore, Dartington was always removed from both its local and national community and the majority of its teachers and students were from outside Britain. As a result, Chekhov’s Studio had very little influence on the British theatre of the time or, indeed, in the years after its closure.

Saint-Denis’s approach to training had a much more profound affect on the field of British theatre, which makes him particularly important when assessing the climate of training at this time. He also provides an important counterpoint to Littlewood given the different positions they occupied in the field. Saint-Denis believed firmly that collective training encouraged ensemble work, and he aimed to establish a ‘non-conforming’ theatre school throughout his life (Baldwin in Hodge, 2010: 86). The ideal of the permanent ensemble was at the centre of his planned curriculum, where he proposed ways to encourage collaboration:

Quality and standards depend on continuity and permanence. Each group entering the school would be kept together from year to year becoming, in effect, a small company. Through their intimate knowledge of one another, which grows with constant collaboration over a considerable length of time, students can create a theatre that can promise and realise the best.

Individual talent must, of course, be cultivated but with the constant aim of its contributing to an ensemble. (Saint-Denis, 1982: 68)

He envisioned a training regime that was both detailed and rigorous, and he demanded that actors approach it with the same commitment, dedication and respect shown in any other field such as music, dance, law or medicine.

Saint-Denis founded three schools or studios for actor training in Britain. He ran the London Theatre Studio with George Devine and Glen Byam Shaw from 1936 until 1939, when it was forced to close with the outbreak of the war. The three were reunited in 1946 when they were invited by Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and John Burrell, co-directors of the Old Vic, to contribute to the theatre's post-war expansion plans, which, importantly, included the Old Vic Theatre School.⁵² The School opened in January 1947, but despite receiving great praise – the students publicly declared Saint-Denis, Byam Shaw and Devine to be ‘the most effective and inspiring of teachers’ (*The Times*, 25 May 1951) – it closed in 1952, the details of which are outlined later in this chapter. Peter Hall invited Saint-Denis to open his final studio in Britain in 1962 at the newly formed Royal Shakespeare Company, which is analysed in detail in Chapter Five of this thesis. Like Barker, Komisarjevsky, and many other directors in the wake of Stanislavsky, Saint-Denis encouraged a dialogue between amateur students and professional actors to ensure a continuation from the classroom to the stage.⁵³ For his season at the Phoenix Theatre in 1938, he created a company that comprised London Theatre Studio students and leading actors such as Michael Redgrave, Peggy Ashcroft and Stephen Haggard. However, the season ended prematurely after its first two productions – *The White Guard* and *Twelfth Night* – were commercial failures.

The programme of training that Saint-Denis developed incorporated his two main artistic influences. First, he drew from his uncle Jacques Copeau's work with masks, improvisation and his use of physical and vocal exercises to liberate the actor. Second, his experiences of watching the Moscow Art Theatre perform and speaking with Stanislavsky in Paris in 1922, which he called 'one of the main contributors to the artistic development of my life' (Saint-Denis, 1982: 35), led him to appropriate the Russian director's internal approach to characterisation. He prioritised work on spontaneity and improvisation in order to facilitate this combination of a creative imagination and a physically alert and responsive body, and followed closely Stanislavsky's exercises in improvisation, outlined in *An Actor Prepares* (*ibid*: 88). He also trained his students in the various other aspects of performance so as to widen their field of expression, equip them with a range of tools and instil in them an understanding of the theatre as a whole. Thus, alongside their training in improvisation, which included improvisations as animals, with masks, and as a group, the students took classes in dance, movement, singing, fencing, speech delivery, choral speech, textual analysis, make up, and costume technique, among others (Saint-Denis, n.d.). He encouraged cross-fertilization between courses and structured curricula to promote co-ordinated learning, where the close co-operation of faculty members ensured that the crossovers between the subjects taught were clear (Baldwin in Hodge, 2010: 87).

While Saint-Denis's foreign nationality limited his movements in the field, as shown in Chapter Three of this thesis, he occupied a much stronger position than Littlewood due to the symbolic power bestowed on him by others. Bourdieu argues that the 'major trump' in the field of theatre is the social capital gained from relationships with the theatrical milieu (Bourdieu, 1996: 116). Saint-Denis's Compagnie des Quinze

productions in London were supported by dominant figures in this milieu, including Gielgud, George Bernard Shaw, G. K. Chesterton, Tyrone Guthrie, and Charles Laughton (Saint-Denis, 1982: 42). Many of these individuals provided financial support for the London Theatre Studio, while Saint-Denis was similarly endorsed by the invitations from Olivier, Richardson and Hall to occupy posts at the pinnacle of the British theatre institution. He also received official recognition when he was awarded a CBE in 1946 for his role in the BBC's efforts to rally French resistance to the German occupation during the Second World War. The above examples were all acts of consecration – as Bourdieu calls it (Bourdieu, 1996: 148) – by the established mainstream theatre, whereby Saint-Denis's position as a director was legitimised.⁵⁴

Littlewood, by contrast, attacked directly such prestigious and well-established figures in her plan to overhaul the British theatre, calling Olivier 'unintelligent and tricksy' and Devine 'anti-Semitic' (*The Independent Magazine*, 26 March 1994). She denounced 'Old Vic acting' and positioned her work as an alternative to it (Barker in Hodge, 2010: 137), openly challenged the English Stage Company (Littlewood, 1994: 358), and refused to refer to the Arts Council without using expletives, even when speaking to its members (Hedley, personal interview, 8 October 2013). The difference in the positions occupied by Littlewood and Saint-Denis undoubtedly influenced the strategy that each director adopted for countering the established method of training and the success of these strategies. It is, therefore, necessary to dispute Derek Paget's claim that Theatre Workshop operated as a 'Trojan horse' in the mid-twentieth century British theatre by introducing alternative and radical practices to the mainstream theatre insidiously (Paget, 1995: 211-3). Rather, Saint-Denis was the 'Trojan horse', given his position as part of the Establishment.

Finding Unity Through Training

Unlike Saint-Denis, Littlewood refused the label ‘teacher’ when training actors, arguing ‘you can’t teach people to write or act, it’s something they can learn only from each other.’ (Littlewood cited in *The Times*, 12 July 1961) She insisted that the group train together in order to unite the actors and, as MacColl explained, ‘the movement training, voice production, acting theory and classes dealing with the history of theatre were combining to weld us into a group with a common vision of the future.’ (Goorney and MacColl, 1986: lii) The training also kept the actors’ bodies finely tuned and alert as a way of conditioning them to work instinctively in rehearsals and to respond to the live moment on the stage rather than simply repeating previously fixed performances (Barker in Hodge, 2010: 137). The latter, which Littlewood called ‘past-tense acting’, was rooted in a perception of the production as a fixed and final product created in the rehearsal room and simply repeated as a facsimile in subsequent performances. Hence the name ‘past-tense acting’ – acting that is focused only on reproducing what has happened previously with no attention for what is happening in the present moment on the stage. Littlewood was vitriolic in her denunciation of this practice of using the rehearsals to ‘fix’ a production and then polish it for its countless regurgitations during a performance run.

While the extent to which Stanislavsky and Rudolf von Laban influenced Littlewood is analysed in detail below, it is important to note here how her interest in training and in European developments in this area distinguished her from the British theatre tradition. Littlewood and MacColl undertook rigorous research in the mid-1930s and read copiously on both past and present continental theatre experiments. They developed a

method of improvisation that incorporated elements of commedia dell'arte, while they learnt about ensemble playing and the innovations of Stanislavsky, Copeau, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Erwin Piscator from influential books such as Léon Moussinac's *The New Movement in the Theatre* (Goorney, 1981: 8; Paget, 1995: 212) They planned to travel to Russia to train at the Moscow School of Cinema and Theatre in 1935, however they had to abandon these plans after the Russian visas they applied for failed to materialise.⁵⁵ It is highly likely that Bertolt Brecht also influenced Littlewood, given the number of affinities between their practices, not least in terms of political militancy, the importance of the ensemble, and belief in the importance of training. However, although it is important to acknowledge this influence, it is not within the remit of this thesis to examine it further.

One of the main aspects of the conventional training in Britain that Littlewood opposed was the perception of it as merely a precursor to the professional career of the actor. She believed that drama schools like RADA perpetuated the commonly held belief that actors did not need to continue training after their graduation, by which point they had learnt a set of skills and were ready to repeat them on cue. The fact that imitation was the common method of training at such drama schools reinforced the view of acting as a form of reproduction rather than creation (Shirley in Pitches, 2012: 40), and encouraged the 'past-tense acting' that Littlewood loathed. She argued for present-tense acting as a counterpoint to this system of mindless repetition, where the actors' performances were never set or fixed by evolved over time. Similarly, she wanted her performers to be creative artists, who constantly sought ways to develop and grow and who subscribed to the belief that 'acting is an art of infinite difficulty which demands constant training and humility.' (Theatre Workshop Winter Season Brochure 1954-1955, Records of the

Security Service, KV 2/3178) Goorney confirms that the group ‘worked long, hard hours rehearsing as well as training in voice, movement and relaxation. We felt it necessary for actors to continue training as it was for musicians, dancers and singers’ (Goorney, 1981: 46-7).

The form and content of the training was also anathema to Littlewood. She was frustrated by the prioritisation of the mind over the body at RADA, where the training centred almost exclusively on verse speaking at the expense of movement. This focus on the mind cultivated an approach to acting rooted in Cartesian dualism that all but ignored the presence of the body and resulted in what Littlewood called ‘talking head’ acting:

This is characterised by an insensitivity to space, a slight but significant retarding of the pelvis, which alters the balance of the body and allows the mind to predominate over the physical sensations of the body, and by an absence of direct eye contact between the actors, each enclosed in their own world. (Barker in Hodge, 2010: 137)

As Barker explains, this cerebral approach shut the actors off from the reality of the live performance and alienated them from each other on the stage, which, of course, made it impossible for them to work as an ensemble.

Drama schools like RADA likewise trained student actors to adhere to the dominant ‘star’ system, which also made them inimical to ensemble practice. As Harley Granville Barker had warned previously, this cutthroat and competitive system inculcated the belief that, in order to succeed, an actor had to develop a distinctive and recognisable personality that appealed to audiences and set her or him apart from the other actors. Conservatoire training internalised the values of this system and encouraged students to display their individuality through the creation of atomistic, mannered performances that pulled focus from the rest of the company. In his survey of British drama schools in

1960, Charles Marowitz complained that any ensemble aspect was ‘strictly superficial’ as the focus was more on ‘personal advancement’ and ‘frantic I-ism’ (Marowitz, 1960: 22).

Given the fact that Littlewood’s approach to both training and directing countered the conventions and traditions of the British theatre almost entirely, it is clear that she needed a particular type of actor for her company. Foremost, she needed actors who rejected the prevailing ideology of the ‘star’ system and who were willing to commit to the ensemble and perform any role, whether large or small, with the same focus, commitment and seriousness. Likewise, she needed actors who were willing to trust her and to abandon the safety of the fixed, unchanging performance. She challenged and unsettled her actors constantly, and she saw it as her job to force them out of their comfort zones to ensure that they kept making discoveries and the production kept moving forward. For example, she made last minute changes to scenes, swapped characters around seconds before the start of a performance and sent characters onto the stage for a scene they were not usually part of in order to unsettle and surprise actors who had become too comfortable or fixed in their performances (Gurney, 1981: 172). If she found an actor had become cocky or self-indulgent in a role – the symptoms of the ‘bloody acting’ that she despised – she broke her or him down to make it clear that there were no ‘stars’ in the company:

During *The Hostage* I went into rehearsal one day in a very optimistic mood. I passed Joan in the passage leading to the dressing rooms and offices. I smiled and said, “Morning, Joan” [...] She glared at me and greeted me with: “You’re nothing but a fucking broomstick with fucking bananas for fucking fingers.” Try to go on stage believing in your genius after that. (Barker, 2003: 102)

Littlewood could clearly be incredibly abrasive and rude in her treatment of actors, which made life at Theatre Workshop ‘often deeply miserable’ (*ibid*: 100). Not all

actors were prepared to tolerate her rude behaviour and unnamed ‘star’ actors often walked out early in the rehearsal process and refused to work with her again (Hedley, personal interview, 8 October 2013).

This need for a particular type of actor was another reason why Littlewood placed such importance on the training. Her rigorous training regime enabled her to combat the ill effects of the conservatoire system and retrain actors in her methods. As she explained in one of her personal notebooks:

The professional theatre has nothing to offer us [...] So we have to start from rock bottom. We have to train our voices and our bodies so that they are well-tuned instruments for our use. We must learn how to move, how to breathe, how to look – it is as if we must learn everything all over again. (Littlewood, n.d. a: 17-8)

At the same time, she aimed to work with amateurs and non-actors as much as possible, in much the same way as Craig and Komisarjevsky. The amateur actor presented Littlewood with a *tabula rasa* with which to work; a performer who had not yet gained a set of assumptions regarding what could or could not be done, and so could experiment freely. The majority of Theatre Workshop actors first joined the company in another capacity such as sound engineer, movement teacher or programme seller as opposed to the conventional audition process, which, in turn, reinforced the company’s communal and egalitarian spirit.⁵⁶ Again, by training the actors – both ‘professional’ and amateur – together as a group on a daily basis they became proficient in her methods and used to each other quickly. This approach both fostered and necessitated the long-standing collaboration of a permanent company, where, over time, the actors become attuned to each other, build a deep level of trust, and respond to each other’s discoveries truthfully and instinctively.

The Training Programme in Action

Littlewood's method of training actors drew from her early experiments with MacColl in London (while they were awaiting their Russian visas) and at Theatre Union. The pair built upon these initial experiments and worked with the Theatre Workshop actors to create a comprehensive training programme, particularly during their brief residency at Ormesby Hall in 1946 and the almost laboratorial conditions they enjoyed there.⁵⁷ This programme focused on the three areas that Littlewood believed to be at the centre of the actor's craft – improvisation, movement and voice – and borrowed exercises directly from Stanislavsky, Laban, and Nelson Illingworth, the Australian opera singer who spent a week working with the group in May 1946. It was both constant and intensive during the group's first ten years. Littlewood insisted on continuing the daily movement and vocal exercises while touring or developing a new production, and she used games and improvisations to bridge the gap between these two aspects of the work (Gurney, 1966: 103; Newlove, 1993: 8). It is for this reason that the training programme is here analysed in relation to Theatre Workshop's productions and, in particular, to its first three seasons at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, when the years of rigorous training began to bear fruit.

Although Theatre Workshop's move to its permanent home at Stratford in 1953 resulted in the departure of a number of its original members, including MacColl, Williams and David Scase, there still remained a core group of performers who had worked with the company for a number of years. The majority of this second generation, which included Corbett, Joby Blanshard, John and Margaret Bury, Harry Greene and George A. Cooper, joined Theatre Workshop in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and so were well versed in Littlewood's methods and used to working and

training together. The trust and understanding established during the years spent touring the country united the actors as an ensemble with shared values, and thus provided Littlewood with the continuity that she needed to create productions that were constantly changing and evolving. It was between 1953 and 1956 that, Goorney recalls, Theatre Workshop became a ‘group theatre in the truest sense and, with Joan as its catalyst, was at the peak of its achievements.’ (Goorney, 1981: 102) A sign of this achievement was the group’s invitation to perform at the prestigious Théâtre des Nations in Paris in 1955, the first to be issued to a British company. The universal acclaim that met its productions of *Arden of Faversham* and *Volpone* secured further invitations in 1956, 1959, 1960 and 1964.

The sheer volume of work undertaken by the company at this time further strengthened its capacity to work as an ensemble. The original intention to run the Theatre Royal on a gruelling two-week repertory system meant that the group produced an astounding thirty-six productions between 1953 and 1956. The intensity of this schedule and the level of time and energy needed to meet it saw the actors spend practically all of their time training together, rehearsing and creating new work. The majority lived at the theatre and barely left it or each other. Goorney argues: ‘This concentrated period of training, rehearsing and playing enormously strengthened the Company’ (*ibid*: 98). A key element of these seasons was the group’s work on Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, including *Richard II*, *The Dutch Courtesan* and the two productions noted above.⁵⁸ It was these productions and, in particular, the work on Shakespeare’s plays, that really showed audiences and critics the group’s training programme in action. The actors demonstrated their ability to counter the pomp and ceremony of the theatre Establishment, with its ‘talking head’ and ‘past-tense’ acting, by producing

performances that were noted for their vitality, originality and flexibility. The contrast between Theatre Workshop's Shakespeare productions and the convention-heavy ones in the mainstream theatre was made most explicit in 1955, when Littlewood purposefully revived her production of *Richard II* to coincide with Michael Benthall's production at the Old Vic (Goorney, 1981: 101). Brian Murphy, who became a stalwart of Theatre Workshop in the late 1950s, was amazed by the truth and relevance of Littlewood's version:

They didn't appear to me – even in my callow youth – to be actors, they seemed to be people. [...] And the language was dry but it was not beautifully spoken and toned, but was muscular and energetic, and drove the play along, and the arguments along. And it changed the course of my appreciation of theatre almost overnight. (Murphy, 2008)

It was the integration of the actor's body and voice with her or his imagination in Littlewood's training programme that gave her actors the tools with which to create such energetic, free-flowing and well-rounded performances. She believed strongly that actors had to perform daily rigorous physical and vocal exercises so that their bodies were able to respond to anything suggested by their creative imaginations. At the same time, they performed exercises in improvisation to develop and expand their imaginations. Thus, the actors were liberated physically, vocally and mentally, and so were able to play any character presented to them, and to play the same character in any number of different ways. Furthermore, the fact that everyone in the company was trained in the same way, and, in fact, trained together, created a sense of security, where one actor could experiment either on the stage or in rehearsal safe in the knowledge that the other actors were equipped to respond.

Stanislavsky was an important source of inspiration for Littlewood when building her training programme, and she remarked that ‘there is hardly any of his carefully worked out and precise theory of acting that we cannot use with great profit to ourselves and the people’s theatre.’ (Littlewood, n.d. a: 20) She and MacColl were drawn to him due to his unending quest to find ‘truth’ in acting and so transcend its declamatory tradition, which resonated with their own rejection of ‘bloody acting’. Her only contact with Stanislavsky came via Hapgood’s inaccurate and much-criticised translation of *An Actor Prepares*, which meant that her understanding and use of his work was distorted.⁵⁹ In this way, she was really drawing from the mythology of Stanislavsky that was already becoming established around the world. However, this does not reduce the significant role he played for her in shaping her approach to training. It is possible to get a sense of the way in which Littlewood used his exercises from her personal notebooks, which are filled with references to his ideas and theories and include exercises lifted directly from *An Actor Prepares* (Littlewood, n.d. a; n.d. b). Goorney confirms that she used these exercises in Theatre Union rehearsals from as early as 1938, which made her one of the directors to do so in Britain, with the exception of Saint-Denis (Goorney, 1981: 19).

Theatre Workshop’s period productions were centred on the rejection of declamation and the presentation of real people. The actors refused to simply reproduce the stereotypical and conventional performances of characters such as Edward II, Bolingbroke and Andrew Aguecheek and focused, instead, on finding the truth behind each character. Littlewood aided this process by encouraging the actors to draw from their own experiences and to explore their emotions, thus echoing Stanislavsky’s ‘emotion memory’, the tool by which actors engaged with their ‘memory of feelings’

(Stanislavsky, 2008b: 198). When Peter Smallwood played Edward II in Christopher Marlowe's play in 1956, Littlewood pushed him to mine his subconscious and 'confront his latent homosexuality, at a time when no great sympathy or tolerance could be expected from society at large.' (Barker in Hodge, 2010: 121) The result was a performance that countered the traditional portrayal of him as the flamboyant 'gay, attractive king of legend' and presented a 'dignified and sentimental Edward [...] full of pathos and vulnerability in the face of the masculinist status quo' (Holdsworth, 2011: 101). These truthful performances astounded the critics and forced them to 'consider [the] characters firstly as human beings, and only secondly as characters with beautiful lines to speak' (*Encore*, September 1958).

Littlewood was similarly interested in Stanislavsky's process of breaking a play down into a series of units with corresponding objectives, and the group spent rehearsals establishing the objectives of both the play as a whole and the individual characters (Littlewood, n.d. b: 36-52; Goorney 1966: 102). Like Smallwood in *Edward II*, Corbett rejected the conventional method of playing Andrew Aguecheek as a rather one-dimensional comic character in *Twelfth Night* and studied Shakespeare's words closely to unearth the character's objective. Littlewood reminded Corbett to 'stand his ground' moments before going on stage in front of an audience of 'boisterous schoolboys', fearing that he would give into the pressure, lose sight of the objectives and begin to play for laughs:

I went round to the circle to watch. Sir Andrew's entrance... catcalls, wolf-whistles [...] He didn't react, he held on to the character so painstakingly evolved and at each simple, true reaction the boys yelled with delight. Not once did he fall back on an easy laugh. He looked vulnerable and the sadder he looked the more those kids roared.

I was thrilled. This was the performer I'd been waiting for [...] I waited anxiously for the next performance. Again, it was miraculous. Harry never went back. He couldn't. Once you have experienced the

thrill of risk, the elation which often comes with fear, the beaten track is no longer inviting. (Littlewood, 1994: 431)

She marked this as the moment in Corbett's acting work when he stopped being 'imitative of the current scene, external [and] inclined to assume a voice' and became a 'true' actor (Littlewood in *The Guardian*, 27 March 1982).

Finally, Littlewood was inspired by Stanislavsky's use of the 'given circumstances' and the 'magic if' as the basis of improvisations, and his claim that an actor 'shouldn't perform actions "in general" for actions' sake. You should perform them *in a way which is well-founded, apt and productive...* Genuine action' (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 42; original emphasis). She followed faithfully the improvisatory exercises Stanislavsky describes in *An Actor Prepares* and used them to foster genuine and truthful performances (*ibid*: 44-7). Thus, she asked her actors to imagine that they were in a variety of situations – closing a door (Littlewood, n.d. a: 9), lighting a fire (*ibid*: 10), or hiding from 'a madman behind the door' (*ibid*, n.d. b: 8) – and to respond accordingly. These exercises also helped to activate and engage the actors' creative imaginations, which were vital in keeping a production fresh and in a state of constant evolution.

Littlewood often began work on a play with a series of improvisations to help the actors uncover its super-objective and gain a sense of the atmosphere and the relationship between characters (Gurney, 1981: 167). The company improvised on the theme of prison life during the first few weeks' rehearsals of Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* in 1956, which included marching in a circle on the roof of the Theatre Royal for hours as if prisoners on exercise and performing daily routines such as 'washing out your cell, standing to attention, sucking up to the screws, trading tobacco' (Goodwin and Milne, 1960: 12-3). The repetition of these activities allowed the actors

to experience the monotony of prison life, which informed their performances. Littlewood set each company member a research task and used the findings as basis for other improvisations, and she created situations to allow the actors to immerse themselves in the social and political context of the play (Melvin, 2014). The latter included inviting experts to talk to the group about a particular aspect of a play and organising field trips to sites relevant to a production.

