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Spattered with Words: a stylistic toolkit accounting for the  
'theatricality' behind the playwright/screenwriter's use of real  
and improvised language in creating drama texts.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of  
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## Abstract

This thesis documents investigations into the success (or not) of real, spontaneous dialogue when applied to the creation of a script for dramatic performance. The accounting for such success delves into different theoretical frameworks: conversation theory, stylistics, Cognitive Poetics, narratology, and extended cognition. This is therefore an interdisciplinary perspective, with ideas emerging from the fields of psychology, philosophy, literary stylistics and linguistics; yet all applied within the context of drama and performance. As such, this thesis may be seen as a playwright's 'toolbox' where the different views, as they necessarily overlap, can be seen as elements, which, when taken together, account for (and help in) the decisions an author may make in creating a text out of improvised speech. The investigation is also a search for the notion of 'theatricality' in the context of authentic speech and uses various forms of theatrical performance as examples, ranging from amateur improvisation to TV and film productions, *Commedia dell'Arte* to modern, immersive theatre. Finally, application of the theoretical frameworks is made to a current theatre project, *The Plant*.

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## Dedication

To Carlotta, of course.



# CHAPTER ONE

## Background to this study

### 1.1. Introduction

#### 1.1.1. Two Men

The scene is set. Two men are visible within an entirely white space. The space is angled, like a triangular squash court. White walls, white floor, white ceiling. Up there is a lighting rig that only softly illuminates the men. They are both in their early thirties. One bald, the other fair-haired. They are dressed in identical dark suits but are barefoot. Silent but mobile. The audience gradually take their seats. The lights go down in the auditorium but up on the 'stage'. It is the signal to start.

For one hour the two protagonists must perform before the audience. An audience that has paid to see *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, a devised piece that forms part of a Masters thesis at Goldsmiths College, University of London. There is no story, no script, no props. The men must simply survive in the glare of the lights and under the gaze of the onlookers for precisely an hour, with nothing but their own resources to help them. The scrutiny is intense: at times they feel like bacteria in a petri dish. There is silence, improvised dialogue, play, audience interaction and the occasional song. Anything to fill the time, yet at the same time perform. At one point, briefly, one of the men physically escapes from the space! Finally, the lights go down. The hour is over. The audience applauds! My friend and I have survived. But *how?*

In *Poetics*, Aristotle somewhat disparagingly said of playwrights that “novices in the art attain to finish off diction and precision of portraiture before they can construct the plot”. This prejudice towards narrative and story-telling over the theatricality of language could arguably still be prevalent in ‘traditional’ playwriting and production today, with its focus on the objectives, super-objectives and psychological characterization of principle protagonists, as well as on the need for a solid narrative arc (Catron, 1993; Spencer, 2002; Fountain, 2007).

However, there has been a movement of late to revive hitherto disparaged or neglected conventions that were once prevalent in theatre all over the world, and in

doing so foreground the use and play of language to theatrical effect. This research project seeks, then, to discover the extent to which a rediscovery of the artfulness of real language, be it improvised or later edited, in writing for drama (particularly in the UK) can be held to account for the ‘theatricality’ of a performance. The definition of this key term will also be alluded to throughout this work, with shades of its meaning changing as new stylistic and narratological perspectives are explored.

In this quest, a variety of areas of academic thought will be brought together, ranging from theories on performance praxis and actor training through to semiotics, conversation analysis, stylistic analysis, cognitive theories and narratology. Due to this wide range of influencing factors, the review of relevant literature will be embedded within the overviews of these different fields. Inevitably, and perhaps necessarily, key players will re-appear in the intersections of these disciplines. In addition, because of the modular nature of this study, unconventionally, a moderate list of references is given at the end of each chapter rather than one lengthy bibliography at the end.

In general, then, such an interdisciplinary approach reflects how the craft of playwriting cannot be pigeonholed under ‘drama’ or even ‘literature’ but does indeed involve engagement with a whole world of human artistic and social activity. It is this latter factor that is key to this thesis: how social interaction can inform the artistic endeavour of a playwright. Therefore, the aim is to seek a particular methodology for the creation of new theatre work; and in particular such work that is founded on the use of language arising from quotidian verbal exchanges. Research via those different disciplines will serve that artistic end, rather than dwell unnecessarily on extensive literary/linguistic analysis. It is this particular focus on the very substance of essentially improvised, unscripted speech and how it lends itself to engaging theatrical dialogue that is what I deem to be important and novel, and will therefore be the underlying yet visible principle throughout these investigations.

This work seeks, therefore, to break new ground in its investigations into what makes a dramatic performance ‘successful’ (or *theatrical*) when its script arises from the use of language that comes from beyond that of a single author, but rather through actor improvisation or acquired through devising or workshopping. Even if that writer has indeed worked alone, I suggest here that when the produced text is clearly influenced

by and/or draws on elements of real-life verbal exchanges, an inherently theatrical quality is revealed; a quality that can result in popular, successful and even award-winning drama.

To do this, I initially describe the current academic landscape with regard to the role of language in modern theatre practice. Then, each chapter will examine different examples of texts arising from real, improvised performance or that bear the hallmarks of such realism. These examples will each be viewed from a different critical-theoretical perspective, i.e. through the employment of a unique investigative and analytical mechanism in each case. Such a variety of ways of accounting for the ‘theatricality’ of the ‘language of the real’ will serve to a) bolster the conclusions drawn and b) inform the definition of ‘theatricality’ in the context of this thesis.

To start, it is worth noting that the use of realistic language on stage and screen was for some time considered inappropriate, with a stylised version of reality, represented before spectators, being the morally and commercially accepted norm (Chothia, 1996). Flamboyant costumes, painted, epic sets, make-up and lighting effects are obvious examples of the artifice of ‘traditional’ theatre. So too is language (as recited through carefully scripted exchanges) seen as belonging to the ‘world’ of the theatre rather than the world of the audience. Of course, the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have seen a move away from this in the form of modernist avant-garde theatre, social-realist ‘kitchen sink’ drama, TV soap operas, docu-drama and other, experimental theatre productions, which could arguably relate more to the reality of life outside the theatre. In the 1960s, notably, playwrights such as Joe Orton took observations of the everyday as their cue:

The style isn’t super-imposed. It’s me. You’ve only got to be sitting on a bus and you’ll hear the most stylised lines. People think I write fantasy, but I don’t; some things may be exaggerated or distorted in the way some painters distort and alter things, but they’re realistic figures. They’re perfectly recognisable.

(Orton, 1967)

This thesis, then, hinges on the contribution that authentic dialogue can give to the writer’s toolbox when creating a written piece of theatre. To examine this contribution, perspectives ranging from psychology and theories of cognition to

narratology and discourse analysis are drawn upon. The creation of such authentic dialogue is situated within the art of actor improvisation, and this forms the basis for the case studies examined in each chapter. Improvisation itself is, of course, problematic in that it is a form that exists very much in the moment, is generally unrecorded, and morphs from performance to performance due to various extraneous and internal factors that can be difficult, if not impossible, to qualify. To attempt to document and analyse such a form may seem paradoxical, therefore. However, this work attempts to overcome that issue as follows: through recording and transcribing improvised exchanges (chapter one) and carrying out a subsequent analysis of the emerging text; by viewing and comparing ‘out-takes’ of similarly improvised scenes (chapter two); by analysing the directorial interventions that effectively constitute a part of the improvisation (chapter three); by comparing a (probable) transcription of a historical improvised dramatic dialogue with a contemporary author-scripted exchange (chapter five); by positioning plays and performances within recent advances in theories of cognition (chapter six). The final examination of the development of a play from inception, through devising and improvisation to final scripting and performance rounds off the thesis.

Improvisation tends towards comedy. This is perhaps because comedy theatre and, as seen in chapters two and three, TV and film productions, are where most audiences experience theatrical improvisation. Therefore, the case studies are predominantly comedy-focused. But this is by no means intentional. Indeed, some of the exchanges in *Lost Without Words* (chapter two) may have funny elements but are also laden with pathos and charm. In any case, the use of improvisation to create a genuine connection between the actor’s felt experience and the need to speak words, to free the actor from the ‘tyranny of the page’, is a principal aim of Stanislavsky-trained performers (Leach, 2004: 24). Indeed, a key reason for the popularity of ‘improv’ is that unique immediacy with other improvisers and with the audience; its revelatory nature, denuding the performer of the crutch of a script, being a contributing factor to its popularity and appeal (Salinsky and Frances-White, 2017: 337). Whether comedic or not, it is with these features in mind that the analyses here are undertaken.

This first chapter, however, does not stem in particular from improvisation or the creation of authentic dialogue but rather looks at the issue from the other end of the

lens. That is, the issue of authenticity and the theatricality of real dialogue is positioned in an emerging culture of language-based rather than plot or character-based playwriting. In this context, and with a cultural and historical perspective on the art of language-use rather than the trappings of ‘conventional’ scriptwriting, improvised dialogue is examined as potential raw material for the writer in their discovery of new creative strategies and forms for theatrical expression.

To that end, an analysis of the purely linguistic elements that constitute a successful playscript, be it for stage or screen, is valuable. A focus on ‘Language-based’ playwriting, wholly situated in its use of language rather than other theatrical elements has been proposed by academics such as Paul Castagno. It is a movement that has gained momentum in the US and has been particularly evident over the last 20 years, with playwrights such as Suzan Lori-Parks being awarded a Pulitzer prize and Eric Overmyer going on to develop the genre on TV in shows such as *The Wire*, of which he was executive producer. What exemplifies the work of these and other ‘language playwrights’ is the dominance of a certain para-realistic vernacular, even localized demotic; a ‘landscape of everyday, common language’, that serves to create a world where language is the dominant force by which themes and characters are defined.

## 1.2. “New language-based playwriting”

### 1.2.1. Definitions

What exemplifies a predominantly language-focused form of playwriting is the eschewing of Aristotlean doctrine, with regard to its prescribed rules for playwriting as laid down in *Poetics*, and a subversion of traditional conventions in order to invent new paradigms and rediscover a certain virtuosity through the use of language. Central to this is Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism (1975; 2010); the notion that literary texts are understood to exist in the light of and in relation to previous and other contemporary works and may not function to dominate or silence those other texts. Evidence of this dialogue exists also within a text itself, with various components of plays, for example, interacting with, referring to and clashing with each other. The result is often a work that instead of ‘mirroring’ reality, dares to create



its own, subversive carnivalesque world that challenges the single, unifying point of view of a traditional, or monologic play.

In summary, two underlying concepts of Bakhtin’s thought are key to an appraisal of the literary power of improvised speech in drama. Firstly, there is dialogism with its contention that a clash of linguistic variations, conceptualisations and beliefs creates a ‘hybrid utterance’; a coexistence of language varieties and ‘voices’ that he termed ‘heteroglossia’, the exploitation of which he saw in the most mundane of written or spoken texts. In essence, it is a literary-verbal ‘performance’ where the actors naturally take a certain stance or position, as revealed by such features as dialect, accent, word choice and register. The other concept is that of the ‘carnavalesque’. If language is dialogic and not controlled by a single unifying force, it has the power to subvert, to be profane and ‘free’, and be (potentially) revolutionary. In this sense ‘freer’ untethered use of language in drama, as produced naturally and without artifice when emerging from an improviser’s mouth, reveals the traits of Castagno’s ‘Language-based’ drama paradigm in opposition to what he sees as stifling, traditional playwriting. A summary of the key differences can be seen in Figure 1.1 and will be further expanded upon in the next section.

Traditional	Language-based
Dialogue determined by plot	Dialogue as ‘free radical’
Monologic	Dialogic
Character-specific dialogue	Multi-vocal characterisation
Genre-based	Hybrid of genres
Theatre	Metatheatre
Language reflects culture	Language is a counterpoint to culture
Linear	Juxtaposed
Character has internal motivation	Device of language as motivation
Protagonist-driven	No central character necessary; maybe an ensemble

Figure 1.1 Key differences between traditional and language-based plays (Castagno, 2001: 21; 2011: 24)

One key aspect of the new language or dialogic play, as Castagno puts forward, is the idea of polyvocality. This refers to the variety of language, speech acts, voices and source material that can be used to construct a play’s text. Such an approach may include the changing of language levels through, for example, the use of slang, discourse or speech genre, dialects and even languages themselves. The playwright synthesizes, changes, re-channels these myriad ‘voices’ and sources in order to

juxtapose; to create ‘dialogic clashes’ that become "the stuff of the play, superseding character development or traditional conflict" (Castagno, 2011: 5).

The playwright’s voice, then, rather than being universally present or dominant within the text, will be stretched, distorted and perhaps even indiscernable above the cacophony. The outcome of such a virtuous exercise in linguistic and textual collage-making is the ‘hybrid play’ (Castagno 2011: 35); one where the play may follow a mixture of structures (linear, non-linear, montage, episodic...) or veer from one to another. In this way the dialogic play does away with one authorial voice in favour of a clash of voices, discourses and therefore social perspectives. In addition, at a more internal level, the play involves elements that interact and are in dialogue with each other. Castagno contends that this mirrors or is indeed informed by the way communication has now been globalised and how discourse is very much a polyvocal and multimodal phenomenon. The artistic effect of this is a shift away from the ‘traditional’ Aristotelian concept of character-driven/plot-driven drama and a focus on the juxtapositions, collection of voices and sources, and clashes that challenge the reader’s / audience’s conceptions while providing more choices, reference points and modes of interpretation.

This movement is, however, far from new. Martin Esslin (1961) traces the importance of language-driven theatre to even earlier eras: from the *mimus* of antiquity, the fantasy plays of Aristophanes through the folk traditions of the Middle Ages. However, this approach fell out of favour over the following centuries, akin as it was to the kind of drama seen in the much disparaged Harlequinades, Pantomime and Vaudeville – subgenres of theatre vilified by critics until relatively recently. It is in the more modern era, then, that a resurgence of these qualities has been witnessed, not least in the works of Modernist and Postmodernist Absurdist writers of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, a theatre based first and foremost in language is both the oldest and the most recent of trends.

### 1.2.2. Dialogism and the connection with new, language-based playwriting

"The word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context."

(Bakhtin 1975; 2010: 284)

In Mikhail Bakhtin's view, a "word" or "utterance" is the main unit of meaning and is formed through a speaker's relation to Otherness (other people, others' words and expressions, and the lived cultural world in time and place). A "word" is therefore always already embedded in a history of expressions by others in a chain of ongoing cultural and political moments. It is always addressed to someone and anticipates or can generate, a response. Discourse is thus fundamentally *dialogic* and historically contingent, positioned as it is, within, and inseparable from, a community, a time or a place.

Two other characteristics of Bakhtin's thought are Heteroglossia and Polyphony. Speech and complex cultural discourse in all genres are imbued with heteroglossia (other people's speech, words, appropriated expressions) and are necessarily polyphonic ("many-voiced," incorporating many voices, styles, references, and assumptions, not just a speaker's "own"). In this way, even conversational exchanges belong within a socio-ideologically aligned system, or strata, of utterances, statements and responses in which new utterances are influenced by earlier statements and likewise anticipate future responses, styles, references, and assumptions belonging to other people: "the living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment, in a socially specific environment cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance" (Bakhtin 1975; 2010: 276).

It is this dialogism and its various implications that are at the centre of new language playwriting. Indeed, as previously stated, it is the very idea of polyvocality that defines the dialogic play (Castagno 2001: 35). This encouragement to use a variety of voices (dialect, register, foreignisms...) and myriad sources (transcriptions, historical texts, popular entertainment, other literary genres...) is what stretches the playwright in terms of creativity and imagination and what expands the range of possibilities available. Thus, this trend towards 'language-based' playwriting encapsulates the key

issues that Bakhtin raised in his call for an awareness of the dialogic features and polyvocality within literature and for a revision of the stylistic appreciation of texts. It would therefore be pertinent at this point to view how these features are manifest in both older and more recent literary works, particularly in drama.

### 1.3. Theatrical Predecessors and Recent Directions

#### 1.3.1. The examples of Pinter and Beckett

The time will come...when language is most efficiently used where it is most efficiently misused

(Samuel Beckett, quoted in Péloff, 1996: 120)

When adopting a historical perspective, one of the most obvious differences between ‘traditional’ theatre and that of the last 70 years, is the adoption of a more vernacular-based dialogue in the written scripts of absurdist and modernist plays. Much has been written about how drama dialogue is comparable to real-life conversation and extensive analyses have been made on excerpts of ‘realistic’ plays by, inevitably, writers such as Beckett, Pinter and Osborne. Vimala Herman (1995: 121), for example, illustrates the conversational turn-taking games of Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot* and Mick Short (1996: 181-184) rather enjoys comparing the text of George Bernard Shaw’s *Arms and The Man* with that of Harold Pinter’s *The Dumb Waiter*, using a stylistic analysis to contrast the stilted, unnatural conversations of Raina and Catherine in the former with the non-fluent, repetitive, arguably inane utterances of Gus and Ben in the latter. Indeed, for leading literary-linguistic scholars such as Short (1981, 1996), Culpeper et al. (1998), Burton (1980), Toolan (2000) and Herman (1995), Pinter, in particular, provides fertile material for the analysis of the role of seemingly real, everyday discourse within a literary setting.

What is of interest to discourse analysts and literary critics alike is the way in which Pinter’s text may resemble a natural-sounding conversation and not merely in a mimetic or impressionistic way. Through the use of certain linguistic mechanisms, everyday speech patterns, structure and rules are indeed reflected, but then if one steps back, it is clear that the speech is far from realistic (Short, 1996: 183).

In addition, it is necessary to consider what the effect of this ‘unreal reality’ is. Inevitably, it should be argued that such dialogues and word-plays as found, for

example, in *The Dumb Waiter*, serve little to create a plot or story but in the ‘new / renewed’ tradition of language playwriting something much more is going on. As Burton states, through the dialogue, statements and conclusions on the interactive characters can be made (1980: 70). Similarly, in his analysis of Pinter’s revue sketch, *Last To Go*, Harry Derbyshire highlights the futility of the conversation between MAN and BARMAN. However, it is the very pointlessness of the dialogue, the pure need for something to say and to make human contact, that is the point of the exchange. From the MAN’s desperate, inane utterances, we glean much about his character, while the keenly observed rhythmic features of ‘everyday’ speech are used to reveal subtext (2008: 1):

MAN                                 Yes it was the ‘Evening News’ that was the last to go tonight.

BARMAN                            Not always the last to go though is it, though?

MAN                                 No. Oh no. I mean sometimes it’s the ‘News’. Other times it’s one of the others. No way of telling beforehand. Until you’ve got your last one left, of course. Then you can tell which one it’s going to be.

BARMAN                            Yes.

(Pinter, *The Last to Go* in Derbyshire, 2008)

Another key feature of Pinter’s work that figures highly in the concept of Dialogism is that of the Carnavalesque, that is, Bakhtin’s ideal of the doing-away of monologic authority and the inversion of order in favour of an equal society where diverse voices are heard, breaking down imposed limits and thus enabling genuine dialogue. These resultant displays of excess and the emergence of the ‘grotesque’ afforded by the breaking down of order is clearly reflected in many of Pinter’s more memorable characters and more specifically, the dialogue:

GOLDBERG:                        Right? Of course right! We're right and you're wrong, Webber, all along the line.

McCANN:                            All along the line!

GOLDBERG:                        Where is your lechery leading you?

McCANN:                            You'll pay for this.

GOLDBERG:                        You stuff yourself with dry toast.

McCANN: You contaminate womankind.  
GOLDBERG: Why don't you pay the rent?  
McCANN: Mother defiler!  
GOLDBERG: Why do you pick your nose?  
McCANN: I demand justice!  
GOLDBERG: What's your trade?  
McCANN: What about Ireland?  
GOLDBERG: What's your trade?  
STANLEY: I play the piano.  
GOLDBERG: How many fingers do you use?  
STANLEY: No hands!  
GOLDBERG: No society would touch you. Not even a building society.  
McCANN: You're a traitor to the cloth.  
GOLDBERG: What do you use for pyjamas?  
STANLEY: Nothing.  
GOLDBERG: You verminate the sheet of your birth.  
McCANN: What about the Albigensenist heresy?  
GOLDBERG: Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?  
McCANN: What about the blessed Oliver Plunkett?  
GOLDBERG: Speak up Webber. Why did the chicken cross the road?  
STANLEY: He wanted to -he wanted to -he wanted to...  
McCANN: He doesn't know!

(Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party*)

In this scene from *The Birthday Party*, it is clearly language, rather than plot, that drives the characters. The 'unreal' reality of Stanley's situation gives the metaphorical and poetic image of the scene its power. This is particularly notable when observing

the differences between Goldberg's (mentally agile) and McCann's (brutal) linguistic personalities. As Esslin affirms in *The Peopled Wound*, it is here that "language provides a poetic texture of images which parallel and reinforce the metaphorical aspect of the action" (1970: 86). For Pinter, the lies, half-truths, contradictions, innuendos, nonsense, and menacing whispers of his theatrical dialogue contribute to a certain purity of the language; reference to the irrationality of quotidian talk that is itself rife with poor syntax, repetitions, tautologies, redundancies, pleonasm and self-contradictions.

Interestingly, Short goes on to compare *Arms and the Man* with *Measure for Measure*, accounting stylistically for the even more 'unnatural' tendencies of Shakespeare's dialogue (written, as it is, of course, in iambic pentameter, which no-one generally uses in casual conversation). However, Castagno relates how Shakespeare and his contemporaries, writing as they did in a time before the onset of what we would now regard as 'traditional' drama, held language in higher regard than merely as a vehicle for plot and character development. In this respect, through stylistic analysis, Short, while not focusing on any inherent artfulness in a writer's use of language, concedes that 'being realistic is not a very interesting end in itself' (1996: 193) and that playwrights, whether they are Shakespeare or Pinter, make their characters talk in particular ways according to the tactical inclinations of the writer.

In terms of his legacy, Rourke (2009) suggests that Pinter 'is definitely in the DNA' of British drama though the connection may not be so easy to discern; however, in terms of political 'rigour', she does cite Dennis Kelly (*Taking Care of Baby*) who destroys 'our current obsession' with 'reality' TV and documentary theatre by constructing and then destroying a 'verbatim' play. With distance/time Pinter's influence will be more easily measured but one legacy he left is of the important dynamic that should exist between dramatist and actor (as an actor himself), thus giving some insight perhaps into the working practice of the writer and the collaborative processes that can exist in the creation of a text.

As for Samuel Beckett, theatre critic Christopher Kompanek believes that his works are likely to continue to fare well in a world that is 'full of the rigours of digital consciousness and the transience of meaning'. The timelessness of his works have been commented on before, but in a world where technology facilitates the rapid

evolution and devolution of words, Beckett seems particularly attuned. Kompanek claims to have been bored yet gripped by his first encounter (at age 13) with *Krapp's Last Tape*. What was it that was so 'gripping' then? He suggests that it was the language – its economy; savouring of the word 'spool'; the 'palpable sense of isolation...' (2012). Could it also, as will be posited later, be the very subversive nature of this 'boringness' and the language used to convey it, that struck the young spectator?

In general, the absurdist nature of dialogue in Samuel Beckett's works could be said to offer a critique of traditional, Western notions of reality. In his breaking down of the barriers between speech and writing he presents, in Bakhtinian terms, a 'carnavalesque' notion of language, where communication is undermined or subverted and where any determinant meaning is shown to be false or lacking.

In *Waiting for Godot*, for example, there is an apparent discordance between language and reality. Vladimir and Estragon say they will go, yet they remain static; they talk of pain but seem to be emotionless as they do so. Here language and dialogue is used primarily for its own sake. Instead of expressing or conveying feelings, the words could be said to *become* those very feelings.

VLADIMIR:            Say I am happy  
ESTRAGON:            I am happy  
VLADIMIR:            So am I  
ESTRAGON:            So am I  
VLADIMIR:            We are happy  
ESTRAGON:            What do we do now, now that we are happy?  
VLADIMIR:            Wait for Godot

(Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*)

Here the focus of language is as a vehicle for creation rather than expression. Thus the words become items in Vladimir and Estragon's toolbox for overcoming their existential angst. This dialogue is at first glance similar to the discourse elements of everyday life: non-sequiturs, unfinished speech acts, repetition, spurious logic and



linguistic circularity; all of which, if taken out of context, can easily be seen as absurd. However, it is clearly much more than a mimetic encounter with the everyday. It serves, as Esslin asserts, “to express the breakdown, the disintegration of language. In a purposeless world that has lost its ultimate objectives, dialogue, like all action, becomes a mere game to pass the time (1961, 2004: 87).

Several structural characteristics of style have been specifically identified in Beckett’s use of language: repetition, monologue, stichomythia (where characters speak alternate lines of verse), phatic communion, word grouping, intentional distortion of syntax, contradiction, clichés and pratfall, indelicacy, structural closure, and absence of language (silence) (Eliopoulos 1975: 60). But perhaps the final say in terms of his use of language should be given over to Beckett himself who, when pressed on the matter, replied “Que voulez-vous Monsieur? C’est les mots; on n’a rien d’autre<sup>1</sup>” (Beckett in Esslin: 88).

Aspects of Beckett’s work exemplify many of the features of the dialogic play whether it be the overtly dialogic nature of *Krapp’s Last Tape* where the main character interacts with an earlier version of himself; the virtuosic monologue of *Not, I, or the Vaudevillian clowning of Waiting for Godot*. The influence of Beckett’s breakthrough in theatre is well-documented and certainly many of the features cited thus far pointed playwriting in a new (or re-newed) direction. However, arguably it is a new aesthetic that was created rather than a model to follow.

### 1.3.2. US writing 1980s-today

In the introduction to an interview for the American Theatre journal, playwright Mac Wellman’s use of language is described thus:

All of his plays represent veritable orgies of language; stretching grammar to the breaking point, revelling in the sound and texture of words, they turn language, character and dramatic form inside out... he creates a unique language-driven mise-en-scene that pulverises the syntax of traditional theatre.

(David Savran 1999: 17)

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<sup>1</sup> What do you want Sir? It’s the words. We have nothing else

This rather encapsulates the manifesto for language-based playwriting as Castagno (2001) would have it (cf. section 1.2), and sets Wellman as one of its main exemplars, along with contemporaries Len Jenkin, Eric Overmyer, Jeffrey Jones and, more recently, writers such as Young Jean Lee, Madelyn Kent and Alice Tuan. Among a host of others.

Wellman himself considers much of contemporary theatre in the US to be ‘dominated by a culture of theatre’, meaning that plays tend to be self-consciously provocative, ‘shrill, knee-jerk and self-congratulatory’ (Wellman in Savran, 1999: 18). Yet American theatre, shrill or not, has successfully released itself from the apron-strings of the European tradition. As Grote et al. (2006) say, there is a sense of American writing now being distinct from the imported styles of England, which was historically the case. Indeed, one feature of the American voice is the US love of ‘entertainment value’, which differs from the European model or concept of the ‘avant garde’. This is perhaps rooted in the melodrama, vaudeville and the Wild West show, although Grote goes on to cite examples of entertaining avant-garde such as Monty Python, Brecht and even Chekhov – all of whom are European.

Nevertheless, the claim is that there is a sense of freedom for US writers today given that playwrights such as Wellman and Jenkin are now actively teaching the next generation of American writers in universities and colleges across the country. Evidence of this is that when new writing appears superficially naturalistic, there is a sense of subversion and parody somewhere along the line. The plays inevitably unfold in unexpected ways and language is never transparent, with familiar subjects and locales being rendered unrecognisable. Citing the works of Anne-Marie Healey, David Bucci, Erin Courtney and Carlos Murillo as examples, Ken Urban (In Grote et al 2006: 13) states that this pretence at naturalism is something inherited from, but different to the plays of Wellman and Jenkin.

In addition, Grote et al. continue to suggest there is a sense of variety in the choice of theatre on offer in the US, while Bonnie Marranca (1996) in her *Ecologies of Theater*, puts forward the idea that the future of theatre lies in its ability to open up to a modern, globalised world by incorporating the ‘multilandscaped’ presence of cultures and theatrical systems on stage. As a result, there could be said to be tension in the US arts; a tension between pressure to democratise theatre, to make it accessible and the

desire to challenge the audience. It is this apparent conflict that can lead to exciting new works (Grote, 2006: 22). However, as this choice, variety and artistic tension was particularly evident in America in the 90s, it is also worth considering the extent to which similar trends arose (and continue to exist) elsewhere, particularly in the UK.

### 1.3.3. Beyond the US

The 1990s saw Britain riding on a wave of Brit-pop, Cool Britannia, old Tory v. New Labour politics, and an explosion of new theatre by aggressive, nihilistic young writers, dubbed by Aleks Sierz as ‘In-Yer-Face theatre’ in his 2002 seminal work of the same name. Protagonists of this ‘genre’, such as Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and Jez Butterworth, were identifiable by their lashing out in words at a cynical, commercial and politically violent world. However, this moment of In-Yer-Face theatre has been well-documented since, and Sierz himself has even invited re-appraisal of this categorisation, opening up a debate on its quality, niche-appeal and apparently negativistic nature (2002: 22).

One stand-out playwright of this time, however, but one who, due to his interests beyond purely ‘confrontational’ theatre, defiantly resists the In-Yer-Face label, is Martin Crimp. In perhaps his most celebrated play, *Attempts on her Life* (1997), there are linguistic and structural devices that are clearly reminiscent of, if not directly influenced by, those prevalent in the works of Beckett, Pinter and Churchill. The use of pauses, different speech acts, foreign languages, the non-assignment of character to speech and the collage-like make-up of the play as a whole all contribute to a non-traditional, non-monologic (and thus dialogic) approach. This chimes with Castagno’s definition of the hybrid play and certainly comes from the same ‘toolbox’ of audience-challenging yet entertaining devices used by writers such as Beckett. Sierz (2006) goes on to assert that Crimp’s writing may also have roots in the European avant-garde (Pirandello, Fo, Handke) and this brings in a fresh feel that questions the ‘conventional’ ways of British story-telling in that “his form of modernism tells stories in an indirect way that calls attention to their telling...denying audiences the usual easy identification with characters, easy plot resolutions or conventional situations” (162). In this way, Crimp has been lauded as a linguistic innovator “focusing on repetitive patterns of colloquial, ordinary speech, developing a dialogue which draws attention to the material qualities of language” (Kitzler, 2010). An

example of this can be seen in this extract from *Attempts on her Life*, where the repetition, rhythms and discourse patterns are foregrounded in order to create in the audience's mind a picture of the character of the non-apparent Anne/Anya/Annushka:

Silence

- You say she rides her bike in all weathers?
- All weathers. That's right.

Silence

- And wears a hat.
- Yes. She wears a hat.
- Which, you state, she has knitted herself.
- I believe so.

Silence

- She grows tomato plants in...
- Margarine tubs.
- Margarine tubs.
- That's right.

Silence

- Or yoghurt...
- Yoghurt pots.
- Yes.
- I see.

Silence

(Crimp, *Attempts on her Life*: 68)

Here, the non-allocation of character or roles to the dialogue, along with the conversational features of repetition, silences, non sequiturs etc. all contribute, I would contend, to that "textual collage-making" and "cacophony" that Paul Castagno champions. In addition, the play's very structure reveals a non-linear, episodic narrative, where even the very nature of the never-appearing (or does she?) female protagonist transcends audience expectations; a feature very much in keeping with the American trends in language-based playwriting.

According to Sierz, Crimp's reception on mainland Europe has been more appreciative than in the UK, and not simply because often, through say, the use of foreign languages in his plays, they have a more international 'feel' (2006: 168). It is more because of his experiment and political agenda, a perceived rejection of mimetic naturalistic or socially realistic themes and settings, the deconstruction of the frontier between fiction and reality, and the use of a poetic-style prose, that allow Europeans such as French academic Elisabeth Angel-Pérez (2013) to put Crimp in the camp of

‘Post-dramatic theatre’. This is a term defined by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) and more usually associated with the modern avant garde and performance-focused practitioners such as Forced Entertainment or the Wooster Group. However, Crimp’s dialogue, in the tradition of Pinter perhaps, remains essentially based on the spoken word in all its demotic variations, rather than any ‘hieratic’, or rarefied literary language (Scott, 2009: 157-8), though the resulting tension between the two persists. As such, as in fairness Angel-Pérez concedes, this renders Crimp’s work essentially un-European in this respect: “The words remain rooted in everyday speech. A very British instinct” (Sierz, 2006: 168).

#### 1.3.4. Post-dramatic theatre

Recalling Paul Castagno’s work, it can be said that he synthesises language-based theatre with Bakhtin’s conceptions of language friction and subversion and has had an obvious impact on perceptions of performance and the nature of the theatrical experience itself. Such a trend may indeed be seen to continue in other theatrical practices, in the UK as much as in the US; one obvious area of consideration being that of Postdramatic Theatre. This notion, as established by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006), considers the stylistic traits occurring in the theatrical avant-garde over the last 40 or so years. Lehmann posits that such a theatre is not primarily focused on the drama in itself, but one where the text of the performance is put in a special relation to the material situation of the performance and the stage. The result is often one of epic spectacle that engages the spectators as much through the *mise-en-scene*, the overall design and visual make-up of the spectacle, as through the text itself. Far from being relegated or considered as secondary to the spectacle, dialogue and language may therefore have another role to play, less dominant than in plays of the past, and certainly not essential to driving a plot, building a character, or above all, engaging in a mimetic representation of reality, as Aristotle would have it.

In his chapter entitled ‘Aspects: text – space – time – body –media’, Lehmann cites Gertrude Stein’s theatre texts where language loses any sense of logical time-bound progression, its ‘teleological temporality’, and becomes almost an exhibited object. Like Castagno, Lehmann suggests collage and montage as ways of using texts within performance, the use of multi-lingual texts, and song interposed with speech: all examples of a form of polyglossia that indicate how postdramatic theatre can and does

bring to light the idea that the word does not necessarily belong to the speaker but resides beyond them.

As a 'New Language playwright', Mac Wellman's use of monologue in his work *A Murder of Crows* is examined by the academic Julia Jarcho (2014) as an example of his establishment as a 'postdramatic writer', though not merely in the fact that he uses monologue extensively as such. Rather it is in the way that his monologues are essentially 'dialogised' in a Bakhtinian sense ('through the cognitive back and forth with the audience': 176) that makes the work experimental. Castagno (2001, 2012) claims that a monologue is a privileged form of collaboration, often revealing strong interpersonal, communicative power, complicated (or enhanced?) by the presence of an audience. Thus, such on-stage talk becomes specifically theatrical by being for the spectators' benefit. This correlates with Lehmann's ideas of theatre, which (no longer focused on relating a 'coherent fictional universe') should be dependent on the interactions between performer and audience rather than the characters in the play. In this way, the monologue transcends text (Lehmann: 128). However, Jarcho suggests that, by this, Lehmann disregards the power of text to more concretely express the relationship between the performer, the play and the audience, by virtue of the mere fact that it is written, and therefore presupposing that an audience will read/view it. Further, she believes that efforts to distinguish the literary from the theatrical can obstruct full appreciation of the possible functions of stage speech. As a case in point, a monologue may not be uniquely FOR the audience but a gesture of determined selfishness on the part of the speaker. Such dilemmas are what renders work by the likes of Wellman at once postdramatic and 'cognitively challenging' in the elusiveness of his text in the audience's attempts to make meaning of them.

This elusiveness, difficulty and the upsetting of preconceived ideas of traditional theatre are what contribute to the contemporary work of the avant-garde both in Europe and the US. Bailes (2011), for example, describes how virtuosity and creativity in theatre can appear in the apparently amateur, inept, edgy productions that lack the finesse of traditional professional theatre, thereby undermining Bourgeois expectations.

This is not only apparent in the 'radical amateurism' of contemporary, experimental companies such as Forced Entertainment or Kneehigh but can be traced back to and is

relevant to the minimalism and apparent ‘boringness’ of Beckett. As Lehmann states, “out of the rejection of traditional forms of theatre develops a new autonomy of theatre as an independent artistic practice” (p. 50). This autonomy may reveal itself, therefore, in text – not necessarily a purely linguistic text, but one that has come about on the stage and reflects what he defines as a ‘performance text’, taking writing beyond the traditional confines of drama.

It is perhaps, in the work of W. B. Worthen, however, where the greatest defence of the relationship between text and performance is made. In his influential and engaging book *Drama: between poetry and performance* (2010), he covers a wide range of issues relating to the enaction of words on stage: from an assessment of the impact of historically positioned cultural and technological backgrounds on text use (particularly with regard to productions of Shakespeare), through Beckett’s blending of text and ‘space’, to fresh appraisals of similarities and differences in the naturalistic rendition of character through text by Ibsen and ‘New Language’ playwright’ Suzan Lori-Parks.

Finally, the basic tenets inherent to Postdramatic Theatre are of course reflected in the practice of performance artists themselves. Perhaps even in a cursory overview such as this, when considering the function of text when combined with performance, the last word should be given to a performance practitioner. In an interview for the article ‘Writing and Performance’, where various performance artists were asked their opinions of the relationship between writing and their praxis, Anni-B Parson, co-director of Big Dance Theater in New York, commented on the objective and reflective nature of her art: “Theatre does not exist to render reality, but to contemplate reality.”

### 1.3.5. Contemporary writing in the UK

Aleks Sierz, in *Rewriting the Nation, British Theatre Today* says it is predominantly the use of language in contemporary theatre, in its instant recognition, that brings vitality to a play. This is even more apparent in the work of today’s black playwrights such as Kwame Kwei-Armah and Roy Williams who go even further than staging ‘street’ language or ethnic/community slang they actually mint a new lingo (2011: 53-4). Other writers such as Debbie Tucker-Green through fracturing of dialogue, verse

and use of repetition are perhaps even more akin to the ideas inherent in dialogic playwriting.

There is a thought that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is being marked by a revival of the verbal theatre, categorised, perhaps flippantly, as “In-Yer-Ear”. Angel-Pérez (2013) proposes that in the recent plays by the likes of Crimp, Churchill and Debbie Tucker Green, “nothing actually takes place but language” and that the “new constellations correctly mapping out today’s English stages definitely help us understand how post-dramatic is not only concerned with the downfall of logocentricity but with the deconstruction of the frontier between fiction and reality” (online). However, as noted before, the *extent* to which this is true is debatable.

Additionally, David Lane (2010) in *Contemporary British Drama* examines the rise of verbatim theatre in the UK. Plays such as *Deep Cut* (Philip Ralph, 2008), *Katrina* (Jonathan Holmes, 2009) and *Talking to Terrorists* (Robin Soans, 2005) are just three examples of plays driven by real, transcribed dialogue gleaned from court-room proceedings, interviews, diaries etc [see also chapter 5]. Lane indicates how there is no surprise that this genre should come about at a time when our TV screens are full of reality shows, and that there is obviously an appeal to audiences both from the ‘reality’ perspective and also a feeling of disenchantment with the press and authorities so that recourse to the theatre is another, more viable option for hearing the story told. However, criticism of verbatim theatre lies in the fact that it is invariably biased, but more caustically, that its construction, based on real, transcribed texts, lacks artistic value (Trueman, 2018). This may be true to a certain extent, but this kind of theatre, political or not, is not what I am necessarily proposing in my research. Rather, I am searching for a way to analyse the success of features of everyday conversation in potentially ‘unrealistic’ theatrical contexts, and to create a framework for its aesthetic application in playwriting.

As the crop of US language-based playwrights in the 1980s and 1990s has shown, there may be scope for a resurgence of the poetic and lyrical in theatre, a refocusing of drama not on the traditional Aristotelian approach of character-driven plot but more along the lines of Bakhtin’s principle of dialogism where a polyvocal, hybrid form can inspire a non-logocentric theatre featuring carnival and theatricality, and where ‘reality’ can be expressed and examined in more thoughtful and interesting ways.



However, arguably, on the British stage, these forms have always been there, and still are. The matter under debate, however, is the extent to which an adoption of this approach has been conscious or subconscious, whether the latest 'avant-garde' works are truly representative of this, and what the potential is for a 'language-based' theatre in the UK today.

### 1.3.6. Writing and performance

Much has been said already about how the text can inform performance and the nature of the theatrical spectacle has been touched on already in this overview. Groups in the US and UK such as Forced Entertainment, The Wooster Group, Joint Stock and Shunt are just a few examples of artists who collectively devise their texts taking into account ideas related to the postdramatic and often based on dialogue rooted in the everyday. In terms of how Conversation Analysis can inform a performance (yet still baulking from the issue of text creation), the nearest analysis, however, has been offered by Nathan Stucky. In *Unnatural acts: Performing natural conversation* (1988, 2009), he examines the dynamic link between the social drama of real-life interactions and that which is reflected on stage through the experience of having it performed. By using recordings and transcripts of conversations coupled with more formalised scripts, actors, he says, can gain genuine insight about the character. This may be questionable, as a pause or silence is no guarantee of the betrayal of a character trait. However, Stucky readily admits that this process needs to go hand-in-hand with more traditional (Stanislavskian) character analysis. Thus, analysing / understanding features of real speech can help an actor simulate the text on stage and make it sound as if they are saying something for the first time. In the final performance, he claims, any concerns about the 'drama' of the pieces, disappeared: "In this method, authors of all ages people their works with characters who perform, reply, respond and adjust to each other." (Stucky, 1988: 35).

## 1.4. The discourse of written drama

### 1.4.1. Stylistic approaches to dialogue analysis

In this research, the investigation into what makes theatrical dialogue 'work' necessarily touches on the now relatively extensive field of linguistic and stylistic analysis of drama. However, as the main commentators of this discipline would

affirm, this is newly ploughed territory, with theatre texts hitherto discussed in very much the same way as poetry or prose. The uniqueness of staged conversation in front of an overhearing audience has given rise to some interesting observations over the last 30 or so years and has necessarily drawn in theories from sociology, psychology as well as literary and linguistic criticism.

Initial investigations by Short (1981: 180), for example, contrast the interpretation of meaning and the effect of a performance on the audience. Discourse analysis, he claims, can go some way to revealing how the audience is affected but suggests that ‘substantiation of this position requires separate argumentation.’ Nevertheless, in moving the research on from traditional criticism of drama, he helps prepare the way for a new investigation into how language use and performance can be seen together to account for the stylistic success of a play. To this end, he cites recent (at the time) developments in discourse analysis and how they can be constructively applied to drama texts (often using Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* as a model). Among others, core features of these developments are: speech acts such as promises, threats and requests; presuppositions (those elements of dialogue, existential, linguistic and pragmatic, whereby writers encourage their readers to ‘buy in’ to their created world – the manipulation of which is seen to great effect in Absurdist drama); the co-operative principle, involving implicature<sup>2</sup> and H. P. Grice’s (1975) maxims (and their flouting for dramatic effect); and finally discourse relations such as forms of address, social status and politeness conventions (e.g. use of ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ in classical drama). Such features are relevant to the conversation analysis of improvised dialogues later within this chapter, are implicit in the observations on cognition in chapter 2, and are also briefly revisited in chapter 4.

Other stylistic commentators include Simpson (1998), who explains the absurd quality seen in both the Theatre of the Absurd and comedy shows such as those of Monty Python by referring to the concept of ‘discoursal incongruity’, where talk/dialogue is ‘marked, aberrant or anomalous’ (35). He says that a language-based approach offers a valuable analytic and critical method for exploring such texts. Additionally, Culpeper has made a number of investigations. These include an

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<sup>2</sup> As coined by Grice, referring to what is suggested by an utterance though not directly expressed nor strictly entailed. This is in contrast to ‘implication’ which has additional meanings

examination (2012) of the historical background to on-stage language use and the practical effects of changing theatrical settings on the way dialogue has been written down. He also (1998) shows how in contrast to the norms of everyday speech and our social convention of generally being polite to one another (in order among other things to 'save face' (Brown and Levinson 1987)), *impoliteness* in a drama context is a crucial element in driving forward the drama.

It is, however, Deirdre Burton's (1980) seminal work that appears to be the foundation for drawing a link between the discourse analysis of literary texts in general and that of drama dialogue. Her in-depth and at times very technical analyses of dialogue reveal how discourse analysis (and by extension conversation analysis – an emergent field at the time of her writing) of naturally occurring conversation can inform the analysis of dialogue on stage.

Most interestingly, but requiring close scrutiny, is her use of Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) 'models' involving a diagrammatic presentation of the 'moves' and 'acts' involved in everyday speech and then applying them to dramatic dialogue (Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*). She does this in some detail but freely admits that without data on how the text was performed (in terms of intonation, delivery etc) then there is a necessary ambiguity here. Therefore, an investigation into the impact on 'theatricality' on the production of a text could be said to be lacking. Such a gap between performance and text is one that is of crucial relevance both to the consideration of a text *for* performance and one arising *from* performance. It is the theatricality inherent in the latter, in particular, that is under consideration in my research.

#### 1.4.2. conversation v dialogue

Although Short (1996) claims that the representation of conversation in modern drama is typically quite different from the realities of ordinary conversation (1996:174) and that drama dialogue favours orderliness such that unnecessary non-fluent items, particularly pauses, silences and repetition tend to get left out (1996: 177), there has been some research into how the analysis of conversational, spontaneous speech can be relevant to that of theatrical dialogue.

Following the theories of ethnomethodologists such as Jefferson (1973) and Sacks et al. (1978), it can be asserted that if a transcript of everyday life conversation may come across as spontaneous, chaotic and disorderly, there can be socio-linguistic reasons for the features that make this appear so (i.e. non-fluency). Most recently, Zheng (2015) applies this idea and observes the occurrence of conversational non-fluency in drama, particularly in the works of Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg. These writers are interesting, coming as they did in the vanguard of what would be considered the modernist approach to drama, transforming the traditional approaches to the presentation of dialogue on stage (i.e. stylised speech, blank verse...). Their use of non-fluency includes features such as overlaps, interruptions, same-turn abandonments, pauses and silences. As Short asserts, these can prove to be an obstacle in normal conversation (1996), or indeed can be used as a rhetorical device. In drama, it serves a more definite function and can betray a psychological feature of a character, a hidden agenda, perhaps, or help to drive the plot. To these ends it is seen that Ibsen ‘shows a fondness for’ same-turn abandonments, Strindberg uses fillers, while Chekhov likes pauses:

LOPAKHIN: [*Listens*] No. . . . They've got to collect their luggage and so on. . . . [*Pause*] Lubov Andreyevna has been living abroad for five years; I don't know what she'll be like now. . . . She's a good sort - an easy, simple person. I remember when I was a boy of fifteen, my father, who is dead - he used to keep a shop in the village here - hit me on the face with his fist, and my nose bled. . . . We had gone into the yard together for something or other, and he was a little drunk. Lubov Andreyevna, as I remember her now, was still young, and very thin, and she took me to the washstand here in this very room, the nursery. She said, "Don't cry, little man, it'll be all right in time for your wedding. [*Pause*] "Little man". . . . My father was a peasant, it's true, but here I am in a white waistcoat and yellow shoes . . . a pearl out of an oyster. I'm rich now, with lots of money, but just think about it and examine me, and you'll find I'm still a peasant down to the marrow of my bones. [*Turns over the pages of his book*] Here I've been reading this book, but I understood nothing. I read and fell asleep. [*Pause.*]

(Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, Act 1)

Inevitably drawing on both discourse and conversation analysis, and arguably carrying Burton's mantle in this respect, Herman's (1995) work, gives a comprehensive account of the relationship between everyday speech and the nature of staged dialogue. In comparing the two she comes to the conclusion, as have others,

that there are indeed underlying rules operating within everyday exchanges that facilitate the analysis of dramatic dialogue. She draws on the influential work of the ethnomethodologists Harold Garfinkel and his successors Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1978) with their establishment of Conversation Analysis, as well as the Discourse Analysts of the Birmingham School (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Brown and Yule, 1983; Labov and Fanshel, 1977, among others). However, she criticises both theories, claiming that, when examining dramatic discourse, they raise more issues than solve. Additionally, she mentions that Burton's (1980) work, in its adaptation of the Sinclair-Coulthard framework renders the analysis of dramatic texts too complex and unwieldy, especially with longer stretches of dialogue.

This is all well and good in terms of analysis, which she does extensively (making particular use of Pinter's works as examples). Indeed, it helps to explain and account for the authorial decisions in already written texts and can help explain why interactional exchanges on stage work, bearing in mind the established thoughts, theories and rules regarding conversation. However, it does not explain the more virtuosic elements of playwriting as propounded by Castagno – works that may fly in the face of 'reality' as Herman would see it, yet which still work. Pinter, for one, used 'realistic' dialogue in a somewhat unrealistic way, for artful effect. A purely socio-linguistic analysis of the type Herman gives, falls short of fully accounting for this artfulness.

The latest in this particular line of observers, and one who has striven most to synthesise the two schools of discourse analysis and conversation analysis, is Susan Mandala. In her book, *Twentieth-Century Drama Dialogue as Ordinary Talk: Speaking Between the Lines* (2007) she succeeds in applying Amy Tsui's (1994) framework of a complete taxonomy of conversational moves as well as previous research, including that of Burton and Herman, to the analysis of four plays by Pinter (again), Wesker, Rattigan and Ayckbourn. However, for me, this analysis is still looking at text from the other side of the lens. It certainly does not take us much nearer to accounting for the success, or lack thereof, in actually creating a text. However, as with the other analyses, it is essential research for helping decode what is actually happening when dialogue occurs.

Perhaps most constructively, and relevant to the research and experiment that I have undertaken in this chapter (outlined in section 1.6.2) is the work done by R. Keith Sawyer (2003). Sawyer claims to be the first to have transcribed and analyzed improvised dialogues, intending to shed light both on the machinations of improv theatre and also on its application to the study of conversation in general. His extensive research and observation of practice within American improv groups have given him the experience and data required to come to some startling conclusions.

The principle finding is that his own, macro-sociological concept of a ‘frame’, that is, the interactional context that improv participants create, is a social phenomenon rather than dependent on observed conventions of conversation such as turn-taking, or on individual interpretation, feeling, attitude etc. In this way he differs radically from the thoughts of most conversation analysts who arguably look at the mechanics of everyday social interaction rather than one that is presumably contrived and intended for performance before an audience.

## 1.5. Speech Acts

### 1.5.1. Theoretical background

Czech avant-garde director Jindrich Honzl stated in his 1947 work *Mimic Sign and Mimic Symptoms* (1963[1947]) that an actor’s expression is divided between mimetic ‘signs’, ie those physical and spoken acts based on convention, and mimetic ‘symptoms’, which are based on unconscious, spontaneous reactions. Even though Honzl had earlier eschewed spontaneity and improvisation, this change of tack appears to correspond with discussions on the improviser’s technique in artforms such as *Commedia dell’Arte* (see chapter 4), where a combination of spontaneity and reliance on tried, tested and recognizable tropes was expected. It also relates to how a performer corporeally responds to changes in their environment and effectively uses cognitive devices beyond their head and body (cf. chapter 5).

This dependence or not on social conventions to create a speech act on stage is what is of interest here. In his influential work on the semiotics of theatre, Keir Elam stresses the accepted importance and expectation of indexicality in speech acts on stage, that is, the deictic devices that establish speakers and their relationship to their listeners, and to the spatio-temporal coordinates (the ‘here and now’) of their on-stage and

fictional condition (1981: 138-139). In drama, as opposed to other literary genres, the dialogic exchange between participants does not only refer deictically to the dramatic action but actually constitutes it. In Forced Entertainment's 1999 project *Dirty Work*, this is taken to an extreme where the entire performance constitutes a man and a woman competing in their verbal descriptions of non-visible, non-stageable theatrical situations.

Five great nuclear explosions. A man delivers a letter to the wrong address, causing months of confusion and unhappiness. There are scenes of betrayal, romance and great anguish. There are scenes of death, folly and ambush. The whole of Doncaster is grid-locked with traffic. the whole of Dortmund is overgrown with foliage. The sky grows dark and silence falls.

(Tim Etchells/Forced Entertainment, *Dirty Work* 1999. From website)

When considering what speech acts occur in drama, that is, those “rule-governed forms of behaviour” as defined by John Searle (1969), there is, according to Elam a perceived shift in dominance from those that occur in everyday speech and those that occur on stage (or scripted drama) (1981: 159). Austin (1962) originally posited that when we make an utterance, more than merely putting forward propositional content, we are actually fulfilling a performative task (i.e. asking, commanding, influencing etc.), and that by simple insertion of an executive verb, ‘constative utterances’ (“Today is Sunday”) can become a ‘performative’ one (“I assert that today is Sunday”). To varying extents, then, all utterances have an executive function.

Austin subsequently divided these ‘acts’ into Locutionary (the utterance + any obvious, socially understood meaning), Illocutionary (eg asking a question, making a demand – even by implication) and Perlocutionary (where the utterance has an evident effect on the listener eg persuasion, conviction, anger...). Taking the Forced Entertainment excerpt as an example, it may seem that the utterances are purely locutionary, thus defying Elam's notion that dramatic discourse relies on the ‘pragmatic doing things with words’ (1981: 159). However, the very uttering of these statements does, to a certain extent have an effect on the listener; in this case, the audience. I would suggest that this effect, in this particular instance, is less perceptible than those of persuasion, conviction and emotion, given that it is essentially image-driven (“five great nuclear explosions”); nevertheless, the evident locutionary act of the utterance plus the (weaker) illocutionary act within its assertion added to the

(weaker still) perlocutionary effect of engaging the audience reveals that instead of polarity, there are varying shades of all three acts within any dramatic utterance.

For a speech act to be successful or 'felicitous', Searle (1962: 136) outlines four conditions: 'Propositional' (is the situation clear and the speaker intelligible?), 'Preparatory' (is the speaker authorized to make this utterance? Are they ignorant of the answer if asking a question?), 'Sincere' (does the speaker believe in what they are saying?) and 'Essential' (is the speaker intending the utterance to be acted upon in some way by the listener?)

Elam maintains that dramatic dialogue to a great extent relies on the failure or abuse of these conditions in the minds of the audience but not necessarily in that of the speaking character in the play (1981: 163). As an illustration of this, in exemplifying Iago's on-going deception of Othello regarding his wife's supposed infidelity, Elam shows how in Shakespeare's play a sequence of defective illocutionary speech acts amount to one single over-arching deed: the accusation of Desdemona.

Such a 'macro speech act', I would suggest, is comparable to a) the objectives and super-objectives in Stanislavskian approaches to reading and performing a playtext, and b) the accumulation of individual 'beats' within a play, whether it be to reach a coherent whole (as in traditional playwriting) or, with New Language Playwriting, merely to group individual 'sites of innovation', "synapses operating in the larger nervous system of the play" (Castagno 2012: 146).

Another dramatic infelicity is one that gives rise to that common comedy trope of speaking at cross purposes; that is, when the interlocutor fails to correctly assess the speaker's illocutionary intentions. This failure to secure uptake (as Austin puts it) and the ensuing ambiguity highlights Paul Grice's focus on the difference between sentence meaning and utterer's meaning (1968: 117ff). King Henry II's "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" is the classic example of an ambiguous utterance whose interpretation as an order rather than a question had infamously deadly repercussions. Nevertheless, in drama, this ambiguity in drama dialogue allows directors to interpret a text and actors to play a role through their toolbox of vocal and physical expression. The question with regard to improvised drama is then: what happens when this situation is inverted? That is, when the script is derived from interpretation, does the



director/auteur seek to capture that illocutionary force and replicate it exactly so that it can be replicated on stage? And what is it about that illocution that is worth preserving anyway?

### 1.5.1.1. Illocutionary Speech Act typologies and principles

Austin and Searle’s relative perspectives on illocutionary acts may be summarized thus:

Searle	Austin
1. Representatives (committing the speaker to the truth of the utterance)	Constatives
2. Directives (attempting to get the listener to do something)	Performatives
3. Commissives (promises, vows, contracts etc)	
4. Expressives (thanking, greeting, congratulating)	
5. Declarations (eg naming a ship, declaring war, marrying a couple)	

Searle’s typology is seen as more ‘useful’ in an analysis of drama in that it can cater for stock characters (cf *Commedia dell’Arte*, chapter 4) who tend to dwell on one illocutionary axis (eg Polonius) while rhetorically rich characters (such as Hamlet or Richard III) can encompass all 5 elements (Elam 1981: 168). Ohmann (1971: 253) suggests that this variety is more prevalent in tragedy than comedy, which often relies on repetitive or mechanical speech acts. However, if this richness and variety can account for the appreciation of a particular character, that is one thing. But whether or not in itself such tragedy-based dialogue is likely to be more ‘successful’ is another

matter. The fact that comedy dialogue can be just as esteemed as that of tragedy suggests that this is not so.

In addition to Austin and Searle's typologies, Grice, a contemporary pioneer in the field of discourse analysis, focused more on meaning, i.e. what is 'said' versus what is 'intended'. In this, he distinguished between conventional meaning and the meaning intended by the speaker at the time of utterance. This latter, 'conversational' meaning goes beyond what we say in such a way that it must be inferred from a combination of non-linguistic features (gesture, facial expression etc) and Grice's principles of communication. These principles are a) the "cooperative principle," whereby those involved in linguistic interaction cooperate in its production and interpretation and b) the four maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner. In other words, people say what they believe to be true (quality), their contribution is no more informative than is required (quantity), their input is relevant to the interaction (relation) and it is unambiguous, brief, and orderly (manner) (Grice, 1975: 41-58).

This contributes greatly to an appreciation of fictional discourse, specifically in drama with its imitation of real discourse, since it is assumed that despite this pretence, any on-stage utterances will comply with these same principles, and the same meanings and interpretations can be made when these principles are violated. It is in the light of the research behind this thesis that the very proximity of real conversation to literary text gives Grice's contribution particular relevance. In addition, in everyday speech, if Sperber and Wilson's principles of Relevance within speech acts are to be followed, human evolution has conditioned us to gear our utterances to the minimum amount of processing cost for the maximum amount of relevance. In this way, communication carries far more than is literally apparent and thanks to other devices such as signalling intention, pointing, use of voice etc is made even more relevant to the listener and compatible with the communicator's abilities (1995: 260).

What is apparent, however, from the improvised sketches as analysed in this chapter is that despite the principles behind these broad theoretical discursual frameworks, the actual speech reveals how an investigation into the moment-by-moment, turn-taking dynamic might be of equal advantage to the investigation into how a 'successful' text is actually spontaneously created; particularly when incoherence, miscomprehension, hesitation and other possible infelicitous phenomena do not necessarily impede the

performance value of that text. For this, a blend of discourse analysis and conversation analysis will be employed with transcripts adhering more to the latter method.

## 1.6. Language-based playwriting in action

### 1.6.1. An experiment

It may be apposite now to see how, from a variety of perspectives, a set of ideas can be drawn up to inform just how a language-based text may be effectively (and affectively) created.

To this end, my supervisors at the University of Kent and I came up with a low-key, provisional experiment<sup>3</sup>. We found two pairs of actors: one pair of amateurs (L and G) and one pair of trained, practising professionals (Amanda and David). They were then asked to improvise two different duologues, one in private and one in front of an invited audience. Both situations were, however, filmed.


The resulting video footage was then reviewed both from a stylistic perspective and a Conversation Analysis perspective to attempt to account for the choices the actors made and what was actually occurring socio-linguistically when they were speaking.

#### 1.6.1.1. Discourse Analysis

The first devised dialogue (see transcript, Figure 1.2) hinged around the opening prompt "Are you not feeling well?". In the amateur version, the actors indulged in the foregrounding of certain elements such as through the repetition of "split up"; internal deviation ('we split up' being a short punch-line, compared to previous utterances, which in turn, seem to exhibit aspects of parallelism in their structure); L's

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<sup>3</sup> Note on ethical protocols: the amateur actors are here anonymized, referred to only by an initial. The trained actors undertook the task as professionals and were paid for their time. Their first names are referred to here in full as well as by initial for brevity. All parties agreed to the participation in the experiment and gave permission to be filmed and perform in front of a private, non-paying audience of colleagues from the University of Kent. Permission was also sought for use of photos in the thesis, for illustrative purposes. One photo has been visually altered by request so that the participants may be less recognizable. See appendix for full statement.

use of a pause before "You're not having a good time are you?" as a dramatic use of understatement that brings this little vignette to a close (despite it being a question). The professionals (Figure 1.3) seem to rely on a basic question and answer format. There is some repetition of phrases such as in "be good for me", and "would be good for you" - common enough utterances when two acquaintances are discussing one's illness. Additionally, the professionals tend to have a more subdued range of speech patterns, yet a more measured pace. They place a more considered amount of stress on certain words, avoiding too much force, adding to the 'veracity' of the situation. For example, even in the opening line, Amanda (A)'s decision to stress 'not' with a secondary stress on 'feeling' would at first glance seem somewhat unnatural while G's primary stress on 'feeling' would be more logical. However, A's subdued fall-rise  questioning intonation gives a certain depth to the enquiry, implying perhaps a mutual pre-knowledge of David (D)'s condition. This is in contrast to the amateurs rising tone, who, with their use of more direct rising and falling tones, may be accused of stylising their speech somewhat in, perhaps, an attempt to achieve dramatic effect. Interestingly, in both versions, the word 'yeah' is used by the confidant (G and A), though for different reasons. G's use of the word is as a filler for the pauses left by L, and to show willingness to go along with the story. A's use, however, is as a way to show empathy with D and his plight even if, superficially, it looks like she is merely agreeing with his suggestions. In this way, I would argue, due to their more considered awareness of theatrical impact, measured delivery and true empathic responses, the professional's conversation has more emotional depth.


L:  Are you not feeling very well?  
 G: Not great, to be fair, hmph  
 L: What's wrong?  
 G: So so you know I told you that I was going out with that girl for two years...  
 L: Yeah  
 G: And then we split up...  
 L: Mmmm...  
 G: ...and then I was going out with the other girl...  
 L: Mm..yeah  
 G: We've split up.  
 (pause)  
 L: You're not havin' a good time are you?

Figure 1.2 Amateurs transcript


A:  Are you not feeling well?  
 D: Not really  
 A: (sighs) So what are we gonna do then?  
 D: Well – I suppose we could go to the seaside.  
 A: Yeah, you would... the air, the air would be good for you wouldn't it?  
 D: Yeah, be good for my chest  
 A: Yeah.  
 D: And this other thing as well: my...my knees.  
 A: Yeah. I...I don't know how the air would be good for your knees, but be warm wouldn't it?  
 D: Yeah, yeah, sit on the sand for a bit. That might, that might or maybe...er...a bit of a swim. That might do 'em some good.  
 A: Yeah. Well, shall we go then?  
 D: Yeah. Where did we leave the car?

Figure 1.3 Professionals transcript



Figure 1.4 L and G. (amateurs) improvising, 2015. Photo: J Fitchett

### 1.6.1.2. Conversation Analysis

In contrast to the focus on discourse above, Conversation Analysis takes into account the ethnomethodological viewpoint, as proposed by Garfinkel and Sacks in the 1960s and 1970s, where the more ‘common-sense’ or intuitive rules for social interaction are observed. In this, conversations are recorded and transcribed as accurately as possible in order to investigate the “the lived stuff of social reality” (Herman, 1995: 55). Key to this analysis is the idea of ‘turn-taking’ and how, instinctively, we, as social beings, manage to facilitate an orderly interaction with one another without our conversations descending into chaos. Sacks et al. (1978) proposed that there was a mechanism involved here and that this was clearly visible from the data (i.e. transcribed conversations). In short, there is a turn-taking system at play, and one that is deemed to comprise two components: turn constructional and turn allocational. The former involves certain linguistic cues that indicate the closure or predictability of the closure of a turn. The latter occurs when a speaker selects another speaker (perhaps through nodding, gazing, naming etc) to take a turn or when a speaker self-selects. It also caters for the ‘failure’ option, where a turn may lapse. These ‘rules’ are apparent in the commonly observed etiquette of everyday speech (e.g. one person should speak at a time, and if not, then the first person to speak has ‘rights’ over the interrupter).

From a Conversation Analysis perspective, then (see Figure 1.6 and

Figure 1.7), in the recorded conversations of the experiment, the social mechanisms of interaction are apparent, but with certain differences between the pairs. There is certainly a sense of strict obedience by G to the unstated desire by L to tell his story. The dramatic ‘role’ quickly adopted by G as friend/confidant certainly predicts this. However, L’s use of a pause in lines 2 and 5 are not long enough to serve as a signal for G to turn-take, but do serve to highlight what L is about to say, arguably giving him a certain authority in the conversation and rendering G somewhat subservient here (in fact, in the video footage, L’s lack of eye-contact at this point may highlight this). Therefore, the amateur pair seem to have been more conscious of the turn-taking protocols, with G almost setting up L’s responses of “mm” or “yeah” in order to lead up to the punchline of “we split up” for humorous effect. In essence, the dialogue has more the appearance of a sketch that has been consciously created on the spot, but

which may only have superficial comedy appeal. The professional version, I contend, differs. Here, the use of pauses and the sighing of both parties reveal a slower paced conversation than that of the amateurs but one that is arguably more intense. The pause after A's initial question is equalled by A's following the answer. Thus, there is no real power game here. In fact A's role of listener/confidant is more 'realistic' as a friend or someone of equal status to their partner. On the other hand, the final pause before D's change of subject, like L, serves to highlight for potentially comic appeal. These relatively lengthy (uninterrupted) pauses are in contrast to the overlapping in the latter part of the conversation that reveal a less reverential obedience to turn-taking rules. However, the use of 'yeah' (a sign of agreement) and other repair strategies serve to help maintain the fluidity and socially acceptable execution of the dialogue.



Figure 1.5 Amanda and David (professionals) improvising, 2015. Photo: J Fitchett

Looking at the transcript of a 'real', overheard conversation (see

Figure 1.8) that started with the same initial line ("Are you not feeling well"), certain key features of everyday speech are apparent such as breathing/sighing, overlapping, repair, and repetition. In the analysis, these parallel more the features witnessed in the professionals' improvisation, and would therefore suggest a more 'natural', realistic style inherent in the latter. However, the question remains as to whether this in itself should constitute an effective and virtuosic piece of dramatic discourse. It certainly may, for an onlooker/spectator make for a more engaging conversation.

1 L: Are you not feeling very well.  
 2 G: hhh Not great, (0.3) <sup>0</sup>to be fair<sup>0</sup> (hhntss)  
 3 (0.1)  
 4 L: What's wrong?  
 5 (0.4)  
 6 G: SO (.) so you know I told you that I was going out with that girl for two  
 7 year:s hhh  
 8 L: Yeah  
 9 (.)  
 10 G: And then we split up,  
 11 (.)  
 12 L: Mmmm=  
 13 G: =and then I was going out with the other girl,  
 14 L: Mm, yea::h  
 15 (.)  
 16 G: We've split up.  
 17 (1.0)  
 18 L: You're not havin' a good time are you.

Figure 1.6 Conversation Analysis (amateurs)

1 A: Are you not feeling we:ll.  
 2 (0.3)  
 3 D: Not rea::lly.  
 4 (0.4)  
 5 A: . hhhh hhhhhhhh So what are we gonna do then?  
 6 (0.2)  
 7 D: Well hhh (.) I supp:ose we could go to the seaside.  
 8 (0.2)  
 9 A: Yeah, you woul- the air the air would be good for you wouldn't it.  
 10 D: Yeah, be good for ma chest=  
 11 A: =Yeah::  
 12 (0.3)  
 13 D: And this other thing as well (.) my...my knee::s. (.)  
 14 A: Yeah. I (.) I don't know how the air would be good for your  
 knee::s, (.)  
 15 [but  
 16 D: [<sup>0</sup>well<sup>0</sup>]  
 17 A: be warm wouldn't it?=  
 18 D: =Yeah (0.2) yeah sit on the sand for a bit That might (0.3)  
 might (.) or  
 19 maybe (.) er (.) a bit of a swim. That might do'm some good.  
 20 A: Yeah (0.3) Well, shall we go then.  
 21 D: YEAH (0.4) Where did we leave the ca:r.

Figure 1.7 Conversation Analysis (pros)



1 L: Are you not feeling very [we:ll,  
 1 J: [ʰ( )<sup>0</sup>  
 2 (.)  
 3 J: No, I'm all ri:ght  
 4 (.)  
 5 L: Yes.  
 6 (0.6)  
 7 J: <sup>0</sup>Ye:s I'm all right,<sup>0</sup>  
 8 L: <sup>0</sup>Oh:.<sup>0</sup> .hh Yi-m- You know I – I- I'm broiling about something  
 9 hhheh[h<sub>h</sub>eh .hhhh  
 10 J: [Wha:t.  
 11 L: Well that sa:le. (0.2) At- at (.) the vicarage.

Figure 1.8 Conversation Analysis (real conversation) (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008: 82)

### 1.6.1.3. The impact of ‘theatricality’

The key to this engagement may lie within the theatricality of the situation. Indeed, when the two pairs (both amateur and professional) were asked to perform a new improvised dialogue<sup>4</sup> in public, the differences were even more noticeable, with the amateurs ‘performing’ reality to the audience (and admittedly currying mirth from the audience along the way) while the professionals adopted a more subtle yet no less (arguably more) comedic approach. In this performance the amateurs seemed to have a careful, almost reverential approach to the words they were uttering while the professionals were more relaxed and much more confidently employing the elements and idiosyncrasies of conversational speech. This included hesitation, repetition, interruption and, above all, silences. If the resulting performance was more engaging, it must then be asked what there was within the professionals’ acting armoury to enable them to draw instinctively and spontaneously on this approach.

In actor training, one of the basic tenets, or maxims, that is taught is ‘to be truthful in the moment’. That is, staying in tune to the responses you are receiving from your duologue partner and not be set in your mind as to how a scene should be played. Constantin Stanislavsky, whose psycho-physical approach to acting remains one of the most influential in drama training today, talked of ‘living the part’.

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<sup>4</sup> The given scenario was of a patient visiting a doctor with the hope of receiving a sick-note to relieve him of his duties as a driver despite being clearly physically well. This was in order to cover up the fact from his boss that he was facing a 6-month driving ban for speeding.

An actor's job is not to present merely the external life of his character. He must fit his own human qualities to the life of this other person, and pour into it all of his own soul...

(Stanislavsky, 1936: 14)

This is considered to be the difference between 'seeming' and 'being' on stage, and one of the methods by which this can be attained is by analyzing a given scene through 3 questions: What is the character literally doing? What is his/her action (objective)? What is this like? (or the 'as if' question).

Taking the first professional duologue (Figure 1.3) as an example, it could be analysed and approached thus:

What is the character literally doing?	A is asking after D's health
What is his/her action?	Stopping a loved one from giving up
What is this like?	It's as if my father came round to fix my leaking tap but it was too hard and he was becoming frustrated, annoyed and running out of ideas. But I didn't want to a) see him defeated and b) have a wet kitchen

It could be then, that the amateurs, when presented with an improvisation exercise 'stepped up' to the occasion and attempted a stylized, performed version of a real conversation, and when in front of an audience, heightened that stylization even more. The professionals, however, through their training and on-stage experience, employed a more instinctive approach in the devising of their piece and created a dramatic duologue that would entertain and engage yet would appear to more closely correspond with the kind of natural, non-theatrical speech that we hear everyday.



Figure 1.9 Amanda and David (professionals) improvising, 2015. Photo: J Fitchett

## 1.7. Conclusions, ‘theatricalised dialogue’ and further research

The above experiment led to the following conclusions. By analyzing the duologues from 3 perspectives, linguistically, ethnomethodologically and from drama training, it may be possible to get to the nub of how improvised discourse can inform a new approach to text creation (see Figure 1.10).

Improvised dialogue

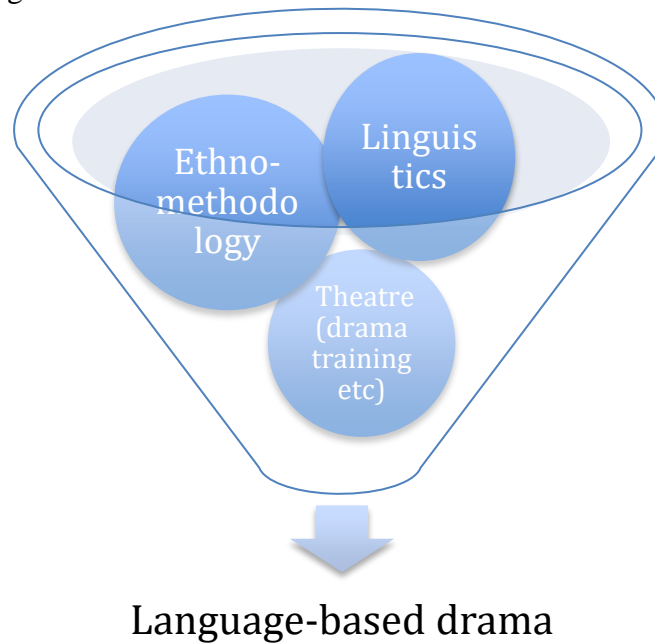


Figure 1.10 From improvised dialogue through analysis to play-text creation

Now, the reference to Stanislavskian technique (and by extension, the Method school of acting that stemmed from it) would seem to fly in the face of the tenets behind this new Language-based drama paradigm. Indeed, the dialogic play eschews the character-specific dialogue, and the uninterrogated objective status quo of the traditional, ‘monologic’ play. After all, the dialogic play seeks to create a new reality rather than mirror the one in which we live. It is my contention, however, that the use of spontaneous speech coupled with the devising process actually serves to heighten the dialogic nature of the subsequent script rather than subdue it. The demonstration of ‘reality’ in plays does not necessarily mean being subject to the unified whims of the lone playwright. The use of improvised speech actually opens up the playwriting field to encompass a whole world of speech idiosyncrasies which can be morphed, warped, knitted together, juxtaposed, used, in fact, in any way the playwright(s) desires to create a stage reality that may or may not be akin to that of real life but

certainly uses some of real life's ingredients (i.e. conversational speech) to dramatic effect.

Taking, for example, one side of the duologue from Figure 1.2, mixing up those speech turns at random and then inserting new interjections from the other character could produce something like this:

(/ shows where speeches overlap)

Chips: Mmmm...

Gravy: (*not looking*) Have you seen my... I can't find that bloody...fuse!

/13 amp

Chips: / Mm... yeah

Gravy: Christ! This just isn't going to work

(Pause)

Chips: What's wrong?

Gravy: I'm going down the shop

Chips: You're not having a good time, are you?

(Pause)

Gravy: Look... Don't.... Just... /Yeah?

Chips: /Yeah

Gravy: I don't... I just don't... I can't. With you. Any more.

Chips: Are you not feeling very well?

### 1.7.1. Theatricalised dialogue

It is probably (hopefully) clear that the quest is still ongoing for what it is that can create a framework for the creation of language-based playscript. And a successful one at that. Such investigations will touch on a wide-range of disciplines. However, the current enquiry into the nature and creative possibilities of real-life dialogue has arisen from my own activities as an improv performer and personal observations as to the theatricality of that practice. To marry this with the craft of playwriting seems a practical step and one that can begin to get to the heart of what it is to use words, the language of the everyday, the 'poetry of real life', to produce plays / performance scripts that can engage and stimulate an audience. This search for 'what makes a good speaker', in theatrical terms, will lead to a discovery of the literary-linguistic,

aesthetic and representational qualities of what I will term ‘theatricalised dialogue’, as well as the narratological features that can underpin it in an extended form. This kind of theatrical dialogue is essentially rooted in real life, but revealing whatever features are required to render it successful to a (paying) audience, and constructed in a way that it revels in its ability to display a virtuosity far beyond mere representation of the real or everyday.

