Character ‘under erasure’: a Stanislavskian approach to postdramatic theatre-making

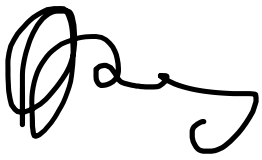
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Declaration of Plagiarism

I, Rebecca Reeves, understand the school's definition of plagiarism and declare that the submission presented here is my own work. Information derived from published or unpublished work of others has been formally acknowledged.



Rebecca Reeves

London, October 15th 2020

Abstract

This thesis explores the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' to postdramatic theatre-making. Through practice-led research, this project has investigated the relationship between Stanislavsky's understanding of theatrical 'truth' and the preference for the 'real' in late-twentieth, early twenty-first century postdramatic theatre. The thesis re-evaluates Stanislavsky's relevance to postdramatic theatre, arguing for a revision of the historical lineage through which the practices associated with dramatic Naturalism and late nineteenth-century realism can be shown to have developed into, rather than simply having been rejected in favour of, the preference for the 'real' in performance. This re-evaluation is undertaken through re-examining the fate of character in postdramatic theatre and re-reading Stanislavsky's analyses of the actor's work on a role. The research argues that the claims about the end of character on the postdramatic stage are overstated, and, following Jacques Derrida, proposes the term character 'under erasure' (Derrida 1974: 60) to clarify the relationship between postdramatic theatre's staging of human subjects and the dramatic characters that precede them. Further, re-reading Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work on a role in light of Derrida's concept of 'hauntology', the thesis illuminates congruencies between Stanislavsky's understanding of character and the post-humanist figures of postdramatic theatre. Building on this theoretical analysis, the research explores the application of strategies conventionally associated with creating 'truthful', 'believable' characterisations, to a postdramatic paradigm that problematizes 'truthfulness', textual authority, and dramatic character. Through research-led practice, this thesis explores whether a Stanislavskian approach to the actor's work on a role can provide a model for devising from text that adheres neither to the authority of the dramatic text, nor is fully anchored in a model of naturalistic representation. It explores processes of staging character 'under erasure' and concludes that the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' is compatible with postdramatic theatre-making.

For Denise and Nicholas

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Introduction

This research argues for a re-evaluation of Konstantin Stanislavsky's principles of acting, and proposes to reassess his relevance to postdramatic theatre-making.[1] The thesis begins by examining the fate of character in postdramatic theatre, arguing that the claims for the end of character in postmodern theatre and postdrama are excessive. This is followed by a close reading of Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work on a role as articulated in *An Actor's Work* (2008), *An Actor's Work on a Role* (2010) and *My Life in Art* (2008), which is examined in relation to Hans-Thies Lehmann's discussion of postdramatic theatre (2006). This analysis provides an opportunity for mutual critique, challenging the claim for the end of character on the postdramatic stage and contributing to the revision of Stanislavsky's legacy beyond Naturalism and individualist psychology. Through this analysis the thesis explores the relationship between Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of theatrical 'truth' and postdramatic theatre's preference for 'liveness' and the 'real' in performance. On this basis, the thesis proposes that a character-led, Stanislavskian approach to performance-making can effectively support a theatre-making practice that attempts to explore the fragmented and disunified experience of human subjectivity in a late-capitalist, highly mediatized society. While the thesis stops short of claiming that Stanislavsky is a postdramatic thinker, it does propose that his understanding of stage 'realism' lives on in the postdramatic. Similarly, the thesis proposes that there are congruencies to be found between his conceptualisation of the actor's work on a role and the figures that inhabit postdramatic stages. This is not, however, to suggest that 'character' is the same in Stanislavsky's analysis as it is in postdrama. Instead, the thesis proposes that these configurations of 'character' should be viewed on a spectrum and that Stanislavsky's understanding of the actor's work and of theatrical 'truth', should be viewed on a continuum of innovation and experimentation that led to postdramatic theatre's eventual rejection of the principles of drama.

[1] See chapter one for a definition of the 'system', an explication of how I have worked with the 'system' and an exposition of postdramatic theatre.

Undertaken through practice-led research, the research project has combined the practical work of devising from text with academic research to test the hypothesis that Stanislavsky's 'system' continues to serve the twenty-first century theatre-maker working beyond the parameters of 'drama' and the intention to stage coherent, cogent characters.[2] The research contributes to the fields of Stanislavskian, postdramatic and actor-training scholarship, and Stanislavsky's 'system', as explicated in his three key texts, is the primary source material for the theoretical case and for the practical exploration. Although the 'system' should not be regarded as offering an immutable or cast-iron formula for the actor's work, it is, nonetheless, a 'coherent, logical and systematic' (Benedetti 1989: xi) model for nurturing the actor's 'creative state' (Stanislavsky 2008: 307). While I will discuss how I used the 'system' in more detail in chapter one, it is perhaps useful to identify here that I have adopted a broadly systematic *approach* to its application.[3] Reflecting the bifurcation of the 'system', I have used exercises that facilitate the actor's work on the 'self', coupled with extensive work on the 'roles' the actors have explored.[4] Stanislavsky's guiding principle, to 'use conscious activity in preparing and rehearsing a role' to 'create the conditions in which spontaneous, intuitive creation could occur', has underpinned each iteration of my practice (Benedetti 1989: 30-31). However, the intention to use the 'system' to support a devising practice, rather than to facilitate the actor's work on a role as it is presented in the author's text, has inevitably shaped its application. The research has demanded the pragmatic deployment of the 'system', disaggregating its component parts before reconfiguring them to serve the revised purpose of staging

[2] Jean Benedetti argues that Stanislavsky 'always stressed the provisional nature of his findings, hence his usage of the "system" with a small "s" and in quotes, never System, with a capital "S" that suggested a closed and rigid theory' (1998: x).

[3] The systematic nature of this approach differentiates this project from existing practice in the field. While there is evidence of Stanislavsky's influence on a range of late twentieth and early twenty-first century theatre-making, that extends beyond naturalistic representation, there is scant evidence of a comprehensively Stanislavskian approach to making postdramatic theatre. See chapter one for a fuller discussion of this.

[4] The 'system' is divided into two parts: the actor's work on the 'self' (for example, working on relaxation and *concentration of attention,* on *communion* and *grasp*) and the actor's work on the 'role' (for example, exploring *given circumstances*, *fundamental questions*, *subtext* and *units and objectives*).

what I term characters 'under erasure' (Derrida 1974: 60) within a devised, postdramatic theatre-making practice. Although applying the 'system' in this way marks a significant shift away from Stanislavsky's apparently central belief that acting is focused on the authorial text, I contend that this pragmatic process (of disaggregation) has been undertaken in the spirit of Stanislavsky's own ever-evolving enquiry into the 'nature of the creative act' (2008: 612). As Sharon Marie Carnicke argues, the 'system' 'was never finished; it remained, to the end, a dynamic, ever-changing experimental process,' (2009: 32) that developed over a lifetime of work in an ever-shifting landscape of dramatic literature and theatrical styles. If, as Carnicke asserts, the 'system's' 'laws were immutable [but] the techniques were many and changing' (2009: 32), then, I propose that the modifications I have made in my application of the 'system' follow the model of revision and re-evaluation established by Stanislavsky himself.[5]

Making the case for a return to Stanislavsky's 'system', the thesis argues for a reconsideration of the fate of character in postdramatic theatre. Considering the extent to which the pronounced 'death of character' (Elinor Fuchs 1996) targets a specific interpretation of 'character' that connotes agency, free will and coherency, rather than a rejection of character *per se*, the thesis argues for a re-articulation of postdrama's depiction of human subjectivities as, following Jacques Derrida, characters 'under erasure'. Further, the thesis contests the identification of Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of character with principles of coherency, agency and self-determination. Re-assessed as emerging from a scientific, cultural and philosophical context in which those very qualities faced radical and fundamental revision, and explored in relation to Jacques Derrida's concept of 'hauntology', Stanislavsky's 'third beings' are revealed to be contextual, contingent and processual.[6] Thus, the thesis argues that postdrama's radical and fundamental

[5] The extent to which Stanislavsky's 'system' is underpinned by a commitment to experimentation and to which Stanislavsky worked in a wide and varied range of genres and styles lays the foundation for my argument for returning to the 'system' in the first place.

[6] For example, the influence of determinism, of Marxist socio-economic theory, the emergence of psychoanalysis and of Structuralism in linguistics all had far-reaching consequences for our understanding the human subject as socially and culturally produced, rather than as an essential, unique, free individual. This was reflected in the Naturalist movement of the late nineteenth-

attack on dramatic character might, in fact, be traced back to the nineteenth-century stage, to Naturalism's codification of the subject and to Stanislavsky's 'new, third being' (2010: 75).[7]

However, Stanislavsky's adherence to the authority of the playwright's text and postdramatic theatre's emergence at a specific historical moment, precludes drawing an absolute correlation between his conceptualisation of theatrical 'truth' and the 'real' in postdrama, and the 'new, third beings' and their postdramatic counterparts. This thesis, therefore, makes the case for a nuanced reading of Stanislavsky's relationship to postdrama; it does not sidestep the divergencies or differences, but embraces the complexity of Stanislavsky's writing and practice in order to foreground a more accurate understanding of the 'system' and to argue for its ongoing relevance to the contemporary theatre-maker. On this basis, the thesis proposes that, notwithstanding the adaptations and modifications, and my own process of grappling with the 'system' and the task of staging characters 'under erasure', Stanislavsky's advice to the actor remains vital and pertinent and that it should, accordingly, be viewed on a continuum of experimentation that extends to postdramatic theatre, rather than being positioned against it. The thesis argues that as the 'system' provides invaluable and unrivalled insights into the nature of acting and the actor's work on a role, the principles, exercises, practices and rehearsal processes of which the 'system' is constituted, can be re-applied in a

century, from which Stanislavsky's 'system' emerged. As I will explore in more detail in chapter two, the relationship between Naturalism and the 'system' accordingly supports a re-evaluation of Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work in a role that extends beyond the conflation of dramatic character with a notion of the human subject as unified, self-determining and essentialist.

[7] In her 'Introduction' to *Postdramatic Theatre* Karen Jürs-Munby describes Lehmann's text as 'in part a response to Peter Szondi's seminal *Theory of the Modern Drama*' (2006:2) arguing that the study is a continuation of Szondi's project. This is important for the work of this thesis because Szondi argues that the modern, twentieth-century dramas of, for example, 'Ibsen and Strindberg though to O'Neill and Arthur Miller' mark a "crisis of drama" and a significant moment of rupture from the principles of the "absolute drama" characterised by Elizabethan drama and 'seventeenth-century France' and 'in the German classical period' (Jürs-Munby in Lehmann 2006: 3). Szondi's analysis, and Jürs-Munby's assessment of Lehmann's project as a continuation of that analysis, supports the contention that Stanislavsky belongs to the moment of 'crisis' which precedes postdramatic theatre. Indeed, as Jürs-Munby goes on to argue, Lehmann highlights the extent to which 'the dissolution of the dramatic concept of theatre' already exists 'within drama' and I propose that the seeds of that dissolution begin to develop the first shoots of growth within the pages of Stanislavsky's texts and embodied in his practice.

postdramatic theatre-making practice to *expose* the actor at work in a role, to problematise the process and practices of representation and to expose the fragmented and disunited experience of subjectivity in a late-capitalist, multiply-mediatized, globalised society.

Chapter one – methodology, organisation of the thesis and definition of key terms

Introduction

The first half of this chapter outlines my research methodology, describing the 'practice-led' model and my processes of documentation and dissemination. This is followed by a brief overview of my devising practice and a discussion of my approach to working with Stanislavsky's 'system'. The second half of the chapter provides definitions of the key terms. I begin by explaining what I mean by 'realism' in relation to Stanislavsky's work and why I have used the terms 'late-nineteenth century realism', 'Naturalism', 'naturalistic characterisation' and 'psychological realism' throughout the thesis. This is followed by a definition of 'postdramatic theatre', primarily drawing on Hans Thies-Lehmann's analysis (2006). Finally, I offer definitions of additional terms used that require clarification. I begin by explaining what I understand by Jacques Derrida's terms '*différance*' (1982: 3), 'under erasure' (1974: 60), 'hauntology' (2006: 10), and the phrase 'the time is out of joint' (2006: 21), before briefly defining what I understand by 'humanism', 'liberal humanism' and 'posthumanism'. This chapter lays the building blocks for the discussion of the fate of character in postdramatic theatre in chapter two, the review of the relevant literature and the practice review in chapter three, the re-reading of Stanislavsky's key texts in chapter four and the analyses of the practical work offered in chapters five, six and seven. Thus, this chapter establishes the foundations from which the thesis addresses the following research questions:

- Can a Stanislavskian approach to character-creation provide a route into devising from text that neither adheres to the authority of the dramatic text, nor is fully anchored in realistic or naturalistic representation?
- When a character-led approach is applied to a postdramatic theatre-making practice what are the implications for the performance of character? Is it possible to use a Stanislavskian model of character-creation to stage postdramatic character 'under erasure'?

1.1 Methodology and organisation of the thesis

Practice-led research

My research methodology follows Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's articulation of 'practice-led research', with their emphasis on the 'reciprocal relationship between research and creative practice' and their contention that 'creative practice…can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research' (2009: 1, 5). In addition, the research also conforms to Robin Nelson's description of practice-as-research as a 'multi-modal research inquiry' (2013: 29) shifting between processes of theoretical analysis, creative practice and critical reflection. However, while I will draw on his triangulation of 'modes of knowing' (2013: 5) to illuminate the form and structure of the research project, it is important to emphasise that the new insights generated through, and manifested in, the practical work of the project are not intended to be read in isolation, but in dialogue with the theoretical case and reflective analysis articulated in this thesis. The creative output of the research undertaken through practice and the theorisation of that practice are, therefore, best read in conjunction with one another. Thus, the practical exploration of the research question is framed in this thesis by the theoretical case and an analysis of the practice supported by descriptions, transcripts, photographic and filmed evidence in Appendices I - VI. Accordingly, and because the practice has *led* to research insights that have been documented, theorised and analysed, rather than presented as stand-alone articulations of this 'new knowledge', I prefer the term practice-led research to Nelson's practice-as-research and in that way my methodology distinguishes itself from his model. Thus, while Nelson offers a useful framework for reading my research process, Smith and Dean offer a more appropriate model for understanding the articulation and dissemination of the new knowledge offered in this thesis. I hope that drawing on both models will help to illuminate the nature of my practice-led research in a field of necessarily idiosyncratic and individuated research approaches, where it is unlikely that one model ever 'fits all'.

I will begin by outlining the research process, before describing the documentation and dissemination of the research outcomes. While the work could only have been undertaken through reflexive practical endeavour, as it proposes to address a gap in scholarship primarily pertaining to theatre-making practices, that practical work has necessarily been underpinned by conceptual and theoretical analyses. That work comprises what Nelson defines as the 'know-what' of the research, constituting the 'cognitive propositional knowledge' and the 'conceptual frameworks' (Nelson 2013: 37) that, in this thesis, are articulated in chapters one, two, three and four as well as the work undertaken in preparation for directing and devising, described in chapters five, six and seven. The learning undertaken, and the knowledge generated in the 'know-what' mode (in this case the central hypothesis, the theoretical case and the strategies for devising and directing), were tested and refined in the rehearsal room. The knowledge generated in the mode of practical exploration, represents the 'know-how' of Nelson's triangulation, the embodied knowledge, in this case, the tacit insights gained from the experience of directing and devising and the performance-events. Following Nelson's dialogic model, the generation of 'know-how' was informed by, and continued to inform, the 'know-what' of the research, and critical reflection informed the ongoing process of theorising the problem and planning further iterations of practice. Thus, the practice drove the research trajectory in a cyclical fashion, relying on a dialogue between the learning generated in the 'know-what' and 'know-how' modes, elucidated in this thesis submission as 'know-that', 'the tacit made explicit through critical reflection' (Nelson 2013: 37). It is notable that the time and space between each iteration of practice and, in particular, following the final project, created an opportunity to reflect rigorously on the work that I had made and, in this way was crucial to articulating the 'know-that' of this research. For, as the researcher-practitioner, my lens for reading the work shifted significantly once I was no longer immersed in the process of 'theatre-making' and I was only able fully to articulate the new insights generated through that work through a process of reflection and

in relation to the theoretical case.[1] This dialogic model is reflected in the way in which the thesis is structured, which I outline below.

Documentation and dissemination of the practice-led research

The practice-led research is documented and discussed through the written thesis and following a practice-led, as opposed to a practice-based approach, the new knowledge generated is disseminated through the written analysis supported by documentation of the practical work. While the research question could only have been addressed through practice, the research findings are explicated in the body of the written thesis, evidenced by the accompanying documentation, rather than being primarily disseminated through witnessing the practice (either live or via documentation). The written thesis therefore frames the practical research. This first chapter outlines the key terms and the second proposes a re-reading of the fate of character in postdramatic theatre to establish the foundations for the argument for adopting a Stanislavskian, character-led approach to postdramatic theatre-making. Chapter three offers a literature and practice review to contextualise the practice-led research which, following Nelson's definition, seeks 'to bring out the specificity of the practitioner-researcher's own findings' (2013: 35) and articulate the gap in current scholarship. Chapter four proposes a re-reading of Stanislavsky's conceptualization of character in *An Actor's Work* (2008), *An Actor's Work on a Role* (2010), and *My Life in Art* (2008) and in so doing articulates the central hypothesis: that Stanislavsky's 'system' remains relevant to postdramatic theatre-making practices. Chapters five, six and seven offer an exegesis of the five

[1] In addition to outlining the research model it is also worth briefly identifying and clarifying my position as researcher and practitioner (I took the role of director, or theatre-maker as opposed to actor in all five iterations of practice). This dual role of researcher and practitioner demanded self-reflection and critical analysis of the creative output at every stage and as such, the research has relied upon my subjective experience of the practice and has embraced a heuristic approach. Following Clark Moustakas' contention, the project has conformed to a heuristic model wherein 'the investigator must have a direct personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated' (1990: 14) and within which the generation of new knowledge both relies upon and illuminates the researcher's own 'self-awareness and self-knowledge' (1990: 9). This project complied with Moustakas' model in its use of instinct and intuition, which has underlined the practical exploration and has informed the documentation of and critical reflection on each iteration of practice. Furthermore, the research has been characterised as having 'a path of its own', it has been 'self-directed, self-motivated and open to spontaneous shift' (Douglas and Moustakas 1985 in Moustakas 1990: 17).

iterations of practice, drawing out the new insights generated in the 'doing-knowing' mode, offering critical reflection on the practice, identifying what 'works' and, of course, what fails, and relating those insights to the theoretical case made in chapters one, two, three and four.

While the research-led practice has been shared with audiences at various stages in the project, in preparing the written thesis my intention has been to make both the theoretical and practical research, and the new insights it has generated, as accessible as possible and to ensure that the research findings are not obscured for the reader who has not experienced the practice in live form. As such, the documentation of practice included is substantial, albeit contained in Appendices. Over the duration of the research project the documentation has included: video footage and still photographs of performances; still photographs and recordings of rehearsals; rehearsal journals (including plans, sketches, notes, as well as in-depth character work); archival rehearsal material (props, costuming, pieces of set); and reflections and responses from audience members (academic staff, research students and the general public). The documentation included in the thesis draws on a range of this material, in an attempt to capture the ephemeral work of theatre-making at the heart of practice-led research and in order to substantiate the critical reflections on, and analyses of, the practical exploration of the research question.

Accordingly, the first three iterations of practice are discussed in chapter five and documented in Appendices I – III. These three iterations are viewed together, as this phase of the practice was characterised by exploratory, 'laboratory' work that laid the foundation for the two later, more substantial, projects. The fourth and fifth iterations are discussed in more detail, each in its own chapter, and a more comprehensive documentation of the performance of each project is included, with each presented in script-form in Appendices IV and V. The two scripts are supplemented by archival photographs and filmed footage of the final performance is included in Appendix VI. As the final iteration of practice, project five represents the culmination of the 'doing-thinking' (Nelson, 2013: 45). It is in this project that

the research-findings are most clearly illuminated, and it is for that reason that full footage of the performance has been included as substantial documentary evidence of the new knowledge generated through the research-led practice.

The practical methodology of devising and a Stanislavskian approach

To illuminate the practice-led research further I will briefly outline the two principal methodological aspects of the practical work. Firstly, I will locate the practice within a broad context of devised theatre-making, before detailing how I have used, and adapted, Stanislavsky's 'system' as model for devising.

Practice Methodology I: devising from text

As the history of devised theatre is rich and varied, and the term connotes a broad range of performance-making practices, I will outline the criteria upon which my approach has depended. In the most general terms, I identify my practice as devised in that the performances originated 'with the group while making the performance, rather than from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted' (Alison Oddey 1994: 1).[2] This definition must, however, be qualified in two respects. Firstly, while the practical projects relied on collaboration with actors, my role as researcher-director placed me in a privileged position. I formulated each of the projects, leading and shaping the practice through rehearsal process to performance. In this way, the practice did not conform absolutely to a process of creative collaboration, wherein material is generated by the actor-performers, and shaped entirely from within that collaboration.[3]

Secondly, my practice focuses on devising from text, a form that Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington identify as a practice wherein 'published

[2] See Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling (2006: 4-5) for an exploration of the complexities and nuances in defining devised theatre.

[3] This is not to suggest that this all devised work is created collaboratively, or that collaboration can ever be absolutely equal. However, it is often assumed that devised work is created according to this model and, thus I wanted to clarify how my own practice has developed in relation to a broad concept of devising.

fiction [is used] as a starting point' (2007: 88) for the development of original performance. Govan, Nicholson and Normington describe adaptations that utilise narratives in novels, poetry, film-scripts and play texts, and outline a clear historical lineage of devising from text that can be traced in the work of, for example, Mike Alfreds with Shared Experience, Simon McBurney with Complicité, and Elizabeth LeCompte with The Wooster Group. Accordingly, in devising from text the practical work of this research follows an established tradition in British and American theatre-making practices that also offers a point of contact with Lehmann's analysis of postdramatic theatre. In circumventing the playwright's authority, devising from text undermines the hierarchy of text and stage that Lehmann argues is central to the emergence of the postdramatic (2006: 146). In addition, working from text proved key for this project as the text provided us with material to deconstruct. Significantly, and as I discovered in the third practical project, a prerequisite for using Stanislavsky's 'system' to deconstruct character was to devise from texts in which the characters had not already been fragmented. If that work has already been undertaken by the playwright, then the opportunities for using the 'system' to destabilise the actor's work on a role are significantly more limited. Thus, devising from text provided me with a context within which to develop a practice grounded in Stanislavsky's 'system' while also rejecting the overarching authority of the text associated with dramatic theatre.

During the first phase of the practice I devised from a short story by Anton Chekhov, 'Disturbing the Balance', from Howard Barker's monologue 'The Investor's Chronicle' and from Gertrude Stein's play *Counting Her Dresses*. Working from the short story proved most productive and I continued to work from Chekhov in the second phase of the practice, devising from *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters*. While I explain this decision in chapters six and seven, it is worth signposting here that Chekhov's plays provided a distinctive opportunity to explore the research question. Stanislavsky's 'system' is inextricably tied to Chekhov's plays; the 'system'

emerged, at least in part, in response to the challenge of staging them.[4] However, while they are often regarded as exemplary of late nineteenth-century realism and Naturalism, the plays also strain at the edges of Naturalism (Raymond Williams 1987: 111), indeed, exemplifying what Peter Szondi articulates as modernism's 'crisis' of drama (1987: 18-22). The emphasis on stasis over action and the failure of dialogue as individuated self-expression that characterises Chekhov's later dramas, prefigures themes and formal practices that would become hallmarks of modern avant-garde theatre and that resonate with postmodern and poststructuralist formulations of human experience (Marranca 1984, Wyman 2017). Accordingly, working from plays that exemplify the naturalistic style pioneered by Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre, but that are also, following Szondi and Williams, central to modernism's crisis of drama, supported my intention to explore how Stanislavsky's 'system' might be used to stage non-naturalistic characterisation, and to reveal congruencies between late nineteenth-century realism and naturalism and postmodern conceptualisations of the human subject.

Practice Methodology II: A Stanislavskian approach and working with the 'system'

In addition to articulating the reasons for drawing on a text-based model of devising, I will set out the particular model of Stanislavskian character-creation that has informed my practice. Jean Benedetti's translations of Stanislavsky's *An Actor's Work*, *An Actor's Work on a Role* and *My Life in Art* have been the primary sources for access to Stanislavsky's ideas and practice. In addition, I have drawn significantly on Bella Merlin's *Beyond Stanislavsky: The Psycho-Physical Approach to Actor Training* (2001), *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (2003) and *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (2007) for explications of Stanislavsky's writing and additional practical exercises and techniques. Similarly, Jean Benedetti's *Stanislavski and the Actor* has

[4] Bella Merlin's (1999) article, 'Which Came First, The System or The Seagull' explores the relationship between Stanislavsky's actor training practices and his seminal production of *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1896. She argues that '*The Seagull* was the catalyst which provoked Stanislavsky into applying new laws to the *acting process* in order that it too might be structured as an art form,' and that 'Through his attention to the playwright's text and his hunger for a psychological theatre, Stanislavsky found in *The Seagull* a mine of resources which prompted him to explore naturalism and thereafter develop this into a realistic style of theatre' (1999: 224, 226).

offered substantial insights into Stanislavsky's rehearsal practices. Furthermore, I have used rehearsal techniques from Katie Mitchell's *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (2009). Thus, *An Actor's Work*, *An Actor's Work on a Role* and *My Life in Art* have offered direct access (albeit through Benedetti's translations) to Stanislavsky's writing and practice (that indeed represents a model for research through practice itself), while the analyses of Benedetti, Merlin and Mitchell have offered a less direct route.[5] In this way, the work of Merlin, Mitchell and Benedetti has provided a route into Stanislavsky's 'system' that has shaped the practical work of this thesis and that have been used in conjunction with theoretical analyses of Stanislavsky's approach to actor training throughout this research project.

Stanislavsky's 'system'

While Stanislavsky's 'system' should not be regarded as offering an immutable or cast-iron formula for the actor's work, it is a 'coherent, logical and systematic' model for actor training and practice (Benedetti 1989: xi). As such, I have tried to respect the integrity of the 'system', adopting an overarchingly systematic approach to its application and using the 'system' as it was developed by Stanislavsky as a coherent method for facilitating the actor's 'creative state'

[5] The work of Benedetti, Merlin and Mitchell all draw on Stanislavsky's ideas and practices, however his influence on their respective practices has been combined with techniques encountered from a range of additional sources. For example, Merlin's encounter with Stanislavsky was primarily facilitated by her doctoral research which took her to Moscow's State Institute of Cinematography. There she experienced 'a "hands on" training in the integrative [psycho-physical] approach to acting proposed by Stanislavsky' (2001: 3, 5) where she trained with Vladimir Ananyev, Katya Kamotskaya and Albert Filozov. Merlin describes her training as 'heavily influenced by, [but not limited to] Stanislavsky' (2001: 7) and she cites the work of Jerzy Grotowski and Michael Chekhov as 'an intrinsic part of much of the work, along with a multitude of other influences' (2001: 7). Her explication of Stanislavskian techniques, therefore, provides access to Stanislavsky through the filter of her own actor-training, which is characterised by a psycho-physical approach and which draws significantly on the techniques developed towards the end of Stanislavsky's life. Similarly, Katie Mitchell describes her encounter with Stanislavsky's practices during a period of research undertaken in 1989 when she received a grant to study director's training in Eastern Europe (2009: 227). Mitchell studied with 'Lev Dodin [who] trained with Boris Zon, who had himself studied with Stanislavsky.' (2009: 227) and she took 'private directing classes in the UK' with Tatiana Olear (who trained with Dodin) and Elen Bowman (who trained with Sam Kogan who in turn 'has trained at GITIS in Moscow, and (like Anatoli Vasiliev) his teacher was Maria Knebel, who had been taught by Stanislavsky himself' (2009: 230)). Mitchell accordingly documents the translations and influences undergone in the process of transmission, identifying the ways in which her practice has been both been shaped by Stanislavsky's legacy and has moved beyond it.

(Stanislavsky 2008: 164) and supporting their 'work on a role' (however changed the nature of that role might be). The 'system' represents Stanislavsky's attempt to codify the fundamentally ephemeral nature of the actor's work, reflecting his desire to condense a lifetime of practice into an acting 'grammar' (Benedetti 1988: 182) that could promote 'ideal' conditions for creative and artistic inspiration.[6] Stanislavsky well-understood the fleeting nature of inspiration and the problem fundamental to the practice of late-nineteenth, early twentieth-century naturalistic acting: the demand for the actor to behave 'naturally' in the 'unnatural' circumstances of the stage (Stanislavsky 2008: 598).[7] I have, therefore, tried to adopt a coherent approach to the 'system' in order to test its continued efficacy when applied to the performance of a role that is constantly and radically reconfigured. Furthermore, as I argue in chapter three's literature and practice review, while there is evidence of Stanislavsky's influence on a broad range of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century theatre-making that extends beyond a naturalistic acting style, or realistic dramaturgy, none of these instances of influence demonstrate a comprehensively 'Stanislavskian' approach.[8] Their adoption of techniques or principles is often piecemeal or even incidental. This project, therefore, set out to test a more thorough approach to exploring whether the 'system' could be adapted to support a devising process and to facilitate the deconstruction of dramatic character in performance. Accordingly, it has attempted to go some way towards addressing that gap in the relevant field of practice.

[6] Benedetti argues that the development of Stanislavsky's 'grammar' of acting, 'an ABC which everyone could master' was designed to provide a 'technical means of producing the creative state', encouraging creative inspiration (1989: 29). His acting 'grammar' was grounded in the idea that acting 'was no longer a question of purely external control, of technique, of skilfully reproducing a facsimile of experience but of creating and conveying inner life, a sense of *being*, fresh each time' (1989: 30).

[7] Stanislavsky conceived of the 'system' as a 'guide' and 'a reference book not a philosophy', a way of acting and, indeed, living, to support the actor's natural creativity. Indeed, he asserts 'There is no "system". There is nature' (2008: 12) and *An Actor's Work* concludes with an explication of why we need the 'system': 'It was essential to establish a "system", i.e. the laws of nature, because in performance conditions nature is violated and her laws broken. The "system" re-establishes them, brings human nature back to normal. Embarrassment, stagefright, false traditions destroy nature (2008: 612)'.

[8] See pp. 112-127.

However, while the overarching approach has been systematic, the application of the 'system' to a postdramatic theatre-making practice has inevitably required considerable adaptation of Stanislavsky's techniques and rehearsal processes. Stanislavsky's 'system' is an actor training model that supports the actor's work on a role and the intention of this research has been to use the techniques, practices and associated rehearsal processes to *de*construct the actor's work through a devising practice. This has involved applying the rehearsal practices associated with staging a text to a devising process in which the text was treated as a starting point, rather than a blueprint for the performance, and applying exercises designed to support the actor's work on a role to expose the processes through which the actor embodies the role in performance. The very act of applying Stanislavsky's 'system' to a devising process, not least one in which I attempted to problematise realistic representation and naturalistic characterisation, demanded some initial disaggregation of the 'system' and some modifications to his rehearsal processes.

My approach to working with the 'system' can broadly be divided into two phases. The first involved working with individual elements of the 'system' as I developed my understanding of it and explored applying actor-training exercises and rehearsal techniques to a devising process. The second phase entailed an increasingly methodical approach, as I developed a more coherent rehearsal process based on the 'system', testing the efficacy of applying Stanislavsky's rehearsal practices to devised, postdramatic theatre-making in a more systematic way. It is also, perhaps, worth noting that Stanislavsky's 'system' divides into two parts, the first addresses the actor's work on herself and represents an ongoing process of training. Exercises relate to the actor's 'inner self' and 'external self' and support the development of an optimal creative state. The second part addresses the actor's work on a role, with exercises focused on processes of text analysis, historical research and the actor's emotions and imagination. As this research project is concerned with the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' to a theatre-making practice, it has drawn more substantially on those elements designed to support the actor's work on a role in a rehearsal process. Thus, the practices of text analysis, working with the *magic if* and engaging the actor in contextual research, have been core to the

devising practice, while exercises relating to actor training have been more peripheral.

To illuminate the adaptations and modifications made in my application of the 'system' I will briefly describe my use of the 'system' in projects one, two and three and the more systematic approach adopted in projects four and five. During the first phase certain techniques proved central while others changed according to the demands of each project.[9] However, while the individual exercises varied, the guiding principles remained the same: the central intention to facilitate the actor's work on a role (even if that role was to be deconstructed in performance, or already appeared deconstructed in the text), and to support the actor's ability to work with the *magic if*, underpinned each of the early iterations of practice. Through the first three practice projects the techniques that revealed themselves to be core to my emerging devising process were: the *six questions*, exploring *subtext, units, objectives, counter-objectives, super-objectives, through-lines of action* and *events* – in short those supporting close textual analysis. This work was complemented by contextual historical research exploring the *given circumstances* and exercises engaging the actor's imagination and exploring analogous emotional states.

Throughout this early phase I worked with elements of the 'system' to explore how character is created in performance and how I might use those same techniques to *de*construct it. I explored transposing work conventionally undertaken in a rehearsal process into a performance context and, while processes of text analysis

[9] For example, in practice project one I began with the *six questions* and the *magic if*. This led to incorporating exercises on *subtext* and exploring *given circumstances* which engaged the actor in historical research and relied upon the actor's imagination. We also explored emotion through *internal monologue* and worked with props and costuming. In practice project two I revisited the exercises used in the first project and the *six questions* remained at the centre of the devising process. I also *objectives* and we explored analogous emotions working with objects. Exercises exploring *circles of attention* and *tempo-rhythm* was also incorporated. Practice project three again drew on many of the same techniques for text analysis, but I used Katie Mitchell's 'Facts and Questions' exercise and her exercise on emotion (2009: 152-56.) During this practice project I began working with Stanislavsky's *silent étude* – the first phase in the process of *active analysis* (see p.163 for a description of a *silent étude*).

were central to this, exercises undertaken to support the 'actor's work on the self' were also reconfigured to support this intention. I incorporated the more peripheral exercises in *relaxation*, *communion*, *grasp* and *circles of attention*, into scenes we were building and began to explore *adaptation*, *justification* and *tempo-rhythm* as we devised specific moments of action. Foregrounding the processes through which the actor explores a role became one of the ways in which I attempted to reveal the actor at work in creating a role, rather than embodying a character. Taking a practice that conventionally supports the actor's journey towards the role and placing that in front of an audience, became a fundamental part of the devising practice and techniques, and practices from both parts of Stanislavsky's 'system' served this intention.

Accordingly, this initial phase of work illuminated which elements of the 'system' would be core to my devising process and allowed me to experiment with the ways in which I might adapt my use of the 'system' to suit the task of deconstructing dramatic character. Furthermore, while this work entailed some inevitable disaggregation of the 'system' as I began to adapt its application, this phase also highlighted the inherently systematic nature of Stanislavsky's methods. Attempting to work with any one technique in isolation was rarely possible. For example, beginning each project with the *six questions* demanded that I incorporate work on *subtext* and *given circumstances* and called upon the actor's ability to engage their imagination and use the *magic if*. Accordingly, as my practice shifted gear in projects four and five and I moved towards a more coherent theatre-making process, I began to adopt an increasingly systematic approach. While chapters six and seven describe this more comprehensive application of the 'system' in detail, it seems pertinent to broadly outline the working model that developed over the two final iterations of practice and to highlight the ways in which my model both adhered to and diverged from Stanislavsky's rehearsal processes here.

The devising process for the two final iterations of practice was framed around the rehearsal method developed in the final years of Stanislavsky's life: *active*

analysis.[10] My approach consisted of three stages: work on the text, devising from the text and refining and structuring the devised scenes and improvisations. While *active analysis* provided a framework for the devising process, I made two important adaptations to it. First, the first and second stages of *active analysis*, in which the actors 'read the scene' and 'discuss the scene', were supplemented with more in-depth 'round-table analysis'. Second, the fourth stage, when the actors 'discuss the improvisation and return to the script,' was expanded to include not only the original text we were devising from, but additional material relating to the overarching *supertask*, and the final stage, when the actors are asked to 'compare what happened in the improv to the words and incidents of the actual text' (2007: 197) was modified. When applied to staging a play, this final step in the process aims to facilitate the actor's connection to the role, moving them closer to speaking the character's lines as written by the playwright. As part of the devising process, this step took on a different function. My intention in this final stage was to retain the distance between the actor and the role; I did not encourage accuracy in the actors' use of the original text but instead, as chapters six and seven will demonstrate, encouraged the actors to expose the 'gaps' between their 'selves' and the roles they were playing. The devising process, therefore, followed Stanislavsky's model for *active analysis*, taking a broadly systematic approach to applying the 'system' in rehearsal, while also adapting those practices to suit the demands of the devising practice and the intention to deconstruct character.

This evidently represents a nuanced approach to working with the 'system'. The very task of applying the 'system' to a devised, postdramatic theatre-making practice, where the text is used as a starting point, rather than providing the

[10] I used the process of *active analysis* described in Bella Merlin's *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (2007). While I will outline how I worked with this technique in chapter seven, it is perhaps useful to describe the principal steps in the rehearsal process here. They are:

1. Read a scene
2. Discuss the scene
3. Improvise the scene
4. Discuss the improvisation and return to the script
5. Compare what happened in the improv to the words and incidents of the actual text. (Merlin 2007: 197)

governing logic for the performance, inevitably informed the way in which Stanislavsky's techniques and practice were applied. However, I believe that these adaptations were necessary and, crucially, that they were undertaken in the spirit of Stanislavsky's own working practice. As Sharon Marie Carnicke argues, Stanislavsky warned against a formulaic and prescriptive approach to the 'system', regarding it as continually evolving. Indeed, she is clear that 'his system was never finished; it remained to the end a dynamic, ever-changing experimental process' (2009: 32). Furthermore, Stanislavsky himself asserts, in his discussion of what the 'system' actually is, that it must be both studied in its separate parts and then grasped as a whole; it is 'guide', 'a reference book, not a philosophy' (2008: 612).[11] Moreover, as the various and multiple re-formulations of Stanislavsky's rehearsal practices illustrate (as he moved further away from 'round-table analysis', to work on *affective memory*, or to embrace an active approach to exploring the text in the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis*), he continued to refine his methods until the end of his life. Accordingly, I suggest that my approach to using Stanislavsky's 'system' has been systematic, dynamic and experimental. In this way I have approached the question at the heart of this thesis in a Stanislavskian spirit – with a secure understanding of his guiding principles, but willing to adapt and evolve his practices as I have continued to learn through research and practice.

In summary, the intention of the research project has been to explore the efficacy of applying Stanislavsky's 'system', as a coherent model for generating a creative state for the actor to work in, and testing whether that model remains relevant and useful to the actor, when one of the principal goals associated with the 'system' (the intention to facilitate the actor's *work on a role*), has been radically reconfigured. Accordingly, the thesis attempts to evidence the extent to which,

[11] As Jean Benedetti persuasively argues 'The Stanislavski System is not important as a set of exercises or precepts, which if religiously followed will result in good acting. Knowledge of grammar is no guarantee of being able to write imaginatively; an ability to manipulate the figures of rhetoric will not create poetry. Grammar provides a structure within which the creative mind can operate. The System is important because it draws attention to certain precise questions and suggests methods for solving them. The solutions cannot simply be repeated, or imitated – that is the return to the cliché. The questions arise each time a play goes into rehearsal. What Stanislavski offers is a process of decision-making that does not do violence to the actor and his creative possibilities' (1989: 74).

despite its long-held association with naturalistic characterisation, the 'system' offers a flexible, practical approach to an actor's work, one that remains pertinent to the twenty-first century theatre-practitioner attempting to deconstruct dramatic character in performance.

1.2 Definition of key terms: 'realism', Naturalism, naturalistic characterisation and psychological realism

Defining what I mean by the terms 'realism', 'Naturalism', 'naturalistic characterisation' and 'psychological realism' is imperative for the work of this thesis because the research builds on the revision to Stanislavsky's legacy that argues against his exclusive allegiance to the theatrically 'realistic' styles with which he has historically been predominantly associated. These are: late nineteenth-century realism and Naturalism, which Stanislavsky describes as the 'historico-realist' style (2008a: 184) pioneered at the Moscow Art Theatre, the Socialist Realism that dominated Soviet theatre in the 1930s, and the psychological realism associated with Stanislavsky's methods of character-creation that became the cornerstone of the American Method. While the extent and significance of Stanislavsky's relationships to each of these performance styles is not disputed, revisions to his legacy (discussed in chapter three) have demonstrated that his understanding of stage 'realism' extends beyond the stylistic verisimilitude of Naturalism and the often psychologically-realised characterisation associated with it. These revisions emphasise Stanislavsky's concept of 'experiencing' (*perezhivanie*) and his 'redefinition of "truth" as whatever happens in performance' (Carnicke 2006: 144) over and above an adherence to any singular performance style in service of a particular literary or theatrical movement.[12] Defining what is meant by the 'realism'

[12] The centrality of Stanislavsky's concept of 'experiencing' has been illuminated by the work of Carnicke (2009) and Benedetti (2008, 2008a and 2010), revealing it to be the lynchpin of the Stanislavskian actor's work. Stanislavsky describes the concept of 'experiencing' as enabling the actor to 'fulfil the basic purpose of creative work, which is to create "the life of the human spirit" of a role' (2008: 20), and its significance is underlined in Benedetti's 2008 translation, where 'experiencing' provides the title for the first part of the book, encapsulating the entirety of an actor's first year of training. References to its meaning and the methods through which the actor can develop this optimum creative state pepper all three volumes and the 'art of 'experiencing' comes to resemble something of a holy grail for the student-actor as well as providing the structural

with which Stanislavsky has, conventionally, been predominantly associated is, therefore, central to the work of this thesis. Furthermore, the terms 'Naturalism', 'naturalistic characterisation', 'psychological realism' and a 'naturalistic' performance style are not only pertinent to my re-reading of Stanislavsky's key texts in chapter four, but also to the exploration of naturalistic characterisation and its relationship to postdramatic theatre's depictions of the human subject in chapter two and the review of the relevant literature and practice in chapter three.

Defining the term 'realism' is not a straightforward task; not only does it rely on two other problematic terms, 'real' and 'reality', it does not refer to an historically delineated movement, but rather can be applied to any kind of theatre that has a commitment to their being a reality that the theatre can represent. Therefore I propose to use 'Naturalism' and 'late nineteenth-century realism' to describe the performance style and theatrical conventions with which Stanislavsky's 'system' is predominantly associated, and I will use the terms 'psychological realism', 'psychologically realised characterisation', and 'naturalistic characterisation', to describe the style of acting that he pioneered. The following discussion will contextualise those decisions; I will begin by exploring what is meant by the term Naturalism and the 'historico-realist' style that was pioneered by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko at the Moscow Art Theatre at the end of the nineteenth century, before exploring the associated style of naturalistic acting and psychological realism.

Naturalism, the 'historico-realist' style and the Moscow Art Theatre

The 'historico-realist' style with which Stanislavsky is predominantly associated has its roots in late-nineteenth century European dramatic Naturalism. Indeed, it was in answer to the challenges posed by dramatic Naturalism that Stanislavsky began to develop the 'system'. 'Naturalism' represents a relatively homogenous dramatic

'through-line of action' (Benedetti: 1989: 63) for Stanislavsky's diegesis. Chapter four offers a fuller discussion of the concept of 'experiencing' and its implications for the actor's work on a role.

movement spanning the final decades of the nineteenth century, driven by a specific ideological agenda. Emerging from a wider literary movement, Naturalism reacted against the formalism of Classicism and the idealism of Romanticism by rejecting transcendental and fantastical subject matter in favour of 'objective' observation and the depiction of a reality presented within its socio-political context (Cuddon 1977: 544). A predominantly urban form, Naturalism reflected the changing social, economic and political upheaval of the modern era, and responded to the technological advances that accompanied industrialisation. It emphasised the individual's relationship to the world, exploring the 'character and fortunes' of man as 'determined by two kinds of natural forces, heredity and environment' (Abrams 1957: 124) and reflected a desire to understand and depict the 'truth' of human experience. Darwin's theories of evolution, August Comte's scientific approach to the study of society and the emerging field of sociology, Hippolyte Taine's application of theories of determinism to literature (Cuddon 1977: 407), together with Marx's *Das Kapital* and Claude Bernard's *Introduction à L'Étude de la Médecine Experimental*, all exerted considerable influence on the Naturalist movement (Styan 1981: 2). An overarchingly scientific approach was reflected in a

> determination to observe the world with all its flaws and disorders with the unsentimental clarity of a scientist, refusing any mystical, spiritual or otherwise non-physical explanations, crowned by a belief that the theatre has the vital social purpose of recording the truth of the world that is too important to be restrained by theatrical convention or moral squeamishness. (Rebellato 2010a: 22)

This determination, in turn, demanded new modes of staging, producing a distinctive 'visual style' through which to represent these 'objective' observations of real life (Rebellato 2010a: 23).

While Naturalism was a relatively short-lived dramatic movement, its stylistic innovations exerted a far-reaching influence on one strand of modern drama and, indeed, on the dominant style of acting and actor-training throughout the twentieth-century (in particular in relation to film and television) in the development of which Stanislavsky played an unparalleled part. While Stanislavsky

did not necessarily fully espouse the Naturalist agenda and, indeed, as I will argue in chapter three, he lamented the extent to which he was regarded as an exclusive proponent of Naturalism, the Naturalist movement was, nonetheless, hugely influential on the development of the 'historico-realist' style with which Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre established their reputation. The Naturalist dramatists' intention to represent the 'reality' of everyday lived experience on stage called for a new precision in design and changes in technology reconfigured both the use of the stage and its relationship to the auditorium, placing new demands on the audience's attention and, crucially, on the actor's work on a role. The introduction of electric light, the use of historically accurate costuming and real objects as set, coupled with dramatists' emphasis on life-like dialogue and fully drawn, complex characterisation, demanded radically reformed modes of acting. Speech and actions were to appear as life-like as possible, and the actors were to behave onstage as though behind a 'fourth wall', unaware of being observed by the paying audience. If everything on stage supported the illusion of 'real life', the actor's challenge was to match that authenticity in performance. It was Stanislavsky's 'system' that enabled actors to meet those demands and the Moscow Art Theatre became 'the fountainhead of the theory and method which nourished realistic acting and production everywhere' (Styan 1981: 70).

'A sense of belief' and 'truthful' acting

The methods Stanislavsky developed in response to the challenge of staging Naturalist dramas went on to make his name a byword for 'realistic and truthful acting' in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Carnicke 2009 :1). As Styan argues, it was Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko who fully realised the realistic style of production and performance that the 'new realism' (1982: 70) (or Naturalism) of the nineteenth century demanded, bringing a hitherto unseen 'psychological depth' (Styan 1981: 70) to the Moscow Art Theatre's productions. This 'psychological depth' is key to defining the late-nineteenth century realism and Naturalism with which Stanislavsky is associated. Stanislavsky's disciplined approach to the work of the actor, the abolition of the star system, the introduction

of the ensemble and his determination to explore every play from scratch, enabled him to take the first steps towards creating plausible characterisation which could be *believed* by both the actor and the audience by encouraging the actor's ability to respond to the stage events as though there were really happening in the 'here and now'.

Stanislavsky's commitment to 'believable' and 'truthful' characterisation was grounded in a desire to depict human behaviour as it could be observed in life and to allow the actor to express 'human reactions, rather than melodramatic ones' (Whyman 2018: 71). In keeping with the Naturalistic agenda, as Rose Whyman argues, Stanislavsky 'departed from the histrionic acting style of the neo-classical romantic theatre, to a style approaching what became known as psychological realism. His aim was to depict human behaviour, based on his observations in life' (2018: 71). The actor's task was to understand and communicate a character's 'inner life' to an audience through presenting their thoughts and feelings *realistically* – that is to say, in a way that might be deemed plausible in real life. This was reinforced by his interest in psychology and by his reading of Théodule-Armand Ribot's concept of affective memory, which offered insight into unlocking the actor's unconscious and drove the development of Stanislavsky's work on *emotion memory*. It was this technique that would, ultimately, go on to become the cornerstone of the American Method and the psychological realist style of acting associated with it. However, what is perhaps more important is the extent to which this work supported Stanislavsky's intention to develop the actor's *natural* creative state and to facilitate 'natural' reactions in the unnatural circumstances of stage performance. Human nature and the natural creative state are the lynchpins of the 'system'; as Stanislavsky attests: 'My life's object has been to get as near as I can to the so-called 'System', i.e. to the nature of creation. The laws of art are the laws of nature' and 'The 'System' re-establishes these laws; it advances human nature as the norm' (Benedetti 1989: 74-75).

Stanislavsky's methods were many and varied. They evolved significantly over the course of his lifetime and, as I will argue in chapter four, his understanding of the

terms 'truth' and 'realism' relate to the actor's experience in the moment of performance, to the recreation of the actor's 'natural state' in the unnatural circumstances of the stage environment, rather than to a singular literary movement or dramatic style. However, the genesis of the 'system' has its roots in Naturalism and is allied to a form of late nineteenth, early twentieth-century realism that embraces a 'realistic impulse, the desire to reproduce on the stage a piece of life faithfully' (Styan: 164).[13] Indeed, the 'system' emerged from a theatrical movement which centred on the idea that there is a 'truth' than can be communicated, and that that communication is best achieved through realistic, or 'true-to-life' representation. Furthermore, that the practice of representation should conceal the processes through which it is created. Although Stanislavsky's work moved away from the 'historico-realist' style he pioneered, it is his contribution to a style of acting that hinges on verisimilitude, on psychological complexity and the character's inner life, that he is best known for. As such I will use the term 'naturalistic characterisation' throughout the thesis to imply a commitment to verisimilitude and an emphasis on a 'believable', 'realistic' style of representing a character as they might appear in real life and I will use 'non-naturalistic' representation or non-naturalistic characterisation to indicate the opposite. I will use the terms 'psychological realism', or 'psychologically realised characterisation' to suggest rich and complex characterisation, with a focus on a character's inner life and to suggest a formal and stylistic determination to 'present characters' thoughts, feelings, and psychological development in a realistic manner' (Nellhaus et al. 2016: 606). The terms 'psychological realism' and 'psychologically realised characterisation' will be applied to both the historical period with which Stanislavsky's 'system' is associated and, also, to the dominant style of acting in mainstream naturalistic, twentieth-century theatre, film and television. While I will make the case for a more nuanced reading of Stanislavsky's relationship to 'realism'

[13] This definition resonates with Catherine Belsey's theorization of 'expressive realism', which is grounded in the idea that 'literature reflects the *reality* of experience, as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who *expresses* this perception in a text which enables other individuals to recognize its truth' (2003: 6) . Furthermore, Belsey argues that 'Realism offers itself as transparent' – hiding its own textuality, proffering itself, instead, as a direct route to something 'real' - emotions, people, stories (2003: 43).

later in the thesis, it has been necessary first to outline the style and conventions with which he has predominantly been associated.

1.3 Definition of key terms: postdramatic theatre

Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* provides a key theoretical framework for the research and, as such, I will briefly define what I understand by the term 'postdramatic theatre' primarily in relation to Lehmann's seminal text.[14] Lehmann's text surveys a diverse performance landscape of European and American theatre-making from the 1970s onwards, offering an analysis of performance texts, the performance of plays, devised work, performance art and hybrid forms that transgress conventional categorization, by a wide-ranging collection of practitioners and performance-makers. Within this broad body of practice, he identifies common patterns of theatrical styles and structures that reflect and express deeper shifts in the wider culture and that represent a significant break with the formal principles of drama. In conceptualising postdramatic theatre Lehmann identifies a paradigmatic shift in theatre-making rather than simply a stylistic choice. Principally, he describes 'a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time "after" the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre' (2006: 27). For Lehmann, this happens at a point in theatre-history when

> almost any form has come to seem more suitable for articulating reality than the action of a causal logic with its inherent attribution of events to the decisions of individuals. (2006: 181)

As Karen Jürs-Munby makes clear in her Introduction to the English translation of *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann's study is, in part, a response to Peter Szondi's *Theory of the Modern Drama* (2006: 2), in which Szondi identifies a crisis of drama, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century and sustained through the

[14] While the term 'postdramatic' was first employed by Richard Schechner to describe the 'happenings' of the 1970s (Lehmann 2006: 26), it entered the lexicon of mainstream theatre and performance studies in 1999 following the publication of Lehmann's now seminal study (translated and published in English in 2006). Although Lehmann first used the term in 1991 in *Theatre and Mythos*, in her review of Karen Jürs-Munby's translation of *Postdramatic Theatre* Elinor Fuchs suggests that Andrzej Wirth is, in fact, its likely source.

twentieth. Szondi articulates this crisis as a rupture from the principles of 'absolute drama' (1987: 8) – which he identifies as a 'particular dramaturgic form', 'a specific literary-historical event – namely the drama as it came into being in seventeenth-century France and was perpetuated in the German classical period' (1987: 5). 'Absolute drama' crucially offers a correlation of form and content that Szondi argues comes into being as

> the result of a bold intellectual effort made by a newly self-conscious being who, after the collapse of the medieval worldview, sought to create an artistic reality within which he could fix and mirror himself on the basis of interpersonal relationships alone. (1987: 7)

Accordingly, it is characterised by the 'absolute dominance of dialogue', and 'interpersonal communication' (1987: 8); reversing the Aristotelian subordination of character to plot, it is the dramatic characters' speech that drives the action. Absolute drama is 'primary', 'it is not a (secondary) representation of something else' (1987: 9), it adheres to unity of time, place and action which unfolds in a linear sequence and it is entirely self-contained; it 'can be conscious of nothing outside itself' (1987:8).

Szondi's conceptualisation of the drama as 'absolute' functions as a kind of 'ground zero', a starting point against which to measure the fractures and crises of late nineteenth century modern drama. From the late nineteenth and through the twentieth century Szondi identifies themes and content that exceed the form of 'absolute' drama, identifying ruptures in the form-content correlation in the work of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Maeterlinck and Hauptmann. He explores how they variously undermine the formal principle of depicting the '(1) [always] present, (2) interpersonal, (3) event,' replacing 'the members of this triad with their conceptual opposites' (1987: 45).[15] Szondi contends that these transgressions demonstrate

[15] Szondi argues that for Ibsen 'the past dominates instead of the present' and 'the interpersonal is displaced by the intrapersonal'; for Chekhov 'Event becomes incidental, and dialogues, the interpersonal form of expression, becomes a vessel for monologic reflection' (1987: 45). Maeterlinck's 'static' drama undermines the principle of action and dramatic time no longer progresses along a linear course, while 'the interpersonal is either sublated or seen through the subjective lens of a central *I*' (1987: 45). The intrusion of the past into the present in Ibsen, the socio-economic context in Hauptman, the internal life of Chekhov's characters, or the return to

that the dramatic form is no longer suited to depicting the modern experience, and represent the beginning of an 'epicization' that shapes his analysis of twentieth-century drama. Framing his theorization of this crisis and, indeed, of the twentieth-century dramatic landscape in a dramatic/epic binary, Szondi identifies various attempts to 'rescue' the principles of 'absolute drama' (bending the form to suit the new subject-matter, for example) or to reinforce this split through the explicit introduction of epic features.[16] This 'epicization' of drama marks a fundamental schism and represents a radical and seismic shift in the history of drama for Szondi, and his theorization offers a useful route into understanding Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* which is a continuation of Szondi's project (Jurs Munby in Lehmann 2006: 3). Lehmann's analysis, however, diverges from Szondi on one significant point, which, in turn, informs his conceptualisation of postdramatic theatre. Arguing that Szondi's dramatic/epic binary fails to take account of the *still*-dramatic features of much epic theatre, Lehmann contends that Szondi's analysis falls short because it cannot account for those practitioners and performances that absolve themselves of the principles of drama altogether (2006: 29-30). It is in order to conceptualise this more radical break from the principles of drama that Lehmann introduces the term postdramatic theatre.

Mediatization

While Lehmann traces postdramatic theatre's lineage in the 'grand theatre at the end of the nineteenth century' and in 'a multitude of modern theatre forms during the historical avant-garde and then the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s' (2006: 48), he locates the truly radical break from the principles of drama in the second half of the twentieth century. While the principles of 'absolute' drama and,

allegory in Strindberg station dramas all represent an epicisation that undermines the 'absolute' form.

[16] Szondi argues that 'Since modern theatre works develop out of and away from the Drama itself, this development must be considered with the help of a contrasting concept. "Epic" will serve here. It designates a common structural characteristic of the epos, the story, the novel, and other genres – namely, the presence of that which has been referred to as the "subject of the epic form" or the "epic *I*"' (1987: 6). Jochen Schulte-Sasse describes Szondi's use of the term 'epic' in his Foreword stating that 'The epic is, to repeat Szondi's formulation, "the depiction of an *entire* world in a *presubjectivist* period"' (1987: xi).

indeed, the very concept that there exists an 'ideal' that can be depicted through mimesis, come under significant pressure from the nineteenth century onward, postdramatic theatre emerges in response to a specifically late twentieth-century phenomenon: the mediatization of society within advanced capitalism. Knut Lundby argues that '"Mediatization" points to societal changes in contemporary high modern societies, and to the role of media and mediated communication in these transformations' (2009: 1). He observes that while modernism was characterised by a proliferation of new media, post-modern, or 'high modern' societies are characterised by media-saturation and dependence on the media (2009: 1). The proliferation of the media (by which I mean film, television, radio, print media, but, perhaps, more significantly, mobile, digital, information and internet technologies) has a direct and tangible impact on everyday life, which shapes the individual's experience of communication, work, social, political and cultural life, and thus the 'real'. Significantly, mediatization is entrenched in the practices and values of a globalised, late-capitalist economy, in which human interaction and events are displaced by mediation: 'being' is displaced by 'having' and experience, and indeed identity, become increasingly commodified and performative. In a mediatized society the image becomes commercial collateral and the economy is increasingly driven by a depersonalised commodity exchange that frames experience and identity as marketable assets. The consumerist individual pursues and presents experience and identity, which themselves becomes saleable constructs to be endlessly re-produced in service of corporate power and the global economy. As a result, the possibilities of authentic, individual experience are undermined as the individual and individual agency is increasingly determined by corporate marketisation and the endless proliferation of advertising. It is this context that, Lehmann argues, produces the radical break from the principles of drama.

Lehmann draws an unequivocal correlation between postdramatic theatre and 'the spread and then omnipresence of the media in everyday life since the 1970s' which 'has bought with it a new multiform kind of theatrical discourse that is here going to be described as *postdramatic theatre*' (2006: 22). Mediatization fundamentally reshapes communication, culture and the perception of reality and Lehmann

describes the how the 'comprehensive virtualization of reality and the widespread penetration of all perception by the grid of the media' (2006: 118) radically 'softens, mellows and weakens' the 'real' it attempts to reproduce (2006: 185). In consequence, the 'representational form of "drama"... grasps at nothing when it is meant to articulate experienced reality' (2006: 182). Drawing on Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, Lehmann argues that the mediatization and theatricalization of 'all areas of social life' illuminates the 'totality of the spectacle', whereby all aspects of everyday life are tied to commodities and consumption; images dominate 'real' experience and need is replaced with desire.[17] Thus in a late-capitalist, mediatized society, relationships are undermined as communication loses its potency; if communication between sender and receiver is mediated through a relentless proliferation of images, and information is received passively and at a distance, 'the bond between perception and action, receiving message and "answerability"' (2006: 184) is fundamentally weakened. Communication is remodelled as information exchange rather than a means to establish a connection between people. As the 'spectacle' dominates social existence, the idea of the 'original' is problematised and the possibility of 'authentic' experience and communication is replaced with its *representation*. We remain radically distanced, and thus potentially disengaged from a reality that is endlessly represented and re-iterated.

This has significant implications for the dramatic form. As Carroll, Jürs-Munby and Giles argue in their Introduction to *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*,

> the key issue here is political and/or economic agency: the extent to which we can or cannot comprehend and intervene in the social, political and/or economic order. In these terms representing reality in terms of traditionally dramatic personalised protagonists and antagonists is clearly anachronistic. (2013: 18)

[17] Lehmann argues that 'It is a fundamental fact of today's Western societies that all human experiences (life, eroticism, happiness, recognition) are tied to *commodities* or more precisely their consumption and possession (and not to a discourse). This corresponds exactly to the civilization of images that can only ever refer to the next image and call up other images. The totality of the spectacle is the 'theatricalization' of all areas of social life' (2006: 183).

As our experience of reality is undermined through its mediatization and as it 'becomes obvious that the real issues are only decided in power blocs, not by protagonists who in reality are interchangeable' (2006: 182), a dramatic model grounded in a mimesis and in interpersonal relations, expressed in interpersonal dialogue and centred on the individual as a self-determining agent, seems woefully out of date.[18]

Furthermore, a theatrical form in which the stage is conventionally subordinate to the text, where the text represents an 'original' that the performance seeks to reproduce, seems increasingly anachronistic when both the concept of an original 'reality' and the processes of representing that reality are problematised by the pervasive mediatization of perception. In addition, film and television undermine theatre's claim on representation through mimetic dialogue and action and, as a less readily marketable commodity, theatre loses standing in a late-capitalist society that prioritises the commercialisation and monetisation of culture.[19] Lehmann argues that postdramatic theatre emerges, therefore, in reaction to the mediatization of society and culture, as theatre-makers consider what is unique about the live theatrical event and explore models of resistance to the 'comprehensive virtualization of reality' (2006: 118). He argues that this manifests in the new theatre both through the self-conscious adoption and 'remediation' of media technologies, and in a retreat from media technologies, with the adoption of a stripped-down form of staging that resists the paraphernalia and aesthetics of mediatization.[20] Whatever form the response takes, the mediatization of society and culture provides the backdrop for a theatre which

[18] It is perhaps helpful to contextualise this statement with Lehmann's fuller analysis. He argues that: 'while the drama of modern times was based on a human being that constituted itself through interpersonal rapport, the postdramatic theatre assumes a human being for whom even the most conflictuous situations will no longer appear as drama... Certainly, one can still recognize a "dramatic form" in this or that moment (e.g. "fights" between powerful rulers), but it soon becomes obvious that the real issues are only decided in power blocs, not by protagonists who in reality are interchangeable' (2006: 182).

[19] It is significant that Lehmann notes that the *real* concern for theatre comes as media technologies facilitate 'interaction of distant partners', threatening to undermine live theatre's claim to offer live participation (2006: 167).

[20] Lehmann argues that those practices that use the media can be roughly divided into four categories: 'Either media are *occasionally* used without this use fundamentally defining theatrical

> tries to withdraw from the reproduction of "images" into which all spectacles ultimately solidify. It becomes 'calm' and 'static', offering images without reference and handing over the domain of the dramatic to the images of violence and conflict in the media... (2006: 184)

Representation and the dramatic form

If, following David Barnett, drama 'is defined by two key processes, it represents and it structures time' (2008: 14), the process of representation and the temporal linearity of drama become anachronistic in the context of a globalised, mediatized society. A media-saturated, globalised culture offers a significantly remodelled social experience where space and time are not only compressed through the use of mobile and internet technologies, but our experience of them becomes increasingly plural as we interact virtually across simultaneously distinct time zones and locations. As Barnett argues,

> Technological advances have radically compressed both time and space, and raise the question as to how one represents a world that is constantly shrinking. Recently, transatlantic and low-cost flights, the internet, and mobile phones have all radically affected the way we view distance and the time required to cover it. Information technology and the mass media have connected the world in ways that engender profoundly different ways of experiencing it. (2008: 15)

If our experience of space and time becomes increasingly disjunctive and simultaneous, and identity is problematised and individual autonomy is fundamentally weakened, then the dramatic theatre's recourse to a linear narrative, centred around an autonomous, self-determining individual, seems increasingly out of step with contemporary experience. Thus given that mimetic action appears to wilfully overlook the 'theatricalization' that has become synonymous with everyday life, and 'reality' is inscribed in an endless chain of theatrical representation, postdramatic theatre tries to find new ways to depict and

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conception (mere media employment); or they serve as a source of *inspiration* for the theatre, its aesthetic or form without the media technology playing a major role in the productions themselves; or they are *constitutive* for certain forms of theatre (Corsetti, Wooster, Jesurun). And finally, theatre and media art can meet in the form of *video installations*' (2006: 167-168).

interrogate that reality that move beyond a mimetic, dramatic form. Indeed, Jürs-Munby argues that postdramatic theatre asks pertinent questions about dramatic representation:

> Questions such as: how can theatre represent or refer to "the world" when the world – multiply mediatized and globalized as it is – has become less "surveyable" than ever? Or: what kind of forms of theatre do practitioners find to address the lack of agency in a world without "real" protagonists? (Barnett, Jürs-Munby, Lehmann, 2006a: 488).

Postdrama responds to those questions by problematising representation, rejecting linearity, resisting singularity of interpretation and undermining the hierarchy of the dramatic text and the stage performance.[21] Indeed, Lehmann argues that a 'history of the new theatre... would have to be written as the history of a mutual disruption between text and stage' (2006: 146). This disruption manifests in a 'de-hierarchization' of theatrical elements, where text, sound, movement, space and light (for example) take on equal importance and where interpersonal dialogue no longer dominates. The act of speaking and the materiality of language takes precedence over the contents of the speech, and the subject's ability to express themselves in and through language is shaken. Meaning and interpretation are questioned, and referentiality diminishes. Lehmann emphasises the extent to which 'the sign merely communicates itself, or more precisely its presence. Perception finds itself turned back on the perception of structures' (2006: 98) and the spectator is directed to the act (speech, gesture, movement) itself, rather than its signified meaning. Undermining a logocentric[22] hierarchy, postdrama favours polyvalency; resisting the coherence and cogency of Szondi's 'absolute drama', it

[21] In the Prologue to Postdramatic Theatre Lehmann argues that 'the text therefore is considered only as one element, one layer, or as a "material" of the scenic creation, not as its master' (2006: 17).

[22] Following Honderich (ed.) (1995) 'logocentrism' is defined as a term 'deployed most frequently by Jacques Derrida and the proponents of deconstruction in philosophy and literary theory. In this usage a logocentric discourse is one that subscribes to the traditional order of priorities as regards language, meaning, and truth. Thus it is taken for granted first that language (spoken language) is a more or less adequate expression of ideas already in the mind, and second that writing inhabits a realm of derivative, supplementary signs, a realm twice removed from the 'living presence' of the *logos* whose truth can only be revealed through the medium of authentic (self-present) speech' (511).

radically undermines the principle of dramatic representation that had become the trademark of a mediatized culture, proposing instead,

> a theatre beyond representation, in which the limitations of representation are held in check by dramaturgies and performance practices that seek to *present* material rather than to posit a direct, representational relationship between the stage and the outside world. (Barnett 2008: 14)

The audience, or spectators

The de-hierarchization of theatrical elements and the problematization of representation has consequences for the audience. Indeed, in postdramatic theatre, audiences are reconceived as 'spectators' whose active participation in meaning-construction is a prerequisite. The spectator's eye is no longer directed to a singular interpretation; meaning is no longer constructed on the stage, but is, instead, grasped or inferred in the auditorium. The Aristotelian unities of time, place and action fragment and the convention that there is nothing external to the drama is overturned. As postdramatic theatre replaces action with stasis, linear time is replaced by '*time "shared"* by the performers and the audience*'*, often with 'structurally neither beginning, nor middle, nor end' (2006: 155).[23] Temporal aesthetics that favour the prolongation of durational time, repetition, or the acceleration of 'media time' (2006: 158) demand that the spectators engage constructively with what they are watching if they are to decipher meaning. The 'middling' space of the dramatic stage is replaced by extremes of scale, undermining the ability of the stage to coherently mirror off-stage reality and, expanses of space, or the proximity of intimate spaces, activate a spectator's participation. They must choose where to look, shaping and guiding their own interpretation of the event, or they may encounter performers more closely, even directly, and the activated spectator is reconfigured as a participant, a 'co-creator' in the theatre event. This returns us to Lehmann's theorization of postdramatic

[23] Lehmann argues that the concept of 'shared time' is at the centre of 'the new dramaturgies of time: from the diverse distortions of time to the assimilation of the speed of pop: from the resistance of slow theatre to theatre's convergence with Performance Art and its radical assertion of *real time* as a situation people live through together' (2006: 155).

theatre's response to a mediatized culture, to its resistance to the erosion of communication and the dominance of representation. It signals an attempt to re-establish the act of communication by returning to what is really 'real' about the live theatre event; it constitutes a rejection of the attempt to bring cohesion and coherence to the inevitable chaos of the 'desperately psyched-up sense of [late twentieth-century] life' (2006: 118).

Postdramatic theatre as a theatre of the 'real'

The representation of a fixed, coherent dramatic cosmos is further undermined by the foregrounding of the 'real' in postdramatic theatre. Subverting the principle that anything not central to the dramatic fiction must be excluded, Lehmann argues that while the 'real' has obviously always been present in the theatre ('without the real there is no staging' 2006: 102), postdrama's willingness to put 'the real on equal footing with the fictive' (2006: 103) produces an effect of '*indecidability*' that problematises the distinction between fiction and reality and reshapes the theatrical event.[24] He argues that the 'theatre of the real' is characterised by

> "treading the borderline", by permanently switching, not between form and content, but between "real" contiguity (connection with reality) and "staged" construct. It is in this sense that postdramatic theatre means theatre of the real. It is concerned with developing a perception that undergoes – at its own risk – the 'come and go' between the perception of structure and of the sensorial real. (2006: 103)

Blurring the boundary between the 'real' and the fictional in this way moves postdramatic theatre closer to the aesthetics of performance. The aesthetic distance between the stage and the auditorium is shaken and the theatre event begins to take on the qualities of a 'situation' (2006: 104). If fictionality is undermined, postdramatic sign usage no longer simply serves representation, but, instead, potentially facilitates a 'communicative event' (Lehmann 2006: 104) in

[24] Lehmann argues that 'Even if theatre has a number of conventionalized disruptions of its closure (asides, direct address), the play on stage is understood as diegesis of a separated and 'framed' reality governed by its own laws and by an internal coherence of its elements and which is marked off against its environment as a separate 'made up' reality' (2006: 100).

which the spectator is offered a genuinely *individual* experience of a performance (Lehmann 2006: 106). In this way postdramatic theatre attempts to rehabilitate the act of communication that has been eroded by mediatization, critiquing the practices of dramatic representation that the media have co-opted, and offering an alternative mode of interaction, an alternative model of meaning-creation and of experiencing a cultural event.

This shift towards an '*aesthetics of indecidability*' demands a new set of performance techniques. Postdramatic theatre prefers performers to actors, foregrounding bodily 'presence' and rejecting the representation of fictional dramatic characters and processes of embodiment.[25] The performer's function shifts from signification to manifestation and the 'psychological orientation' (2006: 96) of the actor's work is abandoned; 'The body becomes the centre of attention, not as a carrier of meaning but in its physicality and gesticulation. The central theatrical sign, the actor's body, refuses to serve signification' (2006: 95).

While I will examine the consequences for the fate of dramatic character in detail in the following chapter, it is important to note, at this juncture, that character is fundamentally reformed on the postdramatic stage. The intensification of mediatization in post-modernity and its impact of the concept of the 'individual' and the idea of identity as stable, singular and authentic, fundamentally reshapes representations of the human subject in postdramatic theatre. As David Barnett argues,

[25] While 'presence' may denote a range of performative possibilities, when referring to 'presence' in opposition to the representation afforded through character I am following Lehmann's definition of 'presence' to mean 'the doing in the real' (2006: 104). While I understand that this may appear an oversimplification of a complex and oft contested term, a more nuanced discussion of the term is beyond the parameters of the research project and, as such, Lehmann's definition provides a clear and precise framework for the analysis offered herein. This definition of presence resonates with Cormac Power's 'literal mode of presence', which he identifies (and, indeed, challenges) in *Presence in Play* (2008). The literal mode of presence is, for Power, a mode of 'being present' in performance that depends on an elision of temporal states as experienced by the audience and the performer. This type of presence produces in, for example, Performance Art, an apparent levelling of status for the participating subjects (performers and spectators) wherein all participants share an experience as their 'real' selves and thus resonates with the practices of postmodern theatre (that Power identifies) and postdrama's revision of the actor-spectator relationship.

> Capitalism, too, in the form of globalization, has become the almost universal economic system and has exploited the new technologies to make categories such as distinctiveness and particularity all the more difficult to apprehend. With this in mind, the individuality of character, for example, may well confer a representation with a sense of singularity where no such quality may be said to exist. (2008 :15)

The ghostly presences, the hybrid entities and the 'posthuman' bodies that take character's place, undermine the conceptualisation of an autonomous, coherent, self-present individual subject. Accordingly, and while I will dispute this contention in the following chapter, they might appear to be the antithesis of the psychologically-realised, naturalistic characters with which Stanislavsky's 'system' has, historically, been predominantly associated.

Although Lehmann is clear that there is no singular paradigm for postdramatic theatre-making, postdrama nonetheless represents a paradigmatic shift, a moment where theatre turns back upon itself, examining the practices, forms, structures and principles of drama, honing in on the central problem at the heart of theatre-making: the fundamental question of representation and its relationship to that which it attempts to represent. This is a theatre that is,

> *not simply a new kind of staging* – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels upside down... it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information. (2006: 85)

1.4 Additional terms for definition:

Throughout the thesis I use several Derridean terms. I will briefly outline what I understand by the terms and describe how I will use them in the thesis. I will explain what they mean for thinking about postdramatic theatre, or about acting and character, providing examples of this how this might manifest in practice.

Différance

Derrida's neologism plays on the dual meaning of the French verb *différer* (meaning both to differ from and to defer) and it is the duality of simultaneous 'temporization' (implied by deferral) and of 'spacing' (implied by difference) that lies at the heart of its strategic function as 'a dynamic process of differentiation' (Taylor and Winquist 2001: 99). *Différance* facilitates the chain of representation through which meaning is produced, it is the very 'movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general is constituted "historically" as a weave of differences' (Derrida 1982: 12). *Différance* is the endless play of difference and deferral that problematises the concept of a transcendental signified, or logocentric anchoring in meaning, truth or consciousness. *Différance* undermines the construction of binary oppositions, for example, the speech/writing binary that underpins logocentrism. The word *différance* illustrates its own constitutively destabilising function. The inaudible difference between *différence* and *différance* highlights the ambiguity of the spoken term that demands to be written in order to properly convey its meaning. In this way the term itself collapses the speech/writing binary that privileges speech as originary and text as its supplementary copy.

Accordingly, in the example of '*différance*', the play of *différance* foregrounds the chain of representation through which meaning is produced and undermines a metaphysics of presence. In '*Différance'* Derrida describes how

> Différance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each so-called element, each element appearing on the scene of presence is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of a past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element; this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not: that is, not even to a past or a future as a modified present. An interval must separate the present from what it is not, in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and in particular the substance or subject. (1982 :13)

For Derrida, *différance* is the very condition of language, text and presence. As Nicholas Royle asserts 'Différance 'is' what makes presence possible while at the same time making it differ from itself' (2003: 71).

I use *différance* in chapter two to re-read the relationship between postdramatic and dramatic theatre. I argue that, in its critique and problematization of the conventions and principles of drama, postdrama differs from and defers the dramatic, rather than making an (impossible) break from it. Indeed, I contend that postdramatic theatre often engages with and, thus relies on the dramatic form and conventions that it rejects. Lehmann makes just this point in his assertion that postdramatic theatre should 'be understood as the unfolding and blossoming of a potential of disintegration, dismantling and deconstruction within drama itself' (2006: 44). If the 'dismantling' remains *within* drama, the postdramatic must still engage with the dramatic, deferring and differing from the dramatic form, but asserting its postdramatic status in relation to the dramatic.

This has further significance for my reading of postdramatic theatre's depiction of human subjects. Following Liz Tomlin's analysis of postdramatic 'characterisation' and the liminal figures of the postdramatic stage and their often failed attempts to conjure dramatic characters, I propose that *différance* exposes the extent to which postdramatic 'subjects' problematise and, accordingly, rely upon the form of 'characterisation' they critique. *Différance* illuminates the extent to which postdramatic theatre depicts human subjects who manifest as and through an interplay with, and an ongoing and dynamic process of differentiation from and deferral of, that which they are not: the self-determining, coherent agents of action associated with dramatic (and realistically represented) character. Accordingly, these postdramatic subjects manifest a form of 'presence' that is destabilised, disunified, citational, and determined by *différance*.

As an example of how this might manifest in practice, this play of *différance* is visible in the work of the Wooster Group, and, indeed, in their development of the

'surrogates' and performed personae that populate their stages. Elizabeth LeCompte describes how 'Each production reflects a continuing refinement of a non-linear abstract aesthetic which at once subverts and pays homage to modern theatrical "realism"' (quoted in Knowles 2004: 149), refusing, but recalling (and critiquing) a realistic, dramatic form and style. The personae the Wooster Group performers create are, neither characters nor are they 'quite equivalent to the performer's "real" identity' (Auslander 1997a: 92), they develop from the performer's encounter with the material they are exploring, and, the characters within that material that their performances recollect and recall. Accordingly, the Wooster Group's performances often blur the line between the fictional 'characters' the actors present and the actors themselves and their presence manifests through a play of *différance* that continually differs from and defers both the performance of 'self' and 'role'. As a result, they manifest a presence that is neither 'character' nor 'actor', but that instead becomes detached and disunified, re-directing the spectator's attention to the *processe*s through which 'characters' and, indeed, human subjectivities are constructed. As Liz Tomlin argues,

> In the adaptations of the Wooster Group... the characters, or signs, are uprooted in this way from their original context and reframed in ways that offer the spectator multiple rather than singular potential referents. In this sense they are signs that do not consist of a signifier (character in the present) coupled with a signified (character in the original) but are now free-floating signifiers open to multiple interpretations. (2013: 88)

This multiplicity of interpretation is characteristic of postdramatic theatre and I contend that *différance* provides a route into understanding how this ambiguity and 'undecidability' associated with postdramatic theatre is constituted through an ongoing relationship with the dramatic form, and, in some cases, with the style of realistic or naturalistic representation that postdrama rejects.

Sous rature or 'under erasure'

Derrida employs the practice of placing a term 'under erasure' to indicate that the word is 'inaccurate yet necessary' (Spivak in Derrida 1974: xiv). While there may be

no better term to describe a concept or meaning, the current term fails to convey everything we may want to suggest. Placing a term 'under erasure' highlights both the limits of language and our dependency on it. Gayatri Spivak, in her Preface to *Of Grammatology* describes the practice of placing a term 'under erasure' as a strategy 'of using the only available language while not subscribing to its premises' (Derrida 1974: xviii). It is a strategy of ' "a discourse which borrows from a heritage the recourses necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself" ' (Derrida quoted by Spivak in Derrida 1974: xviii). That is to say, a discourse that enables the critique of a term, or of the concept which it signifies, but which is dependent upon and makes use of the term itself.

