Embedded Theatre Criticism in England 2012-2022: between mainstream criticism and dramaturgy

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Laura Kressly, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Laura Kressly

Date: 13 November 2023

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Abstract

This thesis engages with embedded theatre criticism in England in the decade since 2012. It advocates for understanding the practice as a type of theatre criticism that focuses on rehearsal processes rather than performances. Recent engagement within contemporary scholarship articulates embedded criticism as a shift away from mainstream criticism's norms (Fisher 2015, Costa 2016, Radosavljević 2016, Vaughan 2020). Significantly, Karen Fricker argues that embedded criticism is a divergence from the "critical trifecta" (2016) of description, analysis, and judgment. This thesis builds on Fricker (2016) and Maddy Costa's (2016) interventions by arguing embedded criticism is a shift from critical norms and works towards dismantling widely held expectations of critical distance and objectivity.

In arguing for embedded criticism's significance, the thesis explores its overlaps and differences with dramaturgy and mainstream criticism. The methodology includes case studies, text analysis of critical outputs, interviews, and autoethnographic fieldwork drawing on Gay McAuley's model of the participant observer (2012). Chapter one analyses embedded criticism over the decade and documents its development. Chapter two investigates the rehearsal space's foregrounding in embedded criticism through examining Megan Vaughan's embedded criticism (2017). Chapter three identifies the role of subjectivity through analysing Ava Wong Davies' embedded criticism (2018-2019). Chapter four examines German dramaturgy's documentation of rehearsals but differentiates it from dramaturgy in England. Chapter five utilizes autoethnography, recollection and critical reflection to consider my work as an embedded critic, mainstream critic, and dramaturg.

By identifying key features that, in combination, distinguish embedded criticism from mainstream criticism and dramaturgy, the thesis argues for embedded criticism's engagement with the rehearsal space and the critic's subjectivity. In doing so, the thesis articulates the importance of a distinct practice that prioritises process over product and dismantles existing distances between critics, artists, and audiences.

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INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTIONS OF EMBEDDED CRITICISM

This thesis investigates embedded theatre criticism over the period of its emergence and development in England. From this ecology, this thesis focuses on exploring embedded criticism that results from rehearsal observation, defined in 2016 by Canada-based theatre critic and scholar Karen Fricker as a theatre critic "observ[ing] productions in rehearsal and writ[ing] about the experience, usually on a personal or group blog site" (p. 45).[1] I specifically look at embedded criticism practice in England due to the different arts cultures and funding structures in Scotland and Ireland resulting from devolution.

The thesis ultimately argues that despite some commonalities, embedded criticism differs from both mainstream criticism that reviews public productions, and dramaturgy practice(s) in the UK. I argue this by looking at the differences as well as identifying overlaps across embedded criticism, mainstream criticism, and dramaturgy, exploring links between them and points of tension. This thesis therefore contributes not only to scholarship on embedded criticism, but also posits that this practice provides a better understanding of mainstream criticism, the broader field of theatre criticism, and dramaturgy.

This research addresses a significant gap in knowledge because to date, in 2023, the only published scholarship on embedded criticism in England is a book chapter by Maddy Costa and a journal article by Karen Fricker. Costa focuses on her own practice, so there is minimal scope to consider embedded criticism more widely. Fricker's article, though drawing on the UK landscape, examines an application of the practice in a Canadian pedagogical context.[2] Though these two works are vital contributions to embedded criticism scholarship, there is a gap in scholarship on the practice's wider development and deployment in contemporary England's professional theatre.

BACKGROUND

[1] Though Fricker now lives in Canada, she based her definition on the practice that she saw develop whilst working as a lecturer and theatre critic in the UK from 2007 through 2012 (Fricker 2016).

[2] Diana Miranda, former student of the MA in Theatre Criticism and Dramaturgy at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, wrote her dissertation on embedded criticism and engagement in 2020 after I delivered a guest lecture on the practice to her course. I was also charged with supervising her dissertation. This suggests there is an increasing interest in this form of criticism.

At the 2012 theatre industry conference Devoted & Disgruntled, critic Maddy Costa convened a session called, "What new dialogue can we set up between people who write about theatre and people who make it?" (Costa 2012, no page).[3] She first suggests that artists welcome "theatre writers in to [sic] the rehearsal process" (Costa 2012, no page). Costa notes that both she and Jake Orr, then a theatre blogger, editor and founder of *A Younger Theatre*, are "embedded in rehearsals" (Costa 2012, no page) with two different companies.[4]

A few days after attending this conference, critic and blogger Andrew Haydon left to accompany the Actors Touring Company production *The Golden Dragon* in Kurdistan. He subsequently wrote about the touring process from a 'behind the scenes' perspective.[5] In a blog post reflecting on questions the experience raised about the relationship between artists and critics, he writes: "being in Iraq and a journalist, jokes about my being ‘embedded’ abounded" (2012, no page).[6] He also refers to Costa's Devoted & Disgruntled session in the opening: "The idea of ‘embedded critics’ seems to have gained something a [sic] momentum recently" (2012, no page). As ‘embedded critics’, Haydon, Costa and Orr wrote ‘embedded criticism’ that documents rehearsals and ‘behind-the-scenes’ production processes.

Just over a decade later, in 2023, embedded criticism describes a practice with several variations. As Costa says, it can entail a critic observing and then writing about the rehearsal process, but its development has been more complex. In contrast, Haydon used it to describe writing that resulted from accompanying an international tour. Separately, in *Exeunt Magazine*, Alice Saville and Louise Jones are described as embedded critics in small festivals: Saville at Camden People's Theatre's *Sprint Festival* (2015, no page), and Jones at Leeds' *Compass Festival* (2021, no page). These variations do not incorporate rehearsal observations; instead, the critic intensively 'embeds' into a programme of work. This allows for contextualising

[3] The Devoted & Disgruntled annual conference was founded in 2006 by the theatre company Improbable. It employs Open Space Technology to ensure that, "everyone’s voice can be heard and no topic is censored. There are no key-note speakers and no fixed agenda – you decide what gets worked on at the event." (Devoted & Disgruntled 2022, no page).
[4] Orr now works as a producer and no longer reviews theatre and performance.
[5] Haydon originally intended the piece be published in the British theatre industry trade publication, *The Stage.* Instead he wrote about the experience on his blog, *Postcards from the Gods* (2012).
[6] This references the practice of embedded journalism, "when a journalist is attached to a military unit [...] For the military, embedding means control over the journalist and the potential to use the media organisation to disseminate positive messages about the progress of the war" (*The Frontline Club,* no date).

individual productions within a larger whole, and putting productions in dialogue with each other across the festival. In another variation developed by Costa, the critic observing rehearsals also provides dramaturgical support such as critical feedback.

Why does embedded criticism matter? Embedded criticism provides readers with insight into otherwise-inaccessible rehearsal processes, which other modes of theatre criticism rarely do. It does this through enabling the critic's proximity to the artists and their work. I use proximity in this context as defined by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris in *Performing Proximity: Curious Intimacies*: the "expanding and contracting distances between audience and performer" (2014, p. 2). The mainstream critic who reviews public performances typically has little or no direct contact with artists, and no contact with the rehearsal process or rehearsal space. They work at a remove from performers and process. In contrast, embedded criticism typically does not.[7]

I have first-hand experience of these differences. In 2013, a year after Haydon gave embedded criticism its name, I began reviewing for *Remote Goat*, a listings and criticism site. In the years that followed, I wrote for other publications and founded my own theatre criticism website, *The Play's the Thing UK*. I first worked as an embedded critic in 2017, and as a dramaturg in 2018. Though I had no prior training in these specific practices, my background lies in theatre – I originally trained and worked as an actor and director, and worked as a producer, and in the mainstream drama education sector. In my current work as an embedded critic, mainstream critic, and dramaturg, these practices' varying distances – between me, and the artists and their processes – feel vast. Other aspects of these practices do as well. As a mainstream critic I need to analyse and then judge how good a show is or is not, and communicate that clearly and engagingly in writing. As an embedded critic, I focus on conveying to readers the moments from rehearsals that I found unique or interesting, or wanted to share with the wider world outside of the closed rehearsal space. As a dramaturg, I work collaboratively to support the rest of the team to achieve a vision for the production, but none of the work is public-facing. Despite these differences, I keep returning to the instinct that these processes overlap – this thesis begins from this investment. As an embedded critic and mainstream critic, I write about performance from an outsider's perspective, for a journalistic readership that includes

[7] Michael Billington describes the physical distance between mainstream critics and a production's cast and creative team: "The critic is separated from the performers by the footlights, and the author and director are either in the pub or skulking at the back of the circle. Critic and artist, in short, occupy different territory" (2007, no page).

people interested in theatre and those working in the industry. As an embedded critic and dramaturg, I work in rehearsal rooms and intensely observe and analyse a performance being made. As a dramaturg and mainstream critic, I analyse and critique artists' creative choices. Working in these three roles uniquely positions me to investigate questions that arise from these practices' overlaps and differences. These questions around these practices' commonalities and differences are the reason for undertaking this research project, and my findings can inform my personal practices as well as the field and academia more widely.

In the next section I review literature on contemporary theatre criticism and chart the emergence of embedded criticism, and its intersections with dramaturgy practice and rehearsal ethnography. I also define the project's key terms by drawing on relevant literature and practice. Following this, I present the research methodology, and summarise the rest of the thesis' content.

LITERATURE REVIEW & KEY TERMS

MAINSTREAM THEATRE CRITICISM

It is difficult to consider the meaning of embedded criticism completely separately from the dominant mode of British theatre criticism, which is referred to as 'mainstream criticism' in this thesis. This term was chosen due to mainstream criticism traditionally being published in what is commonly referred to as 'mainstream media'. In her article investigating if there is a difference between mainstream and alternative media, Jennifer Rauch draws on several categories used to determine whether media is typically understood to be mainstream or alternative. Mainstream media has "organisational structures, processes and forms" (2016, p. 757) that tend towards the hierarchical, corporate and larger scale; and "content" (2016, p. 757) that uses neutral reporting practices, separate from the communities reported on, to cover news relevant to the "status quo" (2016, p. 757). Criticism in mainstream media outlets – or written in the style of that in mainstream media outlets – is typically written using what Fricker and British critic Mark Fisher describe as the "critical trifecta" (2016, 2015) of description, analysis and judgment and adheres to Rauch's description of mainstream content in that critics typically do not work within the industry.[8] Reviews

[8] This is typically the case in large newspapers and magazines. In smaller blogs and independent outlets, some critics like myself and some of those who review for my website work in the theatre industry.

in, for example, UK national newspapers such as *The Guardian, The Telegraph*, and *The Times,* trade publication *The Stage* and solely digital outlets such as *WhatsOnStage* and *Broadway World*, describe, analyse and judge the quality of a production as do many single- and multi-authored blogs and criticism websites. They are often written by a critic who does not otherwise work in the theatre industry. Additionally, mainstream criticism upholds a distance between critics and artists (Costa, 2012) wherein they rarely interact directly. These aspects of mainstream criticism correspond to Rauch's description of mainstream media, though are often evident in multi-authored blogs and to an extent, single-authored blogs. This is despite blogs not typically being considered mainstream media outlets. Therefore, the term ‘mainstream criticism’ is used to describe criticism that utilises description, analysis and judgment to review public performances where the critic and artists typically do not engage with each other, regardless of the type of publication.

Though mainstream criticism is a dominant form of criticism in the UK, in the introduction to her 2016 edited volume on contemporary theatre criticism Duška Radosavljević refers to the expansive theatre criticism field that encompasses varied types of publications, and writing forms and styles, as a 'landscape' (2016). The landscape Radosavljević identifies includes newspapers, magazines, academic criticism, and online criticism, written by a large number of critics, in varying forms and styles. In considering her choice of the word 'landscape' to describe theatre criticism practice, she observes: "the notion of a landscape presupposes the existence of a viewer, and an aspect of their environment" (p. 1). She also notes that in visual art terms, 'landscape' specifies a horizontal view, and that landscapes are changeable (p 1). As Radosavljevic articulates, traditional theatre criticism established in the nineteenth century in UK begins to shift due to two factors: the emergence of digital publications and the blogosphere; and the emergence of marketing and communications. Contributors evidence these significant shifts. For example, Andrew Haydon’s chapter historicises online criticism in England from the late-1990s; he draws attention to online criticism’s ability to provide an alternative to criticism found in newspapers through documenting three stages of its development. The last began in 2012 (2016). It is in this most recent stage that Costa began working as an embedded critic. Notably, Radosavljević’s book also contains a chapter by Maddy Costa on her own embedded criticism practice. This chapter is one of two known published academic writings on embedded criticism in the UK. As a whole,

Radosavljević's collection is the most recent, comprehensive text to examine contemporary criticism's range of practices, styles and forms.

Other literature on contemporary criticism confirms the varied and well-populated landscape that Radosavljević observes; critic Mark Fisher presents a constrained definition of criticism – to him, it must be analytical. In the introduction to his 2015 book *How to Write About Theatre*, he states that in this century "the top-down school of criticism, with definitive judgments made by the few" (p. 4) is giving way as a result of the internet. Though Fisher's book encourages readers to write about theatre online, he argues that criticism requires analysis (p. 5). Fisher also considers theatre criticism's range of functions, audiences, and purposes.[9] Though not explicitly stated, he therefore positions 'theatre criticism' as a broad umbrella term. Though Fisher is a critic for national newspaper *The Guardian*, and so must follow the publication's style guide and writing conventions, he encourages readers to experiment with language, form, and style. Throughout his book he regularly references blogs, tweets, and theatre websites written in conventional, journalistic language as well as more creative styles and forms, such as poetry. His work is indicative of the ways in which critics are using a wide variety of criticism styles and forms.

Similarly, Megan Vaughan's 2020 monograph *Theatre Blogging: the emergence of a critical culture* focuses on the key period of change in the landscape of theatre criticism. Beginning with the late 1990s, she maps and analyses the development of anglophone theatre and performance blogs and bloggers – who she defines as "those who self-publish personal, informal posts, primarily about theatre, in an online space they control" (2020, p. 9). Her study focuses on blogs where all content is written and self-edited by one person. This excludes other websites also colloquially referred to as blogs, but that have some level of editorial process and/or multiple contributors, as well as bloggers who are paid to write for other publications. Though she does not examine this work, its mention relates to the 'newspaper critics versus bloggers' conflict. Vaughan briefly overs this conflict; it is the phenomenon of some paid critics seeing bloggers as a threat to the profession, and blaming them for cuts to arts coverage in paid mainstream media publications from the mid-2000s to the present (pp. 9-11). Yet in reality, this conflict is not such a clearcut binary – the critics with their own blogs who also occasionally write on commission and/or were previously

[9] Radosavljević's 2016 edited collection, *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* also demonstrates this via the broad range of chapters in the book.

newspaper critics[10], and the large multi-authored criticism websites[11] fill the space between the critic and the blogger. Here, then, is Radosavljević's landscape.

More resistant to the growth of forms and modes of criticism is retired theatre critic Michael Billington's *Affair of the Heart* (2023) and his earlier, similar collection, *One Night Stands: A Critic's View of Modern British Theatre* (1993), which span nearly fifty years of newspaper criticism and show an established writing style and form in mainstream criticism up until the nineties. Whilst Billington acknowledges reviews are now typically shorter than they were at the start of his career (pp. 3-5), his criticism has consistently used the critical trifecta (Fricker 2016, Fisher 2015). Typically, this form of criticism is written shortly after the critic attends a production's opening night and includes a star rating that measures the quality of a production on a scale of one to five. These 'reviews', as they're typically called, resemble the theatre criticism that emerged in the Enlightenment, when the theatre critic was established as an expert, arbiter of public taste (Radosavljević 2016, Butt 2007, McDonald 2007).[12] This expertise and taste-making is still reflected in contemporary criticism, particularly that found in newspapers, trade publications and larger websites, which Radosavljević identifies as "the most dominant form in the public domain" (2016, p. 8). It is typically written in what could be described as a journalistic style, that Radosavljević describes as "a hybrid genre between literature and journalism – that is: between creative and factual writing" (p. 9).[13] This, in combination with the critic issuing a judgment on the quality of a production, and that "traditionally, since criticism sits in newspapers, it's governed by newsworthiness – or, more explicitly, the news agenda" (Trueman 2015, no page), means that criticism in many outlets adheres to the broadly similar style and

[10] These include Libby Purves and Mark Shenton.
[11] These include but are not limited to *A Younger Theatre*, *everything theatre*, *London Pub Theatres*, and *Londontheatre1*.
[12] Mainstream criticism is found in Britain's national newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Telegraph*, other major newspapers like *The Financial Times*, *Metro* and *The Evening Standard*, and entertainment guides like *Time Out*. There are also trade and theatre publications that contain mainstream criticism, such as *The Stage* and *WhatsOnStage*, and numerous multi-authored websites and blogs relying on low-paid or voluntary critics such as *Broadway World*, *A Younger Theatre* and *Reviews Hub*.
[13] In her chapter "Definitions of Journalism", Barbie Zelizer identifies journalism as, "a profession, an industry, a phenomenon, and a culture" (2005, p. 66) so therefore it has a range of definitions. Some of these relate more to theatre criticism than others. In her consideration of journalism as a text, Zelizer explains its dominant style: "a generally reasoned and unemotional accounting of events" (p. 74). Whilst the mainstream critic is usually credited as the writer, a mainstream review is widely expected to be "a generally reasoned and unemotional accounting of events" (p. 74). This is most evident in the lack of first-person, where any statements about the production are framed as facts rather than opinion. See chapter one for examples of embedded criticism that use this style.

form seen in Billington's anthologies. Further, what is generally understood as theatre criticism is – within the industry and wider thinking – limited to reviews of public productions. Other writing about theatre – such as news, interviews, and opinion pieces – is typically thought of as journalism, particularly given Radosavljević's conceptualisation of criticism as a hybrid practice. The writers of these kinds of theatre writing typically maintain a distance from the rehearsal and theatremaking process even if the writers directly engage with an artist.

There is some consensus for the term 'mainstream criticism', though other terms are also used informally in the field.[14] Andrew Haydon refers to the critic who writes reviews as "a proper critic" (2012, no page) and a "mainstream critic" (2012, no page) who practices the "old model" (2012, no page) of criticism.[15] Dan Rebellato uses "traditional critics" (2014, no page) to distinguish those writing for newspapers from those publishing in online-only outlets. Fricker also chooses "mainstream critics" (2015, p. 49) to refer to both print and online critics who write reviews in this style originating in newspapers. Irving Wardle calls it "newspaper criticism" (1992, p. 9) in his book on the practice, a term which Radosavljević uses to distinguish a particular kind of criticism from others. Though she acknowledges that online criticism "represents a distinct and often diametrically-opposed domain to that of newspaper criticism" (2016, p. 11), newspapers' expansion into the digital sphere blurs the distinction between online and newspaper criticism. As such, 'newspaper criticism' is a somewhat out-of-date term; though there are still critics writing for printed newspapers, most newspaper content is also published online. There are many theatre criticism websites and blogs that do not have print editions, but adopt British newspapers' critical writing style.[16] This style is also defined by a perception of

[14] In British mainstream criticism practice, 'review' and 'criticism' are often used interchangeably. People who write criticism in the UK – paid and unpaid – also vary in their self-identity, with 'critic', 'blogger', 'reviewer' and 'theatre writer' all in common use across the field. Megan Vaughan addresses this in her 2020 book, *Theatre Blogging*. I too use 'review' and 'criticism' interchangeably.

[15] A 'proper critic' is understood as someone writing for and being paid by a large newspaper, who must adhere to editorial guidelines and style. Associated notions of professionalism, writing quality and remuneration are no longer wholly accurate given the proliferation of solely-online criticism outlets, volunteer theatre criticism, and the steady decline of newspapers' theatre coverage and rates of pay.

[16] Some of these publications have always been solely online whilst others are both online and in print. Notably, the national newspaper *The Independent* moved from online and print to online only in 2016, which resulted in many redundancies and pay cuts (Jackson 2016, no page). Examples of British mainstream criticism in online-only outlets include but are not limited to: *The Londonist*, Emma Clarendon's *Love London Love Culture*, and *Rev Stan's*

‘objective’ critical distance, or what Rauch describes as neutral writing by someone outside of the given community.[17] Therefore, this thesis will use the term 'mainstream criticism' to refer to a style of criticism that is characterised by the critical trifecta, but one that may not necessarily be published in mainstream media outlets, such as national newspapers.

Differentiation of 'mainstream criticism' practice from broader 'theatre criticism' is evident in several sources on theatre criticism. Costa and Fricker come to the conclusion that embedded criticism is a type of theatre criticism, and Fisher implies it by touching on embedded criticism in his book as well as other kinds of criticism, such as the ‘critic as a consumer guide’ and the ‘critic as a reporter’ (Costa 2016, Fricker 2016, Fisher 2015). Therefore, this thesis begins from this position of mainstream criticism and embedded criticism being different kinds of theatre criticism. This distinction is important to consider because it prompts questions about how else they might differ from each other. Mainstream criticism is the most visible mode of theatre criticism and likely that which first springs to mind when the term is mentioned, whereas embedded criticism, in wider discourse, could be considered a type of feature article, or even something else entirely.

EMBEDDED CRITICISM

In his 1992 book *Theatre Criticism*, Irving Wardle notes that critics observing rehearsals have been commonplace since the 1970s (p. 8). This longer history is evident in Fricker stating that embedded criticism has "a practical history [...] but only in the last five or so years has it been undertaken consistently enough to be recognized as a nameable phenomenon" (2016, p. 45). Her article goes on to provide some documentation of its lineage in dramaturgy, rehearsal studies and criticism. She also provides a clear, yet brief, explanation of embedded criticism's function:

> it helps critics and audiences better understand and appreciate the work that goes into making theatre….it promotes an understanding of theatre not as a

theatre blog. These publications vary in scale, readership and focus. *The Londonist* covers things to do in and around London for a general readership, and the other two are arts and culture blogs with a theatre focus.

[17] Butt acknowledges, in his introduction to *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance,* that critical objectivity "has come to look increasingly prone to collapse in recent years, as critics in their various professional guises have abandoned their claims to speak from any form of...'authoritative' viewpoint" (2007, p. 3). Objectivity and subjectivity are addressed in chapter 2.

> fixed product but as fluid and ongoing creativity, and it nuances and renders less hierarchal the critic-artist relationship. (2016, p. 45)

Despite this history and a growing body of contemporary practice, there is little academic literature on embedded criticism as a distinct mode of theatre criticism, In part, this is because the practice only gained an articulation in 2012; and in part, because of the changing landscapes and ecologies of criticism.

Existing research can be charted across the practice's development, beginning with Fricker's definition of embedded criticism. Reflecting on his initial blog posts on embedded criticism two years later, Andrew Haydon identifies that "'embeddedness' has gradually come to mean 'spending time in the rehearsal room'" (2014, no page). He elaborates on how he saw the practice develop from his initial writings on the practice:

> What's interesting is that fact that in none of them do I really seem to be talking about spending time in rehearsals. That seemed to take off after those essays. In the original "Embedded" pieces, I was talking firstly about spending time with ATC in the back of a tour van in Iraqi Kurdistan in March 2012 (hence "embedded"), and then about wider questions related to knowing artists, being friends with artists, knowing artists' intentions, the position of the critic in relation to the work, and about pre-knowing information about a piece. (2014, no page)

In the same year that Haydon wrote this reflection, critic, playwright and academic Dan Rebellato briefly touched on embedded criticism in a blog post on models of criticism in the UK and whether or not criticism was in crisis (2014, no page). The final paragraph of his article makes a case for the financial model of an embedded critic being paid to observe and write about rehearsals, despite what he sees as compromising critical objectivity: "It might seem risky to have critics paid by artists because we won't get fearlessly objective commentary; true…" (2014, no page). This adds to Fricker's definition by indicating that embedded criticism moves away from the perceived objectivity of mainstream criticism that analyses the quality of a production, something that Haydon suggests in his reflection on how reader trust could be threatened by embedded criticism (2012, no page). Costa's description of her embedded criticism as "more detailed, open to digression and personal in tone"

(2016, p. 203) than her mainstream criticism supports this, in that a personal tone could be understood to shift away from objectivity.[16]

In addition to the definition she provides, Fricker notes a key aspect of embedded criticism's process: it "leaves out explicit judgment in favour of the first two elements of the critical trifecta: description and analysis" (2016). In 2013 when he worked as an embedded critic at Ovalhouse, former theatre critic Matt Trueman makes the same argument. He explicitly states embedded criticism "wasn't about judgment. The word critic, with its connotations of star-ratings and marketable quotations, implies an element of judgment" (2013, no page).[17] This prompts questions about what else embedded critics engage with in addition to analysing and describing the work they observe.

Costa's chapter offers her answer to this by sharing the key principles of her practice – dramaturgy, advocacy and engagement (2016) – which differ from Fricker's model of typically silent observation of rehearsals (2016). Costa notes that she verbally critiqued the work she observed whilst also documenting CG&Co's rehearsal and production processes in lengthy blog posts. She states her key principles are drawn from American critic, editor and producer Andy Horwitz. In the same year Haydon named and wrote about embedded criticism, Horwitz wrote about his new model for contemporary criticism, which he seems to locate between criticism, journalism and dramaturgy:

> The dramaturge is an intellectual and aesthetic companion engaging in constructive inquiry and investigation alongside the director, choreographer, designers and performers. At the same time the critic/dramaturge is a scribe and documentarian. In the digital age this means assembling video and audio documentation of the process as well as generating text-based analysis and exegesis. The critic/dramaturge may assemble a bibliography as well and ALL of this material, thoughtfully edited and arranged, can be shared on the internet. (2012, no page, emphasis in original).

[16] An example of this personalisation and digression is evident in Ava Wong Davies' 2018 embedded criticism (2018, no page). See chapter 3 (pp. 83-92) for the role of subjectivities within her practice.

[17] Despite stating this is what he initially believed to be true about embedded criticism, Trueman wrote that, after working as an embedded critic at Ovalhouse, he realised he found it impossible to refrain from judging the work he was watching (2013). An analysis of embedded criticism in chapters one and three will look at how judgment is used in the embedded criticism writing.

In short, Horwitz's embedded critic is part of the creative team making the production, documents the rehearsal process, and curates this documentation for the public. This model extends beyond the embedded critic's responsibilities in Fricker's that she designed for her undergraduate students (2016). Though Horwitz developed this model in New York's off-off Broadway landscape, his writing clearly influenced Costa's practice in the UK.

In turn, Costa's practice – particularly her use of dramaturgy – warranted inclusion in Fisher's 2015 book. In a subsection of a chapter entitled "The critic as insider" (pp. 43-46), Fisher highlights that dramaturgs originated from the "in-house critic" (p. 44), and that historically some artists have advocated for mainstream critics to have closer relationships with artists. Fisher also briefly covers embedded criticism's more recent history, starting with Haydon, and noting the work of Fricker, Costa and Horwitz. Though Fisher expresses some concerns about the term 'embedded criticism', he ultimately sees potential for embedded critics "enhancing the audience's appreciation of the theatrical event…critics operating in this way can be mediators between art and audience, not denying their own critical perspectives but not claiming them as definitive either" (p. 46).

In Vaughan's 2020 monograph *Theatre Blogging: the emergence of a critical culture*, she also offers some contemporary historicisation of embedded criticism. She focuses on Costa and draws attention to Costa's aim for horizontalism and what Vaughan calls "dialogic collaborations" (p. 34). This seems to allude to Costa's dramaturgical work included in her practice. Vaughan calls Costa a pioneer and praises "her ongoing commitment to welcome multiple voices into the public dialogue about theatremaking" (p. 35), and situates her within a wider movement within theatre criticism that democratised the field and expanded its potential. Yet, Vaughan proceeds to later identify coopting of embedded criticism by theatre marketing departments as a risk. She warns:

> if we allow this term to be abused, letting it slide from a description of a process or relationship to the term for a certain outcome or type of employment contract, we risk jeopardising both the practice of embedded criticism and the perception of theatre blogging more widely. (p. 75)

Within this warning, where she identifies embedded criticism as a particular process or a relationship to artists, she indicates scope for the practice's variations but key aspects of embedded criticism include differences in its process and relationship to those that make theatre.

Some literature on embedded criticism takes a wider view by considering its position within the theatre industry and in relation to artists instead of looking at the minutiae of the practice. An example of this is Horwitz basing his model on what he calls "critical horizontalism" (2012, no page). Radosavljević references this in the context of landscapes. Horwitz defines critical horizontalism as:

> a creative practice unto itself and [in which] the writer exists in subjective relation to the work of the artist. The writer's response is the continuation of a dialogue initiated by the artist. If this response is then published on the Internet, this creates a horizontal field of discourse with the work[...]The critic supports the continued investigation of the art event across multiple platforms. (2012, no page).

Therefore, in this model, subjectivity and dialogue are key principles, which suggest a closeness between the critic and artists. This proximity – or dismantling of distance – is one of Costa's aims for her embedded criticism practice as per her report from the Devoted & Disgruntled conference (2011, no page) where she first describes the reasoning for her emerging practice that did not yet have a name.

Haydon's writing also considers wider concepts relating to embedded criticism and its divergence from mainstream criticism (2012). He begins by drawing attention to what he sees as a significant issue with the practice:

> the problem of readers' trust. At root, before knowing anything about theatre, before being able to write, before even having anything like "good taste", the one thing a critic needs is the trust of his or her readers…If a critic is "embedded" then there's the possibility that that relationship of trust is shaken slightly. (2012, no page).

He reasons that this potential reader distrust stems from two things: embedded critics humanising artists, and critics "view[ing] the work more favourably" (2012, no page). He ultimately concludes this is not a significant issue, and that "'embeddedness'

could just be framed as an extreme version of reading the programme notes before watching the script" (2012, no page).

The research, practice scholarship and public discourse on theatre criticism covered so far focuses on the medium of writing. As evidenced by its origins in in-house criticism and mainstream criticism and journalism, embedded criticism is rooted in the written medium, and has been continued through writing as the dominant form of theatre criticism. Though there are other forms of output, like vlogs, podcasts, radio shows, and visual representations such as illustrations or GIFs, this thesis focuses on written embedded criticism that is public facing.[18] Further, the most common form of embedded criticism is written and published online, which is reflected in Fricker's definition – the starting point for my investigation.

PRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENTAL DRAMATURGY

Critics writing about rehearsals is far older than Wardle suggests, and has roots in dramaturgy. From 1767 to 1769, critic and playwright Gotthold Lessing was the 'critic-in-residence' at Hamburg Theatre. During his tenure he generated a volume of essays on the productions running at the venue, *The Hamburg Dramaturgie*. Lessing's work is typically found in dramaturgy scholarship however, with this field positioning him as the first dramaturg (Luckhurst 2006, Orr 2014, Turner and Behrndt 2016). Though there is some recognition of Lessing's criticism, contemporary dramaturgy scholars such as Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt, co-authors of *Dramaturgy and Performance,* focus more on how Lessing influenced the relationship between the dramaturg and the institution, and how dramaturgs now communicate with audiences.

Research on dramaturgical practice often situates criticism as part of a dramaturg's remit (Romanska ed. 2015, Trencsényi 2015, Turner and Behrndt 2016). Geoff Proehl shows this in his introduction to Katalin Trencsényi's *Dramaturgy in the Making* where he intersperses the main body of his text with an alphabetical list of things that a dramaturg can be and do (2015, pp. xi-xvi). Particularly relevant are the tasks in Proehl's introduction that can be done by the dramaturg, the mainstream critic, and the embedded critic: analyse, contextualise, critique, describe, interpret, and respond

[18] Non-written criticism is common, particularly in the form of vlogs and podcasts. Other visual forms are less so, though the examples of forms stated here refer to Beth Lawless' illustrated critical responses to theatre and performance, and *The GIF Review*, founded by Vaughan and Ian Abbot. The criticism that is the subject of this thesis specifically focuses on writing on websites that are not social media platforms.

are a selection of them. Turner and Behrndt describe what a dramaturg does as "a process of analysis" (2016, p. 22), which is one of the elements of a mainstream review. This indicates that aspects of both embedded and mainstream criticism overlap with dramaturgy.

Yet, literature on dramaturgy indicates there is vast variety in dramaturgy beyond critical engagement. Luckhurst, for example, states that "the term dramaturg does not have a single meaning" (2006, p. 11), and Turner and Behrndt recognise that dramaturgy is a "slippery term" (2016, p. 22) that is hard to define due to the wide range of tasks that a dramaturg can carry out, its potential to overlap with other practices, and cultural differences.

In the context of this project, I focus on forms of dramaturgy practice that overlap with embedded criticism and examine these entanglements. Though recent academic literature documents a wide range of global, dramaturgical practices (Romanska 2015, Trencsényi and Cochrane 2014, Turner and Behrndt 2016), this thesis will particularly consider production dramaturgy and developmental dramaturgy in England, and their relationships to and partial overlap with embedded criticism practice.[19] This is because criticism is a task that these practices share, and the rehearsal space is where they are usually carried out. Specifically, it will use ‘dramaturgy’ to refer to what the dramaturg does as part of a creative team rather than focusing on dramaturgy as "the internal structure of a play text" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 10) or performance piece.

Proehl’s articulation informs the construction of a definition of dramaturgy resonant for this thesis, particularly considering its use in the other practices considered in this project. There is precedence for this in literature: tasks are often used to form definitions of contemporary dramaturgy and the dramaturg (Trencsényi 2015, Turner and Berhndt 2016). Luckhurst draws on dramaturgical tasks in the Brechtian model

[19] As a result, there will be many variations and forms of dramaturgy and dramaturgical practice that will not be included in this project. Since British dramaturgy originates from German – particularly Brechtian – practice, it will addressed in more detail in chapter 4. However, this thesis will not focus on the 'literary manager' in British or non-British venues due to the more administrative nature of their role and their habitual lack of engagement with the rehearsal process. In North American dramaturgical contexts, developmental dramaturgy is often called 'new play' or 'new work' dramaturgy, as per my experience as a member of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA), and my training and work in American theatre.

that has inspired practice in much of Europe and the US since, to define production dramaturgy:[20]

> the dramaturg has principal responsibility for research and philological work on the text and historical context, as well as its author; her or she has additional responsibility for editorial work on the text, any necessary translation or retranslation, rewriting or restructuring. Often the dramaturg for a production takes the responsibility for the programme [...] in this way the dramaturg is part of an interpretational team that includes the director, designer and actors, and is a bridging mechanism to the audience. (2006, p. 9)

Luckhurst's does not include new writing where the playwright is included in the rehearsal process, and/or the script is in copyright and cannot be changed without permission from the author or their estate.[21] Given that British dramaturgy practice emerged with the focus on new plays and is still most commonly associated with this genre (Turner and Behrndt 2016, p. 125), and much of the British embedded criticism output examined in this thesis resulted from observing new writing and/or new work in rehearsal, it is crucial that any definition of dramaturgy used here includes processes that involve the writer's presence and agency in the rehearsal room. I have found, in my professional experience and training, that this is because a production of a new play in the UK will likely include the writer in the rehearsal process. They will typically carry out any changes to the play script, and will have conducted their own research on the play's context. Whilst a dramaturg may still work on the production, their role will be more focused on other tasks Luckhurst identifies. This displaces the need for an 'interpretational team'.

Trencsényi provides additional meanings of production dramaturgy that complements Luckhurst's definition, and defines production dramaturgy through the tasks that a dramaturg does: they provide critical feedback on the work being made (p. 107), and as someone who "supports the director to create the production" (2015, p. 124) before and during the rehearsal process. Trencsényi provides definitions from

[20] Including the UK: Kenneth Tynan, Britain's first official dramaturg at the National Theatre, was strongly influenced by Brecht (Luckhurst, 2006).
[21] In her article on the rise of new play development in 1990s Britain, Jaqueline Bolton defines new writing as "the first production of an individually authored unpublished play" (2012, p. 209). Any play produced after its first production is thus considered a revival rather than a new play.

Marianne van Kerkhoven, Martin Esslin, and Turner and Behrndt in order to reach her own conclusion: that dramaturgical practice is constantly adapting to respond to new forms of performance, including live art, site-specific work and theatre with community groups, and technological developments that impact the field as a whole (p. 125). Though this suggests that production dramaturgy practice differs depending on the genre, style and form of an individual performance piece, she emphasises that the production dramaturg is a crucial part of the creative team in contemporary theatre (p. 128).

In addition to Trencsényi's focus on production dramaturgy being flexible and responsive, and the dramaturg being a core member of the creative team, I would argue production dramaturgy consists of a variety of specific, additional tasks. These support the realisation of a unified vision during the rehearsal process. Therefore, I articulate production dramaturgy through a combination of Trencsényi's broad definition, Luckhurst's narrower one, and tasks that Proehl lists: production dramaturgy supports the director and/or creative team's realisation of a production by providing critical feedback throughout the rehearsal process, as well as carrying out other tasks as needed to work towards a coherent and cohesive production. This allows for a range of production scales and working methods, such as collective theatremaking that may not have a singularly dedicated director, devising, and new writing that includes the writer in the rehearsal process.

Though Trencsényi distinguishes between what she calls 'product-led' and 'process-led' dramaturgy, both are modes of production dramaturgy.[22] Though similar to production dramaturgy in some ways, 'developmental dramaturgy' has some significant differences. In a chapter looking at developmental dramaturgy working methods, she uses five case studies to demonstrate how dramaturgs can work with writers and theatremakers before rehearsals begin. In some instances, the boundary between development and production is blurred and a wide array of working methods deployed.[23] However, Trencsényi explains that in British and Anglophone theatre cultures, where the playwright is central to the making process, new work is first shaped through,

[22] The differences between production dramaturgy practices in theatre, and dramaturgy in other forms of performance such as dance, are extensively written about in dramaturgy scholarship but investigating them further is not the focus of this thesis.
[23] This is particularly evident in the first case study, where playwright Judith Thompson's development process of *Such Creatures* continued throughout the rehearsal and production process, and was supported by the same dramaturg throughout.

> one-to-one ‘table work’ that often happens between playwright and dramaturg, whereby existing drafts of the script are discussed in regular, developing conversations […] what happens during these very detailed and specific discussions is that the dramaturg responds to particulars of the script and helps the playwright to recognise problems and find their own solutions to them. (p. 72)

This table work is usually followed by "workshopping a play in development with actors, and rehearsed readings are the tools most commonly used" (p. 69). This workshopping, also known as research and development (R&D) in the industry, can include a developmental dramaturg. Both of these processes seem to be essential to new writing developmental dramaturgy in the UK[24], and an embedded critic could observe and write about the R&D process.[25]

Writing about Canadian theatre, Bruce Barton's article "Navigating Turbulence: The Dramaturg in Physical Theatre" contains many similarities to the British developmental dramaturgical practice that Trencsényi describes. Barton describes the workshop, or development, process of a new script as: "a process that rarely involves the input and priorities of designers and technicians, the playwright whose work is being workshopped regularly experiences a critique of her play as text, and is thus cut off from a discussion of her play as production" (2005, p. 104). This shows that developmental dramaturgy work on a theatre or performance piece does not always directly lead to a full, public production. Instead, the focus of developmental dramaturgy is "to create an environment where a new piece of theatre can be conceived, developed and grown, and a playwright can be nurtured" (Trencsényi 2015, p. 102). In short, developmental dramaturgy work focuses on script and concept development, and entails critiquing a script and nurturing the writer.

Developmental dramaturgy relates to this thesis because the dramaturg’s process of critique can be similar to the mainstream critic’s. Considering that developmental dramaturgy practice in the UK is wide-ranging but often centres the playwright, Trencsényi's definition at the end of the previous paragraph that addresses table work

[24] This is corroborated by my own practice as a small- and mid- scale dramaturg in England; all of the developmental dramaturgy I have done with playwrights centered on one-to-one work. See chapter 5 for further detail.
[25] See chapter 5 for an example of this from my own practice.

and workshopping resonates. This is due to the dramaturg's use of analysis and critique in the rehearsal and development space.[26] These have parallels to the mainstream critic reviewing a show, but are better articulated in a space where the embedded critic typically works.

REHEARSAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Gay McAuley developed the methodology of rehearsal ethnography within the field of Rehearsal Studies, which McAuley is also credited for creating (Fricker 2016, p. 46). McAuley opens one of her articles by explaining that Rehearsal Studies results from a particular urge: "The desire to observe and analyze rehearsals is probably a peculiarly modern (or, rather, postmodern) phenomenon, born of the shift in interest from the reified art object to the dynamic processes involved in its production" (1998, p. 75). Rehearsal ethnographies are generally written for the purpose of research, for an academic readership. A number of scholars in the field of Rehearsal Studies have been permitted access to rehearsals in order to conduct research in this area. These include Tiffany Stern (2000), McAuley (1998, 2012), and Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender (2010), whose publications document rehearsal processes in several Anglophone and European contexts. McAuley's book *Not Magic But Work* (2012), an ethnographic account of the 2007 theatre production *Toy Symphony*, is one such example, which documents the process of producing and rehearsing a play. Fricker says that embedded criticism can be seen as a part of this field (2016), and in this section I consider its resonance for my thesis.

As a practice, rehearsal ethnography consciously draws on ethnographic techniques from Anthropology and the social sciences, and usually aims to further knowledge on rehearsal processes. One of these techniques is thick description, which McAuley describes as "both the detailed minutiae that make up the 'passing occasion' and the larger structures of the 'long story' of which it is a part" (2012, p. 9).

As a rehearsal ethnographer, McAuley positions herself as a "participant/observer" (2012, p. 9) in rehearsals, a position she describes as "both vitally enmeshed in the daily experiences of the people being studied and, at the same time, sufficiently distanced to make observations, write notes about what is occurring and find time to write these up in more detail" (2012, p. 9). McAuley's participant/observer model

[26] Any instances of developmental dramaturgical practice referenced in this thesis that fall outside of this definition will be detailed as needed.

seems to be removed from Costa and Horwitz's embedded criticism that includes dramaturgy, in that the participant/observer does not contribute to the creative process. This, however, resonates with Fricker's pedagogical model for undergraduate students carrying out embedded criticism, where the students generally only spoke to anyone on the creative team at a time designated for them to ask questions (2016).

There are trade books that document rehearsal and production processes and resemble *Not Magic But Work* and other rehearsal ethnographies due to their length. Jim Hiley's *Theatre at Work: Story of the National Theatre's Production of Brecht's 'Galileo'* (1981), is one of these, and could be a considered a rehearsal ethnography, though it is not an academic work. Rebellato notes that Hiley's book could even be considered embedded criticism (2014, no page). Actor Antony Sher's several texts are similar, albeit these are even further removed from rehearsal ethnography due to their first-person perspective of someone who is part of a production's cast. For example, his *Woza Shakespeare: Titus Andronicus in South Africa* (1997) documents his experience in the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) touring production, and *Year of the King* (1985) traces the development of his acclaimed performance of Richard III in the titular play, also for the RSC. Given Sher was part of the cast rather than an observer, this distances his books from academic rehearsal ethnography and McAuley's model of the participant/observer.

McAuley holds an extensive role in developing rehearsal ethnography, and its resulting outputs illuminate systematic documentation of rehearsal processes. In this thesis, I engage McAuley's articulation of rehearsal ethnography as an academic research process of observing rehearsals over an extended time period, and then writing about them using methods derived from ethnography.

KEY CONCEPTS

REHEARSALS AND REHEARSAL SPACE

Given that the form of embedded criticism that is the subject of this thesis involves observing rehearsals in a rehearsal space, it is important that the meaning of 'rehearsal space,' and consequently 'rehearsal', is clarified here.

Andy Lavender and Jen Harvie define rehearsal as "the creation of performance" (2012, p. 1). With a focus on postdramatic theatremaking processes around the world, a broader definition best suits their book's inclusivity of a wide range of practices and cultural contexts. This definition is also useful to define the meaning of rehearsal in England given the range of practices and influences that have resulted from an increasingly diverse and globally-connected populace.[27] McAuley provides more detail when she observes that: "The rehearsal process brings together a number of people and materials, choices are made, and the performance is constructed" (2012, p. 16). In most small- and mid-scale theatre, the rehearsal process occurs in a finite time period ending before the performance opens to the public, as modelled in producer James Seabright's seminal manual, *So You Want To Be a Theatre Producer?* (2010).[28]

In *Space in Performance*, McAuley explains that most of the rehearsal process usually occurs outside of the stage space where the performance will run for public audiences (2012).[29] Physical features of the rehearsal space depend on a variety of factors, such as budgets, production scale, and technical requirements; however they are usually about the same size as the stage. These rehearsal spaces can be in the same building as the stage space where the finished performance is performed, though the majority of rehearsals are typically held in a separate rehearsal space. Some theatres with their own performance spaces also have rehearsal spaces, but most artists and companies do not. As such, rehearsals are often held in purpose-built rehearsal studios available to hire at hourly, daily or weekly rates that are completely separate from performance spaces.[30] Low-budget productions may also rehearse in church halls, pub function rooms, or community centres.[31] The spaces are enclosed rooms in larger buildings

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[27] The 2021 census in England and Wales demonstrates this. For example, since 2011 there has been a 5% decrease in people who identify as white (Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021), and Ofcom's 2022 report indicates only 11% of the population do not have internet access at home (*Digital exclusion: A review of Ofcom's research on digital exclusion among adults in the UK*).

[28] Large-scale theatre productions, particularly those with open-ended runs in the West End and touring, hold rehearsals whilst the show is currently running. This is usually for the purpose of rehearsing understudies and new cast members. However, this thesis is not considering rehearsal processes in this commercial, large-scale, ongoing production context.

[29] Though McAuley's book focuses on theatre in Sydney, this is, I argue, also the case in London.

[30] Some examples in London include Theatre Deli, Applecart Arts, and Nursery Theatre.

[31] My embedded criticism and production dramaturgy practice that informs this thesis has almost entirely occurred in rehearsal studios that were hired by the company/artist, or non-traditional rehearsal spaces including pub function rooms and university buildings outside of working hours. These rehearsal spaces in London include but are not limited to Clean Break's rehearsal studios, fh space, St Mary's University, and Lady Hamilton pub. Given the typical production scale of the majority of the embedded criticism that is examined in this thesis, it is likely that the other embedded critics considered worked in similar environments.

and usually the only people permitted to enter the rehearsal room are those who are part of the creative team or building staff who manage the space. Though likely to be less common, rehearsals may occur in shared public spaces, outdoors or in private residences.[32] Embedded criticism is unlikely to be practised in these more public conditions however, given that it is typically predicated on writing about a process that is seen as closed, away from audiences.