### 1.7.1.1. Further research

It is obvious that the audience (onlooker, overhearer?) is key to the success of whatever dialogue is created. The analysis of drama texts and dialogues can only go so far in establishing what it is that ‘pushes the buttons’ in the audience’s minds. It will also take some investigation using the field of Cognitive Poetics to shed more light on this issue.

Recently, for example, Roberta Piazza (2012) has observed and commented on how language expressing conflict (in one play – Martin MacDonagh’s *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*) engages the audience from the context of its importance to the narrative development of the play and the characters’ identities. She analyses the strategies used by the characters (repair, refutation, witty reposts etc) using a Relevance-theoretic approach positing that a speaker takes into account the context of the communication and the mutual cognitive environment between them and their interlocutor. That is, they consider what they think their listener already knows. They then say just enough to communicate what they intend - relying on the listener to fill in the details that were not explicitly communicated. This is also true for the communication of the characters’ speech towards the audience paradigm, and this is where the ‘success’ of the engagement may lie.

Another observer, Peter Stockwell (2007) mentions, however, how both discourse and ethnomethodological approaches are not necessarily adequate. Indeed he claims they are in danger of over-theorising and entering into self-serving cycle of creating models out of data purely to analyse further data in order to create another model (136). To break this cycle and to provide a more interdisciplinary and perhaps more grounded approach, he proposes the use of Cognitive Poetics. Coined by Reuven Tsur

in the 1970s, this is as yet a still emerging discipline, but one that may have useful applications to my research.

Indeed, Stockwell states that there is a further apparent weakness in both the stylistic and discourse analysis of drama (the focus on text rather than performance) and the ethnographical approach. Models based on pragmatics, he says, will always be compromised by the fact that actors on stage are essentially ‘pretending’. He claims that a key facet of Cognitive Poetics, text-world theory (the feeling of immersion within the world of a text), bears better fruit when analysing a text.

This assumption of ‘pretence’ compromising the authenticity of interaction, may not sit easily, especially among seasoned, trained actors or those engaging in improv. As Simpson (in Culpeper et al., 1998) says, drama dialogue is fabricated interaction *but* can still be analysed through the principles of social interaction as this is the common ground between the playwright and the audience.

However, the wide range of dimensions and issues that Cognitive Poetics offers exploration of, coupled with the focus on how an audience processes either/both a performed or read drama text takes us a step further towards the goal of gauging audience reaction to a scripted text founded on natural, conversational dialogue.

What did I do? I followed the indications, I kept a sharp eye on the clues I found myself dropping. The writing arranged itself with no trouble into dramatic terms. The characters sounded in my ears – it was apparent to me what one would say and what would be the other’s response, at any given point. It was apparent to me what they would not, could not, ever, say, whatever one might wish.

(Harold Pinter in a letter to director Peter Wood, 1958)

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## 1.9. Appendix: Chapter 1 – disclaimer and ethics statement

In this chapter, both professional and amateur actors were used via filming (in a private office) and public exhibition (before a specially invited, non-paying audience at a non-commercial theatre space (lecture theatre) at the University of Kent) for an analysis of improvised dramatic performance.

The amateurs agreed with the researcher to be filmed and have their spoken text transcribed. They were not financially remunerated. The professionals also agreed and were financially remunerated for their time.

No film footage was agreed to be or has been disseminated or employed beyond the use for analysis and transcription by the researcher alone. All footage has been stored securely and will be destroyed once the research is complete.

Still photos of the performance(s) have been used in this thesis for illustrative purposes only and the images of some participants obscured on request.

The professionals' first names have been used in this thesis; the amateurs are referred to by initials only.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

# **Analysing the success of improvised dialogue on TV - a Cognitive Poetic approach**

This second chapter employs a theoretical mechanism derived from cognitive science: namely, Cognitive Poetics, and, more specifically, Text World Theory. Given that this is a framework within which literary criticism may be engaged, its application to theatre texts is apposite yet somewhat new. Indeed, to try and account for the cognitive impact of utterances made on stage through a mechanism that traditionally examines texts on the page may be ambitious. However, such an innovative use of this theory intends to expand upon existing research. If not breaking new ground entirely, this chapter contributes to the field by looking at various performance texts from TV and theatre, and making investigations via the other end of the cognitive lens; that is, to find out why an utterance may be considered worthy of recording for future re-performance.

### **2.1. Introduction**

If all the world's a stage, then arguably we can infer that 'real life' is a template for what constitutes a dramatic spectacle. By extension, perhaps the very nature of our quotidian, spontaneous and unprepared existence (in particular the verbal engagements we make with our fellow humans) can also therefore constitute the raw material for a drama script. It is provocative, then, to investigate the extent to which such mined, reality-based dialogue can be considered 'valid' in theatrical terms (see section 2.3.1 this below), and what the playwright must bring to that material in order to render it so. This research has behind it an interest both in the current vogue for improvised dialogues in theatre, TV and film (often in comedies) and mostly in how what would appear initially to be mundane and banal can be honed into something that is not only widely appreciated but also award-winning.

In theatre, examples of verbatim and documentary theatre and what in the US is defined as the Dramaturgy of the Real (Martin, 2010), have become commonplace. In cinema, the films of Ken Loach, for example, are famous for scenes based, in part at least, on the improvised dialogue between actors (or often non-actors). It is perhaps in

TV in the UK and the US where the most popular examples of the use of ‘authentic’ (scare quotes used with trepidation) dialogue are witnessed. British examples of this genre are comedies such as *The Office* (BBC2 2001-3), *Outnumbered* (BBC1 2007-13) and *The Thick of It* (BBC2 2005-12) while in the US there is *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (HBO 2000-present), *the Office; An American Workplace* (NBC 2005-13) and *Modern Family* (ABC 2009-present).

It is the aim of this chapter, then, to look at the use of chat and ‘banter’ (defined by Richardson (2010) and Culpeper (2005: 66; 2011: 33) after Leech (1983: 142) as “mock impoliteness”) in drama; to appreciate how current cognitive poetic theories shed light on the effective use of such material; to apply these theories in a practical example, and then to place that micro-appreciation within the wider macro-context of audience appreciation of drama spectacle. In essence, what is to be considered here is the placing of everyday, quotidian speech out of the ordinary and into what may be termed a dramatic frame – a frame that may be considered ‘other’ to what we encounter in our everyday lives, yet still recognisable and relevant. The nature of this ‘othering’ and what makes it worthy of consideration, is what is at the heart of this chapter.

The example brought here for examination is BBC TV’s *The Trip* and its sequel *The Trip to Italy*. These are two series featuring well-known British comedians, Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon, travelling together in the first instance through the North of England and in the second, the length of Italy; their sole purpose, it would seem, to visit exclusive restaurants, eat exquisite food and engage in social discourse. The question is, of course, what and how, beyond the obvious visual pleasures (scenery and food, particularly) makes this engaging entertainment from a particularly linguistic perspective.

## 2.2. Cognitive Poetics

### 2.2.1. Definitions

Broadly speaking, the term ‘Cognitive Poetics’, coined by Reuven Tsur in the 1970s, concerns the perceptual effects of literary works on their readers. In recent years, however, the definition has expanded to encompass ideas drawing on cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics (Harrison and Stockwell, 2014). Such an

approach may be considered a reaction to more traditional forms of literary criticism that have been accused of becoming obscure, over-academicised and out of touch. As Peter Stockwell claims,

the vast majority of literary scholarship today remains historical and archaeological in practice, with academics identifying themselves either as card-carrying new historicists, feminists, or ecocritics, or at least as fellow-travellers on a road defined by critical theory.

(Stockwell, 2005: 143)

Cognitive Poetics, on the other hand, attempts to marry literary scholarship with the activities of ‘natural readers’, accounting for the appeal of a text to any reader within or outside the academy (Tsur, 1992; Stockwell, 2002).

Focusing first and foremost on the use of language, Cognitive Poetics also appreciates the social contexts in which that language is created and received. In addition, by drawing on the principles of Cognitive Science, Cognitive Poetics applies general scientific methodological principles: availability for analysis of the object of investigation; evidential support; clear, falsifiable assertions, and replicable studies. However, as it is an ‘artful science’ (Stockwell, 2012), it must be borne in mind that a flexibility and understanding of literary criticism (with all its inherent subtleties and subjectivity) is required to appreciate not only the text, nor solely its reading, but how the two interact. Central to Cognitive Poetics in this regard are the notions of ‘context’ and of conceptual ‘embodiment’; that is, that linguistic expression is inevitably bound to our human biological condition. One example of this is the way we say ‘chop trees *down*’ but ‘chop wood *up*’ - the thinking here being that trees are bigger than us when they are whole, but below us on the ground when ready to be made into timber. Additionally, as Stockwell argues, this notion of embodiment is common to all humanity (we are all flesh and blood organisms with our main cognitive receptors situated at the top of our bodies). The fact that there exist vast socio-cultural differences between communities can account, in turn, for varieties of *expression*. In terms of context’, however, a particular reading may change radically depending on the perceived situation in which the text is posited and on the appropriateness of such a reading (Stockwell (2002: 3) gives the example of a eulogy delivered either at a dead hero’s funeral or at the burial of a dead cat). In addition,



there is the context of why that text is being read – is it to place the text in a historical context? A linguistic context? Or both?

In its approach, Cognitive Poetics (as outlined by Stockwell, 2012) draws on different observations to give insight and then illustrate how a text ‘works’ on our minds when we read. The following techniques are key:

1. Figure and Ground – the ability of the reader to flip between a feature that is highlighted or set as the principle focus (figure) and that which appears as background and setting (ground) (Tsur, 1992; Stockwell 2012; Hamilton in Gavins & Steen, 2003).
2. Prototypical categorisation – the adherence to socio-cultural linguistic expectations (e.g. In response to a query about the weather, we do not tend to give a detailed meteorological report), and the deviance from this for literary effect (Stockwell, 2012).
3. Cognitive deixis - linguistic devices used by a writer to place the reader in a certain spatio-temporal context (e.g. words such as ‘come’, ‘go’, ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘now’, ‘then’). These have considerable consequences on how a reader perceives a text, and the respective and varied roles of the reader, the writer and the characters (Stockwell, 2012; Levinson, 2006).
4. Scripts and schema - as defined by Jean Piaget in the 1920s, the contextual knowledge (schema) and the preconceived factors associated with that knowledge that we have based on our experiences (Harrison and Stockwell, 2014). For example, the schema of going to the pub (for a British person – adult? male?) activates a certain script (there will be beer, crisps, a bar, seating), which may be very different to associations made by someone from a different socio-cultural background.
5. Worlds (discourse-worlds and text-worlds) - Werth (1999: 83) describes the discourse-world as ‘the situational context surrounding the speech event itself containing the participants and what they can see, hear, etc.’ Text-worlds, are at a further remove, being what each participant in the event constructs in their

heads; that is, the creation of a mental representation of a world in order to process the discourse. The structure and content of this text-world is said to be controlled by linguistic features of the text and inferences made by the participants based on their previously-stored background knowledge (Gavins, 2003). In this way, the idea of a text-world may be seen as an extension of ‘context’ in the sense that it can encompass features of schema and script, potentially resulting in a very personalised response to any given discourse event.

### 2.2.2. Text World Theory

Focusing on Paul Werth’s (1999) concept of ‘text-worlds’ in particular, Gavins and Stockwell promote this model as a way of marrying cognition and *textuality*, defined as ‘the sum of lexicogrammatical choices and linguistic patterns in evidence across a literary work’ (2012: 34). In this way, it is hoped that an imbalance perceived to exist between approaches based on cultural and evolutionary issues and those focused on stylistic analysis can be redressed.

Text-worlds, then, may be defined as the mental representations we construct to help us, the reader (and by extension, I argue, the audience) to conceptualise and understand any text (written or spoken) that we encounter. Central to this is the consideration of context, which as Gavins (2007) posits, has often been neglected by Cognitive Linguistic analysis hitherto. Text World Theory (TWT) therefore seeks to chart the representations that we necessarily create in our minds, taking into account the various factors inherent to Cognitive Poetics.

Another crucial feature of this theory is the idea that participants (e.g. a speaker and listener; writer and reader) are in effect co-creating those mental representations and that these are influenced or even founded on factors such as personal experience, knowledge of the world and physical context. According to Werth ((1995: 52), this ‘baggage’ of memories, knowledge, beliefs, dreams, hopes, intentions, and imagination helps the participants make the inferences needed for a successful, meaningful engagement.

The building blocks of any such representation are known as world-building elements (WB), which initially set the parameters of the text world. They may indicate where

and when the discourse occurs, nominate the participants and entities, and provide information regarding the personal/social relationships between them. In all this, the use of deixis (in terms of various linguistic devices such as verb tense (is v. were), personal pronouns (I, you) , spatial adverbs (this, there) and verbs of motion (come v. go) is key.

The representation then grows to include the following elements:

Function-advancing propositions (FA). These are the elements of a text which drive the text forward, seen for example, when a character does something (so action verbs are integral here):

The *discourse-world* deals with the immediate space in which the language event takes place. When temporal and/or spatial coordinates are not shared by all discourse participants, as is predominantly the case in a reader/writer discourse, this is known as a *split discourse-world*. Those engaged in that discourse are referred to as the *discourse participants*. When the participants then refer to other spaces, times, people and objects, a mental representation is created: the *text-world*. Any persons created and engaging within that text-world are then referred to as *enactors* (Werth, 1999: 82; Emmott, 1992; Gavins, 2007). As well as being distinct characters in themselves, they may also be projections of the discourse participants (Gavins 2007: 40).

The next level of discourse within the theory, a *sub-world* (Werth, 1999), arrives where a spatial or temporal shift occurs takes the reader/audience to another place or time (e.g. in the employment of flashback or flash-forward techniques or even through the use of direct speech or thought, as well as through deictic adverbs such as ‘meanwhile’, ‘the other day’, ‘then’, ‘now’, ‘here’, ‘there’, ‘in costume dramas’ and so on) . These are referred to by Gavins as *world-switches*, (2001; 2003; 2007: 45–52). It is this latter term that I will be adopting in the following analyses. Such world-switches are rendered ontologically distinct from the text-worlds when the reader / audience gains access to characters’ (enactors’) own mental representations through the use of, for example, modality; that is, negation, hypotheticality, desire, reported speech and so on.

Other (sub-)worlds. These are modal worlds, created as a result of the author/speaker employing different forms of modalisation in the discourse. Examples of this are:

*deontic modality*, where there is a sense of obligation (e.g. You must..., he really should...); *boulomaic modality*, where there is a sense of desire and/or unattainability (e.g. I wish..., If only...), and *epistemic modality*, where the world seems far removed from the discourse-world from which it originates, and therefore remote to the participants in the discourse. Examples of this are seen in the employment of modal auxiliary verbs such as ‘could’ and ‘might’ as well as hypothetical situations and use of modal lexical verbs such as ‘think’, ‘suppose’ and ‘believe’. In addition, Gavins also identifies focalised narratives. These are when one or more characters in a fiction filter both world-building and function-advancing elements via their own viewpoints – perspectives which, emanating from fictional creations, are unverifiable (2001).

### 2.2.3. Accessibility, reliability and application of TWT to drama texts

One key issue with text-worlds is that of accessibility. A participant-accessible text world is one created by an author/teller/playwright (and even, as will be seen, TV director) or a real-life person. Generally, such participants are seen as reliable since they are available for verification. In the case of a writer (who may after all be physically distant or long deceased) we nevertheless understand them as or as having been real people.

An enactor-accessible text-world is one created by an enactor in the text-world. Their ontological status is now different to that of a discourse-world participant in that we must agree that they have an equivalent ‘real’-ness to a participant in the discourse-world but we do not have the same ability to verify this. Yet we accept it nonetheless (Gavins, 2007: 76-77).

As readers/an audience, we evaluate the reliability of these worlds through conceptualizing how close to us are the origin and content of its information. Such proximity, and thereby reliability, can be achieved, for example if a writer uses present tense instead of past tenses; if a writer addresses the reader directly as ‘you’; if there is use of present-perfect to establish a timeless text-world (“When the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept”); if the writer creates an exclusive relationship with the reader by, for example, excluding an enactor in a text-world who is seen to fail. Generally, reliability and authority hinge upon our knowledge in the discourse-world.

And that knowledge is conceived in terms of how spatially close or distant it is to the *origo* (Buhler, 1982), or the zero reference point of subjectivity (the ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’).

Text World Theory has gained momentum in terms of narrative fiction, but (researchers such as Cruickshank and Lahey (2010), Lugea (2013) and Gibbons (2016) aside) its application to drama texts has been limited. One reason for this is the complication that, in a play, there is generally no obvious deictic shift from the world of the narrator to that of the characters in the story as in a piece of fiction (Cruickshank and Lahey, 2010: 69-70). Written narratives can use changes of tense (Werth, 1999), direct speech (Gavins, 2007), and other deictic markers such as personal and demonstrative pronouns, adverbs of place, and adverbs of time to indicate a shift to the discourse-world of the characters. However, in a play, such a temporal world-switch cannot be so straightforwardly analysed.

Drama is typified by the use of dialogue that has no need for speech marks or reporting verbs. It is also generally written in the present tense, as are the stage directions (the play’s equivalent to the narrator’s voice in prose fiction). Thus, no obvious temporal switch occurs. However, stage directions do offer a different role in the way they alter the reader’s perception from the centre (or *origo*) that is the play’s controlling voice (playwright’s stage directions) to that of the play’s characters (Cruickshank and Lahey, 2010: 70).

In addition to this shift in perception (the world of the author to the world of the characters), we must also take into account the world-switches created by the characters themselves through the use of their dialogue. And all this while the play’s audience is sitting in the ‘discourse-world’ of the theatre, itself arguably at a remove from the world of everyday life.

Although clearly complex (but hopefully not *complicated*), the resultant representation of these worlds can then be usefully transcribed into diagrammatic form, and it is this method which is used in this chapter to illustrate the mechanism that helps decipher the cognitive impact of interpersonal exchanges in drama (see 2.2.4).

#### 2.2.4. A TWT Analysis of an improvised dramatic scene

In the improvised dialogue below, taken from an experiment described in Chapter one, two professional actors were left unobserved (except for unattended recording devices). One actor was given the line ‘Are you not feeling well?’ as the prompt for a devised scene that extended to around 15 minutes in length. Below is a transcript of the first few exchanges.

AMANDA: Are you not feeling well?  
DAVID: Not really.  
A: So what are we gonna do then?  
D: Well, I suppose we could go to the seaside.  
A: Yeah, you would... the air the air would be good for you  
wouldn't it.  
D: Yeah, be good for my chest  
A: Yeah  
D: And this other thing as well. My...my knees.  
A: Yeah. I... I don't know how the air would be good for your  
knees,  
D: Well...  
A: But it'd be warm wouldn't it?  
D: Yeah... yeah sit on the sand for a bit... that might... or  
maybe...err... a bit of a swim. That might do them some  
good.  
A: Yeah. Well, shall we go then?  
D: Yeah. Where did we leave the car?

An immediate observation here, of course, is that the discourse-world is, in fact, staged. The idea being here that the language event that is presented is at once equitable to that of a conversation between two characters on the written page, yet through its physical enactment is also occurring between and for the benefit of a third, silent party: the spectator. This arguably also applies as much to the reading of a play (with its stage directions and authorial interventions) as it does to the watching of it. In their examination of the reading of play-texts, Cruickshank and Lahey (2010) make

a distinction between the fictional setting of the play as a read text and the staged world of its enactment on an imagined stage:

The process of reading play-texts is complicated by the readers' awareness of their role as readers, and their concurrent awareness of a play's potential to be performed. This awareness forces readers to consider plays from at least two vantage points...both of which will be represented in the cognitive architecture that is built as a result of discourse processing. An adequate cognitive-stylistic analysis of dramatic discourse must therefore take pains to acknowledge the juggling of these two simultaneous readerly perspectives.

(Cruikshank and Lahey, 2010: 74)

However, in the case of this dialogue above, there is an added complication in that the actor's performance in the discourse-world of my office is not just an enactment of a text but inherent to its creation in that it arises out of an improvisation – an improvisation of a fictional text-world. Therefore, the transcribed 'playscript', emerging as it does out of improvisation, reveals how the discourse-world, staged world and (fictional) text-world can arguably be conflated. And this ontological conundrum, I believe, may be key to any cognitive poetic examination of a performance text such as this.

Moving on to an analysis of how TWT can facilitate our understanding of how such a text impacts the mind of the audience-reader, we can see that fairly quickly an epistemic world is created by David in "we could go to the seaside". This then sets the scene for the discussion of whether or not being by the sea will aid David's (unsaid) malaise, signalled by hypothetical language such as 'the air would be good for you', 'it'd be warm wouldn't it?' and 'that might do them some good'. We are then brought quickly back into the 'here and now' by Amanda's "Well, shall we go then?"

David's subsequent "Where did we leave the car?" has important effects. It moves the conversation forward (consider the lack of drama in merely responding 'yeah'), thus revealing David's skill as a trained actor and improviser in not letting the scene 'dry up'. However, it also reinforces the fictionality of the scene. Amanda's 'shall we go then' is a natural utterance following a positive decision over whether the sea would be beneficial or not, but to suggest that they have a car, have parked somewhere, and now have forgotten where it is, creates a whole new back story and world that had hitherto been unknown to us, the audience. It is in this final utterance, where the

audience is shifted dramatically into a new avenue of possibilities regarding the fictional text world, that creates interest, engagement and, in this case, a certain comedic effect.

A note on terms: in the following diagrams mention is made of a ‘staged’ discourse-world. In keeping with Cruickshank and Lahey’s definition (2010), I conceptualise a staged world as a text-world where the performance of the content of that world is imagined by an audience. However, Cruickshank and Lahey based this on the reading of a play rather than on its actual enactment. It could be argued that in the physical performance, such imaginings are now done away with and the emerging text through improvisation arise within the discourse-world of the protagonists. I therefore take the liberty of re-labelling the discourse-world as a *staged* discourse-world to combine Cruickshank and Lahey’s definition with one of the central tenets of this thesis; that is, that what occurs between the characters occurs as a genuine discursal encounter in contrast to a traditional scripted play. In its impromptu state it is debatable as to when it becomes a textual construct: at the first utterance? When performed before an audience? Or once directorial / authorial intervention occurs, be that during the performance or in the editing suite later? In any case, for the sake of the following analyses, the proposed conflation of discourse- and staged worlds is illustrated. Note also that these diagrams are not fully comprehensive in all aspects of TWT, but specifically chart those relevant to this discussion.



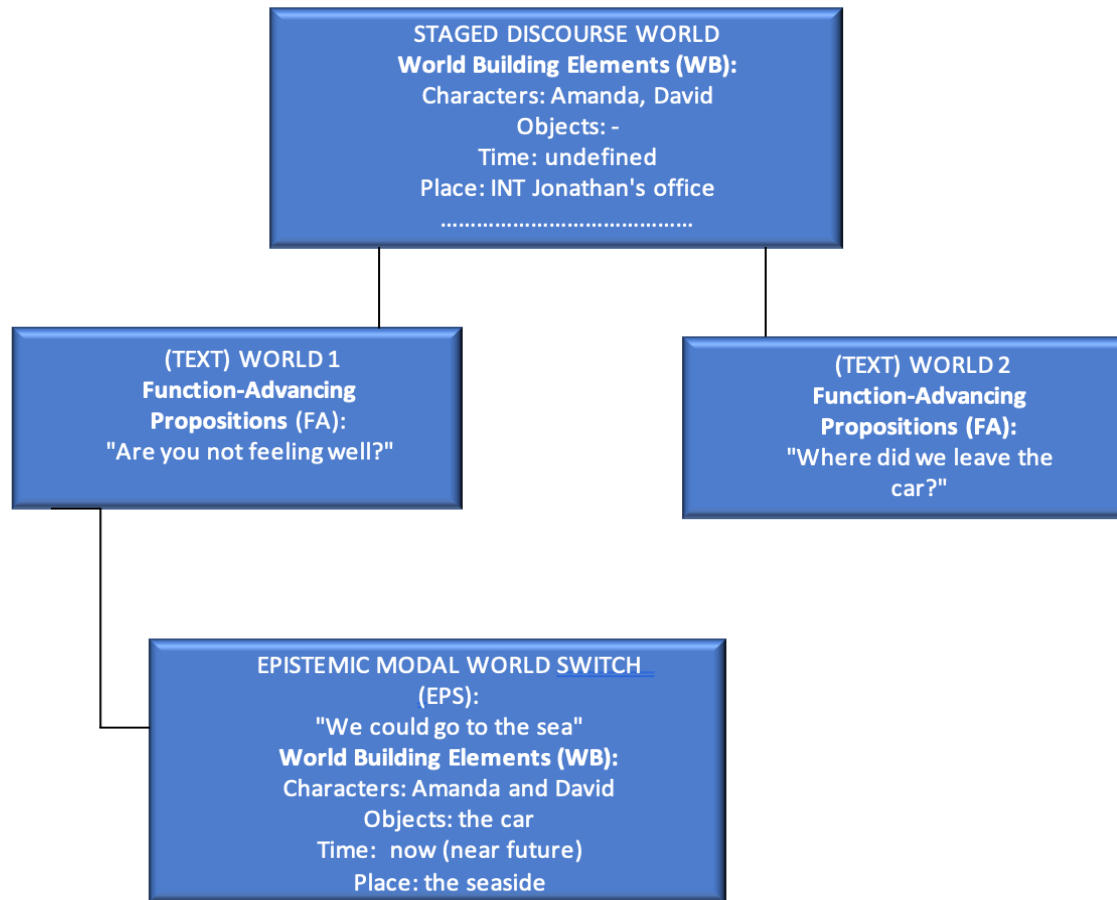


Figure 2.1 Text-worlds in an improvised dialogue – Amanda and David (professionals)

## 2.3. Case Study - The Trip and The Trip to Italy

### 2.3.1. Recent trends in the ‘dramaturgy of the Real’

Michael Winterbottom’s *The Trip* (2010) and *The Trip to Italy* (2014) are two 6-part TV series originally transmitted on BBC2, considered the BBC’s ‘mainstream alternative channel, with a spirit of bold creativity’ (Hadlow, 2010). Thus, these series may be considered a creative production with a more niche market in mind than that catered for by the more popular BBC1 or ITV. Certain features inherent to the programmes do certainly seem to appeal to a particular kind of viewer.



Figure 2.2 *The Trip* (2010) and *The Trip to Italy* (2014). BBC DVD cover

The series were co-produced by the BBC and other companies including Baby Cow (co-founded by Steve Coogan in 1999), Arbie and, latterly, SmallMan Productions (both initiated by Rob Brydon). Revolution Films, in turn, founded by Michael Winterbottom, was responsible for the production of feature-length Coogan vehicles *24-hour Party People* (2002) and *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005), the latter co-starring Rob Brydon, in which both protagonists clash in a series of seemingly unscripted ‘behind the scenes’ encounters whilst engaging as actors in a postmodern adaptation of Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). It is clear, then, that the format and casting of *The Trip(s)* has a precedent and heritage in previous work by the three principal participants in the programmes.

Nevertheless, the lineage of *The Trip*'s genre, considered unclassifiable by Bennett (2014) due to its genre-transforming nature, has roots in work that are far from new or contemporary. Morris observes that "comedic self-fictionalisation" is a staple of the TV sitcom dating back to the 1950s with *Hancock's Half Hour* (BBC 1956-61) and leading up to today's offerings such as Matt LeBlanc's self-parodying in *Episodes* (BBC2/Showtime Network 2011-17). The subsequent sense of audience-on-celebrity voyeurism and the conflation of role and performer serves to instil in the spectator's mind a constant doubt regarding authenticity and the real (2015).

In this sense, *The Trip* may be compared to the 'Cinéma Vérité' of the 1960s with movies such as *Meet Marlon Brando* (Maysles, 1966) and *Mingus* (Reichman, 1968). However, the fact that Coogan and Brydon also 'perform' (for example, in their incessant competition to be the better impersonator) within the context of their seemingly private one-to-one verbal sparring, it becomes nigh impossible to know where the performer and the character of performer (and indeed the person as non-performer) begin and end. One example provided by Morris (2014), in citing an interview given by Coogan to the Financial Times in 2015, is in his disavowal of the Catholic faith, and, indeed, his claim to be an atheist. Nevertheless, in an outtake from *The Trip*, Coogan (his character?) crosses himself before the altar on entering Bolton Priory.

In addition, the audience is never privy to the entourage of producers, equipment and crew that no doubt accompany our protagonists in every scene. Nor do the performers nod or wink to the camera (cf David Brent (Ricky Gervais) in *The Office* (BBC2 2001-3)), while we are further asked to suspend our disbelief that the other customers in the restaurants, as well as other walk-on characters such as Coogan's parents, agents, wives, girlfriends, are anything other than actors.

### 2.3.2. Influences and intertextual appeal

*The Trip* proceeds to draw on elements of road movie, buddy movie and picaresque satire. Although a narrative arc might be discerned over the entire series, each episode, essentially, stands alone and the characters do not undergo any dramatic change that had not been heralded from the start; all this despite the traditional literary idea of a trip as a journey of self-discovery. With this lack of particular dramatic

structure, then, the entertainment may reside in references to and influences from other TV genres. There are, indeed, evocations of the claustrophobic, unfulfilled life of Coogan's alter ego Alan Partridge as well as that of Brydon's car-dwelling character of Keith in *Marion and Geoff* (BBC2 2000-3). We are also reminded of impressions and improv comedy shows such as *Whose Line is it Anyway* (Channel 4/Hat Trick 1988-99), quiz shows such as *Would I Lie to You?* (BBC1 2007-present) hosted by Rob Brydon, and the 'lads' TV, men and motors format of *Top Gear* (BBC2 2002-present). Indeed, the latter example has almost become the template for a comedy in which middle-aged men create carefully staged infotainment through situational observation, information exchange and mutual ribbing; a performance of apparently spontaneous dialogue that draws on what Goffman (1981) referred to as the uniqueness and consequent attraction of 'fresh talk', even when that talk involves belligerence and exasperation.

Such emphasis on topics such as cars, money, power, ambition, music, women and ageing reveal *The Trip*'s reliance on masculinity and the anxieties of male middle-age, rendering its appeal, one would think, to a somewhat specific range of viewers. In addition, certain references – the music of Morrissey, Terry Wogan, Basil Brush and the association of the Mini with *The Italian Job* (Collinson, 1969) – appeal to a certain age-group, if not also a specifically British audience.

However, beyond merely acknowledging certain types of popular TV show that together form the hybrid nature of *The Trip(s)*, there are also what might be termed 'macro-reasons' for the series' appeal. These refer to what Corner (2001) and Wheatley (2011) term 'televisual pleasure', subdivided into the following key areas:

1. 'Visual pleasure' as seen in the depiction of places and spaces with which the viewer makes positive associations e.g. the Italian Riviera, beautifully cooked and presented food, the snow-capped Yorkshire Moors, luxury restaurants...;
2. 'Para-sociality'. That is, the connection of the viewer to a well-known personality in a way that purports to cut through the traditional, distant and staged self-representation of that person;
3. 'Dramatic pleasures': the element of conflict and narrative in the interaction between our protagonists. Morris (2014) extends this to include the vogue for

awkwardness and ‘cringe’ comedy as seen in the antics of the character of David Brent in *The Office* and of Chris Morris and his unknowingly set-up guests in *The Day Today* (BBC2, 1994).

There is also what might be termed a ‘cultural pleasure’ in that the viewer either learns, self-improves or has their knowledge confirmed by both the documentary elements (scenes of food preparation, a visit to Dove Cottage, a tour of Pompeii) and also the cultural discussions between Coogan and Brydon. Morris goes on to mention a televisual pleasure being derived from the unattainability of *The Trip*’s locations, pandering to a need for escapism and fantasy in that we too may be able to indulge as celebrities do (Morris, 2014). However, it could also be argued that today such a lifestyle is actually not so out of the reach of many of the target audience. In an age of low-cost air travel and the rise of the gastropub, it is precisely the possibility and accessibility of such a lifestyle that creates a closer affinity to the principal characters.

With these observations and considerations in mind, then, it would be fair to say that, in response to the challenges outlined by BBC2’s controller Janice Hadlow in 2010 to deliver more well-written comedies with wide appeal, a wider range of drama, and intellectually ambitious factual programmes, *The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy* cover most if not all these criteria to a large extent.

### 2.3.3. The Trip and The Trip to Italy: drama and dialogue

Indeed, there is a perceptible narrative ‘plot’ and backstory to the series: Coogan’s emotional and professional frustrations give way to self-realisation and the promise of happier days ahead in series one, while, in series two, Brydon indulges in an extra-marital affair. However, it can be argued that these recede to the background while the focus stays on scenes of ribald dialogue between the two, often but not always cruelly targeting aspects of the interlocutor’s character, (cf ‘banter’ in 2.5). These mostly involve impersonation contests, literary allusions and references to their own insecurities as middle-aged actors, either over dinner, at the bar, or in the example illustrated in this chapter, while driving.

An important factor in all this is director Michael Winterbottom, who ultimately equates to the playwright in as far as the final cut is his (literary) construct. Susan

Mandala (2007) extensively analyses the way a playwright (Harold Pinter) manipulates ostensibly naturalistic dialogue to achieve ends within the drama (e.g. elicitation, requestives, challenges, dispreferred responses, reclassifications...) and mentions that he does this, probably, intuitively. It may also be argued that Winterbottom likewise manipulates his material in order to elicit responses in the mind of his audience.

Essentially, it is perhaps indisputable that despite the attempts of reality programmes such as *Big Brother* (which could be said to be in any case edited and manipulated), the raw presentation of person-to-person conversation generally makes for very dull entertainment (Herman 1995; Culpeper et al 1998). So the question remains as to what happens to the dialogue in *The Trip* to give the authentic at the same time both a heightened authenticity but also an essentially less authentic quality, in order to satisfy a reality-hungry audience.

#### 2.4. Text-Worlds in *The Trip*

If we can account for the way the audience engages with or invests (mentally and socio-culturally) in the genre of drama of which *The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy* are examples, then we can perhaps better understand the textual choices that are made to facilitate this. Mandala (2007) discusses the ontological status of a play as it arguably only comes into existence through performance while in Culpeper, Short et al. (1998) commentators have famously validated the analysis of a dramatic text independent of the stage. *The Trip* helps us here in so far as it departs from regular playwriting/scriptwriting in its drawing on an initial performance to create a text, rather than the other way round. There is no strong over-arching narrative and, as previously posited, any 'story' is secondary to the scenes of 'banter'. In addition, the scenes are in isolation: vignettes that allow us to examine closely the interaction of the two protagonists without having to worry how it fits into the context of the drama (a feature of improvised theatre which Coogan and Brydon, as UK-trained actors, would be familiar with). Finally, the programme is recorded. In this way we can see and analyse the same version of the performance. Admittedly, this does not give much scope, as Mick Short (1998) would wish, for looking at other possible interpretations in order to consider the aesthetics behind why one version should be more successful than another, leading to a final, definitive text. However, in the second example

below, through examination of out-takes from one particular scene, some insights into the working mind and editorial practices of the director (and by extension, what he considered the criteria that would appeal to a critical audience) may be had.

### 2.4.1. A simple scene analysis

EXT Hotel, Amalfi coast

STEVE: I've organised a place to stay for us on Capri. I was going to ask you: if you want you can come and stay...

ROB: Yeah, yeah.

STEVE: 'Cause then you'd still have your six places to write about

ROB: Great. Be a shame not to go to Sicily, though. I was looking forward to that for obvious reasons.

STEVE: You don't have to... don't have to be in Sicily to do impressions of The Godfather, do you, though, do you?

ROB (as Don Corleone): I don't know, there's something about Sicily, you know...

STEVE: You should put rolled up bread in your cheeks to puff them out.

ROB: I've a... I've a yeast intolerance

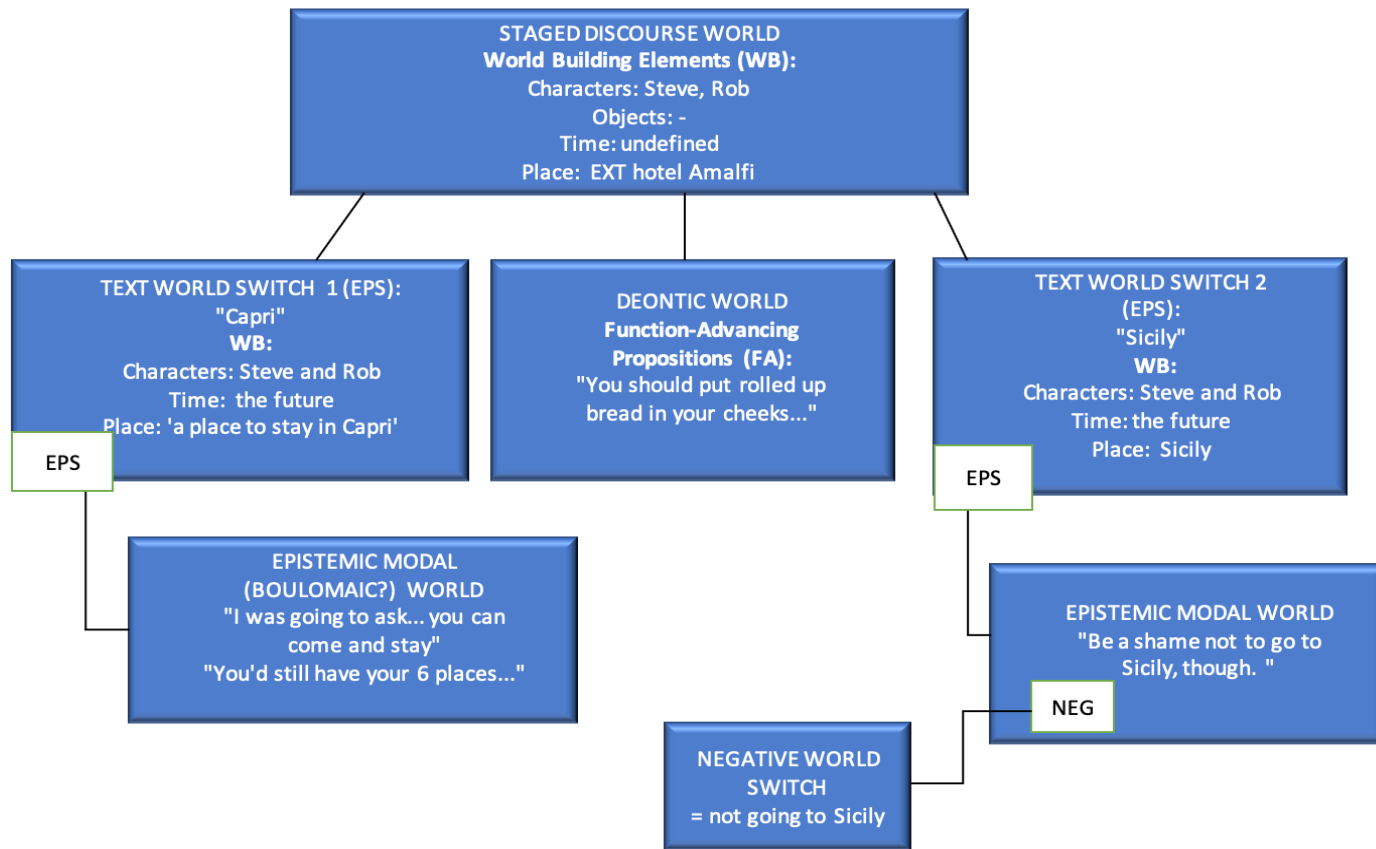


Figure 2.3 Text-world diagram for a 'simple' example of dialogue from *the Trip to Italy*.



In this scene, taken from the final episode of the second outing, *The Trip to Italy*, Rob and Steve are positioned on the terrace of a restaurant on the Amalfi coast (the (staged discourse-world)). They are conversing over lunch and, inevitably, the chat becomes an ‘impression-off’ between them. The excerpt here reveals the transition from ‘normal’ everyday discourse through a dramatic set-up (by Rob when he mentions going to Sicily ‘for obvious reasons’), subtle sarcasm and ribbing, through performance (Marlon Brando impression) to witty come-back.



Figure 2.4 Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon in *The Trip to Italy*. Photo: Time Out

The initial topic of the conversation involves a spatial shift to ‘Capri’ and the six places (hotels and restaurants) that Rob has been contracted to write an article about. It is in this scene that an alternative, future world is given (the next places to visit), which is at the same time boulognaic (Steve is encouraging Rob to join him; Rob is expressing a desire to join “yeah, yeah”) and also epistemic (“you’d still have your six places to write about”).

Rob then introduces another epistemic modal world of ‘Sicily’ in his “[it would be a] shame to miss Sicily, though”, setting up in both Steve’s and our minds a potential world-shift with his unspoken reference to *The Godfather* (Coppola 1974) in “for obvious reasons”. Steve, as much, if not more, for our benefit as Rob’s, picks up on this set-up by inviting the possibility for Marlon Brando impressions being performed on Capri. Rob, however, and fulfilling Steve’s acknowledgement of the set-up, continues the discourse topic of Sicily in the voice of Don Corleone, Brando’s character in *The Godfather*. Steve then brings us and Rob back to the staged

discourse-world of the mechanics of the impression with a somewhat barbed piece of advice: “you should put rolled up bread in your cheeks”; advice which, in turn, creates a deontic modal world of Rob actually stuffing his mouth in this way.

It should be remarked at this point that the delivery of this ‘advice’ is carried out ironically, displaying Steve’s growing frustration with Rob’s incessant impressions. Although such a performative aspect is beyond the scope of this linguistic analysis, by this episode (episode 6), the ‘context’ of the rivalry between the two protagonists is so clear that Steve’s apparent polite advice to do something rather ridiculous can be nothing but mock-politeness in order to be offensive (an interesting counterpoint to the mock *impoliteness* inherent to the concept of banter). Rob then replies in a self-deprecating manner (“I have a yeast intolerance”), which may or may not be true – he is seen eating bread elsewhere – that succeeds in deflating Steve’s attack and so saves his ‘face’ (Goffman 1981)<sup>5</sup>.

#### 2.4.2. A more complex example

What follows is an examination of four versions of the same scene, where Coogan and Brydon are driving through the Yorkshire Moors having a conversation based around one wry observation: the irony and cultural/temporal clash of using modern, everyday (middle class) speech conventions when talking about making a time arrangement but in a historical, war drama setting.

The first three are out-takes while the fourth is what was actually used in the final programme. This examination is made following Peter Stockwell’s (2002) and associated approaches to Cognitive Poetics (Gavins & Steen, 2003), drawing particularly on Stockwell (2002) and Hamilton’s (2003) application of ‘Figure and Ground’ as well as Cruickshank and Lahey’s (2010) observations with regard to Text World Theory. If language can offer, as Hamilton (2003) puts it, a window onto the human mind through its reflection of cognitive structures, then by looking at the language choices a writer (or in this case a director/auteur) makes, we may see what facilitates the ‘buy-in’ that an audience is encouraged to make in order to render an improvised script successful.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf section 2.5.2 ‘Impoliteness’

As Cruickshank and Lahey (2010) claim, playwrights generally imagine their language performed on a stage in front of an audience and so, in addition to the fictional world of the drama, there is also the ‘world of the stage’, with the audience recognising that it is all a set-up. The fictional text-world depends (or is parasitic) on the staged world and through their ‘suspension of disbelief’ the audience needs to oscillate or ‘toggle’ between those two worlds. As previously argued, in improvised drama such as *The Trip*, the staged world and discourse-world are very much the same thing (we cannot see the production paraphernalia) but we will take it that Brydon and Coogan’s placement in a car driving through the Moors is in itself ‘staged’ and that this fiction continues through their dialogue. Important to note: where there are ‘leaks’ from one world into the next (ie specifically where Steve and Rob laugh or ‘corpse’ in the staged world thus betraying their ‘real’ selves in the discourse-world), some liberty has been taken in the following diagrams (be it for *The Trip*, *The Trip to Italy* or *Carpool*). For simplicity, this leakage has been identified by a separate world (‘real world’, although this is not a TWT term) rather than attempt to identify it as a momentary ‘toggle’ from staged world to discourse world.

The next level of discourse, where Steve embarks on his fantasising being in a costume drama is what is referred to as the enactor text-world in the following diagrams (Figure 2.5, Figure 2.6, Figure 2.7, Figure 2.9 and Figure 2.10).

In addition, mention is made diagrammatically of the world switches that occur when triggered by negation (i.e. what does or will not happen). These are referred to here as *negative world-switches*.

As can be seen, these particular out-takes are rather complex in that there are fictions within fictions within fictions all packaged as reality despite our knowingness that it is all inauthentic – though at times we suspect it might in fact be real.

TAKE 1

STEVE: I was talking the other day, about this trip, with some friends. We were having a good old laugh. See if you find this funny:  
In costume dramas, like things sort of set in the Civil War, if they're staying in an inn, with flagons of ale, ermm... they say things... they always say things like "we must to bed! For we leave at daybreak". They don't say "To bed! For we leave at daybreak", they don't say "To bed for we leave at... what time shall we leave? nine o'clock? Nine-thirty? Ten o'clock? What time do we have to be there? Ten? Alright: To bed! For we leave at... nine-thirty, quarter to ten"/

ROB: /"Ten-ish"

STEVE: "Ten-ish"

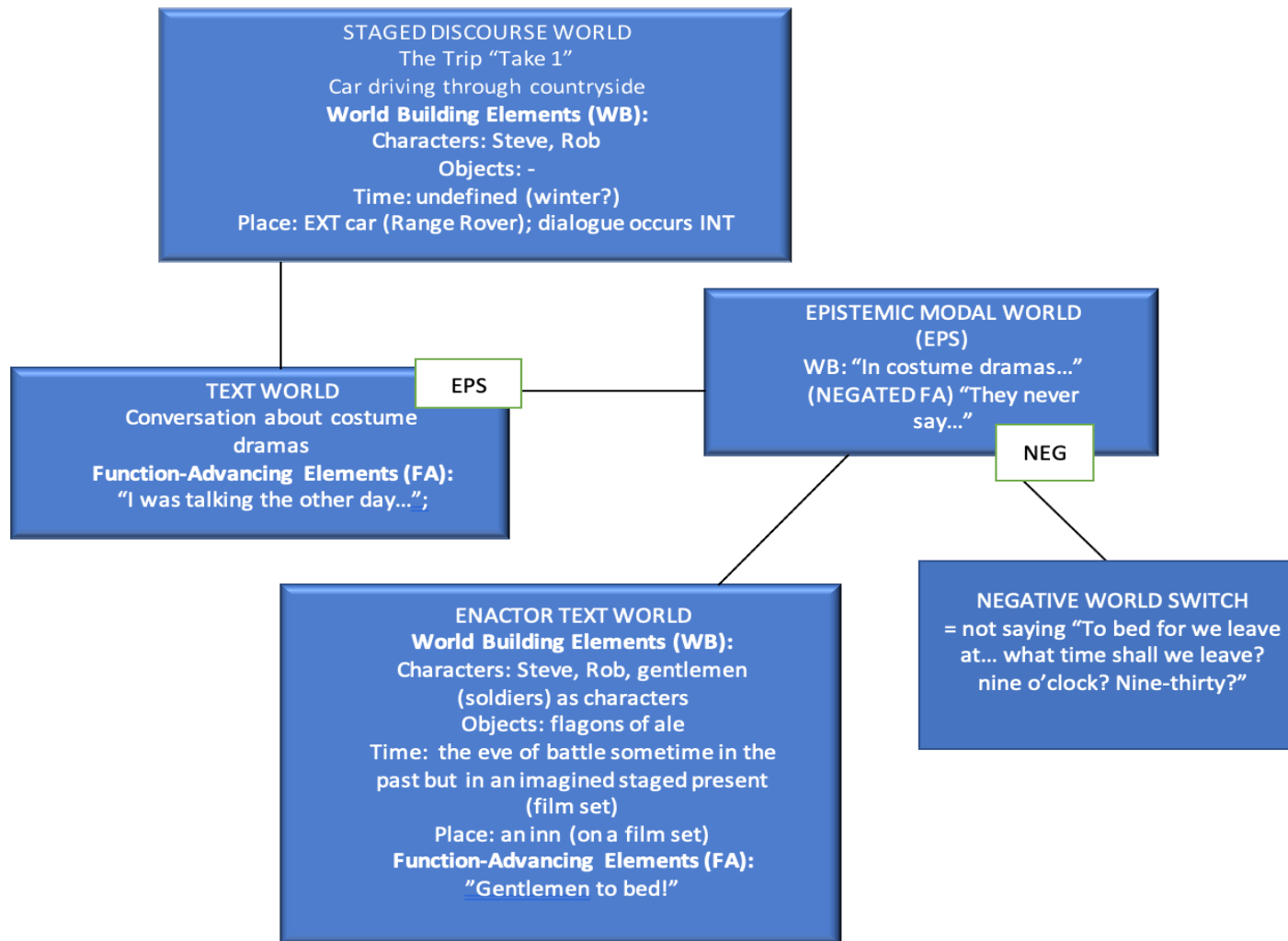


Figure 2.5 TWT diagram: Gentlemen to bed! Take 1

In this first take (Figure 2.5) we see the staged world of the car in the countryside beyond the car (the audience POV is from outside). The text-world is the dialogue performed within (though we cannot see the enactors at the beginning of the exchange). We start with Coogan's mentioning how he was "talking with friends the other day", which serves as a function advancing element that sets up the observation to follow. There is then a sudden shift to an epistemic modal world when "costume dramas" are mentioned along with a negation of that world ("they don't say..."), thus inviting the audience to agree with the observation, paving the way for the context that contains the key ironic gag.

In this case, Coogan makes the decision in his improvisation to set up the scene from the (presumably fictional) perspective of recounting a conversation he had with some friends. This positions the context of the scene away from the immediate world of the landscape our two protagonists are driving through and is therefore a world 'removed' from the one we as the audience are involved in (that is, from the staged world). Additionally, Coogan mis-speaks with "They don't say "To bed! For we leave at daybreak"", as that is precisely what he is claiming they *do* say in costume dramas. Finally, the gag is not as extended as in other takes and Brydon's involvement in this particular scene is limited with interaction limited to his offer of "Ten-ish" at the end.

The second take (Figure 2.6) is similar to take 1 but with further insight into Coogan's desires and the addition of an initial desired or boulomaic modal world when he says "I'd love to be...". This is then tempered by a return to the text-world of Coogan and Brydon when they refer to their 'real' jobs as actors: "But no-one will give me the chance to do that" / "No, of course not. Cause it's not what you do." We are then transported immediately back into the enactor-created text-world of "Gentlemen, we must feast..."

This take sees Coogan setting up his improvisation from two perspectives: the brooding Yorkshire moors visible through the car's windows and also his aspirations to be taken as a serious actor ("because I'd love to be able to do that. But no one will give me the chance to do that"). This latter point is crucial as Coogan is subtly weaving in an element which he returns to time and time again throughout both *The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy*; that is, his frustrations with the fickleness of fame and how

he has been blighted by the success of his comedy roles at the expense of his ambitions to ‘make it’ in Hollywood. This, of course, may or may not reflect his real persona, though Coogan has famously appeared in Hollywood movies (*Night at the Museum*, *Night at the Museum 2*), starred in and produced ‘serious’, award-nominated dramas (*Philomena* (2014)), and undertaken costumed roles (*A Cock and Bull Story* (2005) being an obvious and, in this context, ironic example).

## TAKE 2

STEVE: I’d love to be in a costume drama, you know, looking a bit dirty, wearing lots of leather, and saying things like “Gentlemen to bed, for we leave at daybreak”... because I’d love to be able to do that. But no one will give me the chance to do that.

ROB: No, of course not. Cause it’s not what you do.

STEVE: “Gentlemen, tonight we must feast for tomorrow we may die. We must away to bed, for we leave at first light. We leave at daybreak”..... I’d love to say that... They never, they never, it’s funny though, they always, they’re always quite certain about the time they leave. They never say: “Gentlemen to bed for we leave at daybreak... (really?) or erm, well actually, or maybe, hm, bit later... err nine o’clock. No. Eight, eight. Eight-thirty. Gentlemen to bed for we leave at eight to eight-thirty”/

ROB: /Ha ha ha “Eight for eight-thirty”

STEVE: “We leave at eight for eight-thirty”

This insight into the anxieties of the Steve Coogan ‘character’ adds another layer of complexity to the world-building that is being indulged in here. Arguably also, it may be seen to add too much pathos to the set-up of what is essentially a frivolously humorous observation. Further, Rob’s interaction is to initially sympathise with Steve before then returning to his role (as in the other takes) of offering other comedic possibilities of when the battle should begin (“Eight for Eight-thirty”). It can be seen that such a jarring of worlds in apposition like this makes for a less than slick improvisation, and might have an adverse effect on how an observer reacts to the scene.

The third take (Figure 2.7) unfortunately does not include the set-up, so no comment can be made on this. However, in terms of the gag it has many if not all the elements of takes 1 and 2 but with the added facility for us to question whether the reality is genuine or not when we see our enactors laugh. There is also the complexity of an

embedded deontic world (pertaining to a sense of duty or obligation) within the text-world of Coogan's heroic character.

### TAKE 3

STEVE: "Gentlemen to bed, for we leave..."  
ROB: [chuckling] "We should be leaving... really quite early so..."  
STEVE: "Leaving, leaving, we're going to be leaving *very* early"  
ROB: "I can't impress on you"/  
STEVE: /"I can't... I can't"  
ROB: /"enough"  
STEVE: "They're in pursuit and we cannot give them the edge, so we must leave about mid" [looks at watch]... well they wouldn't look at their watch would they, but "we must leave at ahh..."  
ROB: "At the very latest by/ nine"  
STEVE: /"At the very latest by nine"  
ROB: "And I mean /nine"  
STEVE: /"And I mean nine"  
ROB: "Not a quarter after /nine"  
STEVE: /" Not a quarter after nine, right?"  
ROB: [chuckling] "And Colin, I'm thinking of you when I say /that"  
STEVE: /"I say...I'm looking at you when I'm saying that"  
[ROB CHUCKLES]

It is further embellished by the creation of a world that includes the character of 'Colin', who perhaps just by his very name engages a particular schema of the dull, nerdy member of an office team (reminiscent of the comedy figures of 'Gareth' or 'Keith' in BBC's *The Office*). Again, this gratuitous 'extra' world may be considered superfluous and distracting from the comedy of the original gag, even if, in its anachronism (Colin is hardly a name associated with swashbuckling adventure), it does extend it.

The final take (Figure 2.9), and the one that escaped the cutting-room floor, seems to retain all of the features of takes 1-3 but with more to-ing and fro-ing between the worlds. Also, an important difference is that Brydon sets up the scene while Coogan's dialogue is urgent with Brydon's interjections of "ooh" and "very good" bringing us momentarily back into the original text-world. Due to this, the audience is forced to 'toggle' more than in the other takes. Here, also, Coogan is taking much more of a lead in his personification of the swashbuckling soldier and Brydon adopts the role of onlooker and admirer (perhaps both in the fictional world of the costume drama and in the Staged World as Coogan's interlocutor).



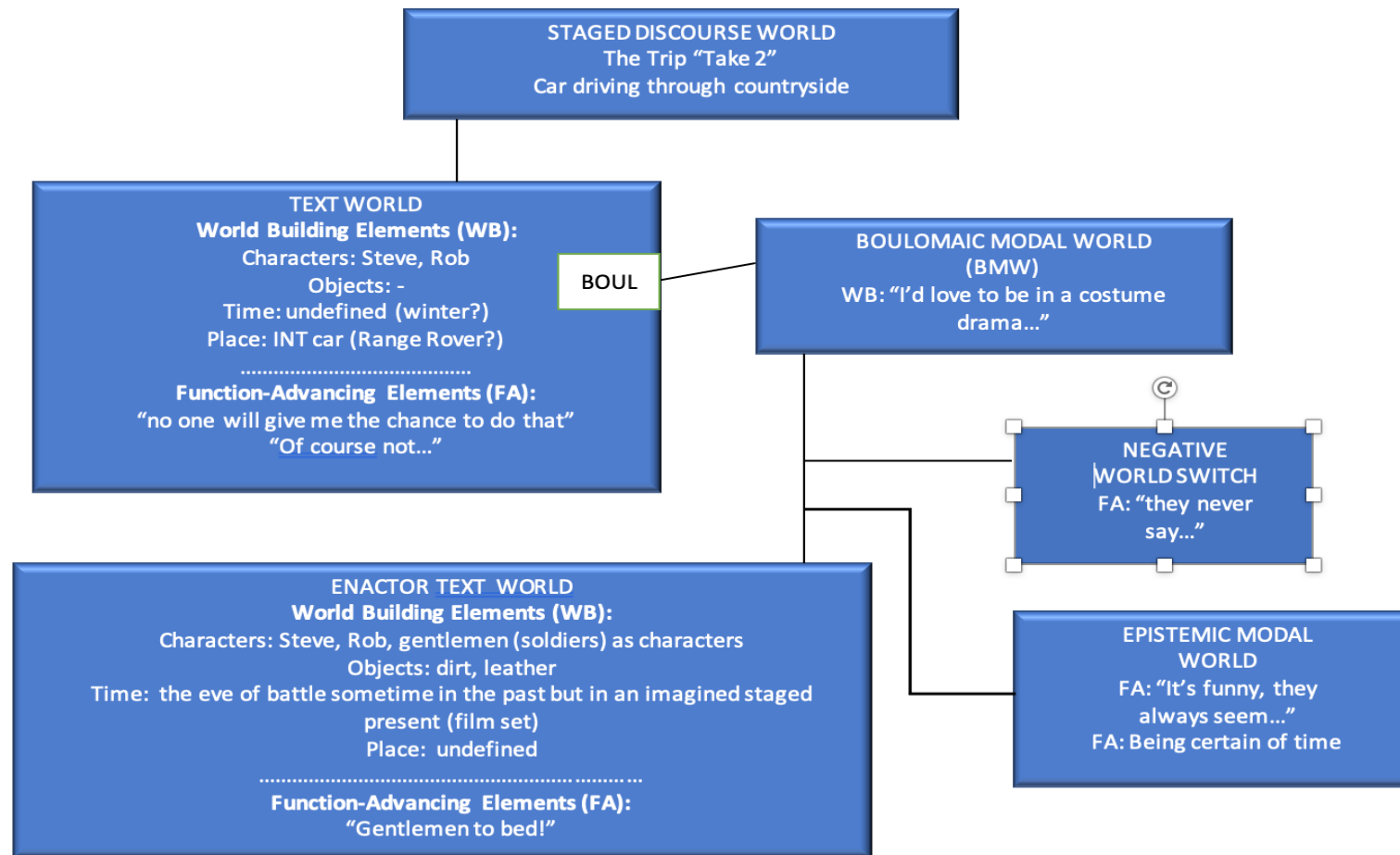


Figure 2.6 TWT diagram: Gentlemen to bed! Take 2

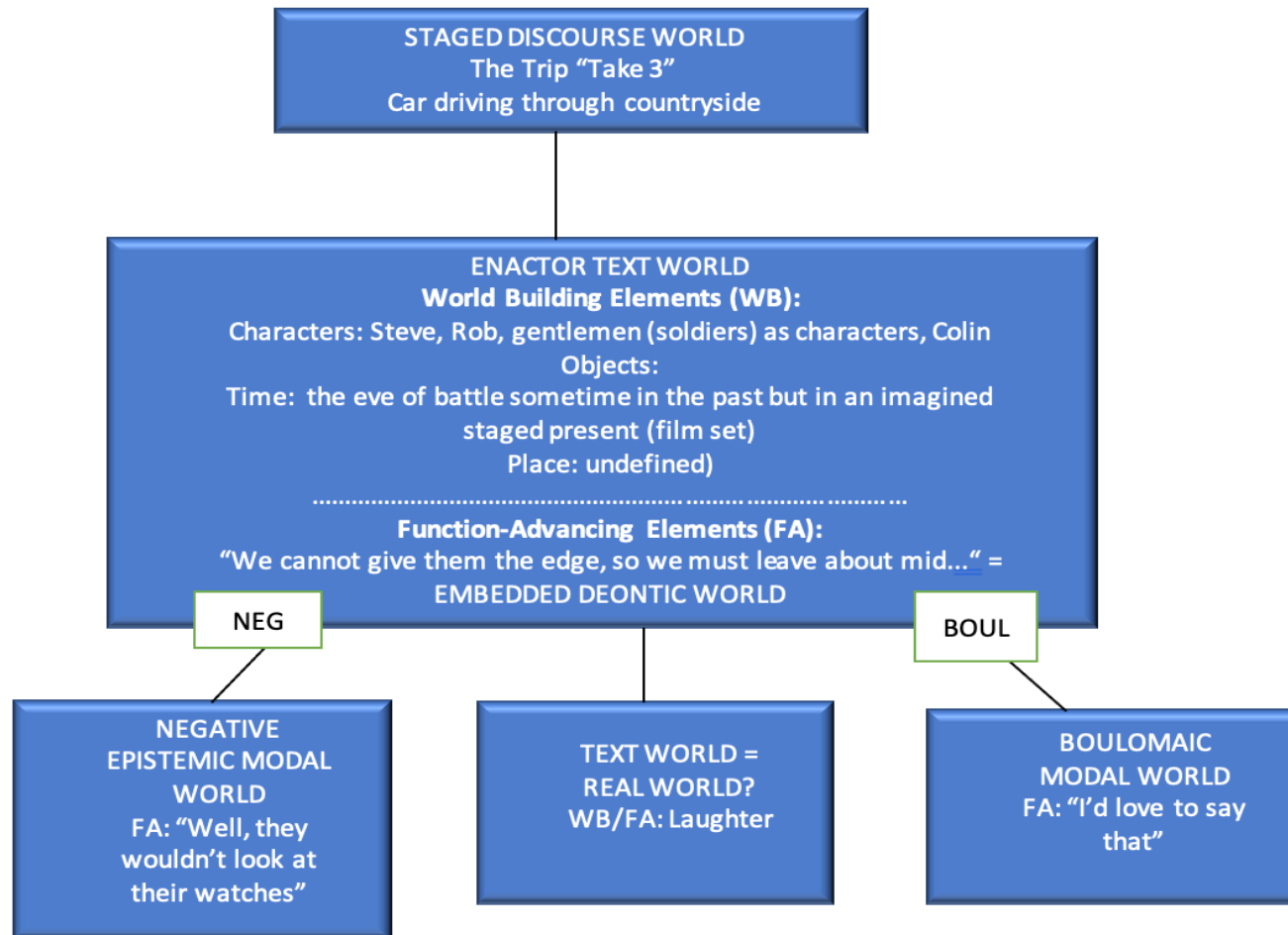


Figure 2.7 TWT diagram: Gentlemen to bed! Take 3

FINAL EDIT

ROB: You could have a costume drama here, couldn't you?  
STEVE: I would love, I'd absolutely/  
ROB: /Mel Gibson coming through the hills  
STEVE: /do you know what? I would just love to do a costume drama  
in these hills. Leaping, vaulting over dry-stone walls with a  
scabbard. There's that dead look in my eyes cause I've seen so  
many horrors that I'm sort of immune to it. And they always say  
something like: "Gentlemen to bed! Gentlemen to bed, for we leave  
at first light. Tomorrow we battle, and we may lose our lives. But  
remember, death is but a moment, cowardice is a lifetime of  
affliction".  
ROB: Nice.  
STEVE: "To bed!"  
ROB: Ooh!  
STEVE: "For we rise at daybreak!"  
ROB: Very good. Very... very impressive/.  
STEVE: /They always leave at daybreak, don't they? They never  
leave at erm, you know, nine-thirty. [ROB CHUCKLES]  
"Gentlemen to bed, for we leave at nine-thirty"  
ROB: "ish"  
STEVE: "ish". "Gentlemen to bed, for we rise at... what time's the battle?"  
ROB CHUCKLES  
STEVE: "About...oh... twelve o'clock". "Right, twelve o'clock. How  
is...how... on horseback? About three hours, something like that?  
[ROB CHUCKLING] So we leave about... eight? Eight-thirty?"  
ROB: "Eight-thirty for nine"  
STEVE: Yes



Figure 2.8 "Gentlemen to bed!" Steve Coogan in BBC's *The Trip* (2010). Still taken from DVD

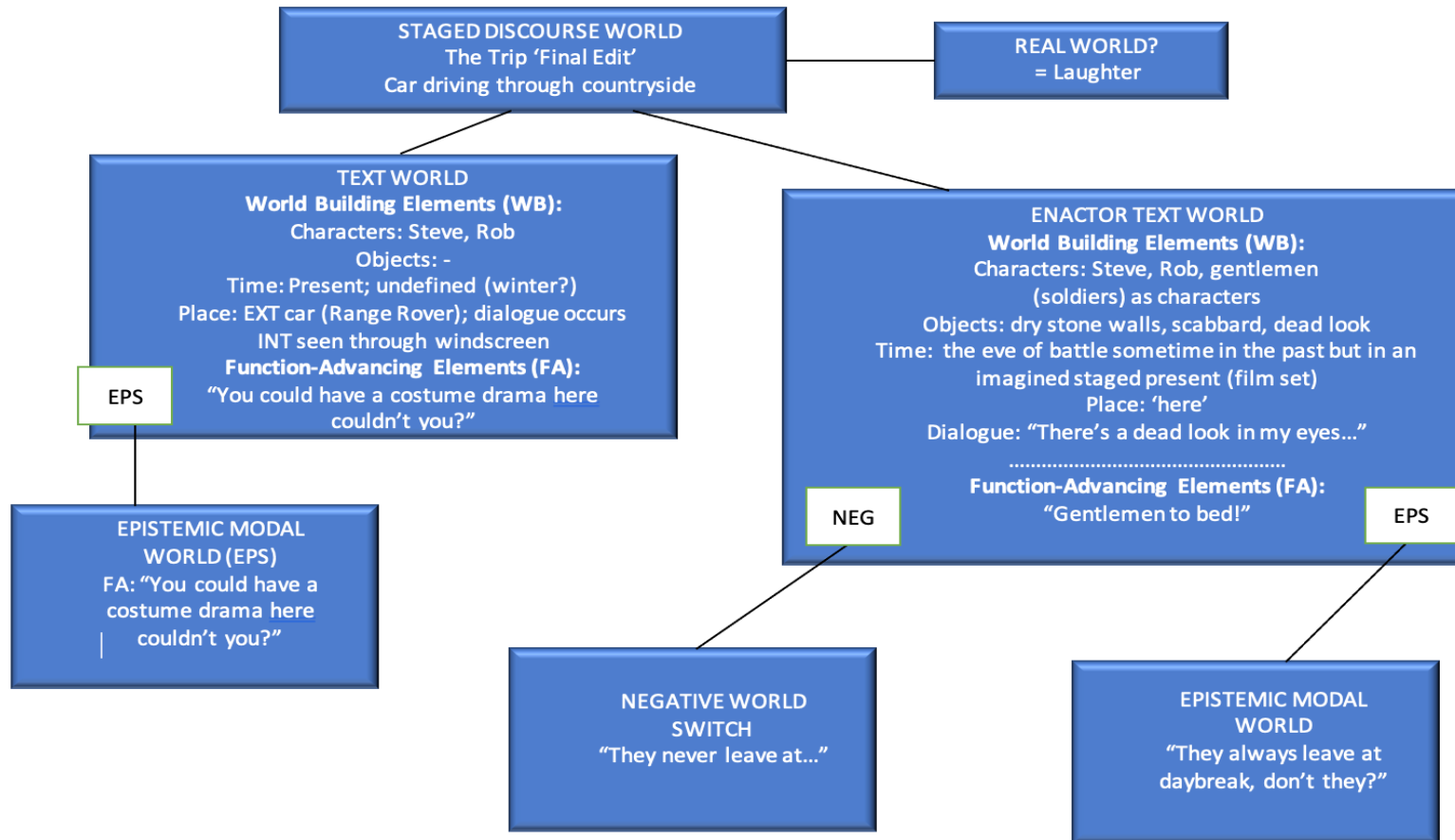


Figure 2.9 TWT diagram: Gentlemen to bed! Final edit

In general, then, there is more complexity in this take, with a combination of the perspectives, worlds and roles that appear in the other takes. What is not so apparent, however, are those elements that could be said to over-complicate or distract from the comedy of the scene; that is, the anachronism of Coogan's imagined discourse. In other words, if the car and the banter provide the background, it is the imagined world of the costume drama that is pushed forward, particularly in Coogan's impression of the heroic soldier, which, in take 4, is pushed far more, thereby arguably better setting up the gag that follows.

R. Keith Sawyer (2003), in his appreciation of the art of improvising dialogue, stresses the importance of relationship over character. In UK actor training, often the focus is more on status asymmetry between two characters in the here and now. This thus reflects the status games we play in everyday life and makes for interesting theatrical scenes. It also leads to what Rob Brydon himself says with regard to his performance with Coogan and the search for conflict (2016).

The back-story to our characters in *The Trip* informs how we interact. The reality of our friendship but also the fiction of our friendship – tweaked to create comedy and conflict. With Steve, the differences [in the way we interact on and off-camera] is that off-camera we wouldn't discuss many of the things we discuss on screen, e.g. Wales versus the North of England. Off-cam we are not looking for conflict and comedy.

(Rob Brydon, personal correspondence, 2016)

Steve Coogan goes on to suggest that his experience as an actor and improviser has informed the choices he makes 'in the moment', particularly with taking risks of not being obviously funny, and that this can indeed create conflict with Brydon who plays it more 'for laughs'.

When you've done comedy for a long time, when you improvise ...you don't have so much to prove, you think 'I don't have to prove to be funny'. What I found myself doing in *The Trip* is thinking: 'well I could go this way and say something and it would be quite funny. And safe. Or I could go that way and it would be a bit risqué and might be offensive, but interesting. Or I could go this way that's just dark and depressing and not funny at all and just see what happens. And I'd often go for the dark depressing one; just bored with the funny side of it. And sometimes when you go for the dark and depressing one, it also ends up being funny as well... Rob wants it to be funny and I'm trying to be as unfunny as possible!

(Guardian Live, 2015)

This decision-making by Coogan can be said to reflect his method as an actor in creating a character, particularly the one of Steve in *The Trip* as a somewhat dour, frustrated man, who is going through various facets of a mid-life crisis. Rob's 'character' is far more upbeat and reflective of his persona as TV presenter and panel-show contestant. Coogan, by his own admission, rarely if ever goes on such shows where his 'true' persona may be exposed (Guardian Live 2015).

Meanwhile, Piazza (2012), in her analysis of plays, has talked of the effect of lessening the distance between characters when they indulge in direct conflict where there are no power imbalances (i.e. they are emotionally close). In this regard they have a high degree of relevance with regard to the audience's prior knowledge, and thus the amount of cognitive processing effort spectators/ readers have to make is minimal. Wit, on the other hand has more of a distancing effect and requires the audience to first perform a literal understanding of an utterance and then, when this is seen as inadequate, find an alternative interpretation. Irony is seen as 'false closeness', where a seemingly relevant restatement occurs but in a derogatory fashion, and is therefore potentially misleading, requiring more cognitive effort. Piazza concludes that alternating between these poles gives a text dialogical variety – something both *The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy* have in spades.

## 2.5. Banter

### 2.5.1. Definition

Considerable reference here has been made to the idea of 'banter' and how this appears to be a popular feature of current TV. This is particularly true in the UK, to the extent that the idea of 'lad's TV', where a male audience is appealed to by enlisting (especially but not uniquely) men to engage each other in activities and the kind of ancillary discourse normally relegated to the pub, has spawned a cultural industry of its own in, for example, the creation of specialised TV channels such as 'Dave'. If we adhere to the definition of banter, as Culpeper (1996) suggests, that it is "mock impoliteness for social harmony", then it may be valid to cite the televisual appeal of a non face-threatening impolite exchange as somehow affirming both the protagonists and the audience's position within a social group.

## 2.5.2. Impoliteness

The modelling of linguistic politeness as propounded since the late 1960s by observers such as Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Erving Goffman (1967, 1974, 1981) and Lakoff and Leech (1973)) has been the subject of intense scrutiny (Watts, 2003). Without going into the minutiae of the various criticisms of each model, which are beyond the remit of this chapter, the inadequacies of the theories behind what constitutes ‘polite’ conversational cooperation are said to rest in outdated assumptions and restrictions regarding the socio-cultural contexts of a face-to-face interaction (Watts, 2003). One key feature of this inadequacy is the central role that impoliteness, or ‘conflictive talk’ plays in a far wider range of contexts, such as military training, adolescent discourse and everyday conversation (Culpeper et al, 2003).

There is a propensity for people to engage in discourse that may seem (on paper) to be intent on belittling and contravening the conventions of a need to ‘save face’ (Goffman, 1967). This was extended by Brown and Levinson (1978) to include the concepts of ‘negative face’ (the desire not to be imposed upon) and ‘positive face’ (the desire to be valued for who and what you are). Linda Pillière (2013) suggests that the entertainment value of impoliteness comes from a mismatch between the context as held in the minds of the audience and the actual communication act between the protagonists. She cites as an example the exchanges between Dr House and his patients in *House* (NBC 2004-present), where the audience’s preconceptions of how a surgeon should talk are challenged. Further complication arises when we understand that House is abrasive and rude, yet even within that *context* often the verbal exchanges do not conform to our expectations (e.g. The recipient of his abuse does not respond angrily or exhibit affront). Another example from UK TV could be in the non-stop abuse emanating from the character of Malcolm Tucker in *The Thick of It* (BBC2 2005-12). In Tucker, we see a top political media adviser verbally berating his long-suffering, if incompetent, political/governmental colleagues in a staggering display of creative abuse while they exhibit little if no real signs of offence. Pillière, however, also points to the comedic element in the set-up of such scenes. That is, our audience expectations are often met initially, only to be subverted later on (2013: 60).

An example from *The Trip* is when Rob and Steve are comparing Arnold Schwarzenegger impressions.

- STEVE: Well I've worked with him[Schwarzenegger]. I've worked with him. You've never even met him.
- ROB: What.. what was that? When he was governor of California as part of a scheme for disadvantaged actors? (CHUCKLES)
- STEVE: No... no... I worked with him... that's very funny... but my career's doing OK actually.

This exchange highlights the competitive nature of Coogan and Brydon's (on screen) relationship. However, as always, we the audience must bear in mind that the addresser and addressee in such situations are actors creating a context within which they can judge not only whether their communication act is appropriate to that context model but also whether it fits the remit to be entertaining to an audience.