Theatre Workshop was a pioneer in its understanding ‘of a crippling need for movement training and [...] a theatre where the actors could handle their bodies like trained dancers or athletes’ (MacColl, 1990: 254). It was the only working theatre company in Britain to have a sustained training in movement in the 1950s (Leach, 2006: 89). Littlewood incorporated a number of Laban’s theories into this movement training, having learnt about him briefly in one of the few courses in movement available at RADA (Littlewood, 1994: 68). In 1946, she, MacColl and a number of the Theatre Workshop actors attended an open day at his Studio Laban in Manchester, where Laban led them in movement sessions. Although she did not explain precisely what he did in the session, the experience was clearly revelatory for her: ‘After a session with Laban you began to look at the world with different eyes, as if it had changed its colours or its shapes, or you could see the neutrons and protons instead of mass.’ (*ibid*: 772)

Laban attended a Theatre Workshop performance after Littlewood asked for advice on the movement training, and he praised the group as ‘the only one in England which is, in the true sense of the word, experimenting in the use of all those factors which go to the creation of real theatrical art.’ (Laban cited in Goorney, 1981: 161) He sent Jean

Newlove, his assistant, to work with the actors at Ormesby Hall and train them in his methods. She soon became a permanent member of the company in the role of choreographer, performer and movement teacher, where she led daily three-hour movement classes for the whole company and pre-performance warm ups (Newlove, personal communication, 6 January 2014). MacColl argued that Newlove's work and her influence on the company ensured that 'the dormant capabilities of the actors in the group underwent a complete transformation' (MacColl, 1990: 254). Having worked closely with Laban, she was able to communicate her training with him to the actors, and so ensured a direct link between his theories and the work of the group (Newlove, personal communication, 6 January 2014).

One of the aspects of Laban's theory that Newlove passed on was his insistence on combining the external physical action with the appropriate internal attitude. She trained the actors in each of Laban's Eight Basic Efforts, instructing them to move around the space in a particular effort – glide, for example – and combining it with simple words of command or reply such as 'jump' or 'no' (*ibid*). Once the actors were comfortable with each of the efforts she devised exercises and improvisations to encourage them to use these efforts as a stimulus for their characters. When working on *Richard II*, Newlove created specific movements for each effort to 'help bring out the right feelings', resulting in Goorney, in the role of Gaunt, basing his performance on 'strong, slow movements, such as wringing and pressing.' (Goorney, 1981: 167) Newlove also led the company in performing movement scales as part of Laban's theory of choreutics, his 'science' for the analysis and synthesis of all human movement. The scales, she argues, helped the actors 'unlock the doors to expression' and taught them the laws of movement (Newlove, 1993: 29). This area of study not

only helped improve the actors' flexibility, but also encouraged an acute awareness of the surrounding space and the other actors in it, establishing an overriding sense of co-ordination.

Such was the level of importance placed on movement that rehearsals often began with a physical exploration of the texts, where the actors used exercises, games and improvisations to 'get the physical feelings of the characters, their beliefs and approaches to life.' (Goorney, 1966: 102) Goorney describes the initial rehearsals of *Richard II* as being 'devoted to capturing the feeling of the period in quite basic physical terms' with improvisations aimed at

developing the enmity between characters, the sudden outbreaks of violence, the suspicions, the ever present fear of the knife in the back. For example, Joan would say, 'You're in a market place and it's full of people. You're getting your shopping and a fight breaks out!' We would fight each other, go berserk, jump on each other. Then she would say; 'Now you're stabbed in the back... You're on horseback, you're knocked off, you're dragged along, you shout and scream and sweat. (ibid, 1981: 167)

He explains that the time spent exploring the physicality stimulated the characters' emotional development: 'Many hours were spent in actual movements – the look over the shoulder, the fawning of the favorites [sic], the hidden threat behind Bolingbroke's bow.' (ibid, 1966: 102)

The body was also central to the group's vocal work, which 'was always considered as an extension of movement' (Newlove, 1993: 8). Again, the interconnectivity of the Theatre Workshop training programme opposed the voice-movement separation that Littlewood experienced at RADA. Vocal exercises were performed alongside physical ones and combined with work on Laban's efforts to encourage a physical perception of the voice that signalled the influence of Nelson Illingworth. During the week he spent

training the company in 1946 he stressed the importance of the breath in all voice work and the notion of breathing with the whole body and not just the mouth and the chest. Indeed, speech was taught to be a physical act, where the voice began in the lower abdomen and rose up through the body before emerging from the mouth. ‘In other words, [speech] was produced by the whole body, not simply the larynx.’ (Leach, 2006: 91) These early lessons were crucial for Theatre Workshop’s vocal training, and Littlewood and MacColl incorporated and developed Illingworth’s teachings to fit the needs of the company.

Just as Littlewood rejected ‘talking head acting’ so Illingworth denounced the behavioural use of ‘head voices’ in the mainstream theatre (Littlewood, 1994: 204). He led the actors through a rigorous schedule of training that began with the basics of breath control. ‘No respite till we could count to fifty with the merest intake of breath at twenty-five,’ Littlewood explained. ‘There we were every morning, singing, chanting, producing pure vowels and throwing consonants into them like straws into a stream. Half an hour of Nelson and I felt quite drunk.’ (*ibid*: 203) The emphasis was on the quality and the richness of the sound produced as opposed to the specifics of verse speaking and the articulation of words. Likewise, the hours spent training the company to sing and chant together in harmony helped to reinforce its unity and its group identity.

The stark contrast between the voice training at the conservatoires, with its emphasis on elocution, and Illingworth’s vocal exercises was clearly palpable. The latter prized emotion over meaning, and he helped the actors to unleash a vocal power and to discover ranges of which they had previously been oblivious:

[David Scase] was amazed to hear Bill Davidson singing away with the rest of us. We were all used to Bill's creaky voice [...] "Vowel is voice," said Nelson sonorously. "Let it come from the solar plexus [...]" and he gave out a siren which shook the window panes. (ibid: 204)

Littlewood echoed this emphasis on vocal quality and truth over articulate delivery in her treatment of texts in rehearsals. She often discarded the scripts during the early rehearsals, which left the actors free to explore the scenes physically and vocally through improvisation without the need to read or remember lines. This practice helped the actors to discover the truth of the scene for themselves, and encouraged them to view the text not as the blueprint of the production, but merely a starting point that was malleable and open to change (Holdsworth, 2006: 69).

The decentralisation of the text was particularly pertinent to her work with Shakespeare's plays. She despised the conventional method that was focused on performing 'star' turns of elocutionary greatness at the expense of communicating meaning, believing that it resulted only in alienating the work from contemporary society and making it appear archaic. Littlewood, by contrast, asked her actors to explore the meaning behind the texts through improvisations and exercises such as those mentioned above. She also encouraged them to approach each speech with the same amount of focus and dedication and to resist the temptation to perform the well-known speeches and soliloquies as the textual highlights of the plays (ibid, 2011: 88). Critics acknowledged that previously overlooked lines carried a new significance and a new meaning as a result of this process. Of *Richard II*, *The Times* noted: 'For the first time the lines that strike us as sounding the key-note of the character are [Richard's] Queen's at their tragic parting' (*The Times*, 18 January 1955). The same critic repeated these comments a year later, when, in *Edward II*, 'the court group paid Marlowe the

long-awaited tribute of speaking his verse with unrhetorical sensitivity.' (*ibid*, 20 April 1956)

Littlewood wanted to emphasise the plays' continued relevance for contemporary audiences, and she encouraged the actors to take ownership of the dialogue and to focus on making its meaning absolutely clear for the audience. Again, this included combining the delivery of the text with Laban's efforts: 'A thrusting effort might be applied to an aggressive speech, while actually thrusting with the arms and body; and a floating effort might be applied to a lyrical passage [...] they were a great help in bringing out the essential meaning of the verse.' (Goorney, 1981: 167-8) This close dialectical connection between the action and the dialogue fostered an integrated approach to characterisation that countered any notion of the actor as little more than a talking head.

Littlewood used both games and improvisations throughout the training and rehearsal process in order to keep the actors' brains alert to new discoveries and to 'develop initiative, excite curiosity, exercise the imagination.' (Littlewood, 1994: 199) One example was the 'identity game', where the actors took it in turns to walk through an imaginary door and introduce themselves to the company. Littlewood used this game when new people joined the company as a way of encouraging them to put themselves on the spot and take risks, as well as introducing the actors to each other (*ibid*: 210). She also suggested a game or an improvisation if she felt the actors had become stagnant or if they were struggling with a problem:

What's wrong? This one is standing with his back to that one, and not even noticing him. They are all unaware of each other, and they are supposed to be part of a small community governed perhaps by fear. Stop! Let's pretend we are a shoal of fish swimming through dangerous

waters. It worked, and partly because the game was amusing and everyone had stopped working on the precise problem. (*ibid*: 210)

By suggesting such games, Littlewood encouraged the actors to think of their problem from another perspective, while also reawakening them to the need to work together.

As has been made clear, the various aspects of the training programme encouraged the company to collaborate with each other and to make discoveries as a unit. Plays were rehearsed for the first few weeks without any clear assignation of roles in order to enhance this sense of group effort, and, once roles had been divided, Littlewood continued to swap the characters around when rehearsing (Goorney, 1981: 167; Windsor, 2001: 102). As a result, the actors had a shared understanding of the totality of the play and of each character in it – an omniscience that is usually reserved for a director. In other words, they were fully equipped to make suggestions about how a scene could be developed or how a problem could be solved. Victor Spinetti recalls watching actors discussing a play during a rehearsal:

The actors' concentration was so fierce, it gave off an energy that infected you. They were thinking, trying this, trying that, not just reading their own parts but other characters' too. In this way, they discovered what was missing. (Spinetti, 2008: 120)

Similarly, the knowledge and understanding of a production that was borne of collaboration meant that the actors were able to improvise together on stage and support each other. The artistic fluidity that came with the constant transference of roles also discouraged any notion of a role belonging to a particular actor and cleared the path for the other actors to make suggestions on characterisation without fear of treading on anybody's toes. In this sense, rehearsals at Theatre Workshop emphasised 'collective graft and decision making to achieve the best possible production rather than cossetting the egos of individual actors.' (Holdsworth, 2006: 49)

The interdependence and co-ordination of the actors on the stage helped them to perform free of self-consciousness and able to take risks with the knowledge that one was not alone. It was a sign that the group trusted Littlewood and each other. Harry Greene explains that during the first few years at Stratford the group was all growing stronger together, and I use the word ensemble. Well, we were evolving as this very good, strong ensemble as a group. We were beginning to feel a genuine sort of affinity, each with each other. And, as I mentioned before, this [was a] feeling of mutual trust, and that was in rehearsing, training, reading, playing, you name it. (Greene, 2007)

The critics and audiences also acknowledged the ensemble quality to the group's work and praised it highly. Following the success in Paris in 1955, *The Times* declared that there was 'something attractive about the idea of a theatre group, in which individual performances count for less than does the joint effort' (*The Times*, 25 May 1955).

When summarising the group's work on the classics for *Encore*, Tom Milne concluded:

The result has been a body of young actors with a bold, vigorous approach, free of mannerisms and falsity, not given to "poetic diction" or posturing, and the astonishing development within the company of such actors as Harry H. Corbett, Maxwell Shaw, Gerard Dynevor, Barbara Brown, Howard Goorney, Dudley Foster, Olive MacFarland, Murray Melvin, Peter Smallwood and Frances Cuka, is a strong argument in favour of a permanent company, where actors can not only extend their range in a constant variety of roles, but are under the firm control and direction of a master of the calibre of Joan Littlewood. (*Encore*, September 1958)

The Struggle to Survive

Littlewood was, however, not able to keep together the strong group that was established during the first three seasons at the Theatre Royal. Cooper, Corbett and Blanshard all left after the group's successful trip to Paris in 1955, Greene and George Luscombe left during the next year, and other members of the second generation soon followed. Littlewood was devastated by the departure of core members of the group at

a time when she felt that they were finally beginning to make a difference. ‘At that moment I swear I heard my heart crack [...] Why had they chosen to go now? Now, just when we could break through?’ (Littlewood, 1994: 465) One of the main reasons was the need to secure more lucrative work in the commercial theatre and television. The fact that the actors had to leave the group in order to get the economic security that Littlewood could not provide is a clear example of her being dominated and restricted by the field. Her refusal to play by its rules and, in particular, by the rules set by the Arts Council meant that she was excluded and had withheld from her the means of survival, which made it increasingly difficult for her to sustain her company and its training programme.

Since Nadine Holdsworth has already analysed the tempestuous relationship between the Arts Council and Theatre Workshop in great detail only the salient facts need to be noted here in order to demonstrate the effect it had on Littlewood’s training programme and her ensemble (Holdsworth, 1999: 3-16). The Arts Council’s archives reveal a clear reluctance to support the group, as its Drama Panel advised repeatedly against any association with the company and turned down the numerous applications for financial support that it submitted during its first nine years (Arts Council, ACGB/43/5). When the group finally received aid in 1954, its annual subsidy was kept at a low rate: its first grant, a £150 bus subsidy, was raised to £500 in 1955, and then increased by only £1,500 over the course of the next six years. Unlike other subsidised organisations, these grants were awarded on the condition that local councils matched them, which Raffles warned was both ‘unrealistic’ and ‘impossible’ (Raffles letter to Hodgkinson, May 1957, Arts Council, ACGB/34/68). The Arts Council’s decision to support Theatre Workshop but to keep its funding at a minimal level was very tactical and it placed

Littlewood in a double bind. She did not have the grounds to accuse the Council publicly of bias, yet it was not enough money for her to pose a serious threat to the status quo. Furthermore, she had to work under the constant threat that the Council would remove the support altogether, which would be justified by the group's inevitable failure to meet its tough conditions.

This treatment of Theatre Workshop is an example of the Arts Council exercising its power in the field and coercing groups to follow its rules. In 1958, Nelson Linklater, Deputy Director of the Arts Council's Drama Department, warned that 'the Council does not make a grant to any company unless it approves of the Company's general policy' (Linklater letter to Walthamstow Council, 30 August 1958, Arts Council ACGB/34/68). This statement actually implies the reverse: that the Arts Council only funded those companies whose 'general policy' replicated the policy of the Council and the values it promoted. As noted earlier in this chapter, the knowledge that only those theatres that adhered to the Council's criterion of legitimacy would receive financial support encouraged groups to internalise and reproduce these values, altering their work so that it toed the line. In this way, the Arts Council secured its domination of the field through 'symbolic violence', Bourdieu's concept whereby the dominant group imposes its meanings and values onto the rest of the field (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 4). This imposition of meaning and value is exercised upon an agent with her or his complicity, which generates the illusion that is not violence but the 'natural' order of things (*ibid*: 17; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 167-8). The apparently wilful acquiescence to the Arts Council's domination by groups in need of funding meant that its definition of legitimate theatre became the unquestioned standard to which all had to conform.

Given the fact that the Arts Council valued preservation over experimentation – with its quest to ‘maintain the standard and national tradition’ of theatre – it is not surprising that it deemed as appropriate only those training methods that upheld these ‘professional standards’ (*The Scotsman*, 13 June 1945). Thus, Bourdieu’s claim that the symbolic violence inherent in pedagogic work focuses on training agents to reproduce blindly the existing societal structures is discernible in the Council’s funding decisions (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 33). It approved only of those methods of training that produced actors willing to adhere to the conventions of the field, with its emphasis on text, the ‘star’ system and fixed performances, and it acted against any system that offered an alternative. Littlewood, for example, was warned that she would not receive any Arts Council money unless ‘some of our actors [were] replaced while the rest underwent a lengthy period of retraining’ to bring them into line with the established way of acting (Littlewood, 1994: 189). Llewellyn Rees, Drama Director of the Arts Council between 1947 and 1949, was particularly vocal in his disapproval of Theatre Workshop and its failure to produce actors who maintained the standards of British theatre. The Arts Council’s files on the company show Rees purposefully ignoring the group’s requests for help and refusing to meet or co-operate with its members (Arts Council, ACGB/34/68).

Rees’s behaviour towards Theatre Workshop and his disapproval of its training is made more significant when one considers his active role in the closure of Saint-Denis’s Old Vic Theatre School. He left the Arts Council to become Administrator of the Old Vic in 1949, where he observed and reported negatively on Saint-Denis’s classes to both the Council and the Old Vic Governors: ‘I went into a class of Saint-Denis [...] and these

boys and girls were being animals; it was like going into a lunatic asylum [...] I felt that they were preparing the students for a theatre that didn't exist.' (Rees cited in Wardle, 1978: 133) Rees argued that the improvisation and movement classes did not produce actors capable of continuing the British theatre and warned Lord Esher, Chair of the Old Vic Governors, that 'unless the policy of the School is radically altered we are accepting a grave responsibility both to the students and the Theatre which I myself would not care to shoulder.' (Rees letter to Esher, December 1950, Saint-Denis, MS Add 81187) The Old Vic Governors, in consultation with the Council and Rees, agreed that it was no longer appropriate to dedicate a portion of its grant to fund the school and it closed in 1952 (Drama Panel Minutes, 3 April 1952, Arts Council, ACGB/43/5). In the light of Rees's previous position at the Arts Council and the amount of power he wielded there, his comments are symptomatic of a deep-seated abhorrence of training programmes that did not conform.

Although Saint-Denis's training programme certainly challenged the Arts Council artistically, Littlewood and Theatre Workshop also challenged it politically. The Arts Council, like CEMA before it, was founded to support work 'done in the interest of the nation' (Arts Council, 1946-1947: 46). Of course, this was a climate of growing political conformity in which communism was looked on with suspicion, fostered by the return of the Russophobic Winston Churchill as Prime Minister in 1951 and the McCarthyism that gripped the United States. Theatre Workshop's outspoken support of communism and its public condemnation of war and capitalism generated suspicion from various sections of the Establishment, including MI5 and Special Branch, which labelled it a 'Communist controlled theatre company' that took its orders from Moscow (MI5 Report, 5 December 1953, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/3178). Indeed,

while Saint-Denis was awarded a CBE for his work with the BBC, Littlewood and MacColl were blacklisted by the same organisation and deemed to be threats to national security.

James Smith rightly notes that there is, as yet, no conclusive evidence to suggest that MI5's suspicion of Theatre Workshop had a direct influence over the Arts Council's funding decisions (Smith, 2013: 109). However, it is naïve to think that the Council was oblivious to this suspicion and that it did not affect its assessment of the group's training programme or strengthen its resolve not to support it. Recently declassified MI5 files reveal that it spent at least nine years monitoring the company closely and built a substantial file on its movements, which was supplemented by information gathered on Littlewood and MacColl during the 1930s. Special Branch and MI5 intercepted letters sent to and from the company, collated reports on particular productions, and stationed officers outside company members' homes. A Personal File was opened on any individual mentioned in connection with the group, while even the most mundane events such as the sale of the company van were reported to MI5 (Manchester Constabulary Report, 16 July 1952, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/3178). Furthermore, MI5 relied on an 'extensive network of secret informants within the British theatre' (Smith, 2013: 82), painting the picture of a field gripped by anti-Communist fear and suspicion of Theatre Workshop. One informant, for example, claimed the group was invited to the Théâtre des Nations because the Festival was a 'communist-backed set up' and that the group's trip was funded by 'a French communist newspaper, possibly *L'humanité*' (Source Report, 15 June 1955; 28 June 1955, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/3179). The Arts Council was certainly aware of the company's notoriety in this respect, given the fact that its members were

drawn from the same theatre circles. It commissioned Drama Panellist Stephen Thomas to investigate and report on the group's political associations, although this report is now missing from the archives (Arts Council, ACGB34/68).

The paramount fear was that Theatre Workshop took orders from Moscow and worked in collusion with various Soviet-front organisations such as the British Youth Festival Committee to turn students to communism (Intercepted letter, 7 January 1954, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/3178). Tapped phone conversations suggested that Theatre Workshop used its contacts within the British Communist Party to organise tours to Eastern Europe (12 March 1955; 14 June 1955, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/3179), while intercepted letters led the MI5 to believe that the Party vetted any potential new company members (1 October 1951; 27 October 1953, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/3178). Of course, Littlewood and MacColl were keen to engage both company members and audiences in political issues, and the importance placed on the group working together promoted their political values. However, they certainly did not purposefully target and brainwash young men and women, as one Manchester resident claimed (Letter to the Home Office, 25 May 1940, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/2757).

The suspicion levelled at Theatre Workshop was extended to any individual or organisation that agreed to support it. A Special Branch report in 1953 recorded that the group received a loan of £450 from West Ham Borough Council at the behest of Councillor W.C. Kuhn. 'According to my information', the report noted, 'he was aware that the company had communist connections and his action in granting this loan has led reliable members of the Council to suspect that he is a communist sympathiser'

(Report to MI5, 10 October 1953, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/3178). If a previously trusted Councillor came under suspicion of being a communist sympathiser, then it follows that the Arts Council would have faced similar accusations if it had funded the group. This threat undoubtedly informed the Panel's advice to avoid any significant association with the company at this time. The Council did, in fact, come under suspicion for its support of Theatre Workshop in 1960. Questions were raised in Parliament after communist propaganda material was found on display at the Theatre Royal, including whether the Chancellor 'will make it a condition of his grant to the Council that its sponsorship be withdrawn from all productions in conjunction with which Communist publications are displayed for sale' (Minute Paper, 8 April 1960, Arts Council, ACGB/34/68). It is easy to imagine the questions that would have been asked if it had supported the group at the height of the Cold War.

George Devine's English Stage Company, by contrast, neither posed a political threat nor brought suspicion onto the Arts Council, and it was rewarded accordingly. The numerous comparisons that have already been made between the two companies show that, while Theatre Workshop's funding increased only fractionally, the English Stage Company's grant rose by £14,500 during its first five years (Goorney, 1981: 214-5; Holdsworth, 1999: 6; Leach, 2006: 118). The main reason that its subsidy was so much larger than Theatre Workshop's was because it adhered to rules of the game, despite pioneering for a non-commercial theatre that critiqued contemporary society. The English Stage Company's productions were all centred on the text, and so did little to challenge the process of making theatre, and they were staged for the affluent neighbourhoods that surrounded the Sloane Square theatre. These were plays written by men who 'were neither Communists nor working class' and there was no concerted

effort to communicate to working-class audiences, or to present an overt political message (Leach, 2006: 118).

Furthermore, the English Stage Company counted among its ranks figures high in economic, social and symbolic capital, who, with the exception of Oscar Lewenstein, were all very much part of the Establishment. Its management committee included Oxbridge graduates, industrialists such as Neville Blond, and members of the British nobility, including the Earl of Harewood, who was nephew to Queen Elizabeth II. It was, in short, part of the old boys' club of the British theatre, and had at its head 'just the sort of people that the Arts Council liked' (Rebellato, 1999: 67). Devine was, himself, very tactical in how he played the game, and he worked from within the framework set by the Council and attempted to transform the British theatre from the inside. Taryn Storey argues that Devine actively sculpted the English Stage Company's artistic policy to ensure that it dovetailed with the Council's funding policy, and that he colluded with its Secretary General, W. E. Williams, to guarantee that his theatre benefitted from any future changes to this policy (Storey, 2012: 363-78). Devine used his social capital to his advantage, understanding that

to carry out one's job seriously and with dedication, producing the results was not enough in subsidised ventures in England. A more generous application of soft soap, a few lunches and dinners with the right people would have safeguarded our interests. (Devine cited in Roberts, 1999: 4)

Littlewood, of course, did not have Devine's social capital to rely on, and she had little interest in permeating the established system or bringing about a gradual change. Instead, she took a position against the field and attacked it violently. The Arts Council, in retaliation, neutralised the threat she posed by withholding funding, which forced her to turn to the mainstream commercial theatre to get the money necessary for survival.