I use the term 'under erasure' to describe postdramatic theatre's depictions of human subjects, making the case for reading them as characters 'under erasure' in the final part of chapter two. I contend that while the depictions of human subjects in postdramatic theatre differ radically from the representation of human subjects in dramatic theatre, we need not do away with the term 'character' in order to describe them. This contention requires both a rehabilitation of the term and a clarification of its meaning. Arguing for a broader definition that recognises dramatic character's pre-psychological and, broadly, figurative and allegorical incarnations, I suggest that analyses that argue for the 'death' of character in late twentieth and early twenty-first century postmodern and postdramatic performances, wrongly conflate the rejection of character as a coherent, self-determining, free agent of action with the rejection of character *per se*. If we extend the definition of dramatic character beyond the parameters of a stable, coherent, self-determining entity, to indicate, simply, any conceptualisation or figuration of human subjectivity within a text or theatre performance, then the term remains useful and relevant. Furthermore, if we understand 'character' to reflect historically specific, social and cultural conceptions of the human subject, and if we accept that character (along with plot) offers the means through which we encounter and read dramatic performances, then, I propose that the term still offers a useful framework for reading postmodern and postdramatic theatre's representation of human subjects.

However, while I propose to rehabilitate the term 'character', I also argue that it cannot be adopted without amendment. Indeed, it appears to me to be useful and necessary, but it is not fully adequate to describe postdramatic theatre's depiction of human subjects. As such, I propose the term character 'under erasure'. By placing the word 'under erasure' I intend to highlight the extent to which postdramatic subjects recall and critique dramatic character. They expose the extent to which late twenty-first century human subjectivity is decentred, unfixed and disunified through an engagement with and problematization of dramatic character. Accordingly, and as I will argue in chapter two, the staging of character 'under erasure' illuminates the extent to which the postmodern or postdramatic subject lacks agency and coherence and the extent to which human subjectivity is commodified and performed in a mediatized, globalised society. Accordingly, in their fractured and disunified state, I suggest that the figures of the postdramatic stage, the characters 'under erasure', illuminate the failure of dramatic character to represent a late twentieth century experience of subjectivity. However, in so doing, I also suggest that the characters and conventions associated with the drama that they reject, are often recalled and recollected by that very process of resistance.

The performance of character 'under erasure' might, in practice, manifest in a performance in which a character is evoked, but never fully embodied, or realised. Characters 'under erasure' might be exemplified by those performances that draw attention to the *processes* through which the human subject is constructed, or the dramatic character is staged. Or by the performance of a role that is disrupted and undermined by mishaps and mistakes, or one that is characterised by failed attempts to produce it. It might also be exemplified in performances that foreground the actor's corporeality in such a way that undermines the presentation of the character as a coherent entity within a separate and coherent fictional universe, instead, drawing attention to the actor's bodily presence and what is 'real' about the performance – the very act of performing the role. Indeed, character 'under erasure' might be exemplified as a performance that plays with the performer's presence, destabilising the boundary between the actor and the

role, extending the self-referentiality of metatheatre to produce a genuine 'undecidability' about whether what the spectator is witnessing is a real or staged event. The performance of character 'under erasure' often draws attention to the act of representation and the processes of representation, exploring the relationship between the staged event or the staged character and the, apparently, 'authentic' original it attempts to re-present. As Liz Tomlin observes in her discussion of the work of Forced Entertainment,

> The play between these levels of presence, from the grotesque fragments of characterisation, to the enhanced surrogate performers, to the 'seemingly' more real performers themselves, is strategically manipulated by the company to interrogate the very notion of authenticity. (2913: 84)

By playing with the styles and conventions associated with different forms of dramatic character and drawing attention to the processes inherent to the actor's work on a role the staging of character 'under erasure' destabilises the dramatic form, undermining realistic representation and foregrounding the fragmentary nature of late twentieth century experience of human subjectivity.

I use the term character 'under erasure' throughout the analysis of my practice to describe those moments in the actor's performance which recall dramatic character while simultaneously undermining the actor's performance of the role. I hope to have highlighted moments in my own practice which, however, fleeting, have attempted to problematise the practice of representation and destabilise the performance of character, exposing the performance of a role as necessarily disjunctive, unfinished and disunified. For example, in the fourth practical project, *The Seagull, or Why Masha Always Wears Black*, the actress playing 'Actor/Masha' adopted a practice of 'Speaking Out', in which she would interrupt her own delivery of the text and speak aloud her thoughts in that moment. The moments when Actor/Masha interrupted herself, switching between the role she was playing in the performance, and commenting on her own experience of that process, created moments of characterisation which I believe are best described as producing a sense of character 'under erasure'. These moments undermined the performance

of ‘Masha’, highlighting the actor’s failure to effectively embody the role, but they remained dependent on the character of ‘Masha’. Switching between exposing her ‘self’ in the role and attempting to perform the role began to blur the boundary between self and role and the performance of dramatic character was destabilised. In the most effective of these moments, it appeared to me that the actor’s presence could no longer best be described as bringing forth a dramatic ‘character’, yet neither was the actor simply being herself, and accordingly they signalled an experience of subjectivity as unfixed and discontinuous, directing the spectator’s eye to the process through which the ‘self’ might be staged, rather than to a unified or coherent performance of that ‘self’. A fuller discussion of these moments can be found in chapter five.

Hauntology, the ‘spectre’ and ‘the time is out of joint’

In chapter three of the thesis I use Derrida’s concept of ‘hauntology’ to re-read Stanislavsky’s conceptualisation of performed character and its interdependence with the actor’s self. Derrida uses the term ‘hauntology’ in *Spectres of Marx* (1993) to examine the ways in which ideologies remain always, already, constitutively infiltrated by those ideologies that precede them and that they seek to resist. The dominant hegemony attempts to maintain its power through processes of exclusion and suppression and, accordingly, becomes haunted by that which it seeks to silence or repress. In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida explores how the spectre of Marxist ideology and communism haunts late twentieth-century neo-conservatism; how neoliberal ideologies and hegemonies fail to ‘banish the spirit of Marx’ (Halpern 2001: 32) and how present structures of power remain absolutely infiltrated by that which they seek to exclude, that which they position themselves against. Hauntology offers an alternative model of ontology which emphasises the extent to which ontologies (and ideologies) manifest in relation to one another, to that which they are not. Hauntology evokes a *spectral* presence, and Derrida uses the concept of the ‘spectre’ to illuminate the transgression of the boundary between past and present, destabilising the border between ideologies, ontologies, discourses and texts.

I propose that Derrida's articulation of 'hauntology' and of the 'spectre' as 'a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate' (Davis 2005: 376) illuminates Stanislavsky's conceptualization of the 'new, third being' (2010: 75), Stanislavsky's term for performed character. I make the case for this in chapter four. In summary, my contention is that Stanislavsky's 'third being' is a spectral figure, straddling the past (the authorial text) and the present (the moment of performance) and problematizing the boundary between the two. I suggest that discussions of the 'third being' are better framed by the concept of 'hauntology' than of ontology, as it exhibits a ghostliness that dissolves the boundaries between past and present, self and other. The 'third being' conforms to Derrida's 'spectrality effect... undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other' (2006: 48). Further, I propose that the 'third being' is characterized as both a form of 'non-presence' and a plenitude of presence, a double, an excess of presence, that dissolves the boundary between past and present throwing 'the time out of joint' (Derrida 1994: 20). It is fluid and multiple, rather than fixed and singular as, following Stanislavsky, the 'third being' exists in the space *between* the actor and the role, inhabiting the boundary, the borderline.

The 'third being' manifests in the very interplay between the presence of the actor and of role and it emerges through dynamic differentiation. It is not afforded a tangible, originary presence – it is a fleeting, otherworldly, conjuring trick. The performed character is haunted by the actor's 'self' it must repress, but upon which it, constitutively, depends. Understanding the extent to which acting, following Stanislavsky's model of *experiencing*, is a hauntological process sheds significant light on the parallels between Stanislavsky's conceptualization of the nature of performed character and the spectral figures that inhabit postdramatic stages. It illuminates the extent to which acting is, for Stanislavsky, not about taking on another role, or *becoming* someone else, but that it is, instead, an ephemeral and fleeting activity that depends upon an interplay with the actor's self.

In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida describes the time of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

> "The time is out of joint": time is disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down [*traqué et détraqué*], *deranged*, both out of order and mad. Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadvantageous. (1994: 20)[26]

The idea of time as 'out of order' is central to the formulation of 'hauntology' and the 'logic of the spectre'; it is time that dispels the illusion of presence and of the singularity of the 'present'. Following Derrida, while the present moment takes place in the 'now', that 'now' is already infiltrated by both the past and its future; the past as it is remembered and the future as it is anticipated. 'The time is out of joint' conveys a de-synchronicity of time, a sense that time can and will never achieve a full self-presence. It is a disjunctive experience of time, marked by the collision of natural time and internal time, or mechanised time, the time of production, or, for Hamlet, the *fore*telling of destiny at his birth. In its recourse to the 'present', the idea that 'time is out of joint' has important consequences for 'presence'. As the present is already, always infiltrated by the past and the future, so 'presence' is complicated by non-presence; if every experience is not quite on time, or *in* time, the experience of presence as fully present is, accordingly, displaced.

It is this concept of 'disjunctive' or 'dislocated' time that I propose Stanislavsky's 'third being' exhibits. I suggest that Stanislavsky understands the extent to which the 'third being' emerges as a spectral entity through an interplay across both the human being, or the actor, and the role they are performing, and that interplay necessarily involves a temporal disjunction. In the task of performing a role, the actor's presence/present is infiltrated by the past – the dramatic character as it exists in the text, or indeed, for the spectator, as it exists in past representations of that character. Further, the performance of a role embraces a disjunctive concept of time when the narrative time of the character collides with natural time of the

[26] In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida interweaves his discussion of Marxism, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the dominance of neo-liberal capitalism, with references to *Hamlet* and, in particular, an exploration of the disjunctive nature of Hamlet's experience of time.

actor. The very act of performing a role is, thus, one that creates a disjunction and dislocation of time. This is a disjunction that the dramatic theatre conceals through the ordering and structuring of narrative time, but which might be exposed in postdramatic theatre; in its refusal of linearity and through 'a mode of presentation' which turns '*time as such* into an object of the aesthetic experience' (2006: 156), or, indeed, through the adoption of 'dream-time' which condenses, displaces and disrupts linear time. Accordingly, thinking about the performance of character as throwing 'time out of joint' further supports the exploration of congruencies between Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the 'third being' as a spectral figure and postdramatic theatre's staging of human subjectivities.

Many of the figures who populate the postdramatic stage might persuasively be described as spectral entities who exhibit a disunified and spectral presence and for whom the time is, often, thrown 'out of joint'. One only has to think of the recollection of absent performers (or, indeed, of the performance that is not quite going to plan, but that is readily recalled and conjured) in Forced Entertainment's *Spectacular* or the way in which Martin Crimp's Anne haunts *Attempts on Her Life*, or indeed, the 'free-floating, mischief-making apparitions' (Tomlin 2013: 81) that recall the characters of the dramatic texts the Wooster Group devise from. Accordingly, plentiful examples of how the 'spectral' might manifest in performance abound in postdramatic theatre. However, as I use Derrida's concepts of 'hauntology', of the 'spectre' and time being 'out of joint' to re-read Stanislavsky's conceptualization of an actor's work on a role, I will offer an example of how the actor's work on a role might be exposed as a hauntological process from my own practice. Devising from Chekhov's *The Seagull* and working on the character of Masha, we developed a scene in which the actor playing Masha appears to 'transform' into the character. The first scene ends with the following stage direction:

> *Sound and lighting cue. Lights switch to tight spotlight centre stage and Kendrick Lamar's 'Swimming Pools (Drank)' (2013) plays for 2 minutes as the ACTOR drinks vodka and takes snuff, dancing and swaying in the light. She is getting drunk. AM 2*

moves upstage to operate the camera and the figure of the ACTOR, swaying and dancing as MASHA fills the screen. Eventually the music fades and the lighting changes back to the setting for the park on Sorin's estate.

As *AM 2* filmed the *ACTOR* he adjusted the shot, adjusting playing with the focus and the depth of the shot to convey *MASHA*'s increasingly drunken state.

In this moment the actor's presence was effectively doubled through the use of the live feed camera; the onscreen 'Masha' appeared, fleetingly, as an image of a unified and coherent characterisation of the actor in the role, a characterisation that had been constructed piece by piece in the preceding scene, however, the live presence of the actor in the role in front of the scene destabilised the unity of the characterisation. The doubling of the actor's physical presence drew the spectator's attention to the processes through which the 'character' was being created (through the actor's embodiment and through the manipulations of the camera).

As the image became more compelling, seeming more 'believable', more 'authentic' than the actor's physical presence, the moment illuminated the extent to which the performed character, the 'third being', depends upon, but ultimately transcends, the actor's body. Furthermore, the 'presence' it manifests is intrinsically ephemeral, fleeting and constructed. In this moment the live feed camera in conjunction with the live presence of the actor in the role, revealed the hauntological nature of the 'third being', of the actor in the role. By doubling the actor's presence, replicating the performed character and drawing the spectator's attention to the way in which the image was being created, 'character' appeared to manifest as a non-presence, but also an excess of presence and the process of 'embodying a role' appeared, at least in my view, hauntological in nature. This doubling of presence has implication for the experience of the 'present'. In multiplying the actor's presence, the experience of the present was similarly multiplied, and the experience of time became disjunctive as the image dominated and the replica offered the apparently more 'authentic' portrayal of the character of Masha. If the copy is more convincing than the original, our

experience of time is problematized and inverted, we find ourselves in a disunified and deranged time.

Further definitions

In addition, I will briefly outline what I understand by, 'humanism', 'liberal humanism' and 'posthumanism'. I reference these terms in my discussion of dramatic character and postdramatic theatre's staging of the human subject and in relation to Stanislavsky's 'system', which, because it is focused on the representation of the individual, appears to be grounded in a humanist ideology. However, it is my contention that Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work on a role embraces a 'posthumanist' understanding of the human subject, specifically in relation to posthumanism's emphasis on hybridity, contingency and heterogeneity. While these two statements might appear incompatible, I suggest they can be reconciled by adopting Louise LePage's articulation of a 'post/humanist' subject as a 'hybrid, natural-cultural and essentially indeterminate form' (2012: 9) and her analysis of 'post/humanist' Naturalist characterisation. LePage argues for a conceptualisation of 'post/humanist' subjectivity that emphasises the extent to which human subjects are materially, culturally, biologically and psychologically determined *and* self-determining. She contends that Naturalist characterisation's emphasis on determinism undermines the idea that of the human subject's 'theistically constituted uniqueness' (2012: 170), emphasising its similarities and blurring the borders with those other materially or biologically determined entities (for example animals and machines) which the subject is conventionally positioned against. However, LePage also argues that while Naturalist characters lack the absolute freedom of the liberal humanist subject, they are not denied the ability to influence, affect or change their circumstances completely. She accordingly adopts the term 'post/humanist' and it is LePage's definition of 'post/humanist' subjectivity that I propose best illuminates an analysis of Stanislavsky's understanding of dramatic character. In order to support this analysis I propose to define what I understand by 'humanism', 'liberal humanism' and 'posthumanism'.

Humanism

In using the term 'Humanism', I am specifically referring to Renaissance Humanism, an intellectual and cultural movement that originated in fourteenth century Europe.[27] Renaissance humanism marked a return to Classical literature and philosophy, and emphasised the development of human virtue, rationality, freedom of thought and self-determining moral behaviour. Renaissance humanism is predicated on the notion that there are essential features common to all human beings which distinguish them from other entities; for example it is the human being's capacity for rational thought that distinguishes him from animals. It is, however, important to note that this 'universal', rational human subject is specifically white and male. Humanism marked an important move away from God to Man and, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries humanism had become allied with a scientific rather than theological outlook. Humanism is associated with the development of the social sciences and emphasises objective analysis. If humanism is indicative of a 'tendency to emphasize man and his status, important powers, achievements, interests, or authority' (Honderich 1995: 375), the 'individual' is at the centre of the project, and unity, personal autonomy and self-determination were Man's primary characteristics.

Liberal humanism

I use the term liberal humanism in relation to the argument made about the death of character on the postmodern and postdramatic stages. I propose that dramatic character's purported demise wrongly conflates dramatic character with a liberal humanist subjectivity. As such I will briefly outline what I understand by liberal humanism and what I mean by a liberal humanist subject. Liberal humanism is a conflation of two terms, 'Liberalism' and 'Humanism' and their associated ideologies. It determines the human subject as a unified, free-standing and self-

[27] Although it is perhaps important to note that the term itself was not coined until the nineteenth century.

determining individual. This is coupled with an emphasis on rationality and reason as Man's central and most important capacity, as exemplified in Descartes formulation of the mind/body dualism that emphasised the subordination of the body to the immaterial, rational, self-determining mind. Humanism's emphasis on the individual's freedom is compounded by Liberalism's guiding ideology: the protection and enhancement of Man's freedom. During the Enlightenment, this amounted to freedom from religious dogma and aristocratic privilege. Liberalism embraces an individualism that separates Man from society; he is neither produced by or tied to his biological, social, environmental or cultural context and he demands substantial personal freedom from the state (Honderich 1995: 483). Further, Liberalism emerges as an 'ideological justification for the rise of capitalism' and it is argued that the 'image of the autonomous individual is simply a glorification of the pursuit of self-interest in the free market';

> Liberalism replaced the web of mutual obligations which bound people together in ethnic, religious or other communities with a society predicated on competition and atomistic individualism. (Honderich 1995: 483)

Accordingly, in drawing on both terms, the concept of the 'liberal humanist subject' not only foregrounds the rational and reasoning, coherent individual of humanism, but, importantly, the extent to which he is *entirely* self-determining, autonomous and free. The liberal humanist subject is wholly self-possessing, the master of his body and the determiner of his fate, the origin of his own history, and represents a configuration of human subjectivity that is synonymous with capitalist ideologies of commercialisation and free-market individualism.

Posthumanism

While the proliferation of a diverse range of theories of posthumanism precludes a definitive definition, it is clear that posthumanism responds to the basic principles of humanism and engages with the idea that the human can be distinguished from the non-human (for example, animals, machines, the supernatural) by its 'essential' and universal features: reasoned thought and consciousness. Posthumanism rejects

the assertion that these universalising features precede social, material structures. Accordingly, it problematises the idea of a natural, essential 'self' and questions the liberal humanist features of self-determination and freedom. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Katherine Hayles argues that the posthuman can best be articulated in relation to liberal humanism and to the conceptualisation of the liberal humanist subject as 'essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, *owing nothing to society for them*' and for whom 'the human essence is *freedom from the will of others'* (1999: 3). The presumption of free will is undermined or problematised by the posthuman subject, which is revealed to be porous to the non-human, to the 'others' conventionally excluded through the formation of liberal humanist subjectivity. Posthumanism problematises the borders between 'self' and 'other' and accordingly de-centres the human subject.

Neil Badmington locates posthumanism's genesis in Freud and Marx's problematization of 'Idealist' philosophy – typified by the Hegelian notion that the 'authentic consciousness was the point from which everything else proceeded: first there is the idea, then comes the material world' (2000: 5). He contends that Freud's formulation of the unconscious problematised Cartesian mind/body dualism and the configuration of Man as an entirely rational, free individual. Further, he argues that Marx inverted the Hegelian and Cartesian models of subjectivity, demonstrating that consciousness 'does not determine a person's social life; it is, rather, social life that determines consciousness' (2000: 5). While Badmington locates the genesis of posthumanism at the end of the nineteenth century, he locates its dissemination during the second half of twentieth century, identifying a 'crisis of humanism' in popular culture, philosophy and theory. He identifies an 'anti-humanist movement' (exemplified in the work of Lacan, Althusser and Foucault), whose central tenet is the belief that as long as humanism conceives of Man as inscribed with essential and universal patterns of thought and behaviour, it precludes radical thinking about his capacity for change. Further, he allies posthumanism with poststructuralism's critique of a Western, logocentric

metaphysics that is grounded in humanist assumptions about individuality and rational thought, communicable in language (2000: 7-9).[28]

Posthumanism proliferates in the twentieth century in feminist and post-colonial thinking that argues that liberal humanism's claim for the subject's universality 'depends on erasing markers of bodily difference, including sex, race and ethnicity' (Hayles 1999:4-5), and accordingly minimises those differences that are central to feminist and postcolonial theory. Furthermore, through the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, posthumanism has offered a framework for thinking about the impact of new media, bio, digital and information technologies, on our understanding of what it means to be 'human', by calling into question the presumed boundaries between human and machine, natural and artificial intelligence, 'nature' and its artificially created or modified replica. Accordingly, the posthuman subject emerges as an 'amalgam, a collective of heterogenous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction' (Hayles 1999: 3). It is characterised by hybridity and heterogeneity and if the liberal humanist subject represents a fixed and unified self-determining consciousness, the posthumanist subject is a 'natural-cultural' entity, porous to its environment, a product of its circumstance and, crucially, open to reinvention and reconstitution. If the liberal humanist subject is liberated from society, freed from the obligations of community and the apparent tyranny of the state, posthumanism illuminates the individual's interdependency on others, championing human beings' multiplicity and interconnectedness and returning to the idea of human subject as an inherently social 'animal'.

[28] It is worth noting that while Badmington highlights poststructuralism's critique of a humanist ideology, he also points out that Derrida illuminates the difficulties of breaking away from humanism; 'Precisely because Western philosophy is steeped in humanist assumptions, he observed, the end of Man is bound to be written in the language of Man. Each "transgressive gesture re-encloses us" because every such gesture will have been unconsciously choreographed by humanism. There is no pure outside to which "we" can leap. To oppose humanism by claiming to have left it behind is to overlook the very way that opposition is articulated' (2000:9).

Subject, subjectivity and identity

I will briefly define the terms 'subject', 'subjectivity' and 'identity'. Following the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, by 'human subject' I mean to indicate a human 'being... that thinks, know; or perceives' and by 'subjectivity' I mean to suggest the state of 'conscious being'. 'Identity', according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, means 'the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition of being a single individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality', or, 'who or what a person or thing is, a distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others; a set of characteristics or a description that distinguishes a person or thing from others' (*OED* online). I return to the idea of a stable and individuated subject and identity in chapter two of the thesis, where I explore the extent to which this conceptualisation of identity, and of the human subject, is not definitive, but, is particular and historically specific. As the development of dramatic, and postdramatic representations of the human subject is inextricably linked to changing notions of subjectivity and identity, I explore the extent to which this formulation of identity as indicative of a stable, individuated subject, is challenged and revised through modernity and postmodernity.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has established some of the key building blocks for the work of the thesis. In outlining the research methodology, I have made the case for exploring the research question through developing a theoretical hypothesis and testing that hypothesis in practice. This should contextualise my discussion of the research-led practice and should support my analysis of the ongoing relevance of Stanislavsky's 'system' to postdramatic theatre-making and the hitherto unidentified congruencies between Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work on a role and postdramatic theatre's staging of human subjectivities. I intend that my discussion of late nineteenth-century realism, naturalism and psychological realism support the analysis of the fate of character in postmodern and postdramatic

theatre in the next chapter, as well as the discussion of the relevant field of literature and practice in chapter three and, indeed, the case for re-reading Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work on a role explicated in chapter four. Further, I hope that my discussion of Hans Thies-Lehmann's formulation of postdramatic theatre will provide useful context for my exploration of character in the next chapter, in particular, supporting my re-reading of postdrama's depiction of human subjectivities as characters 'under erasure'. It is my intention that it should also illuminate the analysis of my own practice in the final chapters of the thesis. The definitions of additional key terms offered in this chapter should similarly support the re-reading of Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work on a role and the analyses of practice. From this starting point I will now turn to a more detailed analysis of dramatic 'character', from which I will make the case for adopting a *character*-led, Stanislavskian approach to staging postdramatic theatre.

Chapter two: character in the postdramatic landscape

Introduction

In this chapter I will establish the foundations from which I will make the case for applying a character-led approach to postdramatic theatre-making. I will do this through three routes. In the first instance I propose that dramatic character is not a stable concept but is subject to continual change, and that its revision reflects the evolving conceptualisations of human subjectivity to which it is inextricably tied.[1] This is crucial to establishing that the apparent 'death' of character in postmodern and postdramatic theatre, in fact, represents the demise of an historically specific conceptualisation of dramatic character (which emerged on the early modern stage and reached an apotheosis in late eighteenth-century drama) and which, in turn, reflects an historically specific ideal of human subjectivity - the liberal humanist subject. In light of this analysis, I propose a significantly broader definition of character, that moves beyond the representation of an individuated, coherent, stable subject, and that allows for the evolving nature of dramatic character.

Secondly, through a brief examination of modern character and following Louise LePage (2012, 2014) I propose that the correlation between Naturalist and late nineteenth-century realist dramatic character and the liberal humanist subject is misplaced and that, in fact, Naturalist and late nineteenth century realist dramatic character might best be understood in, to adopt LePage's phrase, 'post/humanist' terms. This is significant because the fragmentation of dramatic character on the modern stage and its disappearance from the postmodern and postdramatic stage has been viewed as representing a radical move away from the apparently more conservative formulations of the human subject associated with Naturalism and late nineteenth-century realism. But in fact, this distinction overlooks the

[1] Sarah Grochala argues that 'shifts in principles of dramatic characterization over time, reflect shifts in society's understanding of the social subject' (2017: 192). Grochala contends that an individual's sense of self is related to the social structures that shape reality and human behaviours and that as those structures change the individual's understanding of themselves as a subject evolves and those changes are reflected in the evolution of dramatic character.

congruencies between Naturalist and late nineteenth century realist characterisation and the evolution of dramatic character in the historic and early twentieth-century avant-garde.

Considering this I propose that Naturalist and late nineteenth century realist characterisation might rightfully be viewed as part of modernism's pre-history to postdramatic theatre, rather than positioned against it. This analysis supports my contention that treating the absolute rejection of dramatic character as a fundamental and incontestable element of postdrama, relies upon a too narrow conceptualisation of the term and ignores the radical origins of, for example, naturalist characterisation. This is not to argue that the rejection of dramatic character is not significant to postdramatic theatre, but it is to suggest that this rejection should not be overstated. If there are greater commonalities to be found between postdrama's depictions of the human subject and, for example, Naturalist characterisation, I contend that we might not necessarily equate the reconfiguration of character in postdramatic theatre with its absolute and final demise. I return to this argument in chapter four, where I propose that Stanislavsky's understanding of the actor's work on a role has more in common with poststructuralist and, indeed, posthuman, concepts of subjectivity than with a liberal humanist model of the subject as coherent, stable and free.

Finally, I offer an analysis of the fate of character on the postdramatic stage, outlining what remains of 'character' in postdramatic theatre as examined in Lehmann's text and in the body of academic scholarship that emerged in its wake. Here I argue that, contrary to the accepted consensus, but in line with Liz Tomlin (2013) and Cristina Delgado-García (2015), while dramatic character is radically reformed, it has not been entirely eradicated from the postdramatic stage. In support of this contention I examine the relationship between dramatic and postdramatic theatre and the centrality of that relationship to the formulation of

Lehmann's term.[2] Drawing on Derrida's strategy of *différance* (1982: 3), I contend that while the staging of human subjectivities in postdramatic theatre typically foreground the inadequacy of dramatic character to represent contemporary experience, those performances often depend upon, and engage with, the principles of character they forcibly reject. Furthermore, I propose that, if we adopt a broader definition of 'character' that extends beyond the principles of unity, coherence and agency, then the term might still offer a valid route into thinking about how we represent human experience on stage. While I argue for a return to the term character, I propose that the radical nature of its reconfiguration in postdrama demands an amendment. It is on that basis that I suggest that representations of subjectivities on the postdramatic stage might best be described as, again, following Derrida, characters 'under erasure'. This revision of the fate of character in postdramatic theatre provides a preliminary foundation for the work of this thesis.

2.1 Defining 'character'

From the Latin *charactēr* and the French *caractere*, the term originates in the practice of making a mark and it is notable that its association with individuality and fictionality are relatively recent. *The Oxford English Dictionary* outlines the term's evolution from 'distinctive mark' to 'distinct personality' by way of the sixteenth-century meaning 'feature, trait or characteristic' (*OED* online). While references to sign, emblem and symbol endure, the notion of character as indicative of the 'moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual' and of 'personality', and, significantly, of 'a person portrayed in a work of fiction, a drama' (*OED* online) only emerged in the late seventeenth century. These shifts in meaning are indicative of both the evolution of conceptualisations of the human subject and, with reference to *dramatic* character, of the changing dramatic landscape. Indeed, as Elinor Fuchs argues in the introduction to her seminal study of character on the modern and

[2] Here I will build upon assertions by Hans-Thies Lehmann (in Barnett 2006a: 488) and Karen Jürs-Munby (in Lemann 2006: 2) that postdramatic theatre does not rely upon an absolute negation of the principles of drama, but indeed comments and reflects upon the dramatic theatre.

postmodern stage, 'each epoch of character representation... constitutes at the same time the manifestation of a change in the larger culture concerning the perception of self and world' (1996: 8).

Yet although dramatic character is inextricably tied to notions of human subjectivity, the term evidently functions differently in fiction and reality. While 'character' suggests the complexity of an individual's 'personality' and 'psychology' in real life, in fiction it implies a manufactured entity, composed by the author and apparently 'fixed' on the page. Constructed 'wholly within and by means of language' (Aston and Savona 1991: 35), dramatic character appears to be a product of the drama's plot and the dramatic text. Yet in its textual form dramatic character is partial, requiring the reader's imagination, or the actor's embodiment, partnered with the spectator's imagination to 'complete' it.[3] If it is dependent on both actor and spectator, dramatic character is revealed to be contingently created, constantly in process, subject to endless variation and interpretation and dependent on the minds and bodies of the participants in the theatrical event. Furthermore, as Bert O'States argues, 'it is at once cause and effect, both the fuel that drives the plot and a kind of exhaust or emanation given off by the plot' (1985: 87). Thus, while 'character' functions differently in real life and in fiction, it appear to be equally difficult to pin down in both contexts. If in reality 'character' implies something as complex and ephemeral as 'personality', so 'character' appears to be equally elusive in drama; existing in the linguistic etchings that attempt to represent the human subject on the page, the embodied actions that attempt to bring that form to life, and the 'enacted persons' (Storm 2016: 7) that these contingent and collaborative activities produce.

Accordingly, I propose to define 'character' in the following terms. Firstly, although dramatic character is constructed in language, it precedes its linguistic construction

[3] As Erika Fisher-Lichte argues 'in order to constitute the dramatic character as a particular self, the actor has to "transform" this "one-dimensional" role into the three dimensionality of space: the actor has to reproduce what is given as a symbolic order by means of his or her own body' (1997: 294).

in the mind of the author and exceeds it in the actor's performance and the spectator's reception of that performance. It is, therefore, produced collaboratively by the author, the actor and the spectator. Secondly, if character is collaboratively produced, it is also always in process. Dependent on the bodies, minds and imaginations of the actors who embody the role and on the imaginations of the spectators who witness the performance, it is subject to constant change and interpretation. Thirdly, I propose that dramatic character offers a lens through which the spectator interprets the theatre-event. It provides the spectator with a perspective from which to interpret the drama, functioning, as Louise LePage contends, as a conduit through which 'the reader and the spectator come to conceptualise, feel, and imagine what it is like to be someone and somewhere else' (2012: 132). Furthermore, if as Fuchs observes, the actor 'stands in' for the spectator; '"character" is a word that stands in for the entire chain of representation and reception that theater links together' (1996: 8); it is the very *channel* through which theatre event is communicated. Finally, and drawing on Sarah Grochala's proposal that dramatic character represents 'a lens through which the social subject imagines themselves and their role within society', representing how human beings 'understand themselves to be... at a particular moment in time' (2017: 189), I propose that dramatic character is inextricably linked to evolving theatre dramaturgies and changing conceptualisations of human subjectivity. Dramatic characters are, therefore, not fixed, stable entities, but rather are as malleable and porous as they are collaboratively produced.

I therefore contend that dramatic character should be understood as processual and subject to change and should not be interpreted as allied to any one conceptualisation of human subjectivity. Rather it might be best understood as simply any conceptualisation of human subjectivity within a dramatic text or a theatre performance. This definition draws on Uri Margolin's analysis, which proposes that character designates 'any entity, individual or collective – normally human or human-like – introduced in a work of narrative fiction' (2007: 66) and on the work of Cristina Delgado-García who defines character as 'any figuration of subjectivity in theatre, regardless of how individuated or, conversely, how

unmarked its contours might be' (2015: 14). Further, it also draws on Louise LePage's description of character as 'any human, or human-like, storyworld participant' (2012: 44). Both Delgado-García and LePage posit their definitions against more narrowly constructed concepts of character, which, for LePage rely on a 'more limiting and problematic signification [of character] as a unified and 'I'-centred agent' (2012: 44) and, for Delgado-García, equate dramatic character 'with the illusionist representation of a person generated by an actor' which has, as Patrice Pavis argues, come to imply 'a psychological and moral entity similar to other human beings, entrusted with producing an effect of identification on the spectator' (Pavis 1998: 47 cited in Delgado-García 2015:2).

Significantly, both Delgado-García and LePage highlight the extent to which an ideal of liberal humanist subjectivity, which presumes coherence, agency, individuality and freedom, appears to dominate conceptualisations of dramatic character, indeed, often, conflating a liberal humanist concept of character with dramatic character *per se* (Delgado-García 2015: xii, LePage 2012: 103). This conflation is particularly significant because, as LePage contends, it has been misapplied to late nineteenth-century realist and Naturalist characterisation from which Stanislavsky's 'system' emerges, and as Delgado-García argues, it is central to the case *against* character in analyses of postmodern and postdramatic theatre-making. Re-thinking character in less 'narrowly circumscribed terms' (Delgado-García 2015: xi) and replacing it with the broader definition of character as any conceptualisation of human subjectivity within a dramatic text or a theatre performance is crucial to the work of this thesis, as it enables a re-examination of Stanislavsky's 'system' and the apparently characterless landscape of postdramatic theatre. It is for this reason that I propose the broader definition of character as any conceptualisation of human subjectivity within a dramatic text or a theatre performance.

2.2 Character in Greek tragedy, medieval drama and early modern character

Examining the evolution of dramatic character will demonstrate the extent to which it is a concept in progress and subject to changing social, cultural and ideological

trends. While the scope of this thesis does not extend to a detailed examination of that relationship, the analysis that follows will illuminate the extent to which dramatic character is no more a fixed or concrete entity than the conceptualisations of human subjectivity that it 'stands in' for on stage, supporting the definition offered in the previous section and, in particular, the view that character should not be defined according to a liberal humanist ideal.

Dramatic character emerged concurrently with the development of Greek tragedy in the sixth century B.C.,

> when the Greek tragedian and choral leader Thespis became not only a solo performer but also an actor, one who assumed a role in mask... and interacted with the chorus of fifty men who sang the dithyramb in the god's [Dionysus] honour. (William Storm 2016: 3)

The birth of the actor and the role are inextricable and the association with Dionysus, the god of impersonation, transformation and mask offers some consistency with a contemporary, twenty-first century understanding of what it means to perform a role. However, the parallels with contemporary concepts of dramatic character should not be overstated. Dramatic character in Greek tragedy is separated into textual character (*ēthos*) which implies a moral position, and the performer's mask (*persona)* which the performer uses to signify or demonstrate the role. This separation of word and gesture is antithetical to the practices of embodiment that have since become central to the performance of dramatic character (Patrice Pavis 1998: 47), while an emphasis on moral consistency, appropriate to gender and social class and the idealisation of the hero, as well as the reliance on figures from already well-known stories and myths left little room for individuation. Furthermore, following Aristotle's analysis in *The Poetics*, character is, in Greek tragedy, subordinate to plot. Indeed, he argues that it is a component that the drama can exist without – 'there could not be a tragedy without action, but there could be one without character' (1996: 11).[4] Accordingly,

[4] Aristotle argues that 'Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life. Well-being and ill-being reside in action, and the goal of life is an activity, not a quality; people possess certain qualities in accordance with their character, but they achieve well-being or its opposite on the basis

the characters of Greek drama stand in stark counterpoint to the idea of character as 'a fully rounded, psychologically or emotionally complex figure that conveys, through intents and behaviours as well as actions, the impression of a "real" person' – a concept that William Storm argues 'is not only subsequent to the Greek era, but does not arise for centuries' (2016: 29).

The emphasis on dramatic character as a function of plot and its association with morality persists in Medieval and through to Renaissance drama. Catherine Belsey argues that in many of the Medieval plays of the fifteenth century the principal character 'Mankind' does not represent an individual, but rather functions as a battleground for good and evil upon which the struggle for Man's redemption is played out (1993: 17-18). Belsey contends that the 'representative human being has no unifying essence' but is 'disunited and discontinuous' - indeed, she observes that 'the hero of the moralities is not the origin of action; he has no single subjectivity which could constitute such an origin; he is not a subject' (1993: 18). Instead, the medieval 'Everyman' figure is representative of humanity. He is a playground where Vice and Virtue enact the battle for his soul, resistant to the idiosyncrasies of individuality, devoid of unity and agency. And while Belsey argues that the spectator occupies a 'single and thus unified position' from which to interpret the behaviour and action of the dramatic characters, those dramatic characters crucially depict human beings as 'dispersed, unfixed, not in control' (1993: 23). Dramatic character's overarching association with morality continued in Renaissance drama which, Grochala argues, 'reimagined classical principles of characterization through the lens of Christian morality' (2017: 194). While dramatic characters were no longer representative of the 'Everyman', they remained overwhelmingly archetypal, determined as primarily moral beings, and reflecting the human subject 'through a Christian perspective, in which the social subject, in constant danger of falling into sin, should be primarily concerned with the moral condition of their soul' (Grochala 2017: 195).

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of how they fare. So the imitation of character is not the purpose of what the agents do; character is included along with and on account of the actions.' (1996: 11).

2.3 Character in modern drama and the emergence of the liberal humanist subject

However, despite the continued correlation between character and morality, a crucial shift in the development of dramatic characterisation occurred in the mid-seventeenth century on the Renaissance stage. Rather than representing an exclusively moral being, characterisation began to depict the human subject as a rational entity, with consistency of motivation replacing 'moral consistency' (Grochala 2017: 195). The emphasis on rationality and motivation implied a degree of freedom and agency hitherto absent from dramatic character and this shift was mirrored in the development of performance practices, with actors performing individual, rather than multiple roles (Nellhaus et al. 2016: 149). Belsey argues that this transformation reflects the birth of the modern subject, while Peter Szondi locates the beginnings of modern drama in the Renaissance when the 'newly self-conscious being... sought to create an artistic reality within which he could fix and mirror himself on the basis of interpersonal relationships alone' (1987: 7). Patrice Pavis' analysis similarly traces the origins of character as we predominantly understand it today - as a 'psychological and moral entity similar to other human beings' - to the Renaissance and the 'beginning of bourgeois individualism' (1998: 47). This emergence of dramatic character as an individual agent of action is tied to the changing material, cultural and ideological conditions of the seventeenth century. The transition from a feudal to capitalist society afforded greater social mobility, while Protestantism handed the individual responsibility for his own soul. The belief in reason and empirical knowledge at the heart of Enlightenment thinking afforded a delineation between subject and object that gave the individual previously unafforded power, with language as its primary instrument (Belsey 1985: 65).[5]

[5] Belsey argues that 'Discourse is thus no longer constitutive but expressive. Since things themselves, now differentiated as objects cannot in consequence implant knowledge of themselves in the subject, it is experience, lodged in the subject itself, which is now the source of knowledge and thus constitutive of being. The subject consequently takes the place of God and becomes the author and guarantee of its own (subjective) truth' (1985: 65).

Belsey identifies this emergent modern subject as a liberal humanist subject, whom she describes as 'unified, knowing and autonomous', arguing that:

> The common feature of liberal humanism... is a commitment to *man*, whose essence is *freedom*. Liberal humanism proposes that the subject is the free, unconstrained author of meaning and action, the origin of history.[6] (1985: 8)

Positioning the characters of the Renaissance stage as moving between, and exhibiting characteristics common to, both medieval and modern conceptualisations of subjectivity, Belsey identifies an emerging, if incomplete notion of a 'continuity of inviolable identity' in, for example, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. Furthermore, she detects a sense of interiority - 'the inalienable and unalterable property of the individual, which precedes and determines speech and action' exemplified in the linking of speech and thought in the 'formal development of the soliloquy' (1985: 34, 42). Yet these subjects are characterised by a plurality and uncertainty that precludes their definition as liberal humanist subjects – Hamlet is the compelling example (1985:42).

While Belsey identifies a significant move away from dramatic character as archetype, or as a predominantly moral entity, she argues that it is in the 'classic realist' drama of the Restoration that the liberal humanist subject comes to full fruition. The clear demarcation between the stage and the auditorium afforded by the introduction of the proscenium arch provided the audience with a unified perspective from which to view 'an empirical replica' of their 'own imaginary unity' (1985: 23), while the narrative structure that leads to a shared 'final moment of recognition for the characters and the audience' enables a 'shared intelligibility' (1985: 86-87) that legitimises the humanist subject as both the agent of action and the origin of knowledge.[7] While the seventeenth century saw the genesis of

[6] It is significant that the liberal humanist subject is male. Belsey articulates one of the aims of *The Subject of Tragedy* as 'to demonstrate, by placing woman side by side with man, that at the moment when the modern subject was in the process of construction, the "common gender non" largely failed to include women in the range of its meanings. Man is the subject of liberal humanism. Woman has meaning in relation to man' (1985: ix).

[7] Belsey argues that the Restoration stage addressed a 'unified and unifying spectacle to a series of unified subjects' (1985: 26) and this mirroring of stage and auditorium is reflected in Szondi's

modern dramatic character, the term was only widely accepted to mean 'an individual created in a fictitious work in the eighteenth century' (Martin Harrison 1998: 51, quoted in Delgado-García 2015: 2). As Grochala argues, the idea that complexity, autonomy and a richness of 'inner life' are markers of 'good' characterisation is an eighteenth-century concept (2017: 195-6). Grochala develops this idea in relation to Hegel's analysis, which emphasised that consistency and the multifaceted complexity of the individual should be reflected in dramatic characterisation. She states that

> The character is both universal and particular at the same time. The audience recognize elements of themselves in the character, but character is separate from them, "a rounded and subjective unity" in itself'. (Hegel 1920: 316, quoted in Grochala 2017: 196)

Similarly, Fuchs describes how late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century literary criticism argued that Renaissance and Spanish Golden Age drama identified 'a standard of inwardness of character, and... began to revise the Aristotelian assimilation of character to plot' (1996: 25). Fuchs explores Hegel's analysis of 'romantic art' (which Hegel defines as post-Medieval) wherein he 'comes close to replacing the Aristotelian "soul" of tragedy, Plot, with another soul, Character' (1996: 26), arguing that 'For Hegel, character was the only artistic vehicle that could give material form to absolute spiritual subjectivity' (1996: 27). The reversal of character's subordination to plot crucially reconfigured the drama to reflect a humanist concept of man as the *free* agent of the action. Thus, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, dramatic character appears to inhabit *the* central position in the drama, idealised and perfectly unified it becomes the driving force for the action, and reflecting Belsey's liberal humanist subject, it is

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analysis. The 'absolute' drama is driven by interpersonal relations, expressed through interpersonal dialogue and the spectator is drawn into the dramatic event *becoming* 'the person speaking (through the mouths of the characters, of course)' (1987: 8). Characters exists in their own distinct and unified time and place, driving the action of the drama, mirroring the human subject's agency and its apparently central and unifying position in its world. Furthermore, the 'absolute' drama is one wherein '[m]an entered the drama only as a fellow human being,' and where 'freedom and obligation, will and decision [are] the most important of his attributes' (1987: 7).

complex yet coherent, unified and free. It is this conceptualisation of character, with its associated characteristics of agency and unity, that I propose postdramatic theatre most clearly positions itself against.

2.4 Nineteenth-century Naturalist and 'realist' characterisation

Through the nineteenth century dramatic character secured its position at the centre of the drama, prompting significant shifts in the actor's work in performing a role that are, of course, central to this thesis.[8] Patrice Pavis argues that by the late nineteenth century, character as a 'psychological and moral entity' reached an 'apogee' 'when bourgeois dramaturgy saw in this rich individuality the typical representative of its aspirations for recognition of its central role in the production of goods and ideas' (1998: 47). Pavis' emphasis on 'individuality' is crucial, for if the eighteenth-century was the age of reason and of the individual, the nineteenth-century saw radical re-conceptualisations of the individual's relationship to the world around him. The intersection of identity, society, psychology and heredity, alongside the technological advances of the industrial age (and their impact on both theatre dramaturgies and on the world beyond the playhouse) had crucial consequences for the representation of human subjects in drama. As Jonathon Crewe argues:

> Freud's discovery of the unconscious showed that rational capacities were only a small aspect of human identity; Marx declared that the material conditions in which people find themselves are on balance more important than the spark of consciousness that animates them; Darwin's theory of evolution implied that humans and apes shared a common ancestor, and that humans were thus less unique than we thought. In addition, Nietzsche dealt the fatal blow to Enlightenment verities with "God is Dead"'. (2006: 42)

If the new emphasis on 'realistic' representation in drama presupposed a concern with the representation of 'real life' on stage, the individual's experience of 'real

[8] Aston and Savona describe how the '"bourgeois" dramatic text, contemporaneous with the realist novel and (in its later phase) with the development of psychology as a system of scientific enquiry, reflects a more conspicuous interest in character *per se*' (1991: 34-5).

life' was at its heart. David Krasner argues that nineteenth-century dramatic realism and Naturalism put their 'stock in trade in the conflict of individual versus society, with the individual as a "stand-in" for everyone' (2012: 15).

Furthermore, while the centre of conflict shifted as the individual's freedom was no longer taken for granted, but, instead, became the principal subject-matter, a literary form of 'scientific observation' became the principal mode for exploring it. J.L. Styan describes Emile Zola's novels as 'clinical laboratories' (1981: 6) and Grochala cites Zola's demand for 'a "psychological and physiological study"' (Zola 1968a in Grochala 2017: 366) to produce "a character whose muscles and brain function as in nature"' (Zola 1968a: 363 cited in Grochala 2017: 197). The benchmark for successful characterisation became psychological honesty and plausibility. As David Edgar observes, '[b]y the late nineteenth century, Ibsen is describing his characters not as actors in a drama but as persons of his acquaintance' (2009: 47). Morality and archetype were replaced by motivation and rational causation and the personality of a dramatic character was no longer regarded as fixed, but was rather seen to develop 'over time in response to their experiences' (Grochala 2017: 197). The contradictory nature of the human subject was represented with a revolutionary 'life-life' verisimilitude which demanded detailed, historically accurate sets, props and costumes, to be matched by natural speech and diction and 'life-like' performances and it was in response to Naturalist and late-nineteenth century realist characterisation that Stanislavsky's 'system' emerged. Within the emerging psychological-realist aesthetic of the Moscow Art Theatre, dramatic character became associated with a degree of 'believability' hitherto unseen on the stage, as Stanislavsky strove to stage the 'life of the human spirit of a role' (2008: 20).

However, while, the concept of psychologically-realised dramatic character that emerged from Stanislavsky's work at the Moscow Art Theatre, would go on to be regarded as a conservative and essentialist model of characterisation in late twentieth-century performance studies, it is important to emphasise just how radical its beginnings in dramatic Naturalism in fact were. August Strindberg's

preface to *Miss Julie* provides a compelling account of the complex and contradictory nature of late nineteenth-century dramatic character, revealing the extent to which Naturalist characterisation rejected the principles of liberal humanist subjectivity, with which it is, wrongly associated. Significantly, Strindberg's analysis begins with the assertion that 'I have made my figures fairly "characterless"' in order to sidestep the 'bourgeois concept of the immobility of the soul' (Strindberg in Brandt 1998: 93). He rejects the idea of character as 'fixed and set', dominated by type or trait, instead conceiving it as 'split and vacillating', his

> souls (characters) are conglomerates of past and present stages of culture, bits out of books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, torn shreds of once fine clothing now turned to rags, exactly as the human soul is patched together. (Strindberg in Brandt 1998: 93)

Strindberg represents the 'reality' of human nature through patchwork and collage, fragment and fracture, calling upon the Naturalists to present the complexity and contradictory nature of human subjectivity. This marks a fundamental break from the eighteenth-century model of dramatic character as a coherent, rational, stable, free agent of action. While the characters of late nineteenth-century realism and Naturalism are central to the drama, and while they may exert (varying degrees) of agency, they are by no means free.

Indeed, it is, in many ways, the intention of the Naturalist project to expose the extent to which individual freedom is curtailed by circumstance and biology. As LePage persuasively argues in her doctoral thesis (2012), Naturalist dramatic characters exhibit characteristics common to animals and machines, both 'others' against which 'Man' is conventionally positioned (2012: 169). Citing the influence of Darwin's theory of natural selection and the positivism of Auguste Comte, LePage contends that the human subject is, for a writer such as Emile Zola, entirely physiologically constituted and governed by animal passions (2012: 196). The human 'soul' is relegated to mere 'machinery' and the body, as a tangible and observable manifestation of the human subject becomes the central point of interest (2012: 170). Dramatic characters become '"animal machine[s] acting under

the influence of heredity and environment" (Zola's paraphrase of Claude Bernard qtd. in Rothwell xix)' (quoted in LePage 2012: 171) and free will is all but abolished in favour of physiology, heredity and determinism.[9] LePage argues that if the boundaries with animals and machines are blurred in this way, Naturalist characters appear to reflect post/humanist, rather than liberal humanist, conceptualisations of subjectivity. It is important to note, however, that in arguing against correlating Naturalist character with a liberal humanist subject, LePage modifies her use of the term 'posthumanism', suggesting that a compatibilist approach, which allows for an understanding of dramatic character as *both* product and agent, offers a more compelling definition (2012: 10). She argues that Naturalist characters are both biologically, culturally and psychologically determined *and* self-determining, appearing 'to demonstrate self-awareness, at the same time as they are bound to the chains of causality' (2014: 258). LePage's compatibilist conceptualisation of Naturalist characterisation is significant because it allows for the possibility of choice and for the human subject to shape and affect the environments that, concomitantly, produce it. If the will of the human subject is inextricably tied to the will of others, if the subject itself is porous to the others it defines itself against, there can be no absolute free will, no absolute essential, universal and singular subjectivity, and if the subject is not fixed, there also remains the possibility for regeneration and evolution, for human creativity and imagination, for the possibility of progress and change.

LePage's re-conceptualisation of Naturalism's characters in 'post/humanist' terms enables her to rehabilitate Naturalist character, liberating it from an association with liberal humanist subjectivity (2012: 8) and, furthermore, finding parallels with postdramatic articulations of subjectivity, for example, in the work of Sarah Kane. Accordingly, LePage's analysis offers useful context for the work of this thesis,

[9] LePage argues that 'With Darwin's theory of natural selection, the threat to the human's borders, which had already been presenting itself with the rise of science and positivism, became acute. With Darwin, humans become located as kin with animals and, by extension, with machines and so the borders between them become blurred. Deprived of theistically constituted uniqueness, humans are given to derive from the same physical origin as all organic entities, finding form via a process that is natural, complex, and evolving and that seems to deny the human any special self-determining role in the history of the natural world' (2012: 170).

exposing congruencies between Naturalism and posthumanism that counters the dominant narrative that positions Naturalism and late nineteenth-century realism as the conservative counterpoint to the historical and neo-avant-gardes from which postdramatic theatre emerges (see chapter three for a discussion of this dichotomy in relation to Stanislavsky).[10] Re-reading Naturalist dramatic character in the light of LePage's analysis, it becomes possible to re-identify it as part of the narrative pre-history of postdramatic theatre. Indeed, as Szondi's account of modern drama suggests, Naturalist dramatists such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann and Chekhov prompt a crisis that goes on to inform the development of twentieth century drama and it should, therefore, be unsurprising that Naturalist characterisation plays a part in prompting that rupture. Importantly for the work of this thesis, if, following Szondi, Naturalist dramatists are significant to the crisis of 'absolute' drama and, following LePage we re-read Naturalistic characterisation as prompting a crucial shift away from the representation of a liberal humanist subjectivity, the intention to return to Stanislavsky's 'system' and to his approach to the actor's work on a role, as a route into staging postdramatic theatre, seems increasingly plausible.

2.5 Character in the modern avant-garde

While I will return to this argument in chapter four, it is useful to locate Naturalist and late nineteenth century realist characterisation in the wider context of dramatic modernism, which David Krasner describes an 'aesthetic period from 1880 to 1960' (2012:3). Krasner argues that the 'credo' of modernism was 'traumatic rupture', produced by 'power shifting from aristocracy to the mercantile class, from rural to urban, and the rising technology evident in everyday experience' (2012: 34). The rapid acceleration of the industrial revolution and the mechanisation of labour during the second half of the nineteenth century standardised and regulated everyday life, diminishing individual freedom for increasingly alienated workforces. The 'traumatic rupture' prompted by industrialisation was reinforced in the first

[10] Lehmann identifies the historical 'avant-gardes' - a 'multitude of modern theatre forms' around 1900 and the 'neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s' (2006: 48).

half of the twentieth century with the experience of the First and Second World Wars and the Great Depression and the horrors of Hiroshima and the Holocaust. As Krasner argues, modern drama is perhaps best characterised as an attempt to give shape to the fragmented and chaotic experience of the modern world (2012: 85). The response was not, of course, uniform and as Tobin Nellhaus observes, the turn of the nineteenth century saw the division of theatre into 'two major artistic branches: mainstream realism and the avant-garde' (2016: 404) and it is to the fate of dramatic character in the modern avant-garde that I now propose to turn.

While I contest the assumption that Naturalism and late nineteenth-century realism represent inherently conservative dramatic forms, and, indeed, I propose that there are significant parallels to be found in Naturalism and the modern avant-garde's approach to staging the human subject, there remains one crucial point of difference. The multiple and various experiments of the modern avant-garde are unified in their departure from the intention to represent the world 'realistically', as it might appear in real life, on stage. Accordingly, they diverge from the formal practices of Naturalism, even if their central intention – to depict the 'truth' of the modern experience – is shared. The modern avant-garde is characterised at the turn of the century by the experiments of Symbolism (exemplified by Strindberg, Mallarmé, Jarry and Gordon Craig) and, in the twentieth century, by Expressionism, Dadism, Futurism, Constructivism, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, the theatre of Brecht and Beckett.[11] While the term encompasses a diverse range of movements and styles, radical reconfigurations of the representation of the human subject are common to many of them. As Fuchs argues in her seminal study, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism*, 'at the entrance to theatrical

[11] It is important to emphasise that when I refer to the modern 'avant-garde' I understand that this is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of practices. While there are similarities between them, not least the intention to move away from 'realistic' representation and verisimilitude, they do not represent a homogenous movement. Furthermore, despite the distinction between late nineteenth-century realist and Naturalist drama and the formal experimentation of the avant-garde, there are clear intersections between these movements. For example, both Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg embrace Symbolist *and* Naturalist techniques, suggesting that this delineation is not clear cut and should not be overstated.

modernism, there are clear signs that autonomous character is in retreat from its Hegelian apogee' (1996: 31).

As the modern avant-garde rejected the intention to reproduce 'reality' through naturalistic or realistic representation, playwrights and practitioners moved away from attempting to stage coherent, psychologically-realised characterisation. Experimenting with form, they sought to expose how dramatic character is created and contested the humanist orthodoxy of an essentialist individual subject. The modern avant-garde challenged concepts of inwardness and interiority, rejecting subtext and psychology in favour of epicisation and de-individuation. [12] The central theme or 'idea' replaced the individual as the unifying thread and driving force of the action and the concept of the individual as self-determining, coherent and free was exposed as illusory. In her analysis of the period Fuchs observes the dissolution of dramatic character as occurring through three principal routes: 'allegorical, epic/critical and theatricalist' theatre, with Strindberg, Brecht and Pirandello as her seminal examples (1996: 31-32). She sees the re-emergence of the semi-allegorical 'Everyman' figure in Strindberg's allegorical dramas and a return to an 'Aristotelian subordination of character to plot' (1996: 33) in Brecht's plays. Furthermore, as the Brechtian actor presents the character critically for an audience, undermining the possibility of an empathetic connection between either the actor or the spectator and the role, processes of identification were rejected in favour of exposing the 'ideological construction of the social subject' (1996: 32). Further, Fuchs contends that Pirandello's metatheatrical plays attempted to 'express the relative and multiple nature of self-identity' (1996: 33), arguing that in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* the split between actor and character 'makes it impossible for the audience to extend to his stage figures the customary passport of a free-standing ontological base' and character, therefore, 'no longer offers the spectator ontological assurance but embodies an unsolvable ontological problem' (1996: 34).

[12] By epicisation I refer to what Peter Szondi describes as the introduction of the 'Epic I' – the idea that there is a universal subject that precedes and exceeds the drama and that represents the human subject, rather than an individual human subject.

In performance, the actor's work was similarly reconfigured through Meyerhold's biomechanics, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and Gordon Craig's work in set design. Erika Fisher-Lichte argues that Meyerhold's biomechanics led to an abstraction of movement that de-familiarised the human subject, shifting away from interpersonal relations to the relationship between the stage and the spectator with the concept of the audience as the 'fourth creator' (Erika Fisher-Lichte 1997: 42). While Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty embraced a re-theatricalization of the theatre

> to bring about the 'death' of the 'old' European man (a particular psychological and social individual) and his rebirth as 'total man' – in the spectator, not on the stage. (Fisher-Lichte 2002:296)

Puppets, marionettes and masks replaced the individual actor, indicating a mistrust of mimesis and a scepticism towards the representation of the inner life of a human subject on the stage. Gordon Craig roundly dismissed the efficacy of using human actors at all, preferring the über marionette as a more effective stand-in for the alienated and fragmentary experience of modern subjectivity (Gruber 1994: 14). The 'characters' that emerged in the wake of these innovations were figurative rather than psychological, fragmented and partial, as exemplified in the later work of Samuel Beckett. Beckett's characters appear to explicitly problematise essentialist humanist subjectivity; often physically restricted or fragmented, their language resists psychological motivation or subtext, and produces a form of characterisation that seems to refuse interiority or inwardness altogether (Gruber 1994: 81). In Beckett, the loss of unity, coherence and agency, and the failure of language as *self*-expression, reflects a conceptualisation of human subject that is de-centred and incoherent. As William Gruber contends, the dramatic characters of the modern avant-garde, those 'frail, contradictory, occasionally mutilated or even dismembered' figures were 'sobering reminders that the individual's place in the world is not as secure or as central as we imagine it once was' (1994: 1).

2.6 The death of character

While the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century saw the dissolution of dramatic character as understood in liberal humanist terms, Fuchs asserts that 'the very act of putting character into question still marks its place as central' (1996: 35). For Fuchs, however partial or precarious the figures of the modern stage, their presence belies an overarching interest in the human subject, indicative of a humanist ideology that, she contends, postmodern theatre-makers more easily 'shrug off' (1996: 35). It is this 'shrugging off' that, in her analysis, characterises late twentieth century theatre and that underpins her pronouncement of the death of character. Fuchs' analysis is grounded in poststructuralist and postmodern theory, and she argues that dramatic character (with its apparent essentialist ontology and associated agency and coherence) has been replaced by the vacuity of the postmodern 'subject'. Importantly, Cristina Delgado-García argues that, for Fuchs, the death of dramatic character is inevitable in the context of modern and postmodern philosophical arguments about the nature of human subjectivity and the tradition of Western metaphysics. Delgado-García contends that character's demise is a

> foretold loss, chrono/logically preceded by others: Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God, Foucault's suggestion of the disappearance of Man in *The Order of Things*, Roland Barthes' claim about the death of the Author, and Francis Fukuyama's contentions about the end of History (2015: 27). [13]

[13] Jacques Derrida's critique of Antonin Artaud's call for 'pure presence' in 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' illuminates the twentieth-century retreat from dramatic character further. Here Derrida examines the 'theological theatre' (or the theatre of representation) where character emerges as a mechanism through which 'thoughts' and 'ideas' are conveyed from author to audience. He argues that, 'the stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or meaning of representation, letting the latter *represent* him as concerns what is called the contents of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas. He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, enslaved interpreters who represent characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of the "creator." Interpretive slaves who faithfully execute the providential designs of the "master"' (2001: 296). While the 'author-creator' is the instigator of theatre's theological autocracy, character becomes the mode of oppression through which the enslavement of the performer is best effected. As the channel through which thoughts and intentions are conveyed from author to audience (with all their implicitly controlling

It is also significant that the demise of character occurs within the broader context of feminist, postcolonial and psychoanalytic interrogations of unifying constructions of human subjectivity, of the concept of the human subject as coherent and knowing, and of universal narratives of human experience. An example of how the debate around character intersects with these wider interrogations is Hélène Cixous' essay 'The Character of "character"' (1974). Cixous argues that 'the ideology underlying the fetishization of "character" is that of an "I" who is a *whole* subject (that of the character as well as that of the author) conscious, knowable' (1974: 385) and that the subject as expressed in the dramatic text is a form 'simulacrum', formulated in accordance with 'some reality principle ("Life", "truth", "biography", "sense") to which the text is subordinated' (1974: 385-6). Further, she argues that the representation of the "subject" via character must be abandoned if it is to escape the 'treadmill of reproduction', which fails to account for the unknowability and plurality of a subject 'which is unanalysable, uncharacterizable', arguing, instead, for multiplicity in its representation as an 'effect' of the unconscious (1974: 387).

Subject to theoretical and philosophical critique, dramatic character loses credibility in a the late-capitalist culture of postmodernity. The alienated modern subject loses all agency, he/she is no longer an originator of culture or language but is exposed as culturally and linguistically produced. Fuchs argues that '"de-substantiation"' (1996: 3) is the overarching theme of postmodernism, suggesting a postmodern consensus that determines that the

> interior space known as "the subject" was no longer an essence, an in-dwelling human endowment, but flattened into a social construction or marker in language, the unoccupied occupant of the subject position. (1996: 5)

Reading postmodern depictions of human subjectivity as a rejection of a liberal humanist conceptualisation of dramatic character (and its characteristic

machinations), character, in this model, stands in for the author, who in his turn, stands in for the oppression afforded by the logocentrism that Derrida argues defines and dominates the tradition of Western metaphysics.

individuality and self-determination) enables Fuchs to proclaim its death, and her analysis is supported by the theorization of the theatricalization of late twentieth-century experience (Cristina Delgado-García 2015: 29). Drawing on the work of Guy Debord and Jacques Derrida (and, further, the analyses of Michel Foucault, Gillés Deleuze and Félix Guattari and Jean Baudrillard), Fuchs describes the extent to which 'theatre' becomes a central metaphor for the postmodern experience. As the experience of real life is increasingly theatricalised through a chain of representation that, for Derrida, replaces idealist and essentialist metaphysics, and through the retreat into representation and commodification that characterises Debord's 'society of the spectacle' (Lehmann 2006: 183), Fuchs describes a world in which 'contemporary culture does not imitate reality, but simulates it in an effort to disguise its disappearance' (1996: 151). As reality dissolves into 'theatre', mimetic drama loses its footing, and the idea that there is a universal reality, or indeed a universal, unified, essentialist subject that *can* be represented loses validity, prompting a crisis of representation.

Furthermore, Fuchs identifies a textualization of theatre, a literal re-integration of the text that problematises staging theatrical presence and exposes character, and the subject it represents, as a linguistic construction. She explores the emergence of a 'new pastoral' dramaturgy, a 'static' theatre that sidesteps the dialectics of drama, where the theatrical landscape is no longer tied to the temporal or spatial unity demanded by character-driven narrative and the formalisation of theatre as 'shopping' – drawing on an interactive, participatory model that espouses principles of consumerism and reproduction.[14] In these models, 'textualization' problematises theatrical presence and character 'begins to re-assume its pre-psychological meaning – character as impression or inscription' (1996: 74). Figures appear in the landscape as 'characterlogical objects' rather than psychological entities, recalibrated in a theatre 'no longer fascinated by the struggles of single organisms

[14] Describing Peter Handke's *Kaspar* Fuchs argues for 'ontology constructed from textuality, identity spun from sentences'; arguing that Handke's play offers an 'outright reversal' of the speech/writing binary: 'Character-identified speech, traditionally the central constituent of stage performance, is the mere by-product here of an anonymous linguistic accumulation, a voice of authority with no author. The entire aspiration to self-presence is mocked' (1996: 76).

in their habitats', but 'where the thing-held-full-in-view-the-whole-time becomes the measure of theatrical interest' (1996: 107). Further, the line between actor and spectator is problematised in site-specific work, where the spectator's experience of the event takes precedence over 'his experience of characters in a drama' (1996: 140). In this way Fuchs identifies a variety of models in which the vacuity of the postmodern human subject is reflected in decentred, destabilised figures and ontologically stable, coherent and self-determining characters are relegated to the theatre of the past.

Fuchs' analysis resonates with a broader consensus confirming the 'death' of character in late twentieth-century theatre and performance scholarship (for example, in Philip Auslander 1997, Jonas Barish 1981, Marvin Carlson 1996, Erika Fischer-Lichte 1997, 2008, and Nick Kaye 1994). Analyses emphasise the performative turn in postmodern theatre that reconfigures the representation of human subjectivities and radically undermines the theological, logocentric, dramatic text, pitting 'presence' against 'representation' and the presentation of the actor's 'self', and often 'body' against the performance of a role.[15] Erika Fischer-Lichte observes that psychological characterisation gives way to the performance of 'real' actions in 'real' space and time, where the emphasis on the reality of the performance event itself takes precedence over the impersonation or representation of another human subject within a fictional narrative (1997: 238).[16]

[15] Erika Fisher-Lichte argues that in 'the culture of performance of especially the 1960s and 1970s, the actor's body and particularly their naked body, was seen as the locus and epitome of presence. In contrast, dramatic character incarnated representation. Predetermined by the "authoritative controlling mechanism" of the literary text and recreated by the actor as a physical representation of such textual prescriptiveness, the stage character was considered proof for the text's ultimate repression of actors and particularly their bodies. Their bodies thus had to be liberated from the strangling chains of representation in order to break free into the spontaneity and authenticity of their physical existence' (2008: 147).

[16] Michael Kirby's examination of the relationship between acting and emerging performance practices in his essay 'On Acting and Not-Acting' provides useful context for understanding this distinction (2002). Kirby describes a continuum along which various modes of acting and not-acting are positioned. Kirby uses this continuum to define a new performance model of 'nonmatrixed performing' that he identifies as having been pioneered in the Happenings of the 1960s, in contrast to the 'complex acting' that had dominated twentieth-century American theatre up until that point (2002: 45). He identifies a number of matrices through which 'the amount of representation, personification, and so forth has increased.' (2002: 44). These matrices include time, place, costume, emotional intention, intricacy of physical movement and contextual information. As the matrices

Marvin Carlson observes a refusal of dramatic character as an inevitable consequence of the rejection of textual authority and of metanarratives and identifies a recourse to autobiography in an attempt to generate 'authenticity' in performance (1996: 150). Nick Kaye argues that characterisation is often frustrated and coherency of the performance-event undermined, through 'the dispersal and fragmentation of dialogue' and a refocusing of the performer's attention away from the stage to the audience (1994: 52). While modernism's interest in the alienation of the human subject still afforded character a central role in the drama, still assumed some degree of human universality, postmodernism's rejection of 'a single "theological" meaning' (Roland Barthes 1977: 146) of the dramatic text and the logocentric metaphysics that it stands in, undermines character's function as a 'universal' subject, instead illuminating its role in an apparently subjugating model of mimetic, dramatic theatre.

2.7 Postdramatic theatre and character

The scarcity of references to the term 'character' in Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* appears to reflect Fuchs' analysis, indicating the extent to which the retreat from character seems to be a foregone conclusion on the postdramatic stage. In the context of Lehmann's theorization, the 'death' of dramatic character seems to be collateral damage in the postdramatic theatre's rejection of a dramatic model grounded in mimetic, dialogic action, based on interpersonal relations and in the principle that a *universal*, knowable reality exists that can, in turn, be represented through mimesis. Lehmann identifies how the more radical break from drama on the postdramatic stage has crucial implications for the depiction of the human subject, observing that

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increase in complexity the performance moves further away from the mode of 'not-acting' or 'non-matrixed performing' towards 'complex' or 'matrixed action' (2002: 45).
Significantly, although Kirby states that 'complex acting' is not associated with a particular style, he simultaneously cites the prevalence of the Method and American Realism as the context within which this new model asserts itself. Kirby argues that 'nonmatrixed performing' is the performance of an action at its simplest level where the matrices (for example costume, setting, time and place, emotional intention and physical movement) are weak, and that, in this type of performance, character ceases to exist.

> "Drama" is not just an aesthetic model but carries with it essential epistemological and social implications: the objective importance of the hero, of the individual; the possibility of representing human reality through language, namely through the form of stage dialogue and the relevance of individual human behaviour in society. (2006: 48)

The rejection of drama incorporates a rejection of dramatic character as the 'hero' or the 'individual', and of the idea that the human subject can express itself through interpersonal dialogue. Furthermore, as Lehmann goes on to argue, interpersonal conflict is no longer representative of late-twentieth century experience of a late-capitalist, highly mediatized and globalized world, when 'the real issues are only decided in power blocs, not by protagonists' (2006: 182) and the formal structure in which dramatic character is the primary agent of the action is undermined. Bodily presence takes precedence over the act of embodiment, and the physical body no longer '"tell[s]" this or that emotion but through its presence *manifests* itself as the site of inscription of collective history' (2006: 97). The concept of dramatic character as a coherent, individual agent of action, and the practices of embodiment associated with it, come to seem archaic on the postdramatic stage, where 'almost any form has come to seem more suitable for articulating reality than the action of a casual logic with its inherent attribution of events to the decisions of individuals' (Lehmann 2006: 181) and the notion of individuated identity is reduced to a commercialised commodity. The retreat of dramatic character from the postdramatic stage is corroborated in the body of work that followed Lehmann's influential study. Karen Jürs-Munby observes that 'character is largely dispensed with' (2013: 2) and David Barnett argues that 'In the postdramatic theatre, there are no characters but what Gerda Poschmann has called *Textträger* (text bearers) who do not speak dialogue but *Sprechtext* (text to be delivered)' (2006: 33). Price B. Stegemann describes how 'The postdramatic aesthetic despairs particularly vehemently at theatre's longing to illustrate human characters' (2009: 16) while Heiner Zimmermann is unequivocal in his assertion that 'The postdramatic play is performed by a group of anonymous speakers who do not impersonate characters' (2003: 74, cited in Delgado-García, 2015: 5).

Thus, there appears to be a consensus that the abandonment of dramatic character constitutes a hallmark of postdramatic theatre-making. Tied to the shift from drama and acting, to performance and 'not-acting' (Kirby 2002: 40), that burgeoned in the latter part of the twentieth century, the dissolution of character reflects postdrama's reaction to the mediatization of society and culture, and the naturalistic aesthetic association with it. Indeed, postdramatic theatre's rejection of dramatic character appears to specifically target psychologically complex, naturalistic characterization (Lehmann, 2006: 95). Lehmann references 'de-psychologization' while Barnett argues that psychological character is replaced by 'a nexus of impulses that cannot be apprehended by psychology or the discourse of individuality' (2006: 33) in the work of René Pollesch. Jürs-Munby highlights the lack of 'coherent psychological "interiority"' in the 'vestigial figures' (2013: 3) who people the postdramatic stage, arguing that, for a writer like Elfriede Jelinek, the lack of 'psychological characters' (2009: 46) emerges from a 'vehement opposition to a traditional mimetic theatre aesthetics that produces an illusion of life, the pretence of characters with an inner depth' (2009: 48). Here Jürs-Munby employs the language of psychological realism to clarify the focus of Jelinek's attack. References to an 'illusion of life' and a character's 'inner depth' directly echo Stanislavsky's description of the need 'to "create the life of the human spirit" of a role' and 'the inner life of the character' (2008: 20, 19). Furthermore, Jürs-Munby identifies Jelinek's critique of a Stanislavskian approach explicitly when she frames the call for '"shallowness" or superficiality' in performance as 'the aesthetic weapon against the pretence of psychological depth and liberal humanist theatre based on a Naturalist (Stanislavskian) system of actor training' (2009: 48).[17] Thus, dramatic character and the practices of acting that emerged from Naturalism and

[17] The rejection of a Stanislavskian approach is further evidenced in Jelinek's essay 'I Want to Be Shallow' (1983) where she denounces the principles upon which realist psychological characterisation relies - unity of characterisation, and the imitation of human beings. Jelinek argues that, 'I don't want to bring to life strange people in front of an audience', demanding that the theatre, 'get rid of human beings who could fabricate a systematic relationship to some invented character' (Jelinek 1983). Jelinek's manifesto is a clarion call for the dissolution of character and for the removal of actors and the practices of acting. Her attack is acerbic in its criticism of the art of performing a role, denouncing actors who play characters as 'dirty marks [that] … pour themselves from their zip-lock packages all over us' (Jelinek 1983).

from which the dominant model of performing a role in both mainstream theatre and twentieth-century film and television developed, appear to represent *the* model of dramatic character that postdrama most explicitly rejects.

This rejection is contextualised by the theatricalization and mediatization of society. Drawing on Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Lehmann argues that 'theatricalization permeates the entire social life, starting with the individual attempts to produce or feign a *public self*' (2006: 183). He observes that human experience is commodified in a cult of 'self-presentation' and 'self-staging' which depends upon a 'civilization of images that can only ever refer to the next image and call up other images' (2006: 183). As reality dissolves into representation, postdrama pushes back against the commodification of 'the representation of acting people in motion', retreating from those naturalistic styles that emerged in theatre and then dominated film and television, and which, have come to dominate the presentation of 'self' in real life (2006: 50). Postdramatic theatre's return to what is 'real' about unmediated, live performance inevitably impacted the representation of human subjects on the stage. Lehmann cites the use of media technologies to problematise the 'self-presentation' of performers, exposing how the self is re-presented and re-produced, shifting the audience's attention to the *process* of presentation (2006: 168). He discusses the use of media technologies to mediate or distort speech, creating a disjunction between speech and speaker and undermining the logocentric premise that speech offers a direct route to thought. He contends that 'The electronically purloined voice puts an end to the privilege of identity'; if language no longer functions as speech, the 'boundaries between language as an expression of live presence and language as a prefabricated material are blurred' (2006: 149). In separating the voice from meaning, postdramatic theatre undermines the agency of the speaking subject: 'It is not "I" but "it" that is speaking, namely through/as a complex machinized composition' (2006: 149). Accordingly, the 'complex machinized composition[s]' of the postdramatic stage often appear as liminal, mediatized techno-bodies and figures who recede into the

landscape of a theatre without climax, without action.[18] The distinctions between subject and object, between self and other (technological, animal or supernatural) are destabilised, and postdramatic subjects 'feel more like a Deleuzian meeting point of energies than an origin or centre of action' (in Barnett, Jürs-Munby, Lehmann 2006a: 484). This shift reflects a clear transition from a humanist to posthumanist conceptualisation of subjectivity as fluid, multiple and porous to those others it is conventionally positioned against.[19] Moreover, it appears to reflect an ontology for the human subject that is unfinished – always in process, continually representing and re-representing itself. Postdramatic theatre depicts an experience of human subjectivity in a late-capitalist society, where the idea of

> the autonomous individual becomes a strategic commercial fiction that in turn serves to undermine any sense of collective identity or activity in the political sphere. Self-realisation is mediated by consumption as 'life style choice' and we are further alienated from ourselves. The very concept of an 'I' is called into question. (Barnett, 2006: 33)

Alongside these posthuman entities, where the boundaries between subject and other are increasingly blurred, and when the notion of individual, autonomous agency is exposed as a commercial construct, Lehmann describes a shift from acting to performance, again contextualised by postdrama's attempt to 'withdraw from the reproduction of "images" into which all spectacles ultimately solidify' and the desire to assert 'the right to posit through a performative act a reality without the justification of something 'real' being represented' (2006: 184, 136). The

[18] Lehmann describes an experience of theatre that is 'static' and 'calm', resistant to the peaks and climaxes of dramatic action and where the human subject is no longer in the foreground or at the centre driving the 'action' (2006: 75). Describing the 'post-anthropocentric theatre' of Robert Wilson he identifies a theatre of atmospheres and states where figures recede into the landscape, functioning as one of many objects for contemplation in the panoramic scene. The 'human actors on stage do not act of their own volition and agency' but become 'incomprehensible emblems' or 'gestic sculptures' (2006: 80, 78).

[19] References to character are replaced by terms such as 'figures (or figurines)' (2006: 78), 'de-psychologised speaking-machines' (2006*:* 115), 'historical ghosts and apparitions' (2006: 59), 'revenants' (2006: 71), 'optical ciphers' (2006:72). David Barnett describes the 'replicants' and 'simulacra of human beings' produced by the *Textträger* (text bearers) in René Pollesh's work (2006: 37), Neil Swettenham identifies the figures in Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis* as 'constantly dissolving, shifting, refusing to come into focus' (2008: 65), while Jürs-Munby describes the performance of 'multiple or collective identities' (2013: 3), interchanging performers, or relinquishing and subverting conventional markers of identity (gender, age, ethnicity *et cetera*).

postdramatic stage attempts to circumvent the problematic nature of representation altogether by presenting '"real" people, who bring aspects of their real-world identity into the theatre, unadorned with fiction or character' (Jürs-Munby 2013: 3). Dramatic characters are replaced with 'personae' or '"performer-selves" who perform tasks 'without the dramatic projection of emotion that is central to dramatic acting' (Crossley 2018: 146), taking on the role of the performer, engaged in, and typically failing at, the task of representation (Tomlin 2013: 82). In this way, the postdramatic plays with layers of fictionality, blurring the line between fiction and reality and problematising the audience's perception of the human subjects that are presented. By alternately foregrounding 'self' and 'role' the postdramatic both illuminates and problematises the distinction between fictional characters and 'real life' character (invoking personality or even identity); drawing our attention to the constructed and performed nature of both.