Watts (2003) insists that 'face', rather than a given, fixed entity that both addresser and addressee readily acknowledge, is a temporary construct "on loan for the duration of the interaction in accordance with the line or lines that the individual has adopted" (p. 125). In this way, rather than static, the communication situation is fluid and dynamic, and is a co-construct by both parties (Pillière, 2013: 62). The key here, it would seem, is the context and it is this that determines the parameters within which offensive or exasperation-laden language can be employed a) for witty effect between participants and b) for entertainment value to an outside audience.

It is this bilateral approach to an improvised, staged performance that contributes both to the complexity of this analysis and to an appreciation of the skill of the performer/improviser.

## 2.6. Schemata, analogies and conceptual blending

Schemata are defined by Pierce in McConachie and Hart (2006: 228) as abstract constructions that facilitate the way in which our minds deal with everyday concepts through associating them with existing mental templates. As such they are an important consideration when dealing with audience perception, imagery and memory. In their construction of an individual's worldview, such schema may, of course, be dependent on socio-cultural features (as in the PUB schema given earlier), stereotype and personal experience. It was Frederic Bartlett in the 1930s, with his



experiments in memory recall, who established how such schema can have a great degree of influence on an individual's retrieval and appreciation of new information.

Following on from this basic definition, however, one is asked to differentiate between the idea of images or mental pictures conjured up in our minds and that of image schemata: those conceptual structures, abstract and undetailed, that pervade our everyday lives and areas of thought (Nelhaus in McConachie and Hart, 2006: 76). Such structures can govern our perceptions of time, space, material and action. Hart (2006: 37) cites the work of Lakoff and Johnson, innovators in the field of cognitive linguistics, and their assertion that it is the sensorimotor capabilities of the human body coupled with our complex brains that facilitate our understanding of the world. Therefore, from infancy we develop and stabilise image schemata in order to “structure higher levels of cognition via a process of ‘metaphorical projection’, which forms ‘primary metaphors and ‘complex metaphors’ that enable the brain to categorise and assimilate both familiar and new experiences” (2006: 37). Hart refers to Lakoff and Johnson's examples of the human body's positioning in space, with an inside and an outside, as having direct influence on the way we speak: we work *out* a problem yet take *in* advice; we drown *out* noise but *invite* people *into* our lives. This presupposition of an in/out-ness to our bodily existence yields, in this example, the image schema of CONTAINER, a schema that McConachie (2002:108) reflects on in its application to the promenade staging of drama where actors and audience share a confined space. In terms of a play text, however, Hart gives the famous example from the opening of Shakespeare's *Henry V* with the Chorus' reference to the theatre as a “cockpit” and “this wooden O” before going onto exhort the audience to imagine a vast, epic scene. However, these linguistic devices that Shakespeare employs are more detailed and specific metaphors, which would be considered ‘rich images’ rather than image schemata as such, though they do belong to the overarching schema of CONTAINMENT (Hart, 2006: 42).

The concept of schema, whether image-based or otherwise governs our everyday lives to such an extent that we fail to realise how much imagination and mental resourcefulness it involves. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, in their seminal work *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (2002), reveal, for example, how simply finding the exit to an unfamiliar room would

baffle the most advanced robot – a machine that does not share the complex experiential schema of ‘rooms’ that a human does. This sameness of experience is at the heart of analogy theory that, despite falling into disrepute in the light of more form and rule-based systems (cf language education) has seen a resurgence in popularity since the 1970s (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 14). This was due to more sophisticated techniques in observation and experimentation and as a result, analogy, metaphor, mental imagery, affective expression and imagination, with all their inherent and unexpected complexities, were taken seriously.

Central to Fauconnier and Turner’s theories in this regard is the idea of Conceptual Blending. This is where the mind gathers information from a multiple of input ‘spaces’, whose combination produces a new space (known as the ‘blend’) where new meaning emerges. One example of an everyday, seemingly normal phrase that involves conceptual blending is “This beach is safe”. Here you would assume that this assigns the fixed property ‘safe’ to the noun ‘beach’. But ‘safe’ has more than one interpretation. It could mean ‘without danger, you can swim’ or that the beach itself is no longer in danger (from building developers, for example). We are having to consider the frame ‘beach’ and the frame ‘danger’ and apply them together in an appropriate context to then come up with a (counterfactual) blend in which swimmers and sunbathers are potential victims or, alternatively, the beach is the victim (2002: 26).

Drawing these three inter-related concepts of schema, analogy and conceptual blending together, some interesting observations may be made regarding Coogan and Brydon’s choices as performers within their improvisations in *The Trip*, the production/directorial decisions and also the audience’s reactions to them. Firstly, there are the schemata of restaurants / gastropubs /cafes and the differences between the British and Italian versions. Also, the schemata of two middle-aged men on a road trip, I argue, goes beyond the immediate specific image conjured up by the presence of the well-known actors, in certain vehicles, with certain geographical backgrounds. The bickering, banter, references and topics of conversation are loaded with the cultural expectations of both performer and audience. In terms of analogy and metaphor, the dialogue in the above examples is complex as it has our two protagonists imagining themselves as characters in a TV costume drama, while acting

their roles as Rob and Steve. Thus it could be said they are operating at two removes (at least) from the audience; a frame within a frame within a frame:

STEVE: /They always leave at daybreak, don't they? They never leave at erm, you know, nine-thirty.

'They' here deictically refers to the characters in a costume drama, with the present tense used to give the sense of currency. Reference to 'nine-thirty' brings the dialogue back to the discourse-world of Steve and Rob, and the frame of the actors in the car.

In this simpler example, Rob is conflating a true fact regarding Schwarzenegger (governor of California) with a totally fictitious and bizarre piece of information for sarcastic effect. We know that Schwarzenegger held that post, but we know that there is no such scheme. In the blended space of those two pieces of information, a created image of Steve as someone who self-aggrandises is formed:

ROB: What.. what was that? When he was governor of California as part of a scheme for disadvantaged actors?

In performance terms, Fauconnier and Turner account for the way actors can at the same time be performers and characters through the audience's ability to 'live in the blend':

The spectator will live in the blend only by selective projection: Many aspects of their existence (such as sitting in a seat, next to other people, in the dark) although independently available to them, are not to be projected to the blend... The actor, meanwhile, is engaged in a different kind of blend, one in which his motor patterns and power of speech come directly into play... In the blend he says just what the character says and is surprised night after night by the same events.

(Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 267)

The question that remains of course is to what extent that blend is being challenged by the fact that the characters we are seeing and the words they are speaking are not necessarily the product of the 'doubleness' of the performer/character; there is a conceit that, unlike in traditional scripted drama, the fictitious and real are one and the same.

### 2.6.1. Suspending Disbelief or Blending?

If indeed, ‘all the world’s a stage’, then the metaphor might be extended to all theatrical experience. We know that what we are watching is a representation rather than the real thing and so we willingly accept, compare and integrate the elements of the metaphor (the input ‘spaces’) – in the above example, ‘the world’ and ‘a stage’ - in order to create a new, blended space. What is important to note is that this blended space is not a mere mapping of one notion onto another but, through the spectator’s imaginative processes, it has its own ‘emergent structure’, distinct from that of the input spaces.

In Text World Theory terms, metaphors add complexity to worlds. The unique mental representation formed autonomously from the integration of its originating inputs creates a new layer which is referred to as a *blended world* (Gavins 2007: 148). Gavins then goes on to explain that the processing of the text does not stop there. The blended world then informs the prominent text world and exists alongside it (2007: 159).

In *The Trip*, to add complexity to complexity, the audience could be said to be constantly ‘living in a blend’ throughout the series, where the input space of Steve and Rob (real-life celebrity comedians) + ‘Steve’ and ‘Rob’ (improvisers /enactors within their constructed text-world) results in a blended world of these two men as both real people and fictional characters at the same time: essentially caricatures of themselves (see Figure 2.10).

In a specific text-world moment, such as ‘the Gentlemen to bed’ scene(s), the complexity is such that the audience is faced with Steve (comedian, driving a car through the countryside in modern times) + Steve (swashbuckling hero, leading men into battle through that same countryside in a TV costume drama – set presumably in the historic past). The resulting blend is of an anachronistic situation where modern Steve and historic Steve are conflated. This blend then feeds back and informs the original input text-world; hence the humorous remarks such as “They always leave at daybreak, don’t they? They never leave at erm, you know, nine-thirty.”

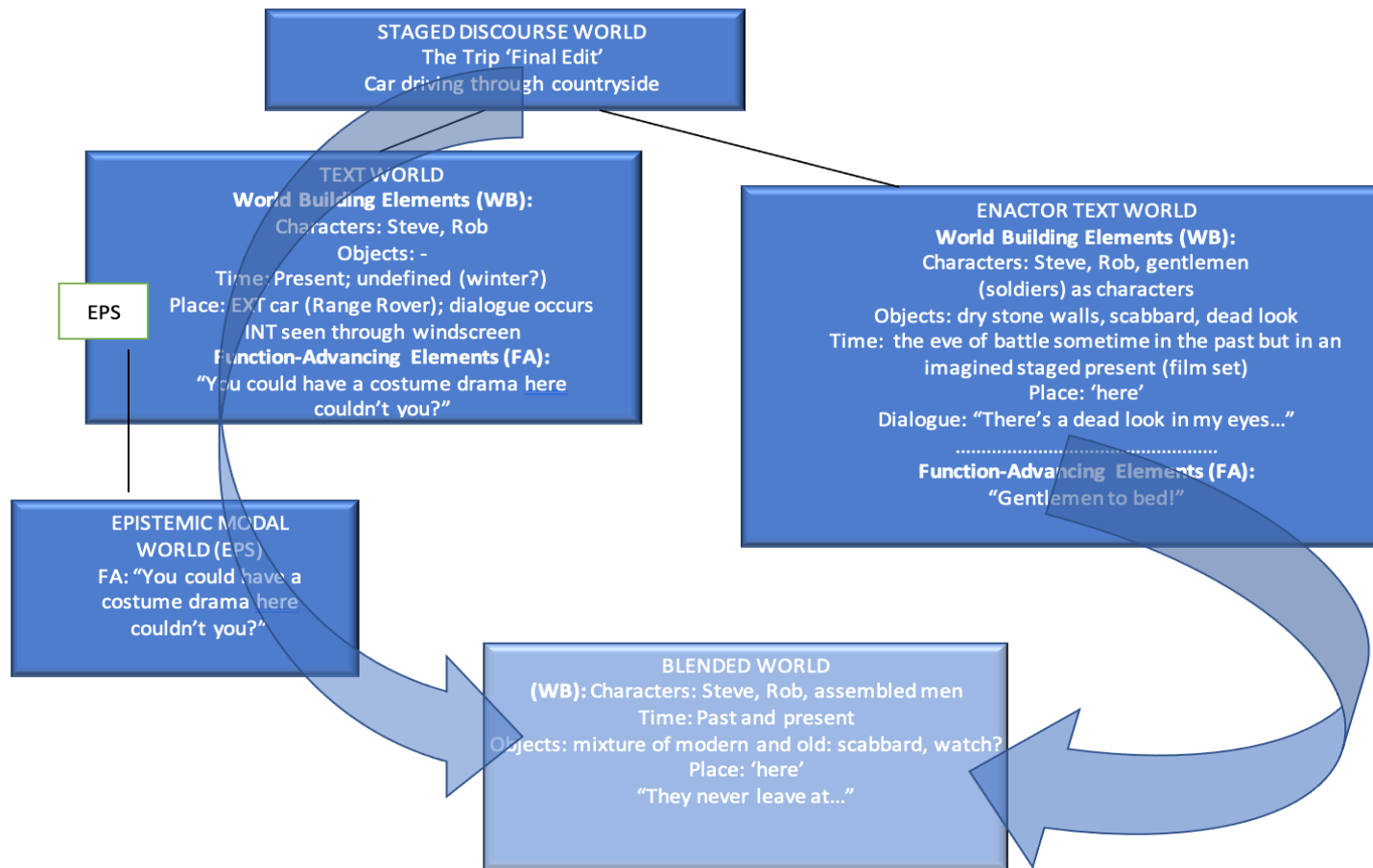


Figure 2.10 TWT diagram: Gentlemen to bed! Final edit – with blended world

## 2.7. Identity

A further, related complexity that needs to be addressed is the notion of identity. In her research into the relationship between text and identity, van der Bom (2015) draws on a cognitive discursive approach citing Hall (2004) in positing that identity is “relational, socially situated, fluid, fragmented and constructed in discourse”. Further theories have built on this to focus not on the instability of identity structuring but on how this is achieved within a given interaction. Such a focus on discourse as shaping identity has tended to stand against the psychological notion that identity is a revelation of an individual’s mental state. By extension, therefore, it denies that language can give extensive insight into the attitudes, beliefs and emotions of the speaker. Problematic as this theory may be, if identity is to a certain extent created in discursive interaction, then this has considerable impact on an improviser’s craft and approach to creating dialogue. In the first improvisation example involving Amanda and David, a reader would very quickly come to conclusions about the identity and character of the protagonists. As professional actors, they have spontaneously made textual decisions about their roles and as the improvisation has progressed, they have chosen methods of discourse to reflect those. With Coogan and Brydon, however, the situation is far more complex in that their identities as ‘Rob’ and ‘Steve’ are already well known to the audience through a) previous TV and film appearances – both in and out of roles, and b) their (particularly Coogan’s) high media profile away from TV, in relation to their private lives (Coogan was particularly vocal during the Leveson enquiry into the News of the World’s phone hacking scandal). This then calls into question the extent to which the protagonists can create a dialogue-based construct of their *Trip* identities too far removed from the one we are familiar with, if indeed we can justifiably say we are familiar with them at all.

Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 251), in their cognitive approach, make crucial observations in this regard. In discussing frames and characters, for example, they maintain that a character is essential and consistent across a variety of frames. An example given is when talking of a co-worker, you might say “he’s the kind of guy who, if he bought a lottery ticket, would immediately dine out on his winnings” (p. 251). The frame is imaginary and perhaps improbable but it gives insight into the character (the blend).

It is the awareness of the different real and fictional frames when watching a play that Erving Goffman (1974) observed as integral to the theatre experience. We perceive the actors and the characters as sharing the same physical properties in two different worlds: the staged, represented world and the real world. Yet in this sense, the ‘frames’ are in different dimensions and so the essential character of both performer and the part they play may not be (presumably are not) consistent. It is here that Coogan and Brydon’s identities as performer/characters in *The Trip* raise some interesting dilemmas as to how cognitively an audience can effectively ‘live in the blend’, when that blend is made on assumptions about the real and performed which are questionable.

## 2.8. Cognitive approaches to the actor-audience relationship

### 2.8.1. The actor

As outlined earlier with regard to cognitive scientific insights into schema and memory retrieval, it is safe to say that, due to constant changes and influences on our brains, the neural patterns that are activated in that retrieval are never identically replicated. This has major implications for the way actors attain that holy grail of performance skills: the ‘truth’ of a performance – whatever that may entail. Rhonda Blair (2008) takes pains to emphasise how a reappraisal of the mind-body continuum can help the actor reach what Konstantin Stanislavsky referred to as “unconscious creativeness through conscious technique” (Stanislavsky 1936: 50) – an elusive concept in his quest for a consistently effective and ‘affective’ method for unlocking the mystery of acting.

Indeed, Blair has considered the processes by which actors successfully perform the transition of a script from page to body as “contested, inexact and often mystified” (2006: 167). In order to demystify these, Blair has worked with actors to create detailed streams of images in their minds that are connected to the text and the other characters, and which will create a sense of ‘being in the world of the character.’

In engaging closely with the given circumstances of a play, alongside the management of attention, imagination, memory and behaviour, an actor hopes to create an embodied, coherent and expressive entity. It is the originality of that embodied product that makes audiences want to see different productions of, say,

*Hamlet*. It is the uniqueness of the relationship of an actor's consciousness with their body that informs a particular performance (Blair, 2008: 52).

Given this cognitive appraisal of Stanislavskian technique, it is necessary also to consider the subsequent implications for the improviser in their struggle to produce engaging dialogue. John Lutterbie finds that one commonality to all the different varieties of improvised performance is the idea of 'boundaries'. That is, the necessity for limits – limits, for example, of time, focus, freedom, and sensitivity. Yet the improviser's craft lies in the extent to which these limits can justifiably be drawn and re-drawn (2011: 167). In contrasting the techniques of traditional scripted performance and those of improvisation, Lutterbie suggests that the latter values more 'the unpredictable' and the freedom to 'go with the flow' whilst staying within the world of the performance. This "being in the moment" (in common actor parlance) is, according to Lutterbie, inextricably linked to the embodiment of the actor's consciousness. This reflects our everyday interactions. Our natural ability to, say, navigate a busy street requires improvisational skill that relies on both our brain and body: "we do not distinguish between thought and movement; we think *in* movement" (2011: 169, italics in original). To make efforts to consciously analyse what one is doing will only detract from that skill. This is not to say, however, that emotional instinctive response is all that is necessary. It just means that the distance between instinct and rational objectivity is minimal, with both working symbiotically "in the moment" to create a successful, improvised interaction.

### 2.8.2. The audience

As Amy Cook puts it, "Cognition is not cold and unemotional. It is not disembodied. It is not separated from the environment" (Cook, 2013: 83). In this light, she argues that the actor must 'get out of their heads' and look to the body for a path to unlocking their instincts and emotions. Such embodied cognition has been claimed by observers in neuroscience to exist both for performers and spectators (cf chapter 5). Research into the role of mirror neurons has revealed a mechanism in which certain brain nerve cells are activated both when an action is performed and perceived. Sofia (2013; 174), however, suggests that 'mirroring' might be erroneous and that 'resonance' is a more appropriate term catering as it does for the different emotional, physical and experiential states of the individual spectator. In any case, the implication is that



observing is in itself an action, involving the faculties for imagination, association as well as engaging the observer's motor abilities. The fact that we automatically do this without explicit cognitive effort recognises the evolutionary necessity for humans (and other primates) to be able to fully interact with and recognise the intentions of others (175).

McConachie (2013; 185) in his 'enaction' paradigm, based on Dynamic Systems Theory (see also chapter 5), goes further in asserting that the very act of spectating involves far more than a passive relationship between actor and audience-member. Indeed, it extends further than simple interaction with the cast, comprising also a 'coupling' with the immediate surroundings and material possibilities of wherever the performance occurs.

Perception, like the rest of cognition, is not only embodied and embedded, it is also ecologically extended. Spectators use their material and social surroundings as well as their bodies and brains to take action and make meaning during a performance.

(McConachie, 2013: 186)

A key element in this is the empathy/antipathy the audience has for the character they are watching as well as the varying levels of emotion (short, intense, long-lasting) that the production requires and creates. However, as McConachie, citing phenomenologist Evan Thomson, says, there is no guarantee of a satisfactorily empathic embodiment of the emotions of performers as so much regarding the socio-cultural environment can influence this process (2013; 193).

In *The Trip*, therefore, it might be concluded that part of the success of the improvisations chosen by Winterbottom is down to features of Coogan and Brydon's interaction that 'presses the right buttons' of a 21<sup>st</sup> century British (and American) audience, whether they are seated at home in front of the television or in an arthouse cinema.

### 2.8.3. The script

Utterback (2013: 153) says that 'to be human is to be a storyteller'. Since our understanding of the world and our understandings of the self are inextricably linked, if not part and parcel of the same thing, then our memories and perceptions of self are

stories we tell ourselves and others. Although Utterback's observations in his paper centre around the actor's cognitive processes in their use of gesture in performance, I would like to make the leap of guiding this perspective towards speech and the subsequent written play-text. Indeed, Utterback himself makes the claim that gesture and language have much in common, for example in the way they can be compressed for ease and speed of understanding:

An initially complex sequence can be shortened and abridged to represent a more complex concept as an actor understands and remembers the larger concepts of and elements of a story.

(Utterback, 2013: 152)

The embodied way an actor recalls memories and produces gesture and speech, and the effectiveness of doing so can, I argue, be translated into text. It is the author's success in adequately capturing the affective nature of that improvised speech that is key.

Although producing texts not based on improvised speech as such, Beckett, Pinter and Mamet are examples of playwrights who have carefully crafted apparently mundane language to provide a "powerful rhythmic and imagistic impetus for the actor's embodiment" (Blair, 2006: 183).

One way to clarify this theory is to draw a comparison between two scripts that sit at opposite ends of the 'reality' cline. Taking on the one hand, a purely off-the-cuff and barely edited dialogue from a reality TV programme and then a more carefully crafted yet still realistic playscript, we can gain some insight into what cognitively is at work in the creation of a successfully engaging dialogue, when considering the creator as either performer and/or playwright.

The texts under scrutiny here are extracts from *Carpool* (ZenithOptimedia 2009-14) and Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* (1982).

In the first (transcribed) text, comedian and actor Robert Llewellyn interviews guests in his car as he drives them on a half hour journey to their destination of choice. Cameras are fixed at various places in the car and the conversation is (apparently) natural and unrehearsed. There is evidence of post-production editing as the camera angles alter and conversation topics seem to change abruptly along with perhaps a

cutaway view of the exterior of the car. Nevertheless, the flow and continuity of the show suggests that this is kept to a minimum. The guest in this case, and for ease of comparison with *The Trip*, is Rob Brydon.



Figure 2.11 Robert Llewellyn and Rob Brydon in *Carpool*. Still from footage.

*Victoria Station*, on the other hand is a published short play hingeing on the relationship between an unwilling taxi driver, currently parked by a ‘dark park’ in Crystal Palace, and his increasingly exasperated controller. As the play unfolds and we discover the taxi driver has a passenger on the back seat (Imaginary? Dead?), things take a turn for the dark, with the controller making admissions and offering self-revelations of his own.

With both cases, the cramped, claustrophobic location of a car for a duologue serves as a suitable case for comparison with the texts hitherto examined.

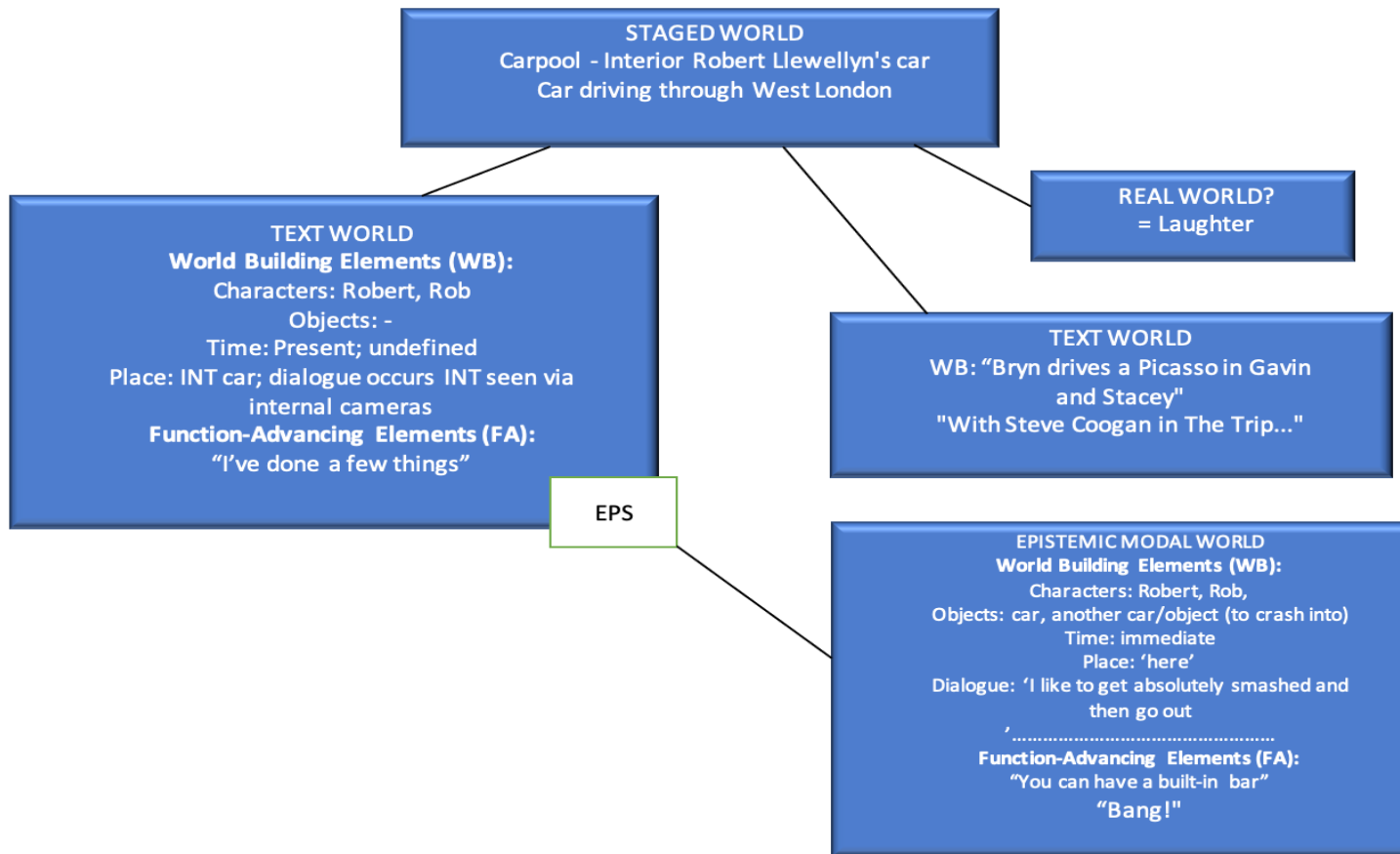


Figure 2.12 TWT diagram for Carpool

ROBERT LLEWELLYN and ROB BRYDON – “CARPOOL” (unscripted) 2011

BRYDON: I've done a few things 'cause, you know, Bryn drives a Picasso in *Gavin and Stacey*

LLEWELLYN: Yes, yes

B: And I think with Steve Coogan in *The Trip* in which he drives but I'm sat there in this big Range Rover, so I...I like cars. I feel very safe in them.

L: So that's good... that's good then...

B: Bang!

L: Ha ha / bang

B: /Slam! /Smash!

L: /Slam! Oops.

(PAUSE) So you like... do you actually enjoy driving...?

B: Yeah

L: ...because a lot of people say, you know, that it's a chore that they have to do...

B: 'cause you've got everything. You've got music. You can have a drink... I don't mean a *drink*

L: [chuckling] You can have a built-in bar

B: 'I like to get absolutely smashed and then go out'

HAROLD PINTER – ‘VICTORIA STATION’ pp. 197-198 (scripted)

CONTROLLER: What are you doing?

DRIVER: I'm not doing anything.

C: How's your motor? IS your motor working?

D: Oh yes.

C: Your ignition's not on the blink?

D: No.

C: So you're sitting in a capable car?

D: I'm sitting in it, yes.

C: Are you sitting in the driving seat?

(PAUSE) Do you understand what I mean?

(PAUSE) Do you have a driving wheel in front of you?

(PAUSE) Because I haven't 274. I'm just talking into this machine, trying to make some sense out of our lives. That's my function. God gave me this job. He asked me to do this job, personally. I'm your local monk, 274. I'm a monk. You follow? I lead a restricted life. I haven't got a choke and a gear lever in front of me. I haven't got a cooling system and four wheels. I'm not sitting here with mirrors and a jack in the boot. And if I did have a jack in the boot, I'd stick it right up your arse.

In *Carpool*, as professionals perhaps very aware that the remit of the show is to entertain, Brydon and Llewellyn waste little time in hitting the gags. Rob Brydon does start off with a rather inane comment about feeling safe in cars, yet slips in a couple of references to his comedy work (he is speaking to a colleague from TV – though not a close friend – and is clearly mindful of the fact that he has been invited onto the show due to his fame as a comedian.) However, he exploits his own set-up for a fall: following ‘I feel safe’ with

‘bang!’, thus complying with the ironic adage of ‘tempting fate’. Robert Llewellyn, as interlocutor, follows this up by offering other versions of the gag line (in much the same way as Brydon does with Coogan in the ‘Gentlemen, to bed’ scenes in *The Trip*). The second witticism is inadvertently set-up by Brydon when he mis-speaks with ‘you can have a drink’, presumably referring to the act of drinking any beverage rather than alcohol, which, in an adult social setting (in the UK) is what the word ‘drink’ tends to imply. This sends Llewellyn and Brydon into a brief flight of fancy when they imagine a car with a bar and Brydon quotes himself in an imagined text-world where he is indeed a drunkard at the wheel. Compare this quip with an extract from the third episode of *The Trip* where Brydon and the pot-smoking Coogan, in a dark exchange, discuss how drug use was *de rigueur* among the Romantic poets. Here, similarly, Rob quotes an alter ego version of himself in ironic fashion:

Rob: If you really want to pay tribute to him [Coleridge] you should be having some opium.

Steve: That’s heroin. I’m not a junkie Rob.

Rob: I’m not encouraging you to become hooked on heroin. (In broad Welsh accent) “You know Steve? You seen Steve lately? He’s living at the council estate curled up in his own shit. Aye, that was my doing that was. I suggested he try heroin.”

(*The Trip* (2010), episode 3)

In *Victoria Station*, the initial conversation is equally banal, consisting of direct, rather obvious questions and equally direct yes/no answers. So far, so realistic, although what is somewhat odd is the very fact that a controller should be asking such questions in the first place. What marks this dialogue as ‘beyond the real’, however, is the subtle play in vocabulary that Pinter indulges in; that is, the terms he employs (through the controller’s voice) for items in the car that go beyond what would be considered regular English. For example, he refers to the car as being ‘capable’, an adjective usually reserved for animate beings; there is a ‘driving seat’ (‘driver’s seat’?) a ‘driving wheel’, instead of the usual ‘steering wheel’; a ‘motor’ rather than an ‘engine’; a ‘gear lever’ not a ‘gear stick’, and a ‘jack in the boot’, issued as a stock composite noun, reminiscent of a ‘jack in the box’. As such the text serves to at once familiarize us with the features of a common enough item such as a car, but also situate us in a somewhat alien world where not everything is as it seems. The subsequent remarks by the controller regarding his role in life, his frustrations in his job as a controller, and his claims of it being his calling (‘God gave me this job... I’m your local monk, 274’) further the somewhat bizarre nature of this exchange.



Figure 2.13 Rupert Graves and Colin McFarlane in *Victoria Station*, Harold Pinter Theatre 2019. Photo: Marc Brenner

Superficially, it would seem that the stylised nature of Pinter's dialogue is far removed from the verbatim nature of *Carpool*. Nevertheless, when making a cognitive poetic analysis of both cases, certain similarities may be drawn in terms of the world building activities that are being undertaken.

From the diagram concerning *Carpool* (Figure 2.12), it can be seen that there are various 'worlds' being presented here: the references to *Gavin and Stacey* and *The Trip* send us into the TV contexts (world-shifts) with which we associate Rob Brydon, removed as they are from the discourse-world we see him in here. In addition, the 'Bang!' outburst takes us into an epistemic world of a car crash, while the idea of having a bar in the car and being a drunk driver present an imaginary, unrealistic world where alcohol consumption and driving is acceptable - both for comic effect. Meanwhile, *Victoria Station* gives us more information on the context of the discourse world; what might be termed here more accurately as the staged world of the play. The controller's monologue then presents the metaphorical images of him as a monk, ordained by God to give instructions to the driver.

In both cases, certain schema are employed by the speakers to engage the audience and bring us into a blended conceptualisation of the issues inherent in their speech. In *Carpool*, the conceptual space of 'a car as a place of comfort safety' is blended with that of the sonically created space of a car crashing. The resultant blended space is not simply that of Rob Brydon being involved in a collision, but one where 'he speaks too soon'; an ironically comic situation, despite the literal severity of having an accident. In similar fashion, the same source domain is blended with that of 'a car as a venue for drinking alcohol'; indeed, perhaps an extension of the 'car as place of comfort' concept, but one that is so far removed from

reality that the blended space, elaborated by Brydon's 'I like to get absolutely smashed and then go out' quip, is funny.

The controller's speech in *Victoria Station*, however, makes much more of the metaphor of the controller's isolation being that of a monk. Although on stage the character would not fulfil our visual schema of a monk, the very utterance of 'God gave me this job. He asked me to do this job, personally. I'm your local monk' invites a conceptual space that at once clashes with the on-stage representation and creates a blend where the controller is elevated to a holy position; someone to trust, confide in and even revere. In addition, the phrase 'your *local* monk' maps a rather rare profession (monk) onto a common one (for example a butcher or postman), to create a blend/world where monks might be considered 'local'.

Both cases reveal a propensity for interlocutors to bring themselves and an audience into imagined worlds. Yet if the two worlds briefly conjured up by Brydon and Llewellyn are entertaining yet somewhat 'throw-away', in *Victoria Station* the world-shift that occurs can be seen to be much more thought-provoking and revelatory.



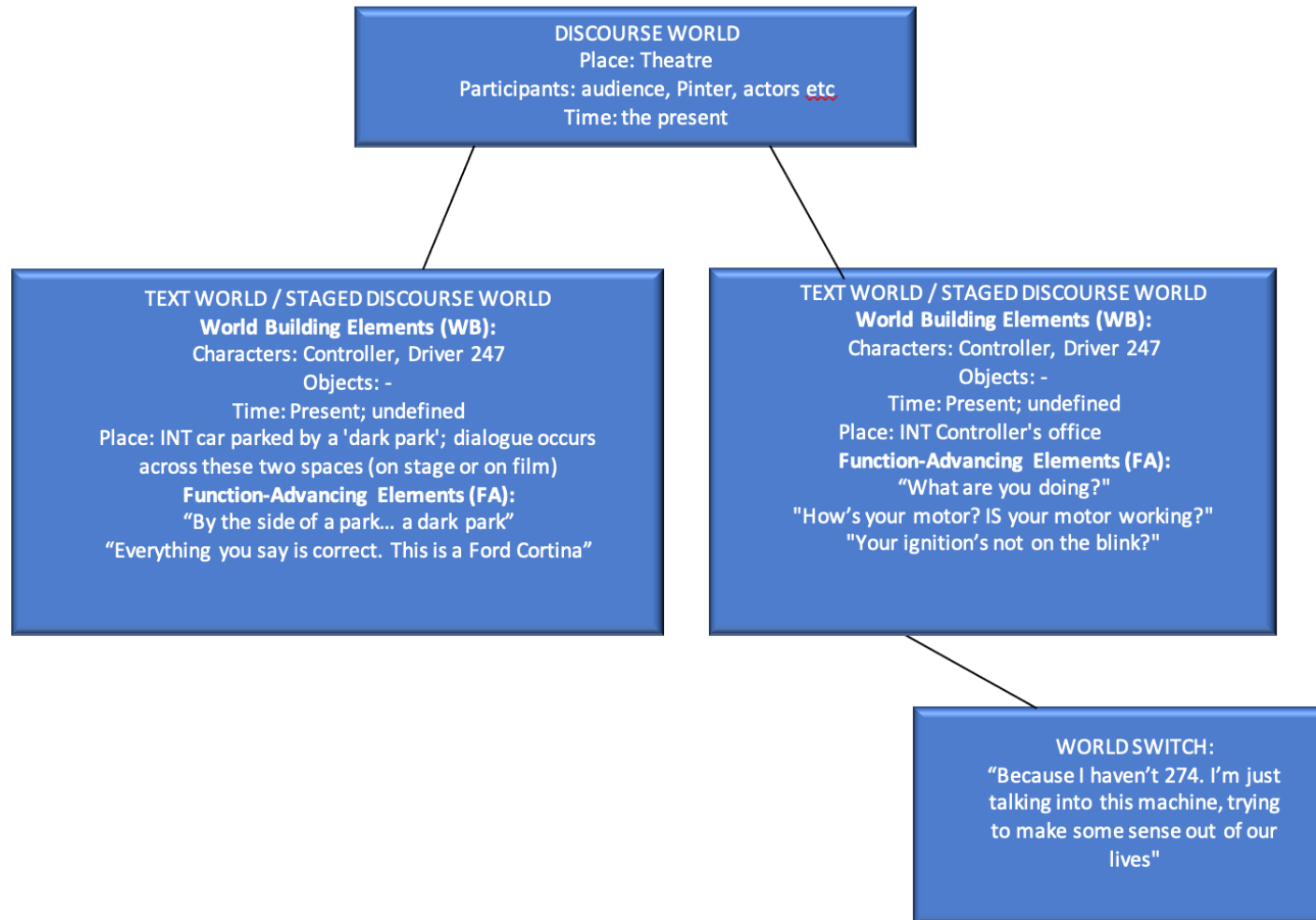


Figure 2.14 TWT diagram for *Victoria Station*

Obviously, what these texts have in common is that being in a car / driving serves as a stimulus for the conversation. In other words, the discourse-world provides the context for the dialogue. This is true, by extension, to the outtakes from *The Trip*, where observation of the landscape through the car's windows is what prompts the costume drama flights of fancy. By further extension, I argue, the very confined nature of the space (a space that is extended from car to dinner table) may also be what encourages the various protagonists to engage more intensely in conversational topics that in a different, more public physical setting would not be so readily broached. Certainly in later episodes, in both *The Trip* and *the Trip to Italy*, when other characters are involved (for example when Coogan's PA and photographer join them for dinner), similar conversational banter takes on a very different dynamic with Coogan almost apologising for Brydon's excessive use of impersonation:

Yolande:           Who is it?  
 Rob:               Ronnie Corbett  
 Steve (under):   Ronnie Corbett...hmm  
 Yolande:           Is that.. is that the man who does this dancing programme?  
 Rob:               (as Bruce Forsyth) No it's not the one that does the dancing programme  
 [Waitress enters]  
                       (still as Forsyth) That was lovely my darling, we liked it... that was my favourite.  
 [Steve raises eyes and exhales loudly]

*(The Trip (2010), episode 4)*

By selecting examples of dialogue taking place within the confined space of a car, some interesting comments may be made regarding the cognitive scientific perspectives on such a performance. This is in particular reference to the image schemata, or conceptual structures, conjured up in the minds of both performers and audience members. Tobin Nellhaus (2006: 76-79) in describing the fundamental role that such processes play in performance, claims that a very limited range of image schemata are actually prevalent. This is accounted for by the fact that these structures are actually rooted in the most fundamental features of human sensorimotor and social experiences. As such, we may return here to the image schema of CONTAINMENT.

The 'in-car' physical setting of the above examples operates the CONTAINMENT schema at one obvious level. However, Nellhaus (82) extends the schema to include

the containment of *self*; that is, that we embody practices that are linked to our inward self-development and unique behavioural characteristics. It is this that informs the individual's 'agency' with the world rather than any overtly outward engagement.

Thus, the claustrophobic settings of *The Trip*, *Carpool* and *Victoria Station* serve to focus this internal agency on the part of the protagonists. In *The Trip* this encourages Coogan and Brydon to explore both the parameters of their skills as impressionists but also their (apparent) rivalry as comedians, as well as their frustrations, worries and neuroses as two men facing middle age; in *Carpool*, the intimate setting seems to facilitate the opening-up of Llewellyn's guests, while in *Victoria Station*, the setting of both car and lonely control office (as well as the vague, sinister reference to 'a dark park') serve to provoke the revelations of the deeply troubled controller, with the metaphor of a monk (in his cell?) only adding to the CONTAINMENT schema.

## 2.9. Conclusions

*The Trip* is different from other 'road-trip' or 'buddy' movies such as 2004's *Sideways* (involving 2 unhappy and alcoholic characters on a culinary odyssey unconsciously pretending to be what they are not). In *The Trip*, Coogan and Brydon are recognised actors consciously pretending for their own, each other's and the viewers' amusement. As viewers, via Winterbottom's editing, we are invited to share in staged gags. Sometimes, when, for example, Coogan convulses with laughter at a Brydon comment, they become appreciative audience members of their own performance, thus reinforcing performer/audience identification and encouraging/validating our (the viewers') response.

Two elements that are crucial for us as spectators, in what is essentially a voyeuristic practice, is, firstly, the awkwardness or ambiguity of the scene - a key tenet of improvised drama (Sawyer, 2003; Johnstone, 1979), and, secondly, our cognitive ability to decode the spectacle through our embracing of the cultural capital involved (e.g. the current vogue for celebrity chefs, 'food porn', acting masterclasses, movies full of film references etc.); all this while allowing ourselves to fall for the illusion of privileged yet highly controlled access to celebrities in a form of documentary that replaces 'truth' with self-referentiality.

In tandem with this notion of cultural indulgence is the idea in our audience minds that somehow we are self-improving (Morris, 2015). Both *The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy* are woven through with references to Wordsworth in the former, while the latter pays homage to Byron and Shelley at every turn. Thus the programmes offer literariness without literature, addressing cultured viewers through quotation and associations while offering proximity to literature (and by extension, in the example of this chapter, to Sunday evening televised costume dramas) as a signifier of taste. Morris' point here, however, is that once authenticity, measured by sensitivity, taste and intense perception becomes interchangeable with literary values, it effectively replaces those values. This perhaps accounts for the fact that despite a vast range of cookery programmes on UK TV, Britain is still not regarded as a nation of great domestic chefs.

This 'blurring' of values and the undecidability of what is authentic or inauthentic, the fiction and the reality, is what provides a palpable tension to our reception of the performance, and arguably, therefore, to that of any consequent/subsequent text. It is the possible but unverifiable glimmers of reality (such as Coogan's spontaneous giggling) that Corner (2002) refers to as 'selving': that ability to infer an underlying truth when watching a self-conscious performance; an inference that grows as the character responds to the various pressures of their given circumstances, but all of which continues to be a textual construct (262-264).

Within his extensive research into performance and cognition, Bruce McConachie (2008) discusses how we perceive actors and their characters as a blend of real and fictional people. The audience essentially lives in this 'blend', going with the flow, with actuality and fictionality merging together. When we read/watch, do we think of the actual words/sounds uttered or rather the marriage of script and character in the staged fiction? Indeed, McConachie posits that we oscillate, or toggle, between the two, with blended dialogue containing differing degrees of actuality and fictionality (c.f. the difference between verbatim/documentary drama and musicals or opera). As spectators, then, we are not delusional victims easily lost in the fantasies of the stage fiction. Rather, we can run multiple conceptions simultaneously, often conflictingly so, resulting in what McConachie terms 'counterfactuals'. Such counterfactual blends would therefore seem to mirror the ideas behind 'worlds' in text-world Theory; a

theory that seems to be predominantly used with the cognitive analysis of literary works, but which can clearly be mapped to an analysis of performed texts, and, by extension, help shed light on what choices a writer/auteur makes in the construction of such texts.

Theatre audiences habitually oscillate between these counterfactual blends and perceptions of their actual circumstances, and theatres are considered safe places to indulge in such collaborative ‘play’. In addition, this oscillation/toggling occurs so often that it is mostly done unconsciously. However, the blending of reality and fiction is important as it goes against the semiotic assertion, citing Baudrillard, that the world is polarised, divided between empty signifiers and real signifieds, and that an audience is therefore condemned to a world of simulation that can never approach the real (McConachie, 2008).

In addition, the ontological implications of the text-worlds created by Steve and Rob are considerable. As participants in a (staged) discourse-world, we attribute to them a reliability that we might to any ‘overheard’ conversation between two people we can verify the existence of. In addition, of course, is the fact that these are two well-known TV celebrities whose own names are being used and who are not *apparently* play-acting prescribed characters. As such we might expect the epistemological level of information to be uniform and reliable between their discourse-world as Steve and Rob and when they go on flights of fancy into their enactor-created text-worlds.

However, if we take the view that Steve and Rob are enactors in a text-world created within a discourse-world where the participants are us (as viewers, eavesdroppers?) and Winterbottom, then the ontological status of Steve and Rob is more questionable. They are now at a further remove, less verifiable. What is important here is the extent to which the quality of the performance and the improvised dialogue manages to ‘paper over the cracks’ where differentiation between these worlds may be glimpsed.

Text World Theory’s emphasis on the construction of mental representations intersects with and overlaps all of the other theoretical frameworks in this thesis. The reliability of narrators is further explored in Chapter 4, while TWT’s foundation in embodied cognition reflects the themes of Chapter 5. As a cognitive theory, TWT gives insights into how an audience engages with received information and can help

account for the extent to which that reception is appreciated. To that end, it helps gauge how one improvised dialogue may be preferred over another if one was looking for raw text material to reproduce in performance.

However, as Michael Toolan (1996; 2016) would confirm in his integrational approach to linguistic analysis, text cannot be separated from context and in the field of dramaturgy, that context, i.e. the co-existence of verbal and non-verbal elements, the actor's improvisational skill, the specific cultural relevance of what is being said, and how it is spoken etc. must be considered alongside the poetics of the words used in order to give a fuller appreciation of the 'success' of the script. Nevertheless, it is still the text and its improvised nature that lies at the heart of that success.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

# **Improvised drama and the role of directorial intervention in creating a ‘theatrical’ text**

The focus of this chapter is to examine directorial intervention. The rationale here is that by accounting for the decisions made by directors in their steering of an improvised piece of drama, we can gain further insights into the nature of what constitutes a crowd/critic-pleasing text. The main argument here being that both the improviser’s skill and a sense of authenticity lend spice to a script that can often be lost in prescribed texts. Case studies here are taken from an improvised theatre event at the National Theatre and also extracts from film and TV scripts. The theoretical framework underpinning this extends the text-world analysis of Chapter two, whilst also bringing in current and classic ideas regarding improv and playwriting.

### **3.1. Introduction**

The search continues for what renders a script arising out of improvised rehearsal/performance theatrical. If by theatrical we mean that which makes a performance ‘viable’ as a piece of commercial art, then by extension it can be argued that the concerns go beyond that which the performers themselves may regard as credible or aesthetically pleasing, but what the observer will be prepared to buy into. Often the best judge of this is anyone BUT the performer, who may have a totally subjective and skewed opinion of the impact of their performance. To this end, as a suitable intermediary, it is the director or producer who is in a prime position to make decisions on what ‘works’ or doesn’t and as auteur can therefore steer the improvisation towards achieving the greatest success.

The question remains, however, as to what that ‘success’ should entail, how it can be measured, and above all how it can be best accounted for. An analysis of the resulting text is only one method of dealing with source material in trying to achieve this aim. Such material is seen as the ‘final product’ and is what has been primarily examined thus far. Perhaps just as interesting/revealing is to observe the directorial decisions as they happen and to make an account of how these interventions shape the final text. This should give some insight, then, into the cognitive processes undergone by the

director/auteur in their pro-audience role. The added advantage here, of course, is that as a director is an experienced professional they are in the position not just as an audience member but as someone who can anticipate what an audience may regard as ‘good’ and also, as an artist, be willing to take risks in pushing that audience’s expectations. Again, this is done to achieve that quality through provocation and experiment.

### 3.2. Lost Without Words (Improbable Theatre, 2017)

As source material, the UK National Theatre’s production of Improbable Theatre’s *Lost Without Words* (2017) has been selected. This was a week-long run of evening improvised theatrical sketches (one hour per performance in total), performed by a group of elderly professional actors, all with extensive life-long experience on stage and screen.



Figure 3.1 *Lost Without Words* (Improbable Theatre, 2017): Photo credit: Atri Banerjee

The premise of these performances was that after lives in predominantly scripted theatre, these actors would now be expected to appear in front of a paying audience, in a high profile London performance space, with no theatrical crutches or masks. They had no prior knowledge of what they might be doing nor had they rehearsed.

The performances were each around an hour long and consisted of different sketches/vignettes that varied in length from 8 to 15 minutes each. Not all performers (7 in total) were involved in each sketch but were present on the fringes of the performance space (a thrust stage surrounded by audience on 3 sides) throughout. Very little in the way of props were available but a table, chairs, couch and hatstand

were generally present, as well as anything the actors had with them (for example, one actor used her own walking stick).

To say this was brutally ‘naked’, unsupported improvisation may be disingenuous. The sketches often took on a ‘comedy improv’ format as seen in shows such as *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, which draws on tried and tested improvisation ‘games’. For example, one sketch comprised a conversation between two lovers (these roles were given by the directors) where each line started with a consecutive letter of the alphabet – with all the predicted hilarity when reaching letters Q or Z.

Of course, the key factor in the performance was not the improvised text, nor even the ready wit and improvising skills of the performers, but the intervention and guidance of the two directors Phelim McDermott and Lee Simpson, positioned as they were on the fringes of the performance space yet in a liminal environment between actors and spectators. In this capacity, I argue they were fulfilling a role as the audience’s intermediaries on stage.

It is the extent to which the directors felt the need to intervene, the apparent justification for this, and the ‘success’ of the resultant dialogue (as well as the ‘failure’ of the preceding improvisation) that forms the core of this chapter’s analysis. However, and crucially, this examination when initially continuing to draw on Text World Theory (TWT) as a mechanism for analysis, may fall somewhat short in truly accounting for the theatrical prowess of the resulting improvised texts.

Cruickshank and Lahey (2010) have been among the first to apply TWT to a playtext. In their analysis of the opening few lines of Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* they attempt to reveal that ‘worlds’ do exist in a drama text that are not necessarily visible in regular prose fiction. This, they argue, comes about because of the readerly knowledge of a play, of what its performance potential is and of how drama discourse is generally processed. In other words, for Cruickshank and Lahey, the reader’s ability to ‘look behind the scenes’ of a play at any given moment, and, indeed, to be invited to do so by either literal (self-conscious) or fictional (self-effacing) stage directions, is a crucial feature when considering the cognitive processes at work when reading a play. The reader ‘toggles’ to and fro from the fictional world of the play to the staged world of the production with directions such

as “he moves upstage” (literal/self-conscious) or “she enters the town” (fictional/self-effacing).

It is this ‘controlling voice’, that which dictates the onstage action through stage directions, that determines the reader of the text’s position vis-à-vis both the fictional world of the play and the theatrical world of the play’s potential to be performed. The former, fictional world subsumes any further, epistemic world-switches created within the dialogue of the characters, whilst the latter, staged world, could arguably be extended to include the discourse world of the writer and reader i.e. the ‘real’ world of the audience (whether reading or viewing).

Interestingly, Cruickshank and Lahey regard this controlling voice as every much a textual product as the dialogue, somewhat bemoaning the fact that it is a mere stand-in for actual contact with the author/playwright. This is arguably erroneous since although there are indeed literary qualities to stage directions (one only needs to examine the difference between George Bernard Shaw’s lengthy and flowery directions and Beckett’s pithy one-liners), the controlling voice *is* nevertheless the voice of the writer.

This is key. If one argues that stage directions reveal the diegetic rather than mimetic quality of a play, in order to create the *illusion* of mimesis, then this is an essential component in what renders the play more credible, entertaining and ‘theatrical’. McIntyre (2006) states that the strength of this illusion largely depends on whether the play is being read or viewed. With diegesis foregrounded in the reading of a play, this does indeed render a drama text worthy of stylistic analysis due to the strength of authorial ‘point of view’ and its subsequent shifts (and world-shifts) when characters begin to speak. However, what may be overlooked here is that the stage directions are exactly that: instructions for how the play might be *staged*. They do not necessarily impact on the dialogue itself. This is down to the poetic and literary skill of the writer. Beyond explicit adverbial indications of line delivery (‘under’, ‘in a whisper’, ‘conspiratorily’ etc), it also has little bearing on the performance; otherwise why would audiences choose to return to theatres to see new and ever-changing productions of the same play? The stage directions do not change but their artistic interpretation does. The Samuel Beckett estate (in)famously gives very little

flexibility with his plays (be it direction or dialogue), yet somehow new productions are continually recreated afresh.

Cruikshank and Lahey's insistence that the mediating voice is somehow a textual construct, sharing the world of the characters, is problematic. They would say that the audience suspends its disbelief at points and accepts the mediating voice as a stand-in for the playwright but otherwise regards the stage directions as part of the fiction and therefore at another remove from reality. This could be seen to be negating the playwright as creator of their world for our benefit. By differentiating in this way between the staged world and the fictional world, we are in danger of ignoring what, for example in Cruickshank and Lahey's case study, Stoppard is actually doing as an artist. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* he is famously referring to and pastiching the absurdist dramas of Beckett, Ionescu, Pirandello et al., where the world of the stage *is* the real world with nothing beyond:

GUIL gets up but has nowhere to go. He spins another coin over his shoulder without looking at it, his attention being directed at his environment or lack of it.

(Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 1967: 12)

Stage directions such as these are arguably communicating as much to the reader about the play's literary and cultural influences (*Waiting for Godot's* blasted landscape) as they are providing information on the fictional setting and practical instructions for staging.

It is this conflation rather than differentiation between the fictional, the staged and the 'real' that is inherent to this examination of how a text produced out of spontaneous dialogue can be theatrically valid and of literary worth; and what shaping and authorial intervention is required to render it so.

Gibbons (2016) further problematizes Cruickshank and Lahey's opinions when using TWT to analyse a scene from a piece of immersive theatre (Punchdrunk's 2013-14 production of *The Drowned Man*). Acknowledging that any performance event is to a certain extent inaccessible afterwards, Gibbons states that Cruickshank and Lahey's reliance on the linguistic content and the concept of a 'staged world' is too reductive and does little to offer true insight into the individual audience members during a particular performance. Her solution is to analyse the text "after the event" and to see



how this promotes the ‘immersive quality’ of performances by companies/artists such as Punchdrunk, Shunt, Geraldine Pilgrim and others. In citing her own personal experience and interaction / involvement in one such performance, Gibbons claims that a blended world (Gavins 2007: 146-64; Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) is being created as is, by extension through her own involvement, what she terms a ‘figured trans-world’.

However, this is still problematic since, although the emergent text is static enough, and even if Gibbons’ own interaction were subsequently written down, the impressions on the audience (in this case, one member) are personal and subjective. What *Lost Without Words* offers us, however, are the personal interactions of a director (or two) that could be seen to act as a proxy representative of the audience in expressing its expectations and desires. Therefore, through directorial intervention we see an audience practically critiquing the performance and, by extension, the emerging text. Therefore, the results of the cognitive processes at work are evident in both the directors’ reactions and their subsequent shaping of the improvised text.

To this end a TWT analysis of three scenes from *Lost Without Worlds* will be made. This is as much to show the inadequacies as well as the strengths of the model’s application within the examination of a literary text that emerges from improvised performance.

What is important to recall when looking at these particular scenes<sup>6</sup>, and indeed at subsequent, filmed examples is the significance of the intervention of the director (or directors in the case of *Lost Without Words*). It is this controlling voice from outside the emerging script that gives insight into the authorial decisions made that render the performance, dialogue (and by extension the text) more effective and ‘theatrical’. In this way, the conceit is that the author acts as an interventional proxy on behalf of the (presumed unsatisfied) audience. So, whenever they intrude/interrupt the dialogue, the directors reveal the cognitive responses the reader/audience is making to the emerging text at that point, as well as to the consequent amendments.

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<sup>6</sup> Selected scenes from *Lost Without Words* transcribed here by J Fitchett from recordings available at National Theatre archive

The idea here, then, is that just as Michael Winterbottom receives, moulds and has his performers (Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan) reformulate a script in *The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy* [see Chapter 2], so too do Phelim McDermott and Lee Simpson intervene to have their cast members reshape sections of their dialogue. The only difference being that Winterbottom's interventions can only be inferred through examination of the available outtakes on the DVD box-set [Chapter 2]. In *Lost Without Words*, however, the directors' intrusions are actually part of the live performance – often to comical effect.

Indeed, as part of the performance, and so transcribed as such, a parallel may be drawn between McDermott's/Simpson's interventions and a play's stage directions as examined by Cruickshank and Lahey (2010). However, again, it must be stated that while Cruickshank and Lahey separate the controlling voice of the stage directions from that of the writer, I would insist that in *Lost Without Words* and in any 'directed' improvisation, that voice is very much that of the author, albeit that the material they are authoring has been given to them by the performers themselves.

In the case of this series of improvisations I conflate the text-world (emerging from the improvisation) and the staged discourse-world of the spectacle. This is particularly necessary if we are to include the directorial interventions (clearly part of the staging) in the text. Indeed, as part of the performance, Phelim McDermott and Lee Simpson's interventions effectively negate Cruickshank and Lahey's claim (2010) that dramatic dialogue can never contain explicit theatrical signals. I would suggest that these chinks in the fourth wall (in similar fashion to Ricky Gervais's nods to camera in BBC's *The Office*, perhaps, or the invitation to 'boo' and 'hiss' at the villain in a Christmas pantomime – there is nothing new here) add to the theatricality of the performance as they at one time jump out of one world and into another while remaining firmly part of the intended spectacle.

### 3.2.1. Lost Without Words – scene 1

Lost Without Words – Transcript 1

Performance date: 4<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Theatre: National Theatre - Dorfman

Directors: Lee Simpson and Phelim McDermott

Performers: ACM; LF

Entire cast on stage. 1 chair.

ALL 5 cast members approach chair along with the 2 directors. All look to the audience. 2 women hold hands.

Directors walk away.

LEE introduces the concept from side of stage.

LEE: There used to be 6 of them

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

PHELIM: What's it like to get lost? And if you do get lost, is it possible to wake up and really know where you are? And if you DO get lost, is the best way out to get even more lost?

Improv scene: Chair + table + 2 women = ANNA CALDER MARSHALL and LYNN FARLEIGH

(LENGTHY PAUSE)

ACM: You know why I've called you here?

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

LF: Yes. I do.

ACM: It's good news

LF: Yes?!

ACM: Your mother (*beat*) has left you her house, her garden and £500,000. Also.... Her holiday cottage in Greece.

LF: (*aghast*)

ACM: Yes, yes, yes

LF: I'm a lucky lady.

PHELIM: The next line is "but it's more than that"

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

ACM: But it's more than that (*grabs LF's hand*). There are certain... appendages? I don't know if that's (*to Phelim*) the right word. My mother was dyslexic.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

But there are certain codicils

LF: Codicils?

ACM: Codicils! There are certain things that you must adhere to. Are you ready?

LF: Oh, I am ready.

ACM: In the house that she has left you...

LF: Yes.

ACM: You must give it for 6 months of the year to homeless people. (*reading the 'will'*) 6 months of the year you can have it on your own but 6 months of the year you must give to homeless people. There are, apparently, erm, 15 rooms.

LF: Yes (*nods*)

ACM: Will you do that?

LF: Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes, I will. That is a good thing to do/

ACM: /a kind thing to do/

LF: /a kind thing to do and... and... I will do it.

ACM: There is also a need of your dear mother to provide for all the waifs and strays of animals. She loved dogs and cats. And apparently most of the garden does have cages (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER) and they can run around on it. You can see here....

On this tiny piece of paper here, you can see a diagram of the cages. You can see spread out throughout the garden. That will mean the desecration of some of the trees.

LF: (*aghast*)

ACM: But I'm sure you will agree...

LF: What?

ACM: Agree to the desecration of the trees... for the little animals to run around

LEE (to LF): You say "are you sure you're a lawyer? You keep using the wrong words"

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

LF: Are you sure you're a lawyer? You keep using the WRONG WORDS.

ACM: Yes (*to audience*). I am a lawyer (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER). But I have a certain 'je ne sais quoi' (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER+ APPLAUSE). I am also a fantasist (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER). It's when I see a will, although it has been written out by your dear mother, I have hope to improve mankind, little animals, dogs and cats and mice.

(LF rises)

And I do admit, I do admit that I... bend the rules. In a lawyerish way

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

LF: I would like to just get this straight.

ACM: Yes.

LF: This house.

ACM: Yes.

LF: This garden.

ACM: Yes.

LF: Do you have any interest in these projects?

(pause)

ACM: Yes.

LF: Do you happen to own 200 cats?

ACM (nodding admittingly): Yes.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

LF: And 50 dogs?

ACM: Yes. Indeed.

LF: And you run a charity for homeless people?

ACM: Yes.

LF: And you are my mother's lawyer?

ACM: Yes. I am.

LF: I have a dilemma here.

ACM: You do?

LF: Yes. I like money. I like my mother's house. I loathe cats and dogs. I do!

(Spooky dramatic music starts)  
ACM, exasperated, looks around, gently slams hands on table  
LF: Could we reach an agreement?  
ACM: Yes.  
LF: Yes? How can we each use this to both our advantages?  
ACM: I...  
LEE: I'm a little less interested in this. I'd like you to say either "Screw you!" or "You can have it!". One or the other.  
LF: You can have/ it!  
ACM: /but  
LF: I don't give money!  
ACM: Thank you. I was going to tear up the will. But now you say I can have it/  
LF: /you can have it  
ACM: /I can have it. I can have it!  
LF: I'm going to hug... a tree.

FADE

The scene begins with simple staging and the fictional text world of a lawyer's office is created as soon as the comment "You know why I've called you here" is uttered (with an epistemic modal world created by "You know..."). In itself, this is a function advancing proposition, driving the scene forward – or at least should do, as long as the other performer responds in a way that befits a seasoned improviser. Keith Johnstone (1981) cites this as a common opportunity to 'block' the other performer thus deflating, even negating, the improvisation from the outset. In this case, if Lynn Farleigh were to simply (and simplistically) answer "No. Why?" to the above question, then the scene would probably fall somewhat flat and need some resuscitation.

The audience laughter after Anna Calder Marshall's opening line can therefore be attributed to the fact that the spectators know that the onus is suddenly on Farleigh to rise to the occasion and co-create the scene. In other words she has been 'dropped in it' and needs to use wit and experience to 'survive'. To merely swat the question back would not be 'entertaining', and although Farleigh's firm response of "yes, I do" may not be resoundingly successful, she has clearly bought into Calder Marshall's set-up. As have we.

The next element of note beyond the fiction of the dialogue, of course, is the first directorial intervention. Here the controlling voice from outside the 'story' appears and magically delivers the next line. We as the audience cannot but notice this extra-

world intrusion and so are hauled back to the reality of the staged discourse-world. Interestingly, the performers refrain from leaving their world\* and fixing their attention on the director but stay ‘in the moment’ while Phelim effectively whispers in their ear. This lack of acknowledgement seems to add to the entertainment as we are invited to believe that the performers do not know that we know they are being directed. Effectively what we experience is 2 worlds happening at the same time. As fig.1 shows, this return to the discourse world then shapes (or at least has an input on) the fictional text-world. The audience toggles between both in much the same way the audience may toggle between worlds when watching conventional plays or, as Cruickshank and Lahey maintain, when reading stage directions.

And so Phelim in his intervention gives explicit instruction as to what the actor should say next: “the next line is ‘but it’s more than that...’”. This is an obvious and well-worn technique in improvisation and useful for bump-starting a dialogue that might be perceived to be flagging in some way. It is therefore pertinent in the context of this examination to review the previous exchanges and draw some conclusion as to why Phelim felt required to intervene at that moment, and to what extent, if any, TWT analysis can give insight into this.

The previous speech by Anna Calder Martin of “your mother has left you her house, her garden and £500,000. Also... her holiday cottage in Greece” seems to comprehensively build an epistemic world. A clear schema is created in the minds of the audience of a classic inheritance scene (witnessed in many stage and screen dramas where a family gathers to hear the reading of a will, the anticipation being in the division of the spoils, with the tension of seeing who receives what – and who doesn’t).

Of course, here, there is only one obvious recipient, and she seems to have come off rather well. So not much tension here. This is revealed by Lynn Farleigh’s rather empty response “I’m a lucky lady” and Calder Marshall’s previous, phatic utterance “yes, yes, yes”. These two interjections subsequent to the ‘great revelation’ of the

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\*One notable exception is when ACM ‘knowingly’ looks to Phelim for confirmation with the line ‘I don’t know if that’s the right word’. However, this is as much for comedy effect as an appeal for genuine direction. She knows we know that he’s there and that he’s a director. Phelim acknowledges this irony and does not respond.

inheritance are clearly not advancing the ‘story’ or the function of this part of the scene. This could end up descending into a banal exchange of pleasantries or even silence.

Thus, Phelim intervenes; his intervention re-opening the possibilities of the scene by forcing the performers to reveal even more details of the inheritance. One could argue, however, that purely adding to the list of items in the will could merely lead to another impasse. And the actors realise this. Therefore, the subsequent utterances add a certain twist and tension in the form of the conditions attached to the deceased mother’s bequest (or “appendages” and “codacils” as Calder Marshall puts them). The opening up of this conditional world full of imagined obligations (e.g. “You must give it for 6 months of the year to homeless people” - TWT may regard this as the introduction of a deontic modal world-shift) drives the scene forward. As neither Phelim nor Lee need to intervene again for some time, we can assume that this has been done satisfactorily.

Indeed, Lee is the next intervener, and when he does this he is picking up on Anna Calder Marshall’s misuse of legal jargon: “You say ‘Are you sure you’re a lawyer? You’re using all the wrong words’”. The audience responds directly to Lee’s intervention with laughter as we are once again drawn ‘behind’ the improvisation while also staying within its fiction. This knowing double-worlding / theatrical irony has obvious implications regarding the performance. This is further compounded by the way Calder Marshall and Farleigh stay in the moment, maintaining straight faces throughout and seamlessly transitioning to the next utterance without obviously acknowledging Lee’s presence. In fact, Calder Marshall’s slightly worried expression (she’s been ‘rumbled’) adds to the comedy, as does her witty repost (slightly to the audience, breaking the fourth wall in true pantomime / *Commedia dell’Arte* fashion) of “Yes, I am a lawyer (pause), but I have a certain ‘je ne sais quoi’”.

This is arguably one of the most entertaining (in a comic sense) exchanges of the entire sketch, and also the most complex in terms of its double-worlding. In essence it also contains the most theatrical elements inherent to on-stage improvisation, dating back hundreds of years. Domenico Pietropaolo (2016) posits that the semiotic features of Italian *Commedia dell’Arte* consisted of spoken, gestural and non-verbal signs

(operating within the bio-mechanical restrictions of mask, costume – and by extension, the actor’s body). And these are all apparent here in *Lost Without Words*.

Returning to a consideration of how the emergent script would accurately reflect this improvisation (i.e. the extent to which the comedy could be as fresh every night if it were scripted), we must assume that the skill of the performer would ensure this.

Pietrapaolo goes to some lengths to suggest how improvisers of the past were masters at regurgitating tried and tested improvised ‘moves’ and that, as the audience, we were well aware of this and of what these moves involved, even if they were not necessarily written down on paper. It was therefore recognised as being down to the skill of the performer as to how well those moves could be incorporated into the performance and delivered afresh to an audience.

In the second and third scenes under scrutiny here, the effects are similar.



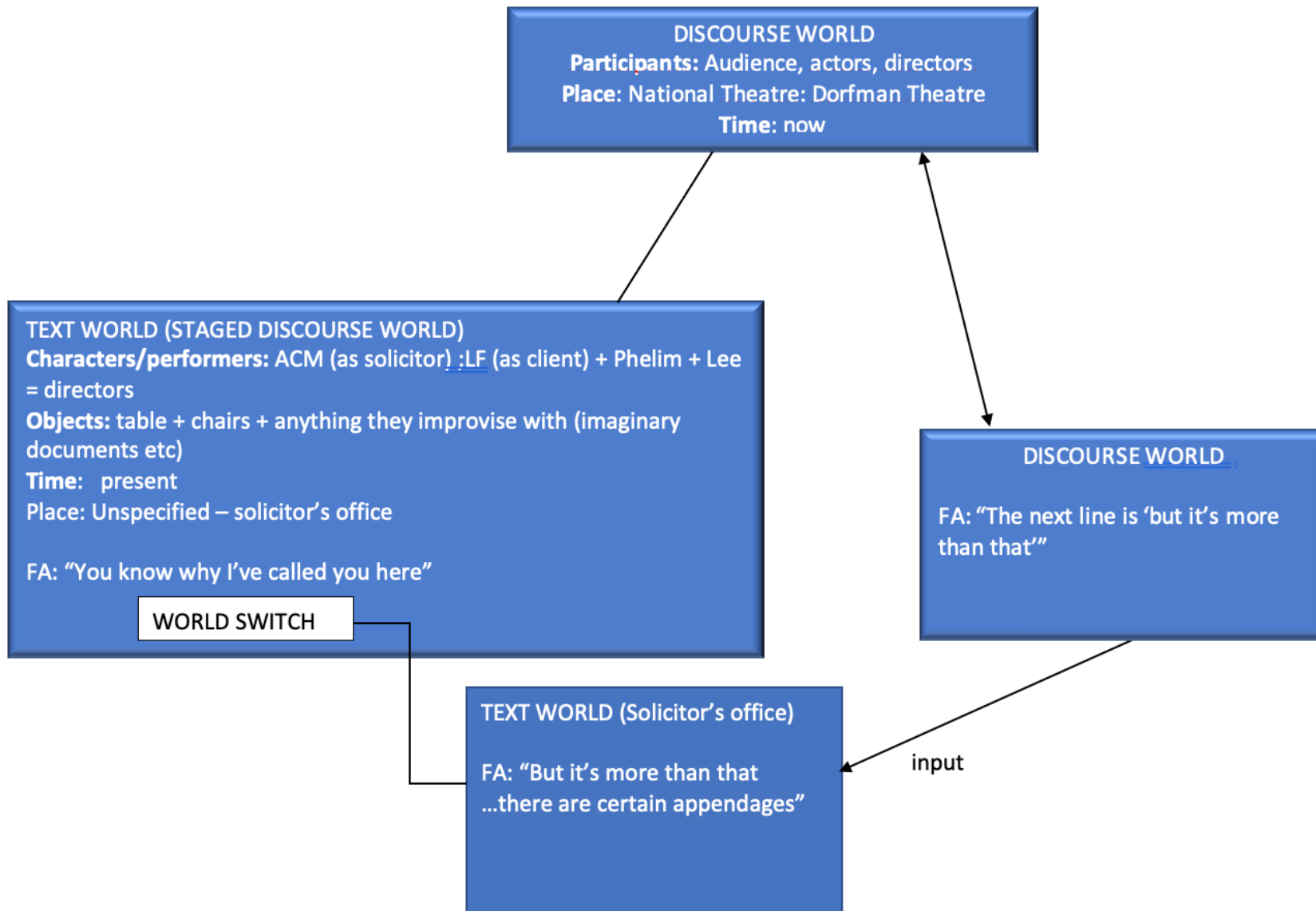


Figure 3.2 TWT diagram for *Lost Without Words* scene 1

### 3.2.2. Lost Without Words – scene 2

#### Lost Without Words – Transcript 2

Performance date: 8<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Theatre: National Theatre - Dorfman

Directors: Lee Simpson and Phelim McDermott

Performers: GA; LF

Similar intro to transcript 1.

Lee changes his patter:

“One of them has made a mistake. She knows she has made a mistake because she said ‘Jesus’”

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

Improv: Lynn Farleigh (standing behind GA with hands on her shoulders) and Georgina Anderson (seated with stick)

LF: Mum?

GA: Yes?

LF: Shall we have fish and chips for supper?

GA: Oh yes. I love fish and chips. Do you?

LF (*deep voice*): Yeeees. In the paper. No cooking. No washing up.

GA: Straight out of the News of the World

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

LF (*turning*): Two fish and chips in the News of the World. Thank you.

GA: Oh...oh... hot.

LF: Yep.

GA: Have you salt?

LF: Couple of salts please. Salt. Mushy peas?

GA: (Speaking with mouth full. Incomprehensible)

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

GA: Chips are good.

LF: Good. Good.

GA: Can't get ever work out how to eat the fish though. Can't grab hold of it like you can a chip, can you?

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

LF (*rising; eyes to heaven*): May I have 2 forks please?

There we are, Mum.

GA: Oh, you are a provider, aren't you?

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

LF: I am

(Pause)

GA: Jolly good.

LF: Fish and chips by the sea. Can't / beat it.

GA: /Are you going to swim?

LF: Yes I am!

GA: Well, I'm going to have a paddle

LF: Right.

(Pause)

LF: And I'm going to eat my fish and chips and then have a swim

PHELIM: Let's fade to the seafront. Onto the beach.

(music starts)  
GA (*stands*): I'll give this to the seagulls. Pssshhht.  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)  
LF (*limbering up; kicking off imaginary shoes*): I'm going. I am.  
GA: Be careful. I want you to come back.  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)  
LF: Nah, you've got to... you've got to do it with 'gusto', Mum. I'll just get in, swim around and... (*jumps*). Ooooh!  
GA: Do you want me to help you with a stick?  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)  
LF (*swimming*): It's cold, Mum. Are you paddling?  
GA: Oh you are doing well.  
PHELIM: And this scene is called "The Day that Mum Decided to Swim"  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)  
GA drops stick and starts swimming  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)  
LF: Mum! Mum!! (*swims to 'Mum'*)  
GA: Ooh. Help me. Get me out.  
LF: What are you doing?  
GA: I'm swimming.  
LF: You are! You're swimming.  
GA: Woo hoo!  
LF: On your back. On your back.  
GA: Yes.  
LF: Let go.  
GA: I can't pick me feet up  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)  
LF: Backstroke. Look at the sky, Mum. Look at the sky.  
GA: Yes.  
PHELIM picks up stick and moves it back to GA as if it's a fish...  
GA: Oh lovely. Floated back to me.  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)  
Well, it's a pity I hadn't thought about that before I jumped in with all my clothes on.  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

FADE

In this second example, Phelim feels the need to intervene when the performers start to talk about future intentions rather than engage in current activities. This is a classic improv 'faux-pas' (Johnstone, 1981) as it leads to 'telling' not 'doing' with the diegetic move of "I'm going to..." being a rather unfulfilling function for an audience that is expecting to see something happen now. Thus Phelim intervenes with his rather cinematically expressed "let's fade to the seafront. Onto the beach". His second intervention of giving a title ("And this scene is called 'the day that Mum decided to swim'") has the same effect of giving explicit lines to the actors in scene 1: it forces

the scene forward. There is no way (reasonably) that ‘Mum’ (Georgina Anderson) cannot ‘take the plunge’ and swim. This therefore opens up the scene to various possibilities (she may struggle, get into difficulties, find she’s an olympic swimmer, get eaten by a shark etc etc) as well as give opportunities for her ‘daughter’, Lynn Farleigh, to engage.

Phelim then interacts physically with the walking stick, turning it into a ‘fish’. The expectation here is that one or other of the actors will pick up on this and respond to it as an aquatic creature, thus setting up a third, if imaginary and non-human, character (as with the robin in scene 3) with which our protagonists can interact. This is also the presumption of the audience (we can see clearly how the stick is ‘swimming’ in a fish-like manner); however, GA does not/refuses to (?) pick up on this cue and with ‘Oh lovely. Floated back to me.’, she acknowledges the object as still being her (real) walking stick – an object that she, as an elderly person, actually requires. This swift negation of the situation being imposed upon her by (the far younger) Phelim, and the suggestion that her stick managed to find her, inspires laughter among the audience.

