PLAYING WITH THE PAST

THE POLITICS OF HISTORIOGRAPHIC THEATRE

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# Introduction

## Abstract

This thesis explores theatre's capacity to act as a medium for the 'production' of history. Proposing a theoretical model capable of accommodating this significantly underexplored function of contemporary drama, I adapt recent developments in the debates over textual historiography to the processes of theatrical production. Concurrent with this investigation, I examine certain examples of one of the most popular forms of contemporary historical theatre in Britain – the documentary strand known as 'verbatim' – and demonstrate the ways in which a lack of attention to theatre-as-historiography has allowed some uninformed and unstable historical methodologies to proliferate in theatrical discourses. Initially focussing upon the August Riots of 2011, I demonstrate the ways in which the political disingenuousness of key verbatim methodologies renders them unfit to engage productively with the demands of their surrounding context. Arguing the necessity for theatre to fulfil this societal function, I then consider alternative, politically conscious theatrical approaches to history.

Exploring the work of Edward Bond through a preliminary study of *Saved* and a chapter-length analysis of *Lear*, I address the topic of narrative historiography in theatre. Interrogating the trajectories of dramatic and performance texts over time, I demonstrate that theatre's propensity to respond to the conditions of its performing context complicates the notion of a single or 'stable' narrative. Thus, in conjunction with the theatrical and scholarly responses of Peter Brook and Jan Kott, I argue that the Shakespeare with whom Bond interacts in *Lear* is a product of the twentieth, rather than the seventeenth century. Focussing in on the theatrical 'event' as a site of historical production, I then examine the National Theatre's 2012 production of Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution*. Barker's plays employ an ambiguous and disruptive approach to history, designed to oppose the orthodoxies of the performing contexts into which they are brought into being. However, using this production as example, I show that this opposition is only possible if a historiographic consciousness is maintained at the level of performance. The studies of Bond and

Barker outline a model for the production of 'historiographic theatre' – theatre that exploits its own unique capacities to produce and engage with history. I reassert the value of this kind of theatre by returning, in the 'Epilogue', to the August Riots, events that I propose are symptomatic of wider instabilities in contemporary socio-political climates. Historiographic theatre, I argue, has the capacity to point beyond these climates, providing a space in which these instabilities may be engaged.

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[T]he written text/performance text relationship is not one of simple priority but a complex of reciprocal constraints constituting a powerful *intertextuality*. Each text bears the other's traces, the performance assimilating those aspects of the written play which the performers choose to transcodify, and the dramatic text being 'spoken' at every point by the model performance – or the *n* possible performances – that motivate it. This relationship is problematic rather than automatic and symmetrical. Any given performance is only to a degree constrained by the indications of the written text, just as the latter does not usually bear the traces of any *actual* performance. It is a relationship that cannot be accounted for in terms of facile determinism.

Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama.*[1]

In the world in which we daily live, anyone who studies the past as an end in itself must appear to be either an antiquarian, fleeing from the problems of the present into a purely personal past, or a kind of cultural necrophile, that is, one who finds in the dead and the dying a value he can never find in the living. The contemporary historian has to establish the value of the study of the past, not as an end in itself, but as a way of providing perspectives on the present that contribute to the solution of problems peculiar to our own time.

Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse.*[2]

If you live in a society that is full of liars, then how can you act?

Edward Bond.[3]

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[1] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980) p. 209.
[2] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism.* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) p. 41.
[3] Edward Bond, 'Bond @ 50 Conference', 2nd November 2012.

# Introduction

This thesis focuses upon theatre's capacity to create and engage with history in the present, contending that theatrical performance offers a unique and often overlooked form of historiography. The argument confronts a series of challenges: for example, how can a medium which ostensibly exists as an 'event' that vanishes at the point of construction be used to write or otherwise inscribe history? What is the use of this history once it *has* been inscribed, if it is irrecoverable and therefore inaccessible to future historians who did not participate in the event? And, even if these objections can be accounted for, why trouble with theatre over more conventional forms of historiography such as writing, film and photography, whose products are infinitely reproducible and therefore a far less troublesome resource for those interested in historical study?

Responses to these concerns will be proposed throughout this thesis, but the most comprehensive and direct rejoinder emerges from a central tenet of the recent and fraught debates concerning the production of history itself. This is, quite simply, that the representations of the past which are history's ultimate objective are always-already a present tense activity. That is to say, the researching, writing and publication of historical study, as well as the encountering, consumption and responses to those studies must take place in the present of a particular context. Developments in humanities research that have destabilised the concept of what Roland Barthes calls singular, 'theological meaning' in any given text have bled, inexorably, into contemporary considerations of history.[4] Whilst still opposed by many historians (as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two) the influence of these critical developments is now such that Keith Jenkins' initially controversial book *Re-Thinking History* (in which he argues that 'history is what historians make of it when they go to

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[4] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image Music Text*, essays selected and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 146.

work') has for the past two decades been a staple text on A-Level and undergraduate syllabuses.[5]

Thus, despite on-going resistance, Jenkins' argument is, if not universally accepted, at least identified

as a significant perspective upon the practice of historical study. This in turn has led to radical

revisions in the concept of meaning-production in historical discourses, which have been increasingly

recentred (as in many other fields) onto the figures of the writer and the reader, as they encounter

and *produce* the historical texts that comprise a study of the past.

This relocation of meaning-production to the present-tenses of writing and reading history thus

opens up new opportunities for theatre to contribute to the debates surrounding historiography.

Theatrical performance offers a distinctive opportunity to bring writers and readers together in the

production of historical texts which rely absolutely upon a present-tense context – an *event*. These

are the initial responses to the objections raised above; rather than being seen as a disadvantage,

theatre's ephemerality can in fact prove an asset to the kinds of historical study that observe the

meaning of a historical text as a function of its production and reception, rather than its intrinsic

relationship to an idea of the past. Further, the reason that I assert theatre's pertinence as a form of

historiography equal in value to the more popular discourses of writing, film and photography is

precisely the fact that theatre's historical texts must always be visibly produced in the present,

granting a historiographically conscious theatre the ability to lay bare the processes of historical

production, and expose the contingence of history upon the specificities of its producing context.[6]

My argument is therefore that theatre's ephemerality, its renegotiation of historical texts in and for

specific performance environments and its corporeal manifestations of historical representation

render it a unique form of historiography, offering privileged insights into the mechanics of historical

production. However, I also argue that a lack of critical interest in this subject has not only inhibited

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[5] Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, with a new preface and conversation with the author by Alan Munslow (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), p. 8. For a particularly vitriolic response, see the 'Afterword' in Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 2000), especially pp. 277 – 302.
[6] For clarity's sake, it must be noted that the kinds of theatre principally under consideration in this thesis may be loosely considered 'text-based', as all are at least partly contingent upon a written script, or equivalent instigative material.

practical and scholarly investigations, but has also allowed certain unstable and problematic uses of theatre's historiographic capacities to proliferate in current theatrical discourses. Two principal tasks are therefore undertaken in this thesis; to identify and critique significant existing historiographic methods in contemporary theatre, and to establish a critical apparatus capable of interrogating the peculiarities of theatre as a historiographic medium.

Chapter One examines a particular strand of British verbatim drama, one of the dominant forms of contemporary historical theatre. My object of focus is Gillian Slovo's *The Riots*, which draws upon the success of the Tricycle Theatre's 'tribunal plays' to suggest itself as a replacement for public inquiry. Verbatim, as the name suggests, is predicated upon the supposedly literal reproduction of documentary or sourced material, and Slovo – along with certain other verbatim theatre makers – often uses claims of transparency and accuracy to legitimise the 'truthfulness' of her drama. Scrutinising these claims, this chapter introduces the issue of theatre's historiographic capacities, and by practical demonstration indicates the dangers of allowing these capacities to remain unaddressed. Chapter Two approaches the notion of theatre-as-historiography by surveying textual and theatrical historiographic theory, identifying both the foundations for my project, and the gaps in existing scholarship which my work will seek to address. Chapter Three then assembles a critical apparatus for the productive appraisal of theatre's historiographic capacities, drawing upon the deconstructive theories of Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Rancière's ideas of an 'emancipated' spectator. These approaches, which emphasise iterability and reconfiguration as integral components of historical production, are shown to be well placed to negotiate theatre's mediations between history and the present. Following the development of this apparatus, the thesis then broadens to examine two alternative forms of 'historiographic theatre' in the final two chapters. Chapter Four looks at Edward Bond, who combines theatrical and socio-political histories in order to construct a narrative between his play *Lear*, and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. This chapter examines the notion of narrative historiography in theatre, a move away from the 'instant', anti-narrative approaches uncovered in verbatim. Chapter Five turns to the 2012 production of Howard Barker's

*Scenes from an Execution* at the National Theatre, and by examining the disparities between Barker's disruptive, rebellious historiography and the treatment of the text in performance, argues for the necessity of a committed historiographic consciousness in the production of theatrical performances, as well as their instigative texts.

The implications of the core research assertions – that theatre constitutes a unique but overlooked medium for the production of history, and that this disregard must be remedied in order to safeguard against misconstrued or unstable historical approaches in theatrical production – are vast in potential scope, and the thesis has focussed upon the above topics in order to facilitate as rigorous and comprehensive a study as possible. I begin with verbatim theatre in order to illustrate the extent of the problems facing a historically motivated theatre whose historiographic methods have escaped critical scrutiny. Without being held to account by the kinds of analytic perspectives that have developed around textual historiography, Slovo – and other practitioners who will be examined – have proposed increasingly problematic arguments about their texts' abilities to uncover and reproduce historical 'truths'. These arguments, as Chapter Two demonstrates, are often swiftly dismantled once they *are* exposed to rigorous analytic perspectives, revealing their insubstantiality and reaffirming the core assertions of this thesis.

What is being sought, then, is a critical model capable of addressing the peculiarities of theatre as a producer of history. The dialogue between these bodies informs what I define in this thesis as 'historiographic theatre'; theatre which consciously exploits its own capacities for engaging with and producing history.

**A Note on Historiography**

The issue of historiography – the writing and production of history – has remained the subject of heated debate over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the introduction to *Rethinking*

*History* (1991), Jenkins invokes some of the more radical implications of these debates in his claims about the irrecoverable nature of the past, and the 'creative' acts of historians.[7] By emphasising history as something *produced* rather than reclaimed, Jenkins rebukes the legitimacy that history has traditionally derived from its supposedly intrinsic connection to the past, and instead asserts that the legitimacy of a historical work lies in the interaction of its producers and consumers.

For Jenkins, this assertion is a question of responsibility; as history is determined by the present whether the present admits it or not, the only way of maintaining what he calls an 'ethics of interpretation' rests in the open acknowledgement of history's absolute separation from 'the past':

> Having no meaning-full existence independent of historians' textual embrace, being constructed by them, the past constituted as historicized text has ultimately no choice but to go along with whatever purposes are desired.[8]

Historical texts, in other words, are always serving contemporary, ideologically subjective functions. Denying this by asserting an intrinsic connection between the historical text and the past it represents will not safeguard against this manipulation; it will simply provide the manipulators with a smokescreen behind which they can hide their own activities, and assert the absolute 'veracity' of their manipulated text. Concurring with this sentiment, Alan Munslow thus argues that Jenkins:

> pushes home what we need to be reminded about history. That it is not the same as the past. That history is always for someone. That history always has a purpose. That history is always about power. That history is never innocent but always ideological.[9]

Jenkins' position is inflammatory, and some of the most hostile reactions to it will be documented throughout the thesis – one of the most melodramatic, to begin with, can be found in the Tudor

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[7] Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, p. 8.
[8] Keith Jenkins, *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 15.
[9] Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, xiii.

historian Geoffrey Elton calling it the 'moral and intellectual equivalent of crack'.[10] The reason for this hysteria is that the relativism which Jenkins asserts in order to prevent the 'ideology' fuelling history from being masked as an objective representation of reality, contingently robs history of its legitimizing relationship with the past. Under these circumstances, argue its opponents, history can be seen to mean anything, and its separation from fiction is dissolved. Ultimately, therefore, the concern of Jenkins' critics is that an undermining of history's connection to the past will usher in exactly the kinds of contextually biased, history-less propaganda which Jenkins believes will occur through the bestowing upon the subjective history text an unfeasible quality of objective transparency. Needless to say, since the stakes are so high, the oppositions are often intractable and bitterly fought; on Jenkins' side, David Harlan has taunted the anti-relativists by saying they believe that the dissolution of historical objectivity would mean that 'we shall all have to fight the Second World War all over again'.[11]

## A Note on 'Historical Theatre'

Translated into theatre, however, Jenkins' observations are less immediately controversial. In a theatrical performance, the relaying and legitimizing of a historical text is the *physical* province of the practitioners and spectators, who inexorably operate in and under the specificities of a particular context. In theatre, history is openly 'made' in and by the present.

There are deeper questions, of course: is it possible to perform a historical text in a way which is responsible to the history it represents, and if so, how might this be achieved? At the time of writing this thesis, for instance, the Globe Theatre in London is staging two all-male 'Original Practices' Shakespeare productions, *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III*, 'exploring clothing, music, dance and

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[10] Geoffrey Elton, *Return to Essentials* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 3.
[11] David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), xxxi.

settings possible in the Globe of around 1601'.[12] Here is historical theatre which attempts to engage with the conditions of an earlier period, and whose practitioners do not simply reproduce a historical text but present this text within a sense of its broader historical context. The presentation, however, cannot be proposed as a direct transposition of the past into the present; the intervening four centuries render such an act impossible. Instead, aspects taken from the past are employed, in an experimental fashion, in the present, with their value, worth and meaning ultimately accorded by those involved in the production and reception of the performance itself. Robert K. Sarlós, a defender of this kind of *revived* history admits as much in his article 'Performance Reconstruction: The Vital Link Between Past and Future' when he says that:

> No matter that it [historical theatre] cannot be an exact replica of the original work – it will bring all participants, including spectators, closer to a sensory realization of the style and atmosphere, the physical and emotional aspects of a bygone era, than can mere reading. The unavoidably incomplete nature of performance reconstruction intensifies the imaginative stimuli, extending them into auditory, tactile, and olfactory realms, with a force and urgency beyond the reach of written language.[13]

In other words, the 'incomplete' nature of theatre cannot provide 'fixed' or otherwise stable bases for historical exploration. For Sarlós this is actually a strength, since theatre is capable of exciting a more multisensory and creative response to its engagements with history than 'mere reading'. Sarlós' implicit view of written texts as 'stable' is rather unconvincing, as is his automatic valorisation of historical theatre, and the notion that there is ever an 'original work' to be replicated. However, he does sketch out the value of theatre's illustrative tools in creating history, and asserts the unique privileges of a theatrical historiography – a core contention of this thesis.

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[12] <http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/theatre/on-stage/twelfth-night-2012> [Accessed 02/02/13].
[13] Robert K. Sarlós, 'Performance Reconstruction: The Vital Link between Past and Future' in, Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie, *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), p. 201.

The example of the Globe productions also introduces two significant divisions in what may be thought of as 'historical theatre'. The first is the division between text and performance – for simplicity's sake I will adopt Keir Elam's terms 'dramatic text' for the script, or otherwise pre-constructed materials which are used to inform a performance, and 'performance text' for the event of the performance itself.[14] Thus Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (in its various editions) becomes the dramatic text, and the 2012 Globe production the performance text. The second division is between different kinds of dramatic texts which may be considered 'historical'. Again, for simplicity's sake these may be crudely divided into two initial categories: texts which contain historical representations, and texts which, as a consequence of having been written in the past, have themselves become historical. *Twelfth Night* would fall into the latter category; *Richard III* into both. There is of course a case to be made that *all* dramatic texts may be included in the latter category, and contextually-based critical approaches such as Raymond Williams' 'Structures of Feeling' capitalize upon this notion, examining dramatic texts for clues to their wider context of production.[15] This thesis, however, is not solely concerned with the ways in which a dramatic text, or the reports/recordings/memories of a performance text may be critiqued in order to gain a sense of an original context. Such considerations *are* accounted for, particularly in Chapter Four, but my overall focus is on the ways in which theatre creates history in the instance of its production, incorporating a wealth of extra concerns: spectators, performance contexts, genealogies of revival and the reconfigurations of the dramatic text under the auspices of a contemporary purpose. These, as Elam observes in the epigraph, cannot be entirely accounted for by a solely 'determinist' reading of the dramatic text in performance.

Where I address texts in terms of their having become 'loaded with history', as Derrida puts it, this will be to explore the development of the texts over time, and the ways in which they have interacted with the presents of their performances, instead of simply the present in which they were

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[14] Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, p.3.
[15] Raymond Williams, 'Introduction' in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: The Hogarth Press [1952] 1987), pp. 11 – 21.

written.[16] The bulk of dramatic texts examined here, however, are in some way directly concerned with representing history itself. It is with such texts that I establish the scope and urgency of this thesis, by showing that, in accordance with Jenkins' concerns, the fortification of history upon a past with which it bears no immutable connection may allow manipulated, mediated and biased representations of the past to be falsely presented as transparent 'truths'.

**An Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first highlights an important issue in contemporary theatre, which is that a dearth of critical attention to the ways that theatre creates history has allowed offshoots of a genre – verbatim drama – to consolidate a position of popularity and influence upon flawed and unstable historiographic strategies. The second contextualises and corroborates the nature of these instabilities, and the third develops a critical apparatus by which they may be addressed, designed to be opened out towards the broader issue of 'historical theatre' in general. The fourth undertakes a study of narrative-based historiography, using the example of Edward Bond's *Lear* as an alternative to the anti-narrative historiography of verbatim, and the fifth outlines the necessity for historiographic consciousness in theatrical production through an analysis of the 2012 National Theatre staging of Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution*.

Chapter One, 'The Riots and the Rise of British Verbatim Theatre' focusses upon Gillian Slovo's play *The Riots* (2011), which was declared to be a replacement for a public inquiry by Slovo and the production's director, Nicholas Kent. In order to discover how this claim was able to be made, I trace the development of verbatim drama through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, looking at the ways in which verbatim texts have interacted with their contexts of production, and their creators' arguments for the plays' cultural viability as historical theatre. Finding problems in these arguments – the implausible idea that a play can provide an objective dispensary for historical 'truths', for

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[16] Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 63.

example – I chart the ways in which practitioners have built upon unstable historical methods in order to assert ever grander functions for their work. A close analysis of *The Riots* in text and performance is then undertaken, introducing the notion of theatre as a historiographic medium, looking at textual and performance choices made in the play and uncovering a mediating strategy entirely different from the 'transparent' truth-claims advanced by Slovo and Kent. This close-textual analysis establishes and asserts the objective of the overall project; to draw attention to the historiographic function of contemporary theatre; to develop a critical apparatus capable of addressing this function in order to safeguard against unstable methodologies; and thus to provide strategies for a more productive exploitation of theatre's abilities to create and engage with history.

There is a further, political significance to my selection of *The Riots*, and the occurrences to which it relates, which informs the overall direction and content of the thesis. The significance of the English Riots of August 2011 has provoked extensive debate. From David Cameron to Slavoj Žižek, many have worried about what these apparently spontaneous outbursts of civic unrest might *mean*, and as yet there are few definitive answers.[17] My concern with Slovo's play is that in employing strategies of apparently transparent 'objectivity', she proposes to offer a dispassionate analysis of 'what happened, why it happened, and what we should do'.[18] As I argue in Chapter Three, Slovo's approach is in fact highly politicised and subjective, and given the significance that the riots have for our contemporary context, her protestations of transparency are therefore extremely troubling. Chapters Two and Three thus seek to unpick the methodological and ideological apparatuses upon which *The Riots* has been constructed, uncovering their concealed political agendas. Chapters Four and Five then examine theatrical texts and strategies which, I argue, offer more productive means for a theatrical examination of the ruptures in our societal context of which the English Riots are symptomatic.

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[17] See the Epilogue of this thesis for a survey of key responses.
[18] Gillian Slovo, *The Riots (Taken from Spoken Evidence)* (London: Oberon Books, 2011), jacket material.

Contextualising verbatim theatre within the debates and discourses that have developed around the subject of historiography, Chapter Two functions in part as a literature review; in part as a theoretical provocation. The review takes several forms — initially, key perspectives within the historiography debates are outlined, with the intensity of their internal conflicts illustrating the scope and magnitude of the discursive terrain in which certain verbatim practitioners often unwittingly seek to legitimise their work. The practitioners' ignorance in this field is then shown to be complemented by gaps in existing theatre scholarship; whilst over the past few decades there has been a surge of interest in 'theatre historiography' spearheaded in the work of Thomas Postlewait, this has focussed largely upon the writing of theatre history, rather than the ways in which theatre is used to write history itself. However, several of the questions raised by scholars in this field, particularly the instability of the dramatic text, the 'truth' of historiographic documents and the relationship of the dramatic text to the performance text are congruent with the work undertaken here, and I survey a range of related critics in order to clarify these questions. The analysis then returns to examples of British verbatim drama, using the context of historiographic theory to explore the issues uncovered in Chapter One. This Chapter ends with an argument concerning the necessity of developing a critical apparatus capable of accounting for and exploiting theatre's historiographic capacities. In order to achieve this, I turn to Jacques Derrida's concept of 'deconstruction', with its focus upon perpetual recontextualisation under the auspices of the context of production and reception, as ideally suited for the purpose.

Chapter Three conducts a discussion of Derrida's work on iterability, and the uses which this concept will serve in creating an analytic framework for the interrogation of theatre's historiographic capacities. 'Iterability' — the capacity for texts to be broken up and redistributed within an infinity of disparate contexts — is for Derrida the 'condition of historicity', or the facet which enables a text to move through time.[19] There is a similarity here to Jenkins, though Derrida works at a more molecular level in arguing the detachment of the text from any absolute point of context. Like Jenkins, Derrida

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[19] Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, p. 23.

believes this to be an ethical issue, arguing that it is 'because we live in infinitude that the responsibility with regard to the other is irreducible'.[20] In other words, all discourses (and the texts which they produce) are attempts to stabilise something that is essentially *un*stable, and must be considered as such – for Derrida there can be no stability to discursive trajectories because such a concept is merely the attempt to grant an unstable structure a false sense of fixity. In terms of theatre, which attempts to stabilise a series of instigative texts into a specific, particular performance text that dissolves at its point of construction, Derrida provides a useful approach upon which an understanding of theatre's qualities in creating history may be constructed. This chapter thus works through that construction, incorporating Jacques Rancière's arguments towards an 'emancipated' spectator, whose agency is not circumscribed by the didacticism of the performance, and consolidating both into a model for the reading of performance. The model is then tested in an analysis of the Lyric Hammersmith's 2011 revival of Edward Bond's *Saved*, a production of a play which, though written in 1965, depicted societal instabilities in a way which, the director Sean Holmes claimed, resonated with the August Riots. I employ my nascent critical framework to explore the political strategies underpinning the productions of both *Saved* and *The Riots*, re-affirming the necessity of a historiographically conscious theatre and introducing Bond's work as the focus of the following chapter.

The final two chapters of the thesis thus seek to address both the methodological and political problems uncovered in Slovo's use of verbatim theatre to respond to the English Riots. In the first instance, I examine two different approaches to making and engaging with history in/through theatre. These – Bond's *Lear* (as dramatic text) and Barker's *Scenes from an Execution* (as performance text) – are *not* suggested as ideal embodiments of historiographic theatre, but rather as examples that offer a more conscious, and thus potentially more productive approach to making history through theatre than *The Riots*. In the second instance, I argue that the conscious ways in

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[20] Jacques Derrida, in Critchley, Derrida, Laclau and Rorty, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. by Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 88.

which Bond and Barker use theatre to create history renders their projects more capable of dealing with the political topographies of their performing contexts – and thus to engage with events of contemporary pertinence, such as the English Riots. Because she bases her work on an idea of transparent 'objectivity', in other words, Slovo hinders her own ability to make informed critical observations about the history she produces. At the same time, however, that history is still intrinsically and problematically *subjective*. Bond and Barker, I argue, are two examples – though by no means the only ones – of how the essential subjectivity of historical production may be more productively engaged in theatre.

Chapter Four, 'Theatre and Narrative Historiography' thus offers a case study of one alternative approach to the issue of theatre-as-historiography, using the critical apparatus developed over the previous two chapters. Bond's play *Lear* (1971) is read as the product of a narrative which Bond created between Shakespeare's *King Lear* (the text in its original context) and his own contemporary context. Bond's theatre operates under a materialist notion of history, and his historiographic strategy reflects this – he dovetails theatrical and socio-political histories into a narrative through which he determines that *King Lear* no longer 'functions' because whilst the questions it asks have remained pertinent, the ways in which it addresses these questions are 'out of date': 'Shakespeare does arrive at an answer to the problems of his particular society, and that was the idea of total resignation [...] What I want to say is that this model is inadequate now, that it just does not work'.[21]

Rather than focus entirely on Bond, this chapter looks at the wider issues of narrative historiography in theatre with which the example of *Lear* engages. An opening section examines Bond's deeply entrenched political philosophy, one that reads the cultural logic of advanced capitalism as being 'held together by the aggression it creates', pushing humanity to a state of emergency.[22] Theatre, for Bond, is an active means by which this emergency can be counteracted, since '[d]ramatization in all

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[21] Bond, cited in Thomas Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Pain: Edward Bond's *Lear* and the Ghosts of History', in *Shakespeare Survey Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 160.
[22] Edward Bond, *Plays: Two* Introduced by the Author (London: Methuen, [1972] 1996), p. 8.

its forms is the one means we have of [...] constantly recreating our humanness'.[23] His own theatre thus relates directly to the problems of his context, and he holds all other theatre to the same standard. This is why Shakespeare's *King Lear* is seen as a response to 'the problems of his particular society'; Bond believes that Shakespeare's problems have matured into those of the twentieth century. Bond thus proposes a continuum between Shakespeare's time and his own, a notion which my study questions by offering a performance history of *King Lear*, focussing particularly upon Peter Brook's 1961 production and suggesting that Bond's reading of Shakespeare is more grounded in the twentieth century than in the seventeenth. Thus it is argued that suggesting a flattened, universal trajectory to the development of dramatic and performance texts as they move through time is insufficient to engage with the complex ways in which these entities interact with their successive contexts. In addition to this, the political position that *informs* Bond's historiography is also proposed as better able to offer an account of societal ruptures such as the English Riots of 2011 than the verbatim-inflected historiography of Slovo. By constructing a narrative view of the past, Bond uses theatre to suggest patterns and recurrences that inform what he considers to be our contemporary situation. This is both the genesis-*of* and the support-*for* his belief that '[d]rama is a complex intervention in reality to get at truths society obscures or denies. Theatre never slavishly serves an establishment, for the reason that a society that knew no sickness would build no hospitals'.[24] In an initially unusual twist, Bond's 'complex interventions in reality' involve fictionalising his engagements with the past. This is because he believes that '[t]he social meaning of the past has become chaotic because we now try to make it the private meaning of the present'; in other words, the conditions of our contemporary context overwrite our engagement with what has come before.[25] If we try to solidify this engagement as 'fact', we deny ourselves the capacity to 'get at truths society obscures or denies'. Bond does not want to 'reproduce psychology, but show how

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[23] Edward Bond, *The Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State* (London: Methuen, 2000), p. 7.
[24] Edward Bond, *Plays: Six* Introduced by the Author (London: Methuen, 1998) pp. 300 – 301.
[25] Ibid., p. 300.

psychology is produced'.[26] Thus, a 'factual' rendering of a historical event is insufficient to suit his purposes. As is demonstrated in Chapter Four, in *Lear* he pushes beyond the notion of a factual history to offer a fictionalised account of the manner in which history itself has developed, seeking ways to more clearly articulate the situation that we find ourselves in.

Building on the idea of historiography that rejects a supposedly 'factual' reproduction of a historical occurrence, Chapter Five, 'Producing Historiographic Theatre' takes as its focus Tom Cairns' production of Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution* at the National Theatre in September 2012. Barker's play employs the historical location of Venice in the sixteenth century in order to stage an argument between the political potential of art and the neutralising influences of state ideology which extends beyond the specificities of its temporal context. As a dramatic text, this is therefore proposed as a pertinent case study for my particular focus upon the ways in which theatre can produce and engage with history.

Barker's historiographic philosophy is one of deliberate ambiguity; he argues that 'the history play is a good thing, because [...] it's a *metaphor*, it enables you to escape some of the crushing documentary factuality about the world and indulge in a little... speculation'.[27] Part of the reason for this, I argue, is that he intends his plays' engagements with history to resonate in the future-other contexts of their production in a way that escapes an absolute identification with any given historical moment; historical theatre that is written for the future. Given the resistance to authority that characterises his work, the intention is thus that wherever or whenever the plays are produced, they are theoretically able to oppose and critique the dominant ideologies of their performing contexts.

Whilst my analysis supports this rationale, I argue that Cairns' production failed to capitalise upon the radical potential of Barker's play, and that in fact that Cairns aligned the performance text with the very ideologies which the dramatic text seeks to oppose. I therefore argue that whilst a dramatic

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[26] Ibid., p. 302.
[27] Irvine, Lindesay, interview with Howard Barker, *Guardian*, 6th December 2006.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/audio/2006/dec/06/culture1426> [Accessed 03/02/13].

text may initiate a particular historiographic strategy, that strategy must be consciously identified and engaged in order for its potential to be exploited in and as performance. An objection which could be raised here is that the circumscription of reading a singular objective into Cairns' production is equally a betrayal of the play's radical potential, particularly given my support of Rancière's concept of the 'emancipated spectator' in Chapter Three. However, given the framing of this thesis with the English Riots of 2011, and the broader societal ruptures that they index, I argue that a consciously oppositional stance to the dominant ideologies within which those ruptures are taking place is critically important *at the moment*. Without this conscious engagement, Cairns' production failed to capitalise upon its potential capacity to use history to engage with and critique the present. The potential to provide a space *outside* of the orthodoxies of our contemporary context, in order to at least indicate the possibility of something existing beyond those orthodoxies, was lost. This loss, at a time of social upheavals in which events like the riots become possible, fuels my critique of Cairns' production. Building on this, then, it should be made clear that my argument concerning historiographic theatre is explicitly political, as it addresses an issue which, I argue, requires urgent attention in the light of contemporary societal developments.

In order to consolidate this argument, Chapter Five then undertakes a more detailed examination of the ways in which the dramatic and performance text interact – in the theatrical 'event' – and the methods by which dramatic texts produce history 'for the future'. In the former case, the notion of the event as a 'rupture' – what Alain Badiou calls 'a break in time, in which the inexistent is made existent' – is employed to illustrate the potential for theatrical performance to produce history in a way which offers a means of resistance to the 'systems of thought' governing its performing context.[28] This illustration builds upon the notion of 'Theatre Events' proposed by Bond, where theatrical performance is able to stand outside of the prevailing discourses of its contemporary context and highlight the disparities between the impulses of the individual, and the conditioning

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[28] Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 56.

pressure exerted by their society.[29] Thus the theatrical event is proposed as a site of potentially radical resistance to hegemonic orthodoxies, offering powerful implications for the ways in which theatre is able to create history. This potential, however, may only be exploited if an engaged consciousness with the ways in which that history is created is actively maintained in the construction of the performance text. Finally, the chapter turns towards the issue of historiographic theatre and the future, and the ways in which the radical potential offered by the historiographic dramatic text may be encountered and exploited in the future-other contexts of its potential performance. This study re-engages with certain of Derrida's notions on iterability, and uses the example of Cairns' production to underline the importance of maintaining an active understanding of a dramatic text's historiographic strategies in order to exploit them in performance.

The thesis concludes with an 'Epilogue' which returns to the 2011 August Riots, asserting the significance of these events – and the urgent necessity of submitting them to rigorous interrogation – through a brief survey of emerging critical responses. In conjunction with these, I employ the model of historiographic theatre developed through the thesis in arguing for theatre's unique capacity to contribute to this interrogation; though again, I argue, a valuable contribution which fully exploits this capacity will only be possible for theatrical approaches that consciously engage with their historiographic approaches.

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[29] Edward Bond, "Commentary on *The War Plays*" in *The War Plays: A Trilogy* (London: Methuen, 1991), p. 308.

**Chapter 1: *The Riots* and the Rise of British Verbatim Theatre**

> *I sense that verbatim theatre now occupies the territory once claimed by*
>
> *works of the imagination...*[1]
>
> *(Michael Billington, 2011.)*

**1. Tribunal Theatre**

**1.1 Verbatim Theatre**

August 2011 saw 'the most serious bout of civil unrest in a generation' erupt across England. 'Five people died and more than 3,000 were arrested when a disturbance that began in Tottenham on 6 August spread across the capital and to towns and cities across the country during four nights of arson and looting.'[2] In the immediate aftermath, Nicolas Kent, the artistic director of the Tricycle Theatre in London, commissioned the novelist Gillian Slovo to write *The Riots*, a verbatim play (a form of 'documentary theatre' which 'incorporat[es] the words of 'real people', as spoken in private interview or public record') exploring these events from the perspectives of those involved.[3]

In preparation for this project, Slovo compiled 'around fifty six hours' of interviews with a variety of people connected to the riots – policemen, community leaders, politicians and some testimonials taken anonymously from rioters themselves.[4] The results were edited into a dramatic text which Slovo declares was 'built' into a narrative that reflected her own interests in the subject, and was designed to 'ask the questions and provoke the thoughts' that both she and Kent felt had been ignored by the government's decision not to open a public enquiry.[5] The play was performed over a

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[1] Michael Billington, 'The Best Shows of 2011', *Guardian*, 4th December 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/dec/04/best-theatre-2011-michael-billington?newsfeed=true> [Accessed 03/02/13].

[2] Paul Lewis, 'Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of Disorder', *Guardian*, 10th October 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/oct/10/learning-england-riots-perspective-responsible> [Accessed 03/02/13].

[3] Michael Billington, 'V Is For Verbatim Theatre', *Guardian*, 8th May 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/may/08/michael-billington-verbatim-theatre> [Accessed 28/01/13].

[4] Gillian Slovo in conversation with Kirsty Lang, BBC Front Row, 21st November 2011.

[5] BBC Front Row, 21st November 2011.

four-week period in November and December 2011 at the Tricycle, whose publicity for the production bore the legend:

> The Government has so far refused a Public Inquiry into the riots that shook our
>
> cities this summer, so the Tricycle is mounting its own.[6]

This was, then, a different sort of theatrical 'inquiry' to those that had more commonly been produced at the Tricycle since 1994 under Kent's direction. These had been dubbed 'tribunal plays' by their practitioners, and were a variant of verbatim theatre that would often focus upon an existing legal tribunal, editing lengthy testimonial and legislative documentation into a shortened version that would form the basis of a theatrical performance. The tribunal selected would usually be contemporary to the context of the production – examples range from the Scott Arms to Iraq inquiry in 1994 (*Half the Picture*, Norton-Taylor), the 1995 Rule 61 hearings into the massacre at Srebrenica (*Srebrenica*, Kent) to the 2003 Hutton inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly and the 'sexing up' of the September dossier on the Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq that same year (*Justifying War*, Norton-Taylor). The plays found audiences in the Houses of Parliament, Capitol Hill in the United States, and national and international theatres through in-house and touring productions, as well as being broadcasted by the BBC on radio or television.[7]

The most successful of these tribunal plays was Richard Norton-Taylor's *The Colour of Justice*, which received a West-End transfer, television broadcast, several touring productions and international revivals.[8] This play is a dramatisation of the inquiry which found the British police force guilty of 'institutional racism' after their mishandling of the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. In 1999, the year that the results of the inquiry were announced, Norton-Taylor's play toured nationally and internationally in an award-winning production. The publicity surrounding the production declared

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[6] <http://www.tricycle.co.uk/current-programme-pages/theatre/theatre-programme-main/the-riots> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[7] <http://www.tricycle.co.uk/home/about-the-tricycle-pages/about-us-tab-menu/about/> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[8] <http://www.nicolaskent.com/NicolasKentInfo/productions.htm> [Accessed 04/02/13].

that part of the reason for *The Colour of Justice's* initial success was its ability to communicate in a

succinct fashion events that had exposed 'serious flaws' in the British justice system, which it

described as a 'model for justice systems around the world'.[9] Within this statement, one of the

grandest boasts of these tribunal plays – and consequently one of their trickiest and most

problematic aspects – begins to emerge. By positioning themselves as distillations of legislative or

administrative processes, the plays seek to provide a direct link between the subject material and

the audience, in which the production is simply a vehicle or a means to an end, one whose

endeavours are at the most secondary, at the least irrelevant, to the overall function of the drama.

It is perhaps easy to see why such claims would be appealing to a figure like Norton-Taylor, a

journalist with the *Guardian* newspaper since 1975, author of a range of books into 'the abuse of

power among public agencies' and recipient of the 'Freedom of Information Campaign Award' in

1986.[10] Proposing his theatrical work as an extension of his journalistic practice, he envisages his

plays as 'tools for the exposure of injustice and subterfuge, as an extension of journalism in another

form, and as a means of providing insight into hidden processes and scenarios [...] honesty, truth,

and the accountability of those who have power over us.'[11] In the service of such exposures, analytic

approaches practising minimal mediation would seem a logical choice, laying bare the findings of

their research for the scrutiny of an informed and critical audience. This philosophy does often tend

to permeate a variety of facets of the verbatim process, from the strategies of information gathering

to the productions themselves, which frequently appear quasi-Brechtian in their application of

familiar V-Effect devices such as subtitles and bare stages which emphasise their non-illusory

stylings. As Mary Luckhurst has elsewhere pointed out, '[i]n its purest form, verbatim is performed

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[9] Richard Norton-Taylor, *The Colour of Justice* (London: Oberon Books, 1999), jacket material.
[10] Ibid., and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/richardnortontaylor> [Accessed 02/02/13].
[11] Will Hammond and Dan Steward, ed., *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre* (London: Oberon Books, 2008), pp. 130 – 131.

with actors in a line before the audience' – as these are plays which are designed to expose, they appear to hold the view that they cannot therefore afford to allow their practices to conceal.[12]

However, one of the most immediate problems with this notion of transparency lies in the textual production itself – the consolidation of history in material form that falls within the discourse of historiography, and one which I shall address in depth in the second chapter of this thesis. It is my contention that theatrical performance offers a range of unique and potentially invaluable possibilities to the production and consumption of history, but that despite Carol Martin's assertion that 'documentary theatre also has the capacity to stage historiography', in contemporary verbatim practices aspiring to the status of 'documentary' (of which the tribunal plays are currently enjoying perhaps the greatest success) this capacity has yet to be fully exploited. A large part of the reason for this would seem to be located in this desire to deny or suppress the theatricality and theatrical endeavours of the productions themselves, in order to pursue a historiography as unhampered as possible by distortion through mediation. The term 'as possible' is of course as crucial to this analysis as it is *im*possible to define – it is also, as a consequence of this, the uneasy space in which some of the most fraught battles over historiography have elsewhere taken place; the space which Keith Jenkins declared insurmountable because '[t]he past is gone and history is what historians make of it when they go to work'.[13] Declaring the past and history as irreconcilable to one another is a deeply contentious issue, with many, such as Elton, unwilling to accept the kind of (what has become dubbed as) 'postmodern' historiography of which Jenkins' statement is a core principle; though it *is* still the subject of extensive debate, as my later analysis will demonstrate. Yet despite this, the issues raised in these debates are mostly, in verbatim theatre, conspicuous by their absence. Kent, for example, is quite prepared to declare that '[t]he intention of a tribunal play is to arrive at truth without exaggeration' and David Hare that '[a]udiences at this time of global unease want the facts,

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[12] Mary Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics' in Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst (ed), *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 214.
[13] Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, p. 8.

but also they want the chance to look at the facts together, and in some depth'.[14] In each case, the problematic concepts of 'truth' and 'fact' are left unexamined, and instead proposed as stable bases from which the efficacy of the medium may be advocated.

The implications of this elision, coupled with the growing power of this form of theatre, which as Luckhurst pointed out in 2008 'has come to occupy an important political territory in Britain', are troubling. This is a popular and influential form of theatre whose practitioners appear not to have made themselves fully aware of the discourse upon which they draw for the bulk of their legitimacy – and legitimacy, conceived upon 'truth' through transparency, is central to its professed operations. As Kent says, since in verbatim the object is to 'arrive at the truth', it follows that only what is 'true' should be presented. Yet as Martin and Luckhurst have both pointed out, there has been little examination of what 'true' is or means in this context, beyond its fortification with an inviolable notion of 'facts' – and as Martin urges, '[t]he paradox of a theatre of facts that uses representation to enact a relationship to the real should not be lost in the enthusiasm for a politically viable theatre.'[15] There is an omission, in short, both in the practice and theory of verbatim theatre, one which this opening chapter will seek in part to address. In conducting this investigation, I will focus chiefly upon *The Riots* as a key text – and rather than attempt to suggest this as a synecdoche for verbatim theatre *en masse*, I will instead propose the play as an illustration of some problems which a specific theatrical project, established upon the unsteady historiographic principles common in verbatim drama, may encounter. Where appropriate, I will draw upon congruent or contrasting examples in other verbatim projects, and at times suggest trends between texts; these will be clearly indicated at each point of use.

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[14] Kent in Hammond and Steward, *Verbatim Verbatim*, p. 155, and David Hare, *Stuff Happens* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).
[15] Carol Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence' in *TDR: The Drama Review*, Volume 50, Number 3 (T 191), Fall 2006, p. 13, and Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics', p. 203.

**1.2 Tribunal Theatre**

My reason for choosing *The Riots*, beyond its immediate relationship to the context of writing, is that

it represents the latest evolutionary development in the discursive trajectory of the tribunal plays,

one which has been made possible by the dubiously secure position that their writers have

established for the texts in contemporary British theatre. Where the plays listed above – *Half the*

*Picture, Srebrenica, Justifying War* and *The Colour of Justice* – focussed upon existing legal tribunals

and were offered as reconstructions of accounts of these tribunals for their audiences, *The Riots*

belongs to a smaller vein of plays that have gone a stage further and sought to *construct* their own

investigations into particular topical events. There are two main antecedents to *The Riots* within the

Tricycle's repertoire – the first, written by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo, concerns the US

internment camp in Guantanamo Bay. Brittain, like Norton-Taylor, is a journalist for the *Guardian*

and the author of books investigating international affairs such as the War on Terror (2013) and the

Angolan Civil War (1997). Slovo is a novelist and short story writer, known mostly for political

'thrillers' centred around contemporary events in her native South Africa.[16] Their play, produced in

2004 under the title *Guantanamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom*, from 'spoken evidence' and

commissioned 'from an idea by Nicolas Kent', 'asks how much damage is being done to Western

democratic values during the 'war on terror''.[17] This was the Tricycle striking out on its own in many

ways – electing a topic which they deemed of particular interest to the context of the production

and making tentative incursions into the space left by the administrative bodies upon which the

other tribunal plays had based their claims to authority. There is room to contest *Guantanamo's*

status as a tribunal play in the mould of its more institutionally grounded siblings, but its framing by

excerpts of a speech given by Lord Justice Steyn in 2003 on the subject of Guantanamo Bay, and its

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[16] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/victoriabrittain; http://literature.britishcouncil.org/gillian-slovo>
[Accessed 02/02/13].
[17] Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo, *Guantanamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom, taken from spoken*
*evidence* (London: Oberon 2004). See also Victoria Brittain, *Shadow Lives: The Forgotten Women of the War on*
*Terror* (London: Pluto Press, 2013); Victoria Brittain, *Death of Dignity: Angola's Civil War* (London: Pluto Press,
1997); and Gillian Slovo, *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country* (London: Virago Press , 2009).

juridical register – closing with the information that '[t]hey [Guantanamo inmates] are being held indefinitely' – attempt to recall the weight and gravitas of a tribunal environment.[18]

In 2004, however, Kent was not quite willing for his theatre to adopt completely the guise of a courtroom. Whilst *Guantanamo* borrows the clothes of a tribunal play in order to grant itself authority, it also employs other tactics which identify it as a different kind of verbatim text. Most notably, reappropriated materials gathered from public sources are placed in dialogue with primary research. Thus we have publicly broadcast statements by Jack Straw and Donald Rumsfeld, reproduced in conjunction with testimonies obtained specifically for the project, in a *bricolage* fashion which refutes the semblance of direct transposition from a particular tribunal or trial. Even at this point, though, the volume of unstable tenets underpinning *Guantanamo* as a project are cause for concern; most particularly in this case the merging of judicial historiographic strategies into the production of a fixed historical narrative. Legal practice operates under a particular kind of historical understanding which Mark Cousins defines thus:

> Reality as far as the law is concerned is a set of representations of the past, ordered
>
> in accordance with legal categories and rules of evidence into a decision which
>
> claims to rest upon the truth. But this truth of the past, the representation of
>
> events, is a strictly legal truth.[19]

In other words, the determining of the historical 'event' under judicial methodologies is restricted to a series of categories and functions that are concerned *only* with its relationship to a legal framework. In verbatim theatre, however, these methodologies are employed to establish historical events which are then taken *out* of their legal contexts and into a social domain in which they are still proclaimed to be 'true', even though the techniques by which their truth was established – techniques that as Cousins shows possess their own instabilities and problems – cannot support

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[18] Brittain and Slovo, *Guantanamo*, p. 59.
[19] Mark Cousins, 'The Practice of Historical Investigation' in Derek Attridge, Geoffrey Bennington, Robert Young, ed., *Poststructuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1989), p. 133.

them here. Further, where the organisation of material in a legal investigation is bent into the service of particular arguments, there are certain precautions such as the visibility of the organisational process and its theoretically real-time occurrence that are designed to remind participants of the mechanics of this process. In a play such as *Guantanamo, a* process is shown, but it is secondary to the overarching activities of the writers and creators of the texts, who ultimately control the events of the play and whose efforts are rendered invisible.[20] Thus, whilst not attempting to insinuate their project as a replacement for a tribunal which has not in fact taken place, Brittain and Slovo still lean heavily upon a nascent theatrical methodology beset by a series of issues which compromise their claims to authenticity through their play's 'truthfulness'.

*Called to Account: The Indictment of Anthony Charles Lynton Blair for the Crime of Aggression Against Iraq*, 'edited' by Richard Norton-Taylor and again 'devised' by Nicolas Kent, marks a further development in this outgrowth of the tribunal plays.[21] In this instance, four lawyers were hired by Kent to assemble a range of testimonies from British and international politicians, certain figures from the UN, academics, journalists and lobbyists who were each connected in some capacity to the British participation in the invasion of Iraq in 2003. These testimonies, along with the circumstances in which they were delivered, were edited by Norton-Taylor into a dramatic text which was 'presented as a trial in which the audience decides whether an indictment is proven'.[22] There are therefore palpable differences between this and *Guantanamo*, but again the contours of judicial discourse are adopted in order to affect a more weighty and commanding semblance to the proceedings. The heightened measures taken in this instance – hiring actual lawyers to accrue the material for the text – are perhaps intended to compensate for the problematic nature of hosting a trial outside of a legal institution, or perhaps to emphasise the fact that this trial *wasn't* held within an established legal institution, despite Kent and Norton-Taylor's conviction that it should have

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[20] See Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence', p. 11.
[21] Richard Norton-Taylor , ed., devised by Nicolas Kent *Called to Account: The Indictment of Anthony Charles Lynton Blair for the Crime of Aggression Against Iraq*, (London: Oberon, 2007), cover material.
[22] Ibid., cover material.

been. Either way, *Called to Account* marks a peculiar turning point, with judicial praxis being transposed into theatre in order to enable that theatre to borrow its authority; the theatre then critiques the failure of judicial praxis to address what it believes to be a critical issue, filling the gap and seeking to complete the task itself.

*Called to Account* is therefore a tribunal play without a tribunal. It goes further than *Guantanamo* by actually presenting itself *as* a tribunal, but lacks the key element by which its precursors sought to establish their legitimacy. The tribunal it represents, in short, never actually took place. The play is thus the replication of a non-event, its practitioners no longer able to pass off their motives as the dissemination of particular legislative actions to a wider audience than would otherwise have had access to it, but rather committed to a political perspective which they are forced to defend purely on its/their own merits. However, the practitioners involved in creating the Tribunal plays up until this point had largely defended themselves precisely *by* their protestations that they were simply reproducing existing events – the play is *not* the thing, in this case, but rather the thing it represents. This appears to have been why Kent and Norton-Taylor took such pains to establish the legal credentials of *Called to Account*, and also why a variety of common verbatim techniques – the inclusion of mundane details in the text, such as subjects requesting glasses of water or stumbling over their words, in order to bolster a veneer of 'authenticity' – were employed.

**1.3 The August Riots**

Where *Called To Account* had in some respects struck out on its own, choosing a topic which was contextually pertinent but still abstract enough to require considerable legitimising support from a legal discourse, in *The Riots*, Kent and Slovo found a topic and an approach which appears to have (to them at least) facilitated the circumnavigation of such concerns.