In addition to those performances that compromise the distinction between character in fiction and reality, Lehmann identifies a preference for the phenomenological presence of the physical body of the performer, over their semiotic or representational function (2006: 96). If the physical body itself becomes the centre of attention, a site of manifestation and inscription, rather than embodiment, if the 'central theatrical sign, the actor's body refuses to serve signification' (2006: 95), the governing logic of dramatic theatre is undermined. When actors (and, indeed, non-actors) take to the stage in postdramatic theatre they are reborn in the traditions of performance, 'no longer the actor of a role but a performer offering his or her presence on stage for contemplation' (Lehmann 2006: 135). Lehmann draws on Kirby's spectrum of 'acting' and 'not-acting' to illustrate how the work of the postdramatic performer highlights 'the provocative presence of the human being rather than the embodiment of a figure' (2006: 135). He contextualises his analysis with the emergence of performance art and the preference for real action in real time, in the here and now and postdramatic theatre's 'attempt to conceptualize art in the sense that it offers not a representation but an intentionally unmediated experience of the real' (2006: 134). Postdrama's preference for the present moment and for what is *real* about the

performance event – the act of communication between the performers and the spectators – recalibrates the presence of the actor, which can no longer be regarded as 'an objectifiable presence' but becomes a 'co-presence in the sense of an unavoidable implication of the spectator' (2006: 148). The staging of the human subject in this way highlights the extent to which the performance is 'co-authored', to which it depends as much upon the active participation of the spectators as it does upon the minds and bodies of the performers. In this context, the concept of dramatic character, as the representation of a free, coherent, autonomous human subject, appears not only anachronistic, but antithetical to the whole project.

2.8 Character 'under erasure'

Yet although dramatic character's absence from the postdramatic stage appears to be widely accepted, and while postdrama's depictions of human subjects undeniably differ radically from the concept of dramatic character as a realistically-represented, psychologically-complex, stable entity, Lehmann nonetheless asserts that 'a lack of interest in the human being... is not a foregone conclusion' (2006: 18). Indeed, he argues that the radical shift made in postdrama's depiction of human subjectivities is from 'intentionality – a characteristic of the subject' to a failure of intentionality, from a singular interpretation of *the* human being to those 'new possibilities of thinking and representing the individual human subject' (2006: 18). Reading Lehmann's analysis in light of the definition of dramatic character proposed at the start of this chapter, where I contend that character might best be understood as simply any conceptualisation of human subjectivity within a dramatic text or a theatre performance, and in light of Delgado-García's proposition that 'so long as a notion of subjectivity is evoked, presented or induced in a text or performance, character remains' (2015: 15, xii), it seems that we might still usefully employ the term 'character' to describe postdramatic theatre's depictions of human subjects.[20]

[20] Delgado-García's persuasive analysis is important, because arguing for the resurrection of dramatic character and, more importantly, for a broader definition of the term, she argues for an expanded and more inclusive conceptualisation of subjectivity. Delgado-García contends that

Accordingly, I propose that the rejection of a particular model of dramatic character that reflects a liberal humanist subjectivity, need not necessarily extend to a wholesale rejection of the term. As this chapter has also demonstrated, the notion of dramatic character is fluid and multifarious, and its correlation to a liberal humanist subject is, in fact, a short-lived moment in its rich and diverse history. Indeed, examining postdrama's rejection of dramatic character within the broader context of the brief history of character offered here, reveals congruencies with characters earlier, pre-modern incarnations, suggesting that the notion of the death of character might be overstated.[21] Re-reading the traces of character that inhabit the postdramatic stage, those liminal figures who both evoke and simultaneously evade character, within the context of the personae of early Greek tragedy, the Everymen of Medieval drama, the morally-determined, yet plural and multifarious figures of the early modern stage, or indeed, the biologically and socially determined characters of Naturalism, offers a lineage in dramatic character for the subjects of postdramatic stages that appears to have otherwise been largely overlooked. In light of this, and indeed building on Cristina Delgado-García's analysis, I propose that it is possible to assert that, while radically reformed, dramatic character has not been entirely annihilated nor completely removed from view on the postdramatic stage. However, while I propose to revive the term 'character', I do not suggest that it can be resurrected without amendment. I do not want to overstate the correlation between the subjectivities that populate the postdramatic stage and the characters of dramatic theatre. Instead, it is my

'expanding the definition of what can be apprehended as a human life is an important task towards equality. This is the political task I believe theatre can conduct... a task that can be executed through the theatrical formulation of character' (2015: 10).

[21] There are parallels to be found between the 'figures' that populate the postdramatic stage and 'Everyman' figure or the Chorus, there are instances in postmodern and postdramatic theatre where 'characters' take on allegorical or epic functions. Delgado-García makes just this point in her discussion of Elinor Fuchs' analysis of the 'alternative – allegorical, epic or theatricalist – human figures' that emerge in the wake of dramatic character's death (2015: 29). This exemplifies, for Delgado-García, the extent to which Fuchs equates dramatic character with the concept of character as the primary agent of action in the drama, as an representative of a unique and coherent individual, overlooking the multitude of examples in pre-modern drama which denied character just that very agency (2015: 29).

contention that the term 'character' remains most useful in supporting our understanding of postdramatic theatre's depiction of human subjectivities when it is amended.

Thus, I propose that the term character 'under erasure' offers a more accurate description of postdramatic subjectivities. Placing the term character 'under erasure' illuminates the extent to which postdramatic subjectivities continue to entertain a relationship with the dramatic characters that precede them. To support this contention the final section of this chapter examines the extent to which postdramatic theatre often critically engages with and, therefore, relies upon the principles of drama that it rejects, specifically in relation to the depiction of human subjectivities. It is from this starting point that I propose that Stanislavsky's 'system', which offers a blueprint for the construction of dramatic character in performance (and which, accordingly, I suggest, might equally be applied to its *de*construction) has much to offer the theatre-maker interested in exploring a postdramatic theatre of 'character'.

(Post) dramatic theatre and character 'under erasure'

The formulation of Lehmann's term is contingent on the concept of dramatic theatre. The *post*dramatic comes 'after' drama. Following the dramatic model in temporal terms and in its relationship to drama, postdramatic theatre both differs from and defers dramatic representation. Derrida's neologism plays on the dual meaning of the French verb *différer* (meaning both to differ from and to defer) and it is the duality of simultaneous 'temporization' (implied by deferral) and of 'spacing' (implied by difference) that lies at the heart of its strategic function. For Derrida, *différance* facilitates the chain of representation through which meaning is produced, it is the very 'movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general is constituted "historically" as a weave of differences' (1982:12). Reading Lehmann's formulation of postdramatic theatre through Derrida's *différance* highlights the extent to which postdramatic theatre is

constituted through, in and by its relationship to that which it is not, to that which it differs from, to that which it defers.

In the first instance Lehmann positions postdramatic theatre as 'a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time "after" the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre' (2006: 27). Rejecting the dramatic principles of 'representation, the "making present"… through mimetic dramatic play' and abandoning the dramatic theatre's 'subordination to the primacy of the text' (2006: 21), Lehmann argues that the 'new theatre' prompts a fundamental rethinking of the dramatic theatre's principal premise of the 'exclusion of the real' (2006: 42). This 'exclusion of the real' is juxtaposed, in postdramatic theatre, with the 'irruption of the real' (2006: 99) and the problematization of the reality/fiction binary that produces an 'aesthetics of undecidability' (2006: 100), an uncertainty as to 'whether one is dealing with reality or fiction' (2006: 101). Thus, the illusion of 'real life' associated with realistic, or naturalistic dramatic theatre is jettisoned in favour of an aesthetic of risk and of failure, a preference for liveness over 'believability' and 'truth' in performance. In its radical revision of the theatre's relationship to fictionality and 'realistic' representation, the postdramatic is established in binary opposition to the dramatic.

The polarisation of the dramatic and postdramatic is further reflected in postdramatic theatre's problematization of totality, referentiality and fixity of meaning. Postdrama favours undecidability, multiplicity and fracture, explicitly rejecting foundational dramatic principles. Furthermore, Lehmann contends that in postdramatic theatre 'the complicity of drama and logic and then drama and dialectic' (2006: 41) are abandoned. The central premise of the dramatic theatre as offering a totalising model of representation with its possibilities for recognition, reconciliation and catharsis, is no longer 'fit for purpose' in depicting late twentieth-century lived experience. In this way, Lehmann establishes postdramatic theatre's status as the dramatic theatre's 'other'; the postdramatic is discernible *through* its differences from the drama and in its deferral of dramatic representation. Indeed, Lehmann's analysis of postdramatic theatre is

characterised by a sense of postdrama's privileging of incompleteness, 'stopping short' of the unity and totality of drama.[22]

Accordingly, Lehmann's conceptualisation of postdramatic theatre relies on the strategy of deferral that is central to *différance*. Derrida argues that the process of deferral:

> take[s] recourse consciously or unconsciously, in the temporal, or temporizing mediation of a detour that suspends the accomplishment or fulfilment of "desire" or "will" and equally effects this suspension in a mode that annuls or tempers its own effect. (1982: 8)

The suspension of the dramatic 'will' is characteristic of postdramatic theatre, which radically revises the principles of drama to produce a 'de-dramatization' (Lehmann 2006:74) of the dramatic structure and a 'de-hierarchization of theatrical means' (2006: 86). The resultant 'retreat of synthesis' (2006: 82) and 'abandonment of totality' (2006: 88) defers the possibility of dramatic catharsis and reconciliation, resulting in:

> *not simply a new kind of staging* – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside down…it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information. (2006: 85)

Here again the postdramatic is defined through an explicit play of *différance*, whereby 'every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of a systematic play of differences' (1982:

[22] For example, linearity of plot is jettisoned, and unity of time and place are destabilised. The highs and lows of dramatic action are substituted with the flatness of ritual and ceremony, and the locus of meaning is displaced and deferred. No longer communicated by the actors to the empathetic observing audience, instead, if meaning is generated at all, it is produced in the auditorium by the active spectator. Lehmann argues that: 'The task of the spectators is no longer the neutral reconstruction, the re-creation and patient retracing of the fixed image but rather than mobilization of their own ability to react and experience in order to realize their participation in the process that is offered to them' (2006: 135). Embodiment is renounced and postdramatic theatre focuses on the actor's body, privileging 'pure' presence and postponing the possibility of character-creation.

11). Indeed, the dramatic theatre is the principal 'other' through which Lehmann describes postdramatic theatre and while this appears to place the dramatic and postdramatic theatres in binary opposition, so, following Derrida's strategy of *différance*, that very opposition collapses as it is revealed to be constitutive and essential to the articulation of postdramatic theatre.

What is more, while Lehmann's analysis identifies a radical reconfiguration of the principles of dramatic theatre, he remains clear that the *post*dramatic does not mean 'an abstract negation and mere looking away from the tradition of drama' (2006: 27). Instead, he argues that postdramatic theatre 'should rather be understood as the unfolding and blossoming of a potential of disintegration, dismantling and deconstruction within drama itself' (2006: 44).
This view is reinforced in Jürs-Munby's Introduction to the English translation:

> 'post' here is to be understood neither as an epochal category, nor simply as a chronological 'after' drama, a 'forgetting' of the dramatic 'past', but rather as a rupture and a beyond that continue to entertain relationships with drama and are in many ways an analysis and 'anamnesis' of drama. (2006: 2)

Jürs-Munby's emphasis on 'anamnesis' has significant implications for revising our understanding of the fate of character in the theatrical landscape 'after' drama, and it is not difficult to find examples of the ways in which postdramatic practitioners 'continue to entertain relationships' with dramatic character in their exploration and representation of human subjects.

Liz Tomlin's (2013) analysis of the relationship between the dramatic and the postdramatic offers insight into just this relationship between dramatic character and the subjects who populate the postdramatic stage. Tomlin argues that the 'inadequate characterisations' prevalent in postdrama engage in 'citational' practices, engaging with the dramatic, broadly 'realist', practices they are positioned against (2013: 87). Exploring the work of Forced Entertainment she argues that, 'It is clear from Tim Etchells's own perspective … that the destabilisation of the realistic, or dramatic model is central to the company's work,'

(2013: 85) and that the failure to stage an 'authentic or originary presence' associated with realist representation is central to staging the companies' '"third rate copies" or imitations of the real' (2013: 86). Further, examining the work of The Wooster Group she argues that:

> the companies' strategies of characterisation arise from this very absence [of 'realist representation'] and are located in the attempts of the performers and give voice to the departed whilst simultaneously dislocating the authenticity or reliability of those they recall. (2013: 87)

Tomlin's analysis employs the language of psychological realism, and it becomes clear that the 'free-floating, mischief-making apparitions that are concomitant with the contemporary understanding of identity as made up of multiple and provisional selves' (2013: 81) are achieved through a critical engagement with the 'realist' dramatic characters they reject. If, as Tomlin suggests, realistic or naturalistic dramatic characterisation is the principle 'other' against which postdramatic subjectivities are defined, then the recollection of 'realist' dramatic characterisation is central to the play of *différance* at the heart of postdramatic theatre.[23]

2. 9 Conclusion

This analysis has argued that there remains a significant and pertinent relationship between postdramatic theatre's staging of human subjectivities and the dramatic characters that precede them. Through examining the historical evolution of dramatic character, I have shown that a broader understanding of the term, that encompasses character's figurative beginnings and emphasises its protean nature, supports the contention that the term 'character' should not be exclusively equated with a liberal humanist subjectivity. Therefore, I propose that we might return to the term character, albeit, as I have argued, 'under erasure', to describe postdramatic theatre's staging of human subjects. By examining postdramatic

[23] In *Différance* Jacques Derrida argues that: 'Thus one could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of each other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same' (1982: 17).

theatre's relationship to drama I have made the case for adopting the term character 'under erasure', illuminating the extent to which dramatic character remains central to postdrama's critique of the liberal humanist subject. While postdramatic theatre's staging of human subjects may no longer be accurately articulated using a term that has become synonymous with a liberal humanist subjectivity (however erroneous that correlation might be), their conceptualisation remains nonetheless dependent on the concept of 'character' and the multiple and various meanings it evokes. While the focus of this thesis is not dramatic character, this chapter demonstrates why it makes sense to explore a Stanislavskian, character-led approach to staging postdramatic theatre and to investigate whether a Stanislavskian approach to character-creation can provide a route into devising that neither adheres to the authority of the dramatic text, nor is fully anchored in realistic or naturalistic representation.

Before reflecting on the practical exploration of applying Stanislavsky's 'system' to the staging of character 'under erasure', I will review the literature and locate the research within the relevant fields of scholarship and practice (chapter three) and offer a re-reading of Stanislavsky's analyses of an actor's work on a role (chapter four). The intention is to identify the scholarly context and further develop the theoretical framework within which the practice was undertaken in order to argue for the efficacy of applying Stanislavsky's 'system' to a postdramatic theatre-making practice.

Chapter three - the case for new knowledge

3.1 Stanislavsky and postdramatic theatre: reviewing the literature

As I have argued, psychologically realised character and the Stanislavskian practices that have historically been identified with naturalistic characterisation, represent one of the constitutive 'others' against which postdramatic theatre appears to assert itself. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, references to Stanislavsky are scant in postdramatic scholarship, reflecting his apparently axiomatic irrelevance to a performance-making landscape that resists characterisation. Where references are made, the unsuitability of a Stanislavskian approach is described in unequivocal terms. For example, Karen Jürs-Munby explicitly positions Elfriede Jelinek's desire for 'shallowness' in performance as a response to the '…liberal humanist theatre based on a Naturalist (Stanislavskian) "system" of actor training' (2009: 48). Jürs-Munby reiterates this point, arguing that postdramatic theatre is incompatible with a Stanislavskian approach which is 'ultimately geared towards "building a character" within a dramatic play aiming to create the illusion of reality' (2006: 95). Her view is supported by Bernd Stegemann, who places the work of the postdramatic performer in contradistinction to that of the actor who 'represents a character… [where the] representation of the character has its own reality' (2009: 17). Stegemann identifies this latter model as 'the ideal of acting training according to Stanislavski' (2009: 17). The scarcity of references to Stanislavsky in postdramatic scholarship and the brevity of Jürs-Munby's and Stegemann's analyses, as well as their routine dismissal of a Stanislavskian approach, suggests that their assertions are based on a consensus, that, until recently, has remained unchallenged.

Two notable challenges to this consensus have been made by Graham Stephenson's (2011) examination of Stanislavsky's relationship to postmodernism and Tracy Crossley's (2018) article exploring the potential commonalities between Quarantine Theatre's *Wallflower* and Stanislavsky's work on *affective memory* and

Active Analysis.[1] While Stephenson offers a theoretical analysis, Crossley's article details the parallels between Quarantine Theatre's devising and performance *practices* and Stanislavsky's 'system'. Although she does not suggest that Quarantine Theatre have consciously adopted a Stanislavskian approach (revealing a principal difference with the work presented in this thesis), she examines the potential cross-pollination between the dramatic and postdramatic, via Stanislavsky's work on 'experiencing'. Exploring how the 'system' might facilitate liveness and serve the performer working towards a 'poetics of failure', Crossley makes a persuasive case for the efficacy of employing Stanislavsky's 'system' in service of a postdramatic theatre-making practice. Accordingly, Stephenson's thesis and Crossley's article evidence the extent to which the ideas that are foundational to postdrama find resonances in Stanislavsky's 'system'. They provide useful contextualising and supporting evidence for a more systematic approach to testing the efficacy of developing a Stanislavskian model of postdramatic theatre-making. Together with these two publications, this thesis seeks to redress the imbalance in current scholarship and challenge the overriding consensus.

In addition to the consensus in postdramatic scholarship, Stanislavsky's relevance to postdramatic performance-making has been questioned in actor-training scholarship. Bella Merlin highlights the challenges faced by the actor trained in a character-led approach when encountering problematized conceptualisations of character 'in the post-modern and post-dramatic canons' (2015: 128). Merlin contends that the contemporary actor must be able to select appropriate 'compositional strategies' according to the material they encounter, and that those strategies will differ depending on 'whether the aesthetic is traditional or experimental' (2015: 128). She draws attention to the accepted assumption that

[1] Stephenson explores the relationship between Stanislavsky's 'system' and postmodernism through re-reading Stanislavsky's relationship to Vsevolod Meyerhold, Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Michael Chekhov and Bertolt Brecht and exploring commonalities with the work of The Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment. He contests Philip Auslander's contention that Stanislavsky's 'system' is anathema to the postmodern practitioner (Auslander 1997), arguing that Auslander misreads Stanislavsky's distinction between the conscious and subconscious, oversimplifying Stanislavsky's 'system' (2011: 49-50). Stephenson also highlights the processual nature of Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work (2011: 56-7), an idea that I build upon and develop further in chapter four.

any chosen theatrical style will be best served by the performance-making strategies with which it is conventionally associated. In using a Stanislavskian approach to character-creation as the primary model of performance-making to facilitate a postdramatic theatre-making practice, this thesis actively challenges this assumption. The question of whether a Stanislavskian practice can best serve the actor working on a postdramatic text is explored further by Philip Zarrilli (2009) and David Shirley (2007). Zarrilli observes that:

> However important psychology has been in shaping the dramaturgy of realist and naturalist plays from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth centuries, conventional realist approaches to acting and or textual analysis may be inadequate or even inappropriate to the realization of the dramaturgy and acting tasks that constitute an actor's performance score in a post-dramatic text or performance. (2009: 7-8)

While Zarrilli does not argue for a rejection of Stanislavskian techniques, he advocates a psychophysical approach to acting that 'moves acting theory and practice beyond some of the historical limitations which have informed our understanding of Stanislavski's legacy…' (2009: 8).[2] Moreover, he questions the efficacy of applying an unadulterated Stanislavskian approach to postdramatic theatre-making, arguing that Stanislavskian practices must be adapted in order to allow actors 'to solve the specific acting problems of both conventional "dramatic" as well as "post-dramatic" dramaturgies' (2009:8). Zarrilli's concern and proposed solution to the problem is echoed by Shirley who questions whether Stanislavskian principles can serve the contemporary actor when unity of characterisation is undermined (2007: 179).[3] He identifies the challenges facing the actor trained in a character-led, Stanislavskian approach when working on a postdramatic text, and, like Zarrilli, he concludes that the problem can best be resolved through the

[2] In *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavsky* Zarrilli advocates a 'post-Stanislavskian' approach. He proposes a considerably revised Stanislavskian methodology that develops Stanislavsky's interest in psychology and yoga, extending Stanislavsky's ideas by drawing on 'newer sciences and in-depth studies of non-Western paradigms and practices' (2009: 8). Zarrilli proposes that this combined approach provides 'a set of complementary conceptual and practical tools to help the actor better meet the demands of today's alternative dramaturgies' (2009: 8).
[3] Shirley asks, 'If the idea of a stable identity is deemed a myth and the events are considered random what is the usefulness of a representational 'system' for which 'unity' is the guiding principle?' (2007: 179).

development of hybrid actor-training practices that fuse new models with 'tried and tested old methods' (2007: 183).[4]

While this thesis does not reject the approaches proposed by Zarrilli or Shirley, it offers an alternative perspective on the relevance of Stanislavsky to the twenty-first century practitioner. In exploring a character-led approach to postdramatic theatre, it is particularly concerned with examining the relevance of those Stanislavskian techniques associated with naturalistic characterisation and with psychological realism (for example, the practices of text analysis that Zarrilli suggests may no longer be relevant), over and above adapting Stanislavsky's 'system' in light of contemporary innovations in actor-training. In this way, through testing the validity of applying Stanislavskian techniques to stage character 'under erasure', this research has explored an alternative solution to the problem and thus proposes to contribute new knowledge to the field of actor-training scholarship.

Stanislavsky for the twenty-first century

In making the case for the application of Stanislavskian techniques to a postdramatic aesthetic, this thesis contests the historical binary that places Stanislavsky's work in opposition to the 'radical' practices of the early twentieth century modern avant-garde (Aston and Savona 1991; Fischer-Lichte 2002), as well as the mid-twentieth century turn to performance (Schmitt 1990) and postmodern theatre (Auslander 1997).[5] In challenging this dichotomy, this thesis builds on, and

[4] Shirley cites examples of work by Peter Handke, Martin Crimp and Sarah Kane, wherein 'the rejection of characters with designated lines and definable personalities destabilises conventional attempts at interpretation' (2007: 183).

[5] This dichotomy is established through analyses that position Stanislavsky's work in opposition to the turn away from the dominant aesthetic of bourgeois illusionism and late-nineteenth century realism and Naturalism, as identified in the work of, for example, Bertolt Brecht (Aston and Savona 1991: 46-7), and more generally the modern avant-garde. In her 2002 *History of European Drama and Theatre*, Erika Fischer-Lichte identifies two divergent paths in twentieth-century theatre-making, positioning a Stanislavskian model of naturalistic representation in opposition to the innovative practices of, for example, Gordon Craig, Meyerhold, Artaud, Brecht and Grotowski (2001: 284, 290, 296, 315, 336). While Fischer-Lichte acknowledges Stanislavsky's influence on, and indeed details his collaborations with, many key figures in the modern avant-garde movement, she adheres to a historical narrative that positions those innovations in opposition to Stanislavsky, who seems to remain a figure tied to the 'bourgeois illusionist' practices of Naturalism and late nineteenth century realism (1997: 34). This view of Stanislavsky's dichotomous relationship to the experimental practices of the modern avant-garde is perpetuated in analyses of his relevance to postmodern

proposes to contribute to, the body of Stanislavskian scholarship that contests the assumption that Stanislavsky's techniques are exclusively relevant to a Naturalist or psychological realist style of performance. The now predominant view in Stanislavskian scholarship argues that the perception of Stanislavsky's 'system' as 'outdated' and ill-suited to the twenty-first-century practitioner, is based on a fundamental misconception of Stanislavsky's legacy, (Benedetti 1998; Carnicke 2009; Beck 2000, 2014). Indeed, it is argued that this misconception is so widespread that, according to Benedetti, Stanislavsky is the 'most consistently and widely misunderstood …figure in the history of actor training' (1998: vii), while Sharon Carnicke asserts that, 'many who reject him actually reject his constructed image, not his fundamental intuitions about acting' (2009: 4). Furthermore, and of perhaps greater relevance here, Benedetti argues that this misconception stems from an overemphasis on Stanislavsky's association with 'a primitive kind of "naturalism" or with Lee Strasberg's Method' (2009: vii). The revision of this misconception seeks to extricate Stanislavsky's legacy from a strict adherence to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Naturalism and psychological realism and provides the foundation from which this thesis builds its central hypothesis. It therefore clearly warrants further attention.

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theatre-making practices and the field of performance. Philip Auslander rejects a Stanislavskian approach as unsuited to performance-making which highlights the intertextuality and Derridean play of *différance* that characterises the contemporary actor's work (1997). He grounds this critique in the assertion that Stanislavsky's practice is based in a logocentric and essentialist view of the actor's 'self' (1997: 30). Auslander's analysis is echoed in that of Natalie Crohn Schmitt who argues that Stanislavsky's techniques are 'antithetical' to the 'new theater' of the late twentieth century (1990: 93). Schmitt contends that in its reliance on 'a world view comparable to that in the traditional theatre' Stanislavsky's 'system' 'no longer has, or can no longer have, the authority it once did' (1990: 94 and 93). This view is reflected by Bonnie Marranca, who uses distinctively Stanislavskian language in her analysis of Sam Shepherd's radical depictions of character in *Angel City*. She contrasts Shepard's depiction of 'character' with 'the "realistic" character [who] is created by an actor who must develop an "inner life" for himself…' (1984: 24). The conflict between a Stanislavskian approach to a role, and the representation of human subjectivity in postmodern theatre is further highlighted by Ellen J. O'Brien who examines the problems encountered by actors trained in 'Stanislavskian-based techniques that serve psychologically based "unified" subjects' when working on 'postmodern' productions of Shakespeare (1996: 126). O'Brien's concerns are echoed in Zarrilli's analysis of the problems encountered by the actor whose 'primary training had been in various forms of Stanislavskian-based method acting' when asked to perform an action without the framework of psychological motivation (2002: 16, 17).

The misrepresentation of Stanislavsky's 'system' has primarily been redressed through re-examinations of the translation and dissemination of his ideas and practices throughout the twentieth century. The revisions to his legacy have revealed the extent to which his work extended beyond the 'historico-realist' style with which Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre is predominantly associated, illustrating the degree to which naturalistic representation was a phase in his working practice rather than the summation of it. Attention has been paid to the impact of the Soviet censor on Stanislavsky's writing and Elizabeth Hapgood's incomplete and, at times, inaccurate translations of *An Actor Prepares* (1936), *Building a Character* (1949) and *Creating A Role* (1961), as well as to the problematic nature of the dissemination of the 'system' through the Moscow Art Theatre tours of 1923 and 1924 in Europe and the United States (for example, Carnicke: 1993, 2009, 2014; Benedetti 1990, 1998, 2008).[6] This revision of Stanislavsky's work has been supported by a renewed focus on the practices developed towards the end of Stanislavsky's life, in particular on the *Method of Physical Actions* in, for example Benedetti (1982), Harrop (1992), Hornby (1992) and *Active Analysis* in, for example Carnicke (2009), Merlin (2003, 2007, 2014), Gillet (2014), Krasner (2014), Blair (2014), Thomas and Knebel (2016), Daventry-French and Bennett (2016). In addition, Stanislavsky's interest in yoga for example in Carnicke (2009), White (2014), Tcherkasski (2016), as well as his emphasis on the psycho-physical nature of the 'system' and the centrality of the concept of 'experiencing' – the term Stanislavsky uses to describe the natural, creative state for the actor and which Sharon Marie Carnicke describes as the '*sine qua non* of the System' (2006: 129) - most notably in Carnicke (2009), Merlin (2001, 2003, 2007),

[6] Carnicke and Benedetti have highlighted the problematic nature of the dissemination of Stanislavsky's ideas. Carnicke traces the transmission of the 'system' through the 'classroom circuit' in the United States via Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya and then, via Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler, identifying problems of mistranslation and misinterpretation (Carnicke 2009: 62-75). Furthermore, Carnicke and Benedetti identify Stanislavsky's unwieldy style and use of perplexing terminology, the pressures exhorted by the Soviet censors, and Reynolds-Hapgood's deeply compromised translations as contributing to a, at best, partial account of his ideas being disseminated in writing. What is more, Carnicke and Benedetti emphasise the fundamental problem of committing to paper a 'system' that remained constantly evolving until the very end of Stanislavsky's life. Indeed, Carnicke argues that as Stanislavsky's practices evolved, so he continued to 'alter and expand his writing' concluding that, 'All his texts are works in progress' (2009: 77).

Zarrilli (2009), Benedetti (2008), and the relationship between the 'system' and psychology, cognitive science and neuroscience, for example in Blair (2008, 2014) and Whyman (2008), have all contributed to a radical revision of Stanislavsky's legacy for the twenty-first century.

This scholarly revision has been reinforced by the publication of several actor training texts, notably Benedetti (1989, 1998), Gillet (2014), Merlin (2001, 2003, 2007), and Benedetti's (2008, 2010) translations of Stanislavsky's autobiography and analyses of his 'system' (published as *My Life in Art, An Actor's Work* and *An Actor's Work on Himself*) have corrected erroneous mis-translations, misinterpretations and omissions. Thus, this reconsideration of Stanislavsky's legacy has overturned the mid-twentieth-century perception of Stanislavsky that equated the 'system' with tradition, convention and stagnation, in favour of the image of a practitioner whose work is, in fact, characterised by experimentation and creative curiosity. Indeed, the consensus in Stanislavskian scholarship today emphasises Stanislavsky's determination to fight 'artistic stagnation of any kind' (Carnicke 2009: 37) over and above any adherence to a narrow set of stylistic principles, emphasising the extent to which he worked beyond the 'historico-realist', naturalistic style. In emphasising the evolving and dynamic nature of the 'system' and in foregrounding the centrality of 'experiencing' and the extent to which the psycho-physical practices of the 'system' are not allied to any one dramatic style or set of theatrical conventions, the contemporary view of Stanislavsky has, therefore, revised and clarified our understanding of both his methods and the principles and goals that underpin the 'system'.

This revision provides an essential foundation for this research which has been undertaken in the Stanislavskian spirit of experimentation and which, more formally, builds on the revised view of his life's work, utilising those late twentieth-century translations and analysis of the 'system'. Moreover, this research follows Stanislavsky's precedent in applying the 'system' beyond the parameters of Naturalism and psychological realism, (Carnicke 2009; Merlin 2001; Benedetti 1998), drawing on the analyses of Carnicke (2009), Listengarten (2014), Beck (2000,

2014) and the evidence of Stanislavsky's own correspondence (Stanislavsky 2014) that reposition his relationship to the historical, neo and contemporary avant-garde.[7] Through highlighting the extent to which Stanislavsky worked outside of a naturalistic style (evidenced in his work on Symbolist plays,[8] his collaborations with avant-garde theatre practitioners,[9] and his continued support of his own pupils as their practices diverged significantly from those of Naturalism and psychological realism), Carnicke and Listengarten radically reconfigure the binary that positions Stanislavsky in opposition to the experiments of the modern avant-garde.[10] Building on these analyses, this thesis develops a revised view of Stanislavsky's relationship to the historical practices that are identified as foundational in the lineage of postdramatic theatre, in light of which the application of Stanislavskian techniques to a postdramatic theatre-making practice seems considerably less farfetched.[11]

In addition, this research draws on, and proposes to contribute to, the body of work that has re-evaluated the application of Stanislavsky's practices in contemporary theatre-making (Kassel 2000; Donovan Smith 2000; Beck 2000, 2014).[12] A

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[7] Sharon Carnicke argues that there was 'nothing absolute about his compendium of theory and techniques', but that, instead, Stanislavsky 'saw his "system" as offering advice to actors of different temperaments who wished to speak through *different aesthetic styles'* [my emphasis] (2009: 3) Furthermore, Carnicke contends that Stanislavsky employed naturalistic staging only as long as it provided 'assistance to his actors' (2009: 35) and that when Naturalism failed to serve him, he moved away from naturalistic representation. Benedetti observes that 'Stanislavski always stressed the provisional nature of his findings' (1998: x) and Merlin describes Stanislavsky as an 'experimenter' who 'didn't confine his acting and directing to naturalistic Russian plays. He tried his hand at operetta, symbolism, Shakespeare, Molière. Despite popular belief, his search for "truth" … was as much a search for *stylistic* and *theatrical* truth as it was for psychological truth' (2001: 9).

[8] For example, the plays of Maurice Maeterlinck (culminating in his production of *The Bluebird* in 1908), Knut Hamsun's *The Drama of Life* and Leonid Andreev's *The Life of Man*.

[9] For example, Edward Gordon Craig, Alexander Benois and Isadora Duncan.

[10] In particular, his relationship with Vsevolod Meyerhold (and his involvement with Meyerhold's theatre-studio) and Yevgeny Vakhtangov as they pursued training practices and theatre-making aesthetics that diverged significantly from Naturalism all characterise Stanislavsky as a practitioner open to and driven by a willingness to experiment and challenge his own assumptions.

[11] Lehmann examines the relationship between the emergence of postdramatic theatre and the 'historical avant-gardes' in 'Prehistories'. He argues that 'the theatre of the Symbolists marked a step on the way to postdramatic theatre' (2006: 57) and identifies Edward Gordon Craig, Antonin Artaud and Meyerhold as 'ancestors of the contemporary theatre' (2006: 62).

[12] Paul S. Kassel makes the case for the application of elements of the Method to the work of Robert Wilson and Theatre de Complicité. Kassel cites the use of actions and the understanding of the structure and function of characters as facilitated by a training in the Method, as serving the actor in theatre-making that resists characterisation and linear narrative (2000: 224). Furthermore, Terry Donovan Smith explores the actor training practices of Steve Pearson and Robin Hunt at the University of Washington School of Drama, wherein Stanislavskian techniques have been combined

comprehensive account of this re-evaluation is provided by Beck's analyses of Stanislavsky's relevance to contemporary 'non-realistic' theatre (2000, 2014).[13] He traces the continued influence of Stanislavsky in contemporary avant-garde theatre-making, identifying several significant legacies of his practice. Beck cites Stanislavsky's commitment to improvisation and highlights the influence of the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis* on a diverse range of practitioners and companies.[14] Moreover, following Maria Shevstova, Beck argues that the 'études…that Stanislavsky used in the Method of Physical Actions' have provided a 'basis for latter-day devised theatre' (2014: 223). In addition, and of greater significance here, Beck argues for a re-examination of Stanislavsky's view of the relationship between the actor and the role, highlighting Stanislavsky's focus on 'dual consciousness' (2000: 261). He contends that Stanislavsky's exploration of the actor's dual consciousness laid the foundations for many of the central preoccupations of late twentieth century theatre-making, and prefaced the emergence of the 'authorial' actor who 'no longer dutifully render[s] the playwright's character but co-create[s] it, co-author[s] it' (2000: 267).[15] Moreover, Beck argues that Stanislavsky's analyses prompted a repositioning of the concept of 'truth' in relation to the imaginative world of the play and the reality of the actor's lived experience in the moment of performance by 'equating "to experience" … with "to create"' (2000: 268). In this way, he traces a continuous line of influence

with Tadashi Suzuki's practice (2000: 247). These examples provide contextualising evidence, demonstrating that the work of this thesis is not being carried out in isolation. Notably, both examples highlight the extent to which Stanislavsky's practices remain a fundamental part of actor training and many techniques continue to be used in contemporary theatre-making models that diverge from psychological realism and naturalistic characterisation. It is worth noting, though, that these essays are particularly concerned with examining the legacy of the Method in contemporary practice, as opposed to Stanislavsky's 'system', and in addition that they do not specifically engage with postdramatic theatre-making.

[13] Beck cites Stanislavsky's influence on Jerzy Grotowski, the Theatre of Gardzienice (identifying ensemble work and communication as two key instances of Stanislavskian influence (2014: 218)) and Yevgeny Vakhtangov (2014: 216), as well as on the experimental (and politically informed) practices of Studio Ypsilon and HaDivaldo in the Czech Republic and of Yuri Lyubinov (Moscow Tasanka Theatre) at the turn of the twenty-first century (2014: 214).

[14] Jerzy Grotowski, Wlodzimierz Staniewski, (Theatre of Gardzienice), Yuri Lyubimov (Moscow Taganka Theatre), Studio Ypsilon and HaDivadlo theatre company (Czech Republic), Song of the Goat and The Wooster Group number among those referenced.

[15] Beck argues that 'Stanislavsky mapped the shifting terrain and defined the paradoxes of modern acting (character and persona), which theatre historian William Worthen expounds as the "theatrical versus the real, acting versus being, public versus private, the theater versus the actor"' (2000: 265).

from Stanislavsky's work on the relationship between the actor and the role to the mid twentieth-century rejection of acting in favour of the performance of 'real' action, in real time and space. Indeed, Beck asserts that:

> Although the ramifications of setting actor and character as dual realities on stage eluded him, Stanislavsky nonetheless established the poles between which actors would perform throughout the century (2000: 268).

It is Beck's exploration of Stanislavsky's view of character as created through an interplay between the role and the actor that this thesis builds upon, and indeed which I develop further in chapter three. Furthermore, this research project has modelled, tested and extended Beck's reading of Stanislavsky's understanding of character through practice, in the application of Stanislavskian techniques to staging a postdramatic form of character 'under erasure'.[16]

Overview

Through mapping the field of literature, I have attempted to highlight the assumption that has determined Stanislavsky's 'system' and the practices associated with naturalistic and psychological realist character-creation, as irrelevant to postdramatic theatre-making practices. In so doing, I have established one of the principal tenets that this thesis challenges and simultaneously illuminated a potential gap in actor-training scholarship that the research addresses. Furthermore, through offering a brief overview of the current field of Stanislavskian scholarship, I have revealed the foundations upon which the work of

[16] While Beck's analyses offer useful contexts within which to locate the practice (pinpointing precedents for the application of Stanislavskian techniques outside of psychological realism), his research differs from the work of this thesis in several ways. Firstly, Beck traces the influence of Stanislavsky's ideas and techniques on contemporary, non-realist practices and while Stanislavsky's influence is evident in the practices Beck identifies, none of the work examined by Beck purports to adopt a predominantly Stanislavskian approach, nor is it primarily concerned with the staging and deconstruction of character. As outlined earlier, the explicit goal of this research project has been to test the efficacy of using an exclusively Stanislavskian approach to stage postdramatic character 'under erasure'. Secondly, Beck emphasises the relevance of Stanislavsky's later practices (*Active Analysis* and the *Method of Physical Actions*) over and above those of 'psychological and textual analysis' (2014: 222). In contrast to Beck, Stanislavsky's practices of 'psychological and textual analysis' have provided a foundation for my practice. In this way, while this thesis builds on the assertions made by Beck, it distinguishes itself from Beck's analyses in the development of the theoretical reading of Stanislavsky's view of 'character' and its application of Stanislavskian techniques in practice.

this project has been built. I have demonstrated the extent to which this research has drawn on the radical revision of Stanislavsky's legacy during the latter half of the twentieth century and, how it has built specifically on the work of Carnicke, Listengarten and Beck's revision of Stanislavsky's relevance to non-naturalistic theatre-making. Accordingly, I propose that this research offers significant insights into current scholarship exploring Stanislavsky's continued significance for non-naturalistic and contemporary theatre-making practices in the twenty-first century. In further support of this analysis I propose a review of the current field of practice.

3.2 Stanislavsky's 'system' and postdramatic theatre: reviewing the field of practice

In addition to the broad body of academic scholarship within which this research is located, the central concerns of the enquiry also resonate within the field of postdramatic theatre-making practice. Most notably, there is evidence that traces of Stanislavsky's influence can be identified within the field of postdramatic theatre. Yet while traces of influence can be identified to greater or lesser degrees in the work of several 'postdramatic practitioners', they are fragmentary, representing singular strands in more complex theatre-making models. The task is further complicated as we scan the horizon for these 'postdramatic practitioners', a term which itself must be qualified by Lehmann's caveat to the 'incomplete' list of 'Names' in the Prologue to *Postdramatic Theatre*:

> The following list offers a kind of *panorama* of the field of study that opens up under the name of postdramatic theatre. It is concerned with phenomena of a most heterogeneous kind… Not all of the practitioners have created a whole 'oeuvre' that can be considered postdramatic in its entirety – if we can use the term 'oeuvre' for directors, theatre companies, theatre productions and actions. (2006: 23)

This clarification complicates any survey of Stanislavsky's influence on the postdramatic panorama, the completion of which would ideally demand a comprehensive knowledge of not only directors' and theatre companies' working practices, but of the rehearsal processes for myriad and diverse individual productions.

It is therefore not the intention - indeed, it is beyond the scope of this research - to offer a comprehensive survey of Stanislavsky's influence on contemporary theatre-making that resonates with Lehmann's conceptualisation of postdramatic theatre. The field is too wide and the strands of influence too complex and diverse to tackle here. Neither is it the intention to present a detailed analysis of any one practitioner's work – for there is no singular practitioner whose work offers an ideal precursor to this research enquiry. Instead, I propose to illuminate the traces of Stanislavsky's influence across the broad panorama that I have encountered in researching postdramatic theatre. I will offer a brief overview of the field, before discussing particular resonances of the 'system' in the work of two practitioners, Elizabeth LeCompte and Katie Mitchell, in more detail. Moreover, in relation to devising from text and to staging character within postdramatic paradigms, LeCompte and Mitchell's work has particular significance for this research. I will, therefore, explore the extent to which both director's work might be viewed as postdramatic and to which their working practices draw on Stanislavsky's 'system', or resonate with Stanislavsky's analysis of the actor's work on a role. Accordingly, I hope to demonstrate how their work has illuminated key areas of this research enquiry, offering insight into, and prompts for, the development of my own practice. Through these analyses, the practice review establishes precedents for the practical work upon which the thesis reflects, demonstrating that the practice undertaken has not been carried out in isolation, while also illuminating the gap in current theatre-making that it seeks to address.

The postdramatic panorama

Dennis C. Beck's revision of Stanislavsky's legacy lays a useful foundation for tracing Stanislavsky's influence on postdramatic theatre-making (2000, 2014). Detailing the influence of Stanislavsky's protégé, Yevgeny Vakhtangov, on contemporary and specifically non-naturalistic theatre-making, Beck argues that

> Vakhtangov reformulated Stanislavsky's concepts of given circumstances, 'magic if', action/task, circles of attention, and the creative state to enable his actors to reach fantastical and proto-Brechtian expression. (2014: 214)

In Beck's analysis, this contention is evidenced by an example that recalls a postdramatic reformulation of the performance of character and of the actor/ audience relationship. He describes how in *Turandot*:

> The actor playing Barach, hearing of his character's parents' death, wept credibly and with conviction. Tartaglia rushed onto the stage, collected the tears in a shaving bowl, and held them up for the audience to see, announcing that they were the result of an affective memory and evidence of the flexible power of Stanislavsky's System. (Gordon in Beck 2014: 214)

Undermining the naturalistic illusion, this moment in Vakhtangov's production invites the audience into the actor's experience, broadening the *given circumstances* to incorporate the auditorium and destabilising the audience's perception of character to foreground the actor's presence in a distinctly postdramatic turn. Beck draws the parallel with postdramatic theatre even more explicitly when he argues that the work of The Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment 'is conceivable as an extension of the given circumstances… to include not only the production processes, but the world at large' (2014: 225). In addition to Vakhtangov's reformulation of Stanislavsky's '"magic if" into "If I were an actor playing a role in"' (214: 412), which has obvious parallels with the shift from characters to the performance 'personae' that populate the work of The Wooster Group or Forced Entertainment, Beck also highlights the extent to which Vakhtangov's improvisatory practices were born out of Stanislavsky's 'theatre of experiencing' (2014: 216). Indeed, he contends that it is this turn to improvisation that has had the greatest impact on non-naturalistic theatre-making, becoming 'the touchstone and holy grail of so much later experimental theatre – Living theatre, Peter Brook, Forced Entertainment, *etc*' (2014: 216).

As well as charting the line of influence via Vakhtangov, Beck examines Stanislavsky's impact on the working practices of Jerzy Grotowski, who features in Lehmann's list of 'Names'. He highlights the lineage of Grotowski's practice in Stanislavsky's model of research and experimentation and singles out *relaxation*, *action*, *the Method of Physical Actions*, the importance of spontaneity and working

from impulses, and perhaps most significantly, Stanislavsky's interest in the spirit and the soul, as foundational for Grotowski's concept of 'flow' and his formulation of the 'holy actor' (2014: 218-219). This view is echoed by Maria Shevstova (2014) who points to Grotowski's declared indebtedness to Stanislavsky, tracing the genesis of his reformulation of the actor into 'performer' and 'doer' back to Stanislavsky's fundamental reappraisal of the actor's work.[17] Carnicke similarly highlights the impact of the 'yogic influence' and 'spiritual overtones' in Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of '"I am"' in the 'art of experiencing' on Grotowski's practice, emphasising Grotowski's insistence that Stanislavsky was 'his teacher despite critics' desire to put him at an opposite aesthetic pole' (2009: 170). This is significant as Grotowski's reappraisal of the actor's work has far-reaching resonances in postdramatic theatre's pursuit of presence and rejection of representation. Thus, tracing the path of Stanislavsky's influence via Vakhtangov and Grotowski provides valuable insight into Stanislavsky's lasting legacy via the work of his pupils and those trained in the Stanislavskian tradition on the paradigmatic shifts associated with postdramatic theatre.

While Grotowski and Vakhtangov represent a direct lineage from Stanislavsky, more fragmentary evidence of his ongoing influence in the postdramatic panorama can also be identified. For example, Eugenio Barba, whose work at the Odin Teatret evolved from Grotowski's practice, references Stanislavsky (alongside Meyerhold and Vakhtangov) as a primary source of influence. He declares his interest in 'the subscore or flow of inner actions – what Stanislavsky called the 'subtext'' as one of a 'few constant technical principles' in his practice (in Shevstova and Innes 2009: 26). This interest in, and application of, *subtext* recurs in Ellen Halperin-Royer's account of working with Robert Wilson on Büchner's *Danton's Death* and Ann-Cristin Rommen's reflection on her working relationship with Wilson and his

[17] Shevstova quotes Grotowski's own description of his relationship to Stanislavsky saying, 'I *continued* his research and did *not just repeat* what he had already discovered' (2014: 336). Further, Shevstova charts the path from Stanislavsky that led Grotowski to abandon the 'actor' in favour of the 'performer' and eventually the 'doer' as concomitant to his rejection of a theatre of presentation in favour of a theatre of presence, wherein the performer 'had neither character nor narrative to sustain' and where the 'performance was the process' (2014*:* 338).

working practices. Rommen's account is especially pertinent because she states that while Wilson refuses to identify the subtext of a line for an actor, he demands that the actor 'feels something' (2007: 66). In this way the demands of the work encourage the actors to fall back on techniques that recall Stanislavskian practices to produce the effect Wilson is searching for. When Rommen says, 'You can think of anything you like, but you have to think otherwise it is empty. It is best when the performer deeply and sincerely feels something, and does not "act" feeling', her words recall the principles of Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing', the '"I am being"' in the present moment (2008: 16 and 186). Rommen's account also provides an additional example of the extent to which Stanislavsky's techniques remain part of the fabric of contemporary, late twentieth-century theatre-making. Describing how Wilson works with the actors exploring 'who is there, where it is, what time of day it is,' the approach reads as a direct appropriation of Stanislavsky's *given circumstances* and the *fundamental questions*.

In a similar vein, Neil Swettenham's (2008) account of performing Richard Foreman's plays illuminates the extent to which Stanislavskian processes are still employed by actors working in postdramatic theatre. Despite the outwards and vociferous rejection of Stanislavskian principles (actors must take care to avoid looking for a Stanislavskian *through-line* and must resist psychological motivation), the actor T. Ryder Smith describes how, when working on *Pearls for Pigs,* he had to find a way of 'playing needs and intentions on the line' (2008: 70). Again, Smith's terms echo Stanislavsky's *tasks* or *objectives* and *subtext* and while he qualifies their use by saying that he had to find a way to 'abstract' motivation, playing via 'metaphor', Stanislavsky's influence on the individual actor's practice being applied within a postdramatic paradigm is clear. The efficacy of adopting a task-based approach is, in fact, a recurrent reference point in several actors' accounts of working in postdramatic theatre. Jay Smith references tasks in the same article, and the role of an action or task-based approach in the work of the Wooster Group is well documented in Philip Auslander's 'Task and Vision: Willem Dafoe in LSD', as well as in Yana Meerzon's analysis of the parallels between Stanislavsky's *Method*

of Physical Actions and LeCompte's working method (Auslander 1997a and Meerzon 2013).

Viewed together these accounts reveal an interesting paradox, for while postdramatic theatre appears to be grounded in an unequivocal rejection of the naturalistic characterisation and the psychological realism association with the 'system', there is ample evidence that many of its principles and practices have permeated the broad panorama of theatre-making, whether adopted by directors, or employed by individual actors, wittingly or not. Despite Stanislavsky's apparently axiomatic irrelevance to postdramatic theatre, fragments of his influence persist. While this is, perhaps simply, a result of the unparalleled dissemination of his ideas in Western actor-training throughout the twentieth century, what is significant is that the new set of demands made upon the performer have created a conundrum which some actors appear to have solved by drawing on elements of their own training, grounded in a psychologically-realist approach to characterisation - essentially a Stanislavskian approach to creating a role.

While identifying these traces strengthens the case for exploring the efficacy of adopting a Stanislavskian approach to staging character 'under erasure', it also reveals a gap in current practice. Although lingering traces of Stanislavsky's influence can be identified in the work of some 'postdramatic practitioners', they do not represent a systematic approach to adopting a Stanislavskian model in service of a postdramatic theatre-making practice, nor are they aligned with an intention to explore character 'under erasure' in performance. It is in search of a more comprehensive engagement with staging characters 'under erasure' that I propose to examine the work of Elizabeth LeCompte and Katie Mitchell in more detail. While the scope of practitioners whose work might correlate to the central concerns of the enquiry is broad, LeCompte's and Mitchell's work stands out for several reasons. In the first instance, both practitioners engage with devising from text and demonstrate an ongoing interest in staging characters 'under erasure'. Secondly, there are evident cross-overs between Stanislavsky's 'system' and the demands LeCompte makes of her actors and the theatre-making processes she

engages with, while Mitchell's directing practice is firmly grounded in a Stanislavskian tradition. In addition, and no less significantly, my research parameters have, inevitably, been limited by language, by the existence of relevant scholarship and by my ability to directly encounter productions.[18] The decision to focus on the work of Katie Mitchell was, therefore, informed by the fact that I am familiar with her work, having seen numerous productions over several years and by the fact that her working practice is well-documented. While I have seen less of Elizabeth LeCompte's work, there is a wealth of scholarly analysis relating to the Wooster Group, which has provided clear opportunities for exploring her working practices.[19] As such I feel well placed to discuss their respective engagement with staging character 'under erasure'. Accordingly, LeCompte and Mitchell are not only central figures in the field of practice within which I propose to contextualise my work, they also represent an essential source of inspiration and stimulation for the research. In the following analysis I will, therefore, examine the extent to which these two directors stage performances that draw (to greater or lesser degrees) on practices and conventions associated with postdramatic theatre, whilst simultaneously utilising elements of either Stanislavsky's 'system', or practices associated with, or derivative of, a Stanislavskian approach to creating a role. Through exploring their work in more detail, I propose to reveal the context for my own work more clearly.

Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster Group

The work of LeCompte and the Wooster Group presents a useful starting point, not least because their highly mediatized performances, their emphasis on process over product, their preference for multiple and diverse performance styles, and their rejection of linear narrative and psychological characterisation all locate their work

[18] I have seen several of Mitchell's productions that demonstrate both her use of naturalistic strategies and the influence of postdrama on her practice. For example: *The Waves* (2006), *...some trace of her* (2008), Martin Crimp's *The City* (2008), *Fräulein Julie* (2013), *Cleansed* (2016), *Ophelias Zimmer* (2016) and her art installation, *Five Truths* (2011).

[19] In addition to the scholarship documenting and exploring the work of The Wooster Group I have been able to access their work via video recordings. For example, the archive material available on the company's website, a South Bank show documentary and a video recording of *The Emperor Jones* as well as watching their production of *Troilus and Cressida* (2012).

firmly within the postdramatic panorama. As David Savran argues, 'They do not attempt to represent, but to explore what it means to represent, to hold up for examination, to submit to the diagnostic gaze' (1986: 81). Most significantly for this research, character does not escape the Wooster Group's forensic investigations, and the group's depictions of character appear 'under erasure'. Routinely described in postdramatic terms that highlight their fragmentation and retreat from the synthesis of dramatic representation, character is radically reformed to become 'a problematic, not a given' (Auslander 1992: 95).[20] What is perhaps of greatest relevance here, however, is the centrality of the Wooster Group's characters 'under erasure' and the extent to which the deconstructions of character facilitate a wider revision of the relationship between the performance and the audience.[21]

For while character is undeniably radically reformed by the Wooster Group, it is *not* abandoned altogether, instead remaining a focal point for the examination of the practices of representation, and one of the principal channels through which the relationship between the 'real' and the 'theatrical' is deconstructed.[22] David Savran highlights the extent to which they expose the actor's relationship to the role in order to interrogate the processes and practices of performance-making. More significantly, while the shift away from character as 'product' to character as 'process' enables the actor's performance of a role to 'resist reduction to a psychological essence' (Savran 1986: 115), the Wooster Group performer does not present him or her 'self' on stage. Indeed, when discussing his performance in *L.S.D. (…Just the High Points…)* (1984) Willem Dafoe states that while he does not play a 'character', neither is the 'persona' that he presents 'quite equivalent to the performer's "real" identity' (Callens 2004: 92). Furthermore, Auslander describes

[20] In his analysis of Gray's performance in *Sakonnet Point* (1975) Auslander argues that character retreats from naturalistic representation in favour of 'celebrat[ing] a fragmented psyche and the reflexive nature of consciousness' (1992: 63).

[21] According to Ric Knowles the Wooster Group's 'semiotic approach' to character-creation in the Rhode Island trilogy, 'took the idea of "character" into new realms, and in the process altered the relation of the audience to the character and, hence, the performance' (Knowles 2004: 149 and 148).

[22] In his analysis of *Sakonnet Point* Savran argues that: 'The character and Spalding Gray both appear before us not to reinforce a distinction between the "theatrical" and the "real", but to demonstrate that the former is necessarily inscribed within the latter' (1986: 64).

how Dafoe's 'role evolved from aspects of his own personality and his relationship to other members of the group' (1997a: 96). Thus, while the Wooster Group performers avoid psychologically realised characterisations, the personae that emerge through the performance-making process remain constructed subjectivities.[23] In this way, the midway point between character and actor, Dafoe's 'persona', continues to bear traces of the essential quality of mimetic representation that is fundamental to the psychological character the Wooster Group seek to relinquish. Moreover, the Wooster Group's performance style has been characterised as 'performance "about" acting' (Auslander 1997a: 41) and yet the group's deconstructive practices necessarily depend upon, and engage with, the very techniques and performance style that they so forcibly reject. In this way, they represent an example of postdramatic theatre in which character is not absolutely relinquished, but, instead within which the performance of character 'under erasure' plays a central role.

While the work of the Wooster Group serves to support the hypothesis that character (albeit in its revised form 'under erasure') remains significant to postdramatic theatre, what is of perhaps greater relevance is the extent to which postdramatic theatre engages with the very practices and stylistic conventions against which it positions itself, namely those associated with naturalistic, or psychological realist characterisation. The degree to which the Wooster Group's work draws on the practices it renounces, bearing the traces of naturalistic characterisation, yet simultaneously denying and interrogating the practice of realistic representation, is evidenced in LeCompte's analysis of the company's work: 'Each production reflects a continuing refinement of a non-linear abstract aesthetic which at once subverts and pays homage to modern theatrical "realism"' (cited in Knowles 2004: 149). It is this relationship to 'modern theatrical "realism"' that is of particular relevance to the work of this enquiry. For, while LeCompte 'rejects the

[23] According to Auslander's analysis of the group's work in the third section of *LSD* (where the performers used video footage to re-create a rehearsal of *The Crucible* after having taken LSD) the performance of these mediatized 'constructed subjectivities' ultimately resulted in a 'realistic, mimetic representation' of identities (1997a: 97).

spurious authenticity associated with a method acting approach' (Radosavljević 2013: 89), and is forthright in her desire to move the group's work 'always away from naturalism' (Savran 1986: 18), so, according to Andrew Quick, LeCompte's emphasis on 'real', spontaneous reactions, 'veracity' and authenticity in the experience of the present moment, recalls Stanislavsky's emphasis on the importance of 'experiencing' (2007: 270). Furthermore, the pursuit of the experience of the present moment, accessed in LeCompte's practice through action and a task-based approach to performance-making (and at the expense of character motivation or emotion), has further significant parallels with Stanislavsky's use of improvisation and actions in the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis*. These parallels have been identified by Yana Meerzon who has argued that that the Wooster Group's:

> desire to create a new 'system' of performative devices that could liberate the actor from the necessity to 'feel', 'sympathise' or 'transform' onstage can be traced back to the same principles' that underline Stanislavsky's search 'for creative techniques to manage the actor's inspiration'. (2013: 381)

While this is not to suggest that LeCompte takes a Stanislavskian approach to performance-making, it is further evidence of Stanislavsky's ongoing influence and thus supports the reconsideration of the relationship between postdrama and Stanislavsky's 'system'. For, despite LeCompte's unequivocal rejection of the Method, of Naturalism, of psychological realism and indeed of Stanislavsky, her practice retains demonstrable similarities with key Stanislavskian principles.[24] Accordingly, and drawing on Meerzon's examination of the commonalities between LeCompte's work and a Stanislavskian approach to actor training, the work of the Wooster Group supports a revision of the relationship between Stanislavsky and the practices of postdramatic theatre, not least because the similarities between the work of LeCompte and Stanislavsky suggest that these distinct practices might best be viewed on a continuum, rather than constituting two sides of a schism (as

[24] For analyses of LeCompte's work that highlights her rejection of naturalistic representation and psychological realist characterisation see Radosavljević (2013); Savran (1986); Arratia (1992) and Allen (2000).

argued by both Meerzon, 2013 and Beck, 2014). Thus, although the work of Elizabeth LeCompte and The Wooster Group does not set out to use the 'system' as a model for staging character *'*under erasure'*,* the extent to which Stanislavskian practices resonate with LeCompte's performance-making processes supports the central hypothesis of this thesis: that Stanislavskian techniques might effectively be applied to create a postdramatic theatrical effect to stage character 'under erasure'.

Katie Mitchell

The performance-making practices of Katie Mitchell provide an interesting and useful counterpoint to those of LeCompte and The Wooster Group, offering a valuable and illuminating resource for the research project. As described in chapter one, Mitchell's practice is firmly rooted in a Stanislavskian tradition, albeit not forged under an exclusively Stanislavskian influence (Mitchell 2009: 225-232). Her work is embedded in the practices of text analysis, fundamentally driven by a character-led approach and a commitment to 'a fidelity to truth about human behaviour' (Rebellato 2010: 213).[25] As Dan Rebellato argues her productions are,

> …always marked by an intense realism of performance style…. an absence of theatrical shortcuts, an absolute avoidance of 'stagy' conventions that are not drawn from the demands of character or situation. (2010: 319)

Mitchell's character-led approach produces a 'rich and profound realism' (Rebellato 2014: 213) that is, however, counterbalanced by experimentation with dramaturgical form and dramatic structure. Her stagings of Martin Crimp's plays, *The Country* (2000), *Attempts on Her Life* (2007), *The City* (2008) her adaptations of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (2006) and Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (2008) as well her art installation, *Five Rooms* (2011) and devised work, such as *Ten Billion* (2012) and *Ophelia's Zimmer* (2016), and productions of Peter Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* (2013) and Elfriede Jelinek's *Shadow (Eurydice Speaks)* (2016), all reveal a

[25] See Mitchell's *A Director's Work* (2009) and Rebellato (2010) for an analysis of the development of Mitchell's practice and the influence of a Stanislavskian heritage that moves beyond Stanislavsky's work.

profound interest in staging that moves beyond naturalistic representation, if naturalistic representation indicates an emphasis on presenting characters and action on stage as they might be directly observed in real life. This is, perhaps, most clearly evidenced in Mitchell's mixed-media staging that incorporates live filming and projection, the inclusion of Foley artists and visible stage hands that became part of her signature style during the late 2000s.[26]

The meticulous and detailed dramaturgy of Mitchell's stages in, for example, both *The Waves* and ...*some trace of her* accumulates in performance to create the effect of deconstructing the painstakingly created naturalism of the live performances that are simultaneously played out on screen. As the mechanics of staging a shot are revealed to the audience, and Mitchell juxtaposes the image with the artifice of its production, she directs the audience eye towards *process* alongside *product*. In this way, Mitchell's work adopts techniques that are common to postdramatic theatre, embracing the practices associated with deconstructive models of theatre-making. Her interest in deconstructing the processes through which images and narratives are created, the impulse to activate the spectator's attention (by forcing an audience to switch between media in order to piece together both narrative and characterisation), as well as the impact of other practitioners on her work,[27] indicate the wide range of practices associated with postdramatic theatre that have influenced the development of her aesthetic.[28] Yet, notwithstanding Mitchell's willingness to embrace stylistic conventions and dramaturgical practices associated with postdrama, her work often resists definition in postdramatic terms, remaining

[26] While despite the fact that these multi-mediatized staging might reflect the *reality* of early twenty-first century experience and expose the *real* processes of cinematic representation (and might, therefore be deemed realist in style), the dramaturgical form abandons a naturalistic style which attempts to present the fictive world of the drama as a separate reality that replicates the real world, as it appears to exist in real life and that is intent on hiding its own artificiality.

[27] For example, Pina Bausch (Rebellato 2010: 319).

[28] The relationship between Mitchell and the aesthetics of postdrama has been analysed by LePage (2008) who argues that Mitchell's drew on a distinctly postdramatic style that resulted in the staging of a 'posthuman ontology' in her 2006-2007 production of *The Waves*. Similarly, Rachel Clements examines Mitchell's use of 'deconstructive techniques and spectral technologies' in her 2007 staging of Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*. Clements concludes that Mitchell's approach 'enabled an exploration of the disconnection and accumulation of meaning within Crimp's text, which switches, repeats its imagery and its imaginings of Anne, refuses to be anything other than fragmented but also refuses to be meaningless' (2014: 337).

predominantly associated with the 'rich and profound realism' that Rebellato identifies.

What is most relevant here in the relationship between Mitchell's commitment to the practices and techniques associated with a sense of 'truthful' representation and naturalistic characterisation, and her willingness to experiment with dramaturgy and staging, is the extent to which her character-led approach can undermine those deconstructive dramaturgical practices (Boenisch 2010; Tomlin 2014). In Peter Boenisch's analysis of ...*some trace of her* he argues that Mitchell's production 'achieved a supplementary closure and coherence' that denied the possibility of creating the 'parallax view' that resists synthesis and thus reflects the postdramatic approach to staging:

> The disclosed production of images, with its accentuated difference between what one saw on screen and what one saw on stage, presented the spectators with a complex, but eventually solvable jigsaw that remained reconcilable in a singular perspective. (2010: 167) [29]

Boenisch goes on to argue that it is Mitchell's Stanislavskian, character-led approach to the devising process (that resulted in this particular instance in the creation of complex characterisations for the multiple 'non-character' roles) that produced a fixed, reconciled representation, securing the production's status as meta-theatre, rather than postdrama. Boenisch's view is echoed in Liz Tomlin's analysis of Mitchell's staging of Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*, *Pains of Youth* and *The City*. Tomlin examines these productions through the lens of Jacques Derrida's citational theory, assessing their relative 'success' in staging deconstructed characters, 'bound to no particular origin or individual psychological causation' (2014: 372). Tomlin identifies a citational effect produced in both

[29] Borrowing the term from Slavoj Žižek, Boenisch utilises the concept of the parallax view thus: 'A parallax perspective… remains reflexively drawn to the irresolvable gaps and Žižekian "strains" that always remain and disturb the view: the spectators are forced to negotiate between representation and presence, yet without the promise of a solution that would neatly reconcile both perspective and "restore order"' (2010: 172).

Attempts on Her Life and *Pains of Youth* through the use of 'filmic and multi-media devices' (2014: 373), yet she also argues that:

> the citational moments become – perhaps – less philosophically indeterminate and more theatrically playful, as they are clearly determined and authorised by a stable subject self – the fictional actor who has been rigorously psychologically constructed within a realist discourse. (2014: 373)

While Tomlin argues that Mitchell's production of *The City* is more effective in realising Crimp's 'intentions for indeterminacy' (2014: 375), it remains evident that grounding the rehearsal process in a Stanislavskian, character-led approach radically alters the performance style of Crimp's work and prompts significant challenges for staging fragmented or indeterminate identities.

Thus, while Mitchell's work represents a useful precedent for the work of this research project (offering an example of practice that utilises Stanislavsky's 'system', but which is also influenced by a late-twentieth century deconstructive, if not explicitly postdramatic, approach to theatre-making), it also illuminates a notable challenge for the application of Stanislavskian techniques to staging character 'under erasure'. Mitchell's work demonstrates the extent to which grounding a rehearsal process in a character-led approach has the potential to significantly re-shape the performance material and, in so doing, illuminates the fortitude of a Stanislavskian approach and the robust and pervasive nature of character. As a result, I have consciously attempted to reflect on the development of the practice, considering the relationship between a Stanislavskian approach and the extent to which this approach determines the overarching form and style of performance. Indeed, the question of whether it is possible to apply a Stanislavskian approach to stage character 'under erasure' within a postdramatic theatre-making practice would go on to become central to the project as I moved into a practical exploration of the research question.

Overview

Through this practice review I have demonstrated that the work of this thesis has not been undertaken in isolation, but rather, engages with concerns that are pertinent to the work of contemporary practitioners. The intention of the review has been to illustrate that there is precedent for using Stanislavskian techniques (or at least practices that are concomitant to those developed as part of Stanislavsky's 'system') in conjunction with dramaturgical practices associated with postdramatic theatre, and that, in some instances, those practices have been effectively aligned to stage character 'under erasure'. However, notwithstanding this, the practice review has also demonstrated that there remains no current body of practice that addresses the central research question directly. In the main, the traces of Stanislavsky's influence on the postdramatic panorama are fragmentary, and while there is evidence of direct lines of influence via Vakhtangov and Grotowski, many of the applications of his ideas are unintentional and unsystematic, or identifiable only in retrospect. Furthermore, while the work of LeCompte conforms to Lehmann's analysis of postdramatic theatre, her engagement with Stanislavskian techniques is incidental rather than intentional. In contrast, while Mitchell's work is underpinned by the principles of Stanislavskian character-creation, her work does not fully embrace postdramatic theatre's reconfiguration of the principles of drama, or of naturalistic representation. What this research offers, therefore, is a more systematic approach to testing the efficacy of Stanislavsky's 'system' within the parameters of a postdramatic theatre-making practice and in service of staging character 'under erasure'; a task that has not been undertaken in practice, nor fully explored in either Stanislavskian or postdramatic scholarship.

In addition, while this practice review has revealed a gap in current practice that the work of this thesis seeks to address, so the work of LeCompte and Mitchell has also provided an invaluable resource upon which to build. Examining the work of these two practitioners has directly informed the development of my own practice, highlighting the potential challenges involved in attempting to develop a devised, postdramatic theatre-making practice when using Stanislavsky's 'system', and,

more importantly, employing the 'system' to fire and drive the creative processes. In light of this examination of practice and of the relevant field of literature, the case for applying a Stanislavskian approach to staging character 'under erasure' seems ever more pertinent. Thus, building on this starting point I propose to examine the relationship between the principles of Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing' and Lehmann's formulation of postdramatic theatre. In the following chapter I will re-read Stanislavsky's analysis of the actor's work on a role through a Derridean lens, in order to re-assess the suitability of his 'system' for staging character 'under erasure'.

Chapter four - re-reading Stanislavsky, making the case for practice

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I propose a re-reading of Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of character as conceived in *An Actor's Work* (2008), *An Actor's Work on a Role* (2010), and *My Life in Art* (2008). In so doing, I will make the case for adopting a Stanislavskian approach to staging character 'under erasure'. I will draw on Sharon Marie Carnicke, Julia Listengarten and Dennis C. Beck's revisions of Stanislavsky's legacy and, in particular, of his relationship to Symbolism and the modern avant-garde. Accordingly, I will challenge the view that the 'system' represents an approach to performance-making against which postdramatic theatre might be defined. Instead, I will argue that the 'system' is, in fact, characterised by a series of contentions and practices that not only resonate with the early twentieth-century avant-garde, but also with several key dramaturgical innovations commonly associated with postdramatic theatre.

In support of this latter claim, I will explore Stanislavsky's insights into the actor's relationship to the text, the use of improvisation and the centrality of the actor's creativity to the 'system' as a whole. Moreover, I will argue that Stanislavsky's view of theatrical 'realism', his conceptualisation of theatrical 'truth' and its relationship to the reality of the actor's experience in the moment of live performance, offer pertinent resonances with postdramatic theatre's preference for liveness and 'the real' (Lehmann 2006: 135, 99 - 104). In this way, I intend to demonstrate that Stanislavsky's insights into the work of the actor and the nature of performance itself, offer notable parallels with postdramatic theatre's turn away from naturalistic representation. In light of this, I propose that the relationship between Stanislavsky's 'system' and the practices associated with postdramatic theatre, must be revised.

Building on this analysis, I will examine Stanislavsky's configuration of the relationship between the actor and the role in the performance of character as a 'new, third being' (Stanislavsky 2010: 75), and drawing on Carnicke's analysis of the

concept of 'experiencing' (2009: 129-148) and on Beck's work on Stanislavsky's revision of Diderot's paradoxical model of the actor's relationship to the role (2000: 261-282), I propose to make the case for adopting a Stanislavskian approach to staging postdramatic character *'*under erasure'. In addition, I will draw on Jacques Derrida's concept of 'hauntology' (2006: 10) to re-read Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the ontology of character and its relationship to the actor's self. Accordingly, I will argue that Stanislavsky's formulation of the 'third being' relies on an ongoing interplay *between* states of experience (that of the human being/actor and that of the human being/role (2008: 286)) that has the potential to provide significant insights into the staging of the 'vestigial figures' that people the postdramatic stage (Jürs-Munby 2013: 3). Thus, I will contend that the 'system' Stanislavsky developed to resolve the problems and challenges inherent to the task of performing a role, provides an apposite starting point for staging character 'under erasure'.

4.2 Re-reading Stanislavsky's legacy

Stanislavsky and the historical avant-garde

Carnicke, Listengarten and Beck have significantly revised Stanislavsky's relationship to theatre-making outside of the Naturalist and late-nineteenth, early twenty-first century 'realist' canon. Through examining the two primary routes of the 'system's' dissemination, Carnicke has illuminated the partial understanding of Stanislavsky's practice that conventionally aligned the 'system' exclusively with Naturalism and psychological realism. She has exposed the limitations of Stanislavsky's legacy as it was exported to and propagated in, early twentieth-century American actor-training and under the endorsement of the Soviet government. Moreover, Carnicke has argued that the Moscow Art Theatre's long-established association with Naturalism and naturalistic representation was cemented by Stanislavsky's collaborator and co-founder of the MAT, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. She contends that it was Nemirovich-Danchenko who was the 'true champion of Realism' (2009: 37) and argues that the Soviet propaganda machine distorted Stanislavsky's reputation to such an extent that the '…created

image…had already begun to obscure the real artist as early as 1923 and 1924…' some fourteen years before Stanislavsky's death (2009: 49). Under the auspices of Soviet patronage Stanislavsky's interest in theatrical experimentation, and indeed any deviation from Naturalism was underplayed in order to maintain his 'carefully managed' image 'as a hero of Socialist Realism' (Carnicke 2009: 49). Yet, in stark contrast to the official portrait, Stanislavsky's work during this period was, in fact, characterised by that very experimentation outside the parameters of Naturalist drama and naturalistic representation that the Soviet government would eventually violently suppress.[1]

Carnicke's revision of Stanislavsky's legacy is echoed in Listengarten's 2014 account of his relationship to the 'early historical *avant-garde*' (2014: 68). Listengarten argues that Stanislavsky's encounters with Symbolism, as well as his collaborations with Vsevolod Meyerhold, Edward Gordon Craig and Alexander Benois and the influence of artists such as Isadora Duncan on his work, are testament to his willingness to work beyond naturalistic representation (2014: 67 and 76). Carnicke and Listengarten's views are easily supported by even the most perfunctory reading of his autobiography *My Life in Art*, where Stanislavsky's interest in theatrical innovation during this period is paramount. Indeed, he articulates an explicit goal to move beyond the 'historico-realist' style when he recalls his collaboration with Meyerhold at the theatre studio they established together in 1906:

> The *credo* of the new studio amounted to the fact that realism and the mundane had had their day. Now was the time for the unreal on stage. We needed to depict life not as it is in the real world but as we are vaguely aware of it in our dreams and visions, our moments of exaltation (2008a: 247).

[1] In particular his work at the First Studio (1912) Opera Studio (1918) and the Third Studio (1920). See Benedetti (1990: 200-212) for an examination of the Studios and his work with Vakhtangov, Sulerzhitsky and Michael Chekhov.
The Soviet government's imposition of Socialist Realism as the dominant cultural aesthetic led to the suppression of avant-garde and experimental theatre-making. During the purges of the 1930s that suppression culminated in the arrest and assassination of artists and practitioners who were deemed traitors. Meyerhold was amongst those arrested for counter-revolutionary behaviour (Benedetti 1999: 373).

Here Stanislavsky not only embraces the language and ethos of Symbolism but invokes a poetic and explicitly non-naturalistic performance style.

Innovation, experimentation and the 'system'

Stanislavsky's willingness to embrace the experiments and innovations of Symbolism and the early twentieth century avant-garde was not always matched by artistic success or indeed satisfaction. Yet the challenges of this work provided a vital spur to the development of his practice and, accordingly, had a lasting and significant impact on the formulation of the 'system'.[2] Indeed, following the apparent failure of the theatre studio's first performances Stanislavsky pinpointed the necessity of striving to develop new systems and techniques, new practices of actor training: 'a new kind of art needs a new kind of actor, with a completely new kind of technique' (2008a: 249). Significantly and, as Jean Benedetti identifies in his biography, Stanislavsky's burgeoning interest in acting pedagogy, that would ultimately result in the documentation of his 'system', flourished during this period of research and experimentation. Indeed, it was as Stanislavsky's focus shifted to the development of an acting 'grammar' as applicable to the staging of classic texts

[2] The extent to which Stanislavsky's experiments beyond Naturalism contributed to the development of the 'system' are well documented in Jean Benedetti's biography (1990) and by Carnicke (2006) and Listengarten (2014). These analyses reveal Stanislavsky's frustrations with the limitations of a working practice that had emerged to address the (then radical) challenges of Naturalism, and, how his encounters beyond Naturalism encouraged Stanislavsky to revise his methods of directing and acting pedagogy. Listengarten's account of the impact of the historical avant-garde summarises the impact of these collaborations and the influence working on Symbolist plays had on his practice. She describes how staging Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* in 1908 forced Stanislavsky to 'reconcile the principles of realistic staging' with 'image-driven static drama' (2014: 69), leading him to adopt a radical approach to set design, lighting and sound and to incorporate pantomime. Working with designers Edward Gordon Craig and Alexander Benois similarly shaped Stanislavsky's practice. Listengarten argues that his collaboration with Craig on the 1911 production of *Hamlet* forced Stanislavsky to 'renegotiate the boundaries of realism by imbuing it with symbol and tragic grotesque' (2014: 74). Moreover, she contends that Stanislavsky harnessed Craig's non-naturalistic set design to encourage the actor 'to engage his or her imagination and creativity' (2014: 75), an emphasis that placed the actor's imagination at the heart of their work on a role, comparable with their investigation of the author's text. Listengarten credits Benois with exposing Stanislavsky to *commedia dell'arte* and the use of improvisation as a means of character development (2014: 77). Furthermore, she contends that it was this experience that enabled Stanislavsky to move 'away from his previous focus on inner motivation and toward what would become the method of physical action' (2014: 77) - the Stanislavskian technique (alongside *Active Analysis*) that most clearly resonates with the devising practices that came to prominence during the second half of the twentieth century.

and fantasy and poetic dramas as it was to the verisimilitude of an 'historico-realist' style (2008a 184), that the 'system' really began to take shape.

In addition to the influence of working on Symbolist and Expressionist drama and with practitioners like Meyerhold, Craig and Benois, it is clear from Stanislavsky's autobiography that he well understood and indeed lamented, the predominant yet partial perception of his work that disregarded those encounters. In *My Life in Art* he offers a clear repudiation to the incomplete view of the 'system' that proliferated during his lifetime. In describing the triumph of the Moscow Art Theatre in pioneering the 'historico-realistic line' he illuminates the pitfalls of that very success:

> We were labelled once and for all a realistic theatre, naturalist, of authentic precision and detail in our productions. This misunderstanding took root, is still alive to this day, although for the following quarter of a century we passed artistically through the most varied and divergent passages, and lived through a whole series of reforms… Our reputation was established and nothing could alter it. (2008a: 184)

Stanislavsky's view of his relationship to 'realistic theatre' is clear, and, as he put it, the 'historico-realist line was only one, initial, transient phase in the development [of the MAT's work]' (2008a: 184-5). This sentiment is echoed in his refutation of the assumption that 'our theatre was as far as possible a realist theatre', an idea he contests in unambiguous terms:

> things were completely otherwise. At the time of which I speak I was almost exclusively interested in the theatre of the unreal and looked for means and forms to give it physical expression. (2008a: 274)

In addition, Stanislavsky's autobiography reveals his frustration with the limitations of naturalistic representation. He draws particular attention to the problem of the materiality of the actor's body, bemoaning the implicit correlation between the actor's corporeality and realist representation:

> Dear Lord… are we stage artists condemned for ever and ever, because of the physical nature of our bodies to serve and convey crude reality and

> nothing more? Are we really not called on to go further than the realists did in painting in their time…? (2008a: 244)

His increasing dissatisfaction with the 'historico-realist' style could not be clearer and reveals a progressive attitude to the problem of representation. Furthermore, the anxieties expressed in this passage resonate with a preoccupation with the representation of human subjectivity that would become a central concern for experimental theatre-makers throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and that culminated in postdrama's ultimate refusal of signification.[3] Thus, not only did Stanislavsky not oppose those more radical interventions, it is clear that his own concerns prefigured them.