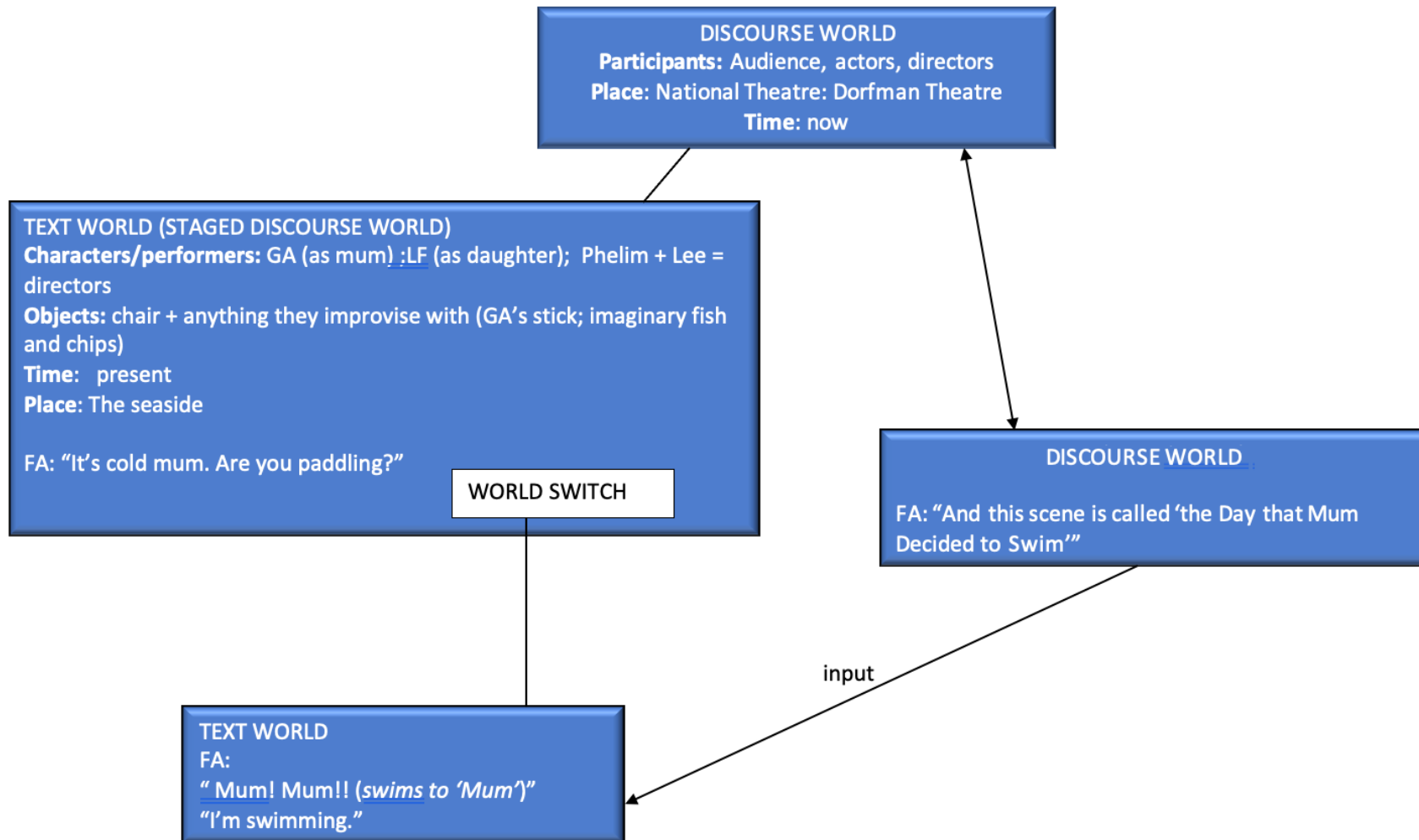


Figure 3.3 TWT diagram for *Lost Without Words* scene 2

### 3.2.3. Lost Without Words – scene 3

Lost Without Words – Transcript 3

Performance date: 9<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Theatre: National Theatre - Dorfman

Directors: Lee Simpson and Phelim McDermott

Similar introduction (but no extra patter tonight)

LEE: Hello. These are the actors.

Improv performers: Georgina Anderson (seated with stick) and Caroline Blakiston

CB: Hello Mum.

GA: Ha ha. I didn't know you were there. Were you hiding?

CB: Not hiding. I've come to prune your rosemary bush.

GA: How sweet of you. To think of me.

CB: And your lavender bush

GA: Yes?

CB: And you can just sit here and enjoy the sun

GA: That is extremely kind of you.

CB: Here's my basket

GA: Yes.

CB: I shall wear my gardening apron. Coz I always do.

GA: Yes. And the gloves.

CB: And the gloves. I've got my secateurs.

GA: Yes

CB: So. Relax.

GA: It's OK. I'll relax. (*relaxes*)

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

CB: Here we go.

GA: Get busy

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

CB: Not too busy. I want it to be fun for both of us (*ties on 'apron'; puts on 'gloves'*)

(birdsong)

GA: A robin? It is!

CB: Good.

GA: He comes a lot, you know.

CB: Yeah.

GA: And sp... sometimes he actually comes and sits on my shoe.

CB: Does he?

GA: He's looking for worms, you see

CB: Is he? Does he sit in your toe, or...?

GA: Yes he... he sat right there (*points with stick*)

CB (bending down to look): Does he?

GA: There's nothing magic about my toe (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER). He just got closer.

CB: Maybe it IS magic for him

GA: Oh... oh...

CB: I think he likes your toe

GA: Well, I suppose it's convenient (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER). It's all (*unclear*)... the earth that gets dug up. Now have you... you've pruned one.

CB: No. I haven't pruned this today. Today, I'm doing the latest bit of pruning. This I did last week... Don't you want to stay sitting, mother?

PHELIM: Pause. I'm just going to pause the scene. We all got excited earlier because you kind of made a promise: that the robin comes and lands on your foot. We might be quite interested in seeing that... happen (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

GA: That'd be a good idea. I tell you what, I'll dig for a bit and see if he thinks I'm digging up worms for him again.

CB: Very well. Do you want a trowel, mother? There you are.

GA: Err... no. I need something longer. Oh, there's a fork.

CB (*bending down*): There's a fork

GA (*digging with stick*): Now we need to be quiet (*sticks out foot* - AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

(Tinkly music begins: anticipation of what will happen...)

GA: Oh. Damn it. Not wormy enough for him. (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER – GA continues to dig)

(More tinkly music)

CB: He's on the way (both follow the bird's trajectory)  
(*whispering*) If you sit down, he may come back

LEE: Let's assume that the robin's going to land on your toe... Pretty soon!  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

(Music crescendos and stops – the robin has landed)

CB (*whispering*): Do you think he likes grubs as well. Or just worms?

PHELIM: This was the day that the robin SPOKE.

TIM PREECE (*as the robin – off*): Hello

GA: Hello?

TP: I love being in your garden

GA: Did you enjoy it?

TP: I enjoyed it particularly because of your shoe. Your shoe is one of the best shoes in the neighbourhood (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

(Pause)

GA: Have you... have you any other news for me?  
(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

I've heard that birds can foretell the future and all that?

TP: Ah. I think your garden is going to flourish. Your garden is going to be very special. And I've heard amongst other birds that you're going to have flocks and flocks and flocks of birds coming to visit you this summer

GA: Oh goodness. I'd better get some more food

TP: You better had. And, if possible, plenty of shoes (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

PHELIM: And all the other birds arrived (*looking at remaining cast members*)

CAST: Tweet, tweet, tweeeet etc etc

GA: Oh... /oh dear

TP: /These are all my friends

CB: Come and stay, come and stay! I'm going to get some breadcrumbs

GA: Well, hurry, hurry  
(CB goes off and returns with a 'basket')

CB: Bread... and fruit  
(CAST continuing to make bird noises, eating and saying 'thank you'; 'what a lovely lady' etc)

TP: Thank you very much

FADE

The third scene, involving Georgine Anderson and Caroline Blakiston, again in self appointed roles as mother and daughter, is a much quieter, slower scene where the two characters are situated in a garden. The mother (Anderson) generally remains seated while the daughter stands and shows more activity. There is less of the tension inherent in scene 1 (the reading of the will and the conditions attached) and of the physical action of scene 2 (mum swimming in the open sea). Instead, the directors allow the two protagonists to continue to build the world of the garden, drawing into their dialogue such schematic features as ‘secateurs’, ‘gardening gloves’ and ‘apron’. It is the introduction of ‘the robin’, ostensibly a third character, and its subsequent negation through a change of subject back to ‘pruning’ that presses Phelim to intervene.

GA: Oh... oh...

CB: I think he likes your toe

GA: Well, I suppose it’s convenient... it’s all the earth that gets dug up. Now, have you pruned that one?

CB: No, I haven’t pruned this today

Here the world-shift to the robin landing on Anderson’s toe is swished away and we revert to the previously set-up world of ‘gardening’. Phelim is not accepting this and drags the performers and the audience back.

Phelim: Pause. I’m just going to pause the scene. We all got excited earlier because you kind of made a promise: that the robin comes and lands on your foot. We might be quite interested in seeing that... happen.

Again, Phelim, cinematically ‘pausing’ the scene as if on video/DVD, juggles simultaneously with different worlds. By his very intervention, we are brought back to the staged discourse-world of the improvisation; he then refers to the world-shift within the actors’ dialogue where they talked about the robin; he meanwhile provokes a future modal discourse-world (“We might be interested in seeing that happen”) of



the audience, while also referring to a potential epistemic modal world of the robin landing on Georgine Anderson's foot.

Lee Simpson's subsequent intervention with "Let's assume that the robin's going to land on your toe... pretty soon!" reinforces this driver (and comically exposes the actors' slowness to respond). Phelim's "This was the day that the robin spoke" has a similar effect to giving the title in scene 2, but with its paranormal potential elevating the scene far beyond everyday conversation in a garden.

Such mundane conversation may not be such a relevant issue, however. The directors were happy for tension-free discourse to occur at the beginning of the scene.

However, with the arrival of the robin and a 'raising of the stakes' (Johnstone, 1981), a reversion to banal chit-chat at this point seems to deflate the scene. So, the robin is given the power of speech and a third actor, Tim Preece (off) comes in, at least vocally. This has the expected comic result: birds can't speak and Tim Preece isn't supposed to be in this scene. The norms are therefore up-ended. Cashing in on this, then, Phelim finally intervenes with "and all the other birds arrived", looking at the rest of the cast for 'help'.

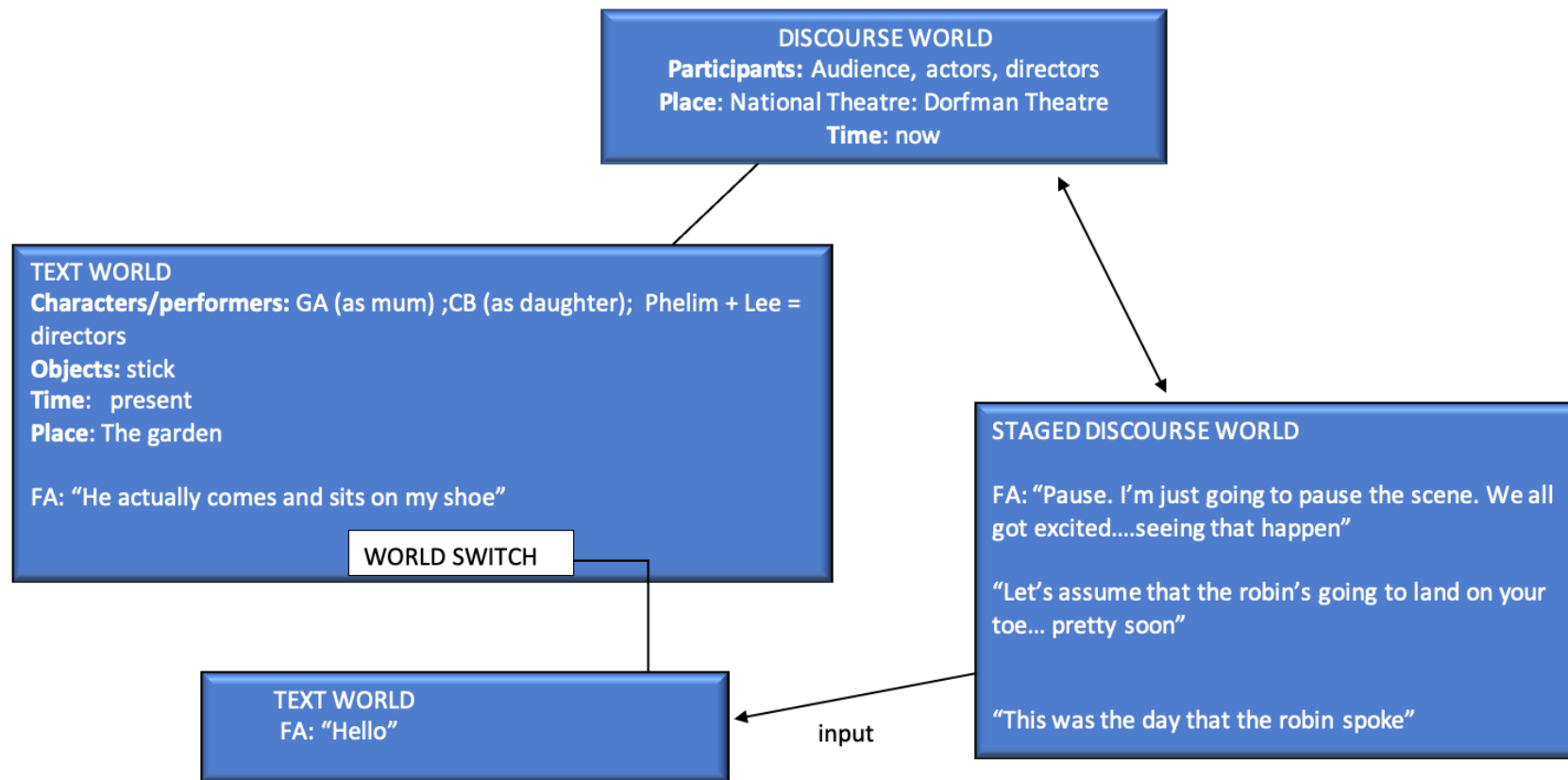


Figure 3.4 TWT diagram for *Lost Without Words* scene 3

### 3.3. Lost Without Words - Conclusions

This analysis of these three example scenes from *Lost Without Words* throws up some interesting issues in terms of the cognitive processing of the drama by the audience, and of the psychological identification of the performers as themselves with their improvised roles. It is this latter conflation or potential confusion which is highlighted in *Lost Without Words*. In fact, when the cast were approached for their comments via the Improbable Theatre press office, the actors were reluctant, their greatest concern being that their real actor selves would be directly associated with their characters. This obviously throws up issues of how performers in this particular instance exist in the liminal area between reality and fiction, and how their spontaneously produced dialogue, in its genuineness, may be taken for 'reality' by the audience (or drama researcher). These issues, I maintain, go towards the formation of an interesting script. The complication being, however, that we have two potential texts arising out of this performance: one the warts-and-all transcript of the entire show, including directorial interventions, repetition, stumblings and audience reaction; the other an edited version, involving only character dialogue, polished as per the director's instructions.

The first is closer to the performance as witnessed by the audience on the night: a unique and largely un-replicable experience. The purpose of scripting and repeating the interventions every night would make the show something other than a 'traditional' play, in that sense. It would be more a comedy, for example, about putting on a show, with the directors forming part of the on-stage cast. The authenticity of the occasion is therefore lost and we have a play within a play (e.g. Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*; Mischief Theatre's *The Play That Goes Wrong*).

The second script-type is more akin to what we see in *The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy*, where Winterbottom's interventions have been absorbed into the subsequent 'takes' and as author, he has chosen, edited and produced a polished final version.

It is this differentiation between text *as* performance and text *from* performance (and its subsequent re-performability) that is key here: what are the features of the text that can stand up to replication, the test of time, and that can retain the wit and energy of

the original fresh utterance? And to what extent, if any, does that rely on the experience and skill of the performer?

In an extension of this analysis, I shall later show how cinematic examples involving largely untrained actors may show that the skill of the performer as a trained professional may be second to the poetry of the script no matter how banal and everyday it may seem on the surface. If this thesis is to reveal any one thing, it is that there is an inherent literary quality to even the most mundane of exchanges, if contextualized and presented in a skillful way, be that through stage direction, the choice and arrangement of the words on the page, or, indeed, delivery. However, one does not need to be an Olivier to successfully deliver a witty exchange. Indeed, the rawness of a relatively untrained actor or spontaneous improviser may be the very ingredient that injects such an exchange with the elusive ‘theatrical’ quality that a scriptwriter may otherwise rack their brains over producing.

To that end, further TWT analysis may be made of outwardly similar examples from other dramatic writing genres (scriptwriting for film and TV). Scott (2016) cites the possibilities of using stylistic, analytical mechanisms in creating a sound pedagogy of creative writing. He warns, however, of the two possible dangers in ‘thinking too much’ about the creative process: first that too much focus on practice can be inhibiting and, second, that it may not be ‘healthy’ to disassociate creativity from theoretical critical study. However, it remains an interesting notion that analyses such as those made in this chapter can serve to inform the creative writer. Here, we gain insight into how directors (in their roles as dramaturgs and writers) go through the process of deciding what works and what does not when using an improvised text as base material. We can also stylistically compare those examples with others that have not undergone the same process.

### 3.4. What makes a play’s dialogue ‘work’?

It is pertinent at this point to (re) examine what it is regarding dialogue (in as far as this thesis is primarily concerned) that playwrights themselves believe to be vital to a successful play. Of course, this has been observed at various levels – from the whole play to the single utterance. It is worth noticing, however, the consistencies and

variations in the theory and in what experts maintain are the driving forces behind a drama text.

Stuart Spencer in *The Playwright's Guidebook* (2002) is happy to differentiate between what he calls the 'tools' of playwriting (structure, motivation, subtext, conflict, stakes, events, beats...) and the 'elements' (theme, plot, dialogue, character). At the same time, however, he is most wary of atomizing these latter features as, for him, the overall creative activity of writing a play is far more than the sum of these parts. The implication here is that 'good' dialogue does not necessarily lead to a 'good' play. And even if those other elements are also 'good', there is no guarantee that it will all 'work' when taken together. Nevertheless, Spencer says that dialogue remains the principle driving force behind writing a play.

Saying that dialogue is easy but plays are hard always strikes me as a little funny. It's like saying you're good at everything about swimming except staying afloat.

(Spencer, 2002: 195)

Spencer's argument is that dialogue is everything that conveys the essentials of a play. Yes, some plays do this without dialogue (cf Peter Handke's 1992 wordless play *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other*) but arguably, here, stage directions stand in for dialogue between the writer and the reader, which results in a staged performance. These are exceptions.

However, the poetic quality of a play's dialogue, Spencer asserts, is not forced or created as much as 'discovered'. This is a result of impulse. Writer and academic Tim Fountain (2007) echoes this when he says that a first draft can come across as cold or banal but it lays the foundations for a discovery of what it is the character (and thus the actor) needs to 'do' rather than 'say'. David Mamet in *Three Uses of the Knife* goes further by claiming that even Brecht's writings, which by their epic nature are the most consciously constructed of works, actually "bear little relationship to his plays, which are extraordinarily charming and beautiful and lyrical" (2000: 47).

The conscious manipulation of language to 'cash in' on any such impulsive, subconscious expression and to extend it to the end of the scene occurs, therefore, in the edit. This is arguably what Winterbottom, McDermott and Simpson are also doing with the spontaneous dialogue they have been given; however, the question remains

as to what it is that can make that spontaneous, impulsive speech a diamond worth cutting and polishing.

Some playwriting and screenwriting industry ‘gurus’ such as Syd Field and Louis E Catron will go to great pains to distinguish successful stage dialogue from life’s everyday conversations, and, indeed, as previously claimed, a verbatim staging of most ‘chats’ would not bring in crowds at the box office. Catron (2001) even suggests that identifying stage characters as conversing indicates a sure sign of failure; of a lack of attention to the elements of characterisation and plot inherent to traditional plays. Even if a writer seeks to capture the flavour of real-life interaction, the shaped, organized and constructed stage dialogue should serve dramatic tension, conflict, and drive the narrative forward in a vital way.

This smacks of rather a conventional view and through the analysis of examples of drama such as *The Trip*, where there is no obvious characterization or plot, this assertion in a modern context of ‘reality TV’ is probably outdated. The American New Language plays as outlined in chapter 1, in their rejection of Aristotelian rules, and in their search for a new linguistic dramatic force, also undermine this conventional stance. Indeed, Catron himself, rather paradoxically, gives writers the advice to “listen to speech patterns of people around you... fill your writer’s notebook with oral sketches that may later become part of a character in a play” (p.131).

I would suggest that this collage-like piecing together of snippets of dialogue and real-life interactions, coupled with a conscious, yet emotional drive to present a staged world in a poetic way, is the essential tool for a playwright.

What all these playwriting experts and teachers agree on most, however, is that the principle source of spoken text is the character themselves. Dialogue does not create a character; characters create dialogue. To effect this, the character must be vital and alive, and the playwright’s ear attuned to what they say, how they say it and how they respond to others. If the dialogue is perceived to emanate directly from the character and not be a text imposed upon them (Catron cites the anemic dialogue of daytime soaps, p.132), then the audience/reader will ‘buy into’ the play and the dialogue will prove effective in its aims.

In the case of improvisation-based drama such as *The Trip* and *Lost Without Words*, the actors themselves have developed their characters, invariably extensions or versions of their own selves (either consciously or unconsciously), and thus their dialogue comes from within that construct. The director/writer then has to re-model that dialogue to ensure that a) the actors have been consistent in their characterization, b) when they haven't been, it has been for some dramatic/comic effect (viz Anna Calder Marshall's aside to the audience; Brydon and Coogan's lengthy impersonations), and c) it is, in general, *entertaining*. What exactly constitutes that entertainment may still seem elusive, though Mamet (2010) is quite outspoken on this, with particular regard to a text's lyrical appeal:

The dramatic poetry (the text) must be entertaining. It must move quickly and possess all the fluidity, rhythmic forces and tonal beauty of which the author is capable. What are our [America's] culture's masterpieces of poetry? They were written by Hank Williams, Muddy Waters, Johnny Mercer... "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" is a pretty good tagline... but how can it compare with "the son of a bitch stole my watch"?

(Mamet, 2010: 74)

### 3.5. That Sinking Feeling (1979) and David and Olivia: Naked in Scotland (2018)

Taking scene analysis further, to highlight how script-writing decisions can differ greatly, and with significantly divergent audience receptions, two more examples can be compared; both on-screen rather than on-stage (the first from a film, the second a TV mini-series). The conceit here is that, in keeping with the examples taken from *The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy* (as well as Pinter's *Victoria Station*), these are short dialogues performed within the tight setting of a car's interior. Thus no exterior props, minimal physical movement and limited scope for traditional theatrical activity or 'business'. The focus is on the language.

### 3.5.1. That Sinking Feeling (1979)



Figure 3.5 *That Sinking Feeling* (Bill Forsyth, 1979). Photo credit: Creative Commons

The first example is from Bill Forsyth's 1979 film *That Sinking Feeling* (TSF). Shot on a minimal budget of just a few thousand pounds at the time, TSF was a surprise hit when screened at the Edinburgh Film festival that year. As lead actor Robert Buchanan has said in interview (2008), it was rare for any film to be made in Glasgow at that time, and the entire production was imbued with a sense of amateur enthusiasm, with no-one really expecting it to come to anything.

Set against a depressed, dilapidated urban landscape (the opening credits declare that the story takes place in Glasgow but 'any similarity to a real city called Glasgow is unintentional'), it tells the tale of how a group of un- and under-employed youths find a way out of their seemingly hopeless existence by planning the theft of a consignment of stainless steel sinks. So much for the plot.

What occurs during the film, however, is a series of comic vignettes, relatively loosely strung together to drive the narrative. The actual heist becomes almost secondary to these individual set-pieces, comical exchanges, and caper-ish action sequences. This may not seem unusual in the history of British comedy films. One need only think of the oft-quoted *Withnail and I* (Bruce Robison, 1987), where the overarching story is largely forgotten among the individual, far more memorable comedy moments.



Looking back, despite its now ‘classic gem’ status, TSF was criticized somewhat for seeming slapdash in this approach (Adair, 1981) and Buchanan himself says that it could easily have had 20 minutes cut from it. Nevertheless, taking just one scene for analysis reveals Forsyth’s decision-making in letting the character-created dialogue set the timbre for the film as a whole.

### 3.5.2. Transcript: That Sinking Feeling – Bill Forsyth (1979)

OPENING SCENE: 3 YOUNG GLASWEGIAN MEN SITTING IN A CAR  
INT: CAR POV THROUGH WINDSCREEN

SIMMY (Douglas Sannachan), RONNIE (Rab Buchanan), WAL (Billy Greenlees)

RONNIE: The rain’s definitely goin’ off eh?

SIMMY: Sure is.

WAL: A good shower really cleans the place up. It makes the world sparkle.

RONNIE: Sure does.

(Pause. Traffic/urban noise in background)

(to SIMMY) Did you have a good day?

SIMMY: Very enjoyable

WAL (*jumping in*): Same here. Very, very enjoyable.

RONNIE: Me too. In the park mostly.

(Pause)

WAL: It’s miserable, innit?

RONNIE: Yeah. (*Pause*) I tried to kill myself today (*pause*). Just after you left, Wal. I took a mouthful of cornflakes and milk and held my nose shut. I tried to drown myself’ in cornflakes and milk!

SIMMY: Now, if you want tae kill yerself, what ye dae is, ye stand somewhere wet, get yerself a good earth and plug yerself into the mains. That’s what I was going to dae. (*Beat*) Woof!

WAL: No. I think the best way is out a window. Really high up. Hurtling down at 120 mile per hour. I was gonnae try that up at the high flats but the lift was stuck. Couldnae be bothered climbing 400 stairs. Christ, you’d be fit for nothing by the time you got to the top.

(Pause)

SIMMY: There’s got to be more tae life than committing suicide.

RONNIE: There’s got to be something. (*Beat*) There’s got to be some way out.

CUT to EXT – VIC (John Hughes) WALKING ACROSS URBAN WASTELAND TOWARDS CAR, WHICH, IT IS REVEALED, IS WHEEL-LESS AND PROPPED UP ON BRICKS

VIC (*through car window*): Hey, this rain’s goin’ off, eh?

ALL (*inside*): Aw, beaut at tha’ / Aye

VIC: You’s comin’ doon the road then?

ALL (*inside*): You’s goin’? / Aw, come on

ALL EXIT CAR AND WALK AWAY. WAL PAUSES AND TURNS TOWARDS CAR

WAL (*to SIMMY*): Eh, you don't think it's time you traded that in fae somethin' with wheels?

This scene, from near the beginning of the movie, finds our protagonists Ronnie, Simmie and Wal sitting in a car. The conversation starts benignly – *too* benignly. This is crucial, as this exchange between three Glaswegian down-on-their-luck teenagers seems incongruously more akin to that between three old ladies at tea. A beat/pause swiftly brings us back to their reality as they each bemoan the futility of their existences and describe how they have each tried or contemplated suicide as a means of escape, but ultimately failed to carry it through.

Such darkly comic, revelatory exchanges about the non-light at the end of their tunnels have an obviously Beckettian tone, as does the confined nature of their surroundings. Forsyth then cinematically issues his comic coup de theatre by panning the camera back to reveal that the car in which they are sitting is wheel-less, propped on bricks in the middle of an area of wasteland in Maryhill.

They then each exit the car and trudge off 'doon the road' at the invitation of a fourth character from outside.

What is important to realise here, before analyzing the dialogue in more detail, is that this scene, as with all the others in the film (and in the subsequent *Gregory's Girl* of 1980), *evolved* from an idea given by Forsyth to his actors – all young, untrained, unpaid members of the Glasgow Youth Theatre. The script was nascent and skeletal in form but the final dialogue came about from a process of improvisation and polishing (Buchanan, 2008).

### 3.5.3. Analysis

In applying a Text World analysis to this scene, the following diagram (Figure 3.6) and observations may be made.

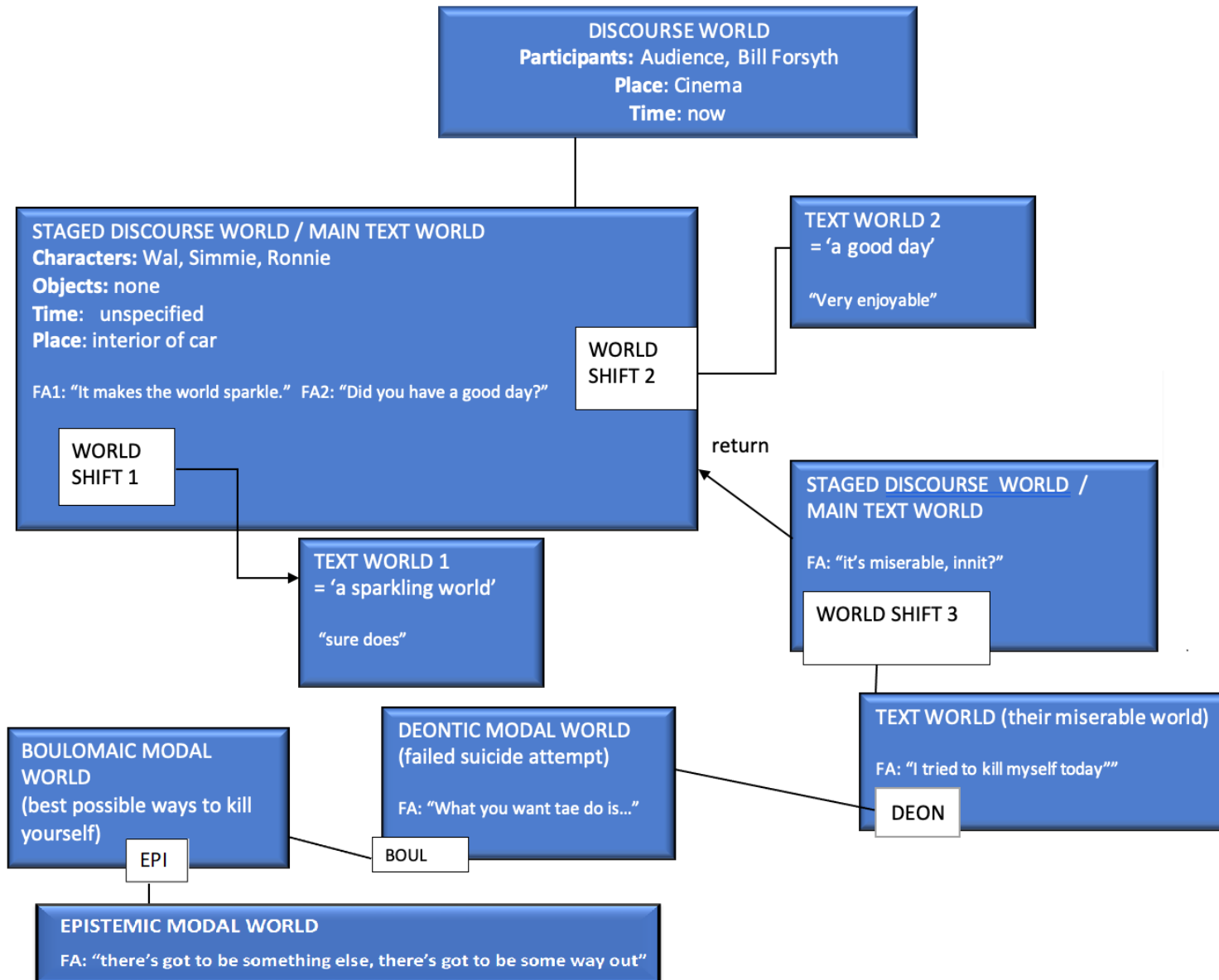


Figure 3.6 TWT diagram for *That Sinking Feeling* (car scene)

The staged discourse-world of the men in a car is established. They then describe a world ('rain makes it sparkle') that is present but beyond what we the viewer can obviously see. Their exchange regarding their 'enjoyable days' is at a temporal remove from what we are experiencing. Thus, two non-immediate world-shifts are created through the characters' dialogue.

The phrase "it's miserable, innit?" after a short pause brings us back to the staged world we are witnessing: it is indeed miserable, though this also refers diegetically to their respective yet shared, futile existences (that we can only know from hearsay). The consequent descriptions of how they attempted or contemplated suicide gives a further, historical basis for this statement. In addition, the theoretical statements of "if you want tae kill yerself..." and "I think the best way is out a window", take us, respectively, into epistemic and boulomaic, even teleological, modal worlds, which, by its incongruously dark subject nature is rendered comical. Then, Robbie's "there's got to be something else, there's got to be some way out", sets up yet another, epistemic modal-world.

On the whole, the set-up is simple and there is irony on more than one level. The fact that they are sitting in a car gives rise to the notion that at least one of them has the means to afford a vehicle. As we see at the end, this is not so. Indeed, the shell of a car on bricks, in the midst of an urban wasteland further emphasises their despair. The initial pleasantries are swiftly undermined too by their despondent analysis of methods of suicide. It is this very analysis, and its cold, unemotional approach ("Nah, if you want to kill yerself, what ye dae is..."), as if giving instructions on how to bake a cake, that add to the black comedy here.

The dialogue is delivered in the simplistic, matter-of-fact manner of young men in discussion, though Robbie does betray some emotion with "I tried drowning mysel' in cornflakes and milk!", which only serves to emphasise his hopelessness not only in life but also in his way to seek death.

It is this short, 3-minute scene, along with the other vignettes in the film, that inspired most reviewers at the time and since (Mark Kermode (2006), for instance) to laud TSF as a 'Scottish gem', and to propel Forsyth's directing career forward with *Gregory's Girl* (1980), *Comfort and Joy* (1981), and *Local Hero* (1983). Essentially

employing the same production techniques, though with bigger budgets and A-list actors, Forsyth's trademark whimsical observation and authentic Scottish 'voices' are evident in all these films – though admittedly less so perhaps once Hollywood's influence renders them less obviously 'homespun'.

#### 3.5.4. David and Olivia: Naked in Scotland (2018)



Figure 3.7 *David and Olivia: Naked in Scotland* (Sean King, 2018). Photo credit: Creative Commons)

In contrast, a more recent example is taken from the mini-series *David and Olivia: Naked in Scotland* (2018) directed by Sean King.

Here there is an equally simple set-up; again, with a twist: a man gets into his own car (Range Rover) to drive across Scotland in order to meet his girlfriend at the airport. As he drives he finds he has a stowaway on board – a naked woman. She joins him in the front and a conversation ensues. The scriptwriter (main actor Sean Lerwill) knows full well not to reveal *why* she is naked and *how* she ended up in the car. Indeed these are arguably never satisfactorily revealed at all during the entire 3-part series.

Nevertheless, and rather obviously, since they are both young, attractive protagonists, there is the hint of romance, the culmination of which is implied (though not seen) in the final scene. In the midst of this is the unseen girlfriend who appears, disembodied via the car's telephone speaker, making ever increasing demands on David (Sean Lerwill), to which his naked passenger, Olivia (Kate Braithwaite), reacts.

### 3.5.5. Transcript: David And Olivia – Naked In Scotland (2018)

Director: Sean King  
New Zealand Son Films

OLIVIA (Kate Braithwaite)  
DAVID (Sean Lerwill)

INT LAND ROVER  
EXT SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS  
LAND ROVER IS DRIVING ALONG ROADS THROUGH SCOTTISH  
COUNTRYSIDE

OLIVIA IN PASSENGER SEAT, NAKED APART FROM A ‘SHIRT’ MADE FROM A PAPER BAG. DAVID DRIVES.

DAVID: “Bitch queen of death” seemed a bit harsh.  
OLIVIA: I just call it how I see it, David.  
DAVID: She’s just particular  
OLIVIA: Yeah, particular about you being her bitch.  
DAVID: Funny (beat). She probably just misses me. She’s never been very good at expressing her feelings.  
OLIVIA: And you’re the master of yours, are you?  
DAVID: She might be a bit stubborn and bossy but organised people often are.  
OLIVIA: Hmph, and you think she’s the one for you coz she’s organised?  
DAVID: People who share character traits work best. There’s less conflict.  
OLIVIA: It may not be my place to say, but... seems like you just give in. Do you ever hear that opposites attract? Conflict can be a good thing.  
DAVID: I don’t think so/  
OLIVIA: /No. Conflict means passion. Do you and what’s-her-face have passion?  
DAVID: Jess.  
OLIVIA: What?  
DAVID: Her name is Jess.  
OLIVIA: ‘Sorry’. Do you and *Jess* have passion? What’s the most passionate thing you two have done this year?  
DAVID: (Silence)  
OLIVIA: Well?  
DAVID: I’m thinking!  
OLIVIA: Struggling to decide between all those passionate memories? Let me help you out: she goes away for work, right?  
DAVID: Yeah.  
OLIVIA: How long usually?  
DAVID: A couple of weeks.  
OLIVIA: And how long once she’s back before you two are ripping each other’s clothes off? (beat) Because you’re desperate to have each other?  
DAVID: We’re 30 not 13.

OLIVIA: Yeah. There's as much 'passion' in your relationship as there is in my 'bag-vest'.

DAVID: I think it looks good.

OLIVIA: Yeah, you would 'passion boy'

(Silence)

OLIVIA: Why didn't you give me your shirt?

DAVID: I... err... I don't know.

OLIVIA: That's bullshit. We always know. Don't think, just answer.

DAVID: I don't know! I should've done, alright? It would have been the right thing to do!

OLIVIA: See, now there's a bit of passion.

DAVID: Oh, shut up! Is that what got you into this mess? Passion?

OLIVIA (sniggering): I wish.

DAVID: So this isn't a sex thing?

OLIVIA: Nudity isn't always about sex, David.

### 3.5.6. Analysis

The scene under scrutiny here is one such occasion where Olivia takes on the role of David's relationship counselor – quite a task for someone who has only known him for a very brief time. In attempting a Text World analysis, we may map the scene as follows (see Figure 3.8).

The staged world is familiar by now: the interior of a car. David is driving, Olivia is in the passenger seat, naked except for a shirt fashioned out of a paper bag. David's opening line of "Bitch queen of death seemed a bit harsh" obviously refers to a comment made previously by Olivia regarding David's (on the phone) girlfriend. Harsh indeed from someone who has never met her, and a somewhat muted critical response by the 'victim's' supposed boyfriend.

Nevertheless, the text-world of the two protagonists is set and the continuing dialogue remains within it at first. Deviations occur when David describes his girlfriend as 'probably just missing me. She's never been good at expressing her feelings'. This shift from an epistemic modal world (*probably*) to a negative world (*never*) when referring to the girlfriend is then dispelled by Olivia's reference to David as being equally dispassionate.

Indeed, David spends the first four or more interjections referring to the 'world(s)' of his girlfriend and each time Olivia brings it back to David, using the deictic pronoun of 'you' while he depends on 'she'. This toggling back between points / 'people' of reference could contribute to some dramatic goal. However, in its (presumed) efforts

to establish David as a weak character, who puts others before himself and needs to re-find an independent spark, the scene falls flat. No real revelation is made, and even if he does start to get riled, the interjections by Olivia would hardly be enough to make him have that moment of self-discovery and emotional freedom. I would argue that at this point in the drama, this to-ing and fro-ing between worlds is somewhat forced and aimless.

The dialogue continues. The world of David's and his girlfriend's 'passionate' (or not) relationship is what occupies the following exchanges until Olivia states that "there's as much passion in your relationship as there is in this bag-vest" to which David responds "I think it looks good", bringing us back to the original staged discourse-world in the car.

Olivia's post-pause interjection of "why didn't you give me your shirt?" is odd and out of place in the previous context. Potentially, and after such a pause, there is a Pinter-esque quality to such a non-sequitur. But David picks up on this with a somewhat weak "I don't know... I don't know. I should have done, alright? It would have been the right thing to do." Here we are asked to image a series of text-worlds, some arguably more remote than others: negative worlds of David's (lack of) knowledge expressed by "I don't know", a deontic counterfactual world in "I should have done" and an epistemic world which evaluates the deontic world in the assertion "It would have been the right thing to do". In these latter, remoter worlds, David appears to act with more gallantry. Yet, so far in the drama, he has acted with surprising compassion and tolerance to the imposition his naked passenger has made on him, so why are we asked to imagine an alternative world, which isn't even necessarily alternative? In terms of an advancement of David's characterisation (presumably the aim of the text at this point), the exchange seems lost. Indeed, following David's above-cited reaction, this series of sub-worlds is cast aside by Olivia's reaction to David raising his voice (why?) in "it would have been the right thing to do!" This gives her reason to re-iterate (for the eighth time!) the idea of 'passion', thus making a connection back to the running theme of the previous exchanges. However, the forced nature of this build-up (Olivia's incongruous reference to David's shirt; his conjuring up a somewhat unbelievable regret and his



inexplicable raising of his voice; Olivia's sudden re-reference to 'passion') renders it all rather contrived.

The dialogue finishes with David associating the now well-worn motif of 'passion' with 'sex', at which point Olivia slams him down with the 'wise' repost: "nudity isn't always about sex, David."

It is perhaps this final observation in the scene analysis that is itself worth remarking upon. The scene is weak. In fact, the majority of online reviews of this comedy-drama series have been mixed to say the least (Amazon Prime, 2018; IMDB Reviews, 2018)), with the more detailed comments tending towards the negative if not outright damning. Some have put it down to the lack of exploitation of an interesting premise (naked female stowaway found in car), which could be a criticism of the plot. Most have condemned the quality of the acting, while a few have mentioned the poverty of the script. For the purposes of this analysis, and within the aims of this thesis, the lack of that 'magical', award-winning quality exhibited in *The Trip* and *That Sinking Feeling* lies in the writer's non-observation of what can make natural dialogue 'work' in its inauthentic setting as a staged performance. In essence what comes out of the actors' mouths in *Naked in Scotland* is very obviously a scripted dialogue that has been imposed upon them. Ironically, of course, one of the actors is indeed the writer. However, it seems apparent that he has come up with the script in isolation and not actually workshopped the dialogue in any way with his interlocutor.

These remarks above hinge not so much on a Text World analysis as they do on a linguistic / poetic one. Text World Theory as it stands may suggest that there is some complexity in the toggling between worlds (the relationship between David and Olivia in the car; the relationship between David and his girlfriend; not to mention the unwritten future relationship between Olivia and David). Nevertheless, this only takes us so far. The scene's failure must also be seen from a linguistic point of view. For example, there is extensive use of repetition. This is in itself lauded by Fountain, Edgar and Spencer in their playwriting advice, but only in so far as it lends rhythm and tone to the text. Here, it is repetitive for repetition's sake and begins to grate.

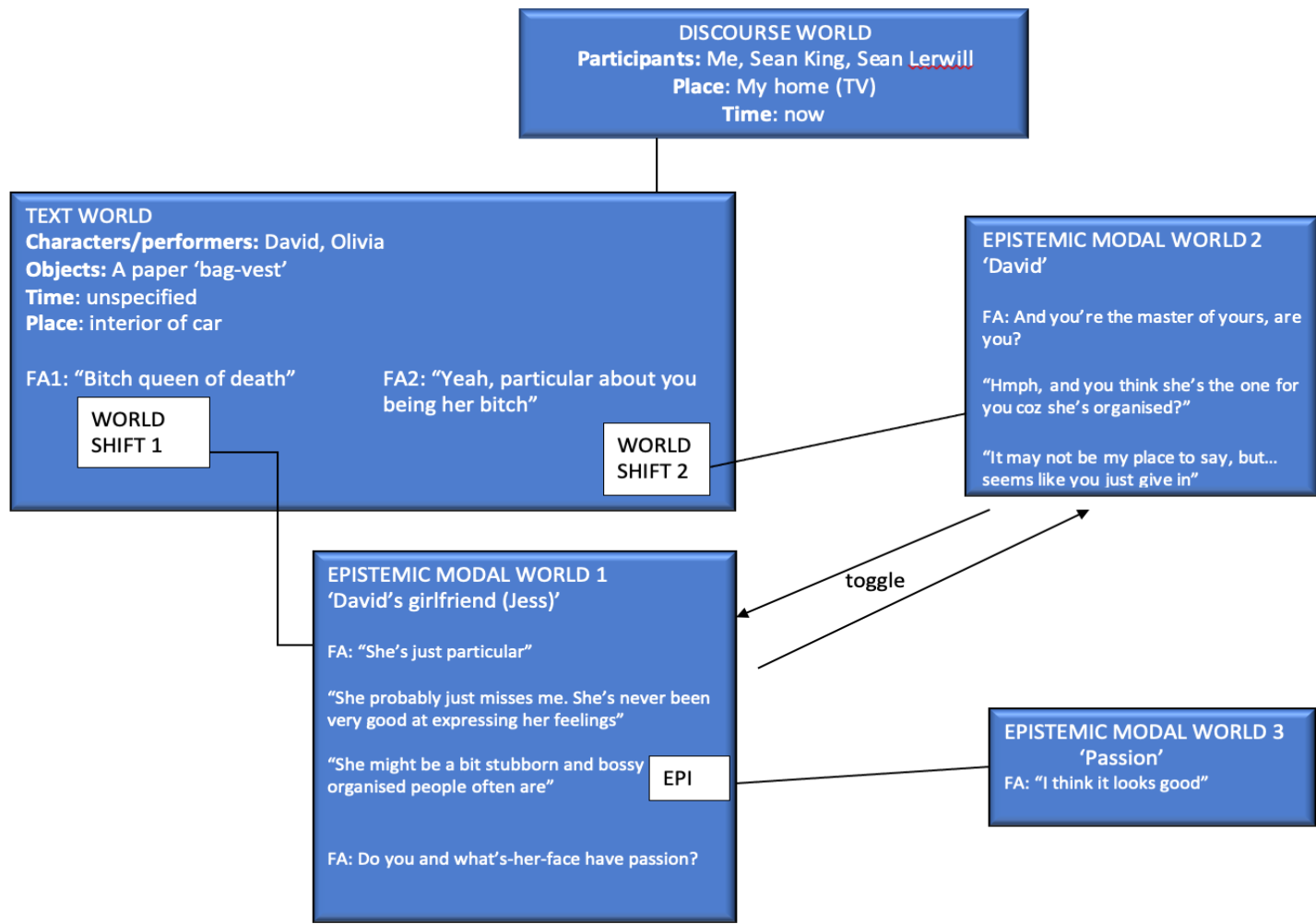


Figure 3.8 TWT diagram for *Naked in Scotland* (car scene)

Fountain (2007) says the ‘rule of 3 (mentions)’ is crucial in getting the audience/reader to absorb an important, spoken plot point. However, in this scene from *Naked in Scotland*, the key word ‘passion’ is iterated nine times. In addition, the word ‘particular’ is repeated twice, as is ‘feelings’ and ‘organised’, while ‘conflict’ and ‘Jess’ are each repeated three times; arguably all incidental items of vocabulary in this scene. Each instance of repetition seems to be when Olivia is glibly responding to an utterance by David. Is this witty repartis? Or is it lazy reformulation? It certainly does not serve Olivia’s intellectual character well to be merely batting David’s words back to him.

One instance where the banter may work, however, is where Olivia actually *seeks* information from David and where David actually *responds*:

OLIVIA:                   She goes away, right?  
DAVID:                    Yeah  
OLIVIA:                   How long usually?  
DAVID:                    A couple of weeks

This seems to have progression. We are going somewhere (hopefully). The idea being set up here is of some revelation or insight on the part of Olivia.

However, we are to be disappointed. She just comes to the conclusion that ‘there’s a lack of passion in his relationship’, which she had already reached earlier, anyway.

In general, this scene seems to be full of barbed quips, jibes and ribbing that could indeed give rise to passions and emotions in performance. Perhaps this is precisely the issue behind its failure, however. They are jibes purely for the sake of being jibes. They give us no real further insight into the characters; they do not allow either of the characters to make a (self) discovery, and essentially, they have no function in advancing the narrative.

I would argue that an improvised and subsequently edited process of script creation could better incorporate these elements, whether performed by professionals or not. Indeed, we must recall that *That Sinking Feeling*’s script was improvised and performed by non-professionals under the eye of a talented young director. *Naked in Scotland* is performed by professionals (albeit poorly) with a laid-down script. The awkwardness of ‘forced’ / obviously imposed exchanges and expressions such as a

simple ‘hmpf’ and ‘you would, ‘Passion Boy’ only go to highlight how ineffective this method has been in this case.

### 3.6. Conclusions: The Trip to Spain (Michael Winterbottom, 2017)

By way of concluding, let us return to *The Trip* for a yet again contrasting example. In Michael Winterbottom, Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan’s third outing, they revive their culinary odyssey – this time in Spain.

Two scenes show how polished, improvised speech on even the most banal of issues can be rewarding. But what is it here that differs so greatly from the dialogue in *Naked in Scotland*?



Figure 3.9 The Trip to Spain (Michael Winterbottom, 2017). Photo credit: Sky Atlantic

#### 3.6.1. Transcript: *The Trip to Spain* (Michael Winterbottom, 2017) - Scene # 1

ROB BRYDON and STEVE COOGAN

INT Range Rover on Spanish country road.  
Both are singing “Windmills of your Mind”

ROB: Know who sang that?

STEVE: Err... lots of people. Dusty Springfield?

ROB: Noel Harrison is the famous one. Son of?

STEVE: George?

ROB: No. Rex Harrison.

STEVE: Really?

ROB: Yes!/  
STEVE: Gosh

ROB: /who sang... The Rain in Spain/  
STEVE: /The Rain in Spain/  
ROB: See? /Circles within circles  
STEVE: /Yeah

### 3.6.2. Transcript: *The Trip to Spain* (Michael Winterbottom, 2017) - Scene # 2

ROB BRYDON and STEVE COOGAN

INT Range Rover – entering town in northern Spain.

ROB (reading guidebook): Starter for 10: What is the Camino de Santiago?  
STEVE: Well.../  
ROB: /No? The pilgrims' route to Santiago de Compostela where St James is supposed to be buried/  
STEVE: /Yeah...  
ROB: /became the most important destination for Christians after Rome and Jerusalem.  
STEVE: I met... I went to the ultimate... to see the Pope. After *Philomena*. I took *Philomena* to see the Pope.  
ROB (putting on Irish game-show voice): And we welcome *Philomena* back into the conversation! It's been a good 5 minutes since she came up/  
STEVE: /Well, you... you know.../  
ROB: /but no... no, go on. It'll be nice to hear. /So you were there in person?  
STEVE: /I can't pretend it's not been a significant part of my life.  
ROB: I can't pretend it's not been a significant part of this bloody journey.

### 3.6.3. Transcript: *The Trip to Spain* (Michael Winterbottom, 2017) - Scene # 3

ROB BRYDON and STEVE COOGAN

INT Range Rover on Spanish country road.

ROB: This is the area where Terry Gilliam was in when he was trying to do *Don Quixote*.

STEVE: *Lost in La Mancha* is the documentary about his failure to do so.

ROB: And it's a show I'd like to do.

STEVE: *Lost in La Mancha*? Oh, /Man of La Mancha

ROB: /*Man\_of La Mancha* is the stage musical. It might be my next theatrical adventure.

STEVE: Really?

ROB: Yes. You get to sing 'The Impossible Dream'.

(pause)

ROB: Given that this is Rioja, I would have thought we'd get to see a lot more vines.

STEVE: It's of no interest to me these days Rob because I no longer drink alcohol.

ROB: I like wine. I like Rioja.

(Pause)

ROB: What's with all the dinosaur signs?

STEVE: I suppose there's lots of dinosaurs that lived round here.

ROB: I say we stop here for a visit because Chloë loves dinosaurs.

STEVE: Who's Chloë?

ROB: My daughter.

STEVE: Oh.

### 3.6.4. Analysis

These scenes are indicative of the in-car exchanges that run throughout *The Trip to Spain*. In the first example, the circular nature of their chat (Spain - Windmills of your Mind – Noel Harrison – Rex Harrison – The Rain in Spain) is a witty reflection of the 'Circles within circles' lyric from the Harrison song. In the second, a fairly benign, travel guide reading becomes a sparring match between our two protagonists resulting in Steve's defensive "I can't pretend it's not been a significant part of my life" to which Rob's barbed echoing response is "I can't pretend it's not been a significant part of this bloody journey". The third extract is a fairly random exchange flitting between playing in *Man of La Mancha*, rioja wine and dinosaurs, before the more effective, emotional punch at the end where Steve's casual indifference is revealed through his ignorance of Rob's daughter's name.

These scenes could be said to cover a range of functions that such scenes exhibit: the first is at first glance quite, quite banal, with the exchange brief and perfunctory; the second has more substance, with the familiar ribbing and teasing clearly apparent; the third is notable by its presence of non sequiturs and sudden changes of tack (after pauses). In all three cases, there are the tell-tale signs of improvised ‘chat’ (hesitations, repetition, repairs, interruptions, overspeaking), and the inclusion of seemingly trivial subject matter. Yet these scenes made the final edit.

There may be several factors at play here as to why Rob and Steve’s exchanges are successfully humorous. At the level of ‘banter’ it depends on the theoretical framework employed. Dynel (2008) emphasises the importance of each party understanding how the other’s mind works. Thus any “jocular mockery” or even “jocular abuse” (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012), remains in the mind of the onlooker as just that: jocular. It is the role (rather than presence) here of a third party that perhaps distinguishes *The Trip to Spain* from *Naked in Scotland*. Simply put, the two men are potentially ‘playing more to the gallery’ (c.f. the transcription from *Bottom* in chapter 5) while David and Olivia, though employing similar banter, barbed quips and personal observations, are adhering to a preordained script since the nature of their performance is at a further remove from the audience than the pseudo-documentary travelogue of *The Trip*. Additionally, the improvised nature of Rob and Steve’s talk and its consequent sense of proximity to the audience has an important impact on the scene’s narrative. This idea will be explored more fully in the following chapter.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## Oh, unsalted pumpkin! - A narratological perspective of (unscripted and post-scripted) improvised dialogue in Drama

In Chapter four, narratology is discussed and applied as a framework within which an examination can be made into current and historical examples of improvised drama. An analysis of transcriptions of such live performances, with a focus on the importance of narrative, helps to reveal the power of improvisation as an artform. A modified theoretical model is then proposed to account for this.

### 4.1. Narratology and drama – an overview

The King died and the Queen died of grief.

E.M. Forster's succinct exemplification of what entails a 'plot' rather than a mere relation of potentially unrelated facts is as much applicable to what happens in a play as to the actions of prose fiction (Richardson, 2019). Such an assertion, however, has traditionally been problematised by theorists (Genette 1980 [1972], Prince (2008) [1983]), if not outrightly ignored or regarded as irrelevant as a medium "without narratorial mediation" (Elam, 1980: 111).

Those who have sought to posit theatre texts within the field of narratology have indeed tended to begin their claims with an explicit criticism of traditional narratological viewpoints vis-à-vis drama, and then go on to expand why their particular, novel takes on the genre do actually have validity (see particularly, Richardson (1988; 2007), Bowles (2010), Claycombe (2013) and Fludernik (2008), as well as the earlier work on film and stage drama of, respectively, Seymour Chatman (1978) and Manfred Pfister (1978)). It is, however, not the position or purpose of this chapter to choose any one perspective over another as such. It is rather an attempt to synthesise the more salient ideas and gauge to what extent their validity extends to an analysis of the use of improvised and/or realistic dialogue within a drama text in so far as that use adds to the 'story-telling' aspect of the play. In this endeavour, historical examples as well as modern incarnations of improvised theatre forms will

be analysed to reveal how the narrative strength of performance is affected by the use of spontaneously produced dialogue.

This is ambitious. As will be seen, the narratological frameworks of Brian Richardson, Monika Fludernik, Ansgar Nünning and Roy Sommer, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Manfred Jahn (among others) all touch on the various ways a tale may be told on stage (or on the playscript page), but very little attention is made to what actual words are produced by the characters, and how they are uttered. Here, the questions are: to what extent can an improvised text contribute (if at all) to the narrative? Who is ultimately responsible for that narrative? And how is this relevant?

To that end, a critical review of recent research will be given alongside insights and thoughts on how these views may be applicable to improvised dialogue. Following this, an analysis of extracts from various case studies will be given, bearing in mind a potential hybrid narratological framework. This case-study analysis also serves a historiological purpose in tracing current theatrical vogues in improvisation back to their antecedents in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Century *Commedia dell'Arte* and even earlier. My overall intention is, through the comparison and reference to similar structures and themes, within the scope of a narratological analysis, to reveal how improvised dialogue lends itself to 'theatricality' through its adding a certain 'impetus' to the narrative processes at play within a drama text.

These case studies will include transcripts of a 16<sup>th</sup> Century *Commedia dell'Arte* improvised dialogue, a modern re-working of Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*, and a current, devised production of Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu*. Reference will also be made to other improvisational theatrical forms which in some cases persist to this day such as pantomime, Mystery Plays and Punch and Judy shows. Finally, mention will be made of an on-going project, *The Plant*, which is a theatre play based on improvised dialogue created by actors in rehearsal. This last case, however will be focused on more directly in Chapters 5 and 6.

#### 4.1.1. Traditional views questioned

According to Richardson (2007), Aristotle's *Poetics* (which in any case devotes more time to drama than epic fiction) is the starting point for any narrative theory. He goes

on to cite Barthes (1975) as saying that narrative is indeed ubiquitous. Going further, Michael Toolan et al.'s opening statement in their concise and instructive definition of narrative clearly states that "narratives are everywhere, performing countless different functions in human interaction" (2001: X).

In general terms, Toolan et al. say that narratives deal with beginnings, middles and ends; characters, settings, drama, suspense, enigma, human interest and morals (2001: 1-2). In this way, it can be said that a narrative is designed primarily to assist the reader (and for the purposes of this thesis, the spectator) to make meaning of the world (Halliwell, 1999).

They continue by stating that inherent to any narrative is the existence of a teller (narrator) and an addressee (narratee) to whom the tale is being told. This relationship can assume three forms (p. 2):

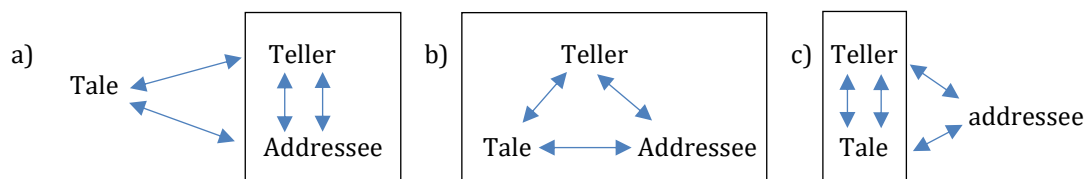


Figure 4.1 Narrator-narratee relationship forms

Diagram a) denotes a situation where the teller interacts with their addressee in telling a tale that is spatio-temporally distant while b) shows that, from another perspective, we could say that due to the proximity of the teller, the tale is also in itself 'present'. On the other hand, c) shows how it can also be argued that in their absorption within the telling of a tale, the narrator is in a closer relationship with the story being told than with the addressee. Interestingly, in all 3 diagrams, the arrows are double-headed, implying a reciprocal, dialogical relationship between each of the three elements.

These three situations or, more usefully perhaps, frames of perspective, are crucial when coming to grips with how a narrative functions cognitively, particularly from the stand-point of the theatre-goer, playwright, script-reader or critic.

As an illustration, it is useful to cite Toolan et al.'s reference to Hawthorn's (1985) exemplification of Millais' painting 'The Boyhood of Raleigh'. In this, an old man is telling a tale to two boys. He is indicating the sea (the focus of his tale) but the boys

are attending to the teller rather than the sea. In effect the boys are engaged with the ‘telling’ rather than the ‘told’ although the sea is concurrently present and absent in their consciousness. They are willingly suspending their focus on the tale to attend to the performer that is telling that tale. As a further complication, it should be asked what our position as viewers / spectators is within this (literal) frame. As addressees, in turn, might we not exist in the diagram beyond the inner frame with Millais, the artist, being an overarching narrator, or what Hühn and Sommer (2013) refer to as a ‘superordinate mediator’?

This may give us a model that looks like this, incorporating diagrams a, b and c.

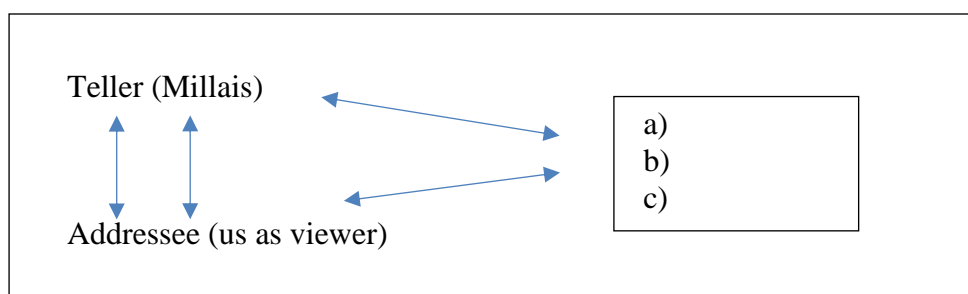


Figure 4.2

This model may be worth bearing in mind when considering further strategies and ideas when applying a narrative framework to drama dialogue; especially with regard to the issues of variation in mimesis and diegesis, performance and experientiality, agency, and authorial voice.



Figure 4.3 Sir John Everett Millais, *The Boyhood of Raleigh* (1870) Pic: Tate.org

These initial models adhere to the traditional epic prose-based view of narrative, which assumed that fiction was narrated (that is, involved a diegetic telling), while plays were enacted (and therefore a mimetic form). Twentieth century structuralist and formalist commentators such as Gerard Genette, Gerald Prince, Franz Stanzel and Dorrit Cohn would balk at the application to drama, therefore, in that the separation of diegesis from mimesis, narration from enaction, is what underpins their narrative theory. For example, in approaching narrative from a Speech Act theory perspective (Grice, 1975), Genette's (1980 [1972]) assertion that narrative is a story told in words has the following somewhat obvious implications with regard to analysing drama: a) drama is a non-narrative medium, lacking a narrator's discourse and voice and b) at best, its only dimension that warrants any narratological analysis is the plot.

There is a noted absence here of any mention of performance. Since improvised drama dialogue is generally, if not invariably, produced out of performance, the way a play is produced on stage is clearly an important element. One obvious example of where the performativity of a play is recorded in written form is in the stage directions. However, traditional views of narrativity have dismissed these. While others see play elements such as stage directions as instructions on how to perform or even on how to 'pretend to perform' (Searle, 1975), Genette would maintain that such 'secondary text' merely oscillates between describing and prescribing, and has no narrative function as such. In doing this he caters for the criticism of the illocutionary force of Searle's 'recipe' analogy in that not everyone reads a play with the intention of performance. That is, imaginary reading comes first. Jahn (2001: 217), however, takes Genette to task in that rather than 'oscillating' between description and prescription, the reader of stage directions in drama texts may well be viewing them as a multi-functional part of the text as a whole.

In this way, Jahn begins to blur the defined lines between a play as a text to be read or performed. It is the traditional distinction between the two that is inherent to all three reception-oriented approaches to drama: 1) Poetic Drama (text-focused, spurning actors, audiences and directors) 2) Theatre Studies (focusing on performance) and 3) Reading Drama (promoting an inter-disciplinary exchange between theorists, critics and practitioners). Further critiquing Austin's (1962) assertion that performative utterances by actors on stage are 'parasitic' to those uttered in real life, most

commentators today would acknowledge that rather than be dependent or subordinate, they are a reflection of what is most crucial to human cognition and communication (Jahn 2001: 664). And the more truthful these utterances are (whether they be in their creation or their performance), the less reliant they are on pretence. This idea of ‘truth’ re-evokes the actor-training of Stanislavsky and his successors, who strove and continue to strive to achieve a method that touches at the truth of the given circumstance in order to evoke the required cognitive and emotional reaction in the audience. If that ‘moment’ comes about through improvisation and can be captured and faithfully transcribed, then the intention is for that speech act to be efficiently (re)performed.

The notion of a speech act in drama cannot be simplified as Austin and Searle would have it as a ‘pragmatically situated act performed by a speaker to a hearer’. As we have seen, exactly who the speaker (authorial ‘voice’) is and who the hearer is (character? Spectator? Actor?) is a complex issue. Nor, according to Jahn, can we assume that a dramatic performance is predicated on a purely narratorial verbal transmission. The way a text is written down is not generally the same as the way it is performed (2001: 665). And the way a text is interpreted may well differ between spectator-listeners (Fish, 1980).

However, the advantage of analysing transcribed improvised drama is that in the momentary act of improvising an utterance, the authorial voice is very much that of the performer/text creator, while the immediate addressee is as much their interlocutor as it is anyone seated in the auditorium – if not more so. Both improviser and interlocutor acknowledge that they may well be operating within the confines of a story (such is the case with *Commedia dell’Arte*, but is also common in long-form improv shows today), but we the audience is aware of this and operate as ‘listeners beyond the frame’. We are engaged by how this improvisation fits in or not to that plot.

It is here that the Russian Formalist concepts of ‘sjuzhet’ and ‘fabula’ (as propounded by Viktor Shklovsky (1919) and Vladimir Propp (1928)), distinguishable as the events of the story and the way those events are presented, become highlighted. In prose literature the fabula is mediated directly to the addressee (reader) via the discourse (‘sjuzhet’). In theatre, however the relationship is more complex with the

story as much mediated via the elements of performance, theatrical setting and the audience reception itself. Nevertheless, my contention, is that even the shortest utterance has an impact on the fabula and can lead to major deviations both in delivery and audience response, but the overarching events of the story remain intact. It is such linguistic play, flavour and spice inherent to successful improvised dialogue that add to the narrative rather than detract from it.

Genette and his contemporaries, in their preoccupation with narrative in epic prose, only briefly acknowledged drama and did not consider the levels of communication on stage beyond the author-reader relationship in order to fit neatly into a Speech Act Theory accountability framework. This is, as propounded by subsequent theorists, erroneous. By examining these more modern perspectives, a more focused framework may be constructed within which the impact of improvised drama dialogue on narrative can be analysed.

## 4.2. New Theories

In light of considerations of how drama does not fit neatly into traditional theories of narrativity, substantial thought has in fact been given to this area; this is despite the protestations of modern commentators that they are lone wolves howling in the darkness. Collectively, it would seem, these new theorists make up a trend towards validating drama as being worthy of narratological criticism.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the pursuit of this chapter is to apply narratology to a specific, narrow feature of theatre text: the discourse produced from improvisation. It would therefore be largely irrelevant, if erroneous, to go into too much detail on the theorising of narrative in drama in general. However, the key ideas thrown up by research, when blended together, will go some way towards accounting for the ‘theatricality’, in story-telling terms, of a real(istic) play-script.

### 4.2.1. Narrators

Since the late 1980s, Brian Richardson may be considered to be one of the earliest guiding voices in support of the narrative in drama (although, as mentioned previously, Aristotle unwittingly arrived there first.) One of his main pursuits has been the debunking of the diegesis/mimesis dichotomy inherent to traditional theories,



and the assumption that drama is essentially mimetic. Clearly, in many plays there is a narrator who appears on stage, and quite overtly so (a commonly cited example is the narrator in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938)). This may be in a role that is to varying extents intra- or extradiegetic, in that these narrator figures actually interact with the characters or they remain aloof and at a remove from the action of the play.

Other examples, more common perhaps in classical drama, are choruses and messengers. Their function is often to bring or summarise essential plot information to the characters and/or the audience in much the same way as stories are told in epic fiction. Of course, if we think more on the classical play, obvious examples of onstage narrators are the prologues and epilogues; narrator/characters who are prevalent in the traditional drama of many cultures globally, and the existence of which has, in turn, (re)impacted modern European theatre. One instance of this is in Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (*Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*) of 1944, which appropriated traditional Chinese theatre narration in order to help achieve the 'Verfremdungseffekt' (alienation effect) of Brechtian epic theatre.

However, viewing these examples of diegesis in an otherwise mimetic genre is only scratching at the surface of the extent to which narrative can be held to exist in a play. This ontological problematization is perhaps best summed up by Marie-Laure Ryan (2005) in her appeal for a definition [of narrative] that can account for narratives across a range of media. An understanding of narrative is required that does not presuppose "the occurrence of the speech act of telling a story by an agent called a narrator" (2005: 2).

Indeed, in fiction, a narrator is relatively easy to define as the teller of the tale, albeit as a proxy for the author. However, in drama it is debatable who the voice is behind the speaker. Even with overtly diegetic narrators such as prologues, it is pertinent to ask who it is that is actually speaking to us via the text. Is it the character? The author? And who, in this instance is that 'author' anyway? In drama, the narrator often speaks *for* the author even while asserting their difference *from* them (Jahn, 2001). They may step out of character and even out of the fiction of the play but they are still delivering lines that are scripted for them. In pantomime and other (often comedic) productions, the theatre space's 'fourth wall' may be habitually broken, but the narrator-figure is still very much a quasi-fictional construct.

Richardson (1988; 2007) therefore suggests that it may be more useful to think of a ‘narrative function’ rather than a narrator *per se*. To do this, and eventually apply it to improvised text, the following sections give an overview of the analysis of drama in terms of the relationship between mimesis and diegesis, consciousness and representation, author and text.

#### 4.2.2. Mimesis and Diegesis

Nünning and Sommer (2008) describe mimetic narrative as foregrounding the ‘story’ while diegetic narrative foregrounds the ‘telling’. And of course, many plays quite obviously do both: Peter Schaffer’s *Amadeus* (1979) with Salieri’s account of events combining with on-stage action; Tom Stoppard’s *Travesties* (1974) in which Henry Carr recollects events from his past that are enacted before the audience’s eyes. The presence of such generative narrators, whose diegetic discourse engenders the ensuing mimetic action (Richardson 1988), hints at a complex relationship. Indeed, Richardson suggests there is a ‘Chinese box’ effect that is created where the diegesis often occurs within the mimetic action of the play (shown through characters performing speech acts with each other), but this dialogue is itself a dramatic embodiment of the storyteller’s act, which is, itself, framed by the mimesis of the play.

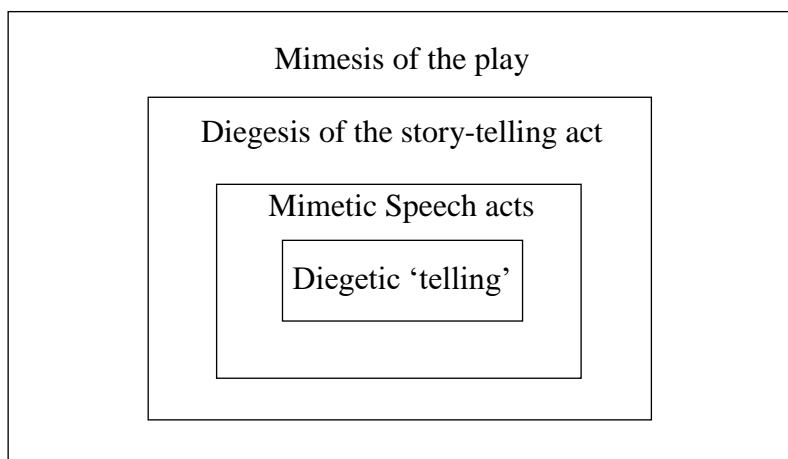


Figure 4.4 Richardson (1988)’s ‘Chinese Boxes’

### 4.2.3. Authors – implied and overt

One of the critical elements of Richardson's hypothesis is the existence of an implied author; that is, an idealised person that stands between the author and the text. As he says, during a play "the audience naturally constructs an image of the figure behind the play which can be very different from the real person who moved the pen across the paper" (1988: 206). This contention may be especially apt when considering drama texts that have effectively been co-written, devised or collaborated upon, involving a multitude of authorial inputs, all of which contribute to the overall perceived 'voice' of the play. This distinction between implied and real authorship gives rise to the realisation of a separate 'consciousness' behind the drama text.

As Chatman (1978) contended, "only the implied author and implied reader are immanent to a narrative." The real author and reader exist beyond the narrative and do not deserve the same exalted status as those that are implied. There is, however, a danger here in disassociating the audience (whether implied or real) from the (real) author, a situation that sounded alarm bells as early as Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981 [1973]) warning against the Russian Formalists who "severed the literary work from its social and ideological setting" (p. 209). Nevertheless, might it be said that when a script is improvised and / or perceived as such, it does away with this dissociation? In its improvisation, a script brings the author(s) nearer to the audience even when it has been fashioned *as if* written by one person; that is, the writer/editor (eg Winterbottom in *The Trip*) is in effect the first audience, and is creating an artefact that attempts to replicate the theatrical impact of the original.

Certainly, there are some but rare instances throughout the history of theatre where the author has appealed directly to the audience, or at least appears to: Aristophanes' direct address to spectators in *Peace* (421 BC); Ben Jonson's boasts in *Volpone* (1605); Calderon's (1600-1681) appeal for applause at the ends of his Comedies. However, more often, the playwright's contact with the audience is mediated either off-stage through stage directions and other didascalia, or on stage through the overt narrator, a chorus, prologue or epilogue, and/or via the characters themselves. This, as Richardson contends, makes for a complex model of narrativity.

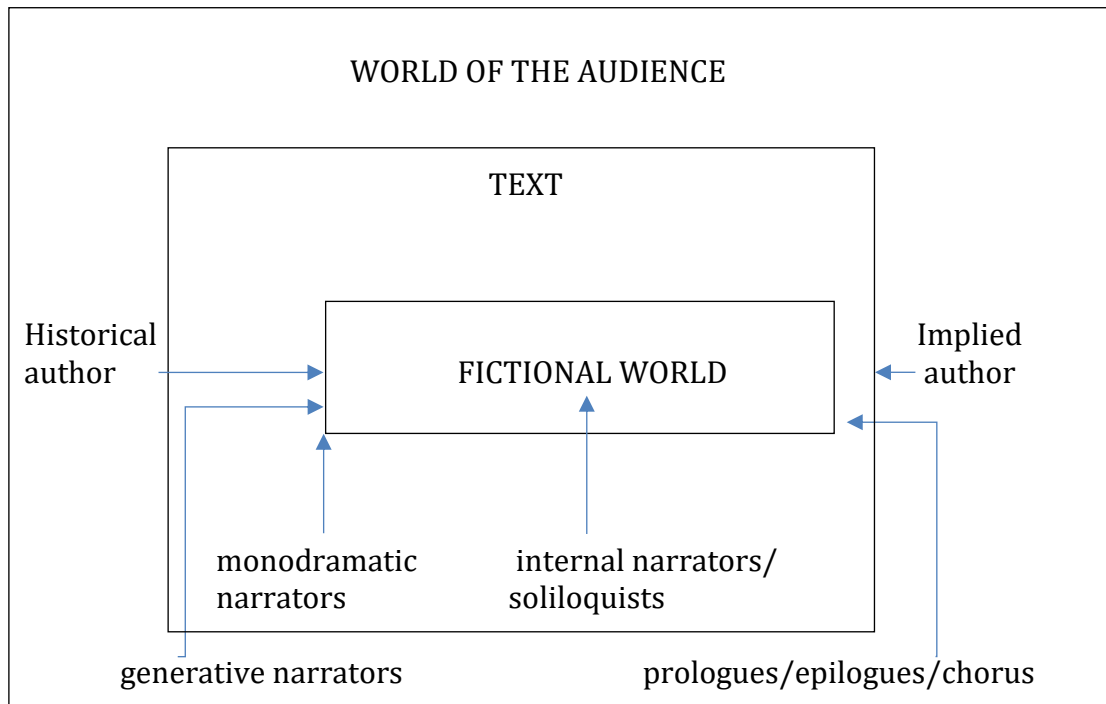


Figure 4.5 Narrator roles in drama (Richardson, 1988: 210)

In this analytical framework, moving outward from the fictional world, the impact of different ‘narrators’ in drama can be seen. The reliability of these narrators is also worth remarking on (Fludernik, 1996; Richardson, 1988; 2000; Jahn, 2001) as the extent to which we the audience can have faith in the veracity of the events (or at least in that narrator’s perspective of those events) has an obvious impact on the story that is being told. The narrator-types and their associated characteristics are as follows:

Internal narrators	Textual constructs that speak to other characters within the fiction of the play
Monodramatic narrators	Textual constructs that have no interaction with other characters, nor are they, arguably, directly interacting with the audience. Reliable. (eg David Hare as himself in <i>Via Dolorosa</i> )
Generative narrator	A character that is distinct from the others. Can be reliable or unreliable (eg Henry Carr in <i>Travesties</i> )
Frame narrators	Prologues, epilogues, chorus. Considered reliable
Implied author	Idealised ‘writer’ of the play. Reliable
Historical author	The one who put pen to paper. Reliable

In this way, it is clear how the diegetic and mimetic elements in fact work together rather than separately to deliver the narrative power of a play; that is, the showing and telling of a story are not separable but exist together on a mutual cline of strength. Chatman's (1978) development of 'a discourse of narratology' is founded on this premise in that it attempts to theorise narrative acts and situations, modes of presentation and 'voice'. In doing so, he necessarily includes narrators who are covert as well as overt. This obviously transcends the division between the intradiegetic (characters telling stories to each other) and the extradiegetic (choruses etc) and goes beyond even the implicit v explicit author dichotomy. The matter here is one of controlling voice and performance.

