



PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION OF THE REHEARSAL PROCESS: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

***OBSERVAÇÃO PARTICIPANTE DO PROCESSO DE ENSAIO:
CONSIDERAÇÕES PRÁTICAS E DILEMAS ÉTICOS***

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CONSIDERACIONES PRÁCTICAS Y DILEMAS ÉTICOS***

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Gay McAuley lectured on theatre and film in the French Department at the University of Sydney before joining with others to establish Performance Studies as an interdisciplinary centre in the University of Sydney in 1989. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, she worked in Sydney to establish modes of collaboration between academics and theatre practitioners for teaching and research purposes, and in the 1990s she pioneered the application of ethnographic methodologies to the study of rehearsal process. Her books *Space in Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 1999) and *Not Magic But Work* (Manchester University Press, 2012) both won ADSA's Rob Jordan Prize in their respective years of publication. Since her retirement from teaching, in 2002, she has edited six issues of *About Performance* (2003 to 2010), convened an interdisciplinary research group and edited the collection of essays emerging from its work (*Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Place*, Peter Lang, 2006), and undertaken several translation projects. She is currently living in London where she is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Drama and Theatre, Royal Holloway University of London.

Abstract

The observation and analysis of rehearsal process as practised at the University of Sydney. Comparison with theatre genetics. Historical account of the development of the Sydney model based on collaboration with professional theatre artists. Goals of the research: enhanced appreciation of the *mise-en-scène*, insights into the processes of group creativity. Concepts and methodological approaches borrowed from ethnography applied to the study of rehearsal: field and fieldwork, participant observation/direct observation, group sociality, insiders and outsiders, paying attention to the words used, thick description. The article concludes with observations concerning creative agency in rehearsal practice and the nature of group creativity.

Keywords: Performance studies, rehearsal studies, participant observation, collaborative theatre, ethnography.

Resumo

Observação e análise do processo de ensaio praticado na Universidade de Sydney. Comparação com a genética do teatro. Relato histórico do desenvolvimento do modelo de Sydney, baseado na colaboração com artistas de teatro profissionais. Objetivos da pesquisa: reforçar a apreciação da *mise-en-scène*, insights sobre os processos de criatividade do grupo. Conceitos e abordagens metodológicas emprestadas da etnografia e aplicadas ao estudo do ensaio: campo e trabalho de campo, observação participante/não participante, sociabilidade do grupo, *insiders* e *outsiders*, prestar atenção às palavras usadas, descrição densa. O artigo conclui com observações relativas à agência criativa na prática de ensaio e a natureza da criatividade do grupo.

Palavras-chave: Estudos da performance, estudos de ensaio, observação participante, teatro colaborativo, etnografia.

Resumen

La observación y análisis del proceso de ensayo como se practica en la Universidad de Sydney. Comparación con la genética del teatro. Relato histórico del desarrollo del modelo de Sydney basado en la colaboración con artistas de teatro profesionales. Objetivos de la investigación: mejorar la apreciación de la puesta en escena, penetraciones en los procesos de creatividad de grupo. Conceptos y enfoques metodológicos tomados de la etnografía aplicada al estudio del ensayo: campo y trabajo de campo, observación participante/observación directa, sociabilidad de grupo, personas de adentro y afuera prestando atención a las palabras utilizadas, descripción detallada. El artículo concluye con observaciones sobre la agencia creativa en la práctica de ensayos y la naturaleza de la creatividad grupal.

Palabras clave: Estudios de rendimiento, estudios de ensayo, observación participante, teatro colaborativo, etnografía.

Rehearsal is popularly assumed to have been part of theatre practice for as long as theatre has existed, but in fact rehearsal, as we understand the practice today, is substantially an invention of the twentieth century, inextricably bound up with the emergence and development of the role of director. Before the advent of the director at the end of the nineteenth century, actors' preparation for performance occurred privately and alone. They 'studied' their parts on their own (the term used lingers still in the word 'understudy', for the actor ready to take on the role should be the indisposed star). The formal preparation for performance, even in the last half of the nineteenth century, was largely a matter of ensuring that the often-spectacular special effects worked and, at that time, it was customary to have only one full rehearsal of the whole play with all the actors present. Indeed, sometimes there were no rehearsals at all. When Edmund Kean was invited to play Shylock at the Croydon Theatre, he notified the stage manager that he would not require any rehearsal even though he knew nothing about the planned production and had never worked with that company before (MARSHALL, 1957).