Carnicke's analysis of this recognition of the limitations of the actor's body supports a further revision of Stanislavsky's attitude toward the representation of individuals on stage, reinforcing the view that his practice moved beyond naturalistic representation and the actor training associated with it. For Carnicke connects Stanislavsky's concern with the problem of representation to his ongoing (and historically marginalised) interest in the soul; his fundamental desire to 'create the "life of the human *spirit*" of a role' [my emphasis] (Stanislavski 2008: 20).[4] Thus Carnicke argues that Stanislavsky's conventionally under-played interest in the spiritual and transcendental offers a convincing repudiation to his unrivalled association with Naturalism and naturalistic representation, demonstrated further

[3] Stanislavsky's appeal to transcend the body's representative function echoes the concerns of practitioners such as Antonin Artaud and Edward Gordon Craig, whose interest in the materiality of performance resonates with the 'turn to performance' that Jürs-Munby identifies as central to Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre. Furthermore, a parallel might be drawn with Lehmann's analysis of 'Postdramatic images of the body' wherein he cites modern and postdramatic theatre's concern with 'over-coming the semantic body', wherein 'the body did not have to content itself with being a signifier but could be an *agent provocateur* of an experience without "meaning"' (2006: 162).

[4] In *Stanislavsky in Focus* Carnicke explores the extent to which Stanislavsky's interest in the spiritual and the transcendental fell foul of the Soviet censor, examining how the optimum creative state of 'experiencing' demanded the unification of the actor's 'mind, body and soul' (2009: 167). See also Merlin (2015) for an account of Stanislavsky's use of the terms 'spirit' and 'soul' and Benedetti's translation of these terms in *An Actor's Work* as 'mind', 'psychology' and 'inner content' (2015: 54). Merlin examines these translations, exploring the distinctive function of the words 'spirit' and 'soul' in Russian culture. She highlights the extent to which Benedetti's translations further contribute to the censoring of Stanislavsky's ideas and her article thus offers a useful counterpoint, reamplifying the emphasis Stanislavsky placed on the actor's mind, body *and* spirit (2015: 54-60).

through her analyses of his relationship with Vsevolod Meyerhold and Leopold Sulerzhitsky, as well as through exploring the impact his burgeoning interest in Hatha and Raja Yoga had on the development of the 'system' from as early as 1906 (Carnicke 2009: 171-172). Stanislavsky's knowledge and application of Eastern philosophies falls outside the remit of this thesis. However, Tcherkasski (2016), White (2014) and Carnicke's (2009) analysis of the influence of yoga on the 'system' and Carnicke's examination of Stanislavsky's understanding of the mind/body relationship and his recourse to the human 'spirit', reveals the extent to which his thinking (and practice) moved beyond the tangible verisimilitude of naturalistic representation and, indeed, beyond Naturalism's attachment to a quantifiable, semi-scientific view of character. Accordingly, Stanislavsky's understanding of the concept of character is demonstrably more nuanced and complex than the traditional historical view of the 'system' suggests. In light of this, postdramatic theatre's rejection of naturalistic or psychologically-realised characterisation might not necessarily extend to include a rejection of Stanislavsky's 'system'.

The revisions of Stanislavsky's legacy and his relationship to the early twentieth-century theatrical avant-garde offer an important insight into the potential efficacy of applying Stanislavskian techniques to the staging of character 'under erasure'. For if we accept the revised view of the 'system' then we must reconsider its relationship to postdramatic theatre for which the innovations of the modern avant-garde and of the Symbolist movement in drama were significant precursors.[5] Building on this assertion I will argue that a close reading of Stanislavsky's three key texts reveals significant resonances with some of the concerns inherent to postdramatic theatre, not least those that centre on the concept of character. While this argument runs counter to the established view of Stanislavsky's 'system'

[5] In 'Prehistories' Lehmann argues that the 'crisis of drama occurs from about 1880 onwards' (2006: 49) tracing the '"take off" towards a formation of postdramatic discourse' (2006: 48) through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He cites 'a first scepticism towards the sheer compatibility of drama and theatre' in the work of playwrights and practitioners such as Luigi Pirandello and Edward Gordon Craig and identifies Gertrude Stein and Antonin Artaud as anticipating 'literary elements of postdramatic theatre aesthetics' (2006: 49). In addition, he argues that the 'theatre of the Symbolists marked a step on the way to postdramatic theatre because of its undramatic stasis and the tendency towards monological forms' (2006: 57).

as anathema to the practices of postdrama, I will contend that once the revision of his legacy is taken into account, it is in fact well-founded. Thus I propose that postdramatic theatre might be viewed on a continuum of theatrical innovation that extends back to Stanislavsky's lifelong search for theatrical 'truth', to his conceptualisation of theatrical 'realism' that focuses on the reality of the experience of performing live in front on an audience, and his committed struggle against the 'art of representation' (2008: 22), rather than be positioned in opposition to it. It is to this analysis that I will now turn and through which I will make the case for the practical work of this project.[6]

4.3 Stanislavsky and postdramatic theatre

The 'art of representation'

In the first instance I will examine the perhaps surprising commonalities between the function of representation in Lehmann's analysis of postdramatic theatre and Stanislavsky's attitude to the concept of representation in the actor's work on a role. As argued in chapters one and two, postdramatic theatre and postdrama's staging of human subjectivities favour 'presence' over 'representation'; representation is problematised, or 'an intentionally unmediated experience of the real (time, space, body)' (Lehmann 2006: 85, 134) is introduced into the theatrical event. In its preference for 'the provocative presence of the human being rather than the embodiment of a figure' (Lehmann 2006: 135), Lehmann's analysis of postdramatic theatre's depiction of human subjectivities appears to stand in marked contrast to Stanislavsky's three volume analysis of an actor's work on a

[6] For Stanislavsky the 'art of representation' is one of the forms of acting that the 'system', and the 'art of experiencing', is positioned against. It exemplifies a performance practice that relies upon surface, and, therefore, entails superficial representation. In arguing for the necessity of 'experiencing' a role anew every time it is performed, playing the role live in the here and now of the moment of performance, Stanislavsky positions the 'art of representation' as the 'art of experiencing's' poor relation. In the art of representation, the actor explores the role in rehearsal and finds moments of genuine experiencing in that exploration. He or she then seeks to replicate and repeat these in performance. As Stanislavsky argues: 'You can experience the role every time, as we do, or you can experience it once or twice, so as to register the outward form a feeling takes. Having noted the form, you then learn to repeat it mechanically with the help of trained muscles. That is the representation, the reproduction of a role' (2008: 23).

role. Yet despite the centrality of the concept of the 'role' to Stanislavsky's practice, and, indeed, its grounding in an, apparently, humanist approach to theatre-making, there are significant congruencies between Stanislavsky's unequivocal rejection of the 'art of representation' and postdrama's fundamental abjuration of the concept.

In the second chapter of *An Actor's Work,* Stanislavsky's alter-ego, the acting-teacher and director Tortsov, offers a detailed assessment of his students' first performances. Analysing the acting styles employed by each of the students, Tortsov highlights their faults and identifies the bad habits they must learn to break. He condemns practices that produce 'stock-in-trade' performances, reliant on 'external clichés' and a 'ready made battery of tricks' that have 'nothing in common with real life' and 'block out the actor's true humanity' (2008: 28-30). He attacks cliché-ridden 'playacting' and 'amateur ham acting' that produce 'lifeless and mechanical' (2008: 33) performances and, more significantly, outlines the pitfalls of the 'art of representation' (2008: 22). While the art of representation harnesses elements of Tortsov's favoured 'art of experiencing' (2008: 16) (the model of acting that Stanislavsky's 'system' aims to engender), it is condemned for its reliance on repetition, for its lack of freshness and spontaneity and for its failure to enable the actor to harness live, lived-in-the-moment experiences that must 'be felt anew and physically embodied anew' (2008: 23) every night.[7] Tortsov argues that by 'fixing' a role in rehearsal (as protocol demands in the art of representation), the actor necessarily undermines the possibility of creating a moment of 'genuine experiencing' (2008: 27). Instead, the performance becomes characterised by repetition, reproduction and *representation*, the moment is

[7] The centrality of Stanislavsky's concept of 'experiencing' has been illuminated by the work of Carnicke (2009) and Benedetti (2008, 2008a and 2010), revealing it to be the lynchpin of the Stanislavskian actor's work. Stanislavsky describes 'experiencing' as enabling the actor to 'fulfil the basic purpose of creative work, which is to create "the life of the human spirit" of a role' (2008: 20), and its significance is underlined in Benedetti's 2008 translation, where 'experiencing' provides the title for the first part of the book, encapsulating the entirety of an actor's first year of training. References to its meaning and the methods through which the actor can develop this optimum creative state pepper all three volumes and the 'art of 'experiencing' comes to resemble a holy grail for the student-actor as well as providing the structural 'through-line of action' (Benedetti: 1989: 63) for Stanislavsky's diegesis.

stripped of its liveness and the role of its very life (2008: 24-26). Stanislavsky's critique of the 'art of representation' finds clear echoes in postdramatic theatre's demand for 'presence' rather than 'representation', 'manifestation' rather than 'signification' and the congruencies between Stanislavsky's analysis and postdramatic theatre become increasingly apparent (Lehmann, 2006: 85).

The 'art of experiencing' and '"I am being"'

In stark contrast to 'stock-in-trade', 'ham-acting' and the 'art of representation', Tortsov extols the virtues of the 'art of experiencing' (2008: 16), and the rejection of the practices of representation becomes a counterpoint to Stanislavsky's fundamental desire to stage the 'life of the human spirit of a role' (2008: 20) and to allow the actor to behave 'naturally' in the 'unnatural' environment of the stage setting (2008: 598). Indeed, the rejection of the art of representation underpins his determination to banish theatrical cliché from the stage, foregrounding his commitment to 'the laws of nature' (Stanislavsky 2010: 201) as the foundation of the actor's work. Stanislavsky's recourse to 'laws of nature' and his desire to enable the actor to act (and re-act) as he might in real life, clearly recalls the principles of Naturalism. The phrase 'laws of nature' suggests the exactitude of a scientific approach to understanding human nature and Stanislavsky commitment to the 'laws of nature' and his determination to encourage the actor to 'live' rather than to act on stage, offers a significant parallel with postdramatic theatre's refusal of representation.[8] Accordingly, this suggests that there may be greater parallels to be drawn between both Stanislavsky's 'system' and the Naturalist movement from which it emerged, and postdramatic theatre, than postdrama's refutation of naturalistic characterisation and realistic representation suggests. Furthermore, privileging an aesthetic of liveness and the actor's ability to exist in the here-and-now of the present moment over a mimetic realisation of the author's creation, Stanislavsky's practice of experiencing foreshadows the more radical engagement

[8] Notably, Stanislavsky argues that: 'There is no ''system''. There is "nature" and that the actor must learn to behave on stage 'in a human way – simply, with the truth of a living organism, freely, not in the way conventions of the theatre demand, but as the laws of a living, natural organism demand.' (2008: 612, 57-8).

with the concepts of liveness and the present in postdrama's preference for performative acts.[9] This is perhaps highlighted most clearly in Stanislavsky's demand that the actor work from the reality of their own experience in the moment of performance and with a sense of 'truth' which, following Carnicke's analysis, favours the actor's belief in that experience over the concept of an essentialist or fixed notion of reality.[10] Carnicke contends that 'performing becomes the sincere reality of the creative process' (2009: 144) and that Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of '"Truth" itself is consequently redefined' as whatever the actor is able to believe (2009: 144). Furthermore, as Timothy Wiles argues, 'what is essentially "real" about theatrical Realism [for Stanislavsky] lies as much in the reality of performance itself as in the true-to-life quality of the play's details' (1980: 14, quoted in Carnicke 2009: 145).

Moreover, the actor's ability to experience the action of the play *as him or herself*, to feel the emotions of a character *as his or her own*, becomes the principal means through which Stanislavsky attempts to combat the duplicity inherent in the theatrical project.[11] In his appeal to take the 'Theatre (with a capital T) out of the theatre,' Stanislavsky (via Tortsov) emphasises that it is *nature* not acting that

[9] Stanislavsky repeatedly emphasises that the actor must work from an understanding of how they would respond to the given circumstances that the character finds him or herself in, 'here, today, now' (2010: 51). He is clear that the actor must work from the emotional, physical, psychological state he or she find him or herself in for each performance, grounding the performance in the experience of the present moment and working to answer the question, what would they do '*that day* if they found themselves in the situation the character is in' (2008: 289). Accordingly, the actor is then able to find 'immediacy, naturalness, truth and most importantly unexpected differences' (2008: 336) in a performance that becomes unrepeatable, unique to each iteration.
See Lehmann's analysis of the relationship between performance (art) and postdramatic theatre (2006: 134 – 144), in particular his contention that the former presents an aesthetic of actual, and unrepeatable, self-transformation and a 'process and moment that is (1) real, (2) emotionally compulsory, and (3) happening in the here and now' (2006: 137 and 138).

[10] Carnicke defines Stanislavsky's concept of 'experiencing' as invoking 'the immediacy of performance and the actor's "presence,"' (2009: 144) arguing that the actor's work is absolutely grounded in their ability to live and to create on stage. It is this revision of Stanislavsky's understanding of 'truth' as a sense of belief in 'whatever happens in performance,' that can, Carnicke argues, best open the "system" up to the many different dramatic styles that fall outside the realm of Psychological Realism' (2009: 145).

[11] In *An Actor's Work* Tortsov explains to the young student, Kostya that: 'The secret is that lying is implicit in the stage itself, in the very circumstances of a public performance. There can be no compromise, we must wage constant war against it, be able to go around it without noticing it. Theatrical lies wage constant war with truth' (2008: 298).

should be the basis of his students' practice (2008: 58). Extrapolating further, he argues that the state of experiencing is a natural human state of creativity that the actor often loses when they walk on stage and that they must reclaim and learn to re-experience on stage as they do in life.[12] When Tortsov praises his actors it is not for their ability to embody or *represent* a character, but for their ability to *be*. He lauds Kostya (Stanislavsky's alter-ego as student) for a classroom performance in which: 'you weren't playing, you were', defining the desired state of experiencing as '"I am being"' interpreted as: 'I am, I live, I feel, I think as one with the role' (2008: 186). In favouring the actor's experience and their ability to create *from* that experience, Stanislavsky takes a first step towards the paradigmatic shift that privileged the performer's presence over their representative function in the mid-twentieth century turn to performance that, consequently, influenced the development of the performer's work in postdramatic theatre.

Stanislavsky's desire for liveness and presence must, of course, not be mistaken for the transformative commitment to liveness characteristic of performance art or the privileging of the present moment that procures 'the erosion and slippage of presence' and ultimately 'crosses out dramatic representation' in postdramatic theatre (Lehmann 2006: 144). For the 'system' remains wedded to the representation of individuals on stage and Stanislavsky's preference for the here and now remains in service of the actor's work in performing the authorial role. However, Stanislavsky's appeal to liveness and presence can, nevertheless, be viewed as part of the prehistory of postdrama's radical engagement with those concepts. For notwithstanding the continued references to the notion of the 'role', Stanislavsky's rejection of representation and mimesis prefigures postdramatic theatre's 'fading away of this trinity of drama, imitation and action' (2006: 37). While drama and action remain lynchpins of the 'system', the repudiation of imitation not only places the actor's presence centre stage, but simultaneously

[12] Again, Tortsov argues that: 'We are born with this creative capacity, this ''system'' inside us. Creativity is a natural need and you would think we would be incapable of creating other than according to the ''system''. But, astonishingly, we lose what nature has given us the moment we walk onstage and instead of creating we posture, counterfeit, playact and represent' (2008: 611).

liberates the Stanislavskian actor from the *absolute* service of the text. Accordingly, this turn away from the idea that acting is about representation marks a significant rejection of hegemonic dramatic principles and of the unequivocal governance of the playwright's authority that would reach its zenith in postdramatic theatre. Moreover, while acknowledging that the performance style conventionally produced by the Stanislavskian actor falls short of postdrama's fundamental refusal of signification, the further exploration of Stanislavsky's 'system' will show how much closer the parallels are.

In the first instance, postdramatic theatre's characteristic 'execution of acts that are real in the here and now' (Lehmann 2006: 104) recalls Stanislavsky's directive to perform 'genuine, productive, purposeful action onstage … here, today, now' (Stanislavsky: 2010: 51). When Tortsov instructs his students: 'If you are listening, listen and hear. If you are smelling, then smell. If you are looking then look and see' (Stanislavsky 2008: 251), he encourages a commitment to *real* action, in *real* time. While this appeal relates to the given dramatic circumstances, rather than the given performance circumstances, Stanislavsky's call for real action nonetheless prefigures postdramatic theatre's more radical formulation of presence as a commitment to the present moment (Lehmann 2006: 144).[13] Similarly and following Beck's analysis, the concept of experiencing embraces an understanding of the actor's dual consciousness that resonates with the rejection of essentialist notions of ontology and, accordingly, with late twentieth-century theatre-making practices (Beck 2014: 225, 2000: 261).[14] Indeed, Beck contends that this grounding

[13] This parallel is further exemplified in Carnicke's analysis of the term 'experiencing' and its dual meaning: 'to live' and 'to create'. Carnicke highlights the extent to which 'experiencing' invokes the immediacy of performance, pinpointing Stanislavsky's conflation of stage time with real time as central to his radical revision of representational acting (2009: 144). Furthermore, she contends that the concept of 'experiencing' 'embraces a subtler, postmodern notion: actors "live" on stage, because they "create" on stage' (2009: 144) and accordingly the art of 'experiencing' appears to anticipate the shift towards the practices associated with performance and a preference for performative, rather than representational acts.

[14] Beck argues that: 'Stanislavsky's core concept of the performer's dual consciousness…reasserts the humanity and agency of the individual actor while also providing, like poststructuralist approaches beholden to Bertolt Brecht, a framework within which identities and their formative influences can be questioned and critiqued' (2000: 261). Exploring Stanislavsky's relationship to Diderot's paradox Beck contends that the concept of 'experiencing' grounds the actor's work in their own experience of the performance, permitting the actor to 'no longer negotiate between two

of the actor's work in the present moment illuminates the interplay between the real and the fictional through which the subjectivity of the character is generated. In this way Beck argues that Stanislavsky's ideas can only be regarded as 'realistic' in so far as they 'seek to account for and utilise phenomena, the experienced world' (2000: 265). Accordingly, Beck shows the extent to which the concept of dual consciousness and the art of 'experiencing' not only transcend the 'psychology' and 'verisimilitude' associated with Naturalism and psychological realism, but also facilitate the incorporation of the real *into* the theatrical event (2000: 265). Moreover, Beck suggests that, in focusing on the actor's relationship to the role Stanislavsky identified the

> two inescapable and perhaps primary poles repeatedly rearranged in twentieth-and early-twenty-first-century theatre: the fictional versus the documentary, the transcendent versus the material, the illusionary versus the real, the signifier versus the signified, the text versus the body. (2000: 265)

While Beck does not draw a specific correlation with postdramatic theatre here, it is an interplay between these binaries that the postdramatic 'theatre of the real' plays on to create an '*aesthetics of undecidability*' (Lehmann 2006: 103, 100). Thus, while postdramatic theatre extends the role of the 'real' in the performance, following Beck's analysis it becomes clear that it was Stanislavsky who turned the real into a 'co-player' in the moment of performance. Accordingly, therefore, postdramatic theatre *reveals* the relationship that Stanislavsky's 'system' first illuminated – exposing that which, in service of a dramatic theatre-making practice remained hidden, but which was in reality already at play.[15]

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selves – one of which they can never "be" but between two types of experiences, both oriented in themselves' (2000: 267). This re-orientation of the actor's focus marks, for Beck, a consequential shift in theatre-making and produces actors who no longer 'simply play back the playwright's character' (2000: 267) but who actively shape and reimagine the role each time it is performed. Accordingly, and importantly for the work of this research project, it is through the *process* of 'active creative negotiation between self and role' (2000: 268) that the actor produces the performance of character, or to use Stanislavsky's preferred term the 'third being'.

[15] Describing how the actor should make use of the liveness brought into play by accidents and errors on stage, Tortsov explains how: 'A chair falls over, or an actress drops her handkerchief and has to pick it up, or the setting has changed and unexpectedly he has to move the furniture around. Just as a breath of fresh air freshens a stuffy room, so an accident, breaking through from real life onto the convention ridden stage gives life to dead, clichéd acting …produces living action onstage, from the real world from which the actor has strayed' (2008: 163). While Tortsov's appeal for the

Indeed, the postdramatic performer extends the Stanislavskian actor's response to the 'real' in order to create an effect of 'undecidability' that, I contend, takes Stanislavsky's desire to wage war against the 'art of representation' to its fullest conclusion. Accordingly, Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing', with its recourse to dual consciousness and to a revised conceptualisation of 'truth', marks a significant step towards the 'split between presence and representation' that is fundamental to postdrama (Lehmann 2006: 136). While Lehmann locates that split in 'anti-illusionist and epic forms of theatre' (which offer a counterpoint to Stanislavsky's conception of the actor's relationship to the role) it nonetheless appears that the genesis of that split might also be traced back to Stanislavsky's interest in the actor's relationship to the real and his rejection of outwardly illusionist representation that bears no concrete relationship the actor's lived experience in the moment of performance.[16] This is significant because it is this split that Lehmann pinpoints as a precursor to the fundamental shift in performance practices that has informed the presentation of human subjectivities in postdramatic theatre. In light of this, the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' to the staging of postdramatic character 'under erasure', once again, seems plausible.

The actor's creativity and the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis*

In further support of this contention it is possible to identify additional principles and practices of Stanislavsky's 'system' that offer parallels with some of the practices associated with staging postdramatic theatre. Stanislavsky's willingness to

actor to harness the experience of an unpremeditated moment into their performance serves a different theatrical form from that of the postdramatic practitioner, it represents a significant point of connection with postdramatic theatre's inclusion of the 'real'. By harnessing these moments when reality breaks through the performance (or indeed constructing a performance in which there is an ongoing 'come and go' between the real and the fictional), both the Stanislavskian actor and the postdramatic performer are working in service of performance-practices that fundamentally seek to challenge the limitations of representation and return to what is really 'real' about the performance event.

[16] While Stanislavsky undoubtedly believed that the actor should convince the audience that they *are* the character, thereby creating an illusion of character, it was crucial that that that illusion was grounded in 'truth', whereby 'truth' indicated a 'sincerity of self-expression' (Carnicke 2009: 145) in relation to the experience of the performance. Further, as Carnicke argues 'by 1923 he [Stanislavsky] has drifted away from the belief that an illusion of reality was sufficient measure for an actor's "truth" on stage' (2009:34) - the central premise of Stanislavsky's art of experiencing was to *live* the role on stage, rather than merely represent it.

embrace improvisation and his emphasis on the actor's creativity, for example, are similar to the innovations of the early twentieth-century avant-garde and to performance-making practices associated with postdramatic theatre (as noted in 4.1 above). Significantly, his attitude towards improvisation was founded on an overarching commitment to empowering the actor. Thus the actor's creativity takes the central role in Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing' and the creative actor is given increasing parity with the authorial text in determining the performance of a role.[17] Indeed, Stanislavsky's attitude towards the author's text is revealed to be pragmatic and, at times, surprisingly irreverent. He argues that the creative actor must build on and add to what the author provides, which itself remains 'incomplete' until it is brought to life by the actor:

> We have to supply what the author has not created in his printed text, using our own imagination. Otherwise you won't get a continuous "life of the human spirit" from the actor, you'll be dealing with isolated scraps (2008: 288).

The actor must take ownership of the role which the playwright delivers in a fragmented, half-formed state.[18] The creative actor must draw on his own 'heart, his human wants, thoughts and endeavours… to make up the role' (2010: 74). Here Stanislavsky's privileging of the actor's creative input appears to take an important step towards the 'creative performer' of the mid twentieth century, who emerged in devised theatre-making practices and whose prominence marked a meaningful rejection of the authority of the playwright.[19]

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[17] Carnicke argues that 'Stanislavsky now equated "to experience" ('*perezhivat*') with "to create" ('*tvorit*')' (2006: 144).

[18] Beck draws a similar conclusion in *The Paradox of the Method Actor: Rethinking the Stanislavsky Legacy*, arguing that: 'Stanislavsky's core concept of the performer's dual consciousness… reasserts the humanity and the agency of the individual actor…' (2000: 261). Beck contends that this renewed agency of the actor, who is no longer forced to reconcile the two 'irreconcilable personalities' of the actor and the character, but instead, through the practice of experiencing, grounds the performance in their own experience of the present moment, liberates them from 'dutifully render[ing] the playwright's character enabling the actor to co-create it, co-author it' (2000: 267).

[19] The concept of the 'creative performer' is explored by Govan, Nicholson and Normington (2007: 29-40) who trace the emergence of this figure through the twentieth century into the practices that have placed 'the performer at the heart of the devising process' (2007: 40). Govan *et al.* contend that the rise of the creative performer was both a product of and provided an outlet for the exploration of the twentieth-century preoccupation with the nature of selfhood. They go on to trace the influence of psychology on actor-training practices (which marked this shift towards the actor's

Stanislavsky's emphasis on the actor's creativity is, perhaps, most apparent in the two models of performance-making developed in the final decade of his life; the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis*.[20] While a detailed examination of either of these methods lies outside the scope of this thesis, there are notable features of both that offer insights into the relationship between Stanislavsky's rehearsal processes and theatre-making practices that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. While staging the play remained the ultimate goal for the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis*, in both models the author's work is accessed directly through practical exploration. After an initial reading of the play, the text is filtered through the actor's psycho-physical being and the character is explored first through the body. While the text remains essential to the process, the actor is encouraged to engage dynamically with the role, focusing on what the character does in the *given circumstances* of the play – a question that can only be answered through actual, physical *action*. Furthermore, *Active Analysis* (which effectively extends the role of improvisation in the *Method of Physical Actions*), demands that the actors work from their own words to re-create the events and story of the play, before finally incorporating the author's text. This process places the actor at the centre of the theatre-making process, celebrating and privileging the actor's creativity and placing 'greater and greater responsibility for the interpretation of the play onto the shoulders of actors' (Carnicke 2009: 202).

However, while Stanislavsky's emphasis on the actor's creativity and his increasing use of improvisation point towards the theatre-making and devising practices associated with some postdramatic theatre, the progressive nature of Stanislavsky's attitude to the actor's relationship to the author's text should not be overstated. For despite his emphasis on the actor's creativity, that creativity remained limited

self) to Stanislavsky's emphasis on 'the "presence" of the actor in performance, the rhetoric of truthfulness, honesty and authenticity' (2007: 29).

[20] For analyses of both the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis* and the differentiation between the two models see Carnicke 2009; Benedetti 1989; Merlin 2007, 2014; Toporkov 2001; and Thomas 2016 and Merlin 2014 for a detailed examination of *Active Analysis*.

by the parameters of the playwright's text.[21] Indeed, Stanislavsky's creative actor still resolutely served the authorial text and in the rehearsal practices of both the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis*, the play always has the last word. Yet while Stanislavsky does not give the actor absolute parity with the author in the creation of the performance, these practices do reveal his willingness to place the actor at the centre of the theatre-making project and to validate the actor's voice in the creative process. Moreover, both rehearsal practices highlight Stanislavsky's continued openness to experimentation and innovation and the extent to which his thinking about the actor's work laid the foundation for more radical shifts in the actor's relationship to the author's text in the decades that followed. Indeed, Stanislavsky's notes on *The Government Inspector 1936-1937* (2010: 46) illuminate a readiness to liberate the actor from the auspices of the playwright's authority at the centre of these new methods. He records a fictionalised conversation between Tortsov and the students, which, despite its length, is worth quoting here in full:

> 'My approach to a new role is quite different: no reading, no discussion, the actors are immediately given a rehearsal call.'
> 'What?', the students did not understand.
> 'I go further. You can act a play that has not yet been written.'
> …?!
> We could not find an answer.
> 'You don't believe me? Let us try something. I have a play in my head I will tell you the plot episode by episode and you act it. I will watch what you say and do impromptu and I will write down what is good. So, by our common efforts we shall write a play and immediately act an unwritten work. We shall share the royalties equally.'

[21] The importance of the authority of the text remained central to Stanislavsky's practice, even in the development of the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis* which rely significantly on the actor's creativity and imagination. Stanislavsky writes that the intention to 'give outward theatrical form to the seed, or thought, that gave rise to the writer's or composer's work' and to 'present the writer's basic idea' remained the 'principal purpose of art' (2008: 570) – although, significantly, authorial intention is always open to interpretation and thus measuring a project's success against such an aim would always have been problematic. He further argues that 'The actor is absolutely free to invent, providing he does not stray away from the writer's basis ideas or his theme' (2010: 114). Even when Stanislavsky's practices moved further away from long periods of round-table analysis, a thorough and detailed understanding of the text was still paramount to the rehearsal process (see Benedetti 1989:70). For, in both the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis*, while the actor engages with the author's work in a different manner. He or she begins by improvising a scene, once an initial reading of the scene had been complete. The performances generated through those improvisations are then revised in light of further re-readings of the text and the actor gradually creates a role that moves closer and closer to the author's intentions (see Merlin 2007: 188 and 197).

> …?!
> The students were even more bewildered and understood nothing.' (2010: 46)

Here Stanislavsky proposes an approach to performance-making that, with its reference to communal authorship and improvisation, echoes the devising practices of the second half of the twentieth century that have, at least for some companies, offered a paradigm for postdramatic theatre-making.[22]

While these parallels must not be read as indicative of Stanislavsky pre-empting a postdramatic approach - his adherence to the playwright's authority absolutely precludes that analysis - a close reading of Stanislavsky's exposition of his working methods reveals a distinct and clear lineage from the innovations of the 'system' to the significant revisions of the practices of representation and the relationships between the actors and the authorial text that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and that informed the development of the postdramatic theatre. While this serves to illuminate a new place for Stanislavsky's 'system' within the narrative prehistory of postdrama, what is of greater importance for the work of this research project is Stanislavsky's attitude towards the concept of the 'role' and its relationship to those entities that I have argued in chapter two, are best understood as characters 'under erasure'. For despite the disparities between Stanislavsky's, apparently, humanist approach to character and postdrama's decentralisation of the human figure, there remain useful parallels to be drawn between the two. Building on the work undertaken thus far, I propose to revisit Stanislavsky's concept of character as a product of the actor's dual consciousness, brought to life through the 'art of experiencing': the 'third being'. Through this analysis I hope to illuminate the ways in which Stanislavsky's 'third being' resonates with postdrama's staging of the human subject and, indeed, embraces a

[22] Jürs-Munby cites '"devised' experimental performance work' (in Lehmann 2006: 2) as one of a number of genres that fall under Lehmann's analysis of the postdramatic aesthetic effect. This evidently does not suggest that all devised theatre is therefore postdramatic, but simply illustrates that devising is one among a number of models of theatre-making associated with postdrama. A cursory scan of the 'Names' associated with postdrama (in Lehmann 2006: 23) bears out this analysis.

'post/humanist' (LePage 2012) conceptualisation of subjectivity. In this way, I contend that his analysis of the actor's work on a role offers an effective route into staging character 'under erasure'.

4.4 Stanislavsky's 'third being'

Stanislavsky and character

An examination of Stanislavsky's treatment of the concept of 'character' throughout *An Actor's Work*, *An Actor's Work on a Role* and *My Life in Art* presents an interesting parallel with Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* for the term 'character' has largely been jettisoned in both. Beck, Carnicke and Stephenson all highlight Stanislavsky's rejection of the term in favour or either 'image' or 'role' (Beck 2014: 226, Carnicke 2009: 4, Stephenson 2011: 55). Beck argues that these alternative terms enable Stanislavsky to 'avoid psychologising the character' and to emphasise, instead, the processual nature of an actor's work on a role (Beck 2014: 226). Where character connotes stability and fixity, 'image' and 'role' suggest the fluidity and mutability of characterisations that are 'created anew by each actor, with their personal experiences, resources and perspectives' (2014: 226). In concurrence with this analysis Carnicke compares Stanislavsky's use of the terms 'role' and 'image' to the musician's score, illuminating the function of textual character as a *template* for an actor's performance that is only brought to life by the personal inflections of the actor who performs it (2009: 4).

When the term character *is* deployed by Stanislavsky it is with overwhelmingly pejorative connotations. Character is associated with the theatre of technique, with stock-in-trade and an unquestioning adherence to the author's text. As Tortsov advises his students, 'As soon as you start thinking about character, you cannot refrain from overacting and representation' (2010: 86). Furthermore, character, as it exists in the dramatic text, is described as 'arid' or 'dead' (2008: 309). Indeed, Tortsov proclaims to his students that: 'when you are given the part there is no living character' (2010: 81) only a lifeless entity, awaiting resuscitation by the actor who is charged with the task of making it their own. Without the actor, Stanislavsky

argues, the character is a 'non-existing person', for it is only the actor who can imbibe the role with personal experiences, memories and feelings, transforming the author's lifeless creation into a 'pulsating, living human soul' (2008: 280, 210). It is the actor who brings the 'life of the human spirit' to a role, and, perhaps even more significantly, it is *from* that actor's real life experience that the role eventually emerges (Stanislavsky 2008: 20). For, as Tortsov seeks to persuade his students, there is only ever one role any actor can play: '*yourself* in the given circumstances of the person you are called on to create' (2010: 81).

Thus, Stanislavsky's rejection of the term *character* is inextricably bound up with his commitment to stimulating the actor's creativity. Grounded in a pedagogical belief that it is the 'talented actor' who is 'the only lord and Master of the stage' (2008a: 344) Stanislavsky makes the first (albeit perhaps incidental) move towards postdramatic theatre's rejection of dramatic hegemony. While the implicit shift away from authorial hegemony may be incidental, it is nonetheless significant and Stanislavsky's emphasis on the pliability of the role and the interaction *between* the actor and the text, resonates beyond the historical period to which it belongs. Indeed, postdrama's eventual refutation of the viability of representing characters at all, might be traced back to Stanislavsky's suspicion of the term evidenced in these three texts. For Stanislavsky's insistence that the role exists in and through the actor's relationship *to* the text resonates with poststructuralism's reappraisal of textual authority and destabilises the ontology of character. It is this destabilisation of ontology, exemplified in Stanislavsky's analysis of the 'third being', that I contend most clearly demonstrates the continued relevance of the 'system' to the staging of character 'under erasure' and of postdramatic theatre. It is thus to the 'third being' that I now propose to turn, in order to explore the extent to which Stanislavsky's analysis anticipates postdramatic theatre's critical crisis of character.

The 'third being'

Underlying Stanislavsky's rejection of the term character is a fundamental reconsideration of an essentialist and, liberal humanist, theory of character. In light of this, and in addition to adopting the terms role and image, Stanislavsky reframes

the actor's work on a role as a 'new creation, the actor/role' (2008: 242) or the 'third being' who exemplifies an ongoing and open-ended generation of ontology through the interaction between the actor and the role in the ever changing present moment of performance.[23] This new being is an entity whose presence is absolutely grounded in the actor's self, yet Stanislavsky never fails to stress the imperative of working within the *given circumstances* of the author's text. Accordingly, the relationship between the actor and the role is best characterised as symbiotic. Stanislavsky's refrain to find 'yourself in the role and the role in you' (2008: 325) punctuates his analysis, as the 'third being' emerges through an ongoing interaction between the self and the role. In this way the 'third being' offers a formulation of subjectivity within which the boundary between the actor and the role begins to be destabilised. Grounded in the practice of 'experiencing' and the state of 'I am being' which engage the actor's dual consciousness (allowing both the actor and the role to exist simultaneously in the moment of performance), this 'new creation' accordingly takes a first significant step towards a postdramatic theatre of 'self-transformation' and an endless present (Lehmann 2006, 137 and 144). It embraces a significantly more mercurial sense of subjectivity than is conventionally associated with the unity and coherence of drama and, in particular with dramatic character as indicative of a liberal humanist subjectivity.

Thus, despite the adherence to the author's text, Stanislavsky's understanding of the actor's work on a role is exemplified by an interplay between the actor and the role. Furthermore, this interplay between two states (identified as human being/actor and human being/role (2008: 286)) is not regarded as incidental, or indeed problematic, but is, in fact, crucial to generating an optimal creative state in the actor. Stanislavsky insists that the actor has 'no difficulty in splitting himself in two' (2008: 302) but willingly embraces the movement between his own experience of the lived moment of performance and the imaginary *given circumstances* of the author's text and the role. Not only does the actor have no

[23] This analysis is supported by Beck's contention that Stanislavsky's concept of character 'functions much like a "text" for Roland Barthes, a methodological field, defiant of classification deferred, plural, irreducible… It is always in the process of creation' (2014: 226).

difficulty in moving between these two states, but, Stanislavsky argues, this interplay between the real and the imagined actively fires the actor's creative imagination. Stanislavsky's alter-ego as student, Kostya, describes the significance of this dual consciousness in his performance of the 'snide critic':

> I recalled while I was living the critic I still didn't lose contact with myself, Kostya…all the time I was acting I took enormous pleasure in observing my own physical transformation. Half of me was an audience, while the other half was being someone else, the snide critic. On the other hand, can you call him someone else? The critic came out of me. I, as it were, split down the middle. One half was the actor, the other watched like an audience. Strange. The sense of being split in two wasn't a hindrance, it fired and encouraged the creative process. (2008: 527)

Kostya's analysis illuminates the extent to which the boundaries between the actor and role and between the internal and the external are elided. He is at once himself and *another* and the new creation emerges as the actor 'as audience' and then the actor 'as role' continually alternate in dynamic interplay.

In this way, the 'third being' exists, somehow, 'in between' the actor and the role, inhabiting a liminal state. When Tortsov plays the role of Famusov he is referred to as 'a new being, whose name is Famusov/Tortsov or Tortsov/Famusov' (2008: 235). Not only does the reversal of sequence highlight the constitutive interplay between the human being/actor and the human being/role, but the symbol '/' is significant. Deployed similarly to aide Stanislavsky's description of the two states the actor engenders, (the 'human being/actor' and the 'human being/role' (2008: 286)) the '/' indicates the liminality of a presence that is both Famusov and Tortsov and, at the same time, neither wholly Famusov nor Tortsov. Accordingly, the subjectivity of the 'third being' emerges in a chain of a supplementation wherein, if we try to conceive of the actor and the role as separate entities, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify to whom the actions and intentions of the 'character' belong. In this way Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the 'third being' fundamentally undermines the idea that dramatic character is indicative of a fixed, knowable, coherent, individual entity. Instead, it appears to reflect a post/humanist subjectivity; the boundaries between the actor and the role are blurred and the

dynamic interaction produces a form of 'character' that is fluid, multiple and heterogeneous because it is reliant on and open to continual reinterpretation and re-invention.[24] Furthermore, if the post/humanist subject is understood to reject the concept of the individual's absolute free-will and the individual's freedom from the will of others, then Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor in the role similarly precludes just that possibility. The actor is dependent on the role, the role is dependent on the actor; each entity is entirely porous to its 'other', and the 'third being' is characterised as a liminal and destabilised ontology.

Moreover and in light of this analysis, I contend that Stanislavsky's 'third being' is perhaps best understood in terms of Derrida's term *hauntology* rather than ontology, and in relation to his analysis of the 'spectre'. In *Spectres of Marx* (2006) Derrida uses the concept of the spectre to examine the ways in which ideologies remain always, already, constitutively infiltrated by those ideologies that precede them and that they seek to resist. He explores the ways in which the present is absolutely infiltrated by the past, and, through the concept of hauntology, the extent to which ideologies, and indeed, ontologies, manifest in relation to one another, to that which they are not, and how they thus accordingly and necessarily bear within them the trace of that very 'other' that they purport to resist. In its

[24] It is worth reiterating here that I am using Louise LePage's term 'post/humanist' rather than 'posthumanist' because I believe that Stanislavsky's understanding of the actor's work on a role conforms to her compatibilist definition of a 'post/humanist' subject as both materially determined and self-determining. I propose that Stanislavsky embraces an understanding of performed character as materially and culturally determined because Stanislavsky understands that the role is determined by the *given circumstances* of the play*;* the where, the when and the why of the play's events, the social, economic and political circumstances. This suggests that Stanislavsky sees the role as indicative of a human subject who is a product of their circumstances; their gender, age, social class and economic and political status, rather than as reflective of a coherent, self-determining entity. Furthermore, Stanislavsky conceives of the actor's work on a role as a similarly materially determined entity – the actor uncovers the role through an exploration of the *given circumstances* and the performance of the role depends upon an interaction with both the given circumstances of the dramatic text and the performance circumstances of the live event. However, Stanislavsky also affords the actor significant freedom in the performance of the role; indeed, they must respond to the *given circumstances* of the author's role as themselves – there is only one role the actor can ever play: '*yourself* in the given circumstances of the person you are called on to create' (2010: 81). Accordingly, while the Stanislavskian actor does not have total freedom, he or she has the ability to affect the material they perform. Accordingly, I propose that LePage's term, that illustrates the extent to which a subject is both culturally determined *and* self-determining, best illuminates Stanislavsky's understanding of the actor's work on a role.

ability to simultaneously straddle the past and the present the spectre offers a useful insight into Stanislavsky's 'third being', illuminating the '/' that, I contend, represents its constitutive heart. In the following passage Derrida explores the spectre's resistance to articulation (or identification) in a way that might equally describe the 'third being's' resistance to categorisation, or, indeed, temporal location:

> One does not know if it is living or if it is dead. Here is, or rather there is, over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything, something, 'this thing', but this thing and not any other, this thing that looks at us, that comes at us [*qui nous regarde*] comes to defy semantics as much as ontology. (2006: 5)

The un-nameablity Derrida describes recalls the liminality of the 'third being', for the 'third being' is both 'something' and 'between something and someone' (between the text and the actor), it is 'some thing' that is only understood because it is 'not any other' but also because it brings forth an other, and, as Stanislavsky's deployment of the '/' implies, naming what that 'thing' is, is problematic. Stanislavsky's use of the '/' reveals the precariousness of the 'third being's' ontology. It is indicative of its ability to be *both* the actor's self and the author's role, yet neither fully the self nor the role at one and the same time.

Furthermore, because the 'third being' materialises through the actor's capacity to embrace a duality of consciousness, it demonstrates an ability to traverse the cold hard reality of the present moment and the (past and indeed future) imagined world of the 'phantom figures' and 'alien' beings (to use Stanislavsky's own terms) who inhabit the author's text.[25] In this way the 'third being' exhibits a ghostliness that once again resonates with Derrida's spectre, dissolving the boundary between the live presence (/present) of the actor in performance and its moribund textual counterpart – the character. Accordingly, the 'third being' conforms to Derrida's

[25] Stanislavsky describes how in performing a role the actor must 'behave in a genuine manner when meeting phantom figures' and likens the actor's task of performing a role to being 'subjugated to something alien' (2008: 611, and 2010: 126).

analysis of 'the spectrality effect … undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other' (2006: 48) and enabling a form of 'haunting' through which the past is brought (back) to life. When the actor merges with the role and the 'third being' emerges, the life and spirit of the actor's body and soul brings forth the author's dead characters. Thus, Stanislavsky's new creations manifest as ghostly presences, revenants, characterised as both a form of 'non-presence' and a plenitude of presence, a doubling, an excess of presence. In offering a bodily return to that which no longer is (or indeed, never was), the 'third being' traverses time, drawing again on Derrida's analysis, throwing time 'out of joint' (2006: 21).

Examining Stanislavsky's 'third being' through the lens of the spectre not only foregrounds the extent to which this ontology of character departs significantly from the stability of coherent and rational subjectivity associated with liberal humanist conceptualisations of dramatic character, but, more significantly, further illustrates the resonances with postdramatic theatre's characters 'under erasure'. For in its rejection of an essentialist ontology, the 'third being' begins to resonate with Lehmann's analysis of the entities that populate the postdramatic stage as 'more like a Deleuzian meeting point of energies than an origin or centre of action' (Lehmann in Barnett 2006a: 484). The liminality that the 'third being' exhibits echoes the destabilisation of boundaries that permeates Lehmann's analysis of postdramatic theatre. It is, after all, the problematization of the boundary between the real and the fictional, the sense of 'treading the borderline' (2006: 103) that Lehmann argues is central to the conceptualisation of the 'theatre of the real' (2006: 103). It is this same liminality that transforms the spectator into a participant as theatre metamorphoses from spectacle to event in postdramatic theatre. Lehmann argues that:

> when the real asserts itself against the staged on stage, then this is mirrored in the auditorium… [and] the staging practice forces the spectators to wonder whether they should react to the events on stage as fiction (i.e. aesthetically) or as reality (for example, morally). (2006: 103 -104)

Moreover, in their fragmented and partial state, the dehumanised 'de-psychologised speaking machines' (Lehmann 2006: 115), the 'ghostly voice belonging to a liminal body' (Lehmann 2006: 130), inhabit a hinterland located somewhere between representation and presence, recalling the models of characterisation that preceded them, but resistant to the logic and conventions of dramatic characterisation nonetheless. Postdramatic characters 'under erasure' embody this liminality, the ghostly 'non-presence' that permeates Derrida's analysis of the spectre and that finds an echo in Stanislavsky's theorisation of the 'third being'. It is on this basis that I contend that Stanislavsky's concept begins to examine in theory, that which postdramatic theatre's turn away from character has explored in practice. For while the actor in the performance of the 'third being' still strove for the illusion of unity, Stanislavsky's theorization of the new creation illuminates the fragmentation at the heart of the actor's work on a role that postdramatic theatre would go on to place centre stage. Accordingly, the 'system' therefore appears to be well placed to enable a postdramatic theatre-making practice that seeks to stage character 'under erasure' as a way of exploring and reflecting contemporary, late-twentieth century experience of human subjectivity as destabilised, discontinuous and fragmented.

4.5 Conclusion

Through re-examining Stanislavsky's relationship to the historical avant-garde and in drawing out the resonances between the 'system' and those practices associated with postdramatic theatre, I have offered a re-reading of Stanislavsky's relationship to postdramatic theatre. While it remains clear that postdramatic theatre fundamentally rejects the principles of unity and coherence which adhere to Stanislavsky's 'system', and that his commitment to the human figure's central function in the dramatic event, to the authority of the text and to staging the play mark a significant gulf between the 'system' and the practices of postdrama, an unqualified rejection of the 'system' and Stanislavsky's insights into the nature of performance and the actor's relationship to the role, is based on a vast oversimplification of his analysis. For, as I have shown in this chapter, Stanislavsky offers a complex and nuanced understanding of the problem of representation and

the actor's relationship to the 'real' in the moment of performance that has much in common with the fundamental preoccupations of postdrama. His recourse to the concept of 'experiencing' and his understanding of dual consciousness illuminate a conceptualisation of character as processual, contingent and contextual, and it is this element of Stanislavsky's theoretical analysis that has underpinned the practice of this research. In the following three chapters I will reflect upon the practical exploration of applying Stanislavsky's theoretical analysis of the 'third being' and the 'system' devised in support of the actor's work on the role to a postdramatic theatre-making practice. Accordingly, I will examine the extent to which the commonalities that I have uncovered in re-reading *An Actor's Work*, *An Actor's Work on a Role* and *My Life in Art* in light of Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, have borne fruit in the cold, hard reality of the rehearsal room – putting the theoretical case stated here to the test.

Chapter five – practice projects one, two and three

5.1 Introduction

The intention of the three preceding chapters has been to establish what Robin Nelson describes as the 'cognitive propositional knowledge' and 'conceptual frameworks' (2013: 37) from, and within which, the practice was undertaken. Following Nelson's 'multi-modal' (2013: 29) research model these chapters have offered insights into the 'know-that', the 'traditional theoretical' and 'cognitive-academic knowledge' (2006: 114) of the research project. Chapters five, six and seven shift focus, directing the reader's attention to the rehearsal room to illuminate the 'tacit' and 'embodied' (2006: 114) knowledge generated through practical exploration. Accordingly, the following analyses document the practical work of active experimentation and the ongoing critical reflection on that practice. While this shift in focus might imply a division between the theoretical and practical work of the research, it is worth reiterating that the new insights that this research proposes emerged through the ongoing interaction between theoretical analysis, practical exploration and critical reflection. While, as the researcher I have shifted between the three modes of learning, the knowledge brought to and generated in each mode has been embedded in my experience at every stage and, accordingly, the research has been characterised by the imbrication of theory and practice.

The analysis that follows documents how Stanislavsky's 'system' has been applied beyond a naturalistic dramaturgy, assessing the benefits and challenges of using the 'system' to stage character 'under erasure' and to develop a postdramatic theatre-making practice. Accordingly, the following chapters aim to reveal how the practical exploration tested the theoretical propositions outlined in chapters one, two, three and four, examining the resonances between Stanislavsky's 'third being' and representations of human subjectivities on the postdramatic stage, in practice. The analysis offered in chapters five, six and seven is supported by the inclusion of archival material, describing and illuminating the devising processes and performances of the work. In addition, projects one, two and three are documented in Appendices I – III, which include excerpts from the texts and images

of each performance-installation. They should be referred to when the reader feels necessary.

A broad outline of the body of practice reveals a shift from laboratory exploration in projects one, two and three, towards more clearly defined theatre-making in projects five and six.[1] Furthermore, projects one, two and three were presented as 'performance-installations', while four and five were presented as fully-realised workshop-performances.[2] To reflect this, the greater share of the analysis focuses on projects five and six, while projects one, two and three are treated as preliminary 'sketches', viewed together as a period of exploration and experimentation which laid the foundations for the work that followed. It is notable that this arc was not outlined at the inception of the project, but that the practice developed organically. While the research question offered an unwavering *through-line* for the body of practice, each individual iteration was shaped by the new insights uncovered through the ongoing process of research and reflection. The findings of the first iteration informed the shape of the second, and so the second informed the third *et cetera*, *et cetera*. Significantly, each practice project produced a series of false starts and failures, leading to continual revisions of the theoretical case and of the proposed iterations of practice in the repeated attempts to address the question at the heart of the enquiry. Despite the frustrations inherent in the experience of failure, these instances offered vital insights and provided the greatest opportunities for learning. In this way, the body of practice emerged

[1] Projects one, two and three were developed and performed over three consecutives summers from 2011 through to 2013. They were all performed at the Collisions Festival at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

[2] Chapters six and seven will explore the two final iterations of practice in detail, but it is worth emphasising here that project four marked a significant step towards theatre-making, a shift which arose from the perhaps self-evident necessity of testing a hypothesis concerning the practice of theatre-making within those self-same parameters. Moreover, project four also marked a significant gear-change in terms of the scope and ambitions of the practice, moving from the exploration of singular elements of the actor's work on a role in projects one, two and three (which variously explored action, emotion and dialogue), to examining the actor's work on a role, through telling a single character's story in its entirety (in this case Masha from Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*). Project five, which represented the culmination of the practice, extended the scope and artistic intentions yet further, exploring the stories of three characters (Irina, Masha and Olga from Chekhov's *Three* Sisters) in order to stage character 'under erasure' through attempting to present a postdramatic re-interpretation of a canonical text.

through an ongoing interrogation of the research question and sustained attempts to explore the hypothesis as rigorously as possible. Significantly, while the journey from the first to the final iteration of practice was considerable, all five projects drew on an ongoing preoccupation that emerged in the first workshop, during the first iteration of practice, and it is thus with an analysis of that initial session that I propose to begin.

The intention of the first workshop was to explore using Stanislavsky's six questions, '*who, when, where, why, for what reason, how*', as a technique for devising from text (2008: 83). The questions provided a framework for exploring the world of the text (a short story by Anton Chekhov called 'Disturbing the Balance') within which to take the first steps towards exposing the liminal and processual nature of the actor's work on a role and begin to stage character 'under erasure'. This first iteration took place over two days, during which a group of four actors worked on the short story. Stanislavsky's six questions were used as a framework for text analysis and the material generated was used to develop short improvisations in which the actors explored three of the principal roles in the story. We focused on a detailed approach to the development of precise and readable actions – the actors worked on a small scale, considering the detail of each action and the context within which it was taking place. We explored the 'when' and 'where' of every moment, and *subtext* and motivation were considered. The second session introduced vocal exploration and culminated in improvisations exploring the relationships between characters. Notably the actors often worked on the same role simultaneously and the improvisations included multiple actors exploring the same role, as well as alternating between roles.

This first session proved fruitful. By the end the actors were sharing sketchy, loosely fleshed out characterisations, playing multiple roles, alternating gender and developing improvisations in which several versions of the same character met on stage. Within these improvisations the actors visibly slipped from self to role, back and forth in continual interplay as they explored Chekhov's landscape and grappled with the roles that were beginning to emerge. The interplay between the actors'

selves and the author's roles resonated with Stanislavsky's 'third being', while also generating moments of uncertainty, or 'undecidability' for the onlooker, illuminating the borderline between the actor and the role. Moreover, the actors' work in that first session was characterised by a particular transparency, through which the *work* involved in the task of creating a character was as evident in the performance as the roles the actors were striving to create and the endless slippage between actor and role, at times, undermined my ability to distinguish between them. In this way, character appeared as a process; contingent on the actor's self and resistant to the concept of stable or cogent representations of subjectivity associated with a liberal humanist model of dramatic character.

The effect of 'undecidability' produced by the actors' work in role during this first session was germane to the hypothesis of the research, offering a point of contact between Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work and the possibility of staging postdramatic characters 'under erasure'. Yet while the liminal nature of the actor's work revealed itself easily in that first iteration of practice, I was conscious that this perceptible 'come and go' between the actor's self and the author's role was typical of the early stages of rehearsal and that the challenge would be how to maintain that transparency, that 'undecidability', once the actors' familiarity with the roles increased. Indeed, it was the pursuit of this transparency and the fluidity at the heart of the actor's work that came to underpin the wider body of practice. Furthermore, maintaining the ongoing interplay fundamental to Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's relationship to the role, highlighting the spectral nature of that relationship became, at times and, particularly under the duress of working towards a performance, one of the principal challenges of the practice. It is, therefore, the process through which I have attempted to foreground this 'treading the borderline' between the '"real" contiguity' (Lehmann 2006: 103) of the actor's self and the imagined reality of the author's role that I propose to chart through the following analyses.

5.2 Practice projects one, two and three

Aims and intentions

Project one began with an unfinished short story and, therefore, a character whose narrative was incomplete. This sense of the unfinished article found an echo in the experience of liminality that manifested in the first workshop; the moment of betwixt and between, when the performance belonged both to the actor and the role and to neither at the same time, when the actor's *work* on a role shone through before being masked by the spit and polish of rehearsal. Thus, a character on the page unsure of how his story might end, and the apparently casual arrival of Stanislavsky's 'third being' in that very first instance of practice, marked a not inconsequential beginning. It was in pursuit of the incomplete, of the sense of liminality and of an emerging understanding of how the effect of 'undecidability' might intersect with Stanislavsky's new creation in the rehearsal room, that I began to explore the problem of staging and deconstructing character, finding my way around Stanislavsky's 'system' and finding ways to apply his techniques to facilitate a postdramatic theatre-making practice.

Starting with the intention to expose the actor's journey towards a role in performance, I began by incorporating rehearsal exercises into the performance itself in order to disrupt and destabilise character.[3] I wanted to test whether this could enable me to replicate the way in which time is thrown 'out of joint' by the actor's work on a role and to disrupt the sense of linear progression from self to role in favour of circularity and recollection.[4] Searching for ways to use the 'system'

[3] My intention was to use the preparatory work undertaken in rehearsal, in performance. Over the course of the practical exploration this ranged from material generated through text analysis exploring setting and context, exercises to aid the actor use of the *magic if* (for example, developing an *internal monologue* for a moment of action), to exploring the actor's physical relationship to a significant object, or revisiting an analogous experience in the actor's own life to connect to a character's emotional response. Through this work I intended to give the actor's work on a role parity with the performance of that role and reveal the shifts that characterise Stanislavsky's understanding of the actor's dual consciousness and of the 'third being'.

[4] Much of the work undertaken during the first iteration aimed to develop a theatre-making practice that might expose how, in performing a role, the actor necessarily revives the past, conjuring the revenant that is the author's role, but also those other apparitions, those past incarnations of him or herself in the role, in the present moment of performance. Thus, the intention to incorporate the reality of the rehearsal into the performance aimed to illuminate the way in which Stanislavsky's

to expose the *actor* in the role, I hoped to redirect the audience's eye to reveal character as 'more process than product, more manifestation than signification' (Lehmann 2006: 85). The inclusion of rehearsal practices in performance became a recurrent motif throughout all five iterations of practice as I attempted to use the 'system' to facilitate the actor's work on a role and to undermine the staging of unified, coherent, characterisation.

Building on this work, I continued to explore ways to incorporate the experience of the rehearsal into the performance in projects two and three, with each of the three iterations taking an alternative approach. The first explored how the actor creates character thorough action, the second through the performance of emotion and the third through dialogue. Similarly, each began with a different stimulus text, the first with Anton Chekhov's short story, the second Howard Barker's 'The Investor's Chronicle*'* (from *13 Objects*) and the third Gertrude Stein's *Counting Her Dresses*. I began working with the first text because the unfinished nature of the story resonated with my intention to stage character as partial and fragmented. The choice of both the second and third texts was informed by the experience of the previous practice and they were selected in order to address the problems and challenges that had accordingly arisen. Howard Barker's monologue was chosen because the short speech hinges on the character's emotional state, and the tone of heightened realism provided a clear challenge to the actor who was tasked with reaching an emotional crescendo quickly and with little additional context. While I will discuss the decision to work on Stein's play in more detail later in the chapter, it is worth signposting that this move away from a broadly naturalistic style was deliberate and that *Counting Her Dresses* presented the challenge of working with a text in which the concept of character had already been radically revised. While the focus of the research has not been to identify the type of text that best serves a devising process for staging of character 'under erasure' these early iterations nonetheless illuminated the possibilities and pitfalls of working with different styles

conceptualisation of the 'third being' embodies Derrida's spectrality effect, and accordingly undermines a binary view of the past and the present.

and thus accordingly informed my subsequent choice to devise from Chekhov's *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters*. Despite their manifold differences, each text provided a valuable context within which to experiment with exposing the processes and practices of character-creation and the various attempts were unified by an overarching intention to isolate individual elements of the actor's work in order to facilitate partial or fragmented representations of character.

Working with the 'system'

Throughout this early work I experimented with staging and dramaturgy, exploring ways of activating the audience, re-directing their attention to the practices and processes of creating a role.[5] I worked with a range of Stanislavskian techniques, trying to identify which elements of the 'system' were core and that had to be used to maintain the integrity of the 'system' while also facilitating the staging of subjectivity in ways that moved beyond cogency and coherency and that resisted naturalistic representation.[6] As previously stated, the six questions quickly became a framework for the devising process and, indeed, formed the foundation for the theatre-making practice over the course of the research. Offering a route into each of the texts, the questions encouraged close attention to detail, aiding the actors in deciphering characters' motivations, highlighting needs and desires and the obstacles that prevent them from being fulfilled. Perhaps more significantly, however, in facilitating a rigorous analysis of the text and subtext, the six questions also revealed the gaps in the authors' narratives and thus actively engaged the

[5] In order to activate the audience to realign its role as participant and witness to the event I experimented with different ways of presenting the actor's work within the space. The audience was encouraged to move freely around the space in all three iterations (and between two separate spaces in project two), selecting where to focus their attention. I used live feed both in the acting space and projected into an adjacent space. I incorporated additional media; headphones for listening to pre-recorded material, projections of captions and excepts from text, or from additional source material used by the actor in rehearsal. Each choice attempted to redirect the audience's eye to the strategies employed in creating characterisation, offering each member of the audience the freedom to experience the installation however they chose.

[6] It is perhaps worth reiterating here that while working with individual elements involved some disaggregation of the 'system', the principles that underpin the 'system' continued to drive my practice. The 'system' is, focused on a set of principles, rather than representing a concrete method and while a complete separation of the exercises into individual elements would significantly undermine its systematic nature, the way in which I have adapted the 'system' throughout the development of my practice has allowed for some disaggregation and modification while adhering to its key tenets.

actors' imaginative and creative input. In this way, the process of answering these questions exemplified the interaction between the actor's self (mind, body, imagination and 'spirit') and the writer's text at the heart of the conceptualisation of the 'third being' and the onus Stanislavsky places on the actor's creative imagination in the theatre-making process.[7]

From this starting point I drew on a variety of other Stanislavskian techniques. For example, in order to answer the 'Who', 'Where' and 'When' questions, we extended our research to examining the social, historical and cultural contexts of the texts (Stanislavsky's *given circumstances*), and in addressing the 'How' question, Stanislavsky's writing on *action*, *magic if*, *objectives and counter-objectives* and *subtext* informed our practical work (Stanislavsky 2008: 37-59, 135–151, 403). In addition, I drew on Merlin's discussion of *silent études* (associated with the *Method of Physical Actions* and *Active Analysis*) in the third iteration of practice as the work shifted to explore dialogue and how character is created *through* relationships (Merlin 2007: 207-211).[8] I also drew on elements of Stanislavsky's writing on

[7] Describing the work undertaken in answering the six questions should clarify this point. The first three questions provide an opportunity for the actor to drill deep into the text. The Who? When? and Where? questions facilitate an exploration of the text on micro and macro levels, highlighting the clues that the author leaves within the story and illuminating those queries that remain unanswered. In this way, answering the six questions exposes the world of the play and the character's function within it. Merlin argues that there is a 'psychological dimension to *Where?*: Am I on the periphery of the play's action or at the centre? Am I one of the key players in the drama or am I a supporting participant?' (2007: 102). Accordingly, answering the questions facilitates the actor's ability to read a text closely, but also engages their imagination. For what the actor cannot find out from the text she must search for elsewhere – whether this be through researching the life of the author for clues, or exploring the historical context. Furthermore, if these options fail the actor, it is her own imagination that must provide the answers. When the actor is confronted with the gaps in the author's story, she is compelled to action and must make a choice based on Stanislavsky's *magic if*. What would I do if I found myself in this situation? In this way, the six questions exemplify Stanislavsky's commitment to the actor's creativity, they demand the use of the actor's imagination and allow the actor to shape and influence the development of the performed role.

[8] It is Merlin's adaptation of Stanislavsky's *silent étude* that I have used throughout my practice, and I will discuss my incorporation of her *silent étude* in more detail in chapter five. The basic principle of the silent *étude* is to explore a scene through the relationship between the characters (and, indeed, the actors performing those roles) and to discover what is happening beneath the text – exploring subtext. Following Merlin's explication, the *étude* begins with two actors in a scene reading a scene and then putting their scripts aside. They should then stand opposite each other and they must make and maintain eye contact throughout the *étude* and should imagine a point of connection between them stretching from solar plexus to solar plexus. They should then move towards one another in a straight line until they make some form of contact. The moment of contact ends the *étude*. The *étude* is not prescriptive in terms of movement. The actor's movements should be guided

relaxation and exercises to develop the actors' concentration and imagination, for example *circles of attention* were used to support a psycho-physical approach to the actor's work (Stanislavsky 2008: 98). Stanislavsky's texts were supplemented with exercises from Benedetti's *Stanislavsky and the Actor*, Merlin's *Stanislavsky Toolkit* and Mitchell's *A Director's Craft*. Mitchell's 'Facts and Questions' exercise was used in conjunction with the six questions from the third iteration onwards, providing a succinct way of organising the information collected through the initial period of text analysis (Mitchell 2009: 11). It is to a more detailed analysis of the efficacy of applying these techniques in service of a postdramatic theatre-making practice and to staging character 'under erasure' that I will now turn.

Reflection and analysis: moments of character 'under erasure'

While the processes of critical reflection revealed that there were real problems in realising the potential identified in the theoretical analysis, the rehearsal and development period of each project nonetheless highlighted the possibilities that working with the 'system' might afford. Many of the exercises offered valuable evidence of the ways in which a character's presence depends on an ongoing interplay across the text and the actor's self. As the actors explored the texts to answer the six questions, examining the characters' respective worlds (when and where am I?) and identifying motivation and *subtext* (why am I doing this? and for what reason?), the relationship between the actors' selves and the author's text was revealed to be symbiotic. In the first project the short story posed as many questions about its central character, Yanshin as it answered and, as such, the actor, Luis and I took the story into our own hands, taking ownership of the process

by their understanding of the scene and the roles they are playing, but also, significantly, by the relationship with the actor standing opposite them. The *étude* demands that the actors really listen to one another, it is a way of establishing and exploring communication between the actors/characters and it incorporates Stanislavsky's ideas on *communion*, *radiation* and *grasp*. As Merlin describes 'In a SILENT ÉTUDE, you read every tiny detail of information that your partner gives you through their eyes, nostrils, eyebrows, breathing pattern, small step towards you, flinch away from you, tremor of the little finger, flutter of the left hand. It's a kind of litmus test of the scene, finding out exactly what's going on *between* two people - both actors and characters – and what's happening under the text' (2007: 284). It offers an effective route into a scene, releasing the actors from the anxiety of knowing their lines and allowing them to explore the relationships in the scene. For a fuller explanation of the exercise see Merlin's *Stanislavsky Toolkit* (2007: 408 - 411).

of character-creation. Similarly, Barker's monologue, in part due to its brevity, but also as a result of Barker's concise style, offered a skeleton sketch of a character– leaving plenty of work for the actor's imagination. The demands on the actors' imagination were stretched yet further working on Stein's *Counting Her Dresses*, a post-anthropocentric landscape within which it was impossible to piece together even the faintest semblance of a coherent identity, narrative or context. In this final instance the questions served to illuminate the gaps (of which they were many) and thus forced us to look elsewhere (for example, the historical context and biographical information) in order to build an understanding of the world she was depicting and the human subjects that might inhabit it. In this way, the material we gathered through working with the questions created patchwork portraits of the characters we encountered, who were then pieced together and completed, both physically and imaginatively, by the actors who explored them.

While there is little in this discussion that could not be gleaned from other accounts of the use of Stanislavsky's 'system', what is noteworthy is the extent to which working on a text in this way exposed the '/' that is central to Stanislavsky's concept of the actor in the role. As each of the actors strove to find themselves in the various roles, attempting to answer the question: 'What would *I* do in this particular set of circumstances?' the boundary between the actor's self (past, present and imagined future) and the author's role became increasingly porous. Not only did the actors navigate the shifts between both states with ease, but it was this very process of moving betwixt and between the text and their own selves that produced the most creative and compelling instances of character 'under erasure'. Furthermore, as we moved from the initial phase of text analysis up onto our feet, these patchwork characters emerged as fragmented, half-formed entities whose presence in the rehearsal room existed, again, betwixt and between the actors and the texts. The co-dependency of, and interplay between, the actor and text was foregrounded during these initial periods of analysis and Stanislavsky's 'system' offered numerous exercises which exposed the ways in which character appears on the threshold between the actor and the role, as the very '/' itself. In this way, throughout the early stages of each period of practice, the actors' work was often

characterised by a kind of spectrality and the actors' journeys towards the roles was typified by an endless slippage between actor and role that, at its most effective, appeared to generate a liminal effect.

While the instances prove too many to list in full, the following examples should provide an insight into how the 'system' produced this effect. In the first iteration we worked on a single action, exploring the opening and reading of a letter. We considered the context of the action (physical and psychological), explored the impact of the action on the actor's body and breath (experimenting with tension, posture, *tempo-rhythm* and *circles of attention*) and examined the actor's responses to the object itself (exploring smell, texture, colour and shape). We considered the character's emotional state, exploring the motivation for the action and what that might reveal about his relationship to the other characters. Working in detail on a single action allowed the actor to build layers of characterisation and, as those layers built, the actor's struggle to find the appropriate action, gesture, breath pattern *et cetera* emerged as a secondary narrative, alongside the character opening and reading the letter. Indeed, the actor's struggle to find the role, the missteps he made as he tried to connect to the role became as, if not more, compelling than the re-telling of a singular fictional moment. An example of this was the audio recording included in the performance-installation. The audio file recorded the actor's *internal monologue* as his character decided whether or not to open a letter not addressed to him. Through the exercise the actor slipped in and out of role as he found points of connection with the character's experience which, at other moments, he struggled to maintain. Played back alongside his live performance of the action, the recording allowed the audience to listen to this struggle at the same time as they watched him open the letter, fully 'in role'. In this way the actor's experience of working on a role was foregrounded and, the elision of the actor's performance of and work on a role produced, if only momentarily, an instance of character 'under erasure'. This instance, however fleeting, seemed to offer real potential for staging character 'under erasure', for developing moments of 'undecidability' whereby the distinction between the 'real' and the fictional might become increasingly blurred.

A further example from the second and third rehearsal processes supports this analysis. Exploring emotion as a route into character, we worked with breathing patterns, using observation exercises and then gestures, facial expressions and actions to stimulate an emotional response and finally drawing on analogous experiences from the actors' own lives. This work exemplified Stanislavsky's dual consciousness (for the actors were largely able to explore emotional states without succumbing to them), but also foregrounded the way in which 'character' shifts in and out of focus during the period of exploration and rehearsal. Observing the actors attempt to create a specific emotional state, I was acutely aware of both the actor at work and at the same time, caught glimpses of that second human subjectivity, the character he or she was working to conjure. Throughout the early stages of each iteration of practice, and before the actors' work on a role became too fixed, the 'system' appeared to perfectly illuminate the '/', the steady sway between actor and role, highlighting the extent to which character is far more a process than a product, contingent and relational rather than fixed, coherent and stable.

In addition to providing a tangible experience of the spectrality of Stanislavsky's 'third being', these early iterations provided an opportunity to explore how to harness this spectral quality to stage character 'under erasure'. The inclusion of material typically relegated to the rehearsal room or internalised by the actors in the performance offered a route into this, and all three iterations strove to find ways of re-presenting the text that might afford the actor's experience of working on the role parity with the performance of the role itself. While appendices I to III document the performance-installations in detail, it is worth noting that each used only limited excerpts from the text, included material external to the text but central to the actor's work on the role, and all the performance-installations were presented in the style of gallery exhibitions. The actors appeared on white plinths and were accompanied by projections, live feed or pre-recorded material, where the intention was to present 'character' as a relic, to be deconstructed through the context in which it was presented.

Although the initial rehearsal period of each iteration proved productive, mastering how to maintain the spectrality of the actors' work beyond the rehearsal room and into the context of the performance-installations was more problematic. With hindsight it is clear that the strategies I explored in each of the performance-installations largely failed in the attempt to stage character 'under erasure' and the characters that emerged remained overwhelmingly intact. Thus, through this early phase of practice it became clear that while these first three projects provided an affirmative answer to the first part of the research question (was it possible to use Stanislavsky's 'system' as a model for devising from text?), mastering *how* to use the 'system' to facilitate a devising practice that moved *beyond* naturalistic representation and staging character as coherent and unified proved significantly more elusive. Indeed, it was clear that herein lay the real work of the research. The task of applying Stanislavsky's rehearsal processes to expose the slippage between the actor and the role alongside the attempt to develop a postdramatic theatre-making practice that revealed the processual nature of the 'third being' and the disunified and fragmented nature of contemporary subjectivity was replete with challenges. It is to those challenges that I will now turn.

Reflection and analysis: obstacles, challenges and frustrations

The ways in which these early iterations of practice fell short of their stated intentions were revealing and produced useful insights into the research question. Although each iteration had attempted to destabilise the actor's performance of a role, I was struck by character's robust nature and by an audience's ability to read character into a single action, the exploration of an emotion or the relationship between bodies in space. Character appeared to survive each dramaturgical deconstruction unscathed as each performance of character read as a staged fictional construct, belonging to a mimetic world and engaged in some form of diegetic practice. I had failed to destabilise, or fragment dramatic character and the performance-installations fell short of staging human subjects as fractured, hybrid

entities, instead reinforcing a predominantly dramatic form of characterisation.[9] Reflecting on the performance-installations it was apparent that as the actor opened the letter in project one, or struggled to connect to the emotion as Barker's MAN, or as the women sat and talked together in project three, the audiences were being presented with something significantly more coherent, more logical, more *representative* than the 'vestigial entities' of the postdramatic stage (Karen Jürs-Munby 2013: 3). Furthermore, while those iterations of character had been characterised by Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing' in the earliest phase of rehearsal, they fell significantly short of Stanislavsky's fundamental demand for liveness and creativity in the moment of performance.

As such, the three performance-installations could neither be described as 'postdramatic' in their approach to staging human subjects nor did they effectively facilitate Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing'. Reflecting on these experiences I had to conclude that I had not yet understood *how* to apply a Stanislavskian approach to staging character 'under erasure', to disrupt or destabilise the representation of the human subject. My practice remained grounded in the dramatic form however much I attempted to expose the fractured or discontinuous experience of subjectivity that postdramatic theatre reflects. As a result, I began to consider whether it was possible that the parallels between Stanislavsky's 'third being' and postdrama's spectral subjectivities that seemed obvious in theoretical analysis would prove all too intangible in practice. Furthermore, might Stanislavsky's view of character at the centre of the dramatic landscape, be an insurmountable stumbling block to using the 'system' to develop a postdramatic theatre-making practice which characteristically decentres and destabilises subjectivity? This concern could, inevitably, only be addressed back in the rehearsal room. However, before I discuss

[9] In project one the actor presented a nineteenth-century male, middle character, reading a letter. While the 'story' of the performance-installation was fragmented, the actor remained engaged in the performance of mimetic action, which was given a context and emotional subtext (albeit unconventionally presented). In project two the performance-installation told the story of an actor rehearsing for a role. This narrative was presented through two alternative means - live performance and video projection, but a sense of character and of story pervaded each presentation. In the third project the two actors engaged in conversation were clearly performing roles. Their costumes indicated time and place and the emotional subtext of their speech revealed something of their story, however fragmented or partial that story might have been.

the iterations of practice that followed, it is worth probing a little deeper into the conclusions I reached during these initial phases of reflection and analysis.

In the first instance, it was clear that in projects one and two the attempts to destabilise character had largely been carried out through the dramaturgical composition of each piece and the deconstruction of character was *external* to the individual actor's performances.[10] As a result, and despite the intention to fracture the performance of character into component parts, character remained undisturbed at the centre of each performance-installation, with the actor's work in the role of Yanshin, and as an actor rehearsing the role of MAN retaining the qualities of Michael Kirby's 'complex acting' (2002: 45).[11] Furthermore, both

[10] The first performance-installation consisted of four identical white wooden blocks, upon which a different iteration of character was presented. The actor was seated on the first block, performing the action, in role. On the second, there were multiple projections of the same actor performing the same action in rehearsal. On the third, excerpts from the short story were projected, describing the setting and context for the action. The fourth provided headphones so the audience could listen to an audio recording of the actor working through the 'Internal Monologue' for the action and a laptop with a commentary on the rehearsal process. For a more detailed description see Appendix I. Each block offered an alternative presentation of character to that performed by the actor. Each was intended to reveal the ways and means through which character is constructed and thereby disrupt its performance. The second project attempted to deconstruct character externally by presenting the actor's work on a role and the performance of that role simultaneously across two spaces. The first space contained the actor working through a series of exercises to connect to an emotional state. This 'staged rehearsal' was filmed in tight close up and this image was projected onto the wall of an adjacent room – framed as the performance of the emotional state. The interaction between the two spaces and the two presentations of character was designed to problematize the status of both the 'rehearsal' and the 'performance' and in so doing undermine the notion as character as a fixed entity to be re-presented in performance. Notably, once again, the attempt to deconstruct character was external to the actor's performance.

[11] Kirby's analysis (as described in chapter two, page 86) provides a useful framework for reading the performances in performance-installations one and two, which despite the intention to isolate individual elements of the actor's work ultimately re-presented that work within a series of complex matrices. In project one, the performance of action was informed by emotional subtext, the actor was in costume which indicated both elements of characterisation and period and the extracts from Chekhov's original text indicated setting and place. Furthermore, the actor's actions were nuanced and motivated with clear intentions. In performance-installation two the matrices were once again strong. The actor's costume (as 'actor'), the presence of the acting coach leading him through the actions all served to reinforce the character of 'the actor' and although the actor was engaged in the simple task of completing an acting exercise, the framing of the action increased the complexity of the performance. As Kirby argues, 'the physical/informational context do the "acting".' (2002 46). While the intention of the practice was not to facilitate nonmatrixed performing, the intention to fragment the performance of character and to isolate elements of the actor's work went hand in hand with a desire to allow the actor not to represent, or to feign or impersonate (2002: 40). As a result, the complexity of the performances reinforced the sense that the actor's work remained resolutely tied to the principles of mimesis and imitation and thus failed to enable anything 'real' to happen on stage.

iterations had attempted to expose the interplay between the actor and the author's text by disrupting the relationship between rehearsal and performance, endeavouring to throw 'time out of joint', to allow for a come and go between the 'staged construct' of the role and '"real" contiguity' (Lehmann 2006: 103) with the actor's self in the present moment. Yet the proposed fluctuations between the past and the present iterations of character (in project one) and between rehearsal and performance (in project two), failed to offer any actual connection with a 'real' present. Indeed, in project one, the live element of the installation, the actor performing the action, was constrained by a pre-defined structure, the precise timing of which was dictated by the four additional elements that attempted to re-contextualise the work. In this way the actor's work on the role in the moment of performance was limited to repetition and representation. Moreover, the composition of the installation and the synchronisation of each representation of character within it denied the actor the possibility of responding to the present moment of live performance, in favour of repeating exactly what had been formulated in rehearsal. In this way, each representation of character was reduced to staged construct and the connection with the present reality was lost. Accordingly, the practice failed on two counts: meeting neither the demands of Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing' nor effectively staging subjectivity as discontinuous and performative.