The need to make money in the commercial theatre brought with it another threat to the principles of collectivity and egalitarianism that were at the heart of Theatre Workshop. As has already been shown in Chapter Three of this thesis, the continued dominance of the ‘star’ system was internalised by the agents in the field and fostered a view that was centred on individuals. As Theatre Workshop gained the attention of the mainstream theatre it was judged increasingly by the logic of the ‘star’ system. Despite Littlewood’s insistence on treating the group as a unit, theatre critics and journalists singled individuals out and created personalities, not least with Littlewood herself:

The notices all started – ‘Joan Littlewood this that and the other.’ We had all been inculcated with the non-personality cult and we felt, rightly or wrongly, that Joan was being forced into a situation she didn’t really want, that for publicity purposes, she was being put through the screws. [...] [The critics] tried to single out the actors, and eventually they got to know them and that, quite rightly, caused a certain amount of dissension. (Corbett cited in Goorney, 1981: 100)

Corbett himself was lauded repeatedly as the ‘star’ of Theatre Workshop, particularly by Kenneth Tynan, who celebrated his command of ‘a dark, cringing bravura which recalls the Olivier of “Richard III” [sic]’ (*The Observer*, 3 October 1954). He claimed that Theatre Workshop prevented Corbett from realising his potential as an actor, noting how his work contained ‘hints of the performance this actor might have given in more favourable surroundings.’ (*The Observer*, 3 July 1955)

These examples signal the clear discrepancy of outlooks that placed Theatre Workshop at odds with the British theatre institution. It is easy to see how the process of continually singling out particular actors undermined the group ethos, and, to echo Corbett, it began to cause dissension and friction within the company. The group’s continued financial instability and limited resources due to the lack of subsidy meant

that the actors were still required to undertake a punishing work schedule while living a frugal existence. Those set apart from the company such as Corbett and Cooper were frustrated by the struggle to survive and the hardship that failed to reflect their growing critical acclaim, often finding themselves ‘the darling of the critics with a caravan for a home’ (Corbett, 2012: 142). Corbett found it increasingly difficult to turn down the offers of lucrative roles in the West End, often engineered by Tynan, which would secure him a regular income and some comfort, and he left the group in 1955 (*ibid*: 143). Cooper similarly announced his departure from Theatre Workshop in search of some rest, some comfort and ‘Lovely money [...] Lovely grub!’ (Cooper cited in Littlewood, 1994: 465) The same can be said for many other members of the company.

Littlewood understood the need to make money and the limitations of what she could offer and let her actors go. The loss of her beloved actors and the break down of this ensemble highlights clearly not only the extent to which Theatre Workshop was attempting to subvert the conventions of the British theatre, but also how deeply entrenched these conventions were. As Corbett acknowledged in 1961, Littlewood’s work would have been celebrated in other European countries such as Germany, where she would have been able to train ‘actors who would work as she wanted and be adequately provided for, and she would not feel she was in the straitjacket of existing in a commercial framework.’ (*The Times*, 10 July 1961)

The need to operate within this straitjacket made the establishment of an ensemble company increasingly difficult and her training programme impossible to sustain. Barker notes that the idea of the group as a permanent ensemble company had already started to disappear by the time he joined Theatre Workshop in 1955, arguing that

Littlewood appeared ‘too tired to begin again creating an ensemble like the one she had kept together through *Arden of Faversham*, *Volpone* and the big breakthrough period.’ (Barker cited in Goorney, 1981: 180). Littlewood apparently shared this opinion. She planned originally to finish her autobiography at the point of Cooper and Corbett’s departure, explaining: ‘That’s it, that is the story of Theatre Workshop.’ (Rankin cited in Corbett, 2012: 143)

The Break Down of the Group

Of course, Theatre Workshop did continue after Corbett, Cooper and the other actors departed, and by 1957 the company members who stayed, including Goorney and Maxwell Shaw, were joined by an influx of new blood with actors such as Barker, Brian Murphy, Murray Melvin, Glynn Edwards, and Richard Harris. The company was increasingly accepted into the mainstream theatre after this point, as its focus shifted from classic plays to working with new writers and texts. The success that came with productions such as *A Taste of Honey*, *The Hostage*, both in 1958, and *Fings Ain’t Wot They Used T’Be* in 1959 brought with it numerous offers of lucrative West End transfers, which, without substantial subsidy from the Arts Council, Theatre Workshop could not afford to turn down. The successful transfer of these and other productions marked the 1958 to 1961 period, and the money raised from them helped to provide financial stability for the company and improve the standard of living for the actors.

However, these transfers were detrimental both to the notion of a permanent ensemble company and Littlewood’s training programme. Littlewood’s refusal to replace the original actors with a new ‘all-star cast’ meant that it was necessary for the group to be divided, as the actors who took a production to the West End remained there for

extensive runs of six months or more.⁶⁰ Each time a production transferred and the group of actors went with it, Littlewood had to gather together a new group of actors to work on the next production. *Make Me An Offer* in 1959, for example, was staged by an almost an entirely new set of actors (Goorney, 1981: 116; Coren, 1984: 40). The constant changing of personnel at the theatre meant that there was very little stability in the group and very little continuity for Littlewood. As Peter Hall noted: ‘Every time she transferred a production, a great cell was torn out of the company, never to be put back.’ (Hall cited in Goorney, 1981: 177) Although some actors remained with the company for a long time, others such as Barbara Windsor came and went quite quickly. The result was that Theatre Workshop operated increasingly as a project-based group, as opposed to the permanent ensemble company that Littlewood had envisioned.

Another sign of the departure from the original egalitarian spirit at the group was the shift away from its co-operative economic basis. Those actors who transferred to the West End received an increase in their salary, which meant they were earning more than their Stratford counterparts. From approximately 1959 there was a differential scale operating, where salaries ranged from £20 to £40, depending on the size of the role (Goorney, 1981: 116). There was also a discrepancy in salaries at Stratford, where former company members were encouraged to re-join the group with the promise of an increase in salary. This variation in earnings and the resulting economic divide between actors became a bone of contention for company members such as Goorney, who continued to see the work as a group venture that should be reflected by equal wages (*ibid*).

The need to bring together new groups of actors for each production meant that Littlewood found herself working with actors with different outlooks and habits. Theatre Workshop began to be seen as a stepping stone to the West End, and actors like Windsor joined the company with the intention of becoming a ‘star’ (Windsor, 2001: 88). Likewise, a large portion of these new actors had received the more conventional theatre training that Littlewood reacted against and so did not have the necessary skills in movement or improvisation: ‘I mean, they just couldn’t move. [...] Whatever they’d done [previously] it didn’t help them improvise; it didn’t help them use their bodies with ease’ (Newlove, 2007). Littlewood had to devote time to re-training the actors, and the emphasis was increasingly on them learning *from* her rather than learning *with* her and experimenting together as a group, as had been the case previously. The result was a shift in the power structure of the group as Littlewood’s role became more predominant so that ‘the focus from 1955 onwards tended towards Joan’s work in the company, without, I hope, minimising the contributions of those who worked with her.’ (Goorney, 1981: 103) The increasing strain on Littlewood to produce a quick succession of commercially viable productions was destructive to her training programme. There was little time for the actors to spend rehearsals training, as in the early days of the company, and the focus was now on generating new material through games and improvisations, which she brought together into a cohesive performance (Spinetti, 2008: 118).

While Littlewood continued to stage productions noted for the ensemble quality of acting and which were created by a group of actors working together in rehearsals, there was a marked shift in the use of the term ‘ensemble’ in this later period. The group’s transformation into a more loose alliance and the gradual dissipation of the

training programme meant that there was not the same sense of unity, or a shared habitus, upon which the original company was founded. The focus was increasingly placed on stand-alone ensemble productions, rather than the development of a permanent ensemble company that grew organically from working on a repertoire of productions and training together. After having struggled for the majority of her life to create an ensemble company, Littlewood found this shift devastating.

Littlewood understood that her survival in the British theatre depended upon her ability to produce work that succeeded in the free market of the West End. However, the need to replicate her earlier commercial successes placed her ‘in an impossible situation with people expecting brilliance the whole time’ to the detriment of her artistic practice (Corbett in *The Times*, 10 July 1961). Unwilling to compromise her artistic ideals and exhausted from her unrelenting work schedule, Littlewood left Theatre Workshop and Britain in 1961 for a two-year sabbatical. In her departing statement, Littlewood laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of the commercial theatre, which ‘belongs to the managers or the landlords’, and the West End, which ‘plundered our talent and diluted our ideas’ (Littlewood in *Encore*, September 1961). She was also frustrated by the prioritisation of product over process, and the need for her to produce periodic results and work in a tight time frame, which left little room for the research and experimentation that was a major feature of the group’s early work. When assessing the field on her departure, she observed bitterly:

You either have to achieve freedom from having no money and no attention paid to you, as we did in the old days, or by having so much money and attention that, like Brecht, you can go on working on a production until it’s just as you want it before showing it to anyone. At the moment we’re caught in between. (Littlewood quoted in *The Times*, 12 July 1961)

The restrictions enforced by this position left her paralysed and incapable of producing work in the way she wanted.

Littlewood returned to the Theatre Royal Stratford East to stage *Oh What a Lovely War* in 1963. In his review of the production for *Encore*, Charles Marowitz called it the culmination of the company's work, where the various techniques that it had developed throughout the 1950s were brought together by 'the genius of Littlewood and the invention of the ensemble' (*Encore*, May 1963). It was, again, the product of group collaboration, a piece of theatre devised in rehearsals as the company discussed, researched and improvised on the theme of war (Paget, 1990: 244-60; Holdsworth, 2011: 69-78). The original programme attributed the creation of the production to the members of the cast to emphasise this point. Yet, it was, at the same time, an atomised ensemble production: there was no direct cross-pollination between this and the next major work, *A Kayf Up West*, and very few of the actors worked on the latter, largely because they were engaged in the West End transfer of *Oh What a Lovely War*.

Littlewood, herself, became increasingly distant from the company. While *Oh What a Lovely War* signalled her return to Theatre Workshop, her work there was sporadic, as she became more interested in community work outside of the theatre system, most notably her plans for the ill-fated Fun Palace (Holdsworth, 2011: 206-33; Rufford, 2011: 313-28). Littlewood began planning the Fun Palace, her 'university of the streets', in 1961, working with the architect Cedric Price to create a communal space that combined various forms of cultural practice, including theatre, film, science and self-participatory education (Littlewood and Price, 1964: 432). Her intention to create a centre that would give all fractions of society access to culture was reflected in Price's

plans for a flexible and ephemeral space that was ‘anti-architectural’ and centred on ‘a mobile grid of open zones’ (Rufford, 2011: 313). The project was never realised, largely due to difficulties in obtaining planning permission and, again, the Arts Council’s refusal to offer its support.

Between 1964 and 1973, Littlewood staged less than twenty productions for Theatre Workshop, including her amalgamation of *Henry IV Part 1* and *Part 2*, produced for the 1964 Edinburgh Festival, *Mrs Wilson’s Diary*, which was her last transfer to the West End, and a revival of Behan’s *The Hostage*. Littlewood purposefully distanced herself from the group, having realised the impossibility of trying to change the conventions of the British theatre: ‘Years ago I told [George Bernard Shaw] what my aims were and what I wanted to do. He just said: “You’ll never be able to do it, of course.”’ (Littlewood quoted in *The Times*, 12 July 1961) The truth of Shaw’s statement was made clear to her throughout the 1960s, which was brought to a head by the sudden death of Raffles in 1975. Littlewood blamed his death on the British theatre, where their fight against the institution was literally a fight to the death. Soon after she turned her back on it entirely and moved to France, handing over control of Theatre Workshop to Maxwell Shaw.

Although Littlewood was unable to establish her ensemble company on a permanent basis or to open up the British stage and diversify its audiences, she proved to have had a long-lasting effect on the theatre. The founding of East 15 by Margaret Bury and Newlove went some way towards establishing a number of her training methods in Britain, despite the fact that Littlewood had no direct connection to the school (Barker, 2003: 107). Like both Harley Granville Barker and Komisarjevsky, such actors who

worked with her as Clive Barker, Corbett and Spinetti continued to promote the idea of teamwork and collaboration in their subsequent work as actors, teachers and directors. Perhaps most significantly, Littlewood inspired a new generation of directors, who took up the ideal of ensemble practice and found new ways of developing it. One of the most important figures in this latter group was Peter Hall, who has acknowledged openly his admiration for Littlewood and called her ‘an inspirer, someone I admire, whose theatre I went to a lot’ (Goorney, 1981: 182). Hall invited Littlewood to direct at his newly established Royal Shakespeare Company, an offer that she declined, apparently put off by the conservatism and cultural hegemony associated with the institution (Littlewood, 1994: 634-5). There are a number of parallels in the work of each director, and, in some ways, Hall built upon Littlewood’s practice of using the ensemble to interrogate Shakespeare’s texts in his overhaul of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. Despite occupying distinct positions in the field of theatre in Britain, as is shown in the next chapter, Hall, too, faced great opposition in his attempt to establish an ensemble company, although, on paper, he managed to achieve what each of the directors in this thesis fought for: an ensemble company funded by public subsidy.

Chapter Five

The ensemble realised? Peter Hall and the Royal Shakespeare Company, 1961 – 1968

A highly-trained group of actors, constantly playing Shakespeare, but with antennae stretched towards our world of contradictions, can, perhaps, be expert enough in the past and alive enough in the present to perform [Shakespeare's] plays. This has been my aim and hope for four years [...] I was clear from the outset that I could contribute little unless I could develop a company with a strong permanent nucleus. Everything – the Aldwych, the training of actors in a Studio, the modern experiments – has stemmed from this conviction.' (Hall in Goodwin, 1964: 43)

In many ways, Peter Hall consolidated and realised the ideals of ensemble practice pursued by each of the directors examined in this thesis during his eight-years' directorship at Stratford-upon-Avon. He pioneered the transformation of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre into the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), as it was officially renamed in 1961, and expanded it from a seasonal venue with an ever-changing group of actors into 'the most successful theatre venture in Britain and the largest acting company in the world' (Addenbrooke, 1974: 22). This company incorporated many of the schemes proposed by the earlier directors: a studio to ensure regular and consistent training for the actors; a link between the British theatre and continental Europe through the annual World Theatre Seasons, which began in 1964; and financial subsidy from the Arts Council of Great Britain. Most significant for this thesis is the fact that it was founded on the ideal of actor-centred permanency, even if only in a 'nucleus' form, as noted by Hall above. Thus, the RSC not only marked the growing presence of ensemble work in the mainstream theatre, but was also 'the first full-scale ensemble' company in Britain (Gaskill, 1988: 52).

However, this chapter argues that although Hall's RSC appeared to realise successfully many of the plans made by his predecessors, it was, in reality, still far from the ideal of ensemble practice that is at the centre of this thesis. The chapter identifies two main reasons for this discrepancy. First, there was a suspicion that permanency in an acting company necessarily resulted in rigidity and immutability. Like Harley Granville Barker before him, Hall's plans for a long-term company were met with resistance from the wider theatre community, who believed it subordinated the individual liberty of the actor to the will of the director. Hall himself argued that the actors should be free to leave the company and work elsewhere for periods of time, while the company should be free to engage other actors on short-term bases. The continual changeover of personnel that resulted meant that the RSC was only ever semi-permanent, and Hall only achieved an ensemble company for isolated periods.

The second reason was the need for distinction in the field of theatre in Britain. Hall understood that, in order to secure the funding required to maintain a long-standing ensemble company, the RSC had to assert its position in the field quickly. 'In the fight to establish the company and to get the money for the company,' he explained, 'we *had* to be in the newspaper everyday of the week if possible! [...] unless there is a very clear image to "put over" – a company, a theatre, a play... a leader of the company – then you haven't got much hope of getting it through.' (Hall quoted in Addenbrooke, 1974: 31; original emphasis) The company had to be consecrated by the field, to use Bourdieu's terminology again, and recognised by the dominant figures within it such as theatre critics, theatre managers, and so on. Yet, the quick expansion that was the result of this drive for distinction threatened to destroy the sense of a closely-knit ensemble altogether.

A detailed exploration of these two reasons corroborates the hypothesis introduced in the preceding two chapters of this thesis, namely, that the British theatre was willing to support individual ensemble productions, but not the long-standing work of an ensemble company as such. In order to examine this hypothesis fully, analysis is focused on Hall's leadership of the RSC rather than his work in rehearsals, as has been the case in previous chapters. My analysis is also confined to the acting company as opposed to the various other aspects of Hall's RSC, including its experimental season at the Arts Theatre and Peter Brook's Theatre of Cruelty season at the LAMDA Theatre Club, its confrontational relationship with the Lord Chamberlain, and its role in promoting international plays and companies, all of which have already been examined in detail (Marowitz, 1966; Addenbrooke, 1974; Beauman, 1982; Chambers, 2004; Trowbridge, 2013). Thus, this chapter outlines the main means by which Hall tried to create an ensemble company, including his *Wars of the Roses* history cycle in 1963, which is seen as the pinnacle of his achievement at the RSC, and focuses on the challenges he faced from the British theatre.

Hall arrived in Stratford in 1959 with a strong belief in the importance of ensemble practice and the need for actors to work together continually in order to establish the necessary 'spirit of sharing, and support, and understanding of a common goal' (Hall, 1995: 207). In particular, the ensemble fostered the knowledge, the trust between actors and the unified style that was essential for Shakespeare playing. He argued that the continuity of actors working together on a series of Shakespeare productions helped to deepen their understanding of each other and of the plays, while the trust that came with a long-standing group encouraged greater experimentation and risk taking in

rehearsals (Hall, 1970a: 18; Hall in Goodwin, 1964: 44). Most importantly, it fostered the creation of the coherent and unified style of production, including a shared method of verse speaking, that Hall believed was essential in order to communicate Shakespeare's meaning to audiences. He rejected the practice at Stratford of replacing actors at the end of each season, which resulted only in a heterogeneous mixture of acting styles and left him with an intangible heritage 'made up of ghosts and legends.' (Hall in *The Sunday Times*, 22 November 1959) In contrast, he wanted to 'create a style which is recognisable as Stratford's own, and to reinterpret plays in terms of the style. To do this I shall need a company that remains basically, though not entirely, the same' (*ibid*).

Hall's plans for the RSC incorporated three key elements to support this permanent ensemble of actors and thus to ensure a unified style of acting. First, a company repertoire that combined plays by Shakespeare and other classical writers with contemporary plays in order to develop the actors' faculties and to create a dialogue between the past and the present, which was vital in making Shakespeare relevant. Second, securing a second venue to stage this contemporary work and to provide actors with a variety of roles so as to encourage long-term commitment. Hall achieved this goal in December 1960 when he opened the first RSC season at the Aldwych Theatre. Third, the successful acquisition of public subsidy to support the company and ensure that it had the space to experiment and develop its style. Hall believed that truly ground-breaking work was only possible when artists did not have to worry about commercial viability and were free to experiment and to take risks under the banner of 'the right to fail'.

Those directors already examined in this thesis influenced Hall's understanding of ensemble practice heavily. He openly admitted the debt he owed to Joan Littlewood, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and his experience of watching Theatre Workshop no doubt shaped his perception of the benefits of a committed ensemble company, particularly with regards to Shakespeare playing. He not only invited her to stage a production at the RSC, but he also made John Bury his Head of Design at the RSC in 1965 and at the National Theatre in 1973. Hall read Edward Gordon Craig's theories of the theatre in books such as *On the Art of the Theatre* and called him 'a special hero of mine' (Hall, 1993: 124). He echoed Craig's call for an 'artist of the theatre' in his claim that a good director was 'a bit of an actor, a bit of a writer, a bit of a musician, a bit of a lighter, a bit of a designer' (*ibid*, 1970b: 19). While at Cambridge, he also read closely Barker's *Prefaces to Shakespeare* and his theories on the importance of ensemble playing in Shakespeare (*ibid*, 1993: 50, 79, 281). Komisarjevsky's influence was more indirect. Hall acknowledged that his productions at Stratford 'defeated the clinical atmosphere' and thus prepared the ground for his work thirty years later (*ibid*: 132). Komisarjevsky also trained actors who became central figures in the RSC to play together as an ensemble, the most prominent being Peggy Ashcroft, as noted in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Like these earlier directors, Konstantin Stanislavsky and the Russian model of the ensemble company was another significant influence on Hall. He read the English translations of Stanislavsky's book during his youth and they inspired him to establish a company of his own: 'The Stanislavski [sic] books and the Magarshack Chekhov books had an enormous influence on me as a late adolescent, and I desperately wanted to run a company, to make a company.' (Hall, 1995: 204) By the same token, he took

inspiration from examples set by the German theatre, particularly in regards to the importance of State subsidy. Anselm Heinrich details the development of public subsidy for the theatre in Germany since the nineteenth century, paying particular attention to the municipalisation of theatres in Westphalia (Heinrich, 2007: 82-90, 108-14). This system of State support continued after the Second World War, and Hall witnessed first hand its importance and its role in rebuilding society when he was posted to Bückeburg in 1949 as part of his National Service. ‘Despite the ruined towns and the chronic shortage of food,’ he recalled, ‘the Germans poured money into the performing arts. They still had subsidised music, drama and opera because they needed them. I was very impressed.’ (Hall, 1993: 62)

At the same time, the Berliner Ensemble provided another model of actor-centred permanency for him to emulate. He explained that his close study of the group and his conversations with Helene Weigel informed his plans for a company, as did his ‘obsession’ with Jean Vilar’s Théâtre National Populaire and Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud’s company (*ibid*: 146). These companies, including, of course, the Moscow Art Theatre, were all salient examples of permanency and ensemble practice, and Hall’s interest in them was also an indication of the growing interest in European companies in Britain in the late 1950s. Peter Daubeny, who trained under Michel Saint-Denis at the London Theatre Studio, encouraged this interest by bringing the companies to Britain between 1956 and 1958. Giorgio Strehler’s Piccolo Teatro di Milano was another permanent ensemble company that performed in Britain at this time, and the presence of these five companies, although brief, was a spur to the development of ensemble practice in the country.⁶¹

The Berliner Ensemble and Moscow Art Theatre seasons warrant particular attention given their influence on the British theatre. The former began its three-week season at the Palace Theatre on 27 August 1956, two weeks after Bertolt Brecht's death, and staged *Mother Courage and her Children*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Trumpets and Drums*. The influence that these productions had on British playwrights has already been well documented (Lacey, 1995; Rebellato, 1999; Billington, 2007), but they also provided an ideal for critics and directors interested in ensemble work. The critics praised the collective standard of acting, which demonstrated 'more unity and perfection of detail than we are accustomed to on stages where actors are rarely together for longer than the run of one play.' (*The Spectator*, 7 September 1956) George Devine, who travelled to Berlin to see the company in 1955, similarly celebrated the commitment and dedication of the actors, who 'gave the impression that they worked because they liked and believed in what they portray. Such devotion changes everything that comes off the stage. There was none of the affected *clichéd* acting which is current in our theatre.' (Devine in *Encore*, April 1956) Young directors such as Hall and Gaskill were also inspired by the example of ensemble work set by the company:

The idea of an ensemble haunted all our dreams; it was something that happened only in Europe where they could afford actors under long-term contracts, adequate rehearsal time, and a possibility of developing new methods of acting, direction and design [...] The example of the Berliner Ensemble towered over us [...] We believed it set a standard to be emulated. (Gaskill, 1988: 55)

Gaskill's observation demonstrates clearly how the presence of this company fostered a belief in the superiority of the permanent ensemble company, and how it had become an ideal shared by a number of directors in Britain by the late 1950s.