Over the course of the twentieth century, all this changed radically and, in the contemporary theatre, the rehearsal process typically involves director,

actors, designers, technicians and other crafts people working together intensively for a period from six to eight weeks; sometimes for much longer in well-funded theatres. It is the time when actors go deeper and deeper into their own and their characters' emotions, when the multiple material elements that will constitute the production are progressively brought together and when the process of reaction between all these elements is set in train, channelled and shaped by the director to create a unique work of art.

The fact that it is now widely acknowledged that a theatrical production, notwithstanding its ephemeral existence, is indeed a work of art must be counted as one of the major achievements of the twentieth century theatre. In earlier centuries, the only acknowledged artist associated with the theatre was the playwright. Certain play texts became part of the literary canon, preserved in libraries and even studied in universities but, for the educated elite, performance was an optional extra, enjoyable perhaps but essentially nothing more than a vulgar distraction from the beauties of the written word. Actors were not considered to be artists, but merely rather disreputable interpreters, tainted by their association with 'rogues and vagabonds' from the middle ages onwards.

Given the profound nature of the shifts in practice and the radical reappraisal of the performance phenomenon that has occurred over the course of the last century, it is rather surprising that scholars in theatre studies, itself an invention of the twentieth century, have not written more about the processes involved in the creation of a theatrical production. In the UK and in the USA, a good deal of performance making continues in theatre studies departments which are often equipped with outstanding performance facilities, but the scholarly literature dealing with rehearsal practices in the professional theatre is still remarkably thin.

This situation is changing. There are, for example, several universities in Europe and Canada where what the French call *la génétique du théâtre* (theatre genetics) is being actively pursued¹ and, of course, there is my former department at the University of Sydney where rehearsal studies have for many years been at the centre of the research training we provide to our graduates.

1. We should mention the work of Josette Féral in Paris, Sophie Lucet in Rennes, Sophie Proust in Lille, Jean-Marc Larrue in Montréal, and Luk Van den Dries in Belgium.

It needs to be acknowledged at the outset that one possible reason for the dearth of scholarly studies of rehearsal process is that the undertaking poses some serious practical and ethical problems, not least due to the fact that many – or even most – directors are reluctant to admit anyone into the rehearsal room who is not actively involved in the work process. The detailed accounts of rehearsal process that have been published are, for this reason, most frequently written by insiders, participants in the actual process, documenting their own creative process². These accounts are certainly fascinating and they are rapidly coming to constitute the canon of classic texts in the developing field of rehearsal studies, but accounts written by outsiders are equally valuable as testimony and they are needed to provide another kind of perspective, complementing and elaborating those of the insiders.

One possibility for people who wish to study the rehearsal process is, certainly, the path adopted by the European and Canadian scholars who are developing theatre genetics. This, like the literary genetics on which it draws, seems to be based substantially on document analysis. Rehearsals generate a plethora of documents both in advance of and during the actual work in the rehearsal room – directors' notes, versions of the script as it is edited and amended during the rehearsal process, actors' annotated scripts, design briefs, drawings, plans, prompt books, etc. – and much of this valuable material often ends up being lost, discarded or, at best, packed into an archive box and stored in a disused corner of the theatre. Therefore,

2. Detailed accounts of rehearsals written by participants include Mark Bly (ed.), *The Production Notebooks: Theatre in Process*, New York, Theatre Communications Group, Vol I 1996, Vol II 2001; Brian Cox, *The Lear Diaries: the Story of the Royal National Theatre's Productions of Shakespeare's Richard II and King Lear*, London, Methuen, 1992; David Selbourne, *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream*, London, Methuen, 1982; Antony Sher's accounts of his work on Richard III and Falstaff in *Year of the King: an Actor's Diary and Sketchbook*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1985 and *Year of the Fat Knight: the Falstaff Diaries*, London, Nick Hern Books, 2015; Max Stafford-Clark, *Letters to George: the Account of a Rehearsal*, London, Nick Hern Books, 1989; Arnold Wesker, *The Birth of Shylock and the Death of Zero Mostel*, London, Quartet, 1997.