Although the second iteration attempted to overcome this problem by presenting a live rehearsal, framing it within the context of a performance-installation and staging it in the presence of an audience undermined the reality status of the rehearsal and the practice confirmed Stephen Bottoms' contention that 'Placed within the frame of art, 'the "real" is always already representational, and the "self" always already a characterisation' (2009: 74). This framing of the 'real' rehearsal reconstituted it as a 'performance of a rehearsal' and, again, little space was left for the actor to respond to the 'here, today, now' (Stanislavsky 2010: 51) as he undertook exercises he had previously encountered throughout our rehearsal period. While the intention had been to reveal the actor's genuine struggle to connect to the character's emotional state, the performance-installation in fact

exhibited the actor engaged in re-presenting an actor's journey towards a role and the actor, 'Luis', therefore materialised as a fully-realised, coherent character. What is more, in its failure to enable the actor to make plausible adaptations, to really fully listen and respond to the experience of the present moment, the performance-installation encouraged a performance characterised by repetition. Thus, the possibility of connecting with the reality of the actor's work was, once again, lost. While the intention had been to facilitate a 'come and go' between the actor and the role, highlighting the relationship between the work undertaken in performing a role and the performance of that role itself, the 'real' actor engaged in the task of performing a role in fact read as as carefully constructed as the celluloid version projected in the adjacent room. I concluded, therefore, that I had once again failed effectively to facilitate either the actor's performance of character as a 'third being', or to create an opportunity for an effect of 'undecidability' and staging character 'under erasure' remained frustratingly out of reach.[12]

The third iteration of practice emerged in response to these frustrations and sought an alternative route into the problem, which was reflected in the choice of text. Gertrude Stein's play presented an opportunity to work with an apparently post-anthropocentric text, marking a significant move towards a more postdramatic form.[13] Stein's *Counting Her Dresses* enabled me to test the 'system' against a text

[12] It is perhaps worth noting that the actors I worked with throughout each of the projects had trained at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (MA Music Theatre, MA Acting for Stage and Screen) and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (BA Acting). While some had undertaken a three year acting course, others had completed a Master's degree and none of them had any significant experience of devising. While it is difficult to assess the extent to which their training background impacted upon the research projects, it is, perhaps, fair to suggest that while they were all more familiar with Stanislavskian techniques than with devising practices, none of them had undergone a comprehensively Stanislavskian training. Significantly, they were all also unfamiliar with postdramatic theatre. It would, perhaps, have been interesting to see how the projects might have developed with more rigorously trained classical actors or with students whose experience had been more weighted towards creating original work, to the practice of devising or, indeed, who had had more exposure to postdramatic theatre.

[13] Following Elinor Fuchs, Stein is a precursor for 'postmodern theater artists [who] hint at the possibility of a post-anthropocentric stage' (1996: 107) and, in his survey of postdramatic 'pre-histories', Hans-Thies Lehmann identifies Gertrude Stein as an 'ancestor of the contemporary theatre'. Lehmann locates her Landscape plays within a broader body of work by several early twentieth-century modern dramatists whose writing stands in marked contrast to the predominant naturalist aesthetic of the period (2006: 62). Through experimentation with form, Stein's work challenged the notion of psychologically realised character as a central signifying force and through

within which character had already been fragmented and as such had the potential to free the practice from the coherency of dramatic representation that had thus far adhered to all the presentations of character.[14] In addition, I hoped that working on this text would enable me to discover whether Stanislavsky's 'system' might anchor the actor's work when faced with an apparently character-less play. The overarching research question of course remained unchanged and the goal of the practice was to uncover how the 'system' might facilitate and foreground the actor's creativity and reveal the essential co-dependence of the actor's self and the author's role, thereby illuminating the potential parallels between the 'third being' and the possibility of staging character 'under erasure'.

Approaching Stein's play through Stanislavskian text analysis immediately demanded that the actors engage their imaginations and creativity. As we grappled with the text searching for meaning, the actors began to turn to their own selves, drawing on their imagination and personal experiences as they struggled to carve out roles from Stein's fragments. Accordingly, Stanislavsky's text analysis practices gave the actors something tangible to hold on to as they strove to decipher *subtext* and identify patterns and linguistic motifs. Yet the more we worked with these

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resisting the dramatic convention of character Stein's Landscape plays offered a shift in perspective that both Lehmann and Elinor Fuchs identify as exerting considerable influence on postmodern and postdramatic performance-making practices.

[14] In Stein's play character manifests in fragments: 'You' and 'I' remain. There are intimations of people and places and time, of the who, where and when of Stanislavsky's questions. There is 'English', 'London', there are 'vests' and 'dresses' and 'roads' and 'men' and 'tomorrow'. But Stein's language acquires a lightness, a superficiality as words are disentangled from the logic and sequence of meaningful sentence construction. The lines echo experiences of lived life yet resist coherent comprehension. The traces of character that we uncovered through text analysis were inconsistent, unpredictable and incomplete. In the play each line is separated into its own ACT, ACTs are amalgamated into numerous PARTs, into distinct periods of time, suggesting perhaps even the passage of time between words spoken and the play reads as a blueprint for a drama yet to be written. Stein unnerves the reader with the speed with which she shifts time, place and perspective, resolutely abandoning the principles of logic and sequence and unity of action, plot and characterisation (principles to which the actor might initially cling in a first reading). Language is crafted, it appears, to withstand such resolution, creating, instead a drama in which structure, form and the artifice of language takes centre stage. Form becomes content, and the representation of lived reality explored through the lens of human identity is relegated from its central position. In re-positioning character thus, Stein produces a shift in perspective that resists the three-dimensional realisation of the dramatic text. Through 'flattening' the component parts she writes a two-dimensional drama that begins the process of deconstructing psychologically real characterisation, prefiguring postdramatic performance practices.

techniques, the further away we moved from Stein's playful meditation on form and language; the more we began to impose characterisation and meaning on a play that is designed to resist them. Although the 'system' enabled the actors to find a route into an unwieldy text, it rendered that text more distant, more impenetrable. By imposing characters onto the text we were working against Stein's intentions, reshaping her experimental practice and creating a performance that, ultimately, bore very little resemblance to the original play. Moreover, as we struggled through the rehearsal process, we found ourselves relying on an exploration of the actors' lives to facilitate the staging of character 'under erasure', thus engaging with and producing the very psychological characterisation that *Counting Her Dresses* resists.[15]

As a result, the actors' work in the final presentation was once again, defined by the performance of coherent character. While ungrounded in a clear narrative arc, and drawing on the actors' own personal experiences to create a slippage between actors and text, character nonetheless emerged through the postures and gestures of the actors' bodies, the tone and timbre of their voices and the emotional subtext of their delivery, which was, in turn, informed by the actors' personal histories, rather than a genuine engagement with Stein's play. While we had intended to use Stein's exploration of dramatic form and structure to illuminate the form and structure of character, the realisation of that ambition had become highly problematic. For although the lines delivered by the actors shifted between Stein's text and the recounted stories from their own lives (thereby replicating the all-important interplay between actor and role and undermining any sense of

[15] We began by working on working to the six questions – trying to build a picture of the world of the play and its possible inhabitants. We also attempted to find a route through the dialogue, allocating lines to the actors and exploring *subtext* or status that might be revealed through alternative ways of dividing the lines. Gradually, we started to identify *objectives* and *counter-objectives* and it was at this point that we began to draw on the actors' personal experiences, looking for moments in their lives that they might connect to the apparent experiences of the characters who were emerging from Stein's play. We used Katie Mitchell's 'Emotion' exercise to identify analogous experiences that the actors could use as a basis for exploring how an emotional response impacts on the body (see Mitchell 2009: 154-156). The stories that the actors recounted basis of the material that was incorporated into the final presentation, becoming an integral part of the script which attempted to reveal the interplay between the actor and the role by mirroring those shifts in its own shifts between the two landscapes (that of Stein's play and the stories of the actors).

conventional narrative) their performances emerged as three-dimensional, cogent subjectivities. And although the performance-installation resisted coherent storytelling we had, in fact, crafted three-dimensional, naturalistic dramatic characterisations out of Stein's two-dimensional landscape. While these characters existed outside of a conventional narrative structure, our determination to work with *logic and sequence* (Stanislavsky 2008: 271) in our analysis of both the text and of the actors' personal narratives had created a performance which resisted the multiplicity of meaning that Stein's play embraces and that rendered the shifts between the actor and the role imperceptible to an audience. Stein's attention to detail, her ability to focus in on the minutiae of life, the fragmented marks of communication that constitute the component parts of her drama had been submerged in a form of dramatic characterisation and were ultimately represented in a naturalistic style.

5.3 Conclusion

While the tenor of these reflections has been coloured by frustration and failure, each project contained at least one experience that reinforced my conviction that Stanislavsky's 'system' *could* be used to expose the interplay between the actor and the role, between fiction and reality at the heart of the actor's work and that might be harnessed to serve a postdramatic theatre-making practice. Thus, this initial phase served not only to shine light on the pitfalls, but also to unearth the seeds from which the practice might develop. In project one, for example, listening to the audio recording of the actor's work on the character's *internal monologue* as he struggled to identify his emotional journey through opening the letter, while the actor performed that very action, appeared to allow something 'real' to break through and momentarily disrupt the unity of characterisation. Here, it seemed, was a way of redirecting the audience's eye to consider *who* was really being presented. Similarly, the actor's presence, the sense of a man at work in the performance of a task, broke through momentarily in the second performance-installation. As the actor struggled to focus on the task at hand, his eye continually drawn back to the audience, his self-consciousness, his awareness of the audience was magnified in close-up in the fifteen-foot projection. While his role as the 'actor'

had become fictionalised within the context of the performance-event, the moments when he glanced self-consciously towards the audience revealed a palpable anxiety that offered the promise of '"real" contiguity' (Lehmann 2006: 103).

Finally, in project three, the opening *silent étude* offered a moment of actual live interaction between two people. Before either actor spoke, the audience witnessed a genuine connection between two actors who were committed to being in the 'here, today, now'. They held each other in 'continuous grip' (Stanislavsky 2008: 251) and the audience witnessed a moment of real communication. Most significantly, this was a moment in which they were neither totally in role, nor out of it, but during which, through the 'art of experiencing' they appeared to embody the 'new creation' and to offer a glimpse into the possibility of character 'under erasure'. While the third project was characterised by overwhelming frustration at having reached another dead end, this single moment offered an instance of exactly what I was really interested in capturing. It seemed to embody the sense of character 'under erasure' and the possibility of staging uncertainty, illuminating the liminal threshold that throws not only time, but character 'out of joint'. In asking the actors to 'take the temperature of the room', to engage with their own emotional state, whatever that might be and however that might relate to their character, to respond to what was happening 'here, today, now' enabled them to produce a moment of palpable liminality – an instance of genuine improvisation, when it was not clear to the audience exactly who or what they were watching.

Accordingly, the first three projects provided ample opportunity for learning. It was during this period that the intentions of the research project were clarified and that my understanding of the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' and of the potential difficulties inherent to developing a postdramatic theatre of character was strengthened. Through these early iterations of practice, I became aware of the extent to which isolating character from its natural habitat (of theatre-making) was problematic in its decontextualization of the actor's work. I also became conscious of the extent to which Stanislavsky's 'system' is grounded in an approach to

theatre-making that places the human being at the centre of the theatrical project – a view undoubtedly at odds with postdramatic theatre's decentring of the dehumanised figure. The next phase was underpinned, therefore, by an awareness that in re-positioning character at the centre of the theatre-making practice I might undermine the attempt to problematize the notion of dramatic 'character' as a coherent, stable, self-determining agent of action. Indeed, at this stage, I had to confront the possibility that the proposal for a postdramatic theatre of character might, in fact, be a contradiction in terms, a paradoxical impossibility. In order to answer this question I turned back to Chekhov and began work on devising from *The Seagull,* on a new project: *The Seagull, Or Why Masha Always Wears Black*.

Chapter six – practice project four, *The Seagull, or Why Masha Always Wears Black*

> *Smoke a cigar or drink a glass of vodka and you're no longer you – you're you plus someone else. The self grows blurred, and you start to see yourself as a third person – not as 'I' but as 'he'.*
>
> *Dorn, Act II,* The Seagull (1991: 81)

> *It is apparent that the decline of the dramatic is by no means synonymous with the decline of the theatrical. On the contrary: theatricalization permeates the entire social life, starting with the individual attempts to produce or feign a* public self *– the cult of self-presentation…*
>
> *Hans-Thies Lehmann*, Postdramatic Theatre (2006: 183)

6.1 Introduction

Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*

The third iteration of practice began with Masha from *The Seagull*. I returned to Chekhov because, as discussed in chapter one, there are self-evident advantages to taking a Stanislavskian approach to Chekhov as Stanislavsky's 'system' emerged, at least in part, in response to the challenge of staging his plays and they therefore offer a natural habitat within which to put the 'system' to work, albeit to new end. More importantly, however, while Chekhov's four major plays are characteristic of, and were indeed formative for, the realism and Naturalism that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, they also anticipate some of the themes and stylistic innovations associated with the mid-twentieth century modern avant-garde. As the first of the four major works, *The Seagull*, sits at a particularly interesting intersection between different dramatic forms and styles. It contains elements of nineteenth-century melodrama, while also exemplifying the burgeoning Naturalism and realism of the turn of the century and prefiguring the turn to stasis, meta-theatricality and intertextuality characteristic of mid-twentieth century drama and of some postmodern and postdramatic theatre.[1]

[1] The devising process used Michael Frayn's translation of *The Seagull,* in Chekhov, trans. Frayn, *Plays* (1991).

The Seagull is a meta-theatrical play and the circularity of action and Chekhov's use of parody and intertextuality in his interrogation of the relationship between art and life and the failure of representation, anticipates not only the work of, for example, Luigi Pirandello and Samuel Beckett, but also postmodernism's self-reflexive gaze and poststructuralism's deconstructions of essentialist ontology.[2] Through satirizing the conventions of nineteenth-century melodrama and, indeed, undermining the principles of dramatic action more broadly, Chekhov prefigures postmodernism's turn back upon itself that ultimately radically reconfigured the dramatic model in postdramatic theatre.[3] While these parallels remain largely thematic, they are nonetheless significant. For instance, postdrama's interest in the cult of self-presentation (articulated in Lehmann via Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*) is a recurrent motif in *The Seagull*. It is a play populated by characters whose self-presentation relies on the artifice of art and literature and through which the concept of an authentic 'self' is effectively denied. Chekhov drives this message home through the central metaphor of the stuffed seagull, exposing the representation of life in art as destructive and macabre. In its exploration of the relationship between identity and performance, *The Seagull* thus offered rich pickings for examining that relationship and indeed, the principal preoccupation of this research: the actor's work on the role. Accordingly, Stanislavsky's 'third being' and the destabilised, disunified 'multiply-mediatized' ontology that I contend is

[2] See Carol Strongin's article 'Irony and Theatricality in Chekhov's "The Seagull"' for a comprehensive account of the intertextual references and a persuasive analysis of the play's parodic nature. Beyond the references to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Strongin identifies references to Maupassant *On the Wate*r, Pushkin's *The River Nymph* and Turgenev's *Rudin*. Significantly, she argues that these references are deployed by the characters, informing their own self-presentation and shaping the action. Furthermore, she argues for the essentially ironic nature of the play, for in the presentation of the apparently tragic lives of these characters, '…Chekhov may be pointing to the possibility that much of his characters' suffering is not so much authentically felt as it is acted, or when it is felt, is continually projected in self-consciously theatrical terms that make the sufferer both the performer of and the audience to his or her own suffering' (Strongin: 1981-2: 369).
In his introduction to *The Seagull* Michael Frayn argues that the play offers 'a critical survey' of 'The traditional function of literature in general, and of drama in particular' and that 'The extraordinary trick of the play is that all around the two writers we see the very life that they are failing to capture' (in Chekhov 1991: xxxix).

[3] It is perhaps the static nature of Chekhov's drama that most clearly exemplifies his radical reconfiguration of dramatic principles, a reconfiguration Strongin suggests Chekhov acknowledged: 'As Chekhov himself said of *The Sea Gull*, 'I began it *forte* and I ended it *pianissimo* – contrary to all the rules of dramatic art'' (1981-2: 379).

central to postdramatic theatre's depiction of the human subject, appear to find common ground here, not least in the character of Masha.

Masha

For Debord's analysis of the late twentieth-century 'cult of self-presentation and self-revelation' (2006: 183), the retreat into spectacle, the reduction of social interaction to that mediated by and through the image cited in Lehmann, offers a critical lens through which to read the character of Masha. Lehmann paraphrases Debord's contention that the theatricalization of reality leads to a disconnection between image and meaning, arguing that, 'the bond between perception and action, receiving message and 'answerability' is dissolved. We find ourselves *in* a spectacle in which we can only *look on* – bad traditional theatre' (2006: 184). It is this 'bad traditional theatre' that Masha, in her mourning costume, with her melodramatic proclamations (which are themselves quotations) exemplifies. The way in which Masha performs her 'self' offers resonances with Lehmann's analysis of the theatricalization of the 'self', and the extent to which the 'society of the spectacle' problematises the possibility of authentic experience and undermines effective communication.[4] For Masha's performance of 'self' is characterised by failure. The act of communication fails for Masha, as she is rendered seemingly invisible to those who encounter her. Upon examining her reception in the play, her reality appears to have dissolved into a spectacle of self-presentation, a spectacle from which almost all the other characters keep their (emotional) distance.[5]

[4] It is worth noting that Masha's performance of self is meta-theatrical, rather than the 'extreme' meta-theatre of postdramatic theatre. For although I contend that 'Masha' is a citational character, who continually presents and re-presents her 'self' through various performative elements (such as costuming and literary quotation) the performance of her 'self' does not lead to a meta-theatricality in which it becomes genuinely difficult to distinguish between the 'real' and the 'performed' ; we understand that the character of Masha is a fiction and the meta-theatricality here plays with layers of fictionality, rather than destabilising the very status of Chekhov's play.

[5] Emotions are writ large if they are to have any impact in *The Seagull*, but even Masha's most explicit declarations of unhappiness are routinely ignored by the other characters. Chekhov highlights the dissonance between Masha's self-presentation and the reception of that 'self' at the very start of the play. Act One opens as Medvedenko questions Masha's decision to 'always wear black', to which she replies, 'I'm in mourning for my life. I'm unhappy' (1991: 59). While Medvedenko does not dismiss her unhappiness outright (as Dorn will later in the act), he treats it as superficial, a surface unhappiness for which he can see no good root cause. His response suggests that Masha's 'performance' of unhappiness is unsuccessful. She is unconvincing in her role and the outward expression of her inner self fails. This lack of perceived credibility typifies most of the other

Furthermore, Masha is revealed to be acutely aware of this failure when she offers herself as a ready-made character for one of Trigorin's stories.[6] While this does not suggest the extreme meta-theatre of postdrama, it certainly offers a point of contact between the ambiguously Naturalist drama of *The Seagull* and postdrama's engagement with the inauthenticity of experience and performative nature of human subjectivity in the late twentieth century. Furthermore, the intertextual nature of Masha's self-presentation illuminates the extent to which, in adopting a series of roles for an audience, parodying her own unhappiness, she emerges much like Stanislavsky's 'new creation', at the intersection between 'self' and, in this instance, myriad, textual roles. Thus, I propose that Chekhov's construction of Masha prefigures postmodernism's, or indeed postdramatic theatre's foreclosure on the human subject as a cogent, unified, agent of action and Masha emerges as a character who is already under partial deconstruction. Accordingly, Masha appeared to offer an ideal opportunity to explore how Stanislavsky's 'system' can be applied to staging character 'under erasure'.

Aims and intentions

My intention was to explore the interplay at the heart of the actor's work on a role, the spectral 'come and go' fundamental to both the 'third being' and postdramatic theatre through the character of Masha. Working with Masha, however, also fulfilled a secondary intention. As the work shifted to theatre-making, I reflected on

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characters' responses to Masha, for whom she appears to offer only a spectacle of unhappiness, performing the 'bad traditional theatre', which ceases to elicit any real emotional affect. This is exemplified at the end of Act One when Masha asks Dorn for help and appears to threaten suicide. Dorn (notably a doctor and, we assume, her biological father) dismisses the seriousness of her distress and refuses her request for help (1991: 77). Similarly, in Act Two when she confesses to Arkadina and Dorn that she often has 'no desire to go on living', Arkadina ignores her as she continues to expound upon the necessity of taking care of one's appearance, bringing the conversation back to herself. Furthermore, when Sorin briefly draws attention to Masha's unhappiness later in the scene, his momentary concern for her is dismissed out of hand by Dorn (1991: 78 and 81). Dorn's ability to gloss over Masha's unhappiness with platitudes, her apparent invisibility for the likes of both Arkadina and Konstantin and Medvedenko's inability to understand her unhappiness, all underline a failure of expression, her performance of her unhappiness lacks depth and credibility, however real it may or may not be.

[6] In conversation with Trigorin at the start of Act Three, as she declares her intention to marry Medvedenko she says: 'I'm telling you all this because you're a writer. You can use it in something' (1991: 92). Masha reveals that she understands that an artistic re-presentation of herself has greater potential for *affect* than she can hope to have in real life; she understands that the currency of *The Seagull* is fame and artistic success.

my intentions, considering the 'why' and 'for what reason' of my practice and it was during this fourth project that I began to grapple with how staging character 'under erasure' might enable me to explore the experience of subjectivity as fractured, destabilised and marginalised and the character of Masha provided ample opportunity for this. Masha's position as doubly marginalised by her gender and her class is mirrored in her minor textual presence in Chekhov's play. The decision to extract Masha and her story from the text, placing her at the centre of both the devising practice and of the performance, was informed by an intention to foreground Masha's story and to examine that experience of marginalisation more closely.

The analysis that follows charts the development of my practice as a theatre-maker, exploring the extent to which the project met the proposed intentions. In assessing the efficacy of applying Stanislavsky's 'system' as a model for devising a postdramatic theatre of character, it is necessary to consider the extent to which I was able to stage character in ways that foreclose a liberal humanist model of subjectivity and, in this instance, to expose the marginalised and contingent reality of Masha's sense of self. Thus, over the course of this chapter I offer a first-hand account of how the 'system' was put to work, exploring how it was applied as a model for devising and staging character 'under erasure' within the context of a theatre-making practice. Furthermore, through an analysis of the performance of the devised play, I examine the impact of applying Stanislavsky's 'system' to a postdramatic theatre-making practice and assess the implications for creating a postdramatic theatre of character, albeit 'under erasure'.

6.2 Devising from text: rehearsal and development

The *supertask*

Aware of the ways in which the previous iterations of practice had failed to realise the potential identified in the theoretical analysis, I was mindful of Lehmann's assertion that the postdramatic is not 'simply a matter of broken dramatic illusion or epicizing distance' (2006: 34) and of the fact that it was possible to employ

postdramatic 'conventions' without effectively deconstructing the performance of character. In order to avoid the pitfalls of the previous projects, I tried to identify a clear and compelling *supertask* (2008: 307).[7] While Stanislavsky uses the *supertask* to elicit an overarching idea driving the play, I articulated my own *supertask* at the start of the devising process. While it took into account some of the thematic concerns of Chekhov's play, it primarily clarified *my* artistic intentions, what I wanted to communicate to the audience in performance. Accordingly, I identified the following: *I want to reveal the oscillations between the actor and the role that are fundamental to the performance of a character and use those oscillations to explore Masha's marginalised subjectivity in* The Seagull.[8]

Articulating the *super-task* forced me to distil my intentions into a single idea that I could communicate clearly to the actors and that would also function as a benchmark against which to measure the day-to-day work of rehearsals. It offered the actors a clear route into the devising process, a centre to return to after the freedom (and chaos) of improvising. Furthermore, using the *supertask* to articulate, rather than identify, the overarching artistic intention, provided me with a shortcut back into the theoretical case, directing me to the 'undecidability' fundamental to both postdrama and Stanislavsky's 'third being', to the spectral quality of the actor's work on a role and to Masha's *hauntological* status.

[7] Stanislavsky identifies the *supertask* as the 'basic goal which caused the writer to write and the actor to act in' a play (2008: 306). As the 'fundamental goal, which draws together each and every Task,' stimulating 'the creative efforts of the inner drives and the Elements that comprise the creative state of the actor-role' (2008: 307) it functions to facilitate the actor's understanding of the author's intention and to awaken the actor's creative response to the drama. The *supertask* enables the creation of the "life of the human spirit" of a role and evokes 'genuine, living, human, direct experiencing' (2008: 313, 308). Used with the *through-line of action*, which 'brings everything together, strings all the elements together, like a thread through unconnected beads and points them all toward the common *Super-task*,' these two elements form a backbone for the 'system'. Indeed, Stanislavsky contends that 'There is no "system" without them' (2008: 313).

[8] The *supertask* is articulated in the same form as a *task* (or *objective*) within a unit of action, with an emphasis on establishing a task that the actor is able to actively pursue throughout the course of the performance.

Cindy Sherman

Before embarking on the process of rehearsal and development, and in addition to the preparatory work undertaken on *The Seagull*, I identified a set of stimuli that helped frame the practice and offered reference points for thinking through how we might fulfil the *supertask*. I found this in a series of photographs by Cindy Sherman; *Untitled Film Stills* #1- #63 (1977-80), *Rear Screen Projections* # 66 - #79 (1980) and *Centrefolds/Horizontals #85 - #96* (1982). In these images Sherman plays different characters in different *mise-en-scènes*. The first series recalls the film sets of mid-twentieth century Hollywood, the second sees the figure super-imposed against projected, cinematic backdrops and the third are close-up 'large-format images…[that] evoke the double-page spreads of fashion or "adult" magazines' (Durand 2006: 248). Many of the photographs depict women mid-action, isolated from the wider context, in a state of anticipation, anxiety even, often looking out to an unidentified other, always out of shot. All are sub-textually rich, implying narrative, action and characterisation beyond that which can be revealed in a single frame, and most significantly, they produce, in the viewer, a sense of familiarity and recognition. This sense of recognition is, however, consistently undermined. For while they recall images that are part of a shared cultural narrative of female representation, none are, in fact, reconstructions of pre-existing images. Laura Mulvey identifies this quality in the first series describing how the allusions are 'highly connotative but elusive', arguing that because the reference points are purposefully unidentifiable they evoke 'the past while denying the reference to history' (Mulvey 2006: 287). The elusive historical referencing both convinces the viewer of their status, enabling the images to pass as genuine film stills, or magazine pull-outs, while simultaneously undermining their own credibility.

The slipperiness of the images' status, their de-historicization, produces an Uncanny effect which enables Sherman to destabilise representations of female subjectivity.[9] Isolated from a contextual narrative, each woman seemingly stranded

[9] In his essay on 'The Uncanny' Freud theorises experiences of popular culture that we find unsettling, frightening and eerie. He describes the ways in which they produce an 'uncanny' effect. Exploring the etymology of the term uncanny or 'unhomely' - '*Unheimlich*', and its relationship to its

within the *mise-en-scène*, Sherman encourages the viewer to look again and reconsider the apparently archetypal depictions. As Mulvey argues, 'her representations of femininity were not a return, but a re-representation, a making-strange' (2006: 286). Characterised by liminality, the viewer is encouraged to reconsider not only the images themselves, but those that they recall. Furthermore, as undercurrents of melancholy and fear, even threat and imminent peril, are evoked, Sherman's 'connotative' referencing illuminates the pervasive narrative of victimhood and otherness central to the depiction of female subjectivity in film. The centrality of the Uncanny effect, and this ability to destabilise the models of representation the images appear to replicate, resonated with Derrida's 'spectre' and accordingly offered a potential way into staging Masha 'under erasure'. Pursuing the production of a liminal effect a little further, should illuminate the extent to which Sherman's images offered a crucial starting point.

There are significant parallels between Derrida's 'spectre' and Sigmund Freud's articulation of the Uncanny, the *Unheimliche.* Indeed, Derrida explicitly draws on the *Unheimliche* in *Spectres of Marx*, concluding that 'The subtitle of this address could thus have been: "Marx – *das Unheimliche*" (2006: 219). Derrida's 'spectre' is characterised by the experience of liminality and dislocation manifested in Freud's *Unheimliche*, and it is the ability to destabilise 'permanently, and in a more or less subterranean fashion, the order of conceptual distinctions' (2006: 218-9) that is the distinctive feature of both Derrida's 'spectre' and the Uncanny. Accordingly, the Uncanny effect articulated by Freud, and conjured in Sherman's images resonated

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counterpart, 'homely' or *Heimlich*, Freud argues that the '*Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of the *Heimlich*' (1998: 157). In the first part of his essay Freud re-reads Hoffman's story of 'The Sand Man' as exemplary of the *Unheimlich*, arguing that the fear of losing one's eyes (the threat that the Sand Man poses to the small child) represents, in psychoanalytic terms, a fear of castration; a fear that is long repressed in the development of the human psyche, but with which with the human psyche is, ultimately, familiar. Freud argues that 'uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression' (1998: 166). It is in this sense that 'The Sand Man' exemplifies the *Unheimlich*. Indeed, Freud's asserts that '…everything is *Unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but that has come to light' (1998: 156) and it is this re-emergence, this repetition of a long-repressed fear that produces the *Unheimlich*, that produces the unsettling, disorientating and unnerving experience of strangeness. Significantly, this strangeness is located, not within the extraordinary, or the extraordinarily *different*, but within the ordinary, within that with which we are most familiar.

with the intention to expose Masha's *hauntological* status. Indeed, Freud's exploration of the relationship between the term *Unheimlich* and its counterpart *Heimlich* proved especially illuminating at the start of the practice. In his 1919 essay Freud concludes that:

> What interests us most…is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word *Heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite. What is *Heimlich* thus comes to be *Unheimlich*… In general we are reminded that the word *Heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, what which is concealed and kept out of sight. (1998: 156)

Freud's hypothesis here, that the *Unheimliche* emerges from the *Heimliche*, whereby the '*Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of the *Heimlich*' (1998: 157) strengthened my belief that character 'under erasure' might function as a 'sub-species' of dramatic character and that an Uncanny effect might be used to illuminate this. Moreover, Freud's assertion that '…everything is *Unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but that has come to light' (1998: 156) underpinned my intention to find a way of staging character that allowed the actor's self to 'interrupt' the performance of a role, to offer a return to the long-repressed, 'something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression' (1998: 166) – in this instance the audience's willing repression of the actor's 'self', and indeed, the actor's *work* on a role, as they read character in performance.[10] Accordingly, and viewed through the lens of Freud's Uncanny and Derrida's 'spectre', Sherman's interrogation of the construction of female subjectivity provided a powerful visual stimulus for thinking-through how to use the paraphernalia of dramatic character to reveal the performative nature of Masha's subjectivity. Here were a series of examples of the performance of character 'under erasure' that were dependent on the evocation of

[10] It is, perhaps, worth noting that in, for example, the work of the Method actor, the audience takes a particular pleasure in what appears to be the actor's repression of the 'self' as they embody the dramatic character in performance. Performances are praised for the extent to which the actor *becomes* the role, and the way in which the actor's performance of character so successfully represses the emergence of their 'real' self. We might, accordingly, describe these performances as 'uncanny' or *Unheimlich* in their lifelikeness and in the extent to which they repress the actor's self.

the practices of representation that they sought to destabilise, problematize and, ultimately reject.

Overview

Exploring Sherman's photographs was part of the pre-rehearsal period, during which I undertook preparatory work on the text. Using Stanislavsky's six questions and Mitchell's 'Facts and Questions Exercise' (2009: 11), I identified key *events* and motivations, allegiances and conflicts within them (Merlin 2007: 202). This work was supported by research into the historical, social and political context. The practice began, therefore, with a conventionally Stanislavskian approach, coupled with a continual return to the *supertask* of the project and to the additional stimuli. Throughout this period I also considered how the text might be deployed in performance to simultaneously construct and deconstruct the character of Masha, how it might be adapted to expose the *hauntological* nature of the actor's work on a role.

After the initial period of analysis, the devising process divided into three stages. The first stage focused on text analysis and research, working with the principal actor, Maria Teresa. We built a common understanding of where and when the play is set and of Masha's position within that landscape. We added to the arsenal of material that I had already gathered, and looked for points of connection between Masha and Maria Teresa – trying to identify a 'lure', or 'initial trigger into the role' (Merlin 2007: 40). The second stage moved the work onto its feet; we improvised around character and *events*, working through excerpts of key scenes and incorporating material gathered through the earlier research we had undertaken. The improvisations were built loosely around the structure of the *études* associated with *Active Analysis* and were framed within particular sets of *given circumstances*. At the heart of the improvisatory work was the desire to keep both Masha's story and her perspective on the action at the centre of the work, and to expose Maria Teresa's journey towards performing that role. Again, all the work was informed and underscored by the *supertask*, to expose the ongoing and continual oscillations between the actor and the role that were central to Stanislavsky's 'third being', to a

postdramatic theatre-making practice and to staging Masha's marginalised subjectivity.

While the process began with a single actor, additional actors were brought in to work on other roles as the piece developed. We cast a Medvedenko early on and, as the structure took shape, three additional actors came in to play the roles of Sorin, Konstantin, Dorn, Arkadina and Nina. The third and final stage of the process involved refining the improvisations and structuring the piece. Throughout the process the *supertask* drove the work and the *through action* arose from the choices we made in each rehearsal, as to how best to tell Masha's story, how to reveal the marginal nature of her identity and how to consciously expose the oscillations central to the actor's work on a role.[11] It was during this period that the hypothesis was once again really put to the test, not least because I was keenly aware that it had been when shifting gear from the experimental mode of rehearsal and devising into preparing to share the work with an audience, that previous iterations of practice had lost the very quality that I was trying to harness. Accordingly, throughout this stage I worked to avoid the hazards identified in previous practice, in fear of fixing anything too quickly, and determined to leave room for continual improvisation and *adaptations*, holding tightly to Stanislavsky's mantra, 'here, today, now' (2010: 51).[12]

Text analysis

Returning to the start of the process, the period of text analysis laid the foundations for the practical work to come. After a first reading, Maria Teresa and I repeated Mitchell's 'Facts and Questions' exercise, drawing on and adding to the material I had already gathered. We collated the information on poster-sized sheets

[11] Stanislavsky argues that the *through action* should be used in conjunction with the *supertask*, stating that it 'brings everything together, like a thread through unconnected beads and points them all toward the common Supertask' (2008: 312). Indeed, the *through action* represents 'all the Tasks and the short lines of life within the role [which] are directed, without exception, on one single direction – i.e. to the Supertask' (2008: 316).

[12] Merlin describes *adaptation* as 'a constant state of improvisation' through which the actor is able to adjust to the circumstances they find themselves in, in any given moment, on any given day, facilitating their ability to listen and respond on stage in the 'here, today, now' of performance (2007: 217-219).

of paper answering the first three of Stanislavsky's six questions. These provided the 'wallpaper' for our rehearsal room and became the basis of several improvisations.[13] We collated information for each character, fleshing out biographies and relationships and identifying a clear timeline of *events*.[14]
We honed in on the significant *events* in Masha's life and explored the play's structure.[15] Masha features in the opening scene of each Act, emphasising that, despite the lapses of time between the acts and the life changing events that occur within them (marriage and motherhood) little appears to change in either Masha's outlook or the day to day reality of her existence. This work deepened our understanding of the play but, more significantly, of Masha's role within it. Throughout this process her story was at the forefront of our minds, all the work undertaken was explored in relation to her. Accordingly, the final stage in the text analysis process focused on Masha's four scenes in the original play. Working loosely from the framework outlined in the 'mental reconnaissance' stage of *Active Analysis* (following Merlin), we looked at the *events* and action in each scene, identified Masha's aspirations (or *objectives*) and the characters who were allied with her, who attempted to undermine her, or were simply ambivalent towards her (Merlin 2007: 201 - 207). We explored *subtext*, teasing out the possible 'why' and

[13] From the first reading we read the play through Masha's eyes. We considered other characters in relation to Masha and how they impacted on her sense of "self". The sheets of wallpaper were titled: Masha, Medvedenko, Arkadina, Sorin, Dorn, Konstantin, Nina, Shamrayev and Polina.
[14] As an example, Masha's list read as follows: Masha wears black and has been wearing black for some time. Her father is not rich. She is the daughter of a farm manager. She is lower middle class. She takes snuff. She doesn't like her father. She feels fondly towards the doctor, with whom her mother is having a long-term affair. Dorn is her father. She is in love with Konstantin. Konstantin does not love her. She is twenty-two. She drinks vodka and brandy. She is often drunk. She takes snuff. She marries Medvedenko. She has a baby. They live with Medvedenko's family. There are seven of them in the house. She visits Nina when Nina returns in Act IV.
Some of the questions we answered were: How long has Masha been in love with Konstantin? Has Masha been to school? Has Masha ever attempted suicide? How old is the baby? What sex is the baby? When did Masha get married? Where does Masha do all day? What is Masha's relationship with Nina? How long has Masha been drinking and taking snuff? How long has she been wearing black? What kind of relationship does Masha have with the baby? What kind of relationship does she have with her mother and her father? Why does Masha confide in Trigorin? Why does Masha offer herself as a ready-made character to Trigorin? What will Masha do when Konstantin kills himself?
[15] Maria Knebel argues that the events provide the framework and structure for a play, that 'without a chain of events, dramas do not happen' (Thomas & Knebel 2016: 102). From early in the text analysis process it became apparent that the play really was the thing. Konstantin is at the centre of Masha's world and his theatrical debut was the *event* of greatest significance for Masha. It was around this event that the action of our story would hinge.

'for what reasons' of her actions and reactions, deepening our understanding of the *given circumstances* that Maria Teresa would have to find herself in.

Approaching the text from Masha's perspective facilitated the shift away from staging the play towards devising from text. Working through the six questions, the key *events* and Mitchell's 'Facts and Questions' exercise in relation to Masha demanded that we explore the role *beyond* its presentation in Chekhov's play. This work forced us to engage our imaginative and creative responses to Masha's story and it was in this period that we began to generate material for the improvised scenes. This phase was, therefore, crucial to developing the form and content of *The Seagull, or Why Masha Always Wears Black* and foregrounded the actor's creative response to the role. In this way the period of text analysis was used to move away from a strict adherence to the playwright's text. Chekhov's play was no longer sacrosanct, but instead, offered a palette of colours with which we might paint a new portrait of Masha. Furthermore, through this process we collated material that not only related to Masha, but that resonated with the *supertask*, for example, those lines that illuminate the meta-theatricality and intertextuality of the play.[16] It was this bank of material that we would draw on in the next stage of rehearsal and development and it is to this stage that I will now turn to in an analysis of our process of improvisation and *étude* work.

Improvisations and *études*

I will describe how an early improvisation led to the creation of the play's opening scene, and draw out the ways in which the structure we developed for working on that scene informed the whole devising process. In this way, I hope that this detailed analysis of a single scene will offer insight into the wider body of work. Furthermore, in describing the form of the improvisation, its relationship to the earlier text analysis phase and how it harnessed Stanislavsky's process of *Active*

[16] For example: 'When the curtain goes up, and there, in a room with three walls lit by artificial lighting because it is always evening, these great artists, these high priests in the temple of art, demonstrate how people eat and drink, how they love and walk about and wear their suits' (Konstantin, Act I: 1999: 63).

Analysis, I hope to illuminate how the 'system' was applied to deconstruct dramatic character.

Towards the end of the text analysis period, we returned to Stanislavsky's 'when' and 'where' questions. We revisited the images we had developed for Sorin's estate on the hot August evening when *The Seagull* opens and played with sound effects to mimic Stanislavsky's corncrakes and croaking frogs and for Yakov and his workmen as they build Konstantin's stage. These sound effects prompted the initial impulse for the first improvisation. Coupled with the intention to allow the audience to see events unfold through Masha's eyes, and simultaneously to begin with Maria Teresa, to chart *her* journey towards Masha, we began with the performance of Konstantin's play. Allowing Maria Teresa to create the setting for the play, inviting the audience to share in Konstantin's 'opening night' put Masha's story up front and centre, but also allowed us to expose the actor's work on a role, beginning with the *given circumstances* in which Maria Teresa had to find *herself* in preparing to play Masha. In this way, and following Lehmann's contention that postdramatic theatre:

> situates itself in a space opened up by Brechtian inquiries into the presence and consciousness of the process of representation within the represented and the inquiry into a new 'art of spectating'… (2006: 33)

we began by trying to expose the process and practices through which character is created *for* the audience.

Accordingly, in this first session I began by asking Maria Teresa to simply re-create Sorin's estate for the audience – at this point a video camera and me. She had the reference books we had been using for research, the play text, the poster-sheets, a list of quotations from the play, some furniture and the sound effects. Finding her feet, Maria Teresa stood centre stage and tentatively began. She said something like this:

> Well, we're in Russia. It is 1893 (we think) and we are on Sorin's estate. He is the landowner, and this is his farm. It's August, it's hot and it's twilight. Over

> there *(indicating stage right)* is a broad avenue of trees and a park and at the bottom of the park is the lake. The beautiful, wonderful lake. Across from the lake, on the other side, there are six other estates. Nina lives in that one over there *(indicating the far distance)*, she's coming here tonight….

And so, it went on. Maria Teresa described the landscape and the setting, moving the furniture to indicate the house, the veranda and the position of the lake and reading from one of the reference books to describe the fading grandeur of nineteenth-century Russian country-living. With the poster-sheets to prompt her she moved through the when? and where? of the opening Act, to introducing the who? Again, the improvisation went something like this:

> There is Sorin, who owns the estate, and Arkadina, his sister – she's an actress. And her lover, Trigorin, a famous writer. And her son, Konstantin, whose play we're seeing tonight. And then there's Dorn, the doctor, and my mum Polina and my Dad, Shamrayev who work for Sorin. Oh, then there's Medvedenko – he's the schoolteacher. And there's Masha.

This first iteration of what would become the play's opening monologue was rough around the edges. Despite the rehearsal context, Maria Teresa's anxiety was palpable; she had no lines, no clear arc, just an instruction to create the setting for an audience, to make something out of nothing and, simply, to be herself in the circumstances she found herself in; the 'here, today, now' of the present moment. As she began to speak, however, it became clear that she had plenty to fall back upon. The breadth and scope of our research and analysis had been wide ranging and Chekhov's landscape and his characters had filtered down into her psyche, ready to be recalled at a moment's notice.[17]

Maria Teresa's detailed knowledge of the world of the play and her willingness to embrace and adapt her own psycho-physical state to the particular *given circumstances* of the improvisation, exposed her uncertainty as she tried to work out where to 'place' the lake and the 'broad avenue of trees' and the occasional

[17] It is worth noting here that this first improvisation privileged Masha's narrative, but also Maria Teresa's response to Chekhov's text, placing Masha at the centre of the story and Maria Teresa at the centre of the creative process.

repetitions, or muddling and mispronunciation of characters' names combined to make the improvisation feel intuitive, inventive and 'alive'. Watching this first improvisation it was clear that while the content of Maria Teresa's speech focused on a particular place and time and the characters who inhabit it (thereby establishing Masha's *given circumstances*), what was most compelling was the secondary narrative of an actor *at work*, really responding and adapting to the 'here, today, now' she found herself in.[18] It was her endeavour to complete the task that held my attention and it was the moments when her ability to fulfil that task came into doubt, when she appeared to stumble, that her performance felt most 'alive' and that she seemed to embody Stanislavsky's sense of '"I am being"'. Accordingly, these moments offered a first clue as to how I might go on to use the *given circumstances* to expose the process of performing a role to the audience and, perhaps, even begin to explore the possibility of producing moments of '*undecidability*' (Lehmann 2006: 100).

However, although the oscillations between character and actor were frequent and produced a tangible 'liveness', I was conscious that this experience was common to the early stages of rehearsal when the actor grapples with the role before anything is set in stone. Furthermore, it is perhaps important to stress that these moments stopped short of producing a genuine experience of 'undecidability' - the delineation between the actor and the character remained clear. Rather, they represented the first step towards developing a working practice that might allow the actor to move between 'self' and 'role' and to highlight this transition. My hope was that this would lay the foundation for a practice grounded in the 'liveness' that is central to both Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing' and to much postdramatic theatre, and that if we could blur the line between the performance of the role and the actor at work, we might destabilise the audience's ability to distinguish between the two.

[18] This work resonated with Knebel and Merlin's discussions of the importance of working from the actor's 'own identity' (Knebel in Thomas & Knebel, 2016: 124) in an *Active Analysis étude*. Maria Teresa had not fixed 'how' to complete the task, but instead simply started from *herself*, adapting to the circumstances and the task, allowing herself to 'go with it and turn it into something unexpected and creative' (Merlin 2007: 219).

Working on this opening scene offered a blueprint for the rest of the devising process. It established a mode of working that enabled the actor to shift between foregrounding the role and exposing the process through which she was creating the role, but it also built in some notable limitations. Indeed, the delineation between the actor and the role and the linearity of the first scene, which established the dual narrative of Maria Teresa's journey towards the role of Masha, and Masha's attempt to return to the main *event* in *The Seagull*, Konstantin's play, framed the work within a clear linear narrative. This linearity ultimately undermined the destabilization of the actor/role relationship, as did the decision to start with Maria Teresa as herself in the *given circumstances* of the rehearsal room/performance space, and end with the 'transformation' into role complete, presenting Maria Teresa in Masha's circumstances at the end of Chekhov's play. Although the intention was to move continuously from 'actor' to 'character', disrupting that transition and while, as I will argue in the following analysis, there were moments in which those transitions facilitated a degree of uncertainty, with hindsight it is clear that the linearity of that transition, from 'Maria Teresa' to 'Masha', adversely impacted our ability to destabilise the performance of character, or to create real uncertainty for the audience.

Nonetheless, after developing this first scene we had established a working model for the practice. We had established that Konstantin's play was the key *event* (for both Masha and Maria Teresa), and that Masha's relationships with Medvedenko, Konstantin and Dorn were the most significant. From this starting point we devised four scenes.[19] Throughout this process we loosely followed Merlin's framework for

[19] Scene 1: Maria Teresa transforms the space into the park on Sorin's estate with the help of an actor planted in the audience and brought on stage. She then introduces the characters in Chekhov's play. By the end of the scene she has begun to act in the *given circumstances* Masha finds herself in at the start of Act I of *The Seagull.*
Scene 2: Maria Teresa/Masha finds a Medvedenko and then a Konstantin in the audience (both actors planted in the audience), she helps them transform into character and attempts to stage the opening scene from *The Seagull* and set up the stage for Konstantin's play.
Scene 3: Maria Teresa/Masha and Audience member 2/Medvedenko invite other, genuine, audience members onto the stage to represent the remaining characters required for Act I. Audience member 1 and a fourth audience member (who is actually a plant) are seated at the tech desk and they voice

Active Analysis as a structure for developing and shaping each improvisation. Merlin suggests the following format:

1. Read a scene
2. Discuss the scene
3. Improvise the scene
4. Discuss the improvisation and return to the script
5. Compare what happened in the improv to the words and incidents of the actual text

(2007: 197)

While this format provided a structure for the practice, it is important to qualify the ways in which our process diverged from it. Firstly, stage 1 'Read the scene' was interpreted loosely. While scenes two, three and four hinged on extracts from Act I and therefore our work followed the *Active Analysis* structure more closely, scene one was constructed from the material drawing from our text analysis notes answering the fundamental questions, and from the wider contextual research.[20] Furthermore, each of the scenes incorporated material from the other three acts and the extracts we used were cut and reshaped. Discussion of the scene was, therefore, replaced by discussion of the material. This phase did include, however, the identification of key actions and *events*, *objectives* and *counter-objectives*. Moreover, while this work sometimes related to the characters and the action of *The Seagull*, at others it related to the actions of conscripted 'audience members' who were brought into Maria Teresa/Masha's world to plays the additional roles as the improvisations progressed.[21] Stages 3 and 4 complied with Merlin's description,

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the remaining characters in the scene – speaking their lines into the microphones. Konstantin's play begins.
Scene 4: The play is a failure and Audience member 3/Konstantin leaves. They perform the end of Act I and Maria Teresa/Masha finishes telling Masha's story.

[20] It is worth articulating the difference between an *Active Analysis étude* and an improvisation. We used an *étude* structure when working on scenes in Chekhov's play, first reading the scene and then improvising it before returning to the scene and repeating the process. While in a conventional *étude* the final phase would take the actors back to the playwright's text we continued to work in the improvisatory phase and the initial *étude* offered a starting point for the development of a scene. The *étude* structure provided a practical approach to exploring the scene from which to develop a lengthier, more complex improvisation that might significantly diverge from the original play. In addition, further improvisations were set up that were not grounded in the original text and while they broadly followed the *Active Analysis* structure (as detailed above) they were not *études*.

[21] An analysis of the inclusion of 'audience members', who were in fact actors planted in the audience follows in section 6.4

although we returned to our own aims and intentions for each scene and the overarching *supertask* in stage 4, rather than to the script. Stage 5 was rendered null and void, with no script to return to.

While the *Active Analysis* structure provided a working-model for devising, it is notable that it was adapted and, significantly, in applying it to fundamentally different ends, it circumvented Stanislavsky's intention to serve the author's text, ignoring Knebel's assertion that, 'The director cannot allow an "approximate" vocabulary, verbal rubbish, or a tendency to be careless with the author's text' but must, instead, guide 'the actors towards unwavering verification' of it (in Thomas & Knebel 2016: 143). Indeed, it was through allowing the actors the freedom to stray from the writer's words, that we tried to reveal the ongoing shifts between the actor and the role that are central to the process of character-creation. Maria Teresa was encouraged to refine and rework her 'text' in rehearsal and in performance and we drew on Lee Strasberg's 'Speaking Out' exercise to enable her to express how *she* felt in the moment of performing the role, articulating her real response to the situation she found herself in.[22] This exercise became a key method for facilitating the actor's 'presence' in the moment of performance, allowing her personal response to the task at hand to interrupt and punctuate the performance of character.

Thus, the ways in which we adapted the model sought to facilitate a method for devising from text that both 're-represented' Masha and allowed us to expose the *actor* in the role. Staging character 'under erasure' became, in this practice, about finding a way to reveal the performance of character as a trick of the light – exposing the processes the actor undertakes, the oscillations between herself and the authorial role that produce an illusory, ghostly presence of an 'other',

[22] Lee Strasberg describes the practice of 'Speaking Out' as 'a procedure used both in rehearsal and in performance to get rid of impediments that stifle the actor' allowing the actor to express those 'impediments' that might take them out of the 'present moment' and away from the scene they are performing in (2010: 51 -2). While Strasberg emphasises that, 'In performance, obviously, Speaking Out is done as an inner monologue' (2010: 52), it became part of the fabric of the performance text in *The Seagull or Why Masha Always Wears Black*.

manifested in and through the actor's performance of her 'self' in the *given circumstances*. Fundamental to achieving this was the ability to retain the experience of liveness that, following Lehmann, highlights 'the provocative presence of the human being rather than the embodiment of a figure' (2006: 135) and that, I contend, resonates with Stanislavsky's '"I am being"' and the sense that real action is being undertaken in the here and now.[23] Furthermore, through attempting to harness this liveness, I hoped to blur the line between exactly who or what was being presented to the audience, Maria Teresa the actor, or Masha the character, again following Lehmann's assertion that:

> in the postdramatic theatre of the real the main point is not the assertion of the real as such but the unsettling that occurs through the *indecidability* whether one is dealing with fiction or reality. (2006: 101)

In this way, we tried to foreground the performative quality of Masha's self-presentation and problematise the audience's perception of what they were witnessing.

In addition, and again in an attempt to destabilise the audience's perception of what they were witnessing we tried to undermine the sense that this was a polished performance, instead attempting to expose it as a process, the completion of which depended on the audience's willing participation in it. This was crucial to our attempt to reduce the aesthetic distance between the actor and the audience, to reconfigure their perception of the theatrical event as no longer an '"objectively" appraisable work' but instead as 'a process between performers and audience' wherein the event itself 'depends on the experience of the participants…on a highly subjective and ephemeral reality compared to the

[23] Harnessing this liveness, this access to the 'here and now' of the actor trying to create something out of nothing, to build a set and establish a landscape for the audience, intended to facilitate the shift towards what Lehmann argues as the 'real of the theatre situation itself, i.e. on the process between stage and audience' (2006: 136). Accordingly, the piece began with relationship between the actor and the audience, attempting to live up to his contention that 'theatre has become an act/moment of communication' (2006: 137).

permanently fixed "work"' (Lehmann 2006: 136).[24] Throughout the devising process we used a range of strategies to achieve this. We left Maria Teresa the freedom to adapt the text and to allow her personal response to the task at hand to interrupt the performance of the role via the 'Speaking Out' exercise. In addition, she was given tasks that were difficult to fulfil without undermining her performance of the role, or that would prompt her to seek assistance from the audience. When these scenarios were played out in rehearsal, or when she simply misspoke, any mistakes that arose were noted down and then incorporated into the next iteration of the scene.

In this way the final performance 'text' incorporated lines from Chekhov's play, the re-representation of material from previous rehearsals (duly fictionalised by that re-representation) and moments of live improvisation. By interweaving this material, we attempted to blur the distinction between the pre-determined elements of the performance and the live interjections, the apparent 'irruption[s] of the real' (Lehmann 2006: 99), to create moments of doubt and 'undecidability' in order to undermine the audience's ability to distinguish fiction from reality. While this analysis offers only a brief insight into the devising process, read in conjunction with the script for the workshop-performance of *The Seagull, Or Why Masha Always Wears Black* in Appendix V and the analysis of that performance that follows, it should, nonetheless, illuminate how Stanislavsky's 'system' was put to work in service of staging a postdramatic theatre of character 'under erasure'.

6.3 Performance analysis

The actor's work on the role

In attempting to both construct and deconstruct the character of Masha and the concept of character, the opening scene attempted to adopt a postdramatic approach to staging the human subject from the start. While the content of the

[24] While no real audience members were, in fact, called up on stage to actually perform a role, the pretence intended to force those real audience members to consider what they *might* do if they were called upon, to make an imaginative leap and consider how they would respond in the *given circumstances* of performing a role.

monologue derived from a Stanislavskian approach to character-creation, the style and delivery (direct address that drew on the live interaction with an audience associated with stand-up comedy and with content often played for laughs) combined to undercut the predominantly naturalistic style of Chekhov's play.[25] Furthermore, while the material was drawn from a process of analysis that was faithful to his text, the re-configuration of that material and the privileging of Maria Teresa's relationship to it through the processes outlined above attempted to re-configure the play in favour of both Masha's story and the actor's response to it. Throughout the rehearsal and devising process, the contextual research and imagined narratives that we explored generated much of the additional material for the piece, becoming, in performance, as significant as Chekhov's text. Maria Teresa's description in the opening scene foregrounded what is implicit as well as what is explicit in the text and, throughout the entire piece, the subtextual and contextual information was brought to the fore and highlighted for the audience. In this way, Stanislavsky's practices of text analysis offered a strategy through which to deconstruct character and explore the shifting nature of the relationship between the actor and the role in staging character 'under erasure'. By placing the actor and her communication with the audience, rather than the character, centre-stage, the opening scene tried to establish the practice within a postdramatic tradition that challenges authorial authority, reconfiguring the relationship between text and stage.

Process over product

In addition, the interplay between the actor and the text that is at the heart of the performance of character, and that was central to our *supertask*, was established from the start. Scene one tracked Maria Teresa's journey towards finding herself in Masha's *given circumstances,* mirrored in the transformation of the space into the park on Sorin's estate. The emphasis was on character as *process* rather than

[25] Lehmann identifies the monologue as significant in postdramatic theatre because of its 'transgression of the border of the imaginary dramatic universe to the real theatrical situation', he also argues that in ''speaking to' the audience, his/her [the actor's] speech is marked as the speech of a real speaking person, its expressiveness more as the 'emotive' dimension of the performers language than an emotional expression of the fictive character represented' (2006: 127).

product and that process was exposed as layers of characterisation were gradually built. These layers followed Michael Kirby's analysis of performance in his continuum of 'non-matrixed' performing to fully-matrixed 'complex acting' (2002:45) as the matrices were increased over the course of the monologue. Time and place were identified ('Welcome to Russia! It is 1893 and we are in the countryside'), while the content provided contextualising information, as Maria Teresa moved from third person narrator to first person character, supported by a change in accent (from her native North American to RP) and costume (from rehearsal clothes to period dress) and through adopting the physical gestures associated with Masha (snuff-taking and drinking vodka). The development of characterisation was reinforced by lighting changes (leafy breakup to create the park) and the projection of the lake and sound effects (crickets, corncrakes and Yakov's banging) as Maria Teresa moved towards a 'fully-matrixed' performance of 'Masha' when the lights cut to a tight spotlight and she drank vodka, took snuff and swayed in the dark, singing to Kendrick Lamar's 'Swimming Pools (Drank)' (2013) at the end of the scene.

Accordingly, the techniques and practices associated with Stanislavsky's 'system' were used to both conjure the role of Masha for the audience, and mock the creation of a naturalistic illusion of character. Influenced by the way in which Sherman's photographs 're-represent' the depiction of female subjectivities, this first scene attempted to evoke Chekhov's character and, indeed, a naturalistic performance style, while also foregrounding the ways in which Maria Teresa was 'bringing the life of the human spirit' (Stanislavsky 2008: 20) to the role. This was exemplified in the final image of the first scene. In this moment, the live feed image, projected behind Maria Teresa effectively doubled the character's presence, offering a seemingly more compelling, more complete version of Masha on screen, and, accordingly, highlighting Maria Teresa *at work* in the creation of that more fully-realised character behind her.[26] It was in this moment that character seemed

[26] Lehmann briefly address the question of why it is 'the image that fascinates us more [than the live presence of a real body]' (2006: 170) and reaches a compelling corollary that it is the 'emptiness' of the image that mesmerises: 'Emptiness offers no resistance. Nothing can block us. Nothing

most clearly to emerge as a 'third being', conforming to Derrida's logic of the 'spectre' and producing an Uncanny effect. For, here character manifested as, above all else, a ghostly presence, brought to life in and through the actor's body, ultimately realised on screen. As Derrida argues:

> For there to be ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever. The spectrogenic process corresponds therefore to a paradoxical *incorporation*. Once ideas or thoughts (*Gedanke*) are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by *giving them a body*. Not by returning to the living body from which ideas and thoughts have been torn loose, but by incarnating the latter in *another artifactual body, a prosthetic body*, a ghost of spirit… (2006: 157)

Indeed, the 'spectre' of Masha manifested most powerfully in the 'artifactual body' of the filmed image, incorporated and conjured in and through the real body of Maria Teresa. Accordingly, the moments of live feed used throughout the final piece exposed the initial transition into character, illuminating the crucial interdependence of the actor's body and the authorial role.[27] Herein, the audience's eye was directed to this *interaction*, to the conjuring of the 'spectre', the moment the 'third being' emerges, when the actor finds him or herself in the character's world and, accordingly, to character 'under erasure'.

'Speaking Out'

While in these instances the live feed image illuminated the transition *into* role, at other times, those moments when the actor appeared to slip *out of* role were just as vital for staging character 'under erasure'. The intention to reveal the oscillations between the actor and the role, the 'dual consciousness' at the heart of Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing' was central to the attempt to blur the line between the actor and the role. As described in 6.2 these shifts were facilitated in

stagnates. The electronic image is an idol (not simply an icon). The body or face in video is enough – for itself and for us. By contrast, an air of (productive) disappointment always surrounds the presence of real bodies' (2006: 171). His analysis was borne out in this moment, wherein the image offered a compelling and satisfying re-presentation of Masha which, in that self-same moment, Maria Teresa-in-role appeared to lack.

[27] For example, the moment when AM 2 first put on the waistcoat and glasses while Maria Teresa/Masha described Medvedenko's *given circumstances*, or as AM 3 was dressed by Maria Teresa/Masha and instructed to play Konstantin, under the watchful glare of AM 2/Medvedenko.

rehearsal by Lee Strasberg's 'Speaking Out' exercise and this exercise continued to allow the 'real' to emerge in the moment of the fictional present, in performance.[28] The *ad libs* that the exercise produced sought to undermine the audience's ability to determine whether her actions and speech belonged to Maria Teresa 'the Actor', or Maria Teresa as 'Masha'. Her use of one of the key props, the vodka bottle, in the opening monologue, provides a clear example.

The vodka bottle served several functions. It shifted between modes of signification, alternately signifying character or the manifestation of the actor's 'real' presence (in relation to either her physical body, or her emotional response to the other actors' inability to support her in the scene) and, accordingly, blurred the distinction between the two. Firstly, drinking from the vodka bottle had been, in rehearsal, a physical action Maria Teresa had used to prompt an internal transformation into role. It became a shorthand for Masha's addiction, and drinking from it helped Maria Teresa recollect the physical experience of inebriation. In performance, the bottle took on a second function, signifying Masha's drinking problem and, therefore, indicating an aspect of character. In this way it represented one of the matrices through which Maria Teresa conjured the role and through which the audience were able to read her performance of it. Drinking from the vodka bottle also demanded the audience's willing suspension of disbelief and compliance with the pretence that this bottle (which one might assume they would understand contained only water) was filled with vodka.

But the bottle also served an additional purpose. During the performance, and following Strasberg's exercise, Maria Teresa reached for the bottle to quench her dry throat:

> So here we are on this nineteenth-century country estate and it kind of, well it works like a/ *(Walking upstage to pick up the bottle of vodka*) **sorry… I'm a bit nervous, I have a really dry throat… (*swigging from the bottle. Then picking out***

[28] Notably her interactions with AM 2/MEDVEDENKO in scene 2 and with AM 1/DORN are peppered with these interjections. For example: 'Don't touch me!', 'Don't fucking laugh at me Ben!', or, to AM 1/DORN, 'Fine. I don't give a fuck. Let's not do anything. Let's leave right now. I don't fucking care!'

an audience member who appears to disapprove) **don't judge!** So, where are we? (Scene 1)

This *ad lib* was significant because it rendered the status of the action ambiguous, drawing attention to both its manifest presence as a prop *and* its signifying function. Whether the audience believed the bottle to contain water or vodka is not the point, but rather through illuminating both functions, Maria Teresa was able to introduce an element of ambiguity that problematised not only the status of the object, but the distinction between the actor's 'self' and the role. This ambiguity was reinforced as the scene progressed and Maria Teresa described Masha's drinking habits as she began to drink from the bottle with increasing regularity. In these moments, the action then seemed, retrospectively, to belong to Masha and thus the line between Masha, for whom the bottle of vodka is a prop to help her through day to day existence, and Maria Teresa, for whom the bottle of vodka was a prop to help her through the evening's performance, became increasingly blurred.

The blurring of the line between actor and role was reinforced throughout the performance as Maria Teresa allowed her experience of the task at hand to break through the surface of performing the role, and it was through these moments that the initial experience of liveness that had flourished in the first rehearsal was maintained in performance. A more detailed consideration of Maria Teresa's use of an additional prop and her costume illuminates this further. The black dress, Nina's white skirt and the pill box all posed particular, unforeseen problems in performance. The Maria Teresa's dress continually came undone, Nina's skirt would not fasten and the pill box kept falling out of her sleeve. These incidents became the source of those onstage interruptions, the mistakes that Lehmann argues dramatic theatre works hard to keep out, the 'accidental "goof-up" in this one performance that does not belong to it any more than a typo belongs to the novel' (Lehmann 2006: 100). Within the parameters of a naturalistic production, the actor is required to cover these mistakes and mishaps. However, through the process of 'Speaking Out' Maria Teresa was able to highlight these moments for the audience,

articulating her very real frustration at their occurrence. Unscripted and unplanned, they undermined the performance of character, drawing attention to the processes of character-creation rather than the product of those processes, illuminating the illusory, indeed spectral, nature of the act of performing a role. Furthermore, they also exposed Maria Teresa's real anxiety in the moment of performance and genuine irritation with the actor playing the role of Audience member 2.

ACTOR/MASHA	*(To the audience)* The show will be starting soon! The show will be starting soon! ***(The snuff box drops out of the actor's sleeve and AM 2 laughs. The actor pauses mid-speech.*****) Don't laugh Ben/**
AM 2/MEDVEDENKO	**/**Twenty-three roubles a month.
ACTOR/MASHA	**/Don't fucking laugh at me Ben**.

In these moments, there was a sense that the audience was witnessing a live interaction between two people on stage – something happening in real time, without the safety of a script to keep the interaction in check.

Furthermore, these errors served a secondary function. While they drew on the actors' genuine response to what was happening in the moment, they were notably fed by the relationship between the character the actors were playing. As Maria Teresa/MASHA's interactions with the other characters became increasingly fraught, the distinction between the actors and their roles became increasingly blurred. When the snuff box fell out of her sleeve for the last time in scene 4 and she hurled it across the stage in frustration, it was difficult to determine to whom the gesture belonged. Was it indicative of Masha's frustration at Dorn's unwillingness to comfort her, or Maria Teresa's frustration with the actor playing Audience Member 1, who refused to give her anything to work with in the improvisation? Or was it simply the expression of the actor responding to an experience of a prop malfunctioning? Accordingly, these instances produced moments of 'liveness', of something real happening in the here and now, while simultaneously encouraging the audience to reconsider exactly who they were witnessing – where the line between fiction and reality was drawn.

This effect was echoed in the mistakes that peppered the opening monologue.[29] These mistakes emerged unprompted and, in conjunction with those errors or difficulties that were pre-determined, heightened the precariousness of Maria Teresa's situation, undermining the audience's confidence in her ability to complete the task at hand and, accordingly, beginning to reconfigure the aesthetic distance between stage and auditorium.[30] Significantly, these moments were facilitated by the practices associated with Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing', by the use of the technique of *adaptation* that encourages 'a constant state of improvisation'. Here, the principles of Stanislavsky's 'system', and the practice of *adaptation* facilitated a devising practice and performance style that gave the actor licence to respond how she wished, in the live moment of the performance. This, accordingly, began to facilitate the shift from signification and manifestation and prompted momentary 'interruption[s] of the real' (2006: 99).

Audience members 1, 2, 3 and 4 and the 'real' audience

This sense of ambiguity was not confined to Maria Teresa's performance, but was replicated in the additional roles, each performed to varying degrees of complexity. These ranged from the dressmaker's mannequin to represent Nina, the genuine audience members invited onto the stage and given an item of clothing to indicate the character they were standing in for, through to the pre-recorded voiceover for Nina's delivery of Konstantin's play and the voices provided by Audience Members 1 and 4 for Sorin, Nina and Arkadina, to Audience members 1 and 3 who were given scripts to read from and were positioned on stage, with Audience Member 3 even provided with a costume. For Medvedenko the matrices were increased even further. Audience Member 2 was given a costume and it gradually became clear

[29] For example, the problem of operating the lights, the mispronunciation of Arkadina's name and the need for assistance with her costume or, Maria Teresa's lines: 'with a wife…**I mean…** with a mother…**a wife… stupid… a mother...** two sisters and a brother to provide for' (scene 1).
[30] Lehmann argues that, 'The aesthetic distance of the spectator is a phenomenon of the dramatic theatre; in new forms of theatre that are closer to performance this distance is structurally shaken in a more or less and provocative way. Wherever this unsettling blurring of boundaries happens in postdramatic theatre, it is invaded by the qualities of a *situation*… even in cases where all in all it seems to belong to the genre of classical theatre with its strict division of stage and theatron (auditorium)' (2006, 104).

that he was an actor, planted in the audience, who both knew Maria Teresa and had worked on the scene with her before. Playing with degrees of characterisation offered a route into deconstructing character into its component parts, and the partial characterisations also attempted to prompt an experience of the Uncanny; problematizing the audience's ability to decipher between fiction and reality, in an attempt to reconfigure their expectations of what they were seeing on stage and, therefore, of what might be required of them, as an audience.

In drawing the actors from the audience, engaging in the pretence that they were genuine audience members inveigled into Maria Teresa's performance, became another way of facilitating ambiguity. Furthermore, the improvised style of the opening monologue and the use of direct address sought to privilege the 'theatron axis' over the 'intra-scenic axis' (Lehmann 2006: 127), emphasising the 'co-presence' of Maria Teresa and the audience, and, accordingly attempting to reconfigure the performance as 'situation, not as a fiction' (Lehmann 2006: 128). As Maria Teresa drew Audience Member 1 on stage to assist with the lighting, as Audience Member 2 volunteered to tighten her corset and as she coaxed Audience Member 3 from the audience to play the Konstantin to her Masha, we attempted to create the illusion that the participants had no previous knowledge of what they were about to do. While it would become clear that this was evidently a fiction, in the moment the genuine audience responded as though it were *real*, certainly at least until the opening of scene 2 when Audience member 2 and the Actor/Masha's relationship was established. As with the vodka/water bottle, whether the belief in the fiction was sustained was not the most important criteria, but rather whether we had planted a seed of doubt in the audience's minds as to whether what they were watching was 'real' or not.

Metadrama or postdramatic theatre

A consideration of the actor-as-plant returns us to one of the initial impetuses for this iteration of practice: the desire to use the 'system' to facilitate the *audience's* understanding of an actor's work on a role. Engaging in the pretence that the actors were audience members and, indeed, inviting members of the real audience onto

the stage, was designed to offer an insight into the experience of finding oneself in the *given circumstances* of a role, to create an experience of 'undecidability', but also to facilitate that radical shift central to the postdramatic, whereby 'Theatre is emphasized as a situation, not as a fiction' (2006: 128). Reviewing the performance in light of that fundamental shift towards 'theatre as a situation' (2006: 128) was central to evaluating the practice. As I have argued thus far, this fourth project provided considerable opportunities for identifying the common ground between Stanislavsky's 'system' and a postdramatic theatre that is 'more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information' (Lehmann 2006: 85), beginning to bear out the theoretical hypothesis and making considerable strides forward from the previous iterations of practice. However, if we follow Lehmann's crucial corollary that the postdramatic theatre is identified by its *cumulative* nature, it becomes demonstrably clear that the practice ultimately fell short of reconfiguring the audiences' relationship to the action on stage, and of staging the human subject as disunified or fragmented.

While the performance was peppered with instances of liveness, moments of ambiguity and 'undecidability', the performance fell somewhere betwixt and between naturalistic dramatic representation and postdramatic theatre, wherein the oscillations between the actor and the role became predominantly metatheatrical. In attempting to present the shifts between the actor's real 'presence', and the 'staged construct' of the role of Masha, *The Seagull, Or Why Masha Always Wears Black* in fact exposed the shifts between two 'staged constructs', the character of 'Masha' and of Maria Teresa, 'the Actor'. In this way, through the overarching fictionalisation of the 'real' in performance, the aesthetic distance between the stage and the auditorium remained secure and the suggestion that the audience's active participation was crucial to the performance event was ultimately exposed as an illusion. Thus, it became clear, once again, that there was much to learn from the ways in which the practice fell short of the intended goal.

While I had endeavoured to expose the ongoing oscillations between the actor and the role, the actor's journey towards the role was, ultimately, represented in a linear narrative, with a clear beginning, middle and end. Accordingly, the shifts between Maria Teresa as 'the Actor' and the character of Masha were framed within a narrative progression from actor to role that aligned with a dramatic linear structure and produced a delineation between 'actor' and 'role' that undermined the possibility of genuinely destabilizing the audience's perception. While the process of re-shaping and re-presenting the actor's journey towards the role highlighted the symbiosis of that relationship, it also established a dramatic narrative in which the telling of Masha's story became a fundamental condition of 'the Actor's' narrative and which thereby rendered both Masha and Maria Teresa 'the Actor' fictional co-players in the drama, both working towards the same objective – to bring the character Masha to life. Furthermore, as Maria Teresa gradually took on the role of Masha, Masha's narrative became incidental and Maria Teresa 'the Actor' was reinforced as the primary protagonist. Within this context of a narrative structure that privileged 'the Actor's' story over Masha's, and wherein the narrative of 'the Actor's' experience superseded that of the character, 'the Actor' became more of a fiction than a reality, more character than 'self'.

The fictionalisation of Maria Teresa as 'the Actor' was reinforced through the context and setting in which she was presented. The transformation of the 'rehearsal room' into the stage made to represent the 'park on Sorin's estate' mirrored her apparent transformation into the role and occurred over a similarly linear trajectory. Significantly, the 'rehearsal space' the audience came in to was no more real than the lake on Sorin's estate, this was an *ersatz* rehearsal room, a performance space dressed up to look like a rehearsal space. Thus, while the transformation of the space offered a possible oscillation between three spaces with apparently differing ontological statuses (rehearsal room, performance space and the setting of Chekhov's play), this oscillation really occurred between fictive settings, rather than between the 'real setting' of the rehearsal room and the fictive world of Sorin's estate. Accordingly, while the use of direct address, audience interaction and improvisation enabled moments of liveness, at times foregrounding

the spectral nature of character, the practice remained overarchingly wedded to the conventions of drama. The dramatic narratives of neither Masha, nor Maria Teresa 'the Actor' were never fully 'invaded by the qualities of a situation' (2006: 104), nor were the audience required to respond on anything other than an aesthetic level. Consequently, I had to conclude that while the practice drew on a concept that Lehmann argues is central to postdramatic theatre, the application of that concept within a practice shaped by Stanislavsky's 'system' resulted, once more, in a performance that remained, overarchingly, dramatic.

6.4 Conclusion

While the flaws inherent in this fourth iteration of practice became increasingly clear, it was also clear that it constituted a pivotal stage in my work. Indeed, it represented the 'light bulb' moment in the 'doing-thinking'. Through this work I became confident that the theoretical propositions *could* be borne out in practice, and I had a better understanding of the ways in which Stanislavsky's principles and practices might be deployed to stage character 'under erasure'. I had identified a way of working from *Active Analysis* that offered productive parallels with the improvisatory practices associated with devising, and I had found a way re-applying Stanislavsky's practices of text analysis to deconstruct character and problematise naturalistic representation. Moreover, I had begun to understand how to deploy the paraphernalia of dramatic theatre (costumes, props, lighting and sound) to illuminate the spectral quality of the actor's work and, at least in moments, to stage character 'under erasure'. In this way, I was becoming more confident of how the practices of dramatic theatre might be used to deconstruct the dramatic from within.

Yet it also remained clear that turning back to character, repositioning the performance of human subjectivity at the centre, had inevitable consequences for the form and style of the performance, indeed, often undermining the intention to stage character 'under erasure' in ways that reflect the contingent and performative nature of the late twentieth-century, mediatized subject. Once again I had to confront the fundamental tension between working with an acting 'system'

designed explicitly to serve 'the creation of a concrete and uniquely human character on stage' (Knebel in Thomas & Knebel 2016: 123) and a postdramatic approach to theatre-making that appears contingent on the refutation of the very premise of a 'concrete and uniquely human character'. This fourth practice seemed, once more, to illuminate that tension, perhaps most clearly in relation to my intention to 're-represent' Masha. For while I would argue that *The Seagull, Or Why Masha Always Wears Black* met the ambition to place Masha's story centre-stage, it failed to achieve the stated goal of exposing her as fractured and disunified. On the other hand, as I moved towards the final phase in the practice, it became clear that this tension need not be unproductive. For while the practice thus far had fallen short of its goal, it had deepened my understanding of *how* character is produced by the actor and, indeed, read by the audience in performance. It had revealed how character is created through a co-dependence with the actor's self, but also through the actor's manipulation of the trappings of characterisation and the mechanics of design, but most fundamentally through the *stories* the actor tells. Thus, *The Seagull or Why Masha Always Wears Black* sent me back to the drawing board one final time and I returned to the authorial text, to the narrative arc and its relationship the actor's work on a role, to the beginning and middle and end of staging character 'under erasure'.

Chapter seven – practice project five, *Three Sisters*

> *'Maybe I didn't break it, and it only seems I did. Maybe we only seem to exist, and in fact we aren't here at all. I don't know anything; there isn't anything anyone knows.'*
>
> *On dropping Mama's clock, Chebutykin, Act III,* Three Sisters *(1991: 248)*

> *'In modernity, the subject – and with it the intersubjective mirroring through which it could continually enhance itself – loses its ability to integrate the representations into a unity. Or, to put it the other way round: the disintegration of time as a continuum proves to be a sign of dissolution – or at least subversion – of the subject possessing the certainty of its time.'*
>
> *Hans-Thies Lehmann,* Postdramatic Theatre *(2006: 155)*

7.1 Introduction

Aims and Intentions

This practice was underpinned by the overarching research question but also forged in response to the findings of the practice immediately preceding it. The most compelling of these was to investigate the relationship between character and its *context*, the structures that contain and shape the actor's performance of a role: narrative, time and place. Building on the work undertaken in the previous project I wanted to use the 'system' to stage character 'under erasure' without reframing it in a dramatic narrative or setting, resisting coherence and cogency. Building on the 'undecidability' that had manifested in moments in the previous project, I wanted to replicate this slippage, to destabilise the audience's perception of the 'when?' and 'where?' of the performance, in order to further problematise the 'who?' of characterisation. This final iteration of practice was summative, drawing together all I had learnt and applying it in order to test my hypothesis as robustly as possible.

Drawing on the principles and processes that had proven effective (for example, the practices of text analysis, the improvisations and *études* associated with *Active Analysis*, the principles of *adaptation* and the *magic if*), I set out to apply the devising practice, once again, to the task of staging 'character' as indicative of a disunified experience of human subjectivity. My goal was to discover if a Stanislavskian approach to performing a role could support the staging of

'character' as no longer coherent and self-determining, but as destabilised, fragmented and performative. In order to fulfil the promise of the theoretical argument I strove to increase the moments of liveness, to destabilise the audience's perception of the performance and to problematise the processes of representation. These intentions were put to work devising from Chekhov's *Three Sisters.* I returned to Chekhov because by this stage in the research his texts had proven effective source material and I had learnt that in order to use Stanislavsky's techniques for creating a role to dismantle character I needed to work from a text with pre-existing rich and complex characterisations. Furthermore, a close first reading of *Three Sisters* revealed his characters to be, much like Masha from *The Seagull*, already partially 'under erasure'.

Three Sisters

Three Sisters offered an ideal text to devise from, not least because the research aims coincided with the thematic concerns of Chekhov's play. The motif of exile as a metaphor for the experience of 'self', the relationship between identity and time and place, and the themes of stasis and failure resonated with both a hauntological reading of Stanislavsky's 'third being' and postdrama's 'vestigial figures'. Chekhov's depiction of a landscape within which the sisters' experience of time, place and 'self' appears to be 'out of joint' offered fertile ground for exploring the production of dramatic character in relation to its temporal and physical context. This inherently experimental, impressionistic play (in its treatment of those contextualising structures as well as of subjectivity) seemed to provide the perfect opportunity to use the 'system' to conjure the 'free-floating' figures that haunt the periphery of the postdramatic stage; characters 'under erasure'.[1]

Poststructuralist and postmodern readings of *Three Sisters* are well-established in theatre-making practice; among which the Wooster Group's *Brace Up!* (1990), Tadashi Suzuki's *The Chekhov* (1986), Squat Theatre's *Three Sisters* (1976) and,

[1] Sarah Wyman describes *Three Sisters* as exemplifying a 'mosaic approach' that becomes realistic only though its 'estrangement' (2017, 183).

more recently, RashDash's *Three Sisters* (2018), offer distinct, yet distinctively postdramatic re-stagings of the play. This is reflected, to some degree, in Chekhovian scholarship with Bonnie Marranca (1984) and Sarah Wyman (2017) offering notable examples. Chekhov's treatment of ontology, the predominance of stasis and liminality, the abstraction of time and place, intertextuality, self-referentiality and the failure of representation are common threads through both artistic and scholarly responses to the play. These stylistic traits and thematic concerns foreground the play's ability to combine elements of late nineteenth-century Naturalism with thematic concerns common to the both the modern avant-garde, and, as Sarah Wyman argues, to structuralist and poststructuralist notions of identity (2017: 199).[2] Indeed, Wyman's poststructuralist analysis of *Three Sisters* reveals a portrait of 'unstable and unknowable' characters in a purgatorial hinterland, providing scholarly support to the reading of Olga, Masha and Irina that we developed as we explored the play using Stanislavsky's six questions (Wyman 2017: 185). In using the six questions to guide our reading of the play we were often left with as many questions as answers and the sisters escaped easy or concrete definition, revealing themselves to be resistant to the role they find themselves playing in the drama. They emerged as characters who are fragmented, partial, out of time and out of place, marginalised and struggling to control their own narratives and the resonances with the peripheral subjectivities of postdrama were palpable.

