

**EXAMINING THE EFFICACY OF POPULAR THEATRE  
FORMS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY DIRECTOR  
OF DIDACTIC PERFORMANCE**

Submitted by Jason Wayne Price,  
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**Jason W. Price**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis seeks to offer a preliminary evaluation of the efficacy of popular theatre forms for the benefit of the contemporary director of didactic performance. Chapter One provides a rationale for the study by outlining the history of popular theatre forms in twentieth-century practices, focusing specifically on those that aimed to be didactic. The chapter then addresses the state of didactic performance at the present time and questions whether the right cultural conditions currently exist to reinvigorate didactic drama with popular theatre forms. The chapter concludes with an outline of my methodology for the development of three research projects designed to analyse the efficacy of popular forms. Chapters Two, Three and Four discuss the development of the research projects specifically. In these chapters I discuss how performers were trained in the popular forms, the development of the performance texts, and, crucially, how the forms were used in performance. The conclusion to each chapter addresses the audiences' reception to the performances. Chapter Five collates the findings from the research through practice projects and seeks to offer advice to directors of contemporary didactic performance on how popular theatre forms can be used to entertain and educate audiences about issues of concern.

This thesis is accompanied by four DVDs, which feature short films of performer training workshops and the research projects. The reader will be directed to the DVDs at specific moments throughout the thesis.

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## ACCOMPANYING MATERIALS

The accompanying DVDs are affixed to the inside of the back cover of this thesis.

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- I. Private *Commedia* Training with Teresa Rodrigues
- II. Training Workshops for *Diplomacy in Ironland*
- III. Popular Theatre Workshop Series
  - i. *Commedia*
  - ii. Shadow Puppets
  - iii. Dance
  - iv. Voice

DVD 2: Research Project 1

- I. *Diplomacy in Ironland,*

Filmed on 17 June 2007 by Jason Price at Roborough Studios,  
University of Exeter.

DVD 3: Research Project 2:

- I. *Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia*
- II. *Fashionable Immigration: a Puppet Show*
- III. *Fashionable Immigration: a Musical*

Filmed on 8 and 9 March 2008 by Jason Price at Roborough  
Studios, University of Exeter.

DVD 4: Research Project 3:

- I. *Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia*

Filmed on 7 June 2008 by Jason Price at Exeter Guildhall  
Shopping Centre, Exeter.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the twentieth-century, popular theatre forms and techniques were featured on many political stages. By using popular forms many practitioners believed that they would be able to create didactic performances about social injustices which, because of the nature of the forms, would appeal to a broad audience; these troupes, to use the Horatian adage, sought to ‘teach and delight’ their audiences. The San Francisco Mime Troupe (1959-present), The Bread and Puppet Theatre (1963-present), and Welfare State International (1968-2006), are just a few examples of troupes who have used popular theatre forms to create such performances. Although I believe that their longevity is indicative of their popularity with audiences, it says nothing about their performances and whether they have been successful in educating and/or altering their audiences’ perceptions of certain political and/or social issues. What seems to be implied by the abundance of theatre troupes that have used popular forms and techniques for the purpose of creating didactic performance is that they are indeed effective didactic tools. But, just how effective are they? Are there certain techniques or forms which are better suited or more effective than others? Furthermore, if indeed the forms are capable of entertaining and educating audiences, then why are not more directors and/or practitioners using these forms today? This thesis seeks to find answers to these questions by analysing the efficacy of the popular theatre forms and techniques most frequently used by popular-political theatre troupes of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; it specifically aims to offer a preliminary evaluation of how popular theatre forms might function to ‘teach and delight’ audiences, as well as make them active as a response to issues discussed through the discourse of performance. In doing so, it aims to explore a viable model for creating political grass-roots theatre in twenty-first century Britain.

### **Section 1: The Radical and the Popular**

The aim of this section is to provide an overview of popular theatre practice in the twentieth-century and provide a rationale for this study. I will begin by addressing definitions and theories of popular theatre. I will then address how popular forms of drama were used in several twentieth-century theatre practices, particularly focusing on those that have aimed to be didactic and/or political, up to the present time.

*Definitions of Popular Theatre*

Only when we accept the possibility that for every literary, philosophic, and consciously artistic theatrical piece, there are some dozens of inartistic, energetic, mindless, unliterary dramatic genres which enjoy a vast popularity and which appeal, not necessarily to persons of refinement and educated taste, but to the greater part of the population, do we begin to see the theatrical expressions of an age in a more accurate perspective (Mayer 1977: 259).

The term ‘popular theatre’, in its broadest usage, is used to describe various performance practices that lie outside the conventional bourgeois and/or commercial theatres. The forms are both popular in the sense that they appeal to broad audiences, and the fact that they are part of oral and performance traditions. Joel Schechter indicates in “Back to the Popular Source” in *Popular Theatre: a sourcebook* (2003) that the forms have been passed on both orally and physically, from parent to child or to others via apprenticeships (Schechter: 2003, 6). Furthermore, many of these practices relied on traditional stories, which, like the practices, were passed on orally; subsequently, many of these practices were not documented in writing, but were instead reliant upon word of mouth and mimesis for survival. As David Mayer pointed out in his groundbreaking paper “Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre” (1977), because these forms were non-literary, and drama was first studied by university language and classics departments, whose interest is not entirely dramatic, their study has been neglected (1977: 257).

Popular theatre performances are often supported by the general public, whose patronage may be a troupe’s sole means of survival. The performances can be highly visual and physical, are generally portable, orally transmitted and comprehensible, and are not generally flattering to wealth. Because of this, they have generally been appreciated by working class audiences (Schechter 2003: 4). Schechter (2003) has noted that popular theatre truly began with ancient mimes in Ancient Greece. He claims that the mimes were widely appreciated because they “[...] received no subvention from the state, in consequence did not take instruction from above, and so worked out [their] artistic principles simply and solely from their own immediate experience with [the] audience” (2003: 4). This direct engagement with the audience, and the flexibility of the performance to acknowledge the conditions/situations of audiences in different locales, is one of the major features of popular theatre forms (van Erven 1998: 6; Mayer 1977: 261; Schechter 2003: 4). Furthermore, Schechter argues that because popular theatre performers relied on their audience for their livelihood, they would generally speak for and voice their concerns (ibid). Other types of theatre that are generally acknowledged

to be popular are: Japanese Bunraku, Indian Jatra, *Wayang Kulit*, *Toepeng*, Italian *commedia dell'arte*, English pantomime, melodrama, circus, and some musical theatre forms.<sup>1</sup>

In his attempt to articulate a definition of popular theatre, Mayer acknowledges several differences between the aesthetic (e.g. the mainstream or textual theatre) and popular theatre. I quote at length in an effort to narrow the field.

The drama of the aesthetic culture is characterized by single authorship, by playwrights who would be known for their skills, by structural and aesthetic relevance, by willingness to face complex moral and social issues [...] and to lead audiences to newer or different attitudes. It is intended for audiences sufficiently educated to insist upon artistic and intellectual coherence” (1977: 265).

Hence, the aesthetic drama is elitist in the sense it caters to the intellectual elite, but may still also be considered popular amongst the higher classes. Historically, the aesthetic theatre has been produced for the middle classes; realism and some musicals written for contemporary commercial stages are examples of the aesthetic theatre. Popular drama, on the other hand, presents a different profile. Mayer refers to this as the “antithetical” profile, which is heavily based on popular tradition. He continues:

It is indebted to conventions of structure, plot, dance, dialogue and song passed down for generations and is refurbished by material borrowed from a wide variety of sources [...] It has the utility in that it serves social needs through public rites or through plays that reinforce desirable social or moral conclusions (1977: 265) [...] It may also amuse and relax the minds of the spectators when it relies on spectacle (magic, trick, freaks, fireworks [etc.]) (1977: 266).

Due to its popularity and close relationship to its audience, politicians or people in positions of power have also found interest in the popular theatre. Generally, as Mayer acknowledged, those in power would do this by: 1) ordering public rites to impress symbols and personalities of authority upon them; 2) creating propagandistic performances; or 3), censoring the form and establishing limitations on it (1977: 263). It would appear that the potential efficacy of the forms, then, was recognised even during the time the forms were initially performed.

Where did the popular theatre go? Eugene van Erven, author of *Radical People's Theatre*, attributes some responsibility to dramatists for losing touch with their audience and writing for the higher classes, an approach that would eventually lead to

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably Ancient Greek pantomime (*pantomimos*), Elizabethan jigs, variety theatres – including revue, minstrel shows, burlesque, cabaret – and some contemporary musicals; specifically, any musical or music theatre form which has catered to its audiences' tastes, as opposed to those composed according to artistic standards established by a literary intellectual elite.

the demise of some popular forms, particularly in the west. He seems to echo Romain Rolland's<sup>2</sup> opinion of Classical French drama, when he claims that the 'death' of the people's theatre came during the Renaissance when playwrights adopted Ancient Greek and Roman models that were "[...] intellectually beyond the education of the masses [...]" (Erven 1988: 6) for writing drama. In his argument, van Erven considers how the *commedia dell'arte* evolved into a mainstream practice in France in the seventeenth-century:

This type of improvisational farce originated as a theatre for and by the people, but was later absorbed by the aristocracy [...] The tendency of theatre (and art in general) to cater to the ruling classes became even more evident when the bourgeoisie took over the social and political hegemony and capitalism made art into a commodity (ibid).

What the commoditisation of popular theatre did, of course, is remove it from its 'popular' audience. Although this might be seen as a bad thing, Mayer indicates that this may have provided those forms with "[...] unique prominence and longevity [...]" (1977: 264). Ultimately, for scholarship, the commoditisation of some popular theatre forms has provided some much needed documentation.

There are two types of popular theatre which have been identified by van Erven (1988). The first type, which predates the twentieth-century, is a theatre which catered to working-class audiences as opposed to the theatre created for the bourgeoisies (1988: 5). This type of theatre sought to bring the classics to everyone, in the form of a kind of public, or state funded theatre (1988: 6); this might also be called a people's theatre. The idea of a people's theatre dates back to 1758 when Jacques Rousseau called for people's festivals, which would include dances and provide an alternative to the bourgeois stage (Schechter: 2003: 3); this was later expanded upon by Sebastien Mercier, who in 1778 called for a theatre which would "mould the manners of the citizens" (Mercier, qtd in Schechter 2003: 3). In 1903 Romain Rolland's *Le Théâtre du peuple* would once again call for this type of theatre. Rolland's theories of a people's theatre, which are widely criticised for being extravagant, called for a theatre of energy, intelligence and comfort for the working classes (Rolland 1919[1903]: 105). Richard Drain, editor of *Twentieth-Century Theatre: A sourcebook*, notes that this type of theatre

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<sup>2</sup> Author of *Le Théâtre du peuple* (1903). He argues that French drama dating back to the seventeenth-century had largely been written for bourgeois audiences, and that this theatre was not appropriate for the un- or under-educated working-class. Instead, he proposes a kind of state sponsored theatre which would give thought to the working class' entertainment, educational and physical needs. Please see: Rolland, Romain. *The People's Theatre* (1919 [1903]) Trans. Barrett H. Clark. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

was particularly appealing to practitioners in the Symbolist period (1995: 153). He writes that “[...] the notion of a theatre like that of the Greeks that might once more unite people and performers in a profound or ecstatic ritual event was much aired [...] The hope was that the class conflicts dividing the nation might be dissolved in a moving communal event, and its people once more realise their oneness” (ibid). These ‘national’ theatres, as Drain terms them, never happened exactly as they had been theorised, but some were eventually created. Drain acknowledges the Abbey Theatre in Dublin as just one example.

The second type of popular theatre identified by van Erven is akin to (and sometimes is presented as) militant street theatre, which is “a theatre designed to reveal the capitalists’ cause of the working man’s misery” (1988: 6). This has been elaborated on by several scholars, but most recently by Schechter (2003) and Prenki and Selman (2000), who place this type of popular theatre inside definitions of ‘community’ and ‘social’ theatres (Prenki & Selman 2000: 13). Prenki and Selman write that popular theatre is “[...] a process of theatre which deeply involves specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analysing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of change, and analysing how change could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied” (ibid). This type of theatre has also been called ‘populist’ as it often seeks to communicate with and acknowledge the problems of the working-class. The twentieth-century saw an abundance of this type of popular theatre. Just a few examples of practitioners and/or theatre companies who created theatre in this category are: Vsevolod Meyerhold, the Blue Blouses, Karl Valentine, Bertolt Brecht, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, Dario Fo, Franca Rama and their company La Comune, The Bread and Puppet Theatre, Welfare State International (WSI), 7:84 England and Scotland, among many others. It is with this type of popular theatre and the works of these troupes and practitioners that this thesis is largely concerned.

### *Popular Theatre in Didactic Practices*

To understand how troupes like The San Francisco Mime Troupe and Welfare State International thrived in the latter half of the twentieth-century, however, we must first consider the cultural and artistic trends, movements, theories and practices that made their work possible. I will now do a whistle-stop tour of the history of popular theatre in theatre practices from 1880 to the present, highlighting in particular the foundations in which direct political community practices, like those of the Mime Troupe and WSI, were made possible.

The rise of liberalism and socialism throughout the nineteenth-century, which place an emphasis on the individual and the proletariat respectively, can be seen by looking at the theatre of this period. The fact that these ideologies were appearing on the bourgeois stages is indicative of how conscious people (at least in Europe) were of them. Two obvious examples of liberalism can be found in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), both of which concentrate on the role of women in society; for socialism, see George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1905), which addresses Fabian socialism and philosophy very directly.<sup>3</sup> From 1880 onwards, liberalism and socialism would take new roots in the avant-garde movement as well, which attempted to wrestle the theatre away from bourgeois propriety. Not all avant-garde practitioners, however, used popular theatre techniques, but they did share distaste for the prevailing norms in the theatre, particularly the experiments being done in realism. Many, spurred on by socialism, shared a sympathetic view of the proletariat, and in some ways their work would attempt to engage with them.

Popular commercial entertainments like pantomime, variety theatre, musical hall and cabaret performances also thrived during this period; the latter, in particular, became a haven for the symbolists and political satire (McConachie 2006: 335). To exemplify how successful popular entertainments were, Bruce McConachie notes that in Glasgow in 1906 there were 29,000 theatre seats available, the majority of them reserved for popular entertainments (2006: 316). In the United States, the late nineteenth-century proved to be a turning point for popular musical entertainments. The musical theatre forms that were popular at the time – the variety theatre, minstrel shows, burlesque, and revue; and the aesthetic forms opera and operetta – began to pollinate one another, and a new, distinct form emerged: the musical (Jones 1998: 21-50). The new form would combine the narrative of the operas and operettas with the popular appeal of the variety theatres to form a distinct new theatre form (ibid). Bred, as it was, by popular and aesthetic forms, the new form could easily appease the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. As we will see, the musical, with its razzmatazz storytelling abilities, is also a powerful didactic form, and has been used by a number of practitioners throughout the twentieth-century to teach and delight their audiences. In light of this, I think it is probably sensible to clarify: whether or not a musical performance is classified as popular can only be determined by how the form is used and who it is used by.

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<sup>3</sup> This shift is also discussed in George Lukács' *The Sociology of Modern Drama* (1909).

Theatre viewing also changed in the nineteenth-century. Before 1880, the theatre was seen primarily as a social function; the theatres were well lit and audiences could socialise during the performance, and even comment on it when it disagreed with them. After 1880, however, the houselights were turned off, leaving the audience in the dark. McConachie has pointed out that this lessened audience participation and turned a social event into a private one (2006: 332) - a fact I find ironic given the spread of liberalism.

Three of the avant-garde movements – symbolism, cultural retrospectivism and futurism – warrant further discussion, as they looked at and sometimes incorporated popular theatre forms into their performances, most notably *commedia dell'arte* and variety theatre forms and techniques. As a symbolist in the early twentieth-century, Vsevolod Meyerhold often incorporated popular theatre forms into his productions. For example, in 1903 he began researching clown performances when he was cast as Landowsky in Franz von Schonhau's production of *The Acrobats*. The play portrayed the backstage life of a circus (McManus 2003: 38). This production appears to have incorporated circus merely for its aesthetic; no attempt seems to have been made at using the circus form to critique, satirize or communicate directly with the audience. Later, as he became frustrated with the symbolists, his beliefs in the power of popular theatre forms changed. In 1906 he directed and played the role of Pierrot in Alexandr Blok's *The Fairground Booth*, which featured characters of the *commedia dell'arte* and satirised the symbolist movement by ridiculing, in particular, the role of the playwright. Donald Cameron McManus, author of *No Kidding: Clown as Protagonist in Twentieth-Century Theatre* (2003) writes that *The Fairground Booth*, “[...] coming as it did directly after the 1905 Revolution, was full of anarchic energy and contradictory clown-logic. The performers on the stage literally burst from the theatre space [...] and challeng[ed] all modes of representation, and, by implication, [...] social and political systems” (2003: 39). This play, as an early example of cultural retrospectivism, includes some of the features of popular theatre discussed by Mayer, van Erven, and Schechter earlier. For instance, the character of the Author directly addresses the audience, commenting on the actors' inability to follow his script and direction, can be seen as both metatheatrical and an engagement with the audience rarely seen outside the origins of the *commedia dell'arte* form (except, of course, in the music halls and cabarets popular during this period). Writing six years later, Meyerhold would discuss the value of popular theatre performance as a tool for actor training (to rid them of the 'nervous disease' he saw on the realist stages) and creating entertaining and didactic performances in his article *The Fairground Booth* (1911-12): “The new *theatre of masks*

will learn from the Spaniards and the Italians of the seventeenth century and build its repertoire according to the laws of the fairground booth, where entertainment always precedes instruction and where movement is prized more than words” ([1911-12] 1995: 167-8).

Even though *The Fairground Booth* predates Meyerhold’s overtly political constructivist works created in the 1920s (often referred to as the ‘Bolshevik phase’), what can be seen here is the start of his fascination with popular forms of theatre.

Another of the avant-garde movements which had popular theatre leanings is futurism. Filippo Tomasso Marinetti’s (1876-1944) *The Variety Theatre* (1913) is one of the more obvious examples of this. In it, the second futurists’ manifesto, Marinetti argues that the variety theatre format had the potential to create highly visual performances that “[...] seek[s] the audience’s collaboration [...]” (1995 [1913]: 172). He further argues that this format “[...] naturally generates [...] ‘The Futurist marvellous’ [...]” which includes “(a) powerful caricatures; (b) abysses of the ridiculous; (c) delicious, impalpable ironies; (d) all-embracing, definitive symbols; [...] (f) profound analogies between humanity, the animal, vegetable, and mechanical worlds [...]” (1995 [1913]: 171) among other things. Here, however, a popular theatre form was being consulted because of its popular appeal, not as a serious model for creating performance. Marinetti’s actual proposal seems more nonsensical than didactic; for instance, he suggests that audience members might be glued to their seats to create chaotic and comedic moments and that the *chanteuses* could be painted with bright colours (1995 [1913]: 173).

Following the Russian Revolution and Civil War, radical socialism in Eastern Europe prospered, and would eventually spread throughout the west. The theatre that came after this time was more direct and didactic than previous practices. With *The Blue Blouses* (1923) we can see the start of a direct political practice which incorporated popular theatre forms. Furthermore, their practice was designed for the proletariat – even their costumes, blue smocks, were selected so that they might look like the proletariat. The original *Blue Blouses* troupe was established by Boris Yuzhanin, a journalist teacher at the Moscow Institute of Journalism, in an attempt to take ‘living newspapers’ to the mostly illiterate proletariat (Drain 1995: 183). Their performance space was dictated by where the workers were: the factory, the street, the workers’ club, etc. The performances consisted of a combination of live music, song, readings and recitations of newspaper and magazine articles, and were designed to teach the proletariat about communism. Spread out over eleven scenes, a typical performance

would last from one and a half to two hours and include a parade, satirical sketches, a *Rayok*, or rapid fire tongue twister story, and a *Chasushki*, a two or four line folk verse which was also satirical and/or humorous (Blue Blouses 1995 [1925]: 182-3). The structure of a Blue Blouses performance is undeniably indebted to the variety theatre. The Blue Blouses became incredibly popular throughout Russia and eventually published *Simple Advice to Participants* (1925), with guidelines on how to create a Blue Blouses troupe and organise a performance; 5,000 such troupes are said to have been created throughout Europe (ibid). They were, however, just the start of a more global proletariat-driven movement of agitprop performance which became known as the Workers' Theatre Movement. In the United States, for instance, in the late 1920s several troupes working in a similar way to the Blue Blouses were established. The Workers Laboratory Theatre, which was funded by the International Relief Cultural Activities Department (a branch of the American Communist Party) being just one example (Cosgrove 1985: 276). As a genre, the living newspaper would also be used by Hallie Flanagan, future head of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), at Vassar College where she taught (Himmelstein 1963: 11) and would later be performed by companies funded by the FTP.<sup>4</sup>

In 1927 the Blue Blouses toured Germany (Drain 1995: 183), where similar agitprop troupes, with the same purpose (spreading radical socialism) already existed. One of the major socialist practitioners in Germany at this time was Erwin Piscator (1893-1966). Piscator's theatre "[...] used situations of class conflict, film clips of historical scenes, and a panoply of on-stage technological devices to create drama history lessons in socialism" (McConachie 2006: 374). He would later call this theatre 'documentary theatre', but his techniques are also recognised as the foundation for the 'epic theatre' that Brecht would develop further. Although Piscator's theatre did not really incorporate popular theatre forms, aspects of his practice do fit with Mayer's definition of popular theatre. For instance, whilst at the Volksbühne in Berlin, where he was director and developed his practice from 1924-7, performances were created by a collective – the role of the playwright, for example, was not prominent. Here, like the Blue Blouses, the message – in this case, the benefits of communism – was the most significant aspect of the performance. Subsequently, as the aim was to create didactic performances about communism and concerns of the proletariat without a playwright or director who seeks recognition for his work (albeit Piscator was indeed well-known),

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<sup>4</sup> Please see: Price, Jason (2005) *Agitprop in America: examining the role of theatre in promoting communist ideologies to audiences during the Great Depression*, M.A. Dissertation. University of Exeter: Department of Drama.

documentary theatre fits Mayer's 'antithetical' or popular profile, as opposed to that of the aesthetic theatre. Furthermore, as we will see, the epic theatre is at the heart of many later twentieth-century practices.

Bertolt Brecht's (1898 – 1956) work, however, did incorporate popular theatre forms – namely, elements of cabaret and music hall performance. In the late 1920s, his political ideology also appears to have shifted further to the left, and, perhaps because of this, he too sought to educate audiences about issues of political and/or social concern. This shift is noticeable in his works. Whereas earlier plays had been experiments in *dada* and expressionism and were not music-driven, his plays from the late 1920s onward were musicals, or, at the very least, musical plays; the first of which was *Man is Man* in 1926. John Fuegi (1987) in fact argues that from the late 1920s Brecht was more or less a librettist instead of a playwright (1987: 49). Brecht's plays and theories are very well documented, and it is not my aim to evaluate those here. However, there are two concepts that I wish to discuss as they will feature in later discussions. The first concerns the *Verfremdungseffekt*. John Fuegi acknowledges that its English translation 'alienation' and its French translation as 'distanciation' have caused a great deal of confusion and misinterpretation of Brecht's work (1987: 82-3).

In Brecht's terms, an object can become invisible either because it is too strange or because it is too familiar. The paradoxical trick is to disrupt the viewer's normal or run of the mill perception by introducing elements that will suddenly cause the viewer to see familiar objects in a strange way and to see strange objects in a familiar way. The terms "alienation" and "distanciation" only capture one side of the dual formation summed up on the one word *Verfremdung* (1987: 83).

In practice, the V-effect should prevent audiences from becoming too involved in the story and empathising with its characters, and, instead, help them relate the allegorical, political performance to their own situations. In other words, in order to relate to the issues that affect them directly, they must be kept at a safe distance from the performance, otherwise they might miss the point. This, then, might encourage them to be more active about the issue being discussed in the performance under an allegorical veil. Everything from the script, blocking, design and actor training (the use of the third person) were considered so that the V-effect might be achieved in Brecht's theatre.

The second issue concerns reality. Both Piscator and Brecht acknowledge the necessity of reality in didactic performance. In his *The Popular and the Realistic* (1938), Brecht writes:

In the theatre reality can be represented in a factual or a fantastic form. The actors can do without (or with the minimum of) makeup, appearing

‘natural’, and the whole thing can be a fake; they can wear grotesque masks and represent the truth [...] The workers judge everything by the amount of truth contained in it; they welcome any innovation which helped the representation of truth, of the real mechanism of society; they rejected whatever seemed like playing [...] (Brecht 1995 [1938]: 190).

Writing nearly ten years earlier, Piscator also acknowledged the necessity of ‘reality’ in didactic performance. He writes that “The business of revolutionary theatre is to take reality as its point of departure and to magnify the social discrepancy, making it an element of our indictment, our revolt, our new order” (Piscator 1995 [1929]: 103). What Piscator and Brecht acknowledged is that for didactic performance to be effective with working class audiences, they (the working class) need to be able to identify and relate to the topic of the performance. The style of the performance did not matter as long as it is rooted in something real and is recognisable.

Although Brecht’s influence on later didactic drama is undeniable (particularly the concepts mentioned above), I shall not pursue his practice any further. The primary reason for this is that he, as a director and playwright, falls into Mayer’s aesthetic profile discussed earlier. Despite his adherence to Marxism and the didactic intention of his work, I am unaware of any evidence which suggests that Brecht offered his plays to working class audiences at little or no cost in order to entertain and educate them. Consequently, it is difficult to determine the size of his impact on, or indeed service to, the proletariat.

Whilst liberalism and socialism thrived in the early twentieth-century, the Second World War temporarily slowed them down; the Cold War would, particularly in the west, nearly stop them all together. From 1947 until 1968 the predominant form of liberalism in American theatre, for example, “[...] supported notions of individual success, consumer choice, and corporate power, while accepting limits on democracy to change patterns of economic equality and traditional racist behaviour” (McConachie 2006: 380). However, liberalism and socialism were still bubbling under the surface; this can be seen in the works of the Theatre Workshop (created in 1945), Living Theatre (created in 1947), the plays of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, the creation of the openly socialist San Francisco Mime Troupe in 1959, among others. By the 1960s these troupes flourished in the growing counter-culture movement.

**Section 2:**  
**Popular-Political Theatre Troupes:**  
**An analysis**

I would now like to take a closer look at some of the troupes of what Baz Kershaw has called the ‘alternative theatre movement’ (Kershaw 1992), which existed in many western countries from the late 1960s until the early 1990s. Before I was able to begin drafting research projects to analyse the efficacy of popular theatre forms and techniques, I needed to narrow down my list of troupes and the popular forms and techniques they used. Hence, the troupes discussed in this section only represent a small percentage of the total number of troupes producing popular-political theatre during this time. My intention was to analyse their methods, the techniques they used, how they used them, and the issues and ideologies present in their works in an effort to determine whether there were any consistencies regarding dramaturgy, training, and, if possible, outcomes concerning the efficacy of the forms they have used. The selection of popular forms and techniques that I would explore in my research through practice would be made on the frequency in which they appeared in these troupes’ works.

First it became necessary to apply filters to the field in order to narrow it down to a more manageable size. The first filter was obvious: I would only concentrate on troupes who have used popular theatre forms and techniques as their principal means of creating performance to discuss political or social issues. Once this distinction had been made, I was still left with an incredibly long list. To narrow these down further, I selected to eliminate all performance troupes that did not have published texts. I found that aside from the San Francisco Mime Troupe and 7:84 England and Scotland, who have published several of their scripts, there are not many texts available from other troupes for analysis. This is particularly true of Welfare State International and the Bread and Puppet Theatre. Welfare State International has never published their scripts, and only one text (*This Is*) has been published by the Bread and Puppet Theatre. However, these troupes have been the focus of several notable studies (Kershaw & Coult, 1983; Kershaw, 1992; 1999; S. Brecht, 1988), which includes descriptions and critical evaluations of some of their works and I believed that these would be adequate.

Because of the availability of materials, and scholarly attention they had received, I selected to analyse the San Francisco Mime Troupe, 7:84 (Scotland), the Bread and Puppet Theatre, Welfare State International, and La Comune (Dario Fo and Franca Rame). Two other troupes, ACT UP and the Church Ladies for Choice<sup>5</sup>, were

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<sup>5</sup> ACT UP was a protest group organised by Larry Kramer in New York City during the late 1980s; the troupe was created to protest President Reagan and his administration’s lack of response to the AIDS crisis. For more information see Solomon in *Radical Street Performance*, pp.42-51. The Church Ladies for Choice is a branch of ACT UP that protests anti-abortion groups by dressing in conservative, church-appropriate drag and singing at abortion clinics. For more information see Cohen-Cruz in *Radical Street Performance*, pp. 90-99.

also examined, but since their work is primarily protest-related (and there are no texts/video available to analyse), they were not analysed extensively. To assist with my study, I made contact with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and they provided me with videos of twenty of their performances dating back to 1981. I was also able to witness Welfare State International's final performance, entitled *Longline: the carnival opera*, in March 2006 and later interview John Fox, the troupe's founder, about his use of popular theatre techniques.

I began my study with a series of questions based on my understanding of popular theatre performance. These questions were to act as a guide for evaluation and analysis and on which my own methodology for analysis would be built. I separated the questions into two categories. The first concerned dramaturgy. The questions in this category are based on the literary (Aristotelian) model of script analysis, and were heavily reliant upon locating published texts. I had hoped to uncover similarities in the texts that might point towards a more concrete method for further textual analysis, as well as a creative methodology that might suggest a consistent popular theatre dramaturgy. Additionally, some of the questions in this first group were meant to guide my research on the troupes themselves, not just on the performances that they create; this was necessary because 1) general knowledge of the troupes is essential to the comprehension of their performances and 2) understanding how the troupes create performances could potentially provide insight into the texts themselves. The second category was that of physicality and aesthetics. This category was primarily concerned with the performance itself, and was created on the anticipation of locating and viewing performances by some, if not all, of the troupes. These questions are listed below. Some of them have been annotated with additional explanatory and source material to help clarify my thought process and to justify the need for asking certain questions.

Dramaturgy/Text/Pre-Performance:

- (1) How are the characters presented? Are they well-developed (in an 'aesthetic' sense)? If not, is there any indication why the characters have been underwritten? Do certain characters represent, or argue for (or against) a noticeable ideology?
- (2) Is there a coherent plot? Plot structure? Does a particular ideology appear in the plot?
- (3) What of rhythm? Does the overall piece have a sense of rhythm? If so, is it quick, or slow in pace?

- (4) How do popular techniques appear in the text? Are they present at all? If so, how do they read? (See question 6).
- (5) To what level are these troupes 'specialising' in the dramatic forms/types used for creating performance? (See question 18).
- (6) What popular theatre techniques are identifiable in these troupes' works? Why are these particular techniques used? How many hybrids are identifiable? (Hybrid: blending techniques to form a new technique.) How were these hybrids created? Why were these hybrids created? How practical are these hybrids for use in performances outside of the originating troupe? (Might they even be effective outside of the specialising/creating troupe?)
- (7) Do they have a means for evaluating their dramaturgy's effectiveness with audiences?
- (8) What ideologies are informing the troupes' work? Do these ideologies always work for the company, or hinder its effectiveness with audiences?
- (9) Are these ideologies present in all their works? What philosophies/politics do these ideologies originate from? Does this 'originating' source have some impact on the methodologies and/or dramaturgies practiced by the troupe?
- (10) How do they portray these ideologies? Do they always remain 'true' to these ideologies or do they change?
- (11) In what ways have these troupes become acquainted with particular issues they address through their works? Is there a research method/process?
- (12) How are the performances created? How are the scripts (if one is created) manipulated during performance?
- (13) During analyses of the script(s), are there any notable, common characteristics in language, character, plot, action, rhythm, ideologies or progression of action? Does this point toward a methodology or consistent dramaturgy?
- (14) From question 9: Are there any troupes who would appear to have similar dramaturgies or methodologies after detailed script analysis?
- (15) What is the troupe's system for creation (rehearsals)? (This would be aside from methodology related to composition of texts for performances.)

Physical Aspects of Performance

- (16) What, if any, emphasis is placed on spectacle?
- (17) What, if any, emphasis is placed on sets, properties, costumes? Does this make them more or less effective?
- (18) If one of the criterion for popular drama is performers that 'impress' an audiences with their skills, what skills are being practiced? How are these skills being used to open up the social 'problem(s)' addressed by the performance? Where should the emphasis be placed: on the socio-political issues being addressed, or the performer's ability to engage and impress an audience? How are these final two elements blended to create effective performances?
- (19) How are actors prepared for performance? Actor training? I discovered that performers are often not trained as specialists in the techniques that they may be performing, but are often introduced to techniques as they become necessary for certain performances (see San Francisco Mime Troupe and Welfare State International). If this is so, how is a performance viewed by audiences (untrained in performance) and experts (obviously trained in performance, or who have some working knowledge of the theatre)?
- (20) What effect does music have on the performance, notably live music? What atmosphere might/could this addition create?
- (21) What types of spaces have been used for popular theatre performances? How is that space utilized? How are the performers arranged in this space (in a directorial sense) to ensure that audiences are receiving the full value (socially, culturally, politically) of the performance?
- (22) What is the appropriate length for such a performance?

In my search for a method for analysing contemporary popular text and performance, it became apparent that I was dealing with not just one, but three different types of drama.

I termed and defined these as:

*Classic and agitprop*: the classic type borrows from traditional popular forms, creating political satire that is coherent and easy to follow. Performances of this type are generally mobile and subsequently can be performed in or outdoors. Of the troupes selected for study, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, 7:84 and La Comune fall into this category.

*Abstract or Celebratory*: This type will also borrow from traditional popular forms, but creates images that are designed to provoke reactions from its audience. There is not always a coherent storyline/plot. The performances will be held in or outdoors. Welfare State International and the Bread and Puppet Theatre fall into this category.

*Activist*: This type of popular theatre uses popular forms as a tool for direct political protest. Conventional theatre requisites, such as characters and plot, may not be identifiable. Performances by activist popular troupes generally take place in the street. ACT-UP and the Church Ladies of Choice fall into this category.

### *Performances of the 'Classic' Type*

Before evaluating the works of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, 7:84 and La Comune, it will first be necessary to discuss the troupes a bit more generally; hence, I will first give a brief history of the troupe, an overview of the work that they have produced, highlighting the ideologies that they work (or have worked) from, and listing the techniques that they have most often employed. In an effort to keep order and continuity, each troupe will be discussed individually. Following this brief overview, I will then discuss the process of analysis, based on the initial research questions listed earlier, that I applied to the San Francisco Mime Troupe's *Factwino Meets the Moral Majority* (1981); 7:84's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973); and La Comune's *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* (1974). It should be noted that these particular texts were selected because I feel that they best represent the troupes' overall style. They will, of course, be discussed in relation to the other works that I have analysed.

### *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*

Founded by R.G. Davis in 1959, the San Francisco Mime Troupe is the oldest popular theatre troupe performing in the United States today (Mason 2005: 2). The troupe began by performing avant-garde performances in the basements of homes around San Francisco, California. Despite what may be implied in their name, the troupe is not silent. Susan Vanetta Mason, author of *The San Francisco Mime Troupe Reader*, explains that the word 'mime' "[...] in their title refers to ancient Greek and Roman mime—scenes and characters from everyday life performed in a ridiculous manner" (2005: 1).

The San Francisco Mime Troupe is a socialist theatre company, and this is reflected in their artistic and management structures. Since 1970 the troupe has been a collective and maintains strict audition procedures for admitting new members (Mason 2005: 17). The first major popular theatre performance technique that the troupe adopted was *commedia dell'arte* because it was, in their words, “popular, free, engaging and adaptable”; however, their interest in the *commedia dell'arte* form has never been antiquarian (Schechter 2003: 10) and they have performed in other genres as well. In their search for the ‘right’ performance style, they have tested the waters with a number of different styles and techniques, including melodramas, spy thrillers, musical comedies, epic histories, sitcoms, and cartoon epics. As for style, the troupe’s website indicates that : “[Their] trademark style comes from all these genres and is based on these common elements: strong story line, avowed point of view, larger than life characters, fantasy and live music” (The San Francisco Mime Troupe 2005a: np).

Two other features of the Troupe’s work are that it is comedic and always based on real events. Luis Valdez, former member of the Mime Troupe and founder of El Teatro Campesino – another California-based popular political theatre troupe, said in an interview in 1966 that the use of comedy was important to their work and his own. He said that:

[...] humour is a major weapon, not only from a satirical point of view, but from the fact that humour can stand up on its own and is a much more healthy [sic] child of the theatre than, let’s say, tragedy and realism. You can’t do that on the flatbed of a truck. If you want to get realistic about the problems, you have to do it in an indirect fashion, through dramatic images. [...] If you think that DiGiorgio [owner of several California ranches] is living and standing on the back of his farm workers, you can show it with humour. You get [him] to stand on the back of his farm workers, and there it is and nobody will refute you [...] I’ve noticed one thing about audiences. When they see something they recognise as a reality, they laugh at it. (Bagby 1967: 232)

This seems to echo Piscator’s and Brecht’s view of the significance of reality in didactic drama.

Over the years, the troupe has stayed true to its socialist ideology with a strict political performance regime. Their works have dealt with a number of politically sensitive issues; among these are civil rights (*A Minstrel Show: or, Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel*, 1968), homosexuality and religion (*Factwino Meets the Moral Majority*, 1981), the Gulf War (*Back to Normal*, 1991), urban redevelopment (*Hotel Universe*, 1977) and even the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (*Eating It*, 2000). Since 1967 the troupe has employed a head writer. From 1967 – 1999 this was

Joan Holden, and it is her works that have been examined here. From 2000 to the present, the head writer has been Michael Sullivan. His scripts have not yet been published, but videos of the performances he wrote exist and were viewed. Despite having a head writer, the works are still an effort of the collective (Mason 2005: 18). Mason explains that:

The troupe has experimented with collective playwriting since 1970, and although there is no formula, today most shows are created in a quasi-collective process. Topics are usually agreed upon at the company's January retreat, when members discuss issues they feel are most pressing. The topic chosen often suggests a particular style, such as science fiction or film noir. All company members research the topic, and most shows are written by more than one person [...] This process usually takes up to three months (2005: 4).

In performance, the troupe's work is most often characterized as being comedic, performed with large gesture and generally includes interaction with the audience (2005: 4). The large physicality as a direct result of outdoor performance and interaction with the audience is, as I have noticed, standard practice for this type of theatre. Theodore Shank, author of "Political Theatre as Popular Entertainment: The San Francisco Mime Troupe", makes reference to this interaction when describing a typical afternoon with the San Francisco Mime Troupe:

The Mime Troupe uses a number of techniques to achieve a spirit of unity among the spectators and between the spectators and performers [...] There is no attempt to create a mystique that would tend to separate them [...] Without assuming characters, they warm up by singing and clapping in unison with the Gorilla Band [the troupe's travelling band] plays, and they parade around the audience and sometimes through them. Often there is a comic juggling competition between several of the performers. The spectators encourage them. Then one or two of the performers speak directly to the audience, asking them all to get up and move closer to the stage, and telling a couple of jokes involving recent political events. [...] The band music, the jokes, the friendly manner of the performers, and the responses of the spectators all help to create an ambiance of fun and a sense of "we," the performers and spectators, against "they," the establishment (2003 [1974]: 265).

The troupe admittedly appreciates twentieth-century realism, although they feel "it sanctions social interaction" and will never consider it a viable performance genre. Rather, they aim to both support and glorify the common man and "annoy" the powerful (The San Francisco Mime Troupe 2005a: np).