Accounts based on direct rather than participant observation include Susan Letzler Cole's two books, *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World*, New York/London, Routledge, 1992, and *Playwrights in Rehearsal: the Seduction of Company*, New York/London, Routledge, 2001; Jim Hiley, *Theatre at Work: the Story of the National Theatre's Production of Brecht's Galileo*, London, Routledge, 1981; Tirzah Lowen, *Peter Hall directs Antony and Cleopatra*, London, Limelight Editions, 1991.

retrieving this material and placing it at the centre of an analytical project is clearly an extremely worthwhile activity.

Another possibility is the model we have been developing at the University of Sydney, based on what anthropologists call 'participant observation,' requiring the scholar/researcher to be present in the rehearsal room at all times as an observer. This practice is problematical given that, as just remarked, many directors refuse to admit observers into their rehearsals. Also, it raises issues concerning appropriate behaviour for a scholar attempting to document a process that participants wish to remain private, as well as questions, familiar to anthropologists, as to how far the process itself is modified by the presence of an observer. Furthermore, there are more questions regarding the constraints that might apply to the subsequent writing up and analysis of the process one has been privileged to observe. In dealing with all these issues and many others, we have increasingly turned to the experience of ethnographers for guidance.

Henceforth, I first provide a brief account of the development of rehearsal studies at the University of Sydney, and then discuss some of the concepts drawn from ethnographic practice that we have found helpful in our attempts to deal with the complexities encountered in the rehearsal room; the article concludes with more general reflections arising from the many rehearsals I have watched.

The background

The first rehearsal observation projects carried out at the University of Sydney actually pre-dated the establishment of the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies and they happened for purely pedagogical reasons and were not part of any particular research agenda.

I was teaching in the Department of French Studies at the time and, for students in a university language department, a play is a book to be read. I wanted to demonstrate to these students that meaning in theatre is created **with** the text, does not reside **in** the text, that where these meanings are created is on the rehearsal room floor, and that it takes highly skilled artists to bring this process of meaning creation to fruition. So I prevailed on the department to

provide a little funding and we invited a director and some actors to come to the university and work on a play the students had been studying, the scholars watched the whole rehearsal process and then we spent a few weeks unpacking the experience and analysing the performance the actors had produced.

It was important for me that this work was always done with professional theatre practitioners. The kind of workshopping that could be done with student performers would not have produced the results I wanted. My intention was to show the students what happens when highly skilled, trained and experienced actors work on a text under the guidance of an equally highly skilled director. And what has never failed to excite and enthrall me in the many projects I have observed since then is how deep this exploration can go, the kinds of question actors raise (so different from those raised by literary critics), the kinds of discussion that ensue and the range of possible meanings that they create and new insights they arise, even with texts I thought I knew backwards.

The projects ultimately fed into my own research interests in the semiotics of performance, particularly exploring the many functions of space in the making meaning process in the theatre (MCAULEY, 1999).

This way of working in collaboration with professional theatre practitioners turned out to be extremely productive in several different contexts as the basis of greatly enhanced studies of performance. Thus, when we were able to establish the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, which the object of study is live performance, we retained and developed the practice of inviting performance practitioners to the university and providing them with rehearsal space on the understanding that they would open their creative process to observation by researchers and students.