Cynthia Marsh rightly argues that the Moscow Art Theatre bolstered up the superlative example of ensemble playing set by the Berliner Ensemble and reaffirmed the ideal of actor-centred permanency when it arrived in Britain two years later (Marsh in Miles, 1993: 115). The company opened its repertory season at Sadler's Wells on 15 May 1958 with *The Cherry Orchard*, followed by productions of *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya* and Leonid Rakhmanov's *The Troubled Past*.⁶² It was the first opportunity for British audiences to see the company perform and to see a supposedly 'authentic' rendering of Stanislavsky's 'system', both of which had acquired an almost mythological status around the world and had been passed down as an ideal through sections of the British theatre since Barker. Of course, the company that visited Britain was different to the company that Stanislavsky created with Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1898 and which Barker witnessed in 1914. As Anatoly Smeliansky explains, the Art Theatre was in a state of deep crisis in the mid-1950s after years of being used as the 'model theatre of the Stalin empire' and driven to stagnancy by the need to toe the line:

The name of [the Art Theatre] still carried a cachet, but the theatre's art had evaporated – it had lost all connection with people's real lives. Even [Stalin's] death did not bring [the Art Theatre] back to life. It had been blinded by its own academic splendour [...] It was a case of self-betrayal crowned with official laurels. (Smeliansky, 1999: 16)

Stanislavsky was similarly 'canonized as a Soviet saint in his own lifetime' (*ibid*: xxi) and both 'he and his "system" were turned into a rigid set of rules' to be obeyed, thus ignoring the perpetual probing and experimentation that was at the centre of his work:

For a while a few people retained the memory of a genius who had been building his theatre day by day, hour by hour in purgatory, amid disappointments and brief victories but always searching for new ways. This Stanislavsky was soon forgotten, his place taken by an imposing statue [...] ready to punish anyone bold enough to doubt the infallibility of his axioms. (Borovsky, 2001: 270)

The discrepancy between the myth and the reality of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1958 and its repercussions on Hall's perception of permanent companies is examined later in this chapter.

The great deal of interest and excitement that accompanied the Art Theatre's visit was fostered by a substantial amount of advanced publicity. The level of this promotion and the timing of the visit were, themselves, politically motivated, coming in the middle of 'the Thaw' period that followed Stalin's death.⁶³ Nikita Khrushchev's initial attempt to relieve the tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States and to encourage a 'peaceful coexistence with the West' saw the reduction of censorship laws and the arrival in Russia of western theatre companies, including Theatre Workshop in 1957 (Service, 2003: 353). Within this climate, the Art Theatre was used, again, as a flagship of the Soviet Union, and its trip to Britain was intended to promote a positive image of the country. The advanced publicity for the tour included a dedicated *Soviet News* booklet, issued by the Soviet Embassy in London (*Soviet News*, 1958), a Pathé news bulletin (British Pathé, 1958), and numerous articles in national newspapers and magazines, including *The Stage* and *Plays and Players* (*The Stage*, 27 December 1957, 13 February 1958, 6 March 1958, 1 May 1958, 8 May 1958; *Plays and Players*, December 1957, March 1958, May 1958). After the company arrived, the BBC Third Programme broadcasted a number of lectures on its origins, the first being on 30 May, and a panel discussion with some of the actors was conducted on 11 June for the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR. In all of the articles, lectures and interviews, emphasis was placed on the company's eminence in the world, its relevance to British audiences and, in particular, the unparalleled quality of the ensemble acting.

Critics reviewing the productions concurred and the company was praised universally for its ensemble work. Marsh has already examined in detail the reaction to the productions and their impact on subsequent British productions of Chekhov (Marsh in Miles, 1993: 113-25). It is, however, worth noting two examples to demonstrate the acclaim bestowed on the company. *The Times*, for example, commended its ‘demonstration that actors working together as a permanent company can emerge from months of rigorous rehearsing with an intimacy and freshness of their night-to-night attack on plays wholly unimpaired.’ (*The Times*, 21 May 1958) *The Stage* marvelled at the ‘oneness, the apparent effortlessness, of the Russian company’ and how it ‘reminded us that Chekhov can never be played with “stars” [...] the perfection with which each [character] was etched down to the smallest, ensure that every moment of the performance lived’ (*The Stage*, 22 May 1958). Like the other ensemble companies that performed in Britain in the last quarter of the 1950s, the Moscow Art Theatre not only set an example of ensemble practice for British directors to emulate, but it also shaped the perception of the British theatre system.

The presence of these companies highlighted the inadequacies of the British system and bolstered up the calls to change it. Frank Granville-Barker (no relation to Harley Granville Barker) used his assessment of the Moscow Art Theatre’s season to attack the commercialism of the British stage, which was ‘subject to the whims of stars on the one hand and businessmen on the other’ and thus was only ever a frivolity:

By comparison with our Russian visitors, we scarcely seem to take the theatre seriously. The English aim to attract audiences by means of a fashionable author, as many “stars” as the management’s budget will allow, and some extravagant costumes by a well-known French fashion house that may be at complete variance with the spirit, style and design of the production. [...] Perhaps if the Russian company can show us that

seriousness does not bring dullness with it we might take a leaf out of their book. It is certainly time we turned to a fresh page. (*Plays and Players*, June 1958)

The Times similarly argued that it demonstrated the need for a permanent company and a systematic training programme in order to create strong work:

We have in this country actors as fine individually as any in this visiting company, but it is extremely rare for an English cast, however liberally sprinkled with distinguished talent, to achieve anything approaching the cohesion and spontaneity of the teamwork now on exhibition at the Wells [...] English acting is perhaps incorrigibly amateur, tending to produce more performances with the stamp of individual genius than displays of inspired teamwork. It is certain, however, that the Russian demonstration of what enchanting results can be gained from single-minded application to the whole art and craft of acting has come clearly through the language barrier to English audiences. (*The Times*, 30 May 1958)

The newspaper published a number of articles over the course of the following year that damned the ‘wasteful process’ of the British system, where the ‘*ad hoc* companies are dispersed before the nature of their collective achievement can be made clear to themselves or to anyone else’ (*The Times*, 27 February 1959). Three years previously, Kenneth Tynan argued that any National Theatre in Britain needed a ‘large, experienced, permanent company’ rather than the usual ‘cast of underpaid second-stringers’ or ‘starry, short-term band’ if it were to succeed (*The Observer*, 1 January 1956). These and other articles reveal the growing desire to establish a permanent ensemble company in Britain in the late 1950s, which had become ‘an ideal which recurs, elusive and persistent as a mirage of the profession’ (*The Times*, 14 January 1959).

Hall also felt this need for change, and, according to Tony Church, one of the first actors to join the RSC, he ‘very much wanted to see an ensemble company working in

this country under state subsidy. In fact this is what we all felt... this was the “revolution” that we all wanted to see.’ (Church cited in Addenbrooke, 1974: 30) He announced his intention to build in Stratford an ‘ensemble of at least thirty players on contracts lasting a minimum of three years’ to the British press in early 1960, which made him the first to respond successfully to the growing calls for permanency in the acting profession (*The Stage*, 10 March 1960). It also meant that he began his company in a theatre climate that was more receptive to the idea of group work than ever before. Hall himself knew that the time was optimal for such a group, explaining that ‘in 1960 to make a permanent ensemble of Shakespearean actors was terribly necessary and was historically a wise choice.’ (Hall, 1995: 204)

Establishing the Royal Shakespeare Company

The growing desire to challenge the British theatre establishment and its strict ‘star’-oriented hierarchy was emblematic of the challenge to the deep-rooted power structures that took place throughout Britain in the 1960s. It is not possible in a thesis of this ambitious scope to give a detailed account of the many cultural, economic, and political changes that occurred, but a few bold strokes will suffice to suggest the rumblings of upheaval and protest that underpinned British society. It was a period marked by the shift towards mass popular culture and the contestation of the rigid class system, as Harold Wilson secured his Labour Party’s victory in the 1964 general election with the promise of a new, modern Britain ‘that is going to be forged in the white heat of [the scientific] revolution’ (Wilson, 1963: 7).

Wilson’s insistence on a forward-looking Britain dovetailed with the growing youth subculture that became increasingly visible during the period. The rapid rise of young

artists in the fields of music, fashion and the visual arts – The Beatles, Mary Quant and David Bailey are pertinent examples – helped to reinvent Britain as a progressive country. The end to National Service in 1960 encouraged this new-found liberation in the young and fostered the ‘disintegration of automatic deference’ to authority and the ‘growing gap between the governors and the governed’ (Billington, 2007: 124). The new ‘autonomy of youth’, as Eric Hobsbawm terms it, saw the adolescent emerge as a self-conscious social actor willing to critique publicly the outmoded Establishment that was not representative of her or his concerns (Hobsbawm, 1995: 324-5). The average age of Harold Macmillan’s all-male Conservative Cabinet in 1963, for example, was fifty-two, 86 per cent of whom had attended Eton or other independent schools, while Wilson’s first Cabinet had an average of fifty-six. In contrast, Quant, Bailey, Lennon, McCartney and Hall were all under the age of thirty and from the working and lower-middle classes. The latter’s appointment as Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre made him one of the most powerful figures in the British theatre at the age of just twenty-nine, and he symbolised, at least on the surface, the young, egalitarian Britain of the future.

The consumer boom that continued into the 1960s was also spearheaded by the younger generations, who benefitted from the prosperity and the high employment figures noted in the previous chapter of this thesis. Young people increasingly had more money to spend on commodities, while the shift towards mass production in the fashion and music industries meant that the symbols of the cultural revolution – the miniskirt or The Rolling Stones’s records, for instance – were more affordable and more readily available (*ibid*: 328). At the same time, the pervading consumerism encouraged an entrepreneurial culture that increasingly equated success with making

money. Raymond Williams identified ‘the ‘selling’ ethic’ at the beginning of the decade and the ongoing strength of capitalism, where the overriding message was ‘what sells goes, and to sell a thing is to validate it’ (Williams, 2011: 346). The fact that the economic success enjoyed by Bailey, The Beatles and other icons, brought them prestige and social capital, which allowed them to transcend their working-class origins, corroborated Williams’s point.

The generational conflict became increasingly radicalized, as a new non-totalitarian socialist Left emerged across Western Europe and the Americas. Although it was certainly not a single homogenous or comprehensive movement, the New Left largely argued for a new sense of social and collective justice. It participated actively in the major issues such as the civil rights movement, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and anti-Vietnam war protests, and foregrounded group over individual liberty. In Britain, Williams and other left-wing intellectuals used *New Left Review* to denounce the ‘assimilation of the Labour Party to the orthodox structures of British society’ and its failure to represent the student protesters who took the streets repeatedly over the course of the decade (Williams, 1968: 161). These protesters fought bitterly for an improvement to workers’ rights and living conditions, greater equality, the protection of civil liberties and world peace. For example, the Committee of 100 began a campaign of civil disobedience against nuclear weapons in 1961, including large-scale sit-down protests that resulted in mass arrests, including leading icons of youth culture such as Vanessa Redgrave and John Osborne. In 1968, the year of student revolt, the violent clashes between students and authority figures in France, the United States, Japan, and across the world were reflected in Britain, albeit on a smaller scale. Protest marches against the Vietnam War staged in March and October

were attended by huge numbers of people, including Redgrave, again, Tariq Ali and Mick Jagger. Similar demonstrations and occupations were organised at the London School of Economics, which became the centre point of student protest in the country, Hornsey College of Art, and the Universities of Essex and Hull, all of which challenged the authority and paternalism of universities.⁶⁴

Challenges to the established order also began to emerge in the British theatre of the time. It is true that it was still dominated by its old guard of businessmen and impresarios such as Hugh ‘Binkie’ Beaumont and Prince Littler, who created an almost impenetrable circle of control over the mainstream theatre and formed conglomerates to monopolise the artistic output. Likewise, the British theatre was still firmly London-centric and governed by the ‘star’ system. However, soon after Labour’s election victory, Wilson appointed Jennie Lee as the first Minister for the Arts, and she oversaw an increase to the Arts Council budget of nearly £6 million between 1964 and 1970 that helped to establish the subsidised theatre in Britain (Elsom, 1979: 128). Her 1965 White Paper, ‘A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps’, outlined plans for a more balanced distribution of funds, thus rejecting W. E. Williams’s ‘few, but roses’ policy and its prioritisation of large cultural institutions. The Paper called for more money to be dedicated to regional theatre, and while the Council was still accused of favouritism and centralising patronage, it supported numerous fringe companies and community arts programmes over the course of the decade (*ibid*: 130).

There were other, more direct challenges to the theatre establishment that are outside the remit of this chapter but which deserve mention. Plays such as John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, Edward Bond’s *Saved* and Theatre Workshop’s *Oh What A*

Lovely War highlighted the anachronism of the Lord Chamberlain and fuelled demands for the abolition of theatre censorship, while Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* challenged the cultural conservatism in Britain. Hall staged similar controversial new plays at the RSC such as Rolf Hochhuth's *The Representative* and Brook's *US* despite being attacked publicly by members of the RSC Board, who contested the company's eligibility for funding given its anti-Establishment stance (Trowbridge, 2013: 55-60). Young critics similarly refused to show automatic respect or deference to establishment figures. In Alan Brien's review of Laurence Olivier's *Coriolanus*, he called for 'less personality [...] too often here and there Olivier seemed to be giving a Green Room parody of the role.' (*The Spectator*, 17 July 1959) Beaumont was also treated as symbol of the outmoded, passé Establishment, and, as Sally Beauman argues, the phrase 'very Tennent's' became a term of abuse by the mid-1950s (Beauman, 1982: 190). Hall, by contrast, was a prominent member of the new class of individuals who sought to wrest artistic control of the theatre from Beaumont and his fellow impresarios. This group, which included Brook, Trevor Nunn and Jonathan Miller, were all directors who were neither members of the social elite nor the acting dynasties, but who had graduated from Oxford (Brook) or Cambridge (Hall, Nunn and Miller).

Hall's plans for an ensemble of actors are here considered within this context of change, given the fact that these plans also challenged the conventions of theatre making and its deeply entrenched hierarchical structures. His main innovation in this respect was the creation of three-year contracts for actors. Although Hall does not explain why he stipulated a three-year period, my suspicion is that he borrowed from Barker's 1907 model. Barker and William Archer argued that the group work that was

integral to their proposed National Theatre demanded permanence of service, and suggested that the minimum ‘period of engagement for a regular member of the company would be three years, renewable in similar periods’ (Archer and Barker, 1907: 23). The permanency of these contracts was to be an antidote to the unpredictability of the commercial system that confined the actor to the role of casual labourer and thus to help create an ensemble sensibility, that is, an ‘artistic home where the members of the family are in habitual sympathy one with another.’ (*ibid*: 33) Hall similarly proposed to use the contracts as a way of creating a theatre-home and a theatre-family at RSC, showing, again, the traces of the Stanislavskian model passed down through the British theatre.

The RSC contracts guaranteed the actor a minimum of three years’ continuous employment and a regular weekly income, which was reviewed by the management annually and which included paid holidays.⁶⁵ These conditions were unprecedented in the British theatre and, for the first time, protected the actors from periods of unemployment. The ‘Non-Playing Periods’ clause stated that, in periods when an actor was neither rehearsing nor performing with the company, ‘the Manager would pay 75 per cent of his playing salary’ (Addenbrooke, 1974: 269). These contracts encouraged greater commitment from the actors engaged, since they did not have to go elsewhere in search of an income, and a greater commitment to the ideal of the ensemble. Hall acknowledged that the ‘star’ system was not conducive to ensemble work, where to take a smaller, supporting role brought with it the risk of becoming obsolete and losing any previously acquired status, which an actor could not afford in a field still dominated by the commercial theatre (Hall in Royal Shakespeare, 1963: 18). The security provided by the contracts allowed the actors to take roles for the artistic

possibilities they offered rather than the money or fame they brought. It also limited the chance of actors being tempted away by the more lucrative offers from the commercial theatre or film and television that had broken up Littlewood's company previously. Additionally, the RSC directors held the exclusive rights to the actors' 'services', which meant that no external offers could be accepted without prior approval. Thus, the contracts brought security for both the actors and the directors.

The innovativeness of this system is made clear when compared to the National Theatre, which was finally opened in 1963 and with which the RSC shared an intense rivalry throughout the 1960s to become the foremost theatre company in Britain. While the RSC symbolised youth and radical experimentation, the National was sanctioned by the Government through the 1949 National Theatre Act and was the main recipient of the Arts Council's funding for theatre, which aligned it to the older Establishment. Furthermore, its opening in 1963 came at the end of a long and drawn-out process that was pushed back continually by bureaucratic disagreements, all of which gave the Theatre the reputation of a slow-moving, committee-led organisation.

The National Theatre plans also included a permanent ensemble company, although it was more closely related to the 'star'-oriented companies of the mainstream theatre, as noted by the actors and directors who worked there in the 1960s. Company member Edward Petherbridge, for example, observed a clear divide between the 'star' actors and the ensemble that was perpetuated by Olivier, who referred continually to the ensemble actors as 'the help' (Petherbridge, 2011: 93). Billington also argues that any attempt to create an ensemble at the National was undermined by the presence of Olivier, who 'could not help but effortlessly dominate' the company, and Tynan as

Literary Manager, who was obsessed by ‘stars’ (Billington, 2007: 142). Indeed, Gaskill left his position as Associate Director after just two seasons, as he was unwilling to adhere to Tynan and Olivier’s ‘star’ policy: ‘In the second season [...] we had Noël Coward trying to get Dame Edith Evans to remember her lines in *Hay Fever*, Franco Zeffirelli camping it up in *Much Ado* [...] I could see the socialist ensemble was not going to happen.’ (Gaskill, 1988: 60) Young actors such as Michael Gambon and Ian McKellen struggled to progress in the company, highlighting the ‘delusions and desperations of the Darwinian struggle, the essentially arbitrary rule undermining the *esprit de corps* of the NT ensemble.’ (Petherbridge, 2011: 153) In contrast, the democratic spirit of the RSC meant that young actors were not automatically confined to supernumerary roles. Hall chose the unknown twenty-two year-old David Warner, who had only left RADA two years previously, to play the title role in *Henry VI* in 1963 and to play Hamlet in 1965.

Hall’s long-term contracts were announced officially to the public on 16 October 1960, ten months after he became Director of the Memorial Theatre. Sixteen actors signed contracts initially, and a further nineteen joined by the end of the month to create the first core group at Stratford. This original group combined young and unknown actors such as Eric Porter, Ian Bannen, Dorothy Tutin and Ian Holm, most of whom had worked with Hall previously, with established actors such as Peggy Ashcroft, who was one of the first to sign the contract. For Ashcroft, the RSC represented the culmination of her years ‘spent seeking to be part of a permanent company’ (Ashcroft in Addenbrooke, 1974: 183). Her training and work with Komisarjevsky made her adept at ensemble playing and, as actor Martin Jenkins recalled, she

nurtured a sense of company spirit, and transformed the actors into a team, working towards a common goal [...] Rehearsing with her was

constantly revealing, simply because she possessed the knack of making you feel important – your contribution mattered. (Jenkins cited in Pearson, 1990: 33)

The newspapers celebrated the revolutionary nature of Hall's achievement. 'Peter Hall has made theatrical history by planning to engage thirty-five artists for a three-year period,' *The Stage* declared. 'Under Mr Hall's regime [the actors] will be playing for years on end and we can expect to enjoy ensemble work such as we have rarely previously seen in an English company' (*The Stage*, 27 October 1960). Of course, the creation of these contracts was revolutionary in the sense that Hall was the first director in Britain to bring actors together as a group on a formal and legally binding basis. The 'groups' or nuclei of actors created by Craig, Barker, Komisarjevsky and Littlewood were only ever loose associations that relied upon shared ideals and an unspoken agreement that was often compromised by the need to make money. Thus, Hall achieved what none of the other directors examined in this thesis was able to, namely, a sense of permanency that was recognised officially and which gave the actors an economic security that the preceding directors were not able to guarantee.

The Royal Shakespeare Company as a Committed Ensemble

As has already been argued in this thesis, the 'star' system fostered an intense, albeit implicit, sense of competition between actors working in the field, which did little to support the notion of ensemble work. Yet, to try and create work without any 'stars' ran the risk of alienating a company from both potential audiences and the support of public funding bodies, as the experience of Littlewood had shown. Thus, a paradox was created, where to work with 'stars' threatened the ensemble, but to work without 'stars' threatened the future of the company. Hall's solution was to transcend the

binary of the ‘star’ and the ensemble at the RSC. Rather than getting rid of the ‘star’ altogether, he aimed to discard the tradition of lead actors being isolated from the rest of the company. He wanted ‘stars’, but only those willing to work as an ensemble and commit to the idea of the group: ‘I believe in stars. [...] But it seems to me that a star who is capable of disrupting a company is just not worth it [...] I needed a star who is happy in an ensemble. That *can* exist – and Peggy Ashcroft is the shining example’ (Hall cited in Addenbrooke, 1974: 85; original emphasis).

Hall’s aim to unite the ‘star’ and the ensemble consolidated the work of his predecessors at Stratford. Beauman’s detailed chronology of the Memorial Theatre’s directorship prior to Hall’s arrival shows that the various plans to create an acting company for the Theatre fell into two distinct camps (Beauman, 1982: 62-232). On the one hand, directors such as William Bridges-Adams (1919-1934) and Barry Jackson (1946-1948), both of whom were influenced by Barker, wanted to create a company of unknown or amateur actors who could be trained to work together as an ensemble over a number of years. In contrast, directors such as Anthony Quayle (1948-1956) used the company as a vehicle to foreground dominant ‘star’ actors, whose profiles brought prestige to the Theatre. Of course, Quayle’s method focused on creating attention-grabbing seasons as opposed to a company that worked consistently together for a number of years. His ‘stars’ left at the end of each season to be replaced by others, which necessitated a complete change in repertoire and a break in continuity. Glen Byam Shaw (1954-1959) also fell into this latter camp, despite his earlier attempts to create long-standing ensemble companies with Saint-Denis and George Devine.

While Hall praised the work and policies of his predecessors, he acknowledged that ‘there could be no long-term plan of development because there was a new company each year. I think it was the burden of continually restarting which finally disillusioned each of these remarkable men.’ (Hall in Goodwin, 1964: 43) His three-year contracts, by contrast, ensured a level of continuity and gave the actors the time to become familiar with, and committed to, each other, which created a ‘company spirit’. Roy Dotrice, one of the original members of the RSC, recalled:

Peter Hall had developed a relaxed and creative atmosphere. The three-year contracts meant the actors were together, their wives mixed, their children mixed and they criticised each other’s work. Such a happy time. It was like being back at school with such wonderful mates. But we worked bloody hard. (Dotrice cited in Pearson, 1990: 30)

Within the framework of the three-year contracts, the creation of an ensemble spirit and a unified style at the RSC was cultivated by four key elements, which are the focus of this section: the company repertory; the training programme; the geographic location; and large-scale productions such as *The Wars of the Roses* cycle.