In the aftermath of the August 2011 riots, a national public enquiry or government review such as those resulting from the Oldham Riots in 2001 or the Brixton riots in 1981, failed to materialise. The government's response up to the time of writing has been restricted to a four-person 'Riots Panel' announced by deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, the diverting of twenty million pounds of funding to assist businesses affected by the riots, declaring a catchment of 120,000 'problem families' who are to be 'helped', and setting up a 'gangs task force' headed by Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith.[23]

There was a great deal of reflection and speculation in the media – throughout the week of the riots, Britain's major newspapers each took particular standpoints and perspectives on what they believed to be the major causes and effects of the disturbances.[24] In the aftermath, the *Guardian* published a detailed study entitled 'Reading the Riots' in partnership with the London School of Economics, which led to a heated debate with the *Daily Mail* over its criticisms of the police.[25] Kent and Slovo were not seeking to expand upon media interest in the subject – as I show later in this chapter, they do not believe verbatim to be an extension of journalism – but rather decided to exploit the peculiarities of their medium by holding an inquiry themselves. It is interesting to note that, despite insinuating that their inquiry was a response to the government's lack of interest, in conversation with Dominic Cavendish, both Kent and Slovo revealed that the idea for the play had first been suggested whilst the riots were taking place. Kent actually goes into fairly candid detail about his

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[23] TUC Briefing: 'Responding to the Riots', 16/08/13.,
<http://www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/80/respondingtotheriots.pdf> [Accessed 03/02/13];
<http://riotspanel.independent.gov.uk/> [Accessed 03/02/13]; and James Allen, Charlotte Stuffins, Karl Wilding, 'After the riots: Evidence from the Voluntary and Community Sector on the causes of the 2011 riots and next steps for policy and practice', NCVO, 10/11., <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/AftertheRiotsfinal.pdf> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[24] See, for example, Rebecca Camber, Arthur Martin and David Wilkes, 'Lockdown on London and Cameron flies home', *Daily Mail*, 7th August 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2023554/Tottenham-riot-2011-London-lockdown-David-Cameron-flies-home.html> [Accessed 01/03/13].
[25] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/series/reading-the-riots> [Accessed 03/02/13]>; Rebecca Camber, 'PoliceFury over LSE's bid to blame them for the summer riots' *Daily Mail*, 6th December 2011. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2070083/Police-fury-LSEs-bid-blame-summer-riots.html> [Accessed 03/02/12]; Paul Bracchi, 'How dare the Left wingers claim the summer looters were victims' *Daily Mail*, 9th December 2011.<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2072228/Apologists-mob.html> [Accessed 03/02/13].

reasons for doing this, outlining a personal approach with revealing results (the following is my transcription from a spoken interview):

> there's an undercurrent... running through society... of certain things... you know when we did, um... the Stephen Lawrence, there was an undercurrent, that people begun to understand, that our city and London and [cough], was institutionally racist... and people begun to understand what that meant... [...] when we did *Guantanamo* people begun to understand, and there was a feeling that this was unjust, that people were being held indefinitely without trial [...] And I think that the very interesting thing about doing *this* play... is *I* sense there is a big tide of feeling, that we cannot go on, with the inequality, between the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer [...] I think there's an *enormous* feeling from people... of *all* spectrums and I've heard right wingers, you know, people who are on the *right* of the conservative party say, this is *not* tenable any longer... to have this gap between people... you know, between heads of companies... CEOs getting 50% pay increases, when everyone else is getting a pay cut, at the lower spectrum, or, getting their pensions removed, you know, and I think that tide, I think that politicians throughout Europe, and in the States, are beginning to wake up to that, and that's one of the conclusions I think this play... moves towards...[26]

With *The Colour of Justice*, Kent and Norton-Taylor were dramatising the event which had finally led to an official admission of institutionalised racism in the London Metropolitan Police. It was *not* a tribunal itself, but rather an actively shapedrepresentation. This representation was proposed as a method of connecting audiences who had been unable to see the tribunal to the historical process of the tribunal itself. Despite the deeply problematic issues which this play raises – if the purpose *was* to show audiences what had happened, on what authority did Kent and Norton-Taylor decide

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[26] Dominic Cavendish, Conversation with Gillian Slovo and Nicholas Kent, 09/11/11., <http://www.theatrevoice.com/7274/the-riots-nicolas-kent-gillian-slovo-discuss/> [Accessed 03/02/13].

what to include and exclude in their script; *why* choose to stage a play, rather than make a documentary film or simply disseminate printed transcripts? – *The Colour of Justice* stopped short of claiming to be a tribunal in its own right.

*The Riots* is a completely different case – it *was* proposed as a substitute for a public tribunal, and this creates a new set of problems. Part of the purpose of legislative tribunals is to work through a process of exploration from which conclusions may be derived. Kent's projects, even if they may be considered explorations in the instances of their material gathering, are refashioned as theatrical texts once those conclusions have already been reached (and the initial exploration has finished); this is even before they are performed for the audiences who are supposed to take the places of scrutinising juries. This realisation lends a highly politicised extra dimension to projects which take existing tribunals as the focus of their endeavours, but for plays such as *Guantanamo* where Kent, and not any form of legislative body or practice, is the ultimate arbiter, this goes beyond political perspectives and into a very uneasy terrain. With those plays that sought to restage pre-existent tribunals, there was a sense that they were trying to reclaim that process of information gathering, even if their selection of material would unavoidably bias that reclamation. In *The Riots*, no such process existed to be reclaimed. This enabled Slovo to put testimonies of particular characters in dialogue with one another. Actors would look at each other on the stage during their interspersed speeches as if the subjects they represented had actually been together in interview, when no evidence was given that this was the case, and in fact – given that at no point did any character address another directly – the indication is that this was *not* the case. Audiences were watching interactions that Slovo had likely invented, but which were being presented as reproductions of 'real' events – more so, the kind of 'real' events that come stamped with the legitimising authority of legislative discourse.

This realisation is made particularly unnerving when viewed in connection with Kent's repeated connections of 'I think' to 'people', and his emphasis upon '*all* spectrums' with regards to the

opinions he is voicing. Increasingly, he appears to be positioning himself as a mouthpiece of popular opinion, whilst at the same time insisting upon the unmediated and 'truthful' nature of his texts. Throughout the run at the Tricycle, audience 'Talkback' sessions were held for three of five performances every week. These were chaired by a variety of politicians and public commentators, and the publicity for the production declared that they were 'a chance to share your views on the August riots, and what should be done going forward.'[27] Kent and Slovo were further seeking to secure their play as a 'voice of the people', appearing to absent themselves from their material in order to claim the project as an alternative to political process; a democratic and objective platform for public debate.

The jacket material for *The Riots* declares the play to be an analysis of 'what happened, why it happened, and what we should do towards making a better future for ourselves and our city.'[28] Where *Called To Account* had to construct and relay a tribunal that had not happened in order to draw public attention to what the Tricycle saw as a critical issue, *The Riots* dispensed with even these formalities and sought to position itself *as* a tribunal, from a voice which Kent and Slovo proposed as a representative of the general population, but whose ability to fulfil this role must be brought seriously into question.

This was after all theatre granting itself a direct political function, insinuating itself into a gap left by public office, creating a platform for debate and discourse which claimed to simultaneously broadcast those voices elided by media analysis – most notably the 'victims', as the writer and director dubbed them – and raise the issues which Parliament had so steadfastly ignored. This is a dangerous claim for any form of theatre to make. In order to support itself, such a project must be able to account for the mechanics of its praxis, and to make an effective case for the ways in which it

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[27] <http://www.tricycle.co.uk/current-programme-pages/special-events/the-riots-talkback-sessions/> [Accessed 26/02/13].
[28] It should also be mentioned that whilst the play ostensibly seeks to examine 'The Riots' as a whole, the focus is almost entirely on London, with scant attention paid to Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Nottingham or Leicester. Slovo, *The Riots*, pp. 32 – 33.

offers itself as a viable alternative to a public inquiry. This is certainly what Kent and Slovo tried to do, but as I have already demonstrated and will shortly continue to do so in direct analysis of *The Riots* in performance, these attempts falter under scrutiny.

Slovo summed up her belief in *The Riots'* ability to replace a public inquiry through an observation about her desires for audience response. The notion of being granted the ability to speak by watching somebody else's testimony is highly dubious, and the repetition of 'sort of' in the following quotation is telling:

> that's what I would think would be great if the audience would walk out feeling, not that they had been told what to think about the rioters or the politicians or the policemen, but that they'd actually sort of understood what was going on in our society in a way that allows them to... sort of have a voice... and I guess that's what a good inquiry does...[29]

In the analysis that follows, I take a critical approach to the notion of *The Riots* as a substitute for a public inquiry. I address the historiographic problems upon which *The Riots*, as a descendant of the Tricycle tribunal plays has been built (symptomatic to a certain point of wider concerns with verbatim theatre in general) and also call into question the rather worrying position of authority which this project sought to attain, highlighting the potential dangers in seeking to wield such authority without fully comprehending its underpinning mechanics. In order to do this, the processes by which the production was built will be examined in depth. This examination will look at the research and information gathering which went into creating the dramatic text, as well as the performance process itself, and the implications this process has on the relationship between the text (with its material referents) to the specificities of the contexts of performance. This will necessitate a sizable interaction with various theories proposed by Jacques Derrida, which have primarily been applied to the production and consumption of *written* historiography, but not as yet

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[29] 'Theatrevoice', 09/11/11.

to historiographic performance, although they provide an exceptionally lucid model through which

to identify and explore this process. In addition, I will outline an argument for what I shall term

'historiographic theatre': a theatre conscious of, and involved in critiquing, its own historiographic

practice. I will argue that this form of theatre offers a more productive approach to the issue of

historiography in performance than the verbatim methodologies encountered in this thesis. First,

however, I will engage in a direct investigation of *The Riots*, with a view to telegraphing key points of

interrogation for this subsequent theoretical inquiry.

## 2. *The Riots*

### 2.1 *The Riots* in Performance

Kent's 2011 production of *The Riots* began with a pre-set of text-messages and twitter feeds,

followed by a short film of footage taken from across the four nights of rioting. These were projected

onto a set of artfully slashed industrial fabric, breeze blocks and a DIY mise-en-scene: chairs, tables,

a couple of crates of beer. Before the production proper commenced, two gunshots rang out across

the auditorium. These gunshots indexed the murder of Mark Duggan, a 29 year old from Tottenham

who was shot to death by the police.[30] Immediately following this, two unidentified 'rioters' dressed

in hooded jumpers and scarves appeared on stage and introduced Slovo's narrative by giving brief

'*matter-of-fact*' statements '*as if they were disembodied voices*'.[31] Their testimonies related directly

to Duggan, whose murder, and its subsequent mishandling by the police, are proposed within the

play as the act that set the events leading up to the riots in motion. In the printed script, the

directions for these two men are revealing:

> MAN 1 and MAN 2 on stage but they cannot be clearly seen. It is almost as if they
>
> are disembodied voices. They are rioters and, like MAN 3, who comes later, they

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[30] Slovo, *The Riots*, p. 7.
[31] Ibid., p. 7.

*should be separated from the rest of the characters. They are Other. A world apart*

*from the audience.*[32]

These final two sentences can be read it a number of ways: Slovo *could* be highlighting the unknowability of her subjects – after all, these are people whose testimonies cannot be openly attributed for fear of punitive reprisals, so they are in a very physical way 'separate' both from the other voices on stage (whose identities are publicly acknowledged) and the audience, who the production has taken every pains to stress *have*, or more worryingly are *being given*, an identity within the production. However, if this is the case, Slovo is admitting that her focus and interest are not upon the rioters themselves, since this would necessitate a deeper understanding of at least the *people* rioting than simply *'They are Other'*. Instead, she focuses upon the precursory events which led up to the riots, and the post-mortem opinions and suggestions of those responding to them. The curious thing about this perspective is that it openly admits that the riots are not part of the play – they are Other as well. The principal events around which the play revolves are not penetrated at any level – they are maintained as a vacuum over which a variety of perspectives are proffered. This is never more apparent than when Slovo's subjects are asked to describe the rioters in three words – a gimmicky but rather unproductive touch, whose only real result is to highlight the confusion and disparity in her interviewees' approaches. For Iain Duncan Smith, for example, the rioters are 'Dysfunctional, criminal and lost'; for Stafford Scott they are 'Frustrated, angry and British'; whilst 'Former Young Mayor of Lewisham' Jacob Sakil calls them 'The walking dead'.[33] Where these summations appear in the text, they are often at the closure of a subject's testimony – the last word – repeatedly reducing the rioters to the status of unknowable Others.

Taking an opposing stance, it could potentially be argued that Slovo is playing upon popular conceptions of the rioters in which she widely treats them as Others, rather than attempting to comprehend their identities; attempts which a particular perspective could argue would permit a

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[32] Ibid., p. 7.
[33] Ibid., pp. 55, 60, 34.

more thorough comprehension of their actions. Slovo could be saying that they are Other because they have been widely said (and at times directly claimed) to be Other, and pointing out that little effort has been made to redress this.[34] However, such a level of sophistication in constructing the text would counteract the professed transparency and objectivity with which Slovo has approached the project – the audience members are not there to have their own opinions critiqued or pilloried, but rather to have the facts of the matter laid out for their informed and well-reasoned scrutiny. This may then mean that the play itself takes the position that the rioters are in fact Other, and *are* a world apart from the audience – though if this is the case, the text would be making some rather worrying statements concerning the relative worth of particular people, which again would counteract the professed objective nature of the project. All that can be deduced with any certainty is that from the very beginning there is a tension operating at the heart of Slovo's praxis, whose protestations of objectivity and transparency actually appear to be hampering and even subverting the analytic or critical potential of the text itself.

The rest of the production's first act was comprised of a series of testimonies from community leaders, youth workers, police officers and – crucially – a man whose home was destroyed in the fires set by the rioters in Croydon. Mohammad Hammadoun, whom the stage directions indicate *'should be separate from the rest of the cast'*, is alone amongst the voices populating the first half in that he did not become involved in the riots as a result of any personal or professional compulsion: he simply happened to be living above Carpetright, a carpet store in Tottenham which was burned down on the first night of the disturbances. His testimony largely concerns removing his two young children from the burning building, attempted conversations with the 'young people in Palestinian scarves' who were alternately assisting with the building's evacuation and 'throwing tyres *into* the fire t-to make it fuel even more', then finally laughing at the surreal nature of the event.[35]

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[34] See, for example, Alecky Blythe's televised verbatim project 'The Riots: In their own words', BBC2, 13th August 2012 – 14th August 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01l3y0v> [Accessed 26/02/13].
[35] Slovo, *The Riots*, pp. 26-28.

Hammadoun's voice did not simply stand apart from the others recounted in the performance: he was on some level proposed as a mediator, an entrance point for audience members – confused, concerned, but unwilling to express contempt or disregard. Slovo herself had already predicted Hammadoun before she encountered his 'story' – in interview, she informed Kirsty Lang that:

> I think that there, it was clear to me from the beginning, that we needed to hear from certain people, in particular I think we needed to hear from a victim, of the riots, and we needed some rioters, we needed some police, and out of those central... people... I built the story around them of the others...[36]

In other words, Hammadoun was auditioned, cast in a role which Slovo had already imagined prior to the construction of her text. From a writerly point of view, this makes perfect sense; the narrative requires the voice of someone on the receiving end of the disturbances, a particular window into the human cost of what for others were either highly charged or distantly academic issues. Pragmatically, her candidness addresses itself quite logically to the process of producing the play. She had been directly commissioned by Kent, who had called her whilst the riots were still underway, to write a play about these events. Approaching the issue as a writer, she had been required to identify the most likely sources of useful perspectives for her material. Her willingness to ascribe the term 'victim' to a particular subject may be in bad taste, but it is certainly not detrimental to her praxis – though of course this raises questions about that praxis itself. If she is approaching the issue with a narrative predetermined even to the extent that it delineates particular character types, how can it maintain any notions of objectivity or reportage? She is even blatant in her admission – '*I built the story*' – a statement as unavoidable to the job she undertook as it is condemning to the rationale which both she and Kent propose. In other words, Slovo's adherence to narratological structures militates against her supposed fidelity to 'documentary fact' because she is

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[36] Gillian Slovo in conversation with Kirsty Lang, BBC Front Row, 21st November 2011.

creating a 'story' which manipulates those 'facts' to suit an exterior purpose.[37] In her own account of her praxis, however, Slovo often appears unable to own up to this manipulation, preferring instead to hide behind protestations of objectivity that she borrows – in a manner that one imagines would prove something of an embarrassment to the donor discourse – from journalism.

In her conversation with Slovo, Lang actually addressed that issue directly, querying whether *The Riots* was in fact a piece of journalism. Despite the fact that many of the protestations to objective reportage she makes concerning her praxis appear congruent with journalism, Slovo comes out against the idea of a shared practice (like David Hare elsewhere), though her defence does rest somewhat shakily on *The Riots* being a play and *not* journalism because it is 'a play length', 'has paying audiences' and 'uses actors'.[38] Kent is a little more careful, pointing to the comparative speed of the two disciplines as opposed to more openly fictional drama, locating his conception of verbatim within an idea of committal and response, but never directly linking it to journalism. Luckhurst has elsewhere advanced a more satisfying observation on the reluctance of verbatim theatre to connect itself to journalism which expands upon Richard Norton-Taylor's increasing use of his own verbatim plays to redress inscrutably motivated omissions in popular press coverage or to critique problems in/with journalism itself: '[T]he reasons for the apparent 'explosion' of verbatim theatre in the west are complex and seem to be bound up with a widespread suspicion of governments and their 'spin' merchants, *a distrust of the media* and a desire to uncover stories which may be being suppressed...'[39]

Certainly, referring back to David Hare's enthusiastic statement about audiences responding to a time of 'global unease' by wanting 'the facts... together, and in some depth', it is easy to see why writers of verbatim would seek to disassociate their medium from its troubled colleague.[40] However,

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[37] The notion of a 'historical fact' is in itself highly problematic: I address this issue through a discussion of Barthes, Chapter 2, 3.2. of this thesis.
[38] See David Hare, "verbatim does what journalism failed to do" in Hammond and Steward, 2008, p. 62.
[39] Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics', p. 200. (Emphasis added).
[40] Kent, *Verbatim Verbatim*, p. 155, and David Hare, *Stuff Happens*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).

there is perhaps a cruel irony in the fact that, whilst journalism has indeed suffered a great deal of scandal (at the time of *The Riots* being written, the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal was being reported), there are still established criteria of integrity by which journalism is able to be judged.[41] As yet, no such criteria exist for verbatim theatre. Consequently, where it is possible to point to a failure of journalism because it neglects to live up to particular standards of conduct or methodology, no such possibility exists for this form of drama. This lack of a series of core principles has obvious and rather worrying implications for material referring to itself as verbatim, with all of the 'factual' or 'uninvented' claims that term implies. I have briefly mentioned the problems of information-gathering where the subject is auditioning for a role constructed *a priori* – Luckhurst found similar problems with Max Stafford-Clark and David Hare, whose acquisition of material for their verbatim project *The Permanent Way* largely involved actors interviewing and then 'reperforming' their subjects from memory:

> ...if actors write their own notes and select what they perform back to writer and director... they are from the beginning searching for a character who interests or moves them, and what constitutes 'facts' in such work?[42]

Clearly, without a centrally agreed set of guidelines for the production of verbatim drama, such questions must be asked on a case by case basis, leading to the rather wryly amusing conclusion that what is 'fact' for one production will not be 'fact' for another. This is compounded of course, as we have seen, by verbatim productions frequently building and broadcasting themselves upon an idea of absolute 'fact'. To complicate this rather compromising issue there is the extra concern that, as this is theatre, the processes and mechanics of performance will construct additional layers of mediation and interpretation to the text before it is offered up to the audience for consumption.

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[41] Nicola Pearson and Torin Douglas, 'News of the World to close amid hacking scandal', 7th July 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14070733> [Accessed 02/02/13].
[42] Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Drama, Media Relations and Ethics', p. 214.

This raises an important question about the relationship between the writing and the performing of the text, which will form the basis of the next part of this analysis.

## 2.2 *The Riots*: Writing for Performance

Perhaps unsurprisingly it is Mohamed Hammadoun, the 'victim', whose voice closes *The Riots*. During the second act, which focusses largely on posthumous analysis of the disturbances by politicians, public sector officials, members of affected communities and academics, Slovo's habit of asking her subjects to define the rioters in three words is roundly exploited in their individual closing remarks. Once all other testimonies have ceased, Hammadoun, who has walked back on to the stage some time previously (no indication of exactly when is given in the script) and sat silently, watching and listening, is left on stage alone.

> MOHAMED HAMMADOUN: The system failed us, yeah? I'm all for people protesting, I'm all for people giving their views across, and holding people to t-to to account. But I just feel like y'know, the whole emergency services were just caught on the back foot, y'know. It's just like they had, they had no plan.
>
> I feel, I feel empty yeah. (*Laugh.*) You have to start a new chapter without having erm the seeds there from the past. You, you can't show people things any more. I can't show 'em photographs. I can't say to 'em 'Well y'know when I was twenty-two this is what happened.'
>
> I can remember sitting with my grandmother on the end, end of her bed and she was just covered with m-m-memorabilia. All that kind of stuff is just gone.
>
> Erm. So – so – you almost. Almost it's like y'have to recreate y-y-y-your own history.
>
> [My three words for the rioters?] Just angry people.

*Spot out. The stage in darkness.*[43]

The issues I want to address primarily here are the style, the tone and the content of his speech as it functions as an *ending*, a final point to the text. Once this is completed, I will spend some time thinking about the text as a springboard into performance, and use this as a way in to considering the historiographic processes at work in the extrapolation of the written into the performance text.

Despite the stammers and hesitations, the actor playing Hammoudan had a confident bearing. Of all testimonies as they were recorded in the text, however, Hammoudan's was by far the most consistently replete with these verbal tics, indicating either that the subject had demonstrated an awkward register in the instance of recording his testimony, or that Slovo paid more exacting attention to it in her transcription. The actor playing Hammadoun spoke in a very confident, calm and composed manner, indicating that if the former possibility *was* the case, then this was smoothed over for the performance of the play. Such editorialising makes sense in the light of Hammadoun functioning as an auditioned 'character', as the anchoring victim around whom the other stories orbit. However, this kind of intervention and repositioning again would damage the text's (and its practitioners') claims to minimal mimetic deviation. If one were to take the alternative perspective, though – that Slovo had paid greater attention to Hammadoun's speech than any of her other subjects – an equally damaging aspect would present itself, this time in the writer attempting to prejudice the presentation of her text by singling out this character for special treatment. Again, this would make sense in considering the pragmatic tasks facing Slovo as a *writer*, with a particular objective in mind and a will to employ whichever tools at her disposal would best effect this objective. But again, such considerations are diametrically opposed to Slovo's posture as merely the stenographer of a pre-existent story which she was (re)presenting through minimal editorial intervention. In performance, the result of this paradox was that in listening to the well-spoken and

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[43] Slovo, *The Riots*, pp. 60-61.

confident character portrayed by the actor Selva Rasalingham, it often appeared as if Rasalingham was forgetting his lines, where in fact he performed them exactly as they were written down.

The implications of this example are vast – a whole series of problems indexed by the reproduction of (mediated) testimonies into an exterior register by an implicitly fallible subject. Is the performance still 'true', for example, if the actor forgets or subtly alters their lines? If so, to what degree are such mistakes or alterations tolerated until the performance becomes 'untrue', and what happens to the text at this point? What's more, in fact, as in the example above, does the very capacity for failure in the performed representations of testimonies affect an audience's ability to conceive 'truth' in the verbatim performance, even, as with Rasalingham, where the failure is only a *semblance* of failure? Practitioners have addressed these concerns in a variety of ways – Alecky Blythe in her 'Recorded Delivery' plays, for example, has actors rehearse by repeating their subjects' testimonies whilst listening to them on headphones, and then performing under the same conditions. The intention is to reproduce faithfully '[t]he exact speech pattern of the interviewee – including coughs, stutters and non-sequiturs'. However, Blythe is also careful to point out that '[n]o matter how truthful the methods of representation, the characters inevitably take on a life of their own once nurtured by the director and presented by the actors.'[44] Blythe, then, acknowledges the 'untruthfulness' of her theatre whilst at the same time employing acting techniques attending to the nuances of the delivered testimonies. Slovo and Kent, who have largely been silent on the subject of the reproduction of testimony, make no such acknowledgements. In addition, Blythe draws attention to the involvement of disparate bodies in producing the text on the stage – initially the interactions of subject and author, that produces a testimony which will then be reshaped by the author as an edited part of a larger text; the director and actor in rehearsal, who will re-shape that edited testimony into a new character, and the actor and audience, where the reshaped character is consolidated in the instance of their performance. This is only a basic genealogy – further reshaping occurs through repeated performances, for example – but it is offered in order to illustrate the

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[44] Alecky Blythe, *Cruising*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2006), pp. 3, 5.

impracticality of assuming, as Slovo and Kent have been seen to do in this chapter, an unbroken link between the experiences of the subject and the way these function in the performance text.

To the degree that the verbatim text is reperformed, then, there are clear lines between testimony, text and performance – despite the best attempts of some practitioners to deny as much of these distances as possible. These denials have on occasion been stressed – Kent has even gone so far as to claim himself not an advocator of verbatim theatre *as theatre* at all, because he sees it as 'a means to an end' – those involved in producing the theatre are simply working to deliver the text, which is itself a representation of the 'real' that deviates to a minimal extent from its source material. Yet, taking just one issue in the way that Slovo writes, it is quite easy to debunk this protestation through the relationship between text and performance alone. The issue is exemplified in the quote reprinted above, in Hammadoun's last line, and the last line of the play: '[My three words for the rioters?] Just angry people.'[45]

The application of square brackets is a widely accepted grammatical tool for the inclusion of extra words into a sourced quotation in order to render that quotation clear and/or coherent in the wider context of its citation. The Modern Humanities Research Association, to use one example, states that '[s]quare brackets should be used for the enclosure of phrases or words which have been have been added to the original text for editorial and similar comments'.[46] Clearly, this is the effect for which Slovo is aiming – in order to clarify the object of Hammadoun's statement, and more broadly to identify his response with the same question answered by previous interviewees, Slovo has added a short, conversational phrase of her own. However, whilst in a printed text, such an addition may be clearly indicated, in performance no such mechanism exists, and Slovo's phrase becomes Hammadoun's: inserted into the 'verbatim' testimony that is being reperformed for the audience supposedly without ornament, is a phrase which Hammadoun never actually said.

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[45] Slovo, *The Riots*, p. 61.
[46] MHRA Style Guide, Second Edition (London: MHRA, 2008) p. 27.

In addition, whilst the case I have just made for the inclusion of these extra words is reasonable and logical, the compromising of Slovo's text is manifest. This is by no means the only extra-textually doctored element of the script; there are seventy nine of these insertions in the first act alone, but at no point in the performance were the audience made aware of their existence. It may seem at first glance a point of pedantry, but this physical example of the mediating practice of the writer is a concrete rebuttal to the arguments laid out by practitioners claiming a direct or 'factual' nature of their craft, pointing towards a much wider concern in the claims for authenticity through factual accuracy in the medium as a whole. Even where writers do not go as far as Slovo in putting words into their subjects' mouths, in short, they must always approach their material with a mind to making it performable, to extrapolating it from one discourse into another. I will address this problem shortly; before this there remains a further difficulty in Slovo's writing to be addressed, and that is the issue of transcription in the preparation of a text for performance.

When Kent talked to Dominic Cavendish on the 'Theatrevoice' radio programme, a quote of Kent's was displayed on the website for publicity material. The quotation was printed as following:

> We're not saying the people burnt out of their houses aren't as much a victim as someone who feels the need to riot because they've had – or they think they've had – a deprived upbringing or been unfairly discriminated against. We try to give everyone a voice.[47]

This was Kent referring to the casting of Hammadoun as a victim – he appeared less comfortable than Slovo in this, and so provided a defence and rationale for the action. He was also reiterating his belief in the objective principles underpinning this project. Often in interviews he attested to the 'unbiased' nature of the Tribunal plays – in this interview in fact he conceded only the selection of the topic for production as a political act within the drama, otherwise declaring himself and Slovo as

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[47] 'Theatrevoice', 9th November 2011.

dedicated to airing 'the whole spectrum of views' concerning the riots.[48] Apart from the obvious problems attached to such a suggestion, what I want to examine briefly is the *style* of Kent's statement. He corrects himself at one point, but rather than undermine the confidence of his argument, this correction largely shows him stopping himself from making any particular value judgements about the people he believes are the subject of the play – though as I have shown earlier, this is a doubtful contestation. Otherwise, his testimony is articulate, reasoned and well judged – he is portrayed as thoughtful, and able to balance contrasting opinions without being clouded by his own.

Below is the same quote, transcribed directly from the podcast in as faithful a manner as possible – again, with all of the problems that such a vague protestation incurs, but adopted here in order to mimic the style which as I have shown, Slovo has used in the transcription of the testimonies of *some* of her interviewees.

> we're saying the *riots* is important, to look at, we're not saying that people who are burnt out of their houses aren't... as much a victim, as say someone who feels the need to riot because they've had a completely deprived or *they* think they've had a completely deprived... upbringing or, they've been unfairly... um... discriminated against, or they... can't get a job and they've been trying. So we, we try and look at *everyone's* viewpoint, and try and give *everyone* a voice if we can.[49]

Quoted in this way, there is a certain clumsiness that adds an extra dimension to his articulations about the issue under discussion; one which complicates and indelibly affects the ways in which his testimony will now be received. If one were to read this as a text for performance, examining the material for clues to the character and/or demeanour of the person giving the testimony to inform the reproduction of *that person* on stage (because it is obviously not simply their *words* that are

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

reproduced in the performance), the hesitations, false starts, emphases and noises would create a markedly different Kent than the one appearing in printed words on the website. His relative inarticulacy could easily be read as symptomatic of uncertainty or nervousness, potentially reducing the credibility of his utterances and focussing our attention quite sharply upon his hesitations and corrections – *what* is he attempting to avoid here, and *how* are these tics of speech and narration attempting to cover this up? Read in this way, his final assertion is defensive and quite aggressive, doubly so because we ourselves are not actually putting pressure on him; we instead observe his responses at one remove, and feel perhaps that we are able to take a more clinical approach to his testimony. Again, this is an important point, because of course Kent *is* being pushed; he is being interviewed for a broadcast; his testimony is being recorded – which add elements of stress and anxiety – and that testimony is structured according to a set of questions that have not been reprinted here, questions to which the reader does not have access. If Kent's testimony were to be performed from this document, in other words *outside* of the context in which it was originally given, and with crucial details such as the provocation to which it responds absented from the performance, it would be missing a vital constituent of its originary conception. As such, it would become something new, something distinct and in many ways *different* from that conception. Maintaining the position that Kent's testimony was the same – 'verbatim' – would therefore be extremely problematic, yet this is the exact process which Kent and Slovo have undertaken in the production of their text, and the performance of that text to its audiences.

Broadening the focus for a moment into the new context in which this testimony is bracketed, and again taking this document as example, it can also be seen that the perspective imposed upon Kent's testimony by this context is flawed at best, false at worst. From the outset, the testimony has been deliberately presented in a way which seeks to condition the reader's response. Before his words have even been printed, they have been/are being introduced within an argument that takes a preconditioned stance towards them. A wide range of tactics within the preceding text are employed to this effect, from the title of this chapter, to the direct identification of Kent's

enunciation as 'uncomfortable' immediately prior to its unveiling. What is taking place here on a formal level is the recalibration of testimony into text – a process which Jacques Derrida has elsewhere understood as one containing within its genetic makeup the irrepressible propensity for perpetual recontextualisation, noting that '[o]ne can always lift a written syntagma from the interlocking chain in which it [the text] is caught or given without making it lose every possibility of functioning, if not every possibility of "communicating" precisely.'[50] It is in this imprecision that the problems of communication emerge – not least because that imprecision itself is denied by the 'fixing' of the text within an exterior field, in which its function – and clearly Kent's testimony-now-text *does* continue to function – is *made to communicate* according to a set of principles outside of whatever guided its originary articulation, instead serving to consolidate the focus of *my* argument. In the quotation printed on the 'Theatrevoice' website, without the hesitations, false starts and emphases, Kent's voice is much stronger and more confident, and so his argument appears to carry more force. It is an oversimplified point, perhaps, but it is a core argument of this analysis: reproduction is an always-already politicised act. And Kent's voice is here reproduced only upon the page – extrapolating the quotation into a performance would attach an illimitable set of variables to the text itself, consolidated in and for the moment of performance and contingent upon the unknowable range of factors which coalesce in bringing that moment into being.

It could well be worth suggesting, therefore, that a more 'honest' reasoning from Kent would not be about theatre's ability to objectively reconstruct testimonial material in order to somehow establish the 'truth' surrounding past events, but rather to question the subjectivity bias of wider hegemonic discourses such as governmental 'spin' and television, print and radio journalism. Martin claims that 'documentary theatre has the capacity to stage historiography'; having revealed the latter practice as an inventory of manipulations, a productive function for this kind of theatre would be an honesty about its own bias in order to reveal the bias operating in other supposedly 'truthful' or 'transparent'

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[50] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context' in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 319.

modes of historical delivery.[51] This would, however, require a verbatim project to abandon its own claims to truth through transparency – claims upon which the legitimacy of those projects examined and references here has been staked.

## 2.3 Towards a definition of 'Historiographic Theatre'

This relationship between the text-in-writing and the text-in-performance is central to theatrical discourse, and offers considerable potential for theatre to contribute to recent debates that have sprung up around the issue of historiography. In the above analysis, I have demonstrated a variety of ways in which Slovo and Kent's practices may be challenged at the level of their written construction and the supposed objectivity of their endeavours brought into question. Such challenges and interrogations have been at the heart of a wide variety of debates surrounding the practice of historiography itself – I have already mentioned Keith Jenkins' controversial assertions, and in a moment will briefly outline a couple of other contrasting perspectives in order to lend contextual detail to the central endeavour of this thesis, which is to explore the ways in which theatre may offer specific, unique and as yet unexplored perspectives upon the operation of historiography. Some of these perspectives have in fact already begun to emerge through the comparisons I have made between *The Riots*' function as what Keir Elam calls a dramatic text, and a performance text.[52]

Slovo's dramatic text is purportedly a historiographic document. It labours, through research and presentation, to explore a particular historical incident and demonstrate its findings in a way which seeks, as the nineteenth century historian Leopold von Ranke once famously summed up, 'only to show what actually happened'.[53] The critiques I have so far made of this text as it is *written* may be quite straightforwardly located within the wealth of existing analyses that constitute the ongoing

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[51] Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence', p. 10.
[52] Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, p. 206.
[53] Leopold von Ranke, quoted in Evans, *In Defence of History*, p. 17.

debates surrounding historiography. To give an example, the historian Geoffrey Elton has argued that:

> It is only by providing as truthful an understanding of the past as we can obtain that we can offer to the present a past which can be useful to the present, a past from which it can learn...[54]

Elton's proposal of this *purpose* of historiography – to present a past which may be useful to the present, is one that is held across a wide spectrum of views. However, his wording here is perhaps unconsciously telling. To *present a past*, where the singular 'a' replaces the more authoritative and universal 'the', unearths a space of doubt; potential, opposed and *equally valid* histories which may also be uncovered through the same methodologies, thus calling into question the potential of factual accuracy within the historiographic endeavour. This is doubly enforced by the preceding 'present', which appears here in the guise of 'representation' (though there is also a critical dimension added to the term through its adjacent meaning of 'making present'). Elton is discussing the making present of *a* past through representation – this, then, at base level, provides a valuable outlining of what it is that historiography *does*, and one of these things is to challenge von Ranke's assertion on its most basic principle. If, as observed, historiography is the business of representing *a* past, rather than *the* past, then there are potentially an illimitable amount of pasts to be represented; thus the idea of showing 'what actually happened' is impossible. This space of uncertainty ushers in the potential for a historical relativism that has become the foundation of what is widely now known as 'postmodern history'. It is to this kind of history that Jenkins directs his assertion about history being the work of historians; and it is a perhaps a cruel irony that Elton's argument can be extended in this direction because his subsequent words mount an embattled resistance to that very notion:

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[54] Elton, quoted in Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader*, p. 179.

I cannot pretend to bring much comfort, especially in the face of the philosophers

and social scientists who question the very notion of a truth in history. They will not

accept that it is there, in the events of the past, and open to investigation, even if it

will never be recovered in full and beyond all doubt.[55]

Elton's opinions on the subject elsewhere explode into the hysterical register which often litters

these debates – he has, as we have already seen, labelled postmodern history 'the intellectual

equivalent of crack'.[56] It should be pointed out that in complete opposition to the above analysis,

Richard Evans has argued that Elton did not in fact think that history should be directly relevant to

the present at all and that 'historians had to make the effort to understand in a cognitive sense the

actions, ideas and motivations of people in the past without direct reference to their own beliefs in

the present.'[57] I mention this largely to illustrate the treacherous and problematic pitfalls into which

any observations on the nature of historiography may fall and that the proclivity for opposition and

critique within historiographic discourse is arguably *the* chief challenger to von Ranke's declaration.

As a consequence, even those who do not subscribe to postmodern history's rather gleeful

insistence upon historical relativism have been forced to concede at least the partial dissolution of

the old absolutes that von Ranke has come to represent. At the far side of the spectrum, the

American historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, also opposed to postmodern history to the point of

aggravation – she calls it an 'invitation to intellectual and moral suicide' – has even come to allow for

a degree of relativism in her own practice, one that is apparently 'sceptical of truth but not of partial,

incremental, contingent truths'.[58]

This is one of the reasons why Slovo and Kent's arguments concerning their text may be so readily

brought to question, and a direct consequence of the dangers I alluded to earlier in seeking

legitimacy or agency through a seemingly unfamiliar discourse. Even a staunch opponent of

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[55] Ibid., p. 179.
[56] Geoffrey Elton, *Return to Essentials* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 3.
[57] Evans, *In Defence of History*, p. 192.
[58] Himmelfarb, quoted in Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader*, pp. 173, 158.

postmodern history like Evans, whose *In Defence of History* is directed almost exclusively to the denigration of historical relativism, would stop short of the kinds of claims to 'truth' that Slovo and Kent have made about *The Riots*. The final reason for this may be demonstrated in a brief digression concerning recent changes made to the British history curriculum in secondary education.

At the Conservative Party conference in October 2010, the Education Secretary Michael Gove announced that '[o]ne of the underappreciated tragedies of our time has been the sundering of our society from its past.' Gove used this rationale as a springboard for proposed changes to the national curriculum which involved, amongst other things, a recuperation of 'our island story' and an instilling of 'British National Identity' through an emphasis on historical 'facts'.[59] In June 2011, Evans issued a caustic rebuttal in the *London Review of Books*, calling Gove's proposals a return to 'passive consumption instead of active critical engagement.'[60] In the face of a couple of critical reader responses, Evans wrote again in a subsequent issue, reiterating his denunciation of Gove's proposals this time as 'crude nationalist indoctrination'.[61]

Whether or not Gove was aware of it, he had stumbled across one of the thorniest problems in history as a discipline – the ideological conditioning of historiography that seeks to develop a particular narrative which it then declares to be an absolute truth. This kind of totalising historical narrative has frequently been treated with extreme caution by contemporary European historians. Elton, for example, observed what he called this sort of problematic 'myth making' in nineteenth-century Germany, where historians fabricated nationalist perspectives upon the medieval empire 'which they came to treat as the model and paradigm for Germany reunited' and which 'survived the First World War and played an important role in the rise of Nazism.'[62] In fact (and speculatively as a consequence) the kinds of historiography which construct narratives under such nationalistic

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[59] Michael Gove, 'All pupils will learn our island story', 5th October 2010, <http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/10/Michael_Gove_All_pupils_will_learn_our_island_story.aspx> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[60] Evans, 'The Wonderfulness of Us', <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n06/richard-j-evans/the-wonderfulness-of-us> [Accessed 02/02/13].
[61] Ibid.
[62] Elton in Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader*, pp. 177 – 178.

pretexts are now quite scarce in contemporary British academic discourses, something which Gove himself observes – though for markedly different reasons – when he notes that his favourite historian Niall Ferguson is the only grand-narrative nationalist left in the British 'history game'.[63]

The comparison may seem potentially disproportionate to the relative size and scope of the narrative which Kent and Slovo are attempting to pass off as fact, but in the context of their assumption of a public enquiry rooted solely in the authority which the tribunal plays have amassed for themselves and in the strength of the material they collect, their endeavours are potentially troubling. All the more so given that they represent only the latest in an evolutionary development of a particular strain of theatre which has thus far encountered little resistance, and is enjoying widespread popular acclaim (witness the theatre critic Michael Billington's declaration cited as the epigraph of this chapter).

Part of the reason, I believe, for the unchecked nature of Kent and Slovo's project, and the growing trend in tribunal and verbatim plays more generally, is that there is not yet a specific critical vocabulary or model for interpreting the kinds of historiography which they are practising. The observations and critiques I have thus far made in conjunction with established historiographic theory are perfectly suited to dealing with the dramatic text – the written text designed for translation into performance. This is because these theories are in the main focussed upon historiographic inscription in mediums such as writing, photography, film and/or sound recording; but are ill-equipped to deal with historiography *in* and/or *as* performance. When historical exploration is undertaken in theatrical performance, as the following two chapters will go on to argue, a peculiar kind of historiography is enacted. This is one that restages historical interpretations

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[63] <www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/.../michael_gove/article674357.ece> [Accessed 02/02/13]. Ferguson later became embroiled in his own controversy in the LRB over Pankaj Mishra's review of his book Civilisation: The West and the Rest, in which Mishra accused him of racist imperialism. Pankaj Mishra, 'Watch this man', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 33 No 21., 3rd November 2011, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n21/pankaj-mishra/watch-this-man> [Accessed 03/02/13].

in direct contact with the contexts of its production, and is thus involved in a perpetual recalibration of its own historiographic endeavours in order to be manifested as a text.

A critical model that is almost suitable to analyse this process has been proposed by Jenkins, who scrutinizes the practices of reading and writing history in fairly idiosyncratic detail, pointing out for example that in writing, historians have '[p]ressure from family and/or friends ('Not another weekend working!'...); [p]ressures from the work-place, where the various influences of heads of faculty, departmental heads, peer group, institutional research policies and, dare it be said, the obligation to teach students, all bear down...'[64] At the other side of this equation, there is the reader, whose activity is just as contextually conditioned – '[s]ometimes you might write comments in the margins of a text and then, returning to it some time later, not remember exactly why you wrote what you did; yet they are exactly the same words on the same page, so just how do meanings retain meaning?'[65] Given its emphasis on historiographic production as process rather than product, his study *could* provide a basis for a similar investigation into theatre, were it not for the fact that for Jenkins, the mediating body separating the figures of the reader and writer, is one which is *made to perform*, but is not itself *performed*. Jenkins does identify key figures within the production of meaning in the historiographic text, but in performance the extra bodies of practitioners who come to render the text in production, and in fact the context in/under which that performance occurs, are also fundamental to that production.

In searching for an appropriate model for the development of a critical vocabulary concerning what I am tacitly labelling historiographic theatre – theatre which stages an examination of history and is itself, in its performance, a rewriting of that history within the context of its production – I have adapted ideas on textual iteration proposed by Jacques Derrida, that are explored at length in Chapter Three of this thesis. Part of the reason I have employed these in seeking a method of describing and critiquing historiographic theatre is that they are explicitly concerned with notions of

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[64] Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, p. 27.
[65] Ibid., p. 29.

extrapolation and re-deployment, which are issues that, with a little re-adjustment are well placed to explore the interplay between dramatic and performance texts which I argue fuel this kind of theatrical historiography.

More broadly, however, there is a perpetual commitment in Derrida's work to the opening and *remaining open* of the notion of possibility within textual production and interpretation, and a concomitant drive to both stabilize and to deconstruct these point(s) of interpretation as they constitute textual engagement. In a response to Ernesto Laclau in *Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, Derrida located these preoccupations within his notion of 'deconstruction' by saying that 'convention, institutions and consensus [...] are stabilizations of something essentially unstable and chaotic'.[66] In other words, all institutions of reading and writing are drives to create an 'unnatural' stability out of a 'natural' chaos; and thus it is 'to the extent that stability is not natural [...] that ethics is possible'.[67]

Chaos, and what Derrida calls the 'chance to change' that it makes possible, coupled with the drive to stabilise something which is 'unstable and chaotic' are remarkably effective ways of beginning to think about the perpetual drive towards textual manifestation which is consolidated in and for the moment of performance. This is in fact quite a common occurrence within the following analysis: Derrida's particular interests in Alterity – the production and maintaining of *other* textual possibilities, which in his hands frequently seeks to undermine conceptions of stability or fixity within printed texts – often provides critical support for the mechanisms whereby dramatic texts (and in the focus of my particular interests therefore, their potential to act as historical explorations) are extrapolated and re-established within the exterior discursive field of their performance.

Concurrent with the following examination of a select amount of Derrida's theories, and also drawing on related ideas proposed by Jacques Rancière and Roland Barthes, I will examine a variety

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[66] Derrida, Critchley et al., *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 86.
[67] Ibid., p. 86.

of theatrical examples largely taken from verbatim drama to flesh out the theoretical models that I will now begin to propose.

## Chapter 2: Theatre and Historiography

### 1. The Historiography Debates

As the previous chapter illustrated, Michael Gove initiated a heated debate in his address to the Conservative Party conference in 2010, by calling for an ideologically conditioned 'narrative' approach to representing and 'understanding' the past as a foundation for the British history curriculum.[1] The hostility with which such totalising historical narratives have been treated by contemporary historians was illustrated through Geoffrey Elton who, in his *Return to Essentials*, identified the 'myths' of a unified Germany built by nineteenth century German historians as a critical forerunner for Nazism.[2] It is, needless to say, difficult to conceive of a more urgent reminder of the potential power available to a politically motivated perspective upon the past, and the necessity therefore of treating such approaches with extreme caution. Elton goes on to argue that in the wake of the Second World War:

> a wholesale revulsion against the national past seemed to have set in; it has taken
>
> thirty years or so for the German educational system to return to an interest, now
>
> sober and generally sensible, in that past... So far as I can tell, in West Germany, at
>
> least, history is unusually free of myths among the consumers, and it will be
>
> interesting to see whether this state of affairs can endure. Will there be new myths
>
> to absorb an interest in the past and give comfort to the present; or will Germans
>
> insist on seeing the past unclouded by myths; or will the death of myth in the end
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> terminate anything like a serious concern with the past?[3]

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[1] Michael Gove, 'All pupils will learn our island story', 5th October 2010, <http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/10/Michael_Gove_All_pupils_will_learn_our_island_story.aspx> [Accessed 03/02/13], and Evans, "The Wonderfulness of Us." London Review of Books, 33.6 (2011): 9-12. 14 June 2011: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n06/richard-j-evans/the-wonderfulness-of-us. [Accessed 03/02/13].

[2] Elton, *Return to Essentials*, pp. 177 – 178.

[3] Ibid., p. 178.

For Elton, the problems with historical representation emerge through a misuse of the methods and principles in exploring and documenting the past – a decision to bend 'the facts' to suit an exterior purpose. The solution he proposes is the pursuit of methods unhampered by ideology, which guard against the dangers of 'myth-making' through an adherence, as previously mentioned, to Leopold von Ranke's call to 'only show what actually happened'.[4]

Alternative approaches to the same problem, however, have rejected Elton's 'return to essentials' approach, arguing that any and all representations and explorations of the past are inevitably politicised. From such perspectives, the only 'sober' or 'sensible' approach is to view *all* interpretations of the past as ideologically loaded, rejecting the concept of objectivity in historical discourse and maintaining a critical awareness of the inevitable bias of all given perspectives. Hayden White, a central voice in advocating these approaches, defended this position thus:

> Every mimetic text can be shown to have left something out of the description of its object or to have put something into it that is inessential to what *some* reader, with more or less authority, will regard as an adequate description. On analysis, every mimesis can be shown to be distorted and can serve, therefore, as an occasion for yet another description of the same phenomenon, one claiming to be more realistic, more 'faithful to the facts.'[5]

The perspective to which White subscribes defies the potential for singularity in historical representation, effectively ruling out the possibility of an incontrovertible historical 'truth'. It is a potentially difficult position, and whilst it responds to 'myth making' as fiercely as Elton, its vastly different methods have sometimes met with unbridled hostility.[6] White's view that 'there is no such thing as a *single* correct view of any object under study' but that there are '*many* correct views, each requiring its own style of representation' embodies a key tenet of some influential approaches to

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[4] Leopold von Ranke in Evans, *In Defence of History*, p. 17.
[5] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) p. 3.
[6] Elton, *Return to Essentials*, p. 3.

historical representation, ones which have been grouped by critics such as Elton, and supporters such as Jenkins, Beverly Southgate and Alan Munslow, under the term 'postmodern history'.[7] The impact of these approaches – which has found high profile supporters in Jean François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, Elisabeth Ermarth, Michel Foucault and Tony Bennett, to name a few – has been well documented elsewhere by Jenkins and Southgate, and is also notable for the condemnation it has generated.[8]

Even for its supporters, the term 'postmodern history' is problematic. Amongst the issues it poses – a rather unhelpful vagueness, an increasingly tenuous connection to Lyotard's 'incredulity towards metanarratives' – is the emphasis on 'history', a term which Jenkins has indicated is often viewed in an unwarranted but persistent fashion as synonymous with 'the past'.[9] Jenkins points this out in the opening passages of his *Re-Thinking History* and suggests that, although popular usage employs 'history' in referring to 'that which has been written/recorded about the past', 'it would be preferable [...] to always register this difference by using the term 'the past' for all that has gone before, whilst using the term 'historiography' for history, historiography referring here to the writings of historians.'[10]

The distinction is necessary for Jenkins because, as we have seen, '[t]he past has gone and history is what historians make of it when they go to work.'[11] In saying this, of course, Jenkins proves himself as inflammatory as White, with Richard Evans devoting much of his *In Defence of History* to discrediting Jenkins as someone who sees 'no real difference between history and fiction.'[12] If

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[7] White, *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 47.

[8] Himmelfarb, from *The New History and the Old*, quoted in Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader*, p. 173. For additional surveys of postmodernism in history, see Beverley Southgate, *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2003); Keith Jenkins, *What Is History: Ethics and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1999); also Evans, *In Defence of History*.

[9] Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword by Frederic Jameson (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv. For a useful discussion of the problems of 'postmodern history', see Southgate 2003, pp. 3–33.

[10] Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, p. 7.

[11] Ibid., p. 8.

[12] Evans, *In Defence of History*, p. 100. *Re-thinking History* has in fact appeared on A-Level and Undergraduate syllabuses since the mid-1990s, but Jenkins claims that it has not 'really 'filtered down' to the 'proper' history

history is simply what historians make of it, in other words, it is entirely exposed to exterior manipulation from all sides and can no more claim a relationship with the past than can the openly fabricated texts traditionally categorised as fiction. This is the most contentious implication of the term 'historiography'; the emphasis upon history as a written, constructed or *built* discourse, rather than one which has been reclaimed, reconstituted or in some other fashion *re*built. Whilst Jenkins suggests that the reason 'historiography' is not more commonly used among English speakers is either their relative ignorance of the word or simple 'force of habit', then, the resonance of the term I have just sketched out would seem to suggest a more profound reason for this elision.[13] Historiography is capable of reconnecting history to an external method of production; something which is not of the past that it describes, but the present in which it is produced. It speaks to a doubling that undermines the singularity of history, a history thus relegated to a subject that may only be pursued – not attained, since that would close its potential for representation, and thus its ability to function as history. These factors: the construction of history within a present context; the doubling which this produces and the uncovering of 'the past' as an unobtainable referent – are all, as I now argue, endemic to the ways in which history is appropriated in theatre. Thus I turn my analysis to the issue of theatre as a 'historiographic' discourse.