Of course, not all the work in Performance Studies concerns traditional theatre practice. Far from it. Colleagues and postgraduate students have, over the years, worked in many different performance contexts, comprising the whole range of aesthetic performance genres as well as sporting events, social performances, and examples of what Richard Schechner calls direct theatre, such as demonstrations and protests. In all these instances, however, the research projects involve observation of rehearsal practices and other forms of preparation aligned with our perception that you cannot understand

a performance practice unless you know how they prepared for it. My own interest, however, at least in the early days of Performance Studies, was with traditional theatre practice and substantially in what the rehearsal process could tell us about the ensuing performance. As I often said at the time, once you have observed the rehearsal process, you become aware that every signifier you may note in performance is just the tip of a semiotic iceberg with depths of meaning that the ordinary spectator does not perceive. The things tried and discarded during rehearsals, the discussions, ideas and story telling that surrounded the selection of that detail continue to have an impact at some level on the finished work, greatly enriching the total experience of the production for those who have been privileged to witness the process of its creation.

The third phase of my involvement in this work began as I gradually became more and more aware that the process deserved to be studied as an end in itself and not simply as a mean of gaining insight into the work created. Issues that demanded consideration included the complex interpersonal relations manifested in the rehearsal room, the role of power, the institutional and cultural context within which the work is being made, the creation of community within the rehearsal room, the nature of creative agency and the function of the need for privacy that has already been mentioned. In dealing with these fascinating issues one is led to a whole different set of understandings as to “what is it that is going on here” (to quote Erving Goffman’s famous question posed, as he says, when individuals “attend to any current situation”)³.

As soon as the focus of observation shifts from the performance being created to the broader issue of the creative process itself, it becomes apparent that the disciplines that underpin theatre studies (theatre history, semiotics, text and performance analysis) are no longer enough. The task involves documenting and attempting to make sense of a complex interpersonal process, involving weeks of intensive work by artists and other skilled workers who use a variety of media and may also be based in different locations (wardrobe, sound studio, construction workshops, etc.). It is in this context that the turn to ethnography and microsociology (the study of small groups functioning within institutional contexts) has been so productive.

3. “I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation they face the question ‘what is it that is going on here?’” (GOFFMAN, 1986, p. 8)

It will be noted from what I have said so far that the modes of collaboration between academics and theatre and performance practitioners have evolved over the years. Some involve theatre artists being invited to come to the university to work in a laboratory context on projects devised by academics, others involve a kind of barter whereby the university provides a theatre company with rehearsal space on the campus for a few weeks while they rehearse their current production and, in return for this boost to their production budget, the artists agree to open their work process to observation and sometimes even let us film it. In other projects, academic researchers undertake fieldwork placements in professional theatre companies where they observe the whole rehearsal process for a production. The task of finding companies who will admit an observer into their own space has required patience and diplomacy, but this is essential if we are willing to explore the nature of the collaborative process as it occurs in the real world where the pressures are greater than in the laboratory conditions provided by the university, and where the emotional stakes are so much higher for all concerned.

Intersections with ethnography

I should like now to mention briefly some of the terms and concepts borrowed from ethnography that have helped us define what we are doing and what we want to do. The scope of an article such as this will permit only a summary indication of the way notions such as fieldwork, participant observation and thick description have been adopted and adapted in the development of a methodology to conduct rehearsal studies⁴.

The related notions of field and fieldwork have been helpful in many ways, not least in persuading university authorities of the need for Theatre and Performance Studies students to spend substantial amounts of time off campus⁵. For Paul Atkinson (2004, p. 94), a sociologist who wrote a study

4. A fully elaborated example of what I am talking about may be found in my book *Not magic but work: an ethnographic account of a rehearsal process*, published by Manchester University Press in 2012.

5. Each honors student in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney does a fieldwork placement in a professional theatre company in their final year of study. They observe the whole rehearsal process for a production and write a casebook study of it.

of the Welsh National Opera, the task of the rehearsal ethnographer is to examine “the social world(s) of cultural production as collective work in socially organised settings”. This formulation, especially with its emphasis on collective work, sums up admirably the intellectual project underpinning rehearsal studies, with the important proviso that the actual cultural production, the work being produced, needs to stay at the heart of the study. It is not simply a question of describing and analysing the social world of production but also of relating the aesthetic project of the work being produced to the means of production and to the society in which it is occurring.