*Factwino Meets the Moral Majority* is the second instalment in the Fact Person tetralogy; it was first performed in the summer of 1981 (2005: 162). Fact Person, or in this case Factwino (an alcoholic homeless man named Sedro F. Wooley) is written in a

Marvel comics superhero style. As Henri Picciotto, author of “Comics on Stage” points out:

Conventional comic book heroes tend to be white male professionals: journalist, photographer, industrialist, millionaire [...] During the ‘70s comic books have featured increased numbers of black and especially female superheroes, in response to the times. But the Mime Troupe went further: [...] with Sedro, a black [homeless] wino. These choices combined with ‘gender free’ name inscribed on the superhero’s cape (Factperson) are a necessary—if not original—comment on the conventions of the genre (qtd. in Mason 2005, 163).

In the case of *Factwino*, the troupe mixed this comic book style of storytelling with musical theatre, with songs ranging from gospel hymns to rap. This constant juxtaposition—conventional/unconventional hero, gospel/rap/rock music—throughout the play (and the series) is just one example of how The San Francisco Mime Troupe turns conventional popular theatre forms into new theatrical hybrids for the purpose of performing issues of concern with left-wing solutions. In *Factwino*, the troupe tackled the rise of the Moral Majority in American mainstream politics (particularly in Congress) as led by Reverend Jerry Falwell. Abortion, women’s liberation, communism, the gay rights movement and the US government were under attack by Falwell and the Moral Majority. To defeat Falwell, Sedro Wooley, a homeless wino, is given the “knowledge of the facts” by the Sprit of Information. Like any superhero, Factwino had a fatal flaw/weakness; in Factwino’s case, this is alcohol. Funding and propagandising Falwell’s power is Armageddonman, an evil two headed super-villain (war and business); he (it) will stop at nothing to get the Falwell-led Christian movement into every household in America, which would subsequently influence their vote, and eventually give the Moral Majority the majority they need to control the Senate and Congress. Can Factwino defeat the Moral Majority and provide insight into a more socialist alternative, or will Armageddon man and/or alcohol get the better of him? I believe *Factwino Meets the Moral Majority* to be a prime example of how the San Francisco Mime Troupe propagandizes anti-capitalistic, and in this particular case, anti-Christian fundamentalist ideologies through performance.

There are approximately 25 characters in *Factwino* (this figure includes principal, bit and ensemble roles). In the original production, these twenty-plus characters were played by eight actors. Joaquin Aranda, who played Sedro’s wino best friend and Barry Shabaka Henley, who played Sedro the Factwino, were the only actors in the company who did not have to take on multiple roles. Bruce Barthol, the troupe’s composer and leader of the Gorilla band, in addition to his musical duties also played half of Armageddon man (a two-headed character required, in this case, two actors), and

Dick, a gay man. This double and triple casting, standard practice of the Mime Troupe, is the first hint at how underdeveloped the characters in their works might be. Their characters are one-dimensional, however, this type of drama really only requires that they either be good, e.g. in support of the play's ideology, or bad, e.g. against the ideology. This almost melodramatic good versus evil is easily recognizable by reading their works, but is even more prevalent in performance (which I will return to later).

In *Factwino*, the principal 'good' characters are: Georgianna, daughter of mid-western Christian fundamentalist parents, who initially moved to San Francisco because she was pregnant (she is now a single mother considering aborting her second child); the Spirit of Information, the mystical character responsible for providing Sedro with his super powers; Buddy, Sedro's best friend who becomes torn between losing his best friend to the battle against the Moral Majority, and alcohol; Clyde, Georgianna's gay brother, also moved away from his fundamentalist parents; and Dela, a young woman also considering having an abortion. Other 'good' characters are also written, but do not relate necessarily to the plot, rather, they are present to support the principal characters (and ideology). Generally, more information is given about the good characters (like, for example, Georgianna having to deal with the prospect of an abortion because she cannot afford another child), which creates a greater sense of empathy with the good characters.

The bad characters, on the other hand, are less developed than the good characters. This is not really surprising considering that the overall aim of the performance is to oppose a certain ideology, and like all good propaganda, this cannot necessarily be done by detailing the opposing ideology. Among the bad characters are: the Reverend Ben Kinchlow, a follower of Dr. Falwell; George, Georgianna and Clyde's father; Edna, Georgianna and Clyde's mother; Jerry Falwell, a Christian fundamentalist preacher; and Armageddonman.

Generally, *Factwino* contains realistic (and some not-so-realistic) one-dimensional characters that represent a particular ideology; these characters are easily identifiable by the audience: the working class single mother; the fundamentalist mid-western couple; gay men fighting for equal rights, etc. The pace and overall rhythm of the piece is extremely quick, and the language is simple; which is, I suspect, intentional so as to not to confuse or lose its audience (as a consequence of playing to audiences in outdoor performance spaces). Even the lyrics to the songs are short and simple, and usually contain no more than two verses and two choruses; in the case of the Mime Troupe, this simplicity allows them to get the audience to sing along with them, a level

of participation that helps eliminate the fourth wall of the aesthetic stage. The ideologies are presented in black and white; there is no middle ground here. The Troupe thoroughly explains its ideological stance, and why immediate action needs to be taken; in the end, the responsibility of action is placed in the audience's hands. This simplicity in text and overall dramaturgy is reminiscent of the agitprop plays of the Workers Theatre Movement, albeit in a slightly more developed and structured format.

In performance *Factwino* is extremely fast paced, physical and loud. The actors, in an effort to be heard, practically shout their lines. They are also extremely animated; their bodies and faces contort with each word they shout. The costumes used in the performance help aid in recognition of the stereotype; for instance, Georgianna's mother, a member of the Moral Majority and representative of the 'bad' ideology, wears a pink polyester trouser suite, carries an out-of-date handbag, and her face is adorned with large glasses and shaded by a visor; she is a caricature of a Midwestern housewife. When the same actress plays Georgianna, she wears a simple (modern) top and skirt. The trestle-style stage is minimally set. It contains one platform that is moved around the stage as necessary; it acts as a library issues desk, a bar, and a park bench. A wooden backdrop, painted with a black and white city scene, which elicits a feeling of Marvel Comics' stylised illustrations, rests at the back of the stage. Above this is a sign featuring the Troupe's name.

The performance runs for approximately one hour. Some of the performers, I feel, seem to struggle with the physicality and vocal projection and consequently their characters appear too over-the-top. Others are more subtle in their delivery, and the contrast between the two makes for a fairly inconsistent performance that seems more in line with an amateur production than a professional one. Despite this, however, the audiences' reaction to the performance seems to be positive. The audience at the recorded performance participate in the production as though it were a pantomime: they jeer the bad characters and cheer the good ones. Furthermore, the performance is frequently interrupted by laughter and applause (this typically succeeds the delivery of a joke about real politicians, events or issues).

Although *Factwino Meets the Moral Majority* is written as a musical, elements of *commedia dell'arte* and farce are also identifiable. Their more recent works, like *Veronique of the Mounties: Operation Frozen Freedom* (2003), which tells the fictional story of how the United States, having brought 'democracy' to Iraq, Syria and France, turn their attention to the terrorist state of Canada, is a far more polished production. The same aesthetic is generated (simple sets, costumes and acting style), but the actors

here seem to embody the musical/*commedia*/farce hybrid more than they did in *Factwino*.

It is clear having examined several videos of their performances that their performance style has evolved considerably since *Factwino* and that it has been developed by combining several popular sources –*commedia dell’arte*, melodrama, farce, and musical theatre being the most frequently consulted; subsequently, these forms would be considered for practical experimentation.

#### *John McGrath and 7:84 England and Scotland*

7:84 (England) was created in 1970 by John McGrath, a successful stage/television writer who believed that a new dramatic form could bring about positive changes in society, as well as eliminate the institutionalization created by a bourgeois dominated theatre (7:84 Theatre Company Scotland 2005: np). Three years later, McGrath, his wife Elizabeth McLennan and her brother John began a new branch of the company—7:84 Scotland. Today 7:84 Scotland is the standing company (7:84 England was officially killed in 1984 when the Arts Council did not renew its funding).

The idea for the name 7:84 came from a 1966 *The Economist* headline that read “7% of the population of this country owns 84% of the wealth,” and although this statement may not be true today, the company’s website argues that those figures have not improved enough to bring about a name change. The website also claims that the company’s goals have remained the same since its inception: “[to produce] high quality drama that entertains and politically energizes audiences [and] to increase access to theatre for those geographically or economically disadvantaged” (7:84 Theatre Company Scotland 2005: np).

Like the other troupes discussed in this section, 7:84 has sought to perform socialist ideologies to working class audience; additionally, they too perform in non-conventional performance spaces. In his *A Good Night Out*, John McGrath outlines an effective performance for a working class audience. He emphasises comedy, variety (as in variety show), localisms and directness (interaction), among other criteria as being necessary for an effective working-class performance (McGrath 1995 [1981]: 209). These elements are undeniably similar to the work of other popular theatre troupes discussed in this thesis. Today, 7:84 Scotland continues to perform, as well as support new writers and provide community outreach programmes.

In *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil*, the first play performed by 7:84 Scotland in 1973, McGrath focused his attention on the way in which Scotland and

its people had been abused by a capitalist system. In her autobiography, *The Moon Belongs to Everyone*, Elizabeth MacLennan, McGrath's wife, explains that McGrath had been preparing the research for *The Cheviot* for fifteen years (1974: 41). The play directly dealt with the history of the Scottish Clearances, but, as MacLennan points out, the play showed a "connection between these events and land ownership today [...] the exploitation of the oil today [...]" (1974: 53). In the prologue to the West Highlands edition published in 1974, John McGrath wrote in the prologue:

The people of the Highlands are intensely aware of the tragedy of their past. They are increasingly aware of the challenge facing them today. Due to the impersonality and remoteness from their lives of the decision-making process, some may have come to see their future as something outside their control, something pre-determined. This play tries to show **why** the tragedies of the past happened: because the forces of capitalism were stronger than the organisation of the people. It tries to show that the future is **not** pre-determined, that there are alternatives, and it is the responsibility of everyone to fight and agitate for the alternative which is going to benefit the people of the Highlands, rather than the multi-national corporations, intent on profit. Passive acceptance now means losing control of the future. Socialism, and the planned exploitation of natural resources for the benefit of all humanity, is the alternative the play calls for. Not the "socialism" that merely begs concessions from capitalism, but the kind that involves every individual in the creation of the future he or she wants, that measures progress by human happiness rather than shareholders' dividends, that liberates minds rather than enslaving them. Some will object that this kind of socialism has never been achieved: this is not true, but even if it were, it is no reasoning for not fighting for it (1975: 5).

In an almost living-newspaper fashion, McGrath and a company of eight tell the story of the Highlands through the eyes of some twenty-plus characters (mostly Scottish, but others are English and North American businessmen that appear as villains). The action is divided into three major sections: the first and second are primarily historical accounts, from the Clearance to North American immigration (approximately 150 years pass), and the third section shows how the abuses of the past affected Scotland in the twentieth-century. The play begins with a song, the Scottish standard "These Are My Mountains", and is conducted as a sing-a-long with the audience. We are told that the setting is small and that many of the scenes are played out of a pop-up book – the actors may refer to the mountains and the book is opened to a page showing mountains. For local colouring, some of the characters speak in Gaelic, which we are told was made illegal in the Highlands in 1746, when Patrick Sellar and James Loch stripped the land of people (violently, and in some cases by murdering innocent people—they claimed that their tactics were acceptable because these people had not been paying rent) and replaced them with sheep (in an effort to make a profit).

Following the action of the scene, the cast assembled to read real-life accounts of the violence that occurred to the Highlanders. As a conclusion to the scene, we find out that Sellar was the only one tried in a court for murdering Highlanders, but the jury found him not guilty (1974: 7-14). Throughout this section, songs are interspersed with fictional and non-fictional dialogue taken from documented accounts.

The second major section involves Highlanders emigrating to Canada to help the Hudson Bay Company, who are having difficulties with the Native ‘Red’ Americans, in gaining access to trade in the area. Their biggest rival is the Norwest Company (a French Canadian company). This scene details how Highlanders were manipulated by the Hudson Bay Company into travelling to Canada to work the land, and reinforces how the Highlands were stripped of its youth and talent (1974: 16).

Following the Hudson Bay incident, we move into the reign of Queen Victoria. It would seem that the army had difficulty recruiting Highlanders to defend the Empire (1974: 22). The following excerpt shows the character of the Duke attempting to recruit Highlanders for the army:

Duke:           Damn it, do you want the Mongol hordes to come sweeping across Europe, burn your houses, driving you into the sea? What are you fidgeting for Loch? Have you no pride in this great democracy that we English—er—British have brought to you? Do you want the cruel Tsar of Russia installed in Dunrobin Castle? Step forward.

Silence. Nobody Moves.

For this disgrace, cowardly conduct, I demand an explanation [...].

Old Man:       I am sorry for the response your Grace’s proposals are meeting here, but there is a cause for it. It is the opinion of this country that should the Tsar of Russia take possession of Dunrobin Castle, we couldn’t expect worse treatment at his hands than we have experienced at the hands of your family for the last fifty years. We have no country to fight for. You robbed us of our country and gave it to the sheep. Therefore, since you have preferred sheep to men, let sheep now defend you.

All:             Baa-aa (1974: 22-23).

The third major section offers suggestions on how to improve the Highland situation. They show how capitalism works, how Scottish companies are being bought up by capitalist money and that immediate actions needs to be taken (oil seems to be the primary subject of concern in this section - there is even a character called Texas Jim).

This section echoes the agitprop plays of the Workers Theatre Movement. The play ends with more Gaelic songs (and an open invitation for the audience to sing along); this was followed by a public dance (1974: 33).

*The Cheviot* is similar to *Factwino*. Again, the characters are one-dimensional; they are either 'good' or 'bad' and clearly represent a particular ideology. However, in this case, empathy is elicited by the documentary-like readings, the real-life accounts of those who endured the Clearances, as well as the fictitious dialogue created for 'good' characters. This potentially allows Scottish audiences to empathise on two levels: 1) with the characters as they are presented in the text and 2) their own local/national culture and history. Because of *The Cheviot's* subject matter, Scottish audiences (for whom the piece was first performed) would have naturally been more sympathetic to the 'good' characters anyway, which could have perhaps allowed for McGrath to write the 'good' characters even more one-dimensionally than those that appear in *Factwino*. Also, like the Mime Troupe, the setting is simple. Although there is no video available of this performance, pictures do exist. Most of these show a relatively bare stage, aside from a pop-up book, a few chairs, properties and signs, and actors posed with large gestures. Elizabeth MacLennan describes the performance and its affects:

The set was a giant pop-up book [...] It was perhaps the first show in which the actors changed in full view of the audience, and sat on the same level as the audience, only jumping on the rostra to act out episodes and songs. People found it fresh, strange, moving, exciting and very, very funny. They stayed behind to talk, argue, dance and enjoy themselves (1990: 54).

7:84 has performed in a variety of different spaces. For the *Cheviot*, they performed in pubs, trades unions, miners' clubs, and working men's clubs in industrial Scotland (MacLennan 1990: 58). Essentially, they performed wherever they were allowed or invited. The uncertainty of not knowing what their next space would have been like would have had an affect on the staging, and points to a certain level of improvisation and adaptability necessary for the performers. For instance, in a pub, actors would not only have to adjust to the new space, may have also had to interact directly with the pub audience. And, since alcohol was involved, they may have also had to engage in several debates.

In addition, 7:84 tries to encourage participation from the audience by including well-known songs played by live musicians so that they might sing along. Unlike the Mime Troupe, however, 7:84 did not write new songs for *The Cheviot*, rather, they used classic Scottish and Gaelic standards. Performing well-known tunes would certainly

increase the likelihood of audience participation. Further participation was encouraged with the formation of barn dances following some of the performances.

The finale is quite similar to *Factwino* in that the audience is called to action; the ideological argument has been presented, so to speak, the audience has been educated about the benefits of socialism, and now they must decide for themselves whether they need to change their society.

Like The San Francisco Mime Troupe, McCrath's works are based in reality, but this is used in both comic and tragic ways, which are often juxtaposed in performance. Despite his use of popular forms, his works are by far the most realistic (in a dramaturgical sense) of the practitioners discussed here. Having also considered *Plugged In* (1971-2), *Trees in the Wind* (1971), *Fish in the Sea* (1972), *The Baby and the Bathwater* (1985), among several others, I noted that the popular forms most frequently used in these works were variety and musical theatre and subsequently these will be considered for practical experimentation.

#### *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*

Dario Fo was born in 1926 in Lago Maggiore in Northern Italy—a region known for its popular performance tradition (Hood 1987: 6). Fo grew up watching the *fabulatori*, or storytellers, puppeteers, *commedia dell'arte* performers, and various other popular performers (ibid). Poer Nano was the first character that Fo created (ibid); Nano was a storyteller who manipulated and adapted Bible stories into comic monologues (ibid). In 1954 he married Franca Rame, an actress who had grown up in a travelling performance troupe, and together they would create a series of highly controversial political comedic performances with the Fo-Rame Company (ibid).

Their first major performance was *Il ditto nell'occhio* (One in the Eye), an “anti-revue” that attacked “myths in Italian life” that “Fascism had imposed and Christian Democracy had persevered” (Fo, qtd. in Hood 1987: 6). Hood explains that:

[One in the Eye] was an immense success to which the participation of the great French mime, Jacques Lecoq, from whom Fo learned much, was an important contribution. [It] was the first in a series of pieces which drew on French farce, on the traditional sketches of the Rame family, and on the traditions of the circus. This mixture of spectacle, mime, and social comment was highly successful but made the authorities nervous; the police were frequently present at performances, following the scripts with pocket torches to ensure that there were no departures from the officially provided text (ibid).

In 1959, Fo and Rame were invited to perform at the Odeon Theatre in Milan. They chose to perform *Archangels Don't Play Pinball*, a piece that again provided a critique of Italian society. The production is said to have been incredibly successful, especially with middle and working class audiences (1987: 7). Soon they both began to freely associate themselves with the Communist Party, and their work became increasingly political. Their dedication to the Communist Party would eventually affect the way in which Fo and Rame chose to perform, particularly with regards to their audience; for instance, after 1967 Fo and Rame would no longer perform for bourgeois audiences (1987: 8).

In 1968 the Fo and Rame Company disbanded to create the short-lived Nuova Scena, a communist theatre company which embraced a collective creative and administration structure. Nuova Scene travelled the country performing for trade unions, cooperatives, and the working class. Following a performance, the troupe would hold discussions with their audiences. Nuova Scene had a huge following, but despite their success, internal politics and questions over organisation would destroy the company by 1970 (1987: 8-9).

With the problems of Nuovo Scena, Fo and Rame began to doubt the Communist structure, and often felt that the party was too authoritarian (1987: 9). Hence, they started to associate themselves with the New Left. Soon after, they created La Comune, a theatre company dedicated to the New Left ideology. With La Comune came some of Fo and Rame's most famous performances: *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* and *Trumpets and Raspberries* (1987: 10).

Despite many hardships, like the kidnapping and raping of Franca Rame in the early 1970s, and numerous death threats for both, Fo and Rame continue to write political satire. Fo was for many years, as Hood points out, not just considered by Italian proletariat audiences to be a performer and practitioner, "[...] but a political figure whom the state powers would use any weapon to silence" (ibid). Due to the success of Fo's and Rame's performances, ample material has been written about their creative process and techniques. Although scholars seem to be uncertain whether Fo's work is primarily based on *commedia dell'arte*, *guillare*, or the *fabulatori*, it is certain that his work is based on popular performance traditions. Two scholars that have written about Fo's approach are Anthony Scuderi, author of *Dario Fo and Popular Performance*, which discusses the performances of Fo's work and the way in which they were created, and Joseph Farrell, author of "Dario Fo-Zanni and Guillare" (1989) which discusses the

working class-based characters that Fo has researched to create his own contemporary popular characters.

In his essay, Farrell explains Fo's use of the *guillare* character. According to Farrell, the *guillare* is a medieval character that prospered from the tenth to fifteenth-centuries. He claims that a true English equivalent of the word does not exist, but essentially the *guillare* was an all around entertainer that was not restricted to one style; a *guillare* was a stand-up comic, tumbler, juggler, mime, singer, dancer, clown, satirist, and actor who would create his own sketches (1989: 322). Farrell explains Fo's use of the *guillare*:

That attitude towards the *guillare* is precisely the one which has been, in Fo's view, expressed by the ruling culture at every stage in history. Precisely because he has been the proponent of a different culture, or the spokesman for an alternative set of values, the *guillare* has been invariably reviled and abused by the official representatives of the regime. Fo has pointed to the edicts of the Medieval Church and the laws of the kingdoms and republics of the same epoch proof of the status of the *guillare* as illegitimate or as the quintessential outsider. Others have mentioned Fo's own brushes with censure and the Law as establishing a continuity between experiences and those of his precursors (ibid).

Like most contemporary popular theatre practitioners who have turned to traditional, often out of practice, popular forms, Fo acknowledges the fact that his *guillare* characters are not exact recreations. Farrell points out that the validity of his performance, however, should not be the question. Rather, the focus should be on the popular tradition which caters to the public interests, rather than bourgeois aesthetics (as Mayer might say) (1989: 40).

For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to point out that the *guillare* performance style as created by Fo has many similarities to the practices associated with both the Mime Troupe and 7:84. Here, we see a rejection of the fourth wall and bourgeois aesthetics, traditional performance types adapted for contemporary working-class audiences that do not have a focus on preservation or historical accuracy, and an engaging working-class character those audiences can associate themselves with.

Scuderi (1988) points out specific elements that are essential to Fo's performance; Fo calls these elements an actor's *poetics*. The first major element to consider is that of *framing*, which Scuderi defines as:

Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content...Additionally, it is

marked as available for the enhancement of experience, through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the art of expression itself. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expressions and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity (Bateson qtd in Scuderi 1988: 21).

The second major element used by Fo is the concept of *keying in* (to signal the start of the frame) and *keying out* (to signal the end of the frame). Essentially, keying into a performance means setting up an audience for receiving information through a frame. A frame, then, would be the performance itself, e.g. when the actor is playing a role. Keying in would be what that actor does prior to stepping into character; this may include chatting with the audience, stretching or warming up, telling jokes, etc. Keying in and out of a performance is intentionally metatheatrical in an effort to connect with an audience. As Gregory Bateson explains, keying in is “accomplished through the employment of culturally conventionalized metacommunication” (Bateson qtd. in Scuderi 1988: 21-22). Additionally, Scuderi argues that because the popular theatre has no fourth wall, keying in and out of character is a staple of the tradition (ibid).

Fo first discovered this ‘keying in and out’ affect with the *fabulatori*, who had greatly influenced him as child. Scuderi writes that Fo “recalls that they never began suddenly, but would find pretexts to let themselves be ‘drawn into’ starting their stories. Most often this pretext was the setting [or environment, most often surrounded by townspeople in the town centre]” (1988: 23). This technique is referred to as *metanarrational*, which may be in the form of a monologue or soliloquy (1988: 28) Fo claims that he borrowed this technique from, among others, Texan Ed Bell (a storyteller), and the *teatro minore*, “specifically from Italian variety theatre, which a confluence of popular traditions and formal stage performance, informed to a great extent by the *commedia dell’arte*” (1988: 25). For example:

[...]Legendary Italian vaudevillians, such as the Roman Ettore Petrolini and the Neopolitan Toto, who would break the performance frame to directly address the audience, for instance to greet latecomers: “Finally, you’re here. We were really worried,” and then take time to fill them in on what they had missed. Sometimes Toto would comment on the loud and/or strange laughter of an audience member, or engage a heckler head-on in repartee” (1988: 26).

*Anteprologue* is another of Fo’s required elements. The *anteprologue* occurs before the prologue. It is, as Scuderi explains, the “Initial interaction with the audience [...] to greet the audience and interact with them, often joking and commenting on who sits where” (ibid). Everything after the *anteprologue* is the performance; however, this

element is important because after this initial meeting (actor/audience, rather than character/audience), the actor is permitted to step in and out of character without destroying the continuity or style of the piece (ibid). And throughout the performance, Fo incorporates mini-performances:

While Fo is relating background material for the main action, before the actual performance is keyed in, he often breaks into short sketches, probably the most famous being those treating the pope [sic], Italian politicians, and American presidents [...] All of [these] metatheatrical techniques serve to blur the line between performance and non-performance frames; performance and setting; performer and audience. The constant shift in and out of frame also blurs the line between the performer's personality and the character(s) he/she is playing, reminding the audience that the performer is there, which tied into Fo's concept of epic theatre. Like Brecht, Fo insists that the actor should present a character rather than represent or try to 'get inside' a character [...] [However], he insists that he derived the concept of epic performance not from Brecht, but from popular traditions to which it is inherent (1988: 27).

This performance style, although similar to Brecht's epic performance style, has been labelled *maschera* by Fo. *Maschera* is a concept that is related to both the actor and the audience. Fo describes the concept of *maschera* as meaning that behind the mask and performance, an actor is human, just like the audience, and although the human actor is pretending to be something he is not, the message that he is trying to perform is very real and important (1988: 28).

The *False Situation/Creating an Accident* is the final element of Fo's *poetics*. The False Situation is a fictitious occurrence created by a company to get a reaction from the audience (1988: 33).

Without having seen *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* it is difficult to tell how much of Fo's performance *poetics* are incorporated. However, elements such as metatheatricity and the elimination of the fourth wall are apparent in the text. *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* is divided into two acts, and unlike *Factwino* or *The Cheviot*, which have both been tailored to outdoor or travelling performance spaces, is written to be performed in a theatre; it is also considerably longer than either of these plays. Additionally, there are only eight characters in *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!*, as opposed to the twenty or more that we have seen in the other troupes' work. However, these eight characters are played by five actors, so again, multiple casting is required.

*Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* (1987 [1974]) deals with civil disobedience. Antonia, wife of Giovanni, a shop steward, and several other women from their Milan

neighbourhood, has rebelled against the high (and rising) cost of living. Giovanni is a conservative communist and upholder of the law, and sees rebellion as an unnecessary act that hinders social progress.

In the first act, Antonia comes home with a load of groceries from the supermarket; half she has paid for, the other half she has looted during a riot. She requests the aid of her best friend, Margherita, in hiding her stolen groceries. When Giovanni arrives home and asks if Antonia had taken part in the supermarket riot, she lies, claiming that she had not. He believes her. When a Sergeant comes to inspect the apartment for stolen groceries (the Sergeant is also a communist), he gets into a political discussion with Giovanni, and neglects to search for the food. Margherita, on the other hand, had not been so lucky; an Inspector had searched her flat, and she was forced to hide groceries underneath her coat, making it appear as though she were pregnant. When Antonia arrives back at the flat with Margherita looking as though she were nine months pregnant, Giovanni is confused (for Margherita and Luigi, Giovanni's good friend and Margherita's husband, have only been married for five months). An Inspector then knocks at the door and demands to search the flat for stolen groceries; the two women fool the men into believing that there are no groceries under Margherita's coat, but that she is in fact pregnant and has gone into labour prematurely. The Inspector tells the women about a new transplant system that takes a premature baby from one mother and puts it into another woman who is then be able to carry the child the full term. An ambulance arrives and the two women are driven away. Later it is discovered that they informed the ambulance drivers of their situation and were dropped safely back home. As soon as the women leave, Luigi arrives home looking for his wife. Giovanni tells Luigi that they have gone to transplant Margherita's baby into another woman; it then dawns on Giovanni that Antonia would probably volunteer her own womb for the transplant. The two men frantically take to the streets of Milan in search of their wives.

Act Two begins with Giovanni and Luigi still searching for their wives. The women, meanwhile, have arrived back home and attempt to find a safe place to hide their groceries; they eventually settle on Giovanni's father's shed. Back on the street, the two men witness a car accident, which sends bags of flour, sugar and rice into the street. The Sergeant (who had seen the accident) asks the men for help in removing the bags from the street. While they are moving the bags, the Sergeant runs after some thieves and the Inspector arrives at the scene. Believing Giovanni and Luigi (with arms loaded with bags of flour and sugar) to be thieves, he chases them back to the flat. Having been to their flat before, the Inspector goes and finds two pregnant women—

Antonia and Margherita, still in the process of moving their groceries. The two women make him believe that all the local women have been pretending to be pregnant because of the Festival of St. Evlalia, the pregnant saint, who at aged 80 was made pregnant by God. According to the story, when St. Evlalia revealed herself to her disbelieving husband, roses appeared and he subsequently went blind – and later died. During this ‘festival’ all women apparently pretend to be pregnant. When he asks them to prove that they are pregnant cabbages, lettuce and various vegetables appear. Just then, the lights go out (because Antonia has not paid the gas, electric or rent for the past five months). The Inspector believes that he is blind. The women encourage him, until he faints. Believing him to be dead, the women hide his body in a wardrobe. Meanwhile, the men, who are still trying to get into Luigi’s flat, are approached by an Undertaker who asks if they can sign for a casket for a neighbour of theirs who recently died. The men agree to do so, so that they can smuggle their stolen goods into the flat. The women, meanwhile, continue smuggling their groceries into the shed. The men finally sneak into the apartment and hide their goods under the sofa, and the coffin in the cupboard. The women arrive back in the flat, and the men notice that neither woman appears to be pregnant. Then, Giovanni’s father knocks at the door carrying the girl’s stolen loot. All is revealed. Giovanni and Antonia then debate communism and radical socialism. When it is revealed that the men have also stolen, the couple reconcile their differences.

*Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* is far more complex than either *Factwino* or *The Cheviot*. The characters are more developed and the plot more intricate. However, the quick pace and metatheatricality are still present. Antonia is the clear heroine of the piece, and mastermind behind most of the comic plot. Margherita is her accidental partner in crime, and it is the situation that she finds herself in as a consequence of helping her friend that acts as the catalyst that sets the play into motion; she will be arrested if it is discovered she is hiding groceries under her coat, not Antonia, the real thief. Together they represent the ‘good’ ideology, which is that of radical communism. Giovanni, on the other hand, represents the ‘bad’ ideology, the conservative communist. He has faith in the current system and does not feel it is necessary to cause a little trouble to make that system a bit fairer. Luigi, like Margherita is to Antonia, is merely a companion, and therefore an innocent bystander, but he somehow manages to find himself in trouble for being faithful to his friend. The real battle here is between Antonia and Giovanni, and it is Giovanni, in the end, who sees the error of his ways and conforms to Antonia’s more ‘radical’ ideology.

Although Antonia and Giovanni's situation is fictional, the issues discussed in the performance, like the behaviour of the police, were based on reality (or, at least on Fo's view of the reality at the time). Unlike The San Francisco Mime Troupe and 7:84, no music or songs appear in this production. Without seeing the Fo-directed *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* in performance, it is difficult to ascertain any traits that might be associated with any popular forms. However, from having explored Fo's methodology, it seems that his performance style is a hybrid of *commedia dell'arte*, *fabulatori* and *guillare* - the latter being rather difficult to train in. The influence of the *fabulatori* is also delicate as it encompasses many popular forms, including puppetry and storytelling. Subsequently, for Fo and Rame, I noted *commedia dell'arte* as one of the principal forms and will consider it for practical experimentation; the others, I feel, might be too challenging to engage with for this project.

#### *Conclusions Regarding the Classic Type*

From analysing these texts (and performance), a few comparisons can be made. The characters all seem to be relatively simple and are representative of a particular ideology (either in support of the play's central thesis, like Factwino, the Gaelic-speaking Scots, and Antonia, or those who oppose it, Jerry Falwell, Patrick Sellar or Giovanni). There are numerous metatheatrical moments prevalent in these performances; many of which are caused by numerous characters being played by few actors, as well as by a general freedom with the text and improvisation. This is particularly true of Fo's work, although maybe not noticeable in *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!*; the concept of frames, antepilogue and keying in are all based on an assumption that a certain degree of improvisation is necessary to create a bond with the audience. Additionally, the use of metatheatrical devices implies a rejection of the bourgeois theatre's fourth wall. Popular theatre performances rely on interaction with audiences. I believe that in this type of didactic drama winning over the audience is particularly important for them to accept the troupe's message. Additionally, elements like music, the use of well-known characters or types, like superheroes, housewives, and historical/political figures, expressive physicality and a steady, rapid pace energises audiences into becoming involved, making the acceptance of a troupe's ideologies and message much more likely.

Finally, the forms most frequently used by these three groups/practitioners were: music theatre, variety theatre, farce and *commedia dell'arte*. Furthermore, comedy

seems to be the most frequently used dramatic genre. These would then be some of the forms considered for practical experimentation.

*Celebratory, Abstract and Activist Types*

This section will begin with an overview of the popular celebratory performance of Welfare State International; I will then examine their production *Longline: the Carnival Opera* (the troupe's final performance) and the interview that I conducted with John Fox about popular theatre forms. This will be followed by a general overview of the Bread and Puppet Theatre and an analysis of Peter Schumann's play *This Is*.

Founded by John Fox in 1968, Welfare State International combines popular theatre techniques with popular celebration. Tony Coult and Baz Kershaw write in *Engineers of the Imagination: the Welfare State Handbook* (1983) that the troupe has remained true to the same resources from its inception: "[...] sculpture (using, as well as more conventional materials, elements such as ice or fire), puppetry, landscape, food, fireworks, music, technology, dance, performance and weather" (1983: 1). Like the other troupes discussed in this chapter, Welfare State has abandoned conventional theatre techniques for those of a more popular nature, such as carnival, the Feast of Fools, the fairground, and mummers' plays. However, unlike the other troupes, Welfare State admits that performing such techniques is laced with contradictions, because they stray away from the myths and legends that they were born from. According to Coult and Kershaw, this issue is dealt with by creating new myths for contemporary audiences and their communities (ibid). Coult and Kershaw continue:

The search for myth and its enactment, could become elite and introverted, and unrelated to the complex, messy culture that we live in. Welfare State, however, works from the assumption that myth and archetype are functional operations of human consciousness. It is not a word that would appeal to many of the company perhaps, but their use of myth is rational – not 'explainable' or 'reducible to a mechanical logic', but based on the reasonable needs of human beings to share and celebrate their humanity (1983: 1-2)

One of the company's earliest major popular theatre creations was the character Lancelot Icarus Handyman Barrabas Quail, a fictitious Everyman, hero and clown. Lancelot would become a staple of the company's early work. Coult and Kershaw describe Lancelot as "[a] figure for the audience to identify with as well as laugh at. He became a rough-hewn comic centre around which extraordinary demons and spirits flew, tormenting him, inspiring him, and finally being defeated by his knotty human spirit" (1983: 7-9). In *The Travels of Lancelot Quail* (1972), the troupe toured from Glastonbury to Land's End in a circus tent; the tour ended with Lancelot and the

company disappearing off the Cornish coast in a submarine (1983: 8). So again, like the other troupes, alternative performance spaces and travelling are present in WSI's performance practice.

The search and creation of new myths led the company to creating performance celebrations, re-enacting newly created myths for communities (they were also available for funerals and weddings). These celebration events typically included the re-enactment of the myth with large-scale puppets, live music, bonfires, films, and popular theatre skills (like acrobatics and juggling). This celebratory performance style became the troupe's primary style in the early 1980s (although some of their early performances, like *Parliament in Flames* (1976), also exemplify this style) and remained so until the company stopped performing in the spring of 2006. Professor Ron Grimes explains the way in which WSI connects with communities and about their performance style:

Welfare State clearly prefers working outdoors with communities and neighbourhoods to whom they teach their skills, thereby demystifying technique, and with whom they create environments in which a primal sense of mystery can arise [...] they connect art with ritual. Their celebrations are marked by an attunement to rhythm, space and construction not ordinarily found in modern theatre. They are not primarily concerned with plot, acting or character development. They are not just interested in rendering religious themes such as birth, re-birth, descent, death or sacred marriages in aesthetic fashion, but in dissolving the barriers which isolate art into aestheticism, and religion into sectarianism (Grimes 1983: 165).

Welfare State International officially disbanded on 1 April 2006. In "Whose culture?" an article published in September 2005 in *Arts Professional* magazine, John Fox explained that the troupe's creativity was being compromised because they had become "a goal-oriented corporate institution." "Free imagination," Fox wrote, "is being poisoned" (Fox 2005: 7). Their final production, *Longline: the Carnival Opera*, ran from the 14-18 March 2006, and was performed, once again, inside a circus tent. I had the good fortune of getting to see this production. The text has not, to my knowledge, been published.

*Longline: the Carnival Opera* is the story of five characters: a rock, Gladys the Dreamer, Jack the Fisherman, Sam, a ghost and immigrant slave from the West Indies, and the Blue Orphan Girl, a ghost and refugee from a Victorian factory. The rock was personified by a rotund man with a baritone voice; he sang of the rock's life in the sea, how pollution and global warming were causing the sea to rise, and how he is now being drowned by sea and contaminated by litter. Gladys was a politician who tried to save Morecambe Pier, but the pier was burned down before restoration began. The Blue

Orphan Girl told of her days in a Victorian factory, where she would eventually drown in a sea of blue dye. Sam was brought over from the Indies to do work as a slave; however, he was killed at sea. Aside from the rock (a giant papier-mâché sculpture), the other characters are represented by Bunraku puppets. As it was an opera, the character's monologues were sung by performers with microphones. After delivering their own stories, the four puppets looked on while the rock is finally consumed by pollution and high tides. The puppets then set off on a mission to save the rock and the Morecombe Bay area from pollution, consumerism (represented by a cruise liner with a devilish singing and dancing crew) and Barrow in Furness' submarine construction. Inserted at random between each scene were acts by acrobats and circus performers.

Unlike the characters in the 'classic' popular political performance type, which were one-dimensional and clearly representative of a particular ideology, a significant amount of information is provided about the five principal characters in *Longline*. Additionally, these characters differ from the other troupes because they are objects: a rock and four puppets. Admittedly, it is much more difficult to have an emotional connection with objects, albeit singing objects. This was perhaps more the fault of the bunraku puppet operators, who, aside from Hannah Fox, John Fox's daughter, were all inexperienced; the characters clearly looked and acted like puppets, with very few human mannerisms identifiable to me during the performance. Characters representative of the capitalist, consumerist and anti-nuclear (or 'bad') ideology did not appear as characters. Rather, this was symbolised by the cruise ship and a giant silver arrow that was placed at the top of the circus tent (and is later removed by the puppets after they have rescued the rock). In Act Two, the cruise liner is destroyed. This was not, however, done by a particular character, but by itself; it sinks into a pit of fire. This method of resolution leaves it unclear as to the reaction I, an audience member, should have. In the classic style of popular performance, the role of the audience is much clearer, but in this more abstract form I am left wondering if I am meant to act or that if left alone, capitalism will destroy itself.

*Longline* was also much longer than the other pieces discussed, and its pace was considerably slower. The first act was approximately one hour and thirty five minutes long; the second half was just over an hour long. An additional fifteen minutes were then spent outdoors watching a firework display following the performance. The production possessed a fragmented structure and despite the inclusion of considerable exposition, the story was often difficult to follow. In fact, had it not been for a programme note outlining the story, I might not have understood as much as I did; this,

I would however like to point out, might have been different had I been more familiar with the Morecombe Bay area and/or local community. Unlike the Mime Troupe or 7:84, the music in *Longline* could not really be considered popular; its rhythms and tunes more indebted to art-songs and contemporary jazz to more conventional musical theatre or popular standard tunes. Consequently, this minimised audience participation by means of a sing-a-long.

Following the performance, I mailed Mr. Fox a letter explaining my interest in his methodology and use of popular theatre techniques and asked several questions about the troupe's incorporation of such techniques in didactic performance. I concluded my letter by asking John Fox what advice he might offer to anyone interested in this field. Fox was kind enough to answer my enquiries and offer his advice; my initial questions and his responses have been detailed below.