ENCOUNTER

Throughout this thesis, I use the term 'encounter' to encapsulate an experience that is more than 'just' the act of observing a rehearsal or production. I chose this term due to how it is used by two scholars who write about the critic's process. The first is Ola Ståhl, an art and design critic, creative writer and academic. He opens his paper on critical writing practices with the question, "in what does writing begin?" (no date, p. 1). He argues that writing begins when the writer has an encounter, and uses evidence from Deleuze and Guatarri's text, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986) to support this argument. Also using several examples from creative writing, Ståhl posits that the writer's encounter is not necessarily with the subject of their writing or other pieces of writing, but falls "outside the field of literature: drugs (Burrough's opiates, Kerouac's Benzedrines), travel (Kerouac's mountain, Burrough's Tangiers), other technologies (Burrough's and Beckett's tape recorders)" (no date, p. 1). With Kafka, the encounter is with "impossibility, seemingly so significant to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of writing" (no date, p. 1). Whilst both the embedded critic and mainstream critic – who essentially write non-fiction – differ from the fiction writer in that their encounter is with the subject of their writing, encounters other than the subject of their writing could also inform both mainstream and embedded criticism.

Ståhl's consideration of the encounter as the start of the writing process is similar to the opening of Diana Damian Martin's "Criticism as a Political Event" in *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* (2016). Her chapter's first paragraph details the idea of encounter that Ståhl describes, and considers how the mainstream critic's encounter with a performance begins the critical writing process, rendering it as a process. The first paragraph of the book chapter is a candid description of the critic's encounter with a public performance:

[32] An example of this is Zoo Co's use of a shopping centre unit in Croydon's Whitgift Centre to rehearse their 2018 production of *Sirens*, and the various dance groups that use open spaces in Royal Festival Hall.

> As the lights dim, I become part of the fabric of a performance. I forget to take notes; perhaps occasionally, I am reminded of something else, creeping in from the edges of my memory, and this gives my encounter, in that moment, particular significance. This choreography of attention unfolds through my encounter. (2016, p. 219)

Damian Martin also explains this process of the critic's attention fluctuating between the performance itself and the critic's memories and associations that are inspired by the performance. She does this in reference to Erika Fischer-Lichte: "we do not simply encounter performance […] our engagement with it is framed by an event. We produce meaning […] through our perception, which in turn, returns to that which we are experiencing" (p. 219). This constant cycle of perceiving and processing during the initial encounter, is key in determining the critic's writing. It is also an inherently dialogical relationship between the critic, the performance, and its components. Writing is also a process; this is the case in both embedded criticism and mainstream criticism. Damian Martin then states, criticism "begins with our encounter with performance and continues beyond the performance space, through to the point in which our thoughts are structured and delineated in the form of a critical text" (p. 220). This indicates the encounter directly informs the choices the critic makes when writing and self-curating.

This cycle of perception and processing during the critic's encounter with the performance does not just contain the world of the performance as produced within the designated performance area. Critics also perceive other people in the audience, the physical features of the theatre auditorium, and how those features feel to our bodies. Elements such as smell, temperature, the comfort level of the seats, and the behaviour of those sitting next to us all inform our encounter and dialogue with the performance, even if they are not included in the written output. This is further evidenced by Anna Winter's review of *Mayerling* (2017) for *Exeunt*, wherein she critically considers how the audience responds to the ballet's story: "Unsurprisingly, such a message seemed lost on the braying denizens of Barnes who take prime position in the opera house auditorium. As the man to my left flicked through the programme, he remarked that in several years' time he hoped to see an all-British roster of principal dancers" (no page, 2017). Therefore, I use 'encounter' to include everything that the critic sees, hears and feels whilst observing a production or

rehearsal, as well as the dialogical process of perceiving and generating meaning. This includes the artists, the space, and their response to the work.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In tracing overlaps, differences and resonances between embedded criticism and mainstream criticism, dramaturgy and rehearsal ethnography, I have also considered the potential impact of an emergent practice on a shifting theatre ecology. As a practitioner myself, I found that whilst some culture workers move between criticism and dramaturgy, the practices are often siloed in contemporary theatre. The under-researched practice of embedded criticism and its resonances, with these omissions and divergent practices, led me to interrogate how embedded criticism connects and severs these practices in and through the rehearsal room.

Therefore I ask: how does proximity to the rehearsal process, artists and rehearsal space determine embedded criticism practice and differentiate it from the practices of mainstream criticism and dramaturgy? A major sub-question emerged in regards to dramaturgy practice in Germany, where dramaturgs commonly generate texts about the rehearsal process. Though dramaturgs in the UK are not known to do this same task, what then distinguishes embedded criticism in England from dramaturgy? Similarly, with theatre critics and journalists often writing news pieces, feature articles and interviews, what is the relationship between theatre criticism and journalism, and embedded criticism? Finally, I am concerned with the impact the rehearsal space has – or does not have – on these practices.

METHODOLOGY

I use proximity as a lens to investigate embedded criticism’s processes and relationships, and argue for the practice's differentiation from mainstream criticism and dramaturgy. Gay McAuley's 2013 chapter in *Performance and the Politics of Space* describes proximity between theatre performers and audience members in Sydney's small Belvoir and Stables theatres as examples of actor-audience spatial proximity. Though she is considering proximity in the context of a public performance, her descriptors of the material conditions of these spaces are similar to those in rehearsal spaces: "the small space [...] the lack of separation between stage and auditorium [...] witnessing actors ‘up close and personal’ [...] the ability to see every detail" (p. 236). Proximity or a lack thereof is a fundamental feature of embedded

criticism, dramaturgy, and mainstream criticism. The embedded critic's position in and relationship to the rehearsal space results in a spatial proximity to the artists and the making process. This significantly differs from the performance space where the mainstream critic encounters a performance.

I take a mixed-methods approach that included fieldwork, textual analysis of embedded criticism, critical reflection on my own experience as a practitioner, and scholarly analysis drawing on distinct areas of theatre studies. The research began with a quantitative study I undertook, that saw me gathering embedded criticism practices and outputs through first-hand knowledge of the field, industry discourse about embedded criticism, and social media and digital publication searches using terms, 'rehearsal' and 'behind the scenes'.[33] All located pieces were logged on a spreadsheet, which comprises this thesis' Appendix A. This enabled me to select a number of key studies that evidence proximities and differences with dramaturgy, rehearsal ethnography and mainstream criticism across the span of a decade – since the inception of the term in 2012 through to contemporary practice. I analyse these outputs more broadly in my first chapter, and engage in case studies across the rest of the thesis.

The first case study includes extracts from a semi-structured interview with Megan Vaughan in 2021, and an analysis of her embedded criticism at The Royal Court's temporary space The Site, in 2017. The Site was both the name of the space and the season of five productions performed in this space, four of which Vaughan was invited to observe and write about.[34] Vaughan's practice as both a mainstream critic and an embedded critic means that she is effectively positioned to discuss both modes of theatre criticism. In terms of proximity, as someone who works in theatre, she is close to the theatremaking and rehearsal processes. Vaughan and I are also in proximity to each other: we met some years ago as critics, she interviewed me for her PhD thesis and her book *Theatre Blogging* (2020) is a significant contribution to 21st Century British theatre criticism scholarship.

[33] An example of this includes Haydon's piece entitled 'Embedded' (2012) and Costa's 2011 discussion of embedded criticism at Devoted & Disgruntled.

[34] Vaughan was not invited to write about the rehearsals for Theresa Ikoko's play due to the writer's relative inexperience when compared to the other writers in the season, and the fact the play was written more recently than the others. Instead, Vaughan was invited to chat with the writer about her work (2021). This suggests that the venue is perhaps protective of its less-experienced writers, and/or it did not want publicly available writing about a play that has had a shorter development period due to a risk of negative critique.

The second case study is the practice of critic and playwright Ava Wong Davies, who explores subjectivity in her work. At the time I interviewed her in 2021, Wong Davies worked as a freelance, mainstream critic for *The Independent, The Stage*, and *Exeunt*. She has also worked as an embedded critic on two productions: *Kingdom*, a play by Celene Lowenthal and Temi Wilkey for Camden People's Theatre in 2018, and Sleepwalk Collective's *Kourtney Kardashian: the opera* in 2019. Extracts of these pieces are analysed. Wong Davies is also a playwright; critic Pippa Sa worked as embedded critic on Wong Davies' play, *i will still be whole (when you rip me in half)* in 2019.[35] Wong Davies' heavily foregrounded subjectivity in her early criticism, and openly acknowledges this in articles about her critical practice (Wong Davies, 2018; Wong Davies et al., 2019). Proximity informs this case study through Wong Davies' familiarity with rehearsal processes, and drawing on her own subjectivities positions her in proximity to the work instead of utilising a critical distance.

In the third case study, I analyse the dramaturgy and criticism practices of Maddy Costa, who worked with CG&Co for seven years as the company's embedded critic, or 'critic-in-residence' as her role was called (Costa 2016).[36] She is the only known embedded critic in Britain to have worked with one company for a continuous period.[37] Costa has increasingly worked as a dramaturg since leaving CG&Co, though her practices as an embedded critic and dramaturg have a four-year overlap. Proximity informs this chapter through my long-running professional relationship with Costa, and Costa's proximity to all three practices that this project researches: embedded criticism, mainstream criticism, and dramaturgy.

Though Costa's embedded criticism and dramaturgy practices are the subject of the case study in chapter 4, her writing appears regularly across the thesis. This is due to her extensive practice in mainstream criticism, embedded criticism and dramaturgy, and her prolific outputs about these practices. She is regularly commissioned and platformed to write and speak about her work, and theatre criticism more widely, so

[35] The only other known example of a person who has both worked as an embedded critic and who has had an embedded critic in the rehearsal room where they are part of the production team is Joseph Winer. Winer worked as an embedded critic on *Barry*, a National Student Drama Festival production in 2019. As a producer, he hired an embedded critic to work on PackPack Theatre's 2021 production, *Cabaret at the End of the World*.
[36] The reasons for leaving the company are complex and varied, which she goes to explore at some length in her blog (2018).
[37] See Appendix A for documented embedded criticism work and their corresponding time periods. This demonstrates that the most common form of embedded criticism occurs within the time frame of individual productions rather than across multiple productions for the same company.

has significantly contributed to the contemporary discourse in these fields – likely more than anyone else also working within these practices. She is widely considered an expert in both mainstream theatre criticism and embedded criticism by other critics and theatre leadership, particularly in the subsidised sector.[38] Further, she is the only British person who has written a scholarly work on embedded criticism, and one of two people who have made British embedded criticism the subject of their academic writing. Though this thesis is not on Costa's work, her prominence in these practices makes her a recurring presence.

However, her embedded criticism practice between 2011 and 2018 was with a company, CG&Co, founded by Chris Goode. Though lauded for his plays, directing work and performance ensemble, he was posthumously exposed as a paedophile in 2021. A week after his self-inflicted death on 1 June 2021, it was publicly revealed Goode had been arrested for possession of illegal images containing children and was due to be charged in court the day after he died.[39] In the time since, accounts of other abuse Goode committed in rehearsal rooms continued to emerge.[40] As a result of these crimes, Goode's widower Griffyn Gilligan has expressed a desire that Goode be written out of theatre and related scholarship (2021, no page).

Given Costa's role within CG&Co for seven years, excluding all mention of Goode's work in this thesis is not possible. In Costa's writing about her practice, she regularly references her work with him, and her process of writing about his rehearsals and performances. However, in order to honour the wishes of Goode's husband, mention of Goode henceforth will be abbreviated to his initials CG, or in the context of his company CG&Co. In addition, the case study on Costa's practice as an embedded critic and dramaturg in chapter four does not include extracts of her embedded criticism for CG&Co. Any references to CG and CG&Co cited in this thesis are read and interpreted through the lens of CG's crimes, and Costa's ignorance of CG's crimes at the time she worked for the company as their embedded critic. Had these events occurred earlier in this thesis' research process, then it would have been adjusted to further exclude CG or his work, even indirectly. However, CG's death and revelation of his crimes occurred six months before beginning the writing-up process, so there was limited scope to readjust this thesis' methodology and argument. I

[38] For example, she was mentioned, unprompted by me, by my case study interviewees Megan Vaughan and Ava Wong Davies.
[39] This news was first published by *The Stage* on 4 June, 2021.
[40] See: Costa's 2022 blog posts by herself and several artists who worked with CG, and Lyn Gardner's investigative long-read published in *The Stage* (2022).

therefore take total responsibility for continuing to indirectly include CG's work in this thesis due to the timing of the research. This approach is further informed by my friendship with Gilligan. These ethical articulations have prompted a further avenue for examining safeguarding and embedded criticism in the rehearsal room; they have also enabled me to problematise the role embedded criticism can play through its possible enabling of rehearsal room abuse, as evidenced by Costa's 2022 blog post on her role in CG's extensive abuse of men working for him.

A final method is the examination of my own professional practice as an embedded critic, mainstream critic and dramaturg, and work specifically undertaken in the frame of this research. I drew on Gay McAuley's method of rehearsal ethnography to conduct embedded criticism field work on two projects in spring and summer of 2021. Instead of using recording devices, I functioned as what McAuley described as "academic observers in the rehearsal room, watching and taking notes" (1998, pp. 75-6). In addition to rehearsal ethnography and autoethnography, I use the method of "conscious recall" (Rupp, 1998) to recollect my observation and writing processes from my embedded and mainstream criticism practice, and my dramaturgy work, prior to this phase of fieldwork and note taking in the spring and summer of 2021.

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

Across this thesis, I focus on embedded criticism's similarities and differences with mainstream criticism and dramaturgy as distinct practices before considering my work across these three practices, then concluding my main arguments.

Chapter 1 chronologically maps embedded criticism practice in England from 2012 to 2022. This develops the practice's contemporary lineage and situates it within a wider theatre criticism. I identify two characteristics that are consistently foregrounded in the work: the rehearsal space and the embedded critic's relationship to it and others within the space, and the use of the first-person to convey the critic's subjective responses to the work they observe. These can be seen despite the broad range of forms, styles and lengths that are evident over this time period.

Chapter 2 firstly analyses the nature of the rehearsal space given that embeddedness in space conceptually underpins embedded criticism practice. It also considers spatial rehearsal paradigms that the embedded critic observes, and how scholarship on site and place relates to space in the context of the rehearsal room. I then identify aspects

of Megan Vaughan's embedded criticism practice that evidence her encounter with the rehearsal space and processes, as well as the work being made. Ultimately, I argue that aspects of the rehearsal space determine embedded criticism writing and differentiate it from mainstream criticism.

Chapter 3 begins by investigating how subjectivity and objectivity are used in criticism, following chapter one's identification of the embedded critic's foregrounding of their subjective experiences in their writing. Whilst scholarship and practice show that subjectivity is present in mainstream criticism, it is often masked through language conventions that typify the journalistic writing style. Through a case study on Ava Wong Davies' embedded and mainstream criticism, this is further evidenced through a close analysis of her work and her use of subjectivity within her embedded criticism.

Whilst the previous two chapters focus on the differences between embedded criticism and mainstream criticism, chapter 4 addresses the overlaps between embedded criticism and dramaturgy. What with embedded and dramaturgy sharing a lineage including Gotthold Lessing's work at Hamburg Theatre, and German dramaturgs writing about rehearsal processes, it could well be argued that embedded criticism is more effectively positioned as a form of dramaturgy practice. To firmly situate embedded criticism as a mode of theatre criticism, I draw on literature about paradigms of German dramaturgy practice, before contrasting it to British dramaturgy. A case study on Costa's dramaturgy and embedded criticism practices reinforces this by differentiating her dramaturgy from that in Germany, and identifying how her background as a journalist and mainstream critic shaped her embedded criticism practice.

Chapter 5 chronologically considers my own practices as an embedded critic, mainstream critic, and dramaturg to contribute an additional perspective and context to the case studies in chapters two through four. Reflection on examples of my past practice provide key insights on how these practices differ despite some overlaps, and positions my practice within a wider field. Though these commonalities are evident within my encounter with the work I am observing regardless of the practice, my relationship with the work, the space and the artists determine and differentiate these practices' outputs.

In my conclusion, I critically summarise my core arguments and analyse the practice's potential. I firstly identify systemic shortcomings in the theatre industry that currently inhibit embedded criticism practice. Following this, I consider how the embedded critic's role could be expanded to include additional responsibilities. Appendix A consists of a log of all known embedded criticism over the decade, along with qualitative information about each piece's writer and the production.

CHAPTER 1

MAPPING A DECADE OF EMBEDDED CRITICISM (2012-2022)

INTRODUCTION

Despite the development of embedded criticism from 2012 through 2022, existing scholarship lacks rigorous engagement with the body of writing generated during these years. This prompted several questions: how does embedded criticism's form, style and content differ across the practice and from mainstream criticism; how does it function in the wider theatre criticism field and theatre landscape; and how do embedded critics influence each other and develop their own practice? This chapter addresses these questions and reveals how embedded criticism can vary from writer to writer, how its developed over time and crucially, how it diverges from mainstream criticism.

It does this by mapping embedded criticism practice in England since 2012, when Andrew Haydon first popularized the term. It was only after this naming of the existing practice that critics, academics, and theatremakers could easily differentiate embedded criticism from other modes of theatre criticism, and therefore embedded criticism started to become known in the industry. This, in combination with online platforms enabling publication and discussion of embedded criticism, resulted in an expanding practice, with more embedded criticism occurring towards the latter end of this ten-year time frame.[41] This is shown in Appendix A by 2019 and 2021's high number of pieces, suggesting that the practice had gathered momentum over the preceding years and has become more widely known.

I break this decade into three periods. The first, 2012-2013, identifies the emergence of contemporary embedded criticism and initial development of dominant ideas behind the practice. The middle years, 2014-2018, show how these ideas are adapted across different publication types and editorial constraints. Over 2019-2022, I examine how the form and style continues to expand and move further away from journalistic norms. This research has resulted in both an identification and description of the

[41] Twitter (repackaged as X at the end of July 2023) is the favoured platform commonly used by people working in British theatre due to its ability to support conversation, self-promotion and advertisement of work opportunities. This is widely accepted by those working in theatre and evidenced in social media advice for those in the industry (*Getting Started in Social Media*, no date).

practice's key characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of theatre criticism, and a documentation of how these characteristics have developed over time. This chapter therefore allows for greater understanding of the practice within the broader context of theatre criticism, and indicates how critics and artists can work outside of the paradigms and material conditions of mainstream criticism through embedded criticism.

2012 AND 2013: A PRACTICE EMERGES

Accompanying Actor's Touring Company enabled Haydon to observe the bigger picture of a company working and living together in another country, rather than a working day where everyone goes home after finishing a rehearsal or performance. This is reflected through his subjective experience as an observer of the company's touring processes:

> I'm sitting on a mini-bus driving through snowy mountains with several elderly Norwegians, five British actors, an English-Iranian director, a Welsh producer, a Scottish stage manager, and various Kurdish fixers, translators, drivers and hangers on. We are listening to very loud Arabic music. There is much clapping and dancing. (2012, no page)

This does not provide readers with insight into the rehearsal process; instead, it provides a fly-on-the-wall view from the position of someone functioning similarly to a roadie. From this position, Haydon is able to convey an insider view of the cast and crew's camaraderie, the job roles required for an international tour, and their collective conditions of travel. In other words, it provides a 'behind the scenes' glimpse into the touring process. He also begins in the first-person: "I'm sitting [...] ". and positions himself as part of this group. Haydon provides similar insights informed by his proximity later in the piece, when he describes the company selecting a venue:

> The space in which the company had been slated to play was the same venue as the grand opening of the Festival – a giant barn of a concert hall, that would be perhaps best suited to a massive orchestral performance. It was less suited to a small, intimate avant-garde piece transferring from Traverse 2 and the Arcola […] The organisers were very understanding and obliging, though, and the company spent a good ten hours of their first day first trooping round

possible alternative venues, eventually settling on a slightly lecture-theatre-y space. (2012, no page) [42]

Though these extracts give the reader some sense of the company's touring processes, much of his article focused on his impressions of Kurdistan – its theatre industry, audiences, and the culture more widely. It is evident that these observations are informed by both his proximity to the company and their touring process, and his position as a visitor to Kurdistan who has minimal knowledge of the country and region, their cultures and their theatre. As a result, Haydon's piece is less about the company's rehearsal and touring processes and more about aspects of Kurdish culture – both in theatre and more broadly – he found different or surprising. Therefore, his proximity is one that is autoethnographic, and the resulting pieces serve to educate readers about Kurdistan. He used the first- person perspective regularly throughout these parts of his piece, for example: "I confess I was mildly baffled about what had prompted such a reaction. Sure, I liked the show plenty" (2012, no page).

Within a practice that primarily details the rehearsal process, Haydon's work is unique because he focuses on differences between British and Kurdish culture instead of rehearsals and the touring process.[43] Further, travelling and living with the company gave him a different perspective than an embedded critic working in a rehearsal room where everyone goes home at the end of the day. There are other differences however, such as varied forms and styles in these early years of embedded criticism, despite the writers knowing each other personally and professionally, and referring to each other's work in other writing and conversations.[44] This is unsurprising given embedded criticism was at the time considered a new practice (Costa 2011, Haydon 2012) based on rejecting mainstream criticism's paradigm of critic-artist distance. How embedded critics rejected this distance varied, as evidenced in Costa's Devoted

[42] Traverse 2 is the smaller of the two performance spaces in Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre, a leading venue for new writing, and the Arcola is an off-West End venue in East London also known for staging new work.
[43] Other examples include: "Whilst being far and away the most *foreign* place I've ever been, there is still a clear Western, American influence beginning to show. The company spent one evening in a café with a bunch of locals who were all merrily checking their iPhones, Facebooking on their MacBooks and drinking Heineken" (2012, no page); and "Another issue slightly worrying the company was the nature of the material itself. We had all been made aware that this was an Islamic country [...] What were the audience going to make, then, of a play in which men frequently put on dresses and played *very* immodestly dressed women, in which "sex-acts" are simulated, and in which several characters get copiously drunk?" (2012, no page).
[44] See: Haydon's pieces on embedded criticism practice titled *Embedded*, *Embedded II* and *Embedded III* (2012), and the overview of Costa and Orr's Dialogue project (2015).

& Disgruntled report (2011, no page). At the same time, theatre blogging was undergoing other changes in form and style such as Eve Nichol's experiments with memes as criticism (Vaughan, 2020). Despite these variations, these first two years witnessed a foregrounding of the embedded critic's subjectivity and an openly personal response to the theatrical practice.[45]

Also in 2012, *A Younger Theatre* founding editor Jake Orr worked as an embedded critic with Dirty Market on their Ovalhouse production, *Be Good Revolutionaries*. In contrast to Haydon's single articles on his larger theatre criticism blog, Orr created an entire blog on tumblr where he published embedded criticism. There are 27 pieces on the blog, presented in a collage format on a single page. Most of these pieces consist of written text, although there are some images and videos interspersed throughout. That same year, Orr and Costa worked together as embedded critics at Battersea Arts Centre (BAC). Rather than embedding into a single production, they worked throughout the venue: "From our base in the BAC cafe, we spend the three weeks discovering how BAC operates, watching rehearsals for Scratch shows, watching all the work programmed in the season, and thinking about new ways to engage with audiences" (2015, no page). This was part of their longer-running *Dialogue* project that aimed to be, "a playful experiment and begin trying to rethink what theatre criticism is, how it's written, who writes it, and what it's for" (2015, no page). Over their three weeks at BAC, they generated a collage-like webpage of images, videos, and links to the work they saw (2012) but very little of their own writing. This differs from Orr's work on *Be Good Revolutionaries*, particularly in terms of how much output was generated. Costa and Orr's work further differs from Haydon's single piece of embedded criticism about *The Golden Dragon*, and his subsequent articles about embedded criticism practice. Haydon's pieces have some images, but these are illustrative of the writing rather than stand-alone material, as with Costa and Orr's BAC project. This demonstrates minimal consensus on embedded criticism's style and form, which suggests a practice that is flexible, iterative, and responsive to both the embedded critic's interpretation of what they observe, and the work that is encountered.

Yet, there are notable similarities across these critics. Like Haydon, Orr regularly uses the first-person to convey his personal response to the rehearsal processes he

[45] See the introduction (p. 7) for further discussion on types of embedded criticism, including those that do not include rehearsal observation.

observes: "I didn't think I would feel the butterflies in my stomach and the nervous anticipation of being so close to the show opening…I feel somewhat sick, I'm not going to lie" (2012, no page); "This excites me, even more so because I've been part of the process, witnessing the creation and development of the piece" (2012, no page); and "I have, wherever possible, kept my presence in the rehearsal room unobtrusive. Sitting quietly observing, or when invited chipping in, but always respecting the work itself" (2012, no page). This last extract also describes Orr's position in the rehearsal space and his relationship to the work being made, similar to Haydon's position on the tour bus. Both position them in the space but outside of the cast and creative team, like McAuley's ethnographic participant observer.[46] Despite this, it is evident that Orr's proximity is one of emotional investment and care for the production's outcome.

In 2013, Veronica Aloess, Matt Trueman and Gemma Hirst worked as embedded critics observing rehearsal processes. Haydon embarked on a new embedded criticism project with the Secret Theatre season at The Lyric Hammersmith. Though Trueman, Costa, Orr, and Haydon were all working as freelance theatre critics, and thus connected to professional networks, Aloess and Hirst were students. Aloess and Hirst worked as embedded critics outside of London – Aloess writing about Lincoln Young Company's production *I'm Spilling My Heart Out Here*, and Hirst covering Northern Stage's graduate company NORTH's show, *The Man Who Thought The Moon Would Fall Out of The Sky*. Aloess' embedded criticism piece was published on *A Younger Theatre*, a UK-wide criticism site co-founded by Orr.[47] Hirst's piece was published on the company's blog despite having her own website. This indicates that embedded criticism is practised beyond London and published on a range of platforms, including personal blogs, company sites and multi-authored theatre criticism sites. Additionally, at the time there is clearly a group of London-based critics including Trueman, Costa, Orr and Haydon, who are not just practising embedded criticism themselves, but likely inspiring others to do the same. This is occurring within a theatre industry impacted by the Tory government's 2010 introduction of austerity measures that included cuts to arts funding (Higgins, 2010). Subsidised theatres and artists may have seen embedded criticism as a marketing tactic to sell more tickets and work towards compensating for reduced government grant money, particularly if

[46] See the rehearsal ethnography section of the introduction (pp. 20-21).
[47] *A Younger Theatre* has been on a 'break' since September 2021 due to an unsustainable financial model (Sims, 2021).

the embedded critic was an established journalist with a wide readership, who could write in a compelling way about the company's work. Further, the increasing legitimacy and impact of theatre blogs as an alternative to mainstream media outlets (Vaughan, 2020) meant theatres and artists would have seen value in bloggers writing about their work.

The pieces in 2013 have significant variation. Aloess' is conversational in tone, contains quotes from the company, description of the play's contents, and information about the festival the show is part of. This piece would not be out of place in a newspaper like *The Guardian*, which occasionally publishes embedded criticism as part of their arts and culture coverage.[48] Hirst's is less grammatically correct. It is also shorter and simpler; it reads more like promotional content or advertising copy. Both writers use first-person to share their subjective response to the work. Aloess also indicates her position within the rehearsal space: "I'm dodging eggs and beetroot juice in this rehearsal, and fight choreography in the one before" (2013, no page). She also shares her opinions on the company and the play:

> I'd love to see other versions of this play to see how companies are facing the more mature content of Gregg's play, but I'll admit I've learnt to love this company (and their baking) for reminding me how fun putting on a show can be no matter how serious the content. (2013, no page)

These extracts communicate not just Aloess' response to the play, but wider theatre interests and what she observes in rehearsals. Her use of first-person emphasises a visceral proximity to the artists and what seems to be messy and physical work that risks consuming her and avoids creating an impression of distance and authority. This style is similar to Orr's writing about *Be Good Revolutionaries*; along with his opinions and emotional responses he observes: "I like seeing how a piece came together, or at least learn about things I would never have done through just seeing a production" (2012, no page). That Orr and Aloess have a similar writing style is unsurprising given that Aloess's piece is on Orr's website, and any editorial guidelines the website may have for embedded criticism and feature articles are likely to be influenced by Orr's own writing practice.

[48] Costa wrote embedded criticism in the 2000s for *The Guardian* when she was on their staff (Costa 2016), and the paper also published two embedded criticism pieces in 2014 and 2015, which are discussed in the next section.

Like their style, the content and form of the pieces written in 2012-3 varies. Whlist Orr and Costa use photos, video, and sound in addition to writing, Aloess, Hirst and Trueman exclusively use text. Haydon uses photos sparsely for illustrative purposes. The longer of these pieces consider moments from rehearsals in detail, broader context, reflection on the work's relation to the critics' lives and experiences, and information about the artist and/or company and their work. This is rarely seen in other kinds of writing about theatre.[49] It has since become commonplace for productions to release photos from rehearsals, but there is little contextual information provided apart from the names of those in the photos. Video clips – in the form of teasers and trailers usually released on social media platforms – can provide brief glimpses of the rehearsal process to potential audiences, though this marketing content focuses on selling tickets rather than disseminating nuanced information on the rehearsal process.

With the exception of Hirst's, the pieces are longer than most newspaper articles. She dedicates three brief paragraphs to information about the company and the show, one paragraph on rehearsals, and a final paragraph on their upcoming tour. The short length, reliance on description, and promotional tone resembles copy written purely to promote a show that is commonplace in, for example, press releases and longer-format social media posts used in a marketing campaign to sell tickets. This is reinforced by the piece's position on the company's website rather than Hirst's blog. This variation between Hirst and the other writers is expected to an extent, as they wrote for blogs and sites that are not mainstream publications. These smaller publications are often flexible with content requirements, word counts and the length of time a critic has to write a piece. Of course, if a critic is writing for their own site, they have editorial freedom to write what they like.

Matt Trueman's 2013 embedded criticism on Ovalhouse's Counterculture 50 season, like that of Aloess, more resembles newspapers' style and tone.[50] He infrequently uses the first-person, though the first of his three pieces uses it far more than the

[49] An example of Orr contextualising what he observes through comparisons with other productions or plays includes: "It reminds me of George Buchner's *Woyzeck* where any combination of scenes will still lead to the same outcome. This I guess it [sic] the joy of devising and making the text as the company goes" (no page); and "This method of directing is a far cry from some of the other approaches to directing, including my own, that I have witnessed before. I once referred to my directing style as that of a dictator, limiting the freedom of my performers and insisting they follow my every action and direction building to my overall vision" (no page).

[50] This reflects his work as a freelance theatre critic and journalist for major publications.

subsequent two. Even though he physically positions himself in the space, he prioritises description of what he sees, rather than his subjective response: "Introductions are over. I've sat down, taken out my notebook and tuned in" (no page), and "by the time I'm next in the following week, the characters inspired by the book are on their feet" (no page).[51] However, an extract such as, "More problematic, however, is the lack of distinction between roles (Edna May excepted) and modes" (no page), completely removes the first-person register. This choice of phrasing – "More problematic, however, is the lack of distinction" – to convey his evaluation of a production's quality as fact, is a journalistic writing style often used in mainstream criticism to uphold the values of the publication and its readership, rather than positioning a theatre review as the critic's opinion.[56] This inclusion of judgment is an exception within embedded criticism practice, which he challenges in a final blog post for Ovalhouse:[52]

> what has become apparent is that even this inevitably involves a layer of judgment. One cannot simply detach how a process pans out and functions from a consideration of what it's not doing, of what's missing. Implicit in that question, however, is an 'ought' – admittedly a subjective 'in my opinion' ought, but an ought nonetheless. So even if one allows an artist their process – as the embedded critic must – one is still looking at it from outside and assessing it. (2014, no page)

Therefore, despite his argument that embedded criticism practice cannot suspend judgment, Trueman recognises that his is an individual, subjective opinion resulting from his positionality. By positioning judgment as opinion rather than fact, he reduces its authority and dismantles the hierarchical relationship between the critic and the artist. This also points to the inherent subjectivity within theatre criticism.[53]

Costa's Devoted & Disgruntled conversation expresses that some critics and artists want to dismantle the paradigm of critical distance in their practice (2012). This establishes that within theatre criticism, some critics are dissatisfied with the norms of mainstream criticism. The embedded criticism considered in this section aims for this

[51] See chapter 3 for Ava Wong Davies' career development from foregrounding subjectivity to focusing on talking about the work she encounters.
[56] More unusually given the negative critique in his embedded criticism, Trueman's writing was published on Ovalhouse's site.
[52] Fricker confirms this in her article where she offers a definition of embedded criticism based on what she has observed as common practice in British embedded criticism (2016).
[53] For more on subjectivity in criticism, see chapter 3 (pp. 83-86).

dismantling through the critic's proximity to the artists in rehearsals or 'behind-the-scenes' moments that are normally private. These examples show that the early years of contemporary embedded criticism begin to establish proximity as a paradigm of embedded criticism, and consider the role of judgment in the practice. They demonstrate how embedded criticism can move away from mainstream criticism's norms of critical distance and the judging of the quality of a performance, and, as evident in Trueman's experience, question whether embedded criticism can achieve this. Additionally, embedded criticism written during these two years speaks to Andy Horwitz's model of critical horizontalism developed during the same time period: "criticism is a creative practice unto itself and the writer exists in subjective relation to the work of the artist. The writer's response is the continuation of a dialogue initiated by the artist. If this response is then published on the Internet, this creates a horizontal field of discourse with the work" (2012, no page). This critical horizontalism is evidenced in embedded critics using first-person to position themselves in the rehearsal space or with artists, directly conveying their personal experience of the artists and their processes. These core traits have featured in embedded criticism written since this two-year period when contemporary embedded criticism emerged.

2014-2018: EMBEDDED CRITICISM STYLE ACROSS PUBLICATION TYPES

Embedded criticism developed rapidly over 2014 to 2018. From 2014 through 2017, although rehearsal room-based embedded criticism still occurred, rehearsal observation was not considered a requirement of embedded criticism.[54] The practice was extended to include a critic embedding themselves into small festivals and events, wherein they see most or all of the programme and write about the festival or/event as a whole as well as individual productions.[55] Festival and event embedded criticism do not include rehearsal observation, so they will not be analysed. Instead, this section considers how embedded criticism during this period varies across publication types by analysing embedded criticism in *The Guardian*, a national newspaper, and Theatre503's blog. The style and content requirements of a national newspaper, and a blog's freedom in these areas, allows for identification of embedded

[54] Several of these embedded criticism writings generated within this timeframe will be examined later in this thesis: Megan Vaughan's in chapter 2, Ava Wong Davies in chapter 3, and mine in chapter 5.
[55] Examples include Maddy Costa's embedded criticism at In Between Time in Bristol in 2014, 2015 and 2017; Matt Trueman's writing about This Thing Called Artist Development at Ovalhouse in 2015; and Diana Damian Martin's writing about Spill Festival in 2015 and 2016.

criticism's features that fall outside of mainstream media's restrictions, and how embedded criticism differs across publication types.

In 2014 and 2015 *The Guardian* published two pieces of embedded theatre criticism.[56] In 2014 John Mulholland's covered *BABY/LON* by Big House, and David Jays' 2015 piece included three productions: *King John* at the RSC, *A Damsel in Distress* at Chichester Festival Theatre, and *Dark Arteries* at Rambert. Like Trueman, Mulholland and Jays deploy a journalistic writing style. The pieces contain description of the rehearsal process, production and company; wider context; and quotes from creative team members. While both pieces contain some first-person use and overt subjectivity, more focus is given to the artists. This results in these pieces resembling interviews published in newspapers or magazines; however there is more foregrounding of the writer's self than is habitual in mainstream criticism or feature writing. An example of this is Mulholland writing about one of the actors in the 2014 production of *BABY/LON*: "When we meet for the first time, in the second week of the project, she is keen to know what a journalist is doing observing the process" (no page). This positions him within the rehearsal room and establishes a direct relationship between him and this cast member. Orr, Aloess, Trueman, and Haydon also used this approach. The effect is one of creating dialogue between the critic and artist, and dismantling the hierarchical distance between them. This dialogue is often in the form of a discussion between the critic and the artist, such as Trueman's inclusion of an extract of a conversation with artist Stuart Alexander during rehearsals for his show, *Crimplene Millionaire*: "'He's a cross between Bruce Forsyth and Ted Baxter' – a precursor to Ron Burgundy from the 70s sitcom The Mary Tyler Moore Show – Alexander explains. To me, he looks like a Guess Who character" (2013). Alexander telling Trueman about his aesthetic inspirations is clearly part of a longer, in-person explanation in the rehearsal space. Trueman's response – that he thinks he looks like 'a Guess Who character' – turns Alexander's explanation into a dialogue.

In writing about the same woman later in the piece, however, Mulholland positions his opinion as fact: "Watching Bobbi take the lead female role in *BABY/LON* is to witness a formidable talent and to speak to her is to hear a formidable intellect" (no page). This sentence would not be out of place in a mainstream theatre review given that he

[56] Due to continued reduction of arts coverage in major publications such as national newspapers and magazines, embedded criticism is not typically published beyond blogs or theatre-specific publications. As such, these are rare examples of broadsheet-published embedded criticism, and the productions are all by larger well-known, subsidised companies.

passes judgment on the quality of her performance and intelligence. Though this is similar to Trueman's embedded criticism in that they both use judgment, Mulholland's is positive and he does not openly articulate it as his opinion.

In David Jays' 2015 piece, he takes a different approach to form and content wherein he analyses rehearsal processes across three productions. The article's focus considers how real-life rehearsal room processes compare to fictional representations. He opens with:

> A martinet director barking at chorines in *42nd Street*. An imperious ballet impresario in *The Red Shoes*. Philip Seymour Hoffman, full of avant-garde angst in *Synecdoche, New York* … I have images of rehearsals in my head and they are probably all misleading. Rehearsal is the work that the public never sees. So what does take place behind closed doors? And how much does genre make a difference? I lurked in the corner of three rehearsal rooms – for a new dance piece, a rare Shakespeare play and a light-hearted musical comedy – to taste the atmospheres and compare the conversations. (2015, no page)

Jays provides readers with insight into rehearsal room processes using popular culture references that readers are likely to know as a basis for comparison. He also points to a long-running, popular fascination with rehearsal and backstage processes evidenced by their inclusion in many stage and screen stories[57] that embedded criticism satisfies, though embedded critics like Megan Vaughan draw attention to rehearsal's hard work instead of glamourising the profession.[58] The commissioning of Jays' and Mulholland's pieces also demonstrate that articles about rehearsals have value to readers and to *The Guardian* as an arbiter of cultural value.

Like Mulholland, he occasionally includes the first-person register in the piece. The first-person indicates his position within the rehearsal space: "I lurked in the corner of three rehearsal rooms…" (no page), and "I'm parked by the stage management desk as the musical *A Damsel in Distress* takes shape" (no page). It is also important to note his use of the word 'taste'. In common vernacular we go to see a play – something that can be done over a distance – whereas tasting requires physical closeness. He also references the privilege of his presence in the rehearsal space in

[57] A small selection of examples include the musical *Kiss Me, Kate*; the play *Noises Off*; and the television series, *SMASH*.
[58] See: chapter 2 (p. 80).

the context of a conversation with others in the room: "Jo Stone-Fewings, in the title role, tells me how tricky it is to keep four different performance spaces in your head" (no page). The confidence placed in Jays by the cast is illustrated in the sharing of these comments on the process of making the work. In contrast, he avoids the first-person to make comparisons between the productions he observes: "Compared with the mild-mannered Dacre and Baldwin, *A Damsel in Distress* comes as a shock" (no page). He does the same when considering his response to the work: "Candlelit churches would heighten the ritual, but even in this bright south London studio, Orlando Gough's music raises goosebumps" (no page). This gives his personal reaction to music greater authority; he states it as fact that others will feel the same. The comparison with the church also provides a comparative sense of something holy and special about the process he is observing. These *Guardian* pieces show how established interview formats used in feature articles can be used to include observations of the rehearsal process. Embedded criticism thus expands in a new direction melding interview and observation.

In contrast to these articles in *The Guardian* that largely avoid the writer's personal response, Salome Wagaine's embedded criticism piece about Theatre503's 2018[59] production of *Br'er Cotton* centres on her expectations of theatre and how these relate to her lived experience, particularly in terms of racial representation. [60] Whereas Jays and Mulholland's use of subjectivity is limited to physically positioning themselves in the rehearsal space, Wagaine foregrounds her identity as a Black critic to discuss how she relates to director Roy Alexander Weise's creative choices in the play about a Black family in the contemporary American south. It is important to highlight her race because the majority of embedded critics in this study are white and as chapter 2 shows, the embedded critic's subjectivity is a key determinant of their

[59] In 2017, both Megan Vaughan and I worked as embedded critics for The Royal Court and Theatre503, respectively. These pieces of embedded criticism are considered in chapter 2's case study on Vaughan, and in chapter 5's examination of my own practice. In 2016, the only known embedded criticism work did not include rehearsal observation (see: Appendix A, p. 208).

[60] Given this thesis' context, the meaning of 'lived experience' is firstly drawn from rehearsal ethnography and its phenomenological roots. In a 2000 article, Gay McAuley says: "performers must be in the place rather than looking at it, theirs is a lived experience, and the power of performance as an expressive practice, for both performers and spectators, is that it produces more lived experience rather than images or artefacts" (p. 7). Here, McAuley suggests lived experience results from an individual's position within a specific time and location. This relates to Simone de Beauvoir's use of the term in *The Second Sex* (1949), where she considers women's subordinate position to men. This positioning, though more than the physical and temporal that McAuley uses, still incorporates space and time. In popular discourse, the phrase is widely used to validate a person's knowledge resulting from their identity in relation to others.

writing.[61] Wagaine draws attention to a particular moment in the production that she sees as a typical part of a Black person's skin care regimen. This is also informed by her work as a Black critic and producer:

> After bathing or showering, we as black people moisturise as part of our regular routine, but as Weise points out, it's a fact of our lives rarely seen on stage [...] It's something I'd not thought about before – so often, as a theatregoer there are aspects of my life I do not expect to see portrayed, and ashy legs is one of them – and is particularly interesting given the scene I was watching them rehearse some moments before. (no page)[62]

In "we as black people", Wagaine positions herself within a racial demographic and subsequently, someone who utilises what she sees as a racially-specific personal care routine. Additionally, Wagaine reveals information about the kinds of theatre she usually sees, how it typically does not share such "aspects of [her] life", and intimate insight into her personal care. Though Wagaine is British rather than American, she has lived experience of the particular, racialised norms within the play. The specific addressing of Black skincare offers a clear example of racial identity being foregrounded in embedded criticism. The highlighting of this specific knowledge demonstrates Wagaine's subjective connection to the creative processes she observes.

In contrast to Wagaine's blog, Jays and Mulholland are writing in a national newspaper, which is perceived as a publication of authority that focuses on disseminating news. Therefore, they adhere to recognisably journalistic paradigms. They minimise references to their selves and thus their subjective engagement with what they are seeing is less obvious in their writing. This demonstrates how embedded criticism style can adapt to publication requirements or lack thereof; when a critic is not given any particular content or style requirements, they tend to more readily draw on personal experience to convey their subjective relationship to the rehearsal. What emerges from embedded criticism in this period, despite the stylistic differences in the critics' approaches, is a sharing of processes that would otherwise only remain known to those in the space with a wider audience.

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[61] For more on race in theatre criticism, and how it can determine a critic's encounter with and evaluation of a performance, see my 2022 chapter "'There's Only So Much Work Our Imaginations Can Do': Emilia and London's Privileged Theatre Critics" in *Notelets of Filth: A Companion Reader to Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's Emilia*.

[62] Roy Weise, the production's director.

2019-2022: FORM AND CONTENT EXPAND EMBEDDED CRITICISM

An overt focus on subjectivity – including personal reflections and narratives, tastes, and preferences – is a consistent feature of later embedded criticism. This focus accompanies the practice gaining more momentum within the theatre industry, indicated by the significant increase in embedded criticism work from 2019 onwards (see: Appendix A, p. 208). An increase in regional embedded criticism in England, is matched by more embedded criticism in Wales, and, significantly, a growing number of Global Majority and minoritised embedded critics. Though the COVID-19 pandemic limited embedded criticism practice in 2020, it rebounded in 2021 due to remote projects such as The Royal Shakespeare Company's online open rehearsals for *Henry VI part I*, and the lifting of restrictions on work environments later that year. Access to online work in particular expanded criticism's material conditions, as it was possible to watch rehearsals and performances live without having to be in the same space as the actors.

Furthermore, in 2019, experimentation with style and form expanded and moved further away from the more journalistic styles and forms used previously. Issues relating to representation were regularly addressed, with writers continuing to foreground subjectivity. One notable example on representation includes Nicky Watson's two 2019 pieces on The Paper Birds' production *Ask Me Anything*. Watson focuses on how the show presents the experience of growing up and how childhood and identity are staged across characters of different ages. In her second piece, she shares her difficult teen years and relates this to the themes in the show:

> Being a teenager is so messy and awful and traumatic and melodramatic, and I don't know about you guys, but when I was fourteen or seventeen or nineteen I felt like no-one would ever ever ever understand or be able to help me. And as an adult, I feel like I wouldn't be able to help my teen self — she's so far away. I could probably explain things to her (like, you feel like this because you have OCD, or this boy is 500% not worth your time, or if you do some work instead of watching Hollyoaks reruns you can probably get into Oxford), but I know she wouldn't listen and anyway, isn't the point of life — and adolescence in particular — figuring those things out for yourself? (2019, no page)

The approach elucidates Watson's personal life; she is unrestrained about this difficult time in her life. This use of 'I' and personal experience – in particular, her vulnerability – exposes how proximity enables her to share how her personal history relates to the work and its themes, and draws attention to the relatability of her response. She also considers how the production's dramaturgy reflects her teenaged interests:

> I, for one, read dozens of books as a teenager which used the diary as a framing device to tell the story — usually a romance plot — of a year in the life of a teenage girl. Georgie's diaries are admirably mundane and truthful, but the format itself is not inherently more authentic than Kylie's sitcom. (2019, no page)

Watson uses her past and personal interests to situate the story and characters. Rather than masking these emotions and/or avoiding their inclusion altogether, she embraces these feelings and depicts them with subjective honesty by regularly using 'I'. She could have easily written something like, 'the coming-of-age theme is convincing and relatable', but instead she uses the first-person to demonstrate her subjective connection to the show. Her piece's highly personal content that discloses feelings of childhood vulnerability and informal tone is a further divergence from third-person norms of earlier embedded criticism. This is emblematic of this most recent phase of embedded criticism.

Watson, a queer white woman, also worked as a co-embedded critic with Shanae Chisolm, a Black woman, in 2019 on *The Niceties* at The Finborough Theatre, a play that reflects the positionalities of the writers. In their written piece of embedded criticism, the pair discuss the characters Janine (a gay white woman) and Zoe (a Black woman) and themes from the play: racism, representation, and power. Given that Watson and Chisolm mirror the characters' races and sexualities, they draw on their positionalities to directly speak on the racial and sexual dynamics in the play. Although they edited the conversation for "clarity and coherence" (2019, no page), as it was a documented conversation between colleagues they regularly utilised the first-person and discussed their personal thoughts on the play. Chisolm and Watson include little detail on the rehearsal process – their piece is more of an in-depth analysis of the play, but their approach has been informed by rehearsal conversations between the cast and creative team in rehearsals and the creative choices they observed. In terms of the piece's place in the landscape of embedded criticism, it

draws on proximity to the production to foreground Costa's ethos of dialogue by literally using dialogue as a form, to discuss the play.