Exploring the social field within which a given aesthetic practice is situated means engaging with a specific company, working in a specific theatre building, that occupies a particular place in the urban culture of a given society. And that observation draws attention to the highly pertinent fact that theatre is so much an art form of the city, that it is profoundly affected by the materialities of urban place and space, and is enmeshed in the realities of urban politics⁶.

Anthropologists traditionally study cultures far removed from their own, spend time immersed in that culture but then return home to think and write. It is no different for the rehearsal ethnographer, even though the practices studied are part of one's own culture.

The work must be done in the theatre, on the ground, and full time. It cannot be done in the library or archive room after the event, nor in the artificial, laboratory conditions created by inviting theatre practitioners to the university to work on limited projects devised by others, nor by an observer dropping into rehearsals from time to time, useful as all these modes of engagement can be. It requires a commitment to the whole period of rehearsals, and if possible, to the various processes that preceded the actual work in rehearsal room and theatre: discussions within the company about the choice of play, funding applications, the casting process, auditions and those early discussions between director and actor, meetings between director and set and costume designers, discussions between the designers etc. Such immersion in the creative process can, however, never be complete. There is always a distance, the need to take notes, to step back and reflect on ‘what is it that is going on’. Being in it but not of it, as

6. This is the domain that Richard Knowles (2004) has been exploring in his work on the ‘material theatre’.

anthropologists describe their practice, is equally applicable to the experience of the observer in the rehearsal room (MEAD, 1973).

Ethnographers have written extensively about being in the field and much of this literature is germane to what happens in rehearsal observations. Relevant issues concern the way one needs to negotiate the terms of one's presence, relations between observer and observed, etiquette to be respected, relations with informants, debates concerning reflexivity (the fact that the presence of an observer changes the event) and positionality (the term anthropologists use to refer to the ethnographer's social position in relation to the people he or she is working with). There is a hierarchy in the rehearsal room and observers will find that they have been subtly placed in relation to this hierarchy and this will, in turn, affect how they are regarded by the other participants, the kinds of question they will be able to ask, the kinds of answer that people will give to these questions, and the level of trust they are able to build.

Some directors insist that the observer take on a role of some sort in the creative process. They fear the disruptive effect that an observer might have on the complex interpersonal process that is occurring and, even though the role may be a fairly peripheral one such as assistant to the assistant director, it seems that an outsider can thus be transformed into a pseudo-insider and the danger will be averted. Anthropologists use the term *participant observation* for the practice that is at the heart of their discipline, and I have suggested that this is equally essential for rehearsal studies. French anthropologists speak of 'observation participante' and 'observation directe' (participant observation and direct observation) and these terms seem to be synonyms in French. But they can be used in rehearsal studies to distinguish between two different kinds of observational situation. 'Direct' for when one is a proper, full-time observer and 'participant' when one is, indeed, a participant in the production process or when the director insists that the observer takes on a role of some sort in the process.

I have already pointed out that most published accounts of rehearsal are written by insiders (directors, actors, dramaturgs). There is much to be said about the relative merits of insider and outsider accounts and, here too, ethnographers have debated the issue extensively as anthropology has reinvented itself in the post-colonial world. James Clifford (1986, p. 9) wrote that "insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths

of understanding”; and it is certainly the case that a participant in the process will have a unique understanding of the issues involved, and is likely to have a close relationship to the other participants that will make possible deep and personal discussions about the work.

It can, however, also be said that there are advantages in being an outsider. Insiders may be so familiar with aspects of the work that they hardly see them anymore, and things which an insider takes for granted, thinks of as normal or even universal, may benefit from being unpacked and analysed more closely.

Clifford continues making a further important point about the accounts that emerge resulting from insiders studying their own culture. He says: “their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways.” We need to be mindful of the restrictions as well as the unique depths of understanding. An insider may feel constrained by ties of friendship and loyalty to the group, may avoid certain delicate areas due to reluctance to hurt people’s feelings or fear for their own future job prospects. An outsider might not feel so constrained, which does not imply saying that the outsider is unconstrained in what he or she may say, but that the constraints are different.