- (1) I noticed in *Longline* that a number of popular techniques were used: *commedia dell'arte*, circus acrobatics, shadow and bunraku puppetry, as well as song. Why were these techniques specifically chosen for this piece? Was it a directorial choice or one established during the writing process? Is this customarily the way techniques are chosen, or has it differed?

JF: [...] The techniques come from the ideas. When you are working in an outdoor form it is inevitable that you use the age old techniques of street theatre.

- (2) Many of these techniques have appeared in your other shows. How did you learn the techniques originally? Did you or some of your performers train in them, or was the practice of the techniques learned from a read or written account? Or in some other way?

JF: We are magpies and steal ideas from everywhere and anywhere. From seeing shows, reading books, making guesses and **as we go along** [his emphasis] trying things out in a practical way. As I say above, the techniques are as old as theatre. All our theatre is self taught. We made it up for ourselves and if it didn't work the audience would leave. Sometimes they did!

- (3) *Longline* was both aesthetically and intellectually stimulating. With the fireworks, lanterns, puppets, etc., do you ever think that the overall message of a piece can be hidden or compromised by the spectacle?

JF: The message has to work viscerally so some spectacle can be appropriate. As you imply though, if you get it wrong the audience just enjoy a superficial entertainment.

- (4) Has there ever been a time when you thought “maybe there’s too much happening?” and had to tone-down (for lack of a better word) some of the spectacle?

JF: [...] In this work there was a calculated rhythm between fullness and emptiness. I think this helped the audience to concentrate on necessary details.

- (5) I noticed that there was a considerable amount of video used within this production. One of my favourite sections of the show was in Act 2, scene 2, with the video that followed the devilish cruise-line singers featuring the dancing skeletons of Tony Blair and George Bush. Some sociologists argue that TV is the new popular theatre. Do you agree with this? And, what do you feel is the overall benefit (or detriment) of using video during performance?

JF: Video is just another, sometimes suitable, ingredient in the cake. It can add or invade depending on the skill of the cook or video maker and the director. It is a form that speaks to young people and it can enable you to go on image journeys that might other wise (sic) be clumsy.

It can be very quick to work with. For example the take off scene with the flying boat took us an afternoon.

Also, it is useful for image layering and large scale effects, such as the view from outer space of the burning of the Furness peninsula.

TV is not the new popular theatre. Theatre gathers people together. TV isolates (unless its pub screening of eg (sic) sporting events.)

- (6) In *Engineers of the Imagination* you talk a little about how topics for productions are chosen. Was *Longline* any different? How did you and Mr. Fleming’s collaboration work?

JF: *Longline* was the summation of three years work with local communities looking at Morecambe Bay. [...] It grew out of a concern for balancing the local with the global and thinking (again) about nature and ecology in the context of climate change.

Tim Fleming [the composer] and I have worked together for years and we enjoy it immensely. My words and images dovetail perfectly with Tim’s musical ideas. Unfortunately there isn’t often the money or the occasion to do more.

- (7) After 38 years experience, what advice would you give to someone interested in this field?

JF: Just do it.  
Don’t talk about it too much.

Be wary of the mainstream which can blunt the edge of radical ideas.  
Critics prefer not to invite bulls into their china shops.

Follow your obsessions but take time out (Fox, interview with Jason Price 2006: np)

Looking at Fox's responses, it is clear that the visual or the development of meaningful (or didactic) images dictates which popular forms are selected. This is not dissimilar to The San Francisco Mime Troupe, whose selection of forms and techniques is done to develop satirical performances that are recognisable to their largely American audiences. Producing the forms authentically is not the goal. Further, the political ideologies of all four troupes mentioned thus far have been socialist and they have all addressed real events and issues in their works. However, the troupes do not share any similarities in character development or dramatic structure. With the classic popular theatre style we saw conventional narrative structures and two-dimensional characters that were both comedic and satiric. Here, however, comedy was not frequently used. In its place, however, was spectacle, which came in the form of popular performers – acrobats, clowns, puppets – and special video affects. The fragmented structure was not as easy to comprehend, but the visuals helped to plug these holes and, in my case, aided in comprehension of the story. For this study, I would then need to consider what value I was going to give to spectacle and how dramatic structures and visuals aid in comprehension. Further, what Welfare State International provided me with is an ample pool of popular theatre forms to consider for experimentation: *commedia dell'arte*, musical theatre, puppets (*Bunraku*, large-scale, or shadow puppets), and some circus skills, like acrobatics and trapeze.

#### *The Bread and Puppet Theatre*

The Bread and Puppet Theatre was formed in New York City in 1963. They became well-known for protesting local injustices, and more so for their anti-war parades during the Vietnam War (Simon & Estrin 2004: 236). Their work draws on the techniques of religious spectacle and combines them with the ideas of Artaud (S. Brecht 1988). Aside from puppets, an audience also receives bread at each performance. Peter Schumann, founder of the Bread and Puppet Theatre explains this is because “For a long time[,] the theatre arts have been separated from the stomach” (Schumann qtd in Brecht 1988: 40). Mark Estrin, author of *Rehearsing with the Gods: Photographs and Essays on the Bread and Puppet Theatre*, puts it another way:

Imagine sitting in a field, or in a gym, or even in comfortable theatre seats. You've just seen a show that makes you laugh and cheer, or become deeply silent. You applaud, and instead of bows you are given chunks of bread to break yourself and pass along to your neighbors (sic). You sit there chewing, salivating, feeling your commonality with others, with the puppeteers, even with the puppets. People with full mouths tend not to chat, at least until after they swallow, and in the munching silence, large messages sink in and soak (2004: 186).

According to Schumann, one of the major aims of the troupe has been to take theatre back to its 'ritualistic' beginnings and to focus on bodies and actions rather than on dialogue (2004: 40). In 1970 the troupe received an offer to be the theatre-in-residence at Goddard College in Vermont; four years later, upon completion of their contract, Schumann and his wife Elka bought a farm in Glover, Vermont, and set up a communal living arrangement for the company and its members. In a large field near Schumann's property, they began to perform what would later become *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*, a large-scale puppet and music event that discussed a number of topical political issues, which brought thousands of spectators to the farm each year. The *Circus* was officially ended in 1998 when a man in a nearby campground was killed after a fight broke out following a performance (Bell 2001 [1999]: 65). They still continue to perform a version of the circus today; however, it is a much smaller performance, as is the number of audience members they allow on the farm (Bell 2001 [1999]: 66).

Like Welfare State International, the Bread and Puppet Theatre have provided community outreach programmes for several years. Each summer they accept between 40 and 60 interns to help build their summer performances. The following recently appeared on the troupe's website, [www.breadandpuppet.org](http://www.breadandpuppet.org). I include it here because I think it provides insight into their methodology and ideology.

#### Street Theater Workshops

Papiermache (sic) offers lessons in state-of-the-arts street theater technology

- 1) how to launch precision attacks on war and capitalist megalomania
- 2) how to get the quickest, cheapest response to horrifically expensive dilemmas
- 3) how to make cardboard politicians, picture stories (cantastoria), hand puppets, and giants for rallies, parades, etc.

If you are interested, please feel free to contact us and we will try to come to your group with a subversive lesson or two (2008: np).

*This Is* (1980) is the only play available (that I have found) by Peter Schumann. The Janus Press Edition, which is the only edition currently in print, was also illustrated by Peter Schumann. A preface in the text acknowledges that many of the play's eleven scenes have been taken from *13 Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* by Robert F. Kennedy. Before I begin, I must warn the reader that *This Is* does not contain page numbers; hence, I cannot properly reference the following scenes. I have, however, tried to give as much detail as possible (this includes the illustrations) to better demonstrate Schumann's performance practice.

The play begins with Woman asking the audience to take the time to remember the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962; the page is illustrated with several hand-drawn ducks. The first scene begins with the heading "The people of America are asleep", and a giant hand is shown hovering in a night sky over several sleeping people. The chorus sings "See" and a man (also named 'man') says that "Dark birds fly over their faces." End of scene. In scene two, the main characters of 1962 are introduced as: The President of the US, the Chief of the CIA, the Secretary of Defence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President of the Enemies. Following their introduction, the trumpets exclaim "Bravo!" End of Scene. Scene three is introduced by Man as "The CIA informs the President about evidence of a Soviet missile base construction in Cuba". The scene is played out by the President and the head of the CIA, but no information actually passes:

President: Silence  
 CIA: Whisper  
 President: Silence  
 CIA: Whisper  
 President: Silence  
 CIA: Whisper  
 President: Exclamation  
 CIA: Silence  
 President: Exclamation  
 CIA: Silence  
 President: Exclamation  
 CIA: Silence  
 Woman: See the sun

Scene four is the same as scene one.

Scene five: The Cabinet Room at the White House (President, CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Curtis Lemay, Dean Acheson, and Drum). The six characters discuss the threat to the United States; each line is accented with the banging of a drum:

General Curtis Lemay: I argue strongly that a military attack is essential.

Dean Acheson: Responsibility  
 Drum: Boom.  
 Dean Acheson: Protect the security.  
 Drum: Boom  
 Dean Acheson: United States  
 Drum: Boom.  
 Dean Acheson: Whole free World.  
 Drum: Boom.

Military action appears to be unavoidable by the end of the scene. The illustrations following the scene consume two whole pages of the book and depict three dog-like creatures (wolves?), walking (or hunting) at night. The final series of drawings are of a crescent shaped moon setting and eventually disappearing behind a hill.

Scene six depicts an empty cabinet room at the White House, where the chairs, tables, doors and windows sing. Scene seven is the President's speech to the nation.

President: My fellow citizens this government as promised has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military build-up on the island of Cuba. Within the past week unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island. To half this offensive build-up a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated. [Illustration of a man wearing a tie and a huge grin, with arms in the air, ala Eva Peron]

President: This quarantine will be extended if needed to other types of cargo and carriers.

President: Should these offensive military preparations continue further action will be justified. I have directed the armed forces to prepare for any eventualities.

President: We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth.

President: But neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be face.

Following the President's speech, we are informed by the man that "The organisation of American States unanimously supported the recommendation for a quarantine." The illustrations shows the giant hand floating in a night sky, above a white chair. Woman tells us that:

The navy deployed 180 ships into the Caribbean. The B-52 bomber force was ordered into the air fully loaded with atomic weapons. As one came down to land another immediately took is place in the air. The Strategic Air Command was dispersed to civilian landing fields around the country to lessen its vulnerability in case of attack. 250,000 men

2000 air sorties against the various targets in Cuba 90,000 marines and airborne in the invasion force.

The man then informs us that the President was mostly worried about the death of children and young people, who were probably unaware of or did not understand the crisis.

Scene eight is the same as scenes i and ii.

Scene nine depicts the Attorney General threatening the Soviet Ambassador with military action if the missile bases were not removed immediately. Again, a drum is used to punctuate each line delivered by the Attorney General.

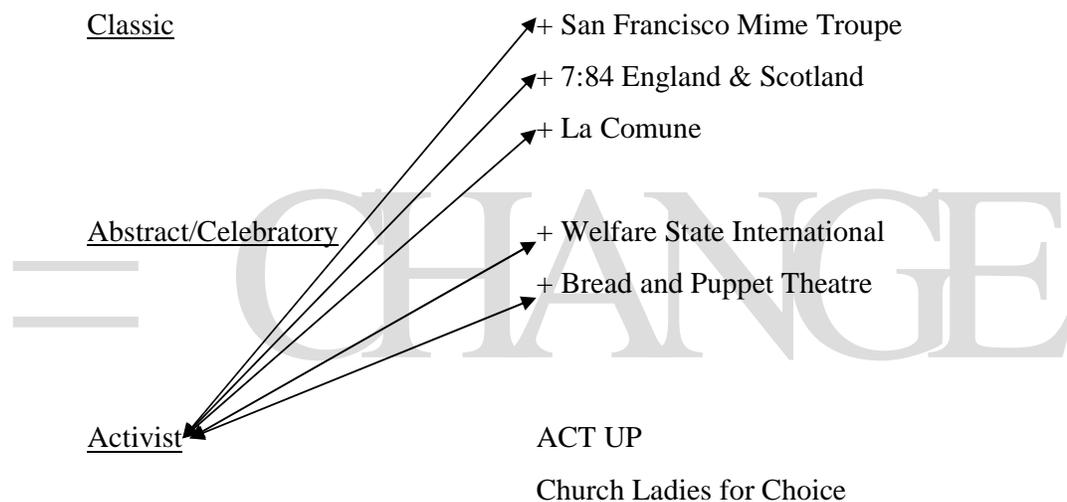
Scene ten is set in an empty room. The room tells us that the president was not optimistic that the Soviets would change their mind. He anticipated military action by Tuesday, and had already sent 24 troop-carrier squadrons of the Air-force reserve to active duty.

Scene eleven: no action was taken. Scene eleven depicts the world. The cymbals tell everyone to 'wake up and enjoy their world'. The illustrations show power plants, tables and chairs, tea cups, silverware, hands holding flowers, ducks, men on horses, clouds above the trees, and trees without leaves. The final word, "Oh" is spoken by Darkness and the illustration shows the wolves hunting again.

The overall pace of the text seems to be steady, but not as quick as that of the Mime Troupe, 7:84, and La Comune. The characters are one-dimensional, but their roles are not as easily defined as belonging to a particular good or bad ideology. The characters are not necessarily 'bad' because it is the event itself that is being questioned here. It might be seen, however, that the 'wolves' hunting at night are a metaphor for what might potentially be a bad event. *This Is* differs from the other texts as well because it is not necessarily calling into question a particular ideology. Overall, the piece is an avant-garde view of a historical event, with an anti-war, anti-weapon ideology which tells its audience to celebrate life.

It should be noted that The Bread and Puppet Theatre incorporate large-scale puppetry with a number of other elements. For instance, Peter Schumann will often make masks for actors to wear instead of building a full puppet. Flag-bearers, musicians, brief comic sketches and dances also generally feature in a typical Bread and Puppet performance. Some of these aspects and forms might then be considered for practical experimentation.

The one similarity that these troupes share is that their performances (typically political) are meant to motivate audiences to think about or even change their opinion on particular issues facing their community. This means that despite their differences in approach to performance, the overall outcome is meant to be similar. The following diagram demonstrates this similarity.



**Figure 1:** Illustration of the relationships between popular political troupes. Illustration by Jason Price.

It would be unfair and untruthful to suggest that all popular theatre troupes performing today share an activist stance with the troupes discussed in this section. The above illustration (especially the “= Change” watermark) would then only be accurate for the seven troupes listed above. Certainly, there are circuses, clowns and *commedia dell’arte* specialists, for example, who have no interest in politics at all, yet their work might still fit into one of the two remaining profiles listed above. I have chosen troupes that perform socio-political issues as a matter of interest, and because of the didactic services they provide to their communities. Of particular interest was how these troupes managed to portray ideologies to communities, and how they have reacted towards (and potentially benefited from) this type of performance.

My initial questions were primarily concerned with character, plot, rhythm, techniques, and spectacle. In analysing the ‘classic’ type of popular theatre, where I focused my attention on the San Francisco Mime Troupe, 7:84, and La Comune, I noticed that there were several similarities amongst these five elements:

- (1) Characters in the classic type are, for the most part, one-dimensional. They are meant to represent a particular ideology (either good or bad). Due to the political objective of the troupes’ works, the good characters, although still

underdeveloped, are written with more detail than the bad ones. Hence, as the ideological debate within the text is weighted to the ideology of the troupe, the good characters are written as to receive more sympathy/empathy from the audience.

- (2) There is generally a quick pace/rhythm. Unlike aesthetic drama where an audience is usually introduced to characters, situations and eventually the conflict, the classic popular troupes present the thesis in the first scene. This is followed by several other short scenes that are, again, centred on a particular ideology.
- (3) Metatheatricity is an important aspect of popular performance. Actors interact with the audience; the audience interact with the actors. Actors jump in and out of character as necessary. Fo would call this 'keying in and out' of a performance. This acting style is undeniably similar to Brecht's epic theatre (see Mason 2005, Cohen-Cruz 1998, and Shank 2003).
- (4) The performance is usually given with small sets and few properties. Although groups like the Mime Troupe have more recently turned to larger production values, their early work was done on a simple platform with a backdrop and a few properties. The performance ensemble, and its ideology, is then not upstaged by unnecessary spectacle.
- (5) The San Francisco Mime Troupe, 7:84, the Bread and Puppet Theatre and Welfare State have used live music in their performances. These troupes have written original material (with relatively simple lyrics) for some of their performances or have used well-known 'standards' which allow the audience to sing along. The San Francisco Mime Troupe, in particular, often create performance that might be described as musicals because the songs help to further the plot. The other troupes include songs less frequently, in more of a variety or vaudeville-like way, but they are present nonetheless.
- (6) As Fo admits, specialising in popular forms that have been out of practice for some time (like the *guillare*) makes it impossible to recreate them completely accurately. So, although the troupes may not be experts in reviving and practicing traditional forms, these out of practice forms are used as a base: a foundation to build a new theatre practices. In the case of the Mime Troupe, they rely on well-known genres, like Marvel Comics superheroes, film noir, melodrama, musical comedy, and lesser known (to modern audiences) forms, like *commedia dell'arte*, and have created a

hybrid performance practice that is still generally recognised by its audiences (again, strengthening the bond between troupe and audience).

- (7) Like the characters, the plot is generally not difficult to comprehend. It too is a clear-cut good versus evil. Subplots, if they are written, are also based on the overall ideology and are linked directly to the main plot. This simplicity, I believe, also makes it easier for audiences to understand a troupe's message.
- (8) The plays are generally comic satires that make-fun of contemporary political issues, but these feature real facts and issues. As Luis Valdez says: "If you want to get realistic about problems, you have to do it in an indirect fashion, through [comic] dramatic images [...] When they see something they recognize as a reality, they laugh at [it]" (Bagby 2003 [1967]: 232).

The abstract/celebratory theatre of WSI and the Bread and Puppet Theatre also have a few elements in common with the classic type, namely underdeveloped characters, left-wing ideologies, and the use of alternative performance spaces. However, unlike the above troupes, their works are much longer, the plots are not always coherent (as Professor Grimes pointed out when discussing WSI), and are generally aesthetic (in regards to visual spectacle). Additionally, I noticed that although the works that lay within the classic type seem to be more accessible to audiences (simpler style, characters and plot) their collective administrative structures do not always allow for much community outreach, especially with regards to the sharing of techniques; whereas, the abstract groups discussed, despite the fact that their performances might be perceived by some to be more challenging to comprehend, do seem to embrace communities, and allow for those communities to create with them (WSI's lantern parade, being just one example).

The popular forms incorporated into these troupes' works vary considerably, but there are forms which appear more frequently than others. *Commedia dell'arte*, for example, was used as a base for both the San Francisco Mime Troupe and La Comune. It has also appeared in some of the works of Welfare State International. Hence, I do believe that this form should be researched through practice. Music also appears in most of the troupes' works, but in vastly different ways. For instance, the San Francisco Mime Troupe's performances are musical comedies, whereas 7:84 uses music more sparingly; this might then place their performances under broad definitions of musical play or variety theatre. I think there is a danger here of using the music theatre term too broadly, but, given the variety of music theatre forms used by these troupes, I think this

term will have to suffice. Given its abundance in these troupes' works, however, some form of music theatre would need to be explored through practice. Finally, in the abstract and celebratory works of the Bread and Puppet Theatre and Welfare State International, forms of puppetry were used. Hence, certain puppet forms would also need to be explored through practice. It should, however, be noted that like music theatre, a number of puppet theatre forms appeared in the works of these troupes and consequently I would need to consider the practicalities of training and building various puppet forms prior to singling out which puppet forms to consider through practice. In sum, the three major forms that were selected to be researched through practice were: *commedia dell'arte*, music theatre, and puppet theatre.

### **Section 3: The Efficacy of Popular Performance**

Baz Kershaw in *The Politics of Performance: Radical theatre as cultural intervention* (1992), which examines the efficacy of what he terms the 'alternative theatre movement' in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, argues that the 1960s saw the start of a long-term international "[...] *cultural* revolution that was not dependent on class, because it impinged on the awareness of a whole generation, and its successors in more or less decisive ways" (his emphasis, 1992: 39). Because of this, he argues, it is more likely that the performances created by troupes during this period may have connected more with audiences. His study focuses on the works of John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy, John McGrath and 7:84 Theatre Company, Ann Jellicoe and Colway Theatre Trust, and Welfare State International.

His conclusions from examining the movement and works by these practitioners are that they had hopes of a theatre not dissimilar to Boal's Legislative Theatre (Kershaw 1992: 243). He points out that because the troupes were working in relatively conservative communities, by working with the members of those communities to develop their work, they were able to introduce oppositional ideologies into the discourse of performance (1992: 246) and the community at large. He writes:

Thus, it is the dialectical aesthetic of celebratory protest, of carnivalesque agitprop, which enables a company to express and explore the fine balance between ideological incorporation and resistance in community contexts. [...] Somehow, the company must gain the trust of the community (1992: 248).

But, he says that such localism, in these instances, is a mixed blessing. Although it might change perceptions about issues at a local level, those from outside that community will not easily adopt the message contained in the performance, and it

consequently “[...] prevents performance from successfully travelling beyond its original source” (1992: 249).

Kershaw acknowledges that gauging the efficacy of a performance is difficult to do. His own conclusions regarding the efficacy of the alternative theatre movement stems largely from Arts Council figures, which indicate the number of troupes producing radical work at any given time and the amount of money they were receiving from the Council. He further acknowledges that many troupes performed before audiences which may have shared a similar ideology, and so the challenge is gauging who in the audience is unconverted and who is already committed (1992: 252). Despite this, he believes that a strong case might be made for the efficacy of the movement as a whole (1992: 243), but he does not speculate as to the efficacy of singular troupes or the forms they used.

Sociologist J.R. Goodlad also considered the effects of popular theatre and media on society in his *The Sociology of Popular Drama* (1971) and “Approaches to Popular Drama through the Social Sciences” (1977). Both of his studies were principally concerned with the commercial theatre and television, but his conclusions are, I believe, valid here. He points out that myth, ritual and folk lore, which form the foundations of many popular traditions, have a cognitive function in society: they inform the members of society about social structure and about the behaviour expected of them (1971: 7). Further, he argues that “[...] although people watch drama ‘to be entertained’, popular drama fulfils functions other than those of mere entertainment [...] The likelihood is that they are not escaping *from* their social obligations, but escaping *into* an understanding of society, which is necessary for their participation in society” (his emphasis, 1997: 178). A drama’s popularity, then, is based on how relevant it is to their lives and their problems. More recent studies in the psychology of entertainment (Rhodes & Hamilton 2006; Cohen 2006; Green, Brock, & Strange 2002, Prentice & Gerrig 1999) also acknowledges that ‘identification’ (one’s ability to relate characters, stories and structures to their own lives and personal experiences) as a principal factor in how one receives a performance; this includes cognition, comprehension, and appreciation of a performance. Further, as Schreier mentions in his ‘(Subjective) Well-Being’ (2006), it has only recently been recognised that “[...] recipients readily adopt information encountered in fictional contexts and that entertainment and fiction may in fact carry powerful persuasive messages” (2006: 398).

Marco de Marinis’ ‘Dramaturgy of the Spectator’ (1987) discusses the work on performance reception by Henry Schoenmakers and Ed Tan (1982 and 1984) and

studies by Eugenio Barba at the International School of Theatre Anthropology. It is noted here, in more scientific terms, that:

The spectator's attention appears to be the product of a certain type of psychophysiological disposition which, in the appropriate scientific literature, goes under various names: arousal, excitation, curiosity, interest, etc. Among other things, this disposition is signalled by several neurophysiological activities, such as characteristic changes in electroencephalogram levels (EEG), sweating, changes in heartbeat, muscular tension, pupil dilation, etc. This state leading up the actual focusing of attention can be termed a "state of interest" (1987: 109).

So, popular theatre may be didactic in two ways: 1) it helps audiences better understand their relationship with and function in society, and 2) can be used as propaganda (ibid). Further, it would seem that a performance that is able to 'arouse, excite, make curious and interest' audiences has an even greater chance of engaging its audience, and potentially having a broader didactic impact.

#### *Popular Theatre's Return?*

In *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (1999), Kershaw would return to the topic of radical performance and question how it might be approached in the twenty-first century. His study places radical practices under a postmodern microscope and considers them in, what he terms, a 'new(ish) global situation' (1999: 84). He writes

[...] it seems to me that, with the demise of the old meta-narratives, any hope for a progressive prognosis for performance practice will lie in its attempts to grapple with the ultra-vexed global issues of inequality, injustice and servitude. If performance can illuminate some of the sources of world-wide oppression by exposing how the politics of representation, say, may be used to reinforce the marginalisation of minority groups, then it may contribute to a fairer economy of signs. It can create fresh cultural space in which the silenced majorities might find a newly resonant and engaged voice, then it may lead to a wider liberation of humankind's most precious resource (1999: 86).

In his search for models that might be suitable for holding radical discourses, he explores protests, lantern parades, postcolonial minstrelsy, mazes, and many other performances that escape commodification by being, in his words, 'beyond theatre' (1999: 216). Although he is able to explain the benefits of each of his models, he is also able to demonstrate how they contradict themselves in light of the postmodern condition. With protests, for example, he argues that despite their modernist traditions, they are "[...] more or less aimed at creating new postmodern spaces for radical

discourse” (1999: 123). Consequently, despite its contradictions, the protest form might still be effective in generating discourses about this 'new(ish) global situation'. By the same logic: might, then, a model for a grass-roots theatre which utilises popular theatre forms, with its twentieth-century connection to a meta-narrative of socialism, be able to achieve this as well? Perhaps it is time to consider whether such a practice is possible.

Are the current political and cultural conditions right to re-introduce popular political theatre into twenty-first century Britain? In Chapter 5 of *The Politics and Performance* (1992) Kershaw outlines the historical conditions in which troupes like 7:84 prospered (1992: 133). He points to Rock and Punk culture, the IRA bombings, the rise in unemployment, the decline in the manufacturing industry, and, by the end of the decade, the government falling into Margaret Thatcher's and the Tories control (ibid). Additionally, he notes that the alternative theatre thrived during this period of 'continual crisis and confrontation', although it was receiving less than 2% of the Arts Council's annual budget (1992: 137).

Today we are also in a period of 'continual crisis and confrontation'. For IRA insert Al-Qaeda, for Labour government woes, please see the front cover of any newspaper in the country. Furthermore, like the 1970s, the United States is engaged in a war (this time aided by Britain) that is highly unpopular and probably unwinnable (which might be compared with Vietnam). The disgraced American President of the 1970s was Richard Nixon, today see George W. Bush. Currently, unemployment in the United States and Britain is rising at a time when the economy is rapidly slowing (and appears to be heading into a recession, much like the 1970s). The similarities are striking.

And yet there are also many differences. Today, we live in a hyper-mediatised world thanks to the invention of the internet, mobile phone, and twenty-four hour news channels. The effects of mass media exposure are frequently debated, with many sociologists and psychologists now becoming aware of how such exposure shapes perceptions of national issues and increases social isolation (Bickham and Rich 2006; Gourley 1999), something which John Fox also acknowledged in my interview with him (Fox 2006: np). It seems ironic that we live in an age of mass global communication thanks to the advent of new technologies and yet these technologies simultaneously inhibit face-to-face interaction. Hence, I believe that the popular theatre might be a valuable tool for creating contemporary performance that will gather people together, engage them about issues that face their communities and potentially help find solutions to those issues.

But what might be the implications and inherent contradictions of such a practice in the postmodern era? It might be seen that such a practice would only serve a meta-narrative of socialism and consequently is too Utopian, or authoritarian. If we are to accept that the meta-narratives are defunct, then yes, a practice which openly aligns itself with the political theatres of the twentieth-century – particularly those which have adhered to socialist ideologies – would seem to be a contradiction. As postmodernism teaches us that all performance is political and open to endless meanings, any performance with a didactic aim could potentially be at odds with itself (McConachie 2006: 543). However, if we look at the same practice as a model for grass-roots theatres aimed at educating and getting others involved in political and social issues, then it might also be seen as a micro-practice, one which permits its user to create, to borrow from Lyotard, *petit recites*<sup>6</sup>, or local narratives, which have the potential to develop into macro-movements. In other words, these local narratives, like the protests and protest events discussed by Kershaw earlier in this section, might be able to generate radical discourses which eventually develop into larger political/social movements. Hence, although a popular-political theatre may adhere to a meta-narrative of socialism, I believe it still manages to accommodate the postmodern condition. Consequently, I feel that a didactic practice which utilises popular theatre forms can be placed alongside other practices of the postmodern era – although it will certainly look and smell differently than many of the others. Personally, I believe that popular theatre and its generally subversive and disrespectful tone is not inherently socialist in an aligned or constructive sense; twentieth-century Marxist practitioners are responsible for aligning the two. Hence, a traditional popular theatre performance presents no model for adherence to any specific meta-narrative. If we consider a contemporary, popular-theatre grass-roots model through perhaps broader historical lenses, then, I think it meets the postmodern condition without the need to forgive its relatively recent alignment with a socialist meta-narrative.

Alex Sierz, author of *'Can Old Forms Be Reinvigorated?' Radical Populism and New Writing in British Theatre Today* (2006) discusses the ways in which popular theatre forms are already beginning to return to twenty-first century political stages. Sierz writes:

In terms of political theatre, 2002 was a turning point. After a couple of years during which the energy seemed to have drained out of new

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<sup>6</sup> Lyotard, Jean Francois (1984 [1979]) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press.

writing, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2002 and 2003 connected again with global politics [...] Examples [are] Gregory Burke's *The Straits* and Henry Adam's *The People Next Door* [...] (Sierz 2006: 304).

The difference between the new radical populist plays and those of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, is, however, that it exists in '[...] a very diluted way. It's not as overt as it once was' (Sirett, qtd in Sierz 2006: 303). For instance, Adam's *The People Next Door* is a farce, and, as Roxana Silbert, the play's director, notes that it is "[...] informed by the Dario Fo tradition. So, it's populist in form [...] It is one of the first Scottish plays to deal with cultural diversity. It differs from Fo's work in being much less didactic [...] It's politics are personal" (Silbert, qtd in Sierz 2006: 304). Sierz also notes recent trends in verbatim and realistic theatres to depict political moments and situations but not offer solutions to them.

Finally, Lisa Goldman has noted that:

Because there's been such a resistance to the War on Terror, and there is a renewed questioning going on in society, it might be that we're due for a new wave of theatre which reflects that movement. At the moment, the theatre needs a bomb under it. The whole system is still geared to the Oxbridge elite, a very narrow stratum of society. In some ways, things are worse than they were 30 years ago (Goldman qtd. in Sierz 2006: 310).

Could that bomb be a practice which utilises popular theatre forms?

#### **Section 4: Methodology**

The principal objective of my research through practice is to analyse the efficacy of *commedia dell'arte*, puppetry and music theatre – the popular theatre forms which appeared most frequently in the works of late twentieth-century popular-political theatre practices – and, based on outcomes of this analysis, question a viable model for a contemporary political grass-roots theatre. In order to do this, I needed to explore these forms in performance and study the audiences' reception to them. Hence, the following research methodology was proposed.

- (1) Using *commedia dell'arte*, puppetry, and music theatre forms, I would write and direct three productions about issues that concern contemporary audiences.
- (2) The productions would be performed at the University of Exeter and audiences would be invited to view them.

- (3) Statistics on audience reception would be gathered via questionnaires and personal interviews. In light of the aims of the popular-political troupes studied, this reception would be considered in the following manner:
- A. The aesthetic: do audience perceive the forms/techniques to be entertaining?
  - B. The didactic: are audiences taking away the information (facts) being presented through the discourse of performance, or does the aesthetic elicited by the popular theatre forms deny this from occurring?
  - C. Activism: does the performance have the ability to make audiences active about the issues discussed in the performance as a response to it?

### *Training*

Before I was able to create performances to explore the efficacy of popular theatre forms, I first needed to train in the forms I had selected. As my performance background consists largely of musical theatre and dance, I felt that my training in this form was suitable and that I would be able to train others in the skills necessary for a live performance. However, I was inexperienced in *commedia dell'arte* and subsequently underwent private training with Teresa Rodrigues, a former member of the Unfortunati Company. Ms. Rodrigues and I worked together for approximately thirty hours in November and December 2006 and a short film made up of video clips from these training sessions can be seen on DVD 1, entitled *Training in Popular Theatre Forms*, by selecting the menu option 'I. Private Commedia Training with Teresa Rodrigues'. Our sessions consisted of physical training in the principal *commedia dell'arte* characters - Magnifico, Dottore, Pantalone, Zanni, Harlequin, Brighella, Columbina, first actor and actress, second actor and actress, and Capitano – masks and improvisation. Conventional research was also done on the history and practice of *commedia dell'arte* and the list of sources consulted can be found in the bibliography under the '*commedia dell'arte*' heading.

For puppetry, however, I took a different approach. Dr. Jay Sinthuphan, then a PhD student in the Department of Drama, is a puppet specialist and was kind enough to advise me on puppet practices. Rather than train with Dr. Sinthuphan on a regular basis, I consulted puppetry books and websites and conducted experiments with different puppet forms. Whilst rehearsing for a production, Dr. Sinthuphan would come into

rehearsals and offer advice. When considering the authenticity of the puppet practices that appeared in these research projects, I would advise readers to consider how the forms were used by the popular-political theatre troupes discussed earlier in this chapter. The forms were not often a specialism of members of the troupe, but were consulted (and then researched) because it was believed they would be useful for portraying certain issues or, as John Fox indicated, for creating visuals. Puppetry would be used in these projects for similar purposes. Like *commedia*, the sources consulted for puppetry can be found under the ‘Puppetry’ heading in the bibliography.

I also underwent circus training at The Circus Space in London in November 2006. There I studied trapeze (static and flying), stilt-walking, juggling, and acrobalance. Although circus was not one of the forms I selected to incorporate into the research projects, I underwent this training in case I decided to incorporate some of its skills into a performance (which I eventually did do). Unfortunately, no video documentation from this training exists due to the difficulty in acquiring permission to film training sessions at The Circus Space and locating a volunteer to operate the camera. I have, however, included notes from my circus training in Appendix B for documentation purposes.

The performers who took part in my productions were students in the Department of Drama. The performers were trained by me prior to the start of rehearsals. These training workshops will be discussed in detail in the proceeding chapters; scenes from these also appear on DVD 1.

#### *A Note on DVD Documentation*

The merits of video recordings to document the outcomes of research through practice work are still much debated. Robin Nelson, author of ‘Practice as Research and the Problem of Knowledge’ (2006) addresses many of the major issues in this debate. Perhaps the most compelling argument regarding video recordings as evidence of an event he discusses belongs to Derrida and Striegler, who have recognised the significance of both ‘evidence’ (the video recording) and the ‘testimony’ (written or oral commentary by the practitioner) (2006: 112). Derrida argues that the two cannot exist without the other, and references the Rodney King case in the United States where, despite having a video recording of the incident, “[...] the young man who shot the footage was asked to come himself and attest ..., swearing that he was present at the scene and saw what he shot [...]” (Derrida, qtd. in Nelson 2006: 113). Hence, in the case of this thesis, the films and commentary in the proceeding chapters should be

considered together alongside the audience reception statistics discussed at the end of each chapter; only then are the outcomes from the research projects and the conclusions in Chapter Five entirely comprehensible.

There are four DVDs that accompany this thesis; they are affixed to the inside of the back cover. The first is entitled *Training in Popular Theatre Forms* and documents the training workshops that are discussed in chapters Two and Three. The training DVD, like this thesis, has been divided into chapters to make navigating between the commentary and DVD easier. For instance, in Chapter Two I discuss the training workshops that I conducted to prepare actors for the first research project. In Section 1 of that chapter you will be directed to DVD 1 and to select 'II. Training Workshops for *Diplomacy in Ironland*' from the main menu. Once selected, a brief film made up of scenes from these workshops will begin to play. During the film, subtitles will appear in the bottom left corner of the screen, which will indicate which workshops and/or skills are being performed. The films of the training workshops have been designed to flow with the commentary provided in the chapters. DVDs 2, 3, and 4 feature films of the final performances.

Finally, in some instances video recording the training workshops was not possible. Subsequently, photographs from these workshops have been included in the chapters as evidence that the workshop occurred and what certain skills/techniques look like. It is my hope that the readers accept these photographs as being as significant as the video documentation.

#### *Thesis Outline*

Chapters Two and Three discuss the processes I underwent to make *Diplomacy in Ironland* (June 2007) and *Fashionable Immigration* (a *commedia*, a puppet show and musical) (March 2008). Further, they provide summaries of the audiences' reception to the performance and consider what this says about the possibility a popular-political grass-roots theatre in the twenty-first century. The chapters are written, for the most part, in the chronological order of the process: concept, research questions, performer training, researching/writing performance texts, design, blocking, production, and reception. In doing so, I hope that the reader is able to follow the process like a developing narrative. These chapters are accompanied by DVDs of each performance. *Diplomacy in Ironland* can be found on DVD 2, and *Fashionable Immigration* (all three versions) on DVD 3.

Chapter Four discusses the production of *Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia* at Exeter's Guildhall Shopping Centre on 7 June 2008. I decided to take this particular production to an open-air shopping centre in Exeter's City Centre in order to explore the *commedia dell'arte* form in an outdoor performance environment (in its natural habitat, so to speak) and to explore the form with a more diverse audience. Audience reception was conducted again via questionnaires that were distributed following the performance, and a summary of this reception will be provided in the final section of this chapter. This production can be viewed on DVD 4.

Chapter Five collates the findings from the research through practice performances, the efficacy of popular theatre forms and the methodologies I used to create the research projects, and seeks to offer advice to directors on how the forms might function in a contemporary didactic practice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH PROJECT 1: PROCESSES OF PERFORMER TRAINING, REHEARSAL AND PRODUCTION FOR *DIPLOMACY IN IRONLAND (AND OTHER TALES)*

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the ways in which I trained and rehearsed actors in preparation for *Diplomacy in Ironland*, the first of three experimental performances intended to analyse the efficacy of popular theatre forms. The chapter will begin by addressing how I gathered and then trained actors in a series of workshops in February and March 2007; it will then address the creation of a text, rehearsal processes and performances of *Diplomacy in Ironland* given in June 2007. The final section of this chapter will address questionnaires distributed to and completed by members of the audience following each performance. In that section I will address audiences' responses to the performance; additionally, I will address conclusions about my methodology based on these statistics.

It will first, however, be necessary to discuss the specific aims of my research and the questions I considered when designing this project in order to meet these aims. As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, the primary aim of my research is to consider whether a theatre practice which utilises popular theatre forms might be a viable model for creating a contemporary political grass-roots theatre. In order to do this, my research would need to analyse the efficacy of popular theatre forms by evaluating, in particular, how they might function to 'teach and delight' audiences, as well as make them active as a response to the issue(s) discussed in a performance. Consequently, the analysis would need to be conducted by questioning audiences about the following three areas; these should also be considered major aims of my research through practice:

- (1) The aesthetics of popular performance: do audiences perceive the forms/techniques used in performance to relay this information as being aesthetically pleasing and generally entertaining, as they were traditionally designed to do? In other words, are the audience 'delighted' by the performance?
- (2) The didactic element of performance: do audiences comprehend the information being presented in the performance and how is the level of comprehension affected by the use of certain popular theatrical forms and techniques as the medium for presenting this information? In short, how

much are audiences learning from the performance? How successful are the forms in ‘teaching’ them about certain issues?

- (3) Activism: this concerns the audiences more directly and seeks to explore how popular theatre forms might make audiences more active as a *response* to the issues/situations/information they are presented with and ultimately questions what they will do with the information being given to them through the performance.