## 2. Theatre and Historiography

### 2.1. Critical Deficiencies

Historiographic theories – the principles behind the various means through which history is approached, represented and construed – have incited radical upheaval and fervent debate in fields such as politics, anthropology, sociology, literature and fine art. Theatrical engagement with these

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courses most students still do, and so it's difficult to judge its 'positive' impact.' 'Rethinking History', Jenkins interviewed by Paul Newall, 2004: <http://www.galilean-library.org/manuscript.php?postid=43810> [Accessed 03/02/13].

[13] Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, pp. 7 – 8.

theories, however, has been strangely asymmetrical.[14] As I will go on to show in this chapter,

through the work of Thomas Postlewait, Charlotte Canning, Bruce McConachie and others, the

influence of historiographic theory on the *reception* of theatrical performance and on the writing of

the histories of theatre, has been extensively (though of course by no means exhaustively)

considered. The impact of historiographic theories upon the *production* of drama, however, on

theatrical performance which seeks to write, engage with or represent history in its own right, has

been critically neglected. As a result, little attempt to consolidate a body of the kind of scholarship

that Postlewait and others have striven towards in their own field has yet been undertaken.

This is not, of course, to claim that there has been *no* work in this area. Occasional, dispersed

examples of study can be found in the critical writings of Marvin Carlson, Freddie Rokem and

Jonathan Miller, who each approach the issue of theatre-as-historiography from different

perspectives, and whose work informs the initial observations in Chapter Three of this thesis.[15]

Increasingly, anthologies such as Bial and Magelssen's *Theatre Historiography: Critical Interventions*

(2010) or Carol Martin's *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage* (2010) also contain articles or

even whole subsections dedicated to the historiographic elements of particular companies,

productions or texts. In the former, for example, Mechele Leon observes towards the end of her

article 'Corpsing Molière' that

> [h]istoriographical performance, like historiography, offers the special thrill that
>
> accompanies unmasking a mystery, revealing essence, the possibility of seeing the
>
> occluded [...] Constructing history in ways salient and meaningful involves willing

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[14] Southgate provides a playful survey of some consequences of these upheavals on fine arts and literature in Chapter 6, 'History in Postmodernism' in Southgate, *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom*, pp. 146 – 157., whilst Bauman's *Postmodernity and its Discontents* examines their operation from a sociological perspective, in Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), esp. Chapter 8: 'Tourists and Vagabonds: The Heroes and Victims of Postmodernity', pp. 83 – 95.
[15] See for example Jonathan Miller, *Subsequent Performances* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986); Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: theatrical representations of the past in contemporary theatre* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2000); Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006).

encounters with representations of the past while keeping a keen, spectator's eye trained for the events that trouble these representations.[16]

Leon's interest is in corpsing – or in other words the *failure* of representation – and the way that this provides material for historiographic endeavours. For her, 'historiography feeds on those places where representations of the past fail (to be understood).'[17] Her comments skilfully articulate a vital aspect of theatre as historiography, yet as this issue is secondary to her main line of reasoning, the implications of her ideas are left unexplored. A similar problem occurs in Magelssen's own contribution in the same volume, a practically focussed examination of 'Performance as Learner-Driven Historiography', which lays out in detail some of the unique capacities for theatrical performance to function as historiography, but avoids any interaction with the theoretical challenges that this consideration poses.

In Martin's collection, Wendy S. Hesford concludes an otherwise robust critique of contemporary theatrical responses to 'terrorism' with the seemingly uncritical remark that Brittain and Slovo's verbatim play *Guantanamo* 'responds to a *crisis of truth*, by giving voice to "alternative truths" that otherwise may not have been heard.'[18] Hesford's approaches to *Guantanamo* are largely through the lens of trauma, and she does not so much seem to be blindly asserting the value of the 'alternative truth' as undermining the value of the official (visible) truth. However, her rhetoric mirrors many of the problematic accounts of verbatim that we have already encountered, and which are explored further in this chapter, and introduces perhaps the most urgent problem with the lack of coherency and consistency in critical approaches to the historiographic capacities of theatre itself. This is, in short, that the theoretical shortcomings that currently underpin the majority of such theatre discourses create conditions that are perfect for what Elton called 'historical myth making'. If

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[16] Mechele Leon, 'Corpsing Molière: History as Fiasco' in Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen, *Theatre Historiography: Critical Interventions* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp. 183 – 184.
[17] Ibid., p. 184.
[18] Wendy S. Hesford, 'Staging Terror' in Carol Martin, ed., *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 56.

theatre's historiographic potential has not been scrutinised at the level of its practical and theoretical implications – if it has not been assessed with regards to the wider discourses of historiography and historiographic theory into which it (consciously or not) is entering – then attempted exploitations of this potential will inevitably be built upon insubstantial foundations. Further, and more pressingly, theatre's engagements with history will be open to the kinds of totalising historical contentions which those debating historiography have been dedicated to opposing. Such thinking is, as I will go on to argue, exactly what has happened in the practice of verbatim theatre already encountered in Chapter One. Addressing these shortcomings in order to expose and counteract the myths that have developed in and around verbatim theatre is then a key objective of this chapter, both in order to address the problems in the medium itself, and to demonstrate the necessity of understanding the historiographic implications of theatrical performance in general.

## 2.2. Practitioners' Potentials

Interrogating these implications is as important for practitioners as it is for critics, and it must be said that those producing historical theatre seem as willing (if not more) to reflect upon its theoretical implications than scholars and critics. As an example: speaking to the question of historiography as it functions in relation to her creative work, the American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks has asserted that '[a] play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history, through the medium of literature.'[19] Parks' observation sketches out some of the unique complexities of theatre as a historiographic medium, concurrently throwing into sharp relief its difficulties as an analytic subject. She identifies the 'blueprint' aspect of the dramatic text; the constructed potential for a future rendering of performance. Through this, she points out, it is possible to "make" history, through a doubling between the blueprint and the event. Parks, who often takes historical events as the focus

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[19] Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995), p. 4.

of her dramatic texts, approaches and appropriates a version of the past in order to construct a particular history, in the same way that a historian working in any given field may do, but with (for these purposes) one significant difference. Parks' histories are designed to be written again, in performance; to be physically manifested in a way which resembles a rereading or a rewriting. She points this out herself:

> I'm working theatre like an incubator to create "new" historical events. I'm re-membering and staging historical events which, through their happening on the stage, are ripe for inclusion in the canon of history. Theatre is an incubator for the creation of historical events – and as in the case of artificial insemination, the baby is no less human.[20]

The fusion of the historical events being explored in the text, and the events created in performance confer a highly unusual character upon the overall history being constructed – one whose historiographic value is measured as much in its relationship to the present of performance as it is to the past that is being represented. Parks, in other words, uses the idea of history to 'create' new histories, and she can do this because the performances of her historically-oriented texts initiate new historical events in and of themselves. Parks' example, then, goes some way to indicating the wealth of potential afforded by the complex and unusual forms of historiography available to theatrical performance.

Yet, whilst the space available for individual practitioners to study their own approaches to historiography may undoubtedly yield innovative and significant advancements in the field, a lack of critical study in the area can also endorse and empower work that draws upon unstable notions of historiography, and indulges in the kinds of myth making that those working in the wider discourses of history treat with such justifiable concern. Such is the case, I argue, with the contemporary practices of verbatim theatre.

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[20] Ibid., pp. 4 – 5.

## 2.3. Verbatim Theatre as Historiography

Returning to the questions that arose in the previous discussion of *The Riots* and verbatim theatre, this section of the chapter now aims to develop a clearer understanding of the ways in which the genre functions as a form of historiography. In doing so, I also seek to counter some of the more worrying 'myth making' which has developed in critical and practical discourses concerning historical theatre, as a consequence of insufficient examination of its historiographic function. Verbatim theatre provides an ideal test case for this exploration, as this form of theatre has recently attracted popular attention in terms of its engagements with history, and perhaps unsurprisingly then is also the medium in which some of the most problematic 'myths' have emerged.

Whilst, as I will go on to show, Carol Martin talks of verbatim's 'capacity to stage historiography', or Derek Paget proclaims the medium's objective as 'the continued reclaiming and celebrating of that history which is perennially at "the margins of the news"', little time is spent examining *how* that reclaiming of history, or that staging of historiography, takes place.[21] There is also a more troubling aspect to these omissions, because part of their perpetuation appears to be the result of critical approaches accepting the essential 'facticity' of the documents and testimonies upon which verbatim is built, and treating them as stable platforms for analysis. Where Ryan Claycomb, for instance, provides an excellent analysis of verbatim that splits it into 'oral history' and 'documentary' approaches, presenting the latter as too often an unwitting supporter of Western political hegemony but finding in the former an Alterity with strong links to postcolonial studies, his initial, peremptory reading of historiography is cause for concern. ['H]istoriography', he claims, 'tends to emphasize plot, causation, and the rhetorics of encomium and vituperation, whereas life writing

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[21] Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence', p. 9, and Derek Paget, "Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques' *New Theatre Quarterly* 3:2, 1987, p. 326.

emphasizes character, motivation, subjectivity, and a rhetoric of comprehensibility (if not precisely understanding).'[22]

For Claycomb, historiography indexes a dogmatic, bureaucratic species of *written* historical representation that underscores the documentary strand of verbatim. He alludes to the narrative debates most clearly associated with Hayden White, but dismisses these as the ossified counterparts of a more fluid, subjective and somehow *alive* notion of 'life writing', which informs his preferred strand of 'oral history' verbatim. Claycomb sees fit to annex historiography off with documentary verbatim because both are traditionally *written*, but as I will go on to show in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this chapter, the distinction is insufficient to comprehend the historiographic frameworks that inform all verbatim theatre. Claycomb's 'life writing' is just as much a form of historiography as documentary, in other words, but since he is working in a field where little attention has been paid to the practices of historiography, such erroneous distinctions may seemingly pass without notice. As a consequence, it is not only the practitioners – many of whom sidestep the implications of their own praxes by trying to locate the value of their work in an unattainable notion of 'truth', alternative or not – who have contributed to the unstable foundations supporting verbatim drama.[23] Re-addressing these foundations, directly considering the mechanics and the implications of historiography in relation to verbatim drama, is therefore a core objective of this chapter.

Historiography, in short, is not limited to works of historical representation principally founded upon documents or documentation (though of course it does concern these too), but underscores *all* attempts to negotiate between issues of the past and present. For this reason, vocabularies must be put into place that are able to account for the historiographic strategies underpinning verbatim theatre, and allow us to clearly identify not just those areas in which the form may offer unique and

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[22] Ryan Claycomb, 'Voices of the Other: Documentary and Oral History Performance in Post-9/11 British Theatre' in Jenny Spencer, ed., *Political and Protest Theatre after 9/11: Patriotic Dissent* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), p. 100.
[23] See Chapter Two, 3.2. for a fuller discussion of this.

valuable contributions to theatre and related discourses and debates, but also those areas in which instabilities or elisions produce weaknesses, and areas of potential concern.

My objective in this and the next chapter is thus to examine the ways in which theatre's historiographic potential may be productively exploited, developing a nuanced appreciation of this potential by engaging theatre in dialogue with critical developments in the wider field of historiography itself. This chapter will examine the assembly of dramatic texts; the following chapter will look at the assembly of performance texts. In separating the texts in this manner, I am not attempting to repeat Claycomb's error of brushing awkward elements of historical production into a locale where they can be avoided. Rather, my intention is to clarify the different kinds of historiography undertaken by both texts before combining them within a unified theoretical approach, identifying their overlaps and interdependency and proposing this interdependency as a quality unique to theatrical performance.

## 2.4. Dramatic Texts

This chapter, then, focuses on dramatic texts: the scripts, or materials produced as instigators to performance. Looking at the peculiar mid-point which these entities occupy between text and production, Joseph Donohue has claimed that '[t]he dramatic text is not only notoriously unstable, but, whatever the script, it is again never more than a pre-text for the theatrical occasion, and only a constituent part of it.'[24] I support Donohue's reading (though not his bemoaning) of the dramatic text's 'instability', but for my purposes the most interesting point of his assertion is that, in locating the dramatic text's function purely as pre-text to performance, he highlights one of its unique qualities as a historiographic object: it is explicitly designed to re-inscribe its historical endeavours in the present. This design manifests itself as an instability, since the potential permutations of the text

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[24] Joseph Donohue, 'Evidence and Documentation' in Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie, eds., *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: essays in the historiography of performance* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, [1989] 1996), p. 184.

into performance are illimitable. At the same time, however, he overlooks the profound implications that this has for the text itself; it *is* a historiographic document in its own right and therefore not *solely* a constituent part of a larger, potential historiography in the implied performance.

Donohue's reasons for flattening this supplementary historiographic function of the dramatic text are revealed later in his analysis, when he claims that '[i]n dealing with facts and sources, we must be sure not to neglect their basic nature, which is a function of their origin and circumstances and which must be read, so to speak, in the language of their age.'[25] In other words, Donohue sees the dramatic text as historically iconic; a referent to the conditions and context of its production and a potential bridge, therefore, between the present and the past. This speaks to the more established idea of theatre historiography, that which forms the focus of Postlewait and McConachie's *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, concerning the industry of exploring and representing the history of theatrical performance. Postlewait, McConachie, and the contributors to their volume, survey a rigorous body of theoretical analysis attached to this form of historiography, which has attracted interest from a broad range of academic and practical approaches. In the follow-up project, *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, Postlewait and Charlotte Canning reassert the necessity for historians to identify and interrogate the theoretical frameworks informing historiographic praxis, claiming that '[t]hey are essential to the procedures of historical understanding, inquiry and practice that historians depend upon, even though most historians spend little or no time reflecting upon matters of historiography'.[26]

For an initial solution they turn to Frank Ankersmit, who suggests a telling move away from 'truth' as the object of the historian's endeavours:

> [T]he meaning of the text of a historical representation can never be identified if one
>
> takes into account only the text itself. Its meaning only reveals itself in a comparison

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[25] Donohue in Postlewait and McCconachie, e., *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, 1996, p. 193.
[26] Thomas Postlewait and Charlotte M. Canning, *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), p. 24.

with texts about (roughly) the same represented. And this necessarily has its

consequences for the notion of truth. Representations are not true or false in the

proper, technical sense of the words, but only more or less plausible. And their

relative plausibility articulates itself in this comparison with other texts.[27]

It is easy to see the implications that such a cautionary assertion could have for the field of theatre

historiography, whose object of study engages in such explicit dialogues with the discourses and

contexts of its own production. Postlewait and Canning use this caution to emphasise the necessity

of analysing the methods used in representing the theatrical past, and their consternation at the

reluctance that 'most historians' in their field demonstrate towards this analysis echoes the

frustration felt by Jenkins for the field of historiography as a whole, two decades earlier.[28] Ankersmit

identifies a legitimacy to historiography that operates at the level of production – in its relationship

to other historiographic documents – which supplements and implicitly overlaps with the legitimacy

operating between the representation and the subject being represented. This is the critical

awareness which Postlewait and Canning are endeavouring to bring to their discipline: a consciously

analytic approach to the theoretical methods underpinning historical exploration, and a contingent

mindfulness of the relativistic nature of truth-claims made under the auspices of these explorations.

The implications of Ankersmit's caution on theatre-as-historiography are actually one of the few

areas of this field that have drawn sustained critique – they are the basis for Freddie Rokem's

*Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, which looks at

various theatrical representations of the French Revolution and the *Shoah*, examining the

representations' value as works of historiography in relation to one another.[29] I consider Rokem's

book in depth in the following chapter on performance texts, where I also engage in a similar study

in comparing different theatrical responses to the 2011 August riots. Of primary importance to *this*

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[27] Frank Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 284.
[28] Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, pp. 1 – 5.
[29] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2007), pp. 3, 6.

chapter is Ankersmit's foregrounding of the question of 'truthfulness', and the strategies by which such a difficult concept may then be approached. In the earlier discussion of Wendy S. Hesford's remarks (section 2.1. of this chapter) I expressed concern over her claims to 'truth' in relation to Brittain and Slovo's *Guantanamo*. These kinds of claims risk becoming commonplace both in verbatim theatre, and in critical works concerning the medium. With *The Riots*, for example, these problematic ideas of 'truth' were used by the practitioners to propose their play as a viable replacement for a public inquiry. One of my tasks is thus to unpick these assertions and try to find, as Postlewait and Canning have in *their* form of historiography, an equivalent and operable idea of how 'truth' may be considered in what I shall call historiographic theatre. In order to do this, I must first examine how the idea of 'verbatim theatre' has become manifested in contemporary drama, and the historiographic strategies that now underpin this manifestation.

## 3. Verbatim Theatre and Historiography

### 3.1. A Means to an End...

> Everyone thinks I'm a great champion of verbatim theatre; I'm *not*... it's a means to
> an end, for me.[30]

The 'end' that Kent talks about here initially concerns the relaying of information, and the representation of particular events and 'voices' within the construction of a given theatrical production. The verbatim play or production is, according to Claycomb, designed to provide a platform for either the witnessing of documentary material or the experiencing of oral history, and Kent has been involved in both: *The Colour of Justice* and the plays of Richard Norton-Taylor being examples of the former, and *Guantanamo* and *The Riots* of the latter. According to Kent, the activities of the writers and directors in these productions are restricted to the conducting of facts,

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[30] Nicholas Kent, in conversation with Dominic Cavendish, 'Theatrevoice', 9th November 2011.

with the end of the production understood as the making accessible of historical events to the audience. Ultimately, Kent's verbatim is conceived as a delivery system for history, the epitome of a Rankean style 'objective' historiography. *The Colour of Justice* is designed to draw audiences' attentions to the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry; *Guantanamo* to human rights abuses perpetrated by the US government in their military base on Cuba; and *The Riots* to the events of civil unrest that erupted in England in August 2011. The plays are not 'self-conscious' in the sense that they do not draw attention to themselves *as theatre* – they do not spotlight their theatrical strategies or mechanics. Instead, they strive to provide a 'transparent' lens upon specific past events, uncluttered or unhampered by artifice or mediation.

Endeavouring to secure this notion of transparency, Kent claims in his conversation with Dominic Cavendish that in making verbatim theatre 'we try and look at *everyone's* viewpoint, and try and give *everyone* a voice if we can.'[31] The impracticality of these intentions is of course immediately apparent, and begins to illustrate some of the gaps between verbatim theatre and critical developments in historiography. It is a cornerstone of Hayden White's thinking, for example, that historiography is always-already politicised because all voices *cannot* be articulated. Further, it is the historian and not the historical subject who ultimately decides which voices can be heard, how long they can be heard for, in what order, and deploys those voices under the auspices of their own historiographic objectives.[32] White's approach is not universally accepted, and has in fact been met with unease in some areas – the historian Arnoldo Momigliano has said that he 'fear[s] the consequences of [White's] approach to historiography because he has eliminated the research for truth as the main task of the historian', whilst Perez Zagorin argues that White's philosophy offers no basis for refuting 'revisionist narratives which allege that the [Nazi] Holocaust is a myth invented by

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[31] Ibid.
[32] See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 4.

Zionist propaganda'.[33] But this unease points towards a space of deep contestation within historiographic praxis, one which commands responses from those engaged in the field precisely *because* it speaks to such a fundamental concern. These are debates which are treated seriously, in other words, because the stakes are agreed to be high – as evidenced in the onslaughts from figures like Elton, Himmelfarb and Zagorin.[34] Kent's ignorance, then, of the implications of his own historiographic praxis – to say nothing of the implications of obscuring that praxis in order to rather blandly assert it as 'a means to an end' – speaks to a worrying elision within his understanding of verbatim.

In a similar fashion, the notion of 'giving' voices to the voiceless that Kent mentions has been irretrievably destabilised by work in the disciplines of postcolonial studies, with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak contending that identifying and attempting to 'voice the voiceless' is an emasculating ventriloquism on the part of those who – tellingly – 'seek to represent themselves as transparent.'[35] This kind of practice immediately problematizes, for example, Slovo's desire in *The Riots* to include a 'victim' prior to encountering Mohammed Hammadoun, which I highlighted in the previous chapter, auditioning him for a pre-cast role in a narrative of which she and Kent were the ultimate arbiters. As a consequence, and as I have already argued in Chapter One, Hammadoun is not 'talking' in *The Riots*, but is rather the subject of a ventriloquism that manipulates him for a particular purpose, whilst at the same time seeking to suppress the visibility of this ventriloquism, claiming the purpose as Hammadoun's own invention.

The problem is not, however, confined to Kent and Slovo, but rather commonplace in interviews with, and writing by, verbatim practitioners. David Hare for example fires off the following rhetorical questions in an afterpiece to Robin Soans' verbatim playtext *Talking to Terrorists*:

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[33] Arnolodo Modigliani, quoted by Simon Hornblower, 'Narratology and Narration Techniques in Thucydides' in Simon Hornblower, ed., *Greek Historiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.133, n.5. and Perez Zagorin, 'Reflections on Postmodernism Now' in Keith Jenkins, *At the Limits of History* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), p. 79.
[34] Harlan, *The Degradation of American History*, xxxi.
[35] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) pp. 255, 257.

> Given that most art-forms, in the hands of metropolitan elites, tend to drift away
> from reality, what could be more bracing or healthy than occasionally to offer some
> authentic news of overlooked thought and feeling? Isn't it the noblest function of
> democracy to give a voice to the voiceless? And where better than in a medium
> whose genius is for sustaining scrutiny? What a welcome corrective to the cosy art-
> for-art's-sake-racket which theatre all too easily becomes![36]

Hare's statement is rife with confusions — 'reality' is not synonymous with 'realism', as Stephen Bottoms has pointed out; 'authenticity' is not granted any qualification, nor is it clear whose 'thought and feeling' have been overlooked, by whom or how.[37] Claiming the ability to 'give a voice to the voiceless' displays a troubling ignorance; and dismissing an unspecified majority of contemporary theatre as a 'cosy art-for-art's-sake-racket' is a lazy and potentially dangerous generalisation. Contemporary theatre for Hare (though he is himself an active participant) is a comfortable and irrelevant place — verbatim drama is the 'bracing' and 'healthy' corrective, at least at the time in which he is adopting it. What is curious, however, is the perhaps unintentional double meaning in the remark that theatre has a 'genius for sustaining scrutiny.' The primary denotation of this statement, which we must presumably read as that intended by Hare, is as obvious as it is reductive — that the length of time available to theatrical productions as compared to newspapers or television programmes allows verbatim 'the chance to look at the facts together, and in some depth'.[38] It is a claim that has been taken up elsewhere — for Slovo, the length of the play is the reason that verbatim drama is *not* journalism but something more (quite what is never specified); and for Norton-Taylor, the time available to theatre offers verbatim a way to improve upon

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[36] David Hare, '...*on factual theatre*' in Robin Soans, *Talking to Terrorists* (London: Oberon Modern Plays, 2005) p. 112.
[37] Stephen Bottoms, 'Putting the Document into Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective?' *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 50., No. 3. (T 191), Fall, 2006, p. 57.
[38] Hare, *Stuff Happens,* Introduction.

journalism's failings.[39] Conspicuously absent from such arguments is an awareness of the traditions of short, pithy, reportage-based theatres that extend in recent history through Augusto Boal's 'Newspaper Theatre' and Oscar Méténier's 'fait divers' (the birth of the Grand Guignol), to name two notable examples.[40] Supplementary to these claims about the relative worth of verbatim's length and its resultant ability to 'sustain scrutiny' of subject material, however, is what Bottoms would perhaps call its reflexive counterpart: its ability to sustain scrutiny of its own internal methods and approaches.[41] This is an important corrective, and one that I will return to fully once I have identified those facets of verbatim in which troubling instabilities have been left by an ignorance of the implications of historiography.

Carol Martin believes that documentary theatre (in its broader sense) *is* capable of restoring to the theatrical event an awareness of its own methodologies; as we have seen, in her article 'Bodies of Evidence' she claims that '[m]ore than enacting history, although it certainly does that, documentary theatre also has the capacity to stage historiography.'[42] It should be noted, however, that there are significant divisions within documentary theatre; the kind of 'verbatim' drama with which I am engaging is often regarded as a particularly British medium, and in critical appraisals of contemporary theatre the more reflexively conscious examples are more widely encountered in work produced outside of the UK.[43] Bottoms, for example, finds his preferred 'reflexive' documentary theatre in the US based Tectonic Theatre, and the only British text that Martin herself looks at in any depth is Alan Rickman and Katherine Viner's *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, which she treats with a considerable amount of unease. Yvette Hutchinson *does* see 'verbatim' theatre in documentary based drama from South Africa, though the work with which she engages does not

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[39] BBC Front Row, 21st November 2011, and Richard Norton Taylor Hammond and Steward, ed., *Verbatim Verbatim*, p. 122.

[40] See Richard J. Hand, *Grand Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), and Brent Blair 'In Search of the Radical in Performance: Theatre of the Oppressed with Incarcerated Youth' in Peter Duffy and Elinor Vettriano, ed., *Youth and the Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), pp. 133, 136.

[41] Bottoms, 'Putting the Document into Documentary', p. 64.

[42] Carol Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence', p. 9.

[43] Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics', p. 200.

appear to bear much resemblance to that of Slovo, Kent, Hare, Soans or Norton-Taylor. Hutchinson

says that documentary theatre in South Africa has:

> moved away from realism towards a complex, overt performativity that signals
>
> itself, and thus alerts its audience to the constructedness of interpreted memory
>
> and experience, as well as suggesting the powerful role that imagination might play
>
> in this process. In this way theatre in South Africa uses embodied verbatim
>
> testimony to negotiate not a singular truth, but many truths, allowing for a more
>
> contradictory exploration of the past, and hopefully offers a vision of a more
>
> tolerant future.[44]

The utopian overtones of Hutchinson's rhetoric aside, the 'move away from realism', 'powerful role'

of imagination and 'many truths' placed in contradictory tandem signal a markedly different genre

than that so far encountered in this study. This is of course another problem posed by verbatim

theatre – in addition to having no universally agreed methodological frameworks, the terms by

which the differing approaches to 'verbatim theatre' are indexed often appear to be considered

interchangeable by those who use them. For clarity's sake, then, the 'verbatim' that I am setting out

to explore here is explicitly that which tries to legitimise itself by making truth-claims based on

objectivity, and proposes the reduction of its own operation to a system of delivery, as I

demonstrated with Kent. I am focussing on this form because its theoretical elisions identify it as the

most removed from developments in historiographic theory, and because its practitioners have used

these elisions to assume a position of authority in contemporary British theatre which, I argue, is

extremely problematic.

When Martin addresses verbatim theatre explicitly, she rounds on the term itself, saying that it can

be an 'unfortunately accurate description of documentary theatre as it infers great authority to

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[44] Yvette Hutchinson, 'Post 1990s Verbatim Theatre in South Africa: Exploring an African concept of "truth"' in Carol Martin, ed., *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 69.

moments of utterance unmitigated by an *ex post facto* mode of maturing memory. Its duplicitous

nature is akin to the double-dealing of television docudramas'.[45] Whilst she (along with Norton-

Taylor, Hare, Luckhurst and Bottoms) identifies the recent rise of verbatim drama within the UK as

contingent upon 'crises of war, religion and information', Martin is ultimately cautionary and

sceptical about the current state of (and infatuation with) the medium:

> [W]hat is real and what is true are not necessarily the same. A text can be fictional
>
> yet true. A text can be nonfictional yet untrue. Documentary theatre is an imperfect
>
> answer that needs our obsessive analytical attention especially since, in ways unlike
>
> any other form of theatre, it claims to have bodies of evidence.[46]

The vagueness of Martin's allusions to 'truth' is the key aspect of her caution; she undermines and

disengages the absolutist truth-claims made within verbatim theatre by dint of its 'bodies of

evidence', by restoring to the concept of 'truth' an essential elusiveness. As often happens in

conjunction with verbatim, the logic of her remark is on many levels plainly apparent, and yet its

utterance is necessary in the light of these very truth-claims that have been made in, by and of

verbatim drama. I conduct my own analysis in a similar vein; much of the work required in the

exploration of the historiographic strategies underpinning verbatim may seem equally apparent, but

it is critical work that has yet to be undertaken.

## 3.2. Historiography and/in Verbatim

Of the existing critiques of verbatim, those closest to my object of study have been produced by

Mary Luckhurst and Stephen Bottoms. Luckhurst is concerned mostly with tracing a genealogy of

various verbatim practices and offering what she calls an ethics of interpretation; Bottoms focuses

on some truth-claims made under the verbatim rubric, and champions a methodological 'reflexivity'

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[45] Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence', p. 15.
[46] Ibid., p. 15.

he finds within the American company 'Tectonic Theatre' that is largely missing from the kinds of

British verbatim which I have identified as my object of study.

Luckhurst points to Derek Paget's '"Verbatim Theatre": Oral History and Documentary Techniques'

as the instigator of the term 'verbatim drama', for which he draws on a range of film, music and

theatre forms from the twentieth century. Interestingly, Paget conceives verbatim as possessing a

liberating potential for reflexivity, claiming that 'Verbatim Theatre seems particularly suited to the

demystification of history, given its ability to foreground its sources while simultaneously utilizing

them for entertainment.'[47] Paget's verbatim is interview based, and advocates the use of the

cassette recorder as its key operational tool – an irony he doesn't miss as it is 'ranged against other

mass technological media such as broadcasting and the press'.[48] He also makes rather grand claims,

stating for instance that verbatim involves 'nothing less than the continued reclaiming and

celebrating of that history which is perennially at "the margins of the news"'.[49] For Luckhurst,

Paget's article is particularly instructive because it was 'framed by the editors of the *New Theatre*

*Quarterly* [as] a political weapon which can be wielded against the very broadcast media which

helped inspire it.'[50] Verbatim's potential as a method of resistance to dominant orthodoxies is made

quite clear, though it is telling that the historiographic strategies employed within this nascent term

are restricted to a sense of pragmatics – the gathering, editing and dispensing of material – rather

than the implications these actions may have upon the material being produced. In short, whilst

Paget is happy to celebrate the 'factual nature of the verbatim material, that which always

constitutes the bedrock strength of any form of documentary theatre' and the 'real' aspects of the

texts being produced, he does not spend any time considering what exactly terms like 'factual' or

'real' may mean in this context.[51]

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[47] Paget, "Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques', p. 326.
[48] Ibid., p. 317.
[49] Ibid., p. 336.
[50] Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics', p. 201.
[51] Paget "Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques', pp. 326, 327.

Luckhurst suggests that the rise of verbatim's popularity in Britain is bound up with 'widespread suspicion of governments and their 'spin' merchants, a distrust of the media and a desire to uncover stories which may be being suppressed, most manifest in the obsession with so-called 'reality' television.'[52] Hers is a rather sceptical and not entirely convincing argument (the kind of 'so-called "reality" television' she refers to, and how it relates to verbatim drama is never specified) but she does point towards one of the primary factors which simultaneously legitimizes and undermines the medium – a fixation with the 'real', and a reaction against mediatised manipulation. Much of these claims seem bound up with material corporeality, and the 'liveness' boasted by theatrical performance. However, there is a tendency to confuse the 'truthfulness' of the performance – one which is contingent upon the actuality of performers, audiences and playing spaces – with the 'truthfulness' of the material being performed. There are certain parallels here with Philip Auslander's critique of 'liveness', which attacked 'the common assumption that the live event is "real" and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproduction of the real.'[53] Auslander, though, seeks to dissolve this distinction in order to argue the absence of an ontological gap between 'live' and 'mediatized'; my focus is rather on challenging the legitimating status which being 'live' is seen to confer upon the verbatim performance text. This is what, for example, has led Robin Soans to the following claim:

> Suppose I went to interview Mo Mowlam. She talks to me; I write down her words, and then edit them into a speech, or in some cases into dialogue with her husband. We then cast June Watson in the role. She sits on a chair on stage and talks to an audience, just as the original Mo Mowlam talked to me. By this process, the audience have become me, or whomever I happened to be with when I conducted

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[52] Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics', p. 200.
[53] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, [1999] 2008), p. 3.

the interview, and the Mo Mowlam on stage talks to the audience on a purely

personal and confidential level.[54]

The gaps in Soans' epistemological assumptions are manifold, and at some level he appears to be

celebrating the deception of the audience and the success of his manipulation. Initially, the 'editing'

– which is given no precise shape, and conceded to reconfigure the material of the testimony – is

written off as immaterial to that testimony's overall function. This is a common theme amongst

verbatim practitioners; Hare has elsewhere admitted to investing lines with his 'own rhythms' and

'recontextualising' them, whilst in the same interview contending without irony that newspapers are

untrustworthy because they are 'a rich mix of what people never meant combined with what people

never said.'[55] Simply having lines spoken aloud, invoking the 'liveness' of theatre is perceived to

restore an essential veracity to the production which renders it transparent, unmediated and

'truthful'. This belief is further compounded by Soans when he claims, also without irony, that 'the

audience have become me'. Soans, like Slovo, does not reproduce himself within his plays, nor the

questions he asked in accruing the testimonies which make up his 'raw materials'. His presence

instead haunts the texts, holding the line of questioning which produced the testimony at one

remove, absenting itself in order to create the illusion that the interviewee has produced the

testimony of their own accord.

When critiquing Hare's *The Permanent Way*, a play about the privatisation of the British railways,

Bottoms turns his attention particularly to this absented author, calling it a 'god-like figure, hovering

invisibly somewhere in the auditorium'.[56] Because the 'truthfulness' of the text is explicitly

determined within the liveness of its production, the predetermined natures of both the testimony

and text are suppressed, to be replaced with the illusion of spontaneity. Soans claims that the

audience 'become' him; the actor 'becomes' the interviewer; and the edited mediated and

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[54] Robin Soans in Hammond and Steward, ed., *Verbatim Verbatim*, pp. 23 – 24.
[55] Hare in ibid., pp. 60, 62.
[56] Bottoms, 'Putting the Document in Documentary', pp. 59-60.

predetermined text 'becomes' the interview. This is in spite of the fact that the audience are not asking the questions that Soans (or 'whoever he happened to be with') asked in the interview; and have no access to these questions or the order in which they were asked. Neither do they have knowledge of the order in which the answers were received; or how much of the answers were left out or 'edited'; or the influence of the questions upon the production of the answers themselves. This process, with no small degree of irony, withholds, suppresses or denies the artificiality of its own construction in order to create a theatrical production that stakes its 'truthfulness' in its ability to pass itself off as transparent. All of which ushers in a paradox: an illusion of transparency is sought through the obfuscation of the methodological frameworks which enable that illusion to function. In journalism, by contrast, the quality of reporting to which Soans' project aspires is held to a much higher and (theoretically) more rigorously maintained standard – public disgrace followed the *Independent's* Johann Hari, for example, when it was revealed that he had been fabricating the initial sources of otherwise accurate quotes included in his articles.[57]

To summarise my argument thus far: verbatim is often argued to be responding to a broader appetite for "facts" or 'information' in the face of over-mediatised and manipulated news industries, and transparency becomes the yard-stick by which its legitimacy and authenticity is measured.[58] However, the inevitably manipulated nature of the verbatim texts supersedes their claim to transparency. Rather than accept this concern and abandon that yard-stick in favour of the 'reflexivity' that Bottoms calls for, or the '"truths" not bound by "fact"' that Martin advocates, popular responses frequently ignore the mediated nature of the text and performance, maintaining pretences of transparency that counteract the supposed opacity of the wider context.

This, ultimately, is the focus of Luckhurst's investigation, but where Bottoms is concerned with restoring a reflexive consciousness to verbatim practices, Luckhurst largely busies herself with

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[57] Conal Urquhart, 'Johann Hari leaves Independent after Plagiarism Scandal', *Guardian*, 20th January 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/jan/20/johann-hari-quits-the-independent> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[58] See Bottoms, 'Putting the Document into Documentary', p. 57.; Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics', pp.216 – 217.

pointing out some of the flaws in current verbatim work, apparently driven by a desire to reassert

the opinion, 'unfashionable in these cynical times', that theatre 'can have [a] political effect'.[59] As a

result, her work becomes in part an apology for verbatim itself. Whilst she does point towards some

of the theoretical elisions underpinning the medium, the bulk of her observations are diagnostic:

'the underlying conviction expressed by these practitioners that verbatim can lay claim to a greater

historical veracity is troubling'; and '[v]erbatim theatre, like other documentary forms, is always

stretched on the rack between a pursuit of 'facts' – a loaded word in its own right – and an

engagement with artistic representation.'[60] Quite how or why this is 'troubling', what is loaded

about the term 'facts' – and how the term functions in the context of verbatim – are left

unexamined. So whilst Luckhurst does raise some important concerns over the nature of verbatim

work, her proposals for counteracting these concerns, and her overall conclusion, ultimately fall

short of offering productive alternatives.

Bottoms begins his argument by dissecting some of the key figures in British verbatim of the time, in

a fairly caustic manner. Hare is read as a self-deluding 'masculinist' who confuses 'realism for reality'

and Soans' *Talking to Terrorists* is denounced as a verbatim text which has garnered public credence

through false claims of transparency. These, Bottoms argues, mask a highly mediated authorial view

of political events and, even more worryingly, peddle 'the standard white mythology of "us" as

normal and "them" as dark and dysfunctional'.[61] The popular interest in verbatim in the UK is

attributed to the gullibility of the British public who 'still believe... in the underlying truth/reality of

the news as mediated by the BBC', as opposed to a more sceptical American public whose media

institutions' 'distortions and biases paraded as fact... have prompted in many a profound distrust of

the news media in general.'[62] At the time of writing this thesis, the scandal surrounding the *News of

the World* and the subsequent Leveson Inquiry call some of Bottoms' contentions into question, but

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[59] Ibid., p. 217.
[60] Ibid., p. 203.
[61] Bottoms 'Putting the Document into Documentary', pp. 57 – 61.
[62] Ibid., p. 57.

his concerns certainly reflect the ambitions of the verbatim practitioners I have been dealing with here, who actively court the credence of a public they believe to be (in Hare's words) hungry for 'the facts'.[63]

Bottoms then moves his critique in a more positive direction, proposing the documentary theatre projects of Moisés Kaufmann as displaying the 'kind of theatrical self-referentiality [which] is required of documentary plays if they are to acknowledge their dual and thus ambiguous status as both "document" and "play."'[64] The dualism he proposes is not quite the same as Luckhurst's 'facts' vs. 'artistic representation', as he recognises that 'unmediated access to "the real" is not something that theatre can ever provide'.[65] Luckhurst's polarisation – echoed by Hammond, Hare, and Stafford-Clark, who declare that verbatim exists within a 'spectrum between fact and fiction' – ostensibly seeks to account for the intermediary positions verbatim tends to occupy, but only really succeeds in supposing a solidity to 'fact' and 'fiction' which is never interrogated. It is this supposition which enables Kent to talk about 'arriving at the truth', as if 'the truth' were a destination to which one could venture, again pointing towards the epistemological myopia espoused in conjunction with much verbatim practice. In order to address this problematic stabilising of fact and fiction as a binary within which the 'truth' of historiographic enquiry is supposedly established, my analysis requires an approach more critical of the 'historical fact' with which history is most commonly constructed. For this I turn to Roland Barthes, who in the late 1960s exerted considerable efforts in attempting to dispel the myths of this kind of 'fact's' solidity, seeking to overturn the unquestioned 'veracity' of the kinds of materials upon which verbatim practitioners have subsequently staked their claims to authenticity.

Near the beginning of his polemic 'The Discourse of History' (1967), Barthes writes about the 'paradox of historical discourse' by asserting that:

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[63] <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/> [Accessed 13/06/12]; Hare, *Stuff Happens*, Introduction.
[64] Bottoms 'Putting the Document into Documentary', p. 57.
[65] Ibid., p. 57.

> [t]he fact can only have a linguistic experience, as a term in a discourse, and yet it is exactly as if this existence were merely the 'copy', purely and simply, of another existence situated in the extra-structural domain of the 'real'. This type of discourse [the historical] is doubtless the only type in which the referent is aimed for as something external to the discourse, without it ever being possible to attain it outside this discourse. We should therefore ask ourselves in a more searching way what place the 'real' plays in the discourse.[66]

Barthes is here contesting the notion that the 'historical fact' may be verified by an independently existing 'reality'. His observation is that this kind of fact – a linguistic entity constructed in and by the present – is projected into an exterior realm (a representation of the past). The fact is said to be verified by the reality, but at the same time the fact is said to prove the reality's existence, because of its factuality. Thus, 'in "objective history", the "real" is never more than an unformulated signified, sheltering behind the apparently all-powerful referent.'[67] Geoffrey Bennington and Robert Young have called this process a 'sleight of hand', where 'the discourse of history is guilty of reducing a three-term structure of signification (signifier-signified-referent) to a two-term structure, (signifier-referent)'.[68] The 'historical fact' is constructed from available evidence concerning an event which *actually happened* (the actuality of the past is never challenged, only the 'reality' of history, which is how the past is made 'real' through representation). That 'fact' is then embedded within a broader historical 'reality', which has equally been constructed in the present, but is now claimed not to have been so, because it has a 'fact' to verify it. Thus the 'signified' – the 'reality' which was constructed in order to establish the 'historical fact' – is dispensed with, and a direct connection proposed between 'the past' (referent) and 'the historical fact' (signifier).

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[66] Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History' in Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader*, p. 121.
[67] Ibid., p. 122.
[68] Derek Attridge, Geoffrey Bennington and Robert Young (eds), *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 3.

Barthes seeks to restore to the discourses of history, and for these purposes most importantly the concepts and practices of historiography, a consciousness and engagement with the historical signified, thus an undermining of the 'apparently all-powerful referent'. The above claims that Luckhurst et al. make to a 'spectrum' or 'rack' between facts and fiction/representation in verbatim are rapidly dissolved under these reflections, and a subtler tension emerges in the complex relationships between the past and histories, a tension that Barthes proposes should rest 'no longer on the real, but the intelligible'.[69] His reasoning is quite simple: since the 'real' in historical discourse is a trick, an 'effect' which falsely passes itself off as truth, this 'real' should be dispensed with and an engaged, conscious approach to history – an 'intelligible' history, which cannot rely upon notions of the 'historical fact', the destruction of the signified or the incontrovertible historical 'reality' – commenced in its place.

The briefest review of the bulk of primary and critical material produced under the auspices of British verbatim theatre reveals a widespread ignorance of Barthes' warning, and a sustained investigation accordingly uncovers a myriad of theoretical instabilities. Bottoms is one of the few who starts to interrogate these inconsistencies; for example, he attacks verbatim texts which borrow the fabrications of stage realism and are 'doubly illusory' because they present a:

> 'realism' that purports to present us with the speech of 'actual' people involved in 'real' events, rather than merely fictional ones. Moreover, this emphasis on the verbatim tends to further obscure the world-shaping role of the writer in editing and juxtaposing the gathered materials.[70]

As far as Barthes is concerned, Bottoms falls somewhere short in that he implicitly concedes the potential for the articulation of the 'real' in history. However, Bottoms does articulate two of the key concerns in the historiographic endeavours of verbatim theatre. Firstly, the truth-claim made

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[69] Barthes, 'The Discourse of History', p. 123.
[70] Bottoms, 'Putting the Document into Documentary', p. 59.

through the assumption that the events depicted are both 'real' and accessible to the text and, secondly, the mediating, though absent(ed) presence and function of the practitioners involved in preparing, constructing and executing the text itself. The two are in certain respects interconnected, since the absenting of the authorial voice is a key strategy in what Barthes calls the 'reality effect' in historiography, as it suppresses the construction of the 'signified' (historical fact).

In Soans' assertions about the interchangeability of the audience and himself, the 'historical facts' are the events to which the interviewee refers. Putting aside Martin's justifiable concerns about an 'ex post facto mode of maturing memory' for a moment, the words uttered in interview become signifiers to a representation of the past. They are delivered in the context of an interview, an encounter subject to an uncountable range of environmental factors that include (but are by no means limited to) the agendas of the interviewer and interviewee, the vicissitudes of memory, and the lines of questioning and response. The relationship between the testimony and the events it attempts to recount is complex, unstable and requires an approach conscious of this condition. For Barthes, this is where historiography cannot afford to enact its habitual repression of the signified – the history that the historical fact seeks to legitimise, and from which it seeks legitimation. This repression, and the resultant truth-claim that historiography can show direct links between the 'historical fact' and the 'all powerful referent', speaks to a falsehood in historical discourse.

Verbatim theatre, however, does not locate its main truth-claim specifically in this relationship – though there is sometimes an implicit sense of it. This is particularly the case in the tribunal plays, where the relationship of testimony to the past is hinged upon an exterior discourse, and on the understanding that responsibility for consolidating the past beyond the testimony lies with that discourse. When the depositions at the Stephen Lawrence enquiry were discovered to provide inaccurate accounts of the past, for example, it was those delivering the depositions, and not the creators of *The Colour of Justice*, who were at fault. Similarly, if material submitted to the constructed tribunals of *Guantanamo, Called to Account* and *The Riots* were to be proven false, that

fault would not be held with the texts or the authors, but those who submitted the testimonies in the first place. Standards of verification are frequently alluded to – Hare talks proudly about amending *The Permanent Way* once he realised a crucial piece of testimony had been left out, for instance – but it is the accuracy with which the testimony is reproduced, not the accuracy of the testimony itself, that is valued.[71] Verbatim practitioners are not so much interested in proving that what people have said truthfully represents the past (in fact, in plays like *Stuff Happens, Called to Account* and *Guantanamo*, the focus is often specifically on *un*"truthful" accounts of the past), but rather in claiming that they truthfully represent what people have said *about* the past. The distinction is crucial, and in a rather neat way absolves the practitioners of responsibility for the relation of their documentary materials to the pasts to which these materials refer.

The primary truth-claim made by verbatim practitioners – and the history they are principally engaged in representing – is located in the gathering and production of materials. Thus, Kent claims: '[T]he mere fact that we've chosen the subject is a political statement. Once we've chosen the subject, then we try and air, the *whole spectrum* of views.'[72]

Responsibility is understood as 'air[ing] the whole spectrum of views'. A topic is chosen; the potential perspectives upon that topic identified; participants selected to fulfil the role of deploying those perspectives in the form of testimony, or in predetermined materials such as articles, diaries and public statements; the gathered materials are edited together into a dramatic text which is then rehearsed and staged in front of an audience. The truth-claim is not in the veracity of the materials, but in the replication of those materials within the context of the dramatic text. The veracity of the materials, in fact, is never questioned, precisely because their value is not in whether or not they are accurate, but in the fact that 'real people' have produced them – a deeply troubling belief that emerges in Paget's 1987 article, where he talks about the 'factual nature of the verbatim material'

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[71] Hare in Hammond and Steward, *Verbatim Verbatim*, p. 61.
[72] Dominic Cavendish, A Conversation with Gillian Slovo and Nicholas Kent, 9th November 2011, <http://www.theatrevoice.com/7274/the-riots-nicolas-kent-gillian-slovo-discuss/> [Accessed 03/02/13].

forming 'the bedrock strength' of documentary theatre'.[73] This unquestioned tenet enables Hammond and Steward to make an offhand comparison between a verbatim writer editing testimonies into a script with Michelangelo as he carves a sculpture. Their book, *Verbatim Verbatim*, is ostensibly a survey of contemporary verbatim practitioners 'in their own words'. Prefaced by their enthusiastic introduction, however, it is also an *apologie* for the genre which perpetuates several of the methodological inconsistencies which this study has uncovered in the work of the practitioners themselves. Foremost amongst them is the argument reproduced here: Michaelangelo did not create the stone of David but the 'sculpture is no less the creation of his skill, imagination and hard work', and the same is said of the verbatim dramatist, who does not invent the documentary material themselves, but shapes that material through their own imagination and hard work.[74]

The testimony is thus considered concrete material, not to be interrogated but rather employed as the substance out of which a dramatic text may be carved. Absented from the text as a consequence of their own claim to legitimacy – the material is unmediated and therefore it is 'true' – Soans, Kent, Slovo or Norton-Taylor are supposedly unable to creatively respond to the material. In the more freely edited writing techniques employed by Soans, and Slovo, (as opposed to Norton-Taylor who does at least maintain the chronology of his source material, even if he edits it down), there is however the option to 'bracket'; to deploy material in such a way as to frame it as part of a debate, or at a given point in the (externally constructed) narrative that will infuse it with a particular tone, or function, or implication. As we have seen in Chapter One, in the case of *The Riots*, Mohamed Hammadoun's response to what appears to be a signature (though unheard) question – 'describe the rioters in three words' – is 'Just angry people.'[75] Slovo decides to use these words to close her play, and has Hammadoun, her 'victim', sitting alone on stage after a range of other characters have exited from a heated debate.

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[73] Paget, ''Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques', pp. 326, 327.
[74] Hammond and Steward, *Verbatim Verbatim*, p. 10.
[75] A similar occurrence takes place at the end of Act One, where Jacob Sakil's testimony closes the Act in response to the unheard question by calling the rioters 'The walking dead'. Slovo, *The Riots*, p. 34.