As use of the terms ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ indicates, what is really being discussed here is the idea of a group, and this is a fundamental notion to the whole performance making process in the professional theatre. A great part of what goes on in rehearsal is bound up with the idea of being part of a dedicated group, governed by spoken and unspoken rules, and affording a degree of emotional satisfaction to those deemed to be insiders that in some way compensates for the low payment and precarious nature of the actor’s life. Anyone who has observed a rehearsal process in the theatre soon becomes aware of the ways in which membership of the group is experienced and policed by the group itself, as well as of the rituals that facilitate group formation and solidarity, and those that mark the dispersal of the group at the end of the play’s run. Also, the notion of group has bearing on things such as who is permitted to view the work in progress, and at what stage of the process such viewings can occur, the aspects of the work that seem to need to remain private, able to be discussed within the group but not outside, and for how long such reluctance to discuss controversial or painful issues will endure

after the production has closed. Bound up with the notion of group are even more important matters such as the nature of the sociality that prevails in the rehearsal room and in the theatre, power relations within the group, and the protocols (to use a term used by an older actress to explain to me how certain kinds of conflict were avoided, the unspoken rules that govern the process and that the observer discovers usually only after having unwittingly infringed one). Almost as important as relations within the group, are those that are perceived to exist between the company and the wider theatre community for these provide the participants with another level of professional validation.

Something else that the ethnographic model has taught us is to pay meticulous attention to the language used by practitioners in the rehearsal room, to the terminology with which they refer to aspects of the process. Ethnographers speak of 'native categories' and stress the importance of noting the words used by the locals, the things and activities to which these words refer and, particularly, what the terms mean to people in that community. Simply providing a rough equivalent in the researcher's own language may lead to crucial epistemological differences being elided. In rehearsal too, to appreciate the logic of the practice one is observing, we need to be alert to all the details of rehearsal room talk, the technical terminology as well as the metaphorical phrases used by actors to refer to more intangible aspects of what their work involves. It is important to explore precisely what members of the group understand by the terms they use. Nothing can be taken for granted because the meaning of terms used can shift over time, as I have discovered over the many years observing rehearsals in the same city. For instance, when actors today use a term such as 'a beat', I cannot assume that they mean exactly what actors meant by it twenty years ago. I have heard the term used to refer to concepts as different as a unit of dramatic action, a new thought, or even simply a pause.

Perhaps the most useful notion we have borrowed from ethnography is 'thick description'. This, according to Clifford Geertz (1973), is the goal of ethnographic work. A thick description contains multiple layers of context, details and explanations that render understanding of the phenomenon ever more complete and more complex. The sort of issues that arise when applied to rehearsal include things such as networks of prior relations that connect

the participants, relations deriving from their prior training and performance experience, and whether they have worked together before. Other issues concern the power relations that exist between the practitioners (age and celebrity can be factors here as well as function within the process – for example, an older actress working with a young director, a famous director working with unknown actors, a star in a cast of less well-known actors). Power relations not only operate between the actors themselves and between the director and the actors but also between the director and the company. The director may be an autonomous agent, but may equally be an employee like the actors, subjected to the politics and the power relations within the company. Other important issues concern the way the production is being funded, the individual or body that is providing the funding, the person responsible for controlling the budget, and the relationship between the funding and the aesthetic and social project constituted by the production. This is an incomplete list, but it indicates something of what is involved in a thick description and how to locate the artistic work functions in a broader social and cultural context.