As noted previously, Hall argued that a repertory that combined Shakespearean and other Elizabethan plays with contemporary work was necessary in order to keep the company together and to develop and test the actors’ faculties. ‘It would not be possible,’ he advised the Theatre’s Executive Council, ‘to hold a group of actors solely to play Shakespeare. The stimulus of other classical and modern work would be needed to develop the company fully.’ (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Report of the Council, 1959-1960) A repertoire dedicated solely to Shakespeare would not provide enough roles for a company of over thirty contracted artists, which meant that some actors would have to undergo periods of inactivity that could lead to idleness or a sense of competition between company members, neither of which engendered ensemble

practice. More importantly, the lack of diversity in the roles available would have a negative impact on the actors' technique. Hall believed that without variation from Shakespeare an actor became 'coarse-grained and cliché-ridden', arguing that an 'experience of modern writing is essential to the classical actor, keeping his sensibilities sharp and accurate so that he can apply these attributes to his Shakespearean work' (Hall in Goodwin, 1964: 65)

The juxtaposition of classical and contemporary work was made possible by the RSC seasons at the Aldwych Theatre. The acting company was divided roughly into two groups each season, with one group working on Shakespeare productions in Stratford while the other performed classics of the twentieth century such as *The Cherry Orchard*, as well as new plays, including *The Physicists* and *The Homecoming*, in London. The groups would often swap at the end of each season. However, there was the opportunity for actors to swap locations during the season as well, not least when a production transferred from one theatre to the other. This system meant that an actor would play a combination of Elizabethan and modern plays over the course of his or her three-year engagement, and that, at least in theory, an actor could play in Stratford one night and then in London the next.⁶⁶ The resulting juxtaposition not only helped to keep the actors alert, but it also created a shared approach to acting. This approach was clearly identifiable and saw the actors 'respond to all the influences of modern and classical drama and use these influences in their Shakespeare repertory at Stratford-upon-Avon' (Goodwin, 1964: 8).

Saint-Denis's RSC Studio also contributed to the creation of this shared approach to acting. Hall cited Saint-Denis as a major influence on his understanding of ensemble

practice, and he invited him and Brook to join him at the RSC as his co-directors and advisers in 1962 (Hall, 1993: 146). Hall hoped to benefit from ‘Michel’s links with the past and the European tradition of theatre’, and, in particular, from his first-hand experience of Stanislavsky and Jacques Copeau (Hall in Addenbrooke, 1944: 240). Training sessions at the Studio ran for two hours every day and followed a similar programme to those of the London Theatre Studio and the Old Vic Theatre School. This programme included active work on play texts, technical classes in movement, verse speaking and singing, and classes in spoken and silent improvisation, which, again, borrowed heavily from Stanislavsky’s *An Actor Prepares*. Saint-Denis also conducted weekly lectures on early twentieth-century theatre history, including Stanislavsky, Craig, Brecht and contemporary artistic theatre movements such as the Theatre of the Absurd (Saint-Denis in Royal Shakespeare Company, 1963: 24). While attendance at the Studio was technically voluntary, all company members were encouraged to participate. In 1963, for example, 95 per cent of the company took part in at least one aspect of the Studio work (*Flourish*, Autumn 1964). The Studio, therefore, was integral in establishing the shared vocabulary of movement and the shared method of verse speaking essential for group and artistic unity.

The Studio also aimed to provide a space for the actors to work together and to become familiar with each other away from the pressure of public performances and the need to produce periodic results (Hall in Goodwin, 1964: 45). In addition to training company members, Saint-Denis had a group of ten student actors with whom he worked closely, including John Kane. These student actors were slowly integrated into the company, performing either as understudies or in minor roles, thus establishing the dialogue between training and practical work that Craig, Barker and Komisarjevsky had sought

previously, all inspired by Stanislavsky's precedence on this score. Kane, for example, played the Second Gravedigger in Hall's 1965 *Hamlet* and Mishka in his 1966 production of *The Government Inspector*, before being promoted to larger roles such as Puck in Brook's 1970 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, Saint-Denis's ill health meant that his work for the company and his leadership of the Studio was cut short. John Barton replaced Saint-Denis as its Director in 1964, just two years after the Studio opened, and the focus shifted from experimentation to supporting productions that were part of that season's repertory (*Flourish*, Autumn 1964).

The geographic remoteness of the company's base in Stratford-upon-Avon and the close working conditions fostered a strong group identity. Hall did not direct all of the RSC productions himself, so he created a system of associate directors – including Barton, Peter Wood, Clifford Williams and Trevor Nunn – to ensure the continuity and stability that encouraged the actors to take risks in rehearsals and to create a home of sorts. He also encouraged the directors to watch and critique each other's rehearsals and work closely together: 'I don't know another company where you all sit round, without being chi chi, and discuss what you're doing, why you're doing it and really believe that the theatre is something that helps to drive the community along.' (Williams cited in Lewis, 1967: 72) This knowledge and familiarity was further nurtured by the fact that the actors, directors and technical team lived in close proximity to each other when in Stratford and, in the absence of a wider social network or community, the company members forged one of their own. Again, Hall encouraged this close relationship and organised events such as company picnics, team sports activities, lawn parties and regular company gatherings at his house in Avoncliffe to

enable the actors to spend their free time together (*The Stage*, 17 August 1961; Pearson, 1990: 10).

Without the numerous distractions of a metropolis such as London, the actors focused on their work with the company and dedicated themselves fully to rehearsals and training. Jeffrey Dench, who first performed with the company in 1963, explained that there was a ‘strange sort of atmosphere’ in Stratford and at the RSC that meant ‘one could really *work* here’ (Dench, 1982; original emphasis). Critics who visited the Stratford theatre in the mid-1960s likened it repeatedly to a university campus, where the actors studied closely together, shared ideas and worked together to solve problems. James Flannery used the analogy repeatedly when detailing rehearsals at the company, which carried the ‘vague air of a university theatre workshop’ and where a ‘scene was performed and then a small seminar was held on it, the actors being the class and Hall acting the part of the mildly imposing tutor’ (Flannery, 1967: 385-6). Gareth Lloyd Evans likewise praised the company for its insistence on ‘the democratic ideal of ensemble playing and direction’, which helped it to establish ‘a strong sense of community; mutual criticism and advice is both encouraged and given. In a very real sense, this theatre is a world within a world.’ (Evans, 1968: 133)

Other critics referred to the atmosphere of monasticism engendered by the intensive work schedule and the separation from friends, family and a social life. Peter Lewis observed: ‘Life in the Stratford company is monastic, in all but the sexual connotation of the term. For the nine-month season there is nowhere to go but the theatre, the Green Room, and the Dirty Duck [...] in some ways it is like college life’ (Lewis, 1967: 72). Indeed, the RSC became ‘a group whose waking hours were all dedicated to one end.’

(Beauman, 1982: 267) The dedication of the group was also facilitated by its gruelling work schedule, in much the same way as Littlewood's company during its first years at the Theatre Royal Stratford East. In its first four years, the RSC staged fifty-five productions across its venues in London and Stratford, including nine revivals and transfers. It is true that actors were brought in for particular productions in order to supplement the core acting company, but this does not detract from the scale of the operation or the effect it had on the company. Working with each other regularly on a series of productions established a strong sense of continuity and expedited the forming of close bonds between company members.

The above was particularly true when the company worked on longer-term productions, the most pertinent example being the complete cycle of Shakespeare's history plays that was developed and staged over a two-year period. The project began in July 1963, when the company performed *Henry VI* and *Edward IV* – Hall and Barton's adaptation of *Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3* – and *Richard III* under the overarching title *The Wars of the Roses*. Hall then added *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V* the following year to complete the cycle.⁶⁷ Of the fifty-seven actors cast for the first three productions, forty-five appeared in all three, and only two appeared in just one.⁶⁸ This statistic, along with the fact that Hall and Barton directed all the productions together, provided the project with a level of continuity that helped to establish it as one, unified piece of work. Further, the large majority of actors who worked on the cycle were either members of the RSC's permanent company or had worked with it on numerous occasions, which meant that there was already an established familiarity between the actors that encouraged trust and openness in rehearsals.

Hall, Barton and Frank Evans, their assistant director, rehearsed *Henry VI* and *Edward IV* as one production over an eleven-week period, and then started the month-long rehearsals for *Richard II*, two days after the first two productions opened. When Hall suffered a breakdown during the rehearsals and spent two weeks recuperating at home, which is discussed below, Barton and Evans devised a rather elaborate rehearsal rota, which involved the first two plays being broken down into a number of blocks that were rehearsed separately. After Hall returned the rota went as follows: the actors involved in each block worked first with Hall, where they discussed the action and established basic movements for the scene, and then moved to a different part of the theatre to work with Barton on the same section but with the emphasis on verse speaking and understanding the text. The actors then moved to a third space to work with Evans on the same block, where the work with Hall and Barton was combined, before finally returning to Hall to begin work on the next block (Pearson, 1990: 31).

Of course, while this meant that the actors worked together in small groups to discover the truth of a particular scene, it was a far cry from Littlewood's ideal of the actors and technicians experimenting and rehearsing together as a single group. Instead, the smaller groups worked as separate units and it was for Hall, as director, to bring them together as a unified whole. However, any feelings of fragmentation were countered by the co-operative method of direction that Hall introduced for the productions, where he, Barton and Evans worked in close collaboration. The close working relationship of these directors ensured that all were working towards the same, shared goal, while the small groups meant that they had the time and space to pay attention to each individual actor. *The Listener* explained: 'Without such delegation of direction the development

of minor parts hitherto relegated to satellite attendance on the star would be impossible.' (*The Listener*, 18 June 1964) Rehearsals took place six days a week, including before and after scheduled performances. When rehearsals began for *Richard III*, the actors, who had already worked together for eleven weeks, spent the day rehearsing the new production, and then performed either *Henry VI* or *Edward IV* in the evening before continuing rehearsals throughout the night (Pearson, 1990: 53). Thus, the time spent immersed in the world of the plays and focused on the productions helped to establish the actors as a committed group.

By rehearsing and performing the productions alongside each other and using the same actors for each Hall realised his aim of establishing a dialogue between plays, where the discoveries made on one production informed the work on the others. His insistence on viewing the plays as part of a larger narrative helped the actors to bring new meaning to the more famous soliloquys. Holm, who played both *Henry V* and *Richard III*, recalled:

I played Richard very much as a cog in the historical wheel, and not as an individual character [...] It was always extremely difficult to play 'Now is the Winter' [...] When I played the young [Richard in *Edward IV*], and joined in the fun with the other brothers in Dad's castle, I was then able to go through into the famous soliloquy very much with the feeling of greeting old friends again and saying 'Hi, here I am'. (Holm cited in Pearson, 1990: 54)

The constant awareness of the cycle also helped to dissuade the actors from performing 'star' turns as the production moved away from a focus on one individual character and showed a series of characters developing over time. Ashcroft played Margaret in *Henry VI*, *Edward IV* and *Richard III* in 1963 and 1964 and so was able to show the transformation of her character over a fifty-year period. This continuity encouraged both her and the audience to consider each production in relation to the others in the

cycle, giving a deeper resonance to the characters and a different meaning to their actions. Robert Speaight observed that because Ashcroft ‘had already built up such a fascinating and formidable figure [...] and because we had actually seen the murder of her husband and her son – I found myself for once actually looking forward to her imprecations.’ (Speaight, 1963: 16) The result was productions that achieved ‘a true three-dimensional effect of real living historical persons – not of chessmen taking up positions.’ (*The Guardian*, 18 July 1962)

The history cycle consolidated Hall’s plans for the RSC and was, to both the actors and the watching public, ‘a living representation of what such a company could achieve.’ (Ashcroft cited in Pearson, 1990: ix) The productions were commercial successes, with over 380,000 people attending the 1964 performances, while the critics were almost unanimous in their praise for Hall (Royal Shakespeare Theatre Report of the Council, 1964-65). The *Daily Mail* called the cycle ‘a landmark and a beacon in the post-war English theatre, a triumphant vindication of Mr Hall’s policy’ (*The Daily Mail*, 18 July 1963), while *The Times* said it was ‘the boldest application so far of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s current style.’ (*The Times*, 18 July 1963). The running theme of the reviews was that the productions confirmed Hall’s belief in the need for permanency in the ensemble company. As R. B. Marriott noted:

In the enormous company, everyone counts: there happens to be a star, Peggy Ashcroft, as Queen Margaret, but what we see is astonishing maturity, assurance and power in the group of players built up by Mr Hall and his colleagues in under three years. Before the coming of the Royal Shakespeare Company, as it works at Stratford-on-Avon and at the Aldwych, I think it would have been impossible to have staged such a production with such success. (*The Stage*, 25 July 1963)

Elsewhere in the same issue, Marriott referred to the ‘growing, creative urge flowering remarkably in the productions’ and explained how ‘nothing is hit or miss: all seems to be derived from firm roots, and made to flourish luxuriantly because of this.’ (*ibid*)

However, the belief held by some critics that the success of the productions gave ‘exciting promise of even finer things’ to come proved to be unfounded (*The Stage*, 25 July 1963). Within two years the company was at a crisis point and became increasingly fragmented with little commitment from the actors and little sign that the idea of an ensemble company had taken root. Brook believed that the fault lay with the success of the history cycle, arguing: ‘The artistic aims were fulfilled by *The Wars of the Roses* [...] After that the company had no target ahead of it.’ (Brook cited in Beauman, 1982: 281) In its early years, Hall’s plans and policy had been a point on which the group was founded and set definite goals that gave the work direction. When these goals were achieved in 1963 and 1964, there was no longer a clear objective to aim towards. Again, this demonstrates a perception of the ensemble as a fixed destination that, once reached, could not be sustained, as opposed to something that needs to be continually worked at and developed.

Hall argued that the break down of a company was a natural part of its cycle. ‘If you are lucky enough to create [a company],’ he explained in 1964, ‘it immediately begins to disintegrate’ (Hall in Goodwin, 1964: 44). Unfortunately, he was not able to recreate an ensemble company at the RSC after *The Wars of the Roses* ensemble disintegrated. The latter set a precedent that Hall found impossible to match. As Ian Richardson, an early company member, remarked, ‘*The Wars of the Roses* was the pinnacle of the

RSC's achievement over the sixties – never to be bettered.' (Richardson cited in Addenbrooke, 1974: 129)

The Problem of Permanency

The success of the history cycle was largely due to the fact that the actors and directors worked together consistently on a single, unified project over the course of a two-year period. Over a third of the actors from the 1963 cycle returned in 1964, and of the seven productions staged in the latter cycle 89 per cent of the actors appeared in at least three and 79 per cent appeared in four or more, while Hall directed all the productions with Barton and Clifford Williams. These figures demonstrate the continuity of the team that underpinned the cycle and helped to establish each production as part of a composite whole. However, Hall struggled to keep the same sense of unity and continuity when working on productions that were not part of a large-scale project. Part of the problem was the professed need to include 'star' actors in the company, and their inability or unwillingness to commit long term meant that, even with the three-year contracts, there was always a certain amount of turnaround in the RSC.

It is true that within the RSC itself the actors were committed to the ensemble ideal, where well-known figures alternated leading and supporting roles, approaching both with the same care, dedication and commitment. Patsy Byrne, for example, played Grusha in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Audrey in *As You Like It* in one season, while Patience Collier played the smaller characters of Charlotta in *The Cherry Orchard* and Mistress Quickly in *Henry IV*. However, the company was still subject to external pressure of the 'star' system, and while it was acceptable for actors like Collier to play such smaller roles for one or two productions, they would not sacrifice wages

or absent themselves permanently from the West End, as Quayle noted in 1965 (Quayle cited in Chambers, 2004: 5). Gielgud explained the pressure placed on the ‘star’ and the need to maintain one’s position, seemingly echoing Barker’s warning to him in 1937 of the need to choose between art and establishing a career. ‘Having been fortunate enough to reach the top of one’s profession,’ he told *Plays and Players* in 1956, ‘one has to live up to this reputation. It is possible, of course, to stick to Stratford at Shakespeare [...] but one needs the commercial theatre too in order to pay one’s bills.’ (Gielgud in *Plays and Players*, December 1956)

In the same interview, Gielgud described the dangers of committing to a production long term:

One welcomes the regular income from being tied up in a successful West End play, but one is always afraid of missing some wonderful opportunity by being tied up in this way. And this fear of losing a better opportunity is even greater for supporting players, who know that the small part they are playing on the stage for a correspondingly small salary may prevent their being able to grasp the chance of a first-rate part in a film or television. (*ibid*)

Gielgud is, of course, referring to the long run, but the same sentiment underpinned criticisms of permanent companies and their incompatibility with the ‘star’ system. It is not necessary to analyse again the particularities of this system, given the detailed examination of it in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, and it suffices to note here how it turns the actor into a commodity to be exchanged for economic and symbolic rewards. The commercial theatre, in accordance with the principles of *laissez-faire* capitalism, thus exists as a free market, where the actor is subject to market forces. Any prestige earned strengthens her or his position and so increases the chance of survival in the market. Committing to a long-term company, therefore, carries with it the risk of

making oneself obsolete or ‘missing some wonderful opportunity’ to secure more prestige and more money.

While the security of the long-term contracts at the RSC nurtured young actors such as Dotrice, affording him the opportunity to develop without the fear and frustration of unemployment, this security was seen as restrictive for actors already established. Paddy Donnell, General Manager of the RSC during Hall’s directorship, explains that an increasingly large number of actors were unwilling to sign the contracts for fear of becoming trapped at Stratford for a minimum of three years (Donnell, 1982). Gielgud was one of the actors to turn down the contract and appeared only as a guest artist in *Othello* and *The Cherry Orchard* in 1961, despite his attempts to establish such ensemble acting groups in the 1930s (Fay, 1995: 161). His decision is perhaps not surprising, given the fact that he was against total permanency and readily accepted the reality of the entrenched ‘star’ system, as noted in Chapter Three of this thesis.

The reluctance to commit to the company undermined the success of the RSC contracts, as did the willingness of actors to break them in order to take more high-profile roles and capitalise on any fame earned. Peter O’Toole, one of the original company members, terminated his contract before the end of the first season in order to play the lead role in the film *Laurence of Arabia*. O’Toole similarly advised Anthony Hopkins to terminate his contract with the National in 1967 in order to play Richard in the MGM film *The Lion in Winter*, telling him: ‘You’ll have to...walk out – I did from Stratford... Do you want Oliver Reed to play the part?’ (O’Toole cited in Rosenthal, 2013: 134). Of course, it was (and still is) common practice in Russia, Germany and France for actors to return to their ensemble companies after appearing in films, and

the fact that this was not the case in Britain suggests, again, the strength of the ‘star’ system. Hall explained that the high wages earned from films encouraged actors ‘to think of themselves in temporary commercial terms which are inaccurate or inflated, and then they don’t come back, because they don’t get the big parts with us.’ (Hall, 1967: 154) Those actors who did return were less likely to take smaller, supporting roles.

Even committed company members such as Dotrice agreed that an actor could not afford to remove her or himself from the free market of the commercial theatre indefinitely. When Peter Lewis interviewed RSC company members in 1967, Dotrice told him: ‘I felt I had to get out and prove myself outside [...] The company builds you up but sooner or later you have got to be judged by your commercial value.’ (Dotrice cited in Lewis, 1967: 72) Dotrice’s statement reveals the extent to which the criteria of the commercial theatre shaped the perceptions of those working in the field. He argues here that one’s legitimacy as an actor was only ascertained by a successful performance in the free market, which is a clear example of him absorbing the logic of the commercial market into his own habitus and using it to judge other cultural products and producers. He accepts the rules of the game and agrees to play by them, or, rather, he enters into the *illusio* of the field of the theatre, to return to Bourdieu’s concept (Bourdieu, 1996: 333-6). Dotrice was certainly not the only company member to do so, and the majority agreed that it was necessary to leave the company and experience the uncertainty of the commercial market that brought with it the potential for great economic gain. Judi Dench admitted that she left the company ‘because I like life to be a bit of a gamble’, while Diana Rigg explained:

I just felt that I had to come out of the womb [...] I had to face unemployment in order to develop. I had nothing to come out to. Maybe

you must hazard your professional life from time to time in order to remain alive. (Dench and Rigg cited in Lewis, 1967: 72)

While the actors enjoyed the security of the contract, the risk of short-term engagements and the practice of moving from company to company were so deeply ingrained in the British theatre culture – and the actors inculcated with it – that to work in any other way was deemed ‘unnatural’.

Hall acknowledged that the commercial theatre made it impossible to run a tightly-knit ensemble in Britain ‘because the market pressures are so strong and the rewards are so enormous. And I think the way to run a permanent company is to admit these facts.’ (Hall, 1967: 154) Further, the commercial theatre gave the actor a set of criteria against which to assess her or his position. ‘The big money and the acclaim of the outside world,’ he explained, ‘is something which is attractive to an actor’s temperament. It measures his status and is part of his actor’s vanity. And a necessary part of being an actor is vanity; and to repress it is dangerous.’ (*ibid*) Indeed, he believed that an actor’s choices were always informed by this vanity, where she or he acted in ‘the expression of self-interest’ (*ibid*, 1993: 206). In order to hold a group of actors together one had to satisfy this self-interest, which meant giving the actors the freedom to follow their own commercial interests rather than imposing restrictions on them and demanding absolute permanency. Hence Hall’s reluctance to create a fully permanent company and his preference for a company that was open to change and which was only ever a nucleus of actors.

This proclivity for a semi-permanent company was also rooted in Hall’s belief that absolute permanency threatened the living dialogue between actors that was central to ensemble work:

I do not think you can have absolutely permanent sealed groups; because then you have the top, who are secure and smug, and know they get all the leading roles [...]; then you have the middle, who are bitter and frustrated and tense, and are therefore getting worse; and you have the lower, who go as quickly as possible, because what's the point in staying? With the RSC [...] one should not insist on loyalties, and one should not expect that a member of the group will be there forever. To stay in a group you must have the right to go away. It must be an open-ended situation. (ibid, 1970b: 18-9)

The image Hall creates here is very similar to that invoked by Gielgud previously, where permanency is necessarily equated with stagnancy and a fixity of positions. Hall warned elsewhere that the security of a permanent company brought with it the risk of complacency among the actors: ‘There is a danger in security. There is a danger in working with people you know; there is a danger in keeping inside one’s range as an actor; there is a smugness; there is laziness.’ (ibid, 1967: 150).

Hall’s fears of permanency were informed by his study of other companies. Helene Weigel apparently warned him of such dangers in the 1950s, complaining that the Berliner Ensemble actors had become complacent and were unwilling to experiment with new ideas (ibid, 1993: 143). It was this inability to innovate that was Hall’s main concern. For him, any declaration of permanency was simultaneously a declaration of immutability, arguing that ‘a permanent company is like saying, ‘Let us never age, let us never die, let us never develop, let us never *change*.’’ (ibid, 1995: 204; original emphasis) This perception of a permanent company as something that by definition does not want to change is, of course, rather desolate. Following his line of argument, to work solely with the same, fixed group of people necessarily led to repetitiveness and a narrowing of artistic possibilities, where the same ideas were replicated with little variation and where certain techniques or methods became established as customary of the company in question.

The Moscow Art Theatre's visit to Britain in 1958 also demonstrated to Hall the danger of stagnancy and rigidity in permanent companies. Hall: 'The first time the Moscow Art Theatre came to London in the 'fifties, when I went to see *The Cherry Orchard*, I was absolutely appalled [...] Stuck in amber, with a very, very, very over-aged cast, woefully sentimental – woefully!' (ibid, 1993: 206). It was the epitome of a theatre company closed off to change that simply repeated the techniques and performances that had made it famous with little spontaneity and vitality. He was similarly damning of the Russian theatre, which he patronisingly labelled 'a fine museum' when he toured the country with the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1958 (*The Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1959). In an article for the *Sunday Times* titled 'Russian Stage Embalmers', Hall attacked the Russian theatre's 'preoccupation with the past' and denounced the 'myth that the Russian theatre is the greatest in the world [...] a theatre that is stagnant cannot claim this title' (Hall in *Sunday Times*, 18 January 1959).

Of course, Hall's assessment of the Art Theatre was, to an extent, accurate. As has been noted above, it had become stagnant by the late 1950s due to years of Stalinist control, of which Hall was clearly ignorant. The type of permanency embodied by the 1958 company was very different to Stanislavsky's notion of permanency, which was founded on the ideals of constant revolution, development and growth. The latter was what had inspired Craig and Barker in the 1910s and the traces of which were passed down through the British theatre and informed Hall's own idealised view of ensemble companies. Thus, his claim that a permanent company necessarily resulted in stagnation and inertia was not based on a comparable case.