Like Watson, Wales-based embedded critic Eva Marloes worked on multiple productions in 2019, firstly an adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, then a new performance piece *Robinson*, inspired by *Robinson Crusoe*.[63] Both were at Cardiff's Chapter Arts Centre, and both were directed by Mathilde Lopez. As most embedded critics do not work with the same artists or companies repeatedly or over a period of time beyond a single production, Marloes is an exception.[64] This shows the possibility of longer-term relationships between critics and artists, that both serve to dismantle the distance between them and allow the critic to potentially become a more integrated part of the creative team.[65]

Across Marloes' two pieces there is a clear focus on both design and spatial elements in the rehearsal process. This is evident in the opening of the *Les Miserables* piece describing the building, some of its music, and a summary of the show's impression on her:

> Up the ramps of steep metal stairs, in a room in the Loft, outside of the main building of Chaptert [sic] Arts Centre, the theatrical company August012 are rehearsing for their unique take on *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo. The music begins. It's a military tune. It's 1815, the battle of Waterloo [...] Then, at a stroke, it's 2016, in Cardiff, the night of the EU Referendum. The battle of Waterloo and the battle of Brexit come together through a meeting and clashing of sounds, words, music, and dance making for an immersive sensory experience. (2019, no page)

By describing how to access the space and its relationship to the main building, she takes herself – and consequently, her readers – on a journey into the rehearsal space, the rehearsal process, and the production's story. The rest of the article largely focuses on the director and choreographer's collaboration, creative choices and thoughts on Brexit. Her *Robinson* piece, on the other hand, has a far more

[63] This production is unrelated to the musical of the same name by Boublil and Shonburg. Though this thesis considers embedded criticism in England, I include Marloes' work in Cardiff to indicate that embedded criticism in the UK is not limited to England.
[64] See Appendix A.
[65] This is also evident in Costa's eight-year tenure with CG&Co; see chapter 4 and the conclusion for more consideration on this kind of working relationship and its consequences.

pronounced focus on the design, such as these extracts: "I sit down and I am given headphones. Every member of the audience will wear them. I hear the waves of the sea, the tweeting of birds, Caribbean music, and Bianca, played by Luciana Chapman, reading..." (2019, no page), "The stage, for the time being, consists of three tables stuck together lengthways cutting the space in two" (2019, no page), and "A big black box arrives. There's dough inside. Mathilde has fun taking it out of the box and playing with it" (2019, no page). Observations such as these are spread throughout the first half of the piece, whereas the rest focuses on the play's themes. This section also contains quotes from the director, and description of the play and rehearsal processes to contextualise the quotes. Giving a voice to the artists discloses creative choices and the thinking behind them; it also breaks up descriptions of the space's material conditions. To summarise, Marloes' content balances a discussion of the rehearsal processes with details about the rehearsal space and insight from the artists whilst using first-person and detailed descriptions of what she observes. As with many of the other pieces considered so far in this chapter, the first-person narrative blends details of the actors navigating the rehearsal with a discussion of the room's spatial elements; the result is a piece that knowingly seeks to share privileged information on the dynamics of the creative process.

Marloes' writing has some structural resemblance to journalism's feature articles: she alternates description of what she observes with direct quotes and insights from the artists. Her writing style is conversational, clear, and punchy. Using a compact length ranging from approximately 1200 to 1300 words, they give readers a glimpse of the rehearsals and leave them wanting more. In contrast, longer pieces such as Haydon's, and Lily Levinson's 2020 piece on *Something in Your Voice* by Emergency Chorus are approximately 1800 to over 3200 words and contain much more detail. Additionally, Levinson demonstrates how longer embedded criticism pieces can disseminate research that supported the show's devising process. For example, the first third of her article looks at some of the theories and histories of surveillance capitalism, cybernetics, and telecom development. She then connects them to the origins of the show's concept:

> Our lives – as individuals and as societies – are now fundamentally intertwined with digital communication technologies in a cybernetic system structured and controlled by vastly powerful capitalists, who use it to predict and manipulate our futures. We don't know how to feel safe in this system, and that has made

> us afraid of our own cyborgism. In *Something in Your Voice*, Emergency Chorus address themselves to these fears. (2020, no page)

These contextual parts of Levinson's embedded criticism, whilst initially not seeming to relate to the production, provide information on some of the research and inspiration for the show.[66] Levinson's article would not be out of place as a programme essay – although, as it is published on her blog, it can be accessed by a wider, non-paying readership and she is not limited to a word count. This allows her to move from context into description of the rehearsal and devising processes she observed, such as: "In a rehearsal room in Cambridge Junction, the company share their initial thoughts about what the show might look like with Zoe. Ben and Clara describe the world just pre-internet: the 1980s. Big grey suits, a row of cubicled offices, headsets and aerials, swivel chairs, the Cisco hold music" (2020, no page). She also includes some of the notes she made in the room, engages with another critic's review of *Portents*, shares links to other source materials, and moves in and out of rehearsal description and additional contextual information.[67] These are written in various forms and styles, such as prose, poetry, and rough notes, making the single piece of writing a stylistic collage. This differentiates the piece from writing considered so far, which largely adhered to a single style and form that resembles a newspaper article.[68] The piece indicates the embedded criticism is shifting even further away from theatre journalism's dominant tone and style, and is taking inspiration from other art forms.

Other types of embedded criticism were written in 2021. Several pieces were written after remote rehearsal room observations[69], and one piece was about a festival that

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[66] Though Levinson is not credited as a dramaturg and her embedded criticism gives no indication that she contributed research or feedback during the rehearsal process, this dissemination of research and context overlaps with some forms of dramaturgy practice, such as German dramaturgy, as detailed in chapter 4.

[67] Levinson notes that some of the design choices in *Something in Your Voice* are similar to those in *Portents*, "a show that shares a significant proportion of its creative team with *Something in Your Voice*" (2020, no page), so considers the review's critique of these elements in conjunction with her thoughts on the design.

[68] Exceptions include Chisolm and Wilkinson's co-written dialogue, and Orr's use of a range of forms and styles in his Dirty Market blog containing 27 embedded criticism pieces, but each individual piece of embedded criticism adheres to a single form and style.

[69] These include three embedded criticism pieces about the RSC's open rehearsal project, written by Peter Kirwan, Diana Miranda and Michael Billington. Notably, the RSC is the largest company in the corpus to have enabled embedded criticism, via remote video access to the rehearsal room. Though *The Guardian*'s previous publication of embedded criticism demonstrate editors value rehearsal room insight, commissioning the retired Billington, who is a widely accepted authority and expert within the theatre industry, to write this piece of embedded criticism further legitimises the practice.

did not include rehearsal observation.[70] There were two advertised job roles for embedded critics wherein the actual job responsibilities did not differ to those of a production dramaturg and no public-facing writing was generated.[71] This draws attention to scope for future research into types of embedded criticism that do not include rehearsal observation, and indicates embedded criticism is becoming more known within the industry.

Furthest away from many of the forms and styles considered in this chapter is choreographer and poet Oluwaseun Olayiwola's writing about PackPack Theatre's eco drag cabaret, *The Cabaret at the End of the World*. Olayiwola wrote his piece in verse, divided into 15 parts that he calls "improvisations" (2021, no page).[78] Each one links to the one before so there is a linear through-line, though the length of each improvisation varies. The first is the longest, and establishes the pandemic's dominance over the production. He then moves onto definitions of drag, before giving the reader insight into his experience of watching rehearsals for this drag show:[72]

> To watch rehearsals of drag performers
> is to be trapped in a three-tiered cake of suspension:
> Even with everyone in the room, half the cast shows up. (2021, no page)

Mirroring the image of the "three-tiered cake of suspension" in the three lines of this stanza, Olayiwola conveys the sense of there being multiple individuals within or portrayed by each performer. In terms of form, he uses the three-line stanza regularly, including in a section that he states is a duet, laid out on the page to indicate the two parts:

> I'll sing you a song for the dying mother earth.

[70] This was written by Louise Jones, about Compass Festival in Leeds.
[71] The Show Must Go Online appointed Fre Kwa Hawking for the production of *GALLATHEA*, and Youness Bouzinab was credited as the embedded critic/dramaturg for Foreign Affairs' production of *Where I Call Home*. Emails with the productions' respective producers confirmed that the embedded critic offered critical feedback in the rehearsal room but did not generate any writing beyond their own notes. Though the creative teams still use the term embedded criticism, this suggests that a lack of a clear definition for the practice results in conflation of embedded criticism with typical British production dramaturgy practice. I address the differences between British dramaturgy and embedded criticism in chapter 4.
[78] Improvisation is an established method of creating work in theatre, dance, and music that as a choreographer, Olayiwola will likely know. Whilst his embedded criticism writing does not otherwise explicitly reference improvisation, he could be referring to embedded criticism as an improvisational response to the rehearsal processes he observes.
[72] The second and third improvisations are assumed to be dictionary definitions of drag, but they are not referenced (2021, no page).

It's a duet:

People are suffering. People are dying.
Entire ecosystems are collapsing.
We are at the beginning of mass extinction.

Then on itself the tree falls and doesn't make a sound.
Then the water level rises and doesn't make a sound.
I climb into bed.

People are suffering. People are dying.
Entire ecosystems are collapsing.
We are at the beginning of mass extinction.
(no page)

In this example of the three-line stanza form, Olayiwola incorporates individual word repetition. This device is used across the improvisations, emphasising key words and ideas. Another example of this repetition in the opening stanza's emphasis on the extent of Covid's impact: "Covid dances everything into ruin, everything! / is what I would have said / before it became everything" (2021, no page). He also achieves emphasis through breaking the three-line stanza form. Single or double lines with line breaks in between them breaks up the rhythm and draws attention to individual lines:

It became increasingly clear the end was coming.
This was not the scary part.
It was How, how, how? that we couldn't be patient for.

In this case a contact trace closed the show. (2021, no page)

The last line standing alone emphasises the finality of the show's closing after an exciting build-up. Additionally, the shorter individual lines when used in contrast to the three-line stanzas suggest irregular rhythms of conversational speech. This, along with the duet that suggests two different voices, evokes the idea of dialogue that repeatedly emerges in embedded criticism in various forms, from Costa and Orr's project, to Mulholland's and Jays' articles in *The Guardian* that foreground quotes from the artists and creative teams, to Chisolm and Watkinson's dialogical piece of

embedded criticism. The choice of poetry as form situates this example more towards creative writing than journalism, and shows the potential for embedded criticism to further reject the paradigms of journalistic writing. Instead of conveying authority and objectivity, Olayiwola embraces emotive language to convey experience of watching rehearsals, and an overwhelming sense of anxiety resulting from Covid and ecological death.[73]

In contrast, one of the other pieces written in 2021 is far less focused on dialogue. Instead, the content resembles promotional material. Debbie Gilpin's article on the RSC production of *The Magician's Elephant* could be described as what is colloquially known in journalism as a 'puff piece'.[74] It mostly describes the show's story, setting, and design elements, and indicates she thinks the production is high quality. An example includes: "You won't just be getting the magic of theatre, and the wonder of skilled puppetry – you'll be getting actual magic as well" (2021, no page).

However, she gives readers some glimpses into the creation and rehearsal process through brief quotes from the creative team:

> In creating the show itself, Teitler and Harris worked closely together in a "pain-staking process" of composing & writing – they were working on the basis of a sung-through musical, so doing book and lyrics separately would not have been a particularly productive plan. "Each character has their own style", explained Teitler. (2021, no page)

This information on the creative processes is not generally shared with audiences outside of programme notes, though Gilpin hints that this open rehearsal was not a typical working rehearsal. In the extract above, it is evident that the creative team are demonstrating their processes by describing them to an audience of press, instead of rehearsing them 'normally'. Additionally, in mentioning "a demonstration of the elephant puppet", she suggests that this rehearsal is a demonstration for outsiders – or a performed rehearsal – rather than one focused on moving the production closer to completion. Her writing, though detailed, is like Hirst's 2013 piece: both primarily use description, and instead of analysis, they praise the productions. Gilpin's article is

[73] See chapter 3 for an analysis on subjectivity and objectivity in criticism.
[74] This is first-hand knowledge resulting from my professional experience as a theatre critic.

titled “Why Should You See The Magician’s Elephant?” and actively focuses on encouraging people to see the show.

In contrast, Diana Miranda's 2021 piece on *Pleading Stupidity* at Camden Fringe positions her within conversations about the rehearsal process: "We talked about collaboration a lot in rehearsal. (Well actually, a little.) After the rehearsal, Caleb said that the show wouldn’t have been as funny and clever without the cast’s input following their work in Oxford" (2021, no page). She also focuses on her reactions to watching the rehearsal, and conveys that as much as she engaged in conversations with the artists, she was not a part of their work: "I watched them laughing about how a scene went, teasing each other and apologising for missing cues. Mostly, I was captivated by how a comedy show is filled with humour in rehearsals, too" (2021, no page). She does not use exact quotes from the cast and creatives like some other embedded critics do, but still conveys a sense of dialogue with the artists and their processes. Paradoxically, she also positions herself as an observer outside of the creative team and draws on a position that is both insider and outsider to share information about the rehearsal process.

In June 2022, the year after her 2021 work on *Pleading Stupidity*, Diana Miranda also worked on two productions as an embedded critic.[75] The first of these was *Playing Latinx* at Camden People's Theatre, then *Ladyfriends* at multiple venues in Manchester.[76] Both pieces heavily discuss the rehearsal processes observed, though the *Playing Latinx* article is clearly more personal to her as a Mexican woman living in the UK – the show addresses Latinx stereotypes and immigrant experience of the UK. When first reflecting on her personal connection with the work, she breaks from the prose she usually writes in and shifts to a fragmented extract from her stream of conscious:

> And so, the stream of consciousness started.
> I’m Mexican, moved to London in 2019. I’m beholding a kaleidoscope of Latin imagery.
> A thought about stereotypes.
> Quick browser search.

[75] Also in 2022, she worked as an embedded critic for an online R&D.
[76] The production advertised for a paid embedded critic position on ArtsJobs and social media, though hired two embedded critics. Ultimately, one of the embedded critics was ill and unable to work on the show at all. This information was gained through my first-hand knowledge of Diana Miranda's work and publishing it on my site.

> A commonly held, but simplistic idea of a particular type of person or thing. (2022, no page)

Though this segment is brief, it stands out from the text around and reveals her relationship with the performance's theme. She then returns to prose, but comes back to her connection with British stereotypes of Latinx people and how they are used within the piece:

> I enjoy seeing those very stereotypes reflected back to me during *Playing Latinx*'s work session. The thing with stereotypes is that they do have a little truth in them, but they wash out the nuances and either remove or distort the context. Perhaps I find joy because those familiar signs are the only thing I have to hand after a period of COVID travel restrictions that kept me away from home. Or perhaps, more significantly, because they were covered with comical sarcasm, which kind of make it OK. (2022, no page)

Here Miranda shares information about her lived experience, her life, and how she relates to the work she sees from her position as a Mexican migrant. She also provides some insight into how she understands uses of stereotype in theatre and when she considers it acceptable. This reveals her values and tastes as a mainstream critic, which are less likely to be so clearly conveyed within a mainstream review. It shares characteristics of Wagaine's embedded criticism in that they both discuss specific parts of the production that represent aspects of their own lives as racial minorities, and position themselves outside assumptions of whiteness in theatre.

Her *Ladyfriends* piece, on the other hand, is far less personal and uses a prose style she maintains throughout. Miranda occasionally uses the first-person to indicate her personal connection with the work she observed, such as this section of her closing paragraph:

> As I walked the streets the afternoon after watching the rehearsal, I was over-sensitive to things that reminded me of puzzle pieces that bring the show together: the LGBTQ+ community, suffragettes 'symbols, and even the city's romance with live music. *Ladyfriends* opened my eyes to multiple readings in that sense, and I can't help but notice that I didn't see something that weaved all those themes together during my walks. (2022, no page)

However, the majority of the article focuses on the processes she observed. Though she also includes some description of the show's story and characters to convey their relationship, she uses this to contextualise her description of the exercises and discussions that were carried out, such as:

> The director uses improvisation to navigate the relationship between the protagonists. In this way, she discovers the beads that build up the script that she's writing parallel to the devising process. To ensure the improvs are distinct, she gives instructions on goals to achieve by the end of each one, or attitudes to tackle throughout. Afterwards, the performers discuss their discoveries about the characters and what they liked or disliked about what they made. (no page)

As well as introducing the characters and story before describing the rehearsal process, Miranda uses the idea of creating what she calls "(hi)stories" (2022, no page) as a thematic framework for her article given the play's story is based on the unconfirmed lesbian relationship between suffragettes Annie Kennie and Christabel Pankhurst (2022, no page). This framework, or 'angle' in journalism, gives her piece a focus similar to Jays' use of fictional depictions of rehearsals in pop culture (2015).

This latter period of embedded criticism, though disrupted by the pandemic, suggests that the practice is continually evolving. The critics who wrote about rehearsals used a range of styles and forms, including poetry, conversational dialogue, and journalistic prose. There was an increase in remote embedded criticism due to lockdown, and interest in productions telling stories about marginalised groups. More widely in theatre criticism, remote embedded criticism reflects mainstream criticism's reviewing of online work. The interest in representation, combined with foregrounding the embedded critic's identity, reflects wider conversations about representation, and who should/shouldn't write about work by, for, and about people whose identities fall outside of majority demographics. An example of this is Equity's 2020-2021 campaign against racist reviews (Hemley, 2020) and resultant backlash from writers in right-wing publications (Young 2021, Somerville 2021). Yet, despite the practice's continuing evolution, there are several commonalities with earlier embedded criticism – namely, the critic's subjectivity and their proximity to the artists and rehearsal process – determining the writing.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This analysis of embedded criticism argues there is a wide range of styles and forms used to document rehearsal processes. This width and breadth, particularly the more unusual examples such as Wilkinson and Chisolm's dialogue and Olayiwola's poetic response, reflect the flexibility of the practice. This allows embedded critics to respond to productions creatively and personally outside of the paradigms of journalistic theatre feature writing often found in newspapers, arts and culture websites, and blogs.

Despite style and form variations, analysing embedded criticism resulted in locating two consistent inclusions across this body of writing: the embedded critics' self in the rehearsal space and in relation to the artists and the work, and the foregrounding of the critic's subjective experience of the rehearsal process. These most commonly take the form of: use of the first-person, descriptions of observed processes that are only visible to those in the rehearsal space, quotes from the cast and/or creative team, and the embedded critic's personal responses to what they observe. Combined, this makes the critic visible within their writing, reduces distance between the critic and the creatives, and communicates the critic's closeness to the artists and their work. Embedded critics then use this proximity as a starting point to illuminate particular aspects of the rehearsal process.

Additionally, Costa and Orr's 2012 focus on dialogue as a guiding principle of embedded criticism can be seen regularly in the embedded criticism in this chapter. There are numerous documented conversations with artists, summaries of what was said and done in the rehearsal space, and direct quotes from those involved in making the show. Further, the embedded critic's response to the work is part of a wider public dialogue about a piece of theatre or performance.

In contrast, in mainstream criticism – particularly in newspapers – the first-person and inclusion of anything about the critic's self is discouraged and used minimally, if at all.[77] Instead, the critic's opinion is framed as fact and conveys a distanced, authoritative verdict on the quality of the production and its elements. An example of this is Matt Truman's *WhatsOnStage* review of *Gastronauts* from 2013, the same year he worked as an embedded critic at Ovalhouse. In his review, he uses the first-person

[77] This is supported by my experience writing for other theatre criticism publications such as *Fest Magazine*.

only once to clarify what he is talking about: "It's best when it leaves a bitter taste behind – and I'm not talking about the insects" (2013 no page). However, the first-person is not used when issuing a judgment about the best part of the production, and provides no real insight into Truman as an individual. By using "it's best" he conveys a sense of factual authority. Were he to say, "I think it is best", this would have foregrounded his subjective experience of the production and framed it as opinion – undermining his position of authority. He is not articulating an opinion bur rather professing a 'truth'.

This decade of embedded criticism evidences an evolving practice that responds to theatre's developments, such as its creative response to Brexit, as well as wider factors such as the pandemic, an interest in the representation of marginalised groups, and a continued curiosity about the processes that unfold in rehearsals and behind the scenes. Though this chapter has identified individual embedded critics do not work with individual artists or companies over sustained periods, it has found a growing practice with an increasingly broad remit, and productions of a range of sizes. It has also emphasised that embedded critics' proximity to artists and their work frequently results in the foregrounding of the writer's subjectivity, the rehearsal space, and creative processes.

Building on the findings in this chapter, the next chapter argues that the rehearsal space directly determines embedded criticism. Specifically, it evidences that the following aspects of the space influence the critic's writing: its dialogue with those within it, its privacy, and the space's palimpsestic nature. A case study on Megan Vaughan's embedded criticism at The Royal Court in 2017 supports this argument.

CHAPTER 2

THE CRITIC IN THE REHEARSAL SPACE: A DIALOGICAL ENCOUNTER WITH ARTISTS AND THEIR PROCESSES

INTRODUCTION

Kim Solga states that in the 1990s and 2000s, theatre and performance theory experienced a "spatial turn [that] made issues of space and place central to the investigation of meaning-making at the theatre" (2019, p. 1). One of the seminal texts resulting from this was Gay McAuley's 1999 monograph, *Space in Performance*. McAuley begins by asserting that, in the English language, theatre is "perhaps the only art form in which the name given to the place where the artistic event occurs […] is the same as that of the art form itself" (1999, p.1).[78] This inseparability of the building and the art form suggests a dialogical relationship between the theatre space and the artists and their work. She confirms this later in the book: "space is, of course, not an empty container but an active agent; it shapes what goes on within it, emits signals about it to the community at large, and is itself affected" (p. 41). McAuley's idea of space as an active agent is a starting point for my argument that the rehearsal space directly determines embedded criticism due to the embedded critic working in the rehearsal space.

In terms of embedded criticism, I posit that the rehearsal space directly and indirectly determines the critic's writing through the meaning the critic ascribes to the space, the connections between the artists and the space, and the critic's relationship with the space and others within it. In this chapter, I develop McAuley's idea by arguing that the contemporary rehearsal space directly determines embedded criticism due to three key aspects of the space that the embedded critic encounters. They are: its dialogical relationship with the rehearsal process and those working within it; privacy that typically results in excluding anyone outside of the production's cast and creative team; and that it is a palimpsest. To do this, I first overview relevant literature that establishes these features of the contemporary rehearsal space in England. Key scholars include Henri Lefebvre, Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender, and Cathy Turner. I then discuss case study findings from Megan Vaughan's embedded criticism practice that support this thinking. This examination into embedded criticism's relationship to

[78] This is reflected in the venue where this chapter's case study is conducted: The Site at The Royal Court in 2017 was both a space and a season of productions.

and with the rehearsal space and others within it develops on findings across chapter 1 wherein embedded critics routinely discuss the material conditions of the rehearsal space, their position in the space and in relation to others within it, and the artists' relationship to the space.

THE REHEARSAL ROOM AND LEFEBVRE'S SOCIAL SPACE

Crucial to the foundation of my argument is an overview of the rehearsal space, which is understood here in terms of Henri Lefebrevre's seminal text, *The Production of Space* (1974). Whilst it is possible to consider the labour politics in the rehearsal space and how they relate to embedded criticism, this chapter is instead concerned with how embedded criticism is determined by the relationship between the embedded critic, artists and their creative processes, and the rehearsal space. Specifically, I engage with the material conditions of the rehearsal space and its relationship to those within it.

Rehearsal rooms fall under what Lefebvre terms 'social space' (1974). He proposes that this social space, where humans can exist and interact, is not naturally occurring but actively produced by human labour within capitalism's market economy. The contemporary British rehearsal space is therefore a Lefebvrean social space due to the space being within a capitalist economy, and that those in the rehearsal space are working. In the context of this thesis, all processes that occur in the rehearsal space to create the 'world of the play/production' are considered human labour. Here the labour of the cast and creative team is referred to as 'work', or 'rehearsal processes'.[79]

Theatre scholar Alessandro Ferrone further supports this Lefebvrean positioning in his thesis on British neoliberal theatre. He concisely explains the complex relationship between British theatre[80] and neoliberal capitalism: "plays have [...] revealed themselves as products of the very market economy they critique, their production histories and formal innovations uncomfortably reproducing the strategies and

[79] In her 2012 article "Art and Labour: on consumption, laziness and less work", Bojana Kunst examines the production of art in an economy that assigns art a monetary value. She refutes this premise by arguing that art is produced by artists' labour. She also calls this work, which is "closely connected to time and space" (p. 120), and "at the forefront in both communist and capitalist societies" (p. 121). In the context of the theatre production process, Theron Schmidt is informed by Marx when he identifies a specific type of work: "a labourer is doing when no one is watching apart from other workers, as when being paid an hourly wage to build a stage-set, or manage a project, or deliver some outcome to meet a deadline" (2013, p. 15).

[80] This refers to individual theatre productions, the content of plays that may or may not have yet been produced, and the wider industry's financial workings.

practices of neoliberal labour markets" (2018, p. 2).[81] In other words, the content of theatre performances can critique neoliberal capitalism. Despite this, rehearsal and production processes use capitalist financial models.

Many other key references on space and spatial theory in recent theatre and performance research also directly and implicitly draw on Lefebvre. These scholars include but are not limited to Jen Harvie (2005), Michael McKinnie (ed. 2007), Jane Rendell (2009), Stanton B Garner (1994) and David Wiles (2003). Other scholars who take a Lefebvrean approach to space in theatre and performance include Ian Maxwell (1999), Matthew Reason (2006) and Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006). Therefore, I start from the position of the rehearsal space as a social space that is produced by labour of those within it, and consider how three of the space's qualities inform embedded criticism.

THE DIALOGICAL REHEARSAL SPACE

Theatre requires an audience; this suggests there is a dialogical relationship between the space and its inhabitants. Firstly, McAuley confirms this need for an audience: theatre is "something that takes place 'live'...that...requires the simultaneous presence of both performer and spectator" (p. 3). Solga positions the encounter between performer and audience as a dialogue by calling this space and its associated relationships the 'contact zone', which she describes as, "a space of world-making that aims to bridge divided spaces" (p. 13). The idea of bridging two distinct spaces suggests a dialogue exists between them. This relationship can also extend to include anyone who accesses theatre buildings beyond their performances. In writing about the impact of young people having access to theatres, Natalie Hart writes that, "having access to a space can provide someone with memories, which in turn gives them the chance to ascribe meaning to it" (2015, p. 117). McAuley takes this further by arguing that everything involved in theatre at all is connected to each other: "in the theatre nothing exists in isolation" (McAuley 2009, p. 16). This means that the space, artists and audiences are in dialogue with each other when in the theatre space.

McAuley confirms that this also applies to the rehearsal space. This space determines the rehearsal process within it and ultimately, the public performance: "it is likely to

[81] Though he specifically refers to plays, his description can also include performance types that are not plays but can be categorised as theatre and performance, such as physical theatre and performance art.

imprint aspects of its own reality on both the fictional world that has been created and even on the physical reality of the set that will ultimately replace the mark-up so carefully indicated within its confines by means of gaffer tape on the floor and bits and pieces of furniture" (p. 74). She goes on to state, "the physical features of the rehearsal space, even the most apparently neutral space, can be picked up and used by the actors in the creative process" (p. 27). It follows that anyone working in the rehearsal space is in a dialogical relationship with the space, and the space determines their work.

THE EMBEDDED CRITIC IN THE DIALOGICAL REHEARSAL SPACE

This dialogical relationship includes the embedded critic, though there are key differences between the embedded critic's and the mainstream critic's relationship with the spaces where they work. These differences are due to the material conditions of the rehearsal space. There is no designated space for an audience, so the non-performing creative team members – such as the director, designers, and stage manager – are in the same space as the embedded critic. There are likely few to no other people observing the rehearsals who are not part of the production, and it is unlikely that stage lighting and sound are in place. This lack of performance conditions means the cast, creative team, and embedded critic can easily see and interact with each other, since they are sharing the same space.

There is a distinction between the embedded critic, and the cast and creative team, however. The embedded critic is usually not part of the creative team and has the aim of writing about what they observe instead of contributing to the rehearsal process. Further, as evidenced in the introduction, across chapter 1, and in Vaughan's work at The Royal Court, the majority of embedded critics observe rehearsals for a short period of time so only see part of the making process. Maddy Costa is the single known exception within the time frame researched in this thesis in that she was part of the company, contributed dramaturgically and worked with CG&Co for eight years.

In contrast, the mainstream critic has little to no interaction with the artists, is typically part of a larger audience, and encounters the final product as it is experienced by the larger audience. Set, lighting design, and distinct performance and audience spaces physically separate the artists from the audience. Though the mainstream critic can be in dialogue with the theatre space as per Solga's 'contact zone' (2019), there is no exposure to the rehearsal process or the rehearsal space. This allows the embedded

critic to write about the rehearsal space, the processes within it, and talk with the artists and the creative team about their work.

THE PRIVATE REHEARSAL SPACE

Rehearsal spaces are typically only open to those directly involved in making the performance, but the embedded critic is granted access to these private spaces so they can write about rehearsal processes. This access is not often given to outsiders, however. This is confirmed by McAuley's discussion of the rehearsal space in *Space in Performance* and her subsequent book *Not Magic But Work* (2012), where she recognises how hard it is for people to observe rehearsals: "it is notoriously difficult for outsiders to gain access to rehearsals in the professional theatre and even more difficult to get permission to document or record the production process" (1999, pp.12-13). This is likely why embedded criticism is not more common, and why embedded critics' access to the private rehearsal space is significant.

One reason for this privacy is to foster a feeling of safety in the performers so that they are encouraged to use a process of exploration and experimentation.[82] In their introduction to *Making Contemporary Theatre*, Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender reinforce this: privacy is "generally to help their companies feel safe to experiment rather than to protect any particular trade secrets" (2010, p. 1). In an article on gender dynamics in the rehearsal space and the relationship between the director and actor, Sahar Assaf also identifies that the private rehearsal space is crucial for creating a sense of safety to experiment (2008). With this in mind, it is not surprising that the embedded critic could be perceived as a threat to this sense of safety in the rehearsal space.

This need for safety and privacy can specifically extend to rehearsing sexual acts and moments of emotional vulnerability, which an invited embedded critic may not be welcome to observe. For example, academic and rehearsal ethnographer Kate Rossmanith, when researching intimate sexual acts in the rehearsal room, was asked "not to attend those rehearsals involving a sexually explicit scene between two men. I was welcome as they read through the scene, but not when it was to be physically negotiated" (2008, no page). I experienced similar as an embedded critic on Theatre503's 2017 production *In Event of Moone Disaster* when director Lisa Spirling

[82] Safety is specific to individual shows and artists, so a detailed consideration of what safety is falls outside the scope of this chapter's argument.

asked everyone apart from one actor to leave the room when she rehearsed part of a scene about her character's abortion. This allows the performer to explore intimate, explicit and/or vulnerable moments, understand the creative team's choices and sensibilities employed during these scenes, and avoid potential voyeurism from anyone who is not directly part of these parts of the performance.

It is important to note the risk that this entails, however. Though extending rehearsal space privacy intends to protect the performer(s), it increases the risk of abuse, perpetuated or enabled by the director, during the rehearsal of sexually explicit material if everyone else is asked to leave the room. There is increasing awareness of how this extended privacy enables abuse (Costa, 2022), but in the decade examined in this thesis there is a lack of embedded criticism that discusses rehearsing this kind of material. This limits what the embedded critic observes and writes about; they cannot discuss the delicate work needed to rehearse explicit and/or vulnerable moments. This keeps this part of the rehearsal process invisible by upholding the paradigm of rehearsal room privacy, and the embedded critic cannot share these delicate and careful processes with readers. Further, the embedded critic cannot consider whether what they observe is good practice, and disseminate examples of safe practice.[83]

THE EMBEDDED CRITIC IN THE PRIVATE REHEARSAL SPACE

The embedded critic's presence in the rehearsal space works towards dismantling the space's privacy, but this can generate tension. One of these reasons is the term itself. In discussing embedded criticism as a term, Fricker notes that artists' associate the word 'criticism' with the act of judging a show's quality (2016). This indicates there may be people in the cast or creative team who are uncomfortable with the idea of an observer in the space, particularly if the observer is a critic and they associate criticism with judgment and/or analysing the quality of the work.[84]

[83] For further consideration of this, please see the conclusion's (pp. 145-146) discussion of the 2022 reflections by Maddy Costa on CG's rehearsal room abuse of young male actors, that occurred when Costa was absent from rehearsals.

[84] This was the case when I worked as an embedded critic on *Tinted* in 2019, which I discuss in chapter 5. Director Elske Waite was initially uncomfortable with the idea of a critic in the room, so she requested to meet me and learn about embedded criticism before she granted me permission to access rehearsals. See chapter 5 (pp. 132-133) where I discuss this in the context of my own practice.

Additionally, the embedded critic's position outside of the creative team challenges the expectation of rehearsal space privacy that the cast and creatives may have.[85] As well as the embedded critic not contributing to the rehearsal process due to their position as outsider, it is evident from the embedded criticism pieces analysed in chapter 1 that the practice does not contribute to the making of the performance. Instead, their writing is generated for a readership outside the rehearsal room, giving readers insight into work and processes that are otherwise – and usually – private. In short, the embedded critic makes the private, public, and writes about rehearsal processes that often require a sense of safety so that the actors are free to experiment.

A process of mutual trust mitigates this tension. Artists and companies trust the embedded critic to understand that the work is in progress, creative decisions are still being made, and that the processes observed are not the same as a performance. The embedded critic will trust the artist or company to provide access to the rehearsal space and the work within it, so that they can write about it. This is essentially an informal contract, benefitted by the critic's lack of judgment (Fricker, 2016). This mutual trust is inherently dialogical, and does not merely inform the embedded critic's encounter in the rehearsal space – it completely enables it to occur.

This trust is particularly important when the embedded critic is not given a brief or constraints as to what they can or cannot write. In the five times I have worked as an embedded critic, only once was I given any sort of content constraint or limitation. This was for the revival of *Tinted* at Vault Festival 2019, where I was asked to focus on the director's process instead of the actor due to the actor's young age and student status. In the interview for this chapter's case study, Vaughan shared that she was told she could write whatever she wanted, though was not permitted to write about one of the pieces at all (Vaughan, 2021). Limitations can support the sense of artist safety and overall trust between artists and embedded critics, whilst still enabling the embedded critic to observe private rehearsal processes.

THE REHEARSAL SPACE AS PALIMPSEST

A further feature that informs the dialogical relationship between the space, those within it and their processes, and the work being made, is the palimpsestic quality of

[85] The only known exception to this is Maddy Costa, in her work with CG&Co.

the rehearsal space. Cathy Turner argues that theatre space is a palimpsest of layers, with each layer created by someone who has worked there. She says of a performance space: "each occupation […] of space offers a reinterpretation of it, even a rewriting. Thus, space is often envisaged as an aggregation of layered writings" (2004, p. 373). Other scholars on space such as John Lutterbie, Henri Lefebvre and Alan Read think similarly. Lefevbre states that space has remnants of past "associations and connections" (1974, p. 37), and that space is not singular, but a "multitude of spaces, each one piled upon, or perhaps contained within, the next: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, global. Not to mention nature's (physical) space, the space of (energy) flows, and so on" (1974, p. 8). Lutterbie, drawing on Lefebvre's idea that space is produced, thinks that: "produced space is not, however, a fixed form" (2001, pp. 124-5), which applies to the accumulation of spatial layers over time. In his 1993 monograph, Alan Read argues against Peter Brook's assertion that Brook can transform any empty space into a theatre, by positing that there is no such thing as an empty space. Instead, "the empty space must be rethought as a populated place. To start from a premise that imagines a space into which an actor enters is to endorse a clearing before an occupation by theatre" (1993, p. 17).

Though this literature addresses the performance space, it also applies to the rehearsal space. Turner's notion of space as a palimpsest particularly resonates with rehearsal spaces, and this chapter's case study. This is demonstrated by her expansion of what is considered a 'theatre space' through her work on site-specific theatre, theatre's relationship to architecture and how artists and space interact outside of traditional theatre buildings. She opens her 2004 article "Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-specific Performance" by stating that "space is produced not only by architects, urban planners, cartographers, and so on, but by the ways in which it is reconstituted or transformed by 'the practice of everyday life', the experiences and actions of subjects moving through it" (p. 373). Therefore, the rehearsal space continually changes as people use it, and those in the space can see evidence of its past occupants.

Rehearsal spaces' material conditions contribute to its position as a palimpsest. As discussed in the introduction (see p. 22), for-hire rehearsal spaces are commonly used in theatre and performance productions in England, especially in London. When one artist or company finishes working in a for-hire rehearsal space, another artist or company uses it. The artist or company only has access to the rehearsal space for as

long as they hired it. This regular change of who has use of a rehearsal space results in small physical and material changes to the space over time. These changes, left by those who previously used and currently use the space, show its layers and how it perpetually changes.

This is particularly evident in the many cheaper, for-hire spaces that are not always in good condition – this is informed by my experience in England, which McAuley confirms to also be the case in Sydney (1999, p. 71). Even well-maintained, for-hire spaces evidence their previous use, however: scuffed floors, tape marks, faded walls and smudged windows are some signs that many artists have used the same room for months or years previously. They result from some common temporary measures that alter the rehearsal space, including tape to indicate the stage space, major pieces of scenery, and actors' positions; costume rails, tables and chairs; and large sheets of paper with design concepts, notes and other imagery relevant to the production attached to the walls. At the end of the rehearsal period they will all be cleared away, yet they can leave physical marks on the space that an embedded critic of a future production can see. These material remains correspond with Turner's idea of rewriting the space and that the rehearsal space is not fixed or singular (2004).

THE EMBEDDED CRITIC IN THE PALIMPSESTIC REHEARSAL SPACE

These aspects of the palimpsestic rehearsal space, particularly material remains and layers of the changing space, shape the embedded critic's encounter in and with the rehearsal space. This is evident in my embedded criticism piece for Theatre503's 2017 production *In Event of Moone Disaster*, where my first two paragraphs of the piece describe the set, props and costume that the building owner stores in the rehearsal space, which do not belong to Theatre503 and are not part of the production (2017, no page).[86] I did this to 'set the scene' for readers so they could picture the space and some of its contents. The Theatre503 cast and creatives had to adjust their work around these items. Therefore, the dialogical relationship between the embedded critic and the rehearsal space is impacted by these traces of past rehearsals, and current spatial choices by the cast and creative team. This serves as documentation of not just the rehearsal process, but the rehearsal space as it is in that moment.

[86] See chapter 5 (pp. 125-128) for extracts of this embedded criticism work.

Additionally, the embedded critic is well-positioned to reveal the layers of the rehearsal space and the actors' processes that produce them. This is because the rehearsal space becomes both the theatre space and the fictional space(s) wherein the play or performance is set. This is particularly the case when there are few or no set elements yet in use, and/or the actors draw on their performance skills to establish the play's setting whilst in role. For example, the play *Passion Fruit,* on which I worked as an embedded critic in 2021,[87] is set in various locations around London, such as the main character's childhood home, a house party, and a nightclub. Rehearsals were held in a studio at ALRA in advance of the run at The Glory in September of 2021. Therefore, the actors and director simultaneously worked in a space that was the studio, a representation of the stage space at The Glory, and the multiple locations where the play's story takes place. This is evident in my second embedded criticism piece that focuses on the process of character development. As the actors develop their characters and situate them in different times and locations, I describe how they are guided through a series of movement exercises and improvisations that work towards clearly communicating scenes' settings (2021, no page). Essentially, the actors produce fictional spaces through their performances, which is conveyed in my embedded criticism. My embedded criticism draws attention to the actors' processes used to create these spaces.

Therefore, the embedded critic responds to these spatial layers by writing about them and rehearsal processes directly or indirectly. These many layers that constitute the rehearsal space, from both past and current rehearsal periods and those of the current one, form part of the dialogical encounter that the embedded critic has with the rehearsal space.

CASE STUDY: MEGAN VAUGHAN'S EMBEDDED CRITICISM

This case study of Megan Vaughan's embedded criticism practice and writing further demonstrates how the rehearsal space and the embedded critic's encounter with the artists and their processes determines embedded criticism writing. It shows how the dialogical encounter with the private, palimpsestic rehearsal space and artists' processes distinguishes embedded criticism from mainstream criticism.

[87] See chapter 5 (pp. 137-141) for an analysis of my practice and work on this production.

Vaughan considers herself a former theatre blogger, though for the purposes of this thesis wherein mainstream theatre criticism is defined as writing about or responding to a public performance, she will be referred to as a theatre critic.[88] Additionally, she is doing a PhD on theatre criticism, and is widely considered a pivotal figure in theatre criticism and blogging. In her job as an arts administrator, Vaughan has occasionally watched 'sharings' of work-in-progress and dress rehearsals, though in these instances she was not a part of the creative team making the performance or invited to provide feedback on the work (2021).[89] She is, however, not commonly in the rehearsal space in this capacity. In her position as a theatre critic, she had only previously attended public performances (2021) and so had not had access to the rehearsal space in this role prior to her work at The Royal Court. This unfamiliarity with rehearsal processes is evident within her first embedded criticism piece: “A rehearsal room is a strange place to be when you’re more accustomed to its results. It’s so easy to erase the making from your frame around the work” (2017).

These factors work in conjunction with constraints on Vaughan's time during this embedded criticism work. She explains:

> I can't remember what I was paid for it […] but it absolutely wasn't enough for me to spend all day, every day in a rehearsal room. So, I basically said [to The Royal Court staff coordinating the commission], ‘look, for what you're offering here, I can spend a half-day session in the rehearsal room, and write something, every week’ […] I had to reschedule working hours in order to be in the space. (2021)

Balancing her job with the theatre's requirement that her embedded criticism is published to coincide with each respective production's opening, Vaughan had minimal time to write each of her articles (2021). Though most other embedded critics also have other work or studies that limit their time in rehearsals, it is likely Vaughan had a tight deadline because she was paid – the only time I was given a deadline for embedded criticism was the paid writing I did for Theatre503. For Vaughan, this compressed time in the rehearsal space and the need to write to a quick deadline was a significant determinant of her writing:

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[88] For further reading on critic/blogger self-identification and defining theatre blogging, see Vaughan's monograph *Theatre Blogging: The Emergence of a Critical Culture* (2020).
[89] Sharings are typically open to a small, invited audience composed of other artists and theatre industry workers for the purpose of providing feedback on the work-in-progress, and are invited by the creative team. Tickets are not sold and the general public is not invited.

> Generally speaking, with this kind of an opportunity, I'm just looking for one thing, just one little nugget that I can latch a few 100 words to […] Time management-wise and work-wise […] I was generally rushing everything. So it was like, just find the little thing that sparks something that means you'll get it in on time. (2021)

In other words, this minimal time to reflect on her encounter meant that Vaughan had to quickly use initial ideas and impressions in her embedded criticism rather than spending more time deeply analysing and reflecting on her observations, and more carefully choosing what she writes. This will have resulted in rapidly-curated and instinctively responsive writing. This is valuable because it is possible to identify the rehearsal processes' most impactful aspects, and it conveys the fleeting encounter she had with each production. These aspects of Vaughan's embedded criticism make her an excellent candidate for this case study, as initial impressions of the space and her encounter with and in it are more likely to be identified within her embedded criticism.

THE SITE

The Site diverged from rehearsal space norms in several ways. Firstly, it was both the rehearsal and performance space, and is typically occupied by Transport for London (TfL) apart from this hire by The Royal Court. This meant that much of the set and design elements were in place when Vaughan observed the first production's rehearsal. Instead of seeing representations of the design concept as sketches, plans or a model box illustrating what the design would look like in the theatre, her encounter included much of the design in situ.

Since the design elements were in place when Vaughan observed rehearsals, The Site as a space diverged from an aesthetic culturally understood as 'neutral'.[90] This perceived neutrality is often present in for-hire spaces. It includes plain, undecorated walls and flooring, usually in white and beige colours. This allows for the artist and company to introduce set and design elements during the rehearsal process, to not be

[90] Regardless of perceptions of rehearsal space neutrality, McAuley still claims that the rehearsal space influences performance choices (1999).

confused or distracted by other decor that is not a part of the production, and to make the space lighter.[91]

As a season, The Site also diverted from common production hierarchies. The five playwrights selected to create work for The Site were chosen by a designer, and created their work "in response to [designer] Chloe Lamford's provocation" (The Royal Court, 2017). Usually, the theatre's artistic director, with support from any internal programming and literary team members, would commission or select playwrights, with the designer then usually answering to the director. In the case of The Site, the designer determined the set and design, the creative vision of the season's programme and its individual plays, rather than the designer developing their designs to meet a director and/or writer's vision as described in the previous paragraph. All five shows were directed by Lucy Morrison.[92] Vaughan emphasised the design-led programme as a key departure from The Royal Court's typical, writer-led, way of working:

> it was a series of five different shows that were going to be put on in an unusual-for-The Royal Court way. It felt very standard from where I was coming from, but for them I understand it was a bit of a departure.[93] And the idea that the creative director of the project was a designer rather than a […] writer or director. (2021)

Vaughan's commissioning, also something atypical of this theatre, further reinforces The Site's shift away from rehearsal and production norms. In short, it is clear that the processes she observed were not unusual to her, despite the theatre framing them as such for their audiences since these ways of working were outside the theatre's norms.

THE SITE AS A SPACE OF DIALOGUE

Throughout Vaughan's four embedded criticism pieces, she directly draws on the space, which reflects her dialogical relationship with it. Her first piece, written after a

[91] These commonly consist of small set pieces and props, costume, and floor tape to mark the edges of the performance area, entrances and exits, and larger elements of the set.
[92] Morrison is likely to have been selected by either Lamford or The Royal Court for the project.
[93] This refers to her work and critical practice in live art and performance art, as mentioned in the methodology section of the introduction.

half-day in rehearsals for *Lights Out* by Stacey Gregg, is a particularly strong example of this. She begins with the space's material conditions:

> Let's get some things out of the way before we start. First, the colour: The Site is blue. Like, really blue. It is bluer than both the sky and the sea, no matter where you go in the world, no matter which beach resorts you visit and no matter which exclusive travel agencies you book with; this blue is bluer. It is bluer than Facebook, waaaaaay bluer than Twitter, bluer than Thatcher and bluer than Smurfette. It's bluer than Leicester City, bluer than Stamford Bridge. Picasso ain't got nothing on this blue. Yves Klein? His blue was homeopathic compared to this blue […] And because it's carpeted and spongey (the walls are like grids of erect foam nipples – you can poke 'em and they spring right back), it does this weird thing to the light too: it *clings.* (2017, no page)[94]

Given that Vaughan was permitted to write how and what she chose and had no content restrictions (2021), it is immediately clear that Lamford's design and the rehearsal space played a role in determining both her encounter and embedded criticism content. The distinct departure from the 'neutral' rehearsal room aesthetics was so notable to Vaughan that she spent about half of her first piece describing the space. The language she used had a visceral, conversational quality that evokes in-yer-face theatre.[102] The large amount of her piece dedicated to the rehearsal space particularly evidences how a space determines the content of an embedded criticism piece, with a particular focus on the dialogical relationship between the rehearsal space and those within it.