The first of the research performances needed to address these aims and begin to answer these questions. I realised that directly engaging with all of the areas encompassed by the above aims would be impossible, but it would be necessary to engage with all of them on some level. Hence, the following emerged as the principal enquiries of the first research experiment:

- (1) Audience reception: how will audiences respond to the combination of several popular techniques and does the combination of these techniques hinder the aesthetic and didactic effectiveness of the performance?
- (2) Training: how much training is required for a performer to safely and effectively execute certain popular techniques in a live performance situation?

The first enquiry, audience reception, is a crucial and ongoing aspect of my research; my analysis of the efficacy of popular theatre forms, with which this thesis is largely concerned, would be dependent on the audience’s feedback to the performances. I would be reliant on the audience, for whom popular theatre forms are ultimately designed, to indicate whether or not the performance was succeeding in meeting its aims (most notably the didactic, aesthetic and activist aims set out above). Audience reception, in this instance, was gathered via questionnaires that were distributed following the performance. It should be noted that because the performances were held in studios at the University of Exeter, and not in a space accessible to the general public, and that audiences were made up largely of drama students, academic faculty, and friends and family members of the cast, then the audiences’ responses can not be considered concrete evidence. The questionnaires, and their limitations, will be discussed in greater detail in Section 5 of this chapter.

The second enquiry, training, is a practical one and, I believe, crucial to understanding just how viable certain popular forms are for creating contemporary didactic performances; it also falls under the aesthetic aim mentioned earlier. Training and observing the training process would be necessary for composing the text and

directing the performers. I needed to be aware of how skilled in certain techniques the performers were becoming and how this affected the final performance. Additionally, I realised that if the performers were unable to perform the techniques accurately, then on some level the traditional aesthetic generated by the techniques/forms being explored might be compromised. This, in turn, could also compromise the didactic aim. Knowing how long it took to accurately and effectively train the performers would also be useful for future projects as it would allow me to timetable them more effectively.

### **Section 1: Performer Training**

In January 2007 I sent the following email to undergraduate drama students attending Exeter University's Department of Drama:

Performance Opportunity

Can you act, sing, dance, juggle, improvise scenes, play an instrument, walk on stilts, manipulate (not mutilate) a puppet and/or ride a unicycle? (Or, equally, have a WANT to learn to do these things?)

Even more importantly: Do you have a legitimate concern about current world issues (like the War in Iraq and US and UK foreign policy)?

If any of the above describes you, then I have a place for you in an upcoming performance!

I am currently seeking performers for a show about conflict in the Middle East. If you can do any of the above: great, please join me. If you can't: don't despair, you will be receiving training in some circus skills (no unicycles planned), dance, puppet and mask construction and *commedia dell'arte*. I am eager to work with students who have an interest in learning new things and are interested in and have opinions regarding current affairs.

A training workshop will be held towards the end of February with rehearsals to follow. The production will go up in the first couple weeks of June.

If you are interested, please contact Jason Price via email. In the email, please include:

- 1) Your name and year
- 2) Details of any unique skills
- 3) If you are interested in politics at all
- 4) A little blurb about yourself (be creative!)

I look forward to hearing from you!

The email campaign turned out to be quite successful. In two weeks, seventeen students had responded to the email and were willing to undertake training. Many of

these students claimed to already possess some knowledge of *commedia dell'arte*, or some other skill (like, for example, fire eating and throwing, clowning, unicycle riding, juggling and puppet manipulation). Given that at this stage I was not exactly sure what the performance would be, I was excited about the student's skills and the spectacular performances we might create with unicycles, puppets and fire eaters.

The euphoria created by the successful email campaign, however, was short lived. Within a matter of weeks students began to back out of the project. By the time of the first training workshop on 19 February 2007, only twelve students remained; by the time of the second workshop on 26 February, this number had decreased yet again and by the third workshop the number of performers stood at nine. It would be these nine performers who would complete the training workshops and eventually make up the cast of *Diplomacy in Ironland*.

It was explained to the student volunteers prior to the training workshops that there would not be a formal audition/casting procedure for this performance. I felt that without appropriate training a typical casting procedure would be a complete waste of time. Rather, I felt it was necessary to observe the students throughout the training process and then consider which roles they might be suitable for later on. The following email is typical of how I responded to questions from students regarding casting. I include it here because I feel it will also help clarify the training/casting procedure and performance as I envisioned it at the time:

There are numerous roles which I will cast following a series of workshops at the end of February. These workshops are kind of like auditions, but everyone gets a role; however, the role will be tailored to each person's skill level. The show itself, still in development, will be a mix of circus/puppet/dance/song/spectacle and *commedia* [...] (email to Anne-Marie Cosco, student volunteer performer, 22 January 2007).

There were four total workshops planned, the first of which was held on 19 February 2007 from 6.00 – 9.00pm. The additional three were held on the next three Monday nights (26 February; 5 and 12 March) during the same hours. The workshops consisted of training in the following areas: the characters and physicality of the *commedia dell'arte*, some dance techniques (namely jazz and some ballet technique) and some circus acrobalance skills. For the first workshop I gave a lecture about popular theatre, defined the term 'popular' and introduced the students to my research generally (this lecture was taken from Chapter One of this thesis). I also explained to the students at this workshop that I had previously selected the topic of the contemporary Middle East for the performance and that they would be required to undertake research in this

area, and that this would be presented at the final workshop. I split the group into smaller groups so that they might research previously selected areas together. I believed that having the students do research on the Middle East was important for several reasons: first, I did not believe that they would be able to perform issues in which they were unfamiliar; second, researching together would allow the students to become more acquainted with one another and somehow this might result in them becoming a closer ensemble; and finally, I knew that there would not be enough time during the rehearsal process to answer the students' questions about these issues.

The second workshop, unlike the first, was extremely physical. Following a warm-up<sup>7</sup>, I physically introduced the characters of the *commedia dell'arte*. Rather than show the student's videos of my private training sessions with Teresa Rodrigues, I selected to have them imitate my physicality as each character. I first introduced a character – his/her motivations, traits, general personality, costume and mask (if applicable); I would then build the character physically, generally starting with the feet and then manipulating my body as necessary to physically become the character; I would then, physically resembling the character, move about the space, using my student volunteers as an audience so that they might witness the transformation and hopefully understand it. I then asked them to imitate everything they had just witnessed: building the character from the ground up and moving about the space, using me, however, as the audience. The process was mimetic. By introducing the physicality and personality of the *commedia dell'arte* stock characters as an evolutionary process, I had hoped that the students would find it easier to remember how to perform them. In addition, by supplying the background and history of the characters, I aimed to assist the students in improvising scenes<sup>8</sup>, which was obviously a very important skill for sixteenth and seventeenth-century *commedia dell'arte* players, and one that would equally be important for the training workshops. By the end of this workshop, all of the principal stock characters - Magnifico, Pantalone, first and second actor and actress, Dottore, Capitano, Harlequin, Zanni and Columbina – had been introduced (for a detailed outline of these characters, their physicality and personalities, please see my

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<sup>7</sup> For the majority of the workshops, I conducted a warm up I acquired at the Circus Space in London. For a full description of this warm up, please see Appendix B.

<sup>8</sup> Improvisation is something I have incredible difficulty with. I noticed that during my private *Commedia* training with Teresa Rodrigues, my ability to improvise improved the more I knew about each character. Hence, I tried to provide my students with as much improvisational 'ammunition' as early as possible. I would like to say that this proved to be a highly effective training technique, but, alas, I cannot. There were several students who still froze during improvisation.

notes from my private training session in Appendix B, which were used as a guide for these workshops).

The focus of the third workshop was dance, improvisation and reviewing the *commedia dell'arte* characters. I also taught the students a dance routine that I had choreographed to Tina Turner's song "Simply the Best". As I had found my dance background useful during my own *commedia dell'arte* training, particularly for performing the role of Harlequin, I thought that I might provide the students with some of this training in the hopes of making some of their interpretations of the characters more balanced, poised and flexible. This was generally disastrous. Although some of the students had told me that they were skilled dancers, or at the very least had basic dance training, the reality was that all nine performers were extremely novice, unskilled dancers. Even after simplifying the dance routine, many students found even the most basic of steps/techniques incredibly difficult to do in time with the music. In the end, I singled out a few dance skills, fine tuned them, and then abandoned the rest of the training. I cannot confirm whether this dance training affected their performances (I am inclined to say that it did not). I do, however, believe that it wasted several hours of our scheduled workshop time that could have been spent reinforcing the *commedia dell'arte* training.

Fortunately, the dance training, or lack of it, did not seem to affect the *commedia dell'arte* training to a very large extent; several students, although they had found the dance training far too difficult, were still able to develop very physical, rhythmic characters. We spent the remainder of the third workshop on acrobalance skills and improvisation. Acrobalance, which is surprisingly an easy skill to acquire, is basically performers' bodies working together, namely by balance, to form human sculptures (pyramids, walls, etc.). Although I would decide later on that acrobalance was unnecessary for *Diplomacy in Ironland*, I do believe that the acrobalance training brought the students closer together (both physical and mentally), and, due to its simplicity, provided some of them with a much needed confidence boost. So although this training was eventually not used, it was, to some degree, useful.

As for improvisation: again, I endeavoured to remain as authentic with the *commedia dell'arte* form at this stage as possible; hence, I distributed the scenarios for *The Fake Madwoman* and *The Trials of Isabella* from Flaminio Scala's *Scenarios of the Commedia dell'arte* (1967 [1611]) to the students. I then split them into groups and asked them create a scene together. I often refer to a scenario as an 'dramatic agenda', because, unlike conventional text, it merely breaks up the action of a performance into

acts and scenes; characters are assigned functions in the plot and their entrances and exits are clearly marked. However, the characters' lines are not given verbatim; rather, the basic idea is given and each character in a scene must ensure that these ideas are given to the audience through improvised dialogue. I visited each group periodically to ensure that they were building the characters appropriately and that they were keeping the improvisations simple enough to be comprehensible. Given that the students had only been properly introduced to the *commedia* characters a week earlier, the improvised scenes were, in my opinion, satisfactory. However, it was apparent that some students had understood the training, been practicing it, and were able to successfully reproduce the training from the week before; other students, however, were only able to recall certain elements of the evolutionary character-building process. As a result, their performances showed a lack of rhythm, skill and overall comprehension. It was apparent to me that for the final workshop we would need to return to the *commedia* character-building process and define it further.

The final training workshop was held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2007. The first hour was used to review the *commedia* characters. Following this, the students were asked to improvise a few scenes together. These were much better than the ones performed the previous week and I felt far more confident about casting decisions than I had done previously.

The second half of this workshop was left free for the students to present their research on the Middle East. I had previously selected and assigned the following areas to be examined by the students:

**1. Fall of the Ottoman Empire: World War I – World War II**

- a. Zionists: Palestine – new Jewish Homeland?
- b. Mandates: Britain and France create new borders.
- c. British liberation of Iraq ...
- d. League of Nations.
- e. Oil – Anglo-Arab Oil Co. - Iraqi borders.
- f. US interest in the region: as part share-holder of A-A Oil Co. and later California Oil Company and Saudi Arabia (1938).

**2. The creation of Israel: 1948**

- a. British control over Palestine.
- b. UN involvement.
- c. Creation of Israel.
- d. US first country to recognise Israel as a state.

**3. US Military support for Israel**

- a. Egypt/Syria and constant attacks.
- b. US support (weapons, money).
- c. Lebanon.

#### 4. Iranian Revolution – late 1970s

- a. Early '70s oil boom – economy good.
- b. Oil economy destroyed by sanctions, mid-70s.
- c. US Embassy captured; hostages held for 444 days. (These hostages were finally released 20 minutes after President Ronald Reagan was inaugurated). – This should also be placed into context of the US's relationship and support for Muhammad Reza Shah, who came to power in 1941 and was removed from power by an uprising in 1953 ... only to be placed back in power by the US shortly thereafter, despite the wishes of the Iranian people.

#### 5. The Gulf Wars

- a. Iraq-Iran War 1980-1988.
- b. US gave Iraq assistance – chemical weapons, satellite information.
- c. Weapons of mass destruction.
- d. Iran-Contra Scandal – Reagan's legacy?
- e. Iraqi invasion of Kuwait – World reaction and involvement.
- f. UN Sanctions – the war that did not end.
- g. Liberation?

#### 6. Al Qaeda

- a. Muslim conservatism, extremism.
- b. Anger at US support of Israel.
- c. Anger at US / UK presence in their 'Holy Land'.
- d. 11 September 2001, 7 July 2005.

#### 7. 2003 – present

- a. Liberation?
- b. WMD ... oops, our mistake!
- c. Sectarian violence.
- d. Civil War?

Anyone who saw *Diplomacy in Ironland* will probably notice that not everything on the above list was discussed in the performance. Again, I feel it important to stress that at this stage I was still unsure about what the actual performance would be. Although I suspected the text would not be able to address all of the issues above, I still felt it important that the students be as familiar with the Middle East as possible. Generally, I was disappointed by the quality of their research (they primarily used internet sources like Wikipedia), but it was easy to see that they had actually learned a great deal about the Middle East. The last hour and a half of the workshop was spent sharing and debating each group's research.

The final workshop came to an end just before Easter break. At this stage, I felt much more confident about the project and the work that I needed to accomplish over the five-week holiday. The scenarios that I had been considering were completely feasible with the talent available; however, there was still a vast amount of training that

needed to be done. This became even more apparent after I had written *Diplomacy in Ironland*: I had written in shadow puppets, and had no formal training of my own in building or manipulating them; I had written in masks and stilts, and although I did have training in making and walking on these (respectively), I was unsure whether there would be time to train the students once formal rehearsals began.

In regards to my research question about training, I was able to at this stage of the process to have a preliminary answer: four three-hour workshops were certainly not enough to effectively train performers of this age. Given that numerous skills had been taught at the four workshops, I was beginning to question whether the problem was that they were too novice, that I was a novice in teaching, or whether the scope of the workshops had been too broad. Additionally, I was concerned whether seven weeks of rehearsal and subsequent reinforcement of the techniques would make any difference in their ability to perform them. I was also becoming aware that many of my student volunteers had also volunteered to perform in several other projects, and, in addition to their degree work, the rehearsal period would be, to some extent, compromised by both their exhaustion and scheduling conflicts. I will return to training in Section 3 when I discuss rehearsals and the additional training the performers received during that period. For a short film made up of scenes from the training workshops described in this section, please see DVD 1, menu option ‘II. Training Workshops for *Diplomacy in Ironland*’. This film includes scenes from the *commedia dell’arte* improvisation workshops, the dance workshop, and the acrobalance workshop.

## **Section 2: Developing the performance text**

As early as August 2006 I had already started to compose scenarios that could be developed into a performance. It should be noted that during this period I was also intensely investigating the history of the Middle East, undergoing circus and private *commedia dell’arte* training with Teresa Rodrigues, and researching the history, dramaturgy and structures of these forms. The more I learned about them, the more developed the content and structure of the scenarios became.

One idea I had for a performance was to present the history of conflict in the Middle East as an epic spectacular. I imagined that I would portray suffering Iraqis as dancers and puppets being manipulated by giant Western forces (performers on stilts). A narrator would explain the scenes to the audience through a mixture of sung lyric and spoken word. Even as late as January 2007, I was still intending to do this, but by this stage I began to realise the importance of selecting a structure and dramaturgy that

would be suitable for testing the suitability/effectiveness of several popular techniques simultaneously; furthermore, epic theatre, at least in the Brechtian sense, was distinguished in my mind from popular theatre<sup>9</sup>. Hence, I returned to *commedia dell'arte*.

As politics would undoubtedly be discussed in the performance, I felt a *commedia* structure could be easily adapted for contrasting opposing ideologies. Typically, a *commedia dell'arte* performance consisted of two or three families. At the head of each household was a masked father-figure (collectively known as *Il Magnifico*): Magnifico, Pantalone and sometimes Dottore. The argument between the families varies, but almost always revolves around the action of their children, also known as the lovers, or first actor/actress. As I had a political and didactic aim in mind, I saw potential for inserting opposing political ideologies as the principal source of conflict thereby alleviating the traditional responsibility of the lovers. The servant characters – Harlequin, Zanni and Columbina – usually find themselves mending the broken families, sorting out love affairs, and, wherever possible, providing comic subplots (tricking their masters, sorting out love affairs of their own, etc.); as these roles were already flexible, I felt that very little would need to be done to make them suitable for a political scenario. Eventually, I selected to make the servants immigrants because immigration in this country, as well as my own (the US) is a very controversial issue; additionally, I could see similarities between the class system as demonstrated in traditional *commedia dell'arte* and the way in which immigrants function in our societies today. I had not considered, however, the traditional two-dimensional qualities of the servants and how their transparent love of food and money might be perceived in a contemporary context. In the final section of this chapter, I will address how some members of the audience perceived my adaptations of these characters and how they felt about immigrants being portrayed in this way.

In addition to structures and forms, I was also very aware of the performers I had and that the text needed to suit their abilities. This proved easier to do for some students than with others. For instance, Jonathan Hunt, who I wrote the role of Dr. Cleaver for, had embraced and understood the training. He was also one of the more experienced performers in the cast, having performed in a number of university productions, small tours, and musicals in his hometown. Vesna Jovick, who played Bobo, one of Dr.

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<sup>9</sup> Please see my discussion in Chapter One. This is not to say, however, that Brecht was ruled out as an influence completely. Being that one of the major aims of this project is to make 'passive' audiences 'active' spectators, a great deal of Brechtian theory and stagecraft was considered, and, in some cases, applied to *Diplomacy in Ironland*. This will be addressed in Sections 3 and 4 of this chapter.

Cleaver's clown assistants, on the other hand, had not been physically able to imitate me during the training (it was not for lack of trying) and had a limited background in performing in the English language; she has a very thick Luxembourgian accent which I find, at times, almost incomprehensible. However, Ms. Jovick has a very good work-ethic, is easy to work with, and has relatively good comic timing as a performer. For these reasons I was happy to have her in the performance, but found it an incredibly challenging task to create a role for someone with limited performing abilities. Writing roles to suit performers' abilities was not as straightforward as I thought it might be.

The original scenario that would eventually become *Diplomacy in Ironland* is vastly different to the final product performed in June 2007. I had initially written a complex scenario where the focus was more religious orientated than political: two families, one American Evangelical Christian, the other Iraqi fundamentalist Sunni, find themselves in a UN refugee camp after a nuclear holocaust. The aim of the play was to demonstrate the similarities between both fundamentalist religious groups and simultaneously show how both are unable to respect each other's faiths and beliefs, the subsequent tension this creates and the role this plays in the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. The idea behind the nuclear holocaust and isolation of the characters in a UN refugee camp was to ensure that a resolution would be reached; the characters would have no choice but to either accept and respect their differences or suffer conflict for the rest of their lives - almost a self imposed purgatory. The lovers had a much more important role in this scenario: they were, in fact, lovers and this created the primary argument of the play. The Islamic girl finds herself pregnant; her father, a Pantalone-like figure, refusing to believe his daughter is not a virgin, believes that she has miraculously become impregnated by some spiritual/supernatural force. The Christian father, a Magnifico-like figure, is not certain what to believe, but is eventually persuaded that the girl carries a messiah. The last scene of the play sees the families working out their differences and the creation of what could potentially be a new religion, based both on Christianity and Islam, and peace between the families is insinuated in the play's final moments.

Although I am still quite fond of this scenario, changing it to something less faith-based proved necessary. In February 2007, whilst researching the Islamic religion and culture, I found that the idea did not settle well with the Muslims I spoke with. One such person was Dr. Al-Ali, an Iraqi and lecturer at the School of Islamic and Arab Studies at the University of Exeter. I had contacted her initially to get her views on the current conflict in Iraq, which she was kind enough to share with me. When it came to

the topic of the scenario above, however, she was more than a little aggressive and somewhat hostile. I also received warnings from inside the Drama Department: Professor Graham Ley warned me that such a sensitive issue might somehow put me in danger; he reminded me of the Sikh community's reaction to and subsequent closing of Birmingham Repertory Theatre's production of *Bhetzi* in 2004. It would seem that some people believe that religion, and matters concerning faith generally, should be exempt from commentary through the arts (a belief I find to be both aggravating and ridiculous). And although I recognised the not-so-positive reactions to the scenario as, to some extent, proving its thesis, I decided to change it.

*Diplomacy in Ironland*, in its final form, contains aspects of the epic theatre and *commedia* performance discussed throughout this section. Epic staging techniques and dramaturgy were applied to the scenes where history was being performed (scenes ii and iv), but the play as a whole is modelled on the structure of a *commedia dell'arte* performance. Although I initially wanted to keep the epic separate from the *commedia*, I eventually decided to weave the two together to form one narrative. The resultant visual effect may have appeared to be episodic, but textually a conventional narrative structure was maintained throughout. By weaving the history of the Middle East into the fictional narrative by way of magical lectures, I could keep many of the popular techniques separate from one another, which, when it came to audience reception, would give me a better sense of the didactic effectiveness of the forms and techniques used.

There are certainly similarities between *Ironland* and the work created by the troupes discussed in Chapter One, namely with regards to propaganda. *Ironland* is unapologetically left-wing, anti-war, anti-nuclear weapon propaganda; but, like the work of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, it was presented within a generally comprehensive structure. The lecture scenes were partially inspired by the highly visual work of Welfare State International, where visual metaphor was utilised more often than conventional staging and visualisation methods. Additionally, *Ironland*, like the works of these troupes, does not bother providing solutions to the problems it portrays, but merely highlights and/or satirises the conflict generally. In an ideal world, or if I were cleverer, I might have been able to formulate some suggestions for possible solutions to the conflict in the Middle East and written them into the play. In *Ironland*, the only characters who attempt to ruin the general's fictional regime are Jose and Anne, and their method is not successful; however, I did think it was important to show them trying to do something about the general's dictatorship, as opposed to sitting and waiting it out, as Charity and the other characters appear to do. This might not be a

solution, but it does show the characters acting and attempting to make their situations better; it was my hope that audiences would recognise this and possibly do the same.

As a research experiment, the text was designed according to the aims mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Whilst writing *Ironland*, I constantly considered how much additional training would be required, whether the characters I were writing were suitable to the performers and their skill levels, as well as how the piece needed to be visualised in order to effectively address the aesthetic aim of my research. The characters in *Ironland* are based on those of the *commedia dell'arte*, but are not and were not meant to be authentic; my intention with these characters was to create contemporary stereotypes using the *commedia* archetype characters as models. By doing this, I hoped that the characters would be more recognisable to contemporary audiences and subsequently have a positive effect on the way they learned from their fictional situation. It would be important for rehearsals to make sure the performers were aware of this and I would eventually create a warm up that would take the evolutionary character-building process further to ensure this was done effectively.

The history lessons delivered by Dr Cleaver in scenes ii and iv of the text were meant to act as context to the current Middle East conflict and not to provide commentary on the fictional situation presented in the other scenes of the play. I had hoped that this distinction would be made clear by how I visualised these scenes on stage, i.e. by using techniques different to those used in the other scenes. The significance of the history lessons were to highlight moments of Middle Eastern history where Western involvement had in some way lead to ongoing/prolonged conflict and how this effects how Middle Eastern states perceive the west today. In addition to Iran and Iraq, I had originally written a lecture about Zionism and the creation of Israel for scene ii; however, I felt that this issue was far too complex for a five minute lecture and it was later cut from the performance.

The overall message of *Ironland* is this: the conflict in the Middle East was bred by previous generations, never resolved and history is now repeating itself; there is a danger of allowing this to become a constant cycle of conflict/non-resolution. In addition, it also questions what makes the collective 'us' such passive viewers; as Rose states in scene vi, "People spend more time in front of the TV or on the computer than they do with other people. Being so isolated, I don't find it surprising that no one seems to care about stuff. And, watching TV almost makes them not real. People are dying, but they are dying in a box in the corner of the front room." It was my hope that, on some level, the audience might recognise themselves as the passive audience Rose is

referring to and that, in turn, they might use the information presented in the performance in a positive, active manner.

### **Section 3: Rehearsal Process / Additional Training**

As a director I feel that my job is to encourage actors to make choices about their characters that work with a text or idea to create images that, when combined with the work of other actors and elements, such as settings and/or properties, create a story or statement. I have never favoured dictating the every move of an actor – it is tiring for me and often frustrating for the actor. That is not to say, however, that I enter a project without ideas about how certain characters should be performed or certain scenes to look; on the contrary, I spend a great deal of time considering what the best means of telling a story through performance are, and ultimately how it should be visualised. Additionally, with regards to this project, I had to consider how certain techniques would be utilised for the sake of visualising history, and, above all, make this history and certain ideas clear to the audience. In this section I will discuss the directing methods I utilised to prepare *Diplomacy in Ironland* – both with regards to encouraging actors to make specific choices about their characters and my scenic and puppet design. Additionally, this section will detail the additional *commedia dell'arte*, puppet and stilt-walking training the performers received during the rehearsal period. I do not feel that recounting each rehearsal will be necessary here; instead, in this section I shall address how my approach as a director and designer shaped – both positively and negatively – this project and how this affected the final performance and the outcomes of this research project.

Probably like many directors, before I can begin blocking a play with performers, I need to know what the setting is going to be. Edward Gordon Craig, whose directing theories I am quite fond of, in his “The Art of Theatre” explains that: “[The director] is to read the play [...] and in reading [...] begin to see the whole colour, rhythm, action of the thing. He then puts the play aside for some time, and his mind’s eye mix his palette (to use a painter’s expression) with the colours which the impression of the play has called up [...] (Craig 1968 [1905]:123). In the case of *Ironland*, this was much easier to do as I had written the play, and my ideas regarding design, to some extent, had already been written into the text. I imagined for *Ironland* a very bright colour palette. As it was set in a refugee camp there would need to be tents for the play’s refugee characters to live, but because the lecture scenes were to take place in Dr Cleaver’s farm house, these tents would need to be mobile as to exit the space quickly.

Additionally, shadow puppets had been written in, so there would need to be a screen to project them on to. To incorporate all of these elements, I decided to model the setting and arrangement of the performance space after traditional circus spaces and structures, which consisted of a ring for equestrian acts with a pantomime stage attached at one end. Helen Stoddart's book *Rings of Desire: circus history and representation* details the various structures that circus adopted from its inception at Philip Astley's school for riding in April 1768 (Stoddart 2000: 13) to the Cirque du Soleil spectacles of today. She describes the transition from outdoor riding school equestrian acts (which were the first circuses) to an indoor ring, 13 metres in diameter, with gas lighting and a pantomime stage attached to one end. Stoddart writes:

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the circus architectural development is the role of a stage as a supplementary performance space alongside the ring. Astley's first amphitheatre established the archetypal arrangement of a combination ring and small proscenium stage, surround by two levels of seating. Far from dying on the vine immediately, however, the stage, for a while, increased in size and importance. In fact, as Speaight points out, the stage in Astley's third amphitheatre was bigger than any other in the English theatre of the period. Not only did many of the most influential early artistic directors have their roots in the minor theatres of the day (for example Charles Dibdin and Grimaldi Snr), but the pantomimes and melodramas produced were of a similar nature (2000: 36-7).

The setting for *Ironland* evolved from this traditional circus structure. In the centre of the space was a painted circle (the ring); upstage of the circle was a stage with a red-velvet drape false proscenium (the pantomime stage). The other two features of the set were the two tents, one red, and the other green, fitted with castors to allow for quick scene changes. In addition to the circus structure, the smaller stages of the *commedia dell'arte* were also considered. For this reason, the circle was restricted to five metres in diameter. The audience would be seated in a U-formation around the downstage side of the circle.

In addition to planning the aesthetic elements of a performance, Craig indicates that it is ideal for a director to know the whole action and rhythm of a piece as well before s/he sets to work. Again, here, tremendous effort goes into planning the traffic patterns of the actors on stage on my part. I tend to use Stanislavsky's method of script analysis as the first step in achieving this. Stanislavsky's method breaks a script into beats, and each beat is assigned a verb to describe the function of that beat. However, from experience I know that an actor might make a suitable character choice that sometimes disagrees with the verb I have assigned that beat, which, at times, can affect the rhythm of an entire scene. When applying this method to *Ironland*, I found myself





**Figure 3** Set design rendering for *Diplomacy in Ironland*. In the centre, is a circle meant to represent a traditional circus ring. The drapes at the back of the space mark off a pantomime stage. The trees, shown behind the green tent in this rendering, were later cut. Illustration: Jason Price.

Beat analysis is, however, meant for assisting actors in developing their characters. As a director, it can be used to assist in explaining to actors how their characters might move, gesture and/or act generally, and is therefore useful for creating the first layer of a visual; it is only marginally useful with regards to creating specific traffic patterns on stage. Following beat analysis, I literally map out the traffic patterns of the performers on stage. The method, similar to traditional storyboarding, is done in two perspectives: a front-view, which allows me to consider heights and how this affects the patterns; and a birds-eye view, which is basically a map of the patterns created for a scene, and is far easier to work with when blocking actors. Figures 4 and 5 show two examples of these storyboards from my director's notebook for scene iv of *Ironland*. The right-hand column shows the line in the text where the movement of a character begins; these are numbered and colour coded to make it easier to read. The colours are then used to draw the traffic patterns onto the map and indicate the order of each pattern. At the bottom of the storyboard is a description of how the characters are to move and when that movement should end. The following abbreviations were used for certain characters in the storyboards shown in Figures 4 and 5: BG – British Gentleman; RK – Reza Khan; RS – Reza Shah; M – Mossadegh; P – politicians.

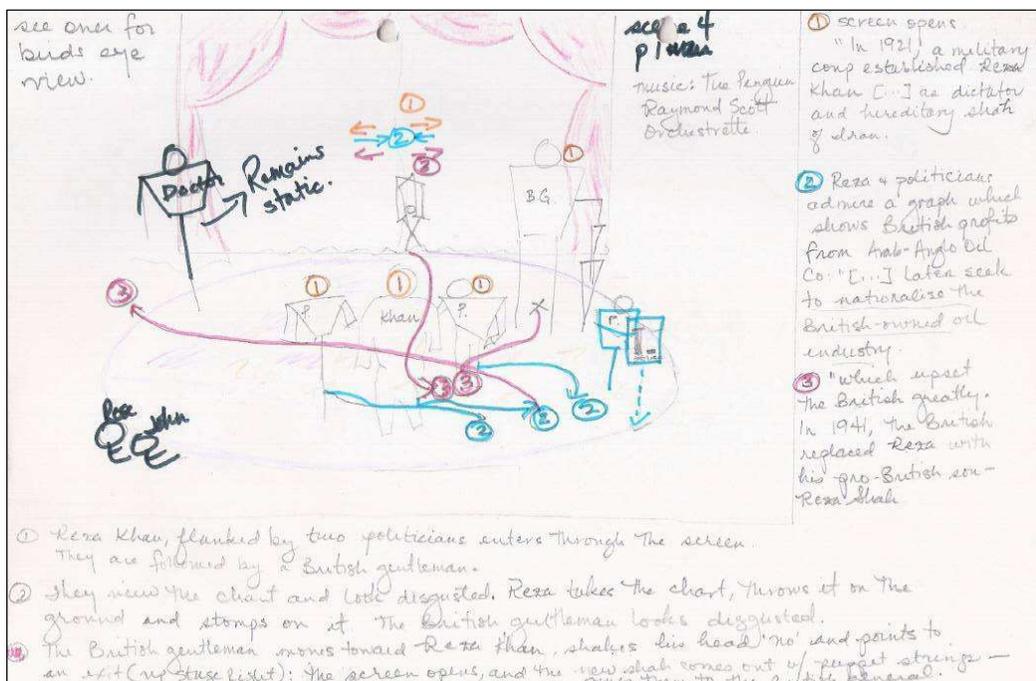


Figure 4: Storyboard for scene iv of *Diplomacy in Ironland*. Illustration by Jason Price.

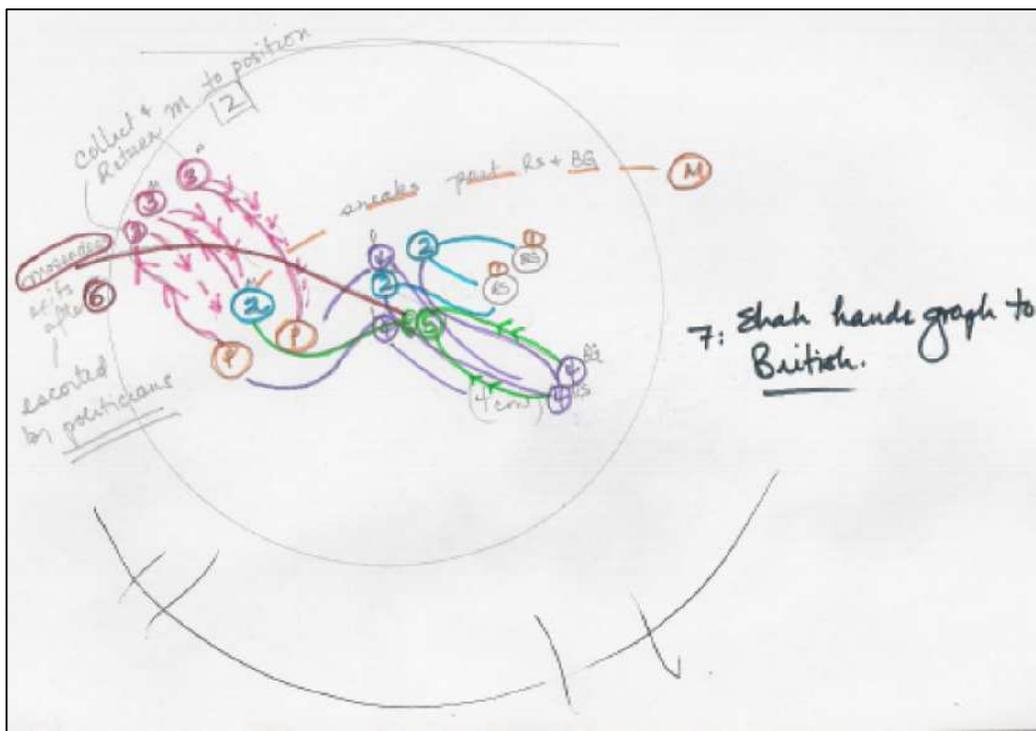


Figure 5: Storyboard, birds-eye view.

As mentioned previously, I do not dictate the every move of an actor on stage, and this is where my use of Craig’s theory of the (to borrow from his *übermarionette* theory) *überdirector* ends. When I block a scene, I tend to only give the actor stage

directions. As for choices about character, I generally provide a description of how I view the character to the performer playing that particular role and then try to encourage them to make choices on their own. If the choices they make do not read well, look awkward, or are completely off the mark, I will then ask the actor to come up with several other choices and I select the one that I believe works best. There are times, however, when this approach does not work. For example, Victoria Anne Horn, who played Charity Candour in *Ironland*, is an extremely self-conscious performer. She is neither comfortable making choices on her own nor improvising character options in front of me and the rest of the cast; therefore, to save time, it became necessary to dictate every movement and gesture to her.

In *Ironland*, there was little doubt that the stage would always appear overcrowded – I had designed it that way. However, my worry was that this overcrowding might make symbolic spatial patterns, which were created to show ideological rifts between characters, less obvious to audiences; hence, I would need to consider how characters removed from the grouping might make this ideological rift apparent to audiences. An example of this can be seen in scene iii when General Irons and Charity Candour go head-to-head over his plans to become president of the camp and open a bank. The scene is played with Anne, Jose, and Charity tightly grouped together on a very small bench listening to the general's plans (Figure 6). He is removed from the group by a considerable distance. Once the plans have been made clear, Charity stands up and moves slightly downstage; she does not, however, move closer to the general. Here, Charity, who is located downstage right, and the general, who is downstage left, appear, at least to the audience, to be on the sides of the stage that best represents their political ideologies. As their argument intensifies, Charity travels slowly towards the general. Only as she shouts the last few lines of her argument does she actually reach him, and, for a brief moment, the two stand face-to-face (Figure 7); the general then turns and walks towards the servants, leaving Charity isolated in the downstage left area; after a few seconds of isolation, she exits. Moments later, the general places himself directly between Anne and Jose on the small bench, which, because of the general's size appears ridiculous, but is spatially significant as he will be reliant upon and eventually receive their assistance; the image shows the future of *Ironland* – the president and his cabinet. In the last moments of the scene, however, Anne and Jose privately agree to help the general until something or someone better comes along to supply food and/or leadership; for this important revelation, they leave the bench and move to the stage left side of the stage as to not be heard – leaving the

general alone on the bench. It is this image of two-against-one that the audience is left with at the end of the scene, which foreshadows action that will be taken later by the *zanni* pair.



**Figure 6** The General (in the foreground) explains his plans to Charity Candour, Jose and Anna (seated). Note the distance between performers. Photo: Jon Primrose.



**Figure 7** Charity and the general face off in scene iii. Photo: Jon Primrose.

Symbolic traffic and spatial patterns were also used for visualising the lecture scenes. This was perhaps most noticeable in scene iv of *Ironland* where masks and stilts were utilised to tell the history of Iran and the Iran-Iraq War. As previously mentioned in this chapter, I had imagined spectacular re-telling of the history of western involvement in the Middle East; it was in scene iv that I was able to salvage some of

those initial ideas. Stilts and the height they provided some characters, for example, would allow me to show power relationships, like Britain's and America's involvement in seeking control of Middle Eastern oil and their general disregard for the Iranian economy and government in the process. The masks were designed to represent the historical figures mentioned in the lecture, but were intentionally stylised and distorted as to represent the fact that the history we were presenting was fragmented and not always in a comprehensive context. The addition of puppet strings to the actor playing Reza Shah would add another symbolic element, representing Britain's tight control of the Iranian government. The shadow puppet show in scene ii was designed with similar symbolic intentions; however, as shadow puppets by their very nature are objects that represent a being (human or otherwise) in shadow form, they are already symbolic in their own right. Because of this, I felt I needed to be far less liberal with visual symbolism than I had been in other scenes. I therefore selected to draw on cultural stereotypes in order to design the puppets and shadow settings. For instance, the Paris Peace Conference was represented by a shadow of the Eiffel Tower (seen in Figure 8); the French government by a man with a beret, cigarette and glass of wine; the English by a man in a bowler hat carrying an umbrella; Iraq by a shadow landscape with palm trees and oil derricks. As elementary as the symbolic/stereotypical features of these performance objects and settings may seem, as the scene was narrated by the doctor and the puppets never spoke, such obvious choices, I felt, were crucial for audience comprehension.



**Figure 8** Shadow puppet show in rehearsals. This image shows the borders of the contemporary Middle East being formed at the Paris Peace Conference. Underneath the Eiffel Tower is Iraq and Transjordan (Jordan and Palestine). Photo: Jason Price

Perhaps this would be a good time to return to the question of appropriate/adequate skills training as it is likely becoming apparent from the descriptions of the scenes mentioned above that there were a number of techniques and skills incorporated into the production of *Ironland* that had not been part of the initial training workshops discussed in Section 2 of this chapter. Additionally, I feel it is important at this stage to address how the *commedia dell'arte* training was carried over into rehearsals in the form of a daily warm-up for the performers and how I encouraged them to use this training to develop their own characters using the *commedia* characters as archetypes.