This is a sophisticated manipulation of Barthes' 'reality effect'. At one level, Hammadoun is simply a talking head, but he also has a wider, metaphorical significance in the context of the play as the voice of pragmatism, reason and sanity. In *The Riots* we hear from politicians, policemen, community leaders and public figures, each with a particular perspective on the causes of the riots, and suggestions for the best course of action in dealing with their repercussions. Hammadoun has not taken active part in the 'debate' (which we must assume is externally constructed, though in performance characters do look at each other when not speaking); but he has sat back and listened to the 'spectrum of views' – again, whether this is the character or the subject is not made clear. Then, when the arguments have died down, Hammadoun issues his closing statement. It is in some ways a strange final note, and Slovo is actually aligning herself, in terms of the script, with Michael Gove, who also delivers testimony and begins *his* 'role' in the play by saying '[t]he first thing my wife said [was] that the riots were like one of those Rorschach blot tests in that everyone sees that – what they want to in them.'[76]

The character Gove is suggesting that any perspective offered on the riots reflects as much, if not more, on the opinions of the commenter as it does the riots themselves. The implication is therefore that the riots cannot be 'explained' because they offer themselves up too much to interpretation – he is perhaps correct, but only for as long as the view is taken that a single, unitary 'meaning' must be gleaned from an object of enquiry in order for a solution to emerge. By concluding with Hammadoun's words, Slovo makes the point that, after all of the hot air and prognosticating (which she has arranged, and which the audience experience for two hours) there is a basic human element concerning 'just angry people'. And, since it is spoken by her 'victim', at the close of the play and as the last words, it is placed in what Claycomb calls the most 'dramaturgically powerful position from which to address an audience'.[77] But is it Slovo's voice, or Hammadoun's? According to the 'testimony-as-material' argument, the voice should be Slovo's – the marble out of which *David* was

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[76] Slovo, *The Riots*, p. 45.
[77] Claycomb, 'Voices of the Other: Documentary and Oral History Performance in Post-9/11 British Theatre', p. 97.

carved did not choose to look like David – and yet Slovo and Kent insisted that their piece was not

biased, lending a platform to political issues rather than making political statements itself.

This results in a problem: either it *was* Slovo's voice, and the material was 'spun' to serve a

particular, exterior objective which is the province of the writer and not the subject, or it *was not*

Slovo's voice and the manipulation of testimony was counteractive to the delivery of the testimony

itself; a betrayal of the subject. This former would, of course, debunk the protestations to objectivity

and transparency which both Slovo and Kent have made concerning *The Riots*, whilst the latter calls

the whole issue of verbatim into question and infringes upon what Luckhurst calls an 'ethics of

production'. It is a well-worn dispute, common to documentary practices in any field and in defence

of her own position, Slovo has argued that:

> you *can't* force people to say what you want... you have an editorial because you in
>
> the end decide, who you're going to use, and, and what but, to make them work I
>
> think, is, to make the audience think... And to help an audience think is not to tell
>
> them what to think... it's to actually put enough there, so that they can have some of
>
> the privilege of the experience I had which is I started off, knowing not very much
>
> about it and then I end up feeling like I understand something about the riots, and
>
> that's what I would think would be great if the audience would walk out feeling, not
>
> that they had been told what to think about the rioters or the politicians or the
>
> policemen, but that they'd actually sort of understood what was going on in our
>
> society in a way that allows them to... sort of have a voice... and I guess that's what a
>
> good inquiry does... But since there *isn't* an inquiry...[78]

Of course, the idea that the audience members are going to undergo a similar process to Slovo is an

illusion; they are not in control of choosing the interviewees, writing the questions, asking the

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[78] Dominic Cavendish, A Conversation with Gillian Slovo and Nicholas Kent, 9th November 2011,
<http://www.theatrevoice.com/7274/the-riots-nicolas-kent-gillian-slovo-discuss/> [Accessed 03/02/13].

questions, documenting the responses or editing those responses together in order to create a text. They are instead the recipients of a prepackaged product that is designed to *look* like a process, but the way in which that process will play out has already been determined. This is even more troubling when, as Slovo reminds us, 'there *isn't* an inquiry', and her product-disguised-as-process is offered in its stead, to say nothing of the fact that a public inquiry implies a lengthy process of evidence gathering and deliberation, whereas the relative speed of getting *The Riots* into production was actually used as an advertising strategy.[79] Slovo has interviewed people connected with the riots, using particular sets of questions that will inevitably influence the particular sets of responses she receives. At the point of interviewing, she pursues a particular idea of "truth"; whether that is of the interviewee being 'truthful' about what they believe, or delivering a 'truthful' account of the events (the two are by no means interchangeable) is impossible to determine. Her subsequent writing of the play is then concerned with the 'truthful' reproduction of the received testimonies in the form of a dramatic text. At none of these points do the 'truths' directly connect with the past (which, as I have illustrated in the earlier discussion of Barthes, is anyway an impossibility). They are performed, however, in a production which is in some ways supposed to 'give the audience a voice' and demonstrate some 'truth' about the events which the production claims to be engaged in exploring.

The theoretical inadequacies underwriting Slovo's verbatim (and the other examples mentioned in this and the previous chapter) are manifold, and I have demonstrated through a variety of methods the implications of their continued disregard. Owing to a disinclination on the part of both practitioners and critics to reconnect verbatim, as one of the major contemporary theatrical forms involved in historical exploration, to the critical discourses of historiography, instabilities have developed in its widespread production and reception that have profound implications for the quality of its material output. In the final section of this chapter, I will begin to counter the unstable historiographies practiced in verbatim theatre by developing a strategy for historiographically conscious theatre, one capable of being impervious to the erroneous, 'transparent' claims to

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[79] Ibid.

veracity uncovered in verbatim by a conscious, reflexive approach to the ways in which theatre can function as a medium for the production of history.

## 4. Historiographic Theatre

### 4.1. Introducing Derrida

In a certain respect, 'historiographic theatre' can be understood as a method of reading; challenging the power of historical 'myth making' within dramatic and performance texts that claim an absolute connection with the past. In another respect, it is also a method of production, a theatrical approach which simultaneously constructs and engages with its own conception of the past, but also undermines the notion that the past is a resource capable of being accessed and represented in any singular or absolute form.

Of the theoretical frameworks employed in the construction and consolidation of this model, the bulk are adapted from critiques of textual, or *written* historiography. The reason for this is that, to date, the issues concerning historiography in theatrical performance have been largely overlooked. The few critical studies that are available – works by Freddie Rokem, Jonathan Miller and Marvin Carlson – focus on such specific aspects of certain dramatic or performance texts as to compromise their ability to support the broader scope of historiographic theatre which I am proposing here. In addition it should be noted that, since the terrain which has been mapped out by the historiography debates is explicitly political in nature, my approach to historiographic theatre will also be political. In addition, whilst I will draw upon a range of theoretical models in the construction of my own, the bulk of the structure will be provided by a reading of Jacques Derrida's theories on deconstruction. My reasons for electing this model are perhaps most fittingly articulated in the following quotation:

> All that a deconstructive point of view tries to show, is that since convention,
>
> institutions and consensus are stabilizations (sometimes stabilizations of great

duration, sometimes micro-stabilizations), this means that they are stabilizations of something essentially unstable and chaotic.

Thus, it becomes necessary to stabilize precisely because stability is not natural; it is because there is instability that stabilization becomes necessary; it is because there is chaos that there is a need for stability. Now, this chaos and instability, which is fundamental, founding and irreducible, is at once naturally the worst against which we struggle with laws, rules, conventions, politics and provisional hegemony, but at the same time it is a chance, a chance to change, to destabilize. If there were continual stability, there would be no need for politics, and it is to the extent that stability is not natural, essential or substantial, that politics exists and ethics is possible. Chaos is at once a risk and a chance, and it is here that the possible and the impossible cross each other.[80]

This sentiment effectively underscores both the necessity for, and the workings of, historiographic theatre. Theatrical performance is itself a form of stabilisation, in that it provides a distinct reading of a particular text in a given environment for a specific audience. It builds upon the chaos and instability of the events and texts which precede it, which is the point at which its historiographic function is revealed and activated. The same can be said, I argue, of dramatic texts which engage either texts or events from the past – and in the remainder of this thesis I explore examples of both. Also, given the ephemerality central both to theatrical performance and the intentions for performance contained within dramatic texts, the return to chaos and instability is always-already present in these stabilisations, with destabilisation and change an inevitable consequence of theatrical production. Derrida's 'deconstructive point of view', therefore, suggests a valuable and effective foundation for the establishing and investigation of historiographic theatre.

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[80] Derrida, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 86.

## 4.2. Derrida and the Historiography Debates

The succeeding chapter will advocate Derrida's theories as a core theoretical model for this thesis' study of the potential for theatrical performance to function as a form of historiography. In order to commence this study, it is first necessary to position these theories in the context of the historiography debates which I have been discussing.

Perhaps foremost amongst the various problems that Derrida's ideas present to the practice of historiography is the rejection of the singularity of any given historical representation. It must be noted, of course, that this is not unique to Derrida, and has been hotly contested throughout these debates. Jenkins identifies a prominent instigator in E.H. Carr, who in his 1961 study *What Is History* claimed a categorical distinction between a 'fact' and a 'historical fact', saying of the latter that '[i]ts status as an historical fact will turn on a question of interpretation.'[81] Carr's argument, whilst still to some extent grounded in a belief in the solidity of 'facts', nevertheless states that since a fact did not become historical until historians employed it, history was therefore subjectively controlled by historians. Whilst Carr's unquestioning reliance on facts is dubious, he laid the groundwork for some awkward questions about the nature of historiography, and preceded Jenkins' later remarks on the essential relativism of historical discourses. If 'historical facts', those fundamental elements of a 'true' and 'faithful' account of the past are seen as conceived by or at the behest of historians, this returns us to the question of where and how 'truthfulness' could be claimed by/in history.

In fact, what Carr was attempting to do was expose the ideological underpinning of what he called the 'cult of facts' practiced by the kind of nineteenth-century historiography expounded by Ranke. This school, he claimed, was operating under a political liberalism which he himself, by this point in his career, had rejected:

> The nineteenth century was, for the intellectuals of western Europe, a comfortable
> period exuding optimism. The facts were on the whole satisfactory; and the

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[81] E.H. Carr, *What is History* (London: Penguin, [1961] 1987), pp. 12 – 13.

inclination to ask and answer awkward questions about them was correspondingly weak.[82]

Carr, a Marxist, found this *laissez-faire* attitude to the study of history unacceptable to his own context and political beliefs, and consequently sought to undermine the attitude's unquestioned acceptance within the discipline of historiography. However, Jenkins also points out that the rest of Carr's text rests somewhat oddly on an equivalent consideration of 'facts'. Instead of accepting the perspectivist approach which he outlines in his opening chapters – '[t]he belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the historical is a preposterous fallacy' – he appears to use these largely as a way of debunking a pre-existent ideologically-driven historiography in order to propose his own in its stead; politically different, but operating on a similarly 'fact based' economy.[83] Thus, Jenkins writes:

> whilst Carr may well have learnt the late-modernist notion of perspectivism, he hardly seems to have been ready for the postmodernist lesson that perspectivism 'goes all the way down': that it includes everything and everybody – including himself.[84]

Carr, for Jenkins, pointed towards a critical understanding of historiography that accepted the subjectivity of the historian's praxis as an intrinsic factor in the history being produced – *a* history, and never *the* history – but was unable, because of his own adherence to a pre-existing political structure, to embrace fully this understanding himself. I outline this argument in order to highlight a key point about the political objectives which frequently underscore historiographic endeavours. The problem, I propose, is not so much with the objectives themselves, but that they are often concealed beneath a vestige of transparency (as we have seen throughout this chapter, for example) which seeks to deny that political or politicised nature. Whether in the case of Carr attacking one political

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[82] Ibid., p. 19.
[83] Ibid., p. 46.
[84] Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History': From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 62.

narrative on the grounds of false objectivity only to replace it with an equivalent narrative of his preference, or Elton's denial of political narratives in order to claim an objectivity which repudiates the subjective nature of *his* practice, the problems encountered by totalising approaches to historiography are, as I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, manifold and highly complex. Such totalising attitudes are hopelessly impractical when translated into theatre, where historical representations not only face problems of being discursively extrapolated (from dramatic into performance texts) into the unknowable contexts of their future productions, but also require a renegotiation at every separate instance of their performance which is inescapably informed by that particular context. The producer of a dramatic text, in other words, cannot predict the ways in which that text will be restaged in future productions, and those productions will engage with that text in the context of their surrounding environments. As such, the declaration of consistent narratives to a text's movement through time, or the belief that there is a single *truthful* reading of the text does not work. I will argue that Derrida's approach, and particularly its insistence upon iterability (the ability for texts to be fragmented and moved from place to place) as a precondition to both the text and utterance, does not propose to offer an exact solution to the problems facing historiographic theatre. Rather, it insists that the political structures underpinning any and all historiographic approaches be reconsidered and renegotiated at every point at which they are encountered. For Derrida, this is actually a question of ethics, which he maintained – again in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* – quite emphatically:

> It is because we act and we live in infinitude that the responsibility with regard to the other *(autrui)* is irreducible. If responsibility were not infinite, if every time that I have to take an ethical or political decision with regard to the other *(autrui)* this were not infinite, then I would not be able to engage myself in an infinite debt with regard to each singularity. I owe myself infinitely to each and every singularity.[85]

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[85] Derrida, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 88.

Jenkins has attempted to clarify Derrida's position as one which constantly seeks to stabilise, and which constantly undermines its own stability. In a relatively uncomplicated reading, a translation of this approach to theatre proposes that since each repetition of a performance text will manifest itself in and as a *different* context to its predecessors and successors, this irrevocably undermines the concept of a universal 'truth' which that text can access from iteration to iteration. It is only in this respect, I propose, that a comprehension of theatre which is truly historiographic – conscious and open about its own construction of history – can be attained. Thus, by this reading, when the director Max Stafford-Clark declared in interview that he considered verbatim practices an 'attempt… to get as near to *the truth* as you can', he was either being misguided or disingenuous, for the basic reason that the iterable mechanisms at work in each and every performance text create their own particular version of 'truth' which cannot, at any level, be traced back to a single, all-encompassing notion of '*the* truth'.[86]

Having rejected the 'truth-claims' so far encountered in notions of objectivity, transparency and direct representation, I will now consider the question of 'truth' as it relates to responsibility to the 'infinity of each singularity' in relation to performance, developing my analysis of Derrida through a rethinking of verbatim, and expanding my research to include other forms of theatre which may be considered 'historiographic', in the terms being developed here.

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[86] Hammond and Steward, *Verbatim Verbatim*, p. 153. (Emphasis added).

## Chapter 3: Theatre as Historiography

### 1. Derrida's Stabilizations

The previous chapter addressed verbatim theatre – as one of the most popular contemporary forms of historical drama – in conjunction with the discourse of historiography, and the debates which this discourse has engendered. By comparing the methodologies employed by verbatim practitioners with developments in historiographic theory, I illustrated the dubious nature of the truth-claims upon which verbatim practitioners have consolidated their influence and authority. I concluded that a more rigorous interrogation of theatre's function as a historiographic medium was required, if such unstable or erroneous developments in theatre were to be countered, and theatre's historiographic capacities to be more fully comprehended and exploited. This chapter, then, will offer an examination of those capacities, beginning with verbatim but expanding to incorporate certain alternative examples of historical theatre that will then inform the succeeding two chapters. In developing a critical vocabulary suitable to the task, I engage predominantly with the theories of Jacques Derrida, whose investigations into textual iterability are ideally placed to address the ephemeral and reinterpretive mechanics of theatrical performance. In addition to Derrida, I will examine a range of textual and dramatic critics in order to establish the existing terrain of work on theatre-as-historiography, and develop critical responses to those areas of theoretical deficiency identified in the previous chapter.

In order to commence this study, I return to examine in more detail certain of the truth-claims proliferating in contemporary practices of verbatim theatre. A particular claim, one which is offered by many verbatim practitioners, is that the 'liveness' of theatre somehow intensifies the authenticity of their historiographic endeavours. Richard Norton-Taylor, for example, argues that:

> A group of actors on a stage can draw back the curtains of Whitehall, or those of any
>
> other powerful authority, and give a sense of context much more effectively than

can the written word alone. The experience of watching leads to an understanding that goes beyond the mere intake of information; it involves empathy for the victims. Second, that witnessing of the search for truth and the exposure of injustice as a group of spectators places a corporate responsibility on the audience to acknowledge that injustice – and, potentially, to act to prevent similar future injustices. Third, that there is a genuine hunger to engage with political material in a serious, unsensationalised manner – and the stage is the perfect place to do so. [1]

Thus the 'liveness' of theatre is seen to emphasise the actuality of an event in a way which provokes empathy, fosters communal responsibility in spectators and provides a real-time arena for the engagement and discussion of pertinent topics. There are various problems here: Norton-Taylor privileges the capability of theatre to 'expose' without considering its inevitable manipulation; he prescribes reactions in a way which assumes a unilateral response to a given stimulus; he fails to differentiate between past events and historical representation and assumes a democratic function to what is ultimately a didactic process. Moreover, each critical elision is traced back to theatre's status as an event, which supposedly confers an innate legitimacy upon its historiographic endeavours. It was this unquestioned conviction which led Philip Auslander to his 'hard-headed' critique of liveness – 'the common assumption is that the live event is "real" and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real.'[2] What I am interested in here, however, is not in disproving the ontological separations of 'live' and 'mediatized', but in pursuing the question of 'truth' in history – a fundamental concern of the textual historiography debates – into theatre, and asking, once the various factors contributing to a production of a historiographic text are considered, where and how the 'truthfulness' of that production may be determined. Norton-Taylor believes that the liveness of verbatim grants the genre a legitimacy that is capable of superseding its critical instabilities. In opposing this, I begin with the key issue emerging

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[1] Richard Norton-Taylor in Hammond and Steward, *Verbatim Verbatim*, pp. 123 – 124.
[2] Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, p. 3.

from the previous chapter: theatre possesses a unique but underexploited capacity to function as a form of historiography. This form is one which relocates pre-existent materials (dramatic texts) in the ephemeral context of a performed 'moment', mediating a fresh, historically located inscription upon both text and context, drawing upon and contributing to the genealogical trajectories underwriting each entity. In other words, because theatrical performance breaks down and reconstructs a dramatic text in the light of a particular context, it is therefore able to contribute to the histories of the text and the context in a way which simultaneously disrupts and reconfigures both. There is thus a duality to the historiographic endeavours of performance, and if a claim to 'truth' is to be located within these endeavours, then that 'truth' must engage with this duality.

It is in assembling a theoretical model capable of articulating and exploring this duality that I turn to Derrida, and his theories on textual extrapolation and re-deployment, and the opening and remaining open of the possibilities of textual interpretation.[3] Derrida's assertion of the fundamental importance of stabilizations (which may be seen at the core of history's attempts to engage with the past) whilst concurrently insisting that the chaos underpinning those stabilisations *must* be acknowledged in order to facilitate future-other stabilizations, renders his approach highly suited to the peculiarities of theatre-as-historiography which I am proposing. The 'chance to change' which an awareness of instability enables, and the urge to stabilise something 'unstable and chaotic' are remarkably compatible with the drives towards textual manifestation that underwrite the kinds of text-based theatre I have been examining. Derrida's particular interests in Alterity, the production and maintaining of *other* textual possibilities which in his hands are used to undercut conceptions of fixity within printed texts, are thus central to the analysis I undertake in the remaining chapters of this thesis, into the mechanisms whereby dramatic texts are extrapolated and re-established within the exterior discursive field of their performances. By drawing on Derrida's frameworks — supplemented by a range of other relevant critical voices, particularly Jacques Rancière's work on

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[3] See the comments on stabilization, quoted in full in Chapter Two, section 4.1 of this thesis: Derrida, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 86.

the 'emancipated spectator' – this chapter seeks to develop a practical way of considering the theatrical aspects of the historiographic issues uncovered during my previous studies of *The Riots* and verbatim drama. This chapter thus works to expand and strengthen the theoretical frameworks that I have begun to sketch out here – drawing on concrete examples across a range of performances to consolidate each theoretical point – and it concludes with a re-examination of *The Riots* in conjunction with Sean Holmes' 2011 revival of Edward Bond's *Saved*, which had a similar thematic focus to Slovo and Kent's production, but approached it in an entirely different manner.

## 2. Performance as Historiography

### 2.1 Freddie Rokem's 'Hyper-Historians'

In *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, Freddie Rokem has perhaps come closest to my object of study when he asserts 'the restorative potentials of the theatre in trying to counteract the destructive forces of history'. Rokem claims that:

> [o]ne of the main features that characterizes the notion of performing history is the
> time lag between the *now* of the performance and the *then* of the historical events
> themselves. Seen from this perspective, the notion of performing history can be
> clearly distinguished from documents exhibited in a museum, where something
> from the past, instead of being re-enacted on the stage, is preserved, displayed, and
> perhaps even reconstructed like an archaeological site.[4]

Rokem's readiness to overlook the manifold instabilities in the notion of 'reconstruction', however, exposes distinct problems in his approach – he elsewhere observes, for instance, that '[t]he theatre, by performing history, is thus redoing something which has already been done in the past, creating a

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[4] Rokem, *Performing History*, pp. 3, 6.

secondary elaboration of the historical event'.[5] Rokem's view is that history is ultimately a somehow *stable* entity – a position further evidenced by his willingness to conflate history with historiography. The unchallenged 'historical events' are supposedly inviolable despite their existence being available to the present only through representation; the unmediated idea of 'preservation' does not account for the reconfiguration of the 'document' by being placed in a museum and the 'secondary elaboration' which performance somehow 'redoes' is left vague and unquestioned. Yet, if the argument is pursued in more detail, his separation of 'performed' and 'exhibited' historiographies (to restore the term) is useful in the sense that it asks insistent questions about their respective forms and techniques. Through Rokem, in short, we can see the distinctions between written and performed historiography; even if he does not challenge the contours of their respective differences, he does at least recognize that those differences exist, clearing a space for the material of my own endeavours.

It should be acknowledged that Rokem does delve briefly into historiography – Leopold Von Ranke is read against the grain in order to account for historiography's essential subjectivity, and Hayden White and Michel de Certeau are claimed to hold 'basically the same position' in asserting the essential reliance of historiography upon exterior narrative structures.[6] Rokem's willingness to skip over some of the thornier problems that the concept of historiography raises is perhaps understandable given that his chief interest is not so much the medium itself as the way that certain historical events – the French Revolution and the *Shoah* – have been approached and appropriated by a broad range of theatrical productions. Yet his assertion that '[w]hat distinguishes the theatre performing history from other forms of performance is the way in which it enables the actor to be transformed into what I have called a hyper-historian, functioning as a witness of the events *vis-à-vis* the spectators' is enormously troubling. Rokem does not account for the manifold subjectivities at play in this 'transformation' but rather, as with the supporters of verbatim theatre in the previous

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[5] Ibid., p. 6.
[6] Ibid., pp. 8, 12 – 13.

chapter, appears to consider the past as a secure and accessible resource, with performers as its supposedly 'objective' arbiters.[7] He does admit to the impossibility of the performer embodying the event portrayed, but again the drive towards 'performing history' is contingent upon an apparently myopic 'truth-claim' that insists upon the fixity of the history being performed:

> Performing history means to re-enact certain conditions or characteristic traits inherent in such historical events, presenting them to the spectators through the performance, but it can never become these events or the historical figures themselves. In order to understand the notion of the actor as a hyper-historian when performing history, we have to examine how the aesthetic potentials of the actor's body as well as emotions and ideological commitments are utilised as aesthetic materials through different kinds of embodiment and inscription.[8]

Rokem circumnavigates the mediating praxis associated with the figure of the 'historian' by proposing his 'hyper-historians' as sites of production into which a historical representation is imported. The performers thus function as a means of historical dispensation, recalling Kent's belief that his theatre is simply a non-mediating 'means to an end', and the equivalent problems which those beliefs incurred. Marvin Carlson has elsewhere taken up this concern, noting that viewing the actor as a 'more or less transparent vehicle for the text... does not take into account what the actor creatively adds to the literary text... [nor] the major contribution of the actor to the process of theatrical recycling and its effect upon reception.'[9] Carlson goes on to document in exhaustive detail the ways in which these effects are manifested – from the lasting influence of iconic performances of particular roles, to certain actors' transporting of character 'types' from role to role throughout

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[7] Ibid., p. 25.
[8] Ibid., p. 13.
[9] Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, pp. 52 – 53.

their careers, to the writing of roles for specific actors, he repeatedly demonstrates the fundamental importance of the actor's contribution to the 'history' in production.[10]

If, therefore, we restore to the idea of a 'hyper-historian' the caveats proposed by Carr and Jenkins (that history is the product of historians), a more valuable perspective on actors – and theatrical productions – concerned with 'performing history' emerges. As active producers in the historiography undertaken by such productions, rather than passive sites of reproduction, actors are emblematic of the wider concerns of historiographic theatre: they help to *make* history, offering a unique reading of the historical materials underpinning the production, and working to relocate that reading into a dialogue with the context of production. As with Jenkins' historians, their role is irreducibly subjective and biased; but in conjunction with the ways in which this study has approached Jenkins' argument, identification of that bias does not seek to dismantle the actor's historiographic agency, rather to restore to it a more open account of its essential subjectivity. This practice – which I am tacitly terming 'honest dishonesty' – indexes a core concern of historiographic theatre, which undermines truth claims based on historical 'objectivity', instead asserting 'truth' in historical explorations in theatre as a function of the mediating praxes which bring that theatre into being.

This agency – and the notion of the 'hyper historian' – is not limited to the actors, however, but is a role undertaken by all participants involved in the production of theatre, from the textual authors to the spectators. Addressing these diverse bodies will require significant broadening of my critical apparatus; for this I propose a more thorough engagement with certain of Derrida's theoretical arguments. I start here with a discussion of context, since it is within context that the unique facility of the 'hyper historian' – to produce history in the present – is grounded, before using the results of this discussion to inform my subsequent investigations of dramatic texts, practitioners, and spectators in the production of historiographic theatre.

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[10] Ibid., pp. 52 – 95.

## 2.2 Derrida: Context and Presence

In *Signature Event Context*, Derrida critiques the notion that the 'meaning' ascribed to any given text is stabilised through its context by arguing that context is itself textualised: in seeking to form the bedrock from which a text can operate, context necessarily draws upon a range of other discursive fields in order to function. In defending this argument he develops an idea of 'iterability' – which he understands as the capacity for texts to be removed from one context and positioned in dialogue with another – by pointing out that '[e]very sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written... can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion.'[11] A quite straightforward example of this process was offered earlier in my 'citation' of Kent's conversation with Dominic Cavendish in Chapter One, in which the meaning and inference of Kent's words altered depending both upon the context of their reproduction, and the style in which that reproduction was enacted. This was in some respects the inverse of the process which I now intend to track – with Kent I was examining performance transferred to text, whereas here I intend to use Derrida's argument to examine the transference of text to performance.

Through the course of his analysis, Derrida aims to prove that the stability of any given text is founded upon a plateau that is itself only contingently stable. Commencing his investigation, he first acknowledges the pervasiveness of context in activating the potential meanings proposed by a text and then asks the question '[i]s there a rigorous and scientific concept of the *context*? Does not the notion of context harbour, behind a certain confusion, very determined philosophical pre-suppositions?'[12] His initial response seeks to demonstrate 'in what way [context's] determination is never certain or saturated', and it is from this response that I intend to assemble, as a point of

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[11] Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 322.
[12] Ibid., p.310.

departure, an enquiry into some of his theories on historical representation, drawing these theories into a broader discussion concerning historiographic theatre.[13]

His response, briefly stated, sees in the 'nonsaturation' of context the effects of

> a marking of the theoretical insufficiency of the *usual concept* of (the linguistic or non-linguistic) *context* such as it is accepted in numerous fields of investigation along with all the other concepts with which it is systematically associated.[14]

Derrida makes a point of abandoning at an early stage the vocal and gestural forms of communication with which performance is most immediately associated, focussing instead on the discursive field of 'writing' as one which 'loosen[s] the limits' of the 'empirical boundary of space and time' within which such communicative fields are contained – and indeed later on, whilst scrutinising the concept of 'performative statements', he is careful to dissociate his analysis from 'a play... [or] the recitation of a poem.'[15]

Derrida's essay is partly a response to J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, against whose emphasis on the performed utterance, sustained by what Austin calls 'total context', Derrida pits his argument.[16] Austin, Derrida points out, excludes the possibility for every performative utterance (and *a priori* all other forms of utterance) to be 'quoted', and Derrida then goes on to ask 'would a performative utterance be possible if a citational doubling [*doublure*] did not come to split and dissociate from itself the pure singularity of the event?'.[17] This informs an issue which is a perpetual concern for Derrida – *presence* – and one that I will explore in a variety of functions, over the course of this thesis. For him, the idea of presence is always attached to an exterior, and in this context

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[13] Ibid., p. 310.
[14] Ibid., p. 310.
[15] Ibid., pp. 311, 326.
[16] Austin argues that "[t]he total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating"; this then forms a key point of criticism for Derrida. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 22.
[17] Ibid., p. 17.

presence is introduced through the doubling which iterability presupposes to the utterance, an idea he that explores further in his essay 'The Double Session':

> That which is, the being-present (the matrix form of substance, of reality, of the oppositions between matter and form, essence and existence, objectivity and subjectivity etc, etc.) is distinguished from the appearance, the image, the phenomenon etc., that is, from anything that, presenting it *as* being-present, doubles it, re-presents it, and can therefore double and re-present it.[18]

Presence is thus inextricably bound together with the notion of *re*presenting, which is why it splits and dissociates itself from the singularity of the event and – contrary to what he sees as a privilege of the spoken word in Western philosophy since Plato – Derrida finds within the written word (the 'mark') the trace iterability which confirms and makes speech possible.[19] Elsewhere, in *Plato's Pharmacy*, he lays out his rationale for this in an analysis of a Socratic dialogue:

> ...only words that are deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up, words that force one to wait for them in the form and under cover of a solid object, letting themselves be desired for the space of a walk, only hidden letters can thus get Socrates moving. If a speech could be purely present, unveiled, naked, offered up in person in its truth, without the detours of a signature foreign to it, if at the limit an undeferred *logos* were possible, it would not seduce anyone. It would not draw Socrates, as if under the effects of a *pharmakon*, out of his way. Let us get ahead of ourselves. Already: writing, the *pharmakon*, the leading or the going astray.[20]

For Derrida the *pharmakon* is a paradox; a drug that can be either medicine or poison, which he applies to writing as a shorthand to illustrate the multiple potential meanings proposed by the

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[18] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, translated and with additional notes, by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) p. 191.
[19] Ibid., p. 79.
[20] Ibid., p. 71.

written word, consolidated into singularities through the instances of their production and reception. In other words, through the act of presence, of being *made present*. The way that I appropriate Derrida's complex combination of iterability and presence here, then, is to re-apply it to performed utterances that originate as re-productions of the written word. Initially this will restrict my analysis to theatrical approaches reliant upon dramatic texts, though as I have already stated I will subsequently argue that performance itself is a form of historiography (therefore writing). With this established, I will then develop my analysis to consider the iterable potential of performance texts – practically considered in a variety of ways in the case studies of the final two chapters.

To return to the earlier comment on context, then: Derrida argues that context provides the space in which a subject – a text, for example – is read (and therefore produced), dictating (and thereby restricting) the possibility of its potential function. However, in destabilising context by locating it in dialogue with 'all the other concepts with which it is systematically associated', he uncovers a space in which texts display their propensity to exist 'out' of context, capable of an illimitable amount of potential meanings. Here it is worth taking into account the caveat drawn up by Geoffrey Bennington, who re-asserts this textual opening-up as located by parameters established *within* that text, thus circumnavigating the ethical problems associated with mis-reading, or manipulating a text and its context to suit exterior, extra-textual purposes:[21]

> Texts appeal to reading, *cry out for reading*, and not just for any reading, but leave
> open an essential latitude or freedom which is just what constitutes reading *as*
> reading rather than passive decipherment. There would be no practice, and no
> institutions of reading, without this opening, and without the *remaining* open of this
> opening.[22]

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[21] See, as mentioned earlier, Geoffrey Elton's assertion of the role that that the 'misread' historical 'myth' of a unified Germany, created by German historians in the nineteenth century, played in the rise of Nazism: Elton, *Return to Essentials*, p. 3.
[22] Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, pp. 35–36.

Derrida's argument does not call for a spurious overhauling of textual or contextual analysis. The repositioning of context in dialogue with other factors at work in any given text is designed to activate and maintain that text's potential and varied permutations – 'The ethics of reading... consist in the negotiation of the margin opened by readability.'[23] What *is* being argued is that a destabilising of context is invaluable to a consideration of the ways that textual readings are produced and consumed – a process integral, for my purposes, to mapping the relationship between the dramatic and the performance text. Further, as my interest is in historiographic theatre, this model provides a practical method for approaching the renegotiation of dramatic and performance texts into further performances – during my discussion of Edward Bond in Chapter Five, for example, I consider the ways in which subsequent productions of *King Lear* responded in a dual fashion to their own contexts, and the historical contexts which the practitioners had observed (or rather defined) around the play's earlier production, thus conducting a dialogue with an idea of the play's seventeenth-century context that had in fact been built in, by and for the 1960s. In this way I am able to conduct a study with a similar intent to Rokem's, without having to rely upon problematic conceptions of stable histories.

Derrida's assertion of iterability provides a historiographic approach highly useful for my purposes, then, because it stresses the importance of destabilising and restabilising context in the production of meaning in and for a given text. In theatrical performance, of course, that meaning is consolidated through the interaction of a variety of bodies – these bodies form the object of study for section three of this chapter.

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[23] Ibid. p. 36.

## 3. Building a Historiographic Performance Text

### 3.1 Historiographic Dramatic Texts

Despite the advantages which they offer to a study of historiography and theatrical performance, Derrida only rarely applies his theories in this direction himself. However, in a piece entitled 'Aphorism Countertime', commissioned for the programme notes to Daniel Mesguich's 1986 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, Derrida makes the following observation.

> [t]exts fully conditioned by their history, loaded with history, and on historical themes, offer themselves so well for reading in historical contexts very distant from their time and place of origin …This has to do with the structure of a text, with what I will call, to cut corners, its iterability, which both puts down roots into the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context out onto a recontextualisation. All this is historical through and through. The iterability of the trace (unicity, identification, and alteration in repetition) is the condition of historicity…[24]

There is an important point to be made here on the different types of dramatic text which may be considered 'historiographic'. So far, I have been concerned with texts that directly engage in a representation of history, as this is the most obvious and easily accessible form of historiographic text. However, as Derrida has pointed out above, a text which does not *begin* as such explicit historiography, not proposing itself as direct historical representation, may become historiographic by being 'loaded with history'. The phrase has a double inference; there is the sense which he offers of its being constructed 'on historical themes', which can mean exploring an idea of the past, and drawing on sources from the past, both of which Shakespeare was doing in his play. The second inference is of a text becoming loaded with history by moving through it, being conditioned by

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[24] Derrida, 'Aphorism Countertime' in, Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 63.

history over time – my exploration of Bond's *Saved* at the end of this chapter identifies the play as such a text. Iterability is proposed as the 'condition of historicity', since it is only by being reiterated that the text is in fact able to move through time.

Conceiving of the movement of the text through time as contingent upon iterability ensures that the text is reconsidered at each point of its production and reception: it is a process of destabilisation and restabilisation, and one which takes into account not simply the material of the text, but all other factors, including context, by which the text is read. Speaking to the same subject and addressing the implications of an iterability-focussed historical approach in theatre, Jonathan Miller has claimed that:

> Common sense, tact and literary sensitivity *should* prevent the director or actor from introducing interpretations or versions of the play that are profoundly inconsistent with the range of meanings understood as constitutive of the play's genre. So that although I sponsor the idea that the afterlife of a play is a process of emergent evolution, during which meaning and emphases develop that might not have been apparent at the time of writing, even to the author, this does not imply that the text is a Rorschach inkblot into whose indeterminate outlines the director can project whatever he wants.[25]

Despite their ideological differences (there is also a curious resonance with Michael Gove's testimony in *The Riots*, which I discussed earlier) Miller and Derrida make roughly equivalent points.[26] Within its readable parameters, the dramatic text grows and 'evolves' at each production. What Miller does not quite make sufficient allowance for, to continue his own metaphor, is the possibility for mutation in the cycle of evolution. This is kind of mutation occurred, for example, when Peter Brook, Herbert Blau and Jan Kott radically revised *King Lear* by allying it to the Theatre of

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[25] Miller, *Subsequent Performances*, p. 35.
[26] Slovo, *The Riots*, p. 45.

the Absurd and the wider social context of the 1950s, dramatically affecting the way that it has been read by practitioners, audiences and critics ever since, an event which I focus on in the next chapter. Dramatic texts may become historiographic through their encounters with history, and it is through their iterable capacities that this is achieved. It is an over-simplified point, but I raise it in order to reassert the congruence of Derrida's theories with theatrical performance, which relies upon constant destabilisation and restabilisation in order to function, and to reassert the necessity for an approach which mirrors these considerations in the historiographic process.

The iterable division between the dramatic text and the performance text is thus a key factor in understanding the idea of performance as historiography. A dramatic text requires at the extra-textual level a process of interpretation by performers and practitioners in order to be rendered into its intended discursive field. This has been well documented elsewhere; it constitutes, for example, a core preoccupation of Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait's *Theatricality* (2003), where they state that 'A play is not just a literary text [*sic*] but a blueprint for theatre, written to be performed. It achieves its substantial meanings and import in performance, and is so judged by its theatricality...'[27] The same idea has also – as we have seen – been advanced by Susan-Lori Parks, quoted earlier in the thesis as saying that '[a] play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history' – the historical dramatic text is the 'blueprint' for a future historical event, one which brings the material of the text together with the material of its context.[28]

This, I would argue, is one of the most contentious issues with *The Riots*, and one which has wider concerns for verbatim as a genre, because when these 'blueprints' are articulated as direct transcriptions of 'real events' and 'real people', a highly specialised set of problems emerges. Whether the performance is imitational, intended to mimic the original as closely as possible, or whether it is representational, solely intended to offer a vehicle for the words of the testimony,

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[27] Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait, *Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 21. Note: as this study focuses on historiographic theatre in the discourse of performance, the analysis is concerned with dramatic texts designed to be performed.
[28] Parks, *The America Play and Other Works*, p. 4.

these processes of interpretation colour and shape the performance and reception of the person and testimony being staged. Luckhurst has recently produced a series of interviews with actors who have played real people, and their disparate concerns and approaches she suggests are generally tied to a desire towards 'a finely balanced combination of careful research and conjuration.'[29] That conjuration is unavoidable even in performances which practice minimal deviation from sourced material – the verbatim productions of Alecky Blythe's 'Recorded Delivery', for instance, where actors repeat testimonies as they listen to them through headphones – owing to the performance's reiteration of the dramatic text into an exterior and always *different* context.[30]

By way of illustration, Chipo Chung, speaking about her experiences of performing in Max-Stafford Clark's production of Robin Soans' *Talking to Terrorists* made the following, revealing observation:

> Verbatim presents real ethical conundrums: some people who came to share their stories were media savvy and knew how to manage their public persona, but people like Nadira [*Chung's character, a belly dancer from Uzbekistan*] are unused to public forums and the way their stories might be handled. I think one has to be careful. I'm sure that this was one reason why the woman from Save the Children was so defensive. She was guarding herself because she had no idea how she would be represented, and what our agenda was.[31]

Chung raises important concerns about the problems of individual testimony, of course, as well as quietly recognizing the politicised agendas underpinning verbatim practices, but the specific interest in her words for the purpose of this thesis is the dual notion of 'representation' she invokes. She does not make clear whether she intends to refer to text or performance, though it is possible that she perceives the two as synonymous, given the nature of research favoured by Stafford-Clark's Out Of Joint company, where actors generate material through interview and then perform from

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[29] Mary Luckhurst, *Playing for Real: Actors on playing real people*, edited by Tom Cantrell and Mary Luckhurst (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 21.
[30] See for example, Alecky Blythe, *Cruising* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2006).
[31] Luckhurst, 'Playing for Real', p. 57.

memory, which has garnered severe criticism from Luckhurst.[32] There is a more subtle problem with

Chung's observation, however, that is of particular significance here. She points out the difficulty of

establishing the veracity of testimonies, acknowledging the performed aspect of their delivery and

that this performance is unstable, contingent upon a variety of subjective factors. These, she states,

range from 'media savvy' performances which speak of an agenda, to distrustful ones which stem

from the inexperience or vulnerability of the interviewee. In response, she then appears to propose

her performance as a reassurance to the process of collecting these testimonies, an attempt to

stabilise their 'unmediated' or 'truthful' dimensions. Thus the performance is referred to as a 'public

forum', indicating only that the testimony will be relayed to the public and making no mention,

despite the resonances with the terms used by Augusto Boal, of the mediation which performance

generates.[33] Chung's performance of Nadira's testimony will add further layers of inscription and

interpretation to that testimony, as will (for example) the performance's bracketing within the

construct of a play entitled *Talking to Terrorists*; this inevitable inscription and interpretation is an

important aspect of historiographic theatre, but in Chung's account of her practice it remains

unacknowledged.

Before I move to the next section of this chapter, I want to reconnect briefly the above assertions to

Derrida's notion of 'presence', as it seems this is best placed to offer a theoretical rationale to the

processes of iteration and interpretation which I have been describing. In another consideration of

the theatrical 'moment', Derrida uses the double notion of presence to counteract Antonin Artaud's

call for a theatre which could 'only take place *one time*', by claiming that:[34]

> Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to
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> represent itself, has always already been penetrated. Affirmation itself must be

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[32] See also Max-Stafford Clark in Hammond and Steward, *Verbatim Verbatim*, pp. 50 – 53.

[33] Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors, Second Edition*, translated by Adrian Jackson (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 25.

[34] Jacques Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Oxford: Routledge, 2001) p. 312.

penetrated in repeating itself… It begins by penetrating its own commentary and is accompanied by its own representation. In which it erases itself and confirms the transgressed law. To do so, it suffices that there be a sign, that is to say, a repetition.[35]

Here is a direct addressing of the instabilities underlying performance which Chung partly conceives, but seems unable to accept completely. Both production and reception of testimony, in relation to verbatim, offer a stabilization of histories that are themselves unstable. Derrida points out that repetition is always *different* to the thing which it repeats (a premise underlying his concept of *différance*) and as a consequence must be encountered afresh, considered outside of the totalising influence of its predecessor.

## 3.2 Emancipating Spectators

My analysis has so far considered the relationship between the dramatic and performance text in some depth, but in doing so has focussed exclusively on the figures of the writers and practitioners. In this section, I now turn to examine the figure of the theatrical spectator, and his or her role in consolidating the performance text, as a way of exploring the manner in which s/he contributes to the production of historiographic theatre.

In his 2009 study *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière opens with the well-established principle that 'there is no theatre without a spectator'. He then observes that in addition to the spectator providing the conditions necessary for a performance text, it is their interpretation which informs, interrogates and in the last instance inscribes the performance with its saturable and absolute reading.[36] Central to what Rancière then calls the 'emancipation' of the spectator is the

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[35] Ibid., p. 312.

[36] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2009) p. 2.

identification and respect of this interpretive function, counter to what he sees as the didacticism of much theatrical praxis that has sought to awaken its audiences from what it perceives as their common inaction. Rancière argues the act of spectating as dynamic and constructive:

> Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed. There is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point. Everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse, firstly, radical distance, secondly the distribution of roles, and thirdly the boundaries between territories.[37]

For the sake of clarity, where 'reading' is subsequently referred to it will indicate all those factors identified in the above quote as being natural to the condition of the spectator. However, where the practice of 'writing' is cited, it will unavoidably describe these same actions, interpreted by and located within the writers – the theatrical practitioners involved in creating the performance. These readers and writers operate in positions which pertain to the same objectives and bear, in the occasion of their analytic functions, trace elements of the same methodologies. Both are involved in interpreting the material provided for them by a pre-existent text; both co-operate with one another in the consolidation of the 'meaning' ascribed to that text as it exists within its performed iteration and both, in the last instance, comprise bodies without which the performance text could not be ratified.

The delineation of these roles is therefore problematic; I have already located the operation of theatrical practitioners in an extra-textual layer of interpretation predicated upon the necessity for both reading and writing, and the function of the spectator is also now being argued as inscriptive as well as receptive. The distinctions will be still be observed for the sake of clarity, however, though

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[37] Ibid. p. 17.

their interdependence will be examined and tested throughout the analysis. The ways in which I approach Rancière's argument thus focus on the politics of observation that he champions as the spectator's 'action' as it exists within the theatrical structures through which a performance text is rendered. In other words, I will explore the ways in which spectating works to codify and crystallise the re-inscription, and therefore ultimately the 'meaning', of a performance text.

The 'starting points' that Rancière refers to can be found in the potential interpretations opened by what I earlier identified as the readability of a text. Here, particularly as he resists the privileging of singular textual readings, his opinions would appear to align with Derrida's.[38] The conditions of Rancière's assertion, however, reveal more about his particular concerns – the 'radical distance' that he insists must be resisted is key to comprehending what he names the 'stultifying pedagogical logic' of conventional perspectives on the condition of the spectator in contemporary theatrical praxis.[39] He also mentions the 'distribution of roles' and 'boundaries between territories', referring to the separations built by practitioners, as seen in the case of Artaud and Brecht in the quote below, between themselves and their audiences. He argues, ultimately, that these separations have been reinforced by those professing to work towards their dismantling. According to Rancière, attempting to bridge the gap between the spectacle and the spectator is to ascribe agency to a concept that would otherwise exercise comparatively little influence. This is what he understands as 'radical distance'; the identification of distance creates and maintains that distance, and hence must be resisted. In order to support this assertion, taking the examples of Brecht's Epic Theatre and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty as two highly influential schools of twentieth century western theatre, he says that:

> [t]heatre accuses itself of rendering spectators passive and thereby betraying its
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> essence as community action. It consequently assigns itself the mission of reversing

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[38] For an analysis of Derrida's position on this issue, and of its ethical implications, see Bennington, 'Deconstruction and Ethics' in *Interrupting Derrida*, pp. 34 – 46.
[39] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 10.

its effects and expiating its sins by restoring to spectators ownership of their

consciousness and their activity. The theatrical stage and performance thus become

a vanishing mediation between the evil of spectacle and the virtue of true theatre.

They intend to teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators and becoming

agents of a collective practice. According to the Brechtian paradigm, theatrical

mediation makes them conscious of the social situation that gives rise to it and

desirous of acting in order to transform it. According to Artaud's logic, it makes them

abandon their position as spectators: rather than being placed in front of a

spectacle, they are surrounded by the performance, drawn into the circle of action

that restores their collective energy. In both cases, theatre is presented as a

mediation striving for its own abolition.[40]

Rancière sees a desire by the writers of a performance text to exert authorial control over the

meaning of their text by defining the position of the spectator and then attempting to recalibrate it.

The desire to inhibit the activity of the spectator – which Rancière conceives as a 'normal' situation

for all humans – is conceived as oppressive: thus the drives to spectator emancipation in Artaud and

Brecht are counterproductive.

Rancière is in some respects continuing Barthes' 'Death of the Author' argumentsinto the field of

drama.[41] The destruction of 'every point of origin' that Barthes saw within the reading of a given text

opens out all points of origin, and thus emancipates the reader from a unilaterally fixed position of

attempting to discover *the* textual meaning to a bilateral, indeterminate position where they locate

or construct meanings from the illimitable potential readings located within a text. Barthes' position

on the reader is predicated upon an impossibility; '[t]he reader is the space on which all of the

quotations that make up a text are inscribed without any of them being lost', but it is still upon the

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[40] Ibid. pp. 7–8.
[41] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.

individual, tenable reader that a single, iterated and saturable reading is inscribed. [42] The impact of this claim on the idea of textual 'truths' is profound, as any 'truth' consolidated within a text is then ultimately ratified by the reader, and beyond the final control of the writers; Rancière's transferral has much the same effect upon performance texts. Rancière's work therefore offers an important contribution to the idea of historiographic theatre, since the location of meaning-production in the context of performance through the spectator neatly articulates the dialogue with the present in which theatrical explorations or representations of history are engaged.

In their introduction to *Theatricality*, Davis and Postlewait's discussion of the spectator echoes the concerns and issues raised here, suggesting that the relationship between the spectator and the spectacle is ultimately imitative – which of course returns us to the truth-claim made within verbatim that the representation of history in performance is 'truthful' because it imitates a 'true' event. However, Davis and Postlewait push this idea further, suggesting that the 'truthfulness' of the 'reality' being proposed by the performance is not conditioned by its reference to an actual, exterior event, but rather through what they call the 'breakthrough into performance' itself. 'Truthfulness' for them resides as much in the performance of a fiction as it can in a supposed 'fact', as it is less concerned with a reality external to the performance than it is with building a reality in which the spectators and practitioners are complicit. Thus:

> When the spectator's role is not to recognize reality but to create an alternative through complicity in the "heightening" of the breakthrough into performance, then both performer and spectator are complicit in the mimesis. This complicity can be exhilarating, but it can also be deeply disconcerting. It means that mimesis may not mislead, because when caught up by it the actors and spectators agree to forgo

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[42] Ibid. p. 148.

truth. This "mimetic conundrum" implies that performers and spectators are still

true to themselves, though paradoxically the representation may lack truth.[43]

Davis and Postlewait are primarily concerned with tracing a genealogy of attitudes towards 'theatricality', and use their 'mimetic conundrum' to contrast the contradictory attitudes of religious incredulity throughout history towards the 'falsehoods' of performance, against performance's frequent historical role as a medium for religious expression.[44] Their observation has a lot to offer this analysis as well, however, as it firms up the delineation of an extra-textual dimension to theatrical performance which importantly rejects absolutely the idea of an objective truth. Where does this leave verbatim, then, if the final aspect of theatrical production is one in which 'truth', or at least truth advanced by the supposed veracity of the dramatic text and the activities of the practitioners, is incapable of operating?

The material of the above citation – 'mimesis' – is a far broader and more problematic term than the comparatively narrow focus of my analysis requires, but the mapping of the relationship between spectator and practitioner which it enables Davis and Postlewait to undertake is crucially important here. It offers an expansion of what I earlier termed 'honest dishonesty', in the sense that it rejects the idea of 'truth' as residing in the material of the performance – where it is 'foregone' – but rather sees truth in the participants being 'true to themselves'. Whilst this last idea is rather unsatisfactory in its vagueness, it does foreground the essential artificiality of performance and endeavours to locate 'truthfulness' away from the dubious terrain of unmediated 'factuality' – something which this study has repeatedly called into question.