Vaughan also uses this dialogue with the rehearsal space, and what she associates with the colour, as an impetus to consider wider ideas around politicians' performance, politics as performance, and performativity by referring to a recent political event:

> More specifically, I'm thinking about those pictures from the 2015 Tory party conference, in which George Osborne and Theresa May and Michael Gove all adopted that ridiculous guitar hero power stance […] Someone had clearly told

[94] Vaughan often uses slang, swearing and colloquial speech to engage readers.
[102] Vaughan likely did not choose to model these embedded criticism pieces on the in-yer-face style of playwriting; when she wrote for her now-defunct blog *Synonyms for Churlish* she used the same style of writing.

> them to do it. And, suddenly, the theatre of all that politicking was right there on the surface. (2017)

This critique of the Tory party initially seems only linked by Vaughan's stream of consciousness response to the space's colour. Later in the piece however, when she describes the play's premise, it is clear she is making a broader thematic link between the space and the concept of performance and rehearsing: "It was like sitting in on a rehearsal before the characters had been fully drawn, before the status games were complete" (2017, no page), and,

> In this blue space, like a screen awaiting its CGI monsters, actors rehearse being actors rehearsing. Today, Stacey and Director Lucy create an extra metatheatrical layer: they steer the actors who in turn improvise the rehearsal of the behaviour which will then form scenes in a brand new play. When they also turn in my direction to explain some context, or plot point, or salubrious political gossip […] I realise that it's not the complexity of the plot and character decisions that makes my head spin, but how they know when to stop including things. (2017, no page)[103]

Initially it seems these are disparate ideas linked only by the colour blue. Vaughan's analysis, however, proceeds to put them in dialogue with each other through the broader idea that we are often performing for others, and that the self each of us depicts publicly is, or can be, rehearsed.

Her dialogical encounter with the space's colour catalysed this chain of associations with history, politics and cultural references. The space allows for this because as per McAuley, nothing in theatre is isolated (1999), including the colour of the space. It also demonstrates the dialogical nature of the encounter as argued by Damian Martin, particularly in regards to how the "choreography of attention" produces meaning for the observer (2016, p. 219); in this case, Vaughan responds to the space's colour by forming connections between it and the Tory party, the play's story, and the concept

[103] The play's premise summary in full is: "In *LIGHTS OUT*, Stacey Gregg is writing the opposite to Edison's story: it's a switch-off. Ten years from now, accelerated automisation has removed huge sections of the current workforce from employment. Whole factories operate without any human workers, so do without any source of light at all. Meanwhile, government-mandated skills coaching remoulds the population to maximise investment potential. Characters practice being their future selves, ready for future jobs, future speeches, future opportunities. They hope for a chance to perform for money" (2017).

of rehearsing and performance. This results in her reflecting on the public performance delivered by both actors and political figures delivering speeches at a party conference, the processes and choices that lead them to their performances, and the wider cultural context that determines the rehearsal process she observes.

The *Lights Out* piece also shows that Vaughan is in a dialogical relationship with the rehearsal processes within the space. She conveys the experience of an outsider observing a rehearsal process by describing how the performance is gradually completed within the space, while also describing its incompletion at the time:

> That period of trying things out, of writing and designing and building things and focusing lights – it all kinda becomes this singular, theoretical programme note in your mind. Like, you *know* the show hasn't just appeared in its finished form, but imagining the specifics of its journey provides too many possibilities for you to comprehend. Visiting rehearsals at The Site, I'm almost panicked by the potential of it all. Literally how is it ever possible to make a decision about anything? How can they tell what's good, what's working? (2017, no page)

Vaughan also seems to grapple with understanding some of the reasoning behind the creative choices being made. Her lack of understanding is likely because she is outside the creative team's process and she only saw a small part of the rehearsals. This highlights her dialogical relationship with what she did see, and conveys a sense of the creative decision making that is part of the rehearsal process.

Dialogue with the rehearsal process and space is also evident in how Vaughan returns to the colour blue later in the piece. She builds on her association of blue with the Tory party that she made in the first paragraph by stating the space was "bluer than Thatcher" (2017, no page). She loops back to her connection of the space with the Tory party, but expands on her thinking in paragraph four:

> This is what I'm thinking about as I watch the cast of *LIGHTS OUT* workshop a scene. More specifically, I'm thinking about those pictures from the 2015 Tory party conference, in which George Osborne and Theresa May and Michael Gove all adopted that ridiculous guitar hero power stance. (2017, no page)

This structure, of returning to an initial idea in order to develop it, is similar to performers repeating sections of the performance in rehearsal. During this process, actors and the creative team explore individual moments many times to experiment with and refine creative choices. Vaughan's return to the space's colour also suggests how actors move in and out of character during rehearsals. This is shown in this extract previously discussed (see: p. 76) that describes the metatheatrical moment of actors improvising scenes about rehearsing. Essentially, whether it was a conscious decision or not, the form of the piece Vaughan used reflects the form of the rehearsal process and gives readers a sense of the exploration that occurs in rehearsals. This reflection is a dialogical response to what she observed, that she then communicates to readers through the piece's structure.

Further, Vaughan includes a brief mention of conversations – literal dialogue – that occur between the performers and the creative team during the rehearsals: "When they also turn in my direction to explain some context, or plot point, or salubrious political gossip, it's as if they momentarily reverse the gif and suck me into the scene too" (2017, no page).[95] As well as emphasising her physical proximity to artists, she conveys a sense of being included in the rehearsal process rather than 'just' watching it. Including Vaughan in discussion, even if it is to explain or justify the work she observes, collapses the critic-artist hierarchy and destabilises her position as outsider. Though she is observing rather than contributing towards making the show, dialogue with the artists about the work induces a feeling that she is part of the production.

Vaughan's writing on *Lights Out* is an example of how the dialogical relationship impacts embedded criticism in several ways. The space directly determined much of the piece's content, the processes she observed informed her writing and her emotional state whilst watching rehearsals, and speaking directly with the artists gave her the sense of being part of the production instead of a distanced observer. Combined, this confirms that everything in the rehearsal space is connected, and the embedded critic is uniquely impacted by the dialogical relationship with the space as an observer who is not part of the creative team, but documents rehearsal processes. This impacts the wider culture of criticism by modelling a way of dismantling distance between critics and artists, which is one of Costa's original aims for her embedded criticism (2011).

[95] Having observed rehearsals over many years, I have concluded that it is common practice for those in the room to discuss the artists' own production of meaning as they work, such as their own cultural references and interpretations of the work.

THE SITE AS A PRIVATE SPACE

Vaughan's final piece, on rehearsals for EV Crowe's *The Unknown* as well as The Site as an entire season, illustrates how the rehearsal space's privacy informs embedded criticism. She reflects on the season as a whole, discoveries she made about rehearsal processes, and shares some of the production team's thinking behind the season. As these processes are typically only visible to those involved in making the show, Vaughan is in a privileged position that allows her to illuminate private rehearsal and production processes to readers.

Vaughan used this privilege to provide wider context to The Site to audiences and her readers. She does this by considering it as a whole made of separate, component productions programmed by Lamford. Towards the end of the piece, she reflects on The Site as both a venue and a programmed season:

> Now that we're nearly at the end of The Site's programme, it's possible to reflect on it as a whole. But, really, it has always been whole. Developed by Chloe Lamford as 'an art project' – neither mini-season, nor curatorial theme – it has existed within boundaries: not to restrict, but to provide freedom through safety […] Its 'wholeness' is fundamental. (2017, no page)

Vaughan provides this context by drawing attention to the parameters that constrain the project. Within this section, she uses language that reflects the paradigms of rehearsal room privacy, and how this privacy supports safety and freedom to experiment, as established by Assaf (2008), and Harvie and Lavender (2010). Though she is not referring to the private rehearsal space specifically, it functions similarly to the boundaries of Lamford's project in that it gives those in the space a sense of safety. By drawing attention to these boundaries and the spacial qualities of the project after observing otherwise-private processes, Vaughan recognises the norms of privacy but opens up the rehearsal space and its creative process to those outside it.

In the subsequent paragraph, Vaughan draws attention to The Site's separation from The Royal Court's main building, which further highlights the boundaries that determine a space's privacy. She does this by considering The Site in spacial terms, as well as temporally:

> That wholeness manifest [sic] spacially, in that it was a singular room, separate and apart from the main theatre building; in terms of time, in that it was built to be temporary and will all be pulled down next week; but conceptually too. [Of] The principles of The Site […] only two of the ten covered the physical specifications of the performance space, while the other eight governed the form of the makers' relationships: with the room; with the audience; with each other. (2017, no page)

Specifically, she acknowledges the temporary nature of the space and each of its productions, which corresponds to Lefebvre's idea of space produced by human labour – The Site was deliberately produced to last for a finite period of time. The season's principles addressing relationships between the artists, the space, and audiences also draws attention to the boundaries between artists and audiences, and that much of the production process is invisible because of these boundaries that delineate the private rehearsal space.

Vaughan addresses how rehearsal space privacy typically masks the labour that actors, writers and directors carry out in rehearsals. The final paragraphs provide an overview of discoveries she made about these artists' work in rehearsals. It is also clear that she does not often see rehearsals and that she is writing for a general readership who do not work in theatre:

> Spending time in rehearsals, as actors go again and again, each time reaching into the psychological centre of a character that they've only just met, has shown me the coalface of acting, the hard labour, the vulnerability, the tireless bloody graft of it […]
>
> Secondly, directing is alchemy…it was a suggestion here, a question there, and just knowing when to take a break and have a chat. This shouldn't give the impression that it is anywhere even approaching simple. The opposite: it is a constantly evolving act of diplomacy […]
>
> I've also learnt more about writing. For me, as a sort-of-critic inhabiting a sort-of-practice, blindly feeling my way between obtainable opportunities, this project has been another lurch forward within a perpetual stumble, but it turns out playwriting – however collaborative – is also that. Being completely honest

> for a moment, I think I have previously thought of playwrights as laying the foundations for something else. (2017, no page)

By sharing her observations she demystifies this typically private work, which evokes parallels to McAuley's title *Not Magic But Work* (2012) – though most people have limited understanding of what occurs in rehearsals, productions are realised through work, craft and skill. Vaughan wants to credit them for the hard work that those outside the rehearsal room do not see.

Reflecting on her embedded criticism when I interviewed her in 2021, Vaughan recognises a point of tension between her experience as an embedded critic, and her typical practice as a mainstream critic. She expresses a belief that her ability to critique rehearsal processes was limited by being in the private rehearsal space. This was due to the space being the artists' workplace, and the production being in-progress:

> I don't believe it is possible to be in those [rehearsal] environments without developing Stockholm Syndrome. And I don't have enough faith in my own practice, to not go easier than I might ordinarily – and bearing in mind I was somebody who generally only wrote about stuff she liked anyway […] I was still able to be critical, I think. And it was very hard to do that when, you know, when you've been welcomed into somebody's work environment. (2021)

This consideration of her embedded criticism also demonstrates how being commissioned to write about rehearsal processes alters the typical relationship between the mainstream critic and artist. The critic must negotiate changes to critical processes they typically employ as a mainstream critic when they are in the private rehearsal space. This is to uphold the artist's trust in the critic to not judge their work when it is still being made. Also of note, Vaughan assumes criticism requires a distance from rehearsal processes in order for the critic to 'be critical', and that critics typically do not 'go easy' on the work they see. This shows how embedded criticism's processes shift away from mainstream criticism due to the critic seeing processes that are typically invisible.

The Site's privacy therefore informs Vaughan's criticism in multiple ways. These firstly include providing wider context to the space and the season by giving insight into the thinking behind the project. She also considers the physical boundaries between The

Site and the theatre's main building, and between audiences and the artists. These boundaries play a role in ensuring the rehearsal processes' privacy. Finally, by disclosing her discoveries of the labour that goes into creative work, she shares private processes to audiences and underscores that theatre is made with high levels of skill. This is particularly valuable to audience members and readers who have no experience of a rehearsal environment, and serves to educate them on creative processes.

THE SITE AS A PALIMPSEST

Vaughan's second piece, on Deborah Pearson's *It's All Made Up,* emphasises how the rehearsal space as a palimpsest influences embedded criticism. The rehearsal space's layers – including the fictional worlds of the production – are evident in her opening paragraph:

> There are three goldfish in *It's All Made Up* by Deborah Pearson. For now, they are played by a jug, a vase and a bowl. They're like mediators for the other characters; this is a chance to be the fish they always wanted to be. 'How is your goldfish feeling right now?' 'What would your goldfish like to say to my goldfish? (2017)

Though Vaughan uses this paragraph to establish the article's through-line – fish reproduction as a metaphor for playwriting and rehearsing – she shares that objects are being used as stand-ins for the real goldfish that will be used in the performance. This exposes two layers of the rehearsal space: the 'real' space where the goldfish are represented by objects, and the fictional world of a play where there are real goldfish. Vaughan occupies a third layer, as someone who is neither in the world of the play, nor the creative team making decisions that builds the world of the play, yet she encounters both of the other layers and is able to write about them.

The Site is also palimpsestic in Turner's sense: it changes as people go about their work within it. This is evident when, after several humorous, jokey paragraphs about fish reproduction, Vaughan arrives at the point of her metaphor: "But there are fish, played today by the jug, the vase, and the bowl. You see, within the environment of The Site – a birthing pool, a breeding ground – there are adaptations, evolutions, metamorphoses. I guess a rehearsal process is a spawning of sorts" (2017, no page). The Site does not do these things on its own, but the people within it make it 'a

birthing pool, a breeding ground' by making the production. This work transforms the space and builds the multiple layers within it.

Vaughan is a friend of this show's writer, Deborah Pearson, so her relationship with the work she observed, and her physical position in the space, differed from the other productions. This is a further example of the space as a palimpsest in that Vaughan's position in the space differed in this rehearsal:

> The Debbie [Deborah Pearson] piece was different because I know Debbie well, she and I are friends, and also [I] didn't get what she was doing. So I had […] slightly more confidence to talk to Debbie about her work […] she and I [were] sitting side by side. (2021)

This friendship was not overtly conveyed in Vaughan's embedded criticism, but because of the rehearsal space's palimpsest, she had multiple positions in the room – her physical position, and her social one. These shaped her writing. She sat next to Pearson because they are friends, which positioned her in the space as if she was part of the creative team rather than 'just' observing the rehearsal process from a more separate and distanced perspective. Further, feeling comfortable enough to ask Pearson about her play and processes will have given Vaughan additional ideas that she could draw on when it came to write. This was particularly beneficial given that Vaughan did not understand the piece when she watched it in rehearsals (2021).

Vaughan also addressed the multiple spaces in which a play exists, and how the spaces change with the work and people within it:

> This is how I like to think of The Site's relationship to *It's All Made Up*: a fleshy ideas-womb, where characters and interactions develop gradually, first in Deborah's head, and then in the mouths and actions of a developing family. It's completely different to last week, where Stacey Gregg had created improvisation prompts for the *Lights Out* performers. That was more like observing a shoal of fish moving together, with hidden, intuitive markers alerting one another to the direction of food, or safety, or danger. (2017, no page)

This is an example of two Lefebvrean ideas that address the space as a palimpsest: a space's 'associations and connections' and a space containing 'a multiple of spaces'

(1974). The metaphor of the rehearsal space as a womb where productions gradually form, and the relationship between a mother and her unborn child, indicate how the space and the artists' dialogical relationship produces multiple spaces within the space, and how the space has multiple functions. Both of Lefebvre's ideas are evident in Vaughan drawing attention to The Site as a season causing The Site as a space to change with each production. Additionally, Vaughan's 'associations and connections' shift every time she is in The Site. This example of embedded criticism takes the shape of comparing the different rehearsal processes of *It's All Made Up* and *Lights Out*.

The Site's palimpsestic qualities therefore directly influence Vaughan's writing. To summarise, this is particularly evident during the rehearsal process where multiple layers of the space are not just visible, but being gradually produced over the course of the rehearsal period. It is also apparent in how Vaughan's movements and positions change according to others in the space. Finally, the multiple purposes of the space are also included – a rehearsal room is not just a container where people work, but the space actively supports the work and creative processes within it. This exposure to the multiple spaces within the rehearsal space draws critics' attention to the processes that create them.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This chapter argued that the contemporary rehearsal space has three key features that determine embedded criticism output: dialogue, privacy and palimpsest. Though these aspects interact with each other, they each play a distinct role in shaping an embedded critic's writing.

Vaughan demonstrated this on numerous occasions in her embedded criticism. Clear descriptions of the space and the rehearsal process are not just present, but are a key part of the pieces' content. They are accompanied by her considerations and contextualisation of the rehearsal process and themes of each of the productions. This shows how the embedded critic is in dialogue with the space, artists and rehearsal processes within it. The dialogue can take multiple forms, from actual conversation between people, to more abstract means of influence such as the embedded critic drawing on what they observe to make wider cultural associations. These varying kinds of dialogue result in explicit and implicit information about the physical and material qualities of the rehearsal space as well as the artists and their rehearsal

processes. This is valuable because these aspects of rehearsals are typically inaccessible to anyone outside of a production's cast and creative team.

This leads to privacy, another aspect of the rehearsal space that informs embedded criticism. In Vaughan's final piece, she shares aspects of rehearsal processes that she found surprising. She shares this with a wide readership, many of whom will also not be familiar with rehearsal spaces and the processes within them. This goes some way in illuminating the work that is otherwise kept private. This work – combined with description of the space – also exposes how the multiple layers of the palimpsestic rehearsal room operate. This is particularly evident in how the space changes over The Site's season, and how Vaughan's processes alter according to her personal relationships with the people in the rehearsal space.

Combined, these aspects of the rehearsal space, and the processes within it, significantly determine what the embedded critic writes about, and shares with readers. This consequently differentiates embedded criticism from mainstream criticism because the mainstream critic does not have access to the rehearsal space or rehearsal processes.

The next chapter builds on the critic's encounter in and with the rehearsal space by considering the role of subjectivity in mainstream criticism and embedded criticism. It argues that close proximity to the artists and their rehearsal processes results in the foregrounding of subjectivity in embedded criticism output. Whilst mainstream criticism is determined by subjectivity, it is usually not clearly articulated as it is in embedded criticism.

CHAPTER 3

AVA WONG DAVIES: SUBJECTIVITY AT THE FORE

INTRODUCTION

Further developing the argument that embedded criticism is a distinct mode of theatre criticism, this chapter argues that one of embedded criticism's distinct features is its foregrounding of the critic's subjectivity. In this context, it is useful to consider subjectivity in relation to its widely perceived opposite, objectivity. This is due to the perception that mainstream critics are or can be objective, which I show in the next section.

In her 2013 article, Michelle MacArthur's use of Paul Leonard's 1988 articulation of critical objectivity is helpful in understanding the meaning of subjectivity in theatre criticism: "[theatre critics] operate on the assumption that they can assess and interpret the work they see as it is—that is, objectively, without themselves being in the sway of any particular ideology" (1988, p. 4). Therefore, objectivity is a separation of the self from the critic's analysis and evaluation of a show's quality. Subjectivity then refers to the critic's self, specifically how the self encounters a performance. Subjective criticism therefore lacks a separation of the critic's self from their critique.

This chapter will show how the embedded critic's subjectivity is clearly foregrounded in their writing. I do this by firstly arguing that subjectivity is not solely the domain of the embedded critic. Though the first section establishes wider perceptions of mainstream theatre criticism's objectivity, the second section evidences that the mainstream critic writes from subjectivity. This is, however, concealed using a distinctive journalistic writing style that effaces the critic's positionality in favour of conveying a sense of authority and expertise.[96] This style also positions the critic's opinion as fact and situates mainstream criticism within journalism. In larger outlets such as national newspapers, star ratings that imply an objective determination – or judgment – of the quality of a production further uphold perceptions of objectivity. These first two sections of the chapter critique thinking of mainstream criticism as objective by drawing on literature from 1981 onwards, as this time frame establishes and overlaps this thesis' timeframe. Examples of this impression of objectivity in

[96] See the introduction (p. 10) and chapter 1 (pp. 35-39) for details of this style.

mainstream criticism are drawn from Ava Wong Davies' reviews for *The Independent*, since she is this chapter's case study. This allows for a direct comparison across her body of work.

I then analyse Wong Davies' embedded criticism practice. In this case study, I include large extracts of her two embedded criticism pieces to demonstrate the expansiveness of her subjectivity and how it is an intrinsic part of her writing. Firstly, I consider how she writes about her relationship to theatre and her own practice, then address how she presents the rehearsal process. Following this I look at her reflections on the public performances, and how her attitudes about the use of subjectivity have changed since working as an embedded critic. Ultimately, I identify multiple ways Wong Davies includes the self in her writing: use of the first-person, and considering their encounter through the lens of their self. This self includes lived and personal experiences, upbringing and childhood, wider knowledge, and her own life more broadly. This inclusion of subjectivity contrasts mainstream criticism, where the writer's self is not openly articulated. I also problematise objectivity and subjectivity as binary opposites in theatre criticism through their differing uses in embedded and mainstream criticism. This further differentiates embedded criticism output from mainstream theatre criticism output.

CRITICISM, OBJECTIVITY AND SCHOLARSHIP

The theatre industry is more widely acknowledging that objectivity within mainstream theatre criticism practice does not exist or is impossible to fully achieve (Taskin 2016, Haydon 2011, Wilkinson 2011). Some critics, for example, are open about their belief that there is no such thing as an objective critic. Lyn Gardner states:

> The old idea that a review is a tablet of stone written by an objective reviewer has been shown up for the nonsense it is with the arrival of a much broader range of voices who acknowledge that theatre reviewing is rooted in personal response. There may be reviewers that over time you start to trust over others, but every reviewer brings their own particular baggage into the theatre with them, whether that is political affiliations, sexual orientations, or personal aesthetic (2019, no page).

Yet, there remains a pervasive attitude that the mainstream theatre critic is able to approach a theatre or performance production objectively. An example of this from my

professional experience occurred during my 2020-2021 advisory work with Equity for their recent publication, *On writing about race: Equity's recommendations for theatre critics* (2021). In an early conversation with the guidelines' other writers, Ian Manborde and Mark Fisher, Manborde suggested that we recommend critics approach their practice objectively. This was later changed to advising critics they "should guard against unconscious bias" (2021, no page). Manborde's suggestion that critics can be objective corresponds with MacArthur's definition of objectivity: that the critic can set aside any experiences, background, ideology, or personal preference to evaluate the quality of a performance (2013).

This thinking is reflected in scholarship. The dominance of a particular form of journalistic, mainstream criticism reinforces the perception that theatre criticism can be objective. Though the scholarship in this section problematises and critiques what is perceived as objectivity in theatre criticism, it still assumes objectivity is not just possible, but the norm in mainstream criticism practice.

An earlier example of this assumption that mainstream theatre criticism is or can be objective is Michael Anderson's 1981 article on criticism of what he calls 'alternative theatre'.[97] In "This, That and the Other: The Critic and the Alternative Theatre", Anderson identifies a lack of press coverage for alternative theatre productions, and argues that the mainstream theatre critic is fundamentally unsuitable for reviewing alternative theatre and performance. His argument begins from the premise that mainstream criticism issues an "objective, evaluative judgment" (p. 445) of a production. Later describing this as "aloof detachment" (p. 454), it seems he expects critics to assess the quality of a show from a distant perspective. He links this to their role in the "codifying of public taste which eventually places a work in its cultural context" (p. 448), particularly if they write for one of the "London papers" (p. 448). Despite Anderson's article being over 40 years old, today's mainstream critics still evaluate a production's quality, issue a judgment on that quality and consequently its value.

Anderson determines this kind of criticism is unsuitable for alternative theatre. He argues the critic must approach alternative theatre differently due to its use of "new

[97] Though Anderson avoids defining exactly what he means by 'alternative theatre', he explains this is another term for what is also called, "fringe, experimental or avant-garde" (p. 446). Therefore, he is presumably using the term to encompass a wide range of genres, styles and forms, particularly in small venues.

forms" (p. 452) and its other differences from "conventional" (p. 451) theatre.[98] He proposes a new model of criticism that he thinks is better suited – the participant observer from social anthropology (p. 453).[99] This would require the critic to "share for a time the physical and intellectual rigours of another world in order to acquire that direct experience on which judgment and analysis can eventually be based" (p. 454). Anderson warns that this means the critic's "objectivity is certainly likely to suffer" (p. 454), however. He also proposes that journalism may be less suited to this model; an academic methodology would be needed during fieldwork. Essentially, he argues for a rehearsal ethnography that is subjective and evaluates an alternative theatre production's quality. Though his model of criticism would need further consideration, his recognition that not all critics are suited to reviewing alternative theatre reflects Gardner's more recent articulation of critics approaching work with their 'own particular baggage'.

More recent scholarship shows Anderson's valuing of objectivity – and its perception within the hierarchy of publications – still exists in theatre criticism to an extent. In "Subjectivity, Identity, and Intersectionality in Arts Journalism: An Interview with Diep Tran" (2019), co-writers Maegan Clearwood and Hannah L. Jones describe theatre criticism as "a traditionally objective form" (p. 45). They ultimately position journalist and editor Diep Tran as an exception within the field due to what they call "personal narrative" (p. 45) in her theatre criticism. The pair describe her practice as "subjective, identity-focused" (p. 45), which they found to be "unique in a genre of writing traditionally expected to be neutral" (p. 45). 'Neutral' suggests a belief in critical objectivity wherein the self can be excluded from criticism as per MacArthur's explanation. Like Anderson, Clearwood and Jones assume subjectivity is unusual within a broadly objective criticism, though Clearwood and Jones recognise that it has value for readers.

Tran herself acknowledges objectivity is standard, when considering her review of *Miss Saigon* in which she drew on her Vietnamese family's history: "doing an objective analysis of whether or not this musical is accurate would not be interesting, so I brought my own family's history onto it" (p. 52). Tran seems to think that a personal review would be more compelling reading. Further, by including her family's story and

[98] Two of these differences he identifies are use of agitprop and highly-sexualised content (p. 451).
[99] See the introduction (pp. 20-21) for more on the role of the participant/observer in rehearsal studies.

relating it to the musical's story, she challenges the show's focus on the US's imperialist role in the Vietnam War – thus using subjectivity to provide historical and political commentary.

Yet in this article, Clearwood and Jones contradict their acknowledged possibility of objectivity when arguing that the objective theatre critic is a "myth [...] intertwined with white supremacy and patriarchy" (p. 45). This argument is supported by *The Feminist Spectator in Action*, where Jill Dolan writes that, in theatre criticism, "many continue to buy into the myth of objectivity, insisting that to be balanced and fair, a critic needs to erase his or her predilections and prejudices and come to their spectating experiences as a 'universalist.' I don't believe objectivity is possible or desirable; instead, it simply masks the biases that any critic, of necessity, brings to his or her work" (2013, p. 5). In the UK, this 'myth of objectivity' upholds a white, British, middle-class male view. Therefore, there is thinking that objectivity in criticism either does not exist at all, or a review cannot be totally objective, because the critic cannot separate from their self.

Further, Clearwood, Jones and Tran's thinking suggests that objectivity and subjectivity are not necessarily binary opposites, but there is a spectrum between subjectivity and objectivity. Within critical theory, the Hegelian school of thought considers that objectivity is measurable and scientific, all "possible knowledge" as a whole is objective, and the relation between subject and object is "absolute" (Habermas, 1971). Habermas disagrees: the "relation between reality and the cognitive process" (p. 12) of an individual cannot be absolute, and the concept of "possible knowledge" is inherently subjective (p. 11). A theatre critic that is not wholly objective therefore aligns with Habermas' thinking. If, as Clearwood, Jones and Dolan think, objectivity is a myth, then theatre criticism cannot be purely objective and separate from the critic's self despite any thinking that objectivity and subjectivity are on opposition.

This spectrum model is potentially challenged by pervasive thinking in journalism and theatre criticism – and related scholarship – that objectivity is the expected norm. John C Merrill's 1985 paper on ethics in journalism begins: "Conventional wisdom among journalists is that objectivity in reporting is paramount and that the newsperson who is objective has fulfilled the highest and most responsible expectation possible" (p. 391). The rest of the introduction indicates he considers journalism and reporting as the same, and objectivity is essential to ethical journalism. Mark Fisher suggests this is a valid approach to criticism: the first subsection of his chapter on critical styles

is 'critic as reporter' (2015) and focuses on writing about a production's ‘facts’. To this end, the mainstream critic could be considered as a reporter who is expected to ‘objectively’ treat reviewing as objective reporting on an event.

This model of objective reporting can be incorporated into models that focus on the critic’s subjectivity. In theatre critic and academic Jonathan Marshall’s 2005 article, "Inciting Reflection: A Short Manifesto for an Introduction to the Discursive Reviewing of the Arts", he takes the opposite approach to Anderson in that he believes criticism is currently too subjective, and not objective enough. His introduction states subjectivity has long been a part of criticism: "Since the Romantic period, the appreciation of aesthetics has been tied to the subjectivity of the individual and to the degree an art work appeals to the individual’s sense of self: to one’s personal refinement, emotions and so on" (no page). Marshall proposes a model for theatre criticism that will encourage continuing discourse about the artwork, and encourages the critic to focus on the work rather than themselves:

> As a critic viewing an art work, it is, therefore, always my first goal to attempt to identify what it is that the artist appears to be trying to do in mounting a production [...] Works of art should, therefore, be judged according to their own manifest terms, and, so, according to the values which appear to govern the relationships which organise materials within the art work. They should also, however, be viewed from a position definitively outside the work, placing the overall concept and its implicit, underlying theses within the context of other precedents, cultural values, political considerations and so on. (no page)

Though Marshall advocates for the critic considering what the production team wants to achieve rather than what the critic thinks they should want to achieve, this does not completely remove the critic's self because the self informs their interpretation of the work. He also wants the critic to consider the context in which the work is being made but be completely outside of the work. Whilst the critic can be removed from the work, the critic is also often part of the wider social, political and cultural context in which the work is being made. This means there is a limited potential for the critic to remove themselves when considering this wider context due to the critic’s positionality.

Marshall’s desire for the critic to focus their evaluation on the work rather than themselves evokes the common concept of 'objective distance’. It also correlates with the critic as an expert authority who can contextualise the production and situate it

within the wider theatre landscape. Though he does state "This does not, however, make the opinions of the critic 'correct'" (no page), he seems to argue for an informed and educated criticism that is removed from a concentration on the critic's subjective perspective.[100]

Patrick Lonergan seems to conceive of objectivity and subjectivity similarly. In considering journalistic theatre criticism and editorial practices, and how they can be applied to academic publications, he defines theatre criticism as "analysing the work both objectively (insofar as possible)" (2015, p. 73), with a footnote further explaining how he understands objectivity:

> Jill Dolan's warning that objectivity is a 'myth' that 'masks the biases that any critic [...] brings to his or her work'. By 'objectivity', I am thinking of what Noel Carroll refers to as aesthetic and critical principles that are 'inter-subjectively verifiable': that is, ideas that are rooted in subjective experience but which are capable of being widely agreed upon. Put simply, I mean that the reviewer has an obligation to imagine how a work will be received by 'readers in general', and thus to guard against the kinds of bias Dolan highlights. (p. 73)

Crucially, Lonergan factors the wider audience and the critic's readership into his approach to criticism. Rather than the critic thinking of their analysis as reflecting their individual opinion, he argues for the critic to imagine how the work would be received by others. Whilst this does further position the critic's self away from their analysis, there is a problem – the critic must then make assumptions about who a show's audience is and what they will think of it. This is also influenced by the critic's self, especially in terms of how they see themselves in relation to who they imagine as readers and audience members. This can be particularly difficult to navigate if the critic is reviewing a show that has a target audience of which the critic is not a part.[101]

OBJECTIVITY IN MAINSTREAM CRITICISM

[100] Correctness implies there is a level of universal truth about the quality of art work, and what constitutes good art is widely understood.

[101] In my review of *White Pearl* at The Royal Court in 2019, I navigate these issues as a white critic reviewing a play set in Singapore, about East Asian women working in the skin whitening industry. As I was writing for my own publication and could therefore write what I wanted, I first relied on the first-person to directly acknowledge that the play is not 'for' me and I am not a part of the groups for which the primary themes are relevant. I then analysed elements of the play that are less related to its themes – dialogue, humour and the performances (2019, no page).

Differing approaches to objectivity are also evident in critics. In 2018, critic and editor Alice Saville writes of an unnamed critic arguing, "seriously and unremittingly in the face of all disagreement, that the reviews on his review site were objective" (2018, no page) at an event about theatre criticism during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. In 2011, critic Natasha Tripney considered not whether a critic is objective, but if they should be (2011, no page); this suggests she thinks that critical objectivity is possible. In a blog post on *Plays to See*, Michael Billington advocates for theatre criticism that is both subjective and objective, implying that mainstream criticism can be objective to some extent by including 'facts' about the production:

> I'd also suggest any review needs to mix the subjective and the objective. One cannot say too often that a review is based on a deeply personal response: one that has to be recorded with total, uncensored honesty. "Speak what you feel, not what you ought to say," as someone points out in King Lear. But there's also room for the statement of certain objective facts: the title, the venue, the actors' names, for instance, need to be got right. (2015, no page)

Like academic literature on criticism, these critics' ideas reflect a landscape that is diverse in thought. It also indicates the persistent thinking that critics, in their common role of consumer guide who advise readers whether or not a show is good and worth seeing, are expected to be objective. If this belief were to collapse, the critic's position of authority and expertise would be under threat given that anyone can have an opinion. This is particularly the case for critics in larger publications, with larger readerships, since publications' reputations inform how their critics are perceived.

Critics reinforce their objectivity and uphold their authority through their writing. MacArthur identifies the style and tone that conceals subjectivity as well as ignores the personal experience of watching a show, creating a veneer of objectivity: "critics' reviews [...] tend to assume a distanced, objective voice that ignores the embodied and emotional experience of engaging with a performance" (p. 181). Again we see the pairing of distance and objectivity. It is also notable that this critical distance is framed as the critic being removed from their body. Christopher Balme also observes this phenomenon:

> As a rule, the theatre critic is a disembodied being, whose legitimation lies in his or her existence via the mediated word. The critic communicates with the

> non-critics via the printed, or, on occasion, the spoken word, in the case of radio reviews; and the latter are very often not spoken by the author but by professional speakers or actors. Theatre criticism is, in other words, largely a disembodied business. (2015, no page)

Mainstream theatre criticism's use of judgment and avoidance of the first-person evidences the style and tone MacArthur references. This is seen in Ava Wong Davies' reviews in *The Independent*, a national newspaper. In her 2020 review of *The Dumb Waiter* at Hampstead Theatre, Wong Davies disguises her subjective interpretation: "*The Dumb Waiter* is fittingly, uncannily claustrophobic", and "Hamilton's direction is meticulous and measured" (2020, no page). These are interpretive statements another audience member could disagree with; for example, it is possible that someone does not find the staging's claustrophobia appropriate to the play. She uses 'is' and excludes 'I', or other forms of active voice and first-person. Whilst this is, on one level, an issue of semantics, on another it disguises her subjective opinion as fact. If she used 'I think' or 'I believe' this would communicate that the review is 'merely' her opinion. It would also contradict publication policy to include star ratings indicating the quality of the production, which supports the assumption there is a definitive metric of quality used to determine how good or bad a given production is. Whilst a metric of this sort could be understood to vary across publications, any metric used is still determined by the critic's subjective response to the work.

Yet, there is scholarship that resists the idea that a critic applies quality metrics subjectively. Marshall refers to "formal aesthetic criteria" used to "identify greatness" (2005, no page). An example of these 'formal aesthetic criteria' adopted widely within a critical culture is found in Fricker and Singleton's article on Irish criticism: "Reviewers functioning in an environment in which plays are almost always driven by coherent plotting and character development, and in which directing is understood as the subservient delivery of the author's intention, are inclined to see deviations from realism as mistakes or faults" (2004, p. 569). This indicates theatrical norms within a specific culture or society that are understood to be 'good', and what is 'good' being shaped by a specific culture or society, rather than broader, universal or globally-held truths as to what constitutes good theatre. However, David K Rod argues that even this evaluation and resulting judgment is subjective: "Evaluative assertions appear often to be statements about the objective nature of a performance; but on closer examination, they invariably turn out to be manifestations of the critic's subjective responses to the performance" (1988 p. 95).

Stating opinions as facts can convey the authority of the individual critic's judgment and frame it as 'universal'. In her review of *The Last 5 Years* at Southwark Playhouse (2020), Wong Davies considers Oli Higginson's portrayal of Jamie: "It's to his ample credit that the character comes across as likable as he does" (2020, no page). Likability is a matter of personal preference, and shaped by subjective taste and values, rather than any objective reality separate from the self. Whilst Wong Davies' evaluation of Higginson as likable is valid, it is no more authoritative or correct than anyone else's assessment of his likability, despite her wording communicating that Higginson's likability is fact. Though she removed the 'I' from this quote about Higginson, Wong Davies' writing has the same meaning as, 'It's to his ample credit that I find the character as likable as he is'.

We see a similar masking of opinion in her review of *Six*, a globally-successful musical that first ran at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017, then quickly transferred to London, New York, and Sydney. Wong Davies' first paragraph of her review states that the cast recording is the second most popular streamed theatre soundtrack in the world (no page), which establishes the show's popularity.[102] However, Wong Davies gives the production three stars and criticises its feminism: "There is an undeniable shallowness that is difficult to shake off – if anything, the high sheen and glossy production values emphasise how slight (if well-intentioned) the show's politics are" (no page). As this is a mainstream theatre review, she does not have the space to provide evidenced arguments justifying the musical's feminist failings. Though another audience member could find it revelatory, her choice of phrasing conceals this possibility by suggesting her opinion and understanding of shallowness is fact rather than opinion. It is, of course, possible for the critic to use the first-person but parts of the review adhere to ideas of objectivity, as per Billington's thinking that a review is a combination of the objective and subjective. Yet what is important to my broader argument is that the parts of a mainstream review that are subjective are framed as if they were objective.

To summarise, in both scholarship and the theatre criticism field, there is a pervasive understanding of mainstream theatre criticism as completely objective or objective to some extent. Thinking varies as to the value of objectivity in mainstream criticism and whether it is even possible for a critic to be objective at all. Yet, analysis of reviews

[102] Wong Davies did not cite evidence for this, though this was reported by *WhatsOnStage* by Daniel Perks in early 2020 (no page).

indicates that style and tone mask the critic's individual analysis and interpretation of a performance, instead conveying it as objective fact.

The next section, however, presents scholarship that rejects the notion of objectivity in theatre criticism, and/or ideas that a critic encounters a performance from a position of distance that is separate from the self. This is also the case in scholarship on visual art; for example, visual art critic and scholar Gavin Butt, in the introduction to his 2005 edited volume *After Criticism*, states: "Critical distance has come to look increasingly prone to collapse in recent years, as critics in their various professional guises have abandoned their claims to speak from any form of [...] 'authoritative' viewpoint" (p. 3). The White Pube, a visual arts criticism platform that rejects the dominant paradigms of art criticism, consider objectivity and its related authority as a costume, slippery and a mode of address (no date, no page).

Whilst this does not make objectivity not 'real', the idea that it is something to put on over the critical self implies a lack of authenticity and a covering or masking of the subjective/self. The scholarship considered ranges from actively arguing that mainstream theatre criticism is subjective rather than objective, to taking it as a given that criticism cannot be objective despite the language it uses to conceal subjectivity.

CRITICISM AND SUBJECTIVITY

Critics and scholars address subjectivity in criticism in multiple ways. These include, for example, how critics draw on or are influenced by their personal preferences, taste, and background and education. These aspects of subjectivity variously inform the analysis and evaluation of a performance, and ideas of critical distance. In turn, this analysis and evaluation informs the judgment on the quality of the piece and its component production elements like design, performances, and direction.

SUBJECTIVITY AND JUDGMENT

In her 2020 article "Theatre Criticism and its Recipients", Miruna Runcan argues that much of the judgment in mainstream criticism results from the critic's personal taste. She also suggests that judgments that are not influenced by taste are more valid or authoritative:

> judgments such as "this is theatre and this is not theatre" or "this is a very valuable performance and this is an insignificant performance" are [...] relatively legitimate, but only as far as the arguments are closely related to and contextually determined with a certain precision, outside of the (unfortunately usual) circle of judgments based on taste. (p. 29)

Whilst Runcan emphasises taste's subjectivity and its role in judgment, she sees judgments as valid only when they are contextualised. This kind of judgment could be understood as objective since they are about the work rather than the critic's self, as per Marshall's desire for a less subjective criticism. As the examples Duncan gives are informed by factors such as the critic's background, education, and theatregoing history, they cannot be considered totally removed from the critic's subjectivity, however. Embedded criticism goes some way in addressing Runcan's concerns given that it usually does not contain judgment on the process at all.

In contrast to Runcan's thinking, Fisher suggests that all aspects of a critic's judgment are opinion rather than objective or fact (2015, p. 31). He also states that, if the new critic is intimidated by issuing a judgment, they can consider their review as an evaluation, which "means the same thing" (2015, p. 31). Fisher distinguishes the critic as judge from 'The critic as consumer guide' (pp. 32-34) who issues star ratings that indicate a production's quality to a potential audience member. Therefore, Fisher differentiates judgment from consumer guidance, despite the consumer guidance giving a judgment in the form of star ratings. The distinction between these is not clear, though if a judgment is a critic's opinion, then it follows a critic's consumer guidance is as well. Tran's thinking supports Fisher's: a "critic's interpretation of a work of art is inherently shaped by their lived experiences" (p. 48). Therefore, given critics like Fisher, Tran and Gardner note that a critic's judgment is inherently subjective, there is a shift in the mainstream press away from thinking that reviews can be objective. Embedded criticism not using judgment at all means that embedded criticism moves away from this part of mainstream criticism that can be seen as objective.

SUBJECTIVITY IN BLOGGING

Subjectivity is used in blogging, particularly in feminist criticism. Michelle MacArthur observes: "privileging of subjectivity over objectivity is also integral to feminist approaches to criticism" (p. 166). The use of subjectivity in feminist criticism

addresses “feminist concerns with reviewing practices” (p. 167). These concerns include “authority and relative inaccessibility” (p. 167), a “lack of transparency or self-consciousness” (p. 169), and lack of community. These all relate to the idea of critical distance that puts the critic in a position of power. The use of subjectivity works towards dismantling this distance and power dynamic by foregrounding the critic’s self. This is particularly evident in embedded criticism where the use of the first-person emphasises the critic’s lack of authority in the rehearsal space.

This is not just observed in criticism that is explicitly feminist. In "Theatre Criticism and Digital Poetics" (2015), Diana Damian Martin discusses 'critical distance' in mainstream criticism and blogging. Some modes of blogging "explicitly challenge critical distance and its correlation to objectivity" (2015, no page). Whilst discourse may not specifically use the word 'objective', it is implied through positioning the mainstream critic as 'critically distant' from a performance. This critical distance provides mainstream criticism with what MacArthur calls a "pretense of objectivity" (p. 169). Therefore, as MacArthur says, “the myth of objectivity persists" (p. 170) in mainstream theatre criticism practice. This supports Fisher and Tran's perspectives from within the industry. In embedded criticism, the first-person register and aspects of the critic’s self are used to dismantle critical distance and convey the close proximity the embedded critic has to the artists and rehearsal process.

SUBJECTIVITY AND INDIVIDUALISM

The foregrounding of subjectivity in mainstream criticism also relates to a broader societal trend towards individualism. Eleanor Collins' scholarship on this contributes wider context to issues of subjectivity in criticism, including blogging. Her work can also explain the subsequent emergence of embedded criticism given its coinciding with this focus on individualism. In her 2010 article, "Theatre reviewing in post-consensus society: Performance, print and the blogosphere", she focuses on mainstream criticism where the critic "may be expected to bring some level of objectivity to the review – usually by way of professional or academic qualification" (p. 330). She states there has been "a fundamental ideological shift towards the sovereignty of individual opinion in a post-consensus society" (p. 330). This seems to indicate a broader move away from valuing community and collectivism, and instead focusing on the individual. This can be seen in influencer culture, where the development of social media, blogging platforms, and so on creates the means for

average individuals – who are not otherwise celebrities, public figures, and so forth – to build a large following and become celebrities.

Collins argues this means there is an "incompatibility of the current model of professional reviewing with the multifaceted, necessarily subjective experience of performance" (p. 330).[103] This 'sovereignty of individual opinion' can be understood to imply a sovereignty of subjectivity despite expectations of objectivity. The incompatibility she mentions suggests that the critic's subjectivity does not align with mainstream criticism's style and tone, and issuing of judgments. Collins also explains:

> The professional reviewer usually experiences the play once, typically at the beginning of its run, and from a singular perspective – both figuratively speaking, and in spatial terms: they cannot, usually, move around the auditorium to improve their view or hearing. It is inevitable that the reviewer brings with them a whole host of assumptions, preoccupations and expectations. (p. 330)

These 'assumptions, preoccupations and expectations' are not purely spatial; they are also the result of the critic's individual subjectivity. Collins emphasises that "the performance will have a unique meaning to each spectator" (p. 331), which includes theatre critics. That unique meaning will be determined by the critic's self, including previous performances they saw, plays they read, their education, social class, race, gender, and nationality as well as factors such as how tired they are, and if "they got rained on" (Wong Davies, 2021) and are sitting uncomfortably in damp clothes. As a result of this subjectivity, Collins argues that "the critic's subjective experience closes off anything beyond his or her own perception" (p. 332), and other perceptions are therefore excluded in a review by a single critic. In short, Collins thinks a review is inherently subjective and only reflects the critic's encounter with the performance. By foregrounding subjectivity in their writing, embedded critics embrace the subjectivity of their perspective: in the room, outside the creative team, and as an individual shaped by their background, experiences, and demographics. This complicates perceptions of objectivity and subjectivity in mainstream criticism by emphasising that the critic's encounter – whether with a rehearsal or a public performance – is informed by the critic's self and their relationship to the space and others in it.

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[103] She does not clarify what she means by 'professional' here, though given she is looking at journalistic and academic criticism, it could be understood that she means a professional critic is someone for whom theatre criticism is part of their paid job.