This final iteration of practice was driven, therefore, by an impulse to expose the fundamentally partial and fragmented nature of the sisters' identities as a basis for staging character 'under erasure'. I set out to uncover what is revealed through a close reading of the play's *subtext* and through an analysis of the characters in relation to one other, to the world of the play (the when I am? and where am I? of

[2] Wyman contends that, in *Three Sisters*, Chekhov anticipates 'post-structuralist notions of identity as unstable and unknowable' (2017: 185), dismantling the 'humanist illusion of intersubjectivity' (2017: 188). Coupled with an analysis of the ways in which Chekhov explores the flawed faculty of speech as the model for self-expression, she highlights the 'breakdown of representation based on similitude and equivalence between real-world referents and their signifiers' in the play (2017: 191). These preoccupations find an echo not only in a poststructuralist re-thinking of ontology, but in the aesthetics of postdrama.

character), as well as to the time and place from which they are exiled. It is to the relationship between the sisters' subjectivity and time and place, and to the constitutive relationship between character and the contextualising structures of setting, that I will now turn in order to outline how the artistic and research aims of the concluding practice converged.

Time and Place

Following Lehmann's contention that the 'Dramatic theatre requires one time in which the opponents, agonist and antagonist, can meet' (2006: 154), and that a 'linear continuum ultimately supports the unity of the subject because it lends direction and orientation to the experiences' (2006: 155), the intention to resist linear narrative and coherent setting was critical and I set out to undermine the synthesis of setting, realistic dialogue and psychologically complex characterisation. While my attempts were not always effective, and the instability that I sought to stage was not always borne out in performance, my initial intention was to try to dismantle the apparent coherence of the dramatic universe of *Three Sisters*. My aim was to encourage an 'open and fragmenting perception' (Lehmann 2006: 82) of time and place in order to allow for an experience of shared time and space, between stage and auditorium, actors and audience.

The sisters' relationship to time is central to Chekhov's narrative; Olga, Masha and Irina's devotion to the fantasies of the past or to an imagined future in *another* place (the quasi-mythological Moscow) thwarts their ability to live life in the present moment which, in turn, produces the play's stasis. Furthermore, as Bonnie Marranca argues, 'Chekhov's drama stands apart from the theatre of its time to anticipate contemporary theatrical sensibility in its embrace of performance *space*, and rejection of *setting*' (1984: 196). Marranca links Chekhov's dramaturgy of space to the concept of *landscape*, wherein the relationship between self and landscape becomes inseparable 'through the passage of time' (1984: 197). Marranca describes this reworking of setting as a 'new ecology of theatre', that she associates with 'Gertrude Stein, Thornton Wilder, Sam Shepard, Maria Irene Fornes, Lee Breuer,

Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson and Heiner Müller' (1984: 198).[3] Re-reading *Three Sisters* as a landscape that produces the characters who inhabit it and in which time and place are abstracted and destabilised, illuminates one of the ways in which Chekhov's sisters already function as characters 'under erasure'. In thematising time, working to make time present (rather than allowing real time to recede as the Aristotelian model prefers), problematising the sisters' ability to commit to the experience of *real* time and place and in mythologizing the only real place referenced in the play, the sisters' experience of time and place is, quite simply, thrown 'out of joint'.[4] Accordingly, Olga, Masha and Irina are already cast adrift in Chekhov's landscape, existing betwixt and between, spectral figures, haunting, rather than living through their own personal purgatory.

It was this sense of a disjunctive and discontinuous time that I intended to establish in my re-working of *Three Sisters* and it was from this and the concept of 'landscape', that the aim of adopting a 'dream-structure' developed – although, again, as I shall describe later in this chapter, the adoption of a dream-structure was only partially realised in performance.[5] While I will discuss this in more detail later in the chapter, it is worth establishing that the intention to use a non-linear approach to stage time, and to destabilise the certainty of place, offered a route into revealing the precarious relationship between time, place and ontology already

[3] Marranca argues that 'Chekhov in his modernity could grasp the notion of landscape in all its dimensions: as a marketable commodity; as a victim of progress which brings about the displacement of human life in a new spatial order; as a collaborator in human emotion; and finally, as a language, a semantic space among the many languages of the world' (1984: 197).

[4] Moscow appears throughout the text as the repository of not only the sister's fantasies, but as a dreamlike place of unreality and theatricality. For example, in Ferapont's report of the outlandish stories of the high-wire tightrope walks he hears at the council.

[5] Following Freud's analysis, as developed in 'The Interpretation of Dreams', dreams follow their own particular logic which is indicative of the role of the unconscious in everyday life: 'Freud attempted to unravel the principles or "grammar" which governed the transformation of underlying thoughts into a remembered dream, a process which he designated "dream work". As well as "condensation" and "over-determination", he invoked "displacement", by which he meant the shift in value that enabled elements in the manifest dream to seem important when they appeared peripheral to the underlying context; and "symbolisation, the process whereby images of one thing came to suggest or stand in for another' (Wilson in Freud, 1997, xi). Dreaming is, for Freud, another form of thinking and 'dream-work' transforms latent content into manifest content; condensation takes the form of combining or overlaying images or words, while displacement may detach emotions from their original experience, attributing them to the 'wrong' person, or experience or decentre or dislocate elements or the dream, while symbolisation re-represents thoughts as images.

at work in Chekhov's characters and enabled me to illuminate the processual, contingent nature of the ontology of the actor in the role. Working towards a form of 'collage, montage and fragment' (Lehmann 2006: 84) was vital to exposing the spectral quality of the actor's work. Drawing on Derrida's assertion that 'It is the proper characteristic of the spectre, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future' (2006: 123), foregrounding the actors' relationship to time offered a route into problematising their ability to conjure characters.

Overview of the chapter

The analysis that follows proposes to do several things. In 7.2 I will describe the devising process; this analysis represents the culmination of the work developing a devising method based on Stanislavsky's 'system' applied to a postdramatic theatre-making practice. 7.3 offers a close reading of the performance, in which I will foreground the insights into the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' to postdramatic theatre-making, into the nature of character, as well as identifying areas for further development of the practice-led research. These analyses are supported by a transcript of a performance of *Three Sisters* at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama on September 28th, 2015 and a video recording of that performance, which can be accessed in Appendices V and VI. The transcript and video evidence can be referred to and/or read in conjunction with one another, or separately – this is entirely down to the reader's preference.

7.2 Stanislavsky's 'system' as a model for devising

The 'toolkit'

The earliest phase of text analysis allowed me to explore how I might deconstruct the performance of character, deepening my understanding of Chekhov's play and driving my imaginative response to it. This enabled me to establish the project's *supertask*, which underpinned the devising and rehearsal process and served as a benchmark against which to measure each day's work. The *supertask* was: *to 'detonate' character, to explore what remains when character is isolated from the*

formal structures of dramatic time and place. By this I mean that my intention was to explore how the contextualising framework of time and place impact on the performance of 'character'. I wanted to test whether disrupting the narrative structure of the play, destabilising and fragmenting the temporal and spatial setting could be used to facilitate the staging of 'character' as disunified and fragmented; as character 'under erasure'. It is worth clarifying here that my intention was not to deconstruct Chekhov's play as an act of rebellion, but to find a way of staging the text to reflect my reading of his presentation of the sisters' subjectivity and to reveal what I had learnt about the Uncanny nature of the actor's work on a role in the moment of performance, through practice.

I worked with three female actors, each of whom took responsibility for one role in rehearsal, but who played multiple roles in performance. Exile, in relation to time and place and the sisters' subjectivity became a central motif and Act I's party stood out as the key *event* from which all other action (or inaction) stems. The party symbolises hope, the possibility of change, of a life still to be lived, a love affair still to be had and it is this hope that the sisters cling to at the end of the play when Olga declares that '…our life is not ended yet. We shall live!' (Act IV, 1991: 282). The similarities between the opening and closing images of the play reinforces its cyclical structure and I was struck by the moment when Fedotik takes a photograph of the assembled party in Act I and I wondered what would happen if the characters became stuck in that moment? That if they were frozen in time by the photograph (or by Chebutykin breaking Mama's clock) the sisters would be forced to re-live an event that might bring them momentary pleasure, but that would ultimately become a form of torture. This image informed the overarching structure into which the devised piece would eventually fall while foregrounding time (through bells, alarms and the chiming of clocks) became a way of corralling the actors through the performance of the play and, ultimately, thwarting their ability to perform Olga, Masha and Irina. Exploring the play's *events* thus generated material that was central to our revision of the play, reconfiguring the audience's perception of the actor in the role, foregrounding the *task* of creating a role and destabilising the performance of character.

In addition to text analysis and the *Active Analysis* rehearsal process, *circles of attention*, *communion*, *grasp*, *adaptation and justification*, *objectives* and *counter-objectives*, *subtext*, the concept of *lure*, *events*, *heroic tension*, *logic and sequence*, *supertask, through-action* and *internal monologue* were all central to the devising process. Lee Strasberg's 'Speaking Out' exercise had proved crucial in the previous iteration and, used in conjunction with *Active Analysis* would become equally vital in developing the improvisations in this project. As I revisited the 'toolkit', I clarified my intention to resist cogency and coherence, and to stage character as a fragmentary collection of vocal effects and physical mannerisms that could be put on and taken off as easily as props and costumes in a dressing-up box. What remained to be seen was how effectively I could put that toolkit to work and the first test of that was in the initial phase of work with the actors.[6]

Text analysis

With Paksie Vernon as Olga, Maria Teresa Creasey as Masha and Grace Chilton as Irina, we read the play and worked through Stanislavsky's six questions and the 'Facts and Questions' exercise. Once again, we made posters collating information relating to time, place and each of the characters and while the focus of the work was on the three sisters, we explored the other characters in detail to gain as full an understanding of the play and the sisters' lives and relationships as possible. Natasha represented a counterpoint to the sisters – a driving force for the action, active in contrast to their passivity, an instigator of change and, in tandem with Protopopov, a representative of the, albeit precarious and short-lived, new world order. We worked on character biographies and timelines, exploring important events in the sisters' lives before the start of the play, their mother's and then their father's deaths and their departure from Moscow, as well as both Olga and Masha's relationship with possible suitors. Natalia Pushkareva's *Women in Russian History* provided context for understanding the *given circumstances* of the sisters' lives, not

[6] As will become apparent from the analysis of the performance, although the intention to stage character in ways that resisted cogency and coherence was established from the outset, this was not fully realised in performance.

least in relation to education, employment and marriage, as well as to class and the social mores of Russian society.[7] We explored recurrent motifs and images; the freedom of the migrating birds opposed to the caged sisters, the striking of clocks, the piano as a metaphor for the heart, the treatment of Moscow as a variously real and fantastical place and identified key events for further exploration. We discussed themes of failure and stasis, the extent to which the majority of the dramatic action occurs outside of the play (for example, Vershinin's wife's attempted suicide, the fire and the death of Tusenbach) and spent time excavating those fleeting moments that might be missed on a first reading, but that are key to unpacking the sisters' relationships.[8] Kulygin's admission that he would have married Olga if it hadn't been for Masha, Solyony's attempt to seduce, or perhaps assault Irina, Olga's refusal to listen to Masha's confession are all pertinent examples. Accordingly, much of this first phase of work was using Stanislavsky's questions and *objectives* and *counter-objectives* to unpack these moments, to uncover the *subtext* of the lines, to understand, for example, what Olga really

[7] Pushkareva provides a compelling account of the extent to which, despite educational reforms and some limited opportunities for women in the workplace, middle class women's freedom was highly restricted and the primary ambition for middle class women remained marriage and motherhood. She argues that even an 'above average' education aimed principally 'to teach them to be good wives and helpful mothers of families' (1999: 212). Indeed, she contends that 'For most young ladies, both in the capitals and in the provinces, marriage was the major event in their lives' (1999: 226). This assessment illuminates the central role marriage plays in *Three Sisters*, which effectively tells the story of three women's relationships to marriage. It also supports Masha's assessment of her and her sisters' education, when she describes knowing three language as a 'kind of useless embellishment – it's some kind of useless appendage like a sixth finger. We know much more than we need to' (Chekhov 1991: 207). The irrelevance of their education to the realty of their lives is, inevitably, compounded by the parochial location, where it is less likely to facilitate their making a good match.
Understanding the significance of marriage to women's identities and their social position illuminates the sisters' attitudes towards work (Irina's limited choices and Olga's reluctance to become Headmistress) and, perhaps more significantly, Masha and Olga's response to Irina's desire for love. Pushkareva's contention that women 'who had not married by age twenty or twenty-two were considered superannuated and doubtless overly fastidious. The lack of a bridegroom by that age was treated as a great tragedy, especially among provincial folk' (1999: 226), and this sheds significant light on Irina's anxiety to marry by the end of the play and Olga's insistence that any marriage, however unhappy, be better than none.

[8] The sisters' lives are predominantly characterised by failure (in Irina's case her failure to find fulfilment in work, or love and finally even in the institution of marriage as her relationship with Tusenbach is cut short before it can even begin) Masha's affair with Vershinin (notably the key events in the play for Masha are Vershinin's arrival in Act I, and his departure in Act IV) and Olga's gradual ceding of control, over the house and, indeed, over her own life (she really doesn't want to become headmistress) to Natasha via Protopopov.

wants to communicate to Masha when she says to Irina, '*I* should have loved my husband' (1991: 195).

As our understanding of the sisters' lives grew, we sympathised with their plight but, by turns, found them irritating, hypocritical and foolish. While the play's stasis is tragic, the sisters' ineptitude, their adherence to hope and fantasy renders them comical. Their attachment to the fairy-tale of Moscow seemed infantilising and we became interested in their childlike qualities, exploring how they playact, at times performing roles and at others resisting the roles foisted upon them (for example, Olga as school teacher, Masha as dutiful wife, Irina as ingénue). This work developed our interest in resistance and failure, themes that would eventually characterise the devised piece, unlocking one route into staging character 'under erasure'. The sisters' frustration with the roles they perform would eventually intersect with the actors' frustration with the characters they were playing, offering an opportunity to blur the line between actor and role, undermining the performance of character while simultaneously reinforcing it. In addition to identifying these points of connection between the sisters and the actors, exploring their characters in relation to time and to predominant *inner motive forces* further illuminated the extent to which the sisters function as a trinity, as constituent parts of a fragmented whole.[9] This distinction is exemplified in the play's opening stage direction and this initial image of the sisters, one locked in thought, another caught up in action and a third overwhelmed by the emotion of the occasion became a starting point for the devising process. It provided a way into exposing the sisters' partial nature and into staging characters resistant to a cogent, coherent depiction of liberal humanist subjectivity.

[9] Bella Merlin contends that the *inner motive forces* are some of 'the most useful tools in the whole toolkit' (2007: 162), pointing out that Stanislavsky dedicates a whole chapter of *An Actor's Work* to them. Exploring *inner motive forces* in *Three Sisters* shows Irina to be governed by the *thought-centre* - she inhabits a world of illusion, her sense of self all too easily shattered when reality fails to live up to fantasy. Masha, in contrast, is governed by her *emotion-centre*, her story begins and ends with Vershinin and the play is peppered with references to her temper and mood. Olga is dominated by her *action-centre*, we are constantly reminded of how tired she is, how much work she has to do. Even on her day off, she is busy pacing and marking exercise books and it is through action that Olga expresses her thoughts and feelings most clearly.

Thus, this period of text analysis enabled us to identify key moments to work on, highlighting the 'material' from which we would go on to develop our scenes. The scene, in Act III, when Irina despairs at her failure to find happiness in either love or work and Olga counsels her to marry the Baron Tusenbach and Masha confesses to her affair with Vershinin offers one such example. A brief discussion of our work on this scene, should illuminate this contention further. We began by identifying *objectives* and *counter-objectives* and exploring *subtext*. For example, Olga's admission that 'I should marry without love. Anyone who proposed to me – I'd marry him, so long as he was someone worthwhile. Even if he was an old man I'd marry him…' recalled her declaration in Act I that '*I* should have loved my husband' (1991: 254, 195). Thus, while Olga's lines are directed to Irina in both instances, the *subtext* of the lines is clearly meant for Masha and in order to deepen our understanding of the tensions between Olga and Masha, we applied Sanford Meisner's 'Repetition exercise' to the scene.[10]

This work liberated the actors from having to perform the scene as it is written, enabling the *subtext* to rise to the surface and establishing one of the fundamental tenets of the final devised piece. Throughout the exercise Paksie (as Olga) and Maria Teresa (as Masha) became exasperated with one another, sabotaging each other at every turn and becoming more aggressive over the course of the scene. When we stopped the improvisation, they were surprised by the level of animosity they had uncovered; the resentment Olga feels for Masha (Masha has the one thing Olga most desires, a husband, and she is not grateful for him) and Masha's disregard for Olga's jealousy. The tensions between them, and the way in which Irina becomes the battleground upon which they play out those tensions as they both strive to prevent her from making the same mistakes that they have made

[10] Working on *The Seagull, Or Why Masha Always Wears Black* we had used repetition as a technique for exploring a point of a connection between the actor and the character's emotional state. This practice had emerged organically, rather than being undertaken as part of an exercise; indeed, I did not know about Meisner's work using repetition at this stage. I read about Meisner's exercise before working on *Three Sisters* and was interested to see how I might use it to deepen our understanding of the roles and the play, and if it might provide a structure through which to expose the actor *in* the role in performance. Meisner's development of Stanislavsky's 'system' in America is well documented, with chapter 9 of Mel Gordon's *Stanislavsky in America* (2010: 176-185) offering a comprehensive account.

(Olga's greatest regret is to not have found a husband as Masha's is, to have married hers), was central to understanding Olga and Masha's relationship, and provided ample fodder for exploring their marginal and decentralised subjectivities. These sisterly dynamics informed the improvisations, but also a number of scenes which reflected Irina's position at the centre (at least at the start of Chekhov's play) as a young woman of marriageable age and Masha and Olga's positions on the periphery while also enabling us to focus on aspects of the play that could be exploited to illuminate the sisters' liminal status.[11]

While this period of work may differ little from the work that might be undertaken in order to stage Chekhov's play in a naturalistic style, it was crucial to the devising process. The text analysis enabled us to develop an extensive working knowledge of the play, to find correlating moments across the acts, excavate the meaning of the lines and probe the sisters' relationships deeply. This thorough knowledge of the play became invaluable in the next phase of work, allowing the actors to move between scenes and acts in individual improvisations and thus to disrupt the linear narrative while still remaining grounded in the stories and thematic concerns of the play. Indeed, developing a comprehensive understanding of the form and structure of the play facilitated its deconstruction once we moved the practice up on its feet. In addition, this work allowed us to identify the key *events* that we would go on to explore through *études* and improvisations. Working on these *events* informed the form and structure of the improvisations, but more importantly enhanced our understanding of the very nature of character in dramatic theatre, evidencing Stanislavsky's contention that character exists on the page as only partially present, the 'isolated scraps' (Stanislavsky 2008: 288) awaiting completion by the actor tasked to perform her. Thus, at the end of this period we had established a common understanding of the world of the play, had gathered material to work

[11] Understanding 'where' the character is in relation to the action again draws on Stanislavsky's fundamental question 'where am I?'. Exploring 'where' the characters are in society revealed the significance of age and marital status in relation to power and subjectivity. In Act I Irina is still young enough to hope of marrying, to dream of a future and she, therefore, inhabits a relatively central position within society. By the end, however, some four years later, as her dreams have faded and even the reality of marriage to a man she does not love has been taken away from her, she moves to join her sisters at the periphery.

with in the improvisations and had gained insight into how dramatic character is crafted and therefore, how it might be deconstructed. We were ready to put that knowledge of the play to work in the task of dismantling character and revealing the actor's *work* on a role.

Improvisations and *études*

I will outline the structure of the devising process and focus on individual scenes in order to illuminate how the theatre-making practice evolved from the previous iteration and to reveal the ways in which Stanislavsky's 'system' was being put to work to stage character 'under erasure'. Stepping into the rehearsal room, we began with a list of the key *events*, the moments that we wanted to explore through *études* or improvisations.[12] These moments were: Act I's opening stage direction and the start of that scene until Masha decides to leave; Vershinin's arrival; Natasha making sure the candles are out in Act II; Masha and Vershinin's love scene in Act II; Olga and Anfisa during the fire at the start of Act III; Olga and Natasha's confrontation over Anfisa; Irina and Masha's confession of unhappiness in Act III, Irina's decision to marry the Baron Tusenbach in Act III, the revelation of the Baron's death in Act IV, Vershinin's departure in Act IV and the closing moments of Act IV. These scenes were often a starting point from which we segued to other moments in the play, or, indeed, to other texts. As we worked through each moment, we cut and pasted Chekhov's text, identifying speeches or dialogue from elsewhere in the play that served our intentions, stitching them together to make new scenes. We moved through the play without concern for chronology, cutting characters from scenes or overlooking moments of action, compressing or expanding time to create a collage of significant events.

We used *Active Analysis* to explore several of these key moments (for example the start of Act I, Olga and Natasha's confrontation in Act III and Vershinin's departure

[12] Initially *Études* were used to explore key moments in the text, and improvisations were used to explore events that were external to the action of Chekhov's play. Much as in the previous project, we often began with an *étude* as we started to explore a scene, but then moved into freer improvisations as the work developed.

in Act V) and working from an *étude* provided a route into devising a scene. In an *étude* the action is driven by the actor's impulses and instincts in relation to the *given circumstances* and initially exploring these moments through an *étude* established a way of working that privileged continual improvisation. Moreover, encouraging the actors to resist fixing their lines, approaching the scenes anew each day produced improvisations that exposed as much about the actors' experience of performing the roles as they did about the roles themselves. Working within this structure, where the actors were tasked to work from *themselves*, enabled us to incorporate their responses to performing their roles from a very early stage. As such, the scenes we were generating were characterised by a continual slippage between the actors and the roles and they were beginning to produce characters 'under erasure'.

In addition to working on specific moments in the play, we also improvised scenes that were reported in the play (Solyony and Tusenbach's duel, for example) and scenes based on scenarios I set up for the actors to work with that drew on characters rather than *events* (the Natasha scenes, for example). As these scenes were extraneous to the action our starting points were often external to the text. For example, the duel scene began with false beards, confetti canons and the Ennio Morricone's soundtrack to *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. In this improvisation the actors explored the sisters' desire for action, something they might approach like children playing at dressing up as soldiers and fighting. While these scenes brought additional nuance to the portrait of the sisters that was emerging, offering insight into the characters' relationships (Olga and Masha quite literally fight over Irina here) they also provided an opportunity to expose the trappings of character-creation. Accordingly, these improvisations undermined the creation of psychologically-realised characterisation, while also being grounded in a complex and nuanced understanding of the roles.

Working in this way, we began to extract the sisters' stories from the narrative structure, resisting a linear progression of time and the representation of coherent place and allowing the experience of performing the scenes, as well as our

understanding of the characters to guide us through the play. We harnessed different performance styles, exploring as wide a range of techniques for performing a role as possible. Slipping in and out of styles rapidly and moving from one part of the play to another increased the instability of characterisation, allowing us to attempt to create uncertainty and 'undecidability' as we tried to reduce dramatic character to its component parts. Over the course of the rehearsal period those key moments in Chekhov's play morphed into our scenes, becoming: the 'Olga Forgets Her Lines', 'Irina Takes Control', 'There Are These Three Sisters', 'Masha Tries to Leave', 'The Party', 'Natasha 1' and 'Natasha 2', 'Your Husband, Kulygin and an Olga for Sale', 'The Duel', 'The Fire' and 'The Brigade Leaves and Masha Laments'. These scenes took on a dual function, recalling Chekhov's play, conjuring its characters and moments of the action, but also exposing the actors' work in creating the scenes. Through disrupting the dramatic framework, resisting coherency and logic they enabled a fracturing of the text and they began to destabilise the performance of character, while simultaneously providing a structure for the final devised performance.

In addition to the work on the text, we began with an additional supply of material to work from. This included: copies of the text, a laptop, projector and speaker, a playlist of music, dresses of all styles, colours and periods, hats, wigs and gloves, high heeled shoes and strings of pearls and party paraphernalia: balloons, banners, hats, streamers and poppers, suitcases, a *papier-mâché* doll that had lost its head, a basketball, pencils and paper, plastic flowers, sunglasses, a pile of old books, two large brooms, a tutu, a high-vis jacket and a hard hat, two furry animal feet, a wand and a tiara, a red sequined dress and a pair of fishnet tights, stick-on moustaches, beards, and three heavy, woollen winter coats. This material aided the actors' performance of the roles and again facilitated a slippage between the actors (these were the props and costumes the actors could use to perform their roles) and their characters (these were the props and costumes of the sisters' childhood dressing-up box). It also established a design aesthetic, following Maria Knebel's contention that the actors should work with set, props and costume from the very start of an

Active Analysis process.[13] Indeed, the cheap, throwaway aesthetic nodded to the lo-fi aesthetic associated with some postdramatic theatre-making while mocking Naturalism's meticulous verisimilitude. Furthermore, it signalled a self-conscious superficiality that reinforced the emergent theme of failure (the inadequacy of the props and costumes at times thwarted the actors' performance of their roles) providing another framework through which the actors might simultaneously construct and deconstruct their characters in performance.

Devising from text

Act I, scene one of *Three Sisters*

Working on the opening scene of Chekhov's play similarly tried to establish the rules of engagement for the actors and in the first scene we tried to explore the ways in which character is created relationally (to other characters) and contextually (to time and place) and to our key *event*, Irina's name-day party. After reading the scene and delineating a section to work on (from the opening stage direction until Masha's line, 'Goodbye for now, my dear – I'll walk myself somewhere' (1991: 199)) we began with a *silent étude* to explore what was happening beneath the chatter and in the silences. Drawing on the characters' predominant *inner motive forces*, (which became significant for working on the opening stage direction, influencing *tempo-rhythm* of breath and movement) as well as the *given circumstances*, we identified *objectives* that were then solidified through the *silent études* and in the discussions that followed them. Irina's was 'I want to enjoy my party and think about the future,' Masha's was, 'I want to remember Father' and Olga's was, 'I want to enjoy my day off'. Masha's *objective* functioned as a *counter-objective* to Irina's and Olga, therefore, was caught in the middle of her two sisters, as her *objective* (to enjoy her time away from the school), was contingent on preventing Masha from spoiling the day for Irina. Having explored the scene in silence, we introduced text, props and items of costumes and music. In reintroducing the text, this meant the whole text; the actors were free to

[13] Knebel asserts that working with set, props and costuming from the start of the rehearsal process is crucial for *Active Analysis* (Thomas & Knebel 2016: 111-2).

use dialogue from anywhere in the play. The opening of Act I, therefore, effectively provided a loose narrative arc, established *objectives* and *counter-objectives*, allegiances and struggles (Merlin: 2007, 202), but the actors were free to roam anywhere in the play, to improvise and to introduce additional material in order to explore their *objectives* as fully as possible.[14]

'Treading the borderline' and Stanislavsky's 'third being'

In this early phase of work, it was clear that, freed from strict adherence to the form and structure of the text and the demands of naturalistic characterisation, the actors were able to fully explore what *they* might do in the *given circumstances* that the sisters find themselves in. The choices they made and how they expressed their responses to the *given circumstances* were informed as much by their own personalities and the dynamic between the three actors, as by Chekhov's characters and narrative. While the actor working in a naturalistic style is encouraged to adapt her personality to the role, we sought to expose the ways in which the actors' personalities diverged from their characters, privileging their response to the 'here, today, now' of every rehearsal. Encouraging the actors to tune into their individual mood and to the atmosphere of the rehearsal room, we allowed the differences in their personalities and the shifts in temperament to permeate the performance of their roles. More importantly, they were encouraged to express those responses and thus the actors' work in rehearsal reflected the characters they were performing and their own individual experience of that task. Accordingly, the actors began to merge with their characters, and *vice versa*, and as they switched with increasing frequency between 'self' and 'role' the distinction between the two became, in moments, increasingly blurred. Indeed, at times, they appeared as them*selves*, the actors engaged in the task of performing a role, at others the roles themselves came to the fore, while at others the actors and the roles bled into each other, and the liminal '/' was illuminated, as 'third being[s]' emerged.

[14] We introduced a number of additional texts to enrich the exploration of character. For example, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Giambattista Bastile's fairy tale, *The Three Sisters* and Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* (for Marilyn Monroe's performance as Sugar Kane).

Promoting the actors' ability to respond to the moment, to harness Stanislavsky's sense of '"I am being"' was, therefore, applied to an alternative end – no longer simply facilitating the actor's identification with the role, but instead, destabilising the performance of coherent characterisation. For example, as Grace/Irina struggled to create a party atmosphere, Maria Teresa/Masha became increasingly frustrated and her attempts to sabotage Grace/Irina's party became ever more persistent. She whistled over everything her 'sister' said, and as her efforts became more determined, Paksie/Olga stepped in to support Grace/Irina and make sure the party would happen, the scene would progress. In this moment, the line between the actor and role blurred, and it became difficult to ascertain to whom the impulse to sabotage the scene/party belonged. These slippages and the tension produced through the shifts back and forth between the situation the characters find themselves in, and the game the actors were playing as they explored those situations, destabilised the performance of their roles. These elisions problematised the ability to distinguish between 'the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being' (Derrida 2006: 12) and in these moments we got closer to staging character 'under erasure'.

Furthermore, as the dynamics between the actors/characters built in that first scene, a new set of *objectives* emerged, and it became clear that Grace/Irina and Paksie/Olga shared the goal of wanting to get through the scene, to 'do the play' so that they could enjoy the party or time away from work, while Maria Teresa/Masha remained intent on thwarting their enjoyment so that she might properly mourn their Father. While these *objectives* were driven by character-impulses, 'doing the play' would also enable them to fulfil the task of the *actor*, the performance of a role. Similarly, the *objective* to sabotage the party also allowed Maria Teresa to fulfil her intention to perform the role of Masha. The choices they made and the tactics they used to fulfil their *objectives* were, therefore, informed as much by their individual experiences of working together and of the process itself, as they were by Chekhov's play. The actors' responses to the game of 'staging the play' also brought a liveness to the performance of their characters that seemed to fulfil both

Stanislavsky's demand for "truth" on stage, as a sense of belief in 'whatever happens in performance' (Carnicke 2009: 145) and postdrama's preference for presence as 'the doing in the real' (Lehmann: 2006: 104).

Indeed, this idea of dual *objectives*, of the desire to stage the play and play their role *and* fulfil individual *objectives* within key scenes in the play went on to shape the entire devised piece and inform our work on different key *events*. If the name-day party was crucial for Grace/Irina, her moment in the limelight, Maria Teresa/Masha was equally determined to stage her love scene with Vershinin, and Paksie/Olga to take centre-stage in the Fire in Act III. Accordingly, each of the actors/characters took turns as the driving force of individual scenes. Thus, while they were freed from the demands of performing a role through delivering specific lines and actions within a specific structure, everything they did and said was informed by their characters' *objectives,* the *subtext* and *given circumstances* of the scene, *and* was grounded in their individual responses to the play, privileging their creativity in responding to the situations they found themselves in, in the 'here, today, now'. This is illustrated in each of the attempts to stage the opening scene, wherein the actors' frustration with the process of performing *Three Sisters* increasingly intersects with the sisters' loss of hope. For example, when Irina takes over in 'Irina Takes Control' her actions are driven by both Irina's impulse to have a party and enjoy her name day *and* Grace's frustration with Paksie's failure to get through the scene. Similarly, Paksie/Olga's apparent disintegration at the start of 'There Are These Three Sisters' reflects Olga's exhaustion with her role as a schoolteacher *and* Paksie's frustration with performing, or indeed failing to adequately perform the role of Olga, while in taking the scene in a whole new direction reflects Maria Teresa/Masha's desire to get to 'her scene', to find and perform with Vershinin.

Over the course of the devised piece the *objectives* continued to elide, bringing the actors and their roles simultaneously closer together while also driving them farther apart. Thus, crucially grounded in Stanislavsky's 'system', the conflicts produced by these interrelated dynamics drove the devising process, prompting a

collapse of the distinction between the actor and the role that resonated with both Stanislavsky's 'third being' and Lehmann's postdramatic 'theatre of the real'. Over the course of the rehearsal period, exploring and revising the actors/characters' *objectives* became a crucial way of exposing the very nature of the 'third being' and of re-presenting characters in order to illuminate the contingent relationship to the actors that conjure them.

Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing' and the devising process

While our process privileged the actors' creativity, the work remained structured around *Active Analysis* and we returned to the extract after each improvisation, re-examining our presentation of Chekhov's characters and considering how our scene was working to expose the processes and practices through which character is staged. Foregrounding the ways in which the actor creates character was one way of achieving this. For example, Paksie/Olga's chronic forgetfulness in the opening scene illuminated Olga's exhaustion, her 'perpetual headache', but also highlighted the relationship between dialogue and character. Similarly, denying Maria Teresa/Masha the use of speech, giving her only a whistle to communicate with, emphasised Masha's lack of compliance, but also highlighted how character can be created through a single gesture, turning the pages of an open book that she cannot read, or by a single sound: the whistle. Similarly, giving Grace/Irina the box of 'party tricks' helped her to fulfil Irina's *objective*, and indicated Irina's childlike nature, but also illuminated the extent to which props signify character. Thus, over the course of the rehearsal period, every choice was revisited and refined in order to construct the characters of Olga, Masha and Irina, and, simultaneously, to expose the methods of their construction.

Despite the intention to illuminate *how* character is created for an audience, we found often ourselves falling back into old habits of creating coherent roles, telling a story, or replicating moments that had initially arisen spontaneously, but that, through repetition became increasingly lifeless. As the scenes took on a clearer form and structure some of the actors' found it harder to improvise and to respond to the 'here, today, now'. To overcome this particular set of challenges we

established a way of working that encouraged continual and ongoing improvisation, and that drew on the practices of *adaptation* and *communion* and on the performance of failure that had begun to emerge in the previous project. In the first instance, it is important to note that there was no fixed script. Instead each scene, as it developed, was written up as a series of bullet points, with beats that needed to be hit and material that ought to be included. How that material was included and how the actors got from beat to beat changed each time they performed the scene. This working method hinged on the actors' ability to listen to one another, to *communicate* with one another and to *adapt* to both how they were feeling in the moment, but also to each other.[15] As a way of working it was demanding, but capable of producing moments of genuine liveness and *real* interactions between the actors/characters on stage. In addition to drawing on elements of the 'system', we returned to Lee Strasberg's 'Speaking Out' exercise, in tandem with embracing mistakes, mishaps and failure.

'Speaking Out'

Encouraging the actors to voice their frustrations with the roles, the scenes, or simply whatever was happening between them in the present moment, was, as I have argued, crucial to illuminating the ways in which the line between the actor and the role is blurred in the moment of performance. Using Strasberg's 'Speaking Out' exercise in the context of the improvisations enabled the actors to articulate their responses to the characters and their frustrations while also pursing those character *objectives* and exploring the play's *subtext*. This produced moments of real liveness, as the exercise promotes spontaneity, listening and a real connection to the 'here and now'. In this way, the exercise blurred the line between the actor and the role, attempting to undermine the distinction between reality and fiction. Combining the *étude* structure with Strasberg's 'Speaking Out' exercise, focusing on the pursuit of *objectives*, without being shackled to the author's text, and

[15] Stanislavsky dedicates a whole chapter of *An Actor's Work* to *communication*, followed by a chapter exploring 'An Actor's Adaptations and Other Elements, Qualities, Aptitudes and Gifts' and both techniques feature significantly in his advice to the actor on communication between the stage and the audience, as well as on the actor's ability to connect to the present moment. They are vital to the 'art of experiencing' and to the liveness at the centre of his 'system'.

introducing additional resources that served both to reinforce character, and undermine its existence as a cogent, coherent entity in a fixed place and time, generated a wealth of material from which we developed the final performance.

Devising the scenes and rehearsing character 'under erasure'

One such example was an improvisation that emerged from Paksie's use of Olga's lines as she tried to silence Maria Teresa/Masha's whistling in the opening scene:

> Everything is for the best, everything is from God, but I can't help feeling it would be better if I were married and stayed at home all day.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> *I* should have loved my husband.

Within the context of the improvisation, the *subtext* came to the fore and Paksie/Olga deployed the line as an attack on Masha, revealing her resentment of Masha's failure to find happiness in her marriage. Maria Teresa/Masha responded, drawing on the Sanford Meisner exercise, and replied: '*You* should have loved your husband?' to which Paksie/Olga retorted again, '*I* should have loved my husband.' And so, it continued. Maria Teresa/Masha and Paksie/Olga played with the line, until Maria Teresa had enough, put on her hat and declared, 'I'm leaving!' (an approximation of Masha's line, 'Goodbye for now, my dears – I'll walk myself somewhere' (1991: 199)). At this point Paksie/Olga retorted with, 'You're leaving?' and the repetition began again. Watching the improvisation play out exposed the tensions underlying Olga and Masha's relationship and heightened the stakes in the scene, while also foregrounding the actor and the task of *acting*, rather than the character and 'being'. From this interaction we went on to develop two further improvisations.

The individual scenes often developed in fits and starts, with a single idea emerging that we then harnessed to form the basis of another scene. Others were developed through improvisations that I structured for the actors, encouraging them to work with the toolkit we were developing to explore either an extract from the play, or a

particular character. There were also some scenes that were inspired by events that are central to the story of *Three Sisters*, but that are excluded from the plot. Briefly describing how each of these three models functioned should illuminate the devising process in more detail, highlighting the extent to which the work remained absolutely grounded in Chekhov's text and Stanislavsky's 'system', while also harnessing elements of theatre-making associated with postdrama.

'Natasha 1' and 'Natasha 2'

The desire to stage 'Natasha' was compelling. For if the sisters represent three aspects, or three ages of one woman, ostensibly combined as the play's protagonist, then Natasha is the antagonist. The sisters' demise, Olga and Irina's gradual eviction from the house, Olga and Masha's (and we might assume Irina's) failure to find happiness in either love or work is contrasted with Natasha's ascendancy. While we see her chastised and belittled by Olga at the end of Act I, the echoes of that admonishment when Natasha remarks on Irina's choice of dress in Act IV, foreground the reversal of fortunes and power. Natasha now possesses the sisters' home (and what remains of their squandered fortune) controlling not only their brother's, but also Olga and Masha's futures through her influence on Protopopov in his role at the local executive council, the body that oversees Olga's and Masha's husband's fortunes as employees of the state. Drawing on the power dynamic at play between the sisters and Natasha, I wanted to explore how the sisters feel about her, illuminating the extent to which we understand their characters partially in relation to her; they are what she is not, and she possesses what they lack: power, freedom and agency. In order to do this, I introduced a device whereby Natasha could affect control over the progress of the play, interrupting the work at any moment by plunging the actors into darkness.

Within this conceit and drawing on the moment in Act II when Natasha curbs the Shrovetide celebrations, roaming the house extinguishing lit candles, the rules of engagement became that the lights would only be turned on again if Paksie, Maria Teresa and Grace were able to satisfactorily conjure 'Natasha'. While this became a way of highlighting the sisters' fear of Natasha and foregrounding the power she

has over them, it also enabled us to play with the ways in which character can be created through voice alone, with the actors working by turns both singly and in chorus to invoke her. The idea of conjuring Natasha was developed further in a second improvisation the following day, in which the actors offered impersonations of her. The improvisation revealed the sisters' deep-felt animosity to Natasha, their ingrained snobbery and indeed the hypocrisy of their treatment of her and the depictions of her hinged on caricature and stereotype, revealing as much about the sisters' perception of her as they did about Natasha herself.

Accordingly, our work on exploring the character of Natasha veered wildly away from naturalistic characterisation. We were not interested in nuance or complexity, but simply bold stereotype grounded not in a desire to represent Natasha faithfully or in a complex nuanced fashion, but to explicate Olga (and her sisters') view of Natasha as the 'Little shopkeeper' (Masha, Act II, 1991: 235). This was also underpinned by the intention to reveal the extent to which the performance of character is a form of 'conjuring', a way of making-present that which is not real, that which no longer, nor has ever existed, but that instead absolutely treads the borderline between fiction and reality, liminal in its very nature and characteristic of a haunting rather than an embodiment. It is, however, worth noting that while these two scenes resisted staging 'Natasha' naturalistically, and they attempted to draw attention to the way in which character is created as a route into destabilising character, the overt meta-theatricality of these moments failed to achieve this. Indeed, the way in which the Natasha device played with personas, stopped short of genuinely confusing the audience – it remained clear that the actors were playing with layers of characterisation. Thus, while these scenes began to highlight the processes through which characters are created, the performance of character was not wholly effectively disunified or fragmented.

'The Fire'

The intention to simultaneously construct and deconstruct character was carried through into the work undertaken on 'The Fire' scene, as we explored the ways in which Chekhov creates Olga in the text and through which Olga might be staged by the actor. Central to this scene were a number of motifs. For example, Chekhov's emphasis on Olga's physical body prompted us to explore how character is created on and through the body. Throughout *Three Sisters* Olga continually references her physical state, her tiredness and the headaches she suffers; indeed, she even frames her optimism in Act I in relation to a lack of physical pain – being free from a headache. Accordingly, we began by searching for an action that would represent Olga's physical state, but that might also simulate the feeling of fatigue in Paksie. Olga's search for clothing for the victims of the fire offered a starting point and I asked Paksie to put on every item of clothing she could find while delivering Olga's speeches in the opening extract. My intention was to indicate the physical impact of life on Olga, and to overwhelm Paksie with the task she was being given in performing the role to replicate a similar, *real* feeling. In so doing, this moment worked against a naturalistic performance style, while also being absolutely contingent on a rigorous understanding of character and of the author's text. This moment exemplified my intentions for staging character 'under erasure'; using Stanislavsky's character-led approach to the performance of a role to move beyond a naturalistic style of characterisation, to produce a connection with the *reality* of the actor's work, and to destabilise the presentation of a cogent and unified character, grounded in coherent time and place.

This sense of both creating and destabilising character was reinforced through Paksie playing both roles in the scene, switching continually between Olga and Natasha. While this illuminated the ways in which the actor was creating two distinct roles (through shifts in tone, accent, rhythm, posture and gesture) foregrounding the actor rather than either role, so the scene was absolutely grounded in the work undertaken in the period of text analysis that revealed the depths of Olga's animosity towards Natasha, the sisters' snobbery and hypocrisy in their treatment of her, and the extent to which Natasha ultimately wields power over her. Effectively this scene became not only an attempt at staging character

'under erasure', watching Paksie/Olga disintegrate under the weight of the clothes and the demands of continually switching role, but that disintegration mirrored Olga's defeat at the hands of Natasha, as she cedes control in Act III.[16] Devoid of a clear contextual framework, and also playing multiple roles, destabilised the performance of Olga and Natasha. Were Natasha's lines simply a memory Paksie/Olga was recalling? Or perhaps Paksie/Olga was fulfilling a desire to become Natasha, to experience the freedom and power Natasha enjoys? In problematising the meaning of the moment, the scene attempted to both deepen the audience's understanding of Olga and foreclose the possibility of portraying Olga as a unified, cogent individual subject. This scene exemplifies how an exercise that might be undertaken at an exploratory stage of rehearsal but jettisoned before reaching the performance phase in service of naturalistic characterisation, was retained and developed as a scene in itself. Harnessing what occurred in rehearsal and taking those experiences *into* the performance, became one of the ways in which Stanislavsky's 'system' facilitated a performance-style that attempted to marry a character-led approach with a postdramatic theatre-making practice in order to explore the destabilised, fragmented and performative nature of contemporary subjectivity.

'Military Men', 'Irina is Lost' and 'The Duel'

In addition to those improvisations that drew on particular scenes or characters, we also worked on staging scenes that occur in the story of the play, but that are not part of the action. The first was the duel between Tusenbach and Solyony. The intention behind exploring this scene was two-fold. In the first instance, the sisters' relationships to the men in the play is central, both in terms of marriage and desire, but also in relation to agency, choice and freedom. Accordingly, it seemed important to explore how the sisters viewed the men in the play, how they

[16] This was felt perhaps most acutely in Act III as Olga attempts to assert her sense of 'self' in her argument with Natasha over Anfisa's fate. It is in this scene that we see her losing control both of the house, 'School for you – home for me. You have your teaching – I have the household to run' (Chekhov 1991: 224) and of her work life ('You'll be the one they choose [as headmistress], Olechka. It's been decided.') effectively appearing to relinquish control over her own destiny (Chekhov 1991: 243).

responded to their advances, but we also wanted to allow the sisters to play at *being* men. In a play ridden with stasis and inaction, it seemed that our actor/sisters were desperate for action*,* desperate to *do* something and playing the male parts gave them just that opportunity. We began by developing a duel scene, from which we also created the 'Military Men' and 'Battle for Irina' improvisations. All three scenes were developed quickly with the actors working with extracts from the text, a framework for the improvisation and judiciously selected props.

The giant confetti cannon, the synthetic beards, Ennio Morricone's soundtrack to Sergio Leone's *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* and Chebutykin's reference to the duel in Act IV were the starting points for 'The Duel', and once this scene was choreographed, we had set a performance-style that carried over into the 'Battle for Irina' and the 'Military Men' scenes. Indeed, these scenes offer an example of how we developed the overall style for the final piece, of how we found props, items of costuming or pieces of music that felt pertinent to the characters we wanted to stage, but that also resonated with the insubstantiality of the actor's work in conjuring a role. The mismatching props and costuming not only freed the actors from the scrupulous attention to detail associated with naturalistic representation, but reinforced the liminality of the space, a somewhere and nowhere place tied neither to a specific era or locality and our 'make-do and mend' approach to design was as patchwork as our performance-style.

Rehearsing character 'under erasure'

One of the most significant aspects of the work undertaken during this period was the exploration of different ways of representing the other characters in *Three Sisters*. This enabled us to explore how to expose the practices that are central to the very nature of character and was, therefore, key to our attempt to stage character 'under erasure'. In the first scene, we explored how the actors could conjure the Baron Tusenbach, Chebutykin, Solyony and Vershinin, using props and costuming, sound effects and projection. The actors created characters by simply reacting to the empty space as though the character was present, or by directing lines to an imagined audience member, or interacting with a projected image of a

Hollywood leading man to represent Vershinin. In addition, they used furniture and props, or *gestus* and stylised movements and voices, exploring archetype and stereotype to embody the military men or the avuncular Chebutykin.[17] While the material generated in these sessions was often filtered out as the improvisations developed, this work enabled us to solidify our 'toolkit', allowing the actors to test the range of resources they had to create character – functioning like Merlin's *aesthetic plane*, the material designated by the designer and the director within which the actor must find themselves in the role.[18] While we initially used this material to aid the actors in representing the additional roles, it became central to how we staged the sisters. For example, exploring the character of Irina, we used evening gowns, tiaras and satin gloves, worked on dance routines and learnt songs. The intention was to develop an arsenal of material that Grace might draw on to create a collage of 'Irina', to be pieced together in a montage of character. Staging character in this way deepened our understanding of Irina, enabling us to find resonances beyond the text and parallels in cultural references outside of the historical context of the play as well as allowing us to embrace a broad range of performance styles, from caricature and clowning to moments of naturalistic characterisation. Further, it also served to undermine coherent setting as we attempted to traverse place and time and began to develop a narrative approach that favoured a 'dream-structure', over and above dramatic time and place.

Dream-structure

[17] If, following Brecht's, we understand that *gestus* refers to a physical movement, or series of gestures and movements, or an entire physicality or posture, the actors developed a particular *gestus* to identify a character and reveal something about the social context the character exists within. For example, Maria Teresa and Grace both performed Anfisa through movement and physical posture: hunched over and shuffling around the stage. The intention was to illustrate Anfisa's age and social standing, the extent to which, because of her social position as a servant, she must continue to work, even when her body begins to fail her and to highlight the impact of that work on her body. David Barnett argues that Brecht uses *gestus* to reveal the social context that the body exists within, allowing the audience to understand the impact of that social context on the body and the restrictions on the character's agency. He argues that by using a particular *gestus* 'the actor is acknowledging that body-shape reveals information about its social situation and its history' (2015: 96) and that a figure's gestures or body shape can 'reveal important things about their place in the social and economic situation' (2015: 96).

[18] Merlin describes the *aesthetic plane* as addressing 'the theatrical devices adopted by the writer, and the scenic and artistic choices' arguing that 'In some ways, the choice the writer makes about the 'aesthetic plane' tells you something about the relationship between the audience and the stage, and the kind of journey on which the writer wants to take the audience' (2007: 63).

As the work progressed and the actors became more confident in continually shifting performance styles and switching roles we found that, almost imperceptibly, a linear structure was beginning to emerge. Recalling the lessons learnt from the previous iteration of practice, I looked for ways to resist this and tried to dismantle the emerging structure. Rearranging the scenes to avoid settling into an overarchingly linear narrative arc, we tried staging them in different combinations and orders. Using the repeated failed attempts to stage the opening scene helped create a structure that felt circular and embracing a repetitive structure illuminated the essentially repetitive nature of performance. However, it was a return to Lehmann's analysis of 'Dream images' (2006: 83) that proved most beneficial to resisting a linear narrative with a clear beginning, middle and end. Working from the idea that a single moment in the scene might instantaneously transport the actors/characters into another time and place, and that, in itself, this treatment of time and place was nothing out of the ordinary, was a way of embracing the logic of a dream. The three military scenes were central to this – appearing suddenly and swiftly, transporting the actors/characters to another world, time and place. In these moments we attempted to overlay the characters of the military men onto the characters of the actors/sisters, dislodging them from a coherent setting. As Masha's whistle appears to conjure the military men, or as the 'Battle for Irina' seems to freeze time, leaving Grace/Irina stranded and unsure how to proceed, the practice attempted to undermine the idea of a coherent character, foregrounding the ways in which character is created in relation to time and place (when am I? where am I?) and revealing the actors work on a role as nothing more than the conjuring of a spirit, the full possession of which was only effective in varying degrees; a temporary and temporarily disjunctive illusion.

Conclusion

Through the course of the rehearsal process I learnt a great deal about how to apply Stanislavsky's approach to the actor's work on a role beyond naturalistic

representation. Not only was I confident in using the practices of text analysis to undercover the material from which to devise, but I was starting to see how it was possible to use the practices and the techniques central to it to expose the ways in which character is conjured for an audience. I was becoming more assured in my ability to use the 'system', to be selective with the practices that served us best and to know when and how those practices might be added to or developed further. As the weeks went on I encouraged the actors to draw on more of Stanislavsky's practices for performance – with his ideas on *listening*, *adaption* and 'here, today, now' underpinning the early improvisations, but also repeatedly invoked as we strove to avoid the 'art of representation' and the pitfalls of repetition. In this way, the practice of improvisation central to a devising model converged productively with Stanislavsky's 'system', natural bedfellows with a shared goal that in rehearsal produced increasing moments of liveness, drawing continually on the shifts between the actors and the role as they attempted to produce 'third beings', partial, fragmented, almost always 'under erasure', but characters nonetheless.

However, during this period I also uncovered the challenges and demands of working in this way, of corralling the actors to resist fully-realised characterisation, to abandon 'logic and sequence' of a linear plot, but to hold onto it in the smaller moments, the singular instances, that we continually revised, reshaped and re-ordered in our endeavour to challenge the audience's preconceptions of Chekhov's play and their understanding of what character should look like. I learnt that this work is challenging for the actor trained to perform a role for an audience. That asking the actor to be playful and open, to resist fixing anything, to confound, rather than fulfil an audience's expectations, to work simply with the idea of communicating whatever is really happening for them in the moment, to *commune* with each other, to really listen, to hold each other and the audience in their *grasp*, is difficult – however foundational those ideas are to Stanislavsky's 'system' and the actor training all three actors had benefitted from. I learnt that what I was asking the actors to do demanded a new set of skills that needed to be developed over time and that, the more we worked, the more they understood the purpose and intention of what I was asking them to do.

The devising process also revealed much about the nature of dramatic character, much of which could be gleaned through reading Stanislavsky's insightful analyses, but which, finally, in this iteration of practice, I was able to explore more effectively in performance. Over the course of the rehearsal period I came to understand how character appears to inhabit every singular instance of the actor's work, every gesture, every glance of the eye, every high-heeled shoe and whispered nothing. It is in the tone of the voice, the pace of the actor's gait, the shape of their stance, and the plastic-flower cigarette they smoke. It is in the lines they say and the silences they leave, and it is always, absolutely nothing more than a momentary haunting, a conjuring of the 'life of the spirit of the role', contingent on the actor's body, mind and spirit and an audience willing to receive it. And what is more, when I reflect upon this phase of work, the distinction between dramatic and postdramatic character, character 'under erasure', appears to be slight. They are the flip side of the same coin, and postdramatic theatre often appears to shine a light on the boundary between self and role that naturalistic or psychologically realised characterisation works to disguise. For I propose that dramatic character is a coherent and unified reconstruction of fragmented thoughts and feelings, speech and actions, props and costume, voice and body and, in designing the 'system' to support the actor on her journey towards a role, so Stanislavsky also offers an effective blueprint for dramatic character's deconstruction.

7.3 Performance Analysis

Introduction

Three Sisters was performed at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama on 28th September 2015. Watching each performance, I was struck by the variations between them; each was as different in tone and tenor as the audience watching it. The extent of these differences evidences the fact that the actors were beginning to fulfil the promise of Stanislavsky's 'art of experiencing'. They were working from where they found themselves each evening, taking the temperature of the room and responding to each other and the audience; their performances were forged in

the ‘here, today, now’. The actors’ work in *Three Sisters* seemed to be fundamentally founded on two-way communication between the stage and the auditorium that resonated with the principles of both Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ and moved significantly closer to Lehmann’s analysis of postdramatic theatre, whereby the theatre event ‘is emphasized as a situation, not as a fiction’ (2006: 128). My assessment was reinforced through discussions with the actors as we reflected on the experience of the performances in the days that followed. It was clear that it was only in the moment of performance that they were able to fully get to grips with the piece, to understand how it worked once it was shared with an audience. Indeed, Maria Teresa summarised this response in her assessment that, in performance, the audience functioned like a fourth actor, playing a vital role and capable of shaping the action.

This observation might be made of any live performance, which by its nature is contingent on the dynamic with an audience. Yet the extent to which the performance of *Three Sisters* depended on the audience, to which the audience fed the actors’ creativity and impacted their choices, moved the work closer to a postdramatic theatre-making practice in which ‘improvised actions [are] aimed at a specific experience of presence and ideally the equal co-presence of actors and spectators’ (Lehmann, 2006: 123). While the practice of improvisation that underpinned the actors’ work on *Three Sisters* is evidently a cornerstone of postdramatic theatre, what is significant is that the actors’ improvisations were grounded in Stanislavsky’s *Active Analysis* and contingent on a rigorous understanding of the text and its characters. Accordingly, the audience’s ability to impact the performance and the subsequent move towards reconfiguring the relationship between stage and auditorium was produced by a theatre-making practice grounded in Stanislavsky’s understanding of the actor’s work on a role. Thus, this final iteration of practice evidenced the extent to which the effects of liveness and, in certain moments, of ‘undecidability’ can be produced by a theatre-making practice founded on Stanislavsky’s ‘art of experiencing’.

Through the following analysis I will explore how the *given circumstances* were re-deployed to undermine a sense of coherent time and place and create an aesthetic of repetition. I will discuss how the performance of failure was used to expose the actor's work on a role and I will examine how the staging of character 'under erasure' began to contribute to a reconfiguration of the demarcation of stage and auditorium. I will explore how Stanislavsky's 'system' was used to problematise the staging of character as representative of a cogent, self-determining, individual entity. It is important to note, however, that this analysis is inevitably subjective and, accordingly, I do not want overstate the extent to which the practice fulfilled the promise of the theoretical analysis. This iteration of practice was part of a process of creative exploration and there remains much to learn from the project's shortcomings. I hope this chapter will clarify how this project contributed to the new knowledge generated through practice in relation to the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' beyond Naturalism and psychological realism, rather than offering an absolute model for a Stanislavskian approach to postdramatic theatre-making.

Time, place and the *given circumstances*

Lehmann contends that 'the dream constitutes the model, *par excellence*' for postdramatic theatre and that '[h]ardly any other procedure is as typical for postdramatic theatre as repetition' (2006: 84 and 156). The structure of *Three Sisters* draws on these contentions, attempting to embrace the temporal logic of a dream, with repetition central to the form and the overarching style of the performance. As the actors/characters are shoved and shunted through the landscape, the scenes form a montage of fragments, cut loose from Chekhov's linear narrative and the collage-like effect resonates with Lehmann's analysis (2006: 84). As Maria Teresa/Masha's whistling morphs from petulant interruption to rhythmic instruction, it pulls the actors/characters out of Act I into a military parade and they transform from actor/sisters into soldiers and swooning heroines. In 'Olga Forgets Her Lines' Tchaikovsky's waltz from *Swan Lake* transports Paksie/Olga and Grace/Irina back to the Moscow of their youth, altering not only their mood and the atmosphere, but the language of the text itself; it is this transition that prompts

Paksie/Olga to descend into 'Russian' gibberish and time and place are condensed – they are at once in Russia and in exile, existing, simultaneously in the past and in the present. The childish squabble in 'Masha Tries to Leave' is interrupted by the doorbell, which fast-forwards time to the imaginary Vershinin's arrival and the longed-for party. Time speeds forwards at an alarming rate in 'The Fire' as Paksie/Olga ages overnight and the scenes overlays the characters of Olga, Anfisa and Natasha, creating, perhaps, a sense of the condensation characteristic of Freud's 'dream work'. When the lights come on at the end of that scene, Paksie/Olga looks around to discover that she is rambling and bent double, an old woman already, she understands that time has sped up and that she has aged, before the lighting change wakes her, as if from a dream, and the passage of time is reversed. She is young again, her 'self' once more.

Re-structuring dramatic time in this way significantly informs the performance of character 'under erasure' in *Three Sisters*. For, following Lehmann, 'the disintegration of time as a continuum proves to be a sign of dissolution – or at least subversion – of the subject possessing the certainty of its time' (2006: 155). Throwing time 'out of joint', actively thwarts the actors' attempts to perform their roles, often with paralysing effects. In addition to the internal prompts within scenes that send the actors/characters helter-skelter through the text, there are external prompts that drag the actors/characters along. The bells from the opening bars of Pink Floyd's *Time* signal the actors/characters' failure, wordlessly instructing them to begin again. They chime at moments when the actors/characters have strayed far from Chekhov's text, or when the task of playing every character has overwhelmed them and as such they appear to signal a form of punishment, a reprimand for their failure to maintain a 'believable' illusion of dramatic character. The blackouts produce a similar affect, attempting to destabilise the progression of linear time and the coherence of place, plunging the actors into darkness at the whim of an unnamed perpetrator. They intimate punishment, apparently producing anxiety in the actors/characters who are forced to take on the role of Natasha to bring the lights back up and reducing the performance of that role to a conjuration, a summoning through the incantation of lines from the text. As the bells and the

blackouts marshal the actors/characters through the text and around the stage, forcing them to endlessly return to the beginning, they highlight the illusion of stage time and the task of performing a role becomes increasingly onerous and banal, but also impossible to fulfil. Indeed, the multiple repetitions of the first scene render it increasingly detached from its original function in Chekhov's play and the performance of it becomes little more than a stick to beat the actors/characters with. Thus, the non-linear passage of time appears malevolent, a controlling force that overwhelms the actors/characters. When time stands still in 'Irina is Lost', Grace/Irina threatens suicide to escape having to perform without knowing when or where she actually is. In this way, the treatment of dramatic time begins to produce characters that are fractured and disunified, truncated before they are fully realised; characters 'under erasure'.

The continual shifts in and through time attempts to undermine the unity of time and place central to the Aristotelian principles of drama, in a bid to reverse the eradication of real time in favour of dramatic time. Indeed, they attempt to make the concept of time present for the audience, a tangible thematic concern, but also exposing the extent to which indicators of time shape the actors' minds, bodies and imaginations in service of the invocation of character. Furthermore, the repetitive, cyclical structure thwarts the audience's expectation of synthesis, as the repeated performances of the opening scene attempt to conform to Lehmann's assessment that an aesthetic of repetition renders stage action, 'meaningless and redundant… seemingly unending, unsynthesizable, uncontrolled and unknowable' (2006: 156). In this way, the five iterations of the opening scene and the resistance to logic and sequence effected through a non-linear approach to time, attempted to encourage the audience's active participation in the construction meaning and also increase their awareness of the real time of the performance-event. Lehmann argues that:

> For any rupture in the structure of time, we read, would harbour the danger that the spectator becomes aware of the difference between the original and the copy, reality and image, and is – inevitably – steered towards *his* time, the real time. (2006: 161)

In this way, we attempted to increase the proximity between the stage and the auditorium, whereby the frustration and boredom of the actors might begin to be reflected in the audience. Accordingly, recalibrating time in this way thwarts the actors' ability to stage Chekhov's play, while simultaneously taking the audience to the heart of the play's thematic concerns. Combining an approach to theatre-making grounded in a detailed knowledge of the play's characters with a postdramatic approach to time produced a performance that attempted to manifest, rather than re-present the stasis that permeates Chekhov's drama. The performance aimed to encourage the audience to actively work to make sense of the world presented to them, much like the sisters are forced to pick through the fragments of their own lives as they attempt to decipher the why and wherefore of existence.

In addition to attempting to embrace a dream-like structure where time is non-linear and subject to displacement and condensation, I similarly attempted to undermine the concept of coherent setting in favour of illuminating the shared space. I tried to expose the extent to which the space is open to manipulation and the creation of setting is dependent on the audience's imaginations. Throughout, the following places are evoked: the Prozorov's house and garden, a military parade, a party, a saloon bar, the deserts of the Wild West, a burning building, a snow-filled Spring. However, these places are signified fleetingly, suggested through a line of dialogue, a sound or lighting cue, a projection or a piece of music, quickly appearing and disappearing. In this way I attempted to destabilise the concept of coherent, knowable setting, in favour of conjuring 'place' through a shared imaginative experience. This is illustrated in the first scene as the actors delineate the space for the audience, building an imaginary fourth wall and demarcating a thrust stage. Here they invite the audience to willingly suspend their disbelief and create the world of the play with them. Furthermore, when the actor/characters fail to break through the imaginary fourth wall that they themselves have constructed, and when Paksie/Olga chastises Maria Teresa/Masha for 'breaking the fourth wall' by throwing a skirt into the audience, they remind the audience not only of the arbitrary demarcation of the space, but of the illusory

nature of setting and the audience's complicity in its creation. In these moments the audiences' eye is directed to the 'real' reality of the theatrical space, and, perhaps, to their own status as an active participant in the event. In this way, the treatment of space in *Three Sisters* attempts to emphasise theatre's status as a shared 'situation, not as a fiction' (206: 128).

As space is rendered endlessly adaptable, even liminal in its malleability, and time becomes a roller-coaster ride, hurtling forward like a runaway train, or grinding to slow-motion as the train crashes, I suggest that the temporal and physical *given circumstances*, the when and where am I? of Chekhov's play are no longer capable of containing or producing coherent characterisation. Instead, I propose that the treatment of time and place begins to expose the relationship between character and its context, illuminating the ways in which the 'third being' emerges *in* and *through* time and place. An example of this is Grace/Irina's response to time stopping in 'Irina Gets Lost'. When time appears to stand still she no longer knows what to say, how to behave or what to do next:

ACTOR/IRINA

There's a bit that comes after this bit. *(Pause.)* But I've forgotten it. *(She looks at ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA willing them to wake up.)* Arrghhh!!! *(Pause.)*

After some time, ACTOR/IRINA runs downstage and strikes a series of dramatic poses, trying out various lines from the play, trying to find her place, or somehow magically use the lines to re-awaken ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA.

(Melodramatically.) What is it? *(Pause.)* What has happened? *(Pause.)* Will someone please tell me, for the love of God! *(Pause.)*

Nothing! *(Looking at ACTOR/MASHA and ACTOR/IRINA).* Yes, and…! *(Pause.)* Nothing! No. Ok. This is ok. This is fine! This is live theatre. *(Pause.)*

She breaks down and sobs uncontrollably.

Silence.

ACTOR/IRINA takes a deep breath and pulls herself together. She stretches her arms out wide and makes her fingers into pistols, holding them to her head.

When time and place fail, the scene exposes the performance of a role as dependent on the *given circumstances*. Recalling Stanislavsky's appeal to the actor to find him or herself in the *given circumstances* of the role, it is the context of time and place that seems to produce 'character' in performance and thus I suggest that what remains when context is removed, produces an instance of character 'under erasure'. We watch Grace struggle to conjure the role she is tasked to perform, and a barely formed shadow of Irina is produced. As time is thrown 'out of joint' and Grace exposes the workings of character-creation, she manages to summon something of Chekhov's Irina, however pale a return it might invoke. Furthermore, the effect produced by foregrounding the task of performing a role as Grace works through a series of inchoate actions, gestures, dialogue and song to retrieve her character blurs the line between actor and role and, as in Lehmann's analysis of the 'theatre of the real' (2006: 103), it becomes momentarily difficult to distinguish fiction from reality. Indeed, by encouraging Grace not to fix her lines or actions in this section, the uncertainty manifested marked a real point of contact between both the character 'Grace/Irina' and the actor. Thus, in that particular moment, undermining the *given circumstances* of the actor's work seemed to facilitate the staging of character 'under erasure'.

Repetition

The destabilisation of time and place and resultingly, of a linear narrative, supports an aesthetic of failure. As the actors/characters are dragged through Chekhov's play, the text redoubles its demands on them, attempting to re-form the actors in the image of its characters. However, as their work fails to coalesce into cogent, naturalistic characterisations, repetition permeates their performances and begins to underpin the structure of the scenes. Indeed, an aesthetic of repetition is established from the opening scene, in which Paksie/Olga endlessly repeats Olga's first speech as she works to conjure the character and remember the lines. The scene presents a series of misquotations, highlighting the unwieldy nature of both

the author's text and the unreliability of the actor who is ill-equipped to deliver it, attempting to expose the precariousness of dramatic character. In addition to the repetitions of the opening scene, Paksie/Olga's lines and her actions are repeated in 'Irina Takes Control' and, revisited in each of the subsequent iterations of the opening scene. Similarly, Grace/Irina's response to Tusenbach's death in 'The Duel' repeats (or prefigures) much of what occurs 'Irina Is Lost', 'Moscow, Moscow, Moscow!' revisits the Tusenbach and Solyony section of 'Irina is Lost', 'Natasha 2' repeats much of 'Natasha 1', and lines from 'There are these Three Sisters' recur in 'The Brigade Leaves and Masha Laments'. These repetitions attempt to reinforce the cyclical structure and underline the extent to which the performance of a play is grounded in repetition, a re-presentation of speech and actions that have been performed before and that will be performed again. Accordingly, the repetitions attempt to draw attention to the actor in the role, to the nature of the actor's work, to the act of dramatic representation, rather than working to build the illusion of fully realised characterisation in a coherent context. Character (and, its real-world equivalent, the human subject) is exposed as multiply performed and enacted, reliant on an endless proliferation of self-representation, rather than indicative of an original, or cogent individual entity.

In addition to the structural repetitions there are numerous instances of repetition of Chekhov's text, often deployed with alternative subtext and to different ends. This is, in part, a consequence of the repeated structure, which forces the actors/characters to revisit lines in their renewed attempts to perform the play. It is also an inevitable result of a devising approach that drew on Stanislavsky's *Active Analysis* model, wherein, when the actors were working with text, it was always improvised, and they were encouraged to edit, repeat or embellish it. This meant that the scenes evolved every rehearsal, without ever being absolutely fixed, and working in this way in performance, meant that the actors were genuinely finding their way through the material each night. Almost every scene in *Three Sisters* combines lines of dialogue directly taken from Frayn's translation with additions, embellishments and repetitions. As a result the performances reveal as much about the actors and their practice in working with the text as they do about Chekhov's

characters. An examination of Grace/Irina's speech at the end of 'The Party' should illuminate this further:

ACTOR/IRINA — I don't like my job. (*Pause.*) 'No, I don't like it at all.' *(ACTOR/OLGA starts to sweep up.)* It's not the work I dreamed about. 'It's work with no poetry in it, mindless labour'. *(Pause.)* Tired. *(Pause.*) This woman came into the telegraph office today because she needed to send a telegraph about her son who had died but she couldn't remember the address and I don't know why I told her she was… well I told her to go away, this woman who came into the telegraph office today to send a telegram *(Crying.)* about her son who had died and she couldn't remember the address and I don't know why I told her she was stupid, I just told her to… fuck off.

Blackout. Total darkness.

Two lines are directly taken from Frayn's translation, and much of Grace/Irina's speech paraphrases Irina's lines, she also adds an expletive and repeats the story about the telegraph office. The repetition was significant in rehearsal as it allowed Grace to explore Irina's emotional state and she sometimes repeated the story several times until she found a point of contact with the character. Encouraging Grace to continue to repeat the speech in order to help her to 'meet' the role of Irina in performance, therefore, facilitated the staging of her character, while also exposing Grace's work in conjuring her. In this way the practice of repetition highlighted the extent to which the actors reshaped and remodelled the material of the text in every performance and accordingly, because each remodelling was different, contributed to the effect of liveness that proliferated in moments.

In this way the repetitions of scenes and sections of dialogue begin to reveal the relationship between the actors and the author's text that is central to the performance of character. The text appears to be capable of exerting control over the actors, seeming to physically engulf them as the lines from Chekhov's opening stage direction are magnified over the course of the piece, or as it demands continual manipulations of the actors' bodies and imaginations for them to produce the play's characterisations (the performance of Natasha is the prime example). Yet, on the other hand, the text is exposed as porous to the actors' responses and their own wilful machinations. For not only do their performances fail against a

barometer of psychologically realised or naturalistic characterisation, the text is also shown to be material to be wrestled with, at times pulling the actors hither and thither but at others being dragged off in new directions, informed by the individual actors' own agendas. In 'Olga Forgets Her Lines' it is unclear if Paksie is crumbling under the weight of the text, or if she is sabotaging the scene for some ulterior motive and both she and Maria Teresa/Masha manipulate the text in service of their own ends throughout. It is Maria Teresa/Masha's desire to perform a love scene that leads to the creation of 'There are These Three Sisters'. Furthermore, in 'Your husband, Kulygin and an Olga for Sale', Maria Teresa/Masha uses the text to punish Paksie/Olga for sabotaging her scene with the Audience member/Vershinin, deploying Kulygin's line, 'If it weren't for Masha, I should marry you' (1991: 245) to wound her 'sister'. Paksie/Olga retaliates by reading Vershinin and Masha's final farewell in Act V. The text is accordingly weaponised by the actors, and these moments foreground the actors *in* the role while simultaneously deepening the individual characterisations.

I suggest that the impact of these repetitions that expose the actor at work in the role, unpacking the actors' relationship to the text, again produces moments of 'undecidability'. As the actors continually shift from dialogue from the play to paraphrasing the text, to improvisation in response to the present moment, the distinction between actor and role is, at times, destabilised. This is not to suggest that everything the 'actors' do on stage should be perceived as 'real', but that the movement between the states of 'actor' and 'role' begins to problematise the audiences' ability to distinguish between what *might* be 'real' and what is entirely fictional in certain moments in the performance. Conforming to Lehmann's analysis, the use of repetition and improvisation in conjunction with Chekhov's text enabled us, at least in moments, to 'put the real [live response to the moment] on equal footing with the fictive' (2006: 103) and, I contend, to blur the line between fiction and reality sufficiently to produce brief moments of 'undecidability'.

Staging failure

'Failure' (itself a key theme in Chekhov's drama) is a common theme and performance convention in experimental and postdramatic theatre-making (Bailes: 2011). In addition to the opening scene of each act, both Natasha scenes are a product of the actors' failure to perform their roles effectively, while 'Irina is Lost', 'Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!' and 'The Duel' explore Irina's failure to find fulfilment in love or work, mirrored in Grace's failure to perform her role. Furthermore, failure becomes an effect to be deployed by the actors/characters within individual scenes. For example, Maria Teresa/Masha as Kulygin wilfully fails to acknowledge Paksie/Olga's Masha, after Paksie/Olga sabotages her scene with the Audience member/Vershinin (itself an unmitigated failure) and Maria Teresa/Masha's attempt to auction Olga off in 'Your Husband, Kulygin' is predicated on, and serves to illuminate, Olga's failure to find a husband. In the five iterations of the opening stage direction the stage becomes chaotic and the props and costuming increasingly fail to facilitate the actors' performances. Furthermore, the actors/characters' attempts to stage the opening moments of Chekhov's play chart Paksie/Olga's disintegration and move further and further away from Chekhov's play and naturalistic staging. Accordingly, failure is intrinsic to the action and central to the attempt to stage character 'under erasure'. Each time character is built up, it is as quickly dismantled, and the actors' attempts to perform their roles fall apart, exposing the bodies, minds and imaginations that endeavour to produce them. Following Sara Jane Bailes' assessment that 'failure indexes a moment in which the other, or otherness itself, is present' (2011: 23) the predominance of failure as a performance convention attempts to focus the audiences' attention on the liminal '/', the interaction between the actor and the role that is foregrounded in the performance of character 'under erasure'. Each time the actor fails to produce or fulfil the role, she exposes both herself to the audience *and* recalls the character she has failed to perform. In this way, failure amplifies the Uncanny nature of the actor's work, facilitating a partial conjuring of the *spectre* of character and revealing the presence of the actor's body through which that conjuring is affected. Foregrounding the failure of the performance throws time 'out of joint' and 'furtive and untimely' we encounter character 'under erasure', who like 'the spectre does not belong to that time, it does not give time, not that one: "Enter the

ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost"' (Derrida: 2006: xi) and the audience's eye is refocused on the act of conjuring itself.

The extent to which 'failure' functioned to expose character as a conjuring act, an attempt to cheat time and bring another 'self' to life is evidenced in the scene 'Irina is Lost'. Indeed, as Grace resorts to stock gestures and stereotype, to quotation and indicating character through props, costume and cliché, the audience's eye is re-directed to *process* rather than product and the actor/character seems to inhabit a no man's land, neither fully herself nor fully in role. This scene forces the audience to attend to Grace's frustration and in so doing to reconsider the task at hand, to reflect upon what it means to play a 'character', what it means to perform a role. Similarly, the multiple iterations of the opening scene foreground the actors' different approaches, shifting the audience's attention away from the characters as they appear in Chekhov's play and directing it, instead, to the practices through which the actors attempt to summon them. 'Olga Forgets Her Lines' foregrounds the extent to which character is produced (or fails to be produced) through dialogue, accent, tone, inflection, tempo and rhythm, but also positioning on stage, actions and gestures through adopting the 'repetitive structure of the attempt' (Bailes 2011: 30). In 'Irina Takes Charge' we witness the failure of dialogue and actions to conjure a character, for while Grace/Irina knows what to do and say, the character that emerges remains Grace/Irina, not Olga. The same can be said of Maria Teresa/Masha's 'Irina' in that scene, for while she replicates Grace/Irina's gestures and actions the subtext of those actions belong to Maria Teresa/Masha and the audience is directed, once more, to the processes of character-creation through the repeated (failed) attempts to perform this new role.

Accordingly, and as Bailes argues in her analysis, staging failure 'destabilizes frameworks and techniques that are more usually co-opted to consolidate the conventions of representational order' (2011: 7) and, refocuses the audience's eye on those practices and conventions (2011:12). Reading *Three Sisters* in light of Bailes' analysis places the practice in a lineage of experimental theatre-making that engages with the problem of representation and the questions of authenticity that

Stanislavsky was so concerned with a century earlier. It seems, therefore, entirely appropriate that Stanislavsky's 'system' has been used to re-direct the audience's eye to mechanics of character-creation and to the oscillations between the actor and the role that, although hidden in service of dramatic representation, are fundamental to the performance of character. Thus, in tandem with structural repetitions, the 'poetics of failure' that permeated *Three Sisters* began to expose the extent to which character, and, indeed, subjectivity, is performatively produced. In this way, these strategies attempted to problematise the idea of an 'original' reality that could be represented, instead drawing attention to the way in which experience and identity are commodified through endless self-representation. For the demands of the task of 'performing a role' become increasingly impossible to meet and we witness the progressive decomposition of the actors/characters in service of the text and the demands of creating 'believable' characterisation. Their attempts to perform their 'selves' appear increasingly ineffective as the 'reality' they strive to represent appears to always be beyond their reach.

What emerges in the wake of those failures still corresponds to the concept of character, but more clearly to Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the term as a dynamic and porous entity, continually in process. I propose, therefore, that through re-imagining Chekhov's text through the performances of Paksie/Olga, Maria Teresa/Masha and Grace/Irina, we foregrounded just how far from the coherent, self-determining liberal humanist subject, Chekhov's characters actually are. In this way, I propose that attempting to stage character 'under erasure' and to marry a character-led approach with some of the principles and practices associated with postdramatic theatre, enabled us to illuminate the extent to which dramatic character, by the turn of the twentieth century, was already, at least partially under erasure.

Characters 'under erasure'

The attempt to stage character 'under erasure' underpins every scene in *Three Sisters*. From scene to scene, moment to moment, alternating methods of character-creation are foregrounded, at times deployed in isolation, at others as part of a wider tapestry of techniques through which character is built up before being torn apart again. A brief analysis of a number of the techniques foregrounded should support this contention. For example, the function of costume in creating character is highlighted in the opening sequence and throughout the piece costume is seen to either produce, or fail to produce, character. While the period dresses of the opening scene, the mantilla, the tutu and the fur stole and high heels, seemingly transform the actor and conjure the role for the audience in a heartbeat, the black skirt and hat fail to produce Masha when donned by Paksie/Olga, and it is on this failure that the scene hinges. Here the costume is incapable of erasing Paksie/Olga's presence because Maria Teresa/Masha fails to allow it to transform her and thus the scene not only illuminates the way in which costume functions, but also the need for the complicity of those witnessing the transformation. The artful use of costuming is foregrounded in the moment when Maria Teresa/Masha flings the skirt across the stage at Paksie/Olga demanding, 'Why don't *you* be Masha!' as though this is all she needs to bring the character to life. In this moment the audience's attention is directed to the *function* of costume, rather than simply absorbing its effect. This idea is reinforced in 'There are these Three Sisters' when Maria Teresa/Masha's plastic flower cigarette completes her transformation into the saloon-bar singer. After Maria Teresa/Masha's lengthy wait for the 'cigarette' to be produced, the power of a single item to conjure time, place and character is illuminated when she inhales, and suddenly the transformation is complete.