One of the skills absent from the training workshops, but planned for the performance, was stilt-walking. Stilt-walking is not an easy skill to master; it requires a performer that is not afraid of heights, has good balance, and, if necessary, can fall appropriately as to ensure no bones are broken. My own training in stilt-walking at the Circus Space was done with professionally made stilts, in a room full of mats and ropes. Ropes were tightly strung from one end of the room to the other. Once balance was established, I was able to grab hold of a rope and walk across the room. The rope acted as a railing – if I felt like I was falling, or was in fact falling, the rope prevented me from doing so; the security provided by the ropes, I believe, allowed me to become confident with the stilts more quickly. In the Department, this training approach was not possible as ropes of a suitable length were not readily available; furthermore, the rehearsal studios are rather large and even if ropes had been available, hanging them appropriately/securely would not be an easy task (and would have caused damage to the walls of the studio; it should also be noted that we were not allowed to use the smaller studios that would have allowed for this training approach since they had new sprung floors and the stilts would have damaged them), and, finally, the stilts available were handmade by technicians in the Department, were about fifteen years old and were completely different to the stilts I had trained on. Knowing that I would need to seek out other ways in which to train my stilt-walkers, I turned to the internet (books on stilt walking, it seems, have not been written). I found many websites dedicated to the art of stilt-walking, but not about training performers. However, I eventually located one that mentioned a method which replaced the rope with walking sticks. Obviously, walking sticks would not provide as good of security as the rope railings, but if I wanted to use stilts (and indeed I did) then I would need to attempt to train my stilt-walkers using this method.



**Figure 9** Ms Anne-Marie Cosco demonstrating one way of falling which avoids natural instinct and helps to avoid injury. Photo: Jason Price.

Perhaps the most important aspect of stilt-walking training is learning how to fall correctly. Typically, when one falls down, the natural instinct is to prepare for the fall by extending the arms away from the body towards the direction one is falling (i.e., the floor). On stilts, obeying this natural instinct is very dangerous and most often results in broken fingers, arms and/or wrists; hence, the first step in stilt training is learning how to ignore this natural instinct. Although there is no exact method of falling in stilt-walking training, it is generally suggested that the stilt-walker attempt to land on a fleshy area: on their back, or, if falling forward, attempt to turn to one side and land on an un-extended arm/shoulder; landing in this manner will still hurt, but probably less so than a broken wrist. This stage of stilt-walking training should be done without stilts because learning to fall in this manner is painful enough without the additional two to three feet of height which increases the force of impact.

The second stage of stilt training involves actually putting the stilts on and finding balance. If it had been possible to have the rope railings, the process would involve strapping on the stilts and being assisted to the rope; once at the rope, it is possible to find the balance and allow the feet and legs to adjust to the additional weight of the stilts. This is one of the most crucial aspects of stilt training, as without this a performer will not be able to walk properly. I found this process much harder and took far longer with a walking-stick support. Anne-Marie Cosco and Vesna Jovick, who had

agreed to do the stilt-walking training, both had difficulty adjusting to the weight of the stilt and this would hinder their progress up to the day of the performance. Additionally, Ms. Cosco and Ms. Jovick used the walking stick as a crutch as opposed to a temporary support; the overall effect appeared clumsy and, at times, frightening. Sadly, Ms. Cosco and Ms. Jovick were never able to move beyond the balance-finding stage of the process. In fact, the two became so reliant on the walking sticks that they had to be incorporated into the performance. During the last week of rehearsals, after a few too many incorrectly manoeuvred falls, Ms. Jovick asked to be replaced as a stilt-walker as she was too frightened to continue. Given that there was not enough time to train someone else, Ms. Cosco took on both of the stilt-walking roles and scene iv had to be re-blocked to accommodate the change. Due to time constraints and the unavailability of appropriate training conditions, the stilt-walking training was not successful and I will need to carefully consider the use of stilts in future productions.



**Figure 10** Stilt-walking training: Ms Vesna Jovick finding her balance on the stilts. Please note the use of the walking-stick, which is not customarily used. Photo: Jason Price.

A great deal of my knowledge regarding building and manipulating shadow puppets comes from David Currell's book *Puppets and Puppet Theatre* (1999). In

Chapter 6 of his book he discusses shadow puppets: appropriate building materials, how to manipulate them, and different methods of lighting them; therefore, it has been an invaluable source of information. In addition, I consulted Jay Sinthuphan, a fellow PhD student in the Department of Drama who specialises in puppetry, about puppet practices; Jay was particularly useful with regards to puppet theatre dramaturgy, which is something I had not previously considered. As for building the puppets, I did not believe that in the seven-week rehearsal period available there would be enough time to hold a puppet workshop and have the students assist with building the puppets. Additionally, I wanted the puppets to look as if they were made by the same artist. Hence, I built the puppets at home with the help of Currell's book. It took about four weeks to complete them.

Once complete, and with only three weeks of rehearsals remaining, I set aside two rehearsals to train the performers in how to manipulate the puppets and block the shadow puppet show. Rather than creating puppets with incredibly complex mechanics, I kept them simple: the joints of the puppets were fastened together loosely with paper fasteners, which would allow for the puppet's limbs to move slightly without much effort, providing a bit more characterisation and variety when handled. The primary skills necessary for shadow puppet manipulation are a keen eye and a controlled wrist and hand. By 'keen eye' I am referring specifically to entrances and exits of the puppet: a handler must be aware of their puppets placement in the light and the shadow being produced on the screen in front of them. Having good control over ones' wrists and hands is also important: if the hand and wrist are moved too much, then the puppet appears to be having a seizure, too little and the puppet comes across as a shadow statue.



**Figure 11** Shadow puppet show in rehearsals. Here, the British (centre and right side of image) conquer Baghdad in 1917 after fighting Iraqi 'rebels' (left of the image). Photo: Jason Price.

In rehearsals, when working with shadow puppets, we used an overhead projector as the lighting source and a white wall to project onto (Figures 8 and 11 show this). When initially blocking the shadow puppet show, I selected conventional staging, treating the puppets as if they were live performers on a proscenium stage. The settings flew in and out as if suspended from a pulley system; the characters entered and exited from screen-right or left. A week before the performance, I invited Jay Sinthuphan to view the shadow puppet show. He disagreed with my conventional staging choices and suggested that I take a more traditional shadow theatre approach. He showed the cast and me different ways of moving the puppets, which consisted of bringing the settings and characters into the scene from the light source outwards thereby creating a blurry-to-focused affect – an affect that I believed made the puppet show confusing and appear sloppy. I eventually selected to balance the existing conventional blocking with some of Mr. Sinthuphan's suggestions. In the next section I will discuss how the shadow show was later affected during the performance by technical problems and whether or not this hindered the show's effectiveness with audiences.

I would like to conclude this section by discussing the *commedia* warm-ups developed throughout the rehearsal period and how I encouraged the performers to develop their own characters through a process I refer to as archetype evolution; I have chosen to use this term because I imagine the evolution of the *commedia dell'arte* characters into circus clowns and pantomime dames went through a very similar process (it just took far longer to do). The warm-up begins with the performers forming a circle. The performers then enter the circle as themselves, transform into the *commedia* character that their own character was modelled on and speak a line from the *Ironland* text. For example, Sasha Jacques, who played Rose Candour, would enter the circle, transform into *commedia's* first actress and deliver one of Rose's lines from the *Ironland* text to one of the other performers in the circle. Once all nine performers had been in the circle once, I then instructed them to move about the rehearsal space as their *commedia* character and interact with the other characters, again using lines from the *Ironland* text. After several minutes, I would instruct the performers to return to the circle as themselves. Once back in the circle, they would repeat the same exercise as before, however, this time they were instructed to move to the centre of the circle as their *commedia* character and then transform into their *Ironland* character. The purpose of this exercise was twofold: 1) it reinforced the *commedia dell'arte* training and 2) I felt that the better the performers understood the archetypes the more appropriate their choices for the *Ironland* counterparts would be. Although this exercise did not prove

effective with all of the performers, I did feel that the majority benefited from it; most noticeably, General Irons (based on Pantalone), Jose (Harlequin), Anna (Columbina) and Dr Cleaver (Dottore).

#### **Section 4: *Diplomacy in Ironland (and other tales) in Performance (DVD 2)***

In this section I will discuss *Diplomacy in Ironland* as it was performed on 16 and 17 June 2007. This section will detail how some of the skills training, blocking and other issues discussed in this chapter were altered during the final days of rehearsal, specifically the technical rehearsals, and how these changes effected the execution of certain skills/techniques and aesthetic elements of the performance and questions whether this could have effected audience reception. As the performance is included alongside this section for viewing, I feel that a more brief/direct approach is suitable as some of the problems will likely be noticeable to the viewer anyway. The following is a list of issues that arose during the three live performances. The issues are discussed in chronological order.

*Shadow Puppets* (scene ii): For shadow puppets to appear clearly on a screen, the fabric needs to be tight (or relatively tight) with no gatherings or seams visible that might intrude on or distort the images. The screen available for *Ironland's* puppet show was, in fact, a very large white drape with large folds and seams that distorted the shadows being projected considerably. The centre seam of this drape was necessary as entrances and exits were made by the performers through its opening, but the folds were eliminated by stretching and fastening the drape tightly to the track from which it was hung. However, because the screen had to be tightly stretched, it would never completely close and therefore exposed the backstage area. As a result, I had to add a centre aisle to the seating plan to avoid this opening; despite this, the opening still permitted much of the audience a view of the backstage area.

Another problem was created by the need of a projector for scene iv, which occupied the centre of the backstage area - the same location that was required for the overhead projector, the light source for the shadow puppets. As a result, we moved the overhead projector off centre by a considerable distance as to not obstruct the light of the other projector. One of the problems created by moving the overhead projector to one side was that in order to centre the light on the screen, the projector had to be turned on a 45 degree angle towards the screen, which distorted the angle of the light considerably. To remedy this, two pieces of paper were taped onto the overhead projector in a '>' formation as to create a rectangular frame around the projected light.

The puppet handlers were also affected by the shift in light and the scene had to be re-blocked to accommodate this change. However, during performance some of the puppet handlers forgot about their new locations and the new blocking and the shadows projected were never as uniform as intended; in fact, there were portions of the shadow puppet performance that were slovenly.



**Figure 12** Image from scene iv of *Diplomacy in Ironland* showing Ms. Cosco as Uncle Sam delivering money and chemical weapons information to Saddam Hussein (Nick Cosslett). Moments earlier she had also been on stilts as the British Gentleman. Photo: Jon Primrose.

*Stilt-walking* (scene iv): Two days before the first live performance, Vesna Jovick asked me whether or not I would be able to train someone else to walk on the stilts because she feared that she would not be able to do so. She explained that she, against my strict orders, had gone privately into a studio with the stilts and had had several severe falls (nothing was broken, but her knees were badly bruised). At this stage it was impossible for me to train someone else – there was no time to do so. Even if I had had several weeks, it would still have been impossible as all nine of the *Ironland* performers were already in the scene. Anne-Marie Cosco agreed to take on both roles, but this required me to re-block the British Gentleman’s exit and Uncle Sam’s entrance, which simultaneously affected the movements of six other actors. In order for Ms. Cosco to

perform both roles, much of scene iv needed to be reversed so that the stilt-walking characters, which had originally appeared on opposite sides of the stage, could enter and appear on the same side. Once re-blocked, there was the issue of costume to consider. There was approximately 80 seconds between Ms. Cosco's exit as the British Gentleman and her entrance as Uncle Sam. After several failed attempts at doing a quick costume change, I took a pair of scissors to the British Gentleman's trousers, cut the outside seams and stitched Velcro into them. Although Ms Cosco's costume change would be heard by the audience (as a result of the Velcro), at least she would make her entrances and exits as both characters. Despite this, Ms Cosco's stilt-walking abilities were still very poor and although I liked the symbolism provided by the height of her characters to the scene, she was not capable (and I was too afraid) to have her enter the scene fully. Twenty minutes before the first performance it was agreed that she would enter the space just enough to be seen by the audience (this was about five feet into the performance space), which would allow her to enter and exit at a reasonably safe pace.

The doctor's lectures (scene ii, iv, vi): Jonathan Hunt found Dr Cleaver's lecture's incredibly difficult to memorise. I do not blame him. They are not overly poetic and extremely lengthy. I had discussed the possibility with Mr. Hunt quite early on of writing the lectures into a book in which he would be able to read from during the performance. I continued to remind him of this up until the final dress rehearsal, which is when he decided to sit down with an old accounts ledger and handwrite all of the lectures inside it. I was pleased that he chose to do this, but panicked during the final run-through when he stumbled through the lecture as a result of his unfamiliarity with the new handwritten copy. There was very little I could do aside from offer encouragement. He stumbled again during the first live performance, taking very long breaks on more than one occasion to find his place in the text, but this balanced out for the final two performances.

Multimedia/Projections and Sound (scenes iv/all): Chloe Strickland had initially signed up to do the lighting design only. Once she arrived at the studio on the first day of technical rehearsals, the technical director turned over all of the technical responsibilities to her: running lights, sound, and projections. I am still not entirely sure why he gave her such a task, but she did, generally, manage pretty well. The text-based projections in scene iv were late during every performance because Ms. Strickland was also activating one of the many lighting and sound cues that occurred simultaneously. As I did not place any specific questions on the audience questionnaires regarding these

technical elements, I am unable to determine whether or not they affected audience comprehension.

Despite the above, I was generally satisfied by the three live performances. In seven weeks, 25 rehearsals, 172 rehearsal hours, my performers managed to adequately perform a number of popular skills. Their ability to do so tells me that with certain skills and forms, like, for instance, *commedia dell'arte*, it is possible in a limited amount of time to train performers and have them perform it accurately in front of live audiences. Puppet manipulation, although I imparted part of this training to others, would also seem to be a relatively accessible and acquirable skill to incorporate into a performance with limited rehearsal time and, as I will show in the next section, one that brings with it a reasonably high audience comprehension level. Stilt-walking, on the other hand, is perhaps not as successful without the appropriate equipment, space and time. Although in the end Ms. Cosco was able to walk on the stilts for the amount of time required by her characters, the intended effect was overshadowed by her fear, my fear, and the audience's collective fear of her falling. Without the confidence gained through adequate training, stilt-walking will not be considered for future performances. For this performance, because some of the forms, i.e. *commedia*, were merely being used as a foundation, and were not being featured in isolation or in a more *authentic* way, then the training the students received was, I feel, adequate. However, if this performance had required the students to perform the form/techniques in a more traditional, or authentic way, their skill levels would not have been. Hence, with regards to the forms being explored and the issue of training and future experiments, one thing seems clear: a more intensive approach will be necessary if a higher proficiency is to be reached.

### **Section 5: Audience Reception**

Following each performance members of the audience completed a questionnaire which contained questions regarding the efficacy of the popular techniques used in the performance. What follows is an analysis of the audiences' reception to the three live performances of *Diplomacy in Ironland* held on 16 and 17 June 2007, which were held at the University of Exeter's Roborough Studios; this analysis specifically refers to the aims, objectives and associated research questions of this project, and considers whether the audience's responses indicate whether or not these have been fulfilled or answered. For a full analysis of the audiences' reception, please see Appendix A.

*General Information and Disclaimer*

A total of 97 questionnaires were completed; this represents 100 per cent of the audience in attendance. 53 of the responders were women and 44 were men. 56 of the responders were between the ages of 16 and 24; 23 were between the ages of 25 and 44; and 18 were above the age of 45.

Before proceeding on to the analysis, I would like to draw the readers attention to what may already be obvious limitations of the evidence collected from the audience questionnaires. Although a cost effective means of conducting research through practice, using university facilities to mount a production, and using undergraduate students as a cast, also brings a number of problems. First, as can be seen in the figures above, over half of the audience for *Diplomacy in Ironland* was made up of undergraduate students – e.g. friends and peers of the cast. Further, I can confirm that each cast member's families attended at least one of the performances. So, out of the 97 total audience members, approximately 80% of them knew someone in the cast. Consequently, there is a possibility that some of the audience members provided sympathetic feedback to the performance as a favour to, or in support of, their friends or family members.

Other limitations of the evidence gained from the audience questionnaires that need to be addressed before we continue concerns education and class. Ideally, *Diplomacy in Ironland* would have been performed before working class audiences unfamiliar with the crisis in the Middle East (although, admittedly, with as much media attention as the crisis had received, finding a completely uninformed audience would have probably been impossible). Most audience members were well informed about the crisis in the Middle East; subsequently, this performance may have been reinforcing their knowledge of the crisis, as opposed to educating them. Class also needs to be considered here. Although it is not my intention to make my research about class, as was noted in Chapter One, popular theatre has traditionally functioned to entertain and educate working class audiences. With an audience of predominantly young, middle-class intellectuals, who perhaps have more complex theatrical tastes (as a consequence of being drama students), the simplicity of the *Diplomacy* text might have been perceived by some to not address the Middle Eastern crisis in sufficient detail.

Although the limitations on the evidence are great, I would like to point out that performing at the University and having an available audience, albeit of colleagues, friends and families of the cast, was the only financially viable way of conducting this

research. The audience reception statistics gathered from the questionnaires are crucial to my research, but because of the number of limitations, I do not believe that they should be viewed as concrete evidence. Hence, from this point forward, the audience reception statistics gained from the performances will be viewed as suggestions of the efficacy of the performance and popular forms used; these, then, might be pursued in healthier research conditions in the future.

### *The Didactic Element of Performance*

*Question: Do Audiences comprehend the information being presented in the performance and how is this level of comprehension affected by the use of certain popular theatre forms and techniques?* To answer this question, Question 1 asked audiences to indicate whether they felt that they knew more about the Middle East following the performance than they did before it. 88 responders indicated that they did, whilst 9 felt that they did not. As a whole, then, this performance succeeded in educating audiences about the Middle East, with a vast majority of audiences claiming to have learned something new about this region from the performance.

To better understand the didactic potential of the shadow puppet form, Question 4 asked audiences to indicate whether their presence in scene ii as a visual aid to Dr. Cleaver's lecture had been distracting, too silly/strange, somewhat helpful, or very helpful. 57 total responders felt that the shadow puppet show was somewhat helpful as a visual to accompany Dr Cleaver's lecture, while 18 of the total responders found it very helpful. When considering the success of the shadow puppets in educating audiences about the Middle East, I can conclude that the majority of responders, 75, felt that the shadow puppet show was either somewhat or very helpful. However, it should also be noted that 13 responders felt that the use of shadow puppets was too distracting, and 3 felt that it was 'too silly/strange'; therefore, a total of 16 felt that the shadow puppet show could either have been used in a different way, or, as it was presented during the performance, it was not useful for them in comprehending the lecture. Some members of the audience indicated in the 'Additional Comments' section of the questionnaire that "the shadow puppets need work" and that they were "not as good as people". These comments suggest that it may have been the quality of the shadow puppet show that caused a problem for these audience members. Hence, I must take into consideration the problems associated with the puppet show that I discussed in the previous section and whether having the original puppet show, unaltered by technical problems, might have made for higher audience comprehension.

The responses between audience members of different genders to the shadow puppets are also worth noting. Whilst a total of 45 men found the shadow show to be either somewhat or very helpful, only 30 women felt the same way. Even more significant is that 15 men found the shadow show to be 'very helpful' whilst only three women found it to be so. Additionally, more women found the shadow show to be 'too distracting' (eight women; five men). Rather than speculate a reason for this divide, I intend to study this further: under what circumstances might a shadow puppet show be as helpful to women as it was for men? Additionally, is the puppet show's success with men a result of the shadow puppets, or would alternative puppet forms (hand and rod, for example) be as successful? Finally, are other puppet forms more successful with women than the shadow puppets were in this instance? For future experiments, it will be necessary to consider these questions.

Question 5 asked audiences whether the combination of popular skills and techniques in scene iv had made the lecture: confusing; fun, but confusing; easier to understand; or more interesting. 15 responders felt that portraying these events with a combination of popular techniques made them easier to understand. Furthermore, 51 responders felt that it made the scene more interesting. 14 responders claimed that the techniques made the scene both easier to understand and more interesting. Hence, 79 total responders felt that the scene was useful as it made the issues presented either easier to understand, more interesting or both.

However, 10 responders felt that portraying the events in this way made scene iv 'fun, but confusing'. Significantly, all 10 of these responders were aged between 16 and 25 year olds; hence, roughly 20% of this age group felt confused by the techniques being utilized in this way. In order to obtain a higher comprehension level amongst this age group, I must then consider for the second research project whether arranging the techniques in a different way might make them less confusing. Additionally, I will also need to consider whether the combination of the techniques generally causes confusion for this audience, and whether this is minimized if the techniques are presented in isolation; however, I must do so without destroying the 'fun' aesthetic which they also acknowledged.

The final question to help gauge the didactic effectiveness of the forms was Question 6. It asked audiences to indicate whether their perceptions had been affected in any way by the performance. 39 of the 97 responders felt that their perceptions of the Middle East were not effected by the performance. 38 of all responders felt that their perceptions had been somewhat affected, whilst 15 confirmed that they had definitely

been affected. Combined, a total 53 responders, a majority, felt that their perceptions of the current conflict had been somewhat or definitely affected by the performance. This indicates that, as a whole, the performance proved enlightening or informing enough to affect how the audience perceives the current conflict in the Middle East, and that the performance met its didactic aim.

### *Aesthetics and Entertainment*

*Question: Do audiences perceive the forms that are providing the information as being aesthetically pleasing and generally entertaining, as they were traditionally designed to do?* None of the questions on the questionnaire engaged with this aim and question specifically enough. Although one of the principal aims of the research, it was neglected in this instance in order to fully explore the didactic impact of the performance. An attempt was made with certain questions to create answers that might help shed some light on this, but, in hindsight, I realize that adjectives like ‘fun’, which were used in Questions 4 and 5 to help describe scenes ii and iv, are certainly not specific enough to provide much insight into this aspect of the performance.

To get an idea about how the audience perceived the aesthetic and entertainment value of the performance, I selected to analyze the additional comments section of the questionnaire, which permitted responders to share their thoughts about the performance, and the adjectives appearing in these. 47 of the 97 questionnaires contained additional comments, and 28 of these addressed the performance’s aesthetic and entertainment values; 21 of these were completely positive; whilst 5 were somewhat positive (using both positive and negative adjectives to describe the performance); and 2 were negative. The five most frequently appearing adjectives in these comments were: enjoy (10 responders); good (10 responders); fun (5 responders); excellent (5 responders); and interesting (4 responders). Less frequent adjectives used were: thought-provoking, stimulating, engaging, entertaining, confusing, busy, heavy-handed and strained (each of these was used once each). Some audience members’ comments were incredibly useful, as they pin-pointed areas that they felt were the least attractive or confusing. For instance, the quality of the shadow puppet show was mentioned three times, and the quick pace of the lecture scenes was mentioned twice. So, although this aim and questions regarding the aesthetic and entertainment value of popular performances will need to be addressed more specially on future questionnaires, the audience’s additional comments, in this instance, have been useful in showing that many believed this performance to be aesthetically pleasing and entertaining. Whether

or not the audience found the forms present in the performance, or the performance as a whole to be aesthetically pleasing and generally entertaining, however, is not clear.

#### *Passivism to Activism*

*Question: Did the performance make its audience more active as a response to the issues/situations/information they are presented with?* To help determine whether the performance had met this aim and answer this question, audiences were asked if they felt compelled to share the information presented in the performance with others (Question 6). 46 responders indicated that they felt somewhat compelled to share the issues/information present in *Diplomacy in Ironland* with others, while 34 confirmed that they definitely felt compelled to do so. In total, 80 responders, a significant majority, felt somewhat or definitely compelled to share the information presented in the performance. Similarly, Question 9 asked responders to indicate whether they would recommend this performance to others: 90 responders indicated that they would. The responses to both questions suggest that a majority of audiences will be active because of the performance, and subsequently this aim has been met.

#### *Conclusions from Audience Reception*

Considering the responses to all ten questions and the limitations discussed at the beginning of this section, I feel it is reasonable to conclude that the performance succeeded in meeting the didactic aim with *these audiences*, as a significant majority of them admitted to having learned something from the performance and that many of the forms had made certain scenes more interesting or easier to understand. Additionally, some members of the audience admitted that they were compelled to share the information they had gathered with their friends and family. Although it is impossible to know whether or not they did eventually share this information with others, this figure suggests that the performance may also have been successful in creating an active rather than passive audience.

Unfortunately, the questionnaires lacked questions which might have determined whether the aesthetic aim had been met. Although by exploring their comments I was able to determine that many people did enjoy the performance, this method does not provide a great deal of insight into the individual forms used, and whether or not the audiences found those aesthetically pleasing and entertaining. For future projects it will be essential that the questionnaires address this aim more directly.

I think it is apparent from studying the reception that there is still room for improvement in my approach to incorporating the forms into performance as not all responders felt that they had learned something from it and admitted to having been confused by them. Question 10 asked audiences to rate the performance from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least effective, and 5 being the most effective, in regards to discussing contemporary political and cultural issues. The average of all 97 responses was 3.9. Although this is a fairly high rating, it is apparent that the performance could have addressed the issues in a more effective manner. I will need to consider for future projects how this might be achieved. One area of particular concern was the combination of several techniques in scene iv, and how this confused 20% of audience members between the ages of 16 and 24 years. I feel that it will be important to consider for future experiments how techniques are grouped for performance and if or how this affects audience comprehension, particularly amongst different age groups. Additionally, I think it will be necessary to consider the forms' effectiveness whilst isolated from one another.

The final aspect uncovered by analysing the audiences' responses is that of male/female comprehension in regards to shadow puppets. More men than women perceived the puppet show in *Ironland* to be 'very helpful'; whilst more women than men found the puppet show to be 'confusing'. Given the problems that plagued the puppet show in performance, I must question whether the poorer result with women might have been caused as a result of these. Hence, I think another test using shadow puppets will be necessary, one where the performance is hopefully not hindered by last minute lighting and puppet handler issues. Additionally, I think it would be interesting to experiment with other puppet forms to determine whether the sexes are as equally divided in regards to their perceived effectiveness.

### **Section 6: Conclusion**

The two major enquiries of this experiment, posed at the beginning of this chapter, considered training, specifically how much training would performers need in the popular forms before they might perform them safely and accurately before an audience, and the didactic element of performance, and whether audiences were able to learn from the forms and whether the combination of several popular forms assists with or hampers this. In regard to training: although I was satisfied with what the students were able to achieve in a relatively short period of time, it is clear that they could have benefitted from a more intensive training programme. Their ability to develop

contemporary stereotype characters based on *commedia* characters, I feel, was good. Unfortunately, others skills, like shadow puppetry and stilt-walking, were performed at a considerably lower skill level. In order to remedy this I will need to consider the forms more intensely, practice them more frequently, and determine what the best methods for teaching them are. I feel confident to conclude that the training methods employed to prepare performers for this production were adequate in certain areas, and substandard in others; subsequently, a more intensive training programme will be required to prepare performers for future projects.

In regard to the didactic element of performance: the audiences' responses to the performance suggest that the majority believed that they learned something about the Middle East, that the forms used (even the shadow puppets) had made the information being delivered by Dr. Cleaver in the lecture scenes easier to comprehend, and that, as a result, many believed that their perceptions about the current conflict had been affected. This indicates the popular theatre forms used, and the way in which they were used in this instance, were largely successful. However, it is also clear that some confusion was caused by the forms and the combination of several forms, and this will need to be considered for the other projects.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH PROJECT 2: PROCESSES OF PERFORMING TRAINING, REHEARSAL AND PRODUCTION FOR *FASHIONABLE IMMIGRATION*

Although the audience reception statistics from the *Ironland* project were useful to this thesis, a second project exploring questions regarding the efficacy of popular theatre forms, and new questions that stem from the responses to the *Ironland* project, would be necessary; one research project alone is not enough proof for such enquiries, and a second project might help make the findings of the first more definitive. Additionally, some of the responses to the first project introduced a couple of unexpected issues, i.e., that the combination of several popular forms/techniques in scene four had confused a significant amount (20%) of the 16-24 age group; and that a large proportion of female audience members found the shadow puppets in scene two less useful/helpful as the male audience members had. The second project, then, would be necessary in order to help confirm the findings of the first project and question whether confusion in these age and gender groups might be remedied. In this chapter, I will discuss the development of the second research project, the research questions it was designed to answer and the outcomes of the subsequent performances.

#### *Development of the Research Project: Research Questions and Methodology*

Before discussing how the project was designed, it will first be necessary to review the aims and objectives of my research, the research questions associated with these, and examine these new questions which arose from the first project.

As the aims and objectives have been set out elsewhere in this thesis, I will not spend a great deal of time elaborating on them here. Instead, I will simply remind the reader that the principal aim of my research-through-practice is to analyse the efficacy of popular theatre forms in order to question a viable model for a contemporary political grass-roots theatre; this is being done by evaluating, in particular, 1) the didactic element of performance: do audiences comprehend the factual and/or ideological information being presented through the performance?; 2) the aesthetics of popular performance: do audiences find the forms pleasing and entertaining, which were traditional functions of the forms/styles?; and 3), the stimulus provided by popular forms and whether they are capable of making contemporary passive audiences more active as a response to the issue being explored in the performance.

In addition to engaging with the questions that stem from these aims, my research would also need to consider issues that had arisen from the first project, as well as general uncertainties surrounding the statistics from *Diplomacy in Ironland*. These were:

- (1) Given that the responses from male and female audience members varied in relation to the effectiveness of the shadow puppet show that appeared in scene ii of *Diplomacy in Ironland*, the subsequent performance would need to consider whether this was a result of the technical problems which plagued this scene; whether women do not respond as well to shadow puppets as men; and finally, whether different puppet forms have a similar effect with both genders, or whether a more balanced (positive) response from both genders is achievable.
- (2) The combination of several popular techniques, e.g. mask, dance, mime, stilt-walking, had been used in scene iv of *Diplomacy in Ironland* to create a spectacular history lesson about Iran and the Iran-Iraq War. This had confused 20% of the 18-24 year-old demographic.

Although I would have liked to have considered various combinations/arrangements of the techniques in order to locate the source of this confusion (and, possibly, whether different combinations were capable of remedying it), I felt that by isolating the techniques it might be easier to identify which aspects of the forms, skills and/or styles had been confusing. Hence, this would be one of the principal enquiries of this research project. In addition, by isolating the techniques I would be able to consider a series of important questions: Why are audiences drawn to particular forms? What significance does familiarity play in how an audience receives information and appreciates a performance? What connection is there between an audience being 'entertained' and an audience 'learning'? Does casting play any role in the way an audience responds to a performance? Answers to the questions would be essential if an effective model for a grass-roots theatre could be seriously theorised.

Finally, one of the ongoing questions of my research concerns performer training. Specifically, I needed to explore how much training is required for a performer to safely and effectively execute certain popular techniques in a live performance situation. Although most of the students in *Diplomacy in Ironland* had been able to perform the *commedia* characters at a competent level, their puppet, circus and dance skills had been inadequate; this was largely due to time constraints caused by their busy schedules. It was my goal that for this production we would reach a higher proficiency in all the forms I have selected to explore. By doing so, I had hoped that it might benefit

the aesthetic/entertainment aims of the project, and subsequently have a positive effect on the didactic one.

*Form Selection, Time Constraints, Authenticity, Organisation and Training*

The forms that would be explored in the research performances were selected on two criteria. Firstly, in order to confirm the results from the *Ironland* project, I would need to use the same techniques and forms in the second project. Adding new forms at this stage would only complicate matters. Secondly, as discussed previously, the forms that I had found to be the most frequently used by the twentieth-century popular/political theatre companies/troupes that I examined in Chapter One were *commedia dell'arte*, puppetry, and musical theatre. In addition, these troupes also frequently employed spectacular staging, live music and audience interaction (metatheatricity). However, as most of the troupes (WSI, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Bread and Puppet Theatre, 7:84 England), combined multiple popular techniques much like I had done in *Ironland*, then I felt that in order to better understand how effective each of the forms are in relaying information to audiences that I would need to separate the forms and test audience reception to each form. Hence, the three forms that would be explored through practice for this project – *commedia*, puppetry, and musical theatre – stem directly from these troupes. The only new form that would be considered would be large-scale or ‘pole’ puppets, similar to those used by the Bread and Puppet Theatre and WSI. The reason I chose to explore this puppet form in addition to shadow theatre was to test whether these might prove more effective with female audience members than the shadow puppets had been in *Ironland*. Hence, both shadow and large-scale puppets would be used in the same performance, thereby permitting both genders to determine which of the two forms are more aesthetically pleasing and informative.

The next consideration I had was that of time. This project needed to be able to explore the forms thoroughly, but had to do so in a reasonable amount of time. I initially proposed that each performance would be 20 minutes long. I felt that this would be sufficient time to introduce a simple narrative with each of the three popular forms and still be comprehensible to the audience. However, 20 minutes would be a short amount of time to discuss and explore a sensitive political or social issue in much detail. With *Ironland* I had been able to separate the facts about Middle Eastern history from the fictional story of the General’s rise to power in the UN refugee camp; this placed the

responsibility of juxtaposing the real and fictitious aspects of the play, and drawing out any meanings from this, in the audiences' hands. With these plays, largely due to the proposed 20 minute timescale, I would need to blend the facts into the narrative, thereby capturing, in some way, the complexities of the issue and try to avoid making agitprop performances.

Another consideration was that of authenticity. With *Ironland* I had taken several liberties with the forms I used. Although the *commedia* form's characters had been used as the foundation for the *Ironland* characters, no attempt was made to recreate these authentically. This time my goal was to attempt to produce scripts that were *truer* to the origins of the forms. This authenticity would be slightly diminished by the fact that I was intending to write a text for the *commedia*. However, as the objective was to explore the forms with audiences through the medium of live performance, I did not feel that an authentic process – in this case, a scenario and performance created through improvisation – was necessary. Furthermore, all of the troupes mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis have used playwrights and directors. As the principal enquiry of this research concerns them and the didactic effectiveness of the techniques they selected to use, then a process which incorporates these things, although not utilised by the performers of the forms historically, is, I believe, justifiable here. Finally, I would like to note that the traditional processes for creating popular performances would have required the *professional* performers to take on managerial and directorial positions. None of the performers I was working with ever became proficient enough in any of the forms to warrant a 'professional' title; subsequently, my roles as playwright and director were necessary if performances were to be created in a timely manner and inline with the conventions of the forms.

The final issue I considered prior to drafting the performances was that of order and its affect on audiences, e.g. in what order should the performances be placed and might this order affect the way audiences receive them? I had already decided that the performances would appear in succession and that the audiences would be led from one performance space into another in order to view them, but I was unsure if this order might have an impact on the research outcomes. As the same ten student performers would be responsible for performing in all three performances, which would require multiple costume changes and fairly challenging backstage choreography to ensure smooth and quick transitions between each performance, then it would not be possible to alter the sequence after it had been established. I eventually decided that the

*commedia* would be performed first, the puppet show second, and the musical third. *Commedia dell'arte* has the most historical distance from contemporary audiences. Despite being familiar with its related form, English pantomime, English audiences would be least familiar with its conventions; therefore, it would be performed first. As many of the archetype characters established by the *commedia dell'arte* form are identifiable in contemporary musical comedy, I felt that they should be separated from one another. As a result, the puppet show was placed in the middle to keep the *commedia* and musical apart. The content of each performance will be discussed in the section 'Development of the three forms'.

To prepare performers for these performances and consider the questions regarding performer training set out earlier in this chapter, a more intensive training programme would be necessary. What I developed to remedy this was an eight week training programme, which was held in the Department of Drama in autumn 2007. Each week students were introduced to a new form, which was explored through lectures, discussions and practical sessions. In the section 'Performer Training' I will discuss these workshops in more detail, focusing on the training methods used and consider their success in relation to the performers who appeared in the live performances held on 8 and 9 March 2008.

### *Chapter Outline*

The rest of this chapter will consider the development of the research project and the associated performances. To make the research process and final performance clearer, this chapter has been divided into six sections. Each section addresses a specific aspect of the overall process and seeks to expand upon and answer the research questions set out in this section. The first section, entitled 'Performer Training', details the various skills and popular theatre forms that were discussed during the training workshops, as well as the methods I employed to train student performers and whether these proved more effective than training methods utilised for the *Ironland* project. This section should be considered alongside DVD 1. The second section, 'The Development of the Three Forms', explains why I selected the topic of immigration and the sources I consulted to compose the performance texts. The third section, 'Rehearsal Process and Additional Training', discusses how the three performance texts were juggled during the five week rehearsal period, and provides insight into how I prepared the actors for these performances. The fourth section, '*Fashionable Immigration* in Performance', is

accompanied by DVD 3; this section discusses the problems we faced during the live performances and questions whether the outcomes of the research project may have been compromised as a result of these. The final sections, 'Audience Reception' and 'Conclusions', contains the findings from this research project, namely the audience's reception of the performances, and questions what these statistics mean and what conclusions can be drawn from them.

### **Section 1: Performer Training**

In order for the performers to achieve a higher proficiency in the popular forms that I have selected to research through practice, I decided that a more intensive approach would be necessary. The students who had trained for and performed in *Diplomacy in Ironland* had, for the most part, become fairly proficient in *commedia*, but some of the other skills, e.g. shadow puppets, stilt-walking and dance, had been lacking. In order to achieve a higher proficiency, I decided to organise a series of workshops in the department that would allow me to 1) investigate various training methods for a number of popular theatre forms/skills/techniques with the students, 2) locate a new cast of performers and 3), as stated previously, ensure that my performers were able to execute these skills at a higher skill level.

The 'Popular Theatre Workshop Series', as the training workshops were later titled, was held for between three and four hours every Monday evening from 15 October – 3 December 2007. In addition to physical training, participants of the series were given a lecture on the history and theory of the forms being explored. As with *Ironland*, I was able to generate interest in the workshop series via a mass e-mail to all students in the Department of Drama. Initially, 42 students signed up for the workshops. Students were allowed to either sign up for the entire series, or select the workshop(s) that they were most interested in. Hence, of the 42 who had showed an interest, only 20 were interested in participating in all of the workshops; the other 22 had showed an interest in only a few of the skills and subsequently signed up for those individual workshops. It was made clear in the email that one of the aims of the series was to locate performers for the March 2008 performance and that attendance at 80% of the workshops was mandatory for those interested in participating in this production. Hence, from the outset, I knew that I needed to closely monitor the 20 students who had agreed to participate in all of the workshops. In addition, five students from the *Ironland* cast – Anne-Marie Cosco, Victoria Horn, Jonathan Hunt, Sasha Jacques, and Leah

Lewis – had expressed an interest in working with me on this new project, and I would therefore need to monitor their progress in the workshops as well.

The following commentary comes directly from my notes from the workshops. This section is supported by DVD 1. Please select the menu option ‘III. Popular Theatre Workshop Series’; this will lead you to another menu, which features four short films under the headings ‘*Commedia*’, ‘Shadow Puppets’, ‘Dance’ and ‘Voice’. These relate directly to the commentary in the subsections below. These brief films are made up of video clips from the workshops, and were designed to give the reader a sense of what the workshops were like and how I worked with the performers; it should not be considered a comprehensive digital archive, but video documentation. Regretfully, I was unable to video record the large-scale puppet workshop; consequently, photographs from that workshop have been included in that subsection to compensate for the lack of video documentation.

This section has been divided into five subsections – one for each of the forms discussed in the workshops. Each subsection will first detail the methods of training employed; this will then be followed by a discussion regarding the perceived effectiveness of this training in relation to the aims and questions set out in the introduction to this chapter.

#### *Commedia dell’arte Training Workshops*

15 October 2007: *Commedia dell’arte*, Part 1: this workshop was an introduction to *commedia dell’arte*. Students who participated in this workshop were given a lecture on the form and were then physically introduced to the principal characters of the *commedia dell’arte*. To accomplish this, I employed the same method I had used previously whilst training actors for *Ironland*. As this is described quite thoroughly in the previous chapter, I will not do so again here. However, one small change was made to this process. As the group was considerably larger than it had been with *Ironland*, I felt the need to review the characters more frequently. Hence, after I introduced two or three characters, I would have the students form a large circle. Each student was then made to enter the circle as one of the characters they had just been introduced to. This allowed the students to put what they had just learned into practice, and me to correct any mistakes that they were making. In this workshop we were able to do this three times, which I feel was immensely useful.