In summary, there is a line of thinking in both criticism practice and scholarship that criticism is inherently subjective. This is because the critic cannot separate their self from their encounter with the rehearsal or performance they see. As a result, criticism is influenced – either subtly or overtly – by the critic's background, education, and lived and personal experiences. Some critics, such as feminist critics, actively choose to foreground their subjective experience of watching a show, though the rise of individualism may also contribute to focusing on the critic's personal encounter with performance. As the next section demonstrates, however, embedded criticism embraces various aspects of subjectivity and foregrounds them in the writing. In the context of embedded criticism, the critic consciously relies on themselves to influence their writing.

CASE STUDY: SUBJECTIVITY IN AVA WONG DAVIES' CRITICISM

In a 2018 blog post written a year and a half after she began to review theatre and performance, Ava Wong Davies reflects on her nascent mainstream criticism practice and the writers that influence her.[104] She states:

> Objectivity is a fuckin lie. Of course it is. You are informed by ur surroundings n ur upbringing n ur skin colour n ur sexuality n whether or not ur queer coded or straight coded, white passing or not, etc etc etc. Why even bother 2 pretend that it exists? [sic] That's actively harmful. (no page)[105]

In a review for *Exeunt* she wrote a few weeks after writing this blog post, she opens with:

> I cannot lie to you. The entirety of my (cough, 18 month) critical practice is based off one thing and one thing only – an acceptance, nay, an embrace of

[104] Though Wong Davies' practice focused on reviewing public performances, her style of theatre criticism does not always adhere to the critical trifecta that this thesis relies on to define mainstream criticism, but the term mainstream criticism will be used here in order to distinguish her criticism of public performances from her embedded criticism.
[105] See chapter 2 for examples of Megan Vaughan's similar use of an informal writing style.

> my own subjectivities.[106] An acute understanding that I, Ava Wong Davies, can never be truly neutral in any review I write. (2018, no page)[107]

By the time she wrote this blog post and review, Wong Davies had begun reviewing theatre and performance for *The Stage*, a theatre industry trade newspaper. Prior to this, she had written on theatre and reviewed in her own blog, *Exeunt*, and other unpaid publications with fewer editorial constraints than the larger publications paying critics for their work.[108] Her unique, engaging, and occasionally irreverent writing style, as well as her open acknowledgement of the role of subjectivity in her theatre criticism, drew attention from editors of other publications. She has since gone on to become a regular contributor to theatre criticism coverage at *The Independent*, write a theatre column for independent publication *Gal Dem*, and be appointed editor of *A Younger Theatre*. Wong Davies recognises that her style differs across publications: "writing for somewhere like *Exeunt* is an entire different thing to writing for *The Stage*, writing for *The Independent*" (2021). However, including her criticism in national and larger publications, Wong Davies openly recognises the role of subjectivity in her criticism, both mainstream and embedded. Though she was not the only critic discussing the role of subjectivity in criticism – Mark Fisher's book was published three years prior – her candidness whilst working as a mainstream critic across a range of publications and editorial requirements, and also working as an embedded critic, makes her contribution to discourse on critics' subjectivity particularly notable.

In 2019 she still held these views on subjectivity and explicitly incorporated subjectivity into her practice. This is demonstrated in a conversation with Maddy Costa and playwright Alice Birch, for a *Howlround* article. In this dialogue, she opens with, "I respond to the work personally and very subjectively" (no page). This style of writing did not originate with her, though it was not something she saw in mainstream criticism in larger publications:

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[106] The use of the plural indicates she recognises she is subjective in multiple ways.
[107] This review of *True West* at The Vaudeville Theatre, published in *Exeunt*, resulted in social media backlash for stating "I think Johnny Flynn is fucking hot" (2018, no page) – some readers perceived this as inappropriate objectification of an actor by a theatre critic. This backlash is a response to the perceived power that a critic has over an actor, and how they can exploit that power by not just analysing the actor's work, but by assessing their body. In this instance, Wong Davies was writing for an independent publication and is a woman of colour, whereas Flynn is an internationally successful actor and musician. This means there are intersectional factors that can alter the power dynamic between an actor and critic.
[108] This includes my theatre criticism website, for which Wong Davies was part of the Vault Festival critics team in 2018 writing under the name Ava Davies.

> I saw criticism as being something that was very [...] like, Billington, very quite removed, like cold, like for a specific purpose.[109] And it was only when I was sort of reading [...] Meg Vaughan's stuff[110], and Maddy Costa's stuff[111] that I was like, 'oh okay, it can be something that is very [...] personal'. And that was what [...] really drew me to it, because it was like, 'okay, it's what my personal response is to this work'. (2021)

In other words, the subjectivity of critics working outside of larger publications provided Wong Davies with examples for the use of overt subjectivity within mainstream criticism. This subjectivity is informed by the critic's personal experiences, tastes and how these interact with the production's content.

In Wong Davies' embedded criticism for two productions, I identify particular forms of subjectivity she employs by analysing what she writes about. Firstly, I consider her relationship to theatre and performance, then look at how she writes about rehearsal processes in conjunction with her self and her own practice, and then her approach to watching public performances of these shows. I also address how her thinking about subjectivity has changed over time.

RELATIONSHIP TO PERFORMANCE

Both of Wong Davies' pieces reflect on her relationship to theatre and performance, and her critical process, more generally. This establishes two areas of focus in her writing – her self and the work she is writing about. In her first piece of embedded criticism, on a new play called *Kingdom* by Temi Wilkey and Celine Lowenthal that ran at Camden People's Theatre, she shares extensive information about her relationship to theatre as a mainstream critic:

> I get theatre burnout every six months or so [...] It's partly because every six months I have a vague existential crisis about the purpose of the arts, but I also think it's symptomatic of sitting at the end of a long marble table from the actual *process* of it all, of just seeing the shiny, polished thing, multiple times

[109] Here, she is referring to Michael Billington, then lead theatre critic of *The Guardian*.
[110] For an example of Megan Vaughan's use of subjectivity in her critical practice, see her review of *Teh Internet is Serious Business* in Duska Radosavljevic's *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* (2016), and a limited selection of her theatre criticism from her now-defunct blog (synonymsforchurlish.tumblr.com) on synonymsforchurlish.com.
[111] Maddy Costa's blog, which contains much of her overtly subjective writing, including her embedded criticism, can be found at statesofdeliquescence.blogspot.com.

> a week, multiple times a month [...] It means that I feel the urge to dash reviews out more rapidly, that I'm less likely to spend time agonising over a specific word I use in a review lest it be interpreted just the wrong side of negative – spiteful or hateful or inconsiderate. I want to be precise in my writing because I think that's kind. I'm feeling my way through these things, often falling and tripping and stubbing my toe and swearing, but I think what I'm coming to understand is that kindness is a really important tenet in the work I do. It doesn't have to mean being a pushover, or someone who gives a nice review when they should have been more truthful or someone who is afraid to make the people angry in a show I didn't like (though I have done and been all those things at some point in the last year). I don't know exactly what it means yet, but, like I say, I'm fumbling through it.
>
> I would like kindness to be a big part of my "practice" (whatever that means) because I really do feel in my gut like a lot of people in theatre are Doing Their Best With What Little They Have.
>
> I think part of the way I can be a kinder writer, or critic, or reviewer, or whatever I class myself as, is by climbing up onto the long marble table and edging my way over it to the other side. (I say "other side" but there's no clear-cut binary between criticism and making, obviously […]). (2018, no page)

Here she critically reflects on the fluctuations within her relationship to and with theatre and artists. This is largely informed by her work as a mainstream critic who does not have any contact with rehearsal and making processes. Further, the conditions of seeing multiple performances a week and having to write overnight reviews impact her craft – it is difficult for her to exercise the precision she aims for. As a result, her ambition to practice kindness is undermined.

She articulates this by using subjective language that is personally revealing and written in the first-person. In describing her struggle, she creates a sense of vulnerability. This vulnerability is immensely personal and demonstrates how subjectivity can take the form of personal difficulty. In addition, the language she uses is imagery-laden. Her "burnout" (2018) is juxtaposed by the metaphor for a theatre performance as a "shiny, polished thing" (2018). This captures the tensions she then goes on to discuss that arise from her desire to be kind, and what that looks like in practice. The "shiny, polished thing" (2018) also establishes the opposite of the

rehearsal process she then discusses. She describes how she is coming to understand her own process in visceral, bodily terms: "I'm feeling my way through these things, often falling and tripping and stubbing my toe and swearing" (2018), and "climbing up onto the long marble table and edging my way over it to the other side" (2018) evoke a practice that is effortful, difficult and embodied. On the whole, her positioning criticism as an embodied process of exploration that is physically difficult yet generous is the opposite of Balme's disembodied critic. This challenges thinking of the mainstream critic as detached and distanced. Instead, it depicts the critic as a person who cares about the industry, their craft, and the artists they review. This model of criticism works towards dismantling the critic-artist binary.

In her second piece, on Sleepwalk Collective's *Kourtney Kardashian* at HOME Manchester, Wong Davies draws on her childhood and family to explain her relationship to opera:

> I grew up soaked in opera. My mother's personal email when I was little was deidamia88 – a reference to one of her favourite Handel operas. I have an intense memory of her blasting a notoriously tricky aria from Handel's Semele called "Hence, Iris, hence" from the speakers in her bedroom. (I'm listening to it now. It is so fucking extra) I must have been about five years old, I think. We all begged her to turn it down, my father included, whose tastes veered more towards Wagner. She ignored us. I remember the CD cover so clearly – a woman in a gold, ruffled dress, lying on her front on a chaise-longue with long dark hair cascading down her back. (Jesus this aria is crazily frilly) I listen to it occasionally now, on Spotify. I think it's fairly weird that my first encounter with opera was with minor baroque operas rather than, yaknow, Mozart [...] But that's never been my mother's style.
>
> So opera is probably the first artform I was exposed to. I don't watch much of it now. Maybe if there's an interesting director attached, but it takes a lot to want to voluntarily endure an opera audience in London. Opera is probably good for me. I mean, not the experience as a whole. But the music. The patience it requires. The music does move me [...] I wish I could experience opera – the music – without all the baggage around it. (My Spotify has now automatically shuffled to a Cardi B song which is…weirdly not massively jarring). (2019, no page).

She draws on her childhood, upbringing and her mother to contextualise the rest of the piece. She establishes her views towards opera as an art form, the experience she has of it, and provides some insight into her music tastes by juxtaposing opera with Cardi B, a hip-hop artist. This also provides information about how Wong Davies approaches performances she encounters, rather than implying authority the way mainstream criticism does through stating opinions as facts and passing judgment on a production's quality. The centring of her subjectivity also draws attention to the piece being Wong Davies' personal response to the work and rehearsal processes, instead of being analysed using some form of 'objective' metrics. This can be understood to shift embedded criticism towards Horwitz's idea of horizontalism because it positions a review as opinion rather than authoritative fact, and establishes Wong Davies' personal connection with what she observes. This brings Wong Davies closer to the work, thus disrupting ideas of the critic as a distanced authority and indicating that theatre and performance are analysed through the lens of the critic's self.

REHEARSAL PROCESSES

In both pieces, Wong Davies follows her wider thoughts on theatre and performance with details of the rehearsals she watched. These sections convey to readers both how the artists work, and how Wong Davies feels whilst watching the rehearsals. This dual focus emphasises that her encounter is shaped by her self.

In the *Kourtney Kardashian* piece, she explains she has not previously observed rehearsals that occur towards the end of the rehearsal process (2019). She uses the first-person throughout to explain how at this late stage, she is only seeing extracts of the complete piece that the artists are refining rather than the show as a whole. She also integrates her embedded criticism process in this section of the piece: "This point in the process always feels the most difficult to me, the point where everything feels old and annoying to the maker and I try to make myself smaller, less of an imposition", and "I try to make sense of what I'm seeing without being told, and then I just let it wash over me. Trying to glean meaning from the scraps I do see is tough – obviously" (2019, no page). These extracts give some sense of the rehearsal process, Wong Davies' physical position in the rehearsal room, and how she navigates her process as an observer. She seems to be trying to keep out of the way, so is likely on the edge of the room, away from those in the cast and creative team. She also wants to emphasise that she tries to be inconspicuous – this establishes the boundary between

her and the artists, and reinforces that she is only in the space to observe despite being close to the making process.

Wong Davies takes a similar approach in her piece on *Kingdom*. After a detailed, subjective introduction, she considers the rehearsal process she is watching in the context of her experiences as a playwright, both in rehearsal rooms and writing alone. In this instance, she considers how it compares to being in the rehearsal room for one of her own plays:

> It's odd to sit in on a rehearsal of a play that isn't my own. I find rehearsals anyway quite difficult, maybe because the process of feeling stuff out is actually physicalised and you can kinda see the exertion, the care, the wrench of it all. I write, and so I do those things privately. It feels almost embarrassing to watch people stumble and try things that don't work and rewind and go over the same three lines over and over and over. For me it's a process of relearning, of rewiring my head to appreciate actual human mess, not just stage mess that can be mopped up at the end of the show. (2018)

This extract also compares Wong Davies' embodied experience of being in a rehearsal room where she is an embedded critic rather than a playwright, though it is less concrete than her other piece where she describes how she tries to shrink herself in the room (2019). This is particularly interesting given she is so candid and vulnerable about herself, but she feels discomfort watching other people's 'mess'. By focusing on her emotional response – embarrassment – to failure and repetition in rehearsal, she uses subjectivity as a lens to convey her encounter with the rehearsal process. She also shifts her focus onto the process, but still incorporates the self into her writing. The combined focus on the rehearsal and the self ultimately reduces distance between the critic and artists, and dismantles preconceptions of the critic as an objective, disembodied expert who evaluates a show's quality.

Though both embedded criticism pieces heavily foreground Wong Davies' personal narrative, upbringing, and approaches to her own practice, her rehearsal room encounters contrast with each other. The two companies are "completely different artists – like *completely* different – you know, Sleepwalk are such a live art-adjacent company, and *kingdom*, which was Celine and Temi, they're very much, like, performers, and [...] it was a much more [...] a legible, traditional show" (2021; my italics). Particularly with Sleepwalk Collective, Wong Davies felt, "out of my depth. Not

because of them – because they were wonderful – but…maybe it's because of the live art-adjacency thing…I felt very stupid because I was [...] watching them do this stuff and [...] it kind of feels incomprehensible to me [...] it felt very, kind of intellectual in a way that I just wasn't able to keep up with" (2021). This feeling is evident in her embedded criticism: "I try to make sense of what I'm seeing without being told, and then I just let it wash over me. Trying to glean meaning from the scraps I do see is tough – obviously. I feel a real pressure to write something smart but I don't really know what, yet" (2018). This exemplifies how a critic's self – particularly their education and theatregoing history – influences their embedded criticism. In this case, she highlights how these limit her ability to write about what she observes and her lack of expertise and authority on live art. This example also reinforces Wong Davies' position outside the production team's creative decisions, and discloses a lack of expertise in live art that reinforces Anderson's argument that mainstream critics are not suited to reviewing alternative theatre.[112] Despite the differences between her two embedded criticism pieces, they read similarly due to their combined focus on her self and the production, and subjectivity in the form of her background, personal narrative and practice, and her limited experience in rehearsal rooms.

PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

Both embedded criticism pieces consider what it was like to see the public performance of each piece after seeing part of their rehearsal processes. In these sections, she incorporates details from her personal life that moments from the performance prompt her to think about.

In the *Kingdom* piece, she switches between writing about herself and writing about the play. The themes and story in the play prompt her to consider her relationship with her best friend, house sharing, and living with her ex-boyfriend:

> (I think too about my experiences of shared housing, of accidentally-kinda moving in with my then-boyfriend when we were five months deep into our relationship. About how that relationship twisted us further together but maybe also lay seeds for us coming undone. I do not think about that too much)

[112] There are mainstream critics such as Lyn Gardner who have regularly written about performance art and live art.

> There are gentle multiplicities to this show, a depth to it that doesn't reveal itself openly but rather gets teased out the more time you spend in their company. The backstories they create are dense and detailed and always wrapped up in care and playfulness. They shift between low and high stakes softly, like a stroke of watercolour getting increasingly blurred out on the page. (2018)

In contrast, in the *Kourtney* piece Wong Davies focuses far more on the performance with less mention of herself. There is still some use of the first-person, but she foregrounds the work. For example, she articulates her current feelings towards opera and live art's differing forms:

> I can see more clearly now the strands about the efficacy of art, and particularly an artform as bloated, as frilly as opera. An artform which recycles old productions from the 90s, maintaining every brocaded costume, every beaded, heeled shoe. They say something about formaldehyde in the show but I forget to write it down. Preservation is completely at odds with live art. It should exist and then it should just evaporate. (2019)

Here, she openly relates the performances to her experiences as an audience member. This is particularly evident when she writes about *Kourtney Kardashian* because she is less familiar with live art, and the performance left a distinct impression on her:

> Later, when I'm dropping off to sleep, I imagine iara and Nhung's white stained faces drifting through the halls of a dimly lit BAC.
>
> I think about the fish-eye lens Yorgos Lanthimos uses in The Favourite – the way it squeezes and bulges normalcy into absurdity. I think about how absurd normality is anyway. (2019)

By clearly sharing how the performances moved her, she debunks the idea that the critic watches performances from a distanced and unemotional position. Instead, her encounter shows how invested she is in watching the performance.

> EVOLVING VIEWS ON SUBJECTIVITY

Wong Davies' attitude towards this kind of overt incorporation of her self has changed as she developed her practice. She found the prominent foregrounding of subjectivity, particularly in the form of lived experience, unsustainable both personally and professionally: "a lot of my [...] really early criticism - is really, really, really personal and [...] it got to the point where [...] I can't do that anymore. Mainly because it's just not good for me to do that, but also [...] publications don't respond to that" (2021). She describes the change not as being less subjective, but a shift from thinking that her criticism "has to be really personal. It has to be [...] how I felt like every moment, and how it relates to me every moment" (2021), to more recently, "it's less centred on myself, which I think is a good thing" (2021). She now has more of an interest in writing about the work rather than herself in relation to it. (2021)

However, Wong Davies recognises that her criticism is still a personal response to what she encounters: "it's how I'm reading it, and how it's making me feel" (2021). This corresponds with Tran's idea that a critic's analysis is informed by their lived experience (p. 48), and the broader feminist thinking that objectivity is a myth. Wong Davies also states, "I don't want to position myself ever as being [...] the only [...] objective voice of reason on a piece of work" (2021). This indicates a reluctance to be positioned as authoritative, and that there is a need for a wider recognition of the role of subjectivity in theatre criticism. Though embedded critics regularly include themselves in their writing (see: chapter 1), Wong Davies' embedded criticism is distinct due to her split focus between the work and her self.

Reflecting on her shifting attitudes, she recognises that to reach this stage of her practice, "it was really important to respond to work in a really subjective way in order to feel like I could belong in a critical landscape" (2021). She also advises emerging critics: "to really lean into their personal response to it because [...] where else are you going to start?" (2021). This demonstrates that drawing on her self helped her formulate her critical practice in relation to other critics and find her place within the field.

In her embedded criticism however, she sees value in the first-person and emotive language to engage with what she observes in the rehearsal room, especially when writing about someone's rehearsal process, which she says, "feels so personal [...] like you're watching someone, like, getting changed" (2021). This contrasts with her attitude towards reviewing public performances: "when I'm reviewing a finished show I feel a lot more [...] able to just make assumptions or [...] to interpret stuff because it's

like, ‘okay it's because you've let the show go, and because you've let it into the world, and it's no longer really yours because it's now in front of an audience and it's the audience's as much as yours now'" (2021). Therefore, she more explicitly includes the self when writing about the more vulnerable encounter of seeing a work in rehearsal.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In this chapter, I have argued that subjectivity is not unique to embedded criticism practice, but it is uniquely utilised within it. This contrasts with mainstream criticism where, particularly in major publishing outlets, there is an entrenched perception of critical objectivity that involves the critic partially or completely setting aside their self. Scholarship supporting this position argues that the mainstream critic can analyse and judge the production on its own merits, without the critic's self influencing their analysis and judgment.

Another school of thought, that is gaining more traction in academia and the industry, does not consider it possible for subjectivity to be discarded, however. Ava Wong Davies' practice provides evidence that there are critics who do not just understand that their mainstream criticism is subjective, but advocate for the critic’s incorporation of their self. Though journalistic language norms can mask the critic's subjectivity and give the reader the impression that the mainstream critic is objective, underlying these stylistic choices it is possible to identify the critic's positionality, taste, experiences, background, and opinions, which influence their analysis and judgment of a theatre or performance piece.

In embedded criticism practice, it is common for the embedded critic to use the first-person, personal narrative, lived experience, emotional response and other evident subjectivities within the writing. This foregrounding of subjectivity in embedded criticism content also distinguishes embedded criticism from mainstream criticism in terms of form and style. This has been demonstrated through a case study on Ava Wong Davies' criticism practices. The use of personal narrative, tastes, and cultural experiences are explicitly referenced in embedded criticism to provide a personal response to the rehearsal process. This consequently destabilises the critic-artist hierarchy and works towards Horwitz’s concept of horizontalism where the embedded critic draws on the subjective to write about processes that are more vulnerable than public performances.

CHAPTER 4

EMBEDDED CRITICISM AND DRAMATURGY: COMMON GROUND AND DIFFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the relationship between embedded criticism in England, and dramaturgical practices, particularly in Germany. This is due to the German dramaturgy practice of generating publicly available writing about rehearsal processes, and dramaturgy's roots in criticism. These writings have some compelling similarities to embedded criticism. Both share otherwise-private processes, provide insight into creative choices, and discuss the production's broader context. Because of these overlaps, there is potential that embedded criticism in England could be considered dramaturgy when mapped against some of the paradigms of German dramaturgy practice. This also indicates the close relationship between criticism and dramaturgy.

I first overview dramaturgy's development in Germany and the UK. Then, I further explore German dramaturgy practice, both historically and more recently. I particularly look at dramaturgs' writing about rehearsals for the production programmes they generate, and dramaturgy's relationship to criticism. The case study that follows, on Maddy Costa's criticism and dramaturgy practices in England, distinguishes these practices from each other and positions embedded criticism as a mode of theatre criticism. I ultimately argue that whilst there are some similarities between British embedded criticism and German dramaturgy their differences are significant, as are those between British dramaturgy and embedded criticism. These differences, and embedded criticism's relationship to journalism, warrant embedded criticism's position as a mode of theatre criticism rather than a mode of dramaturgy in the UK.

DRAMATURGY'S LINEAGES

German theatre critic and playwright Gotthold Lessing is widely accepted as "the world's first officially appointed dramaturg" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 2) following his appointment as Hamburg Theatre's "in-house critic" in 1767 (Luckhurst, 2006). In his 1995 book chapter, Joel Schechter describes the position as "almost accidental" (p. 27), as it resulted from Lessing's initial refusal of the post of playwright-in-residence.

The theatre's financial backers then suggested he write theatre criticism on the venue's productions for an in-house publication (Schechter, 1995). This suggests that the theatre's investors saw 'in-house criticism' as a marketing tool, though Lessing's work ultimately consisted of more than 'just' marketing material.[113] Schechter explains: Lessing "advised theatre management on play selection, and offered his, sometimes adverse, criticism of its productions" (p. 27). His negative critiques caused conflict within Hamburg Theatre (Schechter, 1995). Whilst negative criticism is not unusual for a mainstream critic, or a dramaturg deploying it to improve a production in rehearsal, public criticism from someone within an institution is not the norm now unless it functions as whistleblowing or public admission of their own misjudged creative choices.[114] This suggests that, in Germany, the dramaturg is fully integrated into the institution and is expected to publicly support the institution regardless of what they think of the quality of the work produced.

The newly-opened national theatre would only exist for two years (McConachie, 2008), but Lessing's work had significant impact. Firstly, his tenure at Hamburg resulted in *The Hamburg Dramaturgie,* a collection of essays about the theatre's productions that has important parallels with embedded criticism written in the UK over the last 20 years. His work also directly inspired the profession's development in Germany and Austria (Schechter, 1995).

Later in Germany, dramaturgy practice developed from earlier models such as Lessing's under Bertolt Brecht, who is credited variously with overhauling German-speaking theatre (Luckhurst 2006, Turner and Behrndt 2016, Trencsényi 2015). Luckhurst describes Brecht's dramaturgy model as:

> a writer and analyst of play texts with a thorough understanding of dramaturgical structures; second, a formidable theatre historian, with encyclopaedic knowledge of theatre history from scholarly research in libraries and dedicated spectatorship of plays; and third, an incisive, receptive and articulate communicator-critic. (2006, pp. 112-113)

[113] See chapter 1 (pp. 33-35) for examples of embedded criticism that resemble marketing material, and Megan Vaughan's critique of embedded criticism due to its role in production marketing (2020).
[114] A recent example is The Royal Court's production of the play *Rare Earth Mettle* in 2021, which was accused of perpetuating antisemitism through its writing and directorial choices. The theatre conducted an investigation and admitted they were at fault (Royal Court Theatre, 2022).

This model of dramaturgy is still used today in Germany. It is most often associated with buildings: "in the German speaking world there is a network of 200 well-funded state, regional and municipal theatres [...] without which the dramaturgy department…would be unthinkable" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 140). An International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM) report on German performing arts provides further contextual information by noting that there are also many independent venues and companies, making for a nationally distributed and well-networked theatre landscape (2018). This means that dramaturgy, and consequently dramaturgs, are intrinsic to German theatre.

Dramaturgy's development in Britain is very different. Germany's longer dramaturgy history contrasts with Britain's shorter one, where theatre critic Kenneth Tynan became the first named dramaturg in England when Sir Lawrence Olivier made him Literary Manager of the newly-created National Theatre in 1963 (Luckhurst, 2006).[115] Tynan's ambitions at the National were directly inspired by Brecht's dramaturgy (Trencsényi 2015). This was almost 200 years after Lessing worked at Hamburg and wrote *The Hamburg Dramaturgie.* British theatre has no known comparable document.

Additionally, funding models differ in Britain. Government-supported UK theatres are not fully-funded by the state, and there is a significant number of commercial venues around the country that are not funded by the government at all. British theatre no longer uses the repertory model as Germany does, wherein staff are permanently employed and shows are produced in-house. Institutional dramaturgs, whose responsibilities are described in the section below, are therefore permanent staff who work across the repertory and institutional administration. Since German dramaturgs write about rehearsal processes and work at most of the country's theatres, there is comprehensive writing about rehearsal processes. In the UK, where there are few staff dramaturgs, publicly-available, institutional writing about rehearsals is minimal. This task has therefore been absorbed by embedded theatre critics typically operating within journalism paradigms (see: Appendix A, p. 208).

Though some British theatres have full-time dramaturgs or literary managers, dramaturgs working in the UK tend to be freelance and "deployed on short-term

[115] A Literary Manager differs from an institutional dramaturg in that Literary Managers fulfil an administrative function rather than a production function. They will, for example, read scripts, advise on programming, and manage script readers whereas dramaturgs will directly work on productions in rehearsals. Literary Managers spend little or no time in rehearsals, as their role focuses on programme curation (Trencsényi, 2015).

projects, are not regarded as integral to theatre-making" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 109). As documented by Lyn Gardner in *The Stage* in 2021, more British productions, companies and artists are using dramaturgs. However, it is mostly on a freelance basis and not consistent enough across the industry for it to be the norm. My experience working as a freelance dramaturg in London corroborates this: there are few opportunities for dramaturg employment in theatre institutions.[116] Freelance dramaturgs do not carry out all the same tasks as their institutional counterparts, such as programming and advising on repertoire. Freelance dramaturgs will also not have the same access to institutional resources and production processes, so even if they do write programme notes, these focus on the production and its wider context rather than the venue.

Though these differing countries and time periods result in significant contextual differences around their respective dramaturgy practices, embedded criticism's recent interventions in rehearsal documentation highlights the similarities between dramaturgical and critical cultures. Further, despite the hundreds of years between *The Hamburg Dramaturgie* and contemporary embedded criticism, Lessing focuses on informing the audience about the productions beyond what is seen during a performance, analysing the work, and contextualising it within the broader theatre industry and culture. Contemporary embedded criticism shares these aims.

GERMAN DRAMATURGICAL PRACTICE

LESSING'S WORK AND LEGACY

This section focuses on criticism in *The Hamburg Dramaturgie,* a collection of 104 essays (Lessing, 2021) that critically analyses, judges, and describes the theatre's productions from the perspective of someone familiar with the production team, their processes, and the institution's inner workings. As a result, Lessing is credited with creating "a new form of theatre criticism designed to have a direct, dynamic dialogue

[116] Duška Radosavljević writes in her 2009 article that when she worked for Northern Stage between 2000 and 2005, she may have been only one of a few institutional dramaturgs at the time. She lists The Royal Shakespeare Company, Polka Theatre and Chichester Festival Theatre as those she knows. At the time of writing this thesis, there are more institutions with staff dramaturgs: The National Theatre, The Bush Theatre, and The Royal Court are examples. Though this is not an inclusive list, many British institutions do not have dramaturgs or literary managers on staff. This indicates that, in the UK, dramaturgs are not viewed as essential to the production process. The theatres that do have dramaturgs permanently on staff produce new writing.

with and impact on the theatre company" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 29). This volume of publicly available texts varies in form. Some essays resemble diary entries with brief mentions of performances across a given time period, whereas others deeply analyse one production over several essays. For example, essays one through seven solely focus on the opening season production, *Olint and Sophronia* (Lessing, 2021). In contrast, essay 10 discusses three productions performed across two nights so his analysis is more cursory (Lessing, 2021). Other essays are more thematically broad, such as essays 11 and 12's focus on ghosts in Molière and Shakespeare, and essay 74 on terror and compassion in tragedies (Lessing, 2021). There is brief reference to the production of Molière's *Sémiramis*, but this essay is more literary than theatrical (Lessing, 2021).

As a volume, it is "an informative, topical collection of running articles intended to provoke" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 30) that is pitched to the educated, cultured theatregoer. Austrian academic and dramaturg Evelyn Deutsch-Schreiner describes it as "more of a journal, intended for the public. It might be described as a series of reviews, offering (rather unsystematic and unconventional) commentary on performances and their backgrounds" (2014, p. 41); and “typically, he describes the play in a literary context and its previous reception, then moves on to the theatrical performance itself. He offers expert commentary on stage adaptation and the difficulties in translating verse and metaphors” (2014, p. 41). Deutsch-Schreiner's analysis demonstrates that Lessing used the critical trifecta (2016) in some of his essays, albeit in a form and style that is longer and more literary than mainstream theatre criticism in the UK now. Aspects of his criticism would not be out of place in contemporary reviews.

Lessing’s essays reflect his education and cultural background. They are pitched to a reader of similar background, who speaks multiple languages and has a wide knowledge of arts and culture. Though individual essays are only circa 1500 to 2000 words, they reference other writers, plays, poems, and performances in Germany and abroad. He also uses other languages, such as French in essay 45, and Latin in essay 28 (Lessing, 2021). This bears some resemblance to the contemporary form of dramaturgy wherein the dramaturg is expected to be highly educated, and an academic or scholar who primarily conducts research for a production process (Radosavljević 2006). Shannon Jackson’s argument is similar in *Professing Performance*, where she says the dramaturg is “the in-house academic of the theatre

profession" (2006, p. 1). My experience and training in the US corroborates this, showing Lessing's transatlantic influence.

Aspects of Lessing's practice are evident in contemporary dramaturgy. According to Deutsch-Schreiner, "[Lessing] codified a range of dramaturgical activities that is still valid today: play reading, literary guidance, critical reflection on both performances and acting, the impact of a play on the audience, and general consideration of the theatrical arts and theatre's role in society" (2014, p. 40); and "the modern theatre owes Lessing its claim to a broadly educated, independent intellectual closely connected to the cultural milieu – a dramaturge who maintains an open discussion with the public and who, as an attending intellectual, codifies and encourages the development of the theatrical utopia in a continuing discourse" (2014, p. 43). Some tasks he conducted are part of contemporary dramaturgs' practice, such as critically reflecting on production elements, creative choices and how the play is positioned within a wider context (Trencsényi 2015).[117] In the UK this work is not typically published and available to the public; it is carried out in the private rehearsal space.[118] An embedded critic is well-positioned to bridge rehearsal processes with the wider public.

The Hamburg Dramaturgie can be seen to have directly influenced German contemporary theatre programmes in terms of content and detail. Antonio Cuenca Ruiz, a French-trained dramaturg who worked in German theatre and opera, describes how a dramaturg,

> writes or coordinates several publications. Among them, the most important are the program booklets which are conceived to accompany the spectator before and/or after the performance. At La Monnaie, these internal editorial projects follow a relatively clear publishing trajectory: the programs shed light more on the staged performance than on the operatic text, they give the artists

[117] This is also the case in my own freelance dramaturgy practice, which is discussed and analysed in chapter 5.

[118] An exception to this is Duska Radosavljevic's concept of 'reception dramaturgy' as informed by her work in the Royal Shakespeare Company's education department: a "kind of dramaturgical activity which includes the work of education departments, marketing departments and theatre critics" (2009). This type of dramaturgy practice is distinct from production dramaturgy; rather than being part of the creative team making a production, this work consists of forging connections with those outside the theatre such as audiences, students and teachers.

> a voice (statements of intent, interviews, etc.), and may include other areas of study. (2021, no page)

This focus on staging was particularly evident in Lessing's earlier essays, where he writes about the performance and creative choices. In the booklets Ruiz describes, this would be provided by sharing creative intentions and interviews with the artists. Despite these different time periods, both Lessing's essays and contemporary German programmes are evidently written by someone close to the production and creative team, thus providing a behind-the-scenes look into creative processes that may not be immediately evident from watching a performance. Embedded criticism often operates in the same way by providing details from the rehearsal process, quotes from the artists, and contextual information that relates to the artists' creative choices.

These programmes are now in decline, however. German dramaturg Florian Malzacher states: "In Germany, writing and editing used to be very much part of the work of a dramaturg—when I grew up every production in a municipal theater would have often quite ambitious program booklets with sometimes long texts and additional material. This has now largely disappeared" (2021, no page). This evidences a devaluing of this type of writing that disseminates information and insight into the creative process.

In contrast to contemporary German programmes, contemporary British programme notes – where they exist at all – differ from content in *The Hamburg Dramaturgie.* British programmes do not critically comment on the performances. Instead, they focus on crediting and profiling the cast and creative team.[119] There are institutional reasons behind this, such as budget constraints and the lack of staff dramaturgs. Therefore, providing information beyond cast and creative team credits is not prioritised, particularly in small and mid-scale venues. Many mid-size and small productions do not have a printed programme booklet. Instead, they are more likely to have a single sheet listing the production team's names and roles. These can be digital/online, often accessed with a QR code. In new writing theatres, such as The Royal Court, Theatre503, and The Bush, audiences can purchase a combined play text and programme. These have production credits, but mostly consist of the script and do not contain programme notes. Usually only larger venues produce programme booklets that contain essay-like articles about the production and the creative team.

[119] This is informed by my professional experience of reading programme notes in British theatre as a critic and audience member.

These are typically only available to purchase. Therefore, most British theatres do not provide audiences with supplementary material detailing production processes, so these processes remain invisible unless they are shared by other means such as embedded criticism.

Lessing's negative critique generated tension between himself and the theatre and created a legacy where it is unacceptable for staff to publicly criticise the institution where they work. Deutsch-Schreiner notes Lessing "wanted to be the in-house critic at his theatre and yet remain independent. He sought a lively discourse with the public but also wished to instruct actors" (2014, p. 41). This led to the acting company protesting his work to the theatre's management (Luckhurst, 2006). Lessing then focused on writing about the productions from a literary perspective instead of considering the production's quality (Luckhurst, 2006). His initial public criticism of performances at his place of work would be unthinkable today. Deutsch-Schreiner notes: "no modern dramaturge would dare to negatively criticise the productions of his or her own theatre in public but Lessing was merciless in his criticism of the plays and the adaptations" (2014, p. 43). In this regard, Lessing's negative criticism resembles mainstream criticism because reviews can contain a negative judgment of the work. Mainstream critics differ because they are employed or contracted by a publication. In contrast, Lessing and dramaturgs are employed or contracted by the theatre, artist or company. This means that dramaturgs are responsible to their colleagues, whereas a mainstream critic answers to their editor and readers rather than anyone associated with a production they review.[120] These differing relationships situate mainstream criticism within journalism. Embedded criticism falls in between: the embedded critic has some responsibility to the artists he writes about, and may or may not be accountable to an editor. However, as both Vaughan and Wong Davies discussed, they did not feel comfortable criticising rehearsals because the production is still in progress, and they are in a typically-private space watching work that can be quite vulnerable.

To end, I draw attention again to particular aspects of *The Hamburg Dramaturgie:* critical reflection, analysis, and consideration of a performance's impact on the audience. These are part of both criticism and dramaturgy. They are used differently across these practices due to institutional constraints and positionality in relation to

[120] Though artists and venues have a right of reply to a mainstream review they perceive as negative or problematic, the mainstream critic has no obligation to a venue or artist as they do to the company employing or contracting them.

the production's cast and creative team, however. As part of the creative team, the dramaturg analyses the work in rehearsal to critically reflect on its eventual audience reception. They then share this with their colleagues as part of the rehearsal process. The critic, who is part of the audience, analyses and critically reflects on the performance to issue a judgment on its quality. This is published content that anyone can read. The embedded critic analyses and critically reflects on the rehearsal through the lens of their individual, subjective response, which they then publish. This process, and the embedded critic's position outside of the creative team, means the embedded critic is significantly different from the dramaturg.

BRECHT'S DRAMATURGS

Bertolt Brecht's development of Lessing's work has significantly influenced contemporary dramaturgy practice in both Germany and Britain, so aspects of German dramaturgy were imported to British theatre practice. Therefore, analysing aspects of his practice identifies commonalities between his dramaturgy and contemporary dramaturgy in Germany and the UK. It also enables productive parallels with aspects of dramaturgy practice that could resonate with Costa's embedded criticism practice.

Brecht positions his dramaturgs in the rehearsal space and as part of the creative team. Brecht called this the 'hausdramaturg', known today as the production dramaturg (Malzacher 2021, no page). Deutsch-Schreiner adds that Brecht's dramaturgs were not 'just' production dramaturgs, but also "in-house intellectual[s] placing a high value on artistic reflection, political discussion and the documentation of theatre performances – the most important development in German dramaturgy since Lessing" (2014, p. 55). This contrasts with the dramaturgy model preceding Brecht's, further developed from Lessing by Friedrich Schiller and Ludwig Tieck. This did not include rehearsal work; they were "intellectual, often combining the roles of playwright, translator, reader, literary consultant and distinguished critic, but expressly set dramaturgy apart from involvement in performance practice" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 112).[121] However, Brecht developed these responsibilities by permitting dramaturgs to "act as a roving agent, intervening at any point in the preparation and rehearsal of text" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 118). Malzacher explains this further: they have a "dialectical position within each production process" (2021, no page). This position inside the

[121] It is worth noting that Brecht had also worked as a theatre critic from 1914 until 1922, when he first started working as a dramaturg (Luckhurst, 2006).

creative team also includes input on casting, as demonstrated in *Brecht on Theatre* (1964), a selection of Brecht's writings translated by John Willet. In a series of poems, *Der Messingkauf*, characters named according to their job discuss theatre. This includes the Dramaturg, whose monologue bemoans poor casting choices whilst advocating for casting appropriately to type, and that which allows individual actors to grow (Brecht 1964). Though Brecht's dramaturgs were invited into the rehearsal room, their incorporation into the creative team working on the production goes beyond the embedded critic's observation.

Given the range of tasks and responsibilities that Brecht assigned to the dramaturg, he assembled a group of them who worked together. Russell E Brown describes this as "team-style" to select, adapt and research the play (Brown, 1995). Luckhurst identifies that each dramaturg had particular responsibilities: for example, Elisabeth Hauptmann "was indispensable to Brecht as an editor, literary consultant in foreign – especially English – literature, translator, researcher, writer, notetaker and documenter of discussions, literary agent, secretary and intellectual debating partner" (Luckhurst 2006, pp.121-2). Ruth Berlau was responsible for archiving documents, photographs and footage of the company's work (Luckhust, 2006).[122] This is still the case in Germany where dramaturgs can be charged with adapting a script (Boenisch and Ostermeyer, 2016). This contrasts with contemporary British practice, where these responsibilities would be given to a single dramaturg and/or divided amongst the creative team or theatre staff. Adaptations are most likely written by a playwright. The embedded critic can carry out some of these tasks, such as archivist and documenter of discussions, but given the majority of embedded critics only observe a small portion of rehearsals and generate comparatively little writing, their capacity to carry out these roles is limited.

Luckhurst notes that Hauptmann was not part of the rehearsal process; she "sat in her office reading and translating foreign plays, compiling a register and record of foreign dramatic literature, and making suggestions to Brecht about repertoire" (Luckhurst 2006, p. 135). This resembles a contemporary literary manager. Willett describes Hauptmann as Brecht's "secretary and lifelong collaborator" (1964, p. 9). Whilst the descriptor of "secretary" points towards an administrative role, it also diminishes the importance of her responsibilities, which he lumps together under the descriptor of "lifelong collaborator". Hauptmann is barely mentioned in Willett's edited collection,

[122] Luckhurst notes that there are "disturbing personal aspects to Brecht's relationship with his female dramaturgs" (2006, p. 123).

but given that Willett first published this text in 1957, it is possible that her work was overlooked in part because of her gender. Luckhurst's fuller picture is more recent, and she drew on the original German writings by Brecht, Hauptmann and Berlau. This suggests that Brecht delegated significant responsibilities to his dramaturgs and that they were essential to the rehearsal process. This differs from Lessing in that he was the sole critic-in-residence and his role focused more on the literary aspect of a production.

Brecht appointed trainee dramaturgs (Brown, 1995), who focused on criticism, research, or education (Luckhurst 2006). Buckhurst evidences their subordinate positions and Brecht's pedagogical approach when describing the trainees' role in rehearsals. They were:

> expected to observe and to intervene verbally only when Brecht called for their opinion, make critical notes, an opportunity for the trainee to ask questions and to be monitored […] the dramaturgs provided exhaustively detailed documentation of the entire process of the research, writing and development of a text. (Luckhurst 2006, p. 132)

Their note-taking and documentation of the rehearsal and development process is of particular interest as documentation of processes is a key part of embedded criticism. Further, they were largely present in an observational capacity rather than as a contributing member of the creative team. They were permitted to carry out specific tasks but did not have the same power as those in senior roles. This positions them as outside the creative team whilst still being part of the company. Though embedded critics are almost always outside the company or creative team, Brecht's expectation of trainee dramaturgs to observe and document rehearsals is similar to the expectations of an embedded critic.

Brecht's 'modellbucher', (model books) also provide a compelling parallel to embedded criticism. The editors of *Brecht on Performance* describe these dramaturgical texts as: "seeking to hold fast these otherwise fleeting experiences of theatre rehearsal and production, and with a view to enabling both imitation and critical analysis on the basis of documentary record" (Kuhn et al., 2014, p. 143). In short, model books were put together to enable the productions to be reproduced and/or studied. They contain justification of the production's concept and creative choices, and the processes used to create the production. Though model books are in

part an instruction manual, their rehearsal documentation reveals processes that would otherwise be private.

Though these have not been translated from German in their entirety, the extracts that have overlap with embedded criticism. For example, the foreword to the model book for his 1948 production of *Antigone* reflects on theatre and art in post-war Germany, which contextualises the production choice and concept: “it provides a certain topicality…the role of force in the collapse of a head of state” (1948, p. 165). This provides insight to readers on the rationale of the production choice, and the thinking behind the script’s adaptation. There are similarities in Andrew Haydon’s embedded criticism piece on the Wooster Group and RSC co-production of *Troilus and Cressida* in 2012: “the multi-ethnic cast reflects both modern Britain and the 400 years of Imperialism which resulted in such a diverse population” (2012, no page). Both extracts explain context relevant to these adaptations of classical plays. This could further ground embedded criticism within dramaturgy's lineage, even though the model books were not disseminated to the public.

Some model book extracts also give a glimpse of the rehearsal and adaptation processes: “we did not so much develop a new dramaturgy as try out a new type of performance on an ancient play” (1948, p. 167);“ the blocking and movement must narrate the plot…this is the actor’s sole task” (1948, p. 169); and “bridge verses were given to the actors at rehearsals, which they were to deliver with the attitude of a narrator” (1948, p. 170). These variously indicate dramaturgical choices, the staging’s function, and how the actors should perform. Similarly, in Meg Fozzard’s embedded criticism on Zoo Co’s *Perfect Show for Rachel* that ran at The Barbican in London in 2022, Fozzard describes the on-stage technical elements’ function, how they should be operated, and their importance:

> Flo has discussed with me before the importance of this desk. They were going to have someone else controlling the tech desk under Rachel’s direction, but then that wouldn’t be Perfect Show for Rachel…There’s more to the setup than just the tech desk, though. There’s a camera and TV screen so Rachel, and the audience, can see what Rachel is doing on the tech desk. (2022, no page)

This collaborative performance, developed with Zoo Co's resident company and the Artistic Director's learning disabled sister, is a very different context from a Berliner Ensemble adaptation of a classical play. Yet, both the model books and Fozzard's embedded criticism address defining aspects of the productions and how they should be performed. Though embedded criticism does not aim to provide the granular detail that model books do, both detail rehearsal processes. Model books do this with the aim of the productions being studied or replicated, whereas embedded criticism aims to share otherwise private processes with anyone interested in a glimpse into the rehearsal room. Though this means model books and embedded criticism are fundamentally different, the shared focus of documenting rehearsal processes relates model books to embedded criticism.

CONTEMPORARY GERMAN DRAMATURGY PRACTICE

German dramaturgy has continued developing and expanding since Brecht. Piersandra Di Matteo, an Italian dramaturg who has worked extensively in Germany, identifies that contemporary dramaturgy has undergone a "paradigmatic shift that [...] has undone dramaturgy's exclusive relation with the text and theatrical literary production" (2021, no page). In short, dramaturgy no longer exclusively works with text-based theatre. For example, dance dramaturgy is a growing field (Trencsényi, 2015), as is devised and collaboratively created work that is not singularly authored. German dramaturg, journalist and teacher Götz Lieneweber corroborates this: "in the context of a changing political, cultural and media landscape, and in view of new forms of music theatre, dance and performance, the tasks of dramaturgy become more complex" (2019, no page). These new forms are not necessarily approached the same way in the rehearsal process. Malzacher exemplifies this: he has "very little experience as a dramaturg in the way the profession is usually understood in German-speaking countries [...] because the projects I have been involved in have been based neither on a dramatic text nor on common work divisions within repertoire theaters" (2021, no page). This demonstrates that in Germany, though still an ingrained part of theatre institutions, dramaturgy has expanded well beyond dominant dramatic forms. Consequently, it has shifted how the dramaturg works and what they do. Criticism also adapts to the constantly-shifting theatre landscape and evolving theatrical forms, though as exemplified in Ava Wong Davies' difficulties with writing about live art, critics may struggle to write about performance forms and styles with which they are less familiar (pp. 106-107).