The negative perception of absolute permanency in acting companies expressed by both Hall and his critics was also informed by the more deeply rooted suspicions of long-term commitment to groups and the threat it posed to individual liberty. Although the role played by liberal philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer in constructing a binary between the individual and the group has already been examined in Chapter Two of this thesis, it is useful to recapitulate the central argument here. According to Mill, individual liberty, that is, the freedom to pursue one's own interests and desires without interference, was the most important component of human well-being and should be protected at all times. 'The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way [...] Each is the proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily, or mental and spiritual.' (Mill, 2008: 17) This fundamental principle remained very much an active part of the British mindset and, in particular, in the upper echelons of British society, despite challenges from the New Left.

Within this context, the notion of committing to a permanent company was still seen as a threat to the individuality of the actor. Hall, like Barker before him, was accused continually of dominating the RSC members by various sections of the British theatre, including those actors who worked with him. In Lewis's *Nova* article, again, a number of the company members commented on Hall's desire for control. Glenda Jackson, for example, called him 'complicated and ambitious and a dictator,' while Dotrice labelled him 'power mad' (Jackson and Dotrice cited in Lewis, 1967: 66). One unnamed actor went further:

He is so charming [...] But by the end I was thinking he was the only evil man I'd ever met. You realise you're only a tool to be used for the

greater glory of Peter Hall, whereas from the chat you thought it was so much more. For the first time I thought I saw the priorities of a man who was after power. (*ibid*)

These accounts confirmed the suspicion that commitment to an ensemble group necessarily resulted in the subordination of the individualism of the actor to the will of the director.

Hall apparently corroborated the claims of his overriding quest for power, stating in the same interview: ‘Yes, I’m a dictator [...] You could call it a dictatorship checked and criticised.’ (*ibid*) However, while he was clearly not a member of the New Left or any radical party – he was, after all, a firm believer in hierarchy and power structures – he found ways to protect the individual liberty of each company member. For example, he included a clause in the contracts that allowed the actors to suspend them in order to work with other companies for a maximum aggregate period of nine months over the three years’ engagement. This clause meant that actors had the freedom to take roles that brought greater economic or symbolic rewards, which, in turn, encouraged a greater commitment to the group. At the same time, this opportunity to work elsewhere – including in the commercial theatre – gave the actors the space and variety to develop their craft: ‘It can sometimes be good for them; it opens them, it makes them feel that other people value them, they lose the parochialism which is inevitable in a permanent company’ (Hall, 1967: 154). Again, the so-called stagnancy of the permanent company was avoided. The clause also set a precedent that gave Hall the opportunity to work away from the RSC for periods and to bolster up his own ‘star’ status, which he did on numerous occasions.⁶⁹

The inclusion of a break in the long-term contracts was another way in which Hall mirrored the hypothetical model of a National Theatre set by Barker and Archer. Like Hall, the pair wanted to encourage permanency ‘without giving any one such absolute fixity of tenure as to enable him to decline into mere officialism and mechanical routine.’ (Archer and Barker, 1907: 23) They proposed a clause in the contract whereby the Theatre’s Director would ‘allow a performer an occasional furlough for a definite period, so that, without severing his connection with the Theatre [...] he might accept a special engagement at another theatre.’ (*ibid*: 24) Further, when Hall told *Nova* that ‘I can only keep a permanent group by letting them go away’ (Hall cited in Lewis, 1967: 72), he echoed Barker and Archer’s warning: ‘Loyalty is best secured by a sense of reasonable freedom’ (Archer and Barker, 1907: 24). In both instances, permanency was only acceptable or desired if it simultaneously did not infringe on the freedom of the actors and ensured a certain amount of change in the company.

The decision to protect the actor’s freedom of choice was not an attempt to provide an alternative system for actors. It was, rather, part of Hall’s attempt to consolidate the ‘star’ actors and the ensemble, and to give actors the chance to work in both the commercial and subsidised theatres. However, it was this freedom of choice that undermined Hall’s plans for an ensemble and resulted in the breakdown of a clear and unified group. By the mid-1960s, the contract system at the RSC began to fail, with some actors choosing to spend more time away from the company while others were reluctant to commit to three years altogether. Between 1965 and 1966, both the Planning and the Company Committees of the RSC met numerous times to try and resolve the issue. One of the solutions was to offer a more flexible ‘Associate Artists’ contract to ‘leading actors’ in the company such as Ashcroft and Rigg, which

encouraged them to see the company as ‘their first allegiance in their work, without absolutely involving them in the binding terms of the three year contract.’ (Planning Committee Minutes, 27 January 1966, RSC RL9/Box 2) However, it meant that certain members’ work with the company became increasingly sporadic and there were often actors listed as Associate Artists who had not performed with the RSC for a number of years (Donnell, 1982). With this new system, the company became more like a conglomerate of members than the closely-knit nucleus founded on shared ideals that Hall had originally intended.

Participants in these meetings also expressed concern that the hierarchy that Hall sought to avoid was emerging in the company, and actors were increasingly confined to working at particular levels. In a meeting of the full company in October 1965, a motion was put forward to counter this apparent divide and to reassert the importance of the ensemble:

The Meeting [...] withdraws its support from a system where the idea of HAMLET one night THE BUTLER the next is thrown aside. There should be actors in the Royal Shakespeare Company who will play parts however small or however large as thought proper by the Managing Director. An ‘ensemble company’ should mean ensemble. (Company Meeting Minutes, 29 October 1965, RSC RL9/Box 2; original emphasis)

Part of the reason for this divide was the continued practice of bringing in ‘star’ actors to take leading roles, but it was also a repercussion of company members working in the commercial theatre for periods of time. The presence of these ‘star’ actors weakened the ensemble system by disrupting the continuity, and, therefore, the trust, established between company members and undermining the sense of egalitarianism. Again, the commercial theatre threatened the principle of ensemble practice at the RSC. By the end of 1966, a member of the Company Committee noted that the actors

‘did not want to be really permanent members of a company’ and that the group should be much more loosely associated (*ibid*, 30 December 1966).

The long-term contracts were kept, but as the company became larger and more disparate the sense of a unified group similarly disappeared. While Hall’s company had the appearance of an ensemble, and while it certainly achieved ensemble work on particular productions, the continual changeover of actors meant he was not able to establish a strong sense of continuity or a community founded on shared ideals. At the same meeting in 1966, Eric Porter, an original company member, noted ‘that after six years he had not seen the spirit the Company started with come into existence.’ (*ibid*) Nunn argued that Hall’s company was founded on a ‘mixed economy [which] meant that the RSC has never got beyond the appearance of ‘ensemble’ working.’ (Nunn cited in Addenbrooke, 1974: 183) In short, it was the attempt to straddle the binary of the ‘star’-oriented commercial theatre and the subsidised ensemble – encouraging permanent commitment but insisting on individual freedom – that prevented the creation of an ensemble in the truest sense of the word.

As is clear from the above, a key issue in the breakdown of the ensemble sensibility at the RSC was its size and its rapid expansion. The opening of the first RSC season at the Aldwych in December 1960 meant that within Hall’s first year as Director his company was performing seasons at two separate locations in Britain simultaneously. The company continued to grow over the next few years to include: additional seasons at the Arts Theatre in 1962 and the LAMDA Theatre Club in 1964; numerous national and international tours, including to the United States and eastern Europe; the creation, with Peter Daubeny, of the annual World Theatre seasons; the opening of

Theatregoround in 1965, the RSC's 'mobile' company that toured to canteens, halls, social clubs and other venues in deprived areas; and deals with the BBC and film companies to record and distribute RSC productions.⁷⁰ These various additions made the RSC a large and multifaceted theatre organisation. In the 1962-63 season alone, it staged over twenty-four productions and employed nearly five hundred people, including actors, directors, technicians and administrative staff (Beauman, 1982: 249; Chambers, 2004: 20). *The Stage* noted in 1962: 'Never before has a single organisation been responsible for three companies, functioning all year round or for lengthy seasons [...] [It is] the most dominating feature of the British theatre.' (*The Stage*, 22 March 1962) This expansion enabled the company to play to a much larger and wider audience; in his analysis of its first three years, John Goodwin states that each season 'about 750,000 people pay more than £500,000 to see Royal Shakespeare productions' (Goodwin, 1964: 8). The RSC Annual Report for the 1967-68, Hall's last in charge, notes that over the twelve-month period 1,187,787 people attended productions at the company's two venues and during its various tours (Royal Shakespeare Theatre Report of the Council, 1967-68).

The reason for this rapid expansion was to secure funding from the Arts Council. Hall acknowledged that his proposed company was not a commercially viable venture, stating in 1963: 'We're not running this theatre to make money [...] we believe that the company we are trying to create is impossible to run on a commercial basis. We cannot be activated by the profit principle.' (Hall cited in Addenbrooke, 1974: 47) Norman Sanders similarly noted the difficulty in breaking conventions at Stratford, where any production that 'violated long-cherished preconceptions about the play' was prone to commercial failure (Sanders, 1963: 23). In order to pursue his goals, therefore, Hall

had to separate his company from the commercial market and to become autonomous. As was made clear in the previous chapter, the only way to gain any autonomy or freedom with respect to the commercial market was to have an alternative source of capital, which, in the British theatre context, came from the Arts Council. It was for this reason that Hall was adamant that his company required substantial and regular subsidy. By doing so, he went against the long-standing practice of self-financing at Stratford, and asked the Theatre's Chairman, Fordham Flower, and its Board of Governors 'to forget the accepted commercial notions and realise that, in the new world we had chosen, a large annual deficit was part of life' (Flower cited in Addenbrooke, 1974: 47).

The Arts Council was still pursuing its policy of 'few, but roses' in 1960, and Hall understood that if his company was to secure funding it, too, had to become a 'rose', or, as Brook noted in 1968, by producing 'a quantity of work so great that, with any luck, there would be enough striking triumphs for the eye of officialdom to be ensured.' (Brook in Royal Shakespeare Theatre Report of the Council, 1967-68) In short, it had to meet the criterion set by the Arts Council, establishing itself as a dominant group in the field and distinguishing itself from the other theatres competing for money. The most prominent of these competitors was the National Theatre, the emergence of which placed a further time constraint on Hall's plans. Numerous scholars have already documented the fierce competition between these two theatres in the 1960s, making a detailed examination of it here redundant (Addenbrooke, 1974; Elsom and Tomalin, 1978; Beauman, 1982; Rosenthal, 2013). However, it is necessary to note briefly how this competition and the threat posed by the National influenced the

speed at which Hall made his reforms at the RSC in order to make clear the effect this had on the ensemble work of the company.

Consecration and Competition for the National Theatre

While the plans to establish a National Theatre in Britain had proceeded haltingly and achieved little in the immediate post-war period, the movement had again gained momentum by 1960. *The Spectator* called it ‘the National Theatre year’, stating that the negotiations were at a ‘now-or-never point’ (*The Spectator*, 18 March 1960). The conference of the British Drama League later that year passed a resolution urging the Joint Council of the National Theatre to ensure that it was open by 1964 (*The Stage*, 3 November 1960). Within two years, the Treasury had approved the scheme and Olivier had been appointed Artistic Director. Hall was aware of the imminent arrival of the National, and anticipated the threat that it posed to his plans for the RSC:

Once it was working, it could well deal a death blow to Stratford if Stratford remained as it was. Without anything like the same resources, we would be unable to compete, and might quickly wither into no more than a short summer festival for tourists. All the heavyweight actors and directors would go into the National where conditions and pay were bound to be much better [...] the point was that Stratford had to be turned into a national organisation that could compete on even terms. I was as worried as [Flower] at the thought of one well-subsidised State institution, the National Theatre, being at the top of the pile. (Hall, 1993: 147)

It was the similarity of its plans that made the National a particular threat to the RSC. Hall knew that there would be little space for his group in the field after the National had opened, and that the Arts Council, which was already committed to the latter by the National Theatre Act, would be unwilling to fund two organisations that had apparently similar aims. Acknowledging this, Hall set about establishing his company and its position in the field quickly, making sure that it had achieved its goals, had a

clear and distinctive identity and secured support from the Arts Council by the time the National opened three years later.

A necessary part of this process was the attainment of the various markers of legitimization that consecrated the group in the field and met the criterion set by the dominant figures in it, namely, the Arts Council. It is useful to return here to Bourdieu's concept of consecration and the mechanisms through which an agent becomes recognised by the field of cultural production. Bourdieu argues that it is the 'approval' of those already consecrated in the field and endowed with symbolic capital that legitimates and authorizes an individual or group. Thus, in his favoured example of the visual artist, it is the 'whole ensemble of those who help to 'discover' him and to consecrate him as an artist who is 'known' and recognized – critics, writers of prefaces, dealers, etc.' that imbues value in both the work and the artist in question (Bourdieu, 1996: 167). Further, Bourdieu identifies the various social signs of consecration that any artist must acquire to demonstrate acceptance into the dominant fractions of the field. These include 'decorations, prizes, academies and all kinds of honours', all of which bestow onto the recipient prestige and help to distinguish him or her from the rest of the field (*ibid*: 123).

Hall secured a number of these social signs of consecration in his rapid expansion of the RSC. For example, while the Stratford theatre had received its Royal Charter in the 1920s, Hall implemented its name change soon after he arrived, replacing Shakespeare Memorial Theatre with the Royal Shakespeare Company in order to reassert the sanction of the monarchy.⁷¹ Hall himself was recognised formally by the Queen and the Prime Minister in 1963, when he was awarded a CBE, while the company received

numerous awards and accolades from the theatre establishment during its first three years.⁷² Likewise, it benefitted from the notice of prominent theatre critics, whose reviews imbued the company with value and who publicly supported its request for funding. Tynan, Harold Hobson, Bamber Gascoigne, T.C. Worsley and others made a joint public statement in 1962 that called for a grant of public money to be awarded to the company immediately, stating ‘we have sometimes differed among ourselves as to the merits of individual productions by the company. But we would like to affirm, unanimously, our belief in the vital importance of the company’ (*The Daily Telegraph*, 9 July 1962). Statements of this kind helped to bolster up the importance of the company in the eyes of the wider British theatregoing public.

Perhaps the most important of these signs of consecration was the acquisition of a second venue for the company in London, which, as Colin Chambers argues, was ‘an indispensable element in securing the legitimacy and survival of the company and of the later public subsidy required to support it’ (Chambers, 2004: 18). As noted above, both the commercial theatre and the Arts Council of the early 1960s continued to be London-centric, which meant that both the commercial and the subsidised strands of the British theatre were oriented around London. The importance of the city was further compounded by the changes taking place in wider society, which placed it at the centre of the social and cultural revolution that epitomised the 1960s. Its status as a mecca for the young and the experimental was consecrated by *Time* magazine in 1966 when it named London ‘the city of the decade’ (*Time*, 15 April 1966). Securing the RSC’s presence in London was, therefore, essential if Hall was to succeed in placing his group at the forefront of the British theatre and making it relevant to the changing British society.

A London base was also necessary to encourage deeper commitment from the actors by offering a varied combination of contemporary and Shakespearean roles, as noted above, and, more importantly, the opportunity to perform regularly in London. To commit to playing long term in a geographically remote location such as Stratford-upon-Avon was tantamount to self-imposed exile for any actor trying to establish her or himself, or seeking to maintain previously acquired status. Although critics and audiences certainly travelled to Stratford, the exposure an actor received there was nothing compared to that received in London. Given the continued domination of the ‘star’ system in the British theatre and the fact that exposure, converted into symbolic and economic capital, was necessary for survival, it is logical to deduce that actors would avoid committing themselves to the RSC if it meant playing only in Stratford, as was already acknowledged by Gielgud. Hall circumvented these objections by offering the actors the chance to play in both London and Stratford with the added security of a long-term contract.

The RSC’s presence in London, therefore, enabled it to compete directly with both the National Theatre and the commercial West End, and thereby dispel any accusations of provincialism or isolationism. In the case of the former, the RSC had a three-year advantage in which to establish itself in the London theatre scene as the foremost representative of long-term ensemble playing. Indeed, many, including Olivier, were suspicious that Hall was attempting to supplant the National and appropriate its funding budget. *The Times*, for example, reported that his expansion of the RSC was a clear ‘attempt either to dominate the National Theatre scheme or to supersede it.’ (*The Times*, 23 March 1962) Hall and Flower, in turn, believed that Olivier tried to force

their company out of London in order to make room for his and to secure its monopoly. When he offered the RSC an annual three-month season at the National it came with the condition that the company left the Aldwych. Flower refused, telling Olivier that to ‘chuck us out of the Aldwych amounts to nothing less than the murder of the R.S.[C]’ and accused him of having vested interests:

You, one of the great actors of our time, have taken on the Directorship of the National Theatre. In doing so, you stake your whole reputation on making it a success. But, in your view (mistakenly, I suggest), you regard the presence of an expanding and successful Royal Shakespeare Company as a threat to your prospects of doing so. Isn’t that precisely what you meant when you told me the other day that the one thing which sticks in the gizzards of the powers that be is the Aldwych? I deduce from our talk that it is the aim and policy of the National Theatre Board to clear us out of London, apart from a limited token season, in the National Theatre; a season, which, if I understand you right, is inconvenient to you anyway, and is really only being offered as an expedient. (Flower letter to Olivier, 22 October 1962, Flower, DR 1108/2/5/6)

Further, they believed that the Arts Council was colluding with the National to make sure that the RSC left London, and that Lord Cottesloe, an avid supporter of the National scheme, used his power as Chairman of the Arts Council to obstruct Hall’s progress. In a letter to Flower in February 1962, Hall confided: “it is quite clear [...] that the Arts Council is nervous of backing us, particularly at the Aldwych, until the NT scheme is settled’ (Hall letter to Flower, 7 February 1962, Flower, DR 1108/2/3/4).

Prominent members of the commercial theatre also attacked the RSC’s position in London. The fear was that it would siphon off actors, audiences and popular new playwrights from the West End, and the leading impresarios, including Beaumont and Prince Littler, acted as a cabal with vested interests to protect and used their power to keep Hall’s company out of city. Beaumont resigned from his position on the Theatre’s Executive Council in March 1960, which he had held since the mid-1950s, and used

his significant influence and control over other theatre managers to block Hall's attempts to find a venue in London. The latter only succeeded in convincing Littler to lease him the Aldwych Theatre after a great deal of politicking on his side, including the promise of a position on the RSC Board (Beauman, 1982: 240; Fay, 1995: 146-8). Similar attacks came from within the RSC itself and, in particular, from a number of its governors, who were no doubt influenced by Beaumont. Hall faced repeated calls to withdraw to Stratford in order to cut costs and had to defend the company's position in London continually and to restate that the London-Stratford dialogue 'is our policy and the whole idea of our permanent company is based on it.' (Hall, 1965) How, indeed, could Hall's policy and the RSC as an ensemble company survive when faced with such an onslaught from all sections of the British theatre?

In his bitter fight for survival and his attempt to compete with these forces, Hall used his own manoeuvres and tactics, including expanding the company rapidly and 'soft-soaping' influential figures both within and external to the Arts Council such as W.E. Williams (Hall letter to Flower, 2 February 1962, Flower, DR 1108/2/3/4). He also utilised the powerful connections of his colleagues to influence the Council's decision, informing Flower of Littler's 'close friend who is an independent member in the House and who would be delighted to make a noise. So if we want to spark this off with everything else that is happening, you should perhaps ring Prince before the campaign.' (ibid, 14 May 1962, Flower, DR 1108/2/3/4) The 'campaign' he referred to here was a far-reaching Press campaign detailing the company's lack of funding in order to gain public support and so apply indirect pressure on the Council. *The Stage*, for example, ran five articles over the course of six weeks praising the work of the company and condemning its lack of subsidy:

It is unthinkable that this extremely valuable work should be allowed to perish. The future must be assured. The urgent need of the RSC, under the direction of Peter Hall, Peter Brook, and Michel Saint-Denis, should override conventional obstacles, so that the danger is banished without further delay. (*The Stage*, 12 July 1961)

Hall's campaign for public funding was fought successfully. The company received its first Arts Council grant of £47,000 for the 1963-64 season, which was then increased in successive years: £80,000 in 1964-65; £90,000 in 1965-66; £150,000 in 1966-67; and £200,000 in 1967-68. These grants were always much lower than those awarded to the National, which received £130,000 in 1963-64; £142,000 in 1964-65; and £188,000 in 1965-66, and thus demonstrates, again, the onslaught Hall faced from the Establishment. Yet, the fact that he secured any subsidy shows Hall's ability to decipher the rules of the game and, more importantly, to play by them, successfully generating public support when needed and knowing how to coerce key individuals to get required results. It was this ability to play the game in a way that Littlewood either could not or would not that ensured Hall's survival in the field.

However, while the campaign of expansion secured Hall's position in the British theatre, it did not ensure the survival of RSC as an ensemble and, rather, had negative artistic repercussions. Indeed, many read the move to the Aldwych and the opening of the various other schemes as signs of Hall's desire for power and an empire of his own. Olivier warned Hall: 'you really mustn't throw words like 'Empire' to me, not *you* with Strat., Aldwych and now Arts [...] you are *not* against monopoly unless it is held by the NT instead of Stratford!' (Olivier cited in Rosenthal, 2013: 53; original emphasis and abbreviation) The sheer size of the company threatened the existence of an ensemble sensibility. The directors shared the concerns expressed by the actors

regarding the negative impact of the company's size noted in the previous pages of this thesis. Hall himself explained retrospectively: 'I was scared to death at what I had started. The RSC grew almost daily in amazing headline-catching style. In its first five years the company developed fast and frighteningly' (Hall, 1995: 165).

Brook was similarly critical of the speed at which the RSC transformed, arguing that Hall failed to consider alternative approaches due to his haste and impatience:

It would have been possible, for example, to start gradually: to build a small nucleus of players at Stratford and then slowly expand until step by step everything became ripe for the extension to a second theatre. General Eisenhower, I think it was, said that in war it is no use waiting for the last button to be fastened before starting a campaign. Peter Hall went further. He hardly waited for the first button and began with the end result. Before the structure was ready he opened his grand project: suddenly the vast company, the immense repertoire, the constant output, the excitement, the disasters, the strain all came into existence. (Brook in Royal Shakespeare Theatre Report of the Council, 1967-68)

Without giving the members of the group the time to become familiar with each other or to establish connections and 'ripen', to use Brook's terminology, there was little chance of creating a solid foundation for the group. It was difficult to establish the nodes of unity upon which an ensemble group is founded in such a short space of time, and so difficult to establish an ensemble.

Among the nodes missing were a shared ethos, a shared definition of ensemble practice and a shared view of the form that an ensemble should take. As is clear from Brook's statement, he and Hall had different perceptions of ensemble work. While Hall's plans centred predominantly on a large semi-permanent company of actors unified by a particular playing style and producing large-scale productions, Brook focused on working with small groups of actors, experimenting together for an extended period of time without the necessity of producing periodic results. It was such an ensemble that

he created briefly within the RSC with his Theatre of Cruelty season (Marowitz, 1966: 152-72). Likewise, the various directors who worked at the RSC had different ways of working with the actors in rehearsals. Saint-Denis, for example, arrived at first rehearsals with a clear, detailed and pre-established plan for the whole production, while Hall and Brook both viewed the production as ‘an adventure, an experiment, an unknown – and we’ll discover it together.’ (Ashcroft cited in Addenbrooke, 1974: 197-8) Barton placed the verse at the centre of work on a particular play – beginning rehearsals with a detailed analysis of the text – while Brook began the *Marat/Sade* rehearsals with improvisations and very little initial work on the text (Jackson, 2007).