Davis and Postlewait's central thesis, then – that the performance cannot 'mislead' since it is itself a misleading event – puts the idea of historiographic theatre in a rather illuminating perspective. By admitting to the falsity of performance, spectators and practitioners are able to commit fully to the

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[43] Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality*, p. 6.
[44] Ibid., pp. 6 – 8.

dramatic potential of the text under construction, since they are no longer bound to emulate an objective or 'truthful' external reality which anyway, as Davis and Postlewait point out, is unattainable in and through performance. Recognition of this might have engendered, in the case of *The Riots* for example, Slovo abandoning all pretences to dispassionate objectivity, admitting to the inevitable mediating praxes enacted at both the dramatic and performance level, and then being able to employ much more nuanced analytic and creative strategies in the construction of her text. The sacrifice, of course, would have been of the claims to objective veracity, but as this study has repeatedly sought to demonstrate, such claims are founded upon subjectivities that in any case render them invalid on their own terms.

I wish to address a final assertion of Rancière's here, where he warns of the resistance of the performance text (and its contingent meaning) to easy definition, or in his words 'ownership':

> [Performance] is not the transmission of the artist's knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect.[45]

Viewed in this light, greater force is given to Rancière's attempt to dispel the 'logic of the stultifying pedagogue' – identified a as contributor to, rather than the receiver of, the reinscribed meaning of any given performance text, the emancipation of the act of spectating is fundamental to enabling that text to realise the potential which *that particular* reading of it can create. Davis and Postlewait provide further support for this 'emancipated' function of the active spectator when they suggest, midway through a discussion of theatrical semiotics, that

> [t]he various meanings of semiotics are located not only in the various signs and codes of the dramatic text, the performance text, and the 'natural world' these texts

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[45] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 15.

represent but also in the idiosyncratic interpretive skills and experiences of each and every observer of a performance.[46]

In addition to the laudatory but rather vague championing of the skills of the observers, there is a further body here to which my analysis now turns – what Davis and Postlewait define as the '"natural world" these texts represent.' It is a curious phrase, calling to mind what Susan Bennett characterises in *Theatre Audiences* as the 'outer frame' of performance, but with a certain indeterminacy that leaves it slightly unclear as to whether they are referring to the world of the stage, or the world of the audience with which the stage is in dialogue.[47] For my purposes, I propose to adopt the latter definition, as an expansion both of the consolidation of meaning within the performance text, but also as one of the most critical facets of historiographic theatre – bringing history, whether that is by virtue of a dramatic text which explores history, or one that has in some other way become 'loaded with history', into a *live* dialogue with the present.

## 3.3 Two Producing Subjects

In one of Derrida's own explorations of the relationship between art and nature in 'Economimesis', he claims that there is a paradox in the act of mimetic production. Whilst, he asserts, products of 'Fine-Art' are wrought by acts of 'freedom', discursively secured by their 'purpose-lessness' and practical disassociation from the laws of nature, the products are inversely revealed as formally congruent with these selfsame laws in the methods by which they are produced.[48]

He arrives at this conclusion through an analysis of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, taking as an opening gambit the Kantian assertion that 'art is not nature' and re-establishing the equation which

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[46] Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality*, p. 24.

[47] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: a theory of production and reception* (London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 125 – 139.

[48] Jacques Derrida, 'Economimesis' in *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) pp. 263 – 268.

pits natural mechanical 'necessity' against artistic 'freedom'.[49] However, exploring Kant's proposal

that mimesis serves as an intercessor between the two, he uncovers a double purpose to mimetic

operation that extends beyond imaginative reproduction and into the mechanics by which the 'free

and pure productivity of the imagination... deploys the brute power of its invention only by *listening*

to nature, its dictation, its edict.'[50] The mimetic interpretation of natural products in art is not

restricted to the end result, in other words, but operates as well in the methods by which these

products are constructed. Art is not nature, but art imitates nature in the way that it produces itself;

or, rather, in the way that it is produced:

> The productions of the Fine-Arts are not productions of nature that, as Kant
>
> repeatedly recalls, goes without saying. *Facere* and not *agere*. But a certain *quasi*, a
>
> certain *als ob* re-establishes analogical *mimesis* at the point where it appears
>
> detached. The works of the Fine-Arts must have the appearance of nature and
>
> precisely in so far as they are productions (fashionings) of freedom. They must
>
> reassemble *effects* of natural *action* at the very moment when they, most purely,
>
> are works [*opera*] of artistic confection.[51]

In destabilising the concept of mimesis-as-product and re-establishing the significance of the process

by which it functions, Derrida seeks to restore to mimesis a sense of temporality.[52] Not simply the

end result, in other words, but the means by which that result is (and continues to be) achieved. In

his analysis, there is no clear division between mimetic production and mimetic product; mimesis is

'not the relation of two products but of two productions'.[53] Translating these ideas into theatrical

performance, Derrida is following Aristotle, who in his *Poetics* states, whilst discussing the 'natural'

propensity for mimetic imitation in humans, that 'this is the reason – some say – for the term

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[49] Ibid. p. 266.
[50] Ibid. p. 268.
[51] Ibid. p. 271.
[52] For a discussion of some functions of the temporal form as it operates in the creation of subjects, see Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008) pp. 44 – 51.
[53] Derrida, *The Derrida Reader*, p. 272.

'drama': i.e. that poets imitate people *doing* things.'[54] In the instance of a performance text, which

may only exist in the present, mimesis inexorably refers to the relation of processes, in order to

access the texts which it seeks to address.

Derrida never makes direct reference to theatre in his essay, but arrives at the same conclusion

when he notes that '"[t]rue" mimesis is between two producing subjects and not between two

produced things.'[55] Theatrical performance, with its perpetual recalibration of source material and

complex dialogues between practitioners and spectators is in its relationship with the 'natural

worlds' of its present context, an agent of what Derrida sees as 'true mimesis'. To expand: I have

argued that performances are rendered as texts (products) in the instance of the performance's

creation and reception, yet considering these texts solely as products would be unfeasible. This is

because they negate the fixed status of product by being present only in a moment which is beyond

the reiterable capacity of their component parts. In this way, the performance text alternates

between the status of process and product: as a process it seeks to define a product, yet the product

itself is defined by an incessantly mobilized system of processes. Carlson has in fact noted something

similar, in his essay 'Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance', where he says that

> [t]he theatrical production itself is a kind of reading, very much in the sense
>
> described by Iser: "an act of defining the oscillating structure of the text through
>
> meanings, which as a rule are created in the process of reading itself."[56]

Carlson is adopting the reader-response work of Wolfgang Iser in order to address the readings

undertaken by *both* practitioners and spectators, and suggesting that in the same way that

practitioners bring to a dramatic text personal and professional perspectives born, developed and

shaped within their own societies – which may be entirely different from those of the writer/s of the

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[54] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and with an introduction by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Books , 1996) p. 3. (Emphasis added).
[55] Derrida, *The Derrida Reader*, p. 272.
[56] Marvin Carlson, 'Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance' in Postlewait and McConachie, *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, p. 84.

dramatic text – the spectators will also bring to their readings of the performance text their own particular, contextually located perspectives. Mimetic production is thus at work in all three levels contributing to the consolidation of the performance text and, more importantly, the mimetic processes can be seen to overwrite and overlap as each of these levels interact with one another. Whilst the writer of a dramatic text may, for example, author a script that seeks to reflect a certain aspect of his/her own temporal/spatial/societal condition, the subsequent forms of rereading and rewriting this text will undergo before coalescing into a performance recontextualises not simply the inscription of the text itself, but the reflective inscription of the 'natural world' to which that text refers. In the instance of its performance, the methodological praxes outlined in the first part of this study apply themselves not only to the physically inscribed signs informing the dramatic text, but also the world to which those signs refer. This is again why, in a discussion of mimesis in relation to performance, the relationship between process and product must be addressed – both the textual and contextual aspects of the performance text are destabilised and *re*-inscribed in the ephemerality of their performed 'moment'. This returns us to the idea that sets theatre apart as a unique site of historiographic production, and in fact why so much of the historiographic theory thus far examined is incapable of satisfactorily accounting for theatrical performance; historical explorations in theatre are perpetually reshaped by the natural worlds into which they are brought into being.

The bodies outlined here – the iterable dramatic text, contextually manifested performance text, emancipated spectatorship and the mimetic interactions occurring between all three – thus form a composite model for the subsequent investigations into historiographic theatre to be undertaken in this thesis. These investigations take the form of two case studies in Chapters Four and Five, examining Edward Bond's appropriation of Shakespeare for his play *Lear* (1971), and the 2012 National Theatre production of Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution* (1984). In the first case, the focus is on a dramatic text that has been built upon a narrative conception of history in order to engage with the present of its production; in the second the focus is on the performance of a dramatic text that interprets history as a space of radical resistance to discourses governing a given

present. These studies expand the remit of what I have been calling 'historiographic theatre' as a method of both interpreting and constructing theatrical engagements with history. Prior to these undertakings, however, a further opening out of this nascent theoretical model is necessary in order to establish the political capabilities of historiographic theatre; its capacity to engage with and contribute to the discourses of the context of a given performance. In order to achieve this, I return to the riots of 2011, examining an alternative theatrical response which, unlike Slovo's *The Riots*, approached the events in a manner that undertook a conscious engagement with history.

## 4. The Politics of Historiographic Theatre

### 4.1 *Saved* and the August riots

In October 2011, Edward Bond's *Saved* was revived at the Lyric Hammersmith in London, under the direction of Sean Holmes.[57] This was a rare revival of a forty-six-year-old text, a play concerned with societal breakdown which has gained a notorious reputation, not least because of the uproar that its original production generated amongst theatre critics, and its subsequent banning by the Lord Chamberlain's office in 1966.

When asked why he had temporarily lifted the embargo on London productions of *Saved* (an embargo which by that point had lasted for 27 years), Bond replied that when he wrote the play in 1965, he was pointing to the future, but that 'the future is now here'.[58] As I will go on to show, the 'future' to which Bond makes reference is directly concerned with the British societal inequalities illustrated by the August riots. Adding his voice to the debates surrounding these events, Bond's attention is fixed on history, which, as I have shown, is a subject largely absent from Slovo and Kent's

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[57] *Saved*, directed by Sean Holmes, Lyric Hammersmith, 06/10/11 – 07/11/11.
[58] Costa, Maddy, 'We Didn't Set Out To Shock', *Guardian*, 9th October 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/oct/09/edward-bond-saved-original-cast.> [Accessed 03/02/13].

consideration of the riots.[59] In order to understand the assertion that 'the future is now here', for

Bond, we must be able to see where that future has come from, because without this understanding

we are incapable of comprehending the future that we have inherited, or the one that we are

creating. Further to this, Holmes' revival of *Saved*, a prediction of the future that was made in the

past and delivered in the present, identified and exploited theatre's unique capacity to contribute to

this understanding. Michael Billington acknowledges as much, by saying that 'what [Bond] pinned

down so vividly in 1965 is something that seems even more true today: that if you create an unjust

society, in which those at the bottom of the heap are condemned to a life of meaningless

materialism, then you are simply laying up trouble for the future.'[60]

*Saved* sets out to explore what David Ian Rabey calls the 'deadening of humanity amongst its

futureless city dwellers.'[61] It takes place on a South London council estate, and what starts off as a

presentation of youthful boredom and nihilism develops into a much broader social critique. It

begins with a stilted sexual encounter between Len and Pam, a young working class couple, in her

parent's house, and quickly charts the rise and fall of their relationship. By scene four, Len has

moved in to the house, but Pam has started a relationship with another man – Fred – and has a

baby, though the father's identity is never really established. Fred has a group of friends, who are

introduced in scene three congregated in a public park, attempting to outdo each other with tales of

casual, racist violence. In scene six, Pam wheels the baby out to Fred in the park; after an argument

she leaves it with him, and in a lengthy scene, Fred's friends and eventually Fred himself abuse the

baby with increasingly brutal acts of violence, that culminate with them stoning the baby to death.

Immediately prior to the first stone being thrown, two of the characters have the following

exchange:

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[59] See the conclusion of this thesis for a fuller discussion of critical responses to the riots.
[60] Billington, Michael, 'Saved – Review', *Guardian*, 14th October 2011,
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/oct/14/saved-review> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[61] David Ian Rabey, *British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century*, (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1986) p. 107.

> PETE. (*quietly*) Yer can do what yer like.
>
> BARRY. Might as well enjoy ourselves.
>
> PETE. (*quietly*) Yer don't get a chance like this everyday.
>
> FRED *throws the stone.*[62]

The numbed, monotonous register speaks to a wider dissociation (Rabey's 'deadening') that underpins the text, and informs Bond's position – which he maintains to the time of writing – that the youths murder the baby 'in order to gain their self respect.'[63] This is Bond pushing the 'extreme contradictions' of his own context, arguing towards a societal construction of barbarity (the baby is stripped of humanity and becomes merely an object for violent satisfaction) that is born from boredom, and the systematic erosion of hope and prospect from those in the economically lower strata of society. There is a wider political philosophy at play here as well, concerned with '[t]he prevalent limitations of choice, particularly regarding self-definition and gratification through consumerism and sentimentality' that feeds in to a Marxist historical narrative on the implicit dangers and destructive potential of capitalism, upon which Bond has based the bulk of his dramatic and non-dramatic works.[64] This narrative is crucial to Bond's texts, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, because it enables him to position them within a wider cultural framework that lends credence and urgency to his philosophical observations. And yet *Saved*, on the immediate level of textual narrative, is almost wholly bereft of specific historical situation. Although the script offers meticulous physical details of the characters, the place is identified only as a nonspecific 'South London'. However, this actually allows the text to insinuate itself into contexts beyond the confines of its originary production, which is vital for Bond in his intention to make a quite expansive claim about the conditions of life facing sections of society as a consequence of 'the barbarism of modern

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[62] Edward Bond, *Saved* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011), p. 63.
[63] Dominic Cavendish, 'My Play Predicted The Riots', *The Telegraph*,30th September 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/8799172/My-play-predicted-the-riots.html.> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[64] David Ian Rabey, *English Drama Since 1940* (London: Pearson, 2003), p. 80.

civilisation'.[65] By denying a concrete specificity to the play's location, keeping it instead within a vague but identifiably British urban landscape, Bond seeks to suggest a more widespread resonance to the events his play depicts. In Bond's statement 'the future is now here', then, there is a classification of societal inequalities, a method by which those inequalities may be articulated and thus confronted, and a manifesto for the necessity for theatre to contribute to this confrontation.

Bond's philosophy thus calls for a practical engagement with history through theatre, and the remainder of this chapter will offer a critical examination of this philosophy against the contrasting verbatim approaches with which I have thus far been engaged. As I have argued, Kent and Slovo's *The Riots* actually *opposed* the notion of history as a lens through which to interrogate the riots, by employing a perspective which, through its fundamental claims to 'transparency', was isolated from historical discourses that could otherwise have lent contextual perspective. This isolation – and the *ahistoricism* in which it ultimately results – is symptomatic of a wider problem in verbatim theatre. To begin my modelling of a potentially different approach that can combat this issue, I propose *Saved* as a theatre project that responded to the same stimulus as *The Riots*, but employed a markedly different historiographic approach. I am thus setting out to consolidate Bond's position, and Holmes' revival, within a broader critical framework and deploy both against the trend of ahistoricism that has been allowed to develop, seemingly unheeded, in popular practices of verbatim theatre.

## 4.2. The Riots in Context

In order to commence this investigation, I wish to briefly return to the riots themselves, in order to suggest something of the context in which *Saved* and *The Riots* were produced. Of the emergent scholarship concerning these riots, one which attempts to position the events in the UK within the broader framework of the unrest that erupted around Europe and North Africa in 2011 is Alain

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[65] Edward Bond, *Plays: One* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1977), p. 16.

Badiou's *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*. In this short polemic, Badiou takes in a panoramic scope that puts the English riots in dialogue with the austerity demonstrations in France, as well as the deposals of Hosni Mubarak, Zine Ben Ali, Muammar Gaddafi and the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Collating these events within a congruent discursive trajectory, Badiou mounts a defence against state-sanctioned perspectives that repudiate what he sees as the riots' cumulative significance. To this end he says quite simply that '[t]oday, there are riots throughout the world [...] What they all have in common is that they stir up masses of people on the theme that things as they are must be regarded as unacceptable.'[66]

Developing the point, he identifies three 'types' of riots – immediate, historical and latent – and places the English riots in the first category. This 'immediate' form of riot is proposed as 'violent, anarchic and ultimately without enduring truth'. The 'historical' riot is defined as an uprising, one which coalesces around an 'Idea' and initiates broad and lasting political change; into this category he (rather optimistically) places the riots of Tunisia and Egypt. The middle category, the 'latent' riot covers public action against the dominant order which also has the potential to develop into a historical riot. Setting aside for a moment the utopian projections of his argument, Badiou's principal concern is thus the consolidation of collective resistance against the inequities of a dominant order, 'so that the individuals they engage can give rise [...] to a new figure of organization and hence of politics'.[67]

By grouping the riots of 2011 in this way, he avoids yoking them to a centrally determined ideology and maintains the revolutionary potential of each on its own terms. But, whilst defending the individual character of each outburst – condemning for instance the neutralising function of the 'Arab Spring' epithet – the cause of discontent *is* universally identified. In effect, Badiou argues that the riots are symptomatic of terminal malfunctions in the political, economic and social systems co-ordinated by those countries that 'proudly call themselves' The West, and to which significant

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[66] Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2012) p. 21.
[67] Ibid., p. 42.

portions of the world are subject.[68] He declares, through an enraged reappraisal of Francis Fukuyama's neoliberal polemic *The End of History* (1991), that the cumulative effects of the 2011 riots signal a 'rebirth of History', outlining his argument thus:

> It is certainly not capitalism and its political servants that are bringing about the rebirth of History, if by 'rebirth' is understood the emergence of a capacity, at once destructive and creative, whose aim is to make a genuine exit from the established order. In this sense, Fukuyama was not wrong: the modern world, having arrived at its complete development and conscious that it is bound to die – if only (which is plausible, alas) in suicidal violence – no longer has anything to think about but 'the end of History' [...] If there is to be a rebirth of History, it will not come from the barbaric conservatism of capitalism and the determination of all state apparatuses to maintain its demented position. The only possible reawakening is the popular initiative in which the power of an Idea will take root.[69]

By aligning the English riots with the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, Badiou ascribes to the former an often denied political and historical significance. Whilst stressing the internal nihilism of these 'immediate' riots, he argues that they demonstrate the State's inability to 'prevent the historical sign of rebellion in the desolate spaces for which it is responsible', further suggesting that an *engagement* with this inability (rather than a *representation* of it – a distinction that I shall address presently) can reignite the past and thus expose the societal mechanics generating the conditions of violence in which the riots erupted.[70] Without that knowledge, the mechanics remain concealed and the riot is paradoxically both dismissible as an aberration, whilst simultaneously the intensification of its conditions works to ensure a repeated occurrence of rioting. To this engagement, then, or to what in 'The Bochum Talk' Bond refers to as 'being *in* society', I argue that Bond's demand for a

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[68] Ibid., p. 27.
[69] Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2012) p. 15.
[70] Ibid., p.p 26, 24.

restoration of history in drama expands pragmatically upon the points that Badiou is raising.[71] Or, as Bond puts it 'Drama fashions our consciousness. All great civilizations create the drama that sustains them. And a civilization is created when it comes to terms with its past.'[72] Inability or unwillingness to come to terms with that past, for both Badiou and Bond, amplify the conditions of a crisis point that returns us only to the inescapable nihilism manifested by the immediate riot.

## 4.3. *Saved* versus *The Riots*

However, as I have already intimated, this acceptance and confrontation of history is perhaps harder to find in contemporary theatrical discourses than it is in the emerging corpus of critical work on the riots by writers like Stuart Hall, Zygmunt Bauman, and Slavoj Žižek.[73] In fact, as I have argued, there is rather a trend of *ahistoricism* which has developed in recent verbatim dramas, the British documentary form that is increasingly the vehicle of choice for serious-minded and commercially successful theatrical examinations of the recent past. This ahistoricism, I have argued, was nowhere more stridently and more brazenly in evidence than in the sold-out premiere run of Kent's production of Slovo's *The Riots*. The remainder of this chapter, then, will compare the historiographic strategies underpinning *Saved* with those that this thesis has identified as at work within *The Riots*, and through this comparison open up the potential for a theatrical expansion of what Badiou has called the death and rebirth of history.

As demonstrated in Chapter One, when she composed *The Riots*, Slovo interviewed community leaders, policemen, politicians, London residents and people who had been involved in rioting. She

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[71] Edward Bond, 'The Bochum Talk: The Third Crisis, the state of Future Drama', 22nd September 2012, <www.edwardbond.org/Comment/bochumtalk.docx> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[72] Ibid.
[73] Zygmunt Bauman, 'The London Riots: On Consumerism Coming Home to Roost', *Social Europe Journal*, 9th August 2011, <http://www.social-europe.eu/2011/08/the-london-riots-on-consumerism-coming-home-to-roost> [Accessed 03/02/13]; Williams, Zoe, 'An Interview with Stuart Hall', *Guardian*, 11th February 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2012/feb/11/saturday-interview-stuart-hall> [Accessed 03/02/13]; Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, (London: Verso, 2012).

transcribed, edited and arranged these testimonies into a narrative designed to 'ask the questions and provoke the thoughts' that she and Kent felt had been overlooked by the government's decision not to open a public enquiry.[74] The finished text consisted of reproduced, edited and interwoven testimonies, and in a standard convention of verbatim drama, these were performed by actors in direct address to the audience, giving an illusion of direct contact. Actors played multiple roles, with the names of their 'characters' projected onto screens behind them, on a set strewn with 'loot' and rubble. The play's first act undertook a chronological swoop of blow-by-blow accounts of the riots 'as they took place', before settling down in the second act to a collage of perspectives offering posthumous commentary and analysis.

In contrast, Holmes' production of *Saved* was staged on an often featureless white set, and whilst period details such as costumes and furniture were quite strictly observed, the 'blank' nature of the setting offered the production a temporal flexibility, enabling it to straddle a range of contexts simultaneously. This sense of not being bound *only* to the past of its original production was offered support by remarks that Bond made concerning the contemporary significance of his text: 'Laurence Olivier said that *Saved* was a warning about what will happen. The play is more relevant now than when I wrote it. I'm absolutely certain of that.'[75]

*Saved*, as is well known, had at its author's insistence been absent from professional London stages for 27 years.[76] Whilst Bond's rescinding of this embargo was informed by a professed faith in Holmes' abilities as a director, it was also, as he pointed out, a response to the socio-cultural context of the performance. The interview in which this was discussed was published under the title 'My Play Predicted The Riots' – an epithet congruent with Bond's observations, and in fact throughout the

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[74] BBC Front Row 21st November 2011.
[75] Dominic Cavendish, 'My Play Predicted The Riots', *The Telegraph*, 30th September 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/8799172/My-play-predicted-the-riots.html> [Accessed 03/02/13]; Dominic Cavendish A Conversation with Edward Bond and Sean Holmes, *Theatrevoice*,22nd October 2011, <http://www.theatrevoice.com/7166/interview-edward-bond-on-saved/#.UIVBtsWx9UM> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[76] Tim Masters, 'Edward Bond: I Still Get Letters Written in Blood' *BBC News*, 20th October 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-11534846> [Accessed 14/01/12].

promotional material for Holmes' production Bond makes repeated assertions about the relevance of *Saved* to the events and implications of the riots.[77]

The division between the historical strategies underpinning Slovo's *The Riots* and Bond's *Saved* starts to illustrate what I will propose here as a 'divergence' in history. This, in short, is the potential for a political paradigm shift which Badiou argues in a social context, to be employed by theatrical projects that set out to engage with that context. In the case of *The Riots*, Slovo and Kent are aiming for an 'instant' history, assembling contextually specific materials in order to try and reproduce, as rapidly as possible, a facet of the contemporary world which may then be shown back to its inhabitants. This kind of history aligns itself with what Bond calls a 'theatre of symptoms' – one that is capable of demonstrating the *effects* of problems or issues in its contexts of production, but is incapable of comprehending their causes because, as I will go on to show, these causes are actually built in to the mechanics of their own production.[78] Bond and Holmes, on the other hand, employ a narrative approach to history, identifying and asserting a pattern with historical precedence, in order to mount an argument about the forces at work *within* the modern world, rather than depicting a function of its exteriority by attempting to accurately represent 'the facts'.

## 4.4. Verbatim and/as Fukuyama's 'End of History'

In order to break down these approaches and gain a sense of their political significance, I want to return to Badiou's argument that the upheavals of 2011 intimated a 'rebirth' of history. In order to initiate this rebirth, Badiou says that the 'modern world' has to die, citing – as we have seen – Fukuyama's infamous contention that neoliberalism culminates in the 'end' of history.[79] For Fukuyama, the dissolution of Soviet communism dismantled what he called 'totalising historical

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[77] In particular see Bond's introduction to the programme edition, 'Then, Now and Ought To Be': Edward Bond, *Saved* (London: Methuen, 2011), programme notes.
[78] <www.edwardbond.org/Comment/bochumtalk.docx> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[79] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (New York: The Free Press, 1992), xii.

discourses', and in their place we were left to 'raise directly and explicitly the nature of the trans-historical standards by which we evaluate the goodness and badness of any regime or social system.'[80] This flattening of ideologies opened up a terrain in which he argued that 'the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and aspirations around the globe' was liberal democracy, powered by its capitalist economic structures. These structures were thus conceived as universal; the 'trans-historical' standard by which the 'goodness' or 'badness' of all other systems could be judged, and were therefore conceived as being above, or at least apart from, all other 'social systems'.

There have been a range of attacks upon this argument over the past two decades, and Fukuyama himself has rescinded many of his original statements, but as I will demonstrate, the misapprehension of neoliberalism as a nonideological platform for subsequent analysis remains dominant in popular discourses, particularly those relating to history. The specific response to Fukuyama that I want to draw upon here is that offered by Derrida, because this allows me quickly to sketch out the ways in which Fukuyama's neoliberal agenda has affected the question of history as it is approached in contemporary theatre. During the discussion of Fukuyama that takes place in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida makes the following observations:

> *with the one hand*, it [Fukuyama's argument] accredits a logic of the empirical event which it needs whenever it is a question of certifying the finally final defeat of the so-called Marxist States and of everything that bars access to the Promised Land of economic and political liberalisms; but *with the other hand*, in the name of the trans-historic and natural ideal, it discredits this same logic of the so-called empirical event, it has to suspend it to avoid chalking up to the account of this ideal and its concept precisely whatever contradicts them in such a cruel fashion: in a word, all the *evil*, all that is *not going well* in the capitalist States and in liberalism, in a world

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[80] Ibid., p. 139.

dominated by other forces whose hegemony is linked to this supposedly trans-

historical or natural (let us say rather naturalized) ideal.[81]

The thrust of Derrida's argument returns the flaws and inconsistencies that Fukuyama argued were

endemic to ideology back onto his own neoliberal 'end of history'. In other words, whilst accepting

Fukuyama's argument about the flaws of ideological perspectives, Derrida exposes the ideological

facets of liberal capitalism and thus turns Fukuyama's argument against itself. Within this critique,

then, there is a localised concern that has important ramifications when we consider the historical

strategies employed within Kent and Slovo's production of *The Riots*.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Kent protests that despite everyone believing him to be a 'great

champion' of verbatim theatre, for him it is simply a 'means to an end' – that end, as he and Slovo

have widely articulated, concerns 'giving' a voice to a greater variety of people than would otherwise

be heard on particular topics; to grant audiences a chance to examine the contours of that topic in

detail; and ultimately to disseminate what they consider to be important information across a broad

scope of people.[82] In fact, Kent's only real concession to making a political 'statement' is in the

selection of the subject itself. Talking about the various verbatim projects in which he has been

involved, as previously discussed, Kent proudly declares that he has never been accused of 'bias' by

the media, and that the tribunal plays 'try to air, the *whole spectrum* of views' connected to a

particular subject.[83] =

This references a belief quite common amongst verbatim practitioners – as we have seen – that

neutrality is a function of legitimacy, and that the further one strives for the former, removing

oneself from the history being created, the greater the authenticity of one's eventual work. Kent's

words thus directly mirror those of Fukuyama, whose 'trans-historical standard' is supported by a

claim that '"history"... is a deliberate effort of abstraction in which we separate out important from

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[81] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 69.

[82] Nicholas Kent, in conversation with Dominic Cavendish, 'Theatrevoice', 9th November 2011.

[83] Ibid.

unimportant events.'[84] For Fukuyama, and seemingly for Kent, this separation is only possible from a

non-ideological or *stable* base from which it is possible to critique the processes of history without

falling prey to the inconsistencies and biases endemic to all ideological perspectives. This perhaps

accounts for Kent's pride in having never been accused of 'bias' through his accreditation of the

'logic of the empirical event' (to use Derrida's term) in his 'unbiased' explorations of the past

through the gathering, editing and performance of documentary materials. However, continuing

Derrida's argument, Kent is *also* discrediting the 'logic of the empirical event' in the sense that his

emphasis upon the 'logic of the trans-historical standard', suppresses what Hayden White refers to

as 'historical emplotment' – the codification of events in a broader historical narrative.[85] In other

words, Kent claims legitimacy for his drama because of its absolute grounding within a specific

context, through its accurate reproduction of documents or testimonies that relate directly to

empirical events. In order to secure this legitimacy, the practitioner and the practice is seen as a

'means to an end' – a method of dispensing material from one place (the subjects) to another (the

audiences). Because this suppression serves as a criterion for legitimacy, however, the practitioners

are prevented from exercising the analytic or critical functions that could position these events

within a contextual framework. Instead they operate in a vacuum, which actually reflects what

Badiou calls the 'dominant order', an order that as I will go on to demonstrate suppresses a given

populace by divorcing that populace from history. This is an irretrievably damaging problem that

results from conceiving objectivity as a function of historiographic legitimacy. Under this conception,

the subjectivity of one's own engagement with history is suppressed, which leads to the destruction

of a fundamental aspect of history itself – its temporal and spatial trajectories.

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[84] Fukuyama, *The End of History*, p. 138.
[85] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th-century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) p. 3. (See 2.1. of this thesis.)

## 4.5. Theatre and the 'Rebirth of History'

Thus, where Fukuyama saw the 'end' of history as deliverance from the straightjacket of historical discourses into a neutral 'stability' afforded by liberal capitalism, Badiou perceives this same 'end' but calls it despotic.[86] This is because the 'end' of history annexes the present from a historical consciousness in which could be found the impetus and potential to 'exit' the established order – an order which Badiou says is no longer working, with evidence on offer in the form of the riots themselves. In the interviews and articles promoting Holmes' production, Bond imparts a similar sentiment, and in the programme notes he describes a timeline that connects the 'prophetic' elements of his play with the 2011 riots via one of the most visible wings of the neoliberal project in Britain:

> Thatcher destroyed political memory and understanding. Instead there is a boredom that craves for new excitement and stimulation because that is all there has ever been. The combination of boredom, the training in cupidity, the lost respect and panic at a new unknown poverty – in fact, at social destitution – is a strange mixture. It penetrates the whole of life. It is deeper, angrier, more destructive – yet in its way more human – than the resentment of fifty years ago. It led to the riots.[87]

Here Bond points to the destruction of political memory and understanding as divorcing a modern populace from the historical discourses by which they may otherwise be able to make sense of, and overcome, the inequities of their societal condition. Boredom fills the gap left by history; a boredom which is all the more dangerous for being un-historical. On the one hand, the history-less victims cannot rationalize, articulate or combat their situation based on established precedents, and on the other the panic and violence to which this situation gives rise can be dismissed by the ruling elite, as

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[86] Although Fukuyama has since retracted much of his initial enthusiasm for the 'End of History' project, his book remains symptomatic of the wider currents in neoliberal thought against which Badiou is pitting his argument. See Francis Fukuyama, 'US Democracy has little to teach China', *Financial Times*, 17th January 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cb6af6e8-2272-11e0-b6a2-00144feab49a.html#axzz2A1E5vKX6> [Accessed 03/02/13].

[87] Edward Bond, *Saved* (London: Methuen, 2011), programme notes.

it appears to come from nowhere. This, ultimately, is how David Cameron was able to pass off the English Riots as 'criminality, pure and simple'.[88] In a single step, therefore, Bond outlines the urgency for history's 'rebirth', concomitantly asserting *Saved*'s role within this, as a text capable of reconnecting the boredom and violence of its performed context with a sense of historical consciousness. Thus, despite or more likely *because* of its temporal ambiguities, *Saved* is very much a history play in a full sense, both in terms of being 'loaded with history', and in its capacity to offer much needed historicising to the socio-cultural context of its performance. Hence, as previously mentioned, the blank staging of Holmes' production traced a narrative of societal deprivation through the 1960s of its initial production, to the 2011 context of its performance – a context inscribed with, and by, the events of the riots themselves.

In writing the play, Bond said that a chief strategy was to push the 'extreme contradictions' of the social structures latent in his initial context: a baby is stoned to death by a group of young men in order to regain their self-esteem. He has called this a 'paradox', one that he is asking his audiences to understand. The systematic erosion of hope and prospect from an entire stratum of society that created this paradox becomes the focus of a wider political critique, which Rabey argues is derived from '[t]he prevalent limitations of choice, particularly regarding self-definition and gratification through consumerism and sentimentality'.[89] The critique coalesces into a historical narrative around the destructive potential of advanced capitalism; the narrative then connects the play with its future-other contexts of production, and is ultimately how the revival of a play from 1965 was able to speak to the riots of August 2011.[90] This is why *Saved*, I would argue, though at the level of the textual narrative bereft of many of the typical qualities of a history play, has become not just historical, but historiographic, in the sense that it has been able to create and engage with history

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[88] David Cameron 'This is criminality, pure and simple', video posted on the *Guardian* website, 9th August 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/video/2011/aug/09/david-cameron-riots-criminality-video.> [Accessed 03/02/13].

[89] Rabey, *English Drama Since 1940*, p. 80.

[90] Dominic Cavendish, 'My Play Predicted The Riots', *The Telegraph*, 30th September 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/8799172/My-play-predicted-the-riots.html.> [Accessed 03/02/13].

through its performance. Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts point towards this issue when they talk about the play's flexibility – not in its political objectives, but in the reiterability of its principal concerns:

> The question "How did this come about" is not answered by the play. It is left to the
>
> audience. *Saved* is obviously not about South London, though that is its location. The
>
> play is a passionate and logical account of life lived by the social stratum engineered
>
> to fit the needs of a consumer-based and technologically-fuelled society.[91]

*Saved*, rather than trying to isolate a particular moment in time through a process of reportage or documentation, is an attempt to demonstrate the results (past, present and potential) of what Bond calls, as mentioned earlier, 'the barbarism of modern civilisation'.[92] The play is made applicable to the conditions of its future-other performances by providing a through line, or a narrative thread, between its instances of production. This is not the same as considering the play as 'timeless' (a concept which will come under scrutiny in sections 2.3 and 3.3 of Chapter Four), because in each iteration the play stages a dialogue between its own historical trajectory, and the conditions of *that particular* context. In doing so, it is able to historicise societal conditions that have been divorced from history, a divorce exploited by the dominant order in order to maintain these conditions, and to prevent those subject to them from escaping their predicament. Which returns us, finally, to the urgent call for what Badiou terms a 'rebirth' of history that Bond has echoed by declaring the increased relevance of his play because '[t]he future is now here.'[93]

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[91] Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, *Bond: a study of his plays* (Trowbridge: Redwood Burn, 1980), p. 39.
[92] Edward Bond, *Plays: One* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1977) p. 16.
[93] Costa, Maddy, 'We Didn't Set Out To Shock', *Guardian*, 9th October 2011,
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/oct/09/edward-bond-saved-original-cast> [Accessed 03/02/13].

## 5. Edward Bond

In order to substantiate my argument about Bond's potential in developing a model of historiographic theatre, in the next chapter I turn to focus on a later play, *Lear* (1971). Where appropriate, I will draw upon verbatim drama in order to contrast and compare the differing historiographic approaches, in both this next chapter and the final case study of this thesis on Howard Barker. It is not my intention through these comparisons to discredit verbatim outright, but rather, through a thorough exploration of the implications of two different kinds of historiography available to theatrical production, to suggest ways in which verbatim techniques, and verbatim texts, may be reconsidered in a way that does not suppress their iterable or analytic functions, and thus better enables them to garner a more fully rounded sense of their historiographic potential.

I have selected *Lear* for two principal reasons. First, it is a play which sets out to dramatise the production of history – Bond had written *Saved* and *Early Morning*, which in different ways examined the oppression of the working classes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and now he turned his attention to a more abstract notion; the historical development of capitalism, and the brutalising/destruction of the working classes as its consequence. Second, the play itself is an argument with Shakespeare's *King Lear*, through which Bond seeks to embed the nascent stages of his historical argument, claiming Shakespeare as the inhabitant of a world on the brink of capitalist economic development. As such, Bond sees Shakespeare as somebody aware of an impending problem, but unable to understand or articulate quite what that problem is. Bond offers his own reading as a corrective; thus *Lear* is founded upon an explicitly politicised historical narrative. This is, then, a useful case study for both proposing a creative and analytic approach to a broad historical concept that can then be articulated in and for the specificities of a performed production, and critiquing the positive and negative attributes afforded by a narrative vision of history within theatre.

## Chapter 4: Theatre and Narrative Historiography

*The stage... has its own history, and any production takes its place in that history.*[1]

### Arguments for a Historiographic Theatre

This thesis has thus far hinged upon two related contentions. The first is that theatre, when it seeks to engage with the past, constitutes a unique but often undervalued medium for the production of history.[2] Theatre's inherent dependency upon the reconnection of historical material with present contexts, its destabilisation and restabilisation of historical texts and what Rancière argues as its fundamentally participatory nature make it a fertile discipline for historical production.[3] Secondly, these distinctive characteristics offer further potential for innovative perspectives on theoretical issues such as historical relativism, representations of historical 'events' and the ways in which present climates affect and alter historical discourses. I have identified this capacity for theatre to produce history as its 'historiographic function', taking this as my core object of study. Pursuing this through a critique of British verbatim theatre, however, has produced a supplementary contention – that neglecting to identify and interrogate this function can allow unstable or problematic historiographic approaches to proliferate.

Verbatim enjoys a position of considerable popularity and influence as a form of historical theatre, and its practitioners frequently capitalise upon this position in order to strengthen the socio-cultural significance of their work.[4] Little attention, however, has been paid to the methods by which history is actually produced using certain verbatim theatre techniques. This is not unexpected since, as Stephen Bottoms has pointed out, even the term 'verbatim' 'fetishize[s] the notion that we are getting things 'word for word''.[5] With its practitioners frequently staking their claims to legitimacy

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[1] Leanore Lieblein, "Jan Kott, Peter Brook, and King Lear" in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Spring 1987, p. 43.
[2] Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader*, pp. 7 – 21.
[3] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 2.
[4] See, for example, Gillian Slovo, *The Riots*, jacket material.
[5] Bottoms 'Putting the Document into Documentary', p. 59.

on transparency – 'truth without exaggeration' – those working within the medium are often reluctant to acknowledge, let alone interrogate, the 'constructed' nature of their histories. However, there is also a dearth of critical analysis in the area which, as I have shown, is symptomatic of a wider elision in theatre scholarship. Academic works concerned with the subject of theatre and historiography tend to focus upon the ways in which the history of theatre is written or produced, rather than the ways in which theatre writes or produces history itself.[6] Without this critical attention, a genre like verbatim theatre has been able to evolve in ignorance of its wider theoretical context and implications. The result of this is that when examined, verbatim theatre's historiographic methods are frequently discovered to be either unsound or misunderstood; this then has harmful consequences on the kinds of history being produced.

There are, though, a variety of alternative historiographic approaches available and evident within theatrical discourses, and in the final two chapters of this thesis I examine two noteworthy examples. Where I have argued that British verbatim theatre can be seen as developing an anti-narrative, instantaneous historiography incapable of sustaining productive critical analysis, I now broaden my focus to consider practitioners and texts that have approached history in different ways. My investigation considers the methods by which the approaches function, and how they can enhance an appreciation of theatre's unique capacities as a form of historiography. To develop the scope of my critical apparatus, I have focussed upon theatrical historiographies that are in significant contrast to the end-of-history approaches already examined. Further, since the verbatim practitioners' disinclination to interrogate their historiographies was shown to have injurious consequences upon the texts they produced, these chapters look at practitioners who *have* interrogated their own approaches. This is in order to point towards some of the potential available to theatre when it is constructed as a consciously historiographic act.

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[6] See for example Thomas Postlewait and Charlotte M. Canning, *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010).

The case studies I have chosen are Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971) and the National Theatre's 2012

production of Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution* (1984). With the former, I will conduct an

examination of the play's reconfiguration of its parent text, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in its

contemporary context, and with the latter I will examine the relationship between the dramatic and

performance text, arguing for the necessity of maintaining a historiographic consciousness in the

production, as well as the reception, of a performance text.

Bond's *Lear* has been chosen because its unusual characteristics mean that it engages a number of

key issues that I want to address in this thesis. To begin with, the intention underpinning its

historiographic approaches actually correlates with the arguments put forward by many verbatim

practitioners. Bond seeks, as Jenny Spencer has put it, to 'present representations of reality' in the

service of a concrete, socio-political agenda.[7] However, the methods he employs to achieve this goal

are significantly different from those encountered in verbatim: the text is fictional, making no

pretence of reproducing historical 'facts'; its partisan bias is deliberately unambiguous; it dissects

broader historical discourses and its historiography operates under an explicitly political agenda.

*Lear* is also an 'argument' with Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which opens up questions about the ways in

which theatre engages with its *own* history – a crucial issue for a study into theatre-as-

historiography. What is particularly interesting about the relationship between these two texts is

that Bond builds a narrative view of the past, one which incorporates both theatrical and socio-

political histories, in order to construct his dialogue with Shakespeare.

Briefly put, Bond makes certain critical judgements about *King Lear*, the ways in which its

performance texts have evolved through time, and the entity that it has become at his time of

writing, styling his own text as a 'response'.[8] Simultaneously, and informing the *nature* of that

response, Bond makes comparative judgements about the world in which *King Lear* was written and

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[7] Jenny S. Spencer, 'Edward Bond's Dramatic Strategies' in *Contemporary English Drama*, ed. C. W. E. Bigsby (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981) p. 125.
[8] See Edward Bond, *Plays: Three*, with introduction by the author (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 4.

the world in which he is writing.[9] *Lear* is a hybrid historical investigation, a dovetailing of theatrical and socio-political histories into a single text. Not only does the play enable me to look at historiographic theatre which proposes a narrative to history, therefore, it also provides an example of the ways in which dramatic and performance texts can evolve and change, and how theatre can respond to its own historical lineage in order to speak to the conditions of its wider present. I have thus dedicated a chapter to *Lear* to allow a more thorough examination of the broad range of historiographic issues it raises, and interrogate the ways in which narrative historiography – a significant category in wider historical and historiographic discourses – can contribute to historiographic theatre.[10]

In an interview with Lindsey Irvine, Howard Barker made the following assertion:   .

> [T]he history play is a good thing, because... it's a *metaphor*, it enables you to escape
>
> some of the crushing documentary factuality about the world and indulge in a little...
>
> speculation, and you can do that in a historical period.[11]

In contrast to Bond, Barker's approach to history opens up a markedly different set of questions pertaining to theatre's historiographic capacities. Where Bond demonstrates a similar compulsion to reflect or interact with 'reality' as the practitioners of verbatim theatre – albeit in a very different fashion – Barker rejects this 'crushing documentary factuality about the world' and instead proposes a theatre that sets itself apart from 'reality' or direct considerations of the real. His history is rather a space for 'speculation' and, as I later demonstrate, he constructs his plays within this space in order

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[9] See Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Pain: Edward Bond's *Lear* and the Ghosts of History', p. 160.
[10] Surveys on notable developments in narrative history can be found in Richard J. Evans' 'Causation in History', in Evans, *In Defence of History*, pp. 129 – 160, which offers a broad if rather laudatory perspective, and Geoffrey Roberts' 'Introduction: the history and narrative debate 1960 – 2000', in Geoffrey Roberts, ed., *The History and Narrative Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1 – 22., which offers a more critical appraisal.
[11] Lindesay Irvine, interview with Howard Barker, *Guardian*, 6th December 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/audio/2006/dec/06/culture1426. [Accessed 03/02/13].

to make them 'immune to a single political reading and permanently heretical in terms of [their] attitude[s]'.[12]

Instead of proposing his work as a direct representation of the past in the present (verbatim theatre) or as a rethinking of the past in the light of the present (Bond), Barker embraces the past's inaccessibility and locates his works there in order that the present cannot claim them for itself. It is in many respects a cornerstone of his general praxis, which Lyn Gardner describes as a refusal to: 'exercise his artistic responsibility to make theatre "relevant" by using his craft to examine the social and political issues of the day. He won't be useful.'[13] Barker's historiography is a resistance to the principles underpinning much of the historiographic theory I have so far examined, seeking to reconfigure the past as a place of constant and irrepressible upheaval. However, as I will demonstrate through an analysis of the 2012 National Theatre production of *Scenes from an Execution*, in the next and final substantial chapter of this thesis, this rebelliousness can be compromised or curtailed in performance by a methodology that is not itself historiographically conscious. With these two case studies, then, I examine politically motivated historical approaches that in different ways capitalise upon theatre's unique abilities to produce, engage with and critique history.

## 1. Arguing with History

### 1.1. Edward Bond's *Lear*

The action of *Lear* opens on a building site with the accidental death of one labourer out of a huge workforce engaged in the construction of a wall. Shortly afterwards the King, Lear, arrives with his retinue and his daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle. It becomes apparent that the wall spans the

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[12] Howard Barker, *Arguments for a theatre*, Third Edition, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 149.

[13] Melanie Jessop, 'Howard Barker: A Champion of Imagination, not "Relevance"', *Guardian*, 29th April 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2010/apr/29/howard-barker-playwright relevance> [Accessed 03/02/13].

circumference of his kingdom, and is designed to repel the armies of his enemies, the Dukes of North and Cornwall. It also becomes apparent that the wall is widely despised by his subjects, having cost the lives of many, and is the object of nightly sabotaging raids by those who live on either side of its construction. As the scene unfolds, Bodice and Fontanelle reveal that they have each become engaged to North and Cornwall, entreating their father to abandon construction as reconciliation may therefore be negotiated between the warring kingdoms. Lear refuses, declaring war on his daughters and shooting the labourer arbitrarily blamed for his colleague's accidental death.

Over the following few scenes, the daughters' initial rationality is exposed as deceitful, as both plot the deaths of their husbands and each other, and have Lear's loyal aide Warrington tortured into insensibility by an impassive, workmanlike soldier. Lear is defeated in the war and reduced to a ragged, rambling vagrant over the duration of a single scene. He takes shelter at the home of the naïve Gravedigger's Boy, who is unaware of his true identity. Soldiers under the command of Bodice and Fontanelle arrive, kill the Gravedigger's Boy, rape his pregnant wife Cordelia, kill Warrington who has been in hiding, drop his body in the Boy's well and take Lear away to be tried by his daughters. The Carpenter, a nearby resident, arrives and kills the few soldiers who have remained behind to finish off Cordelia.

Act Two begins with a trial scene, in which Lear demonstrates further mental degeneration, to the delight of his daughters. He is then visited in his cell by the ghost of the Gravedigger's Boy, who will remain his companion for much of the rest of the play. He is also visited by the 'ghosts' of his daughters, who appear as frightened children, and to whom Lear offers comfort. The action shifts to a civil-war zone, with Cordelia now the head of a guerrilla resistance making advances against Bodice and Fontanelle's forces. Prisoners that her soldiers capture are summarily executed, with her assertions that 'when we have power these things will no longer be necessary'.[14] Alternate scenes show the daughters losing resolve and power; Lear is transferred to a prison convoy that falls into the hands of Cordelia's resistance. During Lear's incarceration, Fontanelle and Bodice are

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[14] Bond, *Plays: Two*, p. 59.

respectively captured, brought into the convoy and executed, the former given an on-stage autopsy to determine the cause of death. Lear is spared, but his eyes are extracted by another prisoner attempting to curry favour with the guards. The act ends with Lear encountering a farmer and his wife who are sending their son off to the army, despite Lear's pleas to the contrary.