While props and costume are layered onto the actors' bodies, the transformation of their bodies through actions, posture, gestures, expressions and tempo-rhythm are also foregrounded as part of the actor's arsenal in their work on a role. The opening scene emphasises this as Paksie/Olga paces the stage, marking books with mounting frustration, contrasted with Maria Teresa/Masha's slow-motion turning of the pages of her book and Grace/Irina's stilted movements of a music-box ballerina. Here the actors signal their characters through actions, and characters

emerge in contrast to one another. Posture and gestures are foregrounded when the actors/characters' swagger as military men, bringing the brigade momentarily to life, and in Paksie/Olga's poses and expressions through the striking of the clock in 'Olga Forgets Her Lines'. In these moments, characters exist in single gestures, postures or facial expressions. This is exemplified by Maria Teresa/Masha and Grace/Irina's Anfisas in 'Natasha 2', where they conjure Anfisa through just the rhythm of their movements and the shape of their bodies. In addition to the physical transformation of the actors' bodies, elements of vocal work are also highlighted. Tusenbach and Solyony are created through adopting accents and donning beards, while Natasha is conjured and distinguished from Olga, through accent, tone and pitch in 'Natasha 2'. Furthermore, in the moments when the actors' speech becomes inaudible, for example, upon Vershinin's arrival during 'The Party' and in 'The Brigade is Leaving and Masha Laments', character is created and maintained through only tone, pace and pitch of voice.

In addition to exposing the component parts of the actor's work on a role, the staging of character 'under erasure', the sense of 'undecidability' and the destabilisation of the boundary between the actor and the role is further reinforced by the constant changes in performance style. Switching from stereotype and archetype, from stock gestures, to moments of fully-realised characterisation destabilises the ground beneath both the actors' and, possibly, the audience's feet. The speed and frequency with which these shifts occur attempts to foreclose the possibility of creating cogent characterisation, even when the actors' work on the roles is most fully-realised. This resultant destabilisation is further reinforced by the shifts between three performance modes that the actors move between. They are those of 'the actor', 'the role' and a blend of the two. In addition, the actor shifts between difference uses of the text, which include direct use, paraphrasing and improvisation based on their interaction with the roles and the performance circumstances. As I have previously argued the shifts between these different uses of the text occur frequently and rapidly and this is mirrored in the shifts the actors make between performance modes.

Certain scenes are, however, dominated by one principal mode, for example all five 'Opening Stage Direction' scenes (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) foreground the 'actors', but they contain moments when Olga, Masha and Irina take centre stage and the actors recede. Maria Teresa/Masha's response to Vershinin's arrival during 'The Party' and her scene with Audience member/Vershinin, Paksie/Olga as Natasha in 'Natasha 2' and Grace/Irina's flight from her sister in 'Moscow, Moscow, Moscow' stand out as notable examples. Most commonly the shifts between the states occur throughout the scenes, and the actors move rapidly between them to produce a blend of character and role that attempts to create a destabilising effect. In the opening moments of 'Olga Forgets Her Lines', for example, Paksie/Olga shifts from 'actor' to 'role' over the course of only four lines:

ACTOR/OLGA *(To the audience.)* It's exactly a year ago since father died.

Pause while ACTOR/OLGA remembers her lines.

'A year ago, today'. *(Pause.)* Yes.

Pause. She looks around and takes a deep breath to settle her nerves.

'May the fifth'… It's exactly a year ago… 'May the fifth'… It was ummm… *(To ACTOR/IRINA)* 'It was on your name day Irina'…

A long pause. She has forgotten the next line.

Line.

A long pause.

The first line is a misquotation of Frayn's translation, the second is an accurate quotation and after struggling with the text, Paksie appears to step out of role momentarily and ask for a prompt. As this occurs at the beginning of the piece, the ground rules have not yet been established for the audience and this thus, potentially, produces a moment of apparent liveness and 'undecidability'. Is this the actor really struggling to remember her lines? As Paksie shifts from 'role' to 'actor' through this scene, and the line between the two states becomes increasingly blurred, the character produced manifests most clearly as a 'blend' between the

two, indicative of the '/' between the actor and role. Significantly, as the veracity of Paksie/Olga's forgetfulness is undermined as the scene progresses, the boundary between the 'real' actor and the 'role' is further destabilised. The distinction between the two states becomes increasingly unclear, illuminating the contingent nature of character and the porous effect of the actor's work as the two, actor and role, merge. In this way, the audience is not only directed towards the techniques through which character is conjured, rendering character partial and fragmented, but also invited to question which 'character' is being presented to them.

The destabilisation between the actor and the role and the resultant 'blend' between the two is further compounded by the additional layers of characterisation adopted in 'There are these Three Sisters', 'Your Husband, Kulygin and an Olga for Sale' and 'The Brigade Leaves and Masha Laments'. In 'There are these Three Sisters' Maria Teresa plays Masha playing a saloon-bar singer in an attempt to stage the opening scene of Chekhov's play and the performance of characterisation becomes increasingly circuitous. The line between the actor and the role becomes harder to identify and we may begin to question whose fiction we are really being presented with. Are we witnessing Masha and Vershinin's ill-fated love affair or the struggle between a group of actors all jostling for their moment in the limelight? The answer is inevitably both and, as an audience, I propose that we are more than capable of reading the two narratives in the same moment, even if both are only partially told, momentarily evoked. A similar layering of characterisation occurs in 'The Brigade Leaves and Masha Laments' when Grace/Irina and Maria Teresa/Masha kiss and it becomes impossible to identify to whom the action belongs. While Grace/Irina appears to kiss Maria Teresa/Masha as her sister, attempting to comfort her, Maria Teresa/Masha appears to respond as if she is kissing Vershinin and when Grace/Irina pulls away from her it is unclear whether this is as Irina, Vershinin or as her 'self', the actor.

I suggest that this moment epitomises the practice of staging character 'under erasure'. It highlights the inherently ghostly nature of the actor's work on a role, the conjuring of character that plays across the actor's mind, body, imagination,

through which the author's text is brought to life. Furthermore, this moment demonstrates how the practice attempts to foreclose the possibility of staging character as unified and coherent, instead foregrounding the extent to which the 'role' is contingently created, fundamentally discontinuous and disunified. Thus, I propose that this moment reveals the extent to which drawing on Stanislavsky's 'system' to stage character 'under erasure' enables a critical engagement with the concept of character, and, potentially, with its real world equivalent, the human subject, while also offering a nuanced re-presentation of Chekhov's play. For we understand Masha's desperation when Vershinin leaves, even if we fail to witness either character. Accordingly, I contend that *Three Sisters* began to facilitate the fragmentation of character in performance, allowing us to disassemble psychologically-realised, naturalistic characterisation and expose the individual strands through which character is woven, while also staging Chekhov's play and the characters who inhabit it. In so doing, the practice forecloses the depiction of character and subjectivity as fixed, cogent and knowable, but not the possibility of character or subjectivity altogether. Instead it presents the 'self' and the 'role' as precarious, fragmented and contingent, encouraging an exploration of what constitutes character, and perhaps even the human subject, and what remains if it is reduced to its component parts.

Further development

While *Three Sisters* came closer to illustrating the theoretical case put forward in the thesis, there remains work to be done and the practice posed further questions in relation to staging an effective example of postdramatic theatre, to destabilising the audience's perception and problematising the distinction between what is 'real' and what is fictional in the theatrical event. For example, while I contend that we were able to facilitate momentary interruptions of the 'real', these were neither frequent enough, nor always genuinely confusing enough to fully facilitate a sense of 'undecidability' for the audience. While the actors grew increasingly confident in combining the three approaches to the text (using quotation, paraphrasing the text and improvising in the moment) they found improvising hardest. Indeed, while there were moments when they used the practice of 'Speaking Out', or riffed

directly off the audience, I believe that developing the actors' confidence in improvising would help to further increase the moments of liveness and, accordingly, facilitate the experience of 'undecidability' for the audience. Strengthening the improvisatory element might allow for more 'interruptions[s] of the real', moving the performance practice away from the meta-theatrical delineation produced by the shifts between actor and role, and provide a route into foregrounding the destabilised nature of human experience in a twenty-first century landscape even more clearly. Furthermore, while the intention to embrace a dream-structure underpinned the practice, focusing primarily on establishing a non-linear structure, without fully exploring how to condense and displace images and, indeed, characters, meant that this intention was again not fully realised. Revisiting ways to play with displacement and condensation might offer a productive route into further destabilising the actor's work on a role and, accordingly, facilitating the staging of character 'under erasure' more effectively in future iterations of practice.

I believe the practice could also be strengthened by further supporting the actors to relinquish some of the principles that appear to be central to actor training. The actors were often anxious about the mistakes that occurred in each of the performances and struggled to make use of them. For example, while Maria Teresa made use of a mistaken sound-cue in the second performance, responding to the sound operator and interrupting the action, she was wrong-footed by the confetti canon failing to explode in the final performance and the opportunity to work with it was lost. While Paksie and Maria Teresa got into the stride of responding directly to the audience, it was harder for Grace, who I had to encourage not to replicate an improvisation that had worked well the first night, but to allow herself the freedom to work genuinely from the moment in each performance. This is not to say that the actors failed in this respect, however, it is important to acknowledge how hard it was for them to break out of an acting practice and training that is grounded in the performance of naturalistic characterisation and the portrayal of cogent, complex, 'believable' roles. As such, it seems that exploring ways to strengthen the actors' confidence in their ability to respond in the moment might offer fruitful

rewards for further testing the extent to which using Stanislavsky's 'system' to stage character 'under erasure' can fully facilitate a postdramatic theatre-making practice.

7.4 Conclusion

To conclude this analysis, I will to return to the start of the chapter and the aim of the final project: *to 'detonate' character, to explore what remains when character is isolated from the formal structures of dramatic time and place*, to stage character in its component parts. In my, inevitably subjective view, *Three Sisters* began to facilitate that detonation, revealing that, although it was pulled apart, character, nonetheless, *remained*. Dismembered and divided in fractures and fragments, in just the shape and rhythm of the actors' body, or the repetition of a single line of dialogue, we are still able to read character. For while Maria Teresa/Masha reimagines the opening monologue, relocating the action to a saloon bar, revising the content of the scene, the characters of Masha, Irina and Olga still hover above the action, detached from the bodies of Maria Teresa, Grace and Paksie, but present nonetheless. As Maria Teresa/Masha drags on her flower cigarette we read Masha, and her desire, her need for attention, her longing for life comes to the fore. When she kisses Grace/Irina in 'The Brigade Leaves and Masha Laments' we cannot clearly discern who she is kissing, or who Grace/Irina is as she pulls away, but that does not prevent us from reading Masha, Vershinin and Irina into that one moment, does not preclude their stories being told. Thus, while I conclude that working with Stanislavsky's 'system', developing a devising practice grounded in techniques for character-creation, facilitated moments of liveness and 'undecidability', it did so without completely annihilating character from view. Indeed, I contend that it enabled a theatre-making practice that resonated with some of the conventions and practices common to postdramatic theatre, while also placing character back at the centre of the theatre-making project. Furthermore, it offered rich and complex characterisations, still grounded in the author's text, while also exposing the correlations between Chekhov's 'naturalistic' characters and the fragmented and post-human entities of postdrama. In this way, the final practice offers evidence of the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' beyond Naturalism and

psychological realism and in service of a postdramatic theatre-making practice, but also reveals the extent to which the reintegration of character inevitably reshapes postdramatic theatre-making. While I will return to this question in more detail in the conclusion to the thesis, a robust analysis of the ways in which that reintegration impacts on postdrama are beyond the scope of this research. Thus, this initial observation must serve primarily as indicative of the ample opportunities for further exploration of the relationship between character and postdramatic theatre-making practices in future research.

Conclusion

This research has provided an opportunity to explore how Stanislavsky's 'system' can be applied to the deconstruction of dramatic character in performance. By combining Stanislavsky's rigorous exploration of the actor's work, with a practice that has attempted to foreground the disunified and hybrid experience of subjectivity in a multiply-mediatized, late-capitalist society, I have explored the possibility of staging a postdramatic theatre of character 'under erasure'. Arguing for a re-evaluation of the fate of dramatic character on the postdramatic stage and for re-reading Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the actor's work on a role as hybrid and processual, I propose that Stanislavsky's advice to the actor remains pertinent to the twenty-first century practitioner, even in a context within which the role and function of dramatic character has been significantly revised. In bringing together Stanislavsky's explication of the 'system' and Hans-Thies Lehmann's theorization of postdramatic theatre, I identify parallels between Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of theatrical 'truth' and 'realism' in performance, and postdramatic theatre's preference for liveness and the 'real'. Furthermore, I examine the extent to which Stanislavsky's concepts of 'experiencing' and 'dual consciousness' and his conceptualisation of the 'third being', move away from the idea of dramatic character as fixed, coherent and individuated. Instead, the 'third being' is processual, contingent and hybrid and, accordingly, resonates with the often de-individuated, fragmented characters of the modern avant-garde, and, indeed, the hybrid entities of the postdramatic stage. While Stanislavsky was not a postdramatic thinker, I argue that his theories and practice should be viewed on a continuum of innovation that leads to postdramatic theatre's radical reformulation of character. Thus, the thesis argues for Stanislavsky's continued relevance to postdramatic theatre, supporting a history of twentieth-century theatre and performance that rejects a binary approach, seeking out traces of influence and confluence rather than privileging the instances of rupture and division.

Through the theoretical analysis, I argue for a revised understanding of dramatic character, exploring the extent to which its continual evolution reflects the

changing nature of conceptualisations of human subjectivity to which it is tied. Further, and following Cristina Delgado-García, I contend that the proposed 'death' of character on postmodern and postdramatic stages, relates to the demise of an historically specific conceptualisation of character, indicative of a liberal humanist subjectivity, rather than to dramatic character *per se*. On this basis I argue for a broad definition of character as 'any conceptualisation of human subjectivity within a dramatic text or a theatre performance' that can, accordingly, take account of character in its myriad and ever-evolving forms. From this starting point and, following Louise LePage, I explore the parallels between Naturalism's dramatic characterisation, from which Stanislavsky's 'system' emerged, and dramatic character in the early twentieth-century modern avant-garde and the post-humanist 'figures' of postdramatic theatre. While this is not to suggest that Naturalism's characters are the same as the post-human entities who populate postdramatic stages, it is on this basis that I argue for a reconsideration of the fate of character in postdramatic theatre and of Stanislavsky's relationship to the postdramatic.

The thesis proposes that while character has, undeniably, been radically reformed on the postdramatic stage, it has not been entirely removed from view. I explore the extent to which postdramatic stagings of the human subject continue to entertain a relationship with dramatic character, albeit one that typically offers a critical or citational engagement with the concept of 'character', problematising the very idea of liberal humanist subjectivity and the notions of cogency, agency and self-determination with which dramatic character has come to be associated. Following Liz Tomlin, and drawing on Jacques Derrida's strategy of *différance*, I argue that postdramatic theatre depicts figures who manifest in and through a continual process of difference from and deferral of, those coherent, individual agents of action associated with realistically-represented, dramatic character. On this basis, and drawing on a broader understanding of the term, I propose a return to the term 'character' (albeit placed 'under erasure'), to describe postdramatic theatre's stagings of human subjectivity. Indeed, I contend that postdramatic theatre has contributed to the evolution of dramatic character by problematising

the concept of 'character' and questioning the practice of representing the human subject as an individual, self-determining agent of action.

Following this analysis of the fate of character in postdramatic theatre, I argue for a re-evaluation of Stanislavsky's analyses of the actor's work. Through exploring Stanislavsky's 'system' in the light of Lehmann's discussion of postdramatic theatre, the thesis exposes congruencies and commonalities that challenge the view that the 'system' represents an approach to performance-making against which postdramatic theatre might be defined. Stanislavsky's attitude to the actor's relationship to the author's text, his use of improvisation and his central belief in the actor's creativity are all particularly clear examples, while his conceptualisation of theatrical 'truth' and of stage 'realism' find significant resonances in postdramatic theatre's pursuit of 'liveness' and the 'real' in performance. Furthermore, Stanislavsky's conceptualisation of the 'third being' as a dynamic and hybrid entity and the constitutive interplay at the very heart of his concepts of 'I am being' and 'experiencing' resonate clearly with poststructuralist and posthumanist conceptualisations of human subjectivity. Accordingly, I propose that Stanislavsky's 'system' remains relevant to the work of the performer engaged in the task of staging character 'under erasure'. Indeed, it is my contention that while the 'system' offers a blueprint for the construction of dramatic character in performance, so it might equally be applied to its *de*construction, in service of a postdramatic theatre-making practice. Accordingly, this re-reading establishes the theoretical case for returning to Stanislavsky and for adopting a character-led approach to postdramatic theatre-making. It supports the revision to Stanislavsky's reputation for individualist psychology and exclusive adherence to Naturalism and argues that Stanislavsky's analyses of the actor's work on a role should be regarded as part of the pre-history to postdramatic theatre, rather than positioned against it.

The theoretical case was tested through several iterations of practice, and Stanislavsky's 'system' provided a practical model for devising from text that has begun to support the staging of character 'under erasure'. The six questions, *given circumstances*, *subtext*, *events*, *objectives* and *counter-objectives* provided a

framework for reading and deconstructing a text, while *Active Analysis* offered a route into generating material and structuring the devising process. Stanislavsky's advice facilitated the actor as a creative participant, while his conceptualisation of the 'third being', the concepts of 'dual consciousness' and of '"I am being"' underpinned a devising practice that sought to illuminate the duality of the actor's work and to expose the processes of character-creation, alongside the performance of character. The associated practices of *adaptation* and *justification*, *communion*, *grasp*, *objectives* and *counter-objectives*, together with Stanislavsky's insistence that the actor react and respond in the 'here, today, now', proved vital to facilitating liveness and staging moments of 'undecidability'. Working with the 'system' supported the actor's ability to improvise and to engage with, and respond to, the performance circumstances, allowing the experience of live interaction to come to the fore. Pursuing actor *objectives* alongside character *objectives* facilitated a performance-style that attempted to foreground the oscillations between the actor and the role that are central to the fundamental task of performing a 'character'. In this way, strategies associated with creating a role were re-deployed to expose the Uncanny nature of the actor's work, which inhabits a betwixt and between, 'treading the borderline' between fiction and reality.

While Stanislavsky's instruction to find 'yourself in the given circumstances of the person you are called on to create' (2010: 81) was adapted to include the *given circumstances* of the performance event, the principle remains the same and his advice to the actor is as pertinent as ever. Indeed, exploring the actor's relationship to both the character's *given circumstances* and to the *given circumstances* of the performance event supported the destabilisation of the performance of character, giving equal weight to the actor engaged in the task of performing the role and to the role itself. This work begun to blur the distinction between the actor and the role and provided a first step towards compelling the audience actively to engage in deciphering and interpreting meaning. A critical analysis of the attempts to stage character 'under erasure' was sustained throughout this research project, and the thesis offers first-hand evidence of the application of Stanislavsky's 'system' beyond Naturalism and psychological realism, contributing to the revision of his legacy and

beginning to demonstrate how the 'system' can be adapted to deconstruct dramatic character and to problematise the representation of the human subject as an 'I'-centred, cogent, self-determining individual.

There remain, however, limitations to the practical exploration of the research question. While the first phase of practice exposed the porousness of the boundary between the actor and the role and illuminated the efficacy of working with the 'system', it also highlighted the challenge of maintaining the liminal quality that characterises an actor's work in the earliest stages of rehearsal, in performance. This challenge remained important throughout all five iterations of practice. During the initial practical projects it also became clear that character is a robust entity, resistant to fragmentation, easily and willingly constructed by audience, even in a partial presentation. Moreover, it became apparent that reintegrating character fundamentally reshaped the postdramatic landscape, bringing a coherence to the theatre-event that the postdramatic theatre is fundamentally orchestrated to resist. Re-locating the actor's work on a role at the centre of the theatre-event reoriented the audience's perception and, potentially, afforded the human subject a synthesizing position that is at odds with postdramatic representations of subjectivity. While the fourth and final projects strove to mitigate this synthesizing effect, the impact of reinstating character in postdramatic theatre-making remains an area for further investigation. Reflecting on the practice also illuminated the extent to which the destabilisation of character could not be affected through its external, dramaturgical presentation, but had to occur *within* the actor's work on the role. And while the initial phase of work revealed the significance of exposing the Uncanny nature of the performance of a role and the extent to which the actor-in-the-role throws 'time out of joint', discovering how to expose that play across time to genuinely destabilise the audience's perception remained a more significant challenge. Again, although the final iteration of practice moved closer to staging moments of liveness and to destabilising the audience's perception, there remains work to be done to see the promise of that project through to full fruition, to explore fully how to use Stanislavsky's 'system' to embrace the 'real' as a co-player in the performance and, thereby resist cogency, cohesion, and synthesis.

Yet, having said all of that, this application of Stanislavsky's 'system 'to staging character 'under erasure' has clearly demonstrated the extent to which 'a radicalization is always indebted to the very thing it radicalizes' (Derrida: 2000: 116). Through bringing together a discussion of Stanislavsky's theories and practice with Lehmann's theorization of the postdramatic, I have demonstrated that while postdramatic theatre represents a radical break from the practices of drama and the characters that inhabit dramatic stages, it does not represent a complete ' "forgetting" of the dramatic past' (Jürs-Munby in Lehmann 2006: 2). Indeed, I have shown that returning to dramatic character, revisiting the Stanislavskian principles associated with, but not inextricably tied to, Naturalistic characterisation, against which postdramatic theatre appears to position itself, has, in fact, illuminated the fate of 'character' on postdramatic stages all the more clearly. Furthermore, I have established that Stanislavsky's analyses of the actor's work on a role, and the principles and practices that underpin the 'system', are well-placed to facilitate the staging of character 'under erasure'. Stanislavsky's understanding of the actor's 'dual consciousness', his concepts of 'experiencing' and of the 'third being' have provided the foundations for a performance-making practice that has started to marry a character-led approach with postdramatic theatre-making, both recalling and deconstructing dramatic characterisation. Accordingly, this research-led practice has addressed a gap in Stanislavskian and postdramatic scholarship, contributing to an under-developed area of research into postdramatic theatre-making paradigms, and testing, through practice, the case already well versed in theory, that Stanislavsky's analyses of the actor's work on a role remains well-placed to enable the exploration of the 'truthful' presentation of contemporary subjectivity and of the stories we tell about ourselves in a late-capitalist, highly-mediatised society.

Appendix I

Practice project one

Excerpt from Anton Chekhov's 'Disturbing the Balance'

'Almost every evening he would do to the station to fetch newspapers and letters – while living with his brother-in-law this was his only diversion. The mail train arrived at a quarter to ten, just when the unbearable boredom of evening had set in at home. There was no one to play cards with, no supper was served, he didn't feel like sleeping and therefore, whether he liked it or not, he was forced wither to sit with the invalid or read out loud to Lenochka novels in translation, of which she has very fond. It was a large station, with buffet and bookstall. One could have a bite to eat, drink beer, look at some books. Most of all Yanshin liked meeting the train and envying the passengers who were travelling somewhere and were apparently happier than he was. When he arrived at the station people whom he had grown used to seeing there every evening were already strolling along the platform, waiting for the train. They were the owners of the summer cottages who lived near the station, two or three offices from the town, a certain landowner with a spur on his right foot and a mastiff that followed him, its head sadly bowed. The cottage owners, male and female, who evidently knew each other very well, were noisily chatting and laughing. As always, an engineer cottage owner – a very corpulent gentleman of about forty-five, with whiskers and a broad pelvis, with a cotton shirt over his belt, and wide velveteen trousers – was the liveliest of all and laughed louder than anyone else. When he walked past Yanshin, his large belly sticking out, stroking his whiskers as he amiably glanced at him with his oily eyes, Yanshin thought that here was a man with a very healthy appetite. The engineer even wore a distinctive expression which one could only interpret as saying: 'Aha! How very tasty!' He had an absurd triple-barrelled surname and the only reason Yanshin remembered it was because the engineer, who was very partial to ranting about politics and engaging in quarrels, would often swear and say:

'If I weren't Bitney-Kushle-Suvryomovich!''

(Chekhov 2002: 289)

Performance-installation 1

'Disturbing the Balance'

Four identical wooden blocks arranged in the performance space. The first block (labelled SASHA #1) is occupied by an actor, who performs an action – the opening and reading of a letter. He is in period costume of a late nineteenth century Russian gentleman. He wears a light brown suit, matching waistcoat, a crisp white shirt, a cravat and polished shoes. On the bench next to him there is a hat and a copy of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's ***The Idiot****. It takes approximately seven minutes for him to open and read the letter.*

The second block (SASHA #2) functions as a screen onto which is projected footage of the same actor, performing the same action, over the same period of time in rehearsal. He is in a different space, wearing different clothes, but the action is unchanged. The footage shows a close up of the actor's face. This is accompanied by additional footage playing on a small laptop screen on top of the block. Similarly, this footage shows the same actor, performing the same action, over the same period of time in another rehearsal. This footage shows a long shot of the actor's whole body.

*The third block (SASHA #3) also serves as a screen onto which are projected extracts from the short story by Anton Chekhov, '*Disturbing the Balance'*, from which the character and the action are taken. These extracts place the character and the action in context - a train station in nineteenth century rural Russia in late May, when the 'trees rustle in the breeze and a magnificent sunset flames exuberantly, flooding half the sky' (Chekhov 2002: 284).*

A laptop with two sets of headphones sits on top of an upended fourth block (SASHA #4). The screen shows a commentary on the rehearsal process, including comments like 'Luis sometimes forgot to listen to the laughter of the corpulent gentlemen in rehearsals' and 'In the next 30 seconds Luis will move his head backwards and close his eyes, imagining that he can feel the warm evening air on his face.' The first set of headphones plays an extract from a rehearsal in which the actor discusses the character's emotions as he opens the letter. The second plays a recording of a second actor reading the text of the letter. Both the projection and the recordings last for seven minutes and each play simultaneously, in sync with the actor's performance of the action. After each seven-minute segment the lights dim, the screens go black. After a short pause the lights and screens light up again and the cycle re-starts.

The audience is encouraged to move freely around the space.

Performance installation 1



Figure 1: Performance installation 1



Figure 2: SASHA #1, the actor in the role



Figure 3: SASHA #2, the actor in rehearsal

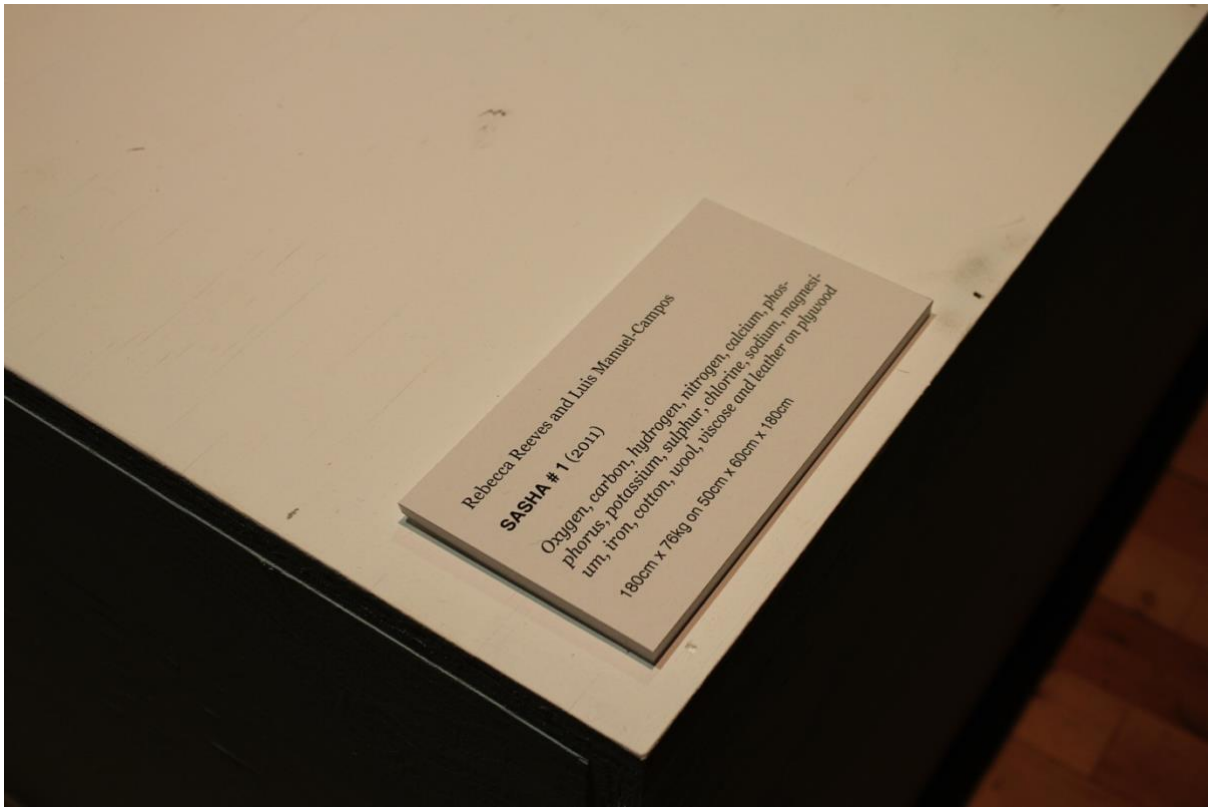


Figure 4: Close up of exhibition label for SASHA #1, the actor in the role

Appendix II

Practice project two

Excerpts from *The Investor's Chronicle* by Howard Barker

'**MAN:** I am burning it
(Pause.)
I think
I try to be honest
I think
Even as I bid for it
As I lifted my fingers off my knee
(I love those auctioneers they see the slightest movement it might have been a nod but I just lift my fingers off my knee)
I knew it would be burned by me'

(2006: 296)

'Holbein
(Pause.)
Holbein
(Pause.)
1553
(Pause.)
And it isn't as if I don't know art
Oh
The Contrary
(Pause.)
Holbein is my favourite
(Pause. He takes out a hip flask, unscrews the top and sprinkles whisky over the painting.)
Twenty years I waited for him
AND THE PUBLICITY
I won't quote
BILLIONAIRE RECLUSE
That's me
PAYS FOUR-POINT-FIVE MILLION FOR'

(2006: 296-7)

'I hate them all
I hate
I hate them all
(Pause.)
Not Holbein
Oh no

Not him
THOUGH HIM I MIGHT HAVE IT WE'D MET
I don't rule it out
A snob he was no doubt
He might have peered at me down his long nose he might have revealed under those heavy eyelids a contempt for me
(Pause.)
I hate them all but
(Pause.)
And I try to be honest
I do try
(Pause.)
That is not the reason I am burning it
I'M NOT A SCHOOLBOY
WHAT DO YOU TAKE ME FOR SOME SNOTTY VANDAL
SPRAYING HIS NAME ACROSS A BROTHEL WALL
I AM A BILLIONAIRE
(Pause.)
It said so in the papers
(Pause.)
I am burning
Not
A Painting
No
Oh
No
I am burning all the human filth who make this painting no longer a paining at all.'

(2006: 298)

Performance installation 2

Are You Really Feeling It?

*Two adjacent rooms, between which the audience is encouraged to move freely. In the first an actor works with a coach to explore an emotional state of heighted anxiety and anger. In the second, a fifteen-foot projection shows the actor's face in close up. The image fills the wall. The second room contains three sets of headphones which are connected to a microphone that the actor is wearing in the first room. The actor is preparing to play the role of '*MAN' *in Howard Barker's monologue, 'The Investor's Chronicle' (***Thirteen Objects***) at an imagined point in the future.*

Guided by the coach the actor works through a series of exercises. They begin with a vocal warm up, working towards a state of relaxation. Gradually the coach introduces the Given Circumstances of the scene and the actor allows this information to affect and alter his breathing patterns. Towards the end of the exercise he incorporates lines from the monologue: 'I'M NOT A SCHOOLBOY' *and* 'I AM A BILLIONAIRE' (2006:298). *At the end of the exercise they discuss how the exercise helped (or hindered) his ability to connect to the character's emotional state.*[1]

Moving on to a second exercise, the actor explores his relationship to an object that is valuable to him. Working with a real object placed in front of him, the actor is asked to imagine that this object is extremely important to him, but, crucially, he must work with the task of preventing himself from touching it.[2] *The actor is encouraged to use this exercise to connect to the complex emotions experienced by Barker's* MAN*, who is both compelled and repulsed by the painting he will set fire to.*

Following directly on from this exercise the actor performs the first 'Bit' of the monologue:[3]

> MAN: I am burning it
> (*Pause*.)
> I think
> I try to be honest
> I think

[1] We began by working with the breath to allow the actor to warm up and exploring Stanislavsky's concept of *tempo-rhythm* and the relationship between rhythm of breath, emotion and character. In *An Actor's Work* Tortsov asserts that, '…*Tempo-rhythm cannot only prompt the right feelings and experiences intuitively, directly and immediately, it can help create characters*' (2008: 476). And as Bella Merlin argues, 'Your muscular memory ignites your emotions purely from the alterations you make to your breathing pattern' (2007: 35).

[2] This is an adaptation of Merlin's 'Object Exercise', in which Merlin argues that 'This OBJECTIVE instantly establishes an inner contradiction: if you have to stop yourself from doing something, it suggests that part of you wants to do it and part of you certainly doesn't. There's a dynamic set up between attraction and repulsion, between desire and denial' (2007: 309-311).

[3] Merlin describes a 'BIT of action' as 'simply a piece of text lasting anything from six lines to a page' demarcated by either a character's entrance or exit, or when the subject-matter changes (2007: 70-73). Dividing a scene into *bits* helps reveal the structure of the scene and aids the actor in discovering the character's motivation. The division of a scene is inextricably linked with the exploration of the character's *objectives*.

Even as I bid for it
As I lifted my fingers off my knee
(I love those auctioneers they see the slightest movement it might have been a nod but I just lift my fingers off my knee)
I knew it would be burned by me

Afterwards, actor and coach reflect on the challenge of connecting with the character's emotional state and then introducing the lines.

The actor then undertakes a final preparatory exercise, drawing on a second external stimulus. The acting coach plays an extract from a documentary in which the interviewee discusses burning a million pounds. The clip plays on a wall in the first room and the actor observes the tempo-rhythm of the interviewee's movements, gestures and speech patterns. He then attempts to gradually adopt one or two of his gestures (a movement of his hand, a tightening of his jaw, repeated swallowing in a pause in his speech) and explores the impact on his own breath and his own level of anxiety. Again, actor and coach reflect upon both the benefits and challenges of the exercise.

As the session draws to a close the actor is asked to speak the monologue. He is encouraged to draw on aspects of the work undertaken in the session to help him connect to the MAN*'s emotional state and to use those exercises as a route into performing the role.*

The actor speaks the monologue and the audience is ushered out as the actor and coach reflect upon the session.

Performance Installation 2



Figure 5: Room 1, the actor and the coach in rehearsal



Figure 6: Room 1, the actor in rehearsal



Figure 7: Room 2, the actor in performance



Figure 8: Room 2, the actor and headphones on plinth

Appendix III

Practice project three

Excerpt from Gertrude Stein's *Counting Her Dresses*

'ACT I

Was she angry.

ACT II.

Whom do you mean was she angry.

ACT III.

Was she angry with you.

Part XXXI.

ACT I.

Reflect more.

ACT II.

I do want a garden.

ACT III.

Do you.

ACT IV.

And clothes.

ACT V.

I do not mention clothes.

ACT VI.

No you didn't but I do.

ACT VII.

Yes I know that.

Part XXXII.

ACT I.

He is tiring.

ACT II.

He is not tiring.

ACT III.

No indeed.

ACT IV.

I can count them.

ACT V.

You do not misunderstand me.

ACT VI.

I misunderstand no one.

Part XXXIII.

ACT I.

Can you explain my wishes.

ACT II.

In the morning.

ACT III.

To me.

ACT IV.

Yes in there.

ACT V.

Then you do not explain.

ACT VI.

I do not press for an answer.

Part XXXIV.

ACT I.

Can you expect her today.

ACT II.

We saw a dress.

ACT III.

We saw a man.

ACT IV.

Sarcasm.’

(Stein 1993:282-283)

Performance-installation 3

The performance-installation consists of two actors in role, sitting on a wooden block. The performance is divided into three sections. Part One is an extract from Gertrude Stein's play Counting Her Dresses and Part Two interweaves two stories the actors explored in rehearsal as they endeavoured to find a point of emotional connection in the script. Part Three combines the extract from Stein's play with the actors' stories, blurring the line between the actor and the role in the moment of performance. They are asked to respond to the 'here, today, now' of the moment and to allow their individual response to the situation to shape the performance.

Counting Her Dresses

*Two women (***A** *and* **B***) sit together on a white wooden block. They wear the period dress of the 1930s. A camera is positioned in the corner of the space, it is connected to a projector and the women's image is replicated, in close up, on the wall behind them. They look into each other's eyes in silence. After a few moments, the silence is broken by laughter or tears.*

PART I

'**A**: Was she angry?

B: Whom do you mean was she angry?

A: Was she angry with you?

(Pause.)

Reflect more.

B: I do want a garden.

A: Do you?

B: And clothes.

A: I do not mention clothes.

B: No, you didn't but I do.

A: Yes. I know that.

(Pause.)

B: He is tiring.

A: He is not tiring.

B: No indeed.

A: I can count them.

(Pause.)

You do not misunderstand me.

B: I misunderstand no one.

(Pause.)

A: Can you explain my wishes?

In the morning? To me.

B: Yes. In there.

A: Then you do not explain.

I do not press for an answer.

(Pause.)

A: Can you expect her today?

B: We saw a dress.

A: We saw a man.

B: Sarcasm.'

The two actors pause, reconnect in the silent étude, once again allowing how they feel in the moment to rise to the surface. Again, the étude ends in either tears or laughter.

PART II

A: I couldn't understand her.

B: I am single

A: My brother said he would call me back.

(Pause.)

I am a wife.

B: I have no siblings.

A: I am not enough.

B: I have no siblings.

A: I am a wife.

B: I am learning to play the piano accordion.

A: I was sitting on the sofa. It was late in the afternoon. I was cold.

(Pause.)

B: I wanted a drink.

A: I lost my father.

B: I walked into the first bar that I came to. And the next. And the next.

A: I lost my father and my mum called.

(Pause.)

I lost my father and my mum called to tell me.

B: Then it started raining.

(Pause.)

A: I got my confirmation crucifix

And I prayed.

B: I got home and I walked down the long white corridor.

A: I prayed and I waited.

But I knew.

(Pause.)

A: I am not enough.

B: I have no siblings.

A: I am a wife.

B: I am learning to play the piano accordion.

The two actors pause, reconnect in the silent étude, once again allowing how they feel in the moment to rise to the surface. Again, the étude ends in either tears or laughter.

PART III

A: I am a wife.

B: I am single.

A: I was sitting on my sofa one afternoon, just sitting when my mother called.

(Pause.)

Reflect more.

B: I am learning to play the piano accordion.

A: I am a wife.

'**B**: I do want a garden.

A: Do you?

B: And clothes.

A: I do not mention clothes.'

(Pause.)

B: I wanted a drink so I walked into to the first bar I came to.

'**A**: He is not tiring.

B: and then the next and the next

A: I can count them.

(Pause.)

You do not misunderstand me.

B: I misunderstand no one.

(Pause.)

A: Can you explain my wishes?

In the morning? To me.

B: Yes. In there.

A: I am not quite enough.'

I lost my father.

(Pause.)

'**A**: Can you expect her today?

B: We saw a dress.

A: I am a wife.

B: Sarcasm.'

Performance Installation 3



Figure 9: Performance installation 3



Figure 10: The actors, in role



Figure 11: The actors, in role and on screen

Appendix IV

Practice project four

THE SEAGULL, OR WHY MASHA ALWAYS WEARS BLACK

CHARACTERS

ACTOR/ MASHA – **Maria Teresa Creasey**

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1 (AM1) / DORN / SORIN – **Riley Madincea**

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2 (AM2) / MEDVEDENKO – **Benjamin Victor**

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3 (AM3) / KONSTANTIN – **Robert Raeder**

AUDIENCE MEMBER 4 (AM4) / ARKADINA / NINA – **Paksie Vernon**

A note on the text

The following script combines lines devised in rehearsal, dialogue from Michael Frayn's 2006 translation of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* and improvised material from a performance at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama on the 30th September 2014. Lines taken directly from Frayn's translation of Chekhov's play appear in quotation marks, while lines devised in rehearsal appear in plain text. Improvised lines are reprinted here in **bold**.

The script represents, therefore, a record of one particular performance and it is important to note that it was not and should not be seen as fixed. Each of the four scenes are structured around a series of key beats that must be hit and specific tasks that must be carried out, but within that structure the actor performing as the ACTOR/MASHA is invited to improvise; importantly, this actor is afforded the greatest freedom – this is her (and Masha's) show.

Thus, the points of improvisation are not fixed but should rather be felt by the actors and their content depends entirely on the actor's reactions to the given circumstances they are working within – the here, today and now of performing for an audience. The improvised

dialogue draws on a Lee Strasberg acting exercise called 'Speaking Out', in which the actor is encouraged to voice, out loud, the frustrations he or she may be experiencing working on the scene.

The actors performing each of the additional roles should adopt varying degrees of characterisation. Audience members 1, 2, 3 and 4 play the role of genuine audience members who are inveigled into the performance by the ACTOR/MASHA. Their status shifts over the course of the play as that guise is undermined (most obviously for Audience Member 2) and the play attempts to produce an experience of uncertainty for audience, rather than to convince them of the players status as either actors or genuine audience members.

When Audience Member 2 begins to perform as MEDVEDENKO it becomes clear that he has learnt lines, but Audience Members 1, 3 and 4 should always work from a script, under the ACTOR/MASHA's direction. As such audience members 1, 3 and 4 are not at liberty to improvise, and AM 2/MEDVEDENKO should only do so when he feels absolutely compelled to by the ACTOR/MASHA's mistreatment of him.

ONE

An empty stage apart from a screen upstage centre, to the right of which is a camera. Stacked upstage there are several chairs, a table, a dressmaker's mannequin and a costume rail. There are a number of books and a bottle of vodka on the table.

A pile of black clothing lies crumpled on the floor, downstage. Festoon lighting hangs from the ceiling. It is turned off and the houselights remain on. Stage right is a tech desk. The ACTOR sits reading at the desk as the audience enter, when they are seated she turns to them.

ACTOR Hello!

Pause.

Welcome to Russia.

The ACTOR moves between the desk and centre stage through the following speech, controlling sound and lighting cues.

It is 1893 and we are in the countryside.

The room fills with the sound of corncrakes and crickets.

We are about forty miles outside of Moscow and three and a half miles from the nearest town. It's August and it's been a really hot summer.

Pause. The ACTOR realises she has forgotten something and returns to the desk.

Actually, the sun has just set and… it is twilight. Houselights please!

Houselights are switched off and the room is filled with twilight.

And you are sitting in a broad avenue of trees.

A leafy pattern dances across the floor.

And this broad avenue of trees leads up to…

Gently rippling water, surrounded by trees, the 'lake', appears on the screen USC.

… the lake! 'Oh, the spells woven by that lake!' 'Ten years or so back you could hear constant music and singing almost every night. There were six estates on this side. 'I remember…' *(The ACTOR forgets her lines – this should be clear to the audience.)* **…you guys are making me so nervous…** I remember… I remember guns going off… pow, pow, pow, pow! 'I remember laughter and noise and… everyone falling in love.'

Pause.

So here we are on this nineteenth-century country estate and it kind of, well it works like a *(Walking upstage to pick up the bottle of vodka.*) **sorry…I'm a bit nervous, I have a really dry throat… (*Swigging from the bottle. Then picking out an audience member who looks like they disapprove.)* don't judge!** So, where are we? We're on a nineteenth-century country estate and it functions like a working farm. I mean we have cattle, we keep bees, buzzzzzz… And we grow millet and rye and, right now, it's haymaking season. It's August! And what is really exciting about August is all the theatres in Moscow are closed right now, so we have a very special visitor, a really famous actress called… her name is… *(Coughs.)* …Irina, Nikolay- *(The ACTOR pauses to pick up one of the scripts from the table. She must find an audience member to help her with the pronunciation of*

the character's name.) **Sorry, but does anyone here speak Russian? *(Looks around searchingly.)* Oh, you do! Great, I was wondering if you could/oh God, ok, you know it already. Thank you. Ark*ad*ina, Ark*ad*ina.** Well, so we call her Ark*ad*ina. She's here. And she is the sister of the estate owner, Sorin. And she's actually here as well with her toy-boy who is a *very* famous writer, Trigorin. And she is also the mother of Konstantin whose play we are going to see tonight.

Pause.

The ACTOR is waiting for something – a sound cue. She is starting to realise that managing the cues and telling the story is becoming increasingly difficult.

Shit. There's no banging. Hold on. (*Moving back to the tech desk and pressing the next cue.)* **There's the banging!** *(A tinny banging starts, barely audible at first, an underwhelming effect.)* **Just hold on a minute, it gets really annoying here (*Pause as she listens.)* There.** That banging, that's Yakov and his workmen knocking up the stage. They've been at it all day!

The ACTOR surveys the stage, there is no set, nothing is being knocked up behind her. There's nothing she can do but keep going and hope the audience are willing to suspend their disbelief. At the same time, she realises that there's a lighting cue coming up that she will need to activate while she's centre stage if it is going to have the right effect. She is going to need to enlist help from the audience. She looks around assessing the options before and settling on Audience Member 1.

Hi, what's your name?

AM 1 *(Unsure that the ACTOR is talking to him.)* **Oh um, Riley.**

ACTOR **Hi Riley, I'm Maria. Pleased to meet you. Would you mind just sitting at this desk for a minute and turning the light on for me please?**

AM 1 *(Reluctantly.)* **Um… ok, yes?**

Audience Member 1 comes up on stage and sits at the tech desk.

ACTOR **You just sit here, and I'll show you exactly which one it is. So, you just need to… I think it's 15 and you just need to put it up to that one when I give you the cue line.**

AM 1 **This one?**

ACTOR **Yup. And I'll give you the cue line. (*The ACTOR whispers the line 'and it frames the lake just perfectly' to AM 1 before moving back centre stage.)*** (*To the audience.)* So, the stage is set, and it frames the lake just *perfectly*! *(Festoon lighting comes on, creating another underwhelming theatrical effect.)* Great. Well, that's pretty much it.

AM 1 **Can I…?**

ACTOR **Would you mind just sitting there, for a little bit – just in case?**

AM 1 **Um, ok, I guess.**

ACTOR **Thanks!**

ACTOR *(To the audience.)* Everyone else is going to be arriving shortly, but first you're going to meet a woman named Masha. *(Sighs.)* Masha. Masha is twenty-two – ***(Indicating herself and to the audience.)*** **don't judge!** She has grown up on this estate.

During the following speech the ACTOR changes into the clothes on the floor downstage. She takes off her sweater to reveal a corset and

starts to put on a nineteenth-century black dress typical of mourning costume. Unable to tighten the corset or fasten the buttons at the back of the dress, she must, again enlist the help of an audience member.

She is the daughter of the estate manager**… yup, I'm wearing a corset. And, in fact, I'm going to need some help with that actually. Is there anybody who specifically…? *(Points to one audience member.)* You might be, actually no… (*Pointing to another audience member.)* Oh, ok you can do it. What's your name?**

AM 2 Ben.

ACTOR **You were looking all eager there Ben, sorry. *(She brings him on stage to help her.)* If you want to just tighten the laces from the bottom to the top please. This is where you have to breathe in for a second. *(She breathes in and stands in silence for a moment as Audience Member 2 tightens the corset.)*** So where am I? She's the daughter of the estate manager, Shamrayev, she's had some education, so she knows she doesn't really want to get her hands dirty. She'd rather read a book. Maybe a Gothic romance, something a little melodramatic. ***(To AM 2.):* Just suck it in. Oh yeah, I'd like a really skinny waist. Oh-ho… Yup! *(More tightening and breathing in.)* How are you doing? Is this ok? Thank you. I appreciate this.** So, she is the daughter of the estate manager who lives here as well with his wife, her mother Polina. She doesn't really like her father and the least said about her mother the better. But she does have a 'special place in her heart' for the local doctor. She's not ever really known why, but you see we do. Dorn, the local doctor, has been having an affair with Polina, Masha's mother, for as long as Masha's been around! ***(AM 2 finishes tightening the corset and makes to move back to his seat. The ACTOR calls him back to help her finish dressing.)* Sorry, I know this is a lot, but would you helping me put my shoes on here? (*The ACTOR starts to pull on the dress and needs help stepping into the***

shoes as she cannot bend down in the corset. Then, indicating the dress,) **Could you help me with this as well?**

AM 2 **Oh, ok, yeah.**

AM 2 starts to button up the dress while the ACTOR continues talking to the audience.

ACTOR So, she's been having a relationship with Dorn probably as long as Masha's been around. So, we actually think that Masha's dad is… Dorn! (*Pausing for the impact of this revelation to land with the audience.)* **No one is ever as surprised as me! I was genuinely surprised. I couldn't believe it**. So, she is the product of an unhappy marriage and she ekes out her existence on this dwindling country estate and yes, you guessed it, her prospects are limited. (*Pause*.) Really limited. **(*Pause. To* AM 2.*)* Am I all done?**

AM 2 **Yes, I'm just doing the top here.**

The ACTOR finishes getting into costume, AM 2 is about to take his seat again, but the poppers keep opening on the ACTOR's dress, so she keeps him on stage to finish the job.

ACTOR **Oh, I think one just popped at the back! (*AM 2 does the poppers up again.)* Oops, two! Oh, another one! Sorry I won't move my shoulders. *(The ACTOR stands stock still.)***

AM 2 **Done.**

ACTOR *(Now directing her lines to AM 2.)* They are limited, in fact, to the local schoolteacher, Medvedenko. (*Giving him a knowing look and placing her hand on AM 2's shoulder.)* **Yes?**

The ACTOR elicits AM 2's agreement to play the role of MEDVEDENKO. He is bemused by the turn of events but appears to be enjoying himself and accepts with good grace. He is evidently good sport. The ACTOR selects a number of items from the costume rail, leading AM 2 to a spot marked on the stage in front of the video camera. She asks him to put the clothing on and as he dresses she moves over to the camera. The ACTOR focuses the camera on his face in tight close up and the projection of the lake is replaced with the image of AM 2 as he puts on MEDVEDENKO's waistcoat, cravat and glasses, gradually transforming into the character.

ACTOR **Can you just put these on? There are some glasses in there. And a tie.**

AM 2 **Put them on?**

ACTOR **Yes.**

ACTOR (*To the audience, while AM 2 dresses.)* Medvedenko is ten years older than Masha and he is pretty clever, well very clever, he's been to university and he's not at all wealthy. 'Twenty-three roubles a month coming in', with a wife…**I mean…** with a mother…**a wife… stupid… a mother...** two sisters and a brother to provide for. But he's kind and he's decent and he loves her. He longs to see her so much that he walks 'three miles here and three miles back every day' and all Masha gives him is 'indifference'. Well she's fond of him but she doesn't love him. *(The ACTOR goes upstage to retrieve the snuff box and the bottle of vodka from the table. She takes a generous swig of vodka, gulping it down*.) 'And that's all there is to it.' *(She takes another long drink before putting the bottle back on the floor.)* And anyway, she's in love with Konstantin whose play we're going to be seeing tonight. He has also grown up on the estate, but he can't stand her, so her love remains unrequited and she's taken it upon herself to dress only in

black. (*Bends down to retrieve the bottle and the snuff again.)* She drinks vodka and she takes snuff… 'what a filthy habit.'

Sound and lighting cue. Lights switch to tight spotlight, centre stage and Kendrick Lamar's 'Swimming Pools (Drank)' (2013) plays for 2 minutes as the ACTOR drinks vodka and takes snuff, dancing and swaying in the light. She is getting drunk. AM 2 moves upstage to operate the camera and the figure of the ACTOR, swaying and dancing as MASHA fills the screen. Eventually the music fades and the lighting changes back to the setting for the park on Sorin's estate.

TWO

The ACTOR sways and sings along to the music that is no longer there, she is drunk and is in character as MASHA at the beginning of ACT I of 'The Seagull'. Through this scene her accent changes from RP when she speaks lines from Chekhov's play and back to her native accent when she improvises. She adopts the mannerisms of MASHA, drinking from the bottle and taking snuff throughout the scene, getting visibly drunker throughout. AM 2 has taken on the role of MEDVEDENKO. During this scene it becomes clear that the ACTOR/MASHA and AM 2/MEDVEDENKO do, in fact, know each other and have worked on the scene before. The line between the actors and the characters they are playing becomes increasingly blurred as AM 2/MEDVEDENKO resolutely tries to struggle through the scene with his drunk partner, the ACTOR/MASHA appears intent on sabotaging his attempts.

The ACTOR/MASHA gradually becomes aware of the audience. When she acknowledges them, the screen switches back to the 'lake' and AM 2 comes out from behind the camera.

ACTOR/MASHA Drinks vodka, takes snuff, always in black. Loved by teacher. *(Drinks.)* 'Don't look at me like that. Women are more often drinkers than you might realise. Some of them do it openly like me, but mostly in secret and always vodka or brandy.' (*To audience.)* **You're very boring aren't you?** I'm going for a walk… with Medvedenko.

She walks over the AM 2.

Through the following exchange the actors should work through the scene at their own pace, repeating their lines and only moving on to the next line when they feel they have connected with the line and it feels "real" to them.

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO ‘Why do you always wear black?’

ACTOR/MASHA ‘I’m in mourning for my life. I’m unhappy.’

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO ‘Why?’ (*Pause.*) ‘Why do you always wear black?’

ACTOR/MASHA ‘I’m in mourning for my life. I’m unhappy.’ *Laughs.* ***(A button pops undone on the ACTOR/MASHA’s dress.)*** **Fuck. Fucking button it Ben and do it properly.**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO *(Buttoning the dress.)* **Ok. I’m doing it.**

ACTOR/MASHA **Again.**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO (*While re-buttoning the ACTOR/MASHA’s dress.)* ‘Why do you always wear black?’ **(*He places his hand on her shoulder.)***

ACTOR/MASHA ***(Violently brushing him off.)*** **Don’t touch me!** ‘I’m in mourning for my life. I’m unhappy.’

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO **‘**Why? I don’t understand. You’ve got your health. Your father may not be rich, but he’s not badly off.’

AM 2 tries to work through the scene, but the ACTOR/MASHA is easily distracted, first by the “lake” and then the stacks of chairs. The stage hasn’t been set up for KONSTANTIN’s play and she decides she must do it.

ACTOR/MASHA *(To herself.)* Oh! ‘The show will be starting soon!’ **Get the chairs Ben! Get the chairs Ben. Set them up.**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO **Where? What…where?**

ACTOR/MASHA **There. Three there. You've done this before. Three. Four.** (*To the audience.)* 'The show will be starting soon!'

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO sets up three rows of chairs on either side of the screen, facing the 'lake'. He is directed by the ACTOR/MASHA, who continues to ignore his attempts to move on through the first scene.

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO 'I have a much harder time of it than you. I only get twenty-three roubles a month all told, less deductions for the pensions and I don't go around in mourning.'

ACTOR/MASHA *(To the audience.)* 'The show will be starting soon!' 'The show will be starting soon!' ***(The snuff box drops out of the ACTOR/MASHA's sleeve and she rushes to retrieve it. AM 2 laughs. She pauses mid-speech.*) Don't laugh Ben/**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO **'/**Twenty-three roubles a month.'

ACTOR/MASHA **/Don't fucking laugh at me Ben**.

AM2 /MEDVEDENKO 'You know what that buys?'

ACTOR/MASHA *(Reluctantly engaging in the scene.)* 'It's not a question of money. Even a beggar can be happy.'

AM 2 'Theoretically.'

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO continues to set up the chairs while the ACTOR/MASHA pulls a white underskirt from the costume rail. It is NINA's costume for KONSTANTIN's play. She plays with it like an accessory in a game of dressing up.

AM2/ Medvedenko 'In practice it comes down to this. My mother and two sisters plus my little brother'/

ACTOR/MASHA *(Quoting from Konstantin's play, mocking Nina's performance of it, taunting AM 2/MEDVEDENKO.)* **'**Men and lions!', 'Partridges and eagles!', 'Geese and antlered stags!'

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO (*Determinedly trying to keep to the script.)* 'Twenty-three roubles a month coming in. Twenty-three roubles a'/

The ACTOR/MASHA puts the underskirt on, over her black dress – even though she knows she shouldn't be wearing it. She can't fasten it, so she asks for AM 2's help in getting it to stay up. He steps forward to help but is quickly reprimanded for touching her.

ACTOR/MASHA /**Get out from under the skirt!!**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO (*Stepping back.)* **Go on then. Carry on doing the chairs then shall I?**

ACTOR/MASHA Yes.
The ACTOR/MASHA keeps trying to find a way to tie the skirt, which is clearly doesn't fit.

ACTOR/MASHA **Oh shit… I ripped it! *(Laughing.)* Oh shit.**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO **Just tie it**.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Laughing hysterically.)* Oh shit!

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO 'You mean there's no need to eat or drink?'

ACTOR/MASHA ***(Distracted, still trying to tie the skirt. Under her breath.)*** 'The show will be starting soon.'

AM 2/ Masha! (*Trying to get the ACTOR/MASHA to focus)*. 'No need for tea and coffee? No need for tobacco?'

The ACTOR/MASHA cannot keep the skirt tied on. She asks the audience member for help and pushes him away once she manages it.

ACTOR/MASHA **Help me…. Oh, oh now it's fine.**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO 'No need for tobacco then.'

ACTOR/MASHA *(Dancing and twirling around the room in white underskirt, she imagines herself in KONSTANTIN's play.)* 'The show will be starting soon!'

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO *(Increasingly frustrated.)* Masha. Masha! 'Twenty-three roubles a month.'

The ACTOR/MASHA continues to ignore AM 2/MEDVEDENKO, dancing and playing with the skirt. ***The snuff box falls out of her sleeve and flies across the room.***

ACTOR/MASHA **Arrghhh! Fuck…. (*showing it to AM 2/MEDVEDENKO as though it is somehow his fault.)* … Fuck!**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO **'**Do you know what that means? I don't know how to manage.'

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO continues setting up the stage when, suddenly the ACTOR/MASHA freezes. She has caught the eye of someone in the audience and her face lights up with a shy smile. She becomes giggly, coy and flirtatious. She cannot take her eyes off the man in the audience.

ACTOR**/**MASHA (*Briefly turning back to AM 2/MEDVEDENKO.)* The show will be starting soon!

Smiling at the audience-member she half-curtsies to him before suddenly becoming self-conscious, she remembers she is wearing Nina's skirt and panics. She must get out of it as quickly as possible, he mustn't see her wearing it.

ACTOR/MASHA **Shit! Oh god, shit. Ben! Ben get it off me!!**

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO ***(They tussle with the skirt, which rips again as AM 2/MEDVEDENKO tries to help her out of it.)***

It's off… It's done.

The *ACTOR/MASHA walks towards the audience, ignoring AM 2/MEDVEDENKO. She flirts with the man who has caught her eye (Audience Member 3). She must now persuade him to join her on stage to play the part of KONSTANTIN.*

ACTOR/MASHA *(To AM 3)* 'The show will be starting soon!'

Hi! *(She gestures to the stage, smiling and giggling.) Yeah?*

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO *(Resolutely sticking to the script despite the ACTOR/MASHA now completely ignoring him.)* 'Twenty-three roubles a month less deductions for the pension and I don't go around in mourning Masha.'

ACTOR **It's ok, you won't have to do anything.** (*She sits AM 3 in a chair centre stage and runs off to find items of costume for him. AM 2/MEDVEDENKO continues with his lines throughout this.)*

AM 2/ MEDVEDENKO 'In practice it comes down to this. My mother and I plus my two sisters with only twenty-three roubles a month coming in.'

The ACTOR/MASHA gives AM 3 a cravat, waistcoat and shoes, she cannot take her eyes off him and continues to flirt and gaze at him as

she helps him change his shoes and jacket. AM 2/MEDVEDENKO looks on from upstage – at a complete loss.

AM 2/ MEDVEDENKO Masha!

The ACTOR/MASHA ignores him, moving upstage to the camera which she focuses on AM 3 in tight close up. The screen switches from the lake to the live feed and we watch AM 3's transformation into KONSTANTIN.

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO *(Losing patience)* **Masha! Maria! This is our scene! Shall I just stand here?**

The ACTOR/ MASHA *continues to ignore him. She focuses in on an even tighter close up and then tidies up the AM 3/KONSTANTIN's clothes, getting ready to do her scene with him.*

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO *(Trying to bring the ACTOR/MASHA back to reality.)* 'The show is a play written by Konstantin, Masha. And his *Nina* will be acting in it. Two people in love and today their souls will merge as they strive to create a single artistic impression. Whereas my soul and yours have no point of contact.'

Pause.

'I love you. (*Pause.*) I can't stay at home I long to see you so much…I walk three miles here and three miles back every day (***the ACTOR/MASHA starts whispering to AM 3 and giggling, pointedly ignoring everything AM 2/MEDVEDENKO says*****)** and all I get from you is indifference.'

The ACTOR/MASHA *sighs with exasperation. She has heard this all before.*

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO Indifference.

(*Pause.)*

Masha?

The ACTOR/MASHA *sighs again and ostentatiously take more snuff. She delivers the following lines without looking at AM 2/MEDVEDENKO.*

'I am very touched that you love me, but I can't say the same in return and that's all there is to it.' (*Without taking her eyes off AM 3/KONSTANTIN, she extends the snuff box to AM 2/MEDVEDENKO.)* Have a pinch.

M 2/MEDVEDENKO 'Not for me.' **(*He moves upstage and starts to tidy the clothes. He drops one of AM 3/KONSTANTIN's shoes, making a loud noise.)***

ACTOR /MASHA ***Don't drop things Ben! It's not very professional. (She takes another pinch).***

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO **Are you done?**

ACTOR/MASHA **Yeah. *(At last looking at him.)*** 'I am very touched that you love me, but I can't say the same in return and that's all there is to it. (*Offering him the snuff again.)* So close. We'll probably have a storm during the night. You know if you're not philosophising you're going on about money. You seem to think the worst thing that can happen to a person is poverty, but I think it is a thousand times easier to go around in rags and beg your bread than it is to… well you won't understand…'

The ACTOR/MASHA trails off. It is time to move on with the scene. She stumbles over to AM 1 to ask him to read in SORIN's lines. Through the

following dialogue the ACTOR/MASHA coaches AM 1/SORIN and AM 3/KONSTANTIN to perform the first scene of 'The Seagull'.

ACTOR/MASHA (*To AM 2/MEDVEDENKO)* The show will be starting soon, Ben!

(To AM 1, giving him a script from the desk) **You see we need a Sorin, would you mind just reading these lines?**

AM 1 **Um, ok**

ACTOR/MASHA **Think old. And English.**

The ACTOR/MASHA goes back to AM 3. Flirting and handing him a copy of the script, she kneels in front of him, gazing longingly up at him as they work through the scene.

Just these lines. Think English. Brad Pitt.

AM 1/SORIN *(Reading from the script)* 'The thing with me though is that'/

ACTOR/MASHA /**Yeah, good! But into the mic.**

AM 1/SORIN **Oh yeah, ok.** 'The thing with me, though, is that I somehow never feel quite up to the mark when I'm in the country. No question about it - I'll never get used to being here. Went to bed at ten o'clock last night and woke up at nine this morning feeling like I'd slept for so long that my brain was stuck to my skull etcetera, etcetera. *(Laughs.)* Then after dinner I dropped off again, and now I feel as if a horse and cart had gone over me. It's like being in a bad dream when all's said and done…'

AM 3/KONSTANTIN *(Prompted by the ACTOR/MASHA.)* 'You're right - you ought to be living in town. Listen, you'll be called when it starts - you're not supposed to be here now. Go away, will you.'

ACTOR/MASHA ***(Delighted. To AM 3/KONSTANTIN.)*** **That'll do! Now – more…angry.** ***(Turning back to AM 1/SORIN.)*** **Yeah give him the cue. I'm sorry yeah, that last line is his cue line. Great**.

AM 1/SORIN 'It's like being in a bad dream when all's said and done.'

AM 3/KONSTANTIN 'You're right - you ought to be living in town. Listen, you'll be called when it starts - you're not supposed to be here now. Go away, will you!'

ACTOR/MASHA ***(To AM 3/KONSTANTIN.)*** **That's good but it still needs to be bigger, louder yeah?** ***(To AM 1/SORIN.)*** **Yeah sorry, one more time please.**

AM 1/SORIN 'It's like being in a bad dream when all's said and done.'

AM 3/KONSTANTIN (*Shouting.)* 'You're right - you ought to be living in town. Listen you'll be called when it starts - you're not supposed to be here now. Go away, will you!'

The ACTOR/MASHA is shaken by this last exchange, reacting to the line as Masha – suddenly fully in role. They all now carry on with the scene.

AM 1/SORIN 'And would you mind asking your father to let the dog loose? It howls otherwise. My sister was awake all night again.'

ACTOR/MASHA **'**Speak to my father yourself - I'm not going to, spare me that at any rate. (*To AM 2/MEDVEDENKO.)* Come on then. *(Aggressively.)* Speak to my father yourself, I'm not going to. Spare me that, at any rate. *(To AM 2/MEDVEDENKO.)* Come on then.'

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO *(To AM 1/SORIN + AM 3/KONSTANTIN)* 'You'll let us know before it starts, then.'

ACTOR/MASHA ‘Come on then!’

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO ‘You’ll let us know before it starts?’

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO and ACTOR/MASHA exit to the side of the stage.

THREE

The lights dim as the sun sets and the screen switches to black, a moon slowly rising from one corner. It continues to rise over the course of this scene. AM 3 is alone, centre stage. *He has become KONSTANTIN, waiting for his NINA to arrive, moments before she is due to perform his play. His ears prick up, he hears footsteps.*

During the following speech (which is repeated over and again) AM 3/KONSTANTIN moves the dressmaker's mannequin upstage centre, in front of the rising moon. He dresses it in NINA's skirt and it becomes NINA. At the same time AM 2/MEDVEDENKO and the ACTOR/MASHA invite genuine audience members onto the stage, to take on the roles of ARKADINA, TRIGORIN, POLINA, SHAMRAYEV, DORN and SORIN. They are each given a single item of costume and seated in front of the screen and the MANNEQUIN/NINA. The ACTOR/MASHA asks Audience Member 4 to come and sit at the tech desk to read NINA and ARKADINA's lines.

AM 3/KONSTANTIN 'I can hear footsteps… I can't live without her… Even the sound of her footsteps is wonderful. I'm so happy I don't know what I am doing! I hear footsteps… (*Laughs.)* I can hear footsteps! I can't live without her…. Even the sound of her footsteps is wonderful. I mean I don't even know what I am doing! I hear footsteps (*Laughs.)*'

When everyone is in place AM 3/KONSTANTIN begins his scene with MANNEQUIN/AM 4/NINA.

AM 3/KONSTANTIN *(To MANNEQUIN/NINA)* 'My enchantress! My dream!'

AM 4/NINA *(Prompted by the ACTOR/ MASHA) '*I'm not late… Tell me I'm not late…'

AM 3/KONSTANTIN 'No, no, no, no…'

AM 4/NINA ‘I’ve been worrying about it all day. I was so terrified! I was afraid my father wouldn’t let me go… But he’s just gone out with my stepmother. The sky red - the moon already starting to rise, and I just kept on whipping and whipping the horse. *(Laughs.)* I am glad though… Look how out of breath I am. I am going in half-an-hour, we must hurry. You mustn’t, mustn’t, for heaven’s sake, make me late. My father doesn’t know I’m here.’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN ‘It’s time to start, in any case. We must go and call everyone.’

AM 4/NINA ‘My father and his wife won’t let me come here. They say you are all bohemians… They’re afraid I might run off to be an actress. But it’s the lake that draws me here… like a seagull. My heart’s full of you.’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN **‘**We’re alone.’

AM 4/NINA ‘I think there’s someone there.’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN kisses MANNEQUIN/NINA.

AM4/NINA ‘What sort of tree is that?’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN ‘Elm.’

Gradually music starts to play, ‘Scream and Shout’ by Will.i.am and Britney Spears (2012). It is joyful and anarchic, an anthem for the young. It gets louder over the course of the scene, as anticipation builds for KONSTANTIN’s play.

AM 3/KONSTANTIN ‘I love you.’

As volume increases the ACTOR/MASHA, then AM 2/MEDVEDENKO and AM 3/KONSTANTIN start to hear it. They tap their feet and sway

with the beat, moving more until they are dancing with complete abandon. It is a moment of freedom, of release.

When the music stops sharp, they are suddenly brought back to reality. The ACTOR/MASHA finds herself centre stage, breathing heavily from the exertion. Everyone waits for her to take action. When she has recovered herself, she motions to AM 4 to read ARKADINA's lines.

AM 4/ARKADINA *(Prompted by the ACTOR/MASHA.)* 'Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me…' 'My precious, when's it going to begin?'

AM 3/KONSTANTIN *(Directing his lines to the audience member on stage who is designated as Arkadina.*) 'In a minute. If you would just be patient.'

During the following exchange the ACTOR/MASHA takes a seat centre stage, to watch Konstantin's play. AM 2/MEDVEDENKO moves to the camera and focuses it on her. The screen shows the moon rising and a live feed of the ACTOR/MASHA's face in close up as she mouths the words of Konstantin's play and continues to take surreptitious sips from the vodka bottle.

AM 4/ARKADINA 'Oh Hamlet, speak no more.
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.'

AM 3/ KONSTANTIN 'Nay but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty…'

A horn sounds.

AM 3/KONSTANTIN ‘Ladies and gentlemen, the performance is about to begin. Your attention. if you please.’

The ACTOR/MASHA turns to the real audience and shushes them. AM 2/MEDVEDENKO takes a seat.

Pause.

‘I am going to start.’

Pause.

‘You honoured ancient shades that hover in the hours of night above this lake, make our eyes grow heavy, and let us dream of what will be in two hundred thousand years from now.’

A pre-recording of NINA’s speech is played and the exchange that follows is over-laid on top of it.

NINA ‘Men and lions, partridges and eagles, spiders, geese and antlered stages, the unforthcoming fish that dwelt beneath the waters, starfish and creatures invisible to the naked eye; in short – all life, all life, all life, its dismal round concluded, has guttered out… Thousands of centuries have passed since any living creature walked the earth, and this poor moon in vain lights up her lantern. In the meadows the dawn cry of the crane is heard no more, and the May bugs are silent in the lime groves. Cold, cold, cold. Empty, empty, empty. Fearful, fearful. Fearful. *(Pause.)* The bodies of all living creatures have fallen into dust, and Everlasting Matter has turned them into stones, into water, into clouds; while all their souls have merged into one. And this one universal soul is me…me…’

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘A touch of the decadent school here, I think.’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN ‘Mama!’

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘There’s a smell of sulphur. Is there supposed to be?’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN ‘Yes!’

AM 4/ARKADINA *(Laughs.)* ‘I see - it’s an effect!’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN ‘Right, the play’s over! That’s it! Curtain!!’

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘What are you getting cross about?’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN ‘That’s it! Curtain! Can we have the curtain, please! *(Stamps his foot.)* Curtain! I’m sorry! I was forgetting that acting and playwriting were reserved for the chosen few. I’ve infringed their monopoly. It… I…’

AM 3/KONSTANTIN runs off the stage, to the back of the space. We watch the ACTOR/MASHA’s reaction as she looks on, unable to help and tortured by KONSTANTIN’s unhappiness.

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘What’s got into him?’

AM 1/SORIN ‘Irina, my dear girl, that really is no way to deal with youthful pride.’

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘Now what did I say?’

During the following exchange AM 2/MEDVEDENKO removes the mannequin and directs the real audience members back to their seats. He apologises for KONSTANTIN’s outburst.

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘He told us himself beforehand – it was an amusing skit. That’s how I took it. As a skit.’

AM 1/SORIN ‘All the same…’

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘Now it turns out to be some great work of art! Oh, for heaven’s sake. So, he got up all this performance and perfumed the air with sulphur not to amuse us, but to give us all an object lesson in the art of writing and acting. Really, it’s becoming a bore. These perpetual attacks on me, this campaign of pinpricks – it would tax the patience of a saint. He’s a wilful, difficult boy.’

AM 1/SORIN ‘He wanted to give you pleasure.’

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘Oh really! But he didn’t pick some normal kind of play to do it with, did he? – He made us sit through these weary poetic ravings. For the sake of amusement I am prepared to sit through even the ravings of delirium, but what we have here, I take it, were pretentions to new theatrical forms, to a new artistic era. As far as I can see we didn’t get new forms we simply got bad manners.’ ‘I’m not angry - I merely find it a bore that a young man should spend his time in such a tedious way. I didn’t mean to offend him.’

AM 2/MEDVEDENKO ‘No-one has any basis for separating spirit from matter, because for all we know spirit is no more than the totality of material atoms. But you know what someone ought to put in a play is how we teachers live. A hard, hard time of it we have!’

AM 4/ARKADINA ‘I’m sure you do.’ *Pause.* ‘My conscience is beginning to prick, however. Why did I offend that poor boy of mine? I feel uneasy. (*Calls.)* Kostya! My son! Kostya!

ACTOR**/**MASHA ‘I’ll go and look for him.’

AM 4/KONSTANTIN ‘Would you, my dear?’

ACTOR/MASHA **Yup.** ‘Hello!’ (*The ACTOR/MASHA gets up and stands centre stage calling to him. She stumbles.*) ‘Halloo-oo! Halloo-oo!’

FOUR

The live feed is switched off and the moon is now in the centre of the screen. AM 3/Konstantin re-renters, visibly distressed.

AM 3/KONSTANTIN 'Where's Nina?' *(Desperately.)* 'Where's Nina?'

Pause. No one responds. The ACTOR/MASHA prompts AM 1 to read Dorn's lines.

AM 1/DORN *(Reading from the script.)* 'She's gone home.'

ACTOR/MASHA *(TO AM 1/DORN.)* **Riley that's not good enough, you're going to have to give him more than that. He's upset. You're going to have to go to him.**

AM3/KONSTANTIN *(With increasing urgency.)* 'Where's Nina?'

ACTOR/MASHA *(To AM 1.)* **You're going to need to go get him.**

AM 3/KONSTANTIN *(Hysterical*.) 'What am I going to do? I want to see her… I have to see her… I'm going to go there…'

AM1/DORN *(Reading from the script.)* 'Now, calm down, my friend.'

AM 3/KONSTANTIN 'I'm going to go, all the same. I must go.'

AM 1/DORN keeps asking AM 3/KONSTANTIN to calm down, but it has little effect. He is at a loss as to what to do and continually looks to the ACTOR/MASHA for instructions.

AM 3/KONSTANTIN *(Shouting.)* Where is she? /

AM 1/KONSTANTIN /Calm down.

ACTOR/MASHA **Riley do it like you mean it!**

AM 3/KONSTANTIN (*Tearfully.)* 'What am I going to do?'

AM 1/DORN s*hrugs, defeated, he doesn't know how to help.*

ACTOR/MASHA 'Will you go into the house? Your mother's waiting. She's feeling uneasy about you'/

AM 3/KONSTANTIN /Tell her I've gone. And please, all of you, leave me alone! Just leave me alone! *(To the ACTOR/MASHA.)* Don't follow me around.'

AM 1/DORN *(From the script.)* 'Now, now, now, come on… Not the way… not right'/

AM 3/KONSTANTIN 'Goodbye Doctor. Thank you.'

AM 1/DORN (*Moves back to the safety of tech desk. To himself.*) 'Youth, youth.'

ACTOR/MASHA 'Whenever there's nothing more to be said then people say 'youth, youth!''

Takes snuff. AM 1/DORN *pauses and watches the ACTOR/MASHA taking snuff. Walks upstage to observe her.*

'That's a filthy habit.'

The ACTOR/MASHA looks at him and takes snuff again, more ostentatiously.

AM1/DORN **'**That is a filthy habit!'

The ACTOR/MASHA reluctantly puts the snuff box away, like a petulant child.

Pause.

AM 1/DORN 'I think they've started playing cards inside. I must go.'

ACTOR/MASHA 'Wait.'

AM 1/DORN 'What is it?'

Throughout the following speech the ACTOR/MASHA tries to get a reaction from AM 1/DORN. Repeating Masha's lines from the end of Act I she tries to make the subtext of the speech clear to him. AM 1/DORN remains resistant throughout, unwilling to understand her meaning or offer her any help. He resolutely adheres to Dorn's lines. It is unclear whether the resistant comes from Dorn, or the audience member himself.

ACTOR/MASHA (*Swaying.)* 'Yet another thing I want to tell you.' (*Pause.)* 'I'd like to talk for a moment.' I want to talk to you about something. *(Drinks.)* 'I don't like my father…' (*Laughs and waits for a reaction.)* ***Nothing!*** *(Louder and more clearly. Spelling it out for him.)* **I – don't – like – my -father. Nothing! Nothing.** (*To the audience.)* **Nothing.** You have a very special place in my heart. 'I don't know why, but all my life I've felt that you were close to me.' (*Pause. Shouts.)* **I don't like my father! Wow!** (*Approaching AM 1/DORN.)* **You have a very special place in my heart and I don't know why.** *(Pause.)* **I – don't – know – why!** *(She looks from AM 2/MEDVEDENKO to AM 1/DORN and back again, imploring one of them to show they have understood.) '*Help me. Please help me.' *They don't respond.* 'Help me.' *Pause. (Louder and faster, more desperate.)* **I don't like my father. I don't know why. I've always had a special place in my heart for you.** *(Shouting.)* **I felt you were very close!!**

(AM 1/DORN gives her nothing. The ACTOR/MASHA looks at him and shrugs sarcastically.) **Fine.** *(Pause.)* **Fine. I don't give a fuck. Let's not do anything. Let's leave right now. I don't fucking care!** *(Snuff box falls out of her sleeve and she kicks it across the floor in anger.)* **Fuuuuuk!!!** *(Tearful and frustrated.)* 'Help me! Pease help me.' *'*Or I shall do something silly!' *(To the audience.) '*Or I shall do something silly! I shall make a mockery of my life. I shall ruin it… I can't go on.' 'I can't go on.' (*To AM 1/DORN.)* Please!