Once the characters had been introduced (both verbally and physically) and reviewed, I established boundaries for a small performance area and instructed the

students to split into pairs. Each couple was then instructed to enter the performance space as two different characters and respond, only physically, to one another. The purpose of this exercise was to get the students to understand how restrictive the small *commedia* stages were and how a character's behaviour and spatial patterns might be affected by this.

22 October 2007: *Commedia dell'arte*, Part 2: the second half of the *commedia* workshop consisted of a review of the characters, an introduction to masks, improvisation and the scenario. Following the review of the characters, I instructed the students to form a circle. They were then asked to enter the circle individually, select another performer from the opposite side of the circle and start a conversation. The rules for this improvisation game were intentionally simple: 1) introduce yourself to the other person, 2) ask them a question and 3) use this question to start a conversation. They were told if they were unable to conclude the conversation, I would do so when 'waffling' began to occur. The students were not asked to improvise using the *commedia* characters; the purpose of the exercise was to get them thinking about *how to* improvise. Once this exercise was complete, they were asked to repeat it as a *commedia* character. The exercise was repeated a third time, but with the inclusion of masks.

These simple exercises allowed the students to explore their improvisation skills as actors, and then apply those skills to *commedia*. I had witnessed *commedia* improvisations before where the history of the form became the focus; words like 'thou' and 'thrice' (as though the Italian players spoke Elizabethan English) were frequently used without any regard to the form otherwise. By shifting the focus of the improvisation to the actor, and more importantly, the improvisation skills they already possessed, the students were able to keep the *commedia* improvisations simpler and, in turn, funnier (without trying to be so). The second and third attempts at the exercise with the *commedia* characters, and then the masks provided an opportunity to once again reinforce the physicality and traits of each of the characters. The idea for these exercises did not come from a book, but from a workshop I attended as an undergraduate student with the Second City improvisation sketch troupe based in Chicago, Illinois.

For the remainder of the workshop, I split the students into two large groups and asked them to improvise a short scene. I encouraged them to keep these simple and to follow the rules of the *commedia* scenario (e.g. not to script a scene, but to create a brief 'dramatic agenda' and use this to improvise the dialogue). The workshop concluded with the two performances.

*Outcomes of the Commedia Training Workshops*

In total, eight hours were designated for the *commedia* workshops. The training process was more intensive than it had been previously, and more conventions of the form were discussed, rehearsed and reviewed. I suppose I had initially believed, with the *Ironland* cast, that once introduced to the form they would rush home and rehearse it. Obviously this did not happen and subsequently their ability to perform *commedia*, although I believed it satisfactory at the time, was merely average.

It has been proven that the more rehearsal one gives to an idea, concept, speech or performance (anything, basically, that requires memory), which is known as repetitive maintenance rehearsal (Harris, Cady and Tran 2006: 75), the more likely one is to recall that idea, etc. Furthermore, studies have also shown that the way in which the information is initially processed by the brain is equally significant (ibid). Subsequently, I am happy to acknowledge that the three hours dedicated to *commedia* in preparation for *Ironland* was not enough time to introduce, and, more importantly, rehearse the principal *commedia* characters. Although the archetype evolution exercise I developed later on would eventually begin to reinforce this information, many of the students, it would appear, had misinterpreted, and probably misunderstood, the training they initially received.

Another significant issue regarding memory is identification. G.H. Bower, author of 'A brief history of memory research' (see Harris, Cady and Tran: 2006, 75), indicates that one's ability to memorise something in much depth will be enhanced if you are able to make connections with pre-existing knowledge (ibid). During the *Ironland* training workshop I mentioned the fact that pantomime stems from *commedia dell'arte*. Although this is true, mentioning this during the training workshops proved to be problematic, as the students who were familiar with pantomime began interpreting the characters in a pantomime-like fashion; even their improvisations featured a hint of pantomime slap-stick. Knowing this, for these workshops I intentionally avoided making unnecessary connections with other theatrical forms. On the few instances that I did mention a form, say contemporary sitcom stereotype characters and their theatrical lineage, I made it clear to the students that these characters and the *commedia* stock characters shared no physical or vocal similarities; that they should not try to replicate Jennifer Aniston's character Rachel from the American sitcom *Friends* and believe it to be a *true* first actress.

Although I would not be able to tell until the start of the rehearsals for the production, I certainly felt more confident about this workshop and was hopeful that the students would be able to retain the information. Fortunately, when rehearsals did begin in January 2008, most of the students were able to do so. What this tells me is that a training system that frequently reviews and frequently corrects mistakes is more successful than one that does not do these things; three hours, in the first instance, was not enough; ten minute reviews the following weeks, were not enough. Unnecessary connections with other theatrical forms should be avoided (at least with some students) almost completely. Although these revelations might seem elementary to more advanced academics and practitioners, I must admit I was surprised. Perhaps I had anticipated university-level drama students of being able and willing to pick up a new form rather quickly and accurately; however, this was just not the case with most of the students I trained for this project.

#### *Shadow Puppet Training Workshop*

29 October 2007: Shadow Puppets: this workshop began with a brief lecture on shadow theatre. I discussed the *Wayang Kulit* puppet form and how this form exists today. Another aspect discussed in the lecture was the impact of Islam on the Byzantine Empire and how some scholars (Brockett) believe shadow theatre prospered as a result. The overall emphasis of the lecture was how shadow theatre has been continued and developed as part of a popular tradition.

Following the lecturer, I showed the students a shadow puppet of Queen Elizabeth I that I had made prior to the session. The puppet consisted of three pieces: a torso with head and right arm, a left arm and a skirt. I explained to the students how when drawing the puppets on cardboard, it was important that the joints be rounded because during movement a puppet with square joints will cast a shadow that is rigid and subsequently unnatural. Although this could be the desired effect for some puppets, as these students were being introduced to the form, I felt that they should stay with natural, uncomplicated shapes (the human form).

Once I had demonstrated how the puppet should be drawn and cut, the students, who had been instructed to bring an empty cereal box and a wire coat hanger, were asked to render their own puppets. Craft knives were also provided so that once the puppets had been drawn and approved by me, they could cut them out.

The final stage of the puppet-building process consists of adding joints and rods. Once the puppets were complete, I then demonstrated using my Queen Elizabeth I

puppet different ways of manipulating the puppet so that it appeared as though it was running, walking, fighting, etc. Each student was then allowed to explore these methods with their own puppets. The workshop concluded with everyone bringing their puppet into the light source to explore relationships and various movements with their puppets.

#### *Outcomes of the Shadow Puppet Training Workshop*

With *Ironland*, I did not train the students in how to build the shadow puppets; instead, I built them all myself. One of the benefits, then, of having this workshop was that when it came time to build puppets for *Fashionable Immigration*, I had ten students capable of building the puppets with me. Of the skills being taught during the workshop series, making shadow puppets was by far the easiest. When it was time to make the shadow puppets for *Fashionable Immigration*, there were arguments amongst the students to determine who got the job – that is just how eager they were about this form.

In regards to manipulation: the intricate hand movements required of traditional shadow theatre were never going to be acquired during this workshop. Those students who had manipulated the shadow puppets in *Ironland*, having had training before, were, unsurprisingly, better at manipulating their puppets than the newcomers. That being said, when it came time to execute that training during rehearsals for the puppet show (five months later), only one of the students could remember how to do this accurately. Here is another example of how repetitive maintenance rehearsal was not done by them, or enforced by me, and subsequently their abilities suffered. Unfortunately, with a project like this, and using busy undergraduate students as a cast, then this reinforcement was just not possible. This would mean that the number of shadow puppets present in the puppet show would need to be greatly reduced to prevent the same poor quality that had plagued the *Ironland* production, and so potentially hindering this production's effectiveness (particularly with female audience members). I shall discuss the use of shadow puppetry in more detail in Section 3.

#### *Large-Scale Puppet Training Workshop*

5 November 2007: Large-scale puppets, Part 1: this workshop was cancelled because it was bonfire night. Of the 26 who had signed up to participate, only four actually attended. I had created handouts on how to build the frames for large-scale puppets. I distributed these and then gave a brief talk about the Bread and Puppet Theatre; I then sent the students home.

12 November 2007: Large-scale puppets, Part 2: As the previous week's workshop had been cancelled, this workshop had to become parts 1 and 2. In order for this to happen, I adjusted the time of the workshop to 5 – 9.45 pm so that we might be able to both build puppet frames and begin learning how to manipulate them. The 'we' in this instance does in fact include me. Although I had studied Welfare State International and the Bread and Puppet Theatre's use of large-scale puppets, and their various methods of building them, I have no formal training in building or manipulating these. This is not to say, however, that I had no idea what I was doing; I had experimented with some of these methods in my own time, and had even built a few large-scale heads and frames in my back garden. Figures 13 and 14 show two different experiments I conducted to establish the simplest and most durable method for creating the heads for large-scale puppets. The first shows a full head mould made from chicken wire. The second, a near-complete puppet head, but this method uses half a mould. The second method is used most often by the Bread and Puppet Theatre to create large-scale masks for people on stilts, although Peter Schumann uses clay instead of chicken wire to create the moulds.



**Figure 13** A mould made out of chicken wire for the head of a large-scale puppet.

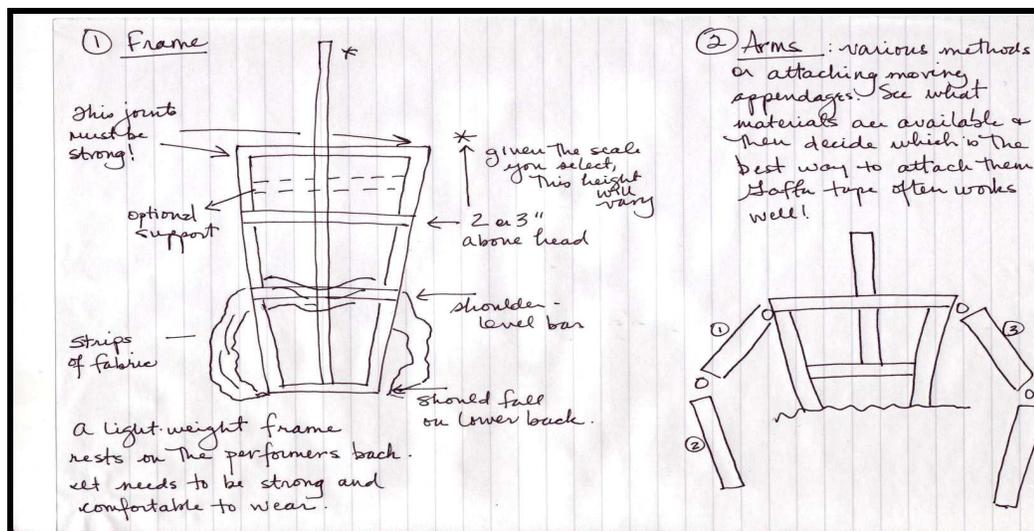
Photo: Jason Price



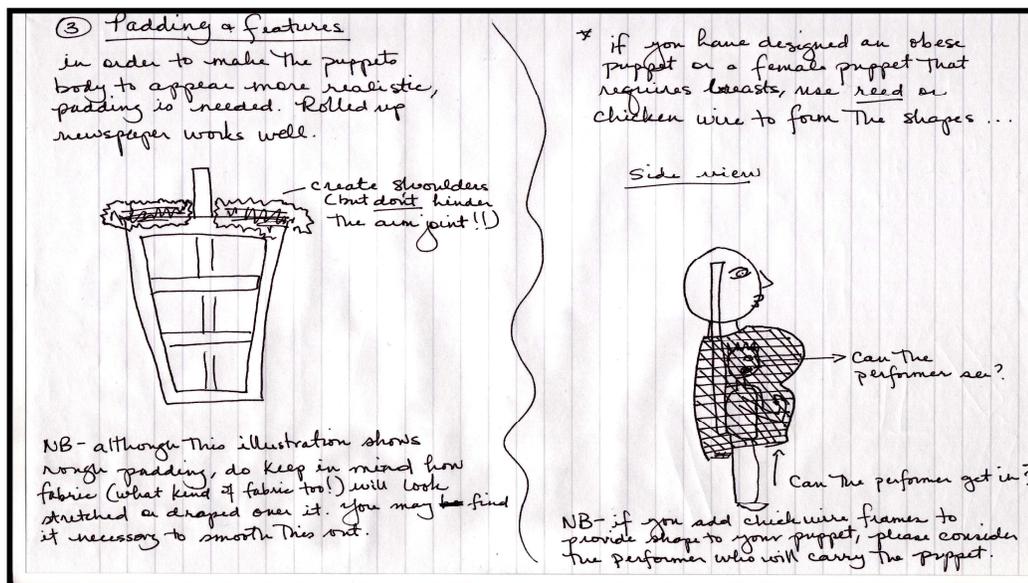
**Figure 14** The mould once papier-mâché has been completed. Note that the eyes and nose were created and added on separately.

Photo: Jason Price.

The frames pictured in Figures 15 and 16 stem largely from a design that appears in *Engineers of the Imagination: the Welfare State handbook* (Kershaw and Coult, 1983: 66). It has been altered slightly to accommodate the materials that were available in the Department at the time of building; this was most often scrap lumber, gaffer-tape, chicken wire, newspaper, foam, and fabric. It should probably be noted that the size of the frame will be determined by the size of the actor and the desired height of the puppet. The performers at this workshop were encouraged to build puppets that, when completed, would be roughly ten feet tall.



**Figure 15** Instructions to build a frame for a large-scale puppet with an exposed actor. Illustration: Jason Price.



**Figure 16:** This shows how to add features, such as padding to create girth, and brings attention to issues of visibility. Illustration: Jason Price.

The frames that were built for this workshop were done very quickly. I do not recall exactly how long they took to build, but I believe they were completed in less than an hour; it is perhaps unsurprising then that the quality of the frames was quite poor. Despite this, they were strong enough to work with during the remainder of the workshop.

In order to include everyone in the manipulation exercises, I assigned three students to each puppet frame. Two students were responsible for working the arms, and another student the torso. Although these frames are designed to be manipulated by a single puppeteer, I felt that as frames were in short supply, and working large performance objects like large-scale puppets require a greater awareness of space and gesture (and how big these gestures need to be) that three puppeteers would be acceptable.

The first exercise I gave each group was extremely simple: walk across the room. I encouraged them to consider how arms aid in balancing the human body whilst walking upright and that the puppet's arms should move accordingly. Once each group had managed to make their puppet walk, I then instructed them to mime picking fruit; one arm would be responsible for holding the mime bucket/basket, whilst the head and other arm would scout for and pick fruit (respectively). To aid in the mime exercises, I instructed the puppeteer working the torso to mime the tasks (as their arms are not restricted in any way), thereby allowing the arm handlers to see and replicate these

movements. This exercise required each puppeteer to be aware of and communicate with their fellow puppeteers and begin working as a team.

Once the puppeteers had successfully managed to find this balance, and were able to mime picking a substantial amount of fruit, they were asked to rotate, so that the arm handlers would have the opportunity to work the torso and alternate arm. This was repeated until each student had gained some experience on each appendage of the puppet. The workshop concluded with a few improvised puppet fights and puppet reconciliations (that were not assigned by me). Overall, the workshop taught me that large-scale puppets were not as complicated to build or manoeuvre as I had initially believed them to be. Furthermore, the students had been able to manipulate them fairly well in a relatively short space of time and seemed to enjoy doing so.



**Figure 17** A few students preparing for a mime exercise from the large-scale puppet workshop held on 12 November 2007. Photo: Jason Price.

#### *Outcomes of the Large-Scale Puppet Workshop*

As mentioned previously, this workshop was as useful to me as it was the students. Having only experimented in my garden, I had not been able to properly look at the frames and how they were manipulated. Although I had seen puppets similar to this in motion before (again, Bread and Puppet Theatre and WSI), it was still very interesting to see them move at my direction.

However, because the frames had been built so quickly during this workshop, and my own experiments had gone rather smoothly, I had a false impression of how quickly large puppets could be built. When it came time to prepare the large puppets for *Fashionable Immigration*, I scheduled for them to be built over the course of two

Sunday rehearsals. In the end, it took four Sunday rehearsals and several weekday hours to complete them.

In regards to manipulation: during the performance, one handler was responsible for an entire puppet; hence, the workshop, which had three handlers per puppet, was not entirely useful for the handlers. However, the handlers who manipulated the puppets during performance were able to adapt to controlling the arms and torso simultaneously without much difficulty. I will discuss the challenges of single-handler manipulation and how those were dealt with in more detail in Section 3.

### *Dance Training Workshop*

19 November 2007: Introduction to Jazz Dance Techniques for Musical Theatre: the aim of this workshop was to introduce students to techniques associated with jazz dance for musical theatre.

Following a brief warm-up and group stretch session, I introduced some basic dance skills – the five basic dance positions, *Pas de bourrée*, kick-ball-change, jazz, ballet and pencil turns (with appropriate leading-in movements) and high kicks. The method of training was not dissimilar to the one I use for *commedia*. I introduced the skills and showed them how to do them; I then asked that they replicate what they had seen me do. I then asked them to repeat the skill until they could execute it reasonably well. Throughout this mimic process, I offered students advice on posture, stance, arm placement, and any noticeable tension that was hindering their ability to perform the skill correctly. Once these basic skills had been taught, I introduced them to a piece of choreography. We spent the remainder of the workshop rehearsing the dance and reinforcing the basic dance skills.

### *Outcomes of the Dance Training Workshop*

As dance had been one of the previous cast's weaknesses, a more intensive training programme, like the one discussed for *commedia* earlier, was absolutely necessary for this project. As a musical was planned, then some dancing would be required of the performers. Additionally, the dance workshop's placement in the series – next to last – was intentional; I hoped that the less time that passed between the workshop and the start of rehearsals the better – hopefully they would be able to retain more of the information I presented them with.

Despite the late placement of the dance workshop and the more intensive approach, when rehearsals began the students had once again forgotten how to execute

the techniques they had been taught. As with the shadow puppets, to remedy this I had to eliminate many of the planned dances and simplify essential choreography. Dance, like shadow puppetry, requires a great deal of skill from their performer/handler; such skills are just not acquirable in such short training periods.

### *Voice Training Workshop*

26 November 2007: Voice for Musical Theatre: For this workshop I enlisted the help of Sasha Jacques, a third year student who had taken part in *Diplomacy in Ironland*; she is a classically trained soprano and as the workshop consisted mainly of women, I did not feel that my classically trained tenor voice would be a useful model for them. Together, we agreed on the following agenda/curriculum<sup>10</sup> for this workshop:

1. Posture: spinal alignment. Sasha demonstrated the appropriate posture and stance for singing. In order to correct problems with the student's posture, I asked them to lie on the floor and straighten their spine. I asked them to remain on the floor for a few moments so that they could 'memorise' this position. They were then asked to stand and reproduce this position.
2. Breathing: stomach breathing/diaphragm control. I asked the students to place their hands just above their waist and take a deep breath. I told the students that, when singing, it is important that they breathe not into their chest, but lower, into their abdomen. If they were doing this properly, then their hands would be forced out when they inhaled. By doing this, the air is in the appropriate place to be controlled by the diaphragm, which is crucial to singing and projecting the voice. Once everyone had mastered this form of breathing, Sasha asked the students to yawn. The placement of the mouth whilst yawning - open and unrestrictive - is similar to that needed for singing.
3. Vocal warm-ups and exercises: Sasha led the group in two vocal warm-ups. The first consisted of a series of arpeggios starting on middle-C. The second was an octave exercise, which required the students to use nasal tones to reach higher notes.

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<sup>10</sup> It should probably be noted that the elements above stem from two very different approaches to classical voice training and are therefore hard to reference. I received my training under Dr Lisa Uhl at McLennan Community College in Waco, Texas. I took private lessons with her for two years. Her training is strongly influenced by the Alexander Technique, and subsequently many of the exercises and techniques I taught during this workshop may sound familiar to those who have trained in the Alexander Technique. Other vocal skills and performance-related techniques for musical theatre performance were acquired at Marymount Manhattan College in New York City, where I completed my undergraduate degree, and through professional experience.

4. Scales: Continuing on from Sasha's warm-ups, I introduced the students to the C/F scales. I ask them to sing the scales in the following pattern: whole notes, quarter notes, eighth notes.

5. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" – we felt that a simple, well-known song would be an ideal place to begin. The purpose of this exercise was to get them to listen and vocally blend with one another – a crucial skill in choral singing. Additionally, it allowed me to introduce them to key music terminology, like *pianissimo*, *mezzo forte*, *forte*, etc. Sasha and I observed them whilst they were singing to determine whether the appropriate stance and breathing were being retained.

6. Reading music and interpreting lyrics: "I Dreamed a Dream" from the musical *Les Misérables*. This final exercise was added so that I could get the students to sing in parts and to attempt to read music. As I was intending to make one of the March 2008 performances a musical, then I needed to see how these students would react in a mock musical rehearsal; additionally, it would give me a better sense of the time required to teach students with limited musical abilities a full musical number and to schedule rehearsals appropriately.

#### *Outcomes of the Voice Training Workshop*

For me, this workshop was significant because I had not previously attempted to train more than a single person at a time in how to sing. However, in addition to exploring a new way of teaching voice, the principal objectives of this workshop were to find singers capable of singing solos in the musical and to teach the others how to be a chorus. Unfortunately, after the workshop I was still uncertain who the soloists might be, as none of the students at the workshop appeared comfortable singing by themselves. However, as a group, the students would make a good chorus; their breath control, blending abilities and music-reading abilities were, I believed, adequate for such a task.

Given that I did not believe there were any vocalists capable of singing solos in this group, I had to determine how the musical would be composed. Would a musical full of songs sung by the chorus be sufficient or even enjoyable for an audience? I ultimately decided that this would stray too far away from the form's conventions, and abandoned this idea. I then considered whether there were any singers in the Department that I might persuade to take part in the production. This, however, would mean breaking the workshop's 80% attendance policy I had set for those wishing to take

part in the March production, which would be unfair to those who had adhered to this policy. Ultimately, I decided to abandon my concerns about the quality of the voices, and would eventually cast the musical based on personality, diction and general talent. I also anticipated that during the rehearsal period I would be able to schedule private training time with the soloists, and that we would be able to establish a way of communicating the lyrics that would not be unpleasant to the audience.

### *Conclusions from the Popular Theatre Workshop Series*

Following the workshops I felt more confident than I had previously about the skill levels of the students. Although I would not be able to gauge how much of the information and training the students would retain until rehearsals began, I was satisfied with the amount of material we had covered during the workshops; I believed that the skills and techniques of most of the forms had been reinforced sufficiently and that the students should be able to replicate them during performance. In addition, once the workshops had ended, ten students agreed to continue working with me and take part in the March production; I was satisfied with their abilities and felt confident that with further reinforcement of the techniques/forms during the rehearsal period that they would be able to successfully reproduce the training. My task following the workshops, having found the right cast, would be to write *Fashionable Immigration*.

### **Section 2: Development of the Three Forms**

The idea for *Fashionable Immigration* really grew out of the character of Anna, a Polish immigrant, who appeared in *Diplomacy in Ironland*. Professor Graham Ley and I had discussed the possibility of using this character to discuss the issue of immigration in Britain as early as August 2007. Although I had initially proposed to use the popular forms to solely discuss the War in Iraq, we both felt that opinions on this issue were generally one-sided, with most people disapproving of it, and that the performances would therefore not be educating audiences about this issue as much as reinforcing a shared belief. Additionally, Leah Lewis, who had played the role of Anna in *Ironland*, had agreed to participate in the March 2008 performance. The decision, then, to make a performance about immigration using this character, played by the same actress, was not a difficult one to make.

Researching the issue of immigration in Britain, I found, was not as straightforward as researching Middle Eastern history had been. First, *Diplomacy in Ironland* had not really focused on the current conflict, but rather moments in the history of this

region where unresolved conflicts, stemming largely from western involvement, directly impacted the current conflict. The research process had included examining published histories of the Middle East, comparing those, drawing conclusions, and then writing lectures for the character of Dr. Cleaver to deliver. Furthermore, the facts and figures presented in *Ironland* are, to a degree, finite and can be easily checked with other published historical accounts. Immigration in Britain, particularly Polish immigration in Britain, is an issue that is so contemporary that it cannot be researched using history books; neither is it an issue where exact facts and figures are available because the current government, it is believed, has not monitored how many immigrants have entered the country. Hence, I knew at an early stage of the research process that the information I collected would have to come from newspapers and television news programmes. As for monitoring the statistics (facts), I would have to compare the information being presented by multiple media/news outlets and draw my own conclusions. Additionally, as immigration is an ongoing issue, I would need to continue to monitor available statistics throughout the writing and rehearsal processes to ensure that by the time the production opened we were not presenting out of date information.

Prior to beginning the research process, I was already aware of the issue of immigration. I am an avid news watcher and read *The Guardian* almost daily. I had also worked with a Polish immigrant whilst working as an administrator for a handbag company in London and had witnessed the difficulties she had with our employers. Additionally, as an American and having lived in the UK for four years, I was aware of some immigration policy, particularly regarding visas. To begin the research process, then, I felt that it would be valuable to collate some of the issues and myths that I was aware of and use those as a catalyst to start locating materials. The lists that I created were broken down into three categories: 1) disadvantages of immigration, 2) advantages of immigration, 3) advantages and disadvantages for the immigrants. These are listed below:

#### Disadvantages of Immigration

1. Uncontrolled borders for EU nationals: not knowing who is here or why they are here.
2. Immigrants are taking jobs from English citizens.
3. The influx in immigration is causing a strain on public resources, particularly the benefits and healthcare systems.
4. Overcrowding.

5. The immigrants' lack of engagement/integration with/into existing communities.

#### Advantages of Immigration

1. Increase in state income as a result of taxed wages.
2. For employers: cheap labour, which might result in cheaper products and subsequent savings for the British consumer.
3. Education and potential appreciation of the customs of multiple cultures (e.g. the positive effects of multiculturalism).
4. Better relationships between Britain and other nations.

#### Advantages and Disadvantages for Immigrants

1. Advantage: higher salaries than they are accustomed to.
2. Advantage: the benefits system (health care and family allowances).
3. Disadvantage: low wage, physical labour jobs.
4. Disadvantage: possible exploitation of needs and worth ethic.
5. Disadvantage: having to accept available jobs that might be far below their skill level.
6. Disadvantage: language barrier.

The sources that I consulted are all easily accessible to the general public. These included: *The Guardian* (newspaper and website, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)), *The Daily Mail* (website only, [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk)) and the BBC (news website, [news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk)). I also searched for clips from BBC newsmagazine and political interest television programmes like *Questiontime* and *Newsnight* on *Youtube* ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)). In addition to searching for available sources at the time the research process began in September 2007, I also maintained a vigorous news watching/reading schedule to ensure that I was up to date on developments surrounding the issue. What I was able to establish as 'fact' by the time I began writing the scripts in December 2007 was the following:

- Between May 2004, when the Accession Eight (A8)<sup>11</sup> countries were admitted to the European Union, and June 2007, 683,000 immigrant or migrant workers from these countries had been granted work permits to work in the UK (Attewell 2007: np).
- 430,400 of these were Polish (BBC News 2006: np).

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<sup>11</sup> The A8 countries are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

- 97% of the Eastern Europeans registered to work in the UK were earning between minimum wage, £5.10, and £6 per hour (ibid).
- 37% of these immigrants had taken on work in factories (ibid).
- 80% of these were under the age of 34 (ibid).
- 3,600 A8 nationals had successfully applied for and were receiving income-related benefits (ibid).
- 68,927 had been approved for child benefits and 38,578 for tax credits (also a family-related benefit) (ibid).
- ‘Higher salaries’ was the most common reason for emigrating, with the average monthly income for a Polish person in Poland being only £200 per month (ibid).
- 8% of the UK’s 29.1 million workforce is foreign (BBC News 2007c: np).
- In 2006, immigration contributed to around £6 billion to output growth in the UK’s economy (ibid).

Most of the above facts had been reported in all three of the news sources that I regularly consulted. The BBC, which has been cited heavily above, was the least biased, which is ultimately why it has been cited here. Overall, I felt that each newspaper/website had provided me with sufficient information to write a script, and, in regard to *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*, the first being politically left-wing, and the latter right-wing, a better sense of the two sides of the immigration argument; I was now able to begin developing the performance texts.

I mentioned in the introduction that the three forms selected for the project were *commedia dell’arte*, puppetry, and musical theatre; I also explained my reasons for organizing the performances in that order. It should be noted that the performance texts were also written in this order. I had hoped that the story, which would be the same for each performance, would be allowed to develop over the course of the three performances; small changes to some of the characters or situations could be made to keep the audience engaged. This would also be reflected in the casting, which would change with each performance, with the exception of the heroine, Anna. I hoped that each form would then be able to shift the lenses through which audiences were viewing the issue and this would subsequently have a broader didactic impact. Additionally, the repetition of the story would establish a sense of familiarity, which might help establish

a greater sense of empathy and emotional engagement with the heroine and her situation. Although produced in a controlled environment, the audience's fast-track familiarity with the story then might be similar to that of popular and oral traditions<sup>12</sup>.

Before proceeding to the next paragraph, I would advise readers of this thesis to examine DVD 3, which contains films of the performances and provides crucial context to the following discussions about text development. Due to time, and the nature of this thesis, scenarios and scripts have not been included.

*Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia* consists of seven scenes and takes place in three locations: a street, Magnifico's office, and a pub. As the script was meant to take twenty minutes to perform, a three act structure, the standard for *commedia*, was not possible. The characters, however, were mostly authentic, although some of their traditional functions were reassigned in order to comment more directly on the issue of immigration. For example, Zanni, who John Rudlin describes as "[...] ignorant and loutish, and has no self-awareness" (Rudlin 1995: 71) and being "[...] astute in knavery [...]" (ibid) is presented in the text in a fairly faithful manner. Two of the major issues in the immigration debate, which appeared on my list at the beginning of this section, are that 1) immigrants are taking jobs from UK citizens, and 2) they are adding to the strain on the benefits system. Although there is some truth to these statements, both have been exaggerated by certain media outlets<sup>13</sup>. I believed Zanni to be an ideal vehicle for this discussion. Through him, I could show someone quite capable of locating work, but selecting not to because an easier means of earning money (benefits) was available. One aspect of Zanni's story, however, that is completely out of character and form is his relationship with Isabella, the first actress. I have never located a scenario where the

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<sup>12</sup> See the chapter "Familiarity and Nostalgia in an Oral Tradition" in Millie Taylor's book *British Pantomime Performance* (2007: 67-79) for a discussion on how this familiarity is crucial to the success of contemporary pantomime.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Matthew Hickley, a reporter for the *Daily Mail*, wrote in his article "Britons 'Squeezed Out of Workforce by Foreigners' says Treasury", that "Since 2002, Britain's workforce has grown by 491,000 to 27.2 million" (Hickley np); the implication being that this nearly 500,000 people were not British. He concludes his article with "The department could not explain why Britain's workforce was shrinking so rapidly" (ibid). The article's title, then, would appear to be misleading. However, if he had checked the archives of his own newspaper, he might have a better idea about why Britain's workforce was shrinking. In their article "The Sicknote Nation", James Chapman and Dan Dwelling write that "Almost a million people are claiming incapacity benefit for mental and behaviour disorders". They further write that "Since 1979, the number of incapacity claimants has more than trebled to 2.4 million. [In 2003] there were 228,000 new recipients". Steve Doughty, also of the *Daily Mail*, writes more recently (2 January 2008) that half a million of these claimants are under the age of 35 (Doughty np). If this figure is placed alongside Hickley's query and the fact that 80% of the immigrants entering Britain are under the age of 35, a fact that I mentioned earlier, then a somewhat clearer picture begins to emerge. It would appear as though the immigrants are in fact filling vacancies in the national workforce that are made by these claimants.

first actress chooses to be with a servant character. The reason I paired these two were because they share a similar intellect. Zanni, as previous discussed, is ignorant, whilst the first actress has been described as having the attention span of a child (1995: 109). Additionally, the prospect of them having a child allowed me to discuss family allowances, another government benefit, and further demonstrate potential abuses of the benefits system.

Another break with convention occurs with the Columbina characters; it may not be immediately apparent, but there are in fact two – Anna and the Landlady. Both of these characters represent Columbina at different stages of the character’s development over the course of the *commedia* form. The Columbina of the sixteenth-century was “[...] older, lustier and more buxom [...]”; in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries she developed into a “[...] more graceful and engaging, [and] less overtly sexual [...]” character (1995: 127). Although her character’s principal occupation was as a servant to the first actress character, her role would eventually become more in line with the *zannis* and “[...] the reflection of her mistress in manner and mood” (ibid). Rudlin argues that this is because travelling *commedia* troupes “[...] would need their third actress to carry an equal share” (ibid) of the stage time.

Anna, the first Columbina, is representative of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century version of this character, with the exception of her ingénue status. However, because she becomes a seamstress for Madam Magnifico, her servant status has not been completely eliminated. The early sixteenth-century Columbina was used as the model for the Landlady for this performance. The reason that there are two Columbina in this *commedia* is simply due to the fact that Leah Lewis, who played Anna, and Melody Thomas, who played the landlady, possessed the right instincts and traits to explore the two contrasting versions of this role.

The only major change to type was made to *Il Magnifico*. This was a change in the character’s gender from male to female. The reason I selected to do this was because I did not want to confuse the audience with multiple political objectives. As a man, Magnifico’s over-the-top, violent behaviour towards his largely female staff might have been interpreted by audiences as a commentary on gender politics in the workplace; a female villain, on the other hand, might prevent this confusion. My decision to have Madam Magnifico played by a man, Jonathan Hunt, was made because I believed him to be the only performer available who would be able to blend the commanding

presence necessary for the archetype with a slight touch of ‘camp’ to create an almost Pantomime Dame-like character. Additionally, he was the only performer who was physically able to pick up his cast members and throw them off the stage, which the office window *lazzo* required. In regards to authenticity, although it was uncommon for men to play female roles on the *commedia* stage, it did occur. In his book *The World of Harlequin* (1963), Allardyce Nicoll indicates that in 1577, the Gelosi Company’s Francheschina (Columbina) was played by Battista da Treviso, a man; additionally, in 1614 the same role was played in the Uniti Company by Ottavio Bernardini (1963: 96).

Ultimately, however, these changes are, in my opinion, trivial. One thing I try to emphasize during *commedia* training is that although the stock characters’ costumes and physicality were similar in almost every troupe, an actor would still ‘create’ a new character – add their signature to it, so to speak. Both Rudlin and Nicoll mention this fact. *Commedia*, as a form, was intentionally easily adaptable to a given situation. And here it is possible to see just how easily the characters and social structures of this form adapted to suit the needs of this project.

There were two major issues that I considered prior to adapting the Ur-text into a puppet show. Both of these issues come from David Currell’s book *Puppets and Puppet Theatre* (1999). The first concerns action and emotion; he writes: “Puppet theatre depends more on action and less upon spoken word than the actor does; generally, it cannot hold complex soul-searching and it is denied many of the aspects of non-verbal communication that are available to the actor” (1999: 9). The second concerns the text, he writes: “For the first moment or two many people do not really listen to puppets; they are too busy watching – taking in the type of puppet, method of operation and the conventions of the performance” (1999: 165). Hence, I knew from the outset that the Ur-text would need to be condensed considerably and that I would need to be careful of how I introduced the puppets, as audiences who are concentrating on the design and conventions of the puppets were not likely to be focusing on the argument of the play.

My first decision, then, was to determine which characters would appear as puppets, and which would appear as humans. I felt that since the play was about Anna, and the success of the play relied, to some extent, on audiences identifying with her that she would remain human. For consistency, I also selected that her immigrant co-workers would also appear as humans. Hence, it would be the English characters that would appear in puppet form.

Knowing that audiences would need time to adjust to the puppets, the first scene in which they physically appear mirrored scene one of the *commedia*. Having seen a similar scene not twenty minutes earlier, I hoped, would allow the audience to take in the puppets, the actors and the general concept of the performance.

The major differences between the *commedia* and the puppet show lie in its structure and characters. I selected a fragmented structure that would be staged with an almost cinematic seamlessness. The subplot about Isabella and Zanni, renamed Issie and Zack for the puppet show, was cut almost completely; the subplot about Anna's family coming to work for Magnifico was also cut because it did nothing to further Anna's story; the figure of Big Brenda was also cut, as were all the pub scenes. The Ur-text was completely stripped down to its barebones. One of the complications with this 'stripping down' was that the facts about immigration, which had been abundant in the Ur-text, had to be relocated. Certain characters – for example Issie and Zack, who had allowed for a satirical look at the benefits system – were now either missing or, because their roles had been cut considerably, were unable to provide the information that their characters had been created to introduce. To remedy this, I wrote in two scenes: the first, which appears almost as a prologue to the performance, consists of Zack and Harry watching television together in their flat. Harry, adapted from Harlequin, attempts to watch the BBC news programme *Newsnight*, which features an interview with Polish opposition senator Ursula Gasek. The clip shows Senator Gasek discussing the influx of Polish immigration in Britain, the average monthly income of Polish workers in Poland, and how the Polish government is working to entice its youth back home. Zack (Zanni), attempts to disrupt the programme by changing the channel to watch *America's Next Top Model*. The two clips were cut so that once a fact or serious revelation occurred in the *Newsnight* programme, the channel would change to a less serious moment in *America's Next Top Model*; the desired affect being mainly humorous, but to also show the different ideologies of each of these characters. The second scene occurs between Zack and Harry once they have lost their jobs. They proceed to fight over and around the audience, with Zack shouting generalisations and misperceptions about Polish immigrants, and Harry countering with the facts discussed earlier in this section.

The final aspect of the adaptation that I wish to discuss concerns Madam Magnifico and how I selected to portray her in the puppet performance. In the Ur-text, Magnifico's villainy is blatantly apparent as she is frequently seen misbehaving. I selected to eliminate this from the puppet show, because, once again, I did not feel the

audience needed to see her abuses to know that they were occurring. In the puppet show Magnifico only appears once – at the end of a lengthy spectacular procession (which I will discuss at some length in the next section). However, she was written to be ten to twelve feet tall, wearing an enormous dress and stylised mask. Hence, the visual impact of this character in this scene was written to eliminate the need for her frequent appearance throughout the performance.

The musical, on the other hand, was more faithful to the Ur-text. The only major changes I made were in the time (updated to contemporary Britain); the language, which was updated to suit the new time; the addition of music; Magnifico's ruff/garment factory was once again changed, this time to a handbag factory; the final scene of the play, although practically identical to the final scene of the *commedia*, depicted the closure of Magnifico's factory as a result of her poor spending habits and the developing (real) economic recession. The names Zack and Harry were carried over from the puppet show, and Madam Magnifico was shortened to Madge. The final change was the addition of a chorus, which was made up of Madge's employees. The Chorus, as a collective character, would serve two major purposes: to satirize the negative British attitudes toward immigration and provide ironic commentary on the action. I wanted this metatheatricality, which had been present in the *commedia* by performers being aware of, and at times communicating directly with the audience, and in the Puppet Show, where the puppet handlers had been visible to the audience, to be realised in the musical by drawing attention to the unique conventions of the musical theatre form, i.e. lovers bursting into song, a collective chorus being available to accompany soloists, dance breaks that seem to appear out of nowhere. As a result, the Chorus was referred to directly by other characters as a chorus, Harry's love song was cut short by the pianist claiming that it had been 'cut for time', and very bright, very colourful lighting would be utilised during the musical numbers, whilst more natural lighting would be used during scenes with spoken dialogue. Throughout the remainder of this section, I will discuss the process of composing music for the performance and how the music and text were structured. To aide with comprehensibility, this will be placed alongside a broad discussion of the conventions of musical theatre based on observations of this form gained through practical experience.