Although focusing on discursual function and structure rather than actual language (i.e. seeing the narrator as 'organiser' as much as a teller of tales), Chatman cites the character of Gower in Shakespeare's *Pericles* (1607) as an example of the prototypical stage-narrator. Yet, Gower fulfils this role in a variety of ways:

[he] addresses the audience, showing off with a Latin quote, advertising the story's didactic purpose as well as its proven entertainment value, add[ing] some verbal décor which establishes story-HERE and story-NOW, and finally asking the spectators to see and judge for themselves...later reappear[ing] as a perceptive moderator who introduces each of the remaining acts and eventually speaks the epilogue, closing the play's mediating frame.

(Jahn, 2001: 671).

In this way Gower establishes himself not only as an on-stage narrator but also ostensibly as the off-stage arranger of the ensuing drama. Jahn continues to use Manfred Pfister's (1984) concept of 'absolute drama' where there is no overt narratorial presence but is not necessarily without a covert one. Thus, removing Gower's on-stage presence and overt narratorial voice does not exclude him from still having a narrative function 'behind the scenes'. It is not as Genette posits, a matter of 'who speaks' but of "who manages the exposition, who decides what is to be told, how it is to be told, and what is to be left out" (Jahn, 2001: 670).

Thus, the elements of performance add up to fulfil the narrative function of Gower as the medium of Shakespeare's narrative force. The stage directions ('secondary text') are another level of narration by a superior agent to the character of Gower in this instance. They are effectively equitable to the description of action in prose fiction

and as such can be seen as a text to be read as a text prior to being used for performance (Chatman, 1978). This concurs with Ryan's (1991) thesis that the reader deals with a drama text in the same way as narrative fiction and processes drama speech like quoted dialogue in prose.

Thus the 'enunciating subject' or controlling voice of the stage directions is not the playwright (historical author in Richardson's framework) but another narrator. These stage directions (secondary text) become, effectively, the controlling frame of the play, with any overt narrator (such as Gower) an 'inset'.

Such conceptualisation of text before performance and the identity of the controlling narrative voice does, however, complicate a prospective narratology of improvised drama in two ways. Firstly, a devised drama derived from improvisation necessarily involves creating a text *from* performance rather than the other way round. That is, the writer 'reads' the text as performance before transcribing it. Secondly, the major issue of reliability (as alluded to in Richardson's model) is important when considering the narrator's ontological status. One way of addressing both these concerns may be to view them through the scope of the play as a narrative experience.

### 4.3. Experientiality and narrative

Theorists, most notably Monika Fludernik, have taken the analysis of narrative in drama a step further and been critical of taking into account only traditionally included linguistic elements. The simple consideration of a drama text as being the sum of dialogue + stage directions would disavow drama's performative and visual qualities (Fludernik, 1996; 2008). To include such 'non-enunciational' forms in a narratological analysis does, of course, cause some conceptual problems, however.

In 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century literature, in particular, be it prose fiction, poetry or drama, certain hitherto unconventional techniques have come to establish such works as experimental or pushing the barriers of acceptable forms of storytelling. Now well-known practices in writing for the stage are, for example, the use of flashback (as in Stoppard's *Travesties* (1974)), jumbled chronology, nonsense dialogue or even no dialogue at all (as in Beckett's *Breath* (1969)). The fact that many of these techniques are also employed in modern and post-modern prose fiction indeed suggests a shared narrative genre.

It is Fludernik's contention that if the traditional narrative elements of event sequence, narration and story versus discourse can be dispensed with, the focus can be on the story as *experience*: "the very presence of a character on stage vouchsafes the basic experientiality of the set-up" (1996: 276).

It is the mediality of the genre that influences its intrinsic narrativity. In prose narratives such elements might be deictic devices, tense usage, or focalisation. In another medium, film, there may be cutaways, close-ups, fades, or voice-over. In plays, however, there is a different raft of techniques, beyond just stage direction. It is true that film can portray narrative elements more easily than on stage: e.g. perception, motivation and consciousness. However, it is my contention that staged drama must compensate for this through use of staging, design and, for the purposes of this current analysis, the use (or non-use) of language - language that resides in the dialogue text and its performed utterance. In addition, a theatre audience, unlike in cinema, has more cognitive 'space' for creative input; that is, in interpreting the symbolic use of props, lighting changes, a minimal set etc). In film, on the other hand, an attention to realistic detail is generally deemed essential. Thus, as Fludernik states, "narrativity can be constituted in all three media (novels, film and stage) and on the basis of the same set of cognitive parameters (even though some of these are more privileged over others within one medium or the other)" (1996: 264).

Accordingly, experientiality in narrative consists in the activation of the cognitive ability of an audience member/play-reader to effectively engage in various ways with a represented world through referring to the real world in which they live. Fludernik groups such parameters as 'embodiment', 'intentionality', 'temporality' and 'evaluation'. In normal conversational narrative, this occurs, for example, when a storyteller relates a past experience by conveying their embodied and emotional responses to the story's events as they unfold through time. This, Fludernik, surmises, is what constitutes a 'natural' narrative (1993; 1996; Richardson, 2000) and is therefore one where storyteller and audience meet on what might be regarded as common cognitive ground (Labov, 1972). However, in fiction, such ground is skewed in favour of the character or protagonist. Thus, the experience of the events is firmly grounded in the representation of that *character's* experience; the narrative effectively emerges from the dynamics of a character's already emotively and evaluatively

charged portrayal of events. In this way, the traditional plot-based perspective of narrative (i.e. temporal-causal) is side-lined and other non plot-related elements can be considered.

In my model there can... be narratives without plot, but there cannot be narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level.

(Fludernik, 1996: 13)

Fludernik's framework clearly validates all media narratologically – not least drama. Other written forms such as reports or purely factual accounts cannot be considered valid in the same way as they lack the aforesaid embodiment, intentionality and emotionally charged temporality. In short, they do not possess experientiality (Caracciolo, 2014).

Critics such as Herman (2009) and Wolf (2003) suggest that this experientiality cannot, however, be the be all and end all of narratology. It is only one of the elements to consider. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this thesis, it can be at least considered a key feature with regard to the representation of narrative within drama, and survives even when the narrative goes beyond any likely experience within the real world (e.g. Science Fiction), or when the narrator is someone with whom no reader or audience would take as authoritative or reliable (as with the older Henry Carr in Stoppard's *Travesties*). In this way, both the idea of an unreliable narrator (Booth, 1961) and Fludernik's concept of an unnatural one may be catered for by the theory that even in these cases, the narrative on stage chimes with the 'kind' of situation any audience member or reader can actually relate to.



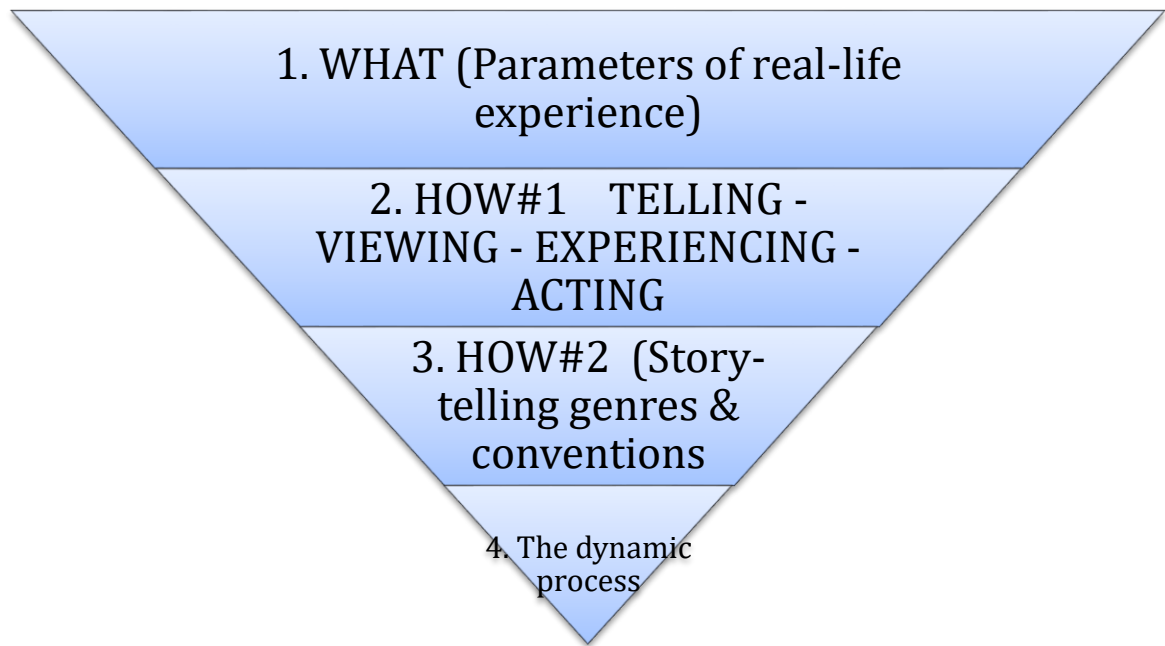


Figure 4.6 Fludernik's Model of Natural Narratology 1996; 2003

#### 4.3.1. Experientiality and the narrative in improvised dialogue

In her model, Fludernik attempts to expose how the real-life experiences, or pre-textual schemata, of the audience as socio-physical beings dictate the overarching theme of any narrative (the 'what'). Subsumed within this is the way in which these experiences are presented at a general level (i.e. is it 'told', 'viewed', 'performed'? In other words, what is the mediation; the 'how?'). Within this, in turn, is the genre (and its associated conventions) of that story-telling method. The final stratum is the actual dynamic process whereby the performer and audience use the elements from the above levels to make 'sense' of what they are producing and watching in order to constitute narrativity.

This goes some way to accounting for the cognitive interpretation by all parties involved in an improvised performance: the performers, the audience and the auteur/playwright, who may be transcribing or manipulating the elements that 'work best' for future iterations. Here the context for such an interpretation is rooted in the semiotic resources available. In a theatre context, these resources are sensory (visual stimuli, lighting effects, set, staging, props, sound, music) and linguistic, manifested in the utterances produced by the character/performers. Key narrative elements such as 'characterisation', 'character development', 'plot' and 'theme' are then cognitively mapped depending on the individual interpretations, while also being connected to

each other causally. That is, a certain development within a character may have an impact on characterisation, which then affects the plot progression, which, in turn, contributes to the narrative theme. This interpretative mapping can operate both top-down, depending on contextual knowledge and prior experience, as well as bottom-up (that is, from initially narrativising the spectacle to mapping it to real-world experiences). Indeed, it may be justifiably contended that we do both. Simultaneously.

An application of this model to improvised drama texts in this way potentially breaks new ground in two ways: it caters as much for the spontaneous choices of the performer as interpreter as it does for the audience; it accounts for why audiences tolerate the often incoherent, unstructured if not bizarre features of ‘natural’ speech, which ironically can give rise to an ‘unnatural’ narrative.

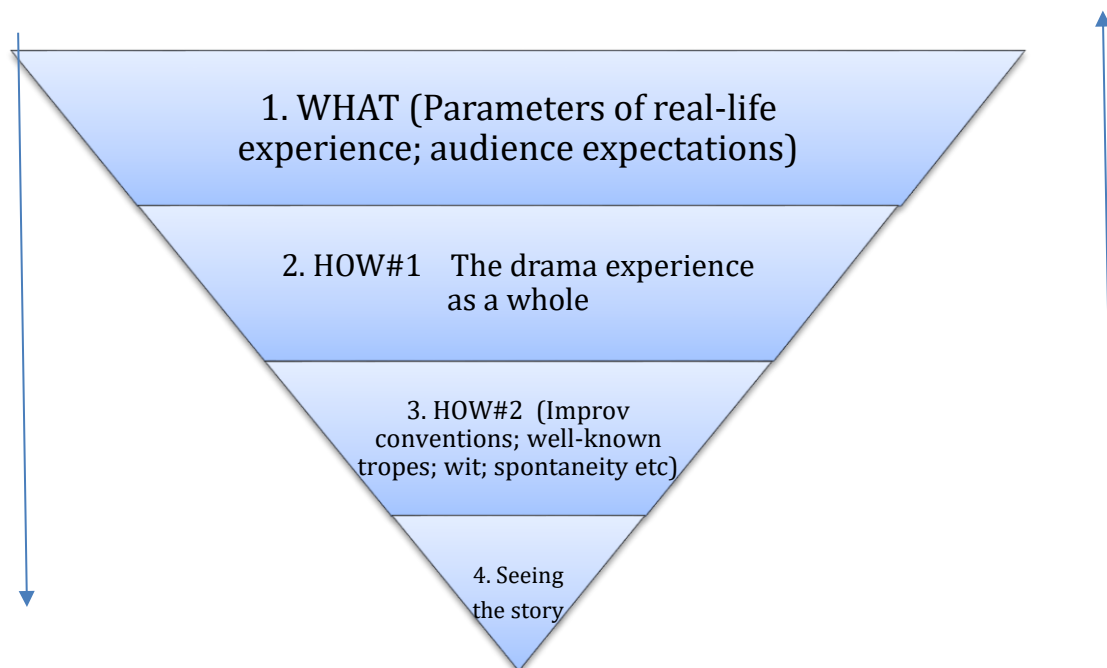


Figure 4.7 An audience's cognitive interpretation is both bottom-up and top-down

#### 4.3.2. Unnatural narratives and anti-mimetic theatre

Brian Richardson (2007) uses examples from the Theatre of the Absurd, specifically Beckett's *Endgame* (1957), to illustrate how, no matter the ‘unnaturalness’ of the narrative on stage, there is always an (often uncomfortable) similarity between the drama and real-life models. This operates, according to Richardson, on different levels. On a formal level, In *Endgame* the characters of Nell and Nagg, confined as

they are to their dustbins, reflect those of Hamm and Clov, and go on to epitomise one of the main themes of the play: the futility of generation. On an ideological level, one interpretation of the Hamm/Clov relationship could be that it is an allegory to that of Britain with Ireland, reflected perhaps in the somewhat Hibernian tint to Clov's spoken text. At a physical level, the performance, casting, set design etc can have a powerful impact on the audience's interpretation of the play; hence the Beckett estate's tight control over these production elements. In addition, Nagg and Nell's confinement, Hamm's wheelchair-bound state and Clov's incessant ladder-climbing can have a certain discomfiting, somatic impact on the viewer.

In short, in a play such as *Endgame*, where a clear narrative may be hard to discern, other elements come together to compensate: the mimetic quality of the spectacle; the embodied cognitive effects of the performance; the auditory qualities of the dialogue (be that in a poetic sense or in terms of dialect, accent or delivery); staging, and characterisation. In this way, the audience may be invited to determine what story there is, if indeed there is a story at all.

Richardson (2011: 34) defines an unnatural narrative as one that "conspicuously violates conventions of standard narrative forms", especially, it seems those acts of narration that defy the parameters of stories told through natural conversation. Alber et al. (2010: 120) go further, saying that it requires the reader [audience?] to employ interpretational strategies that are different from those they employ in non-fictionalised story-telling due to the fact that the narrative elements are so 'impossible' or implausible, thus accounting for the classic 'suspension of disbelief' strategies employed automatically by any theatre-goer.

Richardson also distinguishes between those unrealistic narratives, not rooted in most people's real-world experiences (such as fairy tales and ghost stories) and those that are realistic in premise but unconventional in execution. The former he terms non-mimetic; the latter, anti-mimetic. Beckett's dramatic works, although employing dialogue that superficially could exist in our real, everyday world, fall squarely into the anti-mimetic camp.

However, such a natural v. unnatural, non-mimetic v anti-mimetic conceptualisation is in danger of returning us to the binary thinking hitherto criticised by contemporary

theorists. If we look again at the diegesis/mimesis cline, then here too we may justifiably say that narrative possibilities exist on a gradual spectrum of unnaturalness (Richardson, 2007). This is especially the case when it comes to character, where the more we, the audience, believe in a fictional character-narrator, the more we must assume they have real-world fallibility (and therefore become more ‘unreliable’). Keen (2013) goes further with her expansion on the idea of ‘narrative empathy’ on stage where text creators, be they dramatists, writers or actors, use certain devices to curry empathy with their audiences: emotional contagion i.e. the conscious transference (and unconscious reception) of emotional states from performer to spectator, and physical mirroring, or ‘motor mimicry’ where the audience actually reproduces the actions and facial expressions of the characters they are watching in a subconscious act of affective empathy (Perez, 2015; Zillman 1995). Interestingly, Zillman reflects Fludernik’s model when accounting for the different levels of empathy incurred within actor-spectator interaction:

Respondents to drama bring to the theatre or cinema, as well as to written narrative, a set of empathic response dispositions, part of which are reflexive, part of which are acquired in a large number of learning trials, part of which are acquired on the basis of a few critical emotional experiences, and part of which may derive from perspective taking.  
(1995: 44)

This performer (narrator)-spectator (narratee) empathic relationship may be even more evident with characters who are using real, improvised dialogue. Their position as ‘real’ people, speaking ‘real’ words, ostensibly produced by them and not necessarily scripted in advance renders them at odds with the traditional stance of a character in a play, who we assume to be reliable spokespersons of the author’s intent. If we nevertheless still choose to see them as authoritative and infallible (as we would normally be intent on doing in a regular, scripted play), this would render the narrative unnatural. It is therefore apposite for any audience member / play reader to consider these as variables and move up and down the cline of unnaturalness, as befits that character in that moment. This is particularly relevant when considering the ‘lazzi’ in *Commedia dell’Arte* productions and their modern variants (see section 4.5).

Such an incoherent/differently coherent textual approach to drama has arguably existed in various forms long before the modernist and post modernist plays of the

last hundred years (as seen in Elizabethan history plays or many Greek comedies, which may have had a more metaphoric or thematic focus); an approach that eschews traditional Aristotelian conventions on plot, time and space, without clear beginnings and endings, with ambiguous causal laws determining the action on stage. What is it then that continues to engage the audience, that keeps people in their seats in anticipation of finding form in the spectacle? Fludernik’s model goes some way to answering this when especially applied to the emerging language of the dramatic text as it occurs in performance.

This may be further illuminated by using another model that accounts for the narrator-narratee interaction within the field of drama while also considering the performative aspects.

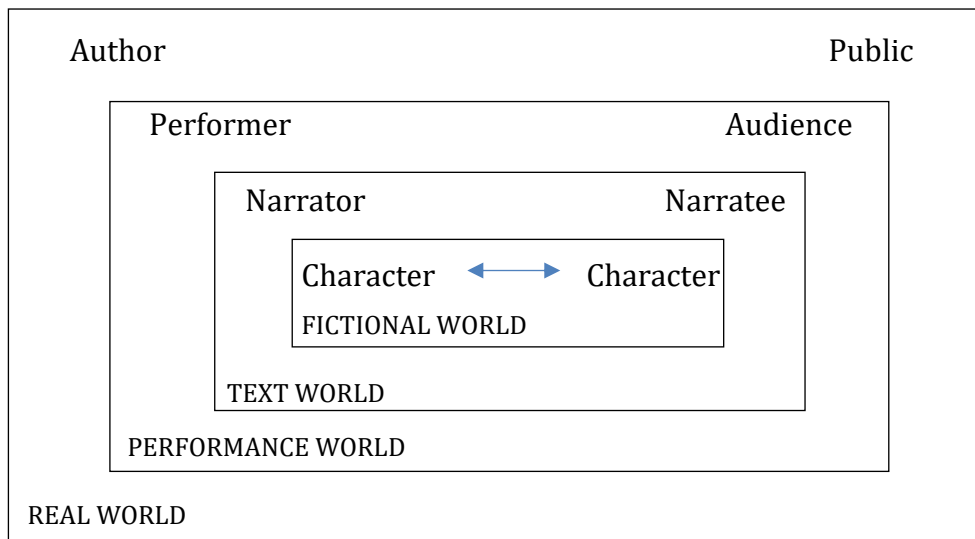


Figure 4.8 Fludernik’s interaction model (2008)

The TEXT WORLD may actually be considered redundant (Fludernik, 2008) since, in performance, the performer and audience effectively take over the roles of narrator and narratee. Unlike in epic prose, in drama, the focus is generally on the performance.

Here, the model shows how narrativity in drama is an evocation of a fictional world through “focusing on one or several human (or quasi-human) consciousnesses, whose experience of that world is the topic of that narrative” (Fludernik, 2008: 361). In effect, then, the filtering of a fictional world, be it realistic or outlandish, as performed

by the character-narrators (reliable or unreliable) in a narrative that can be natural or, more likely, unnatural, is what constitutes the cognitive narrative experience of watching a play.

#### 4.4. A proposed modification of narrative models for application to improvised dialogue

The unique quality of improvised dialogue in drama, within the scope of narratological analysis, is that it is a mode of storytelling derived from performance. The complication is that, as spoken discourse, it is not necessarily overt narration but rather a device through which the narrative is conveyed. Added to this, particularly, is that this text is produced through performance, and thus the experientiality of Fludernik's model is an essential influence on the other models of interaction accounting for the narratological system at play.

However, such a hybrid model may well tell us something of the status of narrativity within an improvised drama, spontaneous or recorded, but does little to account for its success in theatrical terms. To uncover that requires a further, more literary analysis of case studies.

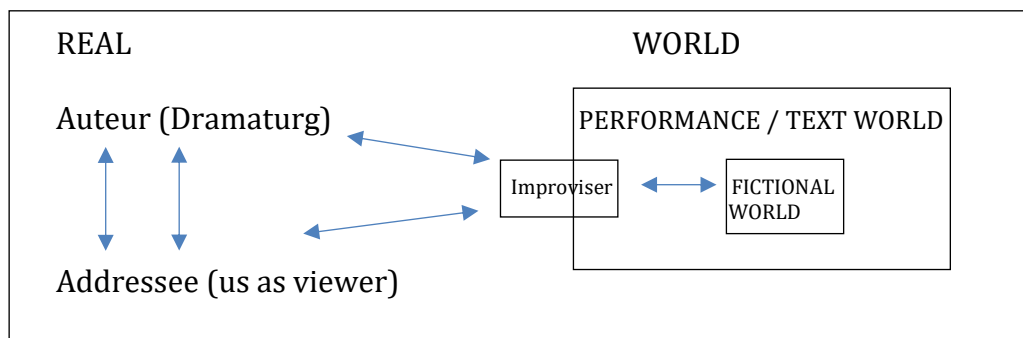


Figure 4.9 A hybrid model for improvised performance

Here I attempt to represent the various interactions at play in an improvised drama performance. The key features are: (1) The author (auteur/dramaturg/director) is receiving the same information from the performance as the audience. However, (2) they may choose to record that performance for further iterations. (3) That decision to do so may come from viewer feedback, a meeting of audience expectations, or purely 'knowing' what sort of thing people might like. However, the auteur's own artistic vision and skill will still dictate the decisions made. Therefore, the exchange is two-

way here. Another factor is (4), the improviser. The fictional world of the play, or at least of the dialogue, is filtered through the improviser (through performance and, ostensibly text creation) back through to both the audience and the auteur. I have positioned the improviser as straddling the world of the play and the real world of the auteur-audience relationship to show that, although the entire endeavour of course exists in the real world (or in Text World Theory terms, discourse-world) *per se*, an improviser-actor-character does not exist wholly in one realm, but oscillates between them. This is an attempt to account not so much for breakages of the ‘fourth wall’ as so often seen in pantomime etc, but also for the improviser’s tacit role as a kind of ‘covert generative narrator’. In addition, it may go some way to considering the reliability/unreliability and natural/unnatural cline that exists within an audience’s conceptualisation of an improvising character-narrator.

#### 4.5. Narrative in historical improvised theatre: *Commedia dell’Arte* as case study

It may be a convenient conceit to use a historical and currently rarely performed genre as an example. However, there is legitimacy in trying to trace back in time the existence of narrative within improvised drama. After all, long before the popularity of the modern novel (that sacred holder of narrative, in the eyes of Genette, Stanzel et al...), stories were performed. The illiteracy of the majority of populations necessitated the role of a storyteller as attested to by the existence in history of troubadours and bards, and which, of course still exist in societies and cultures around the world: Kurdish *dengbêj* singers in Turkey; *Hakawati* throughout the Arab world, and *Phansori* performances in Korea, to name but three.

In Britain, in addition to song and ballads, roving theatre companies would perform Mystery Plays (such as those originating in Chester and York), and the later practice of Mumming was prevalent from the Middle Ages onwards, with modern interpretations still visible at folkloristic events, festivals and seasonal celebrations. It has been noted elsewhere in this chapter that such performance-based ‘texts’ have been held to fall outside the scope of traditional approaches to narratological analysis, considered to be essentially mimetic and therefore ‘showing’ not ‘telling’. However, at the heart of these stories is the idea of recounting a tale, involving stock characters,

popular among an illiterate crowd of spectators, which may or may not have a moral or lesson, a song, dance and maybe even a turn with a dog.

The relevance of such historical investigation to this thesis is the notion that, in drawing on stock characters and well-known tales (be they folk tales in the manner accounted for by Vladimir Propp or stories from the Bible), it is the nature of the emergent dialogue and its continued freshness through improvisation, that rendered these performances theatrical. By extension, should these dialogues and enactments be recorded or transcribed, that ‘theatricality’ may be captured in text-form.

To view this theatricality within a narrative framework is admittedly ambitious. But it is the ambit of this analysis to show how by going back to historical examples of improvised drama, and then revealing modern-day parallels, a narratological perspective can indeed give some (if not total) insight into what it is that improvised dialogue brings to the success of a story in its telling.

*Commedia dell’Arte* is the theatrical art-form of choice here. After a brief overview of this particular genre, I will select what may be the only extant transcription of improvised *Commedia dell’Arte* dialogue and compare it with a contemporary piece of pre-scripted dialogue on a similar theme. Using an analysis based on a synthesis of ideas promoted by recent narrative theorists (see above), I hope to show how experientiality is key to appreciating how the performer/script-creators produced dialogue that was considered valuable enough to transcribe. I will also show how such a text may have fared favourably at a time when the vogue was starting for authored writing to be given to performers to read, learn and enact.

Obviously, variables such as actor skill, performance, and the milking of audience-pleasing tropes are all essential elements here. What interests me here most, however, and which has been hitherto under-explored, is the extent to which dialogue, when improvised rather than scripted, and therefore belonging more closely to a reality with which the audience and/or reader can more closely identify, contributes to the narrative power of a play. To this end, the tropes, ‘lazzi’, embellishments, interactions with the audience, and the varying degrees of ‘narratorship’ inherent to a *Commedia dell’Arte* spectacle are crucial matters to consider when taken together to consider their overall impact on creating a narrative.



#### 4.5.1. Commedia dell'Arte – overview



Figure 4.10 La Commedia degli Zanni Giovanni Tomasetti 2018 – photo: Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Originating in Italy in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, *Commedia dell'Arte* has come to epitomise how theatre practitioners could exploit pre-existing folk forms, improvised masking, music and dance and develop them into a theatrical medium; a practice that prevailed in Italy and France until its demise, or rather, its gradual “relegation to the nursery in bowdlerised form” since the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century (Rudlin, 1994: 5).

It is important to distinguish between *Commedia dell'Arte*, which was rooted in professionalism, performed in masks, and essentially (and perhaps most famously) improvised, on makeshift platforms in outdoor arenas, from the *Commedia erudita* of the same period (Rudlin, 1994: 14). The latter was the preserve of ‘dilettanti’, those amateurs performing in-house for certain nobles, and dressed in fine costumes with all the trappings of theatre that only the Courts could provide. *Commedia dell'Arte*, however, was much more rough-and-ready; its practitioners performing out of necessity rather than frivolous pleasure.

In this way, the word ‘Arte’ as used here refers not so much to ‘art’ in the modern sense but more to ‘artisan-ship’ in that it was deemed a professional craft. This professionalism therefore incurred a certain formal and protected status among contemporary trade guilds, likewise incurring an authority to perform *for money* before the counts and dukes of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. In this sense, as Dario Fo pointed out, *Commedia dell'Arte* was more a social phenomenon than an artistic one (1991).

Siro Ferrone (1993 [2011]) takes this further, identifying the works of *Commedia dell'Arte* as part of a mercantile culture. This has in itself huge implications on the nature of the recording of performances relating to the genre. Much has been made about the lack of evidence of any written traces of the actual performances themselves, verbatim. However, Flaminio Scala (1611) is perhaps the most well-known documenter of the skeleton outlines of the plays; in other words, the scenarios around which the actors improvised. These scenarios are extensive, the existence of which Ferrone puts down to economic necessity as they provided a solid basis for future iterations of the performances. Such written consolidation therefore guaranteed consistency and quality control, to a certain extent, while also giving space for the improvisation and invention which so characterised the *Commedia dell'Arte* form.

In terms of its created performances, *Commedia dell'Arte* was a phenomenon "paradoxically of repertoire and creation at the same time" (Testaverde, 2007) in that it worked on an extremely schematic scene (original or derived from a traditional literary text), to be filled with words, gestures, movements (the so-called 'lazzi') which were the extemporaneous contributions of the individual actors, sometimes improvised at the moment, but often elaborated in rehearsals or in daily work with other members of the company.

The essential value of a scenario lay in what a company was able to do with it—and that depended on the quality of the players in the troupe, on the individual players' mimic and verbal repertoires, their ability to work with and off each other, and on the knowledge and skill of the capocomico [chief player, troupe leader] to harmonize the stage action"

(Richards and Richards, 1990: 142).

Kenneth and Laura Richards continue to describe how a *Commedia dell'Arte* scenario was not a play in itself but rather as a suggestion or jumping-off point from where a play might be composed *all'improvviso*, and that the emerging production would differ dramatically depending on the individual actors and/or the company (1990: 142). This inherent flexibility, catering for the particulars not just of the actors but of varying audiences, playing conditions and trends may well account for the longevity of *Commedia dell'Arte* and how the actors were able to focus more on the performance rather than rehearsal and preparation (Crohn Schmitt, 2004).

Thus, having a fixed, scripted version would actually be counter-productive both in terms of aesthetics and also time and money. The essence of *Commedia dell'Arte*, for reasons of artistic and economic necessity, was its reliance on improvisation. Indeed, as Richard Andrews neatly puts it, “whenever or if a performance was scripted, it was no longer improvised and therefore no longer *Commedia dell'Arte*” (1991).

Nevertheless, despite not being recorded or transcribed verbatim, *Commedia dell'Arte*, even after its decline in popularity, continued to have an influence on European theatre, directly influencing, for example, the work of such playwrights as Goldoni, Gozzi, Shakespeare, and Molière (Crohn Schmitt, 2004). In addition, it could even be said to have been effectively subsumed into certain other theatrical forms (e.g. Punch and Judy shows and Pantomime). To account for this, it is perhaps not the inheritance of actual scripts or *mise en scène* that is crucial but rather it is the ‘idea’ of *Commedia dell'Arte* (Richards and Richards, 1990) that has been so inspirational to more modern theatre practitioners seeking to locate the creative process more in the practice of the actor. To this end, due to the lack of extant playtexts, modern re-interpretations have had to involve a mixture of creative imagination and practical experiment (Anderson, 1998).

Nevertheless, according to Crohn-Schmitt (2004), some performers did branch into publishing those fixed moments from the scenarios as well as collaborate in other court performances to perform scripts from a variety of genres including tragedies, tragi-comedies and pastorals. As actors for hire, it would have been presumably in their interest to ‘follow the money’, and as literacy rates improved, such actors would be more in a position to combine their acting skills (if not improvisational ones) with line-learning in whatever direction the theatrical winds blew them. However, what remains undeniable above all is that the technical acting efficiency of the *Commedia dell'Arte* actors supported this diffusion in theatrical production; a technique founded on gestures and the particular use of the language, enriched in its comic expression by the different sounds of the dialects of its interpreters (Testaverde, 2007).

It is the focus on this communicatively linguistic, narratological element that remains at the heart of this chapter’s attempt to reveal how such techniques may have lent themselves to the narrative quality of a performance. Such a quality would have been

of paramount importance in accounting for the popularity of improvised drama some 300 years ago, and which, in its modern interpretations, remains popular today.

What follows are comparisons and analyses of three scripts: one potentially unique as a found, transcribed excerpt from a *Commedia dell'Arte* dialogue; one from a *Commedia erudita* (pre-scripted), and one from a modern re-interpretation of a play by Carlo Goldoni, itself inspired by the characters, settings and 'lazzi' of *Commedia dell'Arte*.

#### 4.5.2. Two texts: El Dialogo De Un Magnifico Con Zani Bergamasco and Commedia del Crusco

1. EL DIALOGO DE UN MAGNIFICO CON ZANI BERGAMASCO (no date; no author)

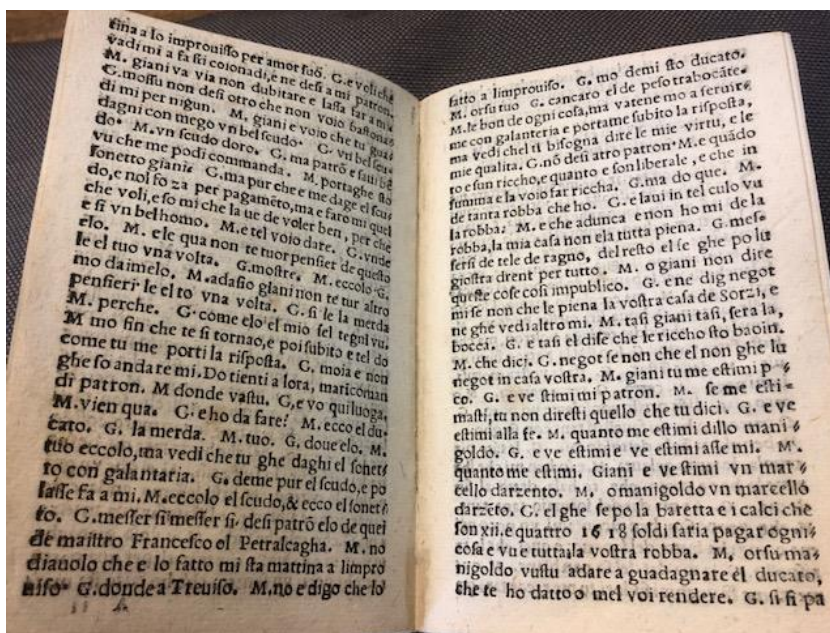


(Photo: J Fitchett)

Being an essentially unscripted, improvised form, to find an example of transcribed dialogue lifted directly from performance some 300-400 years ago is a challenge, if not outright impossible. However, research by Andrews (1991; 1993) has brought to light one such text. Possibly. It is to be found in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, among a collection of pamphlets printed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century from late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> Century woodcuts.

This collection consists of 12 pre-scripted short theatre scenes (dialogues, sketches) in rhyme, destined for stage performance and all invariably ending with a song and/or a dance. Standard fare, perhaps, for the time. One of these pamphlets, however, stands out as being noticeably different from the rest.

The scene revolves around the classic master / servant confrontation where a Venetian ‘Magnifico’ (yet to become the more famous Pantalone of later *Commedia dell’Arte*) lusts after a certain noble lady. He sends his ‘Zani’, or servant, a country bumpkin from the Bergamo region, to be his go-between armed with a message and a poem. (This Zani is himself the forerunner of the more famous Arlecchino or Harlequin). Of course, things don’t go according to plan, with the Zani forgetting why he was sent to her house but enjoying the attentions of the courtesan anyway. The subsequent dialogue between the two, as translated by Andrews, is a series of suspenseful delaying tactics on the part of the Zani, with him also taking the opportunity to tease and make fun of the Magnifico, in time-honoured fashion of the underdog getting one over on his boss.



(Photo: J Fitchett)

TRANSCRIPT (selected excerpts)

(Original in Appendix)

MAGNIFICO: [Introductory monologue, then . . .] Zani!  
ZANI: Yes sir. [Probably at the window]  
MAGNIFICO: Come out a moment.  
ZANI: What can I do for you, boss?  
MAGNIFICO: Come out here a moment, my dear chap.  
ZANI: Me?  
MAGNIFICO: Thee.  
ZANI: You want me to come to thee?  
MAGNIFICO: Aye, thee, you donkey, get a move on.  
ZANI: At your service, as you see. Shall I wear my hat?  
MAGNIFICO: To hell with your hat, put your cap on.  
ZANI: Yes sire. Er . . . Pardon me . . .  
MAGNIFICO: NOW what?  
ZANI: You want me to come?  
MAGNIFICO: Yes, you. Out!  
ZANI: Me myself in person?  
MAGNIFICO: YES, for God's sake, come out!  
ZANI: I'm coming, I've arrived, I'm here, what can I do for your honour?  
  
MAGNIFICO: I want you to know that I am in love.  
ZANI: In love?  
MAGNIFICO: Yes, I am in love.  
ZANI: You mean you are in love?  
MAGNIFICO: Yes,  
ZANI: You? Really?  
MAGNIFICO: Yes, idiot, don't you understand? I mean it. I really mean it.  
ZANI: YOU are in love?  
MAGNIFICO: Yes, I am in love.  
ZANI: (Collapses with laughter)  
MAGNIFICO: What are you laughing at, you clodhopper?  
ZANI: I thought you'd made a joke. You said you were in love.  
MAGNIFICO: But I AM in love. What's the matter, don't I look like a man with normal drives?  
  
ZANI: Driving mules, more likely.  
  
.....  
ZANI: And you're in love with her?  
MAGNIFICO: She's the one.  
ZANI: Then you've had it, master, you're as good as dead.  
MAGNIFICO: Dead?  
ZANI: Dead, master, you're dead.  
MAGNIFICO: But I'm perfectly alive, you dolt, what's all this about?  
ZANI: You're dead, master.  
MAGNIFICO: Why am I dead?  
ZANI: Four brothers, real hotheads, they'd clobber you as soon as look at you.  
  
.....

ZANI: Good news, master! I've been there.  
MAGNIFICO: You've been where?  
ZANI: To see your girlfriend. Good news!  
MAGNIFICO: Really?  
ZANI: Really, master.  
MAGNIFICO: My dear old chap, come on now, give me some consolation, give me some relief!  
ZANI: Master, I was in there talking to her for ages.  
MAGNIFICO: Splendid! What did she say about me?  
ZANI: She's so polite, so accommodating, so friendly.  
MAGNIFICO: Yes indeed, she's got all the graces. What did she say about me?  
ZANI: She gave me an enormous hunk of her cheese.  
MAGNIFICO: Get to the point man, tell me what she thought of the sonnet, and what her answer was.  
ZANI: She gave me some fresh, white bread.  
MAGNIFICO: Do you want me to burst? You can tell me about all those things later - put me out of my misery, tell me about the sonnet.  
ZANI: Yes master... just a minute boss, good news! She wanted it, you know sir, she really wanted it.  
MAGNIFICO: Wanted what?  
ZANI: She wanted it from me.  
MAGNIFICO: WHAT?  
ZANI: She took hold of my hand, and she wanted me to touch her on her rosette.  
MAGNIFICO: On her what? Her rosette?  
ZANI: Oh yes, master ... And she wanted me to stick two buttons on it.  
MAGNIFICO: What the hell is all this? What buttons, what rosette?  
ZANI: Yes master, you see, the rosette on the front of her bonnet, here ... She wanted me to give her two of my buttons, to stick on her rosette. It was a great favour.  
MAGNIFICO: God rot you, you great buffoon, will you stop this gibbering and tell me what she said about me?  
ZANI: Oh boss, she was smiling, she was happy, she was so kind to me, she said if I go back again she'll give me some cake.  
MAGNIFICO: Oh my God! This is causing me so much grief! WHAT DID SHE SAY ABOUT ME?

This scene is obviously at first glance a dialogue belonging to the tradition of *Commedia dell'Arte* rather than the 'run-of-the-mill' comedies of the other pamphlets. In contrast to these others, in the original Italian it is in a distinct dialect, and there is no rhyme or scansion, which lends credence to the notion that this is transcribed performance rather than pre-scribed text. (As an improvised dialogue, it would not adhere to the norms and conventions of prescription as even the most adept improviser would struggle to effectively create rhyming dialogue on the hoof – and

maintain it for the length of the play-let's narrative). Andrews (1991) also notes how other features of the text give it a distinctly improvisatory tone.

A lot of the individual sequences are suspense gags, built up by sheer repetition. This is obviously the easiest shape to use... it is relatively easy

for an actor to go on saying more or less the same thing, with whatever variations of tone and emphasis, until some signal tells him to stop....

As long as the prearranged climax is waiting there as a safety net, the actors can perform almost any verbal acrobatics.

(1991: 27)

Andrews' research seems to only extend, however, as far as commenting on the nature of the text and its spontaneous construction. He refers to the sketch being a succession of 'elastic gags' that postpone the release of tension in the given situation ("prolonging the agony" for both protagonists and audience). This improvisation technique of inserting adaptable stretches of dialogue into any story for comedic effect also serves to advance the plot (p. 27). This is achieved when the story is relatively simple and is open to flexibility in its telling. In this way, a performer having learned set-pieces of action within which they can improvise is essentially creating a block with which to build the narrative. This modular nature of such a performance is in stark contrast to pre-scripted sketches of the time. It is one of this chapter's intentions to go one step further than a mere text analysis and get behind why this particular *Commedia dell'Arte* scene may have stood out over its contemporaries and was worth transcribing – if indeed it really was.

There is no date or author to the text. However, the dialogue between these two particular characters, being named for their earlier incarnations, suggests the text originates from the mid to late 1500s. Nevertheless, the characters of Magnifico and Zani are directly referred to by *Commedia dell'Arte* actors and company directors well into the early 1600s (Pandolfi, 1958; Ranzini, 2009).



One of the most significant of these impresarios was Pier Maria Cecchini (1563-1645), aka 'Frittellino' who, according to Buratelli (1988)<sup>7</sup> was the "only one who took the trouble to set down the rules of acting in writing. And above all, was the comedian [actor] who more closely recognised the peculiarities and ethical principles of the new theatrical professionalism in the balance of the company, and who always put the logic of the collective before the interests and the needs of the client." He was also responsible for writing works such as *Discorso sopra l'arte comica, con il modo di ben recitare* ('Treatise on the comic art with methods for performing well') in 1600 and *Brevi discorsi intorno alle comedie, comedianti e spettatori... dove si comprende quali rappresentationi si possono ascoltare e permettere* ('Treatises pertaining to comedy, comedians and spectators... in which is included such representations that may be heard and permitted') in 1616 (Pandolfi, 1958 IV: 78-90; III: 354-368). These combined would suggest that Cecchini was very much at the forefront of professionalising the *Commedia dell'Arte* actor's art. Indeed, his insistence on this rendered him a somewhat tyrannical taskmaster later in his career with the result that he ended up being alienated by much of the members of his company (Buratelli, 1988; Molinari, 1983).

It is therefore telling when such a purist of the Comedian's art singles out individual performers for special consideration by his benefactor. This is evident in the following extract from a letter between Cecchini and 'un segretario ducale' at the Venetian Ducal palace in 1612:

For the service of his Highness, I have also done that which is impossible and I am sending the present actor, that being Master Marco Antonio Romagnesi, a man that for his role of Magnifico is the best that recites today, and who with his company will move wherever his Highness commands, as long as you remain in agreement with certain details that they want and that he will then say by mouth<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> This information also appears in *Comici dell'Arte – Corrispondenze* (Collected Correspondence of the *Commedia dell'Arte* actors), edited by Siro Ferrone et al. (1993)

<sup>8</sup> In *Comici dell'Arte – Corrispondenze*

Another letter, a year later, has a similar message regarding Magnifico. We can assume that Cecchini is referring to the same actor here. He also makes mention of the Zani.

It is more necessary that if you want us, Your Highness, you must write to Signor Don Giovanni Medici that Scapino be sent for his service, as said Scapino is in that company promised to Florence, as an excuse for needing him, because you have three Zani left, I offer to send His Highness a Magnifico to that company because there are currently none. Said Magnifico will be the best reciter of the role, and I forego him in the service of His Highness.<sup>9</sup>

Could it be, therefore that Cecchini, at a point where he is refining and consolidating the improviser's skills, and writing treatises to that effect, is looking for exemplars of the art? Here we see one actor, Romagnesi, twice being identified as 'the best that recites [il Magnifico] today'. Would it be beyond the realms of possibility that Cecchini recorded the Magnifico's improvisations for instructional purposes, if not future performances?

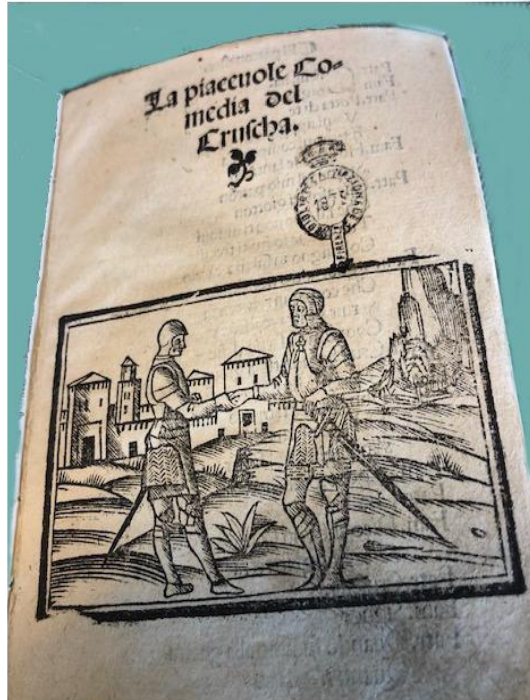
The early 17<sup>th</sup> Century date of Cecchini's activities may seem a little late, but do concur with some of the other dated manuscripts in that same Florence National Library collection alongside the Magnifico/Zani dialogue. It also heralds the beginning of the end of pure spontaneity in *Commedia dell'Arte*, as the theatre world becomes more professionalised, actors more literate and the spectating public more bourgeois, expecting a more polished, reproducible genre (Richards and Richards, 1990: 31). It is a compelling notion. In any case, if this dialogue is indeed a transcript as it appears to be, there was something about it that was deemed worth recording. To get to grips with what that might be and to see how that quality lends itself to the narrative, it is worth examining a similarly themed non-*Commedia dell'Arte* script from the same collection.

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<sup>9</sup> In *Comici dell'Arte – Corrispondenze*

COMMEDIA DEL CRUSCA – A DIALOGUE BETWEEN il PADRONE (the master) AND il FAMIGLIO (his yeoman, Bran) – transl. J Fitchett

Printed by Giovanni Andrea Valvassore (aka Guadagnino) – mid 1500s



(Photo: J Fitchett)

MASTER: Bran!

YEOMAN: Sir

MASTER: May you  
Come with me,

And keep me company

YEOMAN: (Ho, what fantasy is he, my master!)

MASTER: What are you waiting for?  
What? do you not move?  
You wish me to land you  
A fist upon your moustache?

YEOMAN: Master, I do nothing else,  
What with great reverence,

Than serve your excellency  
As a good servant to God

MASTER: Bran, don't be serious  
If for me you suffered  
I am to give you credit  
For your servitude  
If I sift, as you know

YEOMAN: Yes, my master

MASTER: What?

YEOMAN: I say as one with God  
You are on earth today

MASTER: Bran

YEOMAN: Sir

MASTER: When we were at war  
How many did I slay?

YEOMAN: Signor, I was never there  
And I don't know what to say

MASTER: One hundred of them died

YEOMAN: More than a thousand  
(O God how he boasts,  
This poltroon!)

MASTER: What do you say?

YEOMAN: I say, master,  
There is none better than you

MASTER: As we saw later,  
I was a Captain

YEOMAN: Yes, by god, and not in vain

(of branches and fennel)

MASTER: What do you say?

YEOMAN: I say the thing to do

Is to marvel

And amaze as far as Jupiter

MASTER: Bran, how many tests have I already done

In my life

And with sword in hand?

YEOMAN: Verily my dear master

(I have the canvas and the warp

Of this loon;

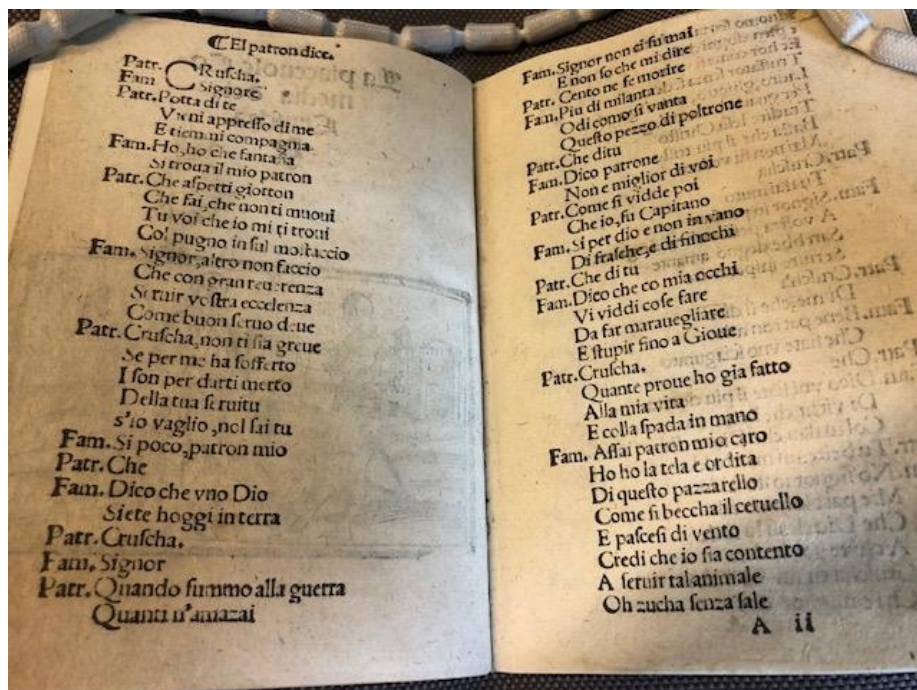
How his brain pecks

And grazes on wind.

To think I'd be happy

To serve this animal,

Oh unsalted pumpkin!)



(Photo: J Fitchett)

#### 4.5.2.1. Comparison and Analysis

At the beginning of the *Magnifico-Zani* exchange, the delaying tactics are key. The fact that the audience knows (or at least believes) the dialogue is improvised only adds to the entertainment value of ratcheting up the pressure of the scene (when will one performer-character eventually capitulate and break the tension?). Zani's ploy is to either throw in irrelevancies ("shall I wear my hat?") or to merely repeat what the Magnifico has requested in a faux attempt at clarification ("You want me to come to thee?... you want me to come?... me myself?"). The latter technique may seem somewhat less sophisticated than the former in that it is based on mere repetition, and it could easily grate if carried on too long. However, in the hands of an accomplished performer, part of the 'experience' of such a device is in testing the audience's patience, so that the sense of release is even greater when it does occur. Judging how far to take this gag is quite an art – one only has to think of UK comedian Tim Vine's 'Pen behind the ear' routine where, on stage, with suspenseful musical accompaniment, he continually throws biros up to the side of his face until one eventually lodges behind his ear. The audience knows full well that the length of time he needs to achieve this could be indefinite. Yet they stay seated and applaud heartily when he (finally) succeeds.



Figure 4.11 (pic from [www.timvine.com](http://www.timvine.com))

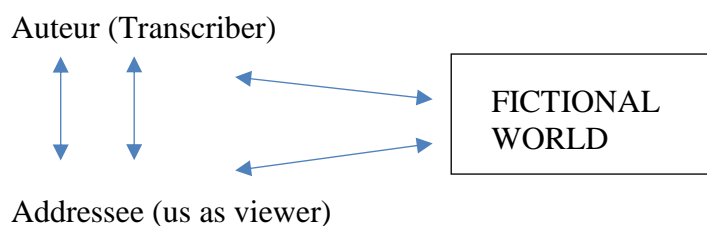
Indeed, from these excerpts from the *Magnifico/Zani* playlet, there are only a few key functional 'turns' within the dialogue: Magnifico requests Zani's presence; he informs Zani he is in love; Zani warns him of the risk; Zani informs Magnifico of his return; Magnifico enquires after the courtesan's reply. These are what can be regarded as the prescribed 'elements' of the scene as might have been recorded by Flaminio Scala in

his 1611 collection of *Commedia dell'Arte* scenarios. The actual comic filler moments are, however, provided by the two actors on stage including, presumably, such details as Zani's description of the courtesan's buttons, rosette etc. which amount to further delaying tactics to keep the Magnifico (and the audience) in suspense.

In the non-improvised, pre-scripted *Commedia del Crusca*, the yeoman character similarly gets one over on his master but by more overt means (i.e. insulting asides). In this case, there is no build-up of tension as such but the humour resides solely in the way he gets away with his barbed remarks. The only real 'routine' or gag is the Master's repeated "What did you say?" line, whereupon the yeoman has to quickly come up with an innocuous version of his previous insult (all pre-ordained, of course). This is a tried and tested device and one that may have originated in the witty 'banter' of *Commedia dell'Arte* exchanges, although, to accomplish this, by thinking off-the-cuff for a suitably original, rhyming alternative to the insult, would take considerable skill. By necessity, then, to ensure consistency and guaranteed comedy value, the nature of this exchange deserves a script. However, the lightness of touch and frisson of energy needed to truly pick up on the other actor's intervention, the extension of the gag, the raising of tension and its eventual release are not so evident in this dialogue as in that of the Magnifico and Zani.

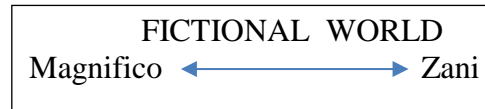
To go one step further and help consider why, then, the Magnifico/Zani exchange may have been transcribed, and how it can contribute to the narrative, a diagrammatic illustration can be employed.

Here the author /transcriber is conveying to us (the later reader) the 'story' of the exchange: Magnifico wants Zani to go and deliver a sonnet to his courtesan and report back on how it was received. The Zani does everything except that which is expected of the Magnifico, however.

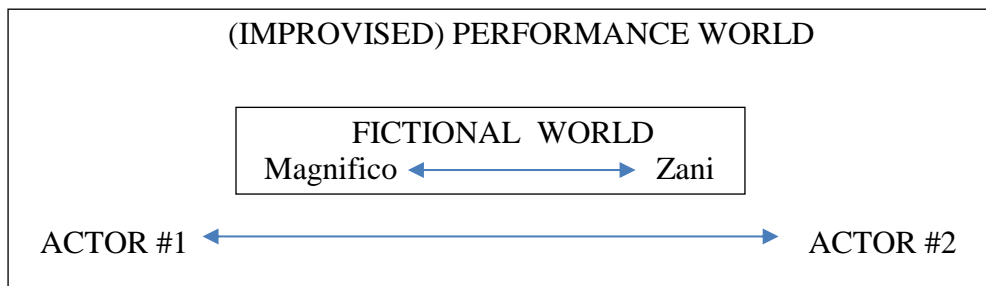


Here there is arguably a spatio-distant relationship both between the transcriber (as narrator) and us as narratee, as well as between both parties and the tale being told.

The fictional world itself exists within the exchange between two characters:

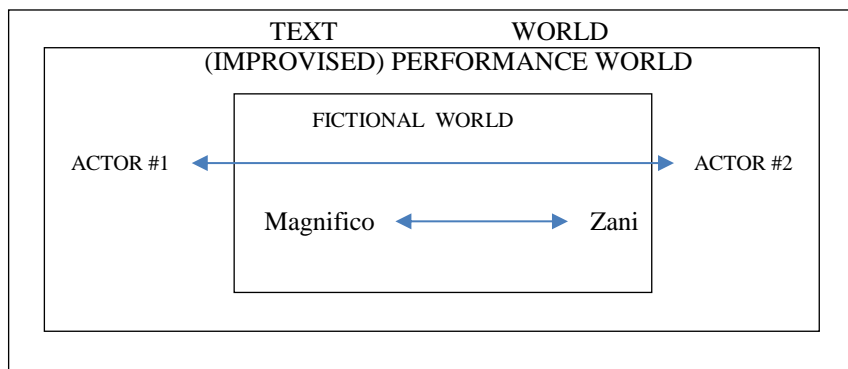


And the performers of these two characters have a text-based scenario within which to flesh out that exchange:



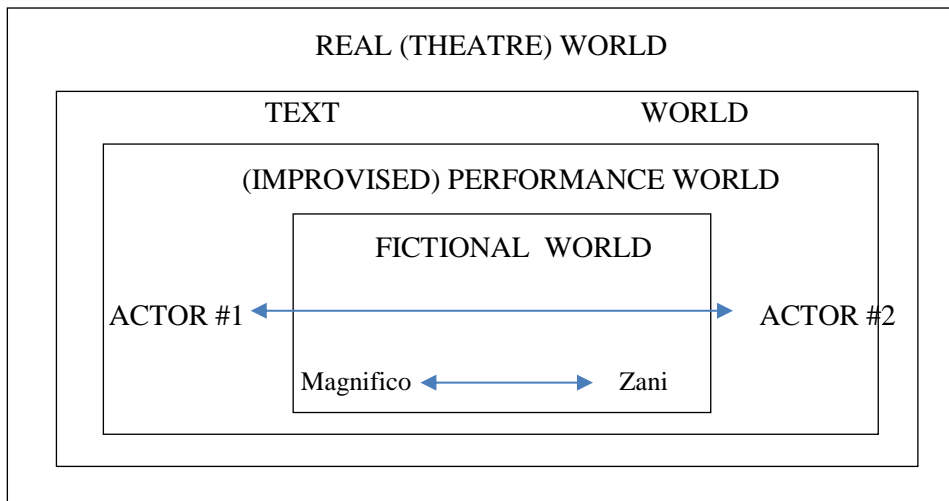
An additional complication here, of course, that as each performer is aware of the outline of the story but not the actual mechanics of *how* between them they are going to tell that story, it could be argued that they are essentially both narrators and narratees within their own performance, attending to each given line in order to respond appropriately, both to adhere to the overarching story as laid down beforehand but also to the mini-narrative as it evolves with each utterance. Such is the art of the improviser.

The above dialogue then forms the text that is subsequently transcribed by our anonymous editor,





which, in turn, forms part of the real ‘theatre world’ within which we (the audience/play reader) and the author/transcriber operate:



This is, itself, also viewed from beyond the immediate theatre world as a model for future reproduction, ‘filtered’, as it were, via the experience of the viewer (in this case both audience and transcriber) as performed by the performers on stage. This filtering can best be represented diagrammatically as follows, with the performers straddling the various worlds

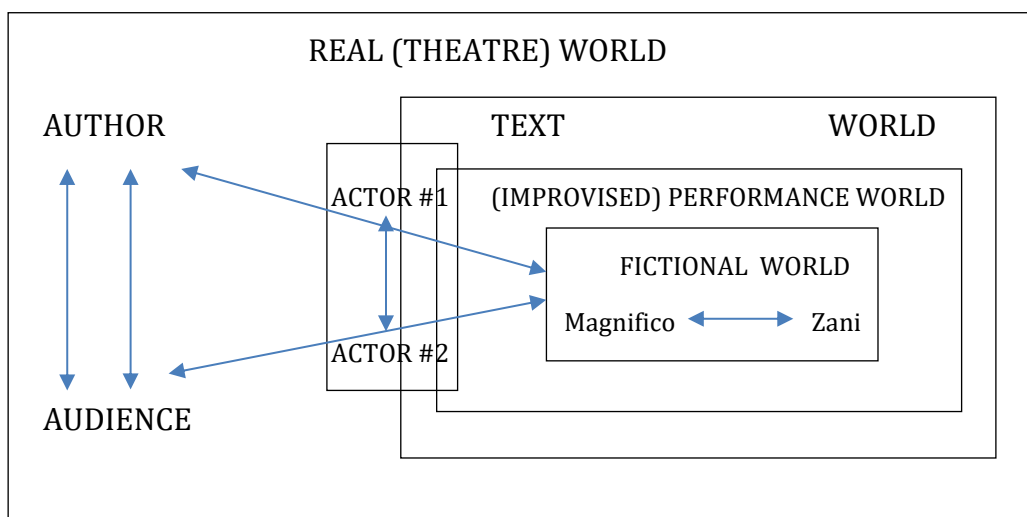


Figure 4.12 Hybrid model applied to Magnifico/Zani exchange - actor/improvisers as ‘filters’

### 4.5.3. A modern case: *One Man Two Guvnors*

*One Man Two Guvnors*, a reworking of Carlo Goldoni's 1745 play *Il servitore di due padrone* (*The servant of two masters*) was first performed at the National Theatre in May 2011 with James Corden in the lead role as Francis Henshall. Transposing the action to 1950s London and incorporating skiffle music and contemporary references, the play nevertheless retained the main character-types, key routines and plotlines of the original. Receiving critical acclaim, the play subsequently enjoyed 4 years of national and international touring and was broadcast to cinema audiences via National Theatre Live in 2011 and streamed online during the 2020 pandemic.

Example of an 'improvised' scene – The Sandwich

From ONE MAN, TWO GUVNORS by Richard Bean (adapted from Carlo Goldoni)  
National Theatre Live (15<sup>th</sup> September 2011)

Cast: FRANCIS - James Corden

LLOYD - Trevor Laird

FRANCIS: Has anybody got a sandwich?

(Audience laughter)

FRANCIS: Seriously

(Audience laughter)

Anyone? Oh come on. There must be a thousand people in here. No-one's got a York ham and mustard? A bacon, lettuce and tomato? Please. Anything of... *(suddenly looks stage right into the audience)*

(Audience laughter. Someone in the audience (3<sup>rd</sup> row) has a sandwich!)

FRANCIS: *(not believing his luck)* Of all the nights!

(Laughter and applause)

FRANCIS: So... just...

(More laughter)

To be clear... you have a sandwich. On you now? Which clearly you do (*giggles*) and you are... prepared to give that sandwich to me?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: If you like

FRANCIS: "If you like", Oh what a guy, ladies and gentlemen!

(Audience applause)

And what kind of sandwich is it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER responds

FRANCIS: (*Looking disgusted*) Hummus?!

(Audience laughter)

No wonder you haven't eaten it!

(Huge laughs)

FRANCIS: I don't really know what to do now. I mean... I can say I'm hungry. And I did ask for it, so... you might as well hand it over. Go on... (*goes towards audience*)

Suddenly LLOYD appears from off

LLOYD: Eh man! I've got a minute if you want a hand with that trunk of yours.

FRANCIS: Alright, OK. Although... (*looking to AUDIENCE MEMBER*) Remarkably, this gentleman has a sandwich...

(Audience laughter)

Err... we... we should get the trunk from the car. That's... (*to AUDIENCE MEMBER*) I... I will decline your offer, sir. Thank you very much. It's just you'll learn in not so far a distant future that you have somewhat messed with the play.

(Audience laughter and applause)



Figure 4.13 James Corden (left) as Frances Henshall in *One Man, Two Guvvners* (photo: Evening Standard/Rex Features)

#### 4.5.3.1. *One Man, Two Guvvners* analysis

A brief analysis of this scene reveals the following: FRANCIS (James Corden) delivers the “Has anyone got a sandwich?” line in much the same, stylised tone in which he has delivered his scripted lines hitherto. Thus the audience may presume this is a staged, rhetorical question rather than a genuine request. When his tone suddenly lowers and physical stance becomes directed towards the audience alongside the line “seriously”, it is clear he is breaking ‘the fourth wall’. This contravention of the conventions of traditional theatrical performance gains immediate laughter. This moment is then reinforced by the subsequent lines in their direct appeal to the audience and reference to the spectator-world outside the play (“there must be a thousand people in here”), even though the character’s hunger (within the story) is clearly being blurred with the actor’s (fake) desire for a sandwich in the real world beyond the stage. It could be argued that, as this jumping in and out of the story world of the play is all a playful part and parcel of the performance, Corden is essentially creating a third, blended, performance world that sits between the story of the play and the real world of the spectators (and of Corden when off-stage, for example) (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002; Ryan, 2015).

Improvisation, here, in time-honoured pantomime fashion, is being used to straddle two worlds (or create a blended world) for comedic effect, thus directly engaging the audience towards one of the plotlines of the play i.e. Francis’ ongoing but fruitless quest to satisfy his hunger. The fact that an audience member just so happens to have a sandwich therefore has a double effect. On the level of improvised performance, it

gives the improviser (Corden) a challenge: it is unusual for people to bring sandwiches into theatre auditoriums, so there is an expectation that this gag will involve Francis' being frustrated yet again in his search for food (thus adhering to that plot strand). However, this is not so. The appearance of a sandwich means Corden must now improvise a way out of an unexpected interruption. Here, the challenge set before the actor creates a certain tension and thrill. Meanwhile, on the narrative level, the production of a sandwich threatens to disrupt the story. Corden's extrication must somehow involve dealing with the situation yet also adhere to the plot and put the play back on track. The fact that the interruption to both the spectacle and the expectations of the audience creates a tension with the plot's coherence is what creates the entertainment here as the audience collectively think: How's he going to get out of this?

Corden's giggles, pauses, asking for clarification all add to this tension and are clearly devices for (apparently) buying him time to consider his strategy but also to build the tension. With the 'hummus' gag (Corden's face falls dramatically when he hears the sandwich's contents – thus potentially prolonging Francis' frustrations and giving Corden an exit strategy), the tension reaches its crescendo at "No wonder you haven't eaten it!", which, as a punchline, receives the greatest applause. This statement is not, of course, because hummus is intrinsically disgusting, but it ironically reflects and explains both why Francis will not accept it and why the audience member still has the sandwich on them; thus tying together the strands of the gag (the set-up) effectively (Foley, 2014).

What is interesting here is that Corden/Francis (the lines between performer and character are very blurred now) continues with a very meta-theatrical speech: "I don't really know what to do now". Is this Corden the actor admitting improv 'defeat' or Francis the character realising that accepting the sandwich will fulfil his objective but scupper the plotline? The intervention by Lloyd and the distraction of the trunk saves the moment. But not before Corden/Francis again meta-theatrically refers to the audience member having "somewhat messed with the play". Again, the all-knowing audience laughs at this 'behind the scenes' acknowledgement.

What is doubly ironic is, of course, that this interlude, as a successfully entertaining, comic example of improvisation, and one that toys with the danger of disrupting the narrative of the play, is not actually improvised at all.

The impression of improvisation is, however, essential for the interlude to work. If it was an obviously pre-scripted moment occurring between characters purely on-stage, the ‘unexpected’ irony of the situation would be lost. As with stand-up comics who feed off audience interventions (heckles, answers to direct questions, interventions from comic partners), the spontaneity and freshness of the performer’s feedback (and subsequently created dialogue) is what creates the humour, rather than the intrinsic quality of the gag’s verbal components itself. Obviously, the ‘wittier’ and snappier that feedback is, the better.

Bill Bailey: “Tis the wisdom of the rural Buddha”  
Sean Lock: “The Dalai Farmer!”

BBC QI Series E (episode 4) 2007

As for driving the plot forward, the comic interlude could easily have been dispensed with. Yet, in a comedy play, with its overt homages to Goldoni and the tradition of *Commedia dell’Arte*, this short episode is effectively a ‘*lazzo*’. It fulfils this function as much as any of the other famous scenes and moments in the play (e.g. the mix up of identities, the serving of lunch to two different masters simultaneously in two different rooms, the carrying of the heavy trunk...) in creating the comic drive behind the overall plot, which in itself is not humorous at all.

The improvised nature of this particular scene is what is of interest here, however, along with the idea that, effectively, it may well have been transcribed (one can easily imagine that it once was a genuine improvisation, the success of which was recorded for re-performance). In this regard we may refer to Fludernik’s (1996) concept of experientiality in the performance of narrative and, in addition, see how improvisation and the use of ‘quasi-real’ discourse (as opposed to the authored script of the rest of the play) gives power to that ‘telling of the tale’ if, admittedly, the scene itself is not integral to the overarching plot but *seems* to jeopardise one of the narrative strands.

The late Dario Fo, actor, writer, director and arguably most notable modern inheritor of the *Commedia dell’Arte* tradition, remarked favourably on contemporary

reworkings of Goldoni's work. While bemoaning the lack of spontaneity and the mechanisation inherent to scripted improvisation, he recognised that this was a natural evolution and represented the kind of theatre of Goldoni's time.

The objection that I hear offered most frequently to this production is that it did not contain so much of the spirit of improvised performance, rather that it presented itself as an extraordinary comedic machine, with pre-programmed rhythms, not much imaginative freedom and great precision—in short, it worked like a clock.... I would first reply that finding any comedic mechanism which is capable of functioning like a clock is quite an extraordinary thing, certainly not an everyday occurrence. Specifically, however, it should be said that [this] *commedia dell'arte* was that of the end of the seventeenth century, that of Goldoni.

(Fo, 1991: 37)

#### 4.6. Other Cases

Obviously, *One Man, Two Guvnors* is a modern reworking of Carlo Goldoni's 1746 play *The Servant of Two Masters* (*Il Servitore di due Padroni*), itself drawing directly on *Commedia dell'Arte*. Indeed, Goldoni originally allowed for elements of improvisation in his original production before settling on a revised, fully scripted version by 1753 – the version we still have to this day. To take the relevance to modern theatre further, it is also necessary to consider other, perhaps more distant relatives of this improvised form.

Commentators on narratology have gone to great pains to use examples of other dramatic forms to illustrate the relevance of narrative models to the analysis of drama. Reference, for example, is made to George Bernard Shaw's excessive stage directions and the way Ibsen clearly delineates the storyworlds of his plays (Richardson (2007); Fludernik (2008); Jahn (2001)). Brian Richardson (1988; 2003) pays particular attention to absurdist theatre and Manfred Jahn (2001) also uses Beckett's *Endgame* as an example of where the specificities of the staging are part and parcel of the narrative drive of the implicit and explicit authors and/or the intradiegetic narrators (characters) within the play. Post-dramatic forms (Lehmann, 2006) are also alluded to, not least the concept of devised theatre, where dialogue and other content are produced through rehearsal and actor performance. What is not fully explored, however, is the power of the verbiage of the dialogue that is produced, edited and re-

produced within these production processes, and how the realistic and improvised nature of these utterances contribute to the narrative of the final play.

Another example, prevalent in British theatre for centuries and still a popular event around Christmas is pantomime. In the UK this is a universally appealing theatrical phenomenon, apparently directly rooted in *Commedia dell'Arte* conventions, with well-known, recognisable character-types, set sketches, audience participation (even as far as the dialogue: “It’s behind you!”; “Oh no it isn’t; Oh yes it is!”), that has permeated popular culture over the years in much the same way as Mystery Plays, Punch and Judy shows, Music Hall theatre and so on (Rudlin, 1994). The on-going popularity and financial success of pantomime has continued to make it a mainstay of British theatre culture in so far as guaranteeing the annual income and viability of many otherwise struggling theatres – not to mention struggling actors.

The improvised nature of some of the turns, sketches, and set-pieces within the pantomime are part of the nature of the play and is an expected feature of any pantomime. Less expected, perhaps, is the use of improvisation in more post-dramatic forms, but it is becoming increasingly the vogue (Lehmann, 2006: 118-120). Companies such as Forced Entertainment, Punchdrunk and Shunt, depending as they do on devised processes and the experimental use of performer/audience engagement, often use improvisation (necessarily) as an integral element within the tale that’s being told on stage (no matter how obscure that tale may be).

One contemporary company that combines devised text and scenography, physical theatre, improvisation and performer-audience interaction to ‘tell a tale’ is Cornwall-based Kneehigh Theatre. Their most recent production (2020) is an interpretation and UK tour of Alfred Jarry’s (1896) *King Ubu (Ubu Roi)*. This production is worth remarking upon since it is a modern re-working of a play using features of both *Commedia dell'Arte* and pantomime while also being original in its postdramatic treatment. That is, as well as adhering to certain facets of popular spectacle dating back to pre-renaissance times, it exhibits experimental, *mise-en-scène* features that transcend what might be expected of traditional theatre.

What is also noteworthy from a narratological perspective is that the narrative works arguably on three levels: a) the authorial voice of the script-writer (which is in itself



the conception of three people: Carl Grose, Charles Hazlewood and Mike Shepherd) working with the creative input of the whole company, based on Jarry's existing play; b) the intradiegetic narration of characters within the play as they tell each other events that have happened off-stage, or even through asides and soliloquies to the audience; c) the inclusion of an overt narrator off (and on) stage who (like *One Man, Two Guvnors*' Francis) straddles the storyworld of the play and the 'real' world of the audience, effectively acting as mediator between the characters and the audience. At times, his (in the production I saw it was a man) function is to follow the script of his narration but more often than not he improvises dialogue with the characters (or at least the liminal zone where actor and character may meet): "it worked better in rehearsal Ubu!"

In this way the narrator slips into the meta-world of the play and facilitates audience-character participation. Indeed, as narrator/compere, he successfully refers back to those participating audience members throughout the performance. In the performance I saw, an American, Dave, was singled out and, once his nationality had been established, references to President Trump etc came thick and fast. Another audience member was a young man, Marco, of Italian descent who had come as part of a sixth-form school-trip. His schoolmates and nationality were referred to at least twice later in the performance and he was thanked with a final 'grazie mille' at the end. So, unlike in *One Man, Two Guvnors*, this is something that is clearly unique to each performance and although the gag can be repeated, the exact words names, references etc cannot be.

As for the creative process, according to Emma Rice, Kneehigh's Artistic Director (2005), the stories are devised from a spring-board of images and ideas inspired by other media, and this before a single word has been written.