Act Three begins after some time has passed; Lear is now living in the care of a small group of people at the Gravedigger's Boy's house, where he is visited daily by large crowds who come to hear him talk against Cordelia's oppressive regime. It is revealed that Cordelia is rebuilding the wall; her government is indistinguishable from Lear's own at the play's beginning. The act shows Lear deliver abstruse but rebellious sermons; argue fruitlessly with soldiers who have come to take some of his audience away to be executed; and receive a visit from Cordelia, who tries to convince him to stop speaking against her government. When he refuses, she resolves that he will be tried and executed. The play ends with Lear, having been led to the wall – this final scene is the only time that the wall actually appears in the play – climbing alone and starting to dig into it, a symbolic gesture of defiance. He is shot out of hand by the Farmer's Boy, who ends the play by passing over Lear's body and saying 'Leave that. They'll picken up. Off now.'[15]

## 1.2. Bond's Historiographic Strategy

*Lear's* historical preoccupations emerge swiftly from even this rudimentary outline: there are concerns with the fate of individuals caught in impersonal historical forces: the collusion of the oppressed in their own subjugation; and a broader interrogation of the evolution, destructive potential and cyclical operation of advanced capitalism. These are delivered through what Rabey

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[15] Edward Bond, *Plays: Two*, introduced by the author (London: Methuen, 1992), p. 102.

calls a 'hauntingly nightmarish scrambling of recognizable historical settings', a layering of medieval feudalism and the destructive capabilities of twentieth century technology.[16]

I want to start this consideration of *Lear*'s historiographic strategies and objectives by returning to Jenny S. Spencer, who asserts that Bond seeks to 'present representations of reality (mediated by theatrical convention in the same way ideology mediates perception) which are both recognizable as our own world, and yet untenable (in need of change).'[17] That the 'representations of reality' are openly 'mediated' quite clearly sets Bond apart from the verbatim practitioners previously encountered, and Spencer's comparison of theatrical convention with ideology is telling. Bond is aware of the ideological ramifications of his praxis, but, where verbatim inadvertently adheres to an 'end of history' – supposedly 'non' – ideology by trying to suppress its theatrical conventions, Bond *embraces* his. Bond then employs these conventions to support the political objectives of his theatre; a theatre that springs from an equivalent desire to illustrate aspects of 'our own world' that are 'in need of change'. Subsequently, although he demonstrates a commitment to the problems of his own context, Bond does not try to tackle these problems by simply offering a reflection of that context. His drama has greater objectives than serving as a denaturalised diagnosis of a given contemporary predicament. As Patricia Hern observes, Bond's praxis is motivated by a demand that:

> the individual should not only recognise how [his or her] society has been shaped by political movements in history but also appreciate that the process is continuous. Society is constantly being changed by technological innovations, economic forces... and shifts in the balance of political power. The danger Bond sees in this relationship between a man's idea of himself, of what he can and should require of life, and the prevailing technology and social organisation is that the ordinary individual does not own and therefore does not control that technology and those social forms. So he is forced to cramp and distort his natural and reasonable needs to fit an unnatural,

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[16] David Ian Rabey, *British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1986), p. 108; Michael Mangan, *Edward Bond* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1998), p. 23.
[17] Spencer, 'Edward Bond's Dramatic Strategies', p. 125.

irrational model. And when he can no longer endure such a crippling construction,

he may become violent in his anger.[18]

The tensions that Hern finds in Bond's work are charged by an urgency rooted in the contemporary

world – the problems of violence resulting from ill-calibrated social forces – but also a need to depict

those forces as historical trajectories, to demonstrate the forces' ability to be overcome. This

objective correlates with Alain Badiou's call for a 'rebirth' of history in order to counteract the

destructive principles underpinning the contemporary socio-political landscape.[19] In order to

dramatize these tensions, Bond requires a historiographic strategy robust enough to support such

weighty and wide-ranging concerns, but pliable enough to allow direct engagement with them

without the strategy's underpinning tenets collapsing. Clearly, then, the end-of-history strategies

employed by Slovo's verbatim, where events must be considered in isolation and the material

presented under the guise of objectivity to uphold internal notions of authenticity, would be

inadequate. Instead Bond turns to the kind of historiographies encountered in Chapter Three of this

thesis in the discussion of E.H. Carr – those built upon a Marxist narrative comprehension of

History.[20] Amongst the appeals of such an approach, immediately obvious for Bond is its insistence

upon causation, and consequently a tangible outline to history – indispensable to both his interest in

dramatizing the individual's relationship to political historical forces, and his desire to propose, in

Lear, a trajectory between Shakespeare's time and his own. These two factors introduce what was

earlier referred to as Bond's 'dovetailing' of socio-political and theatrical histories: throughout Lear,

and the body of Bond's dramatic and non-dramatic writing in general, he proposes the two kinds of

history as interdependent for the simple reason that for Bond, theatre has an intrinsically socio-

political purpose. For the purposes of this chapter, the political commitment that Bond proposes will

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[18] Edward Bond, Lear: Methuen Student Edition, edited by Patricia Hern (London: Methuen, 1983) pp. 10 – 11.
[19] See Chapter Three, Section 4 of this thesis.
[20] Kaye provides a useful summation of notable British Marxist historians in Harvey J. Kaye, The British Marxist Historians: An Introductory Analysis, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985). Tony Bennett's 'Texts in History: The determinations of readings and their texts' in Geoffrey Bennington and Robert Young, ed., Poststructuralism and the Question of History (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1989) pp. 63 – 81, offers an interesting argument of the ways in which Marxist historical narratives may be reconfigured and made to adapt to shifting contexts without compromising their overall political objectives.

come under scrutiny, not to reassert authorial intention (which would counteract much of the work already undertaken), but rather to seek a method by which theatre can productively respond to the urgent demands of this particular contemporary context.

Bond outlined his perspective – and the importance with which he viewed it – in a letter to Tom Erhardt in 1998, refusing the National Theatre's petition to stage *Saved* as a millennial play:

> We are made not by our reason but by our need to dramatize ourselves and our situations. In drama reason and imagination elucidate each other. This enables us to understand ourselves and what we do. Dramatization in all its forms is the one means we have of creating this knowledge and constantly recreating our humanness. The Royal National Theatre trivializes drama and – with a consequence that is so inevitable it is almost the punishment inflicted on error by history – has made itself incompetent to deal with the problems of being human. It is a consequence that is the lesson of drama itself. I am not surprised that the Royal National Theatre has not learnt it.[21]

The grand purpose of 'drama' (and his role within it) thus marked out, it is clear to see why for Bond the histories of theatre and of its wider context are fundamentally interconnected, and as a consequence why in *Lear* his historical approach to Shakespeare is also his historical approach to the world in which he is living. I therefore propose, in this chapter, to unpick the relationship between Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Lear*, as it is in this relationship that the wider historiographic implications of the latter – and their strengths and weaknesses – may be understood. Prior to this, however, it is necessary to gain a more concrete sense of how 'narrative history' manifests itself in *Lear*, and to explore how this begins to open up some of the wider theoretical questions which this study goes on to address.

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[21] Bond, *The Hidden Plot*, p. 7.

## 1.3. Narrative History in *Lear*

There are obvious similarities between *Lear* and Shakespeare's epic tragedy – the name, occupation,

political and physical degeneration of the protagonist; the intertwining of familial and national

catastrophe; and a preoccupation with violence and suffering. It is also equally obvious, however,

that *Lear* is not merely an updated or revised version of *King Lear*. Hay and Roberts point to Bond's

emphatic underscoring of this at the end of Act One, where the audience learn Cordelia's name only

as her dying husband shouts it as she is about to be raped. This, they argue, is 'specifically aimed to

destroy any lingering notions on the part of the audience that someone in the play will represent

conventional goodness [and is] the point at which Bond thrusts Shakespeare's play well into the

background of his own play'.[22] In a bold move, what Bond instead claims *Lear* to be is a kind of

corrective, an attempted remedy to an inadequacy which he sees in Shakespeare's play:

> Shakespeare took this character and I wished to correct it so that it would become a
>
> viable model for me and, I would like to think, for our society. Shakespeare does
>
> arrive at an answer to the problems of his particular society, and that was the idea
>
> of total resignation, accepting what comes, and discovering that a human being can
>
> accept an enormous lot and survive it. He can come through the storm. What I want
>
> to say is that this model is inadequate now, that it just does not work. Acceptance is
>
> not enough. Anybody can accept. You can go quietly into your gas chamber [. . .]
>
> Shakespeare had time. He must have thought that in time certain changes would be
>
> made. But time has speeded up enormously, and for us, time is running out.[23]

Among the many considerable assumptions Bond makes here, two are of particular importance to

this study. First, that despite its pre-Christian setting, *King Lear* is a direct response to its

seventeenth-century context of production, to the political landscapes of Shakespeare's 'particular

society'. Whilst this form of contextually politicised reading may not be unusual in twentieth-century

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[22] Hay and Roberts, *Bond: A Study of his Plays*, p. 117.
[23] Bond, cited in Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Pain: Edward Bond's *Lear* and the Ghosts of History', p. 160.

responses, R.A. Foakes claims that such considerations of the play do not achieve popular status until 1887, which is when Denton Snider asserts that the play 'reaches to the very heart of the age of the Tudors and Stuarts, and reveals to us the disease of absolute authority, showing how such an authority wrecks society on the one hand and, on the other, wrecks the monarch who exercises it.'[24] Although this reading is widely accepted *now*, Foakes demonstrates through a chronology of critical receptions that such received wisdom is contingent upon the vicissitudes of contemporary cultural and intellectual developments. Whilst Bond is able to assert in his twentieth-century context that Shakespeare was responding to the problems of his own seventeenth-century context – and indicate ways in which this response was manifested – Bond is building upon historical perspectives that have emerged much later than Shakespeare's own time. Historical consciousness may seek to propose themselves as stable (as the earlier chapter demonstrated with verbatim), but they are always rooted in the shifting dialogues of the present. This assertion serves to underscore both the fluidity of historical discourses and the necessity of acknowledging that fluidity in order to avoid supposing an impossible immobility to history. This rejection of immobility in history then returns us to Derrida, and his argument that although 'it is because there is instability that stabilization becomes necessary', these stabilizations must not be used to mask the inevitability of destabilization since 'it is to the extent that stability is not natural, essential or substantial, that politics exists and ethics is possible'.[25] The implications of this argument will become clearer as the analysis progresses – initially, it can quite simply be contended that a destabilisation of history is what enables Bond's approach to *King Lear* in the first place, since he is building on a historical understanding that post-dates Shakespeare.

The second notable assumption that Bond makes is trickier to approach. This is that *King Lear* has responded to its contexts in a consistent fashion throughout the intervening period; that there is a continuum, in short, stretching between the two texts. Bond argues that Shakespeare is responding

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[24] R.A. Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 48.
[25] Derrida, in Critchley et al., *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 86.

to problems in his own time – the disparity between humans and the political and economic systems crystallising around them – and suggesting that humans can 'come through the storm', an idea that Bond then contests 'is insufficient now'. By the time the play arrives in the second half of the twentieth century, Bond believes that the problems emerging from these disparities have developed to a point of urgency – so critical in fact as to constitute a state of emergency – but that the ways in which the text has been approached over time have rendered it incapable of dealing with those problems as they have developed. Thus:

> I'm not criticising *King Lear* in any way. It's a play for which [...] I have enormous
>
> admiration, and I've learnt more from it than any other play. But [...] as a society we
>
> use the play in the wrong way. And it's for that reason I would like to rewrite it so
>
> that we now have to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time, for our
>
> problems...[26]

This partly contradicts the assertions referenced previously – here it would seem to be exterior interpretations of the text, rather than Shakespeare's own activities, which have caused contextual problems with *King Lear*. But this in fact is closer to my own line of reasoning. Where earlier, Bond was attributing the object of his argument as a product of the seventeenth century, what he is here suggesting (and what I will endeavour to illustrate) is that in fact the *King Lear* of the 1960s and 70s was to a great extent constructed *in* and *for* the twentieth century. This is a sizeable gambit and will require substantial theoretical support, but once established will uncover one of the most indispensable tools available to historiographic theatre: the ability to demonstrate the historical 'loading' of texts by their movement and mutation through time, reconsidering the interrelated trajectories of dramatic and performance texts as sites of historiographic inscription. In order to consolidate our understanding of this form of inscription, and roughly chart some textual trajectories of *King Lear* from Shakespeare to Bond, I require a critical vocabulary equal to the task: for this I turn initially to Gérard Genette.

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[26] Edward Bond in *Gambit*, 22 January 1970, p. 24.

## 2. *King Lear* from Shakespeare to Bond

### 2.1. Hypertexts in Writing and Performance

Describing the interdependency of disparate texts – that concept most commonly referred to as 'intertextuality' – Genette argues that '[a]ny text is a hypertext, grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier that it imitates or transforms; any writing is rewriting; and literature is always in the second degree.'[27] He conceives intertextuality as a sequential layering, with any given hypertext positioned inside a chain of interlocking and inter-reliant hypotexts. These chains, though, cannot be rationalised as singularities, since they by necessity intersect and bleed into one another. It is perhaps more accurate then to see the hypertext orbiting a multidimensional web, of the kind that Barthes described when he identified a text as 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.'[28] Genette's approach to intertextuality is useful for the purposes of this thesis, because when applied to theatre it offers a model for the differentiation of 'written' and 'performed' hypertexts. I propose to employ this idea in a consideration of *Lear*'s relationship with *King Lear*, offering a comparison of the plays' functions as 'texts' against their functions as 'hypertexts', and expanding the definition of the 'hypertext' to clarify the various distinctions by which it is rendered as both 'written' and 'performed'.

A written text will of course reference a range of hypotexts – *King Lear* draws upon the works of Raphael Holinshed, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Edmund Spenser and the anonymous *True Chronicle History of King Leir*, to name a few examples.[29] But whilst a performance of *King Lear* draws upon

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[27] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, translated by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, foreword by Gerald Price, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997 [1982]), ix. For a fuller exploration of 'intertextuality', see Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), (on Genette): pp. 97 – 115.

[28] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.

[29] Raphael Holinshed and Richard Hosley, *Shakespeare's Holinshed: an edition of Holinshed's Chronicles, 1587; source of Shakespeare's history plays, King Lear, Cymbeline, and Macbeth*, (New York: Putnam, 1968): Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The british history of Geoffrey of Monmouth: In 12 books*, translated from the Latin by A. Thompson (London: Bohn, 1842) pp. 34 – 38.; Edmund Spenser, *The Fairie Queen: Book 2* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006) pp. 157 – 182.; Donald M. Michie, *A Critical edition of The true chronicle history of King Leir and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*, (New York and London: Garland Publishing,

these webs by default, it *also* makes use of a whole other series of hypotexts, some of which may be unique to that production. A production may thus expand the web of hypotexts underpinning the play's performance history. What is more, as I will go on to show through an analysis of Peter Brook's 1962 production of *King Lear*, a significant interpretation can have a direct effect upon subsequent readings and performances of the play itself; thus the incremental histories of performance texts intertwine with those of their parent dramatic texts. This is a key aspect of Marvin Carlson's notion of 'ghosting', informing his study of theatre-as-historiography, *The Haunted Stage*, which was discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. Carlson's particular focus is on recycling – the reasons informing the reuse of props, set, characters and character types between theatrical productions – and whilst not directly related to my own work, he does expose another fertile but untapped area of study offered by a historiographic theatre.[30]

As a dramatic text, Bond's *Lear* may be considered in relatively straightforward terms. Between 1970 and 1971 Bond wrote a play called *Lear*: this play was performed at the Royal Court Theatre in September 1971 and subsequently published. It exists in various printed formats and is occasionally translated into performance as a theatrical event. It is secured in its dramatic format by its existence in physical objects (published texts), and in its performed format through the potential-for and occasions-of its repeated performances. As both dramatic and performance *hyper*text, however, the considerations are significantly more complex. This is something of a truism, of course, since the total amount of hypotexts underscoring any and every hypertext (this thesis, for example) extend beyond comprehension, if one attempts to pursue them to their extremities. In order to maintain clarity, I want to simply focus on *Lear's* function as an 'argument' with *King Lear*, offering a broad outline of some critical responses to the latter in the intervening period of the early 1600s to 1971, which illustrate significant responses to the play as both dramatic and performance text. In this way I will demonstrate some of the complex issues raised by proposing *King Lear* as a hypotext to *Lear*,

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1991). For a study of these and other incarnations of the story of Lear prior to Shakespeare, see Wilfrid Perrett, *The Story of King Lear from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Shakespeare*, (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1904).
[30] See Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, p. 23.

and combat Bond's implicit notion of a direct continuum connecting their political objectives. I restrict my sketch to a 'broad' outline because, as would be expected of a play that has variously been described as 'a Stonehenge of the Mind' and 'one of the monuments of Western Civilisation', the range of responses to *King Lear* over its long and eventful history are too vast to trace in definitive detail here.[31] However, by showing just a few of these responses, the treacherous and erratic nature of what Miller calls *King Lear's* 'afterlife' – reinterpretations occurring after the initial productions and receptions – may be demonstrated, and this example used to interrogate the concept of theatrical narrative historiography.[32]

## 2.2. Hypotexts and *King Lear*

The textual web encircling *King Lear* as dramatic text may be traced immediately back from Shakespeare into the work of the anonymous author of the play *King Leir* (1605), Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1100 – c.1155) and Raphael Holinshed (1529 – 1580), all of whom chronicled stories of King 'Leir' from which it is supposed that Shakespeare took inspiration.[33] The most significant successor to Shakespeare's dramatic text is Nahum Tate, whose tragicomic rewriting, which ends with Cordelia and Lear tearfully reunited before she is married off to Edgar, completely supplanted its parent text on the British stage from 1681 to 1823.[34] During its heyday, Tate's play received high profile support from figures such as Dr Johnson, who said that 'since all reasonable beings naturally

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[31] G.K. Hunter, *King Lear* (ed.), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 7. and Stanley Wells, *The Division of Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of 'King Lear'*, ed. Taylor and Warren, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 3. For a survey of notable productions of *King Lear*, see Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of King Lear*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

[32] Miller, *Subsequent Performances*, 1986).

[33] René Weis, ed., *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition* (Harlow: Longman Group UK, 1993), p. 1. Also, it must be acknowledged that there are two plays – one printed in 1608, and one in 1623 – which possess the identity of "William Shakespeare's *King Lear*". Since the inclusion of both texts in their entirety in *The Oxford Complete Shakespeare*, 1986, the "disintegrationist' school of *King Lear* scholarship' has argued that 'there is no single ideal *King Lear* text' and that to subscribe to this theory 'does not mean that one's instinctive aesthetic response to the play/plays need be impoverished or diminished.' Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor *et al.*, ed., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[34] Nahum Tate, *The history of King Lear* (London : Cornmarket Press, 1969).

love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded that the observation of justice makes a play worse.'[35] After

the revivals of Shakespeare's play began, however, Tate's was ostracised as an embarrassment, a

situation which continues to the time of writing this thesis. During the period of dominance of Tate's

interpretation, when the critics approached Shakespeare's *King Lear* in its written form, they

followed Charles Lamb's sentiment that it is 'essentially impossible to be represented on a stage' and

a sense of awe pervades these analyses, with William Hazlitt claiming that '[a]ll that we can say must

fall far short of the subject.'[36] Whilst the performance text was supplanted by an alternative version,

the dramatic text was able to recoup lavish, reverential praise – though only in reading.

Later, and somewhat incongruously considering its pre-Christian setting (frequently emphasised in

19th century revivals), A.C. Bradley in his *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) offers a Christian

perspective on the play, suggesting that the actor playing Lear should show him dying in 'unbearable

joy' at a 'redemptive death', even going so far as to ask:

> Should we not be at least as near the truth if we called this poem *The Redemption of*
>
> *King Lear*, and declared that the business of 'the gods' with him was neither to
>
> torment him, nor to teach him a 'noble anger', but to lead him to attain through
>
> apparently hopeless failure the very end and aim of life?[37]

A variant of this perspective was still being argued in 1965 by Maynard Mack, whose *King Lear in Our*

*Time* did seek to undermine popular essentialist readings which saw the play's ending as either total

victory or total defeat, but still located it within a tradition in which 'the heavenly destination is no

longer clear, [but] the sense of journey to some form of consummation remains.'[38] Foakes finds in

the first half of the twentieth century a continuation of what he calls these 'traditionalist' readings

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[35] Samuel Johnson, quoted in H.R. Woudhuysen, *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books , 1989), p. 222.

[36] Charles Lamb, 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare' (1811), in *The Works of Charles and Mary* Lamb, ed. E. V. Lucas (7 vols., London: Methuen, 1903), p. 107; William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. P.P. Howe (21 vols., London: Dent, 1930-4) IV, p. 257.

[37] A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean* Tragedy (London: Macmillan, 1904; 2nd edition, 1905), p. 285.

[38] Maynard Mack, *King Lear in Our Time* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: university of California Press, 1965), p. 59.

and performances. He reveals, for example, that in production it was customary to omit the lines '[a]s flies to wanton boys are we to the gods / [t]hey kill us for their sport' because they were deemed 'unacceptably nihilistic' by theatrical institutions.[39] John F. Danby's book *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, published in 1948 and reissued twice in the 1950s, recasts Edmund as a proto-capitalist, the antithesis of the 'utopian dream' of the perfect community represented by Cordelia and Lear.[40] Up until Herbert Blau's 1961 San Francisco production and Peter Brooks' 1962 Stratford production, Foakes points out that *King Lear* was popularly considered a play of redemption, with Lear, despite his tyranny and oppression, read as a man either on the road to salvation, or the victimised emblem of a nostalgic past.

Observing these developments in the trajectory of *King Lear* even in such a broad fashion, two key issues can be identified. First, the relationship of the text to its contexts may differ vastly in its separate functions as a dramatic and performance text. Where Shakespeare's play was able to rouse impassioned praise from the likes of Hazlitt as a written document, as a performance text it was largely ignored. Foakes suggests a number of arguments to account for this situation; for these purposes the important point is simply that the trajectories *are* different, and cannot therefore be flattened into the universal continuum proposed by Bond without a substantial amount of their historical development being suppressed.[41] Continuing on from this, and in a reiteration of my earlier argument, what is also emphasised is the contingency of both the dramatic and performance texts upon the cultural, social, political and intellectual landscapes of their presents, subject to intransigent factors like prevailing tastes, moralities and even technological capabilities. To suppose a single trajectory to the entity known as 'William Shakespeare's *King Lear*' is thus not viable, and this severely problematizes the assumption of a consistent ideological mechanism remaining through each hypotextual development as the entity moves through time.

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[39] R.A. Foakes, *Hamlet Versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 58.
[40] John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (London: Faber, 1949), p. 195.
[41] See Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear*, pp. 45 – 77.

There is, however, a further significant development in the movement of *King Lear* from Shakespeare to Bond, one which occurs much closer to Bond's own time, in the work of Jan Kott, Herbert Blau, and Peter Brook.

## 2.3. The Twentieth Century in *King Lear*

In 1967, Normand Berlin wryly reflected upon Brook's 1961 staging of *King Lear* that '[b]y an interesting chain of circumstances, modern audiences have been exposed to a view of Shakespeare reflected in a mirror held by an English director, fashioned by a Polish critic, and reflecting at the same time an Irishman writing his plays in French.'[42] The production, which involved severe edits to the source text, and which was noted both for its minimalistic stage design and unremitting savagery, was widely accredited as being openly influenced by Jan Kott, the 'Polish critic' who had seen in the play an equivalent existentialist agenda as that advanced by the 'Irishman' Samuel Beckett. Thus as theatre reviewer J.C. Trewin wrote, 'after the premiere, we recognized that Brook had directed a Beckettian Lear, an endgame of the heath.'[43] This complex series of influences and interpretations offers an interesting case study for many of the arguments this chapter has been developing; as such I will examine how and why they coalesced into a single production.

The first point to make is that, as I have shown in the brief dramatic and performance history of *King Lear* up to the 1960s, there seems to be something in the play itself that invites ambiguity. S.L. Goldberg attests to this when he opens his *An Essay on King Lear* by saying that '[a]nyone who sets out to say what he makes of *King Lear* is soon likely to start wondering at his rashness. The further he goes, the less easy he finds it even to keep his critical balance.'[44] From the preference for performance of Tate's 'happier' version at the same time as Hazlitt was exulting the magnificence of

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[42] Normand Berlin, "Beckett and Shakespeare", *The French Review*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (Apr., 1967), p. 647.
[43] J.C.Trewin, 'King Lear' at Stratford: Combined Power of Brook and Scofield." Birmingham Post 4 Nov. 1962., pp. 128 – 129.
[44] S.L. Goldberg, *An Essay on King Lear*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 1.

Shakespeare's 'unperformable' dramatic text, to the nineteenth century revisions of Christianity into a pre-Christian story whose performances at that time actually *emphasised* its pre-Christianity, responses to the text have been diverse and often contradictory.[45]

In 1961, Herbert Blau staged a production of *King Lear* in San Francisco which Foakes describes as '[rooted in] history, in his concern with the political situation at the time, the tensions of the Cold War, the proliferation of missiles and threat of war provoked by the Cuban crisis of 1961-2, and the building of the Berlin Wall (1961).'[46] This was a production which also, as Blau himself put it, focussed on the principles of nothingness. '"Nothing will come of nothing." The line recapitulates a cracked fantasy of Power; the rest of the play proceeds from it... Cordelia says "Nothing" – and history is annihilated'.[47] In a great many respects his production, in its existential absurdism, is seen to preface and mirror that of Peter Brook, who staged his interpretation in Stratford the following year. Brook put his characters:

> on a bare stage... as if they were the victims of a malignant fate in a hostile universe, clothing them in costumes that appeared to have been put together from old rags... [where earlier] Paul Schofield and the others were arrayed in robes specially made to look timeless, though they appeared to have been sewed together from old sack-cloth, achieving an archetypal effect, as of lost souls groping about in a void.[48]

Brook pursued a more direct perspective on the annihilation of history by hardwiring it into his production – the 'timelessness' of the 'void' in which it took place a marked departure from the historically conscious performance texts that had preceded it. Brook defended this decision by arguing that 'we can approach *Lear* not as a linear narrative, but as a cluster of relationships' where

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[45] See Emily Mullin, 'Macready's Triumph: The Restoration of *King Lear* to the British Stage', *Penn History Review*, Volume 18, Issue 1., Fall 2010, pp. 17 – 35., for a detailed account of the first restaging of Shakespeare's text after its long absence, and which set a precedent for productions emphasising a Pre-Christian setting.

[46] R.A. Foakes, 'King Lear and Endgame' in *Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 55: King Lear and its Afterlife*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 153.

[47] Herbert Blau, 'A Subtext Based on Nothing' in *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 8., No. 2., Winter 1962, p. 122.

[48] R.A. Foakes (ed), *King Lear* (London: Arden, 1997), p. 33.

any entrance isolates 'an arbitrary point in the vast structure' from which we can then 'begin to pick

our way to and fro' across the rest of the play in order to secure our reading from *that* perspective.[49]

In essence, what Brook decided was that *King Lear* resists any form of over-arching or total

comprehension; at some genetic level it cannot be supported or sustained as a cohesive whole. This

argument vindicates the play's contradictory nature and complicated genealogy. It also recalls

Lamb's declaration that any reading must 'fall short' of the subject, except that Brook differs from

Lamb in seeing this falling short, this failure, as a deliberate and in fact crucial function of the text.

Echoes of this belief can actually be found in the 'traditionalist' readings of Mack and Bradley, both

of whom identify textual flaws and failings as fundamental to *King Lear's* plot. Mack, for one, points

to:

> Edgar and Kent's continuing in disguise well after the purposes of disguise have been
>
> served; Gloucester's willingness to believe, when Edmund shows him the forged
>
> letter, that one son would write to another when both are living in the same house,
>
> and specifically would put in writing such patricidal meditations as these...[50]

Despite their different purposes, neither Brook nor Mack propose these discrepancies as

weaknesses; neither suggest that the play does not 'work', but both concede that in some

fundamental manner it does not wholly make sense. Worrying away at this problem from his own

angle, Brook eventually decides that:

> [i]n fact we are compelled to face a play which refuses all moralizing... a vast,
>
> complex, coherent poem designed to study the power and the emptiness of nothing
>
> – the positive and the negative aspects latent in the zero.[51]

Brook thus finds 'nothing' disinterred in the play's core. The absence occurs in a place which was

supposed to have housed something concrete; a moral, ethical, political, familial or personal solidity,

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[49] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (St Ives: Clay, 1968), p. 102.
[50] Mack, *King Lear in Our Time*, p. 3.
[51] Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 105.

bounded by a sense of loyalty or duty. Explored, however, this solidity vanishes, and what is more appears to have never been there in the first place: in its stead there is only a void. This is Brook's mid-twentieth century answer to the problems of *King Lear* – he claims that the relationships established within its narrative are built upon a void, a place originally supposed to contain foundational singularities, but in whose indeterminacy they have instead been engulfed.

This conclusion is one he shares with (and has borrowed from) Kott's essay 'King Lear *or* Endgame', a significant hypotext behind his production.[52] Kott reads *King Lear* through the lens of the 'Theatre of the Absurd', observing correlations between the rejection of the absolute as 'grotesque' and the immolation of seemingly unshakable social, theological and political constructs in Shakespeare's play:

> The absolute is absurd. Maybe that is why the grotesque often makes use of the concept of a mechanism which has been put in motion and cannot be stopped. Various kinds of impersonal and hostile mechanisms have taken the place of God, Nature and History, found in old tragedy.[53]

By the 1960s in Europe, these faiths in 'God, Nature and History' which had seemed so indispensable for the construction and maintenance of Western human societies had drastically been called into question.[54] When Martin Esslin looked at the writers that he rather arbitrarily grouped under the heading 'Absurdists' – people like Beckett, Pinter and Ioenesco – he said that their theatre sought to 'breach this dead wall of complacency and automatism and to re-establish an awareness of man's situation when confronted with the ultimate reality of his condition.'[55] For the Absurdists the old certainties believed to underpin the 'human condition' were targets, to be eviscerated on stage in

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[52] Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. by Boleslaw Taborski, preface by Peter Brook, (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 106.
[53] Ibid., p. 106.
[54] A good study of the context and theatre of this era is offered in J.L. Styan, *Modern drama in theory and practice 2: Symbolism, Surrealism and the Absurd*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) pp. 117 – 144.
[55] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, (Third Edition), (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 400.

order to publicly expose their irrationality; this was also achieved through radical reinterpretations

of historical texts.[56] Kott thus sought to overhaul prior readings of *King Lear* by claiming that the play

actively strives to liquefy any qualities of fixity and stability in the familial and political structures of

its narrative – a liquefaction rationalised through the lens of the mid-twentieth century, where the

exposure and dissolution of those structures has contextual support. Central to Kott's reading is the

issue of those 'impersonal and hostile mechanisms, which have taken the place of God, Nature and

History', mechanisms he defines more thoroughly in a wider consideration of Shakespeare:

> Shakespeare's histories are the *dramatis personae* of the Grand Mechanism. But
>
> what is this Grand Mechanism which starts operating at the foot of the throne and
>
> to which the whole kingdom is subjected? A mechanism whose cog-wheels are both
>
> great lords and hired assassins; a mechanism which forces people to violence,
>
> cruelty and treason; which constantly claims new victims? A mechanism according
>
> to whose laws the road to power is at the same time the way to death? The Grand
>
> Mechanism is for Shakespeare the order of history, in which the king is the Lord's
>
> Anointed.[57]

As Kott sees it, the 'order of history' manifests itself in Shakespeare's plays as an engine bent upon

the consumption of its subjects and the production of nothingness – a kind of void-machine,

operating below the surface of the societies in which the plays take place. He goes further, saying

that '[t]ragedy begins at the point when the King becomes aware of the working of the Grand

Mechanism. This can happen when he falls victim to it, or when he acts as its executioner.'[58] Kott

asserts this 'Grand Mechanism' as a constant, a process which replicates itself – as the 'order of

history' – into every historical context in which the plays are produced and received. Thus, whilst he

claims to be undermining absolutist readings of the texts which seek to locate them within specific

readings, he actually makes *re*contextualisation into an absolute instead:

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[56] See Lieblein, "Jan Kott, Peter Brook, and King Lear", pp. 39 – 47.
[57] Kott *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 32.
[58] Ibid., p. 35.

Shakespeare is like the world, or life itself. Every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see [...] One must find in [*Richard III*] the night of Nazi occupation, concentration camps, mass-murders'.[59]

This is how Shakespeare and Beckett found themselves combined in Brook's production – through the argument, as Berlin observed, of a Polish critic – but the relationship between the two writers/hypotexts proves an immediately problematic terrain, as Leanore Lieblein warns:

On the one hand they [Kott and Brook] recognize that Shakespeare is produced in time and changes over time. On the other hand they imply that a Shakespeare that can be made to speak (albeit differently) in many times transcends all time. A "contemporary" Shakespeare, some would argue, is proof of his universality although, as we have seen, it may only be proof of Shakespeare's ability to be made to speak for others.[60]

Lieblein's queasiness is over the 'essential' nature of the play – the question of what is *elemental* or *indisputable* to a given text – and her concern is that this root constituent in Kott and Brook's reading is betrayed, supplanted with an exterior voice that is disguised as a contemporary function of the text. In other words, in demanding that Shakespeare's texts be broken down and reassembled at each point of their production in the absolute light of the contemporary context, she asks whether they are simply being turned into vessels for those contexts, devoid of substance in and of themselves. To answer this, I return the analysis to Bond, and contrast the narrative-based history he employs against Kott's presentism, seeking to offer a resolution to Lieblein's concern.

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[59] Ibid., pp. 3, 38.
[60] Lieblein "Jan Kott, Peter Brook, and King Lear", p. 43.

## 2.4. Kott and Bond

Kott's Grand Mechanism, which sees a 'road to power that is at the same time the road to death' and a king who sets tragedy in motion through an awareness of this violent system, is in some respects very close to Bond's rethinking of Shakespeare. All roads in *Lear* lead to death, either through acquiescence-in or resistance-to the mechanisms of the dominant political systems, and the tragic consequences of the plot are initiated by a king who begins as their executor, before becoming their victim. The difference is that the third act of Bond's play argues a further stage of development – as he puts it: 'Act One shows a world dominated by myth. Act Two shows the clash between myth and reality, between superstitious men and the autonomous world. Act Three shows a resolution of this, in the world we prove real by dying in it.'[61] In other words, following Kott's model, Lear's story begins in myth, where he is the arbiter of an obliterating Grand Mechanism; the mid-section sees a conflict between myth and reality as he falls victim to that mechanism whilst beginning to understand something of its nature; but the end of his story comprises a resistance, as the operations of the Grand Mechanism are exposed and a way of opposing it begins to be made visible. The reason Bond is able to do this, I argue, is a result of the alternative historical philosophy he proposes, which has led him to a similar reading of Shakespeare as Kott, but by a markedly different route.

Where Bond proposes a continuum that ascribes the 'total resignation' of *King Lear* to the Shakespeare of the Renaissance, Kott declares Shakespeare 'our contemporary', and the play a reflection of the cultural and political climate of the twentieth century. But where Kott simply uncovers the void underwriting this reflection, a malign force ensconced in the text/the 1960s, Bond declares it a function of technological warfare and advanced capitalism, predicted in Shakespeare's time but come to fruition in his own. Because of the narrative approach he takes to history, Bond is therefore able to consider the void as part of a process rather than an always-present component of the text (which is, as Lieblein pointed out, the eventual conclusion of Kott's 'universalising' attitude).

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[61] Bond, *Plays: Two*, p. 12.

The manifold differences in the two approaches are fully revealed by the ways in which they are then able to respond to the problems posed by the destruction they find in *King Lear*. Kott lays bare a grotesque and unassailable absurdity; Bond insists on a development, a space of resistance to combat the defeatist attitude of 'total resignation' he sees in Shakespeare. This is central to what Mark Ravenhill has called Bond's 'argument' with *King Lear*. As referenced earlier, Bond believes that it is no longer acceptable merely to endure suffering because 'for us time is running out'.[62] Now, however, it would appear that his argument is not so much with Shakespeare's *King Lear* as it is with *King Lear* through the lens of Absurdism.[63] Considered as such, Bond's argument is hardly surprising, since he has himself extensively articulated his dissatisfaction with Absurdist drama, as exemplified in the following excerpt from a letter to Callum Macrimmon:

> [T]he philosophy of the Absurd claimed to be a statement about foundations. It was meant to show that life was meaningless. That beauty and ugliness were the same. That attempts to remove human suffering merely produced more suffering. That our condition was hopeless. It claimed to be a moral statement about foundations. It took political violence and separated it from any judgement. But if you live in a society where a banknote has a meaning – an exchangeable value – then everything else has a meaning: but unfortunately the meaning is derived from money. The philosophy of the Absurd is a philosophy of the rich which they require the poor to live. Beckett has just written a couple of pages which can be bought for a thousand pounds each. That is an act of violence.[64]

For all of the violence and inhumanity within *Lear*, the narrative thrust actually recalls Mack's 'traditionalist' reading of *King Lear* where 'the heavenly destination is no longer clear, [but] the

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[62] Mark Ravenhill, 'Acid Tongue', *Guardian*, 9th September 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/sep/09/theatre.stage> [Accessed 03/02/13].

[63] Ibid.

[64] Edward Bond, Ian Stuart, *Edward Bond: Letters, Vol. 1*. (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 31. It should be noted here that Bond's sentiment is typically abrasive, and his perspective upon Beckett seems underscored by a pettiness which does little justice to the latter's literary output.

sense of journey to some form of consummation remains.'[65] For Bond, there is no 'heavenly' journey – no God is ever invoked, and the ghosts that populate the play fulfil a metaphorical rather than spiritual function. A sense of journeying to a consummation *is* restored, however – 'Lear is blind until they take his eyes away, and by then he has begun to see' – but the consummation is political rather than theological.[66] And although his death is of arguably little significance, it is this indeterminacy, a potential for significance, which prevents the play from slipping into the nihilism that has saturated the readings of its parent text since the 1960s, and retains what Michael Billington calls Bond's 'stubborn faith in humanity [and] the contradictions of "human-ness."'[67] Bond's 'argument' with *King Lear* is inextricably bound up with the incarnation of Shakespeare's text which emerged through the Absurdism of the mid twentieth-century – a movement that he resists on the grounds of what he considers its political irresponsibility, recalibrating the play in order to rescue it from the 'hopelessness' he so disdains.[68]

Thomas Cartelli reaches the same conclusion concerning *Lear* by recalling Bond's insistence that the protagonist's demise not be *final*, but initiative.[69] Rather than serve as a hermetic sealant to a tragic narrative, in other words, Lear's rebellious death should function as a spur for wider comprehension and debate. Again, this kind of aspiration resonates very clearly with the motives underpinning certain verbatim projects, for example Slovo's declaration that she hopes her audience members leave *The Riots* with an understanding of 'what was going on in [their] society in a way that allows them to... sort of have a voice.'[70] However, because Bond does not try to legitimise his theatre upon a claim to transparent, unmediated representation of 'the facts' but rather on an engaged and openly politicised narrative, he is able to suggest a wider shape to history that offers causes for

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[65] Mack *King Lear in Our Time*, p. 59.
[66] Bond, *Plays: Two*, p. 11.
[67] 'If you're going to despair, stop writing', *Guardian*, 03/01/2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/jan/03/theatre> [Accessed 28/01/13].
[68] For an account of the antagonistic relationship between Bond and Beckett, see Graham Saunders, 'A theatre of ruins'. Edward Bond and Samuel Beckett: theatrical antagonists *Studies in Theatre and Performance* (2005) 25: 1, pp. 67 – 77.
[69] Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Pain: Edward Bond's *Lear* and the Ghosts of History', p. 160.
[70] 'Theatrevoice, 9th November 2011.

'what is going on in society', and also to outline/propose ways in which the problems he shows can be counteracted. This narrative is problematic, as I have demonstrated: reshaping historical developments in a rough and undeniably biased fashion wipes out much of their subtleties, and is thus vulnerable to overhauling by even a rudimentary historiographic investigation. For all its faults, however, by rejecting objectivity in favour of political critique, Bond's method has still allowed him to develop a wider appreciation of historical discourses, and defend this appreciation on his own terms. *Lear* makes informed statements about its socio-cultural context, rather than problematically claiming only to reflect it.

The notion of theatre as a stimulant to political action quite obviously recalls Brecht, and Cartelli is quick to highlight this, suggesting that '*Lear* clearly points more in the direction of Brecht's *Mother Courage* – which correspondingly ends with the daughter of Mother Courage beating a drum to warn soldiers in a neighbouring village of an imminent attack – than it does of Beckett's *Endgame*.'[71] The polarising of Brecht *or* Beckett is not enormously helpful, particularly given Bond's own mercurial relationship with the former; Janelle Reinelt shows him praising Brecht as the most important influence on his career aside from Shakespeare, but in a 2008 interview with Michael Billington, Bond describes Brecht as 'the playwright of Auschwitz... [whose] plays led straight to the death camps.'[72] Yet, this underlying function of Bond's drama in aspiring to stimulate political response through the construction and execution of a polemic demonstrates part of the profound similarities between the two practitioners, and further indicates the potential available to a theatre explicitly constructed upon a narrative understanding of the past.

A way to answer Lieblein's concern begins to surface here, one that will form the final section of this chapter. Instead of considering the trajectory of *King Lear* (or any dramatic text being 'loaded with history' by its progression through time) as a continuous narrative of incremental accumulation, as

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[71] Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Pain: Edward Bond's *Lear* and the Ghosts of History', p. 161.
[72] Janelle G. Reinelt, *After Brecht: British Epic Theater (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance)* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 51.; 'If you're going to despair, stop writing', *Guardian*, 3rd January 2008, < http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/jan/03/theatre> [Accessed 28/01/13].

Bond argues, or a perpetual rejection of genealogical lineage through an absolute commitment to each fresh context, as Kott argues, what I will rather suggest is a mediation between the two. This will be achieved by turning to some questions of *how* a dramatic text 'loaded with history' is able to be brought into dialogue with the present.

## 3. Acculturations and/as Violence

### 3.1. Which Shakespeare?

Midway through an investigation into Shakespearean adaptations on film, Julie Sanders suggests that:

> it is usually at the very point of infidelity that the most creative acts of adaptation and appropriation take place. The sheer possibility of testing fidelity in any tangible way is surely also in question when we are dealing with such labile texts as Shakespeare's plays.[73]

I want to briefly focus here on Sanders' use of the word 'labile' in relation to the mutability of Shakespeare's dramatic texts. Three definitions given by the *OED* offer useful (and quite peculiar) illuminations here: 'labile' may refer to something which is '[l]iable or prone to lapse', '[a]ble to slip away, slippery' or '[p]rone to undergo displacement in position or change in nature, form, chemical composition... unstable.'[74] Themes of impermanence and transience thus emerge, which seem perfectly suited to such an unsettled object as the dramatic text, an entity that has been shown in perpetual resistance to conceptions of fixity or singularity. Further probing, however, reveals a deeper-set contingency on matters of decline and disintegration, which is slightly puzzling. Sanders is introducing us to Shakespeare, that most canonical of all British writers, as an author of works 'prone to lapse', 'able to slip away' and ultimately 'unstable'. His works have become the most

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[73] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p. 20.
[74] <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/104711?redirectedFrom=labile#eid> [Accessed 20/04/11].

celebrated, studied and staged dramatic texts in the British canon: how can they then seriously be considered 'labile'?

The answer proposed by Kott (and Brook) is that since the dramatic texts are not unequivocally located within one particular point in time and space, their interpretations do not resonate automatically with all or every time period but must instead be considered in the light of the context in which they are approached. In other words, Shakespeare is only, as Jonson wrote, '[n]ot of an age, but for all time', if 'all times' make Shakespeare for themselves.[75] But, building on Lieblein's contentions, there is a paradox inherent in this argument because the texts are identified as 'universal' in order to be consolidated in a specific manner. Thus, whilst Kott advocates the applicability of Shakespeare to any age, he then uses the malleability he has bestowed upon the texts to construct what Lieblein calls a 'private hermeneutics' – an unyielding philosophy that reasserts itself as *the* reading of Shakespeare. According to Lieblein's argument, Kott is actually incapable of embracing the 'lability' of Shakespeare's plays. He acknowledges instability only in order to undermine older, unfashionable perspectives, and then installs his own, absolute reading. Lieblein responds to this by meticulously unpicking Brook's production in order to show that its strength lies 'not in its illustration of metaphors of meaninglessness, but in generating an everyday context for the play's language', thus rejecting what she sees as Kott's antihistoricism – and its manifestation in theatre by Brook. She does this by establishing a dialogue between the present of the production and a historical constant of the text, stabilised in its language.[76] For Lieblein, there is a profound 'humanness' in Shakespeare's play which has remained constant, despite the shifts in performing contexts, and rather than offer an absurdist meditation on 'nothingness', Brook's production actually relied upon and re-emphasised this essential quality:

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[75] For a discussion of this question, see Roland Mushat Frye's article '"Not of an age, but for all time": A Shakespearean's thoughts on Shakespeare's Permanence.' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 132, No. 3, (1988), 232–236.
[76] Lieblein "Jan Kott, Peter Brook, and King Lear", p. 47.

Lear's humanness was seen in his petulance, arrogance and vulnerability. These were depicted not through big gestures but through small, in precise collisions between potential grandeur and physical necessity, so that meaning was not immanent and given but a product of human activity.[77]

Lieblein summarises her defence of the innate – therefore constant – 'humanness' of Shakespeare's play by saying that Brook had simply 'contextualised Shakespeare's words', rather than overhauling the material of his play entirely. She thus contradicts herself slightly by inferring an 'immanence' through the perpetual production of meaning in *King Lear* as *always* a 'product of human activity', and engaging in the same kind of 'private hermeneutics' for which she roundly criticises Kott. The conflict between Lieblein and Brook/Kott thus ultimately reduces down to a problem of competing philosophies, with both sides employing equivalent methods in the service of different ends.

This conflict, however, indexes a much broader question, and one of particular interest to my purposes: the problematic relationship between the historical text and its present of reproduction. To uncover some of the ways in which this relationship will be appropriated in the following argument, I turn to the German playwright Heiner Müller, who for the preface of his own anarchic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a short piece entitled *Hamletmachine* (1977), wrote the following account of his practice:

> For thirty years Hamlet was for me an obsession, so I wrote a short text, *Hamletmachine,* with which I tried to destroy *Hamlet*. German history was another obsession, and I tried to destroy this obsession, too, that whole complex. I think my strongest impulse is to reduce things down to their skeleton, to tear off their skin and their flesh. Then I'm finished with them.[78]

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[77] Ibid., p. 44.
[78] Heiner Müller, *Theatremachine*, trans. and edited by Marc von Henning (London: Faber and Faber , 1995), p. 86.

At first, Müller's violent methodology seems irreconcilably different from those of Brook and Kott, who talk about the necessity of producing Shakespeare's texts for contemporary audiences by realigning them with their own time periods. Müller speaks only of his own obsession, and his desire to obliterate those facets of *Hamlet* which fascinate him, concurrent with a topic – German history – that has seemingly little to do with Shakespeare's original. There is scant indication of 'fidelity' in this arbitrary pairing of topics scheduled for destruction, beyond the pyrrhic worth afforded to *Hamlet* as an entity deserving of violence. What, then, is the 'value' of Müller's approach (and subsequent work) and how does it affect an argument in which I am trying to assert the importance of reconsidering past texts through contemporarily politicised perspectives?

Sanders provides the grounds for an answer to this when she argues that creativity in adaptation is an act of 'infidelity'.[79] Her classifications of fidelity and infidelity are at first a little perplexing; in one sense 'fidelity' to a text is conceived of as accuracy and supplication in textual reproduction, processes which may be seen as antithetical to creativity. 'Creativity' itself, however – vague and indeterminate as the term is – is indispensable to the survival of any given text, which is required to resonate within an illimitable range of contexts in order to consolidate its reiterable legitimacy. In other words, a text must be 'creative' – and inspire creativity in its interpreters – in order to be recreated. Yet, as Sanders has pointed out, creativity in those interpretive processes of adaptation and appropriation manifests itself as infidelity to the original text. This is not, as it may originally appear, paradoxical, if we are to accept that on some level, adaptation and/or appropriation of any given text must, if not necessarily to the same degree as Müller, assert itself as an act of violence.

This idea of violence informs the way in which I will finally attempt to answer the questions posed by the example of a narrative approach to historiography through theatre. In order to do this, and inspect the ways in which this kind of approach manifests itself, I will return to Derrida, whose emphasis on destabilization continues to prove the most effective model for tackling the theoretical problems encountered through this study. In this instance, I engage with Derrida's concept of the

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[79] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 20.

archive, looking at the ways in which his contention that the acculturation of texts as 'archival' – through processes of decontextualisation and extrapolation – comprises what he terms 'archival violence'. [80] This kind of violence, I argue, is fundamental to the practices of textual adaptation and appropriation underpinning the kind of narrative historiographic theatre I have observed in the instance of Bond's *Lear*. It should be noted here that I am not proposing Shakespeare's texts as *innately* privileged in terms of their adaptability; simply that their widespread popularity has led to an ever-increasing range of disparate adaptations which respond to the demands of particular contexts. As Sanders points out, for example, '*Henry V* has been re-envisioned as a play about the Second World War, Vietnam, the Falklands crisis, and more recently about the two Gulf Wars.'[81] In order to look at this process more closely, I thus turn towards some critical observations on the 'archive' that have been proposed by Derrida.

## 3.2. Shakespeare in Derrida's Archives

Derrida finds within the archive the roots of both collectivisation and judicial power – a storage facility on one hand, and the rights granted to organize, contain (and thus to provide a dispensary for) the rules of the law on the other, determined respectively as 'consignative' and 'archontic' functions.[82] He identifies a tension between these two functions that reveals itself in the processes of archival construction – a decontextualisation and extrapolation which he calls 'the violence of the archive itself, *as archive, as archival violence.*'[83] This violence, far from providing a neutral, inactive location for the embedding of texts in their complete potential readability, forces a participatory role upon any and all operating within it – texts are placed in a dialogue whose contextual specificity is absolute, for as long as they are involved in the archive.

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[80] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 7.
[81] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 48.
[82] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 3.
[83] Ibid. p. 7.

A further problematizing occurs at the point of conflict between the two 'drives' which Derrida argues are in control of the archive. These are the 'archival', which seeks to create taxonomies into which disparate texts are forced, and forced to operate – and the 'archiviolithic', which strives, with no less urgency, to do the opposite:

> It is at work, but since it always operates in silence, it never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive, as if that were in truth the very motivation of its most proper movement. It works *to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing* but also *with a view to effacing* its own "proper" traces – which consequently cannot properly be called "proper". It devours even before producing it on the outside. This drive, from then on, [is] *archiviolithic*. It will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation.[84]

The discord between the two informs the condition that Derrida calls 'archive fever', and in order to grasp a sense of this term, it must be proposed that the physical archiving of a text is not contingent upon its duplicability (autographic works may also be archived) but on its iterability. This is where Derrida finds in 'Signature Event Context' the 'normal' functioning of the text: 'This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or an anomaly, but is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called "normal" functioning.'[85] The ability to be 'cited' is then the primary factor which enables the destabilising of textual context; the instability which allows the text to be placed within an archive. This 'citationality' can also be seen, conversely, as the same function which enables a text to be adapted or appropriated, and at this point the parallels between the archiviolithic drive and the processes of adaptation and appropriation make themselves conspicuous. In the engendering of fresh materializations upon which the two drives' operation in their changing environments will depend, both commit acts of violence to their points of origin. In order to secure its archival and/or

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[84] Ibid. p. 10.
[85] Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', pp. 322–323.

contemporary positions, in other words, the text's capacity to be divested of its originary functions must be exploited – this exploitation occurs as violence because it strives to destroy those factors that facilitated the text's original incarnation. As such, Müller tries to obliterate the parts of *Hamlet* which enabled it to function previously in order to position the remains in dialogue with his conception of German history. His methodology is unusual in that it takes that process in its crosshairs as a further object for destruction, but up until then his violence is in fact endemic or 'normal' to the practice of appropriation in which he is engaged.