Some general observations

James Clifford (1988, p. 34) has said that the task of the ethnographic observer involves “a continuous tacking between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of events; on the one hand, grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other, stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts.” In the concluding section of this article, I comment briefly on some of the issues that have arisen for me when ‘stepping back’ from detailed observation of the work process involved in creating a specific work of art. These include such things as the nature of community, the group formation that occurs early in the rehearsals, the idiosyncratic sociality of the actor’s life that alternates between periods of intense communion within a group to periods of anxious hustling or even unemployment which is a kind of excommunication. Another fascinating issue is the fact that it is the rehearsal process far more than the run of public performances that seems to provide actors with a sense of themselves as actors, a positive affirmation of themselves as creative artists. There is also the notion of a wider group belonging, which operates

to position members of a given cast or company in relation to the profession more broadly and to a historical tradition that, in the case of Australian actors at least, extends beyond national boundaries to include other parts of the English-speaking world.

However, the issue that has made the most powerful impression on me over the years is the essentially collaborative nature of the creative process in theatre and performance. Therefore, I will end this article with a few remarks concerning the complex question of creative agency as it emerges from doing rehearsal studies. My experience of rehearsals has occurred at a time (the last quarter of the twentieth century) when the director is in the ascendancy, expected to lead the work in rehearsal and is attributed virtual authorial responsibility by all concerned. The notion of director as 'auteur' might not be as strong in Britain as in many other places, in particular on the continent, but even in the UK and certainly elsewhere, the director is seen as the major creative force in the theatre. Yet what has been most fascinating in the rehearsal processes I have observed is the collaborative nature of the creative process, the way that creative suggestions come from many sources, most notably from the actors and designers, but also from technicians and even stagehands. In the rehearsal room, there are typically many different artists, working in different media, pooling ideas, gaining inspiration from other people's ideas or even half-formed suggestions, depending on luck and happy accidents as much as on the conscious guiding will of the director.

Western societies in general seem to have difficulty in recognising group creativity. Even when a creative process obviously draws on the contributions of many different artists, we do not seem able to acknowledge this, thus inventing a figure (usually male) to whom the authorial responsibility can be attributed. Wildly generalising, one can say that in respect of the theatre, until the end of the nineteenth century, this authorial figure was the playwright and, since then, it has increasingly been the director. Clearly, there are directors who can best be described as 'auteurs,' and these include some very great theatre artists, people like Tadeusz Kantor or Robert Wilson who control and ordain every aspect of the performance. For the actors and all the other artists working on one of these productions, the task is essentially to fulfil the director's vision. But directors of this sort are a minority.

More interesting, complex and mysterious to me are the practices employed in what actors perceive to be a good rehearsal process. The director here stimulates, facilitates and elicits the creativity of several different artists and then draws all these inputs together and shapes them into a coherent work of art. The great directors will do this while enabling each individual artist and craftsman to know that they have made a genuine contribution and that without their contribution the work would have been the poorer. The inspirational Australian director Rex Cramphorn (2009, p. 291) once described the ideal to which he aspired as a director, namely to run the rehearsal room in such a way that “the grace of creativity might fall on any member of the group, conferring on him or her the right to lead the work”⁷.

Exploring the way this kind of group creativity functions and the role of the director or group leader in such circumstances, exploring the conditions that facilitate such empowerment of group members, such blossoming of creativity, and conversely exploring the conditions that stunt and close down group creativity, have implications that extend far beyond the theatre. Just as our society fails to recognise group responsibility, group creativity, thus we have entered a period when many institutions (universities amongst them) seem to fear that without constant surveillance and micro management, the staff cannot be trusted to do the jobs that they, more than anyone in management, know how to do. Contemporary theatre practice provides powerful evidence that unleashing the creativity of others does not lead automatically to chaos or anarchy, and that complex enterprises can be run without the authoritarian and bureaucratic interference that thus saps the energies of people working in them. I suggest that theatre practice can reveal a great deal about the value and the nature of group creativity if we can take the trouble to engage deeply enough with it, which is precisely what rehearsal studies is attempting to do.

7. “I believed that my most important function was to establish an atmosphere in which the grace of creativity might fall on any member of the group, giving him or her the right to lead the work. This is very different from the idea of creativity by committee or of following every alternative proposed – it implies the existence of a special atmosphere in which the right and only direction is immediately clear to all concerned” (CRAMPORN, 2009, p. 291)

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