The designer and I gaze at books and films, sketch and begin to form a concept; an environment in which the story can live, in which the actors can play. This physical world holds meaning and narrative"

(2005: 10)

The script, if it can be called that, is shaped by the company members in the form of songs, poems, lyrics and ideas but not as isolated, scripted scenes. In this way, a 'palette' of texts is created.

It is in the sharing of these produced multi-modal texts that the story is retold in the rehearsal room and the improvisation and character development/invention begins, according to the relevant skills of the individual performers.

The writers are in rehearsal. They watch and inspire, feeding in their poetry, their lyrics. They respond to improvisation and craft scenes and characters alongside the actors. Layer upon layer, the world is created, the story released.

(2005: 11)

What is remarkable here is this idea that through improvisation and collaboration with those making a written record of the constructed dialogue, a narrative is *released*; the implication being that the story is inherent, hidden, longing to be found, and requiring the work of an individual or a company to give it the means of expression.

In this case, the focus is once again on ‘experientiality’ (Fludernik, 1996). Indeed, Rice goes on to suggest that in reading the scripts of Kneehigh’s work, the reader/audience should at times leave the text and feel free to relive moments of life experience in order to fully engage with the play.

As you read, close your eyes from time to time. Let a tune drift back from your childhood or recall a painting that made your heart pound. Remember falling in love or losing control, leaving a loved one or laughing until you cried. Now the work lives; Now there is a connection. Now there is meaning.

(2005:11-12)



Figure 4.14 Kneehigh Theatre’s *King Ubu* (2020) – photos: J Fitchett

## 4.7. Conclusions

It is clear that the long-bemoaned lack of application of narrative study to drama has, in fact, been addressed in recent years. However, there have been and still are gaps in the research, as admitted by various commentators (Jahn, 2001; Richardson, 2007; Nünning and Sommer, 2008). Indeed, research into the implications on the story-telling role of characters within a play when their dialogue is spontaneously created is virtually non-existent, it would seem, particularly with regard to how and why that improvised text may consequently be transcribed and recorded for future use.

This chapter has attempted to draw in salient features of narrative analysis, as applied to drama, and create a model that may account for the theatricality (or not) of improvisation in particular. To illustrate this, case study comparisons have been made and extended, using one of theatre history's most famous improvisational artforms – *Commedia dell'Arte* – as a base.

In modern narrative improvisation, performers are given the task of creating a complete story based on audience suggestions. In general, that story is comic but is designed not only to make the audience laugh, but have a complete arc from beginning to end. To this end the practitioners follow the tenets of **CORE**: grounded **C**haracters, strong **O**bjectives, meaningful **R**elationships, and clear **E**nvironments (Impro Theatre, n.d.). In *Commedia dell'Arte* and in other, more modern examples, the actors are often required to 'riff' around an established scenario. Nevertheless, in each case it is the spontaneous dialogue exchange between character-performers that essentially create the experience of the story-telling for the audience's benefit.

This experientiality of narrative as proposed by Monika Fludernik (1996; 2008) is a key factor in considering how authentic, unmediated language, created off-the-cuff, can contribute to an audience's appreciation of the play. The extension of the definition of a dramatic narrator beyond just that of an overt epilogue or generic story-teller is also crucial. The covert nature of the narrator, embodied as it is within the characters and their interaction on stage, has a profound effect on the spectator's reception of the play. In her theorising on the narrative qualities inherent to Pinter and Beckett's works, Kristin Morrison (1983) claims that narration in 20<sup>th</sup> century drama is the "modern psychological equivalent of the soliloquy, allow[ing] the character the

relief of self-revelation while at the same time continuing to conceal from others, and to some extent, even from himself, desires, motives and emotions that are painful and in some way dangerous” (1983: 2-3).

There is, by extension, great importance attached to the selection or restriction of narrative information to the immediate experience and knowledge of the characters on stage. This narrative ‘focalisation’ (Genette, 1972) is as much apparent in film and stage drama as it is in prose fiction (Kuhn, 2009). The contention of this chapter, however, is that when the experience of the character is ostensibly part and parcel of the performer at any given moment in terms of the dialogue that is produced, then that focalisation may be increased due to the heightened sense of ‘experience’ on the part of the spectator.

In addition, there is an impact on the perceived unreliability of those performer-narrators (Nünning and Sommer, 2008). Morrison contends that the long, often rambling, monologic narrative episodes in Pinter and Beckett’s plays require little or no response from the other characters on stage. This lack of interaction adds both to the disconcerting, somewhat alien or para-realistic effect of the plays but also allows the audience to accept the reliability of their narration; leading to the mistaken perception perhaps that if there is no (negative) reaction, they must be telling the truth (Bowles, 2010). Conversely, though, if there *is* interaction between narrator and narratee (ie other characters and / or the audience), then likewise we see a testing of the veracity of the narrative through verbal exchange; an exchange within which the spectator must invest a certain amount of inferential work (Bowles, 2010). This is clearly the case in improvised performance, where the character-performers must pick up on cues, whilst conforming to expected tropes and storylines.

Unreliability in narrative is a long-established concept in prose fiction, ever since Wayne C. Booth’s coinage of the term in the 1960s. In much drama, also, there is a varying degree of disbelief to be held by the audience of the narrators on stage, but if, as previously posited, those narrators are acting covertly within the articulation of their character roles, this disbelief may be tempered by the extent to which the audience can relate to those roles via the utterances emanating from them. In much the same way as a performer-narrator exists to varying extents upon a diegetic-mimetic cline (Chatman, 1978), the actual nature of the discourse may also be

variable in terms of its empathic impact on the audience (Keen, 2007; Richardson, 2002) and the extent to which a spectator may 'buy into' the narrative.

It may be a tentative conclusion at this point to suggest that when interactive narrative is produced on stage by performers who are essentially creating the story or, at least, the story's discourse 'on the hoof' and that, importantly, the audience are aware of this, then the stakes of involvement, engagement and narrator-narratee empathy are ratcheted higher than in traditional, scripted drama. This is also true when the 'improvised' dialogue is actually devised, rehearsed and reproduced to *appear* improvised. At this point, it is in the skill of the performer and the recognition by the audience of the value of improvisation as a genre that come together to imbue the play-watching (and reading) experience with a different theatrical quality to that of regular drama.

To that end, the story is essentially being created through the spontaneous interaction of the performers, functioning both as narrators and narratees to each other. Their reactions and high stakes "sink or swim" circumstance is easily identifiable to the audience. This is even more the case, of course, when there is audience involvement as there is nothing more precarious to a performance than when an unwitting spectator is dragged on stage!

In turn, the flesh of the produced narrative (even when the bare bones have been established in advance) is received by the audience, having been filtered through the performers' improvisational skill. By extension, the director/dramaturg/transcriber of the play, as a spectator, gauges how well that improvisation has contributed to the story-telling and records those nuggets for future production. The aesthetic quality of such moments may boil down to the ratcheting up of tension (as seen in *Magnifico / Zani*); the high stakes of the given situation, and the audience's investment in the spontaneity of the discourse, which, in turn relies on that frisson of danger that it all may, at any moment, come crashing down (a circumstance that is ironically exploited by being purposefully incorporated into the sandwich scene from *One Man, Two Guvnors*).

By comparing examples of scripted and non-scripted plays from the same historical period, and then tracing the influence on (quasi)improvised forms of the modern day,

I have attempted to show how a pattern of discourse, interaction, use of familiar character types, sketches and other tropes may contribute to the audience's acceptance of the narrative form of the play, and thence to its theatricality. Essentially, the experience of watching or reading a play filtered through an improvised performance creates different expectations of the audience. Additionally, its closer adherence to the discourse of the real world (often literally as the performer winks at or engages overtly with the audience) creates an empathic response different to that of a traditional pre-scripted play. Furthermore, the unreliability of the narrator-performer is then up for more interpretation as the improvisers are at once more identifiable as 'people like us' but are likewise invested with the same fallibilities. However, this all raises more questions than perhaps it answers: to what extent does the theatricality depend on the improviser's skill or is it the very nature of the genre that is paramount? How have audience expectations changed over the last 400 years? How does this thesis fully account for the theatrical success of non-narrative or anti-narrative plays (such as Beckett's)? Is this purely down to an audience's inherent *need* to find a narrative where one may not exist as Richardson (2007) suggests?

Chapter 4's appreciation of extended cognitive processes both within the creation and the reception of improvised drama and chapter 5's further investigation and case study of an ongoing project, *The Plant*, with focus on the improvisation process and directorial decision-making, will hopefully begin to answer these questions.

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## 4.9. Appendices

### 4.9.1. Appendix 1: Scripts

#### A) EL DIALOGO DE UN MAGNIFICO CON ZANI BERGAMASCO

MAGNIFICO: Zani!  
ZANI: Plasi  
MAGNIFICO: Vieni un poco fora  
ZANI: Che plasi a vostro signore?  
MAGNIFICO: Vieni un poco fora caro giani  
ZANI: Mi?  
MAGNIFICO: Ti  
ZANI: Che venga fora mi?  
MAGNIFICO: Ti, ti cavallo spazate  
ZANI: Volenticera mester: a patron voli che porta il capello?  
MAGNIFICO: Che voi fare del capello, porta la beretta  
ZANI: Messer si e vegni a me  
MAGNIFICO: Che vustu  
ZANI: Voli che vegni mi proprio  
MAGNIFICO: Si ti proprio  
ZANI: Mi proprio in persona  
MAGNIFICO: Si in nome di Dio, vie fora  
ZANI: E vengo esou chi luogha che plasi a la signore vostro  
MAGNIFICO: Ve qua giani, e vogio un poco parlare con ti di una mia cosa, ma e non voio che ne dighi niente a nessuna  
ZANI: Messer no, non dico niente  
MAGNIFICO: E voio che tu sappi che son inamorao  
ZANI: Inamora  
MAGNIFICO: Si che son inamorao  
ZANI: E si inamora vu  
MAGNIFICO: Si no lintendestu bestia  
ZANI: Desis davera  
MAGNIFICO: Cose digo davera  
ZANI: Vo si inam ora  
MAGNIFICO: Mi è si inamorao  
ZANI: ah ha ah ah  
MAGNIFICO: De che ridestu cavallo  
ZANI: E ridi di vu che desi che si inamora  
MAGNIFICO: E tel digo de novo che son inamorao, perche e non ho mi una bella vita da essere inamorao  
ZANI: Mester si da mulatieri  
MAGNIFICO: O te le pur la gran bestia, anzi e te digo che quella in che è son inamora leime vuol tutto el fo ben, e la me moure drio, per veder mi cosi bella persona  
ZANI: A che ve ne accorzif patron che la ve voia ben  
MAGNIFICO: A che me ne accorzo  
ZANI: Mester

MAGNIFICO: E tel diro, e me ne accorzo che quando e la guardo che le al balcon, la me guarda e ride, la ride espudo e la spuda, vustu meio ti.

ZANI: Ma patron la ve bertiza

MAGNIFICO: La me bertiza

ZANI: La ve bertiza certo

MAGNIFICO: Te fi una bestia

ZANI: Ben chi ella questa

MAGNIFICO: Le quella che sta li a quella casa

ZANI: A quella casa bianca

MAGNIFICO: Ma de si

ZANI: E si inamora in quella

MAGNIFICO: Quella è ella.

ZANI: Ma este fresco e si morto patron

MAGNIFICO: Che son morto

ZANI: Si morto patron, essi morto

MAGNIFICO: E son vivo mi bestia, che parole son queste

ZANI: Essi morto patron

MAGNIFICO: Perche son morto

ZANI: Quatro fratelli chi son tutti lauzescaveze, che i darave in tun muto, cosi come i un pagiato

.....

ZANI: Son stat la patron. Boni noviz

MAGNIFICO: Dove si stat?

ZANI: Da la vostra morusa, boni novi

MAGNIFICO: Certo?

ZANI: Certo patron

MAGNIFICO: O caro giani di su presto, consolame un poco

ZANI: O patron, io ho mi favellad tant con fieghe

MAGNIFICO: Ben che te ha la detto de mi

ZANI: Le tanto piacevola, le tanto galanta

MAGNIFICO: E so ben mi che lha tutto le bone parte. Che te ha la detto al fin de mi?

ZANI: La ma dat del formaio tant tant

MAGNIFICO: Che proposito, ben racontami un poco prima come tha fatto del sonetto, e quel che la ta risposto

ZANI: La ma dat del so pan bianc

MAGNIFICO: Oy me tu me fa vegnr i sudori, tu me racontata po queste cose ma consolame prima un po, dirme la cosa del sonetto

ZANI: Spete patron buoni nuodi oh oh oh oh, la voleva, la voleva

MAGNIFICO: Che voleva?

ZANI: La me tocca la mia man, e la volea che ghe tochass, ah ah ah, la voleva che e ghe tochass la rosetta

MAGNIFICO: Che cosa la rosetta?

ZANI: Ah ah ah, la voleva che ghe metess dui botoni aopresso

MAGNIFICO: Che zanze son queste? Che botone? Che roseta?

ZANI: Mester si, la roseta de la so coffia qua davanti, la voleva che è ghe dess du i me boto, da meterli foura

MAGNIFICO: El malano che idio te dona poltron, lassa ma star le zanze, e dime in fine quello che la tha detto de mi

ZANI: O patron la rideva la me vol tanto be, la dice che torna la che  
la me vuol dare della torta  
MAGNIFICO: O Dio mio, questa è una gran pena, che te ha la detto de fatti  
me?

B) Un antica piacevole Commedia del Crusca – un dialogo tra il PADRONE e il  
FAMIGLIO

PADRONE: Crusca!  
FAMIGLIO: Signor?  
PADRONE: Potta di te  
Vieni appresso di me  
E tiem ni compagnia  
FAMIGLIO: Ho, ho che fantasia  
So trova il mio patron  
PADRONE: Che aspetti giotton  
Che fai che non ti muovi  
Tu voi che io mi ti trovi  
Col pugno in sul mostaccio  
FAMIGLIO: Signor?, altro non faccio  
Che con gran reverenza  
Servir vostra eccellenza  
Come buon servo deus  
PADRONE: Crusca, non ti sia greus  
Se per me ha sofferto  
I son per darti mer'to  
Della tua servitu  
S'io vaglio, nel sai tu  
FAMIGLIO: Si, poco patron mio  
PADRONE: Che  
FAMIGLIO: Dico che uno Dio  
Siete oggi in terra  
PADRONE: Crusca  
FAMIGLIO: Signor?  
PADRONE: Quando summa alla guerra  
Quanti n'amazai  
FAMIGLIO: Signor non ci fu mai  
E non so che mi dire  
PADRONE: Cento ne fe morire  
FAMIGLIO: Piu di milanta  
Odi como si vanta  
Questo pezzo di poltrone  
PADRONE: Che ditu  
FAMIGLIO: Dico patrone  
None è miglior di voi  
PADRONE: Come si vidde poi

FAMIGLIO: Che io fu Capitano  
Si per dio è non in vano  
Di fralche e di finochi  
PADRONE: Che di tu  
FAMIGLIO: Dico che cose fare  
Da far maravegliare  
E stupir fino a Giove  
PADRONE: Crusca  
Quante prove ho gia fatto  
Alla mia vita  
E co il spada in mano  
FAMIGLIO: Assai padrone mio caro  
Ho ho la tela è ordita  
Di questo pazzarello  
Come si beccha il cervello  
E pascesi di vento  
Credo che io sia contento  
A servir quest' animale  
Oh zucha senza sale

## 4.9.2. Appendix 2: Letters

#55 Piermaria Cecchini to the Venetian Doge

Venezia, 8 Dicembre 1612 – A un segretario ducale (Venezia)

Per lo serv(ici)o di Sua Altezza serenissima ho fatto (anche) quello che non si può, et mando il presente l'attore, il qual è Messer Marco Antonio Romagnesi, huomo she per la sua parte del Magnifico è il primo che hoggi recitti, il quale con la sua compagnia si moverà per dove comanderà l'Altezza Sua, purché rimanghi d'accordo de certi particolar che vogliono et che esso dirà poi a boca. De parti ridicole stanno bene, et credo che Sua Altezza rimarà servita, né poteva trattar con persona più civile et che intendesse meglio le cose di questo, perché a dir il vero a Vostra Signoria illustrissima la più parte dei comedianti hanno puoco modo di trattar fuori di comedia.

....

Obbligatissimo servitore

Piermaria Cecchini

#59 Piermaria Cecchini to the Duke of Mantua

Padova, 10 Agosto, 1613 - A un segretario ducale (Mantova)

S'aggiunge di piu che volendoci Sua Altezza bisogna che scrivi al signor don Giovanni Medici che mandi Scapino per il suo servizio, il qual Scapino è in quella compagnia promessa a Firenze, ne vi occur scusa che ne habbi bisogno perche vi rimangono tre zanni, offerendo Sua Altezza di mandar un Magnifico a quella compagnia poiche n'è senza.

Il qual Magnifico sera il meglio che reciti, et io me ne spogliaro per servizio del Altezza Sua.

Obbligatissimo servitore

Piermaria Cecchini detto Frittellino





## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Variety is the spice of ‘real’ life. Towards a cognitive perspective of the performance and reception of improvised and realistic drama.**

Research into cognition is revisited and extended to include recent developments in the field. Applying these to the processes at play when both performing and spectating improvised theatre goes further to account for the ‘success’ or otherwise of authentic dialogue on stage. Two plays in particular are highlighted as case studies in that they are, in different ways, ‘immersive’ and rely on either authentic or spontaneously produced scripted dialogue. In addition, a perspective drawn from the world of Artificial Intelligence is also given.

#### 5.1. Improvisation and the achievement of authenticity

The aim of this chapter is to delve deeper into the cognitive mechanisms determining the theatre practitioner’s art. This statement in itself requires a considerable amount of unpacking. What are these cognitive mechanisms? Is this determination one that is rooted in success? And, if so, how is that success measured? What exactly is the practitioner’s ‘art’? ie what makes it an art as such, or perhaps more accurately a ‘craft’ rather than a ‘skill’? And, finally, since the spectator is key to the success or not of a performance, what are the cognitive mechanisms at work with regard to a play’s audience?

By approaching these questions, I hope to account for how a performance of largely improvised drama can ‘press the right buttons’ cognitively speaking and produce a text that is inherently theatrical.

Such issues and the nature of cognition have been raised previously in chapter 2, particularly with regard to measuring ‘success’. However, in considering these questions here, slightly different or tangential fields of thought are explored; new ideas that give an angled perspective on the effect and affect of improvised drama, and, by extension, an emergent script.

My first and foremost conceit here is that any perceived identification with the ‘real’ world is a powerful event within a theatrical production. Of course, the ‘real’ is a wide-ranging concept, with various definitions and ontological constraints. Is, for example, an avant-garde or absurdist play ‘real’ in any sense? At first glance, the characters in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, although identifiable, do not have the same everyday qualities as, say, characters in a modern TV Soap opera such as *Eastenders* (BBC). Lucky’s lengthy, almost nonsensical, rambling speech has little in common with quotidian talk – at least as most adults would experience. Yet, arguably, neither does the clipped, literary nature of traditional theatre dialogue. No matter how naturalistic the play.

The Theatre of the Absurd can actually coincide with the highest degree of realism. For if the real conversation of human beings is in fact absurd and nonsensical, then it is the well-made play with its polished logical dialogue that is unrealistic, while the absurdist play may well be a tape-recorded reproduction of reality. Or, in a world that has become absurd, the Theatre of the Absurd is the most realistic comment on, the most accurate reproduction of, reality.

(Esslin 1965: 17)

However, perhaps this is not the point. Beyond the superficial dialogic exchange between characters, the syntax, choice of words, linguistic foibles as well as themes, tropes and witty retorts all reflect a genuineness that exists in arguably even the most avant-garde productions. ‘Authenticity’ is perhaps a more relevant word here. The question then is: if improvised dialogue, transcribed and to varying extents honed or re-edited, can express and capture that ‘authenticity’, then what is going on in the human mind to recognise, applaud and thrive off it?

In improvisational theatre, it is said that one can distinguish between two different types of authenticity on stage: that of the actor (the ‘real’ person) and that of the fictitious character (Crohn Schmitt 2010: 227). The former may be related to that Stanislavskian concept of a search for ‘truthfulness’ in performance; a concept that has imbued actor training since the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, underpinning the techniques of such practitioners as Michael Chekhov, Uta Hagen and Sanford Meisner. Getting actors to achieve this authenticity (in Meisner’s words to “live truthfully under imaginary circumstances”) is, of course, what informs the audience’s perception of the character through performance. The character thus seems credible, natural and

with traits congruent to those of people we know or at least have heard of. Even outlandish, science fictional characters will still display characteristics and behaviours with which an audience can identify.

Joseph Chaikin, director of New York's Open Theatre in the 1960s said that his use of improvisation in devising full-length plays was a response to a traditional acting that he felt had "become a blend of that same kind of synthetic 'feeling' and sentimentality which characterises the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, muzak, church services, and political campaigns" (NY Times, 24 June 2003). It is this reaction not so much to 'fakeness' but regularity and predictability that presumably put fear into the Lord Chamberlain's Office in the UK until 1968, such that actors could actually be prosecuted for improvising during a performance (Nationaltheatre.org, 2016).

Today, it would seem, a moment of improvisation in an otherwise pre-scripted performance can have (when done 'well') an extraordinary impact both on the actors and the audience. This is often, of course, to comedic effect, but I argue that it is in the unmasking of the actors within a situation where the performance may be teetering on chaos that draws the audience in; not merely because there is a frisson of 'schadenfreude' at the prospect of total collapse, but because what is happening on stage is much more akin to the world of the spectator yet the trappings of a theatrical performance, specifically within a theatrical environment, are still intact.

The following example comes from a recorded (for commercial purposes) performance of the comedy *Bottom* in 1993. This was a live theatrical production of the popular and anarchical TV show of the same name starring Adrian Edmondson (Richie) and Rik Mayall (Eddie).

During one performance in Southampton, the two actors departed from their scripted play for a full 8 minutes after Edmondson's exaggerated delivery of a particular line, and his subsequent breaking of character in order to milk the audience's consequent applause. This is then followed by his ad-libbing of "Alan Rickman eat your heart out". Mayall's response of staring into the audience with disdain plus an out-of-character appeal to Edmondson sets in motion a tit-for-tat improvised verbal brawl before Mayall eventually returns to the script; at which point, in order not to not have

the last laugh, Edmondson exclaims: “Fucking hell! A line from the play!”. The audience’s applause and laughter then reaches new heights.

Edmondson (Richie) [exaggerating]: Don’t you ever yearn... for change?

(Audience applause at his overblown delivery. Edmondson bows and feigns emotion at the response)

Edmondson: Alan Rickman eat your heart out [to Mayall] and.. cue!  
(*audience laughter*)

Mayall (Eddie) [disgusted]: Do you want to give me the feed line again in front of all your ‘friends’? (*laughter*)

Edmondson: Ah yes, I forgot to mention I was actually born in Southampton

(massive cheers and laughter from the Southampton audience)

Mayall: Eddie, Eddie, Eddie! You were born in Southampton! Wow! Why did you EVER leave???! (*laughter*)

Edmondson [under]: Bit below the belt (*laughter*). Because.... I found the railway station! (*laughter and applause*)

Mayall [to audience]: Stop fucking clapping! [mimics a seal]. Bastards. Especially you! [points to audience members in balcony]. You can fucking jump! (*laughter*)

Edmondson: That’s no way to talk to my mother. Sorry mum. (*laughter*)  
[to Mayall] Ready?

Mayall: Come on, come on.

Edmondson: Are you ready?

Mayall: I’m ready

Edmondson: My arm is getting tired now.

Mayall: That’s not why your arm’s getting tired (*laughter*)

Edmondson: Yeah well at least it’s my arm and not just my wrist! [milks the consequent applause]

Mayall: Come on, come on. They’ll be closed

Edmondson: Right. Ready? [back to script] Don’t you ever yearn for change?

Mayall [to audience]: No! Don't you fucking dare! (massive laughter) Shut the fuck up! "Don't I ever yearn for change?" Well... [lapses into Reggie Perrin impression – is this in the script?] "Oh yes, Miss Jones." Yes I do Eddie but only when that Ralph working behind the bar... [corpses] (laughter)

[Both actors corpse, laughing, unable to look each other in the face. Laughter and cheers from audience as the actors struggle to recompose themselves]

Edmondson: Can I just say, that was the best 'Reg Varney' I've ever seen (laughter)

Mayall: Look. Get on, get on with the fucking play. It's very unprofessional. They're making a fucking video. Now stop it!

Edmondson: OK, right. 'Ralphy, Ralphy, Ralphy...' [remembering place in the play] Oh! Stick to the point Richie. You've got a brain like a car-crash, There's bits flying everywhere (laughter)... What about this suicide?

Mayall: Right. Yes. Suicide. Yes, yes, I'd forgotten about that [corpse] (laughter).

Sit down, right sit down [suppressing own laughter]. I've got some sad and tragic news [composing himself], I've got sad and tragic news, right?

Edmondson: You don't LOOK very upset about it (laughter). You looked a lot sadder than that in rehearsal. It made me cry... (huge laughter)

Mayall: Look! Sit down! I've got some fucking tragic news alright? Now listen, Eddie [corpse]. Now listen Eddie. Listen Eddie [Eddie nods. He is 'listening']. Eddie

Edmondson: Yeah. That's my name (laughter). I think we established it in Act one.

Mayall: Right. Eddie. I've got some sad and tragic... Oh, I've done that one. I've decided to kill myself Eddie. Oh... because I'm so tragically in debt.

Edmondson: Fucking hell... A line from the play! (massive applause)

Mayall [collapsing to the floor – to audience]: Oh just watch the fucking play alright? [to Edmondson] And you leave me alone otherwise we're never going to get out of South-fucking-hampton (laughter).

Stop laughing! Imagine you're watching Ben Elton or something [sits back at table]. Now, what was I saying?

Edmondson: I dunno.

(Bottom, Live, 1993. DVD)

What is remarkable here is that the performers still refer to each other by their character names (Richie and Eddie) although they seem to be 'being themselves'. However, they are not. Edmondson and Mayall are still 'performing' the tension of two actors competing with each other on stage in a game of repartis. This becomes especially apparent as Mayall quickly adopts the character of 'the victim'; that is, the one trying to get the play back on track in the face of both a recalcitrant fellow performer and Edmondson's clearly partisan 'home' audience (Edmondson, incidentally, hails from Yorkshire and not Southampton at all).

In essence, this becomes an (improvised) play within a (scripted) play. The audience readily 'buys into' this new level of artifice; an artificial reality where the actors are breaking character and appearing to actually corpse, and where two friends are sparring with each other to gain laughs. Nevertheless, they are still performing the improvisation, adhering to the rules of improv but then milking the audience's reaction. Although the masks of the Eddie and Richie characters have slipped, we are still not seeing the 'real' Ade Edmondson and Rik Mayall, although they are at times sailing very close to the wind of veracity ("Look. Get on, get on with the fucking play. It's very unprofessional. They're making a fucking video. Now stop it!")

The contention here is that the 'truth' within the corpsing, improvisation and Mayall's apparent struggle to maintain order is enough for the audience to suspend disbelief in the representation of their performance of their 'stage selves' and take it that they are being their real off-stage selves. Obviously, the actors employ vocal and physical traits to enhance their off-script delivery. However, the mental/emotional decisions of both the performers and audience may rely on a state of being influenced by factors that extend far beyond the 'here and now' of the performance: the theatre space, the general conceptions of performance, the actors as personalities in their own right, British humour, cultural references... these may all contribute to an ecology within which cognitive processes operate.

It would be fair to say, then, that the final product/performance (here, the improvisation), and its success, is as a result of both the performer's and audience's choices in terms respectively of enaction and perception. The consequent decision of the filmmakers to include this incident on the commercial VHS merchandise (and my own decision to transcribe it here) must also be taken into account.

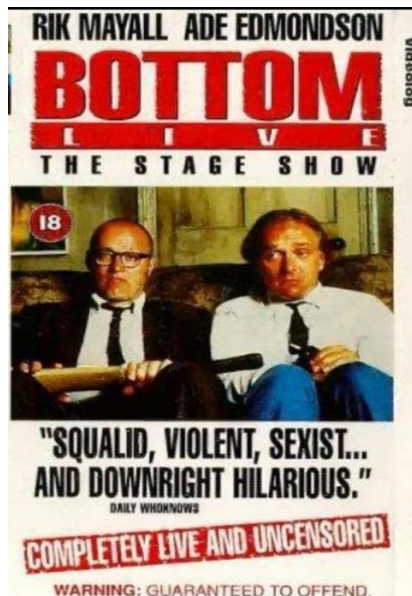


Figure 5.1 *Bottom, Live* 1993. Photo: Imdb

Undoubtedly, an auteur could mine such a successful improvisation for its sense of authenticity and immediacy, which can lend a degree of spice to a play. It may also suit a current vogue for the real or a heightened sense of naturalism that was hitherto absent from traditional drama. Perhaps an accomplished improvisation by experienced practitioners is appealing to writers in the way that it may dispense with all the 'unpleasantness' of everyday speech (eg repetitions, hesitations, unfinished sentences, mumbling, misspeaking) while preferring its idiomatic, quick-fire exchanges. Any elements of these infelicities can be ironed out after the fact, along with deviations from a particular narrative or certain themes that need honing. It is the privilege of an auteur to cash in on memorable linguistic 'nuggets' and images that come out of the improvisation process in an attempt to avoid the tyranny of the blank page.

What is of interest now is the cognitive process involved in the choices made by performer, audience and auteur and the extent to which the workings of the minds of these 'actors' may involve a complex and dynamic system that extends beyond the



workings of the brain as situated in our individual heads. Indeed, one way of accounting for the success of these performative and receptive choices, and their subsequent recording as theatre text, could lie in a field of situated cognition – situated that is, *beyond* the “biological skin bag... the ancient fortress of skin and skull” (Clark, 2003: 5).

## 5.2. Extended Cognition: an ecology of the mind beyond the brain

“You think with the world not just your brain” (Kriss, 2019)

In chapter 2, reference was made to new investigations into how cognitive science can shed light on theatre phenomena: the “Cognitive Turn” (McConachie and Hart, 2006). This attempts to account for the way mimesis and diegesis is revealed through words to trigger, stylistically, those neural connections that facilitate a spectator’s engagement with a performance text. This remains a key concept in this appraisal of creative writing for the stage. However, in this instance, I move onwards to encompass further-reaching ideas regarding cognition; namely, extended cognition. Or, perhaps less precisely, an idea of cognition that is situated in / distributed across the world outside the head (Tribble, 2011).

Indeed, this term may be problematic but here I intend it to refer to a generic concept of cognition ‘beyond the brain’; as ‘embodied’ and further ‘extended’, in that sense.

Clark and Chalmers (1998), justify their notion of thinking being a process that is beyond the head. The idea here is that in life we often modify our environment to “aid and augment cognitive processes such as recognition and search”. These epistemic actions are parallel and equal to actions that occur with a person’s head so should be viewed as equally relevant: “if as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which *were it done in the head*, we would have no hesitation in recognising as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world *is* (so we claim) part of the cognitive process. Cognitive processes aren’t (all) in the head!” (1998: 8, italics in original).

Research is relatively new but divided among those who conceive cognition in this extended sense (Clark, 2001; 2008; Clark and Chalmers, 1998), as embodied (Shapiro, 2010; Thelen, 2000) as well as enacted (Varela et al 1991 (2017)) or embedded (Clark, 1997; Newen et al, 2018). As there is no full consensus on a definition of this ‘4E’ cognition (Menary, 2010), and in the context of this thesis, it may be more useful to consider them as equally subsumed in their overarching opposition to the traditional Cartesian mind v body stance. In any case, it would seem that it is more a variance in strength of enmity towards the traditional cognitivist views that differentiates between the 4E proponents, rather than any clear contradictory opinions. In addition, researchers such as John Sutton have explicitly maintained that remarks and observations can be validly applied across this spread of theoretical innovations in cognitive science (2006: 237).

In combining these views under the umbrella of a ‘situated’ idea of cognition when applied to the theatricality of ‘real’ language in drama, I hope to approach Andy Clark’s challenge of creating “new multidisciplinary alliances – collaborations across the sciences and humanities, studying the range and variety of types of cognitive scaffolding” (2001: 154).

To start this journey, albeit brief, through a new perspective of the mind and its symbiotic relationship with and through the body to the wider environment, a personal observation may be useful.

### 5.2.1. A personal anecdote

I am a runner. More than this (I feel), I run long distances, and I do this in minimalist footwear or indeed totally barefoot. The relevance of this foray into athletic self-revelation to the world of theatre and (for the purposes of this chapter) cognitive theories may not be immediately clear; however, the biomechanical reasons behind my adopted running style are, I believe, a suitable illustration for the same theoretical concepts that may be applied to successful improvisation, and to accounting for the appeal of realistic dialogue in general.

Since the 1960s, and possibly long before, athletes and, perhaps more tellingly, sportswear companies have striven to achieve better performance, gain more comfort and break more records through the adoption of ever more sophisticated footwear.

Running shoes are now available in a myriad of designs, shapes and colours, engineered to benefit a particular consumer, with particular physical characteristics to better perform in any particular running event, be it jogging or mountain marathoning. But at what cost?

Aside from the financial outlay involved in what otherwise should be the most natural and uncostly, both financially and biomechanically, of physical pursuits (the forward motion of the human body through space), research suggests that the modern trend for and trappings of such sophisticated apparel is actually doing runners a disservice in many key respects.

Daniel Lieberman et al. (2007), Lieberman (2010) and others' investigations into the comparative effects on injury, performance and biomechanical efficiency of shod and non-shod runners have resulted in a paradigm (re)shift in the ways athletes consider running. This has led in turn to a move (some might say a fad, some might say a return) towards barefoot or minimalist running in recent years. Lieberman et al.'s conclusions are essentially simple: the human foot and, by extension, through evolutionary necessity the human body, is perfectly designed for running over long distances (not at any great speed – the average domestic cat could outrun Usain Bolt) by efficiently using the biological properties in such a way that energy is conserved (no extraneous effort should be required), overheating avoided (through sweating and panting) and safety maintained, since such an efficient and 'natural' running style leads to fewer injuries (Davis et al., 2017; Warburton, 2019).

The foot itself is a complex yet perfect shock absorbing system in itself and without the use of thick soled, cushioned soles, a runner will naturally fall onto the mid or forefoot. This forward lean, with the body's centre of mass positioned over the knees and a fast, short stride contributes to an efficient use of gravity rather than muscle-based propulsion and, by all accounts a more 'elegant' running style. What is more remarkable is that the thousands of proprioceptors in the human foot effectively do away with a conscious need to constantly carefully monitor where you are putting your feet (Lieberman, 2012: 65). The brain seems to subconsciously interact *through* the body *with* the environment and successfully 'think' how best to engage in a particular action. It is not always perfect (I do tread on the odd sharp stone – occasionally) but with the information at hand (or foot), it is a best fit.

Modern technology, it might be claimed, has clouded all this while unnecessarily complicating and over-engineering the sport to the extent that it has created its own negative feedback loop (Richards et al, 2008): the more ‘fussy’ running becomes, the more issues arise and so the greater the need for ever more sophisticated shoes to compensate. And so on.

The lesson given by proponents of ‘natural’ running styles and a re-adoption of a barefoot running culture seems to be this: less is more.

Philosopher and vocal proponent of the theory of extended cognition Andy Clark, in the early stages of his seminal work *Supersizing the Mind* (2008), outlines how modern robotic devices designed as they are to simulate as naturally as possible the traits of an organic being (such as a human) often fail in that endeavour, or if they do to a certain extent succeed, do so at huge cost (financial, mechanical and in terms of electrical power). In comparison, Clark points out, simple children’s ‘walking’ toys from over a hundred years ago that relied purely on a configuration of jointed wire limbs, a sloping surface and gravity could achieve an equally or indeed much more aesthetically pleasing movement at much reduced cost (2008: 7).

The parallels seem clear. And perhaps they are not parallels at all. Humans seem designed to interact with their environment in order to engage in mind processes that, firstly, spread the cognitive load among elements beyond the brain and, secondly, arrive at more efficient, elegant solutions.

Ballard et al. (1997) apply this brain-body-world relationship to the cognitive forces at play in what they term ‘active sensing’. As an oft-cited example, they explain the way a fielder catches a flyball in a game of baseball. Instead of the ‘agent’ (the player) using their senses to create a rich representation of the situation in their mind by which they can compute a solution (ie catch the ball), they are actually ‘sensing’ repeatedly, in order to reprocess their physical circumstance and the ‘scene’ of the ball flying through the air. In this way they are effectively achieving a fragment of the task at any given moment. This constant recalibration and visual (re)coupling amounts to a clever and efficient ongoing use of the environmental information available rather than some high-powered computational prediction of the ball’s trajectory. The argument here is for efficiency. The energy, power and effort required

for a centrally (ie purely brain-based) cognitive processing is much greater than the alternative. Another example is the way a helicopter employs an energy-hungry system to cover the same flight path as the passive-dynamic exploitation of a glider (Clark, 2008: 7). Clark identifies this as ‘non trivial causal spread’; that is, when seemingly far-flung environmental factors and forces are unexpectedly employed to assist in the cognitive process rather than a purely centralised control system.

The implications are clear for the understanding and study of child development (Thelen, 2000), rehabilitation and VR/robotics. Indeed, Dourish (2001) mentions ‘inhabited interaction’ as a way of being in the world that is contrasted with ‘disconnected control’ (Dourish in Clark, 2008: 8). That is, for example, where the tools we use in our everyday lives become transparent as to be almost non-apparent. One obvious case is the use of a pen when signing one’s name. The focus is very much on the task of signing rather than the holding of the pen, which slides into insignificance. A parallel with the use of VR helmets in immersive video gaming might be made here. However, according to Dourish, there is a crucial difference in this case, since the donning of a helmet (unlike the holding of the pen) affords the wearer a way of ‘peering in’ to a virtual game world rather than being genuinely located in a real one, as we are in life. The issue to return to at this point is whether and to what extent a theatrical experience can be a product of such ‘disconnected control’ and what the dynamic cognitive forces are for both performer and audience.

### 5.2.2. Brain versus Mind: the case of Tim

It may be relevant at this point, if distinguishing between brain and mind, to examine briefly how it is that the brain functions. John Lutterbie (2011) in his *General Theory of Acting* finds such an examination useful and enlightening for helping to cognitively contextualise the theory behind the neural impulses that fire when creating theatre (2011: 79-80).

Lutterbie gives a concise review on how human evolution has resulted in two cerebral hemispheres as comprising three key developmental stages: the reptilian brain (the earliest), where autonomic functions such as breathing and survival fight/flight impulses are controlled, and the neocortex (the newest), which is responsible for higher order functions such as imagination, language and complex decision-making –

“the seat of rationality” as Descartes put it. Between them and acting as mediator, lies the limbic system, controlling sensory perception and bodily motor controls. It is also the locus of the *hippocampus and amygdala, cingulate gyrus and thalamus*, which together account for such functions as emotional responses, long-term memory, social functioning, spatial memory and attention processing. It is also theorised that these loci play a significant role in the processing of perceptual and proprioceptual experience as well as cognitive decision-making. It is without doubt that everyday cognition is very much dependent on the functioning of the brain. But is it wholly dependent? And if it were damaged, would the ‘mind’ as such still continue to adequately function?

In June 2016 a friend and former teaching colleague, Tim Quinn, suffered a sudden and unexpected brain haemorrhage. He survived but was in an induced coma for several days followed by 6 months of hospitalisation and subsequent rehab, which is still ongoing. Now, after 4 years he suffers from epilepsy, can no longer read or write to any great degree but his speech and motor functions are apparently normal, albeit with some obvious pausing and bouts of ‘absent-mindedness’. One thing he finds most problematic is ‘finding the right word’ (particularly ironic for a former English lecturer). This is the main ‘block’ to the fluency of his cognitive functioning and his strategy for dealing with this is remarkable:

I tend to use the visual instead of the spoken word. I can’t remember how to say something and I can’t remember what I wanted to do. But I know that if I look around, I can remember what it was. I know that if I look around the room, if I can go to the place where the thing is that I want to do ... I’ll then know what I want to do. For example, if I’m trying to do something, and that thing is connected to an object in the room – I don’t know how to say it and I don’t know what it is, but I know where it is, so if I look around the room and I physically go to that place where I know it is, as soon as I see it, I go ‘oh yeah’.

(Tim Quinn in interview, 2020).

Tim is clearly (and by necessity) ‘thinking’ beyond his now defective brain. He is using both visual perception and interaction with his environment not just to simply ‘remind’ him of words but, I would argue, to substitute for that linguistic conceptualisation. Indeed, he struggles to create mental constructs of his task in advance and relies on outside input to help. His attempts at cooking, for example, require constant re-assessment at each step in the process (somewhat like the baseball

player going for a catch). Interestingly, although he struggles to mentally capture the nature of the task or the name of the objects related to that task, he can still conceive its physical properties:

I know what it is that I want to do, but I can't explain it to someone else. But what I *can* do is see myself in my mind, like a movie. I can see myself doing that action, but I can't explain what the action is. So, visually there is no problem. It's language that's the problem.

(Tim Quinn, 2020)

Robert A. Wilson (2010) in his article 'Extended Vision' distinguishes between perceptual systems and perceptual experience. The first he describes as cases where an organism creates a sensory field through which it moves to achieve its basic goals (he cites the echolocation employed by bats and the electrification of water by certain fish as two examples of where perception occurs through and by interaction with the environment beyond the body). The second are cases which are arguably more relevant to this thesis: where the experience, received via the senses, are felt 'in the body'. Calling on Clark's (1997) '007 Principle' of "knowing only as much as you need to know to get the job done", Wilson reiterates that it is in the interest of the organism to employ a system that minimises the cognitive load in performing a function rather than form and compute complex internal representations. He proposes there is a combining of the mechanisms within both a perceptual system and a perceptual (sensory, bodily) experience that "produces integratively coupled systems [which] manifest functional gain" (2010: 286).

Tim's experience does suggest that a coupling of mental visualisation and physical engagement with the environment, as well as somatic impulses, are part of a complex system that operate to facilitate Wilson's 'functional gain'. What Tim lacks of course, is ready access to a linguistic component, though this is regained through the use of environmental, extra-cranial elements as well as other forms of internal visualisation.

### 5.2.3. Extended cognition and language production

This observation suggests that when any element in this interactive brain-body-environment system is damaged or removed, other parts of the system are employed more emphatically to compensate. In this case, the link between language, imagery and physicality is particularly striking, and reflects findings by researchers such as

Evelyn Tribble into the nature of bodily movements as part of cognitive functioning on the theatre stage (2011). Indeed, she maintains that such elements as gesture have become increasingly more recognised as playing an active role both in thought and in language production. This ‘thought-language-hand’ link has clear saliency to what McNeill (1992) refers to as Kendon’s gesture continuum (gesticulation – emblems – pantomime – sign language), which has as much relevancy to real life, spontaneous conversation as it has to staged theatrical performance (Tribble, 2011: 93). As such, gesture not only effectively lightens the cognitive load (by helping to explain, remember etc) but also plays a *causal* role in thinking, and may even be constitutive in that process. Gesture and physical movement are therefore not just ‘a clip on feature’ or superfluous decoration that helps to paper over a lack of verbal command (Tribble, 2011: 88; Sutton, 2006: 238).

Effectively, in the case of Tim, he is thinking with his hands and body as he negotiates his environment (and points) towards his objective. This is coupled with his internal visualisation, which, ideally, but sadly not easily in his case, gets translated into words. “Without imagery, there could not be speech; gestures embody these images” (Tribble, 2011: 93).

My contention is that the ‘functional gain’ in such a complex and coupled system is manifested in the production of language. As Wilson and Golonka claim, “the dynamical system creating the linguistic information entails the coupled dynamics of the articulators and the brain, both of which are nested in a socially defined language environment with its own dynamical properties” (2013: 10).

It is now understood that, in humans, more than mental imagery is created by language. Examination of the brain has shown that physical stimuli, along with affective sensation, are triggered by certain words. For example, the word ‘dog’ automatically stimulates sensorimotor and/or mental states associated with dogs – a process absent in animals, which are deficient in such symbolic cognition in so far as they lack language (Schendan, 2012: 351). If language and perception (be it visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory or olfactory) can be linked in this way, can it not also work in reverse? Is it feasible that language can actually be successfully created through this embodied and external cognitive process of sensation, interactivity and physical stimulus?



The implications of applying this particular embodied and extended feature of cognition to the creation of language in performance are twofold: firstly, if ‘natural’ speech and effective language production involves the use of gesture as a part of a dynamical system, then could the natural use of gesture be an indicator of a more realistic text when produced on stage by performers? Secondly, gestures may be equated to other conversational foibles such as hesitation, repetition, run-on sentences etc. As such they are all part and parcel of an ecology of the mind. The ‘art’ comes from their inclusion (appropriation by an auteur) in a spoken text that acknowledges the extended mind ‘value’ of their production but at the same time is not pure verbatim description. There is an element of judicious editing used to keep the audience ‘on side’ and convinced that this is indeed a work of art. In this, such an audience may need to straddle the recognition of a text that is produced in a realistic way (rooted in the situated cognitive processes of the text-producers’ minds) with their theatrical expectations.

The example of Tim’s predicament is relevant when considering how a complex system can account for success in the fulfilment of performative tasks, and, even more relevantly, in the creation of language to that end. When it comes to bodily motion and gesture, Esther Thelen, in her research into child development maintained that such physical actions have a clear role in the unfolding of thought.

Cognition depends on the kinds of experiences that come from having a body with particular perceptual and motor capacities that are inseparably linked and that together form the matrix within which memory, emotion, language and all other aspects of life are meshed.

(Thelen, 2000: 4)

Such perspectives very much reflect Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological views, conceived in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, especially with regard to ‘eco-phenomenology’ and its influence on language. Here, like the ‘flesh’ of the visible body, he saw speech as “a relation to Being through a being, and like it, it is narcissistic, eroticised, endowed with a natural magic that attracts the other significations into its web, as the body feels the world in feeling itself” (1964: 118).

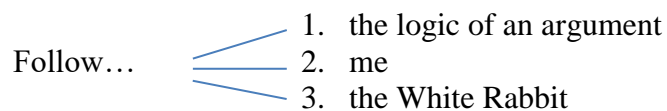
The implications here regarding everyday speech are forceful. When someone speaks, the language is effectively creating a bridge between the visible (the body) and the invisible (the mind). This creates a ‘divergency’ within the listener, who, in turn

reacts in relation to it. Thus, when each speaker speaks, according to Merleau-Ponty, he [sic] does so “with all that he is, with his ‘ideas’ but also with his obsessions, his secret history which the others lay bare” (1964: 118).

With Varela et al.’s (1991) publication of *The Embodied Mind*, this was taken further to include the notion of enactivism; the theory that cognition arises through a dynamic interaction between an acting organism and its environment, and more, that a person’s individual sensorimotor capacities are “themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological and cultural context” (1991/2017: 172-173).

Meanwhile, Shapiro (2010: 4) breaks an embodied perspective down into three concise themes: 1. Conceptualising the surrounding world depending on an organism’s corporeality (a giraffe conceives of the world differently than does a snake); 2. Understanding that the body plays a constitutive rather than purely causal role in cognition; 3. Replacing traditional computational frameworks that rely on ‘representation’. Instead, embodied/situated cognition recognises that cognitive processes are non-discrete and dynamic.

These embodied/situated/enacted cognitive frameworks are mapped to language production such that in everyday life, the meaning of an utterance is considered ‘sensible’ as long as cultural frames are employed to create a ‘best fit’ scenario. Given a mostly correct grammatical structure and an addressee/audience with appropriate experiential schemas, a meaning will be co-created that comes at least close to what the speaker intended (Lutterbie, 2011: 120). John Lutterbie gives a neat example of the possible choices following an utterance such as “Follow”:



If sentence 2 “Follow me is established, then, in a Dynamic Cognitive system, 1 and 3 will ‘decay’, yet 3 may still be revived if the sentence then continues as “Follow me, said the White Rabbit”. The important implications regarding staged improvisation, however, is that an utterance’s physical and social environment (not just the surrounding lexical context) can predispose a performer to respond in a particular way. As Lutterbie suggests, adlibbing “Follow me said the White Rabbit” in a

performance of *Hamlet* would be distinctly odd (though, indeed, Rik Mayall's sudden departure into a Reggie Perrin (a TV comedy character from the 1970s) routine could be likewise seen as particularly off-beam in the context of the stage-play *Bottom* in 1993.)

### 5.3. Extended Cognition and performance

Performers have historically benefitted from a dynamic cognitive system (Tribble, 2011: 12) and watching a performance is itself a complex cognitive process (Tribble, 2011: 9; McConachie, 2008: 23-24). In coupling the elements of production and perception within an extended cognition framework, it may be possible to account for the extent to which on the one hand, the theatrical environment can give power to a spoken (and even unspoken) representation of thought, and, on the other hand, how the 'ecology' of that environment can play a constitutive and causal role in the spectator's perception and reception of the performance. With particular interest is the idea that 'naturalistic' discourse in performance can contribute or even heighten this effect.

In chapter one (and will be returned to again in chapter 6), reference was made to a touchstone event that very much formed the initial impetus behind this thesis: a performance at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2003. In this case, the reactions of both performers and spectators are worth re-examining; particularly with regard to one incident.



Figure 5.2 Performance poster for *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, Lame Buckets Theatre Company, June 2003

The premise of the performance was that for precisely one hour the two performers (myself and Chris Russell), dressed in identical suits but barefoot and with no props (physical or text), were illuminated within a cubic, whitewashed space and left to ‘survive’ in front of a paying audience. In that time, improvisations were made, both verbal and physical, which incurred to varying extents mirth, applause and the occasional heckle. One evening, something extraordinary happened. Chris physically disappeared.

Unbeknownst to me, the fire exit at the rear of the space was unlocked. And so, suddenly and without warning, he bolted out into the car park, leaving me alone, ‘naked’ in front of the audience. Their response to Chris’ unexpected self-removal and my spontaneous physical demonstration of sheer, *real* panic was immense. But what were the situated cognitive processes at play in this brief (not as brief as I’d have hoped) moment, both for the performer and spectator?

### 5.3.1. Dynamic Systems Theory and Embodied Systems Theory

To approach this question scientifically, I turn to Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) as proposed by Lewis, (2000) and Thompson (2007) among others, and subsequently applied to theatre studies by John Lutterbie (2011). Rooted in mathematical theory, DST was originally designed to explain complex phenomena that occur, especially in situations that appear to have or show non-linear causality. In everyday life it seems, despite our tendency to search for simple, linear cause-and-effect narratives, we are often confounded. This is seen very much to reflect the workings of the human mind, which, as has been stated elsewhere, should not be seen to operate like a computer that can store retrievable memory as bytes on an ever-accessible hard drive (Kelso, 1995: 1).

The important point here is that in linear systems any ‘perturbation’ culminates in an eventual return to equilibrium. In a dynamic system, however, an influx of stimuli serves to destabilise that system to the extent that its former state is never regained. Instead, it goes through a process of self-organisation such that patterns, structures and new levels of organisation are arrived at; a situation that Kelso says is key to creativity (1995: 26). In the case of devised theatre, for example, this can manifest

itself when a production ‘emerges’ from recursive and cyclical interactions that are created and affected by experiences in the rehearsal space; as the devisers encounter and solve problems, within constraints that are unfixed and subject to change. These constraints and influences, according to Lutterbie, are the context of the devising process: external pressures, technology, space, budget, resources, the demands of producers, as well as aesthetic pressures and mundane experiences. These extracranial elements create a dialogue with the creative impulse of the performer in a kind of circular causality where the devising ‘environment’ is as much affected as the brain. Eventually the perturbations settle down and certain patterns emerge that hint towards the final performance (Lutterbie, 2011: 90).

The function of such patterns may be seen in other examples of the improviser’s art. In *Commedia dell’Arte* (see chapter 4), the role of ‘lazzi’ or set routines that performers could return to, was important in the creation of an improvised performance. Here, the ‘lazzi’ may be seen to perform another role in that through their inherently repeatable, tried and tested pattern, they effectively resist further perturbation. Thus they lend some stability to an otherwise potentially chaotic state of affairs. However, no performance is ever truly 100% stable, allowing for some innovation and disruption as long as this occurs under three distinct considerations (Kelso, 1995: 18): 1) The ‘boundary conditions’ or system parameters. These could be, for example, an actor’s particular approach to stagecraft; the language of the text; the brain’s sensorimotor functions; the dramatic context (is the play scripted? Improvised?...); 2) The ‘primitives’ or interacting elements within the process (eg other actors, directorial intervention, a snoring or (in my case) heckling audience member); 3) the ‘cooperatives’, or the emerging pattern in the dynamic system. This could manifest itself in the way the actor behaves in response to the nature and intensity of the perturbation.

Returning to the example of the improvised, off-script deviation in *Bottom (Bottom Live – Mayflower Theatre Southampton, 1993)*, it is clear how Edmondson and Mayall’s emerging ‘performance’ applied these considerations despite the fact the perturbation in the context of the play was quite intense. Their constant ‘struggle’ to return to the script is rather a neat illustration, in fact, of what Marc D. Lewis claims is the need for constant appraisal and adaptation to the environment in order for the

actor to be successful in their response (the emerging pattern) (2005: 173). To do this, the actor must be (in Stanislavskian terms) ‘living in the moment’, ever ready to respond most appropriately to a disturbance. The consequent disequilibrium will undoubtedly have some emotional manifestation (eg Rik Mayall’s ‘pain’ and frustration at Edmondson’s constant deviation from the script; my panic at Chris’s disappearance). These feelings may likewise manifest themselves physically as collapse, running away, an embrace, or just stillness (Lutterbie, 2011: 93).

Parallels can be drawn here with George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980; 1999), by which humans are considered to reason through ‘metaphorical mapping’; that is, the creation of meaning by mapping an existing sense of an idea or conceptual idea in terms of another. A commonly cited example is that of UNDERSTANDING AS SEEING in phrases like “do you see what I mean?” or “shed light on” and “I have a different point of view.” In applying Lakoff and Johnson’s embodied cognition model to an appreciation of cinema, Coëgnarts (2017) has pointed out the importance of image schemas, which themselves are highly dynamic structures arising from human sensory-motor experience. Our interaction with our environment, for example, accounts for basic distinctions between ‘in’ and ‘out’ as well as the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema of many everyday actions. This has clear relevance to language, but Coëgnarts also applies it to the non-verbal elements of cinema. Admittedly, film is ontologically very different from language in that the latter is essentially a system of symbols, resembling the conceptual nature of the mind. Film, on the other hand, much more closely resembles the reality it represents (2017: 3). Nevertheless, visual representations in art, film and, I would suggest, theatrical performance are more than mere illustrations. Film theorist and perceptual psychologist, Rudolf Arnheim, theorised back in the 1950s and 1960s that artworks are actually an embodiment of thought and that we must look for “well-structured shapes and relations [within] these abstract patterns to find the concepts or central thought of the work” (Arnheim, 1969: 255).

Another important consideration, I contend, is that to a certain extent, this is as much true for the art creator as for their audience. In my case, the sense of my embarrassment was ‘felt’ by the spectators (indeed, when we watch embarrassing experiences we often tend to cringe or watch through our hands). However,

admittedly, the performer-audience relationship and ‘buying into’ the staged nature of the performance goes a long way to saving the spectator’s blushes.

Coëgnarts addresses the embodied reception and perception of artworks. In justifying his appropriation of the theory to account for non-verbal elements in film he considers Mark Johnson (2007)’s conceptualisation of an embodied view of meaning and ascertains the reasoning thus:

- (1) Form is considered meaningful insofar as it prompts the perceiver of the form to infer thought.
- (2) According to the embodied view of cognition thought is grounded in embodiment.
- (3) Therefore, meaning in form is regarded as a property of embodied thought. Form provides the perceiver of the form with evidence of this underlying process of embodied meaning-making.
- (4) Language constitutes only one mode of evidence by virtue of which these embodied processes appeal to human senses.
- (5) Therefore, meaning is not restricted to linguistic meaning.

(Coëgnarts, 2017: 5)

Coëgnarts also finds further evidence for the embodied inference of conceptual meaning by referring to Embodied Simulation Theory (EST) a proposed by Gallese (2009) and Gallese and Sinigaglia (2011). This hinges on research finding that ‘mirror neurons’ in the brain actually create simulation mechanisms whereby viewers/spectators connect with performed structures of sensory-body knowledge (and therefore the meaning they embody) in their own minds. In essence, an audience is able to infer meaning from the performance because they embody the knowledge that a producer / performer uses to impose those meanings artistically (Gallese and Sinigaglia 2011: 512).

When the lights went up on Chris’s and my performance, we tended not to talk for some time (on one night for over 15 minutes). There was simply nothing really to say. We had no script or narrative. But the tension in the theatre was palpable. Every movement or gesture that was made suggested a spontaneous thought and blessed relief for the audience to see something, anything, happen. I contend that the embodied nature of our ongoing, awkward and stressful process of ‘survival’ (literally thinking on our feet and with our bodies when stripped of anything else, including language) was shared by the audience in what I would dare suggest was a common cognitive environment – the empty white cube. When one audience member shouted

“Come on, then. Say something!”, it was out of frustration; the same frustration felt by the performers. At which point Chris and I both spontaneously felt immense relief at the breaking of the tension and being given an excuse to begin speaking.

#### 5.4. Performing and Spectating the Real

In the 1970s, the late German Anglist and Americanist, Paul Goetsch (1977), foresaw that of the four styles of dramatic design (realist, expressionist, epic and absurdist), ‘realistic’ theatre would be the most “indolent” yet most enduring. Within 20 years this trend began in earnest and continues to see a marked rise in popularity (at least in the UK); most notably in the form of TV docudrama and documentary theatre, affording “key responses to social, cultural and political change” (Bignell et al 2011: 21). On TV, the reason for this trend can be theorized as being rooted in changes in audience taste but more compellingly in the reciprocal downturn in pure documentary production following the 1990 Broadcasting Act. The effect of this legislation was to effectively force production companies to maximise revenue by seeking private funding, both nationally and internationally, with all the risk-aversity that may entail. Bignell et al state that fact-based narratives, with their audience appeal, reduced risk and basis in news stories, have “rootable, relatable and promotable” attractions to TV and film executives (2011: 33). In addition, news stories or celebrity-based drama with strong central characters can easily attract celebrity actors with whom audiences can doubly identify: as both character and star. Couple this with British television’s international reputation for high production value and quality, and the scene is set for a product with global appeal.

Any appeal, however, depends very much on the criteria that viewers bring with them in the expectation of delivery of authenticity. Richardson claims that such realism in literature, for example, is “a model that attempts to reconstruct in an abbreviated but not inaccurate manner the world that we inhabit (Richardson in Demastes, 1996: 41). If this is also applied to other artforms such as theatre and film, such authenticity must equate to validity both through the actors ‘inhabiting’ the real historical characters and through the very nature of the testimony of those real people whose lives are being enacted (Bignell et al, 2011: 24).



Regarding theatre particularly, Janelle Reinelt, in Martin's *Dramaturgy of the Real on Stage* (2010), recognizes the popularity of this trend in realistic theatre, citing the Tricycle Theatre's *The Colour of Justice: The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (1999) as a major turning point in the cultural acceptance of this form (Reinelt in Martin 2010: 27). The directness and immediacy of the real both on stage and screen reflects its capacity to 'pack a visceral punch' in performance. The writing can be as responsible for this as any theatrical staging (Megson, 2006) and it is no accident that documentary playwriting rose to prominence concurrently with the 'In-Yer-Face' plays of the 1990s. However, The 'real' in 'In Yer Face' (Sierz, 2001) theatre was less the real as an effect of representation as it was the 'real as trauma' (Foster, 1996: 168). In contrast, then, 'realistic', verbatim or tribunal theatre sought not to be shocking and confrontational but let the perceived reality of the subject matter and the text exert its own affective impact on the audience. In this way it serves to expose and refute any dubious or inaccurate romantic worldviews inherent in a purposefully created text, especially those purportedly based in reality (Richardson, 1996). However, herein lies the dilemma: through the mediation of real dialogue, there is a need for a certain amount of ideological encoding, even if it is just to make the text less boring. "In short, realism can expose falsehood but cannot reveal the truth" (Richardson, 1996: 40).

What is of particular interest here, from a playwriting perspective, is the extent to which the theatrical mediation and stylization of realistic dialogue contributes to the extended cognitive processes within both performer and spectator. As Megson (2006) posits, it is a 'poetics of immediacy' inherent to this recent vogue for fact-based drama that has had a major role in enlisting the audience emotionally. However, as Demastes is careful to point out, the relation between realism and theatricality changes with the times: "what for one generation may be realistic could be for another the height of artifice (1996: xi). Assuming Demastes refers in general to all the elements and forms of theatrical design, we could further assume that of all these, a near verbatim use of dialogue may be the least resistant to changes in perceptual expectations, rooted as it is in a tangible, recognizable medium – everyday speech.

#### 5.4.1. Two ‘Scottish’ plays: *Black Watch* and *Sleep No More*

According to Justine Hauthal, the use of people’s real words also aids in meeting an audience’s expectations by replacing what might otherwise be considered an unreliable or untrustworthy recounting by the media or officialdom (Hauthal, 2013: 152). Such an expectation and the promise of documentary accounts for the popularity of plays on controversial issues and on current / recent political events. Many such productions in the UK have dealt with the so-called War on Terror, and especially military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, both prior to and following the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center.

The forms of these productions may vary. Megson (2005) compares *Half the Picture* (1995) with *Justifying War* (2003), both tribunal plays created by Richard Norton-Taylor and staged at the Tricycle Theatre in London. These plays each employ different ways of conveying their emotional impact. A series of monologues constituted the former, while the latter downplayed such theatrical devices and was more “observational and polemical” (2005: 370). Nonetheless, these and other plays such as David Hare’s *Stuff Happens* (2004), Gillian Slovo and Victoria Brittain’s *Guantanamo: Honour-bound to Defend Freedom* (2004) and Robin Soan’s *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) all reveal spectatorial anxieties about the veracity of what they understand via mainstream media and provide a facility for “undertak[ing] a collective act of bearing witness” (2005: 371).

Another play on the same topic, which I saw (witnessed?) in a revived production at London’s Barbican theatre in 2008 is Gregory Burke’s *Black Watch*.

A highly stylized account of the actions of a group of Scottish soldiers in the second Gulf conflict, *Black Watch* has proven to be a significant hit for the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) both in the UK and the US (Zerdy, 2013). The play mixes both recorded conversations between writer Burke and members of the Black Watch regiment with theatricalised and carefully choreographed fictionalized scenes. The overall narrative within John Tiffany’s audacious ‘Edinburgh tattoo’-like staging weaves descriptions of the regiment’s birth and history with debates on military/political intervention in Iraq as well as the Black Watch’s (unpopular) amalgamation into the Royal Regiment of Scotland in 2006.

In attempting to account for the play's success on the other side of the Atlantic, Joanne Zerdy claims that, to a certain extent, American audiences are 'guilty' of consuming a carefully constructed "Scottish cultural product" (2013: 183). Such "banal theatrical nationalism", as Zerdy puts it, reveals itself particularly in the staging of certain scenes (eg 'Fashion', where a soldier is dressed in regimental garb as he tells the story of the regiment) and in the language. Certainly, the production set an engagingly theatrical Scottish military 'scene' but it was far from that appeal to 'shortbread tourism' of another Scottish-branded theatrical product: the TV drama *Outlander* (Starz, 2013-2020). In this latter case, the kilts, sweeping Scottish landscapes, expositional dialogue and somewhat repetitive, overlaid Scots vernacular ("Och, dinnae fash yerself lass") are clearly intentional tropes for garnering international (particularly US) commercial interest.

*Black Watch* is far from this. Zerdy's further claim that the play acts as a "Scottish operative" may indeed have merit: the show does 'operate' as both a showcase for the NTS in breaking into the US, and its operation was also a technical and artisanal tour-de-force. However, it is debatable whether in its theatrical and repeated, identical performances, *Black Watch* was reduced to the commodifiable Scottish brand as she suggests (2013: 184). The scene Zerdy picks out as an example is the aforementioned 'Fashion' scene. Here, on a red-carpeted runway, 'Cammy' is dressed and undressed by his fellow soldiers through different permutations of uniform relating to the regiment's participation in Britain's colonial campaigns over the last 300 years. At each interval, he looks to the audience as a camera flash goes off, freeze-framing him for an instant before his mates rush on to transfer him into the next costume. All the while, Cammy narrates the *Black Watch*'s story:

Cammy: We started before Culloden. We dinnay really ken when. 1715 or maybe 1725. When Scotland was an independent nation, we were the fucking mercenaries tay half ay fuckin Europe. But it was 1739 when we really threw our lot in way the British. Now, some people thought we chose the dark tartan tay reflect our black betraying hearts. Bollocks. Fuck all that Culloden shite. The Highlands were fucked (beat) and they let us keep our weapons. Our kilts and our bagpipes. And they told us that we'd never have to serve abroad. Aye (laughs), but that's the fucking army for you.

(Burke, *Black Watch*: 30-31)

As audience members we are at the same time immersed in a dynamic history lesson, a play, and a military drill akin to the assembling and disassembling of a military cannon (Burke, *Black Watch*: 30). In this way, a sense of intimacy is created that both draws the spectators into the event while, through the traverse staging, they are made to be fully aware that they are still onlookers (Hauthal, 2013: 165).



Figure 5.3 *Black Watch*, 'Fashion'. Photo: Lisa Maree Williams Getty Images

As Zerdy points out, this 'fashion show' takes the everyday, intimate act of dressing and undressing to a heightened level of spectacle. Its theatricality and military drill format reveal a national narrative through a physically embodied, public event. But this is hardly banal. It may be extreme but not unjustified to compare this staging to Franko B.'s 2003 performance artwork *I Miss You*, where the artist, naked and in silence, paraded along a white-sheet covered catwalk whilst bleeding from cannulas inserted in each arm. Eventually the catwalk was red with blood, particularly at each end where the artist paused before embarking on the next lap, and he was noticeably weakened from his ordeal. The intimacy with the audience via this staging (plus the obviously challenging nature of the performance) had, by all accounts, a profound emotional effect on the spectators (Tate.org, 2015). In both *I Miss You* and *Black Watch*, arguably, the 'public intimacy' attending to the live event and the use of body as a site for representation instigates cognitive processes within both the audience and the performer. In *Black Watch*, at least, the actor attunes his delivery of the 'history' in synch with his own physical actions and those actions performed upon him by fellow actors, despite those actions being utterly incongruous to real life.

Nevertheless, it works. And the audience's mixed schemata of fashion show, military

drill and lecture are successfully combined, within a physically intimate setting, with (and perhaps despite) another essential element – the demotic voice of the characters.

The use of colloquial, regional speech in fiction and elsewhere has been seen to be a powerful tool for any author in “representing both the internal and the external worlds of these characters concurrently so that, with an empowering self-reflectivity, the medium of representation will appear to come, by sleight of hand, from the representee” (Scott, 2009: 230). Yet dialects and accents on stage and screen are problematic at the best of times and as Scott (2013: 99) asserts, can indeed lead to banality as well as unintelligibility, condescension or stereotyping. In addition, a sense of the alien when confronted with strong ‘foreign’ speech on stage inevitably leads to a distancing effect between the performer and spectator. This may account for some of Zerdy’s US-based reaction and, perhaps, that of some fellow members of the Barbican audience. However, this would be in contrast to the initial tour of the play when performed to locals (often non habitual theatre-goers) in small community venues within the Black Watch recruitment areas of Central-eastern Scotland. Spectators who have been immersed in both the world of the play and the standard vernacular of traditional theatre (I hail from Fife myself, but have been educated and generally work in an standard English accented context) may find it easier to straddle the two accent worlds; worlds which become apparent *within* the play when the characters of the writer and the commanding officer are given English or anglicised Scots accents. This ‘us and them’-ness is a common motif in military dramas and class-based narratives. Here, the added Scotland/England context (Westminster politicians sending young working class men from Fife and Dundee to war) is another easily identifiable binary motif.

The danger, as Scott says, of using such realistic language is that it can draw attention to itself, effectively getting the audience “to look at the window rather than through it into the [performance] world” (2013: 99). Nevertheless, the contention here, as exemplified by the ‘Fashion’ scene is that the environment created by the staging, the shared culture and the social awareness of *Black Watch*’s audience, as well as the physical embodiment of the text, create a holistic performance that not only compensates for but necessitates a ‘realistic’, earthy, accent/dialect-ridden script to complete the theatrical experience.

According to Goetsch (1992), the predominance of dialogue (in contrast to more theatrical, stylised forms of speech such as monologue or chorus) is what typifies a realistic drama. Also, the use of vernacular, as in the Fife and Tayside accents of *Black Watch*'s characters, adds to the individualisation of a language that relates directly to their working-class upbringings and group identity as 'squaddies'. This individualisation and deviation from standard English is "marked by region (dialect), class (sociolect) and gender" (Hauthal, 2013: 164). Hauthal, in quoting critic John Heilpern in the New York Observer, also points out that the realistic quality of *Black Watch* goes deeper than a superficial acknowledgement of the character's background:

This is as close to the experience of war any of us is ever likely to get, thank God. To say 'it's as if we were there' would be phony, however. We're in a theatre; we're attending a performance. Army rituals of dress, tradition, codes of honour are inherently theatrical, too. Watching 10 terrific Scots actors re-enact young working-class squaddies facing death and suicide bombers in the quagmire of Iraq might come uncomfortably close to a case of traumatic tourism. But *Black Watch* is much too real and emotionally convincing for that.

(Heilpern, 2007)

Such emotional conviction is echoed by David Smith's review in *The Guardian* (June 2008), where he particularly noticed how the language, vernacular and banter (including black humour), scepticism and sensitivity rang true to his own experiences as an embedded war reporter. A somatic, empathic response is evinced by his 'wincing' at the scene where a gauche journalist attempts to win over the squaddies in a Dundee pub to reveal their war stories. However, what struck this journalist most was the play's authenticity:

Burkes' greatest achievement is [to restrain] his own voice and trust his interviewees. I have found soldiers and veterans generally talk in spare, unadorned prose, since their stories are vivid enough without need for hyperbole. Authorial intervention would thud with artifice. The authentic voices ring through *Black Watch* in all their Highland colloquial, profanity-peppered, matter-of-fact glory.

(Smith, 2018)

The other 'Scottish' play referred to earlier is Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Or more accurately, its retelling in the hands of *Punchdrunk*, the London-based company that

is seen as one of the foremost pioneers of immersive theatre. Entitled *Sleep No More*, this particular production was lauded in 2003 (and in later runs from 2009 in the US) for its spectacular and emotional engagement, due predominantly to its detailed, individualised and often intimate involvement with the audience.

W. B. Worthern (2014) has commented extensively on the experiential nature of the production and, in particular, on how this kind of theatrical experience operates in terms of the cognitive processes involved in its reception. Citing Yachnin and Slights (2009), he claims that the situation of Shakespeare's characters in an immediately relatable context (rather than Elizabethan figures on a distant stage) triggers the audience member's instinct to "connect observations about dramatic characters and communities to their own life experience [that is] common among both readers and audience members" (2009: 1-3). This reflects the realist conception of theatre in that, as spectators, we engage primarily with the inherent qualities of the character rather than the theatrical processes and forms that bring them to the stage. The more transparent these 'mechanics', the greater the response to the characters as if they were human beings in our social world outside the theatre. In Fauconnier and Turner's terms (2006: 266), there is a 'conceptual blend' occurring here, in that the schema envisioned on stage and that within the world of the audience are coalesced to create a blended world; a world that might be considered a sort of 'theatrical reality'.

*Sleep No More* is an immersive experience. Its non-linear (non-narrative) format allows audience members to wander freely through the performance spaces wearing masks, often being ushered away in small groups or even individually into other spaces where they engage with characters in a personal way. In this way, it is possible for each spectator to receive (or even co-create) a different 'reading' of the play. This raises questions about the apparent emancipation of the watcher as well as what is happening in their mind. Indeed, Worthern (2012: 85) goes as far as to say that this immersion practically reifies the verbal texture of Shakespeare's play with *Macbeth*'s 'interior world' manifesting itself in the material environment of the production's staging; a materiality that the audience engages with at a most intimate level. In addition, Felix Barrett, *Punchdrunk*'s founder and artistic director, in an interview with Worthern, emphasises his identification of "the space of performance with the printed space of the book, [decomposing] *Macbeth* in ways more reminiscent of the

practices of literary interpretation than of the instrumental use of the script for performance” (Barrett in Worthern, 2012).



Figure 5.4 *Sleep No More*. Photo: Yaniv Schulman, Punchdrunk.org.uk

Worthern’s parallels between the Shakespeare text and the sensory experience of the immersive performance has significant implications. The consequent abstraction from a narrative structure gives the audience a fictional interpretive freedom that is more akin to real life than to theatre. The complex relationship between text and performance is key here. In *Sleep No More*, cognitively the spectators write their own individualised plotlines from the embodied and environmentally represented texts that they encounter as they proceed through the play. The instrumentalization of the text depends very much on the practices that are applied, and this, in turn, determines both the perception of the text’s properties and their very essence (2012: 96).

This is also very much in keeping with Fischer-Lichte’s remarks on reality and theatricality (1995). In this she mentions how throughout the twentieth century the avantgarde experimented to free the performance from “the spatial conditions of European theatre: box-set and raised stage” (1995: 97). In addition, other theatre sign-systems, including language, as well as linear time-based narratives were seen as further restrictions to creativity. Once removed, the corporeality of the actor and the ambiguity of the spectacle results in a much more personalised spectator experience: “a radical subjectification of the process of reception: of experiencing time, of perceiving, of generating meaning. These processes depend on the subjectively



determined conditions of each spectator and, thus, differ from spectator to spectator” (1995: 99). The result, she argues, is an experience much more akin to real life.

This corporeality is also visible in certain, traditionally scripted works, however; an example being the works of Samuel Beckett. McMullen (2012) gives an insight into Beckett’s plays when she says that the audience are an inherent part of the performance. Garner (1994) also refers to Beckett’s audiences as the ‘third body’ in the stage’s intercorporeal field (alongside the actor and character). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that in such an embodied and environmentally situated representation (a representation that comes so close to ‘reality’) that any *emerging* text may likewise have considerable cognitive force.

Drawing on the phenomenological theories of Husserl and Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) posited a person’s lived experience (of both consciousness and phenomena) within the body. This is borne out to certain extents by more recent research into experience-brain-body interactions. Di Benedetto (2010: 6) states how sensations and stimulations within a given context triggers the brain of the spectator, whose body is a component of the theatrical event by virtue of its being both the means by which the stimulus is received (via the senses) and by which the event is interpreted. This is exemplified by Norman Doidge (2007) when he reminds us how “the perceiving brain is active and always adjusting itself. Seeing is as active as touching when we run our fingers over an object to discover its texture and shape” (2007: 303). It is clear then that, despite no definitive knowledge of why we respond to the world in the way we do, the senses play a pivotal role in shaping consciousness (Di Benedetto, 2010: 5).