Despite this shifting landscape, there are core principles that guide German dramaturgy practice. One of these is particularly pervasive: 'critical distance'.[123] Leineweber positions the dramaturg spatially, in relation to the work being made: the dramaturg "views the production with critical distance. A part of it, but also removed, the dramaturg continuously questions the production as a whole" (2019, no page). This could be understood as a paradox, but Di Matteo further describes this relationship as, "proximity to the process, however, is never blind immersion" (2021, no date). In other words, though the production dramaturg is part of the rehearsal process, they still maintain a criticality. This is often framed through the spatial idea of 'distance'. That the dramaturg must ensure they can effectively analyse and question the work, and distance enables them to do this, underpins this concept of critical distance. Andre Lepecki disagrees with Di Matteo on the idea of 'immersion', however:

> immersion into the process is a necessary first step to establish with all the other co-laborers a kind of collective intellect of the group. One that can then be accessed, in intimacy and with the precision that only proximity can deliver, by the dramaturg, whose main function in that collective becomes then one of being simultaneously memory repository and articulator of all the experiences, bits of actions, lost sections, and promising experiments developed throughout the rehearsal process. (2021, no page)

In short, Lepecki argues that 'immersion' is essential to mentally archive and recall the entire rehearsal process, so the dramaturg can critically contribute throughout. 'Immersion' evokes the concept of 'embeddedness' since the embedded critic recalls their encounter in order to write. In practice, this contrasts with the British embedded critic because, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, they do not tend to contribute to the creative process. Further, Lepecki notes the importance of proximity, which is essential to embedded criticism. This positioning enables both the dramaturg and embedded critic to understand the thinking behind the creative choices being made. For the dramaturg, they are then able to support the rest of team to best achieve their creative vision. The embedded critic can then share this information with readers.

This 'critical distance' Lieneweber mentions is often discussed in conjunction with the dramaturg's possible objectivity and/or subjectivity, and the concept of the 'outside

[123] This is also a paradigm of mainstream criticism and journalism. See: chapter 1 (pp. 13-14).

eye'. 'Critical distance' initially suggests that, with distance between the dramaturg and the work being made, it is easier or more likely that the dramaturg views the work 'objectively', in that they can identify aspects of the production that need further development.[124]

This 'outside eye' creates tension, however – the dramaturg is part of the creative team that makes the show, yet is relatively distant from the work. In Michael Pinchbeck's interview with German production assistant Elyn Friedrichs, the latter explains how this tension is managed: "in Germany, the dramaturg is responsible for [...] during rehearsal, observing the process and keeping an 'outside eye' on the representation of the text, how the director's visions or intentions materialize" (2011, no page). This process suggests both close proximity to the work being made, and critical distance. Though this seems paradoxical, in practice it requires careful balancing between personal commitment to the production's aims, whilst maintaining criticality. Friedrichs confirms this in detailing the dramaturg's possible processes and practices as an outside eye:

> a certain type of person who will represent your vision or understand what you are trying to achieve. They might be able to tell you that you are not achieving it. They might be able to tell you why. They might be able to tell you how you can achieve it. They have a distant view. Sometimes, people are too busy thinking of representing themselves to think of their audience so it is important to have an outside perspective. (2011, no page)

In short, the dramaturg supports the creative team's vision whilst ensuring they remain analytical so that they can continuously assess whether the creative choices made effectively enable the vision's realisation. Friedrichs conceives of the dramaturg as having both knowledge and aims that are shared with the rest of the creative team, but able to critically consider the production process and assess how best to achieve these shared aims. The embedded critic also balances some tension between their position as an outsider and their proximity to the artists and their work. The embedded critic has their own aims, such as creating a compelling piece of writing that adheres to any existing editorial requirements, and sharing rehearsal processes. They must balance these aims with what Irving Wardle terms "the circle of hypnosis" (1992, p.

[124] See: chapter 3 (pp. 87-92) for the discussion on seeing work objectively.

10), wherein the critic becomes so enchanted with the creative process that they lose the ability to analyse what they see.

The distant 'outside eye' is recognised to have some overlap with theatre criticism in Germany. Malzacher was simultaneously a critic and dramaturg, before choosing to solely work as a dramaturg. He considers that these two practices "are related. The reason I stopped writing criticism for newspapers and magazines was mainly due to a conflict in loyalty and not in methodology" (2021, no page). However, Gad Kaynar draws on Lars Seeberg to distinguish the dramaturg from the critic in terms of how flexible their analysis of a work is: "'The role of the dramaturg', postulates Lars Seeberg, 'is different from that of the external critic. He must not completely immobilize the intellect but apply his analysis non-reductively, attempting to analyze actively, opening instead of stiffening, explosively and not implosively'" (2006, p. 257). This indicates that whilst both the dramaturg and the critic analyse a performance, their process of analysis differs.

Consequently, their respective outputs differ. The dramaturg's analysis is in dialogue with the rest of the creative team. They will likely utilise that analysis to make further creative decisions. This analysis is constantly evolving and responding to developments during the rehearsal process. The critic's analysis, meanwhile, results in a review definitively conveying an evaluation of a production's quality but this is the beginning of a dialogue with the critic's readers and the production's audiences. In short, the scope of the dialogue differs across these practices in terms of who can participate in them. For the dramaturg, this dialogue is a continuing process over the rehearsal period, whereas the critic's dialogue is part of their output, as it follows their encounter with the production or rehearsal. This significantly differentiates dramaturgy from criticism, including embedded criticism, and resonates with the critic's focus on their readers.

Whilst it is clear there is no consensus on dramaturgs' distance or proximity, or what it means to be an outside eye, production dramaturgy in Germany has some aspects that distinguish it from dramaturgy in Britain. One of the dominant models of German dramaturgy entails the dramaturg's handling of the script. In summarising the dramaturg's responsibilities, Friedrichs notes: "he chooses the play. He rewrites the play. He cuts the play. He edits the play [...] He knows the audience and their expectation and can intervene on certain scenes if that expectation is not being met"

(2011, no page). Friedrichs also concisely explains the difference between the playwright's role in Germany and England rehearsal processes:

> firstly, as a writer, you were there in the rehearsal space as this rarely happens in German theatre. In Germany we don't generally have to ask permission if we want to make changes to the text. If you have a play that has never been played before, you are allowed to change things if the author gives his permission. If a play has been performed often you are allowed to cut things, or it is tolerated. But if you write new things, cut characters etc. you should ask the publishing company or the author himself [sic]. (2011, no page)

In short, the German dramaturg, who may translate or adapt a script, can more freely make changes, whereas the living British playwright is involved in the rehearsal process and must approve any script changes.[125] This model where the playwright is present in the rehearsal space also means that the literary manager is confined to an administrative role rather than a production one, and dramaturgs are considered unnecessary. Even if the playwright is not living and the script is cut or edited, it is common practice for the director to carry out this work.

In addition to textual responsibilities, the institutional dramaturg carries out what German dramaturg Antonia Tretter describes as 'passive dramaturgy': "I was also expected—amongst other tasks—to continue PR work, hold introductory talks, prepare forthcoming productions and support the daily theatre business" (2020, pp. 156-58). This contrasts with her production work, also within the German municipal theatre where she works. These institutional responsibilities likely have common ground with institutional dramaturgs and literary managers in the UK, though as stated, there are few theatres and companies with institutional dramaturgs or literary managers. Freelance dramaturgs will be more similar to Brecht's production dramaturg, or they will work solely with a playwright in the early stages of script development.[126] However, given the role of the playwright in British rehearsal rooms, their work on the script can significantly differ.

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[125] My professional experience as a dramaturg in England can corroborate this: on productions of new plays or plays by living writers the playwright is often in the rehearsal space.
[126] See chapter 5 (p. 124), where I discuss my work as a developmental dramaturg for playwright TL Wiswell.

These contexts demonstrate that British and German models of dramaturgy, whilst sharing a lineage and some processes, differ in practice. This is particularly evident in German dramaturgs' responsibilities for the script. Additionally, with the decline of extensive programmes in German theatre, there is less evidence of overlap between German dramaturgy and embedded criticism. German dramaturgy and British embedded criticism difference is further supported by the embedded critic's minimal time in rehearsals, and their position as an outsider who does not contribute to the rehearsal process whereas the dramaturg is integrated into the production team and contributes to the production's development.

CASE STUDY: MADDY COSTA'S TWO PRACTICES

Maddy Costa first worked as a freelance dramaturg in 2014 for Harry Josephine Giles' touring show *Class Act* (Costa, 2021), four years after she started working with CG&Co as an embedded critic. She then dramaturged Selina Thompson's *salt.* in 2017 for its runs at Southbank Centre and Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Since leaving CG&Co in 2018, she has dramaturged Jamal Gerald's *Idol* from 2018 through 2020[127], and Paula Varjack and Chuck Blue Lowry's touring production of *I, Melania* in 2021 (Costa, 2021).[128] All of these artists are theatremakers who create and self-produce their work, and hire additional creative support on a project-by-project basis. Concurrently, she worked as a writer, critic and researcher.[129] There is scope for these practices, particularly embedded criticism and dramaturgy, to overlap when practised by a single individual. As a result, questions arise around how she distinguishes her dramaturgy and criticism practices from each other. Despite this, her relationships with the artists she worked with and the tasks that she carried out dramatically differ between her embedded criticism and dramaturgy practices.

EMBEDDED CRITICISM

Though Costa is considered a pioneer of contemporary embedded criticism, she resists using the term to describe her practice. In her book chapter "The Critic as Insider: Shifting UK Critical Practice Towards 'Embedded' Relationships and the Routes This Opens Up Towards Dialogue and Dramaturgy", an authoritative text on

[127] This production was first performed at Leeds Playhouse, then toured.
[128] This production was originally meant to run at The Barbican in 2020, but was cancelled due to the coronavirus lockdown.
[129] She primarily writes criticism for *Exeunt Magazine*, and does so infrequently due to needing to prioritise paid work (Costa, 2021).

embedded criticism, Costa expresses reluctance to adopt the term (2016).[130] Instead, she prefers 'critic-in-residence' because "you wouldn't call a poet who's working at London Zoo an embedded poet, you know, you'd call them a poet in residence" (Costa, 2021). This bears resemblance to Lessing's 'in-house critic' title. While she uses 'embedded criticism' out of convenience (Costa, 2021), she does not "like that sort of militaristic connotation of it" (2021), referring to Andrew Haydon coining the term as a reference to embedded journalism, a mode of war reporting. More importantly, she does not consider the work she did observing rehearsals and then writing about them as similar to Haydon's work accompanying Actor's Touring Company on a tour (see: p. 7). Haydon's embedded criticism "was not just a day in the life of ATC [...] he was properly spending some time with them" (Costa, 2021), referring to Haydon travelling and living with the company. Costa, however, worked with the same company for eight years so, whilst she did not have intensive periods of time with CG&Co in the same way Haydon did with ATC, she spent a long time with the company. This is a rarity within embedded criticism.

Whilst superficially this is a matter of semantics, it is important to recognise that she observed rehearsals and provided critical commentary (Costa, 2021). However, her working processes differed from Haydon's. This is because the productions Costa worked on were being developed at the time, whereas Haydon accompanied the tour of a finished piece and functioned as a roadie documenting the wider experience of international touring. Despite these differences between Costa and Haydon's work, current[131] paradigms of practice have evolved – likely as a result of Costa's early practice and the financial limitations of individual critics and productions – with the embedded critic observing rehearsals for short periods of time.[132] Therefore, I argue that Costa's work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of embedded criticism due to her length of time with CG&Co and her dramaturgical contributions. As much as Costa resists the term, her practice of rehearsal observation and writing about the rehearsal process warrants being considered embedded criticism.

This is in spite of embedded critics indicating their work resists strict codifying. This resistance is evident in Costa's reluctance to use the term, examples of embedded

[130] Other authoritative texts on the subject include those by Karen Fricker (2016), Megan Vaughan (2020), and Andrew Haydon (2012).
[131] At the time of completing this thesis in 2023.
[132] As demonstrated in Appendix A and the introduction, common practice is for an embedded critic to observe a small number of rehearsals, and to not work with a company over multiple productions.

criticism across chapter 1, and that Costa's thinking about embedded criticism had "a lot of shift and change" (Costa, 2021) over the time she worked as an embedded critic. Prior to the start of her time with CG&Co in 2011, she wrote embedded criticism as part of her job at *The Guardian* national newspaper. At the time she wrote these pieces the term 'embedded criticism' did not exist. She considers this early embedded criticism as a "sort of reportage from the inside" (Costa, 2021) that "very much overlapped with my work in journalism" (Costa, 2021). However, she does not believe she is alone: she also positions Jake Orr's embedded criticism with Dirty Market's production *Be Good Revolutionaries* as this kind of embedded criticism (Costa, 2021).[133] Given that much embedded criticism is written after minimal time observing rehearsals, it often also approaches writing as "reportage from the inside" (Costa, 2021) framed by the writer's subjectivity.

One of the significant changes in her embedded criticism was shifting away from this reportage style. She wanted to do this firstly to remove herself from the commodification of performance within the "marketplace" (Costa, 2021) of capitalist labour, and the role embedded criticism can play in marketing a production to paying audiences: she "wasn't interested in reporting on the work to encourage people to see it" (Costa, 2021). Additionally, she "wasn't interested in reporting on the work as a kind of technical insight into the rehearsal room" (Costa, 2021). This is in spite of recognising the importance of this reportage aspect given theatre's liveness, limited audiences and fragmented archive (Costa, 2021).

Most important to my argument, Costa has come to envisage embedded criticism as a spectrum, with journalism at one end and dramaturgy at the other (Costa, 2021). In moving away from reportage, she therefore moved towards dramaturgy. She did this by providing critical feedback on the rehearsal process when she was in the rehearsal space – a common part of the production dramaturg's practice (Luckhurst 2006, Trencsényi 2015). This spectrum model reflects the wide range of criticism and dramaturgy practices, and resonates with thinking around how much or little distance 'the outside eye' maintains. Embedded criticism that contains reportage falls towards the journalism end of this spectrum.

[133] See chapter 1 (pp. 32-33) for discussion of this work.

Costa's embedded criticism also developed by incorporating Andy Horwitz's horizontalism (2012).[134] It is from this horizontalism that Costa extracted the principles of dramaturgy, advocacy and engagement that guided her embedded criticism practice through the rest of her time working with CG&Co. She is particularly interested in this terminology and the model of horizontalism because it "conveys dialogue and discussion" (Costa 2016, 2021). As this case study will further demonstrate, dialogue and discussion are also important parts of her embedded criticism and dramaturgy practices, as well as her running of theatre discussion groups. This incorporation of dramaturgy into her embedded criticism practice indicates how closely related embedded criticism and dramaturgy are, especially if the embedded critic is able to spend extended periods of time in rehearsals. This shifted her practice away from journalistic paradigms – including the perception of objectivity and a focus on presenting facts rather than a subjective response – and towards a practice that is closer to the artists and their work.

Inspired by horizontalism, Costa strove to create what she calls a 'parallel performance' with her embedded criticism: an "experience [...] to be presented online that can be encountered outside of the space that the theatre work happens in and also outside of the time that the theatre work happens in" (Costa, 2021).[135] This also reflects her relationship with the artist and the work as an embedded critic; she is adjacent to the artist and their work but not a part of it, so she makes something that is also adjacent to the work but in close proximity to, and dialogue with, the performance. This position of adjacency, in dialogue with the performance but separate from it, resonates with the idea of the outside eye who analyses the work whilst supporting the artists' aims.

The content and form of her embedded criticism also changed over time as she moved away from reportage and towards horizontalism. She uses Paula Varjack as an exemplar of what she was trying to achieve:

> Paula creates a tumblr for each of her shows, and that tumblr has got bits of writing by her and [...] loads of links to different newspaper articles or magazine articles, or stuff that she's seen online, or images. It's using the

[134] See: introduction (pp. 17-18).
[135] It is not within the scope of this thesis to critically consider in detail whether or not embedded criticism can be considered a performance particularly if a piece of embedded criticism is only written text, so I am using the term that Costa chooses in this instance as this is one of the primary goals of her embedded criticism practice.

> materials to create another encounter that people can have; they'll glean all of the themes and the thinking and the ideas, but they won't see the thing itself and it's not a replacement for the thing itself, it sits alongside the thing itself. (Costa, 2021)[136]

This conceptualisation of embedded criticism occupies a separate space in a horizontal relationship, even though questions arise as to whether embedded criticism could be considered a performance. Varjack's blog, though adjacent and close to the performance, is still separate from it. Like embedded criticism, it illuminates the making process and can be understood without seeing the show. Though the reader can encounter embedded criticism outside of the space of a rehearsal and performance, it ultimately results from Costa's proximity to the artist and the rehearsal process.

Her own embedded criticism pieces, though usually text-based and less visual that Varjack's blog she used as an example, reflect her aims to move away from journalistic criticism. They differ from mainstream criticism in *The Guardian:* they are far longer, contain granular description and analysis, and lack the judgment of reviews. There is still evidence of reportage in her work, however. Her 2022 blog post summarises her embedded criticism for CG&Co as: "building a narrative around his work, building bridges across space and time between him and potential audiences" (2022, no page). To do this, there will be some degree of reportage. In addition, Costa also realises that she "fuelled a cult of genius around [CG…], and existed within a circle of hypnosis in which I consistently asked people who criticised his work to see it another way, a way more sympathetic [...] or attuned to (what I knew of) his thinking" (2022, no page). This advocacy of CG's work and building a narrative around it resonates both with Lessing striving to create dialogue with his audience about Hamburg Theatre's productions, and Friedrichs noting that the dramaturg considers how the audience encounters a performance.

Costa identifies embedded criticism's archival function. This supports its position as a mode of theatre criticism within the British theatre landscape:

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[136] Paula Varjack is a theatremaker and performer who makes a blog to accompany the performances she creates. For an example discussed by Costa, see imelania.tumblr.com/. Costa was the dramaturg for this production, but Varjack made this blog. It primarily consists of links to articles about and videos of Melania Trump, and some marketing materials from Varjack's show.

> I think a lot about how much reinventing the wheel happens in theatre and performance and how much that's because either the archive is in a separate place, or the archive is terrifying, or the archive is like a massive net with huge holes in it [...] and so, there's just so much like lack of knowledge about the theatre that came before [...] and so there's a lot of, like, dealing with the same problems over and over again. (Costa, 2021)

Costa is referring to the lack of archives and archival processes in British theatre, particularly in small- and mid-scale independent theatre. These venues do not have the capacity to create and maintain an archive of their processes. This prohibits artists from learning about or researching historical productions and processes by their predecessors. Given this fractured archive, Costa suggests that embedded criticism can create an archive of rehearsal processes accessible to practitioners and researchers as long as the content is published and available online. Though the German dramaturgical tradition as developed by Brecht includes archiving, this is not something typically done by dramaturgs in British theatres given that they are usually appointed on a freelance, per-production basis. Further, dramaturgs in Britain do not necessarily have access to a pre-existing publication where they can write about the production. Embedded critics typically work within paradigms of journalism so have access to places that can publish their writing. Therefore, embedded critics are effectively positioned to take on archival responsibilities if they have extended periods of time in rehearsals.

Perhaps most importantly, Costa also identifies opportunity for the embedded critic to take on responsibility for identifying harmful or abusive rehearsal practice(s): "there is so much potential for the embedded critic, especially…in the sort of long tail of #MeToo, to have an eye on all of the ways in which theatre is made that to whatever degree are harmful" (Costa, 2021). This is further supported by their position as an outside observer, but requires a particular type of engagement that specifically monitors behaviour and processes. Originally founded by Tarana Burke as an organisation to support victims of sexual violence (me too, 2021), the company ‘me too' catalysed what is now known as the #MeToo movement. This movement gained wider momentum in 2017, after Alyssa Milano tweeted about her experience of sexual harassment or assault.[137] This caused a period of reflection in British theatre, and

[137] Her tweet did not specify which she experienced.

some institutional actions resulting in the removal of abusers from their positions and investigations into others.[138]

An important point raised during this time of collective reflection on theatre's systemic abuse and the conditions that enable it is that 71% of theatre workers are freelancers (Freelancers Make Theatre Work, 2021) who do not work full-time in a building. This has created what Costa describes as an "unregulated workplace that has no kind of HR. And very few safety protocols" (Costa, 2021). However, she is realistic in noting that an embedded critic must be granted access to the rehearsal process, and if the embedded critic were to suggest including judgment of the quality of the work or the processes of making it, that access would likely not be granted: "what theatre company is going to give a critic, access to the rehearsal room, if they're going to be there from a critical slash judgmental perspective?" (Costa, 2021). This means that significant structural changes are needed within the industry to prevent this. Transparency, disclosure and regulation must become inherent parts of the rehearsal process to compensate for the lack of standardised HR. Additionally, those currently in control of determining who can access rehearsal spaces – usually directors and/or producers – would need to be disempowered to some extent in order to enable an external observation process. Though an institutional dramaturg could take on some of this work, their scarcity within the industry and their lack of administrative access limits this scope. Costa is right in that embedded critics are likely not to be given access to rehearsal processes if the company/artists think the embedded critic is there to monitor practice, but this is largely due to the lack of power of an embedded critic and the lack of industry regulation on rehearsal processes.

DRAMATURGY

The four-year period where Costa's embedded criticism and dramaturgy practices overlap indicates that there are also overlaps between her practices. This could position her embedded criticism practice closer to dramaturgy. Yet, as this part of the case study will show, Costa's dramaturgical processes significantly differ from her embedded criticism. Her dramaturgy work directly contributes to the process of creating a performance piece and she does not write about these shows' rehearsal processes. She also sees the practices as separate from each other (2021). I argue

[138] For a summary of the effect of #MeToo on British theatre, please see the Introduction to *Notelets of Filth: Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's Emilia* (ed. Kressly, Patient and Williams 2022, pp. 1-15).

that this is indeed the case: there is little evidence that her embedded criticism practice informed her subsequent dramaturgy work, and her processes are very different across these practices.

Costa considers her first dramaturg job closer to mainstream criticism (2021). She explains that her work on Harry Josephine Giles '*Class Act* for Dialogue Festival in 2014 was determined by the show having undergone initial development, so she shaped and refined Giles' creative choices rather than working with the show from the beginning: "[the] arc of it was there, [but] it was about kind of polishing the details inside of that" (Costa, 2021).[139] This 'polishing' involved "really rigorously looking at every aspect of it [...] and saying this is what I think about this, and this is what it reminds me of" (Costa, 2021).[140] She mostly guided the piece's further development, which resonates with the idea of the dramaturg as a critical friend (Trencsényi 2015), who analyses the show as it is in that moment and identifies what elements do and do not support the aims for the production. However, her process of providing a critical analysis of a production nearing its public performance also resembles a mainstream critic's process of analysing a work. Instead of writing a review, she shared her thoughts directly with the artist, who then used them to further develop the performance. Given embedded criticism typically does not include dramaturgical feedback, Costa's work on *Class Act* is quite removed from embedded criticism.

This process contrasts with her work on Selena Thompson's *salt.,* largely due to Thompson having not yet made the show when Costa joined the team (Costa, 2021). Thompson had an initial idea and invited Costa and Season Butler to work with her on its development before its first performance at Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2017.[141] Costa was part of the creative team from the beginning rather than being brought in near the end by the artist to provide critical feedback as was the case in *Class Act*. Instead of refining a show that already existed, Costa collaborated with Thompson and Butler to create the show from scratch. Her work on these two shows demonstrates the range of practices within dramaturgy specifically that dramaturgical intervention can occur at any time in the rehearsal or creation process.[142] It also shows

[139] Costa co-organised and programmed Dialogue Festival with Jake Orr, who worked as an embedded critic for Dirty Market in 2013.
[140] This description is similar to my own work on *Windrush Square* as detailed in Chapter 4, because I was brought onto the project after the show had initially undergone research and development.
[141] I reviewed this production for my website, *The Play's the Thing UK*.
[142] See: introduction (pp. 19-24).

that dramaturgy can be co-creative as it was with Thompson and Butler, or responsive to and led by the artist, as was the case with *Class Act*. Though her longer engagement with *salt.* resembles the sustained time period she worked with CG&Co as the company's embedded critic, Costa was more integrated into the creative team for *salt.* whereas with CG&Co she could come to as many or few rehearsals as she wanted (2018, no page).

In addition, Costa found that working in a team of three differed from working with Giles, where it was just the two of them. This altered the making and rehearsal dynamic, and also gave Costa the opportunity to learn from an artist who did not conceive of the original concept. She describes the relationship as triangular (Costa, 2021), indicating her dramaturgy practice is non-hierarchical and active in the making and rehearsal process. In contrast, an embedded critic who is in rehearsals to observe, particularly if they are only there for a small part of the rehearsal period, is outside of the creative team making the work. Additionally, having Butler involved, who was a more experienced theatremaker than Costa, provided Costa with opportunities to learn about making theatre.[143] After working on this production, Costa considers dramaturgy "like a really big building to explore" but describes her initial process as going "through a door into a room and I thought that room was the building, and it was like Season came through an invisible door, and there's a secret door in the room" (Costa, 2021). This suggests the practice's difficulty to define because of the expansive range of tasks that a dramaturg can carry out. These will vary from project to project, and as this was only the second production she dramaturged, she was still understanding how wide-ranging the practice can be.

Costa further developed her practice by working within larger creative teams. When first working with artist Jamal Gerald on *Idol*, Gerald brought Rachel Young onto the project as director and Akeim Buck as choreographer. There was some fluidity between Costa and Young's roles: "Rachel couldn't be around so much [...] and I ended up kind of like, falling into [...] almost a director role, as well. So that was interesting, and kind of unexpected" (Costa, 2021). Being part of a larger team requires supporting multiple people and, in this instance, allowed Costa to share some directorial responsibilities with Young. Working subsequently again with Gerald and Young, Costa notes that this time she was "really learning how to work as a team"

[143] Butler is a writer, performance and visual artist, and researcher. Her website documents a selection of her performance work going back to an artists' residency at Somerset House in 2012, and more recent dramaturgy, installation and writing work (Butler, no date).

(Costa, 2021). This process entails "learning [...] our team processes, and being generative within a team" (Costa, 2021), with an example being how she normally takes notes: "all of the note taking that I've done for me and Jamal [...] now needing to recognise that Rachel [Young] finds big blocks of text really difficult, [and] finds audio much easier to work with, so [I am] needing to change that practice to adapt to the team" (Costa, 2021). This focus on adaptation reflects Trencsényi's argument that dramaturgy is constantly adapting to suit the work (2015). The dramaturg's position within a team is significantly different from the embedded critic, as the former must adapt to and collaborate with others to realise a shared creative vision. The embedded critic does not collaborate with others in the rehearsal space as they are only responsible for their own writing. Though both the dramaturg and embedded critic are responsive and consequently adaptive to the rehearsal, the dramaturg must respond and adapt in the moment when contributing towards making the work, whereas the embedded critic responds and adapts when they are writing.

Reflecting on her dramaturgy practice so far, Costa identifies that rather than negatively critiquing or rejecting an artist's process, she considers ideas' implications, and adjusts her approach to suit each production's needs. At the time of interviewing for this thesis, Costa has worked with Gerald and Varjack each on two different productions (Costa, 2021). Costa's process varied each time (Costa, 2021) because she was working with different people, different productions, and different stages of development (Costa, 2021). As an example, she explains that Varjack works with free writing and improvisation to generate a performance, whereas Rachel Young prefers audio (Costa, 2021). However, across these projects, Costa has identified that she tends to be a 'yes, and' person.[144] She explains what this means using an example from working with Gerald: "if Jamal says to me that he wants to make a work thinking about the difference between domestic slaves and field slaves, I don't say, 'no Jamal that's a terrible idea'. I say, 'hey, okay, and then let's think about what's involved in that'" (Costa, 2021). This exemplifies the difference between criticism and dramaturgy in that the first response Costa had is one of judgment that would not be out of place in a mainstream review. The second response facilitates dialogue with the artist about their creative choices during the early stage of the work, as per Barton's description of the dramaturg's role in the development process (2005).

[144] 'Yes, and' is a term is also commonly used in theatre games and improvisation, where performers learn to override any impulses to say no to another performer on stage as this ends the scene or does not permit full development of its dramatic potential.

There are exceptions to Costa's 'yes, and' approach to working with artists. An instance that Costa shares, which also demonstrates how mainstream criticism can be used to convey an evaluation of a show's quality, is from her work with Varjack on *I, Melania*. After watching a rehearsal of an early version of the show, Costa strongly recommended removing a particular line because, "anyone who hates this show is going to pick on that line and quote it back at you in a way that you are not going to like" (Costa, 2021). Costa explained that Varjack identified that Costa's comments were "absolutely the words of the critic anticipating what the critics are going to say" (Costa, 2021). Criticism is an established part of production and developmental dramaturgy practice (Turner and Behrndt 2007, Trencsényi 2015), and Costa rightly identifies that dramaturgy is "constantly just trying to think about what is the person thinking when they're watching this" (Costa, 2021). In this instance, Costa's background as a mainstream critic converges with her dramaturg practice. Her nuanced understanding of how mainstream critics analyse and write about a performance directly informs her dramaturgical feedback. This indicates how a critic's skillset can be applied to the dramaturgical process in the rehearsal room.

Ultimately, Costa summarises her dramaturgy practice as "always responding to the particular person that you're working with" (Costa, 2021). She thinks this means she does not have a particular process (Costa, 2021). She sees this as positive: "that's how it should be, and in other circumstances I talk about how incredibly detrimental this kind of one-size-fits-all approach that really does happen in theatre [...] and I'm constantly trying not to work in that way" (Costa, 2021). Yet, a dramaturgy practice that uniquely responds to each production and/or artist arguably is a process, and one that exemplifies how difficult it is to define dramaturgy.[145]

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EMBEDDED CRITICISM AND DRAMATURGY

Costa explicitly states that her dramaturgy and embedded criticism are "totally different" (Costa, 2021), and there are many indicators within her work that this is indeed the case. She identifies that the embedded critic is not part of the creative team and therefore can determine their own practice: "there's something quite interesting about being an embedded critic where you are in a totally individual role in a collective room. You get to do whatever you want, in a sense" (Costa, 2021). This is

[145] See: introduction (pp. 19-24).

because the embedded critic is not contributing to or responsible for the rehearsal or making process, whereas the dramaturg is.

Costa rarely writes about the work she dramaturgs. This indicates additional difference between her dramaturgy and embedded criticism practices. The infrequency of this writing reflects common practice in British dramaturgy, where the production dramaturg is not likely to write publicly available content apart from programme notes. Costa's writing, however, models how dramaturgs could write about their work. She acknowledges that whilst there have been some overlaps in her dramaturgy and embedded criticism practices in that she has occasionally written about work she dramaturged, "mostly they're quite distinct [practices…] either I'm dramaturg, and so I'm concerned with the work that's being presented to the public, or I'm not dramaturg, in which case I'm concerned with something else" (Costa, 2021). The embedded critic is concerned with communicating the rehearsal process to readers. Using Gerald's work as an example, she says, "I'm not about to [do], say, any kind of critical writing about Jamal's work, as the person making it with him. As the person with a role inside of the making of it" (Costa, 2021).

This is evidenced in her published conversation with Gerald*,* "Idols and Superstitions – A Conversation Between Jamal Gerald and Maddy Costa". The article is written as a dialogue where the two ask each other questions around the show's themes. Rather than Costa determining the structure and content of the piece, Gerald's words are platformed equally with Costa's. His questions and answers determine the article as much as hers do. It is evident that instead of critically evaluating the quality of the work as a mainstream critic would, or focusing on conveying the making process from a perspective outside the creative team as an embedded critic, Costa shares her thoughts and experiences, and answers to Gerald's questions. Whilst their answers to each other's questions foreground the subjectivity of lived experience, which as chapter 2 of this thesis argues is a common feature of embedded criticism, there is little evidence of the rehearsal space, or the making process. One brief inclusion of a moment from rehearsal is Costa telling Gerald: "one of my favourite things I have gained from working with you is that you told me about a conversation with your poetry teacher, Khadijah Ibrahiim, about someone described in history as a slave, who she described instead using the verb enslaved" (Costa, 2018). The majority of their conversation, however, focuses on their relationships to the show's themes. Therefore, the piece has little in common with embedded criticism due to the content

and Costa's position within the creative process. This shows that the critic's position as an outside observer is intrinsic to embedded criticism.

Costa also wrote about working with Selena Thompson in the book she co-edited with Andy Field, *Performance and the Age of Precarity* (2021). The short chapter does more than provide some insight into Thompson's work; it also documents Costa and Thompson's friendship. It includes what Costa – a white woman – learned from Thompson – a Black woman – about life as a Black woman in Britain and consequently, Costa's racial privilege. Whilst this could give rise to tension between them, instead it serves to address the imbalance in their privilege. Costa also transparently demonstrates how their friendship led to Costa dramaturging *salt..* She provides some insight into the influences on Thompson's work, such as a list of books and concepts. She particularly focuses on what she has learned from Thompson and how it has informed her thinking. This demonstrates Costa foregrounds a process of dialogue and learning from her collaborators.

There is, however, no detailed description of the making or rehearsal process that is typically found in embedded criticism. This chapter shows Costa and Thompson's proximity to each other, and Costa's proximity to *salt.*'s making process, but the rehearsal space is far less apparent in the writing than it is in embedded criticism and the focus is more on Costa and Thompson's relationship. This piece, and her dialogue with Gerald, have some similarity with German dramaturgy practice in that her writing is publicly available, derives directly from her work as a dramaturg, and addresses some of the shows' themes and influences.

Costa's decreasing criticism work is due to reflection on her dramaturgy. She now recognises that when watching a rehearsal or performance, she, "can't speak from anyone except myself [and] can't really anticipate what someone with a totally different background to me might think when watching something [...] all I can do is say how I respond as an audience member" (Costa, 2021). Additionally, she may well be seeking distance from mainstream criticism's association with objectivity, and/or find her position as both an artist and a critic is untenable due to conflict of interest, as per Malzacher's practices (see: p. 141). Ultimately, Costa realises she cannot

approach her dramaturgy practice as representing a 'universal' audience and is ultimately subjective.[146]

Further, Costa is "trying to pull away" from her "long relationship with journalism, and criticism is essentially a journalistic practice, and embedded criticism, kind of, is understood as the journalis[t end of the] spectrum" (Costa, 2021). Though there could be many reasons for this, she may well want to cut ties with a practice that she associates with CG's abuse. Regardless, this further demonstrates that she does not associate her embedded criticism writing with her dramaturgy practice, and the few pieces of writing that she has done as a dramaturg are potentially more similar to German dramaturgy practice than embedded criticism. Given the examples of embedded criticism analysed over the course of this thesis, the emergence of contemporary embedded criticism from journalism, and many embedded critics coming to the practice from mainstream criticism, Costa's association of embedded criticism with journalism reflects the wider practice.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

As the first two sections of this chapter argue, current German dramaturgy practice is the result of a lineage that includes Lessing and Brecht, both of whom significantly determined the practice today. This is particularly the case for institutional dramaturgs in Germany's state and municipal theatres, though they have also influenced freelance dramaturgy practice in Germany. German dramaturgs, when working on productions, are part of the creative team and rehearsal process where they take on much of the responsibility for the script and provide the rest of the team with critical feedback. They are also likely to create publicly available writing about the production. The latter, and the degree of responsibility the German dramaturg has over the script, distinguish them from British dramaturgs. This is demonstrated through the case study on Costa's practice. Though she has written on two of the productions she has dramaturged, these writings bear little resemblance to her embedded criticism, or the extensive programme books generated by dramaturgs in Germany. Though there are other critics who became dramaturgs or took on other creative roles in theatre – such as Stewart Pringle, Kate Bassett, and Matt Trueman – there are few people who have

[146] Shelley Orr argues for a dramaturgy that approaches the work with subjectivity and proximity, rather than a critical distance that can be perceived as objective. This is reflected in how Costa sees her dramaturgy as not being able to anticipate how people different from herself will respond to a performance (2014).

followed this trajectory. This indicates a lack of industry acknowledgment that these practices are related.

However, there are some overlaps between the practice and processes of dramaturgy in Germany and the UK, in terms of lineage and production dramaturgy as a role. Concepts of proximity and distance, and the dramaturg as the 'outside eye', are discussed in both dramaturgy cultures but without an agreed consensus on their use and meaning. Giving critical feedback is also an intrinsic part of dramaturgy in both countries. This criticality positions criticism and dramaturgy as related practices, even though the industry tends to completely silo them.

The case study on Costa indicates that embedded criticism and dramaturgy practices are distinct, with several clear differences. This is despite the use of dramaturgy within Costa's embedded criticism practice. Firstly, as a dramaturg she is part of a team, regardless of the size, with whom she actively works to create the performance. As an embedded critic, even when she did contribute dramaturgically, she is largely outside of the rehearsal and creation process and works independently. As an embedded critic she strove to create writing separate from the performance whereas as a dramaturg, she contributed to the performance itself. Most significantly, Costa has done very little writing about the work she has dramaturged. The two written pieces, rather than reflecting the spatiality evident in much embedded criticism output, instead focus on the relationship between Costa and the artist. This indicates that Costa's embedded criticism is more similar to her criticism and journalism than to her dramaturgy.

CHAPTER 5

MY THREE PRACTICES: SHARED PROCESSES AND DIFFERENT OUTPUTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines my own work as an embedded critic, mainstream critic, and dramaturg. It does so in order to consider the overlaps and differences across these practices. Situating my practices adjacent to the case studies in chapters 2 through 4 puts my practices in dialogue with each other and contextualises them within the broader theatre industry. It also identifies whether the findings in the case studies are unique to them, or also evident within my practices. In doing so, this chapter provides an additional perspective and expands discussions on embedded criticism's practices and processes.

In the first section of this chapter, I reflect on my experiences of mainstream criticism from 2013 to 2022. This positions my mainstream criticism practice both within the field and in relation to my other practices, and establishes how mainstream criticism informed my embedded criticism work. I address how I developed my use of a journalistic style and language conventions to mask my subjective tastes and preferences, and to create a sense of authority and expertise. I draw on recollections of how my practice developed since I started reviewing in 2013.

The next part of this chapter considers my practice and process as a developmental and production dramaturg. This includes developmental work with playwrights as they create and redraft their script, on plays that may not have ultimately been produced. It also includes devised work created collaboratively rather than written by a single writer. The practice in this section occurred on two productions over 2018, where my role solely consisted of working as a dramaturg, as opposed to previous work where I was primarily working as a producer or director who took on some dramaturgical responsibilities. I particularly identify how my dramaturgy and mainstream criticism practices overlap and differ.

I then critically analyse my embedded criticism practice on five productions occurring between 2017 and 2021. I particularly focus on how embedded criticism uses description and analysis instead of judgment. I articulate how the principles of

advocacy and dialogue from Maddy Costa's practice and Andy Horowitz's horizontalism (2012) inform my writing. I also consider what happens when an embedded critic is asked for feedback. Additionally, I identify tensions between the expectations of the embedded critic to not judge the rehearsal process, and the process of evaluation that is an inherent part of mainstream criticism and dramaturgy.

MAINSTREAM CRITICISM

I began reviewing theatre and performance in 2013 for the websites *Remote Goat* and *everything theatre*. It is important to note the context that prompted my start, as it informed how I approached and developed my practice. At the time, I was working full-time in a mainstream secondary school as a support worker for students with learning needs, and as a freelance children's entertainer on weekends. I wanted to keep up with theatre productions and developments in the field, as I hoped to return to working in the industry on a more full-time basis. By reviewing, I could directly utilise my theatre training and experience around my day jobs. Additionally, it could be useful to others in theatre; I understood the importance of reviews for marketing, creative feedback, future employment, and funding applications.

I had no experience in criticism at this point. As such, my training was almost completely self-led and 'on the job'. I drew on my theatre training and work history to inform my analysis, evaluation and judgment of the productions I reviewed. I read criticism in a range of publications to learn how to structure reviews, as well as what writing style to use. These sites I wrote for provided minimal support or guidance, so I largely developed my practice independently. *Remote Goat* did not have a style guide, just a word count recommendation of 200 to 400 words. It also did not have an editorial process: critics filed reviews through a webform that automatically published them. *everything theatre* had something of a style guide, though it was more about the site's ethos. Editors often made changes to reviews, though there was no dialogue or conversation with the editorial team so there was no direct editorial feedback. My earliest reviews were often quite dry; they relied on terminology gained in my training and I evaluated shows' quality through the lens of the techniques I learned and practised as an actor and director. This style and tone attempted to convey expertise in the field and mask the self through the reliance on industry jargon and journalistic language.[147]

[147] See: chapter 3 (p. 86).

I honed my craft by reading other publications' reviews of shows I reviewed, after I published mine. I found it helpful to compare what I had written to what was published elsewhere, from national newspapers to blogs. Reading other writers' style, tone, language and content curation choices enabled me to improve my own writing so that it was more engaging for readers. It was from this extensive reading and analysis that I began to grasp what major publications considered to be 'good criticism' – a journalistic style, giving the impression of authority, and candid and engaging writing. This further evidences chapter 2's findings that the dominant style in mainstream criticism masks the critic's subjectivity and positions their evaluation and judgment as fact. On reflection, I did not actively acknowledge this at the time especially since I considered my criticism to come from an informed and educated perspective given my work history and training.

This trajectory led to founding my own theatre criticism website in 2015, after which theatre blogging and online criticism platforms had become well-established (Haydon 2016, Vaughan 2020). Because theatre criticism sites were so plentiful, I aimed to focus on fringe, small- to mid-scale theatre that was less likely to be reviewed in larger publications due to continuing cuts to arts coverage, but review them in the same style found in these larger publications. This corresponded with the 2013 to 2016 period where Megan Vaughan notes shifts in unpaid theatre criticism. One of these includes attempts to professionalise the practice (2020) so that it would be regarded as equal to paid, professional theatre criticism published in major outlets, instead of seen as lesser. My aim to have an outlet that would meet the same standards of criticism in mainstream media outlets indicates that my site and practice aligns with those like *My Theatre Mates* founders Terri Paddock and Mark Shenton (Vaughan, 2020) who also aimed to professionalise unpaid theatre criticism. My site therefore contributed to a growing movement seeking to professionalise blogging and voluntary criticism at a time when larger publications were reducing their coverage.

In my attempts to take on the journalistic style of criticism in newspapers and trade publications (see: p. 12), I avoided the first-person in order to convey authority and expertise, and focused on the work rather than sharing my own process of engagement. This is a stylistic choice I still use throughout my criticism. An example from my 2021 review of *Somewhere to Belong* at The Lion & Unicorn Theatre demonstrates this: "Unfortunately, despite many great ideas and individual moments of excellent execution, this production feels like a disjointed work-in-progress with

sections that only tenuously connect to each other" (2021, no page). This exemplifies how I mask my opinion and issue a judgment based on my personal taste. My judgment was informed by my personal valuing of cohesion within a performance piece, and preference for cohesion over productions deliberately utilising, for example, fragmentation and collage as structural inspiration.

Ultimately, working as a mainstream critic enabled me to develop my writing style within journalistic paradigms. Widely reading across theatre criticism outlets of varying scale taught me to understand the importance of conveying authority and expertise when judging the quality of a production. I also learned how to balance the different aspects of the critical trifecta (p. 9) to provide readers with information about the show as well as critical analysis and evaluation of its quality. When applying this knowledge to embedded criticism, I still largely focused on the processes I observed and mostly wrote about the work rather than myself. Whilst this exemplifies what Costa calls a reportage style of embedded criticism (see: p. 131), few to no editorial constraints meant I was able to incorporate some use of the first-person and foregrounding of the subjective experience of the encounter. I also focused on balancing description, context, and analysis of the process to convey the experience of rehearsals.

DRAMATURGY

My early dramaturgy practice was significantly influenced by my work as a critic, as well as my broader theatre work and education histories. I first 'officially' worked as a production dramaturg in 2018 on *Windrush Square*, a devised physical theatre piece by Monument Productions, a Blue Elephant Theatre associate company. The young company was a non-hierarchical collective formed during the final year of their Drama degree at St Mary's University, where they made the production. They continued to develop it for touring in the year after they finished their studies. Niamh de Valera, one of Blue Elephant's artistic directors, suggested they work with a dramaturg to further develop the show, and recommended me. She was familiar with my criticism practice, knew I had a background in theatre performance, and thought I would make a good dramaturg. This suggests that de Valera identified a skill overlap between criticism and dramaturgy, particularly given both can involve critically analysing production. This is established in dramaturgy scholarship (Trencsenyi 2015, Turner and Berhndt 2016).

The company perceived the show as largely finished when I came on board, so my process firstly consisted of understanding their aims for the project. I then provided a

critical analysis of what they had done so far. This entailed running through the performance in our first rehearsal. Afterwards, I asked numerous questions in order to understand the company's choices and aims for the show. This process of questioning is a key part of the dramaturg's first encounter with a performance (Hamilton and Byongsok Chon, 2023), and in this instance revealed they needed to further clarify the show's goals. Further, when I asked the company of six performers what they wanted the audience to take away from their production, they did not have a singular, specific answer. I then facilitated a conversation that led them to agree these aims. This conversation resembles Costa's dramaturgy work with Jamal Gerald (see: chapter 4, p. 138), indicating that this process is not unique in British dramaturgy.

With the company's aims in mind, I had a lens through which I analysed the show, and identified areas that could be further developed. This was ultimately a dialogical relationship between myself as an 'outside eye' and the creative team.[148] This process evokes Costa's early dramaturgy work because we joined these devised projects after they were initially created but during a phase of further development. Essentially, we provided the perspective of a critical, outside eye to support the artists' work to refine their initial creative choices. It significantly differed from my embedded criticism, which involved less conversation with the creative team since I was there to observe and write about the rehearsals. I also did not ask questions of anyone on the creative team about their overarching aims. This enabled me to freely interpret the work from an outsider's perspective.

The next steps of my process focused on detailing the protagonist's narrative by recommending cutting scenes that were not central to his story, and creating scenes that centred him. My suggestions implied what I thought would make the show of 'better' quality; in this instance, I advised that the production needed a clear message that every production element supported and a protagonist that the audience rallied behind. Though I had no specific metric for what I understood to be 'better' at the time I made these suggestions, on reflection I drew on my experiences as a mainstream critic – specifically the process of critical analysis and evaluation – to arrive at my judgment about the shortcomings in the messaging and protagonist. However, my personal taste in theatre still informed my analysis, evaluation and judgment. In his monograph *Understanding Cultural Taste: Sensation, Skill and Sensibility*, David

[148] See chapter 4 (pp. 104-105) for further discussion on the concept of the dramaturg as an 'outside eye'.