There are many scholars and practitioners who have written about musicals. There is a wealth of material available, for example, on the history of the form – perhaps the most thorough of which is Kurt Ganzel's *Musicals* (2004). For a definitive

guide to the musicals themselves, however, I would recommend Stanley and Kay Green's *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show* (the latest edition of which was published in 2008), which lists all of the major Broadway musicals, their casts, creative teams, songs, and provides a synopsis and the historical context for each production from 1866 to the present. What these books do not address is the *structure* of the musical form in very specific terms. Many practitioners and/or fans of musical theatre (of which I happen to be both) might argue that this is because each musical is different and consequently there is not just one structure, but many. This is certainly what Tom Jones, author of the musical *The Fantasticks* (1960) and the book *Making Musicals* (1998) believes. He argues that at one point in the development of the musical form the Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II model, which was firmly established by the hugely successful *Oklahoma!* in 1943 and replicated by many throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s, was probably considered by many to be *the one* to follow (Jones 1998: 107). However, he argues that since the late 1960s, experiments with the form had generated 'dance', 'concept', 'rock', and 'sung-through' musicals, and consequently no single structure could be cited as the best or only one (Jones 1998: 65-85); he writes that "[...] there is no standard form. The shape of the musical is always changing" (Jones 1998: 107). I would argue that his statement is still true today.

As an undergraduate student, musical theatre was my declared minor. I subsequently studied the musical theatre genre, and performed in several university and Off-Broadway productions. During this time I began to notice how certain types of songs always seemed to appear in a musical— and although the sequence and function of these songs varied slightly to meet the needs of each narrative, their inclusion in many musicals does, I think, point to a kind of structure of the musical form. I have provided an outline of my observations regarding this structure below. It is relevant here because I acknowledged this structure when composing the musical for this project. For those who would like a more detailed discussion of the construction of a musical, and specifically how one might be structured, I would recommend chapter two of Richard Andrews' *Writing a Musical* (1997), entitled 'Construction'. Ultimately, however, I would encourage practitioners to consider Jones' words above regarding structure, and not get bogged down by following a prescribed model.

As discussed, although the sequence of songs in a musical varies with each production, the function of these songs and their presence in a piece does, I believe, seem to be fairly standardised. For example, it is not uncommon for the opening song of

a musical to include the entire ensemble. In musical comedy, this number will likely require dancing and spectacle elements. Its main function, in my view, is to provide the audience with a view of this fictional world's 'status quo'; the following numbers, then, show how the status quo is developed and ultimately altered by the principal character's conflict(s) and the resolution of this. The opening sequence also generally provides an introduction to the main characters or, at the very least, the wide-eyed, naïve ingénues, which again reinforces the fictional world and the status quo. Following this, there will likely be a song where the ingénue tells the audience about his/her hopes and dreams; a song by the villain or villains explaining their plan and the motives behind this; a song by a non-principal character or the Chorus who have been effected by the villain(s); another song by the ingénue lamenting his/her situation; and then a pre-intermission conflict song, which is usually sung by the chorus, with solos by the ingénues and possibly the villains, highlighting the characters' stakes in the conflict and once again reinforcing the status quo. In musical comedy, there will be more dancing. Following intermission, there will be a resume of the conflict; a duet by the lovers where they proclaim their undying love for each other before the 'battle' with the villain occurs; a reprise of the ingénue's lament re-emphasising their personal stakes and showing their personal development/growth as a result of the conflict; a climactic chorus song which anticipates a change in the status quo (I like to call this the "11<sup>th</sup> hour 'hunting' song" as either the ingénues or the villains will be hunted for by the fictional authorities, or the chorus); a song resolving the conflict; and finally, an all-singing, all-dancing finale where the ingénues and chorus celebrate the conquest and defeat of evil, thereby showing how the status quo of the musical's fictional world has been forever changed. For musical comedy, appearing randomly throughout this sequence, there will likely be a few random songs for the purpose of dance and general frivolity; these songs will likely have nothing to do with the plot, but are placed, almost like a *lazzo* in a *commedia*, to entertain the audience and re-focus their attention. This order will vary with every musical, but each song described above will generally be present in some form or other.

For *Fashionable Immigration*, given the 20 minute timescale, the above structure would not be possible. Hence, I decided to select what I believed to be the most significant features of this structure – big opening and closing songs, the ingénue's lament, the villain's song and the 11<sup>th</sup> hour 'hunting' song – and write those into the text. My *lazzo*-like number would be about benefits; this song, however, would actually

provide some facts about the benefits system, and satirize the abuses that the system frequently receives; hence, unlike some *lazzo*-like musical theatre songs, this one would actually serve to further our didactic aim. With five songs that would be approximately two minutes each, there would be ten minutes worth of music for the production; again, given the proposed timescale, this seemed like an appropriate text/song balance. This structure and use of song is not dissimilar to the compact musical structure of a contemporary San Francisco Mime Troupe performance.

The first step of the song writing process, for me, was writing the lyrics. For this I used standard poetry models and rhyming patterns, e.g. A-A-B-B. Given my student performers' inexperience in singing, all rhymes were written with an even amount of syllables that would easily fit standard 2/4 or 4/4 time. However, it should be noted that I did not compromise the quality of the lyrics to make their jobs easier; actually, many of the lyrics to the songs were quite challenging. In my mind, the fact that actors without much musical ability would be singing (or speaking) in time to music, then the lyrics would need to be interesting to keep the audience engaged. Hence, although I employed conventional rhyming structures, the lyrics, in some cases, were intentionally complex. For example, for the *lazzo*-like "Living in Welfare State" the lyrics appear as follows:

Living in a welfare state  
Where hard times or a lack of ambition  
Are easily remedied with a state-funds injection  
So, Zack and Harry: sit right down!  
This one here's the tax-payer's round!

This A-B-B-C-C rhyming structure is fairly conventional, but 'ambition' and 'injection', as a forced rhyme, makes it more challenging (this was made even more challenging during the performance by the *allegro* tempo). The verb 'remedied' also adds to the lyric's difficulty. Another example of this appears in the song "Immigrants Are Ruining Britain", where Anna sings "We have no choice but to form communities / because we suffer your (stops to think of a rhyme) repugnancy!" This more challenging rhyme is juxtaposed with the song's simple chorus, sung by English characters: "Immigrants are ruining Britain / immigrants keep crowding in / immigrants are ruining Britain / when will it end?", which was written to comment on the irrationality and simplicity of the British characters, and the more rational and compassionate attitude held by Anna.

To compose the music I used *Finale Songwriter* music composition software. With this software I was able to enter each note of the music and the lyrics to create readable sheet music to distribute to the cast. *Finale* is one of the more basic music composition software packages available; it does not permit its user to compose from a midi-keyboard (where the user plays their composition on the keyboard and the music appears, as played, on the computer screen). Each song took between eight and twelve hours to compose with this software, so it is not the most time efficient composing tool available. However, the quality of the printed sheet music is very high, and was very useful for my cast.

What has hopefully been apparent throughout this section is that the writing process occurred with the conventions of the forms in mind. Although liberties were taken with each form, they are, for the most part intact. Each piece was written to capture the issue of immigration and provide the audience with the statistics discussed at the beginning of this section. It was not my objective to create overtly one-sided political performances, but, similarly to *Ironland*, my own views regarding immigration are very clearly, and unapologetically, visible in each piece. In regards to timescale, I began the writing process on 10 December 2007 and finished 10 January 2008. Composing the music for the musical took a week longer because of the time it took to enter each song into the *Finale Songwriter* music software; more composing occurred during the rehearsal process. Finally, it should be noted, as with all my texts, I went into rehearsals with an open mind and altered, re-wrote, and in some cases improvised additional dialogue for each text as it became necessary.

### **Section 3: Processes of Rehearsal**

This section will begin with a general discussion of how the rehearsal schedule was organized to accommodate the preparation processes (blocking, building and additional training) for all three productions. For the sake of clarity, the section is then divided into three sub-sections, one for each performance; each section will discuss the design, blocking and additional training required of each performance in more detail.

#### *Time*

In order to produce each of the performances in the time available (roughly five weeks) the organization of the rehearsal schedule was extremely important. I chose to direct the performances in the order that I had written them. Given that I live in London

and commuted to Exeter to teach undergraduate drama students, and that the student performers had coursework and, in some cases, part-time jobs to attend to, I decided that rehearsals would only be held three times each week – Sunday, Monday and Thursday. The Sunday rehearsals were between six and eight hours long, whilst the Monday and Thursday rehearsals were held for two and half hours during the evening. The Sunday rehearsal would be used for blocking the texts, and the other days to reinforce the popular training and blocking for each production. Eventually, puppet-building would take over the Sunday rehearsal slot, leaving the remaining two days to reinforce training and blocking for the performances.

### *Preparing the Commedia for Performance*

As discussed in Chapter Two, the design of a production is particularly important to me and greatly affects the way I stage productions. In regard to the *commedia*, although the performance was scheduled to take place in a studio, I selected stagecraft most often associated with outdoor *commedia* performances, instead of the stagecraft of the patronized, indoor performances; I did this for two major reasons: 1) *commedia* players, regardless of being patronized, would have almost always received their training and performance experience outdoors and subsequently only minor changes (like the height of the stage, for example) would have been made to accommodate an indoor performance, and 2) an outdoor summer performance of the *commedia* text was being discussed with Exeter City Council and consequently I felt that my students would benefit greatly from having experience on a trestle stage. The design, then, incorporated all the major features – trestle stage, backcloth, minimal properties – associated with the outdoor stagecraft. The design was amended only slightly because I knew that we would be using rostra to make the stage and the department did not possess the equipment to make the trestle stage the required five or six feet high. Additionally, as the production would take place in an intimate studio as opposed to a piazza or busy market square, then the height of a traditional trestle stage would be superfluous. Eventually it was decided between Jon Primrose, the technical director, and me that the trestle stage would be one meter high. I amended the design even further by adding a ramp and a step unit to the sides of the rostra stage to provide more versatility for entrances and exits and eliminate congestion during the scene changes (see Figure 18).

The same considerations were applied to masks and the costumes for the production. Dawn Canham, who manages the Department's costume store, took it upon herself to locate as many apparently sixteenth- and seventeenth-century costumes as possible. I provided her with images of Zanni, Columbina, and Harlequin, and she did her best to locate appropriate elements of costume for these characters as well. As leather masks would have been difficult to make with little budget and materials, I made them using clay moulds and papier-mâché (see Figure 19).



**Figure 18** Rendering for scene iii of *Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia*. Please note the addition of an upstage area that would have acted as Magnifico's office; this was later cut because of a lack of rostra. Illustration by Jason Price.



**Figure 19** Before and after: clay mould for Harlequin's mask, and the mask during performance, worn by Genevieve Robinson. Photos: Jason Price and Jon Primrose.

The staging of the *commedia* was often dictated by the function and movement of the *commedia* characters. Additionally, in some cases, symbolic patterns were created

to suggest moral and ideological divisions; the latter is discussed quite extensively in the previous chapter. There were times where both of these features – the physical traits of the character and liberal ideology present in the performance – worked very well together. For instance, Harlequin, as a representative of the play’s pro-immigration stance, used constant, sharp and animal-like movements, which are requisite features of the traditional Harlequin character. This kept him moving about the stage for the duration of the performance and I believe made him a more engaging hero. Zanni, the benefit fraud who possesses an anti-immigration view, moved in a more bizarre fashion; his wing-like arms, constantly moving head, and slower movements are, I believe, more in keeping with the character’s greed and ignorance.



**Figure 20:** From left to right: Jonathan Hunt as Magnifico, Elenid Hatcher as Zanni, and Genevieve Robinson as Harlequin in *Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia*. Photo: Jon Primrose.

The *commedia* training, which many had received during the workshops described in Section 2, was reinforced throughout the rehearsal process. I wanted to ensure that the stock characters – Harlequin, Zanni, Magnifico, Anna, the Columbina, and Isabella, the first actress – were reproduced accurately. Other characters that featured in the performance – the immigrants, and police officer, although not generally associated with the *commedia* form, were all written based on one or more of its characters. Hence, each rehearsal began with the *commedia* archetype evolution exercise discussed in the previous chapter. This was used in two ways: 1) as a general review of the characters, which would be useful to those who were playing a stock character and 2) for the actors who were not playing a particular a stock character to be

able to practice a number of types and use the evolution process to build hybrid characters using the stock characters as models. To accommodate the needs of all the performers, the exercise was adapted in the following manner:

- (1) All performers form a circle.
- (2) Each performer selects a line of text that belongs to their character.
- (3) One performer at a time speaks their selected line as themselves, in their natural voice.
- (4) Having delivered their line, the performer then walks to the centre of the circle, selecting, as they enter, another performer to engage with. As they walk to the centre, their character must begin to form; by the time they reach the centre, they are their character.
- (5) Once in the centre, they once again deliver their line, but this time as their character. The line is delivered to another performer (see step 4 above).
- (6) Once the line has been delivered, the performer drops their character. They leave the circle as themselves.
- (7) The performer who receives the line is the next one to enter the circle. The process is repeated until all the performers have gone.

As a director, I have found that this exercise provides an opportunity to correct any errors in the stock characters and to determine whether the ensemble's level of physicality matches. If I was unhappy with the way a character manifested during the exercise, I would have the performer return to their place in the circle and attempt the exercise again. I frequently used phrases like 'I need more' or 'it needs to be much bigger' during this exercise so that the right physicality was reached. With more frequent reminders and rehearsals, some of the students were beginning to develop a very good sense of the *Commedia* form; and in a few cases, they even appeared to be embodying the training. In regard to mask work: the Department's collection of *commedia* masks went missing prior to the start of our rehearsals and we were subsequently not able to rehearse or perform this exercise with them until the final week of rehearsals (when I had completed the ones described earlier in this section). Ultimately, I think this negatively affected the performances of the masked characters.

*Preparing the Puppet Show*



**Figure 21** Zack, Anna, and Harry in *Fashionable Immigration: a Puppet Show*. Photo: Jon Primrose.

As the large-scale puppet show was based on the work of WSI and the Bread and Puppet Theatre, then it, like the *commedia*, really needed to be placed outdoors in order to achieve this authenticity; however, I did not trust the English weather to accommodate two outdoor performances in early March (which, as it turns out, was quite apt: it rained on both days of the performances). Instead, to honour the traditions of these troupes, I tried to ensure that the puppets honoured the aesthetics of these troupes, achieving the greatest visual impact with audiences. I believed the best way to achieve this was to surround the audience with the large puppets. The human actors, then, would need to be placed on raised platforms to ensure they were visible to all members of the audience. Beyond this, no other settings would be used thereby keeping the focus on the puppets, the performers, and the argument of the play. I hoped that the arrangement of the space, alongside the scale of the puppets would induce a feeling of entrapment. The central location of the audience would literally and symbolically place them in the middle of the debate. Despite appearances, this audience/performance layout was not an attempt at Artaudian stagecraft; it was arranged in this way because I believed it would be the most engaging. However, my knowledge of Artaudian staging may have (perhaps subconsciously) influenced my decision on some level.

The puppets were built using the plans discussed in Section 1 of this chapter. There were three in total: Zack, Issie, and Harry. The height of the puppets was set at 12 feet and the scale of the body, including extended arms, was set accordingly. I had scheduled for the puppets to be built over the course of two Sunday rehearsals; given how quickly the frames had been built during the workshops and my experiments with creating puppet heads in my back garden, I thought that this would be sufficient time to

complete the puppets. I was mistaken. In total, the puppets took four Sunday rehearsals (approximately 32 hours); in addition to this, I had to complete many of the smaller details during my spare time. In total, it took around 48 hours to build the puppets.



**Figure 22** Anne-Marie Cosco putting the final touches on Harry's head for the puppet show. Photo: Jason Price.

The decision to not build a puppet for Magnifico was made on the logic that the character appears in one scene for approximately two minutes; it seemed impractical to spend time building a puppet that would only be seen for such a short period of time. However, the character, as a major feature of the planned factory spectacle, would need to be impressive. Additionally, despite her brief appearance, she has a major impact on the characters and plot and subsequently needed to leave an impression on the audience. After having considered various ways of achieving this, I eventually selected to place a masked actor on a high platform and cover both with a large, floor-length dress; the platform would have casters so that the character could be pushed around the space and through the audience.

Rehearsals without completed puppets were challenging, but manageable. We were able to make use of the gaffer-taped frames that had been made during the workshops; this allowed for the puppeteers to gain some sense of how to manipulate the puppets, but, given that the puppets made for the performance were considerably heavier, much of the work with the puppets had to be done in the final weeks of rehearsal. Once we were able to rehearse with the puppets, my attention turned to pace and gesture. As the puppet's scale is considerably larger than that of the actor, it was important to keep their pace in line with that scale, i.e. slower than the actor's normal pace; I feared quick movements might appear awkward or even comedic, which would

be inappropriate for the puppet show dramaturgy. Hence, if a puppet was required to wave or physically respond to another character or object, then the puppeteer needed to premeditate that gesture to ensure the puppet's arms were in the right place at the right time. During the rehearsals without completed puppets, I asked the actors to use a five-second timescale for each gesture. To make this easier, we marked in the text where movement should begin, where the gesture would occur, and how it would end.



**Figure 23** *Magnifico*, with Zack, Harry and Issie in the puppet show. Photo: Jon Primrose, 2008.

The factory scene, which featured flags and shadow puppets, was an attempt at exploring the carnivalesque nature of spectacle-based performance. One of the driving forces behind the work of WSI and the Bread and Puppet Theatre, I feel, is the atmosphere generated by the combination of performers, audience and spectacular elements. Although it could be argued that all three performances, given their satiric, comedic and ironical content were in some way already achieving this<sup>14</sup>, I wanted to explore the carnivalesque nature of popular performance in a more direct way – through the use of live music, ritual-like action, and traditional shadow theatre. I hoped that by combining these elements, I might be able to form a spectacle akin to a Mardi Gras parade, a ritual, or a pageant; the question, of course, was whether this was possible in a studio with a minimal budget. As this scene's function was to depict the conditions of

<sup>14</sup> Millie Taylor discusses the theory of carnivalesque with regards to pantomime performance. She writes "The ritual and participation of pantomime involve the audience in seemingly subversive activity, while the laughter at physical comedy and the grotesque boy as well as topic and political humour allows the audience to laugh at the joke while becoming aware of its own subjectivity and complicity" (Taylor 2007: 17-18).

Magnifico's garment factory, the spectacle was arranged with the process of making clothes in mind. Hence, the first stage of the spectacle would show dancers unrolling, waving, and stretching out fabric; this would then be carried behind a screen where it would be stitched into clothing by shadow puppet seamstresses; the final stage would be the presentation of the garments to Magnifico for inspection; to do this, two clotheslines would be stretched the length of the studio, and Magnifico would be rolled out for the inspection. Underscoring this spectacle, would be a live drummer, playing heavy, ritualistic drum beats. The intended effect was to create a 'party-like' atmosphere that might get the audience to participate and enjoy themselves, whilst simultaneously being exposed to the harsh working conditions for the immigrants in Magnifico's factory. In the next section I will discuss how this staging had to be altered for the final performances.

In sum, building large-scale puppets was the most challenging and time consuming aspect of the rehearsal process for the puppet show. Once they were built, we were able to consider the scale of the puppets and their movements more thoroughly than we had previously, but more rehearsal in this area was needed. The spectacle-based factory scene, on paper and in rehearsals, seemed like it had the potential to be stunning, but this was later compromised due in large part to a lack of materials. Out of all the rehearsal processes (note that I am excluding the puppet building process here) the puppet show's was the easiest. I think this was due to the simplicity of the text and the realistic dramaturgy, which the performers were far more acquainted than any of the other forms being explored by this project.

### *Preparing the Musical*

As the most modern of the forms being explored, a musical is not bound to a particular stagecraft. I believe, however, that there is a general perception that musicals require big sets, elaborate costumes, and spectacular lighting effects – a perception that is almost certainly a result of the mainstream commercial theatre that, for the sake of competition, emphasizes spectacle and 'pop' music to appeal to the wider, popular market. As Baz Kershaw (1999) has discussed, the features associated with the 'branded' commercial theatre can create passive audiences. In *Fashionable Immigration: a Musical*, I wanted to directly challenge the (mis)perception that musicals require a spectacular environment to engage audiences and I did this by doing as little as possible. Instead of a large, lavish setting I selected to use minimal properties

and lighting to establish the three major locations – the street, the pub and Magnifico’s office. Beyond this, one small platform was placed upstage centre to allow for entrances, exits and occasionally to layer performers to improve audience sightlines. To complement our minimal aesthetic, the actors were instructed to wear their own clothing.



**Figure 24** The Chorus performs “Another Beautiful Day” in *Fashionable Immigration: a Musical*. Photo: Jon Primrose, 2008.

The staging of the musical, with the exception of the songs and choreography, mirrored that of the *commedia*; this was primarily because the scripts were so similar. I also felt, given the similarities of the physicality of the characters, mirroring the *commedia*’s staging might act as a framing device for the performances, and that this might assist audiences in recognizing the similarities between the performance styles (although the project’s outcomes were not reliant on them making this connection).

As has been mentioned, each of the *Fashionable Immigration: a musical* characters was written with an almost cynical, ironic awareness of the musical form’s conventions. The ironic treatment of the form is not a new concept; in fact, some have argued that it is one of the more significant features of the developed contemporary musical (Knapp 1978; Hasbany 1978). Richard Hasbany, author of “The Musical Goes Ironic: the evolution of genre?” (1978) specifically argues that one of the first musicals to successfully employ irony was Michael Bennett’s *A Chorus Line* (1975). Hasbany claims that the irony of *A Chorus Line* comes from the juxtaposition of the performance’s minimal aesthetic, where the dancers tell an offstage director their most troubling secrets and hopes for the future on an almost bare stage, with the flashy, artificial, ‘1930s sunburst’ finale. As a consequence of this irony, the audience is forced

to identify with the characters and their situations more intensely than with previous musical theatre efforts (Hasbany 1978: 121). With *Fashionable Immigration*, the irony was lyrical (written into the text) and performative (the actors physically acknowledging the conventions in a ‘wink and nod’ kind of way). By acknowledging the form’s conventions, the goal was not so much to make fun of it, but to make it more honest. I hoped that audiences might find the performance more humorous, identify with the situations of the characters more intensely and that this might result in the performance achieving a broader didactic impact. This irony, then, might be considered a metatheatrical device - one which draws out of the contemporary musical a characteristic generally associated with some of the popular forms which were merged to found it, namely forms of variety theatre (e.g. cabaret, minstrel shows and vaudeville – which were mentioned in Chapter One), where the audience and performers are aware of, and much freer to engage with, one another than they are at performances of the aesthetic type. Finally, I think it prudent to mention once again: Out of the forms being performed, the musical would be the most familiar and consequently recognisable to contemporary audiences. Hence, the task of drawing out any humour inherent in the form’s conventions, I believed, would not be difficult.



**Figure 25** Anne-Marie Cosco, the ‘Chav’, tells it how it is in *Fashionable Immigration: a Musical*. Photo: Jon Primrose, 2008.

To prepare the performers for their roles, the *commedia* archetype evolution exercise was once again utilized. This time, however, it was executed in exactly the same way as it had been for *Ironland* and for the same reason: to develop a contemporary character based on the *commedia* archetype. Given that the performers were performing in both the *commedia* and musical, I did not need to explain to them where their characters had originated from. The outcome was that the musical’s

characters possessed a similar physicality and ‘over-the-top’ nature to those from the *commedia*, which I felt was more appropriate to the satirical, ironic text, but still faithful to the musical comedy form.

Out of the six songs written for the musical, five required dance-based choreography. As a consequence of the dance workshop, I knew I was taking a risk by doing this. I figured, however, that I could manage to get them to perform simple choreography and that with substantial rehearsal they would be able to execute this choreography accurately. The opening song, “Another Beautiful Day”, for instance, only required the actors to walk, turn around and open and close umbrellas at the same time; I instructed them to do this with big, almost disturbing, smiles and to overarticulate the words they were singing. In addition, I instructed them to overreact to what they were hearing. For instance, when a ‘chav’ character sings “Yeah, it’s great to be in lov-e-ly old England, you can fuck-off if you think otherwise!”, the Chorus was instructed to gasp, make disapproving facial expressions, and drop their umbrellas; the reaction is not dissimilar to something that might appear in melodrama or farce. Although minimal dance steps were used for the staging of this song, I selected to have the Chorus travel around the stage as a tightly woven pack; I felt that this would make the simple choreography seem more impressive.

Although most of the songs required similar, non-technique-based dance choreography, I did ensure that some jazz and ballet skills and techniques were used in one number; this was “Living in a Welfare State”. The dance techniques that were incorporated were chosen so that the students might attempt more complicated movements to assist in their own development as performers. The dance break, roughly 40 counts, consisted of a jazz turn, *Pas de bourrée*, pencil turn, high kick, *plié*, and a hinge-kick. This was followed by 16 counts of tap dancing from Elenid Hatcher, an experienced tap and clog dancer. As this song takes place in a pub, I thought that if the performers were not able to execute the choreography in a uniform manner, then the audience might conclude that this was due to the fact that they were too drunk to dance.

The musical received the least amount of rehearsal time; this was largely due to the time it took to build the puppets for the puppet show. A week before the productions opened, many performers still did not know their lines for the musical; two days before we opened, they were still struggling. The music, which I feared would be a major obstacle, actually proved to be the simplest element of the musical to teach; I saw

improvement throughout the company in regards to blending and harmonizing with others. Two of the three soloists – Elenid Hatcher and Leah Lewis – improved significantly. The production opened having only been run completely through twice.



**Figure 26:** Leah Lewis as Anna in *Fashionable Immigration: a musical*. Photo: Jon Primrose.

### *Conclusions from the Rehearsal Process*

One of the major issues I brought up in the ‘outcomes’ sections of Section One of this chapter was the significance of repetitive maintenance rehearsals and the role this plays in one’s ability to reproduce, in this case, physical training accurately. With regard to *commedia*, large-scale puppetry and voice, the students were, with a steady period of reinforcement, able to achieve a higher proficiency than they had for performing in *Ironland*. In some individual cases, the performers exceed my expectations and performed these forms/skills very well.

In regard to shadow puppetry and dance: unfortunately, even with the additional reinforcement, most of the students were unable to perform these successfully. I think this is largely due to the nature and difficulty in mastering the *technique* required of each of the forms. As mentioned previously, I believe a considerable amount of training would have been required before a noticeable, positive, difference would have been

visible. Because of the problems with these forms, action was taken – by me – to minimise their appearance in the productions. In the puppet show, for example, the shadow puppets only make a brief (30 seconds) appearance, which eliminated the possibility of exploring the source of confusion for female audience members in response to the shadow puppets that had arisen in *Ironland*. Similarly, dance had been removed from *Ironland* because the cast were not comfortable doing it; once again, I was not able to explore this form in much depth with this project.

#### **Section 4: *Fashionable Immigration in Performance (DVD 3)***

In this section I will discuss *Fashionable Immigration* as it was performed on 8 and 9 March 2008. This section will examine issues that arose during the final stages of preparation for the performances that led to alterations in the staging or general aesthetics, and consider whether these might have affected the audiences' responses to the performances. As many of these issues will be apparent in the accompanying DVD, I will only discuss them briefly here. For comprehensibility, I will discuss each issue following the sequence used throughout this chapter, e.g. *commedia*, puppet show, and then the musical.

*The commedia*: there were only two issues that arose during the technical rehearsal for this production. The first concerned the backcloth and the window *lazzo*. Jon Primrose and I had discussed various methods for making this *lazzo* work. The first method would require a trampoline; the actor would fall from the stage onto the trampoline and bounce back onto the stage. When this method was actually experimented with during rehearsals, it did not work. The stage was too high to bounce back on to. The second method required a crash mat that the department did not have. The day before the productions opened, two crash mats were located and placed behind the stage and an experiment was conducted. Many of the performers were too afraid to fall onto them appropriately; for those wearing masks, falling proved to be even more difficult as their vision was partially impaired. The mats were also quite thick and when placed together were almost the same height as the stage. The problem with this was that the mats and the actors falling onto them would be visible to the audience, which, in my opinion, greatly infringed the comedic potential of the *lazzo*. Unfortunately, as no other options were available at the time, I had to settle for the safe, but less impressive option.

The second issue that arose during the *commedia* occurred during the Saturday evening performance. This performance was attended by over 60 people; the capacity of each performance was meant to be 50. The majority of this audience was students and friends of the performers. As a result, a couple of performers took liberties with the text and the blocking to achieve a greater response by their friends. It should be noted that the text for all three performances were written for mass appeal and subsequently only a few choice profanities had been written into the texts. During this performance, Melody Thomas, who played the role of the Landlady, discovered that the audience found the words ‘fucking hell’ remarkably funny; she subsequently inserted these words on a number of occasions. I appreciated her attempts to engage with the audience, but unfortunately when this occurred during crucial moments of the performance, like, for instance, the finale when the characters summarized what they had learned from Anna’s experience, her behaviour was incredibly distracting. As the DVD shows, the audience seems to enjoy the Landlady character very much; however, I have to wonder whether such distractions compromised the didactic potential of this performance for this audience. Such behaviour in *commedia*, according to Allardyce Nicoll, was not appropriate: “Every actor must remember that when a second actor enters, he should at once give him place; he should not interrupt the second player, and, especially, if he is taking a comic role, he should not engage in ridiculous business while a serious speech is being delivered [...]” (Nicoll 1963: 18). In future, I will need to emphasise the importance of this during the rehearsal process to ensure that it does not happen again.

*The Puppet Show*: There was only one major issue that arose during the final preparation stages that affected the performance. The day before the performance, during the technical rehearsal, Dawn Canham, our costume manager, had urgent personal business to attend to; unfortunately, she had not provided us with all the necessary fabric and clothing items required for the spectacular factory scene. Subsequently, the bolts of fabric that would be stretched over the audience to begin the spectacle and the clothes lines that were to be stretched over the audience’s heads at the end of the scene were cut. The final spectacle only contained flag bearers, live drum music, shadow puppets and the giant, masked Magnifico. As the complete clothes-making process was not shown, I believe that the audience was unable to comprehend what was happening, which subsequently might have affected how they received this performance.

*The Musical*: The only issue that I believe is noteworthy here occurred during the Saturday evening and Sunday matinee performances. Sasha Jacques, who played Madge, inspired by Melody Thomas's adlibbing during the *commedia*, decided that she too would try her hand at improvisation. When Brigida and Anna are reunited during scene seven of the musical, Madge is meant to enter and say "Oh, I heard we had a new arrival. Welcome. I trust your journey was safe and comfortable". Instead, she entered and said "Eww. You do smell of piss." This line, which had been created by Jonathan Hunt for the chase scene of the *commedia*, was, in my opinion, inappropriate to the musical's type of humour. During this performance she was also unable to remember her final monologue, which explains that the factory is closing because of her massive debts and the looming "wretched recession". Rather, she claimed that she was in a recession. I do not believe that this affected the audience's understanding of the scene to a large extent, but it may have influenced their opinions of the text and how it was composed.

### **Section 5: Audience Reception**

Questionnaires were distributed to members of the audience following each performance of *Fashionable Immigration* on 8 and 9 March 2008. What follows is a summary of the responses to the performances (for a complete analysis of the statistics gathered from this performance please see Appendix A). In total, 114 people attended the three performances. Of these, 79 were women (69%) and 35 were men (31%). These figures have been divided further into age categories: there were 80 audience members between the age of 18-24 (approximately 70.2%), 21 between the ages of 25-44 (18.4%) and 13 over the age of 45 (11.4%). I would also like to remind the reader of the limitations on the evidence as discussed in the previous chapter; the audience reception statistics and the analysis that follows should not be considered concrete evidence, but suggestions of the efficacy of the forms explored that will be pursued at a later time.

The first three questions asked audiences specifically about the forms and the issue of immigration in Britain. They were asked to indicate whether the form (*commedia*, puppetry or musical theatre) had been distracting, too 'over-the-top' for their personal tastes, interesting, enjoyable, made the information being presented easier or more difficult to understand. In regards to the *commedia*, most responders indicated that they had found the form to be enjoyable (73%), entertaining (86%) and interesting (61%). 55% of these responders also indicated that the use of large gesture and masks had made the information being presented easier to understand; only 4% of responders

indicated that these elements had made the information confusing. The puppet show elicited similar responses: 80% of responders felt that the puppet show was interesting; 58% enjoyable; 55% entertaining. Whilst 38% of responders felt that the puppets/actor combination had made the information being presented easier to understand, 11% felt it was more difficult because of the combination of techniques and puppet forms. In regard to female reception of the puppet form, which was one of the major enquiries of this research project, nine women and three men indicated that the puppet show was confusing. However, once these figures are considered alongside the gender demographic of the audience, these figures become insignificant. Finally, in regards to the musical, 93% of responders felt that it was entertaining; 88% felt that it was enjoyable and 66% felt it was interesting. Whilst 70% indicated that the musical had made the issue of immigration easier to comprehend, less than 2% indicated that the information had been made more difficult by the musical form.

What the above figures indicate is that all three forms were able to successfully inform, engage (interest) and entertain their audiences. The musical was the most successful in achieving this with 70% of audiences indicating that the issue of immigration had been made easier to comprehend by this form, whilst only 2% believed it had been made more difficult. In contrast, the puppet show was the least successful of the forms with 38% of the audiences indicating that the information had been made easier by the form, and 11% indicating that they had been confused. This echoes the responses to Question 5, which asked audiences to indicate which of the performances was the most effective in discussing the issue of immigration in Britain. 48% of responders indicated the musical; 30% indicated the *commedia*; and less than 17% indicated the puppet show.

In order to better understand why audiences are drawn to particular forms, Question 6 asked audiences to justify their response to Question 5. They were provided with the following options: you preferred that particular performance style?; you were familiar with or recognised the theatrical form being utilised and felt more comfortable with it?; it was unique or unusual?; you appreciated the aesthetics of that particular performance?; you found that performance to be the most entertaining?; the dynamics of that particular cast?; you appreciated the text?. 52% of responders indicated that they believed their selected performance to be the most effective because it had succeeded in entertaining them. 44% indicated that the performance's aesthetics as the reason for its effectiveness. 36% declared a preference for a particular performance style. Once all responses are separated into age and gender groups, the results only vary slightly. For

women, the top three reasons for selecting a particular performance are: entertainment value (58%), the aesthetics of the performance (47%) and a preference for the performance's style (43%). Amongst men, entertainment value is also the most frequent response (51%); this is followed by the text (43%) and the aesthetics (37%).

In regard to the performances specifically, those who selected the musical as the most effective did so because:

- (1) It was the most entertaining (63%).
- (2) They preferred that style (43%) and because they were familiar with and felt comfortable with that style (43%).
- (3) They appreciated the performance's aesthetics (37%).

The *commedia* elicited similar responses. Responders who favoured it claimed they did so because:

- (1) It was the most entertaining (68%).
- (2) They preferred the *commedia* style (53%).
- (3) They appreciated its aesthetics (50%).

The puppet show, on the other hand, elicited quite different responses. Those who selected it as the most effective performance did so because:

- (1) Of its text (58%).
- (2) It was unique/unusual (47%).
- (3) Of its aesthetics (42%).

The differences between the puppet show's audience's responses from the others are, in my mind, significant. It would appear that the combination of large-scale and shadow puppets with human actors has resulted in an audience that is able to appreciate the text more thoroughly than with the other forms. I will return to this question in the conclusion of this chapter.

To determine the didactic effectiveness of the forms, Question 7 asked audiences to name at least one thing they had learned from one or all of the performances. 59% of responders were able to name at least one thing they had learned. The answers varied greatly to this question, with several responders only providing generalized 'facts'. For instance, a 19 year old female indicated that she learned "the extent of paper work tied up in immigration." The scene in which she 'learned' this 'fact' appeared in the musical; it was a completely fictional scene that had been composed out of generalizations I had collected through conversations with other people; it was completely satirical and not founded on any facts at all. It should be noted that generalized responses such as this were eliminated from the analysis. Despite this, the

majority of responders were able to remember a fact from the performance, and subsequently the performances met the didactic aim of the research.

The final questions (8, 9 and 10) were designed to explore the effectiveness of the performances more directly and attempted to gauge whether any of the audience members might become *active* in response to the performance. For instance, Question 8 asked whether their perceptions about immigration had changed or altered as a result one of the performances. 64 responders (56%) said that it had. When asked whether they felt compelled to share or discuss the information in the performances with others (Question 9), or even recommend one of the performances to friends or family (Question 10), 90% indicated that they were compelled to share the information, and 96% indicated that they would recommend the performances. Hence, I am able to conclude that the performances succeeding in meeting the third aim of the project (to make contemporary audiences more active as a response to the performance).

#### *Conclusions from audience reception*

Considering the responses to all ten questions, alongside the aims and objectives of the research, the questions posed in the conclusion of the preceding chapter, and the limitations on the audience reception statistics, I feel the following can be concluded:

*The didactic aim:* audiences at these performances were able to comprehend the factual and ideological information present in each performance. As the responses to Question 7 indicate, 67 responders, a majority, were able to identify something that they had learned through the performances. Unfortunately, some of the responses to Question 7 shed light on one of the problems with the performances: that some audience members were unable to separate the factual from satirical aspects of the performance. What this signifies is that greater care needs to be taken in order to make these distinctions more apparent in the performance.

*The aesthetic aim:* on the questionnaires this aim was explored through several responses. For Questions 1, 2 and 4, audience members had the option of selecting that a performance was entertaining, enjoyable or too 'over-the-top' for their taste. As the tables in Appendix A show, 'entertaining' and 'enjoyable' were the most frequent response to the *commedia* and the musical. For the puppet show, the majority of audience members found it to be 'interesting'; whereas, 'enjoyable' and 'entertaining' were the second and third most frequently given response for this performance. I believe that this indicates that the aesthetic aim of the performances was also met. However, in regard to puppetry, these figures also indicate that some audience members were drawn

to the uniqueness of the form; this then made them more aware of the text. Whether this was a result of the form, or the unconventional staging, is hard to tell and could warrant further investigation.

*Puppetry and gender:* As mentioned in previous sections, because of the difficulties the performers had with mastering this form, most of the shadow puppetry had been eliminated from the puppet show; subsequently, the divide which appeared between genders in regard to comprehension before could not be adequately studied here. It should, however, be noted that the responses from men and women were statistically the same here, with no gender group being more or less confused than another. I am then able to speculate that the reason for the divided gender responses from *Ironland* was due to the poor quality of the shadow puppet performance. However, the scale and dimension (one-dimensional shadow versus three-dimensional puppets) of puppets and their effectiveness with both genders might warrant further investigation.

*The combination of techniques and the 18-24 year-old demographic:* although all three performances fared well with this demographic, the responses to Questions 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 do help shed some light on what possibly might have caused them confusion in scene iv of *Ironland*. With regard to the *commedia*, although no one from this group found the performance confusing, seven responders did find it ‘too over-the-top’ for their taste, and four found the masks and large gestures made the performance more difficult to understand. With puppetry, 11 responders had found the performance to be confusing, whilst seven believed it was too ‘over-the-top’, and that the puppets/actor combination had made the issue of immigration more difficult to understand. For the musical, however, only two indicated that it was too ‘over-the-top’ and that the form made the issue more difficult to understand. What this seems to indicate is that this age group, which was made up largely of drama students, do not react as positively to performance objects – in this case, puppets and masks. Although there were no puppets in scene iv of *Ironland*, there were two characters on stilts – similar to the large-scale puppets in *Fashionable Immigration*. The majority of this age group preferred the musical (45%), and claimed the reason for this preference was: it was entertaining (94%) and because they appreciated its aesthetics (89%). The latter figure is, I believe, the most telling. The musical’s aesthetic was simple – no elaborate costumes or major settings. This, then, might support an argument that, at the present time, this age group prefers a more straightforward approach, which excludes frivolous material elements (masks, puppets, costumes, sets, etc.).