The absence of shared and universal ideals at Hall’s RSC made it a company ‘markedly free from theatrical dogma’, the work of which ‘depended strongly upon a confederacy of individual tastes and beliefs. It was (and has remained) an organization flexible enough to contain those who in some respects fundamentally disagreed with it.’ (Beauman, 1982: 244) But this freedom from ‘theatrical dogma’ also meant the loss of unity; and emphasis was placed on the individual and the freedom to pursue one’s own preferences even if they contradicted others. As a result, the RSC did not operate as one unified ensemble, but, rather, as a collection of smaller, disparate ensembles created for a particular production or series of productions with little continuity or connection between them.

The fact that Hall had to accelerate the development of his company and to establish it in the field before it was fully formed in order to secure public funding highlights the pressure placed on companies by the British theatre institution and the need for quick results. It also highlights the continued importance placed on products as opposed to

process in calculating a company's 'worth', as well as the enduring dominance of the commercial market. There was little space for a company like the RSC to experiment or to develop organically in the way that Brook suggests. Even after it received regular money from the Arts Council, the RSC had to prove its eligibility for funding continually through positive box office returns and turnover figures, increased ticket sales, high audience numbers, and so on, in much the same way as Theatre Workshop. The need to adhere to this criterion made it impossible for the company to have any real autonomy from the commercial market. This point is proven by the financial difficulties the company faced in the 1966-67 season, when its application to the Arts Council for a grant of £247,000 was denied.⁷³ With little money available for the company, Hall came under increasing pressure to not make any more theatrical or economic gambles (Beauman, 1982: 284). In short, both the conditions of Arts Council funding and the gaps that it left meant that it was not possible to experiment under the banner 'the right to fail'.

When reflecting on his work with the RSC in 1993, Hall compared the funding situation in Britain to that of continental Europe, identifying the pressures of the former and how it left little space for creativity:

I mean, if we worked as they do at the Schaubühne, say, in Berlin, with a huge subsidy, doing three plays a year, there would be a scandal. We have to do twenty plays a year and tour, and do this, and do that, and then we're allowed subsidy. (Hall, 1995: 209)

Unlike funding on the continent, where directors and companies were given the time and space to experiment and develop work slowly, companies in Britain had to operate as businesses and churn out productions constantly that were commercially successful and appealed to large audiences. Of course, these working conditions were unfavourable to the principles of ensemble work and the models set by Stanislavsky

and Brecht, let alone the post-World War Two Schaubühne, that Hall was attempting to emulate, albeit with his own nuances added to the model.

The innate propensity of the British system to support official institutions rather than people also made it inhospitable to ensemble companies. '[In] this country,' Hall argued,

we don't believe in people, we only believe in institutions. I mean, they did not give money to Joan Littlewood or to Peter Brook, and they ain't going to give money to Peter Hall! They will give money to something called the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Theatre if you scream hard enough, but they won't give it to people. (*ibid*: 204)

This unwillingness to support individual directors or groups of people meant that an ensemble company could only exist and receive the financial support necessary for survival in the field if it became a large, distinguished, national institution, as Hall aimed to do with his expansion of the RSC. Yet, to become an institution risked stifling the ensemble spirit and engendering the ossification that Hall feared. This was, after all, what happened with the RSC, where the larger it became the more difficult it was to establish the close connections of a committed ensemble.

Thus, any attempt to create an ensemble company in Britain was forced into an inescapable double bind, where the criteria needed to survive in the field and to secure public subsidy was not conducive to, and was even antithetical to, the criteria needed for long-term ensemble work. This double bind demonstrates clearly that the field and the British theatre establishment worked against the very idea of a permanent ensemble company. In these conditions, the ensembles of Hall and his predecessors could only ever have limited success and were forced continually to make compromises and sacrifices. Like Craig, Barker, Komisarjevsky and Littlewood before him, Hall was

soon exhausted by the constant and bitter battle to survive, and, realising that it was impossible to create an ensemble company in Britain, he gave up on his ideal. He resigned as Director of the RSC in January 1968.

The Departure of Peter Hall

The very real sense of exhaustion that Hall experienced was one of the main reasons why he left the RSC when he did. The sheer volume of his workload since becoming Artistic Director in 1960 and the stress of trying to push through his proposed changes quickly had a negative impact on his physical and psychological well being. When faced with the prospect of staging the three productions of *The Wars of the Roses* for the RSC in three months in 1963, Hall suffered a breakdown:

Two weeks into rehearsal I broke down. My body was host to every passing psychosomatic disease: upset stomach, roaring sinuses, terrible headaches and, above all, an overwhelming tiredness. I had fits of weeping. [...] I thought of suicide. I lay in bed in a darkened room, clearly in the grip of a serious breakdown. [...] Physically, mentally and emotionally, I had reached my lowest ebb. I was not ready to meet the greatest challenge of my professional life. Like a child who doesn't want to take the exam because he fears he will fail, I collapsed. (Hall, 1993: 177-8)

While Hall recovered from this particular episode, he suffered similar breakdowns during his time at the RSC, including in 1964 and 1967, where he nearly lost the sight in his left eye after a serious case of shingles.

A major source of this stress was the continued dire financial situation of the company and Hall's realisation that its struggles with the Arts Council and its fight for subsidy would never be resolved. When faced with the need to economize to meet the financial shortfall in the 1966-67 season, the Council pressured Hall into compromising key aspects of his policy, namely, the number of new or experimental productions staged

and the size of the ensemble company. The cuts to the latter jeopardised the nucleus of actors that was at the heart of Hall's company and which he had built up over the previous six years. In a memorandum to the Arts Council, Hall warned that 'the way in which it has been necessary to build a company ad hoc throughout the season to keep costs at the absolute minimum, has made it impossible to continue with the ensemble work which is the foundation of our artistic success.' (Hall, 1966) Again, the subsidy system in Britain failed to support long-term ensemble work and, rather, endorsed the dismantling of any ensemble companies for economic gain.

Hall regretted deeply his decision to compromise his policy in a bid to save money for the company, calling it his 'biggest mistake. It's when my heart went out of it. [...] I should *not* have compromised' (Hall cited in Addenbrooke, 231-2; original emphasis). The fact that he did make compromises was a sign of his failing energy and confidence in the British theatre, and the growing belief that both he and the RSC would never be free of the battle for subsidy. These negative feelings were bolstered up by the death of Flower in 1966, Hall's strongest ally at the RSC who always supported him and his progressive ideas. Hall knew that Flower's replacement, George Farmer, would not allow him to make the artistic gambles that Flower had and that, increasingly, he would have to toe the line and make more conservative choices in order to safeguard the RSC's funds. Unwilling to make further compromises and exhausted by the continual struggle, Hall resigned:

Run-down and depressed, I found myself disillusioned, tired and daunted by the thought of a future spent chiefly fighting for money – now without [Flower] – against a National Theatre that would always be better placed to get it. In 1968, I decided to leave the RSC, and proposed Trevor Nunn as my successor. Within six weeks I had gone. (Hall, 1993: 208)

Hall turned his back on the ideal of a permanent ensemble company after he left the RSC, and became much more closely aligned to the very people and the system that he had previously critiqued, including the National Theatre, where he worked as Artistic Director from 1973 to 1988. Rather than try again to create a permanent ensemble company, Hall worked much more in keeping with the conventions of the field, bringing actors together for a particular production with little sign of permanency. Likewise, his Peter Hall Company, founded in 1988, operated as an impermanent company and positioned itself firmly within the commercial field. The aim was to create ensemble productions as opposed to an ensemble company, and Hall brought famous actors, including Hollywood ‘stars’ such as Dustin Hoffman, together on a project-based remit (Fay, 1995: 451-3). Of course, there was little continuity between each production and little chance for experimentation, as Hall had to adhere to the rules of the commercial theatre and stage productions that were guaranteed commercial successes.

These two examples of Hall’s post-RSC work demonstrate the extent to which he abandoned the ideal of an ensemble company of artists working together on a long-term basis in the pursuit of commons goals. In 1995 he expressed publicly his doubt that such a company could ever exist in Britain:

I’d like to work for three or four years with the same twelve people [...] But it isn’t going to happen. It’s a dream. I had pretty much the same group for three years, a bit longer, in the early years of the RSC. And that was terribly beneficial to my work and to theirs. Then they all split up and... (Hall, 1995: 205).

Clearly, the stress and strain of leading the RSC and the continual resistance that he faced in his attempt to deviate from well-established conventions left Hall bitter and with little faith in the British system. The pressure exerted by this system and its

inherent celebration of individualism, commercialism and competition undermined his attempts to consolidate fully the ‘star’ with the ensemble and to create a unified and committed group at the RSC. These principles were so deeply rooted in the habitus of the British theatre, and so hotly defended by the dominant members of the field, that it was inconceivable for any director to offer an alternative, including Hall. At the same time, the Arts Council’s failure to provide any real autonomy in the field and the need, again, to conform to the prevailing economic paradigm meant that Hall was unable to create his envisioned ensemble and lead it under the banner of ‘the right to fail’. Indeed, while he certainly came closer to realising the ideal of a permanent ensemble company than any of his predecessors, he ultimately failed. The fact that he was defeated in this aim despite investing everything he had into the RSC convinced Hall that it was impossible to create an ensemble in Britain. Given this complete lack of hope, it is unsurprising that he abandoned the ideal of an ensemble company in much the same way as the other directors examined in this thesis.

Conclusion

This journey across sixty-eight years in Britain testifies to the sustained interest in ensemble theatre, as exemplified by Edward Gordon Craig, Harley Granville Barker, Theodore Komisarjevsky, Joan Littlewood and Peter Hall. These five directors were instrumental in the growing acceptance of ensemble practice in the country, staging work that demonstrated the artistic benefits of a unified group working closely together and highlighted the flaws of ‘star’-centred productions. At the same time, the thesis examines the resistance that these directors have faced in their attempts to continue this work on a long-term basis. The analysis of this resistance through the framework of the sociology of the theatre identifies three major factors that have shaped (and continue to shape) the British theatre and have fostered a climate that is inhospitable to permanent ensemble companies.

The first factor is the importance placed on economics and the overwhelming perception of the theatre as a business to be conducted according to the principles of *laissez-faire* capitalism as opposed to an art form. Throughout the chosen period of this study, the British theatre was governed by the need to make money and to produce work that was commercially viable and economically sound, where actors and directors were subject to the laws of the free market. The absence of a comprehensive patronage or subsidy system exacerbated the issue in the first half of the twentieth century. However, it remained impossible for directors and theatre groups to escape this economic paradigm even after the creation of the Arts Council. The fact that the Council based its funding decisions on such data as box office returns, financial statements and budgets demonstrates the continued emphasis placed on ticket sales and profit making, and the ongoing practice of judging a director’s value according to the commercial success of

her or his artistic outputs. This practice fostered a climate of entrepreneurship in which the theatre was equated with money and where there was little room for artistic experimentation.

The inherent individualism of the British theatre, including, in particular, the dominant ‘star’ system, is the second factor to be considered here. The ‘star’ system’s celebration of the individual personality and the precedence given to the leading actor over the rest of the company fostered a perception of theatre as being centred on individuals that was deeply ingrained in the psyche or habitus of the British theatre. This disposition manifested itself in the expectations of audiences and critics, who continued to single out ‘star’ performers even in ensemble productions, and, perhaps more significantly, in the attitudes of the actors. The competition between actors fighting to ascend the ‘star’ hierarchy trained them to place their interests before the rest of the group and to carve out distinctive and recognisable personalities that did little to encourage the unity, trust and collaboration essential for ensemble work.

Furthermore, the individualistic assumption that commitment to a collective necessarily entailed the subordination of personal liberty was discernable in the suspicion that the ensemble company posed a threat to actors. This threat was perceived as either a direct threat to the actors’ agency, as epitomised by the accusation of authoritarianism levelled at Barker in 1913, or a threat to their economic or symbolic capital. The latter is apparent in the belief that any long-term commitment to an ensemble on the part of the actors risked missing the opportunity to secure more prestige or money, and thus improve their position in the free market of the British theatre. In both instances, actors in Britain were inculcated with the values of the field – its entrepreneurship and

prioritisation of individual ‘stars’ – and trained to perpetuate them. Thus, while the British theatre certainly produced good individual actors – Ellen Terry, Charles Laughton, John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier and Judi Dench to name just five – it did not train actors who could belong to a long-term, tightly cohesive group.

The final factor is the cultural conservatism and traditionalism of the British theatre system. The experience of the five directors analysed in this thesis is testament to the deeply rooted resistance to change in Britain and the strength with which the theatre establishment defended its status quo. This resistance was most notable as regards Shakespeare, where the established method of Shakespeare production was tied closely to a celebration of British identity. As a consequence, any challenge to these conventions was seen as a national insult. Moreover, the inherent Anglocentrism of the theatre establishment (rooted in the Victorian ideal of ‘splendid isolation’) and the dominance of the upper-middle class within it made the theatre particularly resistant to influence from those deemed to be outsiders, whether by national identity or class.

The research necessary for this thesis has identified the various mechanisms by which adherence to the established values was enforced, which, in turn, ensured the perpetuation of the status quo. The training of actors to adhere to the ‘star’ system noted above is a clear example of this symbolic violence in action, as is the threat of punishment exerted on anybody who refused to play by the rules and toe the line. This threat usually took economic forms (the withholding of funding, for example) that were tantamount to exclusion from the field. The result was a climate in which it was incredibly difficult to offer an alternative to the dominant system. This need to follow the rules and to conform to the established conventions made it impossible to nurture a

permanent ensemble company that prioritised the group over the individual, and artistry over financial profit.

Although this analysis ends in 1968, the three factors addressed here continue to shape contemporary British theatre, making it difficult to maintain ensemble companies. There are still signs of conservatism, for example, and the threat of ostracism for anybody who deviates from the established norms. Even Richard Eyre, who possesses a great deal of symbolic power in the British theatre, does not feel empowered to critique publicly its conventions or its traditionalism. Thus, at a recent lecture at Rose Bruford College on 29 November 2012, he only alluded discreetly to the strict limitations placed on directors of Shakespeare, suggesting that they could not ‘get away with’ too much ‘mixing and messing around with Shakespeare’s plays’. At the 2004 Ensemble Theatre Conference, Michael Boyd observed that the isolationist attitudes in Britain are enduring and contribute to its continued resistance to ensemble practice, explaining: “‘Ensemble’ is a foreign word and many people don’t like it for that reason alone. They prefer the word company.’ More recently, in a personal conversation of 10 June 2010, he admitted that his attempt to reintroduce a long-term ensemble to the RSC faltered because of the prevailing ‘celebrity culture, short termism, portfolio careerism, and an obsession with individualism and freedom of choice’.

A fruitful area of research that has emerged from the material examined in this thesis is the long-term impact of these factors on the field of theatre in Britain. The groups that followed Hall’s RSC such as Shared Experience and Cheek by Jowl and the changing artistic, political and economic context – including the relative funding bubble of the 1970s and the return to individualist politics under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s – are

areas of study that would grow out of this thesis. By the same token, it would be beneficial to trace this trajectory through to more recent examples such as Boyd's work at the RSC and the growth of project-based ensembles such as Kneehigh and Improbable, the presence of which corroborates my conclusion that the British theatre supports ensemble practice on individual productions, but not the work of a permanent ensemble company.

This thesis indicates that political motives have underpinned the Arts Council's funding decisions to exclude other leftists groups who were tracked by MI5 such as Unity Theatre London, an area ripe for further investigation. Investigation of this kind would make a significant contribution to British theatre history, given the Council's position at the top of the British theatre hierarchy since it was founded in 1946. Above all, the intention of this thesis is to provide the beginnings of a sociology of the British theatre, which has not yet been written, but which this thesis anticipates.

Endnotes

Introduction

¹ The Ensemble Theatre Conference was co-organised by Equity and the Directors Guild of Great Britain and took place on 23 November 2004 at the Barbican Theatre. The aim was to examine the absence in Britain of ensemble companies and included contributions from Michael Boyd and Alan Lyddiard. For more information and full transcripts of the panel discussions and keynote speeches, see www.dggb.org/files/EnsembleTheatreConf.pdf [accessed 10 November 2014].

² Complice was founded on the principles of ensemble theatre but has not operated as a permanent ensemble company for the past thirty years, working, instead, as a ‘team theatre’ that brings actors together for particular productions. The same is true of Cheek by Jowl, who disbanded in 1998 and reformed in the early 2000s on a projects-based remit.

³ Burns interviewed twenty-one former RSC members, including actors, designers and dressers, in 1982 as part of the RSC Oral History Project. The original aim was to use these interviews to establish a picture of life and work at the company, although they have since not been used and remain uncatalogued in the British Library’s Sound Archives.

⁴ Maria Shevtsova outlines the central theoretical principles and methodology of the sociology of the theatre in detail in her pathbreaking trilogy of articles, originally published in *Theatre Quarterly* in 1989. These and other seminal articles by Shevtsova have been reprinted in full in Shevtsova, 2009: 21-82.

Chapter One

⁵ Craig retained a patriarchal attitude throughout his life, filling his Daybooks with comments such as: ‘Which ever way women are taken they fail to a great extent except as mothers and here only a small percentage reach any high standard’ (Craig, Daybook 1 1908-10: 134) and ‘a suffragette is a woman who likes keeping a man or men in order but hates being kept in order by any man.’ (Daybook 2 1910-11: 70)

⁶ While the majority of theatres encouraged the creation of permanent ensemble companies, the role it played in each scheme differed. It was a central aim for the Moscow Art Theatre, for example, while the focus of Britain’s Independent Theatre Society and the Stage Society was almost entirely on playtexts and the search for new writers, with ensemble practice being only a subsidiary concern. See, for example, McDonald, 1984: 121-39.

⁷ Hardie shocked the House of Commons when he took his seat in August 1892 by choosing to wear a worker’s cap and tweed coat and speaking with his ‘worker’s intonation’ (Hobsbawm, 1969: 281).

⁸ See, in particular, ‘Appropriating Bourdieu’s *Champ* and *Habitus* for a Sociology of Stage Productions’ in Shevtsova, 2009: 83-109.

⁹ In keeping with the focus of this thesis, the chosen example is that of directors, but the methodological approach remains the same for the other agents in the field, whether individual agents, groups of agents or institutions.

¹⁰ Bourdieu epitomizes the division between the fields of large-scale and restricted production in *Distinction*, focusing on theatre in 1970s Paris and its geographical separation between the right-bank – the bourgeois, mainstream, boulevard theatres – and the left-bank – the avant-garde, intellectual theatres playing to a restricted and culturally-elite audience (Bourdieu, 2006: 235–40).

¹¹ See, for example, William Archer’s essay *The Fashionable Tragedian*, wherein he accused Irving of sacrificing his acting craft by performing in profitable long runs, which succeeded only in ‘exaggerating his faults, while it rendered them ineradicable’ and giving ‘rein to his most inartistic proclivities’ (Archer, 1877: 23).

¹² Richard Cross’s 1875 Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Improvement Act pioneered the redevelopment of some of the poverty-stricken areas of London and the demolition of famous slums such as the Rat’s Castle in St Giles, Bermondsey’s Jacob’s Island, and those close to Drury Lane, Westminster Abbey, the Savoy and the Strand (Yelling, 1986). The removal of these slums and the growing power of the Metropolitan Police improved the sense of security and safety in the West End, transforming it into a space of leisure (Steinbach, 2012: 18-9). Improvements to public transport at this time included the development of underground and overground railway systems in London in the 1860s and the increasing comfort and cost-efficiency of the horse-drawn omnibus (Hughes, 1981: 1).

¹³ Craig toured North America with Irving’s company as a boy of thirteen and performed on the stage in numerous small, walk-on parts before he joined the company officially in 1889 (Craig, 1968: 58).

¹⁴ The duration of the rehearsals are disputed. According to Edward Anthony Craig, the rehearsals took place over seven months while Denis Babet and Christopher Innes both state that the rehearsals took, at most, six months (Babet, 1966: 40; Craig, 1968: 124; Innes, 1998: 72). The size of the chorus for the original performance in 1900 is also a point of contention. Craig states that *Dido and Aeneas* was performed by a company of seventy-five (including both amateur and professional performers) while Innes argues that the original performance had a company of forty-two which swelled to seventy-five for the revival a year later, presumably due to the growth in interest in the Society (Craig, 1968: 117; Innes, 1998: 38). Babet states that the chorus of *Dido and Aeneas* was comprised of approximately seventy performers, although he does not indicate whether he is referring to the 1900 or 1901 production (Babet, 1966: 39). In 1913, Edward Gordon Craig stated that approximately eighty people worked with him on the three operas, spending eight months on each production (Craig, 1913a: 25). The 1900 edition of *The Hampstead Annual* includes a review of the performance and a complete company list, which lists forty amateur performances and two professional actors in the title roles (Greville and Matheson, 1900: 138), while the programme of the 1901 revival lists seventy chorus members (Craig, 1901), and so the present writers uses these numbers in her analysis.

¹⁵ The movements Craig choreographed helped to strip away the individuality of the performers, where the group moved in chorus and performed actions that were neither recognisable nor familiar to the audience. Craig also designed the performers' costumes so that they merged in with each other and became part of the scenery. For *Acis and Galatea* he used the same strips of ribbons for the chorus's costume as those used for the scenery, which created the sense of a single 'writhing, living body' (Eynat-Confino, 1987: 38).

¹⁶ For a full account of the disputes between Craig and the respective theatres during work on these productions, see Craig, 1968: 187–222.

¹⁷ Due to the difficulty in accessing the original source material concerning the production, this analysis of the relationship between Craig and the Art Theatre actors relies heavily on Laurence Senelick's seminal case study (Senelick, 1982).

¹⁸ See, for example, entries in his 1931–32 diary in which he mocks Stanislavsky's book, *My Life in Art*, and its account of his life-long search for truth in the theatre: 'Stanislavsky doesn't think anyone ever searched but he [...] I am serious enough about my search – no need to make a whole book on the word.' (Craig, 1982: 72).

Chapter Two

¹⁹ In addition to the Court Theatre season and his Savoy Shakespeare productions, Barker ran seasons at the Savoy Theatre in 1907 with Vedrenne again, the Duke of York's Theatre in 1910 with Charles Frohman, and the St James's Theatre in 1913 with Lillah McCarthy. All three closed prematurely for financial reasons (Rowell and Jackson, 1984: 28).

²⁰ Barker describes his experience of watching the company perform in detail in the article 'At the Moscow Art Theatre', published in the New York arts journal *The Seven Arts Chronicle* (Barker, 1917: 659–61), and in his book *The Exemplary Theatre* (Barker, 1922: 229–30). He published a condensed version of the former in *The Manchester Guardian* under the title 'The Genius of the Normal Life on the Stage' (Barker in *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 July 1917). In all three accounts, Barker focuses his analysis on the Chekhov productions.

²¹ See, for example, Barker, 1917; 1919; 1922; n.d. a; n.d. b. See also numerous newspaper articles in which Barker cites Stanislavsky as a source of inspiration, including *New York Herald*, 20 March 1915 and *New York Times*, 21 March 1915.

²² Beasley and Bullock's edited book, *Russia in Britain, 1880–1940*, examines in detail the increased presence of Russian cultural forms and artists in Britain at this time and the influence these had on British artists (Beasley and Bullock, 2013). See, in particular, chapters concerning literary movements (Newton, Beasley and Patterson), the visual arts (Maclean), and music and ballet (Bullock and Burt).