Wright states that taste is more complex than "consumer choice preference" (2015, p. 2). I similarly use taste in the value-neutral sense of personal preference in order to draw attention to its subjectivities, even though I recognise they are informed by one's education, culture, background, lived experience and work history. Ultimately, I prefer theatre with clear, well-supported messaging.

Race informed an important part of my analytical process. I paid particular attention to the role of race within the production's story and messaging and the racial composition of the devising cast.[149] The piece was about a Black family's experience of the Brixton riots and systemic racism in the police force. This meant that I had to acknowledge that racism against Black people in the UK exists within the police and justice systems on a systemic level to critically analyse the production's messaging and ensure it communicated the team's aims. This is evidenced by a United Nations-commissioned report (2023), and the disproportionate application of police 'stop and search' policy to Black people (Dodd, 2021). Ultimately, my critical feedback and suggestions focused on highlighting this systemic racism through the plot. This was particularly pronounced when discussing the production's climax, where one of the characters is killed by a police officer. The one white performer in the company suggested that it would be more powerful for his character to be killed during this conflict instead. I suggested that doing so would centre the experience of a white man instead of any of the Black characters, and as a result this would diminish how both the fictional characters and real people living at the time experience racism, violence, and oppression. The ending stayed as it was. This highlights how race, and my personal support for the play's message, informed my dramaturgical response. Considering how subjectivity informs mainstream criticism, it is evident that it overlaps these practices but is used in different ways.[150] In this instance, dramaturgy enabled me to shape the production's messaging about this particular issue.

The form my output takes marks a crucial difference between my dramaturgy and embedded criticism practices. For *Windrush Square,* I verbally expressed feedback and made developmental recommendations in the rehearsal room. These were in response to the artists' goals for the work, and within the material and financial constraints of the production process. I did not produce any written material that was

[149] The show was created and performed by a company almost entirely composed of Global Majority artists; there was only white person in the original cast/creative team. I was the second white person in the room.
[150] See chapter 3.

publicly available: all writing was via email and accessible only to those in the production team. In contrast, my embedded criticism primarily describes and contextualises what I observed. This writing was not critical feedback meant for the artists and creative team; instead, I wrote for a wider readership that wanted to learn about the rehearsal process. It may have been useful to the creative team to some extent since it provides understanding on how an observer may view the artists' work. However, it is not as comprehensive as my dramaturgy feedback and does not aim to improve the production. In short, my output differs not just in its content and the form but also in who it is for.

This is evident in my dramaturgy work on TL Wiswell's play *How I Became a Dominatrix* at Camden Fringe in 2018. Most of this work was developmental dramaturgy entailing reading and and email-based discussion months before the play entered rehearsals. Wiswell approached me before writing the first draft. We first discussed her ideas and aims for the play; during this conversation I mostly listened and asked some questions about anything I found unclear. In Katalin Trencsenyi's *Dramaturgy in the Making*, Maureen Labonté describes this dialogical first meeting as "gentle dramaturgy" (2015, p. 94), a process where the dramaturg starts to understand the writer and their work. This is similar to the first stage of work I did in my first rehearsal on *Windrush Square* though more cyclical in nature, and took several months. After reading a draft, I provided written feedback in the form of comments and questions. I did this from the first draft through the production script.

I attended two rehearsals, though the director was reluctant to work with a dramaturg despite being one herself. However, this could have been because the rehearsal period was only a week long. I was largely silent in rehearsals, apart from answering any questions about the script that arose, and gave approval for any script changes on behalf of Wiswell, who was unable to attend rehearsals at all due to her day job. Essentially, I acted as Wiswell's proxy since I had detailed knowledge of the script's development and an understanding of how Wiswell's aims for the play evolved. As such, my critical feedback on the play's development was predominantly limited to the development period when I was consistently evaluating the script's quality and providing suggestions for improvement based on Wiswell's aims for and vision of the play. Though this feedback reflects what I read, it differs from my embedded criticism because the feedback is tailored to meet the writer's aims and the material and temporal realities of the production budget and timeline. Embedded criticism is, firstly, not critical feedback that supports production development, nor is it necessarily

limited by the production's limitations. This is evident in Vaughan and Wong Davies' embedded criticism that focuses on the cultural associations the critic makes during their encounter.

To summarise, my dramaturgy has a similar process to mainstream criticism in that I evaluate the quality of the work, but as a dramaturg this is through the lens of the artist or company's goals. Additionally, the form the output takes in dramaturgy differs from that in criticism. In mainstream criticism, I evaluate the quality of a production once it is ready for the public to see; this is a key aspect of mainstream criticism that distinguishes it from embedded criticism and dramaturgy. In contrast, my evaluation of quality as a dramaturg takes the form of written or oral feedback during the rehearsal and/or development process. Embedded criticism describes, contextualises and reflects on the rehearsal process, from the position of someone outside of the creative team. Though the embedded critic and the dramaturg both work in the rehearsal space, their functions in the space are significantly different.

EMBEDDED CRITICISM

I first worked as an embedded critic in 2017, about four years after beginning to work as a mainstream critic. Since then, I worked on two more productions, and a rehearsal and development (R&D) phase of a production. In this section, I analyse and reflect on my embedded criticism processes in chronological order, to identify how my practice develops over time and how it is informed by wider contexts including the COVID-19 pandemic. I will identify how my embedded criticism overlaps with and differs from mainstream criticism and dramaturgy.

IN EVENT OF MOONE DISASTER: THE REHEARSAL SPACE AND ACTORS' PROCESSES

In Event of Moone Disaster by Andrew Thompson had won the theatre's International Playwriting Award in 2016; winning plays are then produced by Theatre503 in-house the following year.[151] Theatre503 is a pub theatre in Battersea that platforms new plays. Rebecca Usher, the theatre's marketing manager at the time, commissioned me as an embedded critic. She wanted a series of three, 500-word blog posts that would

[151] At the time I carried out this embedded criticism in 2017, Theatre503 also operated on a hire basis, wherein external companies hire the theatre to stage their productions. In-house productions are produced by the venue's staff.

be posted on the theatre's website. She said she was inspired by Megan Vaughan's embedded criticism for The Royal Court earlier that year and wanted to introduce embedded criticism to Theatre503. For the £100 fee, I would write a rehearsal observation piece, an essay thematically responding to the script, and a listicle-style, lighthearted article about a topic related to the play that she would provide. I analyse only my embedded criticism here.

Whilst I am comfortable in rehearsal rooms, I had not previously considered documenting rehearsals and felt unsure how to condense an entire day's rehearsal into a 500-word article. This is because Usher provided few parameters, apart from advising me to take inspiration from Vaughan's embedded criticism. I knew of Costa's embedded criticism, but her long-form articles' form and style would not suit the commission's brief. Therefore, I had Vaughan's writing in mind when I went into rehearsals and as I wrote my pieces. I directly took inspiration from her first embedded criticism piece's opening that described the physical characteristics of The Site and detailed part of the room:

> In the corner of a Forest Hill rehearsal room, there's a large silver trunk. It's easily big enough to fit a person if they curl up a bit. It's shut, but not locked. I wonder what could be in there. It's definitely well used – there are dark scuffs on the front, the lid doesn't close all the way, the latches looks [sic] broken, or well on their way there. Apart from the obviously functional storage capacity, I contemplate the journeys it's taken and why it's been kept. The kitchen/set and prop store have some hints as to the sort of things that are deemed valuable enough to hold onto – bits of backdrops, old furniture, fake flowers and bedding. Boxes simply labeled 'props – 'anything could be in them. They, along with the trunk, are full of possibilities that come from only their most superficially observed features. (2017, no page)

This opening functions on multiple levels. Firstly, I use description to 'set the scene' and provide factual information about the rehearsal space. I also used the first-person to openly articulate my thought process within and in response to the space to create the sense of actively exploring the space. This invites readers to, in a sense, accompany me on this exploration and see what I see. I also invite them to consider broader ideas around the objects we decide to keep and how others might interpret our choice of belongings. This draws awareness to the space itself and how we 'read'

spaces. I also establish the concept of possibility, which I then use as a lead into the creative process:

> In front of the trunk, a pair of actors wrestle with a scene from *In Event of Moone Disaster*. Director Lisa Spirling – also theatre503's artistic director – is guiding them through a multi-step process to find their characters. First, they read the scene sitting down. Whenever a line rings false, Lisa simply says 'again' until she's happy with the delivery. They discuss the characters' backstories and mull over the unknowns that aren't in the script. Why might he have said this? Why might she have done that? Little is set in stone at this point, but everyone here is looking for truth. They delve into all the possibilities of why the characters say and do the things they say and do (2017, no page)

Developing the theme of possibility, I employ the metaphor of creating and assembling a puzzle to describe first the process of character development and then the wider process of producing the play. I briefly mention the display on one wall:

> A mood board taped onto the wall gives additional clues as to what this bigger puzzle might look like by opening night. The phases of the moon, stark landscapes and a photo series of a diver all hint at a barren world unlike anything on this earth. There's endless potential. (2017, no page)

I do not, however, expand on how the mood board can be used nor engage with the production's design as conveyed in the mood board and model box that was also in the room. When I worked at Theatre503, I drew on my background in acting and teaching actors, confidently communicating about these components of the rehearsal process; I understand what I am observing and the reasons behind it. Perhaps, inspired by my own experience, I assumed this is what readers of embedded criticism wanted to learn about. My existing knowledge played an evident role in determining my writing, along with the rehearsal space. An embedded critic with no prior knowledge of rehearsal processes could find other aspects of a rehearsal more interesting, or pitch their embedded criticism to a readership with a similar lack of knowledge. These are both evident in Megan Vaughan's final, reflective piece (see: pp. 79-82). Therefore, the embedded critic draws on their acquired knowledges when choosing what to write. These may or may not be directly related to theatre, as evidenced by Ava Wong Davies' reflection on personal relationships in her *Kingdom*

piece (see: pp. 107-108). Nonetheless, embedded critics' knowledges – which are unique to each individual – implicitly and explicitly inform their process.

I then complete the piece by returning to the theme of possibility and potential:

> Throughout the rehearsal, Lisa maintains an exquisite balance between control and freedom that's just as compelling as the actors' work, the mood board, and the room itself. This is the early stages of the process and the air is tense and sparky, but in a good way. Like the trunk that sits in the corner of the room and the boxes in the storage area, anything could be revealed. (2017, no page)

Using the theme and the metaphor of a production as a puzzle provided me with the journalistic paradigm of an 'angle' that focused my writing and gave it a through-line. On reflection, I drew on this familiar form and style to focus my writing when faced with a vague brief. In terms of content, it still gave me flexibility to describe the rehearsal processes whilst also convey the experience of being in the rehearsal space. In addition, though I used this technique derived from journalism, the rehearsal space and proximity to the rehearsal process allowed me to draw on my theatre background in a way that reviewing does not.

This content flexibility enabled me to use a more casual tone in this piece than that used in many mainstream media outlets. This includes the mainstream criticism I write for my own site as well as criticism I have written in training and for paid publications.[152] Consistent with examples of embedded criticism throughout this thesis, particularly those in chapter 3, I use the first-person to indicate my position in the rehearsal space and to ensure my presence in the room is foregrounded so readers can experience the space through my eyes. This contrasts with my limited use of first-person in mainstream criticism, where I usually avoid using it. Additionally, I use Spirling's first name rather than her surname after I first mention her, suggesting an informality that differs from the convention of surname use in mainstream criticism.

Overall, this embedded criticism focuses on the rehearsal space and the actors' processes. Description of the space enabled the readers to picture it themselves. I also continue to rely on description to convey the actors' process of developing their

[152] My formal training in theatre criticism has solely consisted of my fellowship at the National Critics Institute at the O'Neill Theatre Center in 2017. My BA and MFA did not include any theatre criticism modules.

character. It is evident this is my first piece of embedded criticism and written early in the rehearsal process because I rely on concrete, material features of the space to contextualise what I am most familiar with in rehearsals. Other aspects of the writing, such as a less formal tone and positioning myself as an observer in the space, resemble extracts from Wong Davies and Vaughan's embedded criticism. This similarity suggests that whilst embedded critics use the physical and material conditions of the rehearsal room to situate themselves in the space, they do this to enable readers to picture the space and experience the rehearsal as the embedded critic did. It also separates embedded criticism's more casual writing style from the formal constraints of journalistic language.

JAMBOREE: DESIGN AND ACCESS

I worked as an embedded critic in 2019 for Oily Cart, a London-based touring company that creates highly sensory work for people who are profoundly disabled. They also use similar creative approaches to create theatre for babies and very young children. I recall first liaising with the company's PR who had sent a press release about their production *Jamboree*. The release invited critics to write a feature article, interview the creative team, or observe rehearsals. I expressed an interest in writing a piece of embedded criticism, though I had to explain what the practice was as the PR was not familiar with the term despite extending an invitation to rehearsals. The company did not provide a brief, and once we agreed the date I would attend they said I was welcome to come at any time and stay as long I liked. I was not commissioned to write the piece so was free to write what I pleased. This indicates industry understanding of embedded criticism's value, and inviting critics into rehearsals supports the practice's positioning as a mode of criticism.

I aimed to attend the whole day of rehearsal in order to minimise any disruption to the artists and their rehearsal process, but I arrived late. I used this experience to begin my piece and establish that design is one of the focuses of the piece:

> "Welcome to the glitter zone!"
>
> I'm greeted exuberantly by one of the actors, who are mid-yoga warmup when I arrive. Though I try my best to quietly enter their rehearsal space, I'm flustered by a series of train and tube delays that mean I arrived nearly half an hour after I intended and it's impossible for me to not be noticed. I self-consciously wave,

> smile, and settle into the chair that's closest to the door. There are musical instruments, costume [sic], sound equipment and lots of 'stuff 'everywhere in their Tooting rehearsal room overlooking a school's playground. And indeed, glitter. (2019, no page)

In contrast to the Theatre503 piece where much of the first paragraph solely focuses on physical aspects of the rehearsal space, here for half of this first paragraph, I position myself within the space, specifically in relation to the performers. By noting that I am near the door I situate myself on the edge of the space, as far from everyone else as possible, and clearly separate myself as the outsider who does not wish to disrupt their work. I am close enough to them that we can speak to each other, however. This evidences the rehearsal space as a dialogical space due to its physical and material conditions (see: chapter 2, pp. 65-66).

I also indicate my mental and emotional state. Though I did not deliberately incorporate the literary device of juxtaposition, the calm, quietness of actors doing yoga contrasts with my flustered and out-of-breath entrance that briefly disrupted their focus. The consequences my arrival had on the activity in the space also shows the dialogical relationship between the rehearsal space, those within it, and the embedded critic. It demonstrates how the rehearsal space and rehearsal processes determine embedded criticism because, as McAuley states, everything in space is connected (2009).[153]

Despite this initial use of the first-person in the first paragraph, much of the rest of the piece describes and contextualises the visual and physical characteristics of the rehearsal space and the actors within it, following the format of the Theatre503 piece. As this is the company's space rather than a for-hire rehearsal room, the company can recreate their performance space, and store materials in the room. This is evident in the second paragraph:

> Even part of the floor is covered with a silver, reflective material, but most of the shine comes from the costumes for *Jamboree*, Oily Cart's newest show for young people aged 12+ with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). The actor who greeted me, Mark, is wearing a waistcoat of shiny green, orange and earth toned ribbons, and a feathered headpiece. The other

[153] See: chapter 2, p. 64.

> five performers are similarly bedecked in sparkly and shimmery garb in a range of styles. There's a futuristic, tailored jumpsuit, a flowing dress of sheer silver that reminds me of an angel or a fairy, an elaborately beaded top hat, pink glitter Doc Martens, and other incredible pieces. The bright and shiny style immediately reminds me of all the different variations of Birds of Paradise that live in Papua New Guinea (when I'm not at the theatre in the evening, I watch nature documentaries). (2019, no page)

I specifically aimed to convey the show's design concept and aesthetic, something that I did not have much sense of in the Theatre503 rehearsal. I loved the bright colours and shiny elements of the design, and hoped to communicate how much I liked the concept. Though I also employ the first-person in the first paragraph, it is only used twice to contextualise who and what I am observing. In this paragraph, using it to explain how I came to the comparison of the costumes to Birds of Paradise justifies my choices as a writer. Whilst sharing this personal interest does not directly relate to the production, it reminds the reader that experience shapes the author's encounter and emphasises that someone else watching the same rehearsal could draw a different comparison. This is rarely so explicit in the mainstream criticism I author, where I avoid the first-person and explicit reference to my personal interests. There is scope to further consider how target audiences would receive the show, particularly in regard to the design choices I describe. This would have required knowing the reasons behind the design concept, as a dramaturg would.

As well as describing some of the costume pieces, I utilised description to convey information about the show's scripts and advocate for them as an access provision. These were unlike any script I had seen before and formed a key part of the company's access provisions for the disabled actors in the cast. As someone who values inclusive practices, I particularly wanted to draw attention to this way of working:

> Adding to the rich, visual landscape of the rehearsal room, are the scripts. They are completely different from what I normally picture when I think of a script; here they are series of illustrations and symbols and taped to the walls for easy reference. There are some bits of text, but rather than pages of only words, there are five to six sheets of A4 in a row, each row representing the staging for a song, or the overall order of the show. (2019, no page)

These scripts indicate a process that is outside the norms of typical script use in rehearsals. Through this description, I aimed to challenge readers to reflect on what they understand as a 'script', and how scripts can be adapted to be inclusive within the rehearsal process. Therefore, I use description and my personal interest in access and inclusion to disseminate information about a specific access provision that is otherwise invisible to those outside of this rehearsal period. This prompts reflection on how theatrical conventions can be adapted, and advocates for inclusivity. Advocacy is one of the three principles of horizontalism, which Costa also uses to inform her embedded criticism practice, so this piece demonstrates how I understand and apply the principle of advocacy to champion a way of working that I personally care about.[154]

Building on this initial, descriptive advocacy, I share the conversation I had with Robyn, one of the actors. Though this is further description of how the scripts function, it conveys this aspect of the inclusive rehearsal process along with mention of the dialogue I had with her:

> Disabled musician and cast member Robyn talks me through them on one of the tea breaks, showing me her blocking for one of the numbers. Each performer is a distinct symbol, with arrows and other markings showing where they stand at what moment. These relics of the devising process may look simple, but they indicate a precise dramaturgy that is suitable for performers who learn their staging, lines and songs in different ways. (2019, no page)

Therefore, I use description not just to describe physical and material aspects of the rehearsal space, but to advocate for inclusion and share dialogue that occurred within the space. This evidences how the dialogical aspect of the rehearsal space and those within shape my embedded criticism.

In these descriptive sections, I focused on the visual elements and design, largely because I do not have the technical knowledge or expertise to write about the music composition and performance that make up a significant part of the show. Though this lack of knowledge may not come across to a reader, it is rooted in the vocabulary of theatremaking that I know and feel comfortable engaging with. This further evidences my education and work history, though it also indicates I am not comfortable with

[154] See: chapter 4 (p. 132).

diverging from mainstream criticism's norms of the critic as an authoritative expert and stating areas where I have a lack of knowledge.[155]

I also write about the rehearsal processes specific to the late stage of the rehearsal period that I observed as part of my advocacy for access and inclusion. I considered the show's target audience, the use of access provisions, and express support for these to be an intrinsic part of a show's creation rather than something separate:

> At this point in the rehearsal process, director and new company Artistic Director Ellie Griffiths makes small tweaks to the staging and helps the performers solidify the introduction, a lengthy process allowing for the young people to acclimate to the characters and the performance space. Everything is precise and centred on the audience and their needs. Nothing Griffiths asks of the performers is generalised, even though parts of the piece depend on the young people and their carers 'needs and reactions. The performers explore and improvise their way through a variety of scenarios, like how to support anyone who is deaf, and what to do to comfort and soothe a young person who may be feeling anxious.
>
> Throughout the day, I'm continuously impressed by the processes that put inclusion at the centre of the theatremaking process rather than tacked on as an after-thought shortly before opening night. Whilst teenagers with PMLD is a very specific audience demographic, surely considering access more broadly can be part of the starting point of any new piece of theatre. Keeping those needs in mind throughout the rehearsal and development process means that access provisions become an innate part of the storytelling and are fully integrated into the show. Theatre would be richer, more welcoming and more radical for it. (2019, no page)

In this penultimate paragraph, I attempt to describe how Griffiths guides the actors through various scenarios they may encounter as the audience enters the performance space. In contrast to productions for non-disabled audiences, the process of getting this audience in and out of the auditorium is slow, careful, and time consuming. During this process, each young person and their carer were welcomed

[155] See: chapter 2 (pp. 86, 91).

and seated individually by an actor who introduced themselves and established their unique needs.

In this part of the rehearsal, Griffiths asked company staff and others in the rehearsal room to stand in for audience members so that the cast had bodies to rehearse and improvise with. I was asked and agreed to participate. Following this improvisation, Griffiths asked whether there was anything that could improve the experience of an audience member. Whilst this feedback could be considered dramaturgical in that it could have shaped an individual actor's work, I had no suggestions to offer as a non-disabled person. It was evident that Griffiths and the cast sought concrete suggestions to inform their audience interactions, and using rehearsal observers informs the development of productions' interactive elements. Not providing feedback reduced any tension that could have arisen as a result of dramaturgically contributing to the show as an outsider originally there only to observe. Though I did not explicitly write about contributing to the rehearsal, this still will have informed my thoughts on access provisions within the show because of the detail and care that was invested into this aspect of the production.

Ultimately, the company's ethos – which determines their practices and processes – determined my encounter, the show itself, and consequently, what I wrote. Reflecting on my practice now highlights how watching and listening to the artists constructing a production focuses attention on the principles underpinning the work and how it is made. This enabled me to advocate for inclusive practice as an embedded critic.

TINTED: SAFE REHEARSAL SPACES

In early 2020, I worked as an embedded critic on *Tinted*, a Vault Festival revival of a one-woman play by Amy Bethan Evans. Unlike the Theatre503 and Oily Cart work, where I was not provided with any content guidelines, the production team asked that I focus on the director Elske Waite's work rather than the actor, or anyone else who would be in the rehearsal room.[156] This was due to Waite having some reservations about a critic being in the rehearsal room, despite being assured by the producer that I would not be reviewing the rehearsal.[157] This suggests Waite recognises the sense of

[156] The production team consisted of the producer and the director. I am not aware of the playwright being part of this decision.
[157] The producer Amy Toledano was also a critic, who first began reviewing for my website *The Play's the Thing UK* and then went on to start her own theatre criticism website. At the time of

vulnerability actors can have in rehearsals, which Wong Davies likens to someone changing their clothes (2021). I was happy to agree to this, as being given a particular focus means I did not have to choose what I wrote about, while not agreeing would likely mean I could not observe rehearsals. I did not see this as self-censoring, but as adhering to a clear set of parameters that protected a young artist. In response to Waite's concerns, I emphasised to those in the rehearsal space that I was not there to judge them or their work. This highlights how embedded critics must take particular care when writing about rehearsals. In this instance, my observation process was focused on one person so this informed what notes I took, and where I focused my attention.

As I explain in the embedded criticism piece, I had read the production script in advance; there were few if any stage directions and scene divisions. It was mostly – if not completely – the text that the performer speaks. In the initial meeting with Waite, she explained her production concept and how she would use staging, lighting and projections. This differed from previous embedded criticism work, providing extensive context to the rehearsal I observed through directly telling me about her work rather than letting me observe it. This allowed me to write about the design concept planning, as this work is largely invisible to audiences:

> Though this isn't a rehearsal focusing on the design so I don't get to see any samples of these elements, Waite says she will be using a lot of sound, lighting and projection to help tell the story, and is currently crowdfunding to integrate access provisions [...] Waite has broken the monologue into small scenes, with each one assigned to one of four colour groups according to the age of the character at the time. There are four colours – today they are focusing on the blue scenes, which show Laura at her youngest. (2020, no page)

I felt it was important to convey that Waite applied a concept of her own creation rather than relying on the script's stage directions and explicitly written production notes to shape the show's staging. I also convey that the director's invisible processes are inherently creative and complex.

writing in 2023, she has since moved back to her home country of Australia and is no longer reviewing theatre and performance.

This embedded criticism piece, like the style of the play, is episodic though I did not consciously make this choice. Whilst it focuses on Waite's practice and processes, the piece is nonlinear and does not have a clearly defined angle beyond writing about Waite's work. This allowed me to cover a broad range of sub-topics without worrying about smoothly transitioning between them, and provides some insight into the piece's structure without explicitly stating what the structure is. It also allowed me to convey a sense of her process, which I do by breaking the piece into clear sections separated by "***" (2020, no page). This indicates that there is an abrupt transition in the writing. This is not something I had done in my previous criticism, and would never do this in a mainstream review due to this falling outside of mainstream criticism norms. I made this choice because there are few established, recognised conventions in embedded criticism so the practice is inherently more flexible.[158] This could be considered what Costa calls a 'parallel performance' given the embedded criticism piece resembles the form of the play, but can be read separately from it.[159]

It was also important to me that I communicate what healthy directorial processes in the rehearsal space look like: high professional standards, a clear directorial vision, support and warmth, and the ability to run a rehearsal room. By this I mean the director should take responsibility for all creative processes deployed by the rest of the creative team, manage the process of bringing them together into a cohesive production, and ensure this is done safely and according to the production schedule. Since the rise of the #MeToo movement in theatre, there has been growing discourse within the industry to raise awareness of and correct abusive rehearsal practices.[160] In this embedded criticism piece, I hope to respond to these broader events, with a particular focus on the director's role in fostering a positive environment. In this instance, I begin with a description of an individual moment from the day:

> Two women are sitting on the floor in the corner of a north London pub's function room. One gently rocks a chair back and forth with her hands, while the other one watches. The former is quietly focused, the latter grins and nods encouragingly.

[158] See the range of styles and forms used in embedded criticism as documented in chapter 1.
[159] See chapter 4 (p. 109) for further discussion on embedded criticism as parallel performance.
[160] This is an emergent topic in scholarship, but two examples documenting this discourse specifically in British theatre includes Mark O'Thomas' 2022 article on The Royal Court's role in #MeToo, and Jen Harvie's 2009 chapter "The Power of Abuse" in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*.

> If this moment was photographed, it would be difficult to identify the reality of what's happening. I'd probably guess it was two friends chatting about something quite serious. Most – if not all – womxn would recognise the relaxed yet vulnerable postures that are often adopted when close friends are sharing something sensitive or important, usually curled up on a sofa with a glass of wine or cup of tea in hand.[161] The image evokes a warming feeling of comfort that comes from knowing you are completely heard and valued, and freeing to know you can say anything in these moments of safety and support. (2020, no page)

My focus is on Waite's attention on and engagement with the actor: I hoped to capture the intimacy of the moment by delineating that Waite sits on the floor rather than in a chair at a distance. By sitting on the floor with the actor, Waite indicates that they are equal within the production and Waite is fully invested in her process rather than signifying her higher status by sitting above her. Therefore, I am conveying the power dynamics of that moment within the space.

The next paragraph further explains what is happening, and ends by describing Waite's working methods. I interpret and analyse what I can see to give insight into her demeanour as well as her practice, and uncover the power dynamics at play in the room:

> Yet, Waite's warmth and support is tangible, and demonstrated by literally bringing herself down to the performer's level. Rather than watching from an elevated distance, she gives the sense of a collaborative working method rather than a hierarchical one. (2020, no page)

I return to Waite's inclusive and safe practice in the closing paragraph, yet I make clear that this is not to the exclusion of clarity and directorial authority:

> From the creation and application of a concept to the design elements, her dramaturgical work, and the performance, it is clear she approaches her practice holistically whilst maintaining control over all elements. Yet, she's not

[161] I chose this spelling of women as an attempt to be trans-inclusive; though there were no trans people in the rehearsal space as far as I was aware, this was an editorial choice I was using on my site at the time. I have since shifted to using the spelling 'women' to include all women, cis and trans.

> strict or overly-dogmatic. She has a clear style, tone and message in mind that she wants to convey to her audience, and she nurtures and coaxes her team to do that together through a receptive, benevolent authority. (2020, no page)

Essentially, this is a form of activism and advocacy that I can do as a theatre critic, like my approach with *Jamboree,* though here I look at how the director navigates her power to create a safe rehearsal space. This also resembles Horwitz's advocacy aspect of horizontalism, even though I apply it differently according to the brief I was given. This example demonstrates that the embedded critic is particularly well positioned to consider what is perceived to be good rehearsal room practice, even if they are only present in the room for a single day.

CARE CRISIS: REHEARSAL ROOM HIERARCHIES

Choosing the focus of this piece on Zoo Co's 2021 research and development (R&D) for *Care Crisis,* was significantly harder than previous embedded criticism work. This was due to the scale and complexity of the project, and the length of time I spent in the rehearsal room. Unlike *Tinted*, I was not given a brief. Whilst this is was also the case for *Jamboree* and *In Event of Moone Disaster*, I observed three out of the five days of the R&D. Compared to the amount of time I spent embedding in other productions, this allowed me to see much more of the process than I had previously, and how the project developed over time. It was much larger in scale than the other productions where I worked as embedded critic. The complex, internationally-collaborative project involved another company that was based in Indonesia, with whom Zoo Co worked to create a hybrid performance that was part in-person, and part-remote. There were about 25 to 30 people involved in the project in total, with 12 to 15 in Zoo Co's space at any given time and similar with the other company. Though much of the time involved the two companies working separately with their own teams, periodically throughout the week there were joint sessions with both companies working together over Zoom. This meant there was another digital space projected into the physical rehearsal space. This exemplifies the palimpsestic nature of the rehearsal space and how it was constantly changing depending on who was in the room at any given moment.[162] All these factors combined meant that the process of selecting what I would write about entailed drawing on far more material, a hybrid rehearsal and making process unlike anything I had encountered before, and an R&D

[162] See chapter 2 (pp. 57-59) on the rehearsal space as a palimpsest and how it constantly changes.

process that was inherently iterative and experimental without the pressures of a public performance at the end.

Ultimately, like *Tinted*, I decided to discuss an example of good rehearsal room practice I observed. When COVID-19 lockdowns were ending, there was intensive industry reflection on how theatre can and should change now that productions could start rehearsing in-person.[163] This piece contributes to that wider dialogue about theatre's issues, such as abuse and rehearsal room power structures, and how they can begin to be addressed. This exemplifies the dialogical aspect of the rehearsal space and embedded criticism.[164] Specifically, this piece examines how non-hierarchical rehearsal models are used in this R&D, and how that resulted in a space where everyone in the room is trusted to use their expertise. I establish this by positioning the project and the piece's direction within the wider theatre discourse in the opening paragraph:

> In some of the recent popular discourse on the abuse that pollutes the theatre industry, hierarchies and the power they bestow on those at the top have – rightly – been criticised. A rehearsal room mostly populated by freelancers, but run by a single salaried person on staff with the production company or venue, creates a massive power imbalance that can be weaponised. Of course, many rehearsal processes are steered by good people who don't exploit their position, but in my 20+ years of working in theatre, I've rarely seen these hierarchies dismantled, either partially or fully, when the production company operates with one in place. Power is clearly and consistently utilised, with the person in charge easily visible at all times. (2021, no page)

Following the second paragraph's overview of the project and its aims, I describe how the company's artistic director uses power structures and delegates authority. I focus on the small-group model and more independent approach to working because I had not seen this rehearsal room method previously used for sustained periods of time in a professional context. As a drama teacher and youth theatre director I have often worked this way out of necessity because I would rarely have an entire cast together until the final stages of a rehearsal process. I found it unusual that this way of working

[163] These discussions addressed a variety of topics, such as racism and racial representation (Mahon, 2021), gender inequality (Masso, 2021), and broader structural change and inclusion (De Montfort University, 2021).
[164] See chapter 2 (pp. 54-55).

was being used in a professional context, and also wanted to convey this model as an alternative to the norm:

> Given this split between making and responding, Zoo Co's Artistic Director Flo O'Mahoney decided not to action the more common, hierarchical structure seen in rehearsal rooms. Instead, she divided the work across several small groups and worked within a group rather than overseeing from on high. Though O'Mahoney did a little bit of delegation, she seemed to trust that much of the work would to be done instinctively by each person in the team according to their expertise. Each group, for the most part, quietly got on with what they needed to do and consulted more widely on an as-needed basis. Each group's function would change over the course of the week, and some people would move between groups, but the small-group approach to making a bigger thing was pretty consistently maintained throughout the week. As a result, the company hierarchy was rarely visible. (2021, no page)

This builds on the opening paragraph by contextualising the R&D within the industry, as well as developing the piece's look at rehearsal room power dynamics. It offers readers who work in theatre an example of a less-hierarchical way of working, and demonstrates how labour can be divided within a larger creative team. Therefore, there are multiple layers of contextualisation that I incorporate into descriptions of what I observed in this particular rehearsal space as well as in the industry more widely.

On reflection, the amount of time spent in rehearsals may have been unnecessary given that I only wrote one piece and was not participating in the R&D process. My mind often wandered when in rehearsals and it took some time to develop the angle of the piece from the large quantity of notes I took. Yet, being able to see how the rehearsal process developed over the week, particularly how individuals moved across groups and how the small group tasks developed as the various stages of the project were completed, directly informed my piece. If I had only been there for one day like the other rehearsal periods I had previously observed, I would not have had a sense for this at all and the piece I wrote would have been very different. Whilst it is the norm that embedded critics observe only a small part of the rehearsal process, being able to observe more of the process can illuminate how the rehearsal process

and individuals' roles evolve over the rehearsal period. This expands their encounter and informs their writing.

PASSION FRUIT: REHEARSAL ROOM RELATIONSHIPS AND EVALUATING QUALITY

In August 2021 when working as an embedded critic on *Passion Fruit,* an autobiographical play written and performed by Dior Clarke*,* I also wrote about rehearsal room power and relationship dynamics. This was not a conscious decision to build on the Zoo Co embedded criticism, but the theme is similar. Given that CG's death two months prior triggered extensive industry discussion on abuse and power dynamics in theatre, these topics were on my mind at the time. As a result, what most stood out in the first of two rehearsal days I observed was the friendship between writer/actor Clarke and director Melina Namdar. The two had been friends since their teen years and have since worked as artistic collaborators. Their memories of shared experiences regularly informed their collaborative creative decisions. Along with dramaturg Stephanie Martin, they are self-producing a three-day run of the new play.

Writing about Clarke and Namdar's work resulted in foregrounding both their working relationship and their friendship. My angle was that friends can also be work colleagues, and their relationship created a respectful, yet familiar and intimate environment. Whilst professional boundaries were always upheld, they had a knowledge of the other's skills, values, and families and friends. This was particularly exemplified when Clarke was working on scenes with other characters based on real people in his life. Since Namdar also knows these people, she can direct his interactions to reflect the truth of the moment as well as the aims they both have for Clarke's story. My experience of working in rehearsal rooms where prior relationships have negatively impacted the working relationship provided me with the piece's opening:

> Despite the best of intentions, working with friends doesn't always turn out well. It can lead to crossed boundaries, arguments, and environments that make others uncomfortable. Work can be sidelined by inside jokes and messing about. Additionally, being mates doesn't mean you have the same creative vision. However, none of this is the case with actor/writer Dior Clarke and director Melina Namdar. (2021, no page)

The next two paragraphs provide factual information about the production, such as its funding status and creative team, as well as some description of how the pair work. Namdar leads the process, so much of my writing focuses on her process and choices:

> Working on a few lines at a time, Namdar shapes Clarke's delivery by adjusting pace and tone. Sometimes she looks at movement and staging within particular moments, but more often than not she doesn't. That will all come once the other two actors join them, and develop even more once they're able to rehearse in the venue. (2021, no page)

However, I emphasise that despite Namdar's lead, Clarke also has space to provide input and shape the work:

> On the whole, Namdar usually leads on these changes, working with a dramaturgical instinct for compelling and honest storytelling. She isn't brutal, though – Clarke has final approval on all changes to his script but he always agrees. (2021, no page)

I wanted to emphasise how this rehearsal felt more like a partnership than a hierarchy because of their friendship. This dynamic and working relationship informed their process: they actively developed the script and honed its delivery on its feet in the space because this suited Clarke's access needs. Namdar had a deep understanding of this because they had known each other for so long, and had seen how Clarke's needs manifested when they were in school. Further, they were able to make script changes because Clarke was the writer and could change the script without needing approval from anyone else. In hindsight, their shared experiences and deep understanding of how each other worked determined their process, which I aimed to convey in my writing.

As in previous rehearsal rooms I wrote about, the practices and processes I saw were healthy and respectful. Here, it was due to Namdar and Clarke understanding how each other worked and how they adapted to that. They also maintained an open dialogue the entire time, clearly justified their creative choices to each other, and trusted each other with the material. As such, I ended my piece on this so that it would be the last thing the reader encounters, and will hopefully remember:

> As much as intimacy underpins their process, there's also complete trust in each other's creative process and choices. There isn't much of a sense of individualism in this rehearsal room. Namdar's work aims to centre and support Clarke's story rather than impose a directorial vision on the piece. It's a true partnership, and in this case it's definitely helped by their friendship rather than a coldly professional distance. Their commitment – to the work and to each other – and professionalism keeps them on task but their personal history gives them a mutual understanding of each other's practice and the ability to lift each other up. It's a lovely thing to watch, and something audiences don't tend to see directly. However, this rehearsal room dynamic can be seen in Clarke's vulnerability and the narrative's impact. (2021, no page)

Though I do not discuss specific moments where this comes across, it was most evident in their work on Clarke's monologues that connect scenes with him and the other actors. Whilst Clarke had most of them memorised, Namdar wanted to refine Clarke's delivery and movement. This often included making small adjustments to the script, which Namdar did with respect and care for Clarke's story by verbally checking that all changes supported his aims for the piece. Her approach had some resemblance to Waite's work on *Tinted*, even though Waite had no prior relationship with anyone else in the production. As with the *Tinted* and *Care Crisis* embedded criticism, the *Passion Fruit* piece draws attention to rehearsal room dynamics and relationships between those in the space. That this was a significant theme in three of my five experiences as an embedded critic indicates that I particularly notice relationships and dynamics when observing rehearsals and see them as crucial to good practice. These are aspects of the rehearsal process that are not necessarily apparent to audiences watching a public performance and therefore not addressed in mainstream criticism. As such, embedded criticism has the potential to document not just individual moments of process, but larger, conceptual topics such as power dynamics, working relationships, and the role the production has within the wider frameworks of theatremaking. This means embedded critics provide readers working in theatre with prompts for reflection on relationships and power dynamics in their own creative processes. For readers who do not work in theatre, it illuminates how these forces influence rehearsals and some of the conceptual mechanics at work within a creative team.

When reflecting on my embedded criticism work for *Passion Fruit*, there were moments across the rehearsals that, were I reviewing the production as a mainstream critic, would have informed my evaluation of the production's quality. In the second rehearsal, Namdar worked with actor Hayden Mampasi for much longer than she spent on previous scenes because he struggled to find a suitable tone and intention. When she decided to move on, I noted: "some of the stresses still aren't right" (2021). This is clearly an evaluation of Mampasi's delivery. Were this a public performance, it would have been noted and influenced my evaluation of the production's quality overall. This indicates that Trueman's argument that an embedded critic cannot help but judge (2013, no page) is partly correct; however the embedded critic can choose to not include a judgment of quality in their writing out of fairness. On reflection, the embedded critic who is also a mainstream critic must navigate a tension between their mainstream criticism processes that typically include evaluating a production's quality, and the expectations of the embedded critic to not deploy negative judgment.

Just as I realised I was evaluating the quality of the work generated during *Passion Fruit* rehearsals as if I were working as a mainstream critic, I similarly realised I was evaluating quality of individual production elements as if I were approaching rehearsals as a dramaturg there to support the cohesion of the whole show. This takes a different form in dramaturgy practice: it is usually expressed verbally rather than written down. However, there were moments where, were I the dramaturg, I would contribute critical feedback in the form of a question that would prompt further discussion and reflection on the topic at hand. An example of this was on the second day of rehearsals I observed, when Namdar was discussing a scene between characters that Clarke and Mampasi play. In this short scene a character threatens his wife, and the team discussed whether the subtext indicated that his threat is a joke or not. This scene is a flashback about the main character's much-loved deceased grandfather, but elsewhere in the script, he has hit his wife. The creative team decided he was joking, but were I the production dramaturg, I would ask if they "are...wanting to see the good in him [because the character is dead] rather than face up to [the reality of] his violence?" (2021). Given that I was not invited by the creative team to contribute to or comment on the rehearsal process, I stayed silent. However, despite evaluating the production's quality, I did not include the evaluations in the written output due to the likelihood these scenes will change and develop over the rehearsal period. I may also evaluate them differently in the context of the entire performance, which I did not see during my rehearsal observations. This further evidences that embedded criticism output does not generally contain negative critique of the overall

quality of the entire work because the production is still being developed. This corresponds with Vaughan and Wong Davies' reluctance to criticise anything they observe in rehearsals.[165] Crucially, it indicates that, whilst my critical and evaluative processes can overlap across practices, whilst writing the piece I choose to not include negative judgment or give dramaturgical feedback.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In this chapter, I have critically analysed and reflected on my practice as a mainstream critic, dramaturg, and embedded critic. This documents how my practices have developed over time, how they inform each other, and crucially, where their overlaps lie.

Ultimately, whether reviewing a public performance, or working as a dramaturg or an embedded critic, I have some similar processes during my encounter with a performance piece. This evidences overlaps across these practices. Though some of these processes include an evaluation of quality, the final form differs across these practices and corresponds with norms of each respective practice. As a mainstream critic, how good I thought a production was shapes my views, and much of the content of my review justifies this evaluation of its quality. As a dramaturg, the evaluation changes as a production evolves in rehearsal and development, and is always in dialogue with the artist's or company's goals. I adapt and respond, as Maddy Costa does in her dramaturgy practice (see: p. 138), as well as support the artist to achieve their goals for the production. This varies depending on when in the production timeline I join the team. The feedback I generate is written in private communications or shared verbally in the rehearsal room; though I often take notes in rehearsals as a dramaturg, they are not used in any public-facing writing. As an embedded critic, I am silent for most or all of the rehearsal and whilst I may evaluate the quality of a production – consciously or unconsciously – I avoid including that evaluation in the written output if it is anything other than positive. As such, self-curation plays a vital role across these practices and works to differentiate the style and form of their outputs.

This chapter also confirms that a key difference between embedded criticism and mainstream criticism is that embedded criticism uniquely describes, contextualises

[165] See chapters 2 (pp. 67-68) and 3 (p. 91).

and reflects on the rehearsal process rather than the completed, whole product that is a public performance. Specifically, my embedded criticism relies on description to convey rehearsal processes to readers. I use descriptions of the rehearsal space and people's positions within it to 'set the scene' for the reader, indicating how various aspects of the rehearsal space (as discussed in chapter 2) shape what I write. I also advocate for good rehearsal practices that are healthy and safe. As these are topics I am personally invested in, my subjective interests, beliefs and experiences inform my writing, as demonstrated by Ava Wong Davies' embedded criticism in chapter 3. In this capacity, I can advocate for good practice that I observe, as exemplified in Horwitz's horizontalism, and often convey this advocacy through use of first-person. This indicates the dialogical relationship I have with the cast and creative team.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have sought to closely examine the specificities of embedded criticism in England as a distinct practice. I have done so by analysing its overlaps with dramaturgy and mainstream criticism, and have concentrated on rehearsal room-based embedded criticism as one of the most common and developed forms of the practice. This research specifically addresses how this form of embedded criticism is determined by the rehearsal space and those within it, and the role of the embedded critic's subjectivity. This subjectivity includes their personal narrative, childhood, past theatre experiences, wider cultural references, and individual interests. While it is possible to argue that embedded criticism is not distinct from mainstream criticism and dramaturgy, I have described its distinctiveness by showing how embedded criticism's foregrounding of the rehearsal space and the writer's subjectivity in embedded criticism distinguishes it from these practices.

My methodology was developed in response to my practices as an embedded critic, mainstream critic, and dramaturg, and a sense that though there were commonalities between these practices, the differences were significant enough to warrant distinguishing them from each other. The ways these three roles relate to the rehearsal room emerged as key factors in their differences. To investigate how proximity to the rehearsal process, artists and rehearsal space determines embedded criticism practice and differentiates it from the practices of mainstream criticism and dramaturgy, I developed a methodology of mixed methods. These methods include text analysis of embedded criticism written over the decade of 2012 through 2022, case studies on the work of three prominent embedded critics, critical reflection, and autoethnographic fieldwork observing rehearsals, inspired by Gay McAuley's model of rehearsal ethnography. This methodology approaches a seemingly disparate practice through the prism of the embedded critic's proximity to and relationship with the rehearsal room, and the artists and their processes within the space. This has allowed me to investigate embedded criticism from multiple people's perspectives, and explore how it overlaps with other practices given that Vaughan, Wong Davies, and Costa are also mainstream critics, and Costa additionally works as a dramaturg. Semi-structured interviews with my case study subjects about their work, and critical reflection on my own practices as an embedded critic, mainstream critic, and dramaturg, enabled reflection on what embedded criticism achieves. It also allowed

for the identification of different ways of practising embedded criticism, and pinpointed tensions between embedded criticism and other practices.

The first chapter mapped the field since the term 'embedded criticism' was coined in 2012, to critically analyse its development and identify common features across the practice that emerged over the following decade. These findings establish that embedded critics typically observe a small part of the rehearsal period and write one piece on this observation. Their time in the rehearsal space positions them in physical proximity to artists and their process, enabling them to engage in conversations about the work with the artists concerned; these are often referenced in embedded criticism. This positioning allows the embedded critic first-hand insight into the artists 'aims for the show, and the processes used to create the performance. However, there are few indications that the embedded critic contributes to the rehearsal process; when they do, these moments are infrequent. This ultimately means that the spatial relationship to the artists and their work make embedded criticism distinct, and that observing the rehearsal process enables critics to disseminate information about the work that is typically invisible to those outside of the production process. This expands critical practice to include writing about rehearsal processes (rather than the product) and alters the typically distanced relationship between critics and artists by bringing them closer together.

Chapter 2 examines the rehearsal space and its relationship to those working in it. The chapter argues that three aspects of the rehearsal space play key roles in shaping the embedded critic's writing: the rehearsal space's dialogical nature, its privacy, and its palimpsestic qualities. A critical analysis of Megan Vaughan's embedded criticism practice demonstrates how the rehearsal space explicitly and implicitly shapes her writing. It also addresses how Vaughan's embedded criticism differs from her mainstream criticism practice because of its description of the rehearsal space's multiple layers, the privacy it offers, and the associations she makes with the space and the work within it. Further, in relation to chapter 1, Vaughan articulates the economic limitations of the practice: the embedded critic is only usually able to spend a short amount of time in the rehearsal space because if companies pay embedded critics at all, the small amount they can pay is typically not enough to compensate for critics 'time away from other work. Though the mainstream critic can focus on the physical and material aspects of the performance space, such as set design and staging, their consideration of the space is inflected by their evaluation and judgment.