AM 1/DORN 'Help you with what?' What do you want me to do?

ACTOR/MASHA 'I'm in such torment.' (*Noticing that the he isn't giving her his full attention.)* **Oh great. Ok scratch your arse. Go ahead! I'll wait.** (*Pause.)* 'I'm in such torment. No-one knows, no-one knows the torment I'm in.'

The ACTOR/MASHA gives in to her frustration. She howls. Lashing out, she kicks the props, throwing a chair across the stage, gulping back vodka, before collapsing in a heap, centre stage.

'I'm in such torment.'

AM1/DORN and AM 2/MEDVEDENKO look at each other, unsure of what to do. They don't want to go near her.

'No-one knows.'

Lights change to centre spotlight on the ACTOR/MASHA.

ACTOR/MASHA I love Konstantin.

Music starts to play quietly. It is 'The Winner Takes It All' by ABBA (1980).

'I'm in love with Konstantin.'

*The **ACTOR/MASHA** repeats this phrase as she finds the bottle of vodka and the snuff and slowly struggles to her feet and the music gets louder. She begins to hum and sing along to the music as she sways in the spotlight, drinking from the now nearly empty bottle – the last woman standing at a party who's had too much to drink. AM 1/DORN and AM 2/MEDVEDENKO look on helpless and ineffectual. A disco ball is light up, projecting shapes that look a lot like birds, flying around the room. The room starts to sway.*

***(Singing.)* 'Does she kiss, like I used to kiss you. Does it feel the same, when she calls your name?'**

The more she drinks and the louder the music gets the more enlivened she becomes – the lights and the music restore her for her final curtain.

The music begins to fade.

'I don't want to talk if it makes you feel bad'

The ACTOR/MASHA alone centre-stage, still singing. She realises the audience is still there. She swigs from the now empty bottle.

(To the audience.) So, I marry Medvedenko and we have a baby. And I don't live on the estate any more. And Konstantin becomes a famous writer. My Kostya. (*Pause.)* But… it's not enough. And he shoots himself. (*Pause.)* He shoots himself. (*Pause.)*

She moves over to the tech desk, steadying herself and switches on canned applause. She takes an elaborate bow, basking in the wolf whistles and catcalls. Lights.

The Seagull, or Why Masha Always Wears Black



Figures 12, 13: Scene one Maria Teresa waits for the audience and begins to take on the role





Figure 14: Scene two, Maria Teresa/Masha looks for her Konstantin



Figure 15: Scene three, Konstantin's play

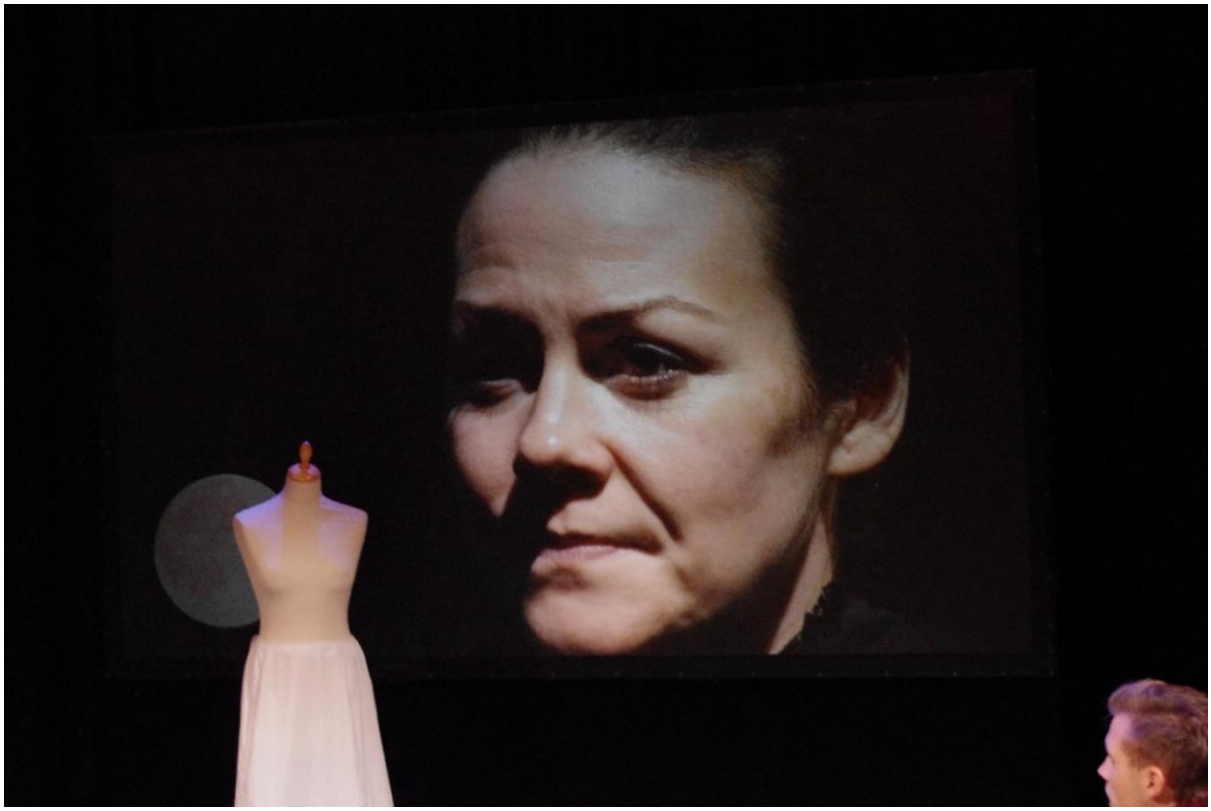


Figure 16: Scene three, Maria Teresa/Masha watches Konstantin's play



Figure 17: Scene three, Maria Teresa's transformation into Masha is complete

Appendix V

Practice project five

THREE SISTERS

CHARACTERS

ACTOR/OLGA – **Paksie Vernon**

ACTOR/IRINA – **Grace Chilton**

ACTOR/MASHA – **Maria Teresa Creasey**

A note on the text

The following transcript combines dialogue from Chekhov's original play, *Three Sisters*, translated by Michael Frayn (2006) with dialogue improvised by the actors. Each scene comprises of direct quotation from Chekhov's text, approximations of the text and original material improvised in the moment of performance. Lines from Chekhov's play, as well as other quotations, appear in quotation marks, while all improvised dialogue appears in plain text.

This transcript is based on a performance at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama on September 28th, 2015. The script, therefore, serves as a record of a singular performance and, as such should be viewed as an exemplar of how the show *can* be performed, rather than as a blueprint for its performance.

The transcript is structured into five acts, each of which are demarcated into distinct scenes. The structure of the acts and scenes was developed through the devising process and each scene is organised around beats the actors need to hit. The actors have a secure understanding of the structure and the *objectives* they are trying to fulfil in every scene, building their improvisations around them. While many of the improvisations paraphrase Chekhov's text, others are extraneous to the text and Chekhov's story – relating to the experience of the actors performing their roles.

The actors are tasked with responding to the present moment, to each other and to the audience. They should embrace everything that happens during the performance, both on stage and in the auditorium, as material to work with. They are encouraged, through Lee Strasberg's 'Speaking Out' exercise, to voice their frustrations and are free to draw attention to mistakes or mishaps on stage and to interact with their audience. The intention is that the show performed should be 'different every night'.

One

Stage direction one

An empty stage. Three nineteenth-century period dresses, one blue, one white and one black hang from the back wall and three large brooms, two upstage left, one upstage right are propped up against the side walls.

The opening bars of Pink Floyd's ***Time*** *blast out, with the ticking of clocks and the cacophonous ringing of bells continuing through the scene that follows. As the bells sound the three ACTORS, dressed in rehearsal clothes, burst onto the stage whopping and yelling with excitement. They drag a large flight case, three suitcases and an empty crate onto the stage with them. They set the flight case centre stage left, the two suitcases upstage right and the third suitcase and crate centre stage right. They extract a series of props from the suitcase: a notebook and pencil, a black dress, a mantilla, a whistle and a copy of Anton Chekhov's* ***Three Sisters****.*

ACTOR/MASHA scrawls the words 'Three Sisters' across the floor in chalk. ACTOR/IRINA marks out the thrust stage with a chalk line. ACTOR/OLGA walks the length of the arc, miming the 'fourth wall' for the audience – like a mime trapped in an imaginary glass box.

ACTOR/IRINA Lights please!

Houselights go off.

The music builds in intensity and volume and the three ACTORS check in with each other to make sure everything is in place. They smile and nod in acknowledgement, then race excitedly to the dresses on the back wall and begin to undress. They are wearing corsets under their rehearsal clothes and as they unhook the

dresses from the wall (ACTOR/OLGA takes the blue dress, ACTOR/IRINA the white one and ACTOR/MASHA the black one) they begin a loud and enthusiastic vocal warm up. They turn to the right forming a line and button each other's dresses. When the ACTOR /OLGA's dress is buttoned she runs to the back of the line to help with ACTOR/IRINA's dress. With their dresses fastened they turn out to face the audience and continue to warm up vocally as they begin an enthusiastic and exaggerated physical warm up.

The introduction to ***Time*** *segues into the verse and, as the first line of the song is sung, the ACTORS break out of their line to take their positions on stage.*

ACTOR/OLGA picks up the exercise book and pencil and paces the perimeter of the stage, correcting the work in the exercise book. Through the scene she becomes increasingly irritated by the work she is marking, tearing the pages from the book before, finally, ripping it to pieces and breaking the pencil in half.

ACTOR/IRINA takes a pink gymnastic ribbon out of the suitcase stage right and begins to dance with it. Her dancing is stilted and mechanical, with a fixed grin on her face. She is a music-box ballerina, an über-marionette.

ACTOR/MASHA twirls around the stage before hanging the whistle around her neck and picking up the book and the mantilla, which she places over her head. She sits on the flight case, striking an exaggerated pose, half reclined, with the book raised in the air – thumbing the pages in slow motion, like a statue come to life.

The opening stage direction for Act I of Michael Frayn's translation of Anton Chekhov's ***Three Sisters*** *is projected onto the back wall. It reads: 'The interior of the Prozorov's house. The drawing-room, with its colonnade beyond which the main reception room can be*

seen. It is noon, and the day is bright and cheerful. The table in the big room beyond is being laid for lunch. OLGA*, who is wearing the dark blue dress laid down for a teacher in a girls' high school, stands correcting exercise-books the whole time – walks up and down correcting them.* MASHA, *in a black dress, her hat in her lap, sits reading a book.* IRINA*, in white, stands lost in her own thoughts.'*

ACTOR/OLGA throws the remains of the pencil and exercise book away in anger and paces the room, now frantically, marking an imaginary book with an imaginary pencil, before tearing up that book and that pencil in anger.

She stops, takes a deep breath and comes to stand centre stage.

***Time** stops dead.*

Olga forgets her lines

Through the following speech ACTOR/IRINA goes to the suitcase centre stage left, puts the gymnastic ribbon back into the case and takes out a string of bunting which she unravels and strings across the stage. ACTOR/MASHA sits silently 'reading' Chekhov's play throughout.

ACTOR/OLGA *(To the audience.)* It's exactly a year ago since father died.

Pause while ACTOR/OLGA remembers her lines.

'A year ago, today.' *(Pause.)*

Pause. She looks around and takes a deep breath to settle her nerves.

'May the fifth'… It's exactly a year ago… May the fifth… It was ummm… *(To ACTOR/IRINA)* 'It was on your name-day Irina…'

A long pause. She has forgotten the next line.

(To the lighting desk.) Line.

A long pause. No prompt is given.

ACTOR/IRINA *(Prompting.)* 'It was very cold'/

ACTOR/OLGA /'It was very cold, we had snow…'

Long pause. She has forgotten again.

She takes a deep, calming breath.

It's exactly a year ago since Father died. *(To Irina.)* A year ago? Two years? Five years? Five years? One year? *(Irina holds up a single finger.)* 'A year ago, today', yes exactly… Today. One year. *(Pause.)* Uh…. Today is… May… the twelfth? Uh, the thirteenth?

ACTOR/IRINA tries to pull the bunting across the stage, but it has become tangled and she cannot undo it. It won't stretch from one corner to another, so she tries to hold it up from one end, acting like a post. She grins at the audience.

No, the tenth. Eleventh? Ninth?

ACTOR/IRINA gestures to ACTOR/OLGA holding five fingers up and mouthing the word 'fifth'. She is becoming frustrated.

What? Oh, 'May the fifth!' And I should know because it's an important day in our family. *(Pause.*) It's er… Masha's birthday? *(Looking to ACTOR/IRINA for guidance. ACTOR/IRINA gives her nothing.*) 'May the fifth…' 'May the fifth…' 'May the fifth…' *(ACTOR/IRINA drops the bunting and glowers at her.*) 'May the fifth…' 'May the fifth.' I know it's something. *(ACTOR/OLGA looks at ACTOR/IRINA again who starts pointing to herself and making faces.)* I know it's something to do with… you! *(ACTOR/IRINA is smiling, miming happiness.)* 'May the fifth…' It's your name day!! *(Excited.)* It's her name day! I'm such a bad sister. Sorry. *(Triumphantly, now she has found her flow.)* 'It was on your name day' and the weather, oh the weather, well the weather… Well oh the weather was, well… Well there was some weather! *(Pause. ACTOR/IRINA shudders, miming cold and snow.)* Cold! It was cold! Oh-ho, was it cold! Cold in May, 'May the fifth!' On your name day. 'It was very cold' and *(ACTOR/IRINA is losing patience and she starts ripping the bunting in frustration.)* And, ah…. *(Pause.)* 'May the fifth….' *(ACTOR/IRINA throws pieces of ripped up bunting into the air to represent snow.)* And oh… 'we had snow', because it was

cold, it was cold, so we had snow, yes and you were… *(ACTOR/IRINA drops to the ground in a 'dead faint'.)* And you were?

ACTOR/IRINA *(Getting up and falling to the ground again.)* Ohhhh!

ACTOR/OLGA Ohhh?!! *(Pause.)* You were? *(Pause.)* You were? *(Pause.)* I thought… *(Suddenly remembering.)* 'I thought I should never survive it and' you… and you were… *(ACTOR/IRINA is now back on her feet. She takes party hats out of the suitcase, all the while keeping eye contact with ACTOR/OLGA encouraging her through the speech.)* …you know… You were doing something, I remember something. You were… *(ACTOR/IRINA has had enough. She gets up and starts placing the party hats noisily around the stage, ready for the party.)* She was… She was doing something, 'and I thought I should never survive it and there you were, lying in a dead faint!' I know, I know… sorry. 'There you were lying in a dead faint' and now look!

Here's a … *(Pause.)* Is it one year? One year had gone by and yes, 'here's a year gone by, and we can think about it again' calmly, yes. Because… er… you are… back in... *(ACTOR/IRINA indicates her dress.)* in white! Back in white because of your white costume, yes! You're back in white and you are… *(ACTOR/IRINA starts smiling/ grimacing.)* And you are...? *(ACTOR/IRINA points to her 'smiling' face.)* And your face… 'Your face is… shining!' 'Your face is shining.' 'You're back in white' and 'your face is shining.'

The clock strikes twelve and the ACTOR/OLGA freezes. She has been transported into another version of ***Three Sisters*** *and has no longer forgotten her lines. She takes centre stage and moves confidently through a series of gestures representing mourning and despair before settling on defiance – her hand clenched in a fist and raised in the air, a look of courage and determination on her face.*

ACTOR/OLGA *(In the clipped tones of a heightened RP accent, an impassioned speech delivered directly to the audience.)* 'The clock kept striking then, too. *(Pause.)* 'I remember the band playing as they carried Father's body on the bier…' *(She pauses to make eye contact with an audience member who is laughing, as though warning him not to knock her off her stride.)* 'I remember them firing the volley over the grave.' *(ACTOR/IRINA lets off a confetti canon to recreate the noise of the volley. The confetti fall on OLGA/IRINA like snow.)* 'He was a general, he had a brigade, but not many people came.' *(ACTOR/OLGA suddenly switches accent, to the tone and style of an American preacher.)* 'Though it was raining at the time. Sleeting – sleeting hard.'

ACTOR/IRINA 'Why keep harking back?'

ACTOR/OLGA You're right! 'It's warm today. We can have the windows wide. The birch trees aren't out yet, though. Father got his brigade and left Moscow with us eleven years ago and I remember well what Moscow would be like at this time of year…'

ACTOR/IRINA Moscow!

ACTOR/OLGA 'At the beginning of May.'

'*Tempo di valse' from Tchaikovsky's* ***Swan Lake*** *begins to play. It gets gradually louder as ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/IRINA are swept away by their memories of Moscow.*

'Everything would be warm. Everything would be in blossom already, everything would be awash with sunshine.' *(As ACTOR/OLGA is carried away with the emotion and memories of Moscow she begins to speak in Russian-gibberish.)* Dushda babooshka Muscova!! Buva glavanyaybore…

ACTOR/OLGA *(Together.)* Muscova, Muscova, Muscova!

ACTOR/IRINA

The waltz gets louder and ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/OLGA clasp hands and whirl around the stage, transported back to their former life in Moscow.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Together, whirling.)* Wheeeeeeeeeee! Wheeeeeeeee!

ACTOR/IRINA

They break apart still laughing and look at ACTOR/MASHA, this is her cue. She does not respond and continues to read her book. The music fades and ACTOR/IRINA laughs nervously as they continue to stare at ACTOR/MASHA, waiting for her to deliver her line.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Giving ACTOR/MASHA her cue line again. Sarcastically.)* Wheeeeeeeee!

Silence.

(Eventually skipping to the next line, which she delivers in Russian-gibberish.) Nish vwistit Masha.

Silence.

Nish vwistit Masha. *Pause.* Ok, fine, well… *(Approaching ACTOR/MASHA and getting increasingly aggravated.)* Nish vwistit Masha. Dusda babooshka bestarga sto/ *(ACTOR/MASHA starts to whistle 'Happy Birthday' quietly.)* / Nish vwistit Masha, dusda babooshka bestarga sto/

ACTOR/MASHA turns to ACTOR/OLGA, their faces nearly touching, whistling louder and louder, interrupting ACTOR/OLGA's attempts to speak. /Glavnaya bol, dabuyta Russia, dabutya! Nish vwistit

Masha… Nish vwistit!!! Dushda babooshka glavanyaybore!! *(ACTOR/MASHA blows the whistle very loudly into ACTOR/OLGA's face.)* /Huh! …Nish/ *(ACTOR MASHA whistles.) Nish/ (ACTOR MASHA whistles.)* Ok, well. Fine. Dushda babooshka da/

ACTOR/MASHA keeps whistling until she drowns ACTOR/OLGA out. She then blows thirteen short, sharp toots and the ACTORS/CHARACTERS run downstage to form a regimental line.

Military men

The ACTORS/CHARACTERS adopt the poses of military men ready for inspection and speaking in the parodied tones of British army generals, American GIs and Russian soldiers.

ACTOR/MASHA Atten…tion! *(They all jump to attention.)*

ACTOR/IRINA 'Father was a general. He had a brigade!'

ACTOR/OLGA 'If it hadn't been for the military'/

A military march begins to play, and ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA break out of the line as military men while ACTOR/IRINA adopts the stock gestures of a silent film-era ingénue.

/ 'The whole town would have gone up in flames! Sterling work! Sterling lads and sterling work!'

ACTOR/IRINA becomes a military man, slapping her things and flexing her muscles as ACTOR/OLGA takes on the role of the swooning ingénue.

ACTOR/ MASHA/ 'Hulloo! Hup-hup!' Hey ho! Hey ho! 'Hup-hup, hup-hup!'

ACTOR/OLGA becomes a military man again and it is ACTOR/MASHA's turn to play the ingénue. She mimes fainting from desire.

ACTOR/IRINA *(Lifting imaginary weights.)* 'With one hand I can lift only fifty pounds, but with two, I can lift one hundred and eighty, two hundred even'.

ACTOR/IRINA turns back into the ingénue. ACTOR/OLGA is a self-important Colonel and ACTOR/MASHA a crude solider.

ACTOR/OLGA ‘In our hometown the most worthwhile, the most educated… are the military.’

ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA wink at ACTOR/IRINA who is overcome with embarrassment at their attention.

All three ACTORS/CHARACTERS pick up imaginary guns and aim them at the audience.

ACTOR/MASHA/ In a couple of years from now I’m going to lose my temper and ‘I’m going to put a bullet through your lovely face’.

They fire at the audience. ACTOR/IRINA has a rifle. ACTOR/OLGA a handgun and ACTOR/MASHA a bazooka. ACTOR/MASHA accidently shoots ACTOR/OLGA who dies a slow, noisy and dramatic death.

After she breathes her last ACTOR/MASHA and ACTOR/OLGA freeze.

Irina is lost

ACTOR/IRINA is left to carry on alone. The military march continues to play as she stands upstage, half-heartedly shooting at the audience, playing for time. She is vulnerable. She looks at the audience, still holding her imaginary gun, but unsure what to do with it. Perhaps it might go off and kill someone else?

Silence.

ACTOR/IRINA There's a bit that comes after this bit. *(Pause.)* But I've forgotten it. *(She looks at ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA willing them to wake up.)* Arrghhh!!! *(Pause.)*

After some time, ACTOR/IRINA runs downstage and strikes a series of dramatic poses, and delivers various lines from the play, trying to find her place, or somehow magically use the lines to re-awaken ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA.

(Melodramatically.) 'What is it?' *(Pause.)* What has happened? *(Pause.)* Will someone please tell me, 'for the love of God!' *(Pause.)*

Nothing! *(Looking at ACTOR/MASHA and ACTOR/IRINA).* Yes, and…! *(Pause.)* Nothing! No. Ok. This is ok. This is fine! This is live theatre. *(Pause.)*

She breaks down and sobs uncontrollably.

Silence.

ACTOR/IRINA takes a deep breath and pulls herself together. She stretches her arms out wide and makes her fingers into pistols, holding them to her head.

‘How I’m still alive, how I haven’t killed myself before now, I really don’t know!’ … Bang!

She looks up to the lighting desk as though to ask for help, a cue to move the scene on. Nothing. She drops her hands and stands still, at a total loss.

Eventually, in desperation, she starts to sing.

‘I want to be loved by you, just you and nobody else but you, poo poo pi do.’

ACTOR/MASHA and ACTOR/OLGA are woken by her singing. They unfreeze and join in with ACTOR/IRINA. ACTOR/OLGA finds two red clown noses for her and ACTOR/MASHA which they don, and they morph into a misfit girl-group trio. They sing and dance.

ALL ‘I want to be loved by you, alone, poo poo pi doo, whoo!
I want to be kissed by you, just you and nobody else but you.
I want to be loved by you alone, poo poo pi doo!

ACTOR/IRINA ‘I couldn’t aspire,
To anything higher,
Than to feel the desire, to make you my own.’

ACTOR/MASHA and ACTOR/IRINA continue to accompany ACTOR/IRINA while dressing her in a white tutu, placing a tiara on her head and handing her a fairy wand. She doesn’t seem to understand what is happening to her.

ALL ‘Ba dum, ba dum, bad da ba dobody do, wooh!’

The singing slowly fades out and ACTOR/IRINA rushes downstage and adopts a ballet dancer’s fifth position.

ACTOR/IRINA ‘Romeo, Romeo, where for art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love and I’ll no longer be…’
... a Prozorov?

Lights change suddenly, and ACTOR/IRINA is in a cold, tight spotlight, she strikes the pose of a damsel in distress. ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA appearing out the darkness behind her. They are wearing the beards of Tusenbach and Solyony. They strike the poses of amorous lovers. ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA continue to hum the tune of ‘I Want to Be Loved by You’ throughout the scene.

ACTOR/OLGA *(In a phoney German accent as Tusenbach)* For five years I have loved you.

Back to tight spotlight. ACTOR/IRINA strikes another pose. Lights up again to reveal ACTOR/MASHA as Solyony.

ACTOR/MASHA (*In a phony Russian accent.)* ‘You are only one who can understand me!’

Back to tight spotlight. ACTOR/IRINA strikes another pose. Lights up again to reveal ACTOR/OLGA.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Moving closer.)* I will make you so happy!

Back to tight spotlight. ACTOR/IRINA looks startled and strikes another pose. Lights up again to reveal ACTOR/MASHA.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Moving closer.)* ‘Sumptuous, magical, amazing eyes!’

Back to tight spotlight. ACTOR/IRINA looks excited and strikes another pose. Lights up again to reveal ACTOR/OLGA next to her now, reaching out to touch her.

ACTOR/OLGA Just one thing wrong. 'You don't love me.'

Back to tight spotlight. ACTOR/IRINA looks awkward and strikes another pose. Lights up again to reveal ACTOR/MASHA. She moves in very close to ACTOR/IRINA.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Ominously.)* 'I'll kill any rival.' *(ACTOR/IRINA pulls an expression of mock horror.)*

The bells from the opening bars from Pink Floyd's ***Time*** *sound, loudly interrupting the action. The ACTORS/CHARACTERS all immediately stop what they are doing, deflated.*

TWO

Stage direction two

As the bells sound the opening stage direction from Act I of 'Three Sisters' is projected onto the back wall again. The font is larger now and it is harder to read the complete text. The ACTORS/CHARACTERS look out to the tech desk in disbelief. The bells signal that they have been asked to start again. ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA tear off their beards and they hurry to tidy the stage, looking for their original props to set up the opening scene and mutter under their breath. ACTOR/OLGA finds the ripped exercise book and begins to mark it again. ACTOR/IRINA stuffs the party hats back into the suitcase and ACTOR/MASHA throws the mantilla back on her head and sits down again to read her book. ACTOR/OLGA throws the exercise book away again, replicating the previous scene and stands centre stage. The music fades.

Irina takes control

ACTOR/OLGA *(In heightened RP.)* It's exactly a year ago today since… *(Pause.)* Father died. Yes, yes, 'a year ago today'. Ah… *(Pause.)* May… *(ACTOR/IRINA looks on, visibly pained. She can't bear to go through it all again.)* … the *(Looking to ACTOR/IRINA for help.)*

ACTOR/IRINA *(Throwing the hats out of the suitcase)* Fifth!!!!

ACTOR/OLGA *(In own accent.)* Sorry, sorry. I'm so sorry. *(Heightened RP.)* 'It's exactly a year since father *died'/*

ACTOR/IRINA /'It was very cold!'

ACTOR/OLGA /A year ago and we had snow. Yes. 'It was very cold and *(Changing back to her own accent.)* we had snow' and I… thought… that *(Trying to remember.)* I should never survive it. *(To the audience.)* Yes, I do know, don't worry. 'I thought I should never survive it and *(To Irina.)* there you were lying in a dead faint…' A year ago,…today!

ACTOR/IRINA Olga.

ACTOR/MASHA Oh Jesus!

ACTOR/OLGA 'May the fifth!' *(Heightened RP.)* 'May the fifth.' *(Own accent.)* It is actually May the fifth isn't it?

ACTOR/IRINA Just stop. *(Pause.)* Just stop.

ACTOR/OLGA I'm doing my monologue.

ACTOR/IRINA Yup. We've all heard your monologue.

ACTOR/OLGA Ouch.

ACTOR/IRINA No, no, no, it's a good monologue.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Heightened RP.)* 'May the fifth' and/

ACTOR/IRINA /It's fantastic and/

ACTOR/OLGA /It was cold/

ACTOR/IRINA /But for that reason Olga, Paksie. I will take that monologue and you, you can be Masha!

Pause. ACTOR/OLGA looks at ACTOR/MASHA.

She doesn't do anything for the whole of Act I. She just sits there/

ACTOR/MASHA /Woah, Woah…/

ACTOR/IRINA /I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry/

ACTOR/OLGA /Fine. I'll do it *(Going over the ACTOR/MASHA, pulling the mantilla from her head and grabbing the book from her hand. She puts the mantilla on her own head and takes ACTOR/MASHA's place)/*

ACTOR/MASHA /Actually. Actually Grace/

ACTOR/IRINA I know, I know, I know/

ACTOR/MASHA /Actually I and kind of well Olga as well, am in mourning for Papa, you know who you never actually mention do you, ever? *(Pause.)* No. You don't. You just want to have a party.

Pause.

ACTOR/IRINA Yup.

ACTOR/MASHA Anything to say about that?

Pause.

ACTOR/IRINA *(Fast.)* It's exactly a year ago today since Father died. 'A year ago, today, May the fifth. It was on your name day, Irina' *(Indicating ACTOR/MASHA).* Irina. Please? Please. *(Pause.)* 'It was very cold, we had snow'/

ACTOR/MASHA Please what?

ACTOR/IRINA Be Irina? Irina? You're in white, 'your face is shining'/

ACTOR/MASHA /Jesus Christ, she's lost it/

ACTOR/IRINA /The clock

The clock strikes twelve. ACTOR/IRINA replicates ACTOR/OLGA's gestures and facial expressions (mourning, despair and defiance) at double speed.

ACTOR/MASHA It's not going to work because I cannot play Irina and she's not Masha and you just can't be Olga…

ACTOR/IRINA looks pleadingly at her. Pause.

Fine. If you think you can be Olga, I can be a much better Irina.

ACTOR/MASHA goes over to the suitcase of party supplies and relentlessly pops party poppers at ACTOR/IRINA as she tries to deliver Olga's speech.

ACTOR/MASHA Woohoo! Fun isn't it? Party! Woohoo! /

ACTOR/IRINA /I remember Father's funeral

ACTOR/MASHA /Woohoo! /

ACTOR/IRINA /I remember Father's /

ACTOR/MASHA / *(To the audience. Throwing everything she can find out of the box, trying her hardest to put ACTOR/IRINA off.)* There's a party everybody!

ACTOR/IRINA /Sorry.. Arrghhh! /

ACTOR/MASHA /It's Irina's name-day! /

ACTOR/IRINA /Arrghhh! Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it! I'm trying to do the play.

ACTOR/MASHA /(Quietly.) Me too.

ACTOR/MASHA takes out the gymnastics ribbon and begins to dance with it, mimicking ACTOR/IRINA's movements from the opening of scene One.

ACTOR/IRINA *(ACTOR/MASHA throws hats and confetti at ACTOR/IRINA throughout.)* I remember them carrying Father's body on the bier, he was a General, he had a brigade, 'I remember them firing the volley over his grave' because, *(To ACTOR/MASHA)* that's actually your cue but that's fine/

ACTOR/MASHA /'Why keep harking back?' Ooh volley *(Looks for something to fire.)*

ACTOR/IRINA You're right. 'Today we can have the windows wide.' *(ACTOR/MASHA fires a party popper. Music cue, the 'Tempo di valse' from Tchaikovsky's* ***Swan Lake*** *plays again. ACTOR/MASHA dances. ACTOR/IRINA races through Olga's speech at breakneck speed.)* 'I remember what Moscow was like at this time of year.' It would be warm, 'everything would be awash with sunshine. Eleven years have gone by, but I remember it all as if it were yesterday. '

ACTOR/OLGA Whistle, whistle, whistle.

ACTOR/IRINA *(Shouting over the music.)* Nish vwistit Masha. 'I'm at school every day and I give lessons for the rest of the afternoon' and blah, blah, blah… 'And the only thing that grows, the only thing that gets any stronger *(Slowing.)* is one single dream…' 'To go to Moscow!' *(ACTOR/IRINA whirls and dances across the stage.)*

ACTOR/OLGA takes off her mantilla and gets up off the flight case.

ACTOR/OLGA I'm leaving. Bye.

Music fades.

Masha tries to leave

All three ACTORS/CHARACTERS look at each other in silence, before ACTOR/IRINA speaks.

ACTOR/IRINA *(To ACTOR/OLGA)* 'I understand you, Masha'.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Sarcastically to ACTOR/IRINA)* You understand me Masha?

ACTOR/MASHA Sorry, you guys, actually /

ACTOR/OLGA *(To ACTOR/IRINA again, ignoring ACTOR/MASHA)* /You understand me? /

ACTOR/MASHA You're just pretending to be me right now. You can't actually go, because I'm Masha.

ACTOR/OLGA *(To ACTOR/IRINA again, ignoring ACTOR/MASHA)* /You understand me? /

ACTOR/MASHA /You can't actually go so it doesn't make sense. That doesn't make sense. I'm Masha.

During the following exchange ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/IRINA start to mimic everything ACTOR/MASHA says and does in a childish game of 'copycat'.

ACTOR/IRINA I'm Masha/

ACTOR/OLGA /That doesn't make sense. I'm Masha.

ACTOR/MASHA I'm sorry Paksie?

ACTOR/IRINA /I'm sorry Paksie?
ACTOR/OLGA

ACTOR/MASHA /That's a really shit American accent/

ACTOR/IRINA /That's a really shit American accent.
ACTOR/OLGA

ACTOR/MASHA No, this is not how you play the game/

ACTOR/IRINA /Not how you play the game/
ACTOR/OLGA

ACTOR/MASHA /No the game is to… *(ACTOR/MASHA mimes buttoning her lips in frustration. They copy her.)*

Pause.

ACTOR/MASHA rushes forward, making a run for it, trying to break through the imaginary fourth wall. It is impenetrable. ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/OLGA rush forward too, copying her.

I'm leaving! Arrghhh!!!

ACTOR/IRINA /I'm leaving! Arrghhh! /
ACTOR/OLGA

ACTOR/MASHA /You're so annoying! This is not the game, /the game…

ACTOR/IRINA /This is not the game, the game is/
ACTOR/OLGA

ACTOR/MASHA /That is not it! /

ACTOR/IRINA /That is not it! /
ACTOR/OLGA

ACTOR/MASHA /Don't look at me/

ACTOR/IRINA /Don't look at me/
ACTOR/OLGA

ACTOR/MASHA *(Despairing.)* You guys, please…/

ACTOR/IRINA /You guys, please…/
ACTOR/OLGA

ACTOR/MASHA /Nobody wants to see this/

ACTOR/IRINA /Nobody wants to see this/
ACTOR/OLGA

Pause.

ACTOR/MASHA This is the stupidest game/

ACTOR/IRINA /This is the stupidest game/

Pause.

ACTOR/MASHA screams in frustration. The copy her.

ACTOR/MASHA Fine. I'm leaving/

ACTOR/OLGA /Fine. I'm leaving.
ACTOR/IRINA

All three ACTORS/CHARACTERS attempt to break through the imaginary fourth wall again. ACTOR/MASHA wails in anger.

ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/OLGA copy her until suddenly the doorbell rings and they all stop dead, frozen to the spot.

The party

Looking out to the audience, the ACTORS/CHARACTERS' expressions suddenly change to delight and excited anticipation. The guests are here for Irina's name-day party.

ACTOR/MASHA *(To the audience.)* Oh! My one! 'Is my one here?' *(To the audience.)* *'*My one!' My man! *(Looking for her man in the audience.)* *'*Is my one here?' My one! *(Remembering.)* *'*We had a cook who called her policeman that - my one.' Is my one here? /

ACTOR/OLGA/
ACTOR/IRINA *(In slow motion.)* *'*The Colonel Vershinin turns out to be from Moscow!'

ACTOR/MASHA 'Out of the blue we've met someone from home. Now it's come back to me! You remember Olya, we used to talk about the 'lovelorn major'. You were a lieutenant then… but everyone used to tease you by calling you the lovelorn major.'

Through the following sequence music starts to play, Rudimental's ***Waiting All Night****, quietly at first but building to a crescendo. The music is accompanied by fireworks bursting into flame on the back wall and a lighting change to night. Again, these start gradually, but build, mirroring the intensity of the music. Over the music all three ACTORS/CHARACTERS repeat the following speeches. ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/OLGA's are not fixed, they are simply tasked with introducing the guests who are arriving for the party. They can do so in any order and describe them however they see fit. All three ACTORS/CHARACTERS take turns to increase and decrease volume so that only sections of each speech can be heard. All speeches are directed to the audience. The effect should be cacophonous as the excitement builds at Vershinin's arrival and the start of the long-awaited party.*

ACTOR/MASHA /'Out of the blue we've met someone from home. Now it's come back to me! You remember Olya, we used to talk about the 'lovelorn major'. You were a lieutenant then… but everyone used to tease you by calling you the lovelorn major.' 'You only had a moustache in those days. Oh, how you've aged.' *(Cries.)* Oh no, I'll be fine. *Pause.*' Olya, Olya, Olya.' You remember the Colonel, he's from Moscow…/

ACTOR/IRINA /'Olya, Olya, Olya,' it turns out the Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow. 'You're from Moscow… It's like a bolt from the blue!' 'We're moving there you see. We think we shall actually be there by the autumn. It's our home town – we were born there… In Old Basmannaya Street…' Do sit down. Everybody's here. Chebutykin's here. And there's Solyony with a black beard and he keeps washing his hands. Andrey, our brother who plays the violin. Chebutykin, he's fat. And Kulygin, Masha's husband. And there's Rode and Fedotik – lovely boys, but no-one knows what they do! /

ACTOR/OLGA I thought I remembered them all, and now suddenly… Oh you haven't aged a bit. I mean your hair is going grey, 'but you're not old yet'. Not like me… Do sit down. Everyone's here. Chebutykin's here. He's a doctor, rather large. Tusenbach, he's German, he's with the army and he's in love with Irina. Oh, and we have Natasha. Our brother's girlfriend, she's vulgar and tarty. She's wearing a pink dress with a green belt. I mean, what? And then there's Rode and Fedotik, no-one knows what they do!

As the music reaches a crescendo the ACTORS/CHARACTERS break into dance – they dance with freedom and abandon. ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA lose themselves in the music, this is the release they have been longing for. Through the sequence they dance around the stage, stripping out of their period costuming. ACTOR/MASHA finds a 1980s black cocktail dress to wear and

ACTOR/OLGA stays in her pantaloons and corset. ACTOR/IRINA tries to join in, but her heart's not in it. As ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA get more lost in the music and dancing, ACTOR/IRINA tries to bring them back to reality, to talk to them about the future, about how the key to happiness lies in work. They ignore her, so she switches her attention to the audience. Mouthing silently at first, then standing on an upturned crate, like a speaker at a rally, she shouts above the music.

ACTOR/IRINA We must work. We've got to work. That's 'why we see life in such dark colours. It's because we don't know what it is to work. We were born to people who despite it.' 'Dear Ivan Romanich' 'I woke up this morning… and I felt I knew how life had to be lived.' 'Dear Ivan Romanich' 'a human being has to labour, whoever he happens to be, he has to toil in the sweat of his face; that's the only way he can find the sense and purpose of his life, his happiness, his delight. How fine to be a working man who rises at first light and breaks stones on the road, or a shepherd, or a teacher, or an engine driver on the railway,' I mean, 'never mind being human even - better to be an ox. Better to be a simple horse, just so long as you work' 'and if I don't start getting up early and working then shut your heart against me, Ivan Romanich.'

The music gets louder again and all the ACTORS/CHARACTERS dance for one last time. ACTOR/IRINA collapses on the floor and the music fades.
It is suddenly daylight.

ACTOR/IRINA I don't like my job. *(Pause.)* 'No, I don't like it at all.' (*ACTOR/OLGA starts to sweep up.)* It's not the work I dreamed about. 'It's work with no poetry in it, mindless labour.' *(Pause.)* Tired. *(Pause.)* This woman came into the telegraph office today because she needed to send a telegraph about her son who had died but she couldn't remember the address and I don't know why I told her she was…

well I told her to go away, this woman who came into the telegraph office today to send a telegram *(Crying.)* about her son who had died and she couldn't remember the address and I don't know why I told her she was stupid, I just told her to… fuck off.

Blackout. Total darkness.

Natasha 1

The *ACTORS/CHARACTERS scream in fear and run to the back of the stage. They huddle together in a corner, sheltering from an unknown terror.*

ALL I'm so sorry/
/We'll be better/
/We'll make it more believable/
/This will be the best ever/
/Don't make us do it/
/We promise/
/Don't make us do *her*/

ACTOR/MASHA starts sobbing quietly. The stage remains dark.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Eventually.)* Ok. Ok. Ok… we'll do it. We'll do Natasha.

Silence.

ACTOR/OLGA *(In a Cockney accent and with menace.)* I'm just making sure the candles are out. Just making 'sure there isn't a candle burning.' 'It's Shrovetide - the servants are all excited' so we've got to keep an extra lookout. 'Twelve o'clock last night and I'm on my way through the dining room and what do I see? *(Pause.)*

ACTOR/MASHA *(In a Cockney accent and with menace.)* I'm just making sure the candles are out. Just making sure/

ACTOR/OLGA There's a candle burning! *(Pause.)* Who lit it? I still haven't got to the bottom of that.'/

ACTOR/IRINA *(Through tears.)* I'm so sorry/

ACTOR/OLGA/
ACTOR/MASHA Oh that must be Olga, she's terribly late.

Suddenly the lights come back on and the bells from the opening bars of Pink Floyd's ***Time*** *sound, loudly interrupting the action.*

THREE

Stage direction three

The opening stage direction from Act I of 'Three Sisters' is projected on the back wall. The font is even larger now and it is even harder to read what the words say. The ACTORS/CHARACTERS are disappointed and frustrated. They stagger around the stage, making half-hearted attempts to clear up. ACTOR/OLGA tries to mark the torn book, ACTOR/MASHA throws the mantilla over her head and ACTOR/IRINA sits on the floor by the party suitcase. Eventually ACTOR/OLGA takes centre stage.

There are these Three Sisters

ACTOR/OLGA *(Heightened RP.)* 'It's exactly a year'/

ACTOR/MASHA *(Getting up from the flight case and throwing the mantilla off.)* Oh my god, stop. Please. I can't even breathe. Please.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Completely lost. No longer with any idea what is happening…*) 'Exactly a year,' 'May the fifth…' And the volley… boom! /

ACTOR/MASHA / *(Walking over to ACTOR/OLGA, putting the mantilla on her head and leading her over to sit on the flight case. Gently.)* Paksie, Olga, Olga, Paksie. You be Masha. Be Masha. OK. Grace do the scene.

Pause.

Grace? Do the scene!

ACTOR/IRINA bangs her head on the party suitcase.

Ok Grace, that's not the scene. *(Pause.)* Grace let's just do the scene, because you like it and Paksie can't do it.

ACTOR/IRINA No.

ACTOR/OLGA I can do it!

ACTOR/MASHA *(Putting her hand over ACTOR/OLGA's mouth.)* No. No, don't. Shhhhhh… *(To ACTOR/IRINA.)* Ok? Come on. Ok fine. Ok. I'll do the scene. I'll do the scene.

ACTOR/MASHA takes a breath. She straightens her dress, moves centre stage and smiles seductively at the audience.

Pause.

There are these three sisters…

Pause.

ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/IRINA look bemused. ACTOR/MASHA looks back at them and moves over to ACTOR/OLGA on the flight case. She pushes it and the crate closer into centre stage and, stands just in front of them.

Actually, closer, intimate, better.

ACTOR/OLGA /Where are you taking me? /

ACTOR/MASHA /Ok that's fine. (*To ACTOR/IRINA)* Ok you just look… you look happy.

ACTOR/IRINA Where do I go?

ACTOR/MASHA *(Pointing to the crate.)* Just there! Quietly.

Adopting a seductive pose, pulling her dress off her shoulders and fixing her hair, she makes eyes at the audience.

(Huskily in a Mae West parody.) There are these three sisters, see.

ACTOR/OLGA *(In an American accent. ACTOR/OLGA is out of her mind, high, but seems to be going along for the ride.)* Yeah!

ACTOR/MASHA Oh my! *(Pause.)* There are these three sisters see. *(Pause while she adjusts her dress again. In even huskier tones.)* There are these three sisters, see. Irina.

ACTOR/IRINA *(Coming on board, with the voice and facial expression of a toothless cowboy.)* Yeah!

ACTOR/MASHA Give me a cigarette, Irina.

ACTOR/IRINA fumbles in the party supplies box for some time.

Jesus Christ!

ACTOR/OLGA God thing I've given up the smokes! Bad for the voice…

ACTOR/IRINA eventually pulls out a plastic flower, which she hands to ACTOR/MASHA.

ACTOR/MASHA Thank you Irina.

Lights dim.

Lights, yeah!

Pause.

There are these three sisters, see!

ACTOR/IRINA rolls a piece of confetti into a cigarette and smokes it. ACTOR/OLGA begins to drum a beat on the side of the flight case. They are like two stoned, drunks propping up the bar.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Indicating ACTOR/IRINA)* Irina, see.

ACTOR/IRINA Yeah!

ACTOR/MASHA Oh, wow! *(Pause. Indicating ACTOR/OLGA)* And then there's Olga see.

ACTOR/OLGA That's me, Olga. Yeah!

ACTOR/MASHA And then there's me… Masha *(Smoking the flower and flirting with the audience.)* It's a name-day, see… Who's here, Irina?

ACTOR/IRINA Well… We've got Solyony. He is a strange man.

ACTOR/MASHA Yes he is, see/

ACTOR/OLGA And we've got Tusenbach he's here too…

ACTOR/MASHA /Yeah.

ACTOR/OLGA He's a nice fellow.

ACTOR/MASHA Tusenbach. Ummm. Who else is here ladies?

ACTOR/IRINA Rode and Fedotik.

ACTOR/OLGA /Oh there so sweet those two boys, no one knows what they do but they're sweet.

ACTOR/MASHA Interesting, see.

ACTOR/OLGA Chebutykin. Yes, the fat doctor, he's here too.

ACTOR/MASHA Chebutykin see.

ACTOR/OLGA With his belly.

ACTOR/MASHA With his belly, see. *(Pause.)* No, no, I think there's someone we're missing.

ACTOR/OLGA Oh yes! Kulygin!

ACTOR/MASHA takes a long drag on her cigarette but doesn't react. ACTOR/OLGA is coming back to her old self and, together with ACTOR/IRINA she starts play with ACTOR/MASHA, they won't want to give her what she wants.

ACTOR/IRINA Your husband….

ACTOR/OLGA No?

ACTOR/MASHA I think there's someone else, see.

ACTOR/OLGA Oh of course, yeeeees…

ACTOR/MASHA Yes?

ACTOR/OLGA George Bush, Senior?

ACTOR/IRINA George Clooney?

ACTOR/MASHA *(Trying to hide her irritation.)* It starts with a 'V' see.

ACTOR/OLGA Voldemort?

ACTOR/IRINA Voltaire?

ACTOR/MASHA *(Dropping the Mae West accent.)* Vershinin! It's Vershinin! You both know that.

ACTOR/OLGA It slipped my mind!

ACTOR/MASHA *(To the audience.)* It slipped my mind. Jesus Christ.

ACTOR/OLGA The colonel Vershinin.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Back in Mae West accent.)* Vershinin, see…

ACTOR/IRINA He talks a lot.

ACTOR/OLGA He's got a wife and two little girls.

ACTOR/MASHA He does, see.

ACTOR/IRINA Forty, forty-five at most.

ACTOR/MASHA Uh-huh.

ACTOR/OLGA builds the beat and hums an accompanying tune in the background. ACTOR/MARIA gazes out into the audience and starts to sing.

'And I began to be in love',
With his words.

And I began to be in love,
'With his two little girls'.

And I began to be in love 'with his misfortunes'.

'I'm in love.'
'I'm in love.'
'I'm in love.'
'I'm in love.'

And I began to be in love with his words…

(Breaking out of song, to an audience member.) You're beautiful aren't you?

(Singing.) And I began to be in love 'with his two little girls.'

(Breaking out of song, to another audience member.) Hiya handsome!

ACTOR/OLGA *(Singing.)* She's in love
She's in love.

ACTOR/MASHA Oh yeah!

ACTOR/OLGA *(Singing.)* She's in love.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Singing.)* 'I'm in love.'

ACTOR/OLGA continues to mark the beat and hum the tune while ACTOR/MASHA finds a member of the audience to come on stage and play the Vershinin to her Masha.

(In her own accent.) Hi. I wonder if I could ask you to be my Vershinin today? You don't have to do anything, you just have to sit on the stage with me for a second. You're very handsome, I think you'll look great in candlelight.

The audience member agrees. She brings him up onto the stage.

Come on sweetheart… Your name?

AUDIENCE MEMBER Ncuti.

ACTOR/MASHA Ncuti. *(Leading him on stage and presenting him to the audience.)* Isn't he lovely ladies and gentlemen! *(Seating him next to ACTOR/OLGA.)* Have a seat here next to Paksie, please. She doesn't bite. *(Looking him up and down.)* Look at this! *(To the audience.)* What a specimen huh? You like him don't you?

(Singing.) And I began to be in love with his words.

ACTOR/OLGA keeps the beat and hums the tune throughout this section. She becomes increasingly irritated by the ACTOR/MASHA's flirtation with the audience member and soon starts to sabotage the scene.

ACTOR/MASHA looks longingly into the audience member's eyes.

(Singing.) And I began to be in love 'with his two little girls.'
And I began to be in love 'with his misfortunes.'
'I'm in love.'
'I'm in love.'

(Speaking to the audience member.) Ok. Let's do the scene.

ACTOR/MASHA moves downstage left, preparing for her scene with Vershinin.

(Singing.) 'I'm in love.'
Oooh, 'I'm in love.'
'I'm in love.'

ACTOR/IRINA speaks ACTOR/MASHA Vershinin's lines.
ACTOR/MASHA responds to the audience member as though he is saying them.

ACTOR/IRINA ‘Are you superstitious?’

ACTOR/MASHA ‘Yes.’

ACTOR/IRINA ‘It’s dark in here, but I can see the shining of your eyes.’

ACTOR/MASHA *(Moving into the light.)* ‘There’s more light here.’

ACTOR/IRINA ‘I’m in love. *(Pause.)* I’m in love, I’m in love… In love with your eyes, with the way you move. I dream about it… Magnificent, magical woman.’

ACTOR/MASHA laughs quietly.

‘Magnificent, magical.’

ACTOR/MASHA ‘When you talk to me like that I don’t know why, but I just find myself laughing, even though it frightens me. *(Pause.)* Please don’t do it again, or rather do. What does it matter. What does it matter….?’ *Pause.* Again Grace.

As ACTOR/OLGA looks on in increasing irritation the beat starts to get more aggressive and ACTOR/OLGA starts to sigh loudly and roll her eyes.

ACTOR/IRINA ‘Are you superstitious?’

ACTOR/MASHA *(Approaching audience member.)* ‘Yes.’

ACTOR/IRINA Strange. ‘It’s dark in here, but I can still see’/

ACTOR/OLGA *(Interrupting loudly and in a phoney American accent.)* / ‘Are you superstitious?’

ACTOR/IRINA ‘I can see the shining of your eyes.’

ACTOR/MASHA *(To audience member.)* Just ignore her.

ACTOR/OLGA Masha, are you?

ACTOR/MASHA *(Taking audience member’s hand and leading him downstage.)* Let’s do it over here. It’s better over here, just listen to Grace.

ACTOR/OLGA Superstitious! Black cats, voodoo dolls, ladders? Are you superstitious?

ACTOR/MASHA Do it again, Grace!

ACTOR/OLGA *(Sings.)* Very superstitious.

ACTOR/IRINA ‘Are you superstitious?’

ACTOR/OLGA Yes, ‘are you superstitious?’

ACTOR/IRINA *(Confused.)* ‘Are you superstitious?’

ACTOR/MASHA Yes!

ACTOR/OLGA I’m giving you your cue line so…

ACTOR/MASHA *(To audience member.)* Just listen to Grace. Grace!

ACTOR/OLGA Just listen to me. Are you, or have you ever been superstitious Masha?!

ACTOR/MASHA *(Desperately.)* ‘When you talk to me like that I don’t know why’/

ACTOR/OLGA *(Banging violently on the flight case and shouting.)* 'Are you superstitious?' 'Are you superstitious?'

ACTOR/MASHA 'I don't know why but I just find myself laughing, even though it frightens me. Please don't do it again… Or rather do.'

ACTOR/OLGA 'Are you superstitious?' It's a simple question, is it not?

ACTOR/MASHA *(Moving downstage, facing the audience and placing the audience member's arm around her waist.)* Forget it, let's do the scene this way. *(Singing.)* 'I'm in love', 'I'm in love…'

ACTOR/OLGA *(Banging frantically on the flight case now, making as much noise as is humanly possible.)* 'Are you superstitious?'/

ACTOR/MASHA /'I'm in love…'oooh I'm in love/

The banging reaches a crescendo and ACTOR/MASHA cannot hear herself think.

Fine! I quit!

Hurriedly ushering the audience member back to his seat and throwing her flower cigarette to the floor in fury.

Just go… It's fine… Thank you. You're lovely. Just go, it's fine.

The audience member takes his seat.

Your husband, Kulygin and an Olga for sale

ACTOR/OLGA *(Smiling. She has won.)* 'Are you superstitious?!'

ACTOR/MASHA It's fine. Because, I can never do a fucking scene!

ACTOR/OLGA 'Are you superstitious?'

ACTOR/MASHA I can never do my scene because Paksie won't let me. *(Looking at ACTOR/IRINA)*. And neither will you!

ACTOR/OLGA I'm just giving you your cue. /

ACTOR/MASHA *(To ACTOR/IRINA)* /And you, whatever you're doing with your face. I don't know what you're doing.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Banging on the flight case again.)* 'Are you superstitious?' Are – you – super – stitous?

Pause.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Giving in. Quietly.)* 'There's someone coming, talk about something else.'

ACTOR/OLGA Yes! *(Jumping off the flight case in triumph to find Kulygin's costume.)*

ACTOR/MASHA Someone is coming. That's what she wants, it's her cue. Someone is coming, 'let's talk about something else.' *(Robotic.)* Someone is coming, 'let's talk about something else.' Someone is coming, 'let's talk about something else.' Fuck!

ACTOR/OLGA *(As Kulygin, to the audience.)* I'm just looking for my wife, Masha! I don't know if any of you have seen her? I'm Kulygin. Teacher. Seventh grade of the civil service.

ACTOR/MASHA *(In disgust.)* What is this? What even is this? It's not even the scene. Where are you? I don't know, where are you Paksie.

ACTOR/OLGA *races towards ACTOR/MASHA and embraces her. ACTOR/IRINA tries to block out what is happening, burying herself in a game of patience.*

Oh fuck, no!

ACTOR/OLGA Masha, Masha, Masha! 'Masha loves me. My wife loves me.'

ACTOR/MASHA *(Struggling to loosen ACTOR/OLGA's grasp. ACTOR/OLGA holds tight to ACTOR/MASHA throughout the following exchange.)* Ok Paksie… Paksie, it's not this scene.

ACTOR/OLGA I've been looking for you everywhere. By the way, there's a party at the headmaster's at four o'clock.

ACTOR/MASHA Please stop Paksie. It's not this scene.

ACTOR/OLGA It's at four o'clock, it's just a little event for the staff at the school.

ACTOR/MASHA I just want to do the scene with Ncuti.

ACTOR/OLGA *(To the audience.)* Oh, just look at her. She's so beautiful. I'm so lucky.

ACTOR/MASHA Fine. Fine, fine, fine. *Pause.* Here's an idea. Why don't you go to the headmaster's?

ACTOR/OLGA Me?

ACTOR/MASHA Yes! Why don't *you* be Masha

ACTOR/OLGA Oh yeah!

ACTOR/MASHA Show everyone your amazing Masha/

ACTOR/OLGA *(Taking off her Kulygin costume and throwing it at ACTOR/MASHA.)* /I will show everyone my amazing Masha.

ACTOR/PAKSIE Paksie, don't throw things at me, or I'll throw things at you! *(Throws a black skirt. It lands almost in the audience.)*

ACTOR/OLGA Oh well great, now you've broken the fourth wall!

ACTOR/MASHA Fuck off.

ACTOR/OLGA (*To herself.)* Masha. I'll be fucking Masha.

ACTOR/MASHA Well show us your Masha then. Go on then. Go! Everyone's waiting!

During ACTOR/OLGA's speech, ACTOR/MASHA puts on Kulygin's cardigan.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Melodramatically, with a hand over her face in feigned distress.)* No! Stop! It's so hard being me! I wake up every day and I work so hard… *(Dropping the melodrama.)* Oh no that's not right, I don't have a job! I'm a kept woman! *(Melodramatic again, sobbing.)* Oh, but my marriage is *awful*. My husband beats me. *(Dropping the melodrama.)* Oh, oh no he's actually really sweet and he dotes on me. He's completely head over heels! *(Melodramatically sobbing again.)* But it's just so hard being me…

ACTOR/MASHA *(In a parody of ACTOR/OLGA's Kulygin.)* 'Where's Masha?'

ACTOR/OLGA *(Suddenly sweetly to ACTOR/MASHA.)* Oh Kulygin! I'm here!!

ACTOR/MASHA *(Looking in the audience. Unable to see 'Masha' on stage.)* Masha? Masha?

ACTOR/OLGA *(Embracing ACTOR/OLGA.)* I'm here!

ACTOR/MASHA *(Pulling away. Surprised. Dropping her impersonation.)* Oh Olga, what are you wearing? You look really nice though. *(Trying to free herself from ACTOR/OLGA's grasp as she tries to kiss ACTOR/MASHA.)* You look really nice. You know, if it weren't for Masha/

ACTOR/OLGA /I'm Masha! /

ACTOR/MASHA /I'd have married you! *(Searching in the audience.)* Masha? Masha?

ACTOR/OLGA I'm here! *(Running up behind him and clinging to him.)*

ACTOR/MASHA Masha! Masha! Masha! Olga, wow this is close. Hi. You know you look really nice today. *(ACTOR/OLGA tries to kiss her on the lips.)* Do you know what Olga, don't kiss me, 'if it weren't for Masha I should marry you'.

ACTOR/OLGA I am Masha.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Forcibly grabbing hold of her arms and looking her in the eyes. With spite.)* If it weren't for Masha, I would have married you!

ACTOR/IRINA 'It's going to come out I see! We shall go to Moscow!'

ACTOR/OLGA breaks out of ACTOR/MASHA's grasp. She is devastated.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Gloating, as if to punish her.)* I would have married you. Huh?
ACTOR/OLGA walks upstage and takes the black Masha skirt off.

ACTOR/MASHA *(Turning to the audience and laughing.)* She hates that bit!

Pause.

Oh, here's a better game. *(To the audience.)* Who can I interest in an 'Olga'?

Pause.

Anybody? Anybody for an Olga? No? *(To ACTOR/OLGA.)* Wow, it's like crickets out there! Nobody wants an Olga. She's going to be all alone…

*ACTOR/OLGA picks up the copy of **Three Sisters** that ACTOR/MASHA was reading in the opening scene and searches for something.*

(To an audience member.) Do you want an Olga? No, you don't. Nobody wants an Olga, do they?

ACTOR/OLGA *(Thumbing through the text ACTOR/OLGA mounts a counter-attack)* So, let's go to Act Three. Ok, here we go. *(To the audience.)* 'Have you heard?' 'Have you heard?' 'Have you heard?' *(To ACTOR/MASHA.)* Oh no, they haven't heard! *(Pause.)* 'They are taking the brigade away from us, they're posting them somewhere,' what is the line? *(Laughs.)* Here it is, '*far away*.'

ACTOR/MASHA *(Mock crying.)* Nobody wants an Olga!

ACTOR/OLGA Act Four!

ACTOR/MASHA *(to Olga.)* Oh, Act Four! Big card well placed. *(To the audience.)* Does anyone want a shrivelled, old Olga with nothing left inside?

ACTOR/OLGA *(Finding her place in Act Four.)* Oh, my favourite scene! /

ACTOR/MASHA /Old and alone. Forever!

ACTOR/OLGA /My favourite scene in the whole play.
Enter Masha and Vershinin says, *(Aggressively.)* 'I've come to say *goodbye*.' That's what you say when you're about to leave the love of your life, forever. *(To the audience.)* Did you hear that?

ACTOR/MASHA *(To an audience member.)* Do you want an Olga? *(To ACTOR/OLGA.)* Did you see that? He said no!

ACTOR/OLGA Then they have a 'prolonged kiss' and 'Masha sobs bitterly.'/

ACTOR/MASHA /He said no! /

ACTOR/OLGA /'Bitterly'/

ACTOR/MASHA /Absolutely not. That is a shame. /

ACTOR/OLGA /'Bitterly'.

Suddenly, out of nowhere ACTOR/IRINA begins to yodel. Standing up from her crate and raising her arms to the air she gets louder and louder and eventually ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA are silenced. They both turn to face her, not quite able to keep a straight face.

ACTOR/IRINA Thank you.

ACTOR/MASHA You’re such a brat

Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!

ACTOR/IRINA screams and throws herself to the floor, in a dead faint. ACTOR/MASHA rolls her eyes, ACTOR/OLGA goes to her.

ACTOR/OLGA Ok. Hey, ok Irina, what's wrong. What's wrong?

ACTOR/MASHA Big cry baby.

ACTOR/IRINA *(Getting up. Pointedly addressing ACTOR/OLGA.)* Oh. Why thank you Olga.

ACTOR/OLGA What is it?

ACTOR/IRINA I don't like my job.

ACTOR/MASHA Oh!

ACTOR/IRINA *(Crying.)* I really don't like it. And... *(Pause.)* 'I'll be… *(Pause. She really can't bear to say the words.)* …twenty-four next birthday.'

ACTOR/MASHA Jesus Christ, twenty-four!

ACTOR/IRINA *(Sobbing.)* Yes, twenty-four! And I'll be old! Old. Old. Old. Old. Dried up and I keep working and I'm always working, and I just can't take it anymore. Olga *(hugging ACTOR/OLGA.)* Olga hold me.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Holding her.)* Ok I'm going to give you some advice now, as your sister and as your friend. Ok?

ACTOR/IRINA *(Through her tears.)* Ok. Ok.

ACTOR/OLGA I think you should marry the Baron Tusenbach.

ACTOR/IRINA screams and pulls away from ACTOR/OLGA immediately and runs around the stage in circles.

ACTOR/IRINA Moscow! Moscow! Moscow! Moscow! Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!

ACTOR/MASHA *(It is ACTOR/MASHA's turn to give her sister advice. She encourages her to hold out for love. She takes a red nose from the flight case, puts it on and sings ACTOR/IRINA.)* Ok, ok, ok.

'I want to be loved by you'/

ACTOR/OLGA /He's a decent man/

ACTOR/MASHA grabs hold of ACTOR/IRINA and they dance. ACTOR/MASHA sings 'I want to be loved by you'. If ACTOR/OLGA is encouraging ACTOR/IRINA to follow her head and marry the Baron, ACTOR/MASHA is reminding her to hold out for love.

ACTOR/IRINA 'Romeo? Romeo? Where for art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name or if thou will not be sworn my love'/

ACTOR/OLGA Irina? Irina!

ACTOR/IRINA *(Still twirling. Alone now.)* Yes?

ACTOR/OLGA 'Women don't marry for love - they do it because it's their duty.' He's a decent man, he loves you.

ACTOR/IRINA Oh. *(Pause.)* But. *(Pause.)* 'I kept waiting for us to be in Moscow.'

ACTOR/OLGA puts on Tusenbach's beard and holds out her hands to ACTOR/IRINA.

'That's where I was going to meet the real one.' So that's been a bit silly hasn't it. Just a lot of silliness. Your silly sister. *(Pause.)* Well… *(Tortured.)* I do have a great regard for the Baron. 'I do have a great regard for him… and I'll marry him, only we must go to Moscow.' *(Pause.)* 'Olga we must.' Go to Moscow. 'There's nowhere like Moscow in the whole wide world.' I implore you Olga we must go.

ACTOR/MASHA finds Solyony's beard and puts it on.

ACTOR/OLGA *(In the phoney German accent as Tusenbach.)* I will take you away from here and you will be happy. But one thing wrong, you don't love me.

ACTOR/IRINA Ahh. *(Pause.)* 'I will be your wife.'

ACTOR MASHA comes up behind ACTOR/IRINA wearing Solyony's beard. She caresses her.

'I'll be your loyal, submissive wife, but there's no love there, and there's nothing I can do about that.'

ACTOR/MASHA *(In the phoney Russian accent as Solyony.)* 'I'll kill any rival…'

The duel

The theme from Sergio Leone's ***The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*** *plays as ACTOR/IRINA strikes the pose of a silent film era damsel in distress. ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/MASHA retrieve their weapons/confetti canons from the flight case. ACTOR/OLGA's is worryingly small in comparison to ACTOR/MASHA's and as they walk in slow motion towards the audience ACTOR/OLGA is terrified, while ACTOR/MASHA brandishes her weapon with glee. Everything happens in slow motion, in time to the music. When they duel ACTOR/OLGA turns too late and ACTOR/MASHA shoots her dead, in time to the shots fired in the soundtrack. The confetti cannon fails to explode but ACTOR/OLGA still dies a slow, agonising death.*

ACTOR/IRINA *(Rushing forward.)* 'What is it?' What has happened? Will someone tell me, 'for the love of God!' *(Collapsing on the floor.)* I knew it. I knew it. *(She gets up again and rushes forwards, repeating her damsel in distress poses, half-heartedly, only half remembering them. She doesn't know what to do next. This is a repeat of 'Irina is Lost' from Act One)*

Pause.

(Eventually. Searching for something, anything to say.) There's no use crying over spilt milk.

Pause.

What goes up, must come down.

Pause.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. There're no people like show people. If you have lemons, make lemonade.

Pause.

I've actually, I've got some notes. *(Reaching into her pocket and taking out a piece of paper. She reads from it. The lines are not what she expected to find.)* There's no use crying over spilt milk, it's just one of those thigs, life is swings and roundabouts, every cloud has a silver lining, six of one and half a dozen of another, when you have lemons, make lemonade, what goes up, must come down, that's the way the cookie crumbles, there's no people like show people, *(speeding up.)* you win some, you lose some, there's no time like the present, there's no use crying over spilt milk, it's just one of those things, life is swings and roundabout.

(Pause.)

The show must go on!

The bells from the opening bars of Pink Floyd's ***Time*** *sound again.*

FOUR

Stage direction four

The bells chime and the ACTORS/CHARACTERS are defeated, they cannot go on. The opening stage direction is projected on the back wall again. This time it is huge. It is as though they are being sucked into the text. The bells stop momentarily, and they argue over who will do Olga's opening speech. The bells sound again silencing them. When the bells stop they continue arguing. The bells sound for a third time. They stop again. When the bells stop the argument reaches a crescendo.

Blackout.

The ACTORS/CHARACTERS scream.

Natasha 2

In darkness.

ACTOR/IRINA I'm sorry. We're sorry. I'm so sorry/

ACTOR/MASHA /I'm sorry. Ok. We're sorry/

ACTOR/OLGA /It's ok. I'll do Natasha.

ACTOR/IRINA Please…

ACTOR/MASHA Fuck. No.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Cockney accent.)* I'm just checking all the candles are out yeah? I'm just making sure. That there aren't any candles burning. 'It's Shrovetide - the servants are all excited.' So, you gotta keep an extra look out ain't ya?

Lights slowly come back on. ACTOR/OLGA is Natasha. She moves slowly towards the audience, looking for lit candles.

Twelve o'clock last night and I'm walking through the dining room and what do I see? A fucking candle burning… 'Who lit it? I still haven't gotten to the bottom of that…'

ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/MASHA scurry out of the darkness and hide behind the flight case. They are afraid. Bent double, they suddenly have the bodies of old women. They have become Anfisa.

But I'll get them, let me tell you I will. This house. *(Pointing to ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/MASHA.)* These servants. I mean, look at them. Look at what I have to work with. Got to have the patience of a fucking saint let me tell you that.

The doorbell rings. ACTOR/OLGA's tone changes.

(Giggling.) Oh that's Protopopov! I mean I wasn't expecting company, but I mean if someone's come to see me I better go and say hello, otherwise that would be rude.

ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/MASHA start to rummage in the flight case for Natasha's clothes.

And I'm a well-mannered lady aren't I? I'm just going to say hello. I'm just going to say hello to Protopopov. *(ACTOR/IRINA brings over shoes and a fur stole.) (Impatiently.)* Yes, thank you, thank you. Putting your dirty mitts all over my clothes. Jesus Christ, they stink. Protopopov though! I really wasn't expecting company. *(ACTOR/IRINA helps her into the stole, but she is bent double so ACTOR/OLGA has to bend down to her.)* Am I supposed to bend down to you am I? Lazy little bitch. Right. What was I saying? Protopopov. He's come in his little troika. I might go for a quick ride, if you know what mean. *(Putting on a wig and stepping into high heeled shoes.) (To the audience.)* What are you looking at me like that for? I'm not that kind of lady.

A baby cries. ACTOR/MASHA appears from behind the flight case holding a papier mâché baby, and making the wailing sounds of a newborn infant.

Bobik?! Oh, my god. My baby. Come here, come here *(To ACTOR/MASHA.)* Get off! *(Cradling 'Bobik')* Oh Bobik, it's all right. Mummy's here. Oh, look at his little head, oh Bobik you're perfect and I made ya, yes I did! Yes, I did!

Suddenly spotting something on the floor a look of horror comes over her face and she drops 'Bobik' to the ground. Furious.

Why – is - there – a – *fork* in my garden?!

She stares at the two Anfisas. ACTOR/IRINA shuffles forward to pick up an imaginary fork.

What is that? Am I a fucking animal? Do I eat outside? No. Get it out of my sight!! *(To the audience.)* That's what I mean. Patience of a fucking saint in this fucking house. Do you know what else? People keep fucking telling me I've put on weight! *(Looking out into the audience and catching someone's eye.)* Is that funny is it? Do you think I'm fat do you? Yeah, you just wait till after the fucking show Mr Second Row, Row C, whatever, I've got your number mate.

Anyway, as I was saying… You know there's been a fire in the town. Yeah a really big one *(Laughs.)* and yeah people have lost their homes and people have died. I shouldn't laugh, it's not funny… Well, actually there's been a charity started which I think is an excellent idea. Because it is the duty of the rich, you know people like me, to help the poor *(Indicating the audience.)* Yeah so there's this charity started, the fire's still burning. It's a really big… *(ACTOR/OLGA starts to lose her train of thought, her accent starts to fade, and she gradually sheds Natasha, becoming Olga again)* … like a fire. There's been a fire.

The fire

All trace of Natasha has vanished, and ACTOR/OLGA self-consciously takes off the ridiculous outfit she finds herself in. When she realises when and where she is, she starts rummaging through the two suitcases at the back of the stage, throwing clothes out to the two Anfisas who slowly make their way around the stage collecting them. As she throws the clothes the flames of a fire begin to lick the back wall and Mozart's Requiem in D minor, K.626:1 Requiem aeternum, begins to play, getting gradually louder and louder throughout the scene.

There's been a fire. Shit. There's been a fire.

(To ACTOR/MASHA and ACTOR/IRINA) Nanny, there's been a fire, take these downstairs *(Throwing more clothes.)* take everything! Take everything. Take everything downstairs. We don't need it. God, it's still burning. Are the Vershinin's downstairs? The house is full, but we can't say no.

(Suddenly possessed by Natasha again.) You, useless old woman, why do we even keep her here, she's fucking useless!

(Now back to ACTOR/OLGA.) 'She's been with us for thirty years', so I can't exactly just throw her out. And poor Fedotik! He's lost everything he owns, he won't have anything left.

ACTOR/OLGA stops throwing the clothes out to the Anfisas and instead, in her confusion starts to put them on. She puts on as many as she can, almost suffocating herself.

(As Natasha.) Oh Olga, I'm sorry sometimes I do say more than I should… *(As ACTOR/OLGA.)* Well yes you were quite rude to Nanny just then. I just don't like bad manners! Maybe people will call me old fashioned, but I just don't see why people need to be rude to

each other. Actually I think you should apologise. *(As Natasha.)* Oh Olga. It might be better if you moved downstairs. *(As Olga.)* It's my house. I've been living here for fifteen years, so I can't do it. So, no. *(As Natasha.)* Oh, but Olya you're going to be headmistress soon. Leave the house to me. 'School for you - home for me.'

As she speaks ACTOR/OLGA gradually hunches over, and by the end of the speech she is bent double like the Anfisas. All three of them move around the stage, so slowly to be barely perceptible.

(As Olga) I don't have the strength. I don't want to be headmistress. I'm so tired. *(To the audience.)* There's a fire. There's a fire. Can anybody help? No? That's alright. I'll do it. Leave it all to Olga. There's a fire. The whole of the… Everyone's in the house. So tired. Tired. I can't bear bad manners.

The fire disappears, and the lights come on. ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/MASHA slowly sink to the floor. ACTOR/OLGA realises she is bent over double, wearing too many clothes, muttering like a mad, old woman. She is embarrassed. She straightens herself up and takes off the clothes. She is left wearing a t-shirt and blue jeans.

The brigade leaves and Masha laments

ACTOR/IRINA slowly sits up.

ACTOR/IRINA *(Tentatively, as though she can't really believe they have found themselves here, at the end of Chekhov's play).* 'A time will come, when people will understand what it was all for, what the purpose was of all this suffering and what was hidden from us will be hidden no more.' A human being has to labour and tomorrow I will make my way to the brickworks alone.

ACTOR/OLGA 'By tomorrow there won't be a soldier left in the town.' This will all be nothing but a distant memory. And for us, of course, a new life will be commencing.' Nothing works out as you plan it. I didn't want to be headmistress but, headmistress I've nevertheless become. So there's no question of my living in Moscow…'

Pause.

(Reluctantly.) Masha?

Pause.

Masha… 'Here she comes,'

ACTOR/IRINA 'I've come to say goodbye...'

ACTOR/MASHA wakes up and looks at ACTOR/IRINA. She sits up and looks around at the audience, as though she can't believe she has found herself here.

ACTOR/MASHA 'When you snatch happiness in fits and starts and bits and pieces the way I have, and then you lose it again the way I am, you find yourself getting gradually coarser and more foul tempered. It boils

up inside me here.' The problem with living in a climate like this is that 'it will be snowing before we know where we are but to have to listen to these conversations into the bargain…'

Pause.

I'm not going into the house. I'm won't go there. *(ACTOR/IRINA crawls over to her.)* You'll tell me when Vershinin arrives?

Pause.

The birds are flying South. Swans or geese.

ACTOR/OLGA *(Quietly.)* 'Here she comes.'

ACTOR/IRINA *(Saying Vershinin's lines, but in her own voice, her own accent. There is no playacting now.)* I've come to say goodbye.

ACTOR/MASHA 'Goodbye my love.' *(ACTOR/IRINA strokes her hair and kisses her on the cheek, the nose and the forehead, like a sister. ACTOR/MASHA kisses her back on the lips, as though she is Vershinin. She won't let her go. ACTOR/IRINA tries to pull herself away. It is unclear if this is as the actor, as Irina or Vershinin.)*

ACTOR/IRINA 'Write to me… my love.'

ACTOR/MASHA *(Crying.)* No!

ACTOR/IRINA Yes, don't forget. It's time for me to be going. It really is.

ACTOR/MASHA howls with grief.

ACTOR/IRINA *(To ACTOR/OLGA.)* Take her please. I'm already late.

ACTOR/OLGA holds ACTOR/MASHA as she sobs. ACTOR/IRINA and ACTOR/MASHA try to comfort her. Snow starts to fall – projected on the back wall.

ACTOR/OLGA ‘There’s more light over here.’ ‘There’s more light over here…’

ACTOR/IRINA ‘When you talk to me like that I don’t know why, but I just find myself laughing…’ (*ACTOR/MASHA wails.)*

ACTOR/OLGA ‘I don’t know why but I just find myself laughing.’

ACTOR/IRINA ‘There’s more light over here….’ It may not be so elsewhere, but in our town the most honourable people, the most worthwhile/

ACTOR/OLGA /Shhhh/

ACTOR/IRINA /In may not be so here, but in our two, all the most worthwhile, the most educated/

ACTOR/OLGA /’I don’t know why, but I just find myself laughing’/

ACTOR/IRINA /Are the military. ‘There’s more light over here’/

ACTOR/MASHA *(Trying to sit up.)* I can’t breathe.

ACTOR/IRINA ‘They’ll be bringing it in a moment.’

ACTOR/OLGA *(Cradling ACTOR/MASHA.)* ‘When you talk to me like that… I just find myself laughing.’

ACTOR/MASHA I can’t breathe.

ACTOR/OLGA and ACTOR/IRINA gradually get ACTOR/MASHA to her feet. They stand together downstage, ACTOR/MASHA in the middle, flanked by her 'sisters'.

ACTOR/IRINA 'They'll be bringing it in a moment.' Yes, please. Do it again.

ACTOR/OLGA Please don't. Do it again. 'When you say things like that I don't why, but I just find myself laughing'/

ACTOR/IRINA 'Or rather do - what does it matter?'

ACTOR/MASHA laughs/cries.

ACTOR/MASHA I'm in pain.

The ACTORS/CHARACTERS repeat the following lines over and over. They get gradually louder and louder.

ACTOR/IRINA I was married off at eighteen and I thought my husband was the most intelligent man in the world… They'll be bringing him in a moment.

ACTOR/OLGA 'What does it matter?' 'I don't know why, but I just find myself laughing, even though it frightens me. Please don't do it again… Or rather do.'

ACTOR/MASHA *(Switching between laughter and tears.)*

I'm in love.

I'm in pain.

I'm in love.

I’m in pain.

I’m in love.

I’m in pain.

*The bells from the opening bars of Pink Floyd’s **Time** sound again.*

No. No. No.

FIVE

Stage direction five

The bells chime and the three ACTORS/CHARACTERS are crushed. They know they are being punished now. They know they won't get to the end of the play. The projection of the opening stage direction swamps them.

ACTOR/MASHA No. No, no, no….

ACTOR/OLGA It's a year ago since Father died…

ACTOR/IRINA We can do it. We can do it again. That's good. That's fine. That's wonderful…

ACTOR/MASHA I don't want to do it anymore.

They stumble around the stage, using the brooms to sweep the detritus of the play into a mound. ACTOR/IRINA climbs onto the slight case with her gymnastic ribbon. ACTOR/OLGA tears up the remaining pages of the exercise-book and stuffs them in her mouth. ACTOR/MASHA curls up in a foetal position on the floor.

Spotlight.

Fade to black.

Three Sisters



Figure 18: ‘Stage direction one’



Figure 19: ‘Stage direction one’



Figure 20: ‘Masha tries to leave’



Figure 21: ‘Natasha 2’



Figure 22: ‘There are these Three Sisters’



Figure 23: ‘The duel’

Appendix VI

DVD recording of *Three Sisters*, performed at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama , 28th September 2015.

Please find in pocket at back of thesis.

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