Di Benedetto insists that sensations are triggered unconsciously, devoid of any dependence on thought and intellect. However, because our senses are already interpreted via the body, the role of sensation is key to creating a powerful theatrical experience (2010: 6).

Such is clearly the case in the postdramatic (see Lehmann, 2006) forms prevalent in both *Black Watch* and *Sleep No More*. These productions exhibit a radically different use of playscript, however: one mines genuine, spoken dialogue to create a structured performance; the other takes a ready-created script and deconstructs it via embodied

and material representation. Nevertheless, the extended cognitive processes of both performer and spectator, as well as their differing co-participatory roles, are crucial to the affective success of both plays. The importance here is that, as Lutterbie proposes (2011: 94-95), there is a circular causality within a dynamic system.

In *Black Watch*, this is perhaps more apparent in rehearsal. As an example, the outcome (the ‘Blueys’ scene) of a process of devising and rehearsal that involves an extended process involving body and environment has considerable affective power even if its resulting text is actually unspoken.

Here, towards the end of the play, the soldiers, spaced around the performance area, receive ‘blueys’ (blue airmail letters from loved ones back home). As they unfold and read them, the actors calmly and individually mime specific actions associated with the letter’s contents before allowing them to flutter to the ground.

A clearly stylised and ‘unrealistic’, theatrical event in itself, it is nevertheless based on reality. Inspired by a photo of a soldier reading a letter in the back of a Warrior armoured vehicle, the idea was to somehow capture how such an individual could be so absorbed, and be ostensibly ‘back home’, whilst surrounded by the paraphernalia and environment of the Iraq war. “The actors were asked to write their own airmail letter and choose three sentences from them. They then created their own individual sign language to externalise what they were reading” (Peter Forbes (actor), 2008. In interview). Here, the actors deal with an interaction between perceptual experience of the ‘reading’ of letters that they themselves have written and the perturbation inherent in a somewhat unusual approach to text creation.



Figure 5.5 *Black Watch*, ‘Blueys’. Photo: Ryan Fletcher; Traverse Theatre Festival Programme

In *Sleep No More*, the actual performance is a clearer example, where the perturbations are created through the dynamic nature of the immersive event. With the audience wandering through the performance space at will and possible interactions between spectator and performer, there is enormous risk and scope for ‘instability’.

I contend, then, that the workings of this dynamic system is as relevant to the audience as it is to the performer. The cyclical causality of perturbation and boundary limitations result in a pattern that Evan Thompson (2007) terms a ‘dynamic gestalt’, which is key to the way an audience engages bodily and environmentally through the extended mind of the theatrical event.

## 5.5. Artificial intelligence and extended cognition in performance: *Imrobotics*

Throughout this chapter, reference has been made to the post-Cartesian view of cognition that rejects a perspective of the mind that depends on atemporal representation. An alternative, dynamic approach recognises how we, as human agents, are involved in an on-going real-time interaction with our ever-changing environment. Situated as it is in our bodies and beyond, our cognitive system may exhibit a subtlety and complexity that not only defies traditional computational views of how the mind works but also transcends them. This is particularly the case when it comes to the notion of representation (Van Gelder, 1995: 381).

Interestingly, traditional cognitivist views often drew comparisons between the human brain and a computer, reflecting the linear processes that are easily conceivable in a programmable, artificially intelligent machine. Nevertheless, this is not the understanding of more recent theorists who champion a more situated or extended conception of the mind.

However, in what is perhaps a cross-over between these two views, recent forays into the role of cognition in Artificial Intelligence, and in particular its application to theatre, may throw some intriguing light onto the processes at work in the creation of drama texts. One pioneering project in this field, currently operating online as well as live in venues around Europe and Canada is *Imrobotics*.

Co-created in 2016 by scientists and performers Piotr Mirowski and Kory Mathewson, *Improbatics* is a stage improvisation show that combines human performers with an on-stage robot (informed by an off-stage computer system known as A.L.Ex (Artificial Language Experiment)). The human improvising team varies. Originally it was just Mirowski and Mathewson but more recent shows have involved other performers and often volunteers from the audience. The main ‘star’ of the show, however, would seem to be A.L.Ex, whose improvisations, based on a stored corpus of dialogue from 100,000 Hollywood movie scripts, interact with the utterances of its human counterparts (Mathewson and Mirowski, 2018; Mirowski, 2020), with entertaining results. “Sometimes it says something that is so relevant and funny that it is quite eerie. Other times, it just talks complete nonsense” (McCord, 2018).

This ‘experiment’, as Mirowski and Mathewson themselves dub it (2018), has a lineage in robotic performances dating back at least 20 years. Recent incarnations such as *Bot Party: Improv comedy with robots* and *Human Machine: Artificial Intelligence Improvisation* have made use of avatars within their performances. *Improbatics*, however, does not. Instead, the AI-generated dialogue is fed via headphones to a human performer on stage. In this way a kind of ‘Turing test’ is set up whereby the audience has to distinguish which performer (all the performers are wearing headphones) is the ‘bot’. Interestingly, the audience is indeed often ‘fooled’ - though not always for very long, since typographical and grammar errors as well as contextual inconsistencies can eventually give the game away (Mirowski and Mathewson, 2018). Nevertheless, the success to any extent of an AI-created text in generating a scene which is at once coherent and entertaining is laudable. It is, for example, remarkable in its production of what Baumer and Magerko (2010: 173) call a ‘tilt’; that is, a scene resulting from the successful response to offers from co-performers in order to reach a shared mental model. (However, there is presumably no evidence that the ‘bot’ heaves a sigh of relief when a common understanding is reached between itself and the human).



Figure 5.6 *Improbotics*. Photo: Mark Hambleton, Improbotics.org

In human-computer interaction, whether in theatre or in other improvised artforms such as jazz, assumptions are made that the human improviser is willing to suspend their disbelief that the computer is merely a “stupid” electronic device (Thom, 2000: 35). Success in any mutual improvised exchange depends on each party being aware of each other’s mood and using this dynamically changing knowledge to listen, respond, interact and adapt (Thom, 2000: 36). Simple prediction of what the next best thing should be contains, according to Belinda Thom, a “myopic anti creative bias” (2000: 37). The answer to this has been to focus on localising the input from which the computational agent selects a sequence; that is, drawing on a user’s most recent improvisations that reflect socio-environmental influences and variations within their performance.

Piotr Mirowski from *Improbotics* mirrors this idea when he relates how his partner Kory Mathewson realised that within an exchange of ten or so utterances, the AI ‘bot’ (A.L.Ex) would be able to fine tune the topics and context to ensure a more successful or realistic generation of improvised dialogue (Mirowski (in conversation), 2020). In this interview, Mirowski went further by admitting an element of human intervention in the giving of a restricted lexical field to the ‘bot’:

Jonathan: So you helped it along?

Piotr: Yeah, there’s a lot of what we’d call ‘inductive bias’. We don’t just use data science, we also come with human-made ideas. So

that was the neuro-network language model. The chatbot is basically taking that model and wrapping it in a system that enables you to enter a prompt and then send it as an input to the language model and let it generate multiple times, multiple answers. And that is because the language model models the probability of what comes next and you can then sample different trajectories.

Another feature of this project is the freedom that is created when working with Artificial Intelligence. The often nonsensical contributions of the ‘bot’ can give the performance licence to go places that the human performers may never have thought of venturing. In this case, is there more to the improvisation than merely accepting and moving on (the “yes, and.. -ing”)? Could it be said that this performance is actually a three-way construction (bot-performer-audience) beyond that of a normal human-human stage encounter? From Mirowski and Mathewson’s qualitative data arising from answers to questions posed to the actors post performance, one stand-out feedback response was that the improvisation involved more concentration and creativity as it was “like acting opposite a novice improviser”. Having to be on your toes and react to unexpected and often bizarre contributions is certainly in keeping with the reactions to perturbations in a dynamic system as outlined by Lutterbie (2011: 120). Here, he discusses how words themselves destabilize, activating attractors (possible meanings) and boundary conditions (cultural frames) across different domains. This (re) search for stability incurs a ‘best fit’ approach and so the other, discarded options decay but do not disappear completely as, in future perturbations they may be called on to attempt further stability (cf the white rabbit example earlier). Meanings that emerge are deemed ‘sensible’ as long as these cultural frames are employed; that is, for example, as long as a sentence is grammatically correct “and the audience has the appropriate experiential schemas, meaning will evolve that approximates the intended idea in all its richness of content” (2011: 120).



Figure 5.7 *Improbatics* @ Camden Fringe 2019. Photo: Natalya Micic

In the case of *Improbatics*, this dynamic cognitive process is operating both in the mind of the human performer and the ‘mind-less’ robot. But is this synthetic cognitive instrument any less successful in a creative sense than its human counterpart if it follows a similar cognitive process? Mirowski does not mention dynamism as such when describing A.L.Ex’s latest neural network. Instead, he refers to predictions and modelled trajectories. However, one analogy he makes is of the AI using ‘a blank canvas’; a canvas upon which a system of inter-related elements is drawn and which the AI can revisit holistically rather than just at the most recent ‘step’ in the process. In this way, the ‘bot’ can just as easily retrieve something from the beginning of a conversation as it can from the end. However, Mirowski baulks at my use of the word ‘coherence’ in this context:

Piotr: No. I would really avoid the word ‘coherence’. It’s the use of previous input. My hope is that I will not give any misleading impression that there is any intelligence or sensibleness or rational thinking behind anything we are doing. We are looking purely at statistics of words. But in this case, because it produces earlier parts of a context, it seems like it’s bringing back something. And it is very important for narrative storytelling, which relies on that. And it’s possible that the researchers (and I am one of them) who work with these models are inspired by how we write stories, and we use that bias, that human bias, in the way we build the algorithms. So essentially we fetch some very good ideas from life and biology [sic] and design the neural network architectures.  
(Piotr Mirowski in interview, 2020)

Importantly, then, features of an extended cognitive model (such as Dynamic Systems Theory) as applied by theorists to theatre (McConachie, 2008; McConachie and Hart, 2006; Blair, 2008) and to improvisation specifically (Lutterbie, 2011) are apparent in the *Improbatics* experiment. However, the dependency on the human interactor is key. When it comes to language, a machine, according to Marcus (2017), fails to deal adequately with ambiguities; for example, in determining between possible referents in a sentence with pronouns such as ‘he’, ‘she’ or ‘it’. This and other ‘failings’ on the part of the ‘bot’ can obviously lead to hilarity (if that’s always a suitable marker of success) or confusion. In any case, the onus falls to the human interactor to make their AI partner ‘look good’. In addition, the human performer of the AI-fed text is likewise the real power base in this interaction as it is they who gives the AI-created words meaning (Seager, 2019) with their body language, intonation, and all the ‘actor tools’ at the performer’s disposal. These combined make an enormous difference to how the language is received by the spectator, in addition to the embodied and environmental elements that are invested in the cognitive process; a process that here may not be so much involved in the construction of the text but at least in how they are delivered, received and perceived.

## 5.6. Some conclusions... and Grant’s monologue

When examining the use of robotics in improvisation and ‘authentic’ text creation, it may be argued that the entertainment value is more in the improvisation process than in the actual product (ie performed scene). O’Neill et al (2011) describe how they created a model of a computational improviser and, although the complexities of language were removed for simplicity, by communicating with motion and the use of icons this model revealed how the computational agent can indeed create a ‘good’ improvisation (ie one that adheres to the improv ‘rules’ of advancing the scene (see Johnstone, 1979)). It achieves this by dealing successfully with such variables as unusual offers from human interactors (perturbations) by simulating the interpretation and extrapolation phases that are inherent to a human improviser’s cognitive processes (2011: 91-93). This is achieved through selecting the most likely response based on considerations of previous knowledge and iconic, experiential moments in order to expand a ‘mental model’. This model then serves to create material to ‘extrapolate’ and drive the scene further. It might be suggested then that in a



programmable, self-directed way, the computer is approximating a dynamic interaction with its environment, albeit an environment limited purely to discrete items of data.

The case of *Improbatics* reveals that despite its not having a body or being in touch with its physical environment, the creators of this artificial mind have approximated (by using a complex and dynamic statistical probability model) the effects of extended cognition in humans to a) create a 'realistic' encounter that can fool an audience and b) put pressures on the human actors to up their game and reveal their use of extended cognition to engage the AI bot in a meaningful and entertaining encounter.

It is worth remapping these ideas from the world of robotics to purely human interaction and look at an example where a text is created spontaneously from minimal input.

In rehearsals for a new play based partly on scripts derived from improvisation (*The Plant* – see chapter 6), actors were asked to do a simple exercise. Sitting on a chair (in front of an audience of production team and co-performers), they each held a coin in their hand. This coin, they were told, was 'a medal'; a medal won by their character for services rendered to the fictional car production company of the play. They were then required to improvise a short monologue accounting for the medal and their character's emotional response to it.

From an extended cognitive point of view, what is interesting here is how the performer responds to a) their position in the environment of a theatre space, seated before an audience and b) their interaction with the coin and how that helped facilitate the creation of a text. An analysis of this short scene is valuable in attempting to use the theories underpinning this chapter in order to account of the success (or not) of the improvisation.

One crucial metric for this success is audience feedback, and, once again, I would maintain that extra-corporeal forces are at play among the spectators when cognitively processing the scene.

One actor, Grant Stimpson, stood out as creating a particularly effective and affective scene, judging by the audience's response:

GRANT: This medal, it might... might seem to you just a small thing but this is like... this to me is like lead in my heart. I look at that and I think, that's my life. I've... I've put everything into this company and all these people rely on me and that feels like, to me... I see that and I almost... almost feel bitter about it. Because it's almost taken something of me.... To do that. And, you know... but the other thing about it is.. is that I've got my life, I've got my money, I've got my bank account, I've got my car, I've got my house, you know, I've got my boat and I've got Maddie. And all those little strands, it's... it's like a spider in the middle of a web, that is. And that web is also like on my face, like that and in my brain.



Figure 5.8 Grant Stimpson in *The Plant*. Photo: J. Fitchett

To begin, he is seated as if before an interview panel or a jury, accounting for his actions and for his emotions. His opening lines, deictically referring to the object in his hands, reflect this intimate relationship between his character's imagined world and the imagined significance of 'the medal': "This medal, it might... might seem to you just a small thing but this is like... this to me is like lead in my heart." There was no time to prepare this scene, so, the physical act of being seated in the space and holding the object was in itself a perturbation to which Grant had to find ways of achieving stabilisation. The comparison of a shiny object of value to 'lead in my heart' is an example of quick-thinking rhetoric; the metallic contrast and therefore

paradoxical images of ‘achievement’ and ‘despair’ set the scene for both an engaging narrative (what has happened to make this man of success so unhappy?) and also an insight into the character beyond the story (perhaps we are uniquely privileged to see this confessional soliloquy; before other characters he may have a different bearing). Thus the processes going through Grant’s mind even in this opening sentence extend through his physical position, the object in his hands via the relationship he has with his audience.

The following line has a similar deictic reference followed by an embodied image of his character’s ‘life’: “I look at that and I think, that’s my life”. Here, clearly, the audience is drawn into the imaginary world of the actor via the coin and the metaphor it illustrates.

Grant’s departure into talking about the company and how he has invested time and energy is, to my mind, a weak moment as he ‘leaves’ the coin. Another perturbation perhaps. But he soon returns with “I see that and I almost... almost feel bitter about it. Because it’s almost taken something of *me*.” Again, a departure, but a more successful one now. Grant then connects the medal back to the narrative of his life as the boss of the factory, his success and his lover Maddie. Once this is established via a list of achievements (‘strands’), Grant takes, in Lutterbie’s (2011) words, “a line of flight” in painting a vivid, gruesome picture of the coin as a spider in a web of these strands; a web that he illustrates via physical gesture as being “on my face, like that and in my brain”.

The audience response was immediate and instinctive: applause, laughter and expressions of “whoaaa”. This improvisation obviously hit a certain spot due to its spontaneity and immediacy; an immediacy that is not just facilitated by but part and parcel of the embodied and extended cognitive power of Grant’s performance and the consequently emergent (fantastical) language.

In essence, the theory here is that the success of this particular example of improvised text creation is down to the constitutive interaction of brain, body and environment. By ‘letting himself go’ within a dynamic and complex cognitive system, Grant at once reduces his cognitive load, is more efficient, and freer to creatively explore opportunities beyond what might otherwise be expected. In turn, the audience, as part

of his environment, 'buys in' to the image-laden world that Grant provides, enhanced by his use of physicality, stance and the holding of the coin. Together, production and perception within an extended cognitive framework work to produce a spoken text that is at once authentic and pleasing to both performer and spectator.

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## 5.8. Appendix: Interview with Piotr Mirowski of *Improbabilities* (14<sup>th</sup> February 2020)

Jonathan: How does story-telling come into your project and how do you measure the success of an Improbabilities performance?

Piotr: There was recently a paper published by a research group at Google about a new chatbot called MENA and they compared it with existing chatbots including one that won multiple times the Loebner Prize, which is a Turing test run in Brighton. And here they define two metrics which are essentially about the specificity of the language given by the robot and how sensible is the answer compared to the context. Interestingly, the answer ‘no, I don’t know’ is very sensible in many contexts but it’s extremely unspecific and that is something we try to avoid in improv and storytelling because that doesn’t help... While if you try and say something very specific, the trade-off is that you may say something that is incorrect within the context. So they have these 2 measures: how sensible it is, and how specific it is. And they evaluated the chatbot by that metric.

Besides that it is extremely difficult to evaluate the quality of a language model, so all the research in natural language processing is often goal-driven. So, for instance: can this natural language processing system choose the right answer in a multiple choice questionnaire? Can it find the part of a text that refers to a question? Can it answer a simple question – the context could be how much is  $2 + 2$ ? So then it should say the answer is 4.

Jonathan: So in these discrete models we know the answers but does it get it right? But in improvisation we are looking for things that are much more ethereal...

Piotr: Exactly. Korey had a paper which dealt with the Narrative Arc and essentially the idea was this: through Topic Models he calculated the number and spread of topics in the current part of a text that was generated and the idea was that the spread of topics should become more and more narrow over time in order to concentrate on one topic. And that goes in the direction of specificity.

Jonathan: What is the time-frame for that narrowing-down process?

Piotr: It could be within an exchange of... 10 sentences, for example.

Jonathan: So the idea is that the robot ‘tunes in’ to fewer topics and that stops it going off on weird tangents....

Piotr: Exactly. And you can measure the topics simply by looking at the lexical field. So Topic Models are statistical models, offering the probability of words given some random variable. The model essentially finds different random variables, and combines them to combine different topics. But each topic has a different distribution of the words. For this reason we can say that one particular topic ‘favours’ words like *yakuza* and *samurai*... I’m just making it up... but ‘Japanese Movies’. Another topic might be about ‘space’ because the vocabulary is from that. And these are topics that can arise just from the statistics of words in the language.

They don't have to be manually labelled. We actually used that in the earlier version of our chatbot. That was based on sequences of words: what comes next statistically. Based on the contexts of the previous words. And it's an idea that's been around for a long time. It dates from Claud Shannon in the 1940s and 1950s who wanted to characterise the complexity of language. And he would, at that time, calculate the probability of what words would come next in a particular context. And he created bigrams or trigrams of words to model what word would come after that word or after those two words.

That idea went very far. With the advent of computer-enlarged data cells, this essentially made machine translation work. Google was essentially relying on six-grams and seven-grams to re-rank multiple choices, candidates, for translations, and pick the one that had the average likelihood that was maximal based on the likelihood derived from large corpora of text. So the chatbot that we built in 2016 was a neural network version of that. Again, it was trained on 1 billion words, hundreds of films and again modelled what word would come next, given a variable length context.

Jonathan: Did this have an immediate effect or was it a gradual process?

Piotr: Gradual. To make it work better, we introduced topics. So we had, like, an additional constraint of deriving the topic from the context and feeding that as a conditioning variable. That would essentially restrict the search space of the words that were output.

So we already had this idea of being specific, trying to pick up what topic was suggested, and staying in that lexical field.

Jonathan: So you 'helped it along'

Piotr: Yeah, there's a lot of what we'd call 'inductive bias'. We don't just use data science, we also come with human-made ideas.

So that was the neuro-network language model. The chatbot is basically taking that model and wrapping it in a system that enables you to enter a prompt and then send it as an input to the language model and let it generate multiple times, multiple answers. And that is because the language model models the probability of what comes next and you can then sample different trajectories. So, for instance, with 'yesterday I ate some fish and today I feel...', it may suggest 'unwell, I will stay at home' or it may suggest 'fantastic, transformed by proteins!'

It would sample words at each time-step.

There's an expression in physics: a random walk process. Here it was not entirely random. It was random over distribution, which favoured some words over others but you had many possible trajectories and realisations that could be achieved.

[starts drawing a diagram on whiteboard behind, illustrating how the model creates a tree effect, with branches leading to other branches etc]

Jonathan: And am I right in saying that the chatbot is constantly 'correcting itself'? So it follows a particular trajectory but if the feedback from the other performer does not seem to be following that path, does it backtrack and go on another path somehow?

Piotr: No, it basically picks up from where it ended and keeps going. And it doesn't just work on one sentence or context and then one response. It actually relates to a context over time. And it also accumulates what it has generated over time. So the entire string of words that is generated from the beginning of a scene is accumulated and this is what [creates] the conditions of a prediction.

Jonathan: So it's not just living moment to moment, it's actually looking at a more holistic view of the exchange.

Piotr: So for this reason, we have to reset it before each scene so we start with a blank canvas.

So the big improvement that happened in early 2019, was a new architecture of neural networks, which was published and was also made to work on a very large scale. A research group at Open AI published a paper using 'transformers' – so, transformers is a just a name in neural networks relating to inputs-to-outputs. And this is an interesting concept because it goes more into this idea of a canvas. So there is the context and when you generate the sequence of words and at every time-step there is a comparison with the entire sequence of a context and what this means is that it can actually more easily produce what is in the context. So it means that if you have a large context (up to say several hundreds of words), the transformer network can just as easily retrieve something from the beginning of a conversation as it can from the end. So it has what was in our previous architecture, ie models of the dynamics of how things change over time, but now it also checks with the 'canvas'.

Jonathan: So it can continually check back and forth with this overall 'canvas' in order to promote coherence...

Piotr: No. I would really avoid the word 'coherence'. It's the use of previous input. My hope is that I will not give any misleading impression that there is any intelligence or sensibleness or rational thinking behind anything we are doing. We are looking purely at statistics of words.

But in this case, because it produces earlier parts of a context, it seems like it is bringing back something. And it is very important for narrative storytelling, which relies on that.

And it's possible that the researchers (and I am one of them) who work with these models are inspired by how we write stories, and we use that bias, that human bias, in the way we build the algorithms.

So essentially we fetch some very good ideas from life and biology [sic] and design the neural network architectures.

Jonathan: So this brings me back to my question on to what extent the appreciation of the story-telling ability of the AI is actually fully or not with the audience/recipient... us. So, is the AI making a story at all, or are we making a story to fit?

Piotr: My colleagues that worked on 'AlphaGo' created an algorithm that was in a way creative but in a world that was 19x19. In that universe where there was only 19 x 19 possible positions, it was able, *tabula rasa*, to come up with strategies that were there to maximise the chance of winning, which again, is the only goal that exists in the universe of 'Go', and it came up with solutions that humans didn't think of.

This was because the search space was so small. But the search space that we want to apply AI today is infinitely large. So we would need an infinite amount of time and opportunity for play to come up with an algorithm that is truly creative to our own standards.

Unless we restrict the problem.

Storytelling is not just about generating sequences. Storytelling is about telling something about the human experience. So you compress the presentation of 10 billion neurons in one individual x a society, interacting with nature, in a universe that has 10 to the power of I don't know how many 10s of particles....and so the complexity of those interactions is so large... and then that complexity is compressed into symbols: human language.

Jonathan: So I'm interested to know to what extent the robot (in the case of your experiment) can 'fool' the audience into believing that the interactions we are seeing on stage are actually human. So I'm very interested in the Turing Test element of your performance where the audience doesn't know which of the actors on stage is being fed lines from the robot. I understand there's quite a high incidence of people being bluffed.

Piotr: Yes, so I think there are multiple explanations here. Firstly, a large percentage of human interactions can be statistically modelled. We do follow patterns. And the problem with that is that this fools us into thinking that we are entirely predictable which is of course not the case. So there is the analogy of a making a new type of car: you can achieve 50% of this in your own garage; you might need to start a small start-up company to get to 80%, be a giant corporation and have massive industrial collaboration to get to 95% and change the way roads are built to get the final 5%. So the complexity grows...

So this means that when AI works is when it manages to reproduce a pattern that exists in our language and our behaviour, because it has captured the statistics of our behaviour.

Jonathan: But only to a certain extent. And that extent is enough for us to 'buy in' to the idea that there is a story being told or that there's human intelligence involved but actually even though I'm buying into that 50%, it's the other 50% that the AI would never be able to match. But you're saying that's enough for us to be 'fooled'.

Piotr: Exactly. There is Daniel Kahneman's book 'Thinking Fast and Slow' and decomposing thought into 2 levels: system one and system two. System 1 is this intuitive, reactive thought, where 'here's the pattern, there's the reaction' eg a chess-master has played so much that he has internalised play strategy as a system 1 level of reasoning. It's intuitive at this point.

Jonathan: This touches on the art of the improviser anyway. So getting back to improvisation and Commedia dell'Arte, for example. C d'A was never *tabula rasa* performances as such; the performers had a store of *lazzi* in their heads that they could draw on and bring out whenever they needed them. And I think modern improvisers are the same. So to what extent do you think the AI is doing that, storing certain moves and then reproducing them when it sees fit? And can it then respond if something doesn't quite go according to plan?

Piotr: Yeah, it will respond. Not according to a plan. AI doesn't do an exact pattern-matching. It does a fuzzy pattern-matching. So, it interpolates between examples. So, it'll basically find something between known examples and create a response based on that. But it might miss totally the point.

As an example, in the current transformer algorithm, if you type in the context 'Paul is eating a cake with Mary, Mary is drinking tea in the kitchen, the kitchen is littered with cheese, Harry the mouse loves cheese', then you ask 'who loves cheese?' it will answer 'Harry' but it may also answer 'Paul' because there was a Paul in the sentence. And because the vector space corresponding to Paul is not too different from that corresponding to Harry. In the algorithm.

So it can generate an answer that is very intuitive and the kind of answer you might generate if someone wakes you up at 4 am and shouts a question in your face that you have to answer immediately, without any so-called system 2 thinking, which is 'taking back the context'.

Jonathan: In your experiments and performances, is interacting with this robot, slightly like interacting with an autistic person?

Piotr: We don't use the word 'autistic' in this case because I guess autism is a very complex condition so we only use the term 'novice improviser', who doesn't exactly follow the rules. Rules that are essentially a 'cognitive control' that tells us, at least at the beginning, "be constructive, move the story forward, don't have a gut reaction that is negative, use a different gut reaction." So it is essentially [like] a 'badly tuned' human who isn't thinking about the consequences of what they say.

## CHAPTER SIX

# Conclusions. Talk to text: accounting for the ‘theatricality’ of improvised dramatic texts through a case study of *The Plant*.

PLAYER: You don't understand the humiliation of it – to be tricked out of the single assumption which makes our existence viable – that somebody is *watching*...

(Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 1967: 112)

This concluding chapter answers the key questions raised throughout this work and consolidates the findings by applying them individually to one piece of work. This is a play, *The Plant*, that has been in development for over three years and is in the process of being produced and performed on the professional stage. Devised by actors and directed through an engagement with particular social themes, the play and its dialogue are essentially improvised. The co-writers / producers then worked with the emergent dialogue to produce a script, which is still morphing today subject to audience reception, actor interpretation and the fluctuating perceptions of what makes an utterance ‘theatrical’.

### 6.1. Theatricality

#### 6.1.1. Defining theatricality

Central to the research within this thesis has been the term ‘theatricality’; a term that is proving hard to pin down exactly but there is a quality that can be defined by both audience reaction (and by extension an on-looking director / producer / writer), and how they engage with the play. It is this quality that underpins all the theories that have here been employed to account for the ‘success’ of a play text arising from genuine dialogical exchanges; whether those exchanges have been improvised or merely overheard. But is theatricality any attempt to impress an audience and solicit applause? The latter case of ‘overheard’ exchanges would imply that this is not the case and that there is an inherent poetic quality to everyday speech.

Ganim in his research into Chaucer’s writing considers theatricality as “a governing sense of performance, an interplay among the author’s voice, his fictional characters



and his immediate audience” (1990: 5). He further points out that in the case of *The Canterbury Tales*, at least, this theatricality arises from and is constituent of a dynamic narrative ‘frame’; that is, the tales told by the pilgrims within the frame of the journey to Canterbury are continually “reframed, reset, changed by the very process of their presentation” (1990: 5). The nature of what Ganim refers to as “the illusion of multivocality” is essentially linguistic in *The Canterbury Tales* given the authored ‘talk’ that is at its narrative root. This is combined with the differing and fluctuating relationships between the various narrative agents: the author and the characters; the author and us, the reader; the tellers and their audience; the tale and the tales; Chaucer and his sources as well as his previous works. When these elements are considered together, he claims, the work becomes at once both an artifact and a performance - “as talk and as text”.

While acknowledging, in Bakhtinian terms, the ‘carnavalesque’ in *The Canterbury Tales*, Ganim claims that Chaucer’s text is not only a mimesis of the demotic voice of ‘real’ people as opposed to the expected, rarified courtly language of literature, but also something else: the invention of a future audience (1990: 13). The tension between his product and his contemporary readers’ predilection for “pious and more obviously useful poetry” is a reflection of the literary efforts of Chaucer’s contemporaries on the continent such as Boccaccio and Petrarch. However, unlike medieval, strictly hierarchical, Florence, Chaucer’s London was less socially rigid, less literate and comparatively ‘backward’; a situation that worked to Chaucer’s advantage: “on the one hand, literary language suffered under the yoke of French feudal forms; on the other, language itself had the advantage of a more direct connection to everyday reality” (1990: 69). Thus, while the narrative ‘storytelling’ frame of *The Decameron* is as precise and considered as Florentine society itself, that of *The Canterbury Tales* profits from an inherent flexibility and dynamism in its (re)presentation; that is, in its ‘theatricality’.

We can see that theatricality in text construction has its roots in a literary movement that appropriates everyday language in a new and permanent way. According to Ganim, in order to achieve such permanence (unlike Boccaccio) Chaucer makes reference to the vernacular sources of *The Canterbury Tales*, even highlighting its ephemeral nature and ‘minor’ status: “the *Tales* seem to now proclaim their

connection with rumour, now with gossip, now with conversation games, folklife, flytings, or improvised situations” (1990: 16). But what of the present, 700 years on? Josette Féral (2002) asks this very question within her enquiry into the properties of theatricality today and into the extent to which it may belong uniquely to the theatre or also be present in the everyday. By extension, she asks whether such theatricality pre-exists its manifestation in performance or whether it is as a consequence of a process related to reality (2002: 94-95). This query, or concern, seems to arise from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century theatre’s tendency to subjugate text to other theatrical practices, *mise-en-scène* and performance genres. However, if we are to assume, as Féral in fact does, that theatricality is part and parcel of quotidian life, then these concerns should dissipate.

Féral’s claim that theatricality exists in the theatre by very virtue of the existence of the performance space goes a long way to accounting for an audience’s reaction to a play’s dialogue. Even the removal of that space (Féral cites Augusto Boal’s ‘Invisible Theatre’ where site-specific happenings occur unbeknownst to an unsuspecting public) become theatrical once the audience becomes aware that they are, in fact, an audience. In this case, the onlooker ‘re-semiotizes’ the space from an everyday location (Féral mentions the interior of a subway train) to one of a theatrical event. However, going further, she also points out that onlookers find entertainment in the interactions and gestures of say, passers-by, who have no intention of being watched. Here, the viewer ‘inscribes’ a theatricality to the space within which the objects of their attention are operating. All through the simple activity of watching: “more than a property with analysable characteristics, theatricality seems to be a *process* that has to do with a ‘gaze’ that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge” (2002: 97).

It is this very process of creating a space, a transitional, liminal one that exists between the real world of the viewer and the fictional world of the play/performance, and its eventual dissolution, that brings to mind the dynamic cognitive processes as described in chapter 5. Victor Turner’s conceptualisation of ‘communitas’ within liminality is key here, I believe. These communitas, refer to the camaraderie among groups of individuals (eg a theatre audience) in finding themselves in such a liminal space. In this, they may both share immersively in an event and also cooperate to

make sense of their situation or attempt to stabilize it with “the immediacy of *communitas* giv[ing] way to the mediacy of structure” (Turner, 1966: 373). Seeing the entrance into this liminality as a type of perturbation, one can draw parallels to Evan Thompson’s enactive approach to cognition (2007) as well as John Lutterbie’s application of this to theatre in particular (2011).

If that liminal space is one where the audience may be made to feel a ‘real’ participant (as in the tattoo-like staging of Gregory Burke’s *Black Watch*, or in the immersive, promenade setting of Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More* – cf chapter 5), then I maintain that this cognitive cooperation, or communal ‘buying-in’ into the performance is even more pronounced, and heralded by attempts to rationalise what they are seeing, by their interaction and suitable responses (eg applause).

Féral describes the cleft that occurs when a performer re-appraises the quotidian space that they occupy and when a spectator does the same, via their gaze, to a space they do not occupy. In other words, this cleft is either the result of either a performer creating a space out of an everyday situation or of a spectator’s gaze constituting such a space as theatrical. The conclusion is therefore that theatricality arises from this situation of objects in a “framed theatrical space” as much as it does from according the ‘signs’ of theatre to an event. It is a dynamic process of watching and being watched (2002: 98).

This goes a long way towards accounting for the apparent ‘success’ of the Goldsmiths College performance *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* in which myself and Chris Russell participated in 2003 [cf chapters 1 and 5]. Having formed our own company (“Lame Buckets”), we staged an improvised, unscripted 1-hour show in front of a paying audience, seated in rows within Goldsmith’s studio theatre.

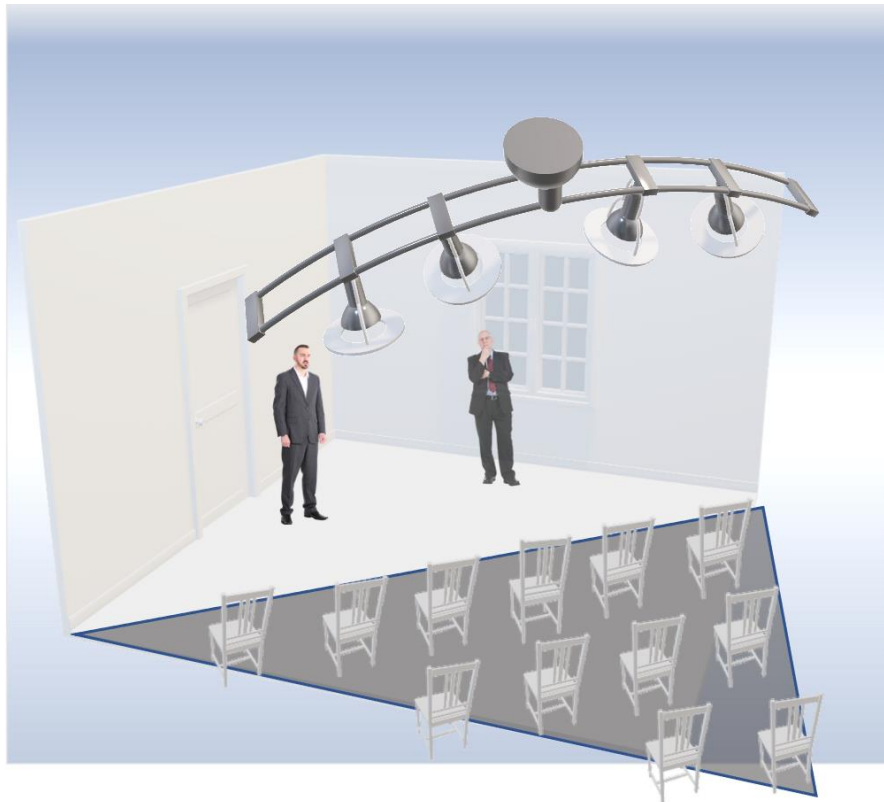


Figure 6.1 Representation of the staging of *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*. J Fitchett and C Russell, Goldsmiths Studio Theatre, University of London, June 2003.

With the audience space markedly different (dark coloured floor) from that of the performers (painted bright white) and skewed such that the spectators were looking into an angled stage (we were literally ‘cornered’), the sense of theatricality was established before the performance started (see Figure 6.1). Of course, the buying of tickets, the receipt of a programme at the door, the entering into the space and the rowed arrangement of seats further contributed to this. Crucially, the performers were already in their space when the audience entered, dressed in identical suits, but barefoot, interacting only when the lights went up and stopping only when the lights went out: a cue that the performance was over and that the audience could applaud and then leave. Such semiotic elements of theatre are clear. In addition to this ‘othering’, though, the nature of the audience-actor relationship was at once intimate (we were physically very close and there was considerable verbal and sometimes physical interaction) and yet clearly differentiated (white, lit versus black, unlit spaces). I contend, then, that the dynamic processes of both actor and spectator in creating and dealing with this ‘encounter’ is what contributed to a heightened sense of theatricality. The fact that, within such a context, there was no script and that any emerging script was spontaneous only served to raise the ‘theatrical stakes’ even

more; that is, the audience members, in their communal attempt to achieve stability from this perturbation, were effectively ‘buying in’ to the situation in which they found themselves. The emerging on-stage text, despite being relatively banal ‘chat’ and lacking in any predetermined narrative, was then afforded considerably more attention and value than if it had been overheard in a non-theatre context; to the extent that in post-performance feedback one spectator (a colleague from the MA in Playwrighting course) actually asked for a copy of the script, refusing to believe that there wasn’t one!

In summary, if Ganim’s focus is on the theatricality of a literary text and Féral’s is on that of a performance, then I hope to have combined these two perspectives in accounting for the theatricality of a text arising *from* a performance. However, I suggest further that there is more than just being in a theatrical setting that makes a spectator appreciate such an emerging text: there is still often an inherently creative quality to that text.

Taking into account Féral’s claim that theatricality is attributed as much through the spectator / onlooker’s act of ‘gazing’ then another observation can be made, again, from personal experience. In my transcribing of texts emerging from rehearsal for *The Plant* [see later in this chapter] the very fact that I eves-dropped on conversation among the actors during a coffee-break makes it a theatrical event even though the protagonists were unaware of their audience. I then cognitively engaged in their conversation, sifting, as well an auteur would, to find nuggets of ‘poetry’ – those nuggets being aspects of everyday speech that ‘you couldn’t make up’. Such words and phrases might be outlandish and bizarre but still inherently recognisable as everyday speech yet have an inherently poetic quality in their creativity: that creativity residing in imaginative lines of flight, cultural references, banter-like witticisms, impoliteness, complex ‘worlds’, a certain narrative quality or as a result of a dynamic cognitive system of text production and appreciation.

The question then arises over to what extent the resulting performance and text is capturing the authenticity of a situation by accomplishing that most Platonic ideal of breaking down the barriers of representation and avoiding the ‘inferiority’ of mimesis.

### 6.1.2. Mimesis v theatrum mundi

Theatrical mimesis inevitably draws attention to its own vacuity. Plato's assertion that it is a poor representation of an original artifact is only partially countered by Aristotelian claims to the cathartic effect of audience recognition and distance. Can the authenticity of improvised dialogue counter this since it involves real language generated spontaneously in response to given circumstances?

Sugiera (2004) claims that traditional, mimetic drama has been guilty of forcing one monolithic representation of reality on its audience. In her view, more contemporary, postdramatic theatre, in its eschewing of traditional text-forms in favour of a theatrical 'experience', has done away with such an attempt "to re-present real-life experiences on a proscenium-arch stage, while retaining unshaken confidence in the magical illusion and the reliability of the mechanisms of projection" (2004: 21). Instead, an environment is created in which the spectators are free to interpret and relate individually to a performance. In Kneehigh's *King Ubu* [see chapter 4] and Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*, this is clearly seen in the promenade staging and the delivery of text in intimate audience-actor encounters, while in *Black Watch* [chapter 5], in addition to the unconventional auditorium, the subject matter and verbatim-based dialogue has the same effect of liberating the performance from a traditional fictionality; of creating an experience rooted in the 'here and now'.

Any sense of artifice and emptiness inherent to mimesis undoubtedly accounts for a long tradition of negativity associated with 'theatre' in this sense, evident in linguistic tropes such as 'playing up'; 'putting on an act'; 'playing to the gallery'; 'making a spectacle of yourself'. In *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981), Jonas Barish accounts for the history of this belief while recognizing that this is an inevitable part of the dynamic of theatre and showing appreciation of historical literary figures such as Baudelaire, Keats and Wilde who nevertheless defended theatricality in its artistic value.

As to the poetical character itself... it is not itself – it has no self – it is everything and nothing – It has no character – it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated – It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the Camelion poet... a poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no Identity – he is

constantly in for – and filling some other Body – the Sun, the Moon, the Sea, and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse, are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none; no identity...

(John Keats, Letter to Richard Woodhouse, October 27th, 1818)

Here, Keats was clearly championing the creativity of artists (“the Chameleon poets”) in their flexibility to grasp and portray both good and evil with equal conviction. Going further, Oscar Wilde claimed that art is of itself and does not stand up to comparison with reality.

[Art] is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance... Hers are the forms more real than living man and hers the great archetypes of which things that have existence are but unfinished copies

(Oscar Wilde *Intentions*, 1888: 29)

In this view, real life can be no more than the raw material from which Art is fashioned. An idea very much at the heart of this thesis.

These thoughts do not, however, necessarily contradict famous critics of mimetic performance. Indeed, Samuel Johnson’s claim to having been scandalised at a convincingly realistic performance of Richard III in 1741 (‘If Garrick really believed himself to be that monster, he deserved to be hanged every time he performed it’<sup>10</sup>) appears to reinforce the artful nature of the actor’s creative skill in provoking a strong reaction within the spectator while at the same time allowing recognition that it is, after all, a fiction.

This dual conceptualisation of an actor on stage as both character and performer brings to mind as an antidote to the apparent emptiness of pure mimesis the concept of meta-theatricality. That is, any element of the drama that draws attention to the practices underlying and producing the fictional world of the play. As Lionel Abel further defines it,

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<sup>10</sup> Attributed to Johnson and cited by Boswell in his ‘Life of Johnson’ (1783) as republished by John Croker in 1848

theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized. By this I mean that the persons appearing on the stage in these plays are there not simply because they were caught by the playwright in dramatic postures as a camera might catch them, but because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them. What dramatized them originally? Myth, legend, past literature, they themselves. They represent to the playwright the effect of dramatic imagination before he has begun to exercise his own.

(Abel, [1963] 2003: 133)

Such an idea that the world is essentially theatrical and a source of material for the artists to hone and exploit is contiguous to the *Theatrum Mundi* metaphor, which although based in a rather deterministic theological notion that we on Earth are simply strutting a stage before a celestial audience, conversely in theatre identifies with the world as microcosm. Therefore, to bring that world into the performance space, at least in the form of quotidian speech, rather than attempting to mirror the reality of the world and require the suspension of belief among the audience, is actually, as Stuart Davis maintains, calling attention to the very “strangeness, artificiality, illusoriness, or arbitrariness – in short, the theatricality of the life we live” (Davis, 2003).

Therefore, although metatheatrical techniques may ostensibly make the audience acutely aware of the difference between life and art, in doing so, paradoxically, an uncanny likeness is revealed. Through the various mechanisms investigated in this thesis, it is hoped that some greater understanding may be reached regarding why this maybe so. The use of improvised speech, with its proximity to everyday talk is an important vehicle for revealing how the boundary between reality and artifice may not be as thick as often believed and, in some cases may be practically transparent.

What follows in this concluding chapter is a brief analysis of various scenes from *The Plant*, a still-in-progress theatre project where a script has arisen out of improvisation in rehearsal. The analyses will roughly follow the theoretical frameworks outlined in each of the previous chapters, with comparisons drawn between the improvised and final re-authored texts. In addition, insights from the producers-authors will accompany salient observations as well as relevant points raised in feedback from audience members at a public script-in-hand performance at the University of Kent in April 2019.



## 6.2. *The Plant*: case study of an improvised play from conception to performance



Figure 6.2 *The Plant*, scripted performance (April, 2019). Photo: J Fitchett

### 6.2.1. Background to the project

In late 2017 it was discussed between myself, supervisor and writer Jeremy Scott, and mutual friend and writer Greg Lawrence that a theatrical project could be developed centering on the role of actor improvisation as a writing tool. This had its roots in my research hitherto and was intended to take further forward the investigation into the practical uses of improvised dialogue and the ancillary processes involved.

The two writer-producers (Scott and Lawrence) intended to work together on the practical dramaturgy of the project, while I would be in the wings observing the process, transcribing the emerging text and analyzing the decisions made. This would therefore be an obvious extension to the earlier analyses of already developed and performed texts such as in *The Trip* and *The Trip to Spain* [see Chapters 2 and 3], and differ from the analysis of spontaneously produced dialogue as was the case with the amateur/professional scenes (chapter 1) and with *Lost Without Words* (chapter 3). Here, I was able to directly observe the development of the text arising from the improvisation as it was shaped and edited by the writer-producers, and be able to both consult them on their decisions and also gain feedback from the audience at a live performance.

Scott and Lawrence organized a series of rehearsals throughout 2018 and early 2019, having recruited a group of professional actors and a director (Robbie Humphries, replaced firstly by Amanda Croft and then Dave Turner after Robbie's untimely death in January 2019). Each rehearsal involved warm-up and improvisation activities focusing on a different theme of the play or on a way of interaction that may open up interesting exchanges between the participants – 'interesting' in a variety of ways be it in how the actors engaged with each other, with the audience, certain repeated tropes, use of a phrase in a particular way, or in reflecting real-life interaction. At one point indeed, a transcription was made of a conversation outside the rehearsal, and it was incorporated into the final text.

The initial idea was germinated in light of the Brexit debate and the on-going associated political saga in the UK. Greg particularly saw value in using this as a backdrop to a modern-day romantic drama; the idea being that two protagonists from different sides of the debate meet and fall in love despite the consequences on both their lives from the impact of Brexit. With life imitating art, it was decided that the effects of Brexit in a particular industrial context (here, a car manufacturing plant) would provide the socio-political context to the play; all this well before the announcement by Honda to curtail its activities at its Swindon factory by 2021.

Another feature of the production was decided upon after having seen a production of *Rebecca* by Kneehigh theatre. Both Greg Lawrence and myself (independently) remarked upon the use of music, which seamlessly tied in with the dialogue and onstage action to convey a narrative. From the outset, this musical element was to be an integral component of *The Plant's* performance.

The characters were set from the very beginning with the actors being assigned roles, though those roles were not fixed to any actor in particular until the final stages of rehearsal. However, the writers were open to the nature (and even names) of these characters evolving over time to match the text that was being produced through improvisation. In fact, this was an important part of the process, for if the writers had been too fixed about their own vision of what the protagonists would be like in performance, then the improvisation would necessarily have been too controlled and forced. Indeed, as an outside observer, I would say that there should have been even more openness in this respect and greater will to change direction completely given

the material created in rehearsal. However, given the time, space and personnel availability, this would probably not have been possible, so a certain amount of framing and control was required.

The story was mapped out from the beginning and certain images were also created for inclusion (or not) at an early stage; for example, the flipping of the coin as a metaphor for the referendum, and the associated recounting of a dream where Niall sees the coin rolling away from him. As an exercise in creating theatre from improvised language, the story was seen as something for the actors to hang onto, though in rehearsal the super-objectives of the overarching narrative was not often discussed. Instead, more engaging was the minutiae of individual instances, the moment-by-moment exchanges that were workshopped, with only the most shadowy of backdrops to consider. This, for me, is interesting as, in traditional theatre, an actor would generally have read and discussed the main themes of the play, have considered their super-objectives as much as their immediate aims, and have spent some time considering the impact of each utterance on the dramatic story as a whole. In this case, however, the snippets of dialogue were much more isolated and immediate, lending a certain sense of urgency to the exchanges. With these ideas in mind, then, a brief look at example exchanges from the play (in its devising) will be a suitable way to draw this overall investigation to a close.

In the following brief sections, the scenes chosen for analysis each focus on facets of a different theoretical framework investigated hitherto in this thesis. To distinguish from any final scripted dialogue, the raw, improvised speech is in red.



Figure 6.3 *The Plant*, scripted performance (April, 2019). Photo: J Fitchett

## 6.2.2. Extract #1 – a discourse analysis

Chapter one dealt with linguistic and ethnomethodological analyses of improvised dialogue and found that the exploitation of real-life idiosyncrasies in text creation rather than mirror reality actually serves to add a certain spice to the text that would perhaps be out of the easy reach of a writer working alone. In the following extract, the conversation is completely overheard in that it occurred in a coffee break between sessions while the camera was still running. As much out of curiosity, I decided to transcribe it anyway and passed it onto the ‘auteurs’ in case they saw something of value. In the end, they did and kept parts of it in the final script. The conversation is among two actors, who had both previously been playing the character of NIALL in rehearsal, and the actor playing GEOFF.

NIALL1 actor: Escher. You know... the artist.

NIALL2 actor: Yeah yeah, that is it

N1 actor: It's an Escher building

N2 actor: It is, it is. And he finds the sort of hex... garden thing. Ah, panorama

GEOFF actor: It's based on a prison, this....

N2 actor: Is it really?

G actor: Yeah yeah

N2 actor: Wow

G actor: Nice to know, isn't it?

N2 actor: Yeah, there are some parts of it that do have that prison feel. I just get lost. I was here for a week and I was still getting lost

G actor: Yeah

Figure 6.4 Extract #1 from *The Plant*

As this was a genuine, off-the cuff conversation, wholly unrelated to the play, a discourse analysis, as outlined by Mick Short (1996: 169) and remarks relating to conversation analysis, as well as the observations of R. Keith Sawyer (2003), may be relevant here. Sawyer's findings in the work of improv troupes were predominantly that they tended to create a frame or context within which to create a dialogue. This is not the case here, however, where (phatic) communication rather than entertainment

is presumably the main purpose of the conversation. This is evident in the naturally occurring phenomena inherent in this exchange.

NIAL1 actor: Escher. hhh You know (0.1) the artist.  
NIAL2 actor: Yeah yeah, <sup>0</sup>that is it<sup>0</sup>  
(.)  
N1 actor: It's an Escher building  
N2 actor: It IS, it i:s. And he finds the sort of hex (0.1) ga:rden thing  
(0.1) Ah, panorama  
(0.3)  
GEOFF actor: It's based on a prison, this=  
N2 actor: =Is it really?  
G actor: Yeah yeah::  
N2 actor: WOW=  
G actor: =Nice to know, isn't it?  
(0.3)  
N2 actor: Yeah, there are some parts of it that do have that prison feel  
(0.1) I just get lost. (0.1) I was here for a week and I was still  
getting lost  
(.)  
G actor: YEAH (0.4)

Figure 6.5 Extract #1 Conversation Analysis transcript

Both turn constructional and turn allocational elements are visible here with linguistic cues indicating closure (“yeah yeah, that’s it”; it’s an Escher building”) and turn-taking strategies (“You know, the artist”; “is it really?”; Nice to know isn’t it” – although these somewhat rhetorical questions could equally be regarded as politeness markers or throw-away comments rather than any real encouragement for the interlocutor to respond). In terms of rule-breaking, only two minor interruptions occur (“this/is it really?” and “WOW/Nice to know, isn’t it?”) and these are more indications of enthusiasm and engagement in the topic than any attempt to steal the floor. The repetition of “yeah” throughout is significant in contributing to the flow of

the exchange, though the initiator of the topic, NIALL1, chooses not to use this word and has effectively removed himself from the conversation after two interactions. Perhaps there is some status game here, where having introduced a (somewhat rarified) topic – the art of MC Escher – he leaves his two interlocutors to make of it what they will. What is immediately apparent is that they may not be 100% clear about what an “Escher building” is and despite the affirmations of lines 2 and 5, there is apparent confusion (the “hex(agon?)” and “panorama” are incongruous here and make no obvious sense). Indeed, GEOFF comes in after a significant pause with a repair strategy and picks up on the idea of the building design being like a prison. Escher is now dropped.

R. Keith Sawyer (1995) states that creativity in theatre improvisation is analogous to the processes in everyday speech, where the ‘emergent’ (text) is very much akin to that produced on stage but, due to its much freer liability to shift topic, subtopic, focus, is far more ephemeral (1995: 177). As a socially constructed fact, such a text is unconstrained by the determinations of any single individual. And although the result can be awkward, raw and often incoherent, there is a process of human creativity at its core.

It is when this dynamic, synchronic, in-the-moment improvisational process throws up an element that at once is interesting, odd or amusing but also practical to the machinations of a plot or character development, that an auteur may seek to take it, hone it and include it in a final (static) script.

Indeed, the two auteurs in this case did just this in this case. The ‘Escher scene’ was destined not to be included but on reflection, even though this little exchange has nothing to do with the plot, the image of the play’s factory setting to an Escher picture (never-ending staircases; impossibly infinite water courses) and the image of a ‘prison’ played well into the Maddie character’s psyche.

Greg: No, we added that but she’d been talking about the place being like a prison. And that was the whole point of it. The whole point of it is that they’re both looking at the Nissan plant completely differently.

Jeremy: Exactly, and that came out really well

Figure 6.6 Greg Lawrence/Jeremy Scott, *The Plant* writers, in interview 2019; see appendix

As can be seen from the authored text below, much of the overheard, real dialogue has been included, with only minor tweaking to make the exchange more eloquent and ‘tidy’, especially with the removal of the ‘yeah’s and ‘wow’. Note, however, the inclusion of the nonsensical ‘hex’ and ‘panorama’ here.

MADDIE: No. No, listen. The Plant is designed like a prison is designed. It’s meant to look like a prison. Which is what it is. So that everyone can be watched.

NIALL: [Laughing] What?

MADDIE: Listen. No. Not a prison. It’s like...that artist.

NIALL: What artist?

MADDIE: Escher. You know. The artist.

NIALL: Love Escher.

MADDIE: It’s an Escher building. It is. It’s meant to... encourage collegiality or something. And you’re supposed to find the garden. A sort of hex. Or a panorama.

NIALL: Panorama? What, the programme?

Figure 6.7 *The Plant* - Final script. Full side-by-side comparison with original in appendix.

This resulting script, to my mind, reveals that the auteurs were as much influenced by the incongruities and incoherence inherent to the dynamic conversational process as they were to any salient nuggets that overtly drove forward elements of the play. Indeed, in audience feedback<sup>11</sup> at the end of a script-in-hand performance in April 2019, no mention was made of any non-standard theatre dialogue or lack of coherence. Quite the contrary. Elements that were cited as being most ‘entertaining’ were invariably “the dialogue and the humour” alongside features described as “life-like” and “real”, with 15 out of the 21 responses indicating “enjoyment of how the characters spoke and what they were saying.” Interesting also was that one of the narrative threads that most appealed was the relationship between Maddie and Niall which this scene, with its ‘everyday’ properties, arguably helps to establish.

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<sup>11</sup> Note on ethics: feedback sheets were included in the programme. All feedback was anonymous and voluntary. See appendix for actual questionnaire responses

### 6.2.3. Extract #2 – a cognitive poetic analysis

GEOFF: This project is... this is the future. This is brilliant. I mean... that... that... whole concept of it and that... electric/

Maddie: /Yeah

G: It's electric. I mean it's like... this has come out of US. OUR electricity. I find that... this gives me passion! THAT gives me passion. And it just makes me want to, you know, devote my whole life to THIS! Do you know?

M: Yes... Geoff.../

G: /It... it... it's made something. It's so important that... now I can see why... what EXACTLY it is that I should have been doing a long time ago.

M: This is the future, Geoff.

G: Exactly. The future Geoff.

Figure 6.8 Extract #2 from *The Plant* / denotes interruption

The scene from which this extract comes was improvised around the aftermath of a presentation given by 'Maddie' to 'Geoff' and his management team over possible future developments for the car factory. The idea is that (as in the case of the real-life Nissan car manufacturer) investment will be made in the development of electric vehicles. Here, the positive reaction by Geoff to this idea may be as much genuine enthusiasm for the project as it is his desire for Maddie with whom he has been having an affair. Hence the references to 'our electricity'. Maddie, however, is trying to tell Geoff that it's not working out between them ("Yes... Geoff...").

This is the backstory. However, in taking a cognitive poetic perspective, a brief Text World analysis may help to account for what elements of the improvisation were included in the final script. Chapter 2 detailed how applying a TextWorld analysis to drama and improvisation in particular is not without its challenges due to the lack of deictic shift between the world of a narrator and the world of the characters as there is in literary fiction. This is especially the case in improvised theatre where the characters/actors/'writers' are one and the same. Additionally, the world we see is a conflation of the discourse, staged and fictional text-worlds.



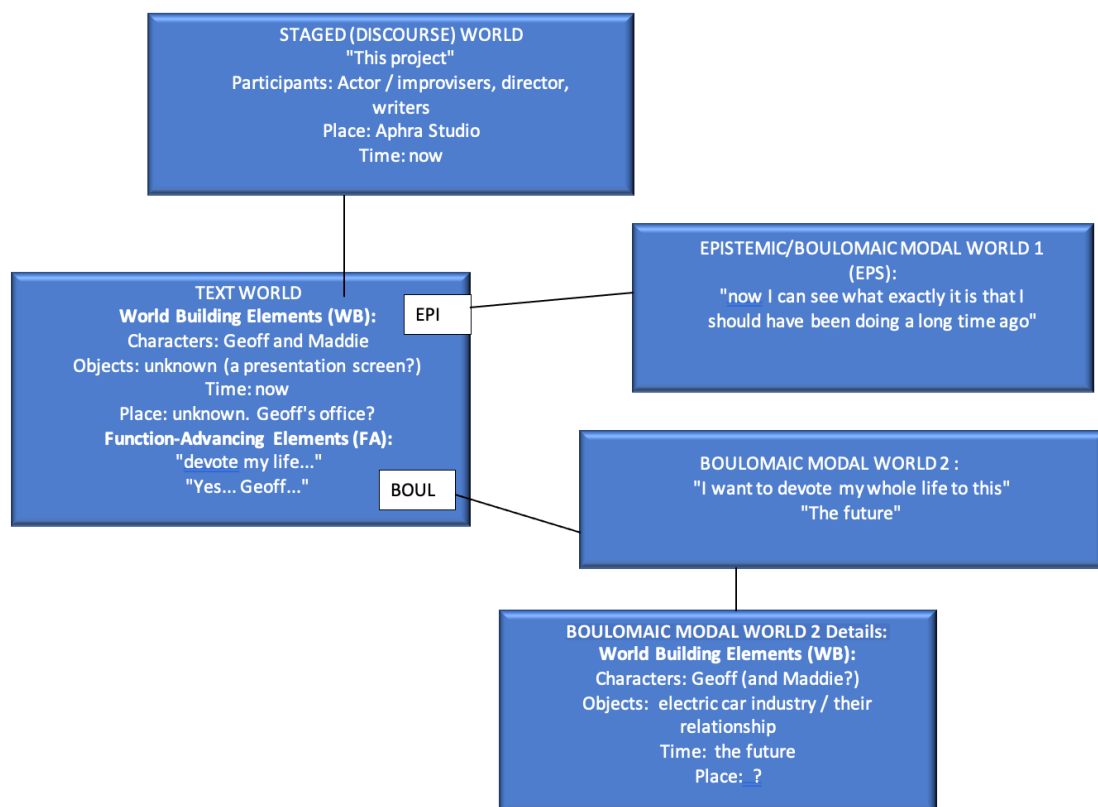


Figure 6.9 Text-world diagrammatic representation of extract #3 from *The Plant*

What is of interest here is that this conversation in itself does not on the surface seem to be moving the story forward in any particular way. It is based mostly on Geoff's enthusing over the project; his one function advancing move being to talk about his intentions for the future ("I want to devote my entire life to this"), which at the same time draws us into Geoff's future, 'desired' world (or, in strict TWT terms, a boulomaic modal-world) – a desire that may or may not be fulfilled, of course. Juxtaposed to this is Maddie, whose brief interjections are to give a phatic "yeah" which is then interrupted before she can say any more, and another failed attempt to turn Geoff's attention to more pressing matters. His failure to respond to Maddie's "Yes... Geoff..." and her attempt to drive the scene forward is what creates tension here. In the end she concedes defeat with "This is the future Geoff". In the final script, however, she stays her ground and eventually says the inevitable: "I've got something I need to tell you". A common motif perhaps in men/women relationship drama where the irony of the audience knowing or anticipating the woman's next line (eg "I'm leaving you" or "I'm pregnant") arises from the unsuspecting man's obsessing with something that is of far lesser import.

GEOFF:                   We're building the future, Maddie....  
  
                              .... It's going to be big for this company and it's going to be  
                              big for us.

MADDIE:                 Geoff...

GEOFF:                   I know, Maddie. I know.

MADDIE:                 I've got something I need to tell you.

The effect of selecting this scene has not so much to do with narrative or plot as it has with character development. Geoff was always intended to be an unlikeable character, but this scene, thanks to the improvisational skills of the actor and the creation of two world-shifts (one of regret ("now I can see what exactly it is that I should have been doing a long time ago") and one of an imagined, desired future) helps create a 'human' character with hopes and dreams; someone with whom the audience can feel empathy, as the two writers concur:

Jeremy:                 Well, that's a brilliant example of what improvisation brings to the process because in a narrative you have your stock characters, your archetypes, but we didn't think... but we had, this 'baddie'... 'look there's the baddie, boo hiss'. And the improvisation lent him 2 or 3 extra dimensions. And suddenly he wasn't a baddie any more, he was just... there are no baddies, they're just guys, people... And we wouldn't have been able to write that... well, we could have but I doubt we would have written it like that. We would have gone down the wrong road.

(Jeremy Scott, *The Plant* writer, in interview 2019; see appendix)

#### 6.2.4. Extract #3 – a narratological analysis

Chapter 4's focus was on a narratological perspective. The finding there was that when the on-stage character's dialogue reveals that their experience is at one with that of the performer, then there is increased selection or restriction of narrative information to the immediate experience and knowledge of the characters on stage. Such a heightened sense of experientiality on the part of the audience results in an increased level of empathy for the character-performers. This is further fuelled by the realisation of the proximity of the world of the play and the discourse-world of the improvisation as well as the greater faith in the reliability of the actors as narrators, given the lack of any authorial intervention.

- GEOFF: Maddie has... Maddie. Maddie is... maybe... saved... it's saved. It's saved the company
- GARY: Maddie? Maddie has saved the company? That's very nice and tell me: what are the promises you can give me to say that these guys are gonna have a job a year from now?
- GEOFF: Well, when... when everybody... is on board and... and...
- GARY: I'm not getting in your way, Jeff. We're all on board. It's just that we need some assurances that we can pay for our families' well-being
- GEOFF: We'd like that exactly, you know. B..but some people, you know, might not want to come on board with this, but this is the future. This IS the future. This is our... all our futures. And we just have to... push on through and really just get rid of all that stuff from behind. You know, the diesel. The diesel. It's bad for us. It gets into our...
- GARY: Are you saying that we're like diesel?
- GEOFF: No!
- GARY: We're that old, smoky stock that you just want to streamline out of your factory?
- GEOFF: I want... I want us ALL... us... all... to be with... THAT.
- GARY: (to audience) There's something I'm not buying here. There's something going on which I don't think is all he's saying. I'm worried.
- GEOFF: Thanks for coming Gary and...

GARY: What? Is that it?

GEOFF: No... no but I think I understand it now. And me and Maddie have got much more... future plans...

GARY: Yeah but.../

GEOFF: ...we need to work out/

GARY: /but Geoff, we need to talk more. We need consultation. We need to talk and represent these guys. I mean, I'm here.../

GEOFF: /you go and sort that out. Write it down. Send me an email. Ping it to me. And we'll talk about it. I know your feelings. Thanks Gary.

(Gary leaves)

GEOFF: This. Is where it's at.

MADDIE: Can you sit down for a moment Geoff and let me get a word in?

GEOFF: No, no, no... this is... this is... I'm going for this now (leaves)

Figure 6.10 Extract #3 from *The Plant*

In terms of a narratological framework for this extract, taking chapter 4's hybrid model, we see that the characters of Geoff (Plant manager) and Gary (foreman) co-exist in an established text world. This is itself sitting within an improvised performance that operates with and because of the spontaneous dialogue that is created by the actors. These actors are essentially filters through which this complex nest of worlds reaches both the audience and, in the case of *The Plant*, the subsequent authors. The relationship is two way, with the actors essentially spontaneously facilitating the coherence of the narrative for satisfactory consumption by the audience.

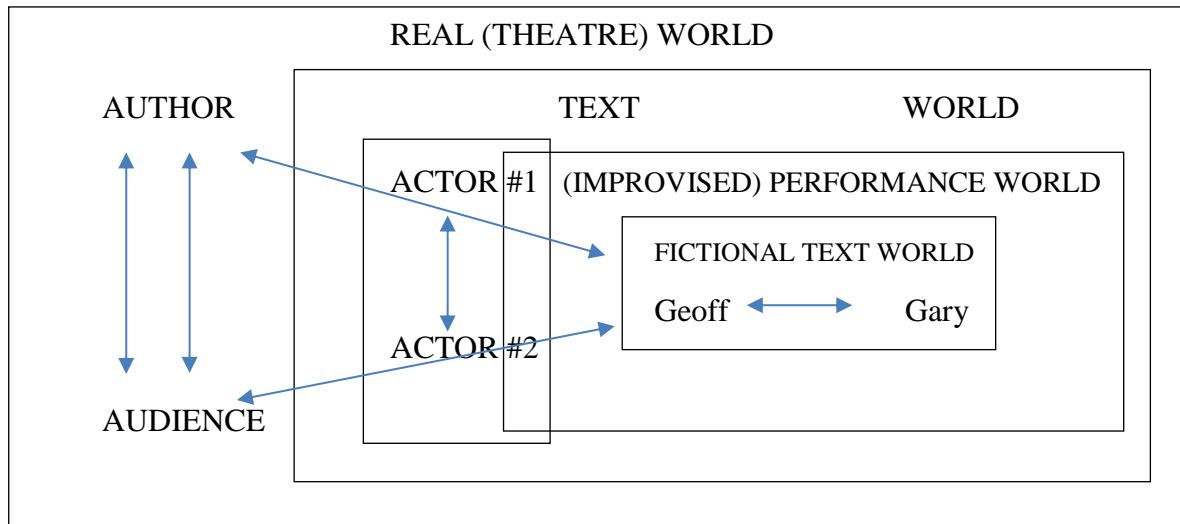


Figure 6.11 Narratological model for an improvised performance

In the extract, certain repeated narrative threads are revealed, threads that are spontaneously woven into the exchange in order to give it a structure. These are the notion of ‘people being on board’, ‘the future, and the future of the employees’ as well as the ‘distrust’ between the manager and the foreman. All these arose spontaneously in this particular exchange (another improvisation on the same meeting did not have such clear themes nor underlying tension between the two characters). In addition, there is one line which (evoking the asides of *Commedia dell’Arte* etc as seen in chapter 4) is delivered to the audience: “There’s something I’m not buying here. There’s something going on which I don’t think is all he’s saying. I’m worried.” Unlike in comedy and pantomime, however, this breaking of the fourth wall is not done for comic effect and is akin to the soliloquies in traditional drama. It does, however, serve to highlight the way the character-performer is straddling the worlds in the narrative model, effectively becoming an overt narrator for a brief interlude.

In the final script the ‘being on board’ motif is dropped but the ‘diesel’ metaphor is picked up and taken further than in the original improvisation:

GEOFF: We’ve got to get rid of all the old baggage. Move on. Move with the times. Live in the real world. We used to be all about diesel. But now we know better. Diesel is old. Obsolete. Past it.

GARY: Are you saying that I’m diesel? Are you saying our workers are diesel?

In addition, the final part of the exchange where Geoff pulls rank on Gary and effectively dismisses him from the office is retained. Indeed, the tension is ramped so that Gary gets the last word in: “You’re bloody well right it’s over. For now. I will get the truth out of you somehow”, though Geoff’s own abrupt departure in the improvisation arguably has an equally dramatic effect in leaving Gary and Maddie high and dry on stage.

The authors themselves focus on the story of Gary. This scene seems to not only set his character against that of Geoff but also serves to indicate his struggles within the play. This backdrop was already partly in the minds of the writers at the time, but elements in the improvisation seemed to add to it, particularly his concerns over the workers’ future.

Greg:                         It’s his role as Union Man. He’s the guy who sits in the middle because he’s got this lot on one side and that lot on the other, his son on one side and the people he has to work with on the other side. He’s kind of balancing all these things.

Another key phrase that came out of an earlier improvisation (unrecorded, unfortunately) was also from the Gary character. This was the idea of ‘the bigger picture’; a phrase that struck a distinct chord with the writers:

Greg:                         [Gary’s] the only person who can see the ‘bigger picture’. Because Geoff can only see his own picture, Niall can only see his picture. So Gary is the one who has to incorporate all of them. And also it works so beautifully when they were looking through the window and seeing these people working on a production line, which, again, is symbolic of industry and all the things that the play is about.

Jeremy:                     Because the whole play is about the relationship between individuals and the society in which they operate and grasping that is absolutely fundamental to many of the dilemmas these characters have. So seeing the ‘bigger picture’ was applicable to almost all of the dilemmas and conflicts that are in the play. So whether it’s the individual workers against the company, the individuals against society, the individuals against the community... it’s all about ‘who come first’. And you can use that phrase ‘the bigger picture’ to argue for either.

If not actually contributing to the narrative of the play, this one spontaneous utterance certainly manages to carry it and its various strands through to the audience, notwithstanding the paucity of feedback from the spectators regarding the story.



Figure 6.12 ‘Geoff’ and ‘Gary’ in *The Plant*, scripted performance (April, 2019). Photo: J Fitchett

### 6.3. Final thoughts



Figure 6.13 *The Plant*, scripted performance (April, 2019). Photo: J Fitchett

*The Plant* is an ongoing project destined for professional performance in the near future. Its script has gone through various drafts and the current one is a substantial extension of that which was performed in April 2019 before an invited audience of around 50 people. The feedback (see appendix) was universally positive with most comments being on the characters’ relationships and the language. As a play about Britain’s departure from the EU (Brexit) and its political and social ramifications its interpretation by many audience members will be dependent on an individual’s

knowledge, political stance and opinion. The fact that the text has emerged from the mouths of several improvisers, both in and out of character, both directed and left to their own devices, means that the play ideally escapes the potential tyranny of one polemical author. Indeed, in feedback one interesting comment was “*I thought it was written by remainers (I am one!), my wife thought: pro-leave!*”

In terms closer to the theme of this thesis, a play created partially out of the spontaneous language of the actors, scripted and then rehearsed is very much the epitome of what this work has aimed to investigate: the mechanisms that are at play when a director/author/spectator chooses to invest cognitively and emotionally in those utterances such that they may be written down and re-performed.

In this endeavour I have been influenced and persuaded by Paul Castagno’s work on New Language Playwriting; a movement that espouses Bakhtinian dialogism in its rejection of monolithic convention and Aristotelian doctrine of what a play should ‘look like’. This has echoes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century absurdist tradition as well as Postdramatic theatre trends, with its focus on the use of language as a poetic part of the *mise-en-scene*. The works of Beckett and Pinter have also played a major role in this research given that both these writers make, in different ways, poetic use of ostensibly (quasi) authentic speech for theatrical effect.

To account for this effect I have employed various theoretical frameworks. The conversation and discourse analytical discussions of chapter one highlight how the impact of elements of authentic discourse can be seen when viewed from a blend of ethnomethodological, linguistic and actor-training perspectives. Chapter 2 built on this by applying a cognitive poetic model to improvised text. The application of text-world theory, for example, revealed levels of rich complexity in even the most seemingly banal of exchanges. The further use of this theory in chapter 3 served to clarify how and why directorial interventions work to ‘improve’ a text, while chapter 4 moved on to a narratological examination of current and historical improvised theatre. Finally, chapter 5’s treatment of the mind’s operational processes when watching and creating drama gave a deeper insight into how the successful production and reception of authentically produced speech may be the result of a dynamic, extended cognitive system. Together, I have dubbed these mechanisms a ‘toolkit’ in



that through the examples and explanations given for each, there is a hint at possible practical application.

As a final note, this has been a thesis about language and performance. Indeed, one might say language in and from performance. It may have been oblique in its championing of the spoken word above other traditional elements such as character and plot, but I hope to have justified a claim that more value should be accorded the innate poetry of everyday speech in its application to drama.

Back in 1972, John Russell Brown in *Theatre Language* predicted the mounting pressure on theatre as other media ('cassette television') came into being. He also asserted that theatre, being a complex organisation, is resistant to change, inheriting as it does old buildings, old work habits and old texts. To that end, he observed the practices of Arden, Osborne, Pinter and Wesker who he saw as experimenters who simultaneously had enjoyed commercial West End success, and endeavoured to examine this success from the perspective of language:

I have asked: 'How does the theatre work for them, how have they controlled theatrical reality in words actions and time, so that the plays say what the authors want to say now, to present audiences and in present theatrical conditions?'

(1972: 12).

The answers to these questions are eternally relevant as audience expectations, cultures and schema evolve. Also, the detail and depth to which his enquiry can probe may seem endless.

With this in mind, I will leave the last comment to the writer whose 'difficult music' influenced that unscripted Goldsmiths College performance in the summer of 2003 and, which, in turn ignited this thesis research.

She felt... spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. It was like difficult music heard for the first time.

(Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*)

**J Fitchett**  
**Florence, December 2020**

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## 6.5. Appendices

### 6.5.1. Appendix: Transcript of interview with Jeremy Scott and Greg Lawrence (July 2019)

Jonathan: So you said that you knew what you wanted, the treatment and the story, characterisations, but there were occasions where...

Greg: There were occasions where what they fitted and there were occasions when it didn't. There were many occasions when it was clear they hadn't any idea what the character was... because we had people coming in and out. We didn't have... it wasn't like Mike Leigh where we give people a character now and in 2 years time we make a movie. We had to work with an ensemble where we had some people at the beginning and then we had some people coming in and playing different characters and we always struggled with Niall because we never really had a Niall. Which is why it was only when we really started rehearsing with an actual script that we started realising that the chap we had got was bringing something to the role

Jonathan: So it didn't actually matter who the character was at times, because it was what they came out with on the day that you saw...

Greg: Yeah

Jonathan: So you had a preconceived idea. It didn't matter who the actor was.

Greg: The most obvious one I can remember is that we had a chap come along, a black guy, can't remember his name but he was really good.