*Why are audiences drawn to certain forms? What significance does familiarity play in how an audience receives a performance? What connection is there between an audience being 'entertained' and an audience 'learning'?* These questions, posed at the beginning of this chapter, are crucial to this thesis. The responses elicited to Questions 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 begin to shed some light on these enquiries. The majority of audience members who selected the musical as the 'most effective' performance claimed they did so because they perceived it to be the most entertaining; in a joint tie for the second most frequent response were a preference for that particular performance, and familiarity and comfort with the form. Although it could be argued that the other two performances are also recognizable – *commedia* through knowledge of pantomime and puppetry through children's television – the recognition is certainly not as direct. Additionally, although the numbers are still small, those who found the *commedia* (5 responders) and puppet show (12 responders) forms had 'made the information more difficult to understand' still outweigh the number of responders (2) who found the musical form made the information more difficult. A performance's ability 'to entertain', however, seems to be the largest reason why audiences are drawn to it.

*Does casting play a role in the way an audience responds to a performance?* Yes, it does. 'Dynamics of casting' was the fifth most frequently specified reason for having selected a particular performance (36 responders). Specifically, it would appear that the musical's casting was favoured most by audiences; this was followed by casting for the *commedia* and finally the puppet show.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH PROJECT 3: EXPLORING *COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE* IN AN OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

The projects discussed in this thesis thus far have been performed in the protected environment of the performance studio. Although these experiments have proved useful in understanding the nature and potential benefits of the forms, some of the conventions of the forms have had to be neglected to suit this environment. Furthermore, the audiences that have viewed and provided feedback on these performances have largely been drama students, friends and family of the cast, and academics. Again, although this feedback has been invaluable to this study, a performance given without a drama-informed and potentially biased audience might help determine whether the previous statistics were accurate, and how the general public would react to didactic popular theatre. Hence, the third and final project would place a *commedia dell'arte* performance, a form which has been used extensively in the previous projects, outdoors; in its natural habitat, so to speak. In doing so, I would be able to explore how this environment affects the *commedia* form – particularly physicality, gesture and voice, and what work would need to be done in the training and rehearsal studios to prepare for an outdoor performance – and, whether the form could engage, entertain and inform an audience made up of the general public.

This chapter will discuss how *Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia* was adapted and rehearsed for three outdoor performances in the Exeter Guildhall Shopping Centre on 7 June 2008. Because the same text and performers were used from the previous project, I will not need to discuss text creation or basic training; instead, this chapter will concentrate on preparation, the performances, and the audiences' reception. The first section of this chapter, entitled 'Reinforcement of the Form', will detail how previous training methods were tailored and reinforced during the rehearsal period to accommodate the needs of an outdoor performance and also how new exercises were developed in order to help achieve this. The following two sections, entitled 'Performance' and 'Audience Reception' discuss the three performances and the audiences' reception to them. 'Conclusions', the fourth and final section, will discuss the outcomes of the performances and consider the audiences' reception in relation to the previous projects. Cross-referencing with previous chapters will be done throughout to show how previous training and problems that arose during the performances were addressed for this project.

### Section 1: Reinforcement of the Form

Most of the performers from the March performances had agreed to participate in this production. Elena Byers, who had played several small roles, Anna-Marie Cosco, who had played Big Brenda, and Elenid Hatcher, who played Zanni, due to impending final exams and other performance projects, however, were the exceptions. Nicholas Cosslett, who had played the role of General Irons in *Diplomacy in Ironland*, and trained with me previously, was recruited to perform the role of Zanni; and Tara Postma, who played Brigida, agreed to assume Ms. Byer's roles. Although I did attempt to recruit a new performer for the role of Big Brenda, given the time of year (end of term), no one suitable was available to perform the role; subsequently, I adapted the text and eliminated this character. In the new text, Big Brenda's significant lines were redistributed to Zanni and the Landlady. In regards to this adaptation, it should also be noted that certain profanities were removed to make it more family friendly. With a new cast member, and an adapted text, rehearsals began on 11 May 2008.

As the performers were already trained and knew the text and blocking (with the exception of Nicholas Cosslett, but this was quickly remedied), the rehearsal process focused on reinforcing the training and developing the skills needed for an outdoor performance – namely, vocal projection. Here, breath-control, diction and projection, which had previously been discussed in the Voice for Musical Theatre workshop, discussed in Chapter Three, were readdressed and tailored for an outdoor performance. To help the students become more aware of the projection that was needed, rehearsals, when the weather permitted us to do so, were held outdoors. Simple vocal warm-ups, breathing exercises, and singing scales, like those discussed in the previous chapter, were used again here<sup>15</sup>.

Because many of the performers had been working with this text since late January 2008, the early rehearsals for this project lacked energy, as the performers appeared to be bored with the material. Subsequently, their characters were incredibly flaccid. To remedy this, I first resurrected the archetype evolution exercise, but this did not seem to have any affect. As the issue was primarily their lack of interest with the

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<sup>15</sup> I would like to note that John Rudlin's book *Commedia dell'Arte: an actor's handbook* (1995), which was consulted frequently for the previous two projects, does not address the issue of vocal projection for an outdoor performance. An attempt was made to locate other sources which might shed light on how this is achieved, but the techniques discussed in these books were not considerably different to what I already knew. Subsequently, my decision to use the vocal training methods previously employed for musical theatre was made because I believed it to be the most suitable for preparing the performers for this performance.

text and their characters, I would need to create a new exercise – an incredibly physical one – that would help refocus their attention, restore their interest in the project, and further develop their characterisation (physicality, voice and gesture) simultaneously. After several failed attempts, I eventually found a game that they claimed to enjoy, and did help address these issues; this was ‘characterisation football’. Characterisation football is played exactly like normal football. The only new rule is that an actor/player receives penalties for abandoning their characterisation during a game. To exercise their voices, the actors were encouraged to address one another with either lines from the text, or to improvise new ones. Due to the nature of the sport, and the competitive nature of the students, the football matches were incredibly loud and extremely physical. Unfortunately, from a vocal training standpoint, the quick and active nature of the game did not really permit the referee (me) the opportunity to determine whether breathing, posture and projection were being done accurately. Despite this, the performers seemed to enjoy this game very much, and I do believe it helped revive their interest in both the project and their roles. It also permitted me the opportunity to watch the performers and correct any mistakes they were making in the physicality of the archetypes and gauge whether the physicality of the non-archetype roles (e.g. the immigrant characters) were evenly matched.

Unfortunately, we were not able to rehearse in the designated performance space, an open-air square in the middle of a concrete shopping centre. Subsequently, only on the day of the performance did it become apparent that the echo of the performers’ voices, the voice of shoppers, crying babies and laughing children off of the concrete buildings surrounding the square would be a major issue. Although it appeared that the vocal work done in rehearsals had improved their ability to enunciate and project their lines, the clarity of their voices on the day varied greatly. The first performance, for instance, which was held at 10:30 am, was mostly audible from where I was standing (roughly twelve feet forward of the stage-left side of the stage), but Professor Graham Ley, who viewed the performance from various locations, claimed that the volume varied. Subsequently, before the second performance, the performers were instructed to project even more. I watched this performance from a parapet overlooking the square and could only hear the male cast members’ voices. For the final performance I instructed the girls to lower the tones of their voices and continue to project as normal. Unfortunately, this performance was plagued by rain, misbehaving youth and general exhaustion, and almost all of the performers struggled to maintain their focus, and, as a result, the vocal projection suffered greatly. The physicality,

gesture and general characterisation of the performers, however, remained reasonably consistent throughout the day.



**Figure 27:** Leah Lewis as Anna, Nick Cosslett as Zanni, Genevieve Lewis as Harlequin, and Jonathan Hunt as Madam Magifico in the outdoor production of *Fashionable Immigration*. Photo by Claire Peart.

Based on the performances on 7 June, one thing about *commedia dell'arte* seems to be clear: the form's use of distinctive physicality, gesture and movement was necessary to help to communicate a story without entirely audible dialogue. Although the *commedia* players would have been more accustomed to projecting their voices over the sellers and shoppers of a busy market square, being audible to everyone in that square would not have been completely possible. Furthermore, a *commedia* troupe in sixteenth-century Italy would have been recognisable to their audience and subsequently those interested in viewing their performance would probably have been drawn close to the stage where they could hear the performance; there are many illustrations from the period that depict this. In Exeter, most of the general public are not accustomed to seeing *commedia*; they are probably not accustomed to seeing live theatre performed in their shopping centre. Consequently, most of the people who attended the performances selected to keep a safe distance from the stage (no one stood closer than six feet to the stage). Despite their distance from the stage and difficulty in hearing the performance, most of the people who completed questionnaires claimed that they found the story easy to follow; the use of masks and large gestures made the information being presented easier to understand. Hence, although the performers struggled with vocal projection, the physicality and general movements of the characters, it would seem, were able to

communicate our story to audiences. In regard to the *commedia* form, then, it should be considered whether the distinct characterisation of the archetypes, which includes their physicality, movements, gestures and even masks and costumes, constitutes a language of its own. In regards to this performance, it proved to be as significant as the dialogue in communicating the story and information about immigration to audiences.

#### *Student Conflicts and Time Constraints*

Organising a rehearsal schedule with drama students is often difficult because many of them often try to balance their coursework with part-time jobs and performances outside the Department. However, the months of May and June, where final exams, essays and performances are due, make this an even greater challenge. For this project, rehearsals were scheduled to begin on Sunday, 11 May for five hours; this would be followed by rehearsals every Monday and Thursday night until 7 June. Unfortunately, because of their busy schedules, many of these rehearsals had to be eliminated. In total, we were only able to rehearse for this performance nine times; only six of those were attended by the entire cast. So, although I had intended to reinforce the training and develop their voices for an outdoor performance, the amount of reinforcement and additional training done was in fact limited. In numerical terms: roughly thirty hours in total were used to prepare this production. Given that the students knew the text, blocking and their characters, this might be considered by some to be an adequate amount of time. I, however, feel that an additional ten to fifteen hours worth of rehearsals – with a strong focus on vocal training – would have benefited the quality of the performances significantly.

#### *Outcomes of the Rehearsal Processes*

Although the rehearsal period was brief, I feel that the performers had been adequately prepared for the performance. The ‘characterisation football’ game proved to be a very useful tool – helping to revive student interest, increase their energy-levels, focus their attention, and develop their characters further. Additionally, vocal warm-ups and breathing exercises previously used to train singers were used and helped prepare the students’ voices for an outdoor production. Unfortunately, it became clear on the day of the performance that they were not prepared enough, as they struggled with the echo of their voices off the concrete buildings that surrounded them. I think the only way this problem might have been remedied would have been to rehearse in the space and experiment with vocal projection and the echo. As this was not a possibility in this

instance, I will have to be satisfied with what they were able to achieve on the day. Fortunately, the physicality, large gestures, and stylised movements of the characters were able to communicate the story to audiences and compensate for the lack of completely audible dialogue.



**Figure 28:** Leah Lewis and Jonathan Hunt in *Fashionable Immigration*. Photo by Claire Peart.

## Section 2: Performance (DVD 4)

Three performances were held on 7 June 2008 at 10.30 am, 12.30 pm and 4.10 pm (this performance was scheduled for 3.30 pm, but was delayed due to rain), at Exeter Guildhall Shopping Centre. The performances took place on a *banco*, or trestle stage, which had been hired from the Common Players, a local performance troupe. Although only a metre high, as opposed to the five- or six-foot height of a traditional *banco*, it was high enough to create good sightlines for most of the audience. In keeping with the traditional outdoor stagecraft, a backcloth was suspended at the back of the stage, and was used to hide the backstage area and as drapes to the window in Magnifico's office, which was necessary for the window *lazzo*. As with the indoor performance, step units were placed at the stage-right and backstage areas to make the transition between scenes, including scene changes and entrances and exits, easier.

In my attempt at recreating an *authentic commedia* aesthetic, I dressed the stage with an antique desk and two chairs. To garnish, I placed a purple quill on the desk, alongside several sheets of antiqued parchment, and had a sign made containing the title of the play (which can be seen in Figures 27, 28, and 29) and the name of the form

being performed, which was then attached to the backcloth. This feature, although not traditional, was required by the Guildhall Shopping Centre, who requires that sellers and/or performers in the square show the title of the product, company or performance clearly somewhere on the stall or booth. Finally, to complete this aesthetic, Dawn Canham's period costumes, which had been used for the indoor version of *Fashionable Immigration*, were utilised again here.

The first and second performances ran smoothly. As previously discussed, there were moments where it was difficult to hear what the actors were saying, but their physicality, for the most part, was quite good. I would estimate that approximately twenty people stood for both of these performances, with countless others staying for five or ten minutes and then moving on. Aside from children, no one dared stand too close to the stage. Even when encouraged by the performers to do so, the audience would not move forward. It did appear that some people were very resistant to the idea of a performance taking place in their shopping centre, particularly a performance about immigration. And, since the words 'Fashionable Immigration' appeared in bold black lettering on the stage, some people were turned off immediately. Only after the performances did one of the performers tell me that several people had commented on this; had I been told earlier, I would have probably taken down the sign.



**Figure 29:** *Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia* at the Exeter Guildhall Shopping Centre on 7 June 2008. Photo by Claire Peart.

Something that I had only considered briefly in preparing the performers was the idea that hecklers might be an issue. I told the performers that because we were dealing

with what some people might consider a sensitive issue, then some audience members' tempers might flare and that they would need to be prepared to respond, in some way, to these people; fortunately, this did not happen. Never, however, did I anticipate that children as young as eight years old would heckle a performance. At all three performances, children heckled; and they seemed to direct the majority of their inappropriate comments to Jon Hunt, who played Madam Magnifico. If Mr. Hunt had been dressed in anything remotely flattering, had I instructed him to wear fake breasts and high heels, for instance, I might have understood the homophobic content of their insults. However, as Madam Magnifico possessed none of these things, least of all sex-appeal of any kind, I was left truly baffled by their responses. Unfortunately for them, Mr. Hunt is an experienced performer and good improviser and was able to counter their harassment without losing focus.

Other performers, however, were not as capable of responding to the young hecklers as well as Mr. Hunt was. Even if the insult was not directed at them, it was visibly apparent that they had been distracted. These moments, as a director, were very painful to watch, but it does highlight, I think, the significance of improvisation in *commedia* and how this might better prepare them for such interruptions. Rudlin calls this 'readiness', and he explains that *commedia* performers need to be prepared to both "[...] interrupt and be interrupted [...]" during performance (1995: 58). Additionally, working with a text, however liberally followed, as we did here, provides security to the performers, and subsequently, many did not feel as though they should deviate from this. I believe that if I had continued to develop the students' improvisation abilities beyond the initial training workshops, their ability to handle the hecklers and not appear distracted because of them would have improved significantly. I would like to briefly return to a discussion in Chapter Three regarding authenticity and my decision to write a text for the performance instead of improvise one from a scenario. At the time, I discounted improvisation as a viable tool, because it would require the students to research the issue of immigration alongside me – something that would have not been possible; furthermore, their improvisation abilities were not very developed. Hence, although I realised that a written text was not traditionally used, I knew that there would not be time to try to develop a performance using any other method. However, having witnessed the performers' reactions to interruptions during these performances, I have realised that improvisation must play a significant part of the training and rehearsal period for preparing performers for outdoor *commedia* performances; early on, these rehearsals would need to have planned distractions – like invited guests, loud music, etc.

– which might get the performers to start thinking about how to cope with this issue. Waiting until the performers know the performance text (whether devised through improvisation or using a written text) would be too late, as this would be set in their minds and subsequently nearly impossible to break.

Aside from the hecklers and the rain, I think the outdoor performances went well. What the hecklers and echo, in particular, have taught me is that the physicality of the *commedia* archetypes is as significant as the spoken dialogue in communicating a story to audiences, and the function improvisation plays in preparing performers to deal with unexpected interruptions. In this regard, I can be satisfied with the physical aspect of the training I provided this group of performers, but can clearly see areas, e.g. voice and improvisation, that need to be addressed and incorporated into the workshops more extensively.

### **Section 3: Audience Reception**

Following the first and second performance<sup>16</sup>, the cast spanned the square and asked members of the audience if they would be interested in completing a questionnaire. A total of 17 people volunteered to complete the questionnaires. Of these, 15 were women, and two were men. Seven responders were aged between 17 and 24; four between 25 and 44; and six were over the age of 45.

As with the previous projects, the questionnaires were designed to help gauge the effectiveness of the popular form being explored in entertaining, engaging, and informing an audience about an issue; additionally, they asked questions that would help determine whether the performance had the potential to make an audience more active about the issue being discussed. These stem from the aims and associated research questions of this thesis, which are discussed in previous chapters. In addition, the questionnaires contained questions designed to help better understand why audiences are drawn to particular characters. This question was raised for the first project, but was abandoned for the second because of its scope and alternating casts; as only one play was being performed here, I felt it an appropriate and reasonable question to ask. As with previous chapters, the completed analysis of the audience reception is located in Appendix A. Here, I will instead discuss the statistics that are most significant to this study. For ease, this section has been divided into subsections; in these, I will

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<sup>16</sup> I decided that questionnaires would not be distributed following the third performance. As this performance was plagued by rain and misbehaving children, only a handful of people stayed to watch it. Furthermore, the costumes and properties were being damaged by the rain, and so the actors began packing away these things to protect them from further damage instead.

discuss the audiences' responses in relation to the aims and associated research questions of this thesis.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, with this production it was imperative that we find a more diverse audience. Although it proved difficult on the day to get people to complete the questionnaires (because, unlike the performance studio, the audience was free to come and go for the duration of the performance, and many left immediately following the performance), we did manage to get some useful feedback. There are two audience members in particular that I believe should be mentioned – because they perhaps best represent what I imagine our target audience to be: working class and/or relatively uninformed about the issue discussed in the performance. These audience members – two young ladies – arrived about five minutes into the first performance. After the performance, when they were asked to complete a questionnaire, they ran away from the square shouting something about not being good at 'taking tests'. On the promise that they would not be made to take a test, the young ladies returned and Leah Lewis helped them complete the questionnaire. They provided some of the most enthusiastic and appreciative feedback of the performance of the day. Through conversation, Ms. Lewis managed to establish that they had never seen a theatrical production before, nor did they know about immigration (beyond what they had been told by friends or family members). They were very complimentary of the production, and, in the end, told us that they had enjoyed the performance and learned a great deal about immigration; furthermore, they agreed to let others know about some of the abuses that some immigrants in Britain face. This tells me that should our audience have been made up of these young ladies' peers, then this performance may have been received remarkably well – and the didactic potential of the *commedia dell'arte* form far greater than I have been able to show in any of the research projects.

#### *Aesthetics and Entertainment*

To determine whether audiences found the performance to be aesthetically pleasing and entertaining, Question 1 asked them to indicate whether the theatrical form had been distracting, too 'over-the-top' for their taste, interesting, enjoyable or entertaining. 11 responders indicated that they found it to be interesting; 12 responders found it to be enjoyable; whilst 16 found it to be entertaining. Although there were considerably fewer responders to this performance, these figures are in line with those given to the studio performance in March 2008. It would appear, then, that audiences do

appreciate the conventions of this form and find it entertaining, whether performed in or out of doors.

#### *Didactic Effectiveness*

To determine the form's didactic effectiveness, audiences were asked to indicate whether the use of masks and large gestures had made the information presented easier or more difficult to understand (also Question 1). A total of eight responders indicated that they felt that these elements had made the information being presented easier to understand. None of the responders indicated that the information had been made more difficult to understand by the inclusion of these elements.

Question 4 asked audiences to indicate whether they felt that they had learned anything about immigration from the performance. Ten responders indicated that they had, whilst seven claimed they had not. The responders who claimed that they had learned something were then asked to indicate what this was; 70% of those responders were able to do so.

Again, these figures indicate that the *commedia* form does have the potential to educate audiences about certain issues, and echoes the responses given to the previous projects.

In regards to perception: Question 5 asked audiences to indicate whether their perceptions about the issue of immigration had changed or altered as a result of the performance. Four responders indicated that their perceptions had changed, eight indicated that they had somewhat changed, and five indicated that their perceptions remained unchanged. Subsequently, it is evident from these figures, and those from previous projects, that the *commedia* form has the potential to help change perceptions about an issue.

#### *An Active Audience*

Question 6 asked responders to indicate whether they felt compelled to share or discuss the information in the performance with others. This question was specifically asked to determine whether the performance had the capability of making its audience more active as a response to the issue of immigration. Seven responders indicated that they did feel compelled to share the information with others, whilst a further six indicated that they were somewhat compelled to do so. Only three responders indicated that they were not compelled to share the information.

The final question asked audiences whether they would recommend this performance to friends or family as entertainment, to inform them about the issue of immigration, or to do both. 12 responders (71%) indicated that they would recommend the performance to both entertain and inform their friends and family; four responders specified to just entertain, and one would only do so to help someone better understand the issue of immigration. These figures indicate that most audiences felt that the performance was capable of entertaining and educating friends and family.

### *Responses to Character*

The questionnaire for *Diplomacy in Ironland* asked audiences to select from a list which characters they were drawn to; I, however, neglected to ask them *why* they were drawn to these characters. Knowing why audiences are drawn to certain characters, I believed, would be useful in composing future performance texts; since my aim is to develop a didactic theatre practice using popular forms, then knowing, for example, that a character who receives the most laughs is – despite their ideology or the function they have in the plot – the audiences' favourite, would help me place significant information about particular issues with these characters, which then might result in achieving a broader didactic impact with audiences.

Question 2 on this questionnaire asked audiences if they felt drawn to any of the characters in *Fashionable Immigration*, and to specify which ones. Question 3, then, asked them to indicate whether they had been drawn to this character because they empathised with the character's situation, because they were funny and/or entertaining, or because of the character's views/politics. The responders indicated that they were most drawn to the characters of Magnifico (11 responders), Anna (6 responders) and Harlequin (4 responders). The answers given to Question 3 show that this was because 1) the character was funny and/or entertaining, 2) the responder agreed with their views/politics, and, finally, 3) because they empathised with the character's situation. This order also appears when singling out the responses to the two most popular characters: Anna and Magnifico. Those who were most drawn to Magnifico claimed this was because 1) they found her to be funny (eight responders), and 2) because they agreed with her views/politics. No responders indicated that they empathised with her situation. Similarly, five responders indicated they were drawn to Anna because they found her to be funny and/or entertaining, three because they agreed with her views/politics and two empathised with her situation. Although minimal, these responses suggest that audiences are more drawn to a character that makes them laugh

or entertains them, as opposed to one that requires their empathy; furthermore, audiences are more likely to be drawn to characters that possess a similar ideology, than a character that requires their empathy.

#### **Section 4: Conclusions**

What this final project has shown are some the possibilities of the *commedia* form to discuss an issue like immigration with an audience made up of the general public and help them better understand it as a result. Furthermore, the audiences' reception also highlights the potential of the form to make audiences active about the issues discussed in the performance. Finally, this project has also shown that popular theatre forms do have the potential to help shape and alter perceptions about certain issues.

Additionally, this final project has been useful in helping me better understand the *commedia* form: how the stylised physicality of the archetype characters can help communicate the story and general message to audiences; the significance of improvisation in preparing performers to develop the ability to be interrupted and not lose focus; and the need to experiment with vocal projection in various outdoor performance settings prior to a performance. Looking beyond this thesis and to future practical work with popular theatre, understanding these issues can only make a positive impact on the work I do with students and the theatre we create.

I have mixed feelings about the audience's response to the characters in the performance. With such minimal responses, I cannot claim them to be completely accurate. If the history of the *commedia* form is anything to go by then the *zanni*, i.e. Harlequin and Zanni, should have received more votes from the audience. Harlequin's longevity as an icon of the form and, later, a feature of children's nurseries (Rudlin 1995: 4), is further evidence of his and the form's popularity. I think there are two possible explanations for this. Firstly, perhaps subconsciously, the audience selected the two strongest performers out of the cast, instead of the characters they were drawn to. If this is true, then having Leah Lewis or Jonathan Hunt in any of the other roles may have elicited different responses; it should be remembered that these performers also played the characters in *Diplomacy in Ironland* to whom most audience members were drawn (ref. Chapter Two). Secondly, the way I used some of the archetypes in *Fashionable Immigration*, particularly the *zanni*, made them less appealing to audiences. If, perhaps, I had made them immigrants, instead of Anna, would the reception to these characters have been different? Maybe British audiences did not like being represented by these

characters? Perhaps, then, it should also be considered how well these characters resonate with twenty-first century British audiences? As is suggested by this series of questions, this aspect of the audiences' reception is unclear, and will require further investigation.

Lastly, I think it is worth noting that the audience reception to this project mirrors that of the previous two and subsequently has helped to substantiate the previous findings. Although some pertinent questions have come out of this project, particularly regarding the reception of different characters, I feel that I am now able to discuss some fundamental guidelines for directors of popular didactic theatre.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has endeavoured to analyse the efficacy of popular theatre forms and techniques most frequently used by popular-political theatre troupes of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; it specifically aimed to offer a preliminary evaluation of how popular theatre forms might function to ‘teach and delight’ audiences, as well as make them active as a response to political and social issues discussed through the discourse of performance. In doing so, it aimed to explore a viable model for a political grass-roots theatre in twenty-first century Britain.

I took as my starting point the popular theatre forms most frequently utilised by twentieth-century popular-political troupes. In Chapter One I discussed and analysed some of the works of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, 7:84, Dario Fo and La Comune, the Bread and Puppet Theatre and Welfare State International. My analysis of their works showed that the popular theatre forms *commedia dell’arte*, puppetry, music theatre and some circus skills appeared most frequently in their performances. I then practiced these forms and developed three research projects featuring them. The first major aim of the research projects was to create performances about contemporary issues of concern and determine whether audiences both enjoyed and learned from the performance. The second major aim was to determine whether the audience might become more active about the issue in response to the performance. As discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four, the majority of audience responders did claim to have learned about the issues discussed, and that their perceptions of those issues had been somewhat or definitely altered by viewing the performance. A majority of audience responders to all three projects also indicated that they found the forms to be aesthetically pleasing and entertaining. Further, when asked whether they would discuss the issues raised in the performances with others and whether they would recommend the performances to others, a majority of responders claimed that they would. Although this is indicative of an active response to the performance, it is admittedly difficult to determine how many of those responders actually did discuss the issues or recommend the performance to others, something which Baz Kershaw noted in his *The Politics of Performance* (1992); subsequently, there is room for debate over how active an audience might become as a result of the performance. Despite this, and the limitations of the evidence provided by the audience questionnaires in general, I do believe a case can be made for the efficacy of these popular theatre forms, and I would recommend that directors interested in creating didactic performances consider using them.

Because this study has explored the forms in different performance contexts, i.e. different issues were explored through performance, and the forms were explored individually and in combination with other forms to help answer certain research questions, I think it would be useful to discuss them separately here. In the following four sections, I will address the conclusions I have come to regarding each of the forms explored. These sections are geared towards the contemporary director and/or practitioner in the hope that they might take the lessons I have learned about each form and either use or experiment with the methods I have employed to create the research project performances.

### **Section 1: The Efficacy of *Commedia dell'arte***

*Commedia dell'arte* was a principal focus of my research and was used in all three research projects. For *Diplomacy in Ironland*, the form's archetype characters proved to be effective models for developing contemporary stereotypes with which audiences did seem to identify. I developed the archetype evolution exercise, which helped my student performers reinforce the *commedia dell'arte* training they received and to develop the contemporary stereotypes necessary for the *Ironland* project.

*Commedia dell'arte*'s use of narrative structure and stereotype characters, and its adaptability to suit any number of social issues (the ease with which this can happen was discussed at some length in Chapter Three), makes it an ideal vehicle for contemporary didactic performance. L.J. Shrum (2006) argues the significance of stereotypes in the chapter "Perceptions" in *Psychology of Entertainment* when he writes "[...] stereotypes are activated preconsciously as part of the perceptual process. If the stereotype of a person or group is available to memory, it will be activated upon mere exposure to the target person or group (2006: 60). The characters of the *commedia dell'arte*—lovers, clowns, quacks, or braggarts – are still easily identifiable today in Western culture. Further, as many social or political dramas need to be written and performed quickly in order to not be out of date, the easily identifiable stereotype can speed up the process of developing a performance. In didactic drama the issues being explored, as well, must take precedence over any other factor in the performance; hence, I believe that a realistic dramaturgy, where character development may happen over several scenes or acts, is an inappropriate model, as this places the focus on the individual and has the potential to distract from the issues being discussed. I would argue that the stereotype, whether a character or image, speeds up several aspects of the complete performance and communication processes: the writing, blocking,

actor/character development, and the audience's understanding of the performance. Further, the narrative structure of the *commedia dell'arte* is also easily activated in a person's memory (Bruner in Shrum 2006: 63) and this helps to process information more easily than unconventional or fragmented structures (ibid). If indeed the director/practitioner seeks to take their performance to the general public, then narrative structures are probably best suited. Should the performance be for a known intellectual audience (for instance, a body of academics or other practitioners) then there is perhaps more room to experiment with less conventional structures and signs.

The students who performed in the three research projects discussed in this thesis were introduced to *commedia dell'arte* and its characters through workshops. In preparation for the first project a total of three hours (plus brief reviews) were used for training. After realising that a more intensive training programme was required, for the second workshop approximately nine hours were dedicated to training the performers in this form. In both instances some performers were able to retain the training and carry it over into the rehearsal process, whilst others were not. Consistent reinforcement, or repetitive maintenance rehearsal of this form is crucial, particularly for those interested in pursuing the form with any historical accuracy. Ultimately, reinforcement of this training was done for these projects with the archetype evolution exercise. I did attempt a standard mimic review process, but the students' reaction to this was not entirely positive. Once they have been assigned characters and have an idea about that character's function in the story, the evolution exercise – used to either create new stereotype characters, or to reinforce and build on the archetype – allows them the chance to be creative; hence, the exercise becomes more than a review, it helps them with their performance.

The type of training that the performers will need will be dictated by the performance space. In a theatre or studio, the training process described in Chapter Three proved to be effective with most of the performers. This process included a general introduction to the physicality of the characters, improvisation exercises, and working with masks. During the training process, I found that it is best to avoid making comparisons with other genres of performance. Pantomime is not *commedia*; a sitcom is not *commedia*. In my experience, if I mentioned either of these forms then the students attempted to replicate them, as opposed to concentrating on the physicality of the *commedia* characters. Should the performance be outdoors, the director must consider voice, physicality and potential distractions (hecklers, rain, etc.). In Chapter Four I discussed how I used techniques from the 'Voice for Musical Theatre' training

workshop detailed in Chapter Three to help the actors develop their vocal projecting skills. However, I had not considered the performance space (a concrete shopping centre) thoroughly enough and it became apparent on the day that the echo of their and the audiences' voices off the concrete would be a major issue. Although it would be ideal to rehearse vocal projection in the space itself, this is not always possible – particularly if this space is situated in a busy public area (shopping centre, street, etc.). I found that the distinct and expressive physicality of the form helped compensate for what was at times an inaudible performance; obviously, however, having both would have been ideal. Directors should also consider potential outside factors that might break the actors' focus. Public spaces in busy city centres are particularly vulnerable to distractions. Only once we were performing did the issue of hecklers become apparent to me. Unfortunately, not all of my actors were prepared to handle such distractions. I would advise practitioners who are training performers for an outdoor *commedia dell'arte* performance to focus on developing the performer's improvisation skills, which will need to be continued through the rehearsal process. Planning distractions in these rehearsals – like playing loud music or inviting an audience to heckle at the rehearsal – might also be considered to help develop the performer's concentration.

The archetype evolution exercise is useful for preparing a performance, but less so once the performance is ready. By this stage, the performers know the exercise and can become bored with it (as it is no longer useful in helping them build their characters). I would advise that directors seriously consider introducing new physical exercises and games at this stage, as, particularly with young performers, they will be necessary to help maintain the energy-levels and focus required of such a physical performance. In Chapter Four I discussed the characterisation football match, which proved to be an effective means of resolving this problem. I think many directors will find that after the performers have been with a project for a period of several months, then their major function will be as a cheerleader – trying to keep the performers energised enough so that they can perform at even an adequate level – than as an artist.

I have used the term 'archetype' throughout this thesis to signify the characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, but I admit that this might be seen as a dangerous use of the term. After all, it does imply that I believe these characters were the first 'types' presented on stage; I do realise that they were not. My use of the word 'archetype' throughout has been done to signify only the starting point for stereotype characters in my projects. I am in fact averse to the idea of the *commedia* characters being referred to as 'types' at all. Undoubtedly, this is a twentieth-century label that has been perpetuated

by scholars and ‘specialists’, who, perhaps for lack of a better word, merely settled on it. I support Allardyce Nicoll’s view that the word ‘type’ implies a single presentation (1963: 22) – i.e., that Harlequin always skipped onto the stage or that Zanni was remarkably stupid – when even Scala’s scenarios show that these characters served a new function each time they were presented; hence, a collection of *scenari* can show many facets of a character’s personality (ibid). Further, there is little evidence to support the cookie cutter presentations of their physicality either. Yes, Harlequin’s acrobatic skills and quick movements do appear in a mere handful of eye-witness accounts from the period, but we should not forget that the character also appeared in several tragedies and pastorals, where such physicality might not have been appropriate. Hence, I am more inclined to believe that with each actor came a new interpretation. Like thieves, each Harlequin would steal effective comic bits and physical gestures from others, and then develop the character to fit his own personality and body. My point here is that practitioners should not get bogged down by trying to make their actors replicate the physicality of these characters exactly – let the actor take the ‘cookie cutter’ model and experiment to find a physicality right for their own bodies. Only then will the actor appear to embody the training and create a believable interpretation of the character.

## **Section 2: The Efficacy of Large-scale and Shadow Puppet Forms**

The puppet forms proved to be the least effective of the forms explored through practice. In Chapters Two and Three I speculated that this might be the consequence of the aesthetics of the puppet performances, which were of a considerably lower quality than performances of the other forms explored. In Chapter Two I noted the comments of two audience members who claimed that the shadow puppets in *Diplomacy in Ironland* were not as good as people and that they needed more work. Further, the efficacy of the shadow puppet form was brought into question by the differences between male and female audience members’ response to them. The large-scale puppets discussed in Chapter Three, however, created a more balanced response, with both genders claiming to find them equally effective.

I did not receive formal training in building and manipulating puppets and selected to research the form and how to practice it using conventional research methods. I would recommend examining David Currell’s *Puppets and Puppet Theatre*, which was mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, as it is a useful source of information on the history and techniques for building multiple puppet forms. This should only be used initially, though. Ultimately, my understanding of these puppet forms and how

they are built and operate comes from practicing them. Should professional training not be available in a director's community (or, if such training is not financially possible), I would advise that the director consult puppet books, but also find the time and place to experiment in building and manipulating them. Welfare State International, which I discussed in Chapter One, has also worked without specialist training, so it is entirely appropriate for this type of theatre. It may be seen, however, that this self-taught approach is not entirely effective given that the puppet forms explored in the research projects were the least favoured by audiences.

One of the features of popular performance discussed in Chapter One is that of metatheatricity. An attempt was made to explore this metatheatricity with the large-scale puppets in *Fashionable Immigration* by completely exposing the handlers. Some audience responders, however, did not appreciate seeing the handler manipulate the puppet and claimed that they would have preferred only seeing the puppets. Given the very limited amount of technical resources at our disposal, completely blacking-out the handlers was just not possible. The fact is a handler is incredibly difficult to hide completely with a large-scale puppet; Big Bird on *Sesame Street* is perhaps the exception (but note that the people at *Sesame Street* have a considerably larger budget than we did). The handler must be able to see, walk, work the puppet's hands and speak; subsequently, making the handler invisible with so many tasks to perform is a real challenge. I think the director must make the decision as to whether they are willing to show the actor completely or minimally. I believe that either approach will be accepted and believed by the audience, but I am undecided whether a partially exposed actor would not be more distracting for an audience than a completely exposed one.

If budgetary constraints make it impossible to spend a great deal on a production, then shadow and large-scale puppets are a good solution to this because they can be made mostly from recycled materials. The shadow puppets for *Diplomacy in Ironland* and *Fashionable Immigration: a Puppet Show* were made with empty cereal boxes. The heads and hands of the large-scale puppets in *Fashionable Immigration* were made from chicken-wire, paper and glue. Time does, however, need to be set aside to build the puppets. One shadow puppet with a considerable amount of detail will take several hours to complete; one twelve-foot high puppet made from papier-mâché and timber will take several days of full-time labour to complete.

Shadow puppetry seems to work best without a considerable amount of dialogue. When teaching shadow puppetry to my students, I generally recommend that they consider this form for use in historical scenes or mini-epics and that these will need

to be largely narrated by a narrator figure. As Dr. Sinthuphan said to me, ‘shadow puppets are good for creating the landscape of the performance’. They are not, however, good at holding a conversation. In *Wayang Kulit*, one operator, the *Dalang*, operates all the puppets and narrates the story. As this might suggest, two shadows may communicate physically, but rarely through complex dialogue. Hence, a realistic dramaturgy is probably not ideal for shadow puppets. With *Diplomacy in Ironland* an attempt was made to make a serious piece of Middle Eastern history comedic, and the design of the puppets mixed with the human narrator’s reactions was able to achieve this without any dialogue being required of the puppets.

Should a director be interested in using the shadow puppet form, I would advise that they keep the visual clean and to follow the general staging practices most familiar to their audiences. In the west, this is most often staging for a proscenium arch stage. Western audiences have far less experience in viewing this form, so its conventions – like the ‘blurry-to-focused’ effect for entrances and exits that Dr. Sinthuphan instructed my handlers to do in *Ironland* – are not likely to be read well. Use signs and index signs that are known to the local audience, particularly in moments of the performance where facts and information about the issue being explored are being presented.

Large-scale puppets, like those used by Welfare State International and The Bread and Puppet Theatre, generally form part of a pageant or spectacle. They can, however, hold more complex dialogue than shadows and subsequently can also be considered for indoor, less spectacle-driven performances. Harry and Zack’s fight scene in *Fashionable Immigration* is proof of this. In this scene a realistic text was used, but the language was still simple and contained. However, the puppets will not keep an audience interested if they stand still – an effort should be made to have the puppet conduct its ‘speech’ with gestures and movement, much like a conductor might conduct a symphony. As discussed in Chapter Three, I approached puppet gestures with the text first. The first step involved having the actor/handler read the material and pinpoint moments in the text where s/he might select to gesture if they were performing the role themselves. We then considered each passage of text and agreed on times when specific gestures would occur. Timing is extremely important. A twelve-foot high puppet that rapidly gestures might look a bit odd (and is difficult for amateur handlers to manage, as the arms can be heavy and do not move easily); whereas, if the puppet’s movements are timed and are appropriate to the puppet’s scale, then they will look more believable. The exact figures varied, but generally a five second rule was applied: the handler/actor would start moving the puppet’s arms/body into the gesture five seconds before the

gesture was meant to occur, and another five seconds were considered about right for releasing the gesture and putting the puppet's appendages back into a neutral position.

Although the puppet forms were less successful than the other popular forms in educating and entertaining their audience, 58% of