There is a further issue concerning Derrida's use of the archive that requires exploration here. This is expressed in the resonances between theatrical adaptation/appropriation and the opposing force at work in the archive: the 'archival' drive, which seeks to retain, catalogue, consign and maintain the (potential) function of its inhabitant texts. In order to provide a space, and materials, for the creative 'infidelity' which I am proposing as a potent tool for the redeployment of pre-existent texts in response to particular contexts, some form of continuity to those texts must be maintained. Perhaps the most effective way of considering this, using the extreme example of Müller, is to point out that whilst *Hamletmachine* seeks to destroy *Hamlet*, *Hamlet* survives *Hamletmachine* in a form which is *not* destroyed, and in fact *must* do this in order to sustain *Hamletmachine*'s capacity to be productive and/or meaningful.

In some instances, the text may be supplanted for extended periods of time, only to be eventually resuscitated in something that appears to resemble its initial form, which has been demonstrated here in the example of Tate's of *King Lear*. However, the *King Lear*s of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were produced under the auspices of their particular contextual climates, and thus supposing them a 'return' to the text of Shakespeare's time would be disingenuous – the most that can be said is that they restored the dramatic text(s) to their function as geneses for performance.[86]

Here is a further aspect of what Sanders would term the 'labile' nature of the dramatic text. By its

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[86] The plural refers to both the alterations that Shakespeare's *King Lear* has undergone throughout its history as dramatic and performance texts; and the two 'versions' of his play which are now recognised as separate entities. See Wells and Taylor, eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works.*

very nature, as it is required to interact with a wealth of interpretive cultures in order to ensure its own survival, the dramatic text is prey to the contextual specificities that shape and define those cultures. These specificities are unforeseeable, and their influence is paramount in shaping plays' 'afterlives'. The capriciousness with which dramatic and performance texts are treated in any given context are often perceived after the fact, which enables their narrativisation through the linear tracing of a particular text's 'history'.[87] To use the example of Tate: throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries his text enjoyed popularity – after the popular revival of Shakespeare's it was reviled as an embarrassment, and has largely remained so up until the time of writing this thesis. Its 'afterlife', therefore, has been reshaped in ways contingent upon the unforeseeable future, the changes wrought upon it being retroactively fashioned into a narrative. However, as I have shown by comparing Bond's notion of a consistent historical narrative to the complex history of *King Lear*, the interactions of dramatic and performance texts and the presents of their respective contexts challenges and disrupts the idea of linear progression to a given textual entity. Furthermore, I have observed through Derrida the incessant returning of the text to the present by a destruction of its point of origin. These destructions may be arranged in a chronological order after the fact (as in Foakes' *Hamlet versus Lear*), but to propose this arrangement as a historically consolidated narrative is to ignore the attempts to return to the text's point of origin by each iteration in order to destroy it afresh.

Coming back to Derrida, then, a final point to be made about the archival drive as it functions in theatrical performance is to suggest that, whilst the performance text speaks to its own moment, the textual contingencies upon which it rests, and through which it is produced, maintain a separate (continuous) structure that *may* be traced through their temporal and spatial endurability. Whilst the dramatic text, in other words, undergoes modifications in its subsequent interpretations, and whilst these interpretations occur as violence which destroy as much of the text as is required in order to recalibrate some part of it within the context of a particular present, the text keeps a

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[87] See Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear*, pp. 45 – 77.

version of itself back – archived, for want of a better term – in order to offer itself up to future acts of violence.

In order to sum up the ways in which I have attempted to consider the processes of textual adaptation and appropriation here, I ant to return briefly to Marvin Carlson who, tackling a similar issue in *The Haunted Stage*, points out that:

> [t]heatre, as a simulacrum of the cultural and historical process itself, seeking to depict the full range of human actions within their physical context, has always provided society with the most tangible records of its attempts to understand its own operations. It is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts.[88]

Through his identification of a simulacrum of the historical process, Carlson's reading chimes with my own identification of Derrida's archival and archiviolithic drives in the ephemerality of theatrical discourse. If we consider the dramatic text as an object of 'memory' – one which is continually recalled in the present – an alternative version of narrative historiography emerges. Rather than develop and evolve through time in a consistent fashion, there is a duality to the text's evolution that incorporates both its dramatic and performance formats, and its 'archived' and 'archiviolithic' drives. This realisation offers a corrective to Bond's historiographic strategies, as identified in this chapter. Drawing upon Shakespeare's dramatic text in 1971, Bond is engaging with an entity that has been incrementally overwritten with the memory of 'new circumstances and contexts'. As a 'repository of cultural memory', *King Lear* has been transformed by the events of the twentieth century, whilst at the same time retaining an 'archived' presence that enables it to be offered up to further acts of violent re-inscription.

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[88] Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, p.3.

The canonical status of *King Lear* grants this process a certain visibility, which thus allows us to examine the attitudes to history that have been encoded within the play. Bond's open engagement with these attitudes – even though his absolutist reading of the play's 'original' implications is, as I have shown, problematic – allows him both to develop a critical, politically aware approach towards history, and to honestly account for his own praxis. This is in sharp contrast to the methodologies employed by Slovo and Kent, where editorial decisions are obscured in order to maintain protestations of transparency and objectivity that are ultimately fallacious, and prevent the practitioners from developing a critical (or self-aware) historical approach.

Drawing together the various arguments concerning theatre and narrative historiography advanced in this chapter, I now turn back to the conflict between Brook and Lieblein over the question of 'immanent' meaning in the translation of the dramatic to the performance text.

## 3.3. Keeping the Slate Dirty

Brook ends *The Empty Space* with a series of declarations. These include the following:

> Repetition, representation, assistance. These words sum up the three elements, each of which is needed for the event to come to life. But the essence is still lacking, because any three words are static, any formula is inevitably an attempt to capture a truth for all time. Truth in theatre is always on the move.

> As you read this book, it is already moving out of date. It is for me an exercise, now frozen on the page. But unlike a book, the theatre has one special characteristic. It is always possible to start again. In life this is a myth; we ourselves can never go back on anything. New leaves never turn, clocks never go back, we can never have a second chance. In the theatre the slate is wiped clean all the time.[89]

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[89] Brook, *The Empty Space*, pp. 156 – 157.

Lieblein criticises this final act of Brook's as 'disingenuous'; for her this is because '[t]o offer a reader a book that "is already moving out of date . . . , an exercise frozen on the page," is to evade responsibility for the form that book has been given.'[90] *Form* is the critical term here, and her subsequent analysis repeatedly engages with the physical aspects of Brook's production to show that theatre always takes place 'somewhere' rather than 'anywhere', challenging what she sees as his disinclination to take responsibility for his performance text. His *King Lear* was made under and for a specific context, and must be accounted for within that context, taking its place amongst the other performance texts that have been fashioned from *King Lear*. As Lieblein states in the epigraph for this chapter, 'the stage... has its own history, and any production takes its place in that history.'[91] Brook's vaguely accounted for 'truth' has to be brought into being at a certain point and in a certain place; productions may be dismantled and started again but once a production has occurred it cannot be undone; the slate *cannot* be wiped clean – it is always in some respects left dirty, its residue adding to that of previous interpretations, and informing the production of potential-others in the future. All of which recalls Genette's palimpsestic hypotexts and hypertexts; Brook's *King Lear* is positioned in a genealogical web of which it is itself a benefactor. For Lieblein, this web relates primarily to the kind of theatrical historiography that draws the most critical attention; the interrelation of dramatic and performance texts with one another, processes that are scrutinised in the works of Jonathan Miller and Marvin Carlson – evidenced in her subsequent comparison with Peter Hall's 1965 Kott-inspired *Hamlet*.[92]

Lieblein's emphasis, then, is on the performance text as a stabilisation, and she attacks Brook's unfeasible notions of 'empty' space ('the stage, however bare... is never neutral') in order to combat Kott's 'anti-historicism'.[93] This latter she perceives as a dishonest 'sleight of hand'. Whilst he 'quite properly treats his own historical moment as a textual field within which Shakespeare's work lives', Kott uses contemporary cultural perspectives to revise the pantheon of Shakespeare's texts in order

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[90] Lieblein "Jan Kott, Peter Brook, and King Lear", p. 44.
[91] Ibid., p. 43.
[92] Ibid., p. 44.
[93] Ibid., p. 46.

to assert a 'meaninglessness' to history.[94] Thus he is guilty of betraying his own assertions. Far from celebrating and maintaining the 'universality' of historical periods, he instead indulges in a 'private hermeneutics', and once his philosophical position is defined it 'is there to be found in works of art which become a metaphor for the conclusions he has drawn from his own experience, regardless of their own history and contexts of creation.'[95] In other words, Kott's democratising of Shakespeare is merely a ruse to assert his own ideology as an absolute a view of the contemporary which 'becomes timeless when, throughout the ages, artists can be seen to express current views or, more precisely, his [Kott's] own views.'[96]

Lieblein cites the following quote from Herbert Lindenberger as a bolster to her critical endeavours:

> The self-consciousness we have developed in recent years about interpretation... encourage[s] us to understand the historicity of all interpretation, to arouse our suspicions, for instance, toward the way we read contemporary concerns into earlier works and periods.[97]

There is a danger in Lindenberger's warning, particularly when applied to theatre, because as I have sought to demonstrate through this chapter not only is the reading of contemporary concerns into earlier works inevitable, it is also an integral component of the ways in which theatre engages with history. Provided an equivalent warning is issued alongside, however – that suspicions also be aroused against attempts to *avoid* reading contemporary concerns into earlier works and periods – his caveat is useful for the approach to narrative theatrical historiography that I am proposing. This observes a correlation between the *presence* of the performance text and the sequential nature of the multidimensional webs with which it interacts, comparable to the archiviolithic and archival drives that underpin Derrida's *Archive Fever*. Or, put another way, historiographic theatre is a destructive practice in which dramatic and performance texts seek the obliteration of their points of

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[94] Ibid., pp. 41, 42.
[95] Ibid., p. 42.
[96] Ibid., p. 42.
[97] Ibid., p. 43.

origin in order to resonate within their own contexts, and during this process contribute to and

develop those very points of origin. The conditions in which Bond produced *Lear* were fostered by a

combination of the recent past and the ways in which *King Lear* had been adapted to respond to

that past from a particular perspective; he was responding to a Shakespeare, but it was a

Shakespeare who had been destroyed and rebuilt in many different fashions under a multiplicity of

different contexts.

## 4. *Lear* in 21ˢᵗ Century Sheffield

The same, it must be said, has occurred to Bond's own play as it has become a historiographic

document. In Jonathan Kent's 2005 revival at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, John Peter's review in

the *Sunday Times* talks about 'a spiky, venomous patriarch in a suit, building a wall around his realm,

not unlike Ariel Sharon, to keep his people free.' [98] The series of inferences indexed here draws

Bond's play into an entirely new discourse – the cold war settings of its 1970s context expanded into

the violence perpetrated by the state of Israel in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. John

Highfield, writing in *The Stage*, takes the contextual recalibrations a step further:

> [The production is a] brutal, savagely funny study of a society in freefall which, at a
>
> time when one of the world's great powers is advocating attack as the best form of
>
> defence and putting up barriers around itself, seems frighteningly relevant.[99]

What is taking place, then, is a violent recalibration of Bond's own adaptation of Shakespeare to fit

the requirements of a new performing context. In order for this to happen, the complex trajectories

by which *King Lear* had arrived at Bond – from Holinshed and Monmouth to Nahum Tate, from A.C.

Bradley to Brook and Kott, and the subsequent trajectories of his own dramatic text through its

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[98] John Peter's review of *Lear*, *The Sunday Times*, 20ᵗʰ March 2005 in *Theatre Record*, 2005, vol. 6., p. 379.
[99] John Highfield's review of *Lear* in *The Stage*, 24/05/05,
<http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/7071/lear> [Accessed 27/02/13].

performed iterations – were reconfigured, as a new act of violence was wrought upon that text at its various points of origin.

In order to establish the immediacy of his performance text, the design of Kent's production served as an extension to the materiality of its performing context. Produced in a Sheffield under urban development, the stage was made to resemble a building site. Large quantities of churned up earth had been dumped onto the performance space, and smeared up the sides of the metal and concrete constructions which ringed the auditorium. As the audience assembled, anonymous, hard hatted workers dug, hauled and laid slabs of concrete and mud under the supervision of armed soldiers who strode around, quietly conversing and occasionally adjusting their rifles. Dominic Cavendish made explicit connections between the building site stage set, and the 'messy regeneration scheme in progress' in the centre of Sheffield. [100] In addition to reshaping the grander political narratives of *Lear* and its parent text in addressing the policies of Ariel Sharon and George Bush Jr., the play also spoke to the conditions of its performing environment – an example of the model established in Chapter Three, where performance texts are able to interact with a range of 'natural worlds' in constructing what I have tacitly termed 'mimetic interactivity'. [101] Whilst inviting comparisons with the geopolitical situations acknowledged by Peter and Highfield, then, this was a production *physically* rooted in its performance context and – in a move that could not help but echo Sarah Kane's *Blasted* – sought to draw comparisons between the two. [102] An interesting difference between James MacDonald's influential production of *Blasted* and Kent's *Lear* is that, where the former 'lures the audience into a false sense of naturalistic security, eclipsed behind the invisible fourth wall', by echoing the surrounding context *without* a fourth wall, Kent connected his audience to the on-stage action from the outset. [103] The consequence was a complex amalgamation of what Wixson calls the 'ontologies of stage space'. At one level, the 'ghosts' of Shakespeare and Bond's tragedies were

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[100] Dominic Cavendish, Review, *Daily Telegraph* 17.03.05.
[101] See Chapter Three, Section 2 of this thesis.
[102] See Christopher Wixson, '"In Better Places": Space, Identity and Alienation in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*' *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 39., No. 1., Spring 2005, pp. 75 – 91.
[103] Ibid., p. 77.

transposed into the context of what began as 21st Century Sheffield. As the play developed, this familiar, local setting became amalgamated with the familiar-but-distant conflicts of Israel/Palestine and US/UK interventions in the Middle East. A spatial dialogue was thus created between the historical preoccupations of Bond's text, and a range of international events occurring in the world of its contemporary iteration.

The action of the piece commenced with the accidental killing of one of the workers and a flurry of confusion on the part of his counterparts, who concealed the body under a tarpaulin as Lear strode on with his retinue. An otherwise familiar building inspection was queered by the presence of the guns and the corpse, a scenario that quickly disintegrated into the political struggle which would rip Lear's country to pieces, and was crowned by the summary execution of a worker scapegoated for the death of the first. This rapid shift from the domestic to the political succeeded partly because of the production's ability to unite the worlds of spectator and spectacle, and then to push beyond them. The anonymity of the workers and soldiers suggested a multitude of identical situations, accidents and betrayals with lethal consequences. In the mundane representation of execution within the recognisable iconography of manual labour, a statement was made which challenged the hierarchies of power governing the context of production, whilst still drawing upon the politics of the dramatic text – and, in fact, the 'Grand Mechanism' that Kott had found in Shakespeare. This led *The Times* to describe the characters portrayed as 'unnatural... where reducing another human being to 'walking offal' is just a job...'[104] The 'unnaturalness' of the brutal events of the production were problematized by their initial presentation within a familiar, local' framework, and subsequent illustration through a war-torn setting that was not 'local' to the context of production, but very much recognizable as 'contemporary'. The uniting of historical and contemporary preoccupations (the toxic consequences of hierarchical power structures combined with the logic of advanced capitalism) was mirrored in the uniting of different contemporary spaces (the domestic regeneration

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[104] *The Times*, 17.03.05.

of Sheffield and the conflict of the Middle East), demonstrating a key strength of theatre's capacity to (re)create history in dialogue with the natural worlds of its contemporary production.

Another intervention made by the production in terms of its historiographic endeavours was evidenced through the character of the Gravedigger's Boy. Prior to his death, the scenes involving this character were markedly understated, with the harsh, industrial brutality that characterized the rest of the piece toned down in favour of a peaceful, pastoral idyll, complete with dappled lighting and birdsong. The bracketing of these scenes with visceral explorations of the horrors of civil war, however, positioned the Gravedigger's Boy's world as an unsupportable fiction. His function, eventually, was to illustrate the dangers of living in a separatist fantasy; a condition which Bond compares to idealising the past, rather than examining its resonances with the present. Bond argues that the character is:

> a destructive thing in the play. He starts off as a very innocent person, but what he wants to do is to live in a small community, in his own little private world, in which he ignores certain problems, and you can't ignore those problems. If you try to ignore those problems – they are problems of Lear himself, the questions he keeps asking – then I think you start inventing a myth about the age of a golden past. And if you try and live in the past, then that becomes a very destructive thing. And the ghost does live in the past, and he does belong to a stage of society that I don't think one can go back to... [105]

The issues exposed here about the irrecoverability of past lives are pertinent to this analysis not only in the ways in which Bond appropriates Shakespeare, but the ways in which Bond's own text reverberates within moments of its performance that are divorced from his own time. Bond's present of production has become a past that cannot be lived in. Any contemporary iterations of *Lear* must seek out and interact with their thematic or conceptual counterparts in the worlds into

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[105] Bond, *Plays: Two*, p. 133.

which they are brought into being or else risk becoming, like the Ghost, a retrograde parasite, a 'destructive thing'. This is why, returning to the earlier argument, acts of violence *must* be undertaken against a historical text in order to reconfigure it within a contemporary context and rescue it from the 'irresponsible' inertia that comes from leaving history in the past. Where readings of Shakespeare's play have, throughout history, mutated to fit the conditions of a particular context, and where Bond himself had reconfigured Shakespeare to interact with a particular, cold-war influenced context, Kent reconfigured *Lear* to interact with a context informed by a new set of concerns, in order to avoid relegating the play, as history, to 'the past'.

Kent's production of *Lear* was thus recalibrated to interact with the conditions of its performing context, violently adapted and with its initial set of references overwritten by that context's specific demands. This overwriting will in turn shape and inform future recalibrations, with an aspect of itself 'archived', in Derrida's sense of the word, to ensure the potential for those recalibrations to take place.

The significance for this identification to the model of 'historiographic theatre' that I have been outlining is thus that the narratives available to a theatrical engagement are always-already renegotiated under the auspices of the performing context. However, these narratives *also* grant theatre the potential to point beyond those specificities, and avoid the absolute circumscription of a particular theatrical text (dramatic or performance) to the prevailing orthodoxies *of* that context — the trap, as we have seen, into which contemporary verbatim theatre all too often falls. Historical narratives — this chapter has dealt with both theatrical and socio-political examples — grant theatrical production the ability to interrogate both a notion of the past, and the present in which that past is interrogated.

It is to this subsequent function of historiographic theatre that I turn, in the final chapter of this thesis. Through my discussion of Badiou, I concurred with his argument for a 'rebirth' of history in order to comprehend the significance of the contemporary societal developments of which the

English Riots in 2011 were symptomatic, and contended that theatre could offer a unique contribution to this 'rebirth'. In this chapter, I have outlined one particular way in which this contribution might be approached. Theatre is able to locate its performing context within a broader historical trajectory, and this in turn enables that theatre to move beyond and critique the context itself, in a temporally and spatially located occurrence in which all participants collaborate in the production of meaning: an *event*. Thus, where this chapter has examined the ways in which theatre may engage with historical trajectories in order to exploit its historiographic potential, the final chapter moves to examine the event of theatre itself.

In order to do this I turn to Howard Barker, a dramatist who, as I will show, employs a historiographic philosophy that is explicitly concerned with the production of historically-oriented texts *in* and *as* events. In order to explore the operation of this philosophy, I take as a case study the National Theatre's 2012 staging of his play *Scenes from an Execution* (1984). Through this investigation, I will explore and propose certain ways in which the theatre event may be exploited in order to make, and engage with history.

## 1. An Execution at the National Theatre

In September 2012, the National Theatre in London staged Tom Cairns' production of Howard Barker's 1984 play *Scenes from an Execution*.[1] The play takes place in a historical setting, as is not uncommon in Barker's work – in this case Venice around 1572, in the aftermath of the Battle of Lepanto. Its thematic concerns include the ways in which contemporary power relations, most notably the conflict between artistic and political sensibilities, influence the translation and transformation of events into the discourses of history. *Scenes from an Execution*'s pertinence to this thesis is readily apparent in these concerns – a key preoccupation of my developing argument has been to explore the ways in which theatre can appropriate history to engage with the present of its production. In addition, there is another factor contributing to the play's value as an object of study. This is the historiographic philosophy that Barker develops within (and envisages for) his drama, and the disparities between this philosophy and the performance text developed for the National Theatre by Cairns.

In an interview for the *Guardian*, Barker revealed that he considered Cairns' production *in principle* (as well as, it must be said, in practice) a kind of defeat.[2] Barker believes that theatre should be an 'ordeal', and takes considerable measures in the writing of his plays to ensure that future-other performances comply with this belief.[3] Amongst these measures, which include non-linear plots, inconsistent and contradictory characters and baroque, anti-naturalistic dialogue, he develops an approach to history that is unusual in its deliberate opacity:

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[1] All subsequent references to will be to this production.
[2] Maddy Costa, 'Howard Barker: I don't care whether you listen or not', *Guardian*, 1st October 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/oct/01/howard-barker-scenes-execution> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[3] Ibid.

[T]he history play is a good thing, because... it's a *metaphor*, it enables you to escape

some of the crushing documentary factuality about the world and indulge in a little...

speculation, and you can do that in a historical period.[4]

For Barker, the uncertainties and ambiguities latent in historical discourses provide a frontier *against*

what he calls this 'crushing documentary factuality' – his historiography is one of deliberate

obscurity, producing texts that are themselves obscure.[5]

This chapter aims to use the peculiar example of Barker's historiographic objectives – and their

disparities with Cairns' theatrical production – in order to explore a further set of questions

concerning the concept that I have been calling historiographic theatre. In the argument developed

in the opening three chapters, I have shown that in order to capitalise upon theatre's unique abilities

to create history, an awareness of *how* that history is being created (an engaged historiographic

consciousness) must be present both in the production of the dramatic text, and in the reception

and analysis of dramatic and performance texts. In the previous chapter, building on this assertion, I

demonstrated certain ways in which a theatrical production can make use of historical narratives in

order to productively engage with its performing context. In this final chapter, I turn to address a

question that arose in Chapter One concerning the development of the dramatic *to* the performance

text, and illustrate the necessity of maintaining a historiographic consciousness in this process as

well.[6] In order to achieve this, I will address a contingent uncertainty in what I have until now

referred to as the theatrical 'event'; the temporal and spatial location in which theatre ultimately

takes place. If there is to be a 'legitimacy' in historiographic theatre, it must operate within this

event, and thus a better understanding of what the event *is* must be attained. To consolidate both

the pragmatic and theoretical developments undertaken in this chapter, I will finish by approaching

a critical issue that has yet to be addressed – can historiographic theatre survive in the future-other

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[4] Lindesay Irvine, interview with Howard Barker, *Guardian*, 6th December 2006,
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/audio/2006/dec/06/culture1426> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[5] See Howard Barker, *Arguments for a theatre, 2nd edition* (London: John Calder, 1993), p. 80.
[6] See chapter 1; 2.1. and 2.2.

contexts of its potential performance, and if so, how? My analysis has so far been concerned with issues of past and present, but by developing my theoretical apparatus around the example of Barker and Cairns, I will look at the ways in which dramatic texts *can* be constructed in order to stimulate historiographic theatre in, of and for the future

## 1.1. Establishing an Execution

*Scenes from an Execution* concerns the commission of the artist Galactia by Urgentino, the Doge of Venice, to paint a commemoration of the Battle of Lepanto, a maritime conflict in which the Italian forces defeated the Turks.[7] Rather than show the violence in the light of a glorious triumph, Galactia paints a visceral, brutal depiction of war full of '[t]he noise of men minced'.[8] She is not, however, operating from conventional political motivations – she does not object to the conduct of the state in war, so much as its censorious regulation of art, or more specifically of *her* art. The stage is then set for a protracted struggle between Galactia's artistic imperatives, Urgentino's political machinations, the opportunist interventions of the art critic Rivera, a host of wounded-soldiers turned sideshow-freaks, envious contemporaries that include Galactia's lover – the religious painter Carpeta – and Galactia's long-suffering daughters. Woven into the narrative is the 'Sketchbook', a figure who operates outside of the world of the play and offers detailed observations on both the finished painting and its preparatory sketches (neither painting nor sketches ever appear on stage). As Galactia's protestations become more volatile and unstable, she is alienated from her daughters and then imprisoned, with her commission passed on to Carpeta. But although (or more likely *because*) he adheres to Urgentino's increasingly autocratic specifications, Carpeta's picture fails to impress, and at Rivera's insistence that Galactia's painting be 'retrieved' (that is, politically repackaged), it is triumphantly exhibited as a celebration of the Venetian government. Galactia

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[7] For a detailed study, see Andrew C. Heiss, 'The Battle of Lepanto and Its Place in Mediterranean History' in *Past and Present*, No. 57., Nov. 1972, pp. 53 – 73.

[8] Howard Barker, *Collected Plays: Volume 1* (London: John Calder, 1990), p. 257.

herself is released from prison, to the adulation of a superficial public. The play ends on a pyrrhic, deeply ironic note:

> URGENTINO: Do you feel powerful? I have such power, but no such power. I can make men weep, but only by torturing them, while you – don't resent me. In a hundred years, no one will weep for your painting only respect it. Cold, dull respect. Enjoy your peculiar authority! It is a great nation, is it not, that shows its victories not as parades of virility, but as terrible cost? [...] Will you dine with us? I hate to miss a celebrity from my table. (*Pause.*)
>
> GALACTIA:    Yes.[9]

In Urgentino's excited chatter and Galactia's numb, monosyllabic acquiescence is a downbeat argument about the seemingly inevitable neutralising of art by both the state and by history itself. In his speech, Urgentino initially acknowledges art's ability to engender extreme individual responses that are beyond the hegemonic influence of any exterior authority. In the case of theatrical art, this echoes the rationales behind Antonin Artaud's insistence upon 'drastic action pushed to the limit'; rationales which Susan Sontag drew upon to argue for theatre's ability to ensure that its audience does 'not leave the theatre "intact" morally or emotionally'.[10] There is a powerful potential in theatre's ability to rupture the spectator's individual experience, in other words; a power available to theatre that is committed to achieving such an effect. This constitutes the desired 'ordeal' of Barker's work, informing the ways in which he believes that the performance text should be presented to, and approached by its audience:

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[9] Ibid., p. 305.

[10] Antonin Artaud, 'Theatre and Cruelty' in Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works: Volume Four*, trans. by Victor Corti (London: John Calder , 1974), p. 64; Susan Sontag, 'Approaching Artaud' in Edward Scheer, ed., *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 87.

The work of art is not digestible

but

overwhelms

systems of consumption

evaluation

use

repair [11]

The 'indigestibility' of the work of art – in this case the performance text – thus demands from

spectators a committed response which 'revive[s] the concept of knowledge, which is a private

acquisition of an audience thinking individually and not collectively, an audience isolated in darkness

and stretched to the limits of tolerance'.[12] Alison Brice defines this process by seeing both

practitioners and spectators '"grinding on the complexity of the text" until individual meaning is

formed out of the exigencies of that struggle.'[13] Brice's reading of Barker here quite clearly echoes

Rancière, and his recentring of meaning-production in the performance text upon the participation

of practitioners, audience and text in order to 'emancipate' the figure of the spectator.[14]

And yet, to return to Urgentino's speech, the fallibility of this desired ambiguity or 'knowledge' is

illuminated in his valorisation of both the state – 'It is a great nation, is it not...' – and history – 'In a

hundred years, no one will weep for your painting only respect it'.[15] Regardless of the commitment

in the work of art to rupturing the spectator's experience to create an 'ordeal' that is beyond the

political influence of the state, or the neutralising propensities of history, the work is still vulnerable

to assimilation by both *unless* that commitment is perpetually, staunchly maintained. In this case,

the responsibility for maintaining the commitment, in which the power of the text resides, falls upon

the practitioners and spectators who interpret the text in and for themselves. The sentiment

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[11] 'On Plethora' in Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Second Edition), p. 139.
[12] 'The politics beyond the politics' in Barker, *Arguments for a theatre* (Second Edition), p. 50.
[13] Alison Brice, 'Introduction to the Second Edition' in Ibid., p. 4.
[14] See Chapter Three, 3.2 of this thesis.
[15] Barker, *Collected Plays: Volume 1*, p. 305.

resonates with Bond's revulsion towards the 'sloppy patriotic way that Shakespeare becomes "our Shakespeare"' if Shakespeare's plays are not interrogated in and for the contexts of their contemporary productions.[16] No matter how revolutionary the potential of a work of art, in other words, that potential can easily be betrayed by the culture in which it is appropriated.[17] Graham Saunders identifies this betrayal as a key thematic preoccupation across much of Barker's oeuvre, a body of work that struggles against 'historical processes that lead to inclusion within the canon, [which] ultimately neuter impulses that can be thought of as radical forms.'[18]

With the antagonist's final utterance, *Scenes from an Execution* ends on a note of capitulation. Flattered as a 'celebrity' (a term only previously employed in the play to describe soldiers whose war wounds had rendered them 'grotesque curiosities'), Galactia accepts Urgentino's invitation, acknowledging the victory of the forces of history and politics over the rebellious potential of her art. In his review of Cairns' production for the *Guardian*, Michael Billington proclaimed that 'it's a measure of Barker's subtlety that he shows how even the most transgressive art can be co-opted by the state.'[19] Had he developed this thinking, Billington may perhaps have reflected upon the irony of this statement in conjunction with a text that aims for 'transgression' – in the sense of inviting ambiguity and 'reviving knowledge' – being produced in a fashion that, as I will now argue, complied with the prevailing political and cultural hegemonies of its performing context. Once this has been demonstrated, in opposition to Billington's (perhaps unconscious) celebration of hegemonic neutralisation, the chapter concludes by examining the relationship between a dramatic text's

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[16] Edward Bond, *Theatre Quarterly* Vol VIII, 30, (1978) p. 34.

[17] For a recent example of this, see Anthony Lane's review of Tom Hooper's *Les Misérables*, where the societal conflicts explored in Victor Hugo's novel is reduced to 'harmonious mush'. 'Love Hurts', *The New Yorker*, 7th January 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2013/01/07/130107crci_cinema_lane> [Accessed 26/02/13].

[18] Graham Saunders, 'Howard Barker's 'monstrous assaults': eroticism, death and the antique text' in Karoline Girtzner, ed., *Eroticism and Death in Theatre and Performance* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010), p. 146.

[19] Michael Billington, '*Scenes from an Execution* – Review', *Guardian*, 5th October 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/oct/05/scenes-from-an-execution-review> [Accessed 03/02/13].

historiographic potential, and the ways in which that potential must be *consciously* engaged in the future-other contexts of its performance.

## 1.2. The Stage of an Execution

The programme for Cairns' National Theatre production contained: an article by David Ian Rabey entitled 'Howard Barker and the Ocean of Imagination'; a survey by Richard Cork entitled 'The Emergence of Women Artists' that stretched from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries; a discussion by Roger Crowley of the Battle of Lepanto; a page by Martin Crowley on the Doge of Venice; and a set of rehearsal photographs portraying amicable interactions between an industrious cast and crew.[20] Beyond Rabey's article, which offered a brief introduction to the common concerns of Barker's drama, there was scant engagement with the interests of the text itself – resistance to singularity; resistance to censorship; resistance to the clarification of the individual, or of art, or of history. This easily digestible, 'informative' and 'educational' product indexed the broader objectives of the production itself – a political repackaging not dissimilar to that pronounced by the Doge upon Galactia's painting – which, given the apparent lack of irony in the proceedings, began to take on the form of an unintentional parody. The audience laughed and applauded at signposted moments of comedy and dramatic exuberance; acting, as it were, in unison. The two leads were celebrity castings, one of whom – Tim McKinnery as the Doge – played heavily upon recognisable archetypes from his performances in *Blackadder* to create a camp, menacing, pantomime villain.[21] Fiona Shaw's performance was more nuanced, but the controversy she managed to elicit was rather a consequence of her on-stage nudity than the challenges posed by her character.[22] This, of course,

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[20] Programme, *Scenes from an execution*, directed by Tom Cairns, National Theatre 2012.
[21] Ian Shuttleworth, 'Scenes from an Execution – Review' *Financial Times*, 7th October 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/e3d8acd6-0ecd-11e2-ba6b 00144feabdc0.html?ftcamp=published_links%2Frss%2Farts%2Ffeed%2F%2Fproduct#axzz2H0ksnxkA> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[22] Paul Taylor, 'Scenes from an Execution Review', *Independent*, 5th October 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/scenes-from-an-execution-lyttelton-national-theatre-london-8199249.html> [Accessed 27/02/13].

was not Shaw's fault, but does indicate the way in which this production was presented and received: not as an ordeal, but rather an entertainment.

There is a certain degree of inevitability to this repackaging, of course – the National Theatre by sheer value of its status as a 'national' institution maintains an overbearing identity that is etched into everything from its glossy, advertisement-heavy programmes, to its celebrity castings, to the comfort of its well-lit foyers.[23] These spaces, it must be noted, are particularly loathed by Barker, who sees them as 'indelibly associated with entertainment and conviviality [...] the very converse of the sacred vestibule he [Barker] admired in the old church, a space of silence and preparation for the experience of prayer.'[24] From the outset, then, it could reasonably be suggested that the National Theatre was simply an unsuitable location in which to stage Barker's play: that the overwriting of *Scenes from an Execution*'s challenging political potential was always-already assured by the nature of the venue itself, and thus the production could not help but fail to deliver on the dramatic text's historiographic promise. But Barker, unlike Bond, does not attempt to exert a didactic control over his work, for the reasons that he does not propose any unilateral meaning to the texts, rather asserting their meaning (and the responsibility for its creation) as the province of practitioners and spectators.[25]

Despite authoring in excess of 100 dramatic texts over a forty year career in which he has gained international acclaim, this was the first of Barker's plays ever staged at the National Theatre.[26] Previously, in fact, Barker had made it a point of pride that every new text he wrote was sent to the National Theatre 'for rejection, so that I know I can still see clearly'.[27] However, given the perverse,

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[23] In addition, as this production did not tour and was not broadcast in cinemas, its London-centric audience makeup add further challenges to its status as a 'national' text.

[24] Howard Barker / Eduardo Houth, *A Style and its Origins*, (London: Oberon Publishing , 2007) p. 43.

[25] See Edward Bond, *The Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*, (London: Methuen, 2000) p. 7.

[26] Dominic Cavendish, 'International Howard Barker Day', *The Telegraph*, 21st October 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-news/6396396/International-Howard-Barker-day.html> [Accessed 03/02/13].

[27] http://www.danrebellato.co.uk/Site/Spilled_Ink/Entries/2012/11/17_Scenes_from_an_Execution.html [Accessed 03/02/13]. It is worth noting, however, that just as Bond refused a millennial 'celebration' of *Saved* at the NT, Barker refused his play *Victory*'s inclusion in the same festival – for, it would seem, similar reasons (see the above site).

negative inclusivity of his praxis – 'I don't know what I want to say, and I don't care if you listen or not' (with the implication therefore that *anyone* who wants to listen *can*, and hear whatever they want to in his texts), it is not necessarily surprising that, again unlike Bond, when the National Theatre *did* propose a production of one of Barker's plays, he accepted.[28] Barker had, in fact, already laid some foundations for this possibility when he claimed that he would 'not [be] averse to a range of styles of playing his texts [...] even if he thought those styles less potent than his own and the institutions dishonest'.[29] The vagaries of 'potency' and 'honesty' compromise their viability as criteria for the consolidation of any particular style, and superficially in fact serve to underscore Rabey's contention that it is precisely Barker's idiosyncratic, unclassifiable aestheticism that has rendered the bulk of his work irresolvable to mainstream theatrical discourses.[30]

The political implications of a 'National Theatre' arose in a recent conversation between Barker and Maddy Costa. Here, Barker expressed his unease at the very concept of such an institution, in a way that speaks directly to the concerns of this study:

"A question you might ask is: what is a national theatre? It seems to me it has to be something; it's not just a big building that does a lot of plays, because then it could be anything. Presumably it knowingly or unknowingly must reproduce the contemporary political consensus." Reproduces it, or questions it? "No: it thinks it questions it – but that's part of the consensus. We're in a world of what I believe is worryingly called transparency: everything is continually being examined critically. But by producing lots of plays which argue about society, the theatre is merely reproducing the role of society: it's not breaking it down."[31]

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[28] Maddy Costa, 'Howard Barker: I don't care whether you listen or not', *Guardian*, 1st October 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/oct/01/howard-barker-scenes-execution> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[29] Howard Barker and Eduardo Houth, *A Style and its Origins* (London: Oberon, 2007), pp. 62 – 63.
[30] David Ian Rabey, *Howard Barker: Ecstasy and Death, An Expository Study of his Drama, Theory and Production Work, 1988 – 2008* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 10 – 11.
[31] Costa, Maddy, 'The Curious Romance of Howard Barker', 2nd October 2012, <http://statesofdeliquescence.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/the-curious-romance-of-howard barker.html> [Accessed 03/02/13]; Maddy Costa, 'Howard Barker: I don't care whether you listen or not',

We are thus returned to the arguments developed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis concerning the seemingly unconscious reproduction of dominant ideologies within texts that superficially purport to offer resistance to those self-same ideologies. What is more, just as I endeavoured to demonstrate with my analysis of Slovo and Kent's supposedly nonideological politics, the practitioners at the National Theatre *believe* themselves to be challenging the political consensus, when all they actually do – according to Barker – is reassert it. It should be noted that in a recent public talk, Bond made a similar assertion, claiming that 'we live in a society that sells everything and now it sells its diseases... If you go to the National Theatre, disease will be sold to you as a solution.'[32] In contrast to these arguments, Dragan Klaic recently suggested a role for the National Theatre as a proponent of a kind of 'public' theatre which offers much-needed resistance against the economic onslaught of unsubsidised commercial theatre, where not even the pretence of opposition to dominant ideologies can be affected.[33] To support this, however, one would have to overlook (as Klaic often does) the potentially disconcerting ends to which 'public' theatre can be used. George Hunka points to this when, discussing the absence of a national theatre in the USA, he frets that 'given what's been done to the geopolitical scene by the American military and cultural power structure in the name of its citizens over the past 10 years, I'm loathe [sic] to think what might be done by the theatrical and dramatic community in the name of its citizens as well.'[34] A more accurate reading of the danger, of course, would not separate politics and art but rather

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*Guardian*, 1st October 2012,
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/oct/01/howard-barker-scenes-execution> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[32] Edward Bond, 'The First Word' – keynote address for the 'Bond@50 Conference', Warwick University, 2nd November 2012.
[33] See Dragan Klaic, *Resetting the Stage: Public Theatre between the Market and Democracy* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012).
[34] George Hunka, 'Why America has no national theatre', *Guardian*, 17th December 2012,
http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2007/dec/17/whyamericahasnonationalth> [Accessed 07/02/13]. Hunka's unease mirrors that articulated by Bottoms, as he reflects on the manifold troubles underpinning Hare's *Stuff Happens* – one of the National Theatre's signature productions. Bottoms, 'Putting the Document into Documentary', pp. 60 – 61.

identify the latter (in the hands of a national ideology and institution) as a potentially very powerful advocate of the former.[35]

As the focus of this thesis is upon exploiting the historiographic capacities of a dramatic text through its performance in a particular context, the example of a national theatre as an (unconscious or otherwise) agent of state ideologies provides an ideal candidate for considering the potential effect that the performing context can have on the material being produced. When brought into contact with the uncompromising nature of Barker's philosophy, this creates an extreme example of the relationship between dramatic and performance text from which a template for a more productive idea of historiographic theatre may be tentatively advanced. It is somewhere between what Brean Hammond calls Barker's 'fierce hunger for vision amid imaginative liberation of the self' that can easily 'shade over into romanticised absolutism' and the neutralising propensities of the state, evidenced here through the hyper-ideological identity of the National Theatre, that this study will trace a way in which Barker's drama may offer a productive basis for historiographic theatre.[36]

## 1.3. Please Don't Let Me Be Understood

At the level of the dramatic text, it would not be too difficult to suggest that *Scenes from an Execution* seeks to resist appropriation, and that this objective informs the basis of both its form and content. The narrative concerns a protagonist who believes that it is 'death to be understood', and whose art thus opposes definitive understanding.[37] The play in which this narrative is developed offers equal opposition to definitive understanding – there are no easy points of identification or empathy. As Rabey puts it, 'Galactia wants her audience to experience the pain of the sea-battle

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[35] See Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation State* (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 2002), especially pp. 51 – 94; and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2000), for discussions on the powerful capabilities of art to establish and consolidate national identities and ideologies.

[36] Brean Hammond, "Is everything history?" Churchill, Barker, and the Modern History Play' in *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Spring 2007, p. 21.

[37] Barker, *Collected Plays: Volume 1*, p. 303.

rather than be oppressed into association with the institutionalised reverence of national sacrifice';

the figures of artist and audience can be expanded beyond Galactia and the Venetians, to Barker and

the practitioners and spectators who consolidate *Scenes from an Execution* in production.[38] Rabey

develops his observation to suggest a broader historiographic philosophy across Barker's work:

'[Barker's plays] call for ceaseless redefinition of the self and engagement in historical dynamics,

seeking the truth which occurs when essence is illuminated by the renewal and regeneration of

form: new manner for new situation.'[39]

Through this logic, of course, Cairns' performance text *could* be seen as fulfilling a historiographic

function that does not contradict Barker's stated intentions – it was, by sheer dint of its production

in 2012, engaged in the regeneration of form for a new situation. Also, as has been argued

throughout this thesis, the performance text is only partly contingent upon the stated intentions of

the dramatic text (or its writer/s) – something that Barker emphatically supports, in fact. The

performance text, in short, is always already inscribed with the discourses of its performance

environment. In addition to which, as was observed by certain reviewers, walk-outs were not

uncommon during the run of Cairns' production, from which can be inferred at least that certain

spectators found the piece 'challenging'.[40] Such contestations can be answered, however, by

returning to Barker and Bond's critiques of the 'national theatre' institution itself, an establishment

whose products are automatically inscribed with an exterior, hegemonic ideology. Or, to put it

another way, the drama produced by the 'national theatre' becomes 'national' in a way which

overwrites the drama with an idea of the nation.[41] This overwriting thus curtails the historiographic

potential of the drama by rendering it the passive recipient of a particular orthodoxy. In order for

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[38] David Ian Rabey, *Howard Barker, Politics and Desire: An Expository Study of his Drama and Poetry, 1969 – 87* (London: Macmillan Press , 1989) p. 96. For a fuller discussion of the interrelated activities of dramatic texts, practitioners and spectators in the production of the performance text, see Chapter Three, Section 3 of this thesis.
[39] Ibid., p. 100.
[40] Alex Sierz, '*Scenes from an Execution* – Review', 4th October 2012, <http://www.theartsdesk.com/theatre/scenes-execution-national-theatre> [Accessed 03/02/13]; Lyn Gardner, 'Is it OK to walk out of a theatre?' *Guardian*, 1st October 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2012/oct/01/walk-out-of-play> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[41] See Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State*, pp. 52 – 53.

that potential to be capitalised upon, the drama would need to be mined for its specific abilities to expose, interact with and *critique* the orthodoxy, rather than passively obeying its directives. Under this principle, Barker's play *could* form the basis of a fertile piece of historiographic theatre, as it directly confronts the tensions arising between art and the state; expression and censorship; the homogenising propensities of compliance; and it does so through an engagement with history. What is needed in order to exploit the play's potential, then, is a historiographic method of theatrical production that stages a conscious balance between the history engaged by the text (history-as-subject, historical trajectory and historiographic strategies) and the conditions of its performing context. Only if this balance is sought and maintained will theatre be able to exploit its unique capacity to make and engage with history.

Towards the end of the play, as Urgentino laments at Carpeta's inability to complete the commission to his increasingly didactic specifications, the critic Rivera offers a Machiavellian solution:

> RIVERA:   In art, nothing is what it seems to be, but everything can be claimed.
>
>           The painting is not independent, even if the artist is. The picture is
>
>           retrievable, even when the painter is lost... [42]

In this statement, the use of the word 'claim' takes on a sinister double function as it offers both a 'recovery' and a 'contestation'. The art may be 'claimed' in the sense of being rescued, stolen from the jaws of obscurity, or the service of some (presumably ill-fated or misconstrued) extra-textual purpose and relocated within a 'saveable' – with all of the uneasy portents attributable to such a term – remit. This begets and is complemented by the secondary function, where having 'claimed' the painting, the claimant may then stake their own claim *about* it, bending this 'claimed' work into the service of some or other chosen purpose. Both the statement and its position within *Scenes from an Execution* operate as a brutal irony, as they 'resolve' the tension that has provided the dramatic impetus for the play, and usher in the conditions for a bitterly 'positive' (or rather 'acquiescent',

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[42] Barker, *Collected Plays; Volume 1*, p. 299.

which Barker dryly proposes as synonymous) ending. The ultimate pessimism of the edict 'everything can be claimed' can only be counteracted if the production in which it is uttered has managed to escape this fate; if it has not been 'claimed' by an overwriting, external force. This was, as I have argued, not the case with Cairns' production, and along with the political repackaging that saw *Scenes from an Execution* as an example of a 'national' text, added to a taxonomy of extra-textual ironies coalescing around the performance text (which are now, as I argued in Chapter Four – and as Keir Elam argues in the epigraph to this thesis – encoded into the dramatic text itself).

These ironies were perhaps at their sharpest in the presentation of the 'Sketchbook'. This role was taken by Gerrard McArthur, an actor who had previously worked in Barker's own company 'The Wrestling School' over several productions, and had been described by Barker as 'an actor of transparent religiosity'.[43] Here McArthur played the Sketchbook as a black-clad, twentieth/twenty-first century art critic, whose appearances were heralded by a snap lighting change and the freezing of all other characters on stage. McArthur would typically be found sitting on a high stool in a white, frontless box, suspended over the stage itself, but on one or two occasions was revealed standing amidst the characters (though invisible to them): an unknown presence until violently announced.

In both dramatic and performance texts, the Brechtian function of the Sketchbook is quite blatantly signposted. The audience are removed, temporally and spatially, from the narrative proper, and returned to an exterior level of observation in which their role as spectators – and most importantly as *critics* – is consciously foregrounded. Within this latter concern, a more troubling function of the Sketchbook is unveiled as the spectators-as-critics are spoken-*for*, with the Sketchbook spouting observations on composition, context, and the conditions of artistic production. Scene Three, for example, closes with:

> SKETCHBOOK:  The sketchbook of the fifth daughter of the painter Galactia, known
>
> as Supporta, also an artist and scenery painter, in red chalk, shows

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[43] Barker, *A Style and its Origins*, p. 72.

> her mother sitting with her legs apart, mouth hanging open like a
>
> rag, remonstrating with workmen in a vast room empty but for
>
> stools and scaffolding...[44]

Significantly, although the Sketchbook has made direct reference to Galactia before, this is the first time she is observed captured within a work of art herself – she has become an object, and is portrayed to the audience as such. In Cairns' production, this was the first time that the Sketchbook had left the white box, and appeared amongst the other characters on stage. These, at the lighting cue, adopted a static pose which took on the form of a tableau, and as the Sketchbook revealed himself and turned towards the audience, we were invited to reconsider the on-stage image *as* a work of art. The information imparted to us by the Sketchbook offered no particularly noteworthy insight – we had already gleaned this information by watching the scene itself – but rather served to recapitulate the narrative in a form from which we could be distanced, and which could then be quite literally *set*.

It is to this *setting* that I now wish to turn, as it combines the concerns of 'claiming' outlined above, and the issues of iterability and historiographic inscription which informed the theoretical investigations of Chapters Two and Three of this thesis. In short, where Barker offers the notion of 'claiming' as an ironic rebuttal to the fate of theatre – and art in general – that aspires to a political function, Cairns' production either seemed to miss, or more worryingly take delight in confirming this irony. In doing so, it ignored the potential for Barker's play to constitute a piece of historiographic drama – its ability to reproduce its ambiguities in its future-other performing contexts. By having the Sketchbook *set* Galactia and her retinue on stage, the performance text attempted to ascribe an absolute definition to the dramatic text which imposed upon the latter the possibility of a singular, unitary meaning. The significance of McArthur being cast in this role was that his presence 'ghosted' (to use Carlson's term) an icon of earlier, more rebellious incarnations of

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[44] Barker, *Collected Plays: Volume 1*, p. 264.

Barker's drama into Cairns' commercial, 'national' iteration.[45] Not only was the play being 'set' as a mercantile commodity, but the theatrical genealogies from which it had been created were also being corralled into the same profitable neutrality.

The production attempted to foreclose on the historiographic interactions proposed by the text itself, and in that foreclosure adhered to the absolutist, unambiguous ideology which this thesis has elsewhere identified as a facet of contemporary political – and theatrical – discourses. The remainder of this chapter will contest this attempted foreclosure, seeking to uncover a more productive means of exploiting the historiographic potential of Barker's dramatic text in performance.