²³ Edward Pease, a founding member of the Fabian Society and its secretary, argues that Barker was 'one of the most active' of the new members who joined the Society in the early 1900s (Pease, 1925: 100). Ian Britain, in contrast, cites an unnamed Fabian who claimed that Barker's commitment to the group waned after 1908 and that he was only re-elected to the Executive Committee due to 'his theatrical reputation' (Britain, 1982: 175). The Minutes of the Fabian Society Executive Committee meetings list him as sitting on the Publishing Committee alongside Shaw and Aylmer Maude, as well as various other sub-committees (Fabian Society, 1906–08).

²⁴ Ian Britain examines the Fabian interest in the arts at length (Britain, 1982). There has been no detailed analysis of the link between the Fabian Society and the promotion of Russia culture in Britain at this time, although the facts are plain to see. For example, Shaw played a central role in promoting the work of Chekhov in Britain (Obraztsova in Miles, 1993), while Maude, the leading translator of Tolstoy, was a prominent Fabian. Other Fabians who demonstrated an interest in Russia include Wells, Herbert Trench, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and Arnold Bennett.

²⁵ Wells, who pioneered the attempted ‘revolution’ of the Society in 1907, observed that ‘the Fabian Society had gathered together some very angular and incompatible fragments [...] and at every meeting it stirred with mutterings beneath its compromises’ (Wells cited in Hynes, 1968: 89). For a detailed comparison of the nuances of thought in the strands of Fabianism presented by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Shaw, Wells and G. D. H. Cole, see Beilharz and Nyland, 1998: 9-53.

²⁶ See, for example, Richard Bellamy’s edited book *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-century Political Thought and Practice*, which examines the prolificacy of liberalism in Britain at this time and analyses the work of various liberal thinkers, including Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham and T. H. Green (Bellamy, 1990). See also, Charles Macpherson for a detailed analysis of the individualism of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (Macpherson, 1964) and Uday Singh Mehta for an examination of Victorian liberalism in relation to the British Empire (Mehta, 1999).

²⁷ Other ways in which Barker internalized the Fabian habitus include his promotion of the repertory system of play production, which was shared by other members of the Fabian Society, including Trench and Stewart Hedlam (Britain, 1982: 58). Barker also incorporated the Fabian Society’s attack on the property landlord – as epitomized in ‘The Unearned Increment’, the first tract of the Fabian’s Municipal Programme – in his crusade against the London theatre landlord (The Fabian Society, 1895).

²⁸ Between 1904 and 1907 McCarthy performed in eleven Barker productions at the Court, while Casson performed in fifteen, Mathinson in six, Minto in ten, Gurney in fourteen, and Page in twenty-three. Gwenn was one of Barker’s most frequent actors, performing in twenty-five productions, including *Man and Superman* and *The Voysey Inheritance*. Barker performed in twenty productions, only five of which were non-Shavian plays, and retired from acting altogether in 1907. All figures include revivals of productions. For full company lists, see MacCarthy, 1907: Appendix I.

²⁹ Casson pays little attention to this aspect of the work in his account of Barker’s rehearsals at the Court (Casson in Jackson, 131-3), but it is clear from Barker’s own writing that it became a crucial part of the rehearsal process. See, for example, Barker, 1919: 2-4; 1922: 122-3; n.d. b: 12.

³⁰ Poel founded the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1895 with the aim to present drama from the Elizabethan and Jacobean era under conditions that matched those of the original production as closely as possible. Barker performed the title role in the Society’s 1899 production of *Richard II*.

³¹ It is not possible to determine the identity of ‘An Actor’ from the company list of *The Winter’s Tale*. However, Cary Mazer is correct in noting that one can eliminate a number of candidates, including Playfair, McCarthy, Nesbitt, Ainley, Leon Quartermaine, Felix Aylmer, Esme Beringer and Enid Rose due to either their inclusion in the debate or their subsequent comments on working with Barker (Mazer, 1984: 6). It is also possible to eliminate the remaining female members of the company, given the writer’s choice of the title ‘Actor’ at a time when the female equivalent was standard usage. For this reason the masculine pronoun ‘his’ is adopted.

³² Mill limited this doctrine to ‘human beings in the maturity of their faculties.’ It did not include children, those who relied on the care of others, or people from ‘those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage’, all of whom ‘must be protected against their own action as well as against external injury’ (Mill, 1998: 14). However, he failed to explain fully the criteria for gauging whether one has reached the maturity of her or his faculties and did not make it clear who decides whether a person is fit to make her or his own decisions.

³³ According to Anthony Jackson, Barker had worked with thirteen of the eighty actors who worked at the Glasgow Repertory Theatre between 1909 and 1913. Similarly, Clare Greet, Irene Rooke and Penelope Wheeler played major roles at the Gaiety after they performed at the Court, while Madge Mackintosh, another ‘graduate’ from the Vedrenne-Barker seasons, became the artistic director of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre in 1914 (Rowell and Jackson, 1984: 26).

Chapter Three

³⁴ Komissarzhevsky senior, the famous opera tenor, was an influential mentor to Konstantin Stanislavsky and an integral member of his Moscow Society of Art and Literature. Vera Komissarzhevskaya was the

most celebrated Russian actress at the turn of the twentieth century. After meeting in 1903, Komisarjevsky joined his half-sister's Dramatic Theatre of Vera Komissarzhevskaya, where he was a share-holder and worked as an assistant director to Vsevolod Meyerhold before taking full responsibility for the actors after Meyerhold's dismissal in 1907. His position at the theatre established his reputation as a director in Russia.

³⁵ *The Times*, for example, recorded the event in great detail, including an hour-by-hour eyewitness account of the massacre by the newspaper's correspondent in St Petersburg (*The Times*, 23 January 1905). In its subsequent coverage, the newspaper noted that the actions of the Russian autocracy had 'excited the scorn and execration of the whole civilized world' and alienated itself from France 'the only country in Europe where, up to yesterday, it still counted friends.' (*The Times*, 24 January 1905) The *Daily Mail* called St Petersburg a city 'inflamed by Coassack brutality' and called the massacre a 'murderous affair' full of 'scenes which have rarely or never been paralleled in any civilized community' (*Daily Mail*, 23 January 1905), while the *Financial Times* described the 'massacre of the mob' and the thousands of men, women and children 'mowed down in swathes by volleys of rifle fire' (*Financial Times*, 23 January 1905).

³⁶ Poel published *What is Wrong with the Stage* in 1920, in which he charted the failures of the theatre system in Britain. Herbert Reginald Barbor was a theatre critic, writer and dramatist. In 1924 he published *The Theatre: An Art and an Industry*, written in support of the case made for an Actor's Trade Union. Huntly Carter published *The New Spirit in European Theatre, 1914–1925* in 1925. He was a critic for *The New Age* and *The Manchester Guardian*, a writer and lecturer on Russian theatre and travelled extensively to the Soviet Union between 1921 and 1938. In 1929 he wrote a companion to his 1925 book titled *The New Spirit in Russian Theatre, 1917–1928*.

³⁷ In 1916, *The Observer* noted that the West End receipts from the previous season 'would show figures of a nature quite exceptional in the records of theatrical earnings' (*The Observer*, 2 January 1916). Similarly, in 1918 *The Stage* remarked that there were 'now twenty-nine theatres open in the West End, and with hardly an exception the monetary returns are eminently satisfactory' (*The Stage*, 24 January 1918). It celebrated the positive box office returns again the following year: 'Never in the history of London theatres has there been such a tide of prosperity as that which is now filling our places of amusement to their utmost capacity. Never, even in the history of Drury Lane, have such enormous and continuous queues been seen as those which now line up for advance tickets.' (*The Stage*, 2 January 1919)

³⁸ Sir Oswald Stoll was one of the most successful theatre entrepreneurs, and by 1905 his Stoll Moss Group managed a theatre in almost every large town in Britain. Sir Alfred Butt built his empire under the title Variety Theatres Controlling Limited. In London alone, between 1911 and 1931, Butt managed the Victoria Palace, the Empire Theatre, the Adelphi Theatre, the Gaiety Theatre and the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, which he became the co-owner of following a lengthy battle with the board of shareholders (*The Guardian*, 21 January 1919; 26 February 1919; 2 April 1919). Edward Laurillard and George Grossmith Jr controlled a number of theatres in London during the course of the First World War, including the Prince of Wales Theatre, the Shaftesbury Theatre, the Apollo Theatre, the Winter Garden Theatre and His Majesty's Theatre, which they bought following the death of Herbert Beerbohm Tree in 1917.

³⁹ Oscar Asche's musical spectacle *Chu Chin Chow*, based on the well-known story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, was written and staged in 1916 following the success of his adaptation of *Kismet. Romance*, which opened at the Duke of York's Theatre in October 1915, was a North American sentimental comedy, which incorporated many of the usual 'tricks of the romantic stage' and which was greeted by 'immense applause by a public only too delighted to forget for a moment present horrid realities in an atmosphere of romance.' (*The Times*, 8 October 1915) In the same vein, Walter W. Ellis's *A Little Bit of Fluff* at the Criterion Theatre was a farce that replicated the conventions of traditional farce – the large number of plot twists, the stylized acting, the largely incomprehensible narrative, and so on (*The Observer*, 31 October 1915).

⁴⁰ *A Little Bit of Fluff* ran for one thousand two hundred and forty-one performances, while *Romance* ran for one thousand and forty-six performances. *Chu Chin Chow*, the undoubted hit of the period, ran for over two thousand two hundred performances. For a detailed account of its commercial success, see 'The Record of "Chu Chin Chow"', *New York Times*, 10 August 1919. For a full list of long-run productions between 1900 and 1924, see Agate, 1926: 30–1.

⁴¹ Komisarjevsky published *The Actor's Creative Work and Stanislavsky's Theory* in Russia in 1916, which was his first attempt to interpret Stanislavsky's 'system'. Stanislavsky was outraged by the book, and annotated his copy with comments such as 'Lies! [...] How vile! [...] What a scandalous slander and lack of understanding [...] I could cross out everything written in this book' (Stanislavsky cited in Allen,

2000: 164). Among the numerous interviews conducted in Britain in which Komisarjevsky described Stanislavsky's 'system', see *The Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1920 and *The Observer*, 18 January 1920. See also, Sayler, 1920: 252-3, and Komisarjevsky, 1929: 138-42.

⁴² Coates, Rosing and Novikov were well known amongst the upper echelons of London society by 1920. Coates was chief conductor at the London Symphony Orchestra, while Novikov had performed in London with the Ballets Russes and Anna Pavlova's company. Rosing performed in a number of popular and successful recitals following his 1913 London debut, and gave private performances to influential political figures such as Lloyd George and Herbert Henry Asquith. Surviving for only a short amount of time, the Lahda Society produced a number of theatre and ballet performances, as well as a season of opera performances at Aeolian Hall in 1921.

⁴³ Komisarjevsky eventually opened his Komisarjevsky Theatre Studio in North America in 1939, taking the advice of Shaw, who told him 'to tour the United States and talk to them about the school of acting' (Shaw letter to Komisarjevsky, 3 December 1937, Shaw, MS Thr 490 156).

⁴⁴ *Uncle Vanya* opened on 17 January and ran for three weeks before transferring to the Duke of York's Theatre for an additional three-week run. *Three Sisters*, the most critically successful play of the season, ran twice daily for eight weeks following its premiere on 16 February, before being revived on 25 October of the same year and again in October 1929 at the Fortune Theatre. *The Cherry Orchard* opened on 28 September.

⁴⁵ There were only eleven productions of Chekhov's work in Britain between Wareing's production in 1909 and the start of Komisarjevsky's season in 1926, including Komisarjevsky's two productions for the Stage Society. For a detailed overview of the critical response to these productions, see Emeljanow, 1981.

⁴⁶ John Gielgud and Ivor Barnard (Trigorin and Medvedenko respectively) both worked with Komisarjevsky at Barnes; Peggy Ashcroft (Nina) worked with him on three previous occasions; and Leon Quartermaine (Dorn) played Vanya in his 1921 *Uncle Vanya*, having been introduced to ensemble playing when working at the Savoy with Barker. George Devine (Shamrayev), who first worked with Komisarjevsky in 1932, became increasingly interested in ensemble work following his close friendship and work with Saint-Denis, while Frederick Lloyd (Sorin) was a regular player for the Vedrenne-Barker seasons at the Court Theatre and so was already sympathetic to the ideal of ensemble practice.

⁴⁷ Komisarjevsky's staged an amateur production of *King Lear* at the Oxford University Dramatic Society in February 1927. He staged five plays at Stratford following *The Merchant of Venice: Macbeth* in 1933; *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1935; *King Lear* in 1936; *The Comedy of Errors* in 1938 and *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1939. He also staged *Antony and Cleopatra* at the New Theatre in October 1936, where he had staged *The Seagull* four months earlier. It was his only Shakespeare production in London's West End.

Chapter Four

⁴⁸ See, for example, Goorney, 1966: 102-3; 1981: 16-107, 158-63; and Barker in Hodge, 2010: 130-43. Barker rightly notes that accounts of Littlewood's rehearsal method are often filled with inconsistencies and subjective interpretations because they are based largely on memories and anecdotes (Barker in Hodge, 2010: 130). The prime example of this is Littlewood's own notoriously unreliable autobiography (Littlewood, 1994).

⁴⁹ Both Littlewood and MacColl were forced to leave Theatre of Action in 1935. At a meeting of the Manchester District of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), unnamed members of Theatre of Action accused the pair of deviating from the Communist Party line by prioritising art over politics (Holdsworth, 2006: 7). MacColl recalled how both were 'crushed under the weight of our own infamy – crushed and frightened.' (MacColl, 1990: 215) Despite MacColl's claim that they were expelled from the CPGB soon after, the MI5 files on Littlewood and MacColl show that they remained members until they left in 1941, having been blacklisted by the BBC (BBC Report to MI5, 7 April 1941, Records of the Security Service, KV 2/2757).

⁵⁰ This initial core group was soon joined by David Scase, Bunny Baven, James Gilhouley, Nicholas Whitfield, Arnold Locke, Phyl Gladwyr and Pearl Turner to form what Howard Goorney calls the first Theatre Workshop company (Goorney, 1981: 40). This company was initially based in Kendal and toured productions across Westmoreland and Cumbria. The move to Stratford in 1953 is an appropriate marker for the group's transition to its second generation as it was the start of a concentrated period of training and performing. This second generation included Harry H. Corbett, John and Margaret Bury, Harry Greene, George A. Cooper, Barbara Young, and Marjie Lawrence, among others.

⁵¹ MacColl spoke out repeatedly against the proposed relocation to London, fearing that it would have a negative influence on the company's principles. Although he was still formally a member of the

company, his involvement became increasingly sporadic following the 1953 move. For many, the loss of MacColl and the promotion of Gerry Raffles to Theatre Manager marked a distinct shift in the artistic policy of Theatre Workshop, where the group became less interested in politics and more interested in commercial viability (Goorney, 1981: 88; MacColl, 1990: 268; Newlove, 2007).

⁵² The proposed Old Vic Theatre Centre incorporated the Old Vic Theatre School, led by Glen Byam Shaw, the Young Vic, a touring company specialising in performances for children led by George Devine and Suria Magito (Saint-Denis's future wife), and an experimental group, although plans for the latter were never realised. Saint-Denis acted as the controlling director of the two auxiliary ventures (Saint-Denis, 1982: 51).

⁵³ As manifested in Shevtsova's work, the Stanislavskian impulse to ensemble, and, in particular, the need for a dialogue between students and actors, has gone on beyond Saint-Denis and the other directors examined in this thesis and includes those directors working in Russia, Britain and across Europe. See, Shevtsova, 2004: 6-8, 36-7; Shevtsova and Innes, 2009: 37-46; Innes and Shevtsova, 2013: 185-217.

⁵⁴ Bourdieu's concept of consecration refers to the act by which one becomes known, recognized and established in a field by 'making a name for oneself'. He examines the capital of consecration possessed by those dominant in the field – art dealers, publishers, theatre directors, critics – which gives them the power to consecrate people or objects and thus give someone or something value. See, Bourdieu, 1996: 148-7, 167.

⁵⁵ Both Littlewood and MacColl were awarded places at the School in 1935, where they planned to 'train under teachers like Myerhold [sic], [Vsevolod] Pudovkin, Vahktangov, Stanislavsky and [Sergei] Eisenstein and after two or three years we would return triumphantly and confound our critics with productions so brilliant that they would be silenced for ever.' (MacColl, 1990: 217) They moved to London to await their visas, but despite making daily visits to the Russian Embassy in Kensington, the visas never arrived and they were forced to return to Manchester, where they established their own training programme with Theatre Union (*ibid*: 218-28).

⁵⁶ Three examples will suffice to demonstrate the point. David Scase, a former engineer at the BBC, joined Theatre Workshop to take charge of sound but soon began performing, as did Bill Davidson, a scientist who visited the theatre to see a friend but remained with the company for three years (MacColl, 1990: 244). Jean Newlove began working as the group's movement teacher and choreographer before 'Joan managed to inveigle me into acting roles, simply by telling me that she was one actress short for such and such a play and "I could do it!"' (Newlove, 1993: 8).

⁵⁷ Theatre Workshop was invited to Ormesby Hall by Colonel and Ruth Pennyman in 1946, which gave them the conditions convivial to the development of their programme, including time, space and a sense of seclusion. Ruth Pennyman also invited Littlewood and MacColl to run regular classes and summer schools at the estate, which helped to clarify and concretize their ideas on training (Goorney, 1981: 56).

⁵⁸ Theatre Workshop staged seven productions by Elizabethan or Jacobean writers between 1953 and 1956. These were *Twelfth Night* (2 February 1953), *The Alchemist* (27 October 1953), *Richard II* (19 January 1954), *The Dutch Courtesan* (23 February 1954), *Arden of Faversham* (28 September 1954), *Volpone* (3 March 1955), and *Edward II* (19 April 1956). *Richard II*, *Arden of Faversham* and *Volpone* all received numerous revivals. Littlewood staged two other classic works in 1957, *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Macbeth*, but there had been a considerable change in personnel at the company by this point.

⁵⁹ For an examination of the numerous mistakes and misinterpretations in Hapgood's translations, see Benedetti, 2008: 150-1; Shevtsova, 2010: 172-4.

⁶⁰ *A Taste of Honey* opened at the Theatre Royal Stratford East in May 1958, where it ran for four weeks followed by a further three weeks in January 1959. It then transferred to the Wyndham's Theatre in February of that year and then again to the Criterion Theatre four months later, where it remained for a year. *The Hostage* opened at Stratford in October 1958, where it ran for eight weeks. It transferred to the Wyndham's Theatre in June 1959, where it replaced *A Taste Of Honey*, and played there until June 1960. *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be* had three short runs at Stratford in 1959 before moving to the Garrick Theatre in 1960, where it remained for two years. As these dates show, in 1960 there were three Theatre Workshop productions running in the West End simultaneously. For more information and for a full list of Theatre Workshop productions and performance run dates, see Goorney, 1981: 200-10.

Chapter Five

⁶¹ The Berliner Ensemble and Moscow Art Theatre seasons are examined in the body of the text. The Théâtre National Populaire's three-week season at the Palace began on 16 April 1956. The season consisted of three productions: *Le Triomphe de L'amour* by Marivaux, *Marie Tudor* by Victor Hugo and

Molière's *Dom Juan*. The Barrault-Renaud company conducted a month-long season at the Palace Theatre in November 1956 that included Georges Neveux's *Le Chien du Jardinier*. In his review of the production, R. B. Marriott praised the company for its ability to work together as an ensemble: 'The company work so closely together, understand each other and the director's intentions so well, that every second has its weight and relevance.' (*The Stage*, 15 November 1956) Strehler's company first performed in Britain at the 1956 Edinburgh Festival, where it presented Pirandello's *Questa Sera Si Recita* and Goldoni's *Arlecchino*, before returning to perform Goldoni's *A Servant to Two Masters* at Sadler's Wells in July 1958 and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and the New Shakespeare Theatre, Liverpool in February 1959. The group made numerous subsequent visits during the 1960s.

⁶² The Moscow Art Theatre returned to Britain in 1964, as part of the RSC's World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych Theatre, and again in 1970.

⁶³ Robert Service outlines the various reforms introduced by Khrushchev as part of the 'de-Stalinization' of the Soviet Union, including the public denunciation of the abuses perpetrated by Stalin, albeit without acknowledging the role played by Khrushchev and other members of the Presidium (Service, 2003: 331–55). For a detailed account of the impact these reforms had on the Russian theatre, see Smeliansky, 1999: 1–73.

⁶⁴ For more information on these and other student demonstrations in Britain, see Fawthorp et. al, 1968: 59–70; Caute, 1988: 345–71.

⁶⁵ David Addenbrooke includes a reproduction of the terms and conditions for the long-term contact. See Appendix 4 in Addenbrooke, 1974.

⁶⁶ In reality it was rare for an actor to be engaged at both theatres simultaneously, although there were exceptions. Eric Porter was one of the first actors to travel between the two theatre on successive nights when he played Buckingham in *Richard III* at Stratford and the Lord Chamberlain in *Ondine* in June 1961, becoming what *The Stage* called a 'commuter actor' (*The Stage*, 1 June 1961).

⁶⁷ *Henry VI* and *Edward IV* both opened on 17 July 1963, and *Richard III* opened on 20 August. The productions were performed in repertory, including special 'Trilogy Days', when all three plays were performed in one day. These productions were revived the following year and performed alongside *Richard II* and *Henry IV*, which opened on 15 and 16 April respectively, and *Henry V*, which opened on 3 June. This was neither the first nor the last time that Shakespeare's history plays were produced as a cycle at Stratford. Anthony Quayle staged *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V* in 1951 as part of the Festival of Britain; Terry Hands staged the full-text versions of the eight plays in the history cycle between 1975 and 1980; and Michael Boyd staged all the plays in one season in 2008.

⁶⁸ John Welsh and Michael Craig performed in only one production, *Henry VI*, playing Duke Humphrey of Gloucester and William de la Pole, respectively.

⁶⁹ Hall staged *Moses and Aaron* and *The Magic Flute* at the Royal Opera House in 1965 and 1966, respectively. He was also keen to work in the film industry and spent a large part of his final season at the RSC working on his first feature film, *Work is a Four Letter Word* (Fay, 1995: 249).

⁷⁰ For details of the RSC's film and television productions, and for a full list of its numerous tours, see Appendix 5 and 6 in Addenbrooke, 1974.

⁷¹ The theatre building in Stratford became the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Hall also insisted on the change of name in order to move away from the negative connotations of the word 'Memorial' in the original title, which, to him, 'sounded like a gravestone.' (Hall, 1993: 148)

⁷² These awards included *Evening Standard* awards for Best Play (*Becket*, 1961), Best Actor (Christopher Plummer, *Becket*, 1961; Paul Scofield, *King Lear*, 1962) and Best Actress (Dorothy Tutin, *Twelfth Night*, 1960; Vanessa Redgrave, *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1961). Peggy Ashcroft became the first British actor to receive a Théâtre des Nations award for her role in *Hollow Crown* in 1962.

⁷³ The RSC asked the Arts Council for an increase of £157,000 for the 1966–67 season in order 'to maintain our present policy efficiently' and to cover the following: an increase in artists' salaries; rent for the Aldwych; maintenance of the Studio; reduction of the workload of the directors and management team; and any deficit that had previously been made up by the Reserve Fund, which was entirely used up by this point (Hall, 1965). Although the Arts Council turned down the request for £250,000, it did increase the company's subsidy to £150,000 for the year in question.

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