The rehearsal space or rehearsal processes are usually absent from mainstream criticism and yet, as this chapter shows, they are core to embedded criticism.

Chapter 3 investigates the role of the critic's subjectivity in embedded and mainstream criticism. It demonstrates that, despite common preconceptions of the mainstream critic as an objective authority, upheld through journalistic language conventions, critics' subjectivity – including their backgrounds, demographics, experiences, and education – inform their encounter with a performance. A case study on Ava Wong Davies' mainstream and embedded criticism practices demonstrate that foregrounded subjectivity is a key aspect of embedded criticism, and one that differentiates it from mainstream criticism – most notably that in larger outlets like newspapers and trade publications. While mainstream criticism may attempt to erase the critic's lived experience, embedded criticism brings it to the fore through the first-person voice and a focus on personal narrative. Embedded criticism therefore has widespread implications for practices thinking through ideas of voice, agency and positionality.

The fourth chapter examines the relationship between contemporary embedded criticism in England, and historical and contemporary dramaturgy in Germany. Embedded criticism and dramaturgy have a shared lineage as evidenced in Lessing, Brecht, and contemporary German dramaturg's dissemination of rehearsal processes within their detailed programme notes. Dramaturgs in Britain, however, do not typically write about rehearsals they work on, and embedded criticism is typically practised within the paradigms of journalism. Given the German model, it is important to consider whether embedded criticism could be identified as a form of dramaturgy. A case study on Maddy Costa's embedded criticism and dramaturgy practices provides evidence of their separation because, as an embedded critic, Costa does not work towards the creative team's aims because she is focused on documenting their processes. In contrast, as a dramaturg she collaborates with the rest of the creative team to achieve the production's goals and does not write about the rehearsal process. This is even the case within her work as an embedded critic for CG&Co, despite the role including dramaturgical responsibilities. I argue that dramaturgs in England are intrinsic to the creative team and do not tend to write public-facing content, whereas embedded critics focus on writing public-facing content instead of contributing to the making process. This differentiates embedded criticism from dramaturgy in England.

The final chapter uses autoethnography and critical reflection to consider my practices as a mainstream critic, dramaturg and embedded critic, and critically analyses their overlaps and differences. As in chapter 1, I examine the development of my practices, how they inform each other, and consider the contexts and decisions that have shaped them. This is particularly important when considering how my practices interact with each other and develop over time. The findings from chapters 2 through 4 dialogue with my professional experience and ultimately support positioning embedded criticism as a distinct mode of theatre criticism.

In closely examining the intersections between dramaturgy, mainstream criticism and embedded criticism, I evidence how criticism and dramaturgy share histories and processes, and how embedded criticism specifically values and centres the process of making work. This multifaceted argument and its supporting evidence therefore contribute new knowledge in both the fields of dramaturgy and criticism.

LIMITATIONS

Like all research, this thesis has limitations. There are a number of factors that impacted on how I approached the project. Firstly, the lack of literature on embedded criticism meant that there was no canon of publications to draw on. As such, in positioning the practice, I had to draw on disparate evidence across other fields, including journalism, material in theatre and performance relating to rehearsal processes, and critical theory. Further, there is no centralised archive of digital theatre criticism so locating a substantial body of embedded criticism entailed manual searches of individual publications and social media platforms. Given the practice was only named in 2012 and is typically published in mainstream criticism outlets, locating examples pre-2012 was not possible within this project's time constraints, despite some mention of critics observing rehearsals before 2012 (Wardle 1992, Hiley 1981). Even post-2012, embedded criticism is rarely, explicitly referred to as such within the headline or body of a piece, and is typically published as a feature article or on an artist/company blog, so I had to use other search terms such as 'rehearsal' and 'behind the scenes' to identify relevant work.

My process of researching German dramaturgy practice was constrained by language and location. I do not speak or read German, so the scholarship I drew on was limited to English language publications. While Brecht's papers and production

documentation are archived, the archive is located in Berlin, and only part of it has been translated to English and published. Time and funding constraints, language, geographical distance, and pandemic travel restrictions meant I was not able to travel to Germany and work with a translator to directly research a wider range of his company's documentation. The impact of Covid also meant that I could not carry out any embedded criticism between March 2020 and spring of 2021. I was then navigating an evolving practice that was further curtailed by Covid.

The revelations following CG's death, and their occurrence in the final year of the thesis' research period, also relate to another limitation. Though few embedded critics work with an artist or company beyond one production, Costa is a known exception.[166] That Costa did not notice signs of CG's abuse indicates there is a risk that an embedded critic working long-term with one company or artist could overlook or become desensitised to signs of unreasonable or problematic behaviour. Costa admits she "missed so many warning signs" (2022, no page). Drawing on Irving Wardle's concept of the 'circle of hypnosis' that a critic is susceptible to entering when in the rehearsal room, she recognises she "existed within [CG's] circle of hypnosis" (2022, no page) that led to her "romanticising his work and narrating a politics of resistance and care around it" (2022, no page) instead of addressing the warnings visible in CG's incorporation of young men, nudity and sexual acts in his work (2022, no page). To summarise, this indicates the complex ethics that can result from the embedded critic's proximity to artists, and the potential for embedded criticism to support and advocate for people who utilise harmful processes and structures. My case study subjects identified possibilities for the embedded critic to contribute to collective safeguarding responsibilities from an outsider's perspective, though limitations include time and existing systemic constraints within the industry, such as a lack of centralised HR reporting processes and a high number of freelancers who are not permanent venue staff. Yet, my project's timescale and lack of existing work in this area meant it was not possible to explore this issue in a way that would lay the groundwork for meaningful change in the industry.

ADVICE FOR PROSPECTIVE EMBEDDED CRITICS

This thesis' findings and questions it examines have the potential to inform embedded criticism practice in multiple ways. Firstly, I show that editorial freedom has resulted in

[166] See: Appendix A (p. 208).

embedded criticism's wide range of forms and styles, and means the critic can usually write how they choose. This freedom also extends to content, where the writer often considers how the rehearsal space and how the rehearsal process relates to their self. What and how they write informs the dialogue the embedded critic develops between their readers and the artists observed. Additionally, the embedded critic can consider the implications of offering feedback or comments during the rehearsal, and how this relates to dramaturgy. Finally, the embedded critic can reflect on the ethics of writing about work they think is not of good quality, and consider this within the wider context of proximity to artists and seeing work still in development. This relates to the process of navigating Wardle's "circle of hypnosis" (1992, p. 10). Ultimately, though there are few factors that limit how and what the embedded critic writes, prospective writers can use the guidance below to inform their process.

DIALOGUE AND CONTENT, FORM AND STYLE

The body of embedded criticism examined throughout this thesis indicates that typically, there is substantial freedom for the critic to write what and how they choose. Provided an editor or commissioner does not provide constraints, an embedded critic is not limited by content requirements, word counts, or writing forms or styles. No matter what or how the embedded critic writes, it creates a dialogue between the artists, the critic, and their readers.

It is therefore possible to focus on any aspect of the rehearsal process that is observed and write about it in any way, though it is useful for embedded critics to consider their work's role in developing this dialogue. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, this can include but is not limited to using any of the following: a feature article resembling mainstream journalism's form and style, videos and images, poetry, rough notes, and conversation extracts. For example, to align with conventions of mainstream journalism that will be familiar to many readers, you can choose to deploy what Costa calls 'reportage' (see: p. 131) wherein the embedded critic focuses on describing, contextualising, and analysing key aspects of the rehearsal process. This may include quotes from the artists during rehearsals to further add context to the work being observed and written about. Including visual art, video clips, or other forms of writing is also possible. Additionally, a combination of different forms and styles can be used.

Regardless of what style or styles you use, ultimately your work connects theatremakers to those who are not in the rehearsal space. Whilst including quotations or extracts of conversations is one way to do this as it allows artists to directly speak to your readers through you, your response to the work also creates a dialogue between the artists and your readers by enabling people not in the rehearsal space to learn about processes and practices otherwise invisible to them. Therefore, embedded critics can consider how their work uses form, style, and content to develop a dialogue wherein artists can share their processes and readers can understand them.

EMBRACING SUBJECTIVITY

As addressed particularly in chapters 1 and 3, this dialogue that embedded criticism generates often includes the first-person register and/or the embedded critic candidly relates what they observe to their own life and experiences. Informed by these findings on the critic's subjectivity, embedded critics can consciously choose to foreground aspects of their self in their writing. For critics more accustomed to adhering to journalistic paradigms that conceal the self and avoid "I", the following questions can act as prompts for deliberate reflection on how they relate to what they see in rehearsals:

- What feelings and associations do you have throughout the day?
- Are there any processes that you find particularly interesting or notable?
- How does what you observe relate to other rehearsals or productions you have seen? What similarities and differences can you identify?
- What can you relate to your own life and experiences?

Reflecting on and incorporating these answers into your writing has multiple benefits: generating material for your embedded criticism, providing context for what you observe, and positioning you within the dialogue that embedded criticism creates. Of course, there is no obligation to foreground the subjective in embedded criticism, but doing so clearly communicates your personal experience to readers and avoids giving the impression that others would have the same experience. It also distinguishes your embedded criticism from mainstream criticism or other kinds of critical writing.

NAVIGATING PROXIMITY AND CRITICALITY

Embedded critics who do not otherwise work in theatre are typically not accustomed to directly interacting with artists, or their rehearsal and making processes. This

means it could be your first time in a professional rehearsal space and interacting directly with artists for an extended period of time. It may feel uncomfortable to be so close to the making process – the performance is unfinished, changeable, and usually private. It could be reassuring to know that others have felt similar, such as Ava Wong Davies comparing watching rehearsals to watching someone get changed (2021). It is, then, important to acknowledge this tension and decide how to approach it within your practice.

Within this tension lies the idea that the embedded critic should maintain criticality, but as this thesis has demonstrated, negative critique is not required. The proximity to the artists and their work-in-progress means it is typically not considered appropriate given the work is likely to continue to change after you observe rehearsals. You will also find that there is so much material and processes to discuss, analyse, describe, and contextualise that it is not necessary to include an evaluation of its quality. Further, you are in a position of trust with the artists who invited you into their otherwise-private rehearsal space: they trust you to understand the work is still in development until the production officially opens. Ultimately, you should take care to not breach this trust by respecting the creative and development processes, and that you are in their place of work.

On the other hand, it possible that the artist would welcome negative critique especially if there is no dramaturg involved in the process who can take on the role of an 'outside eye'.[182] There is certainly scope for the embedded critic to critically analyse the quality of a production in rehearsals and consider what could be done better, though as per paradigms of dramaturgy practice, this should be done through the lens of the artists' aims for the show. An embedded critic who only observes a small portion of rehearsals may well not have this information, however. Therefore, if an advance offer of providing dramaturgical feedback is accepted, it is important to find out what the artists wants to communicate, achieve, and explore by making this work. Having this information will position you in closer proximity to the artists and their process than an embedded critic would be who does not give critical feedback. Yet, this closeness also requires respect and trust, as any negative critique during rehearsals is also typically not shared beyond the rehearsal space.

[182] See: chapter 4 (pp. 125-127).

If the embedded critic is not offering dramaturgical feedback in the rehearsal room, they may want to maintain criticality by having the option of writing about moments from the rehearsal or creative choices they do not support, agree with, or think are not done well. Given embedded critics are not always provided with a brief or limitations and there may not be any formal contracts or agreements about what is expected, this may well not have been discussed. Using the first-person register and other examples of the writer's subjectivity to indicate it is 'just' the embedded critic's opinion may reassure the artists. Provided the artists agree to this, this enables the embedded critic to remain critical and to avoid Wardle's 'circle of hypnosis'. The company then also receives critical feedback during the making process that they can action before the production opens to public audiences.

Ultimately, if it not agreed that the embedded critic can include negative critique in their writing, it is possible to critically analyse the quality of the work whilst watching it provided this aspect of the analysis is not published. For example, I address this in the context of my embedded criticism on *Passion Fruit*.[181] This unpublished acknowledgment of aspects of the work that the critic thinks are not very good, or does not like, permits the embedded critic to engage with the processes they observe whilst still maintaining critical distance. This means that you are not wholly giving way to Wardle's 'circle of hypnosis', but you maintain the trusting relationship developed with the artists by observing work in development that is typically private.

FURTHER RESEARCH PATHWAYS

Given that embedded criticism is rarely included in academic research, there is further potential to investigate its relationship with other practices and fields outside of this thesis' scope. For example, there is room to further consider embedded criticism in conjunction with rehearsal ethnography. There is significant difference across these two practices, including their outputs, audiences and aims, and the timescales involved. Rehearsal ethnography usually has the observer in rehearsal for much longer periods than the embedded critic. Rehearsal ethnography has been used as a method within academic research, and this thesis has focused on practices within the theatre industry, so an exploration of their intersection could further bridge industry and the academy. Such a study on the relationship between rehearsal ethnography and embedded criticism would no doubt also give rise to further arguments for embedded

[181] See: chapter 5 (p. 170).

criticism's position in a wider theatre ecology and within academia. This also relates to the possibility of researching models of embedded criticism where the critic conducts practice-research within most or all of the rehearsal period, and/or developing a form of embedded criticism more directly inspired by McAuley's rehearsal ethnography. This can offer new ways of thinking about theatre rehearsal and making processes.

Considering embedded criticism's relationship with other modes and models of theatre criticism – such as feature writing, visual responses to work, and creative modes of critique such as those in Katja Hilevaara and Emily Orley's edited collection, *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice* (2018) – would also open up further research directions. This could also extend to artists writing about their own creative processes, both in theatre and outside of it. Dance, visual art, music, and film all have potential for an embedded critic to write about creative processes in these fields, and critically consider their own processes as embedded critics of these art forms.

This study has solely focused on embedded criticism practice in England since this is where it is most often practised, and the theatre ecology and funding models operate similarly across these two parts of the UK. However, embedded criticism practice occurs beyond these nations. Andy Horwitz's 2012 article proposing embedded criticism as a new model of criticism was responding to the theatre criticism landscape in New York City. His site *Culturebot*, launched in 2003, "was meant to exist in contrast to the 'reviewer-oriented' model of mainstream news outlets like the New York Times" (2012, no page). Though Horwitz is no longer editor of *Culturebot* (2016, no page), the site is still active and operates with the following mission: "We do not publish traditional reviews, but seek to enter into dialogue with work through critical thought that takes on various creative forms" (2016, no page). Embedded criticism's position within *Culturebot*'s ethos could be a research project in itself, as could embedded criticism's role in American theatre more widely, or the relationship between *Culturebot*'s methods and British criticism cultures. The research on German dramaturgy in chapter 4 shows there are in-house publications with a focus on process; further research has the potential to look at the focus on embedded criticism – or similar writing on rehearsals – in other national contexts, in Europe and beyond. In Adelaide, Australia, for example, critic Ben Brooker wrote embedded criticism as part of his remit as writer-in-residence at performance venue The Mill in 2018. Investigating how embedded criticism could interact with Scottish and/or Northern Irish dramaturgy practice is an additional research pathway.

EMBEDDED CRITICISM'S POSSIBLE FUTURES

My findings show that embedded theatre criticism as a practice has potential for continued and significant development in itself and within the industry. These are not definitive predictions for the practice, but as Ava Wong Davies observed, "I think it will always be an experimental fringe thing. I think that's actually good for it because I think that means it can kind of maintain a sort of fluidity" (2021). Whether or not it remains an uncommon, 'fringe' practice, this fluid and experimental quality suggests embedded criticism is an iterative practice that can respond to changing industry and cultural norms. For example, the writer can discuss rehearsal observations in the broader context of the field or socio-political events in the wider world that they think of when encountering the rehearsal process, as is evident in Vaughan's embedded criticism.[167] Embedded critics have joined rehearsals remotely, as several people did for the RSC's Open Rehearsal Project for *1 Henry VI* held during lockdown.[168] A commentary on the implications of these real-time, remote encounters may offer further developments for industry practice.

Other possibilities for evolving or expanding the practice within the industry, include the embedded critic spending more time in a production's rehearsals. Rather than 'just' observing rehearsals and writing about them, the embedded critic's unique position – of being in rehearsals but outside the creative team – could further be utilized to fulfil other responsibilities. Dramaturgy practice in German-language countries provides one example where the embedded critic could provide dramaturgical input and write programme notes. The embedded critic could also be tasked with developing a production or company archive, critiquing rehearsal practice, or working with or within the marketing team. This could also potentially further shift the relationship between critics, artists and venues in ways that leave a lasting legacy of the company's work.

Wider systemic change would, however, need to occur to enable the embedded critic to spend more time in rehearsals and/or take on additional responsibilities. Theatre in

[167] See: chapter 2.
[168] Michael Billington, Peter Kirwan and Diana Miranda all published embedded criticism pieces on this project, in *The Guardian*, *The Bardathon*, and *The Play's the Thing UK*, respectively. *1 Henry IV* was a completely online production. The RSC also livestreamed the rehearsal process, for which anyone could buy a ticket.

England is under-resourced and underfunded (Arts Council England no date, Parker 2023, UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre 2020), which has resulted in a culture of low wages, overwork and reliance on low-paid and unpaid labour. The majority of freelancers, for example, report they are overworked and underpaid, with an average annual income of only £22,900. This is "17.5% below the UK national average salary" (*The Big Freelancer Survey 2023*). These issues also apply to embedded criticism. One reason behind embedded critics' limited time in rehearsals, as mentioned by Costa and Vaughan (2021) and corresponding with my own experience as an embedded critic, is that it is not common practice to pay embedded critics for more than a few days of work in the rehearsal space followed by some writing, if they are paid at all.[169] This is due to scarce funding that consequently limits production staffing budgets to 'essential' cast and creatives. Therefore, embedded critics are not able to spend much time in the rehearsal space and/or writing, and so may not fulfil the practice's potential to experiment with content and form.

Whilst it is absolutely sufficient to 'only' observe rehearsals and write about them so readers can learn about rehearsal processes and artists' work, Costa's combined critical and dramaturgical processes point to how the practice could expand if embedded critics could spend more time in rehearsals, both in individual productions and with an artist or company beyond the timeline of a single production. Whilst I have found that even observing a single rehearsal provides more than enough to inform a single piece of writing, an embedded critic could document the entire process of making a production rather than capture a small part of it, as Jake Orr did for Dirty Market, or as Gay McAuley's rehearsal ethnography *Not Magic But Work* (2012) does.[170] This would create a more detailed archive of an artist's or company's rehearsal and making processes, give readers a clearer insight into how the artist or company works, and allow the embedded critic to create more output of varied style and form. This would open up different modes of observing, since the embedded critic would be specifically tasked with creating an archive and could draw on archival practice and theory to determine how they observed the work and what they decided to document. It would also enable further research into rehearsal and making processes. For example, rather than writing a single piece detailing some of the processes observed in one rehearsal, they could document one artist's creative routes

[169] See chapters 2 (p. 60) where Vaughan discussed payment. Of the five times I have worked as an embedded critic, I have been paid twice – by Theatre503 and Zoo Co. The fees I received were low and were ultimately less than minimum wage when considering the hours required to observe rehearsals and then write about them.
[170] See chapter 1 (pp. 32-33) for discussion of his work.

through the rehearsal process, or give a wider overview of the whole production including, for instance, development of the design concept, and technical rehearsals.

Similar to the German model, there is also the possibility of embedded criticism taking on dramaturgical responsibilities, or the dramaturg taking on embedded criticism responsibilities. An actor in the cast or the individual responsible for marketing the production could also generate embedded criticism as an extension of their role, though this would of course change the nature of the relationship between the embedded critic and the work as well as the rest of the creative team. Rather than being someone who solely observes the rehearsal process from outside the creative team, they would be a part of it. Arguably, this would redefine embedded criticism particularly in terms of who carries it out, but it would deepen embedded criticism's engagement with process and give readers a more nuanced view of rehearsals.

The possibilities for embedded criticism indicate a practice that is versatile and iterative with potential to contributes to both the theatre industry and wider scholarship in the field of theatre and performance. It is clear that the practice has a nuanced relationship with the rehearsal space, allowing the critic to openly share their process of engagement with the artists and their rehearsal processes. The resulting documentation of the rehearsal processes render the practice distinct from dramaturgy and other modes of theatre criticism by shifting the relationship between critic and artist. Crucially, it makes the invisible, visible – showing the labour that underpins the process of theatremaking.

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APPENDIX A

This appendix contains examples of embedded criticism written during the decade of 2012 through 2022. It is presented in the form of a spreadsheet. Each row of the spreadsheet represents one example of embedded criticism. Though this is, most commonly, only one piece of writing, there are examples where an embedded critic wrote multiple pieces about a production or event. As I log how many pieces were written and links to each piece, individual pieces of writing by the same author about the same event do not have separate spreadsheet rows. For example, Jake Orr's Dirty Market embedded criticism is one row, though there are 27 pieces of embedded criticism about this production.

The following data is organised into columns, with the columns containing the following information:

- The name of the critic(s)
- The year the piece(s) were written
- Basic demographic data, if known
- The critic's other work and practices
- If they observed rehearsals
- The number of rehearsals observed
- The name of the event
- If the event is a production, festival, season, or something else
- The scale of the event
- The name of the producing company or artist
- Whether or not the event had Arts Council funding
- The location of rehearsals
- The location of the performances
- The performance venue or if the production was a tour
- The number of embedded criticism pieces written/created
- Whether the pieces were written, visual, or in another format
- Where the embedded criticism was published
- Who likely edited the embedded criticism
- The link to the embedded criticism piece(s) if they are still online
- Any of my own explanatory notes

I include this information as a partial repository of the practice to provide a wider context for the individual examples of embedded criticism discussed in the body of the thesis, and to give a fuller picture of the practice beyond what can be considered within the thesis' constraints. For example, not all the embedded criticism in the

appendix included rehearsal observation and some of the examples are no longer online at all. These two inclusions further indicate the flexibility of the practice and the ephemerality of criticism that is not published in print.

The data included could be used as tool in further research on embedded criticism that was not able to be included in this thesis. In particular, there is scope to analyse who writes it, the types of theatre and performance that are written about, and to further study the individual pieces logged on the spreadsheet, or as a larger collection of work representing the practice during this time frame.

As spreadsheets are live, digital documents meant to be displayed on screen, formatting them for print is challenging. This one is a work-in-progress that may be added to and changed as more embedded criticism is written. To print it so that the contents are large enough to be read here, each row is spread across three consecutive pages. The column headings are on the first 3 pages, and the printed pages are ordered as if the reader is reading left to right along a row, rather than down each column. Every three pages, then, are the names of the critics writing the embedded criticism that is logged across that page and the following two.

A digital version of the spreadsheet is available to view here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1FaV8kTsKDpTrEap90BXsHmt6jkOdK7j1/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110480799655162331324&rtpof=true&sd=true.

Critic	Year	Known writer demographics	Writer's other practices and work	Rehearsal Observation: Y/N/Unsure	Number of rehearsals observed if known	Event Name	Production, Festival, Season, Other	Scale
Maddy Costa and Jake Orr	2012	white, British cis straight woman; white, British cis gay man	critic and journalist, later dramaturg/critic and editor, later producer	Y		Autumn Cook-Up	festival	mid
Jake Orr	2012	white, British cis gay man	critic and editor, later producer	Y	multiple	Be Good Revolutionaries	production	mid
Andrew Haydon	2012	white, British cis man	critic and journalist	Y	1	Golden Dragon	production	mid
Andrew Haydon	2012	white, British cis man	critic and journalist	U - probably N		Forest Fringe	festival	small
Catherine Love	2012	white, British cis woman	critic and journalist	Y	1?	production	production	unsure
Andrew Haydon	2012	white, British cis man	critic and journalist	Y	14	Troilus & Cressida	production	large

Company Name	ACE Funding: Y/N/Unsure	Rehearsal Location	Performance Location	Performance Venue (if fixed)	Number of Embedded Criticism Pieces	Format	Where Published	Who Likely Edited
Battersea Arts Centre	U	London	London	Battersea Arts Centre	1	collage of video, music, images	Dialogue website	self
Dirty Market	U	U	London	Ovalhouse	27	mostly written, some video and images	own blog	self
Actors Touring Company	U	U	Kurdistan, Iraq	tour	unsure	written	own blog and The Stage	self and editor
various	U	varies	London	Gate Theatre	12	written	own blog, Exeunt	self and editor
Greyscale	U	London?	London	Gate Theatre	1	written	Spoonfed, then cross-posted on her own blog with additional writing	self and editor
RSC/Wooster Group	Y	London	London	Riverside Studios	1	written	writer's own blog	self

URL	Notes
https://web.archive.org/web/20150303095145/http://www.welcometodialogue.com/bac_documentation.html	"From our base in the BAC cafe, we spend the three weeks discovering how BAC operates, watching rehearsals for Scratch shows, watching all the work programmed in the season, and thinking about new ways to engage with audiences." (https://web.archive.org/web/20170314062643/http://welcometodialogue.com/projects/timeline/)
https://digitaldirtymarket.tumblr.com/	
http://postcardsgods.blogspot.com/2012/05/kurdistan.html	
http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/forest-fringe-at-the-gate-redux/	Exeunt piece links to all pieces on his blog
https://catherinelove.co.uk/2012/05/06/review-tenet-gate-theatre/ (main piece + additional writing), http://web.archive.org/web/20120707221138/http://www.spoonfed.co.uk:80/spooners/catherinespoonfed-23605/tenet-at-gate-theatre-6793/ (original piece)	brief mention here: https://catherinelove.co.uk/2012/11/29/where-is-the-audience/, but main piece is here: https://catherinelove.co.uk/2012/05/06/review-tenet-gate-theatre/
http://postcardsgods.blogspot.com/2012/09/troilus-and-cressida-rsc-wooster-group.html	reads like a review, but mentions observing rehearsals. Haydon also mentions it here: http://postcardsgods.blogspot.com/2014/02/embedded-criticism-revisited-few.html

Veronica Aloess	2013	woman	student	Y	1?	I'm Spilling My Heart Out Here	production	mid
Matt Trueman	2013	white, British, cis straight man	critic and journalist	Y		Counterculture 50	season	mid
Andrew Haydon	2013	white, British cis straight man	critic and journalist	Y		Secret Theatre	season	large
Gemma Hirst	2013	white, British cis woman	critic and journalist	Y	1?	The Man Who Thought The Moon Would Fall Out of The Sky	production	mid?
Matt Trueman	2013	white, British cis straight man	critic and journalist	U - probably N	5 out of 5 days	This is Tomorrow	event	large

Lincoln Young Company	U	Lincoln?	Sheffield	Sheffield Crucible	1	written	A Younger Theatre	editor
Ovalhouse	U	London	London	Ovalhouse	3	written	Ovalhouse website	marketing staff
Lyric Hammersmith	U	London	London	Lyric Hammersmith	unsure	written	nachtkritik, own blog	self, editor
North/Northern Stage	U	Newcastle/ Northeast	tour	various	1	written	the company's blog	self
China Plate/Warwick University	U	n/a	Warwick	Warwick University	5	written	writer's own blog	self

https://www.ayoungertheatre.com/behind-the-scenes-national-theatre-connections/	part of the National Theatre Connections Festival
https://www.ovalhouse.com/theatre/matt_trueman/The%20Act, https://www.ovalhouse.com/theatre/matt_trueman/crimplene%20millionaire, https://www.ovalhouse.com/theatre/matt_trueman/mars.tarrab, https://www.ovalhouse.com/theatre/onembeddedcriticism	https://web.archive.org/web/20150724231645/https://www.ovalhouse.com/theatre/matt_trueman/The%20Act, 1st, 3rd link contains evaluation/judgement and 4th piece recognises that
https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9325:theaterbrief-aus-grossbritannien-das-regietheater-experiment-secret-theatre-des-lyric-hammersmith-london&catid=221&Itemid=100057, http://postcardsgods.blogspot.com/2013/07/circle-mirror-transformation-royal.html, http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/taking-control/	of the pieces located where he discusses Secret Theatre, 2 discuss it indirectly but it is clear that observing their processes have informed how he thinks and writes about theatre more widely
http://theletterroomers.blogspot.com/2013/07/guest-blog-gemma-hirst.html?m=1	
Internet archive page: https://web.archive.org/web/20160313124336/http://matttrueman.co.uk/2013/03/this-is-tomorrow.html	Haydon mentions it here: http://postcardsgods.blogspot.com/2014/02/embedded-criticism-revisited-few.html

Maddy Costa, leading a team of writers (Laura Burns?, Bojana Jankovic?, Kate Kelsall, Rosemary Wagg, George Meredith, William McCrory, Rasheeda Nalumoso)	2014	various		U - probably N		In Between Time	festival	mid
Maddy Costa	2014	white, British cis woman	critic and journalist, later dramaturg	U - probably N		Forest Fringe	festival	mid
Maddy Costa and Jake Orr	2014	white, British cis straight woman and white, British cis gay man		U - probably N		Talking/Making/Taking Part	Festival	mid
John Mulholland	2014	white man	critic and journalist	Y	1?	BABY/LON	production	mid?

In Between Time	U	various	Bristol	various	U - 12+	written	the Guardian, Exeunt, A Younger Theatre, This Is Tomorrow and Urban Times, Maddy's own blog	editor
Forest Fringe	U	various	Edinburgh	U	1	zine	hardcopy	self
Dialogue	Y	various	London	Ovalhouse	about 12 - depends on what 'counts' as embedded criticism	written, video, photographs	1 piece on the Guardian, rest on company's website	self, Guardian arts editor
Big House	U	London	London?	Hakney Downs Studios	1	written	The Guardian	editor

https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/feb/19/in-between-time-review (evaluative), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/feb/20/how-far-should-theatre-push-us (feature), https://www.ayoungertheatre.com/guest-blog-public-art-for-what-its-worth/, http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/ibt13-in-between-time-festival, http://statesofdeliquescence.blogspot.com/p/ibt13.html, http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/in-between-time-festival/, http://exeuntmagazine.com/venues/ibt13/	I'm not sure I have not located all of these pieces though most seem to employ evaluation
N/A	mentioned here: https://web.archive.org/web/20170314062643/http://welcometodialogue.com/projects/timeline/
https://web.archive.org/web/20150724180629/http://welcometodialogue.com/projects/dialogue-festival/dialogue-festival-documentation/ and links from this page, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2014/nov/18/can-theatre-change-peoples-relationship-to-society, https://web.archive.org/web/20150303094528/http://welcometodialogue.com/talkingmakingtaking-part-the-full-line-up/, https://web.archive.org/web/20160820060808/http://welcometodialogue.com/our-festival-and-some-ace-ace-news/	Costa and Orr produced and curated the festival, but also generated what they are calling documentation and Ovalhouse calls embedded criticism, of the event
https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/apr/20/theatre-big-house-care-leavers-young-people	

Kaitlin Wray	2014	woman	actor	Y	1	Romeo and Juliet	production	mid-large
Matt Trueman	2015	white, British cis straight man	critic and journalist	N/A		This Thing Called Artist Development	Other - conference? Site calls it an event	unsure
Maddy Costa	2015	white, British, cis straight woman	critic and journalist, later dramaturg	U - probably N		In Between Time	Festival	mid
David Jays	2015	man	critic and journalist	Y	1 each?	King John, A Damsel in Distress and Rambert's Dark Arteries	productions	mid-large?
Alice Saville	2015	white, British, cis queer woman	critic and journalist	U - probably N		Sprint Festival	Festival	small

Sherman Theatre	U	Cardiff	Cardiff	Sherman Theatre	1	written	Get the Chance	editor
Ovalhouse	U	N/A	London	Ovalhouse	1	written	Ovalhouse website	self
In Between Time	U	various	Bristol	various	Unsure	U	IBT website	self
RSC, Chichester Festival Theatre, Rambert	Y	various	London, Chichester, Stratford	various	1	written	Guardian	editor
Camden People's Theatre	U	various - multiple companies	London	Camden People's Theatre	2	written	Exeunt	self

https://getthechance.wales/2014/09/18/an-insight-into-the-rehearsal-process-of-sherman-cymrus-romeo-and-juliet-by-kaitlin-wray/	
https://www.ovalhouse.com/theatre/matt_trueman/notes-on-artist-development	linked to from a page on OH's website entitled 'Embedded Criticism'
no longer online	mentioned on Dialogue archive: "Maddy collaborates with IBT15 (In Between Time) in Bristol to create the digital project Gathering Storm, capturing conversations happening through and around the festival programme, responding to work and commissioning the team of young festival writers to respond to its theme of storm." https://web.archive.org/web/20170314062643/http://welcometodialogue.com/projects/timeline/
https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/may/13/rehearsals-rambert-king-john-a-damsel-in-distress	
http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/sprint-festival-precarious-games/, http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/sprint-festival-adventures-in-audience-participation/	there is nothing to indicate in these pieces that she observed any rehearsals

Diana Damian Martin, Bojana Jankovic, + others	2016	various	critics	U - probably N		Steakhouse Live	Festival	small/mid
Laura Kressly	2017	white, cis queer woman, American	critic and journalist, dramaturg	Y	1	In Event of Moone Disaster	production	small
Megan Vaughan	2017	white, British cis woman	blogger and arts administrator	Y	1 for each of 4 productions	The Site (RC venue) season programme	season	mid
Maddy Costa	2017	white, British, cis straight woman	critic and journalist, later dramaturg	U - probably N		In Between Time	Festival	mid
Salome Wagaine	2018	Black British woman	critic and producer	Y	1	Br'er Cotton	production	small
Ava Wong Davies	2018	British East Asian, queer, cis woman	critic and playwright	Y		Kingdom	production	small

Steakhouse Live	U	various	London	3 different venues				
Theatre503 (in-house)	U	London	London	Theatre503	3	written	theatre's blog	marketing coordinator
Royal Court	U though suspect Y	London	London	Royal Court	4	written	theatre's blog	marketing dept
In Between Time	U	various - multiple companies	Bristol	various	6	written	IBT website	self
Theatre503 (in-house)	U	London	London	Theatre503	1	written	theatre's blog	marketing coordinator
Artists of Affection	U	London	London	Camden People's Theatre	1	written	own blog	self

direct link no longer works but this article talks about the project: http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/steakhouse-live-2016-embedded-criticism/	
https://theatre503.com/about-us/503blog/	
https://royalcourttheatre.com/collection/megan-vaughan-site/, https://royalcourttheatre.com/collection/megan-vaughan-deaborah-pearsons-made/, https://royalcourttheatre.com/collection/megan-vaughan-stacey-greggs-lights/, https://royalcourttheatre.com/collection/site-blog-3/	observed rehearsals for 4 shows, then wrote 4 pieces
https://www.inbetweentime.co.uk/library/	also wrote reviews of festival shows for Exeunt
https://theatre503.com/about-us/503blog/	
https://avawongdavies.wordpress.com/2018/10/10/on-softness-and-kingdom/	

Nicky Watkinson	2019	white, British woman	critic and blogger	Y		Ask Me Anything	production	mid
Eva Marloes	2019	woman	critic, anthropologist, photographer	Y	1?	Robinson	production	unsure
Eva Marloes	2019	woman	critic, anthropologist, photographer	Y	1?	Les Miserables	production	unsure
Lyn Gardner	2019	white, British, cis woman	critic and journalist	Y		The Amber Trap	production	small
Laura Kressly	2019	white, cis queer woman, American	critic and journalist, dramaturg	Y	1	Jamboree	production	mid

Paper Birds	U	Bristol	tour	various	2	written	own blog	self
Give It a Name	U	Cardif	Cardiff	Chapter Arts Centre?	3	written	Get the Chance	editor
August02	U	Cardiff	Cardiff	Chapter Arts Centre	1	written	Get the Chance	editor
Damsel Productions	Y	London	London	Theatre503	1	written	The Stage	editor
Oily Cart	Y	London	tour	various	1	written	own blog	self

https://medium.com/@nicky.watkinson/on-failure-39a47415d85b, https://medium.com/@nicky.watkinson/spaces-of-authenticity-ask-me-anything-e095adfbdfd2?source=friends_link&sk=5016a944168ea26d0e2ab547f2913bff	
http://getthechance.wales/2019/05/12/behind-the-curtains-part-1-robinson-the-other-island-by-eva-marloes%ef%bb%bf/, http://getthechance.wales/2019/05/16/the-sound-of-robinson-the-other-island-behind-the-curtains-part-2-by-eva-marloes/, http://getthechance.wales/2019/05/22/becoming-oneself-on-stage-robinson-the-other-island-behind-the-curtains-part-3-by-eva-marloes/	
https://getthechance.wales/2019/03/26/behind-the-curtains-of-les-miserables-by-eva-marloes/	explicitly mentions she commented on the rehearsal process
https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/2019/anatomy-of-a-fringe-production/?login_to=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thestage.co.uk%2Faccounts%2Fusers%2Fsign_up.popup	
https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2019/08/23/feature-a-day-with-oily-cart/	

Pippa Sa	2019	British East Asian, queer woman	blogger	Y		i will still be whole (when you rip me in half)	production	small
Nicky Watkinson & Shanae Chisolm	2019	white British queer woman; Black British woman	critic and bloggers	Y		The Niceties	production	small
David Jays	2019	man	critic and journalist	Y	1 each?	J'ouvert, Measure for Measure, Captail Corelli's Mandolin (3 different shows' rehearsals for one article)	productions	mid and large
James Varney	2019	white British cis man	critic and journalist, maker	Y		Forest	production as part of PUSH festival	small? I think it's a solo show
Ava Wong Davies	2019	British East Asian, queer woman	critic and playwright	Y		Kourtney Kardashian: the opera	Production	mid?
Joseph Winer	2019	white British man	critic and producer	Y		Barry	production	mid/large?

(produced by Emily Davis)	Y	London	London	Bunker Theatre	1	written	own blog	self
(unsure)	U	London	London	Finborough Theatre	2	1 written, 1 post-show discussion video	own blog	self
Theatre503, RSC, Birmingham Rep & others	U	London	London, Stratford and touring	Theatre503, RSC, touring	1	written	The Guardian	editor
U - I think the artist is producing their own work	U	Manchester	Manchester	HOME	4	written	own blog, Exuent	self
Sleepwalk Collective	U	U	Manchester	HOME	1	written	own blog	self
Shrinking Violet (Edinburgh uni student company?)	U	Edinburgh (assumed)	Leicester	NSDF	2	written	NSDF's Noises Off	editor

https://bechdeltheatre.com/2019/03/04/embedded-criticism-for-i-will-still-be-whole-when-you-rip-me-in-half/	
https://naewrites.wordpress.com/2019/11/15/the-niceties-an-embedded-critique/, https://naewrites.wordpress.com/2019/10/14/post-show-discussion-the-niceties/	may have also worked dramaturgically - they both use the phrase "worked on the production"
https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jun/03/captain-corellis-missing-mandolin-rehearsals-jouvert-rsc	
http://jamesvarney.squadsite.uk/embedded-critic-forest-afterword/, http://jamesvarney.squadsite.uk/embedded-critic-forest-1/, http://jamesvarney.squadsite.uk/embedded-critic-forest-2/, http://jamesvarney.squadsite.uk/embedded-critic-forest-afterword/. review: http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-forest-push-festival-manchester/	may have provided dramaturgical input, though there was a dramaturg working on the production. JV also reviewed the production for Exuent
https://avawongdavies.wordpress.com/2019/03/06/kourtney/	
https://www.nsdf.org.uk/the-fourth-wall/noises-off/embedded-critic/, https://www.nsdf.org.uk/the-fourth-wall/noises-off/subject-matters/	

Lily Levinson	2020	white, British	critic	Y		Something In Your Voice	production	mid
Laura Kressly	2020	white, cis queer woman, American	critic and journalist, dramaturg	Y - by video only	parts of 2. They were short pre-recorded video clips	Wild Onion	production	small
Laura Kressly	2020	white, cis queer woman, American	critic and journalist, dramaturg	Y	1	Tinted	production	small
Luise Jones	2021	white, British cis woman	critic	U - probably N		Compass Festival	festival	mid
Oluwaseun Olayiwola	2021	Black man	choreographer and poet	Y		The Cabaret at the End of the World	production R&D	mid
Frey Kwa Hawking	2021	trans British East Asian person	critic and dramaturg	Y - by video only		GALLATHEA	production	unsure
Laura Kressly	2021	white, cis queer woman, American	critic and journalist, dramaturg	Y	3 out of 5	Care Crisis	production R&D	mid

Emergency Chorus	U	Cambridge, Bristol, London	tour	various	1	written, with video and article links	own blog	self
Orange Skies	N	London	Brighton (cancelled)	Brighton Fringe Festival	1	written	Platform Journal	editor
Scripped Up	Y	London	London	VAULT Festival	1	written	own blog	self
	U		Leeds	Compass Festival		written	Exuent	editor
Packpack Theatre	Y	unsure	not publicly performed	N/A - no public performances	1	written in poetry, also audio	company's website	Joseph Winer?
The Show Must Go Online	U	online	online	online	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE
Zoo Co	British Council	London	online	online	1	written	writer's own blog	self

https://malcolmmooney.wordpress.com/2020/02/28/something-for-emergency-chorus-and-other-voices/	
	production cancelled due to COVID-19, but I still wrote the piece after watching rehearsal footage and interviewing the cast and creative team by email
https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2020/02/05/feature-a-director-at-work/	
http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/compass-festival-1/	
https://www.packpacktheatre.co.uk/embedded-criticism	
NONE	the role evolved from embedded critic to dramaturg, and no public-facing embedded criticism writing was created
https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2021/06/29/feature-dismantling-rehearsal-room-hierarchies/	

Diana Miranda	2021	cis, Mexican straight woman	critic and journalist, arts administrator	Y - by video only	several	Henry VI part I: open rehearsal project	other - rehearsal	large
Michael Billington	2021	cis, white British man	critic and journalist	Y - by video only		Henry VI part I: open rehearsal project	other - rehearsal	large
Peter Kirwan	2021	cis, white British man	academic	Y - by video only		Henry VI part I: open rehearsal project	other - rehearsal	large
Laura Kressly	2021	white, cis queer woman, American	critic and journalist, dramaturg	Y	2	Passion Fruit	production	small
Diana Miranda	2021	cis, Mexican straight woman	critic and journalist, arts administrator	Y	1	Pleading Stupidity	production	small?
Debbie Gilpin	2021	cis white British woman	critic and unknown day job	Y	1	The Magician's Elephant	production	large

RSC	Y	Stratford			1	written	The Play's the Thing UK	editor
RSC	Y	Stratford			1	written	The Guardian	editor
RSC	Y	Stratford			1	written	own blog	self
N/A - self-produced	N	London	London	The Glory	2	written	writer's own blog	self
Pleading Stupidity	U	London	London	Hen & Chickens	1	written	The Play's the Thing UK	editor
RSC	Y	unsure	Stratford	RSC	1	written	writer's own blog	self

https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2021/07/06/feature-henry-vi-part-one-open-rehearsal-project/	
https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/jun/14/bard-days-work-what-i-learned-from-eavesdropping-on-rsc-rehearsals	
https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2021/06/17/henry-vi-part-one-open-rehearsal-project-rsc-the-rsc-rehearsal-rooms-online/	
https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2021/08/23/feature-making-passion-fruit/, https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2021/09/22/feature-bringing-characters-come-to-life/	
https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2021/08/17/feature-re-framing-narratives-with-maybe-you-like-it-productions/	
https://pleasemindtheblog.wordpress.com/2021/10/13/why-should-you-see-the-magicians-elephant/	

Youness Bouzinab	2021	MENA? man	dramaturg, theatremaker	Y		Where I Call Home	production	unsure
Diana Miranda	2022	cis, Mexican straight woman	critic and journalist, arts administrator	Y	1	Playing Latinx	production	small
Diana Miranda	2022	cis, Mexican straight woman	critic and journalist, arts administrator	Y	1	Ladyfriends	production	small/mid
Diana Miranda	2022	cis, Mexican straight woman	critic and journalist, arts administrator	Y - online	all R&Ds, 3/7 Discord sessions	The Broad Cloth	R&D (in online RPG format) working towards a production	mid
Meg Fozzard	2022	disabled white woman	film and digital media producer, journalist	Y	1	Perfect Show for Rachel	production	mid/large

Foreign Affairs		London	London	Rose Lipman Building	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE
MarianaMelena Theatre Co.	U	London	London	Camden People's Theatre	2	written	The Play's the Thing UK, Latin Girl at Work	editor
	Y	Manchester	touring	various	1	written	The Play's the Thing UK	editor
	U	online	N/A	N/A	4	written	on the production website	self
Zoo Co.	Y	London	London	Barbican	1	written	on Zoo Co's website	self

NONE	credited as an embedded critic/dramaturg, emailed for links to pieces as I cannot locate them but told he did not publish any writing - all feedback was verbal in rehearsals
https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2022/04/01/feature-sombreros-and-other-stereotypes-rehearsing-playing-latinx/, https://www.latingirlsatwork.com/voces/multiple-edged-swords-of-humour-playing-latinx-at-camden-peoples-theatre	
https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2022/05/03/feature-building-history-ladyfriends-in-rehearsals/	
https://www.worldanvil.com/w/the-broad-cloth-jenifertoksvig/a/the-three-critics-article (plus links to other 3 pieces)	The R&D was held over March and April, with an immersive production to be held at a later date
https://www.wearezooco.co.uk/psfrartistsresponses	Zoo Co considered this peer review rather than embedded criticism, and Meg was paid for her work

Maddy Costa	2011-2018	white, British cis woman	critic and journalist, later dramaturg	Y	varied	various by Chris Goode & Co	Company	small/mid
Diana Damian Martin, Mark Aaron, Elisabeth Carlile, Jackie Montague, Phoebe Patey-Ferguson, Claire Ridge, Michelle	2015-2016	various		U - probably N		SPILL Festival	Festival	mid
various - a small team each year	2015-2019	various		U - probably N		Edinburgh Festival Fringe - Pleasance venues	Festival	large

Chris Goode & Co	Y	London (& possibly others)	various	various	numerous	written, visual	writer's own blog	self
SPILL Festival	U	various - multiple companies	Ipswich	various	46 in 2016, 32 in 2015	written	SPILL website	self
various	U	various	Edinburgh	Peasance venues	varies per year	written, video, podcast	theatre's blog	self

http://statesofdeliquescence.blogspot.com/	wrote numerous blog posts about this company's work and rehearsal processes between 2011-2018
https://www.spillfestival.com/spill-writing/	links to each piece of individual writing on this page
https://pleasancetimes.tumblr.com/archive	Content style, form and quantity varies from year to year. Terri Paddock discusses her role mentoring the young journalists 'hired' to create the in-house newspaper about Pleasance shows here (a new scheme in 2015): https://www.terripaddock.com/the-fringe-may-be-over-but-perhaps-we-can-keep-the-spirit-alive-a-little-longer/