In order to assemble this contestation, two significant tasks must be undertaken. The first is to attempt a clearer identification of 'legitimacy' in historiographic theatre. In order to argue that Cairns' production did *not* capitalise upon the potential of Barker's text, there must be a stronger idea in place of what that potential was, and how it might be accessed. For this, a term that has come under frequent use in this thesis will require in-depth examination – 'event'. If, as Susan-Lori Parks contended, '[a] play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history', then what exactly is this 'event', and is there a way of tracking a tangible relationship between it and its instigative blueprint, as there would be in the architectural use of the latter term?[46] Despite Barker's belief that meaning-production is the province of practitioners and spectators, an engaged consciousness of the dramatic text's historiographic potential in the specificities of its performing context must be maintained in order for that meaning-production to occur, which can only happen in and as an 'event'. Once this 'event' has been better understood, the analysis will move to the second task: examining the relationship between 'event' and 'blueprint', in order to establish and secure the *future* operation of what I have been terming 'historiographic theatre'. Before either task can be undertaken, however, a clearer sense of Barker's historiographic philosophy – and how it sits

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[45] Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, p. 133.
[46] Parks, *The America Play and Other Works*, p. 4.

in relation to those previously encountered in this thesis – must be attained, in order to establish the dramatic text of *Scenes from an Execution* as a profitable site of analysis for the task I am undertaking here.

## 1.4. Barker's anti-historical historiography

One of the factors that makes *Scenes from an Execution* (as both dramatic and performance text) a useful object of study for this thesis is that Barker's work offers a rare example of historical theatre which resists interactions with the present. Or rather, it resists interactions with a *single* present, in which could be adduced a definitive, political reading. His plays are designed to be opened up to multiple, simultaneous, contradictory readings that defy consolidation within any given 'present'. Before I expand upon this, it must be firmly stated that I am not suggesting that Barker is the only, or even perhaps the ideal candidate for historiographic theatre. As I have demonstrated, his historiography can fail (or be failed, and the tension between the two requires careful consideration). But, for the reasons previously outlined concerning the ideological extremities of both Barker's philosophy and the performing context of Cairns' production, this example provides a highly fertile site of analysis for the present study, and for the question of how to effectively produce historiographic theatre.

In each of the theatrical examinations undertaken in previous chapters of this thesis, the texts and practitioners encountered constructed their dramatic engagements with history in dialogue with notions of the present. A common claim made by practitioners of verbatim theatre, for instance, is that they attempt to reproduce 'historical events' in and for the present of a particular production – 're-presenting' an event for an audience in order for that audience to gain a greater sense of the event in its 'original' incarnation.[47] The other main conception of the 'present' was uncovered in the renegotiation of historical texts in the light of a contemporary context, seen in the work of Jan Kott,

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[47] See Bottoms, 'Putting the Document into Documentary', p. 59.

Peter Brook and Edward Bond. In the first case, the irreducibility of 'the past' to 'history' opened up a gap in which verbatim theatre's supposedly 'transparent' methodologies were problematized, their concealed political mechanics exposed, and the kind of non-ideological history they purported to offer revealed as (at best) operating under a grave misapprehension. In the second case, the overlapping of dramatic and performance texts as they move through time and space was employed to construct a model for theatrical narrative historiography which recentred the historical focus of Bond and Brook's work as products of the presents of their production. Without this recentring, I argued, the absolutist comprehensions of history that they had separately employed, and in which a sustained examination revealed troubling inconsistencies, could easily undermine the significance of their respective projects. In both cases, the objective was to suggest historiographic *analyses* (in both textual and performance format) that were conscious of theatre-as-historiography's inexorable failings and limitations. But, rather than ignoring these failings in order to propose apparently functional histories built upon insubstantial methodologies, the goal was rather to embrace them openly and consciously, in order to capitalise upon theatre's unique capacities as a method for the construction of history.

By contrast, Barker thinks of history (in terms of a *subject*) as a way of avoiding the present.[48] Or, more specifically, of avoiding the pressures which the present places on theatre – particularly in terms of 'relevance', 'function' and 'purpose'. He believes, and has argued at length, that theatre has no obligations to any of these, and that their application as value-determining criteria is an act of oppression.[49] His theatre turns to history because he finds it, if no less susceptible to these oppressions than the present, then at least more defensible against them. He believes that securing the past into stable narratives or fixed analytic terrains is a betrayal of the instability of lived experience. For Barker, the generation of the experience that makes up the material of the past is characterised by uncertainty, choice and chaotic ambiguity. Art which engages with this experience

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[48] Lindesay Irvine, interview with Howard Barker, *Guardian*, 6th December 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/audio/2006/dec/06/culture1426> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[49] Howard Barker, 'Barely concealed irritation: a critical encounter' in *Arguments for a theatre*, third edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 135.

is thus compromised if it relies upon 'representation'. Rather than Barker seeking to hermetically seal off the past in order to create a hygienic environment for the representation *of* that past, he embraces the severing of past and present so that that the former cannot be controlled or restricted by the latter's systematizing compulsions. Part of the way in which he seeks to oppose these compulsions is by creating obscure or non-linear texts whose meaning-production is conferred upon the practitioners and spectators that collude in a given performance; his drama thus rests upon a peculiar aspect of the iterability of the dramatic text.

In Chapter Three, I argued that iterability, which Derrida defined as a text's ability to 'break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion', is a fundamental and invaluable characteristic of historiographic theatre.[50] Theatre which is revived, or produced as a consequence of rehearsal and reproduction, is disconnected from the past and reassembled in an unfamiliar present. That present thus interacts with the performance text in new and unpredictable ways. Rather than build a narrative to bridge the gap between text and context, as Bond does (or simply ignore it, as often happens in verbatim) Barker acknowledges and embraces this gap, using it to support a critical aspect of his philosophy – wholesale rejection of 'relevance':

> I have shunned relevance with every text I have written, which may explain the continuing relevance of them to cultural experience far beyond my own. If art is relevant to anything, it is so by accident, and its task is to survive its own relevance and lodge at some deeper stratum of consciousness, immune to time if not to idiom.[51]

Barker's histories are places of upheaval, about which authoritative, comprehensive explanations are impossible – precisely, he argues, because the complexity and privacy of lived experience renders any such circumscriptions ineffective. He provides his rationales for this philosophy in the following adage:

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[50] Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 322: see 3: 2.2 of this thesis.
[51] Barker, *Arguments for a theatre* (Third Edition), p. 154.

The ordering of experience

is

posterior

not

anterior

to

the event [52]

Barker's theatre is thus consciously located in the space *before* the ordering of experience, capitalising upon that peculiar character of theatre as it engages with the historical event by becoming an event in and of itself. But what, precisely, might then be meant by the term 'event'?

## 2. Theatre Events

### 2.1. Event: Reception Studies and Theatre Semiotics

In turning to the question of the event, I am not attempting a renegotiation of the often-asked question 'what *is* theatre?' There are an increasing number of books, conference proceedings and journals which do address the theatrical event in this way.[53] Their rationales often spring from an equivalent concern to that of Auslander, attempting to codify some or other principle of theatrical performance that will attest to its uniqueness as an art form, and thus ensure its survival in profit-based economic climates.[54] An example of this kind of 'event' study may be found in John Tulloch's *Shakespeare and Chekhov in Production and Reception: Theatrical Events and Their Audiences.*

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[52] Ibid., p. 139.
[53] For notable studies of the theatrical event, see Timothy J. Wiles, *The Theater Event* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Willmar Sauter, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000); Temple Hauptfleisch, Shulamith Lev-Alage and, Jacqueline Martin, eds., *Themes in Theatre – Collective Approaches to Theatre and Performance., Vol. 3.: Festivalising! Theatrical Events, Politics and Culture* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2007).
[54] See Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, [1999] 2008).

Tulloch offers detailed analyses of various productions of canonical texts, employing Willmar

Sauter's term 'contextual theatricality' (the cultural/commercial discourses encompassing a given

'performance event') in order to observe the ways in which production companies capitalise upon

the peculiarities of space, location, casting, text and social context to create artistically and

economically 'successful' theatre.[55] This kind of 'reception studies' analysis, which borrows heavily

from Marvin Carlson and Susan Bennett in its focus on the 'outer frames' of performance is

unsuitable for this present study, for the same reason that both Carlson and Bennett were identified

as incompatible with the undertakings of previous chapters. An examination of the economic

strategies, audience demographics and publicity campaigns that surrounded Cairns' production at

the National Theatre may, it must be admitted, sharpen the image of that production as a

commercial enterprise (and therefore shed further light on its deviation from Barker's anti-orthodox

objectives). However, such an approach would reposition the analysis towards the commercial

discourses of the theatre industry. My intention is to consider the theatre event's capacity to create

a temporal and spatial *rupture*, rather than simply examining its status as 'product' within the

existing capitalist economic structure.[56]

Within considerations of the 'theatrical event', there is an adjacent branch of scholarship descended

from the 1930s semiotic analyses of Otakar Zich, Jan Mukařovský and the 'Prague School', through

the development of theatre semiotics in the twentieth century by figures such as Keir Elam and

Martin Esslin.[57] This form of analysis focuses upon the communicative aspects of performance

where, in Elam's words, '[t]heatrical signification is not reducible to a set of one-to-one relationships

between single sign-vehicles and their individual meanings', and in which '[i]t is the business of the

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[55] John Tulloch, *Shakespeare and Chekhov in Production and Reception : Theatrical Events and Their Audiences* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), especially pp. 189 – 201.

[56] Again, for a recent example of this kind of event study, see Klaic, *Resetting the Stage*, pp. 99 – 117, 121 – 134.

[57] See, for example, Jan Mukařovský, *Form, Sign and Function: Selected Essays*, edited by John Burbank, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980); Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama* (London: Methuen, 1987).

[theatre] semiotician to find a model *specific* to the complexities of theatrical communication'.[58] The

'event' of drama is seen here as the site of a dense, multifaceted interaction of contingent meaning-

production where, as Esslin warned, it is 'almost impossible to arrive at a basic unit of meaning [...]

by which the multitude of signifiers unleashed upon the audience could be noted down'.[59]

Unsurprisingly, then, the bulk of studies considering the 'event' in this fashion focus upon complex

models of meaning-production in which communication can be made possible. The event itself,

however, is often regarded as simply the vessel or arena in which these systems of communication

are housed.[60]

In one of the most accomplished studies of the theatrical event that 'attempts to bridge the gap

between semiotics and reception studies', Willmar Sauter claims that:[61]

> A historical event can be transformed into a contemporary experience by someone
>
> who recreates it through a narrative document such as a participant's memoirs or
>
> through a scholarly study. In this way the event enters today's discourses about this
>
> event.[62]

There are some rather strange assumptions being made here using what Derrida calls the 'logic of

the empirical event', which this thesis discussed in Chapter Three.[63] Sauter is accrediting an organic

singularity to the historical event, a singularity which the event only possesses *in actuality* by dint of

artificial construction. The historical event is proposed as a certainty, in other words, where in fact it

is only defined as such through the retroactive construction of historical discourses. Sauter's reason

for doing this is quite clear; his interests are in the ways in which the theatrical event may transform

a historical event and make it part of 'today's discourses', so there is ostensibly little profit in his

examining the historical event itself in order to determine its relative value as a concept. In omitting

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[58] Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, pp. 33, 35.
[59] Esslin, *The Field of Drama*, p. 19.
[60] See, for example, Esslin, *The Field of Drama*, p. 127.
[61] <http://www.mups.su.se/english/research/research-areas/theatrical-events-1.90696.> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[62] Sauter, *The Theatrical Event*, p. 100.
[63] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 69. For the discussion mentioned, see Chapter Three, 4.4 of this thesis.

this investigation, however, Sauter repeats the 'sleight-of-hand' historiography that Barthes attacked

in 'The Discourse of History'. Sauter proposes the 'historical event' as a stable, verifiable entity; the

theatrical event is then able to 'transform' that entity into 'contemporary experience'.[64] However,

the 'historical event' bears the same credentials as the 'historical fact' upon which Barthes' analysis

focussed – an artificially constructed body whose artificiality is suppressed in order to bestow upon

that body the false transparency that is often employed as the yardstick for historiographic

legitimacy. A falsity, it must be added, that the theatrical event repeats and confirms, under Sauter's

model, if or when it 'transforms' this event 'into a contemporary experience'. In his haste to lionise

theatre's ability to bring history into the present, Sauter forgets that the present is always-already

the place in which history is constructed.[65]

As mentioned, the focus of Sauter's study is on combining 'theatre semiotics' and 'reception studies'

in order to 'propose a holistic study of theatrical events', which perhaps accounts for his acceptance

of the 'historical event' without interrogation.[66] He goes on to consider the development of what he

calls 'cultural history' – a discourse evolving from continued encounters with 'cultural objects and

artefacts'. However, his main interest is in the ways in which the theatrical event itself may be

considered a form of communication in which 'there is not first a sender and than [sic] a receiver; it

is the simultaneous encounter between performer and spectator in the situation of playing which

constitutes theatre as art'.[67] Sauter's analysis simultaneously denies and prioritises the temporal

dimension – there is no 'first' sender; the event is spontaneous and thus such considerations do not

apply (despite the fact that he maintains the separate roles of 'performer' and 'spectator', inferring

that in fact there *is* a system of communication at play). At the same time he does point towards

what I have roughly identified as a genealogy of performance, where 'the event enters today's

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[64] Barthes, 'The Discourse of History' in Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader*, p. 121. See also Chapter Two, 3.2. of this thesis.
[65] See Chapter 3, sections 1 and 2.1 of this thesis.
[66] <http://www.mups.su.se/english/research/research-areas/theatrical-events-1.90696.> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[67] Sauter, *The Theater Event*, p. 82.

discourses about the event', but at no point is this 'event' penetrated – or, if it is Sauter's conclusion

that the event resists penetration (which is highly possible), then this conclusion is never shared.

Sauter's work is therefore of limited value to this thesis, where the focus is upon theatre as both an

inscription – the fusing of dramatic and performance texts under the auspices of a performing

context which then act as a layering of interpretation and meaning onto the trajectory of the text

itself – and also as a space of *resistance* to inscription; a disturbance or rupture which is in some way

inaccessible to the kinds of totalising discourses that otherwise seek to codify the performance text

within a particular discursive trajectory. It is by staging a dialogue between these two seemingly

contradictory functions – congruent with what Derrida calls the 'archival' and 'archiviolithic' drives,

as I showed in the previous chapter – that I was able to argue in Chapter Three for theatre's

contribution to what Alain Badiou calls a 'rebirth' of history.[68]

## 2.2. Bond's 'Theatre Events'

A conception of the 'event' that is more relevant to the interests of this thesis has been offered by

Bond, in his own definition of 'Theatre Events'. For Bond, Theatre Events are moments of

contradiction between individuals and their societies in which the formers' belief in the latters'

unshakeable authority may be revealed as absurd, potentially providing a way for individuals to

identify the vulnerability of domineering, seemingly impenetrable systems of oppression. As Sean

Carey puts it, these 'Theatre Events materialize the elements of society that are at war with one

another and that make it impossible for society, as such, to exist.'[69] In other words, in the physical

production of a performance text under the auspices of its particular context, the contradictions

between the individuals and the society that make up that context may be observed through the re-

examination of the dramatic text that occurs *in that event*. Thus, for Carey, 'the sense of them [the

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[68] Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p. 42.
[69] Sean Carey, 'Edward Bond: Tragedy, Postmodernity, *The Woman.' Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 19.1 (2004) p. 9.

Theatre Events] comes from the audience, and it is in this that a dialectical theatre must have a stubborn, optimistic faith in its audience's ability to recognize, in the aesthetic form, the necessity and vision of justice that in fact exist only in the spectator's mind.'[70]

In an interview with Ulrich Köppen, Bond expanded upon the concept of Theatre Events as a crucial, though he believes usually absent, component in any dramatic text, praising Shakespeare in this instance because '[w]hat is so strange about a writer like Shakespeare is the impermanence that is constant in his work. You can constantly TE [Bond's abbreviation for Theatre Event] his work in different ways and thus enable a more radical understanding of his plays.'[71] This view, of course, rather contradicts the perspectives on Shakespeare that Bond has offered elsewhere – and seemingly his entire rationale for (re)writing *Lear* – but the argument is nevertheless invaluable here, because it pinpoints the fundamental significance of the event in consolidating the historiographic potential of theatre.[72]

There is a notable confluence between Bond's Theatre Events and Derrida's deconstruction, where both seek to destabilize totalizing systems of thought (and their repressive potential) through the radical undermining of those systems at any given point of interaction. Carey outlines as much in a discussion – appropriately enough, considering Cairns' production of *Scenes from an Execution* as a 'national' text – of patriotism:

> Patriotism escalates into fanaticism because authority and ideology are weakest
> when they try to cross the real contradictions of economic class and, thus, require
> the reinforcement of fascistic belief systems. Therefore, our doubt, our ability to
> estrange the self-evident, is resolutely opposed to authoritarian and ideological
> thinking; yet, at the same time, our ontological doubt is an encroaching encounter

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[70] Ibid., p. 9.

[71] Edward Bond, 'Modern and Postmodern Theatres', interviewed by Ulrich Köppen, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 13, (1997) p. 101.

[72] See 1.3. of this thesis, and Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Pain: Edward Bond's *Lear* and the Ghosts of History', p. 160.

with nothingness, a terrifying non-presence that, when we seek to avoid it, pushes

us directly into the hands of totalizing authority and fascism.[73]

Carey is employing Bond's ironic understanding of the term 'self-evident'; those beliefs which are

held to be incontrovertible under any given political system, but which are ultimately fallible items

of human construction. Beneath this 'self-evidence', however, is the 'terrifying nothingness'

(Derrida's 'chaos') which, by virtue of its terror, pushes the individual *back* into the political system

that offers a protection against that nothingness.[74] The result, for both Bond and Derrida, is that the

political system is then able to propose itself as *the only alternative* to a terrifying chaos which

would engulf individuals were that system to be removed. Theatre, for Bond, is a place which can

counteract such hysterical propaganda by exposing the contradictions of the 'self-evident' and

pointing to the possibility of an alternative to 'totalizing authority and fascism' which is *not* engulfed

by a 'terrifying nothingness'. It can do so precisely because it is manifested in, of and for the 'event'

of its performing context. All of which offers further rebuttal to the supposed political objectives of

Slovo and Kent's *The Riots*, where the consequences of violent contradictions between individuals

and their society were supposedly examined with a critical eye, but in actuality were simply

reproduced within the orthodoxies of the society itself. As this thesis has repeatedly argued, in

producing historical theatre, a consciousness of the historiographic undertakings of the performance

in conjunction with the specificities of the performing context must be actively maintained in order

for the political potential of that performance to be exploited.

Before turning to the final question facing this thesis, then – the issues of historiographic theatre in,

of and for the future – I propose to re-engage Bond's notion of the 'Theatre Event' with certain of

the philosophical observations offered by Alain Badiou that were examined at the end of Chapter

Three.

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[73] Carey, 'Edward Bond: Tragedy, Postmodernity, *The Woman*' , p. 11.
[74] Derrida, in Critchley et al., *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 88.

## 2.3. Badiou's Events

In *The Rebirth of History*, responding to the global upheavals of 2011, Badiou's definition of the event is deceptively simple: 'a break in time, in which the inexistent is made existent'.[75] This statement occurs at the culmination of an exhaustive study in which he defines the 'inexistent' as all people 'who are present in the world but absent from its meaning and decisions'.[76] He thus locates the notion of 'uprising', or the 'historical riot' (illustrated in Chapter Three as the opening and remaining open of history in the systemic undermining of, in this instance, global neoliberalism) as 'restitution of the existence of the inexistent, conditional upon what I call an *event*.'[77] For Badiou, the event is a 'minoritarian but localised' response on the part of a defined body – all who are *present* – to a given stimulus in a unified fashion in which they then obtain the status of 'being in existence'; not because they are identified as such, but because they identify themselves.[78] He develops his argument further:

> I shall call what occurs in them [events], for which 'expression of the general will' is
>
> Rousseau's term, by a different philosophical name: it is the *emergence of a truth* –
>
> in this particular case, of a political truth. This truth concerns the very being of the
>
> people, what people are capable of as regards action and ideas. It emerges – this
>
> truth – on the edge of a historical riot, which extricates it from the laws of the world
>
> (in our case, from the pressure of the desire for the West) in the form of a new,
>
> previously unknown possibility.[79]

It should be made clear that I am not attempting to align the theatrical projects undertaken by

Barker (or, for that matter, Bond, Brook, Slovo, Kent or Norton-Taylor) with the same kind of

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[75] Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2012) p. 70. A relatively accessible outline of Badiou's loner consideration of the event in *Being and Event* can be found in Quentin Meillassoux' 'History and Event in Alain Badiou', translated by Thomas Neil: <http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia12/parrhesia12_meillassoux.pdf> [Accessed 05/02/13].

[76] Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p. 56.

[77] Ibid., p. 56.

[78] Ibid., p. 60.

[79] Ibid., p. 60.

revolutionary import as Badiou ascribes to the historical riot, nor claiming the capacity for theatre to attain such status (though neither am I denying it). Instead, as I earlier employed Badiou's reading of the contemporary socio-political landscape as a barometer against which theatrical engagements with that context could be judged, I am asserting an equivalent comparison that contends the absolute necessity for theatre that engages with history to *attempt* a concept of the event similar to Badiou's definition. As I have endeavoured to illustrate, one of the particular strengths of the model of historiographic theatre proposed here is its reliance upon the participation of practitioners and spectators against the rubric of a contemporary context. Timothy Wiles points this out in his own examination of the theatrical event by remembering that 'art is not art "in general" but is made up of the particular, unrepeatable interactions between the original creator's work and each of its new recipients, a transaction which leaves neither party unchanged'.[80]

This, however, is where the 'theatrical' and the 'historical' event (the latter understood through Badiou's definition) must diverge. Since the kind of theatre under consideration here is that which *comes from* or *engages with* history, it is different from Badiou's notion of the event, which is historical because it is *absolute*, because it ultimately betokens what he calls a 'political truth'. In other words, whilst historical riots may happen again, they cannot be repeated – the historiographic theatrical production, though it may never be repeated in the same way, is at its core an *iterable* event. However, this divergence can be at least partly addressed when it is remembered that the theatrical event is fundamentally an act of participation, and that the production of a performance text opens up a space in which the revolutionary potential of Badiou's historical event *may* be brought in to being. It is this potential which this thesis is interested in identifying and maintaining through the assertion of a historiographically conscious method of production in the construction of the performance text.

Badiou thus provides a philosophical rationale for the kind of rupture that Barker desires for the event of his theatre – not an event that may be unravelled in order to determine its communicative

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[80] Wiles, *The Theater Event*, p. 2.

properties (as with the semiotic approach) or an event seen as a cultural commodity (as with the 'reception studies' approach) but rather an event that possesses the capacity to override the conditions of its contemporary context and provide the space for what Barker would call an 'ordeal', and Badiou would call an 'unknown possibility'. Both see this potential as a means of opposing the standardisation of experience which robs it of its (potentially dangerous) character. Barker lays out his view on history, and the need to protect it from standardisation thus:

> I believe the experience of history is an experience of pain; the words are interchangeable. Just as the individual, in the years following trauma, likes to recall the trauma, so does society insist on reproducing its dislocations, but always in a laundered way, which invokes necessity [...] and anaesthetizes memory. The individual is robbed of his experience of agony by being forced into a participation he could not at the time recognize; in other words, he is re-individualized.[81]

Where Barker and Badiou differ is on the question of 'unity'. For Barker, the notion of a unified body of people participating in the event is the consequence of hegemonic discourses that have 'treated [the spectator] like a child', a spectator who would otherwise be 'willing to know more, and to endure more, than the dramatist or producer trusts [them] with' and should not be 'led to the meaning as if truth were a lunch.'[82] For Barker, the ideas of 'clarity' and 'lucidity' that would produce a unified response in an audience are simply tools of dominant orthodoxies, and their demand as a yardstick for legitimacy in *art* (let alone in history) has contributed significantly to the neutralising of political dissidence in the theatre.[83] The argument, again, underscores the importance of Rancière's call for an 'emancipated' spectatorship, where the production of meaning is not manipulated by a centrally defined text, or body of practitioners, but collaborated in by all who participate in the event.

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[81] Barker, 'Articulate explorers in an age of populism' with Charles Lamb in Mark Brown, ed., *Howard Barker Interviews 1980 – 2010: Conversations in Catastrophe* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), p. 48.
[82] Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Third Edition), p. 45.
[83] Ibid., p. 183.

Barker's position, it must be said, has received considerable support throughout this thesis, as the idea of 'transparency' has been repeatedly argued to be simply a mirage to conceal the dominant ideologies of the contemporary context. The relatively simple distinction, however, is that Badiou is concerned with the event that *comes,* or *has come* into being, and his project is to clarify the nature of this event in order to maintain its power, protecting it against circumscription or neutralisation. Barker's project, as has been shown, is to safeguard the possibility of the *future* event; that which has *not yet* come into being, in order to preserve the revolutionary potential for art to participate in, and construct, the kind of rupture which Badiou intends to identify and maintain. Finally, then, this chapter must now turn towards this issue of the future, and the ways in which it can be approached and appropriated by a historiographically conscious theatre.

## 3. Historiographic Theatre and the Future

### 3.1. A Future of Instability

Part-way through *Of Grammatology*, Derrida discusses what Geoffrey Bennington calls one of the 'more enigmatic features of his work' – a 'past that was never present':

> [The] impossibility of reanimating absolutely the manifest evidence of an originary presence refers us therefore to an absolute past, an always-already-there that no reactivation of the origin could fully master and awaken to presence. That is what authorized us to call *trace* that which does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present. It could in fact have been objected that, in the indecomposable synthesis of temporalization, protention is as indispensable as retention. And their two dimensions are not added up but one implies the other in a

strange fashion. To be sure, what is anticipated in protention does not sever the present any less from its self-identity than does that which is retained in the trace.[84]

In his own reflection upon this, Bennington points to 'an obviousness about the link of writing to the future (one writes when the absence of the addressee makes speaking impracticable, but in view of a future presence of that addressee)'.[85] In other words, the text engenders an interdependence between the anticipation of its future consumption – that function which Derrida ascribes to the term 'protention' – and the retention of the 'trace' elements of the text itself, or what he calls 'the impossibility of reanimating the manifest evidence of an originary presence' in textual interpretation.[86] Thus the tensions of protention and retention 'imply' one another; in every text there is both an unshakeable 'trace' of an absolute past that cannot be reanimated, and the anticipation of future consumptions which will inscribe and consolidate the text in conjunction with their contextual environments. For Bennington, the complexities of this tension are particularly visible in the work of Immanuel Kant, who writes against the 'future perfect'; 'a future contained in the past, but whose realization is always a deferred event', in favour of the 'future proper'; that the 'meaning' of a text is an event that has yet to come into being.[87] Kant, substantiating his own response to John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, outlines his position thus:

[U]niversal and yet determinate principles are not easily learned from other men who have only had them obscurely in their minds. One must hit them first by one's own reflection; then one finds them elsewhere, where one could not possibly have found them at first because the authors did not know that such an idea lay at the basis of their observations. Men who never think independently have nevertheless

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[84] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) p. 66.
[85] Geoffrey Bennington 'Towards a Criticism of the Future' in David Wood, ed., *Writing the Future* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) p. 18.
[86] Derrida, 1997, p. 66.
[87] See José María Rodríguez García, 'Paradoxical Time and Providential History in Shakespeare', *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 12 (1999) p. 159; Bennington, 1990, p. 20.

the acuteness to discover everything, after it has been once shown them, in what was said long since, though no one could ever see it there before.[88]

There is a clear precedent here for what, as was shown in the previous chapter, Leanore Lieblein calls Jan Kott's 'private hermeneutics' of *King Lear* where, having divested the text of prior readings by arguing for complete textual reconsideration in the light of any given context, Kott overrode his own assertions in order to then claim *his* reading as an absolute.[89] Kant also provides a precedent, of course, for Bond's rather troubling belief that the questions asked by *King Lear* had finally been exposed, in an absolute fashion, by the events of the twentieth century (and that the answers to these questions which Shakespeare had provided were revealed as ultimately inadequate).[90] Despite Kant's apparent scorn for the notion that 'everything that will be said will already have been said' (which is the ultimate conclusion of the 'future perfect') Kant cannot concede that the future which he champions is 'radically open or unpredictable'.[91] Instead, Kant proposes a return to stability – even if that stability can only be *predicted* – in which singularity of meaning may be adduced, concretised, and endowed with the incontestable status of an absolute. Ultimately, the failing of Kant's logic is the same as that encountered earlier in this thesis in the positions of Kott and E.H. Carr: instability is employed by all three as a debating tactic, a way to overcome some or other adversary. Once that adversary has been vanquished, determinacy is reinstated through the theorist/critic's preferred, absolutist reading. In the case of Kant, Bennington rather sharply suggests that it was simply a bruised ego from popular 'misreadings' of his *Critique of Pure Reason* that led him to advocate the 'future proper'. "One day", in short, "my works will be understood".[92]

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[88] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be able to come forward as Science*, trans. Oaul Carus, revised by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977) p. 18.

[89] It must be noted, again, that *King Lear* has been selected simply because its popularity and complexity have engendered a range of conflicting responses that make it a useful object of study for this analysis – its historiographic capacities, however, are not being proposed as unique.

[90] See Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Pain: Edward Bond's *Lear* and the Ghosts of History', p. 160.

[91] Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, p. 21.

[92] Ibid., p. 22.

## 3.2. No Exergue...

Throughout this thesis, I have endeavoured to demonstrate the disingenuousness of asserting an absolutist reading of history, arguing instead for the reconfiguring of interpretation at each point of historical production and consumption. This process, I have further argued, is uniquely emphasised in theatrical production, where historical texts are reassembled and rehistoricised at their points of production, in ceaselessly fluctuating dialogue with the presents into which they are brought into being. In the dramatic text, returning to Derrida, the protentive function is foregrounded in the prediction of performances *yet to come*, and the performance text is assembled for an addressee who *has arrived*. Two issues are exposed by this statement: the historiographic dramatic text creates history *for the future*, and the historiographic performance text is the manifestation of *one possible future* as an event. In order to support this assertion, finally, it is necessary to briefly clarify this question of 'for the future'.

Having challenged Kant's 'future proper' on the grounds of its didacticism (and the curiosities of writing for a 'specific' – if unknown – future), Bennington offers instead the idea of a 'future imperfect', a concept which Derrida points towards in the 'Exergue' to *Of Grammatology*:

> The future can only be anticipated in the form of absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity. For that future world and for that within it which will have put into question the values of sign, word, and writing, for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no exergue.[93]

An exergue – a favoured term of Derrida's which, as he points out in *Archive Fever*, plays with citation as it occurs before the beginning – could not occur before the kind of future which Derrida proposes because that kind of future would break from (and break) the exergue itself.[94] In the focus

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[93] Derrida in Critchley et al., *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 5.
[94] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 7.

and terminology of this thesis, what is being discussed is the capability of a dramatic text to initiate a performance text that breaks away from its parent in an absolutely new fashion, presenting itself as a monstrosity and destroying those constituent parts that had engendered its manifestation as an event. This, quite clearly, recalls the caustic praxes of Heiner Müller, and the subsequent discussion in the previous chapter of the processes of theatrical production articulated as acts of violence. Here, however, the production is necessarily destructive in order to safeguard the political potential of the text itself against the 'totalising systems of thought' (to use Carey's phrase) that govern the performing context, enabling the theatrical event to capitalise upon its radical capability to stand outside of those systems. Thus, returning to Bond, it becomes a Theatre Event by showing its audiences that moving beyond those systems *is possible* without being engulfed by the chaos that is widely feared to reign there.

Cairns' 2012 *Scenes from an Execution*, then, did not capitalise upon the historiographic potential of the dramatic text in as much as it offered no resistance to the contemporary orthodoxies of its performing context, but was rather overwritten with state ideologies. Whether the National Theatre is capable of staging a Theatre Event in the sense established by Bond is of course a matter for wider debate: the conclusion of this chapter is simply that Cairns' *Scenes from an Execution* failed to do so, and I have attempted to offer a rationale for *why* this was the case. In the process, several points have been made clear which are now integral to the model for historiographic theatre being developed within this thesis. First, the performance text *must* be staged in critical awareness of the orthodoxies of its performing context, in order both to avoid the neutralising of its instigative dramatic text, and unlock its own potential to exist as a Theatre Event. Second, the Theatre Event possesses a uniquely privileged capacity to re-examine history in the light of a contemporary context and further, the Theatre Event is able to act as a rupture within that context, destabilizing contemporary 'totalizing systems of thought'. And third, an awareness of both of these tenets must be actively maintained in order to secure the potential for historiographic theatre to function in and for the future, avoiding its circumscription and neutralisation within the dominant discourses of a

given present – which was the ultimate risk, as I argued in Chapter One, of Kent and Slovo's

treatment of the August Riots of 2011.

**Epilogue**

In the midst of the August Riots, the playwright Nick Gill issued the following acerbic forecast of a verbatim practitioner's response to these events:

> I'm already planning interviews with Real People who were Really There, being Real, and their very Real Experiences, so I can present them in a non-judgmental way through a Really Interesting and Thought-Provoking piece of Verbatim Theatre, and show how there really are a number of sides to the Issue that maybe you haven't considered actually, and that it's all Really Mixed Up Yeah, and it's really great that Something Positive can come out of this whole thing, especially if Influential People think I'm really great at seeing The Human Stories behind The News and that I'm Really Brave to confront something like that, and I can get a job writing for Eastenders.[1]

Apart from the fact that Slovo and Kent are hardly looking for jobs on the writing staff of Eastenders, Gill's prediction proved unerringly accurate. The emphasis upon the 'real' through a fact-based economy as a criterion for the worthiness of the text; the protestations of multivocal objectivity and the vagaries of a resultant 'Something Positive' resonate not only with my analysis of *The Riots* in this thesis, but with the rationales provided for the project by Kent and Slovo themselves.[2] The play was a supposed substitute for a public enquiry, predicated upon the ultimate authority of its creators. The mediations of these creators were disguised behind protestations of transparency in order to get to 'the truth' of the events. Gill's mordant overtones aside, his forecast was proven correct. Where he falls short, however, is that his critique remains locked in the political and economic discourses governing the contemporary context, and is therefore unable to point towards the broader mechanics that make certain notions of verbatim such a popular choice for politically-

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[1] Nick Gill, 'Riots in Peckham Rye', <http://nickfuckinggill.com/index.php/riots-in-peckham-rye/#comments> [Accessed 26/02/13].
[2] See Chapter 1, 2.1 and 2.2.

minded historical theatre *at the moment*. For Gill, the perception of verbatim as an appropriate medium through which to engage with the riots is the fault of the practitioner, who is adopting a 'Really Real' perspective in order to secure professional commendation. The resulting play, according to Gill's logic, serves little function beyond the superficial advancement of that practitioner's dissembled 'worthiness'. Whilst my findings do lead me to sympathise with Gill's frustration at the inadequacy of the 'it's all Really Mixed Up Yeah' diagnosis, however, this thesis has demonstrated that there are concerns underpinning the current popularity of one particular idea of verbatim theatre that are more significant than the size of its practitioners' egos.

Chief amongst these concerns, as I have argued, is the reproduction of dominant orthodoxies under the auspices of texts that are proposed as societal critiques. Kent claims that his verbatim theatre is simply a 'means to an end' for him: the 'end' being the supposed education, stimulation or 'empowering' of audience members on the subject of a given topic.[3] As I showed through my analysis in Chapters One and Two, however, verbatim theatre practitioners such as Kent and Slovo often employ flawed historiographic techniques to offer audiences inevitably biased historical representations whose protestations of transparency render them largely devoid (and incapable) of critical analysis. In addition, by isolating historical events from the conditions of their discursive contexts, the plays inadvertently strip those events of their wider significances. This then obscures the contextual attributes of the events and curtails the identification of relevant factors that may assist or expand an analytic investigation. Rather than examine the broader narratives of Western political and economic involvements in the Middle East, for example, the verbatim response was theatrical scapegoating: putting Tony Blair on trial.[4]

The lack of critical scrutiny into the function of these strands of verbatim as a form of historiography – which has allowed them to accrue increasing popularity and influence based on flawed methodologies – indexes a broader disinclination of contemporary criticism to engage with the

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[3] Nicholas Kent, in conversation with Dominic Cavendish, 'Theatrevoice', 9th November 2011.
[4] Norton-Taylor, *Called to Account*.

function of theatre *in general* as a medium for historical production. The pressing need for this situation to be remedied is underscored by the very fact that, again as Gill was able to predict, the vehicle of choice for much serious-minded historical theatre is a medium that is often employed in a way which perpetuates the very ideologies it claims to resist.[5] Despite Kent, Slovo, Hare, Norton-Taylor and others' defence of their verbatim projects as ways of tackling societal problems such as the English Riots of 2011, the conclusions of this study have rather seen in those projects a reflection of Fukuyama's 'end-of-history' philosophy, which valorises global neoliberalism as an apotheosis of human endeavour.[6] This philosophy also supports ideological and societal structures which, as I will now demonstrate, an increasing number of critical perspectives identify as chief contributors to the eruption of the riots themselves.

The riots, their implications and their position in relation to the unprecedented outbursts of social unrest around the world in 2011, have aroused an expanding wealth of critical attention. Slavoj Žižek for example, in an article where, like Badiou, he locates the riots on the same spectrum as the student demonstrations in London in 2010, the so-called 'Arab Spring' and global 'terrorist attacks and suicide bombings', observes:

> Alain Badiou has argued that we live in a social space which is increasingly experienced as 'worldless': within such a space, meaningless violence is the only form protest can take [...] Perhaps it is here that we should locate one of the main dangers of capitalism. Although capitalism is global, encompassing the whole world, it sustains a *stricto sensu* "worldldess" ideological constellation, depriving the vast majority of people of any meaningful cognitive orientation. [...] The fundamental lesson of globalisation is that capitalism can accommodate itself to all civilisations, from Christian to Hindu or Buddhist, from West to East: there is no global 'capitalist worldview', no 'capitalist civilisation' proper. Capitalism's global dimension can only

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[5] See Chapter 3, section 4.
[6] Fukuyama, *The End of History*, xii. See Chapter Three, 4.4. of this thesis.

be formulated at the level of truth-without-meaning, as the real of the global market

mechanism.[7]

Žižek reads an insidiousness into capitalist discourse that overlaps and circumscribes even (or

perhaps *especially*) those areas that seem to oppose the machinations of hegemonic dogma. In an

earlier draft of his article, he underscores this assertion with Herbert Marcuse's concept of

'repressive desublimation'; human desires can be ostensibly desublimated whilst remaining subject

to capitalist control. The example that Marcuse offers is the commodification by the pornography

industry of the sexual emancipation of the 1960s.[8] For Žižek, the absence of demonstrable purpose

in the riots of 2011 is a function of the dominant social order – capitalism has reduced social space

to a 'worldless' arena in which eruptions of violence are the sole, completely ineffectual, strategies

of responding to societal inequalities. Žižek sees the riots as symptomatic of malfunctions in the

governing economic systems, but is wary of inscribing the riots themselves with any further

significance. In this he echoes the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who declared the rioters 'defective

consumers' whose social programming – the requirement to shop – overrode their conditioning to

remain within the law.[9] Bernard Stiegler has developed this idea a stage further, dedicating a book-

length study to what he calls the 'spiritual misery' that this kind of programming induces, and

arguing for a shift from 'psychopathological' to 'sociopathological' analyses in combatting this misery

in order to stave off the increasingly uncontrollable eruptions of violence to which it inexorably

leads.[10] Stiegler claims that '[s]piritual misery, engendered by the most recent becoming of this

capitalism [...] leads not only to the psychic dis-individuation of producers and consumers [...] but

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[7] Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, (London: Verso, 2012) pp. 54 – 55.
[8] Slavoj Žižek, 'Shoplifters of the World Unite' in the *London Review of Books*, 19th August 2011.
[9] Zygmunt Bauman, 'The London Riots: On Consumerism Coming Home to Roost', Social Europe Journal, 9th August 2011, <http://www.social-europe.eu/2011/08/the-london-riots-on-consumerism-coming-home-to-roost/> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[10] Bernard Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals*, translated by Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), esp. pp. 80 – 102.

also to a process of the loss of collective individuation, that is, to the outright destruction of societies, to their death.'[11]

The alarmist rhetoric so commonplace in these debates does at times risk compromising the credence of certain arguments. Perhaps, though, it should be remembered that in England, those convicted of rioting have faced disproportionately severe sentences; performances of state-sanctioned violence against those who transgressed.[12] The *importance* of the riots is not questioned in state-sanctioned perspectives, in short; only their *significance*. David Cameron, as previously mentioned, dismissed the latter issue entirely by calling the riots 'criminality, pure and simple.'[13] But for Stiegler, Žižek, Bauman, Badiou (and Bond), the English Riots of 2011 were contingent upon the instabilities of state apparatuses. Curiously and unnervingly, however, these violent eruptions were not seen to be *against*, but rather in accordance *with* the underlying principles upon which the apparatuses are designed to function. Each of the writers listed have tried to draw attention to what they observe as societal paradoxes – a superficial clamour for order and stability by an ideological construct which at its base reduces humans to a situation in which violence is the only available method of response. And, whilst their conclusions differ, each writer ultimately sees the riots as symptomatic of volatile insecurities in the discourses of advanced capitalism.

The forecasts of these studies are not entirely pessimistic. Although Žižek argues that the globalist propensities of capitalist discourse render it an almost infinitely adaptive ideology, Stiegler contends that 'capitalism will nevertheless eventually disappear, to be replaced by a new economic organisation; capitalism is only one historical form taken by civilisation, and a recent one at that'.[14] This contention returns us to Derrida, whose perception of human endeavours as a drive to stabilise

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[11] Ibid., p. 125.
[12] See Julian V. Roberts and Mike Hough, 'Sentencing Riot-Related Offending: Where Do the Public Stand?', in *The British Journal of Criminology*, published online 2nd January 2013, <http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2013/01/25/bjc.azs069.full> [accessed 03/02/13].
[13] David Cameron, 'This is criminality, pure and simple', video posted on the *Guardian* website, 9th October 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/video/2011/aug/09/david-cameron-riots-criminality-video.> [Accessed 03/02/13].
[14] Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals*, p. 124.

chaos was accompanied with a warning against imbuing those stabilisations with the status of an absolute.[15] Stiegler asserts that there *is* an 'outside' to the machinations of advanced capitalism. It is towards this 'outside' that any attempts to overcome the failings of the current 'historical form' must be directed.

Whilst direct access to this 'outside' may be difficult – perhaps even impossible – to contemporary discourses, I have endeavoured to show that a historiographically conscious theatre may employ the *possibility* of this outside in order to critique the conditions of its performing context. As I argued in Chapter Five, the theatrical 'event' offers a space in which the discourses of the present may be identified and opposed.[16] It is in this space that theatre's unique potential to make and engage with history is located – and is unsurprisingly therefore where both Bond and Barker insinuate the political functions of their dramas. Bond's theatre stages a political reappraisal of history in order to critique the present, where Barker's uses the ambiguity of history to push beyond the confines of that present and into a space of radical uncertainty. These are not, it must be reasserted, the *only* historiographic strategies available to theatre, simply examples that offer a productive method of critiquing the present of production.

Such a critique cannot be undertaken, however, through the kinds of contemporary verbatim theatre practiced by the likes of Slovo and Kent because, as I have argued, they claim transparency and authenticity for their plays, which are actually an unwitting mouthpiece for the orthodoxies of the dominant order.[17] This is made particularly clear in the example of *The Riots* where the subject, as Stiegler and others argue, is a direct consequence of the malfunctioning of that order itself. Thus, despite its current popularity as a vehicle for theatrical examinations of history, the verbatim practices analysed in this thesis are incapable of capitalising upon the political potential offered by theatre as a form of historiography.

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[15] See Chapter Two, section 4.1 of this thesis: Derrida, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 86.
[16] See Chapter Five, Section 2 of this thesis.
[17] See Chapter Three, section 4 of this thesis.

I have endeavoured, through a detailed reading of various forms and examples of contemporary theatre, to assert both the unique capabilities that theatre possesses to make and engage with history, and the pressing need for these capabilities to be exploited in order to address increasingly problematic malfunctioning in the current socio-political climate. This exploitation cannot, as verbatim practitioners often mistakenly suggest, occur by simply producing theatre that is 'relevant' to the present, where 'relevance' becomes a shorthand for a 'reflection' or 'imitation' of historical events that are deemed to be of particular significance. Where such 'relevance' is claimed by verbatim practitioners, it is invariably supported by protestations of transparency and objectivity that, as I have repeatedly illustrated, are untenable. Further, the attempted (re)production of history in theatre, where neutrality and transparency are the stated criteria for the legitimacy of the history being developed, robs that history of both its genealogical and evental significance. All that is achieved is a highly problematic reconfiguration of the orthodoxies governing the context of performance, which is therefore incapable of critically engaging with that context at all. Bond has taken this a stage further, attacking much contemporary theatre in general as equally insufficient to the needs of its performing context, declaring that '[i]f you go to the National Theatre, disease will be sold to you as a solution.'[18]

Theatrical 'productions' of history, however, *can* productively engage with the specificities of the performing context if a conscious awareness of the historiographic strategies employed to achieve them is identified and maintained. In Chapter Three, I showed that theatre's explicit reliance upon the present as the site of historical production, its emphasis upon participation in constructing the historical text and its subsequent location *of* that text in dialogue/opposition to the specificities of the performing context render it a uniquely privileged form of historiography. I demonstrated the importance of maintaining an awareness of theatre's historiographic methods by arguing that *The*

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[18] Edward Bond, 'The First Word' – keynote address for the 'Bond@50 Conference', Warwick University, 2nd November 2012.

*Riots*, despite its practitioners' claims to critique the performing context, had rather instead simply reproduced the orthodoxies of that context.

Using the examples of *Saved* and *Lear*, I examined certain ways in which theatre can draw upon various forms of history to locate its own undertakings within a broader historical trajectory. I argued that in such cases, engagements with history can help theatre point beyond and therefore critique the conditions of its performing context – and contingently employ that context to initiate a critique of history. In the final chapter, I used the example of Howard Barker to demonstrate certain ways in which theatre can embrace history as a space of radical uncertainty, again affording theatre the capacity to point beyond its performing context in a manner that enables challenge or resistance to the orthodoxies by which that context is governed.

The capability to point towards a space 'outside' of the present grants theatre the ability to engage with the volatile contemporary predicaments that Stiegler, Žižek and others outline with such urgency. In the closing section of his book *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Žižek makes the following claim:

> Say, in today's apocalyptic global situation, the ultimate horizon of the future is what
> Jean-Pierre Dupuy calls the dystopian "fixed point", the zero-point of the ecological
> breakdown, of global economic and social chaos – even if it is indefinitely
> postponed, this zero-point is the virtual "attractor" towards which our reality, left to
> itself, tends. The way to combat the catastrophe is through acts that interrupt this
> drifting towards the catastrophic "fixed point" and take upon themselves the risk of
> giving birth to some radical Otherness "to come".[19]

It is the 'apocalyptic global situation' of which the riots are symptomatic that ultimately recentres the direction of this thesis. As I have demonstrated, a purely democratic reading of the model advanced in Chapter Three rejects the circumscription of a performance text into a given, absolute

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[19] Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, p. 134.

reading. Indeed, various critics from Kant, to E.H. Carr, to Jan Kott have come under scrutiny here because they have initially adopted democratic, anti-authorial positions, only to assert their *own* authorial circumscriptions once a given text has been deconstructed. A criticism that could be levelled at my own analysis, then, is that I have unpicked the authorial intentions of certain verbatim practitioners on the grounds of didacticism, and then proposed my own didactic view in their stead. In response to this suggestion, I would re-emphasise the temporal specificity of historiographic theatre as history which is produced *in* and *for* a given context, and must therefore interact with the specificities of that context in order to function. If they signify anything, what the English Riots of 2011 demonstrate, as argued by Badiou, Bond, Žižek, Stiegler and Bauman, is that there are volatile, dangerous instabilities at work within our particular context, and that these must be engaged with if they are to be counteracted. Theatre, as I have argued, possesses a unique ability to engage with the specificities – and *problems* – of its performing context, by enabling practitioners and spectators to conceive of a possible state which lies *outside* of that context. This is particularly evident in the ways in which theatre makes history, where it is able to draw upon a vast range of strategies in putting a present in dialogue with an idea of the past in order to demonstrate that the contours of that present are not absolute. In a condition such as ours, which as Žižek argues is 'apocalyptic', this ability is invaluable to understanding and counteracting our situation. It is for this reason that I have taken what may appear an authorial stance (such as supporting some of Bond and Barker's philosophical and methodological assertions, and opposing certain of Kent and Slovo's) – not because they are unilaterally or universally 'true', but because my research has led me to conclude that they are what is needed *at the moment*. In other words, the overarching attempt of this thesis has been to acknowledge and support Derrida's contention that whilst 'chaos' is our natural condition, there is a necessity to stabilise at particular points in order to address and engage with the requirements of a particular context.[20] In the future, those requirements will change, in what

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[20] Derrida, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 86.

Derrida calls an 'absolute break from the present', and facing those requirements will necessitate what he would presumably term a 'return to chaos'.

To resume my central contention, what I would then add to Žižek's diagnosis, and have sought to demonstrate throughout this thesis, is that the interruption, this 'risk of giving birth to some radical Otherness "to come"' that he speaks of, is only possible through a sustained and conscious engagement with history (whether that is history of the *past* as we saw with Bond, or history of the *future* as we saw with Barker). In addition to this, again as I have demonstrated, theatre possesses a unique though often overlooked potential to contribute to this process, a potential which demands further exploration if it is to be fulfilled.

The directions which this exploration could take are manifold. A key task of this thesis, for example, has been to expose and critique historical theatre which assumes authority and influence through flawed historiographic methods that ultimately damage the history being produced. Unless more of these kinds of critiques are developed, popular theatre practices may well continue to respond to the urgencies of their contemporary contexts with texts that do little to offer productive contributions to the dialogue surrounding those urgencies. Concurrently, then, an additional undertaking of an exploration of the historiographic capacities of theatre must be to seek further, alternative forms and methods by which theatre can produce and engage with history. Ultimately, explorations in this field must continue to examine and develop the unique capabilities for theatre to deploy its productions of history in order to, as Žižek puts it, 'combat the catastrophes' of the present.

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