Jeremy: Oh yeah I remember

Greg: And he played the Gary character. And Robbie gave him some ideas of what he wanted to play with, and he came out with the phrase 'the bigger picture.' And it stuck. Throughout the play. Coz it's such a great pick

Jonathan: So that's... let's talk about that. 'The bigger picture' wasn't something you'd conceived before. That was something he'd come up with on the spot. How did that fit in with the treatment, the story, the characterisation? Why did that go 'ding' in your head? Why did you think that was relevant? Or did you think it was just something that you thought you *could* fit in?

Jeremy: Because the whole play is about the relationship between individuals and the society in which they operate and grasping that is absolutely fundamental to many of the dilemmas these characters have. So seeing the 'bigger picture' was applicable to almost all of the dilemmas and conflicts that are in the play. So whether it's the individual workers against the company, the individuals against society, the individuals against the community... it's all about 'who come first'. And you can use that phrase 'the bigger picture' to argue for either.

Greg: And equally, Gary is that pivotal character who has to see the ‘bigger picture’. Because it’s his role as Union Man. He’s the guy who sits in the middle because he’s got this lot on one side and that lot on the other, his son on one side and the people he has to work with on the other side. He’s kind of balancing all these things so he’s the only person who can see the ‘bigger picture’. Because Geoff can only see his own picture, Niall can only see his picture. So Gary is the one who has to incorporate all of them. And also it works so beautifully when they were looking through the window and seeing these people working on a production line, which, again, is symbolic of industry and all the things that the play is about.

Jonathan: When he came up with the phrase ‘bigger picture’, you used that phrase and you ran with it, incorporated it and I remember seeing rehearsals where that word was used again and again and it looked like you’d got this...

Greg: Nugget

Jonathan: Nugget. And you were testing it out in lots of different ways to see what they. Came up with; to apply that ‘nugget’ to see if something else came out of it. Did that whole idea of the window come out later or was it already there?

Greg: No, he did it. He got hold of the guy who was playing Geoff (I think it was Dave, at the time) and did ‘here look at this, look at this window; this is a picture. This is the bigger picture’.

Didn’t Geoff use the ‘bigger picture’ in a kind of patronising way? Like I’ll tell you what the bigger picture is’... ‘Come here and look at the bigger picture’. So actually it was David who said ‘the bigger picture’. It was David, in a patronising manager way: ‘you don’t understand Gary. You gotta see the bigger picture, because from behind this desk I have to control all this stuff.’ But it was that actor [playing Gary] who took that and ran with it... and said ‘no, YOU have got to look at the ‘bigger picture.’

Jonathan: Did you instruct him to run with it?

Greg: No, he just went for it.

Jonathan: So that’s interesting as it was the actor, then, who perceived that it was a good phrase to use. So you, obviously both perceived that it was good to use, either thematically or topically or whatever and obviously so had the actor. And it is, you know, a trope.

Jeremy: There are a few of those

Jonathan: There are a few. So there are others. I’d like to talk about Grant [actor] a bit because Grant has a very comical, almost clown-like element to his performance. And there are bits that you kept in the script which I don’t think lend anything particular to the story or the ‘formed’ part of his character. But they, I reckon, and I’m asking you this question, were funny or entertaining in some way. For example, when I was in a rehearsal and I enter and he says ‘I’ve been expecting this, and I have been expecting that, but I haven’t been expecting *this* [turns to me]’. A great Morecombe and Wise sort of moment...

Greg: Beautiful. But that's rhythm isn't it?

Jonathan: So that's more linguistic and rhythm isn't it? That's dialogue.

Greg: I mean I couldn't have written that... we might have been able to write something similar

Jeremy: No we wouldn't have written that.

Jonathan: Were there any other snippets like that? Any other little motifs, where you thought 'we couldn't have made that up'?

Jeremy: There's the interview with the narrator, who's playing a journalist at that point, and when Geoff is asked 'why were none of you invited, why was the Labour MP not invited to the meeting with Nissan (not Nissan, but the 'company') and he says 'I can't explain that' and the other character says 'I can't explain that either'.

Greg: Yeah 'I didn't know that and I can't explain it either'

Jeremy: Yes, something like that. It was just very funny.

Jonathan: Yes, automatically, I chuckle. Does it remind you of a sort of slapstick comedy thing or...?

Greg: Yeah, they got so into character doing that that they were just bouncing off each other. It was amazing. And that went in. Verbatim, basically.

Jonathan: Because of the rhythm and the bounce...

Jeremy: Because it captures the idiocy of the whole situation: 'I can't explain it' 'Nor can I' basically.

Jonathan: So there is a kind of 'Yes Minister' satire of people in power (and journalists) getting away with it.

Greg: Yes

Jonathan: And that's interesting for me as well because you are drawing on your experience of comedy, of satirical theatre, of TV.

Greg: Yeah.

Jonathan: To what extent do you think, then, that those nuggets that you found were reminiscent of the kind of thing that you experienced. If you were more steeped in another kind of drama, would you be more impressed by that?

Greg: Well, I think it's more that my ear is alerted to those kinds of bits of dialogue and because we didn't want it to become this sort of soap opera... kitchen sink drama.

Jonathan: Which it could easily have become.

Greg: And so we were looking for lighter moments. Light and shade is so much more effective than if it's shade all the way through. So, my default system is comedy. I'm always looking to make the audience laugh.

Jonathan: Because, objectively, when I saw the piece, it does have comic elements in it. It isn't kitchen sinky. It is a very stylised, almost Armando Iannucci, *In the Loop*-y, kind of affair. Some bits are serious, some bits are funny - more serious than funny but the funny bits are significantly lighter. So that's your background in comedy. Were there any nuggets that you latched onto that weren't entertaining in that way? That you thought were purely, viscerally, gut-wrenchingly right for this play? Apart from the 'bigger picture' thing. And not necessarily because it just 'fitted' but because there was something intrinsically about it which was good.

Greg: Interesting. Because there was definitely a scene we didn't put in, which was a monologue scene about an award that the company had got...

Jonathan: Is that the one with Grant and the spider's web?

Jeremy: Yes

Jonathan: I've got that

Greg: And I've thought about putting it back in.

Jonathan: And I remember as soon as he [Grant] said it, everybody including Robbie just went 'woooah'

Jeremy: 'Woooh' yes you can hear it on the tape

Jonathan: And it's that 'woah' reaction that I'm interested in because it's like everyone knew that it was good but it's very difficult to vocalise why.

Jeremy: The only reason it's not in the extracts script is because we took all the monologues out. So they're still there. But whether they'll make the final cut or not is another question. But they are 'in the air'.

Jonathan: But you've toyed with it and the fact that everyone reacted in the same way means that they all knew it was quality dialogue, but why it was quality is the question...

Greg: I'll tell you the most emotional moment that I felt was when we got them [actors] to talk about how they felt the next morning after the [Brexit] referendum result. First of all they did it from their own, biographical point of view and there were a couple of things that got said, and we were all getting quite emotional. Everybody in that room was getting quite upset, and I could feel the emotion. It was really strong. And then we had to get one or two of them to say how they'd feel if they were Brexiteers and then it became less emotional...

Jonathan: because they were 'playing'?

Greg: ...because it involved a bit of research, and their brains going on, and trying to imagine what it was like. But the other stuff just came from the heart. And I think it was Grant who said something about trying to explain to his son that we weren't in Europe any more, and his son said something like 'but it's only over there Dad'. That was fucking brilliant! Absolutely stunning. I would love to have that in there [the play]. And at one moment I was trying to contrive a way to actually get it in! But it just didn't fit anywhere.

Jonathan: So those moments you think are amazing. Is it because it's innocent? Is it because it's pure? Is it because it hasn't been thought about? Is it because it comes from a child's mouth? Is it because it's come from a child's mouth via Grant in a position where he is speaking improvised without any kind of script and speaking from the heart? And I guess that has an impact on *you* because you've had similar conversations with your daughters? Or because you are very much a remainder?

Greg: I think it's just empathising with situation and dealing with a situation where you are explaining to your child this huge earthquake that had happened overnight. So I think for all of us that have got children... that resonated. But equally it resonated because we all felt like that the next morning and you have to get on with your life. So you're standing in front of the television, watching this news, but then you have to go to work. You have to get on a bus, sit on a bus with loads of people who may or may not have voted for Brexit and you start looking around you. And so everything about that one sentence, it was all resonating, it was all summed up in that one moment – how we felt, because we'd felt that this would never happen.

Jeremy: And there's also, from the point of technique itself, where you're looking at a real event, a real historical (if that's not a contradiction) thing that's happening and we are recording and gauging people's genuine reactions. They weren't even in character at that point. They're being themselves, right? So what you've got here is 'real people' rather than theatrical characters...

Greg: Which is what the play's about as well.

Jeremy: ... discussing, reacting to those events and coming out with authentic responses to them. And that creates authentic dialogue because you just transcribe.

Greg: But that is the ethos of the entire play though.

Jeremy: Exactly.

Greg: That's why we want to take it into communities and say 'right, you're real people. How did you feel?'

Jonathan: Right. And it's the transference of that. You are seeing real people saying what they really said with their real emotions at the time and...

Greg: And there were emotions as Greg said. They were getting quite wound up. And it's not just some dick in a garret, you know, writing it.

Jonathan: No, and this is it. Getting back to this gut-instinct thing, people were speaking, as you say, from the heart, and there's a gut-reaction, on the spur of the moment. They weren't actors thinking about how best to say their words. Because that's where actors can kind of fail, and sound stilted because they have learned the script and they have consciously wrought it in order to produce in a way that the audience buy in, invest in it the best. These guys are cutting out all the middle stuff; they are actually saying it for real.

Jeremy: It's not even improvisation

Jonathan: It's not even improvisation. It's like us now.

Greg: I'm trying to think of an instance where we've got them in *character* and we've had them say things which we thought 'oh, I hadn't thought that that character might say that kind of stuff. Because one of the biggest issues that obviously we had is that we lost Becks [actress] and it wasn't what she said it was how she said it that made that character for us. Because when we wrote that character study, we had an idea. Let's say we had 65% of an idea of what she was like and who she was but actually having watched her play that character, she brought a feistiness a rawness to that character – almost a naivety. And she said something that is definitely in the play.. where she said 'the overriding feeling is the hatred... and the division'. She said that.

Jonathan: In character?

Greg: Yeah, yeah. She was in character. Because she was really worried about it because she's not political. As far as she's concerned. I mean she is, but she obviously didn't understand what we meant by 'being political'. No. She was in character and we got them to talk about... I think it was the reactions, I think it was that same thing. And actually that wasn't Robbie [original director], that was me. That was me asking them, well, asking Robbie to ask them.

Jonathan: Do you think it matters if she was in character or not? She was still coming out with that stuff.

Greg: Well, I think at that point she suddenly became Maddie and Maddie became her. And that's when we suddenly went 'ooh, hello!'.

Jeremy: I think also when you're in character there's a filter.

Jonathan: Of course there is, because you're not being yourself

Jeremy: You're crafting a language

Jonathan: But you're asking someone to improvise by being themselves but not being themselves and I'm just wondering whether Becks was actually in character or not.

Greg: The interesting thing about Becks is that she's not, I'm not sure she's trained like the others. You know, you've got Grant and Adam and I think Jane. They're all trained. Whereas Becks, I think she's done a little bit of training but most of her learning was through Robbie.



Jonathan: This is something I've touched on before: to what extent actor training actually beats the improv out of you because you end up devising a 'method' of improvisation which is stylised...

Greg: Well Adam said something interesting, he said 'I've learned more from Robbie in the last 6 months than I did in the 3 or 4 years at drama school'

Jeremy: Did he say that?

Jonathan: Because when I look at the video of when Grant improvises or when Adam improvises, they have very very specific ways of... improvising. Very specific ways of approaching a role and coming up with stuff. Adam repeats... repeats a lot and hesitates and.. and... and does this. Grant is a totally different thing and is more comical. Becks, if what you're saying is true, is just a girl sitting on a chair saying stuff.

Greg: Well we wanted that

Jonathan: It is more raw.

Greg: There's a scene that I've just rewritten, and we kept rewriting it because one of the things he did with them was this improvisation where they weren't allowed to say anything, and then they were allowed to say one word, then two, and then they could bring dialogue again. And we really loved the scene without the dialogue, didn't we?

Jeremy: Yeah

Greg: And we played around with the idea of just having those scenes and we played around with a structure...

Jeremy: But in the end they were shit

Jonathan: What made them shit?

Jeremy: Because they weren't interesting scenes to watch. The scenes were brilliant but the ones we wrote...

Jonathan: Oh so you wrote...

Jeremy: We wrote them like that. So we were going to have this concept where some bits were going to be extremely stylised and the dialogue wouldn't be naturalistic and had the idea that maybe they'd be memories or flashbacks or something like that so those bits would be delivered in maybe an almost monosyllabic way. Which the improvisations sort of came up with and we really liked the way they worked but, of course, when we saw them, they just sort of became wank.

Jonathan: Is it because you saw something really good but when you tried to sort of insert it into a bigger play, it looked strange?

Greg: They just never played the scene the same; no matter what we did or how we rehearsed it, because obviously we'd lost Robbie by then; it was a massive disadvantage and Amanda [second director] did a wonderful job, and obviously I stepped in as well - every time they did it... cause there was this awkwardness that Adam brought to the scene: it was all physical, everything was physical, he just kept moving the seat and then kind of 'do you wanna sit?... do you want...?... shall we go?...' You know, 'what are we doing here?'

Jeremy: And once you put that on the page, it doesn't work any more

Greg: Yeah

Jeremy: because it's very interesting your idea of moving something out of performance into text. Because *that* was just shit.

Jonathan: Yes, because I'm only looking at the language and if what most of what Adam does is theatrical in the sense of visual spectacle, of course it's not going to translate unless you have very specific stage directions. And that seems to be his schtick actually: he's a very physical, visual actor.

Greg: I'll tell you another really lovely moment. There was a moment where Dave was playing Gary and Adam was playing Geoff and it was post Brexit and negotiations were going on behind closed doors. And they'd gone away to come up with ideas about what they'd say to each other in that situation and basically came up with the idea that they'd basically just look at each other and neither of them would.... They'd be both speechless. Do you remember that?

Jeremy: Yeah

Greg: And they didn't even know what to say. And again, we haven't got that in there. But I loved that. I loved the fact that they'd just completely stripped it down to body language. It didn't have anything to do with words at all. It was all body language and oh my God, it was really fucking ahh... it really absolutely nailed it.

Jonathan: Why didn't you put it in then?

Greg: The scene that we wrote didn't have that moment. It would have been contrived to put it in.

Jonathan: Would you not consider rewriting the thing?

Greg: No.

Jeremy: Because you're working backwards then from performance into script, aren't you? You're looking at a moment of performance that is not scripted. It's an action. And what we want is a script that doesn't have stage directions to the point where it says 'they do this and then they do that'. So that's the directors and the actors that bring that to the script. But of course what we are doing is reversing the telescope in going from the performance to the script...

Jonathan: Er... yes?

Jeremy: So, those moments are not... you can write them as text but you're not going to be capturing what's been going on in the same way as an actor and a director might want to do it. It's about that relationship between text and performance. So that moment, which was fabulous, wasn't scriptable in the same way as, say, someone might write a novel about it or put it into a short story.

Jonathan: That's interesting. For me, it not being scriptable is intriguing.

Greg: So what we could have done, or what we could do, is just have that moment behind the narrator. That could be something. Because you don't need dialogue in that. You just need something... the two of them standing together. And their entire body language is about 'well, what happens now?' And I think we possibly got a little bit of that in the interview with the TV [journalist].

Jeremy: Yeah, we did yeah.

Greg: But they verbalised it by that time, and, obviously, by that point Grant was playing Gary. That was another thing that was quite interesting to me: when I was talking to Robbie, I was talking about casting and all the time we'd had Grant as Geoff and Adam as Gary, and he said 'swap 'em'. Swap them, he said, 'it'd be brilliant'.

Jeremy: Yes, he did. I'd forgotten that.

Greg: You see, we'd got words that Grant had come up with and we were giving them to Adam, but we were now letting Grant loose with 'Gary' and what was great was that I'd always wanted Gary to be funny. I'd always wanted Gary to have that kind of wit, because he's the guy in the pub who you want to talk to; he's the guy that knows everyone; he's the glue, you know, and I think that person has to be humorous. But what was great about it was that by then we'd got this Geoff character who we hated, didn't we, right at the beginning?

Jeremy: Well he was a tosser, but then suddenly he became really likeable. The finished article of Geoff is now a great character. He is a tosser, but he's very likeable, and you feel for him don't you.

Jonathan: You feel for him because he's stuck in a terrible position.

Jeremy: Well, that's a brilliant example of what improvisation brings to the process because in a narrative you have your stock characters, your archetypes, but we didn't think... but we had, this 'baddie'... 'look there's the baddie, boo hiss'. And the improvisation lent him 2 or 3 extra dimensions. And suddenly he wasn't a baddie any more, he was just... there are no baddies, they're just guys, people.

Greg: That's exactly what we wanted. He nailed it.

Jeremy: And we wouldn't have been able to write that... well, we could have but I doubt we would have written it like that. We would have gone down the wrong road.

Jonathan: I think NOT giving... I mean if you told people 'right you're a baddie, improvise being a baddie', it would have spoiled it. I think, 'improvise this situation, where you are in this situation' and out comes somebody relatively unlikeable because they are in this position but intrinsically they are likeable because the guy who is improvising is a likeable guy. So Adam... is a nice bloke, you know, and he was improvising on himself, I suppose and you haven't told him to act being a baddie, but you've put him in a difficult situation where people don't like him.

Greg: He said some interesting things after the play of when leading up to the rehearsals, when he said that he'd had some experience of being a manager in a situation and he said 'I think I let you down a bit because I think I could have pulled on that a little bit more'. He'd worked in a call centre or something really shitty. He said 'it'd been really bad but I had to be a particular... I had to play a role, to be that person,' and he said 'I'd really wished I'd brought more of that to the character.'

Jonathan: I wonder if that would have helped actually. Because then he would have been playing a role.

Greg: Well, I thought he nailed it. I mean, I did say, 'I think you've done a marvellous job, mate to be honest with you', so.... He wrote that in his feedback as well.

Jonathan: Another important question I need to ask is to what extent you are considering your audience.

Greg: Oh we are absolutely considering the audience. One reason I loved that evening was because my sister loved it. And Zorin loved it. Zorin is an intellectual and my sister just loves theatre. She's a working class lass. No disrespect to her but, you know, she's fairly simple, but she thought it was brilliant. And we had other people coming up saying 'oh we thought it was going to be this f-ing political piece and blah blah blah but actually it's just a great story. And I've always just wanted to write something (and that's why I got this chap on board [indicating Jeremy], something that just resonated with people. Right across an audience. I'm always asking my students about their target audience. My target audience is everyone. Everyone should be able to go to the theatre and get something out of it. And the reason I love musicals, and my favourite is Cabaret, is because it works on so many different levels, you know; it is intellectual, it is cerebral, but at the same time it's got great fucking songs! It's just brilliant... and great performances.

Jeremy: And another point about that, the audience, is that we.. we were the audience for a lot of that improvisation. We were acting as the audience and making judgements based on what we found, in terms of your project, 'theatrical' and what we thought worked dramatically. So was Robbie. So was Dave, other people who were sitting watching what was going on. So there was always an audience.

Greg: And there was always feedback

Jeremy: It was a feedback process.

Jonathan: So my measurement of feedback, especially when I'm watching the videos is when people clap and when people go 'ooh' and that bit with Grant with the spider's web for me was brilliant because we were all the audience weren't we? And he was performing to us. And I think the fact that we had that gut reaction, like that, 'phwooor'... even though it was just random, freaky words stuck together, there was something intrinsically poetic about it and that's what I'm trying to get to the bottom of.

Greg: So do we put those monologues back in? Because there is some good stuff in those monologues...

Jonathan: Well, you've got to be ruthless because, obviously, within the framework of your play, it may not [work], but then you did throw in some things which seemingly didn't have much to do with the play at all, but they were just good moments. The bit where 'Maddie' and 'Niall' are having a chat. She misunderstands something he says

Greg: The Escher stuff

Jonathan: The Escher stuff. Which was something someone came out with in the coffee break and you decided to keep in. It's got nothing to do with anything!

Greg: Well, that was you [Jeremy]. That was all you! Because we wouldn't have put that in but we wanted to put that in because we argued the toss. And you've got to argue the toss because it has to have purpose and he told me the reason why he thought it had purpose and I said 'yeah, that's a good point, OK good, because it kind of showed her character. So, every scene, every bit of dialogue has to move character and plot on doesn't it? Yeah? It moved her character on.

Jonathan: because to my mind, it really didn't have much to do with the plot of the play at all, but if it's characterisation...

Greg: Well, I think we tweaked it a little bit

Jeremy: Escher wasn't in there originally...

Greg: No, we added that but she'd been talking about the place being like a prison. And that was the whole point of it. The whole point of it is that they're both looking at the Nissan plant completely differently.

Jeremy: Exactly, and that came out really well

Greg: And that moved her character on

Jonathan: Ok

Jeremy: For him, it's a home and for her it's a prison

Greg: Equally there's a moment later on where she wants to talk about Brexit and he doesn't because he doesn't want to have an argument with her. Until he absolutely has to right at the end. And we made that decision that he wants to keep her separate from

everything that's going on because he's romantic and he doesn't want their relationship to be tainted by this argument and if it doesn't matter, he's still drawn into it. And when he bases his decision on the fucking flip of a coin, she says 'oh you fucking idiot'.

Jeremy: But that's exactly what he'd do

Greg: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. That was written months ago. That particular scene. That was from a short story, so... I can't remember at one point I said 'can I put this in?' and you said 'yeah!' So we put that in and I just thought it worked really well, because it did mirror that scene... well, all the way through where he wants to keep her separate until he actually has to say 'this is really playing on my mind. I can't do this because it doesn't fit in with my *scheme*.. my *plans*'. The plan is 'I get a job, I get well-paid and I look after you'. But she's never going to be that woman.

Jonathan: Which brings us back to your first statement that this was a tragedy in the waiting. Ok.

Greg: Yeah.

## 6.5.2. Appendix: Audience reactions to *The Plant* performance (April 2019)

*Questionnaire responses (in italics)*

### **The Plant**

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or ‘real life’)?** YES / NO

**If yes, what?**

*I work for a company where Brexit could affect everything that I’m working on*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*The relationship between Gary and Geoff*

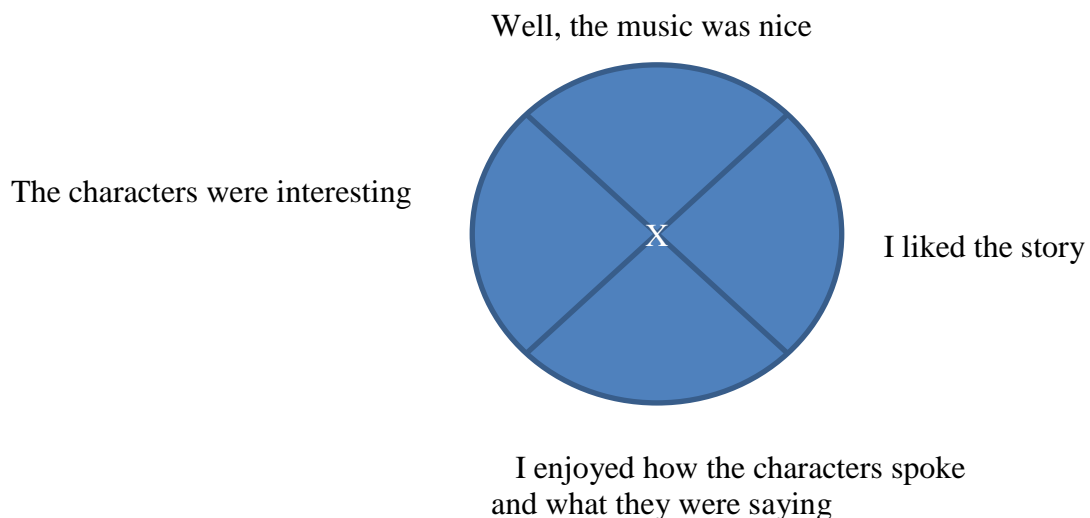
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself ‘switching off’?**

*Never*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*The discussion of Marta and what happened to Josef*

**Put an ‘X’ in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?.....**

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**

*The metaphor of the coin toss*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*Ensemble scenes eg in the pub*

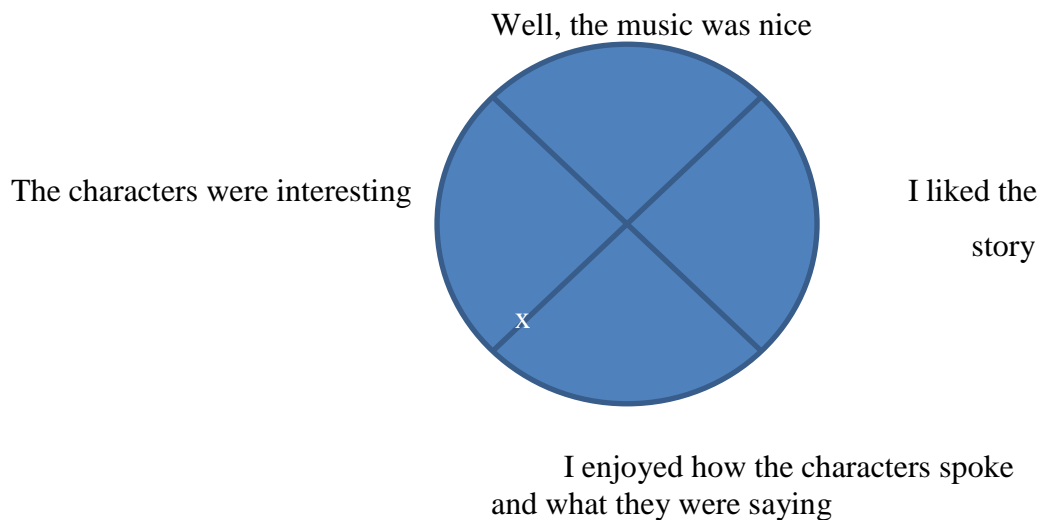
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**

*Romance between niall and maddie*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*uncertainty*

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**





## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?.....**

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**

*All of it*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*The relationships and honesty*

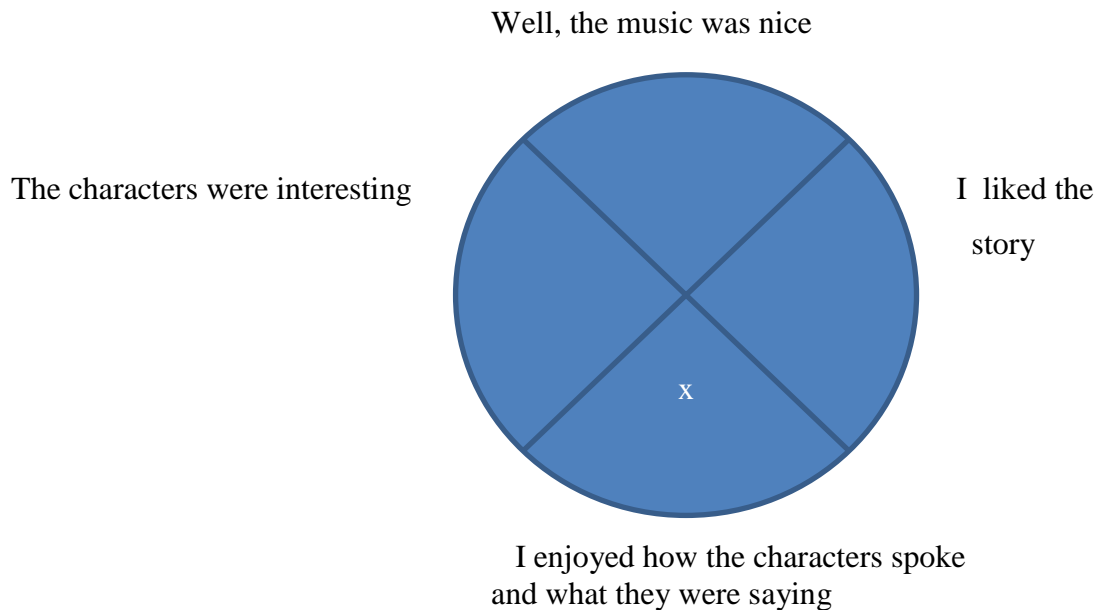
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**

*none*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

.....  
.....

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or ‘real life’)?** YES / NO

**If yes, what?** *Real life discussions/ social media topics*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**

*Dividedness amidst ordinary people / class dividedness*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*Management / workforce relationships*

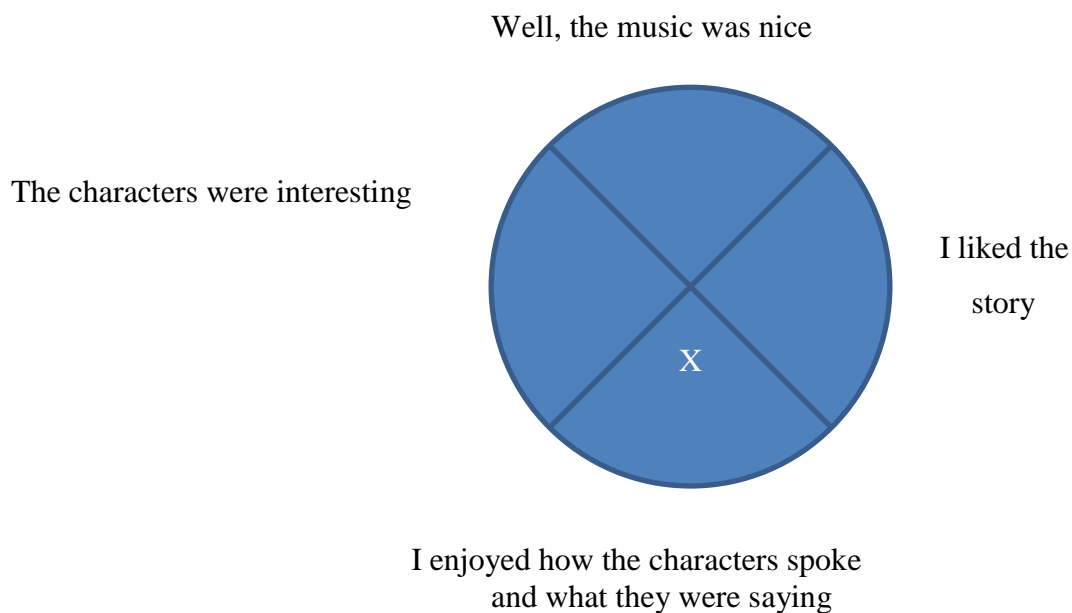
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself ‘switching off’?**

*never*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*Maddie and niall towards the end*

**Put an ‘X’ in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')?** YES / NO

**If yes, what?** *Nostalgic TV drama. 1970s?*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you think?**

*Nice to reflect on impact of Brexit on ordinary people*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*Humour / music*

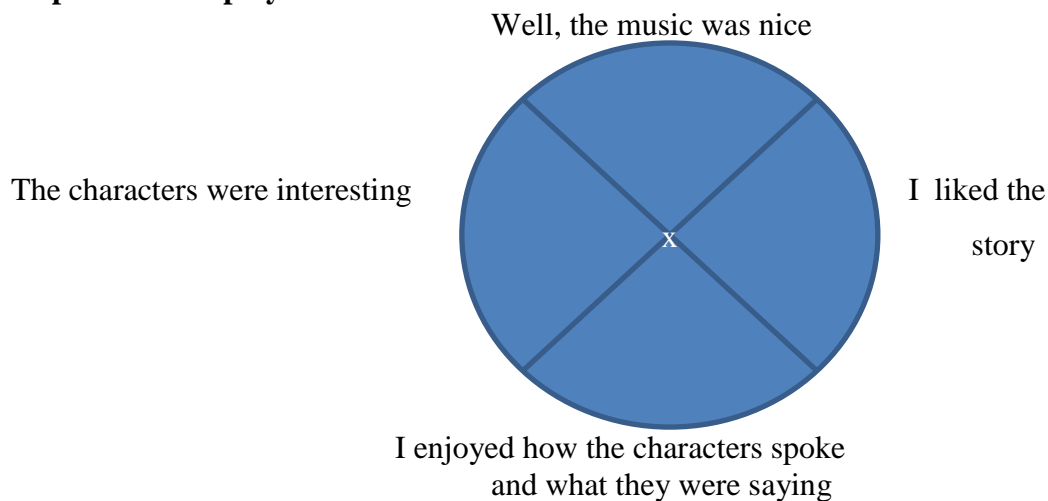
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**

*? length of first half could be condensed ? Brexit D in real life*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*"it's the new normal"*

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



Further comments:

*I thought written by remainers (I am one!), wife thought: pro-leave!*

*Music excellent and added an extra dimension / atmosphere*

*Characters seem mostly at mercy of events outside their control*

*Brexit in foreground!*

*Characters were convincing*

*Behind the scenes negotiation impact on community was clear*

## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? **YES / NO**

If yes, what?.....

- What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?

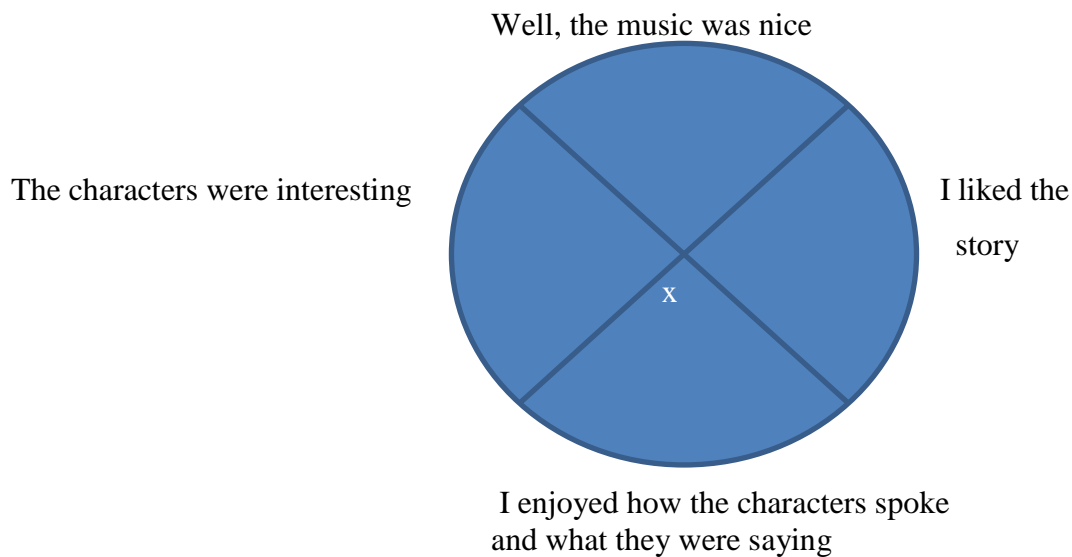
*The different experiences / class of characters*

- What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?

*dialogue*

- At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?
- Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?

Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?** *Brassed Off*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you think?**

*The songs and the way they intertwined with the narrative and included the broader context of the past and folk music/tradition*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*The life-like dialogue and the humour*

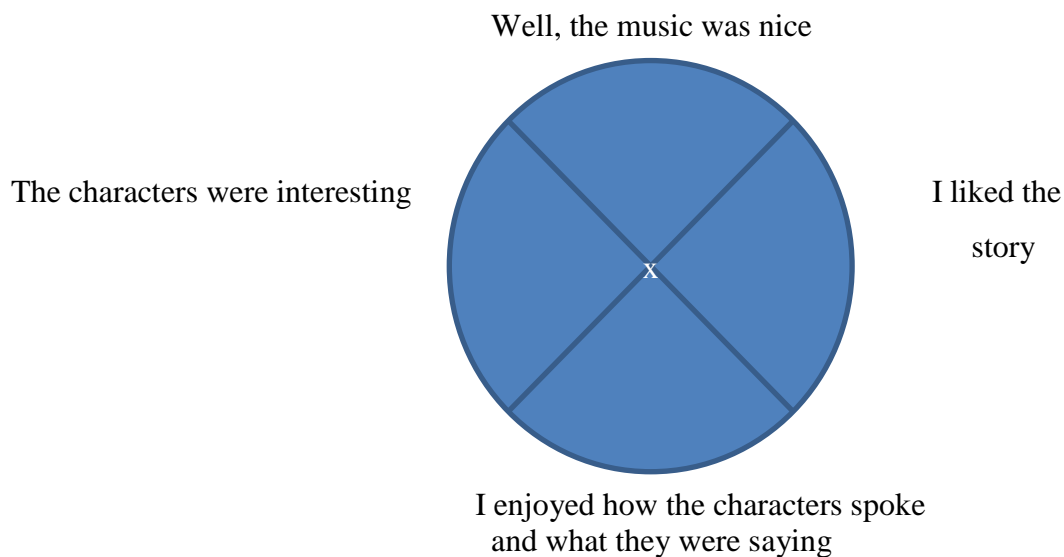
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**

*None*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*The idea that we're not helpless and the mixed opinions from different viewpoints*

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?** *Theatre – many years back*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**

*Not just one aspect*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*Loved the music*

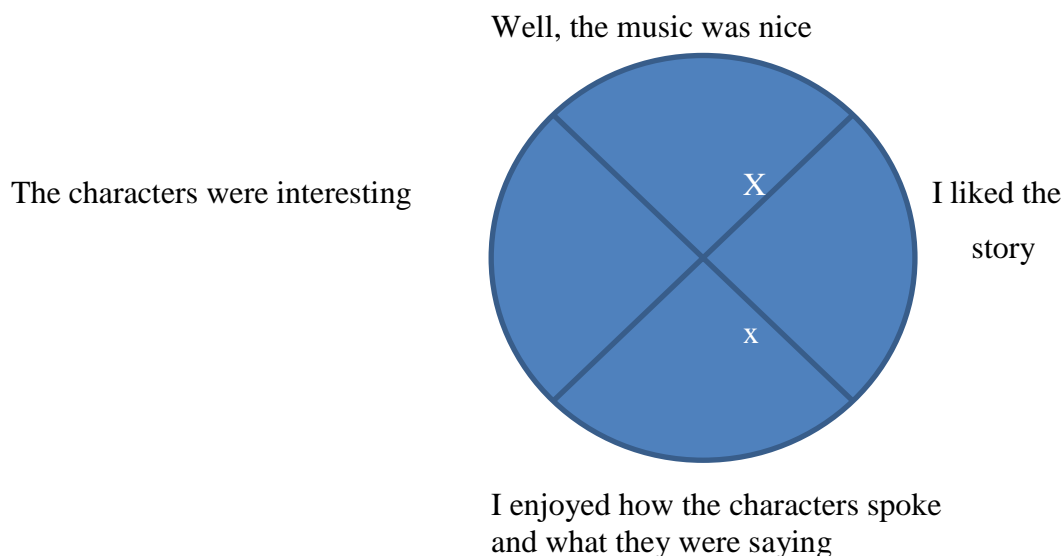
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**

*I did not*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*The confusion*

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?.....**

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**

*Our life changes if UK leaves EU*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*Actors express very well*

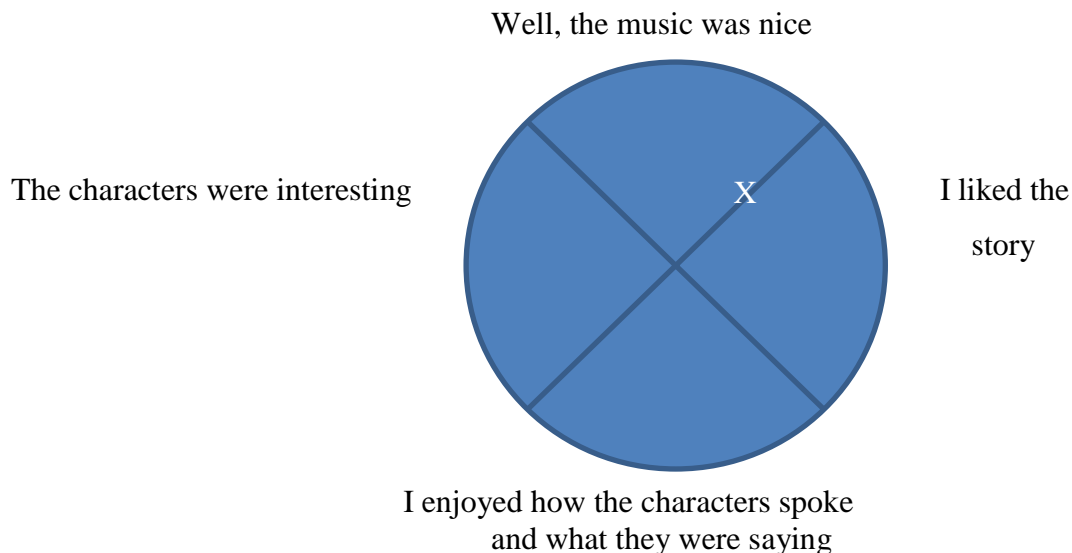
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**

*The music was great*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

.....

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?.....**

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**

*The personal – how it would affect Marta + Tomas*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*The romance – Maddie and Niall at beginning*

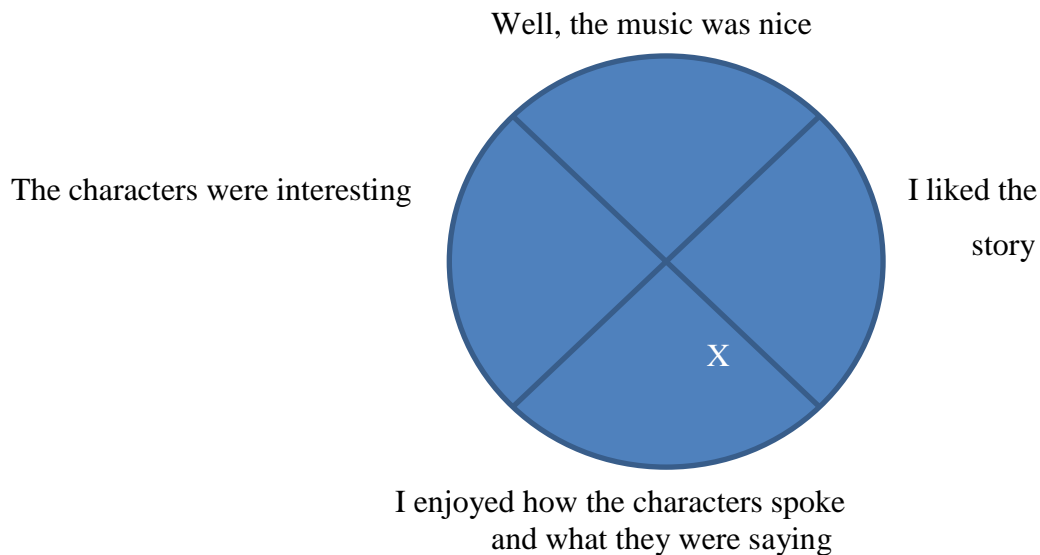
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**

*Not at all*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*Tomas, Marta*

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**





## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?.** *Brassed Off / Full Monty*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**

*Relationship between Maddie and Niall*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*Gary and Niall's relationship*

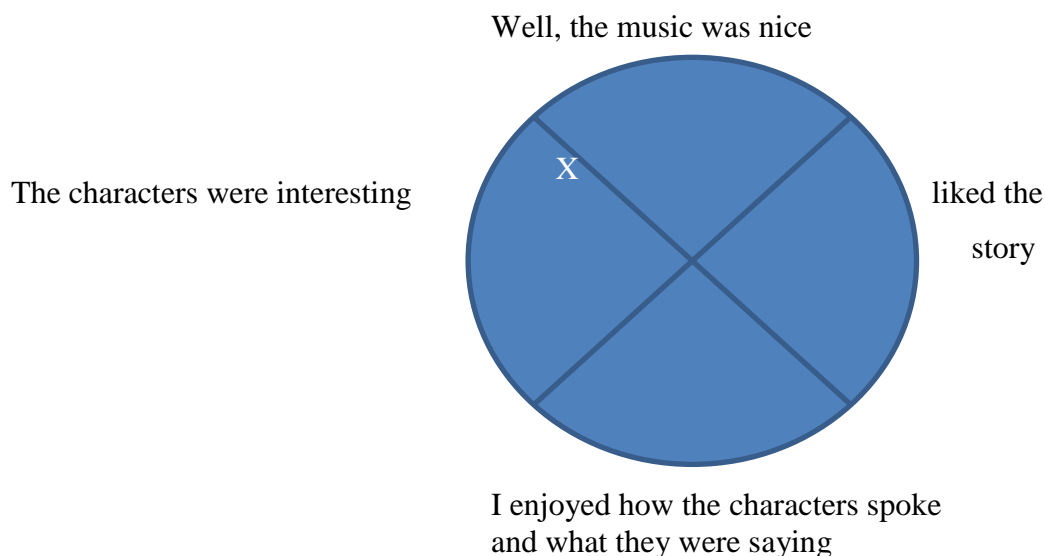
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**

*Jeff and Maddie's 'affair' behind the wife's back*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*"normal"*

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

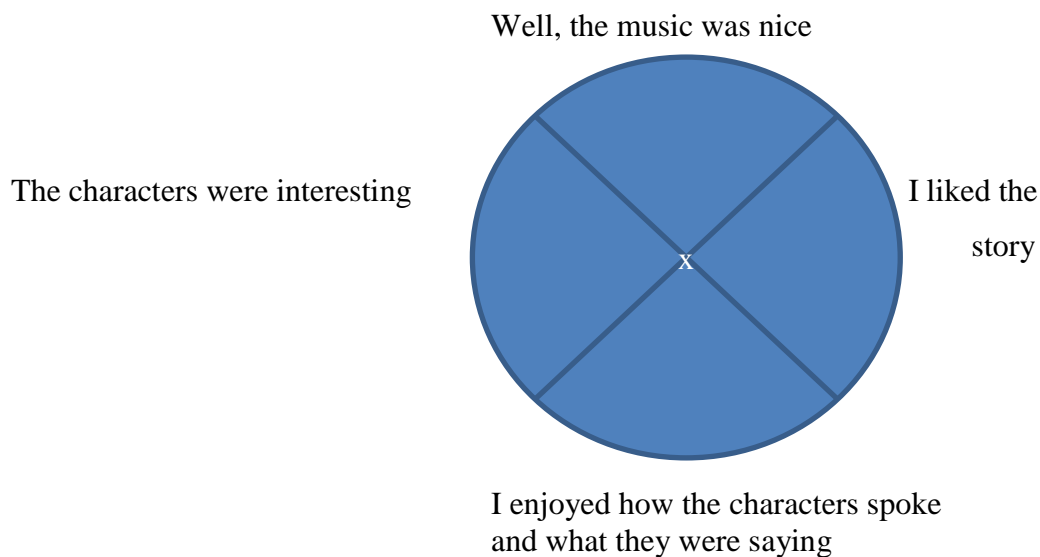
At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or ‘real life’)?**                      **YES / NO**

**If yes, what?.....**

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**  
*I liked the script – missed the viewpoint of the upper-class brexiteers*
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**  
*I liked the milling around while saying different viewpoints*
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself ‘switching off’?**  
*The dates*
- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**  
*“we are not helpless” – also the smile of Geoff while he spoke to the workforce about being not responsible for anything*

**Put an ‘X’ in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

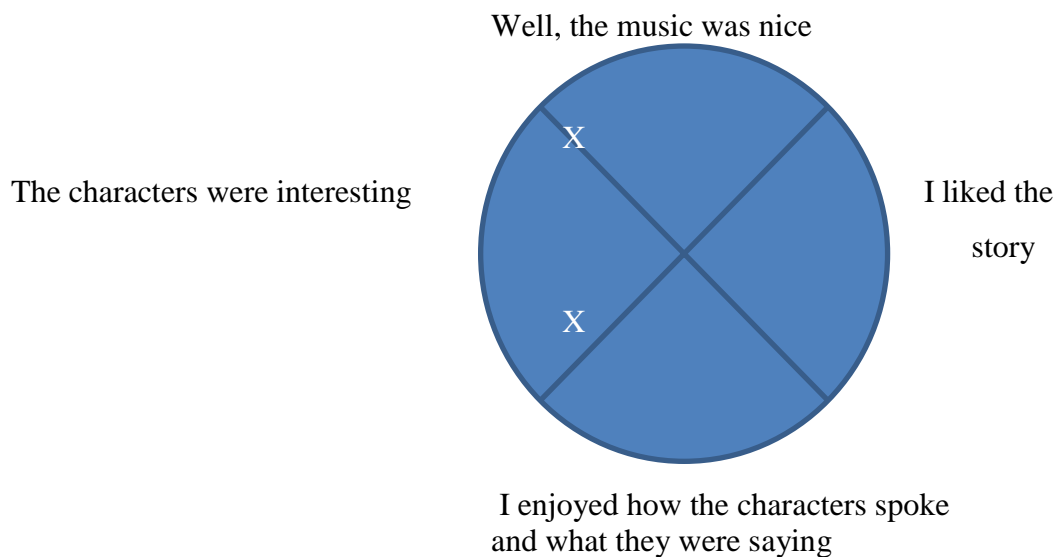
At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or ‘real life’)?**                      YES / NO

**If yes, what?** *Made in Dagenham (a bit)*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you think?**  
*The discussions around individuals’ personal lives*
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**  
.....
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself ‘switching off’?**  
*Not at all*
- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**  
*“That window is a frame”*

**Put an ‘X’ in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

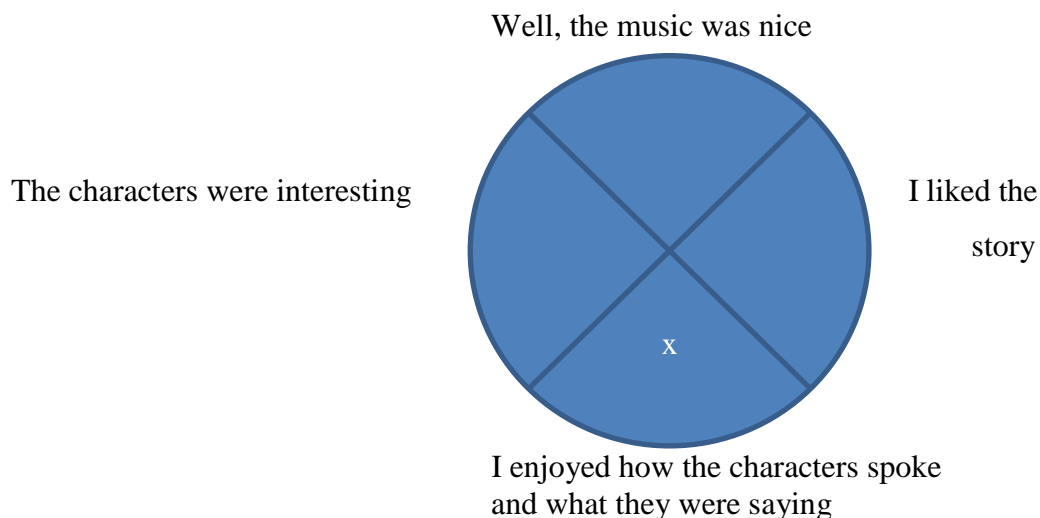
At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?** *[Don't] look back in Anger*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you think?**  
*All of it – so many – the plight of the Polish worker / class differences / management oblivious to the workers' situation / the passion for the workers from the foreman*
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**  
*The role of the foreman – difficult situation he was in – his fight*
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**  
*Not at all*
- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**  
.....

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

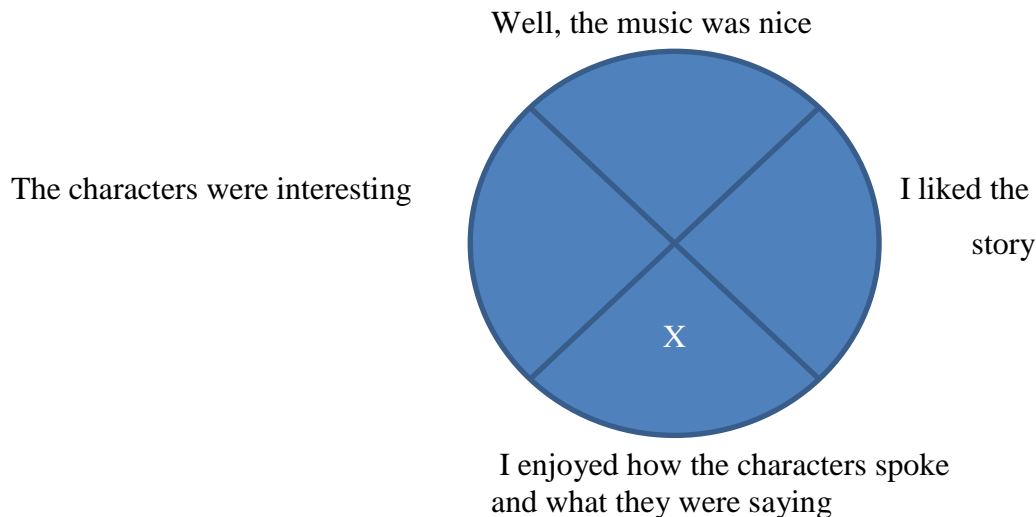
At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or ‘real life’)?** YES / NO

**If yes, what?**.....

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**  
*The points of view of ordinary people*
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**  
*The music and humour – added levity*
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself ‘switching off’?**  
*N/A*
- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**  
*“We are not helpless”*

**Put an ‘X’ in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

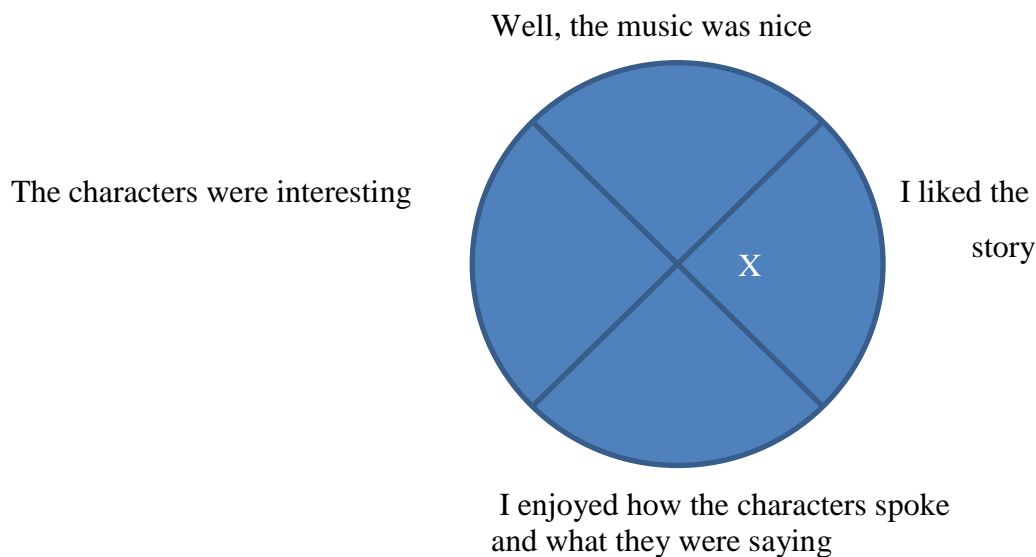
- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or ‘real life’)?** YES / NO

**If yes, what?** *More reminiscent of real-life pub/ friend discussions, people’s concerns for impact of brexit*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you think?**  
*Narrator and the love story metaphor*
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**  
*All of it – especially the integration of the music*
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself ‘switching off’?**  
*Didn’t really – also liked that all actors visible all the time*
- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

.....

**Put an ‘X’ in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

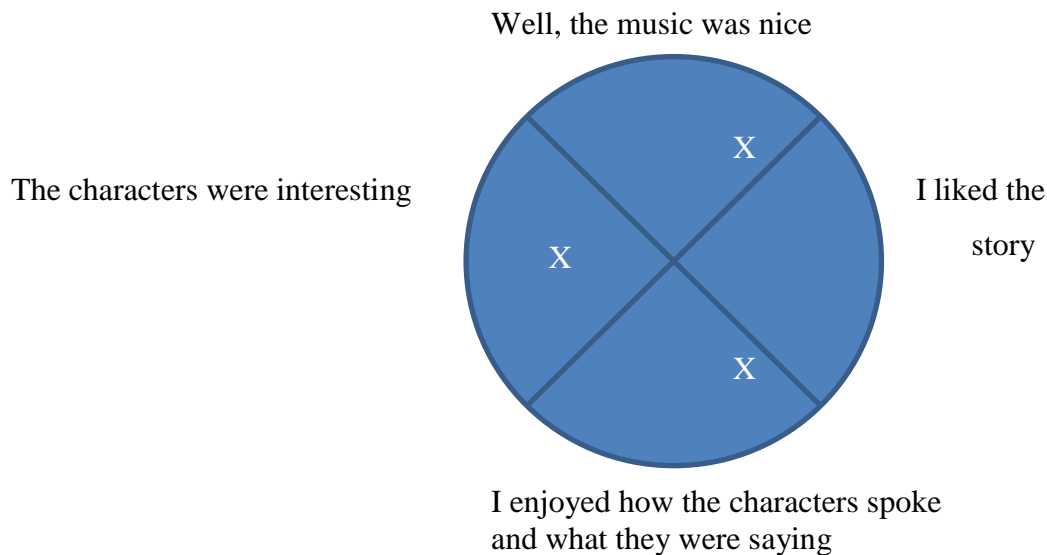
At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO

If yes, what? ITV Northern drama

- What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?  
.....
- What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?  
The human interest, real lives
- At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?  
.....
- Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?  
.....

Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play



## The Plant

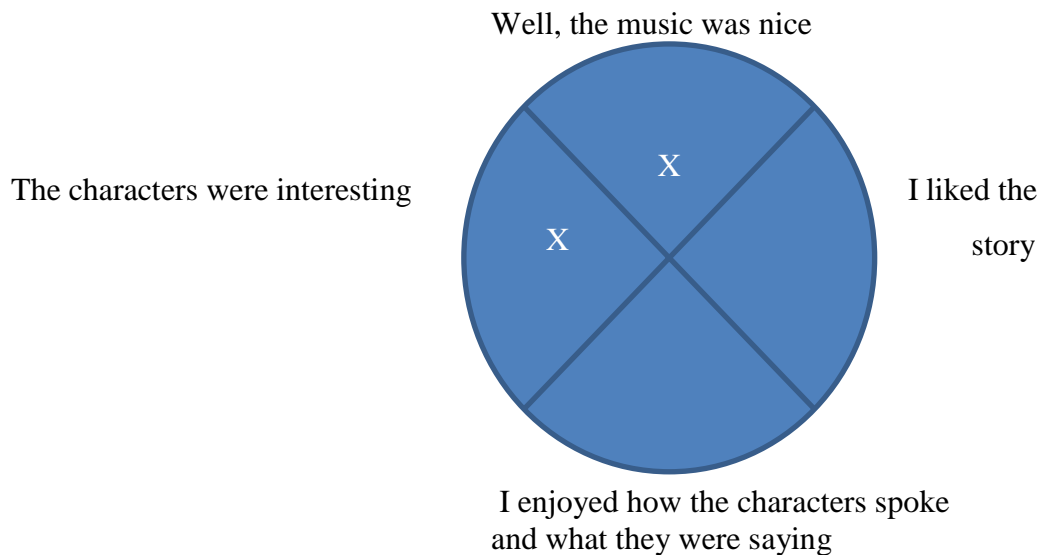
At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?.....**

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**  
*That there are two sides: Gary and Geoff who represented the class divide*
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**  
*The music always provokes emotion for me. I loved Gary!*
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**  
.....
- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**  
*I loved the strong Maddy and was great to see a strong woman play her*

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**





## The Plant

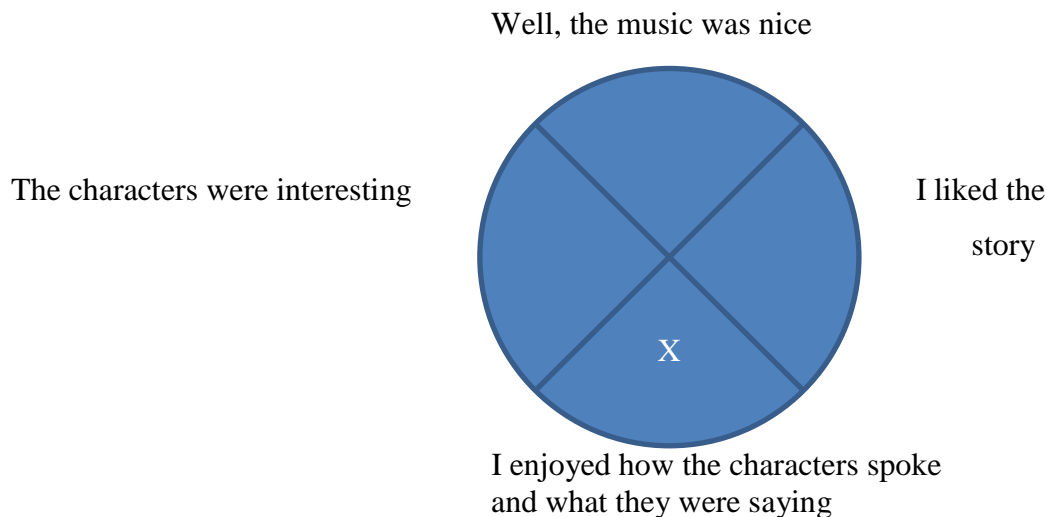
At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or 'real life')? YES / NO**

**If yes, what?** *Question Time*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you *think*?**  
*All – Maddie most realistic*
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**  
*Real life*
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself 'switching off'?**  
*None*
- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**  
*People's lives a number in a cog*

**Put an 'X' in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or ‘real life’)?**                    YES / NO

**If yes, what?** *Certain scenes reminded me of Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you think?**

*The narration*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**

*The relationship between the characters*

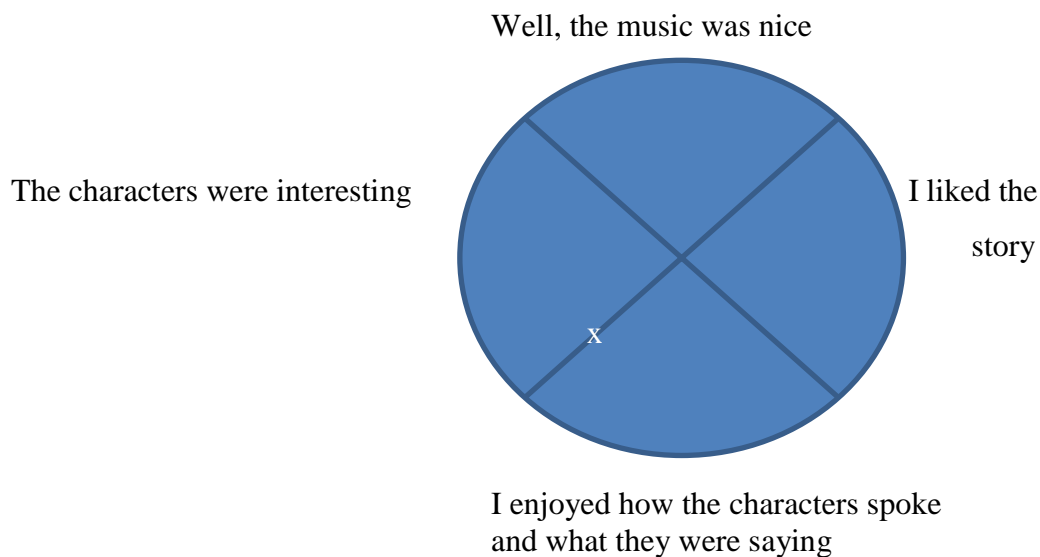
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself ‘switching off’?**

*Geoff and Maddie’s affair went on too long*

- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**

*“Fuck the referendum!”*

**Put an ‘X’ in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



## The Plant

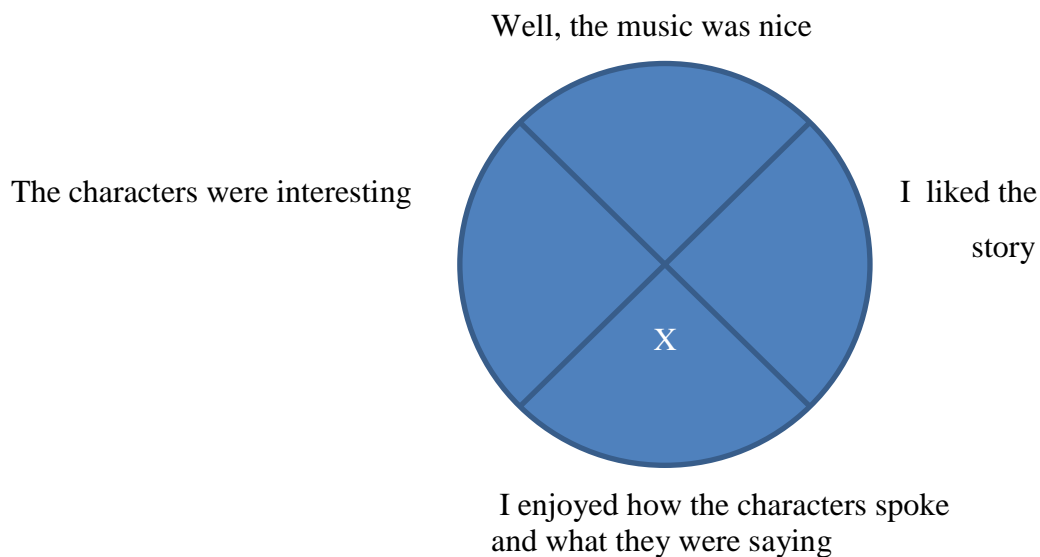
At the end of the play please take a moment or two before you head to the car park/bus-stop/bar and answer some questions regarding your reactions to this performance. Thanks

- **As a whole, did the play remind you of anything you have seen before (in the theatre, TV or ‘real life’)?** YES / NO

**If yes, what?** *Real life. Working in my teenage years at Tesco*

- **What aspect(s) of the play most made you think?**  
*When the Polish guy was attacked*
- **What aspect(s) of the play most entertained you?**  
*The narrator character*
- **At which point(s), if any, did you feel yourself ‘switching off’?**  
*None*
- **Now, at the end, what words/phrases/scenes (if any) have stuck most in your mind?**  
*“Why was your Labour representative at the meetings?”*

**Put an ‘X’ in somewhere in the diagram which you feel most reflects your response to the play**



### 6.5.3. Appendix: Side by side scenes from *The Plant* for comparison

#### Scene #1

<p>NIALL: A prison?  MADDIE: Yeah.  NIALL: It's not a prison.  MADDIE: But it's designed like one.  NIALL: What, like a prison?  MADDIE: No. No, listen. The Plant is designed like a prison is designed. It's meant to look like a prison. Which is what it is. So that everyone can be watched.  NIALL: [Laughing] What?  MADDIE: Listen. No. Not a prison. It's like...that artist.  NIALL: What artist?  MADDIE: Escher. You know. The artist.  NIALL: Love Escher.  MADDIE: It's an Escher building. It is. It's meant to...encourage collegiality or something. And you're supposed to find the garden. A sort of hex. Or a panorama.  NIALL: Panorama? What, the programme?  MADDIE: [Losing her thread] No. Or is it something to do with Jeremy Bentham?  NIALL: You mean Paxman?  13  MADDIE: I suppose there are some parts of it that have a prison feel. I get lost.  Still, I've only been there a few months. Sometimes, I go up to the top floor and look down on the factory floor through those great big plate glass windows. All these people, busy, working, doing whatever it is they do. Making cars. Putting components together. Building. Sometimes I think it looks like a painting, perfectly put together.  NIALL: Like you.</p>	<p>In the break...  Actor ('Gary'): I actually got lost. I went that way but came back down some stairs. A little adventure  N2 actor (who seems quite a shy improviser in rehearsal) confidently takes the floor with a story:  When I did a workshop here, there was a room. I always get lost. So, I remember, we had to go up a small flight of stairs to get to the room but then, whenever I came out that room, that flight of stairs was never there (laughter). This building really messes with my mind. Massively.   N1 actor: Escher. You know... the artist.  N2 actor: Yeah yeah, that is it  N1 actor: It's an Escher building  N2 actor: It is, it is. And he finds the sort of hex... garden thing. Ah, panorama (??)  Jeff actor: It's based on a prison, this....  N2 actor: Is it really?  Jeff actor: <i>Yeah yeah</i>  N2 actor: <i>Wow</i>  Jeff actor: Nice to know, isn't it?  N2 actor: Yeah, there are some parts of it that do have that prison feel. I just get lost. I was here for a week and I was still getting lost  Jeff actor: <i>Yeah...</i></p>
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<p>MADDIE: Yes. No. Like an Escher. All those stairs going round and round but leading nowhere. But it doesn't matter. They're still happy, you know. Happy in their skins. Content. And I think to myself, 'You're part of all this.' But I don't feel part of it. Not yet.</p>	
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Scene #2

<p>GEOFF: Yes, amazing. We're building the future, Maddie. The Electra. Electricity. It's the future. And this is going to revolutionise the whole company. This is going to save our bacon. They don't eat bacon, do they? It doesn't matter. The Japanese are going to love it. They'll give the green light, no problem. MADDIE: God, I hope so. GEOFF: We need to tell the world about this. It's like the chemistry we have. That you have. The electricity. Look. The electric car comes from the electricity between us. And that's why... It's going to be big for this company and it's going to be big for us. MADDIE: Geoff... GEOFF: I know, Maddie. I know. MADDIE: I've got something I need to tell you.</p>	<p>GEOFF: This project is... this is the future. This is brilliant. I mean... that... that... whole concept of it and that... electric/ Maddie: /Yeah G: It's electric. I mean it's like... this has come out of US. OUR electricity. I find that... this gives me passion! THAT gives me passion. And it just makes me want to, you know, devote my whole life to THIS! Do you know? M: Yes... Geoff... G: It... it... it's made something. It's so important that... now I can see why... what EXACTLY it is that I should have been doing a long time ago. M: This is the future, Geoff. G: Exactly. The future Geoff.</p>
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Scene #3

<p>[To Geoff] What? [To Maddie] What? GEOFF: This is going to save the world! This is going to save the Earth! This is going to save The Plant! [Flustered] Look, you were all for it the other day, weren't you? GARY: Yes. Yes, but... What? What fallout? GEOFF: We've got to get rid of all the old baggage. Move on. Move with the times. Live in the real world. We used to be all about diesel. But now we know better. Diesel is old. Obsolete. Past it.</p>	<p>GEOFF: Maddie has... Maddie. Maddie is... maybe... saved... it's saved. It's saved the company GARY: Maddie? Maddie has saved the company? That's very nice and tell me: what are the promises you can give me to say that these guys are gonna have a job a year from now? GEOFF: Well, when... when everybody... is on board and... and... GARY: I'm not getting in your way, Jeff. We're all on board. It's just that we need some assurances that we can pay for our families' well-being</p>
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GARY: Are you saying that I'm diesel?  
 Are you saying our workers are diesel?  
 GEOFF: What? No! I'm saying that the future is electric, and we [looking at Maddie] need to be electric too.  
 GARY: You're talking about streamlining. You're going to have to make redundancies.  
 MADDIE: Gary, could we have this conversation another time? Formally, in a proper meeting? There's something Geoff and I need to discuss.  
 GEOFF: [To Gary] No. I'm not saying anything about streamlining.  
 Necessarily. We just need to take people with us. Take people with us on the journey. [To Maddie] This journey. That we're taking.  
 GARY: What are the Japanese saying? Are they pulling out of?  
 GEOFF: This meeting is over. Thank you.  
 GARY: You're bloody well right it's over. For now. I will get the truth out of you somehow.

GEOFF: We'd like that exactly, you know. B..but some people, you know, might not want to come on board with this, but this is the future. This IS the future. This is our... all our futures. And we just have to... push on through and really just get rid of all that stuff from behind. You know, the diesel. The diesel. It's bad for us. It gets into our...  
 GARY: Are you saying that we're like diesel?  
 GEOFF: No!  
 GARY: We're that old, smokey stock that you just want to streamline out of your factory?  
 GEOFF: I want... I want us ALL... us... all... to be with... THAT.  
 GARY: (to audience) There's something I'm not buying here. There's something going on which I don't think is all he's saying. I'm worried.  
 GEOFF: Thanks for coming Gary and...  
 GARY: What? Is that it?  
 GEOFF: No... no but I think I understand it now. And me and Maddie have got much more... future plans...  
 GARY: Yeah but.../  
 GEOFF: ...we need to work out/  
 GARY: /but Geoff, we need to talk more. We need consultation. We need to talk and represent these guys. I mean, I'm here.../  
 GEOFF: /you go and sort that out. Write it down. Send me an email. Ping it to me. And we'll talk about it. I know your feelings. Thanks Gary.  
 (Gary leaves)  
 GEOFF: This. Is where it's at.  
 MADDIE: Can you sit down for a moment Geoff and let me get a word in?  
 GEOFF: No, no, no... this is... this is... I'm going for this now (leaves)

GEOFF: [For something to say] You've got to see the bigger picture.

GARY: But that's the point. We can't think of the bigger picture when we don't know what it is.

GEOFF: But we do know what it is. We know exactly what the bigger picture is.

The bigger picture is that it's out of our hands. It's down to them. To the Japanese. [He gestures 'outside']

And it's down to what happens when all those people out there go out to vote on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June.

GARY: What's more of a bigger picture than family? Community? A bloody livelihood?

GARY: (enters, shakes hands, sits). Help me! (stands, indicates shopfloor). Working. So hard.

GEOFF: I know. Same songsheet. Difficult times. Unknown futures. Bigger picture.

GARY: Help me to help them.

GEOFF: Understand. Your passion. My passion. Our passion.

GARY: Their lives.

GEOFF: Long-term thinking. Planning. Bigger picture

GARY: Please help me here

GEOFF: Securing markets. Wider... wider welfare. Bigger picture

.....

GEOFF: I'm happier at work. It's ironic. I love my children but... I don't know. I'm just respected... I just seem to be more in control, I just seem to... dunno... I just seem to be able to... it's like I've got to paint the bigger Nissan picture.

MADDIE2: I've got to be more assertive. I've got to see the bigger picture, and just go for it

GARY: The bigger picture

M1: The bigger picture

M2: The bigger picture

NAILL: Well that's sorted then. Great.

#### 6.5.4. Appendix: Chapter 6 – disclaimer and ethics statement

In this chapter, a public script-in-hand performance of *The Plant* was produced in front of an audience in a commercial venue at the University of Kent (Jarman Studio).

This was part of the development process of the play and relied on the producers/writers receiving audience feedback via a questionnaire.

This feedback was also used within this research. The questionnaire did not touch on the performers or quality of performance but rather on elements of the writing and production.

The feedback task (see Chapter 6 appendix) formed part of the programme and was found by each audience member on their seat at arrival. The audience were instructed NOT to write their names on the form and none did. The feedback questionnaire was therefore completed and submitted anonymously at the end of the show.

No record of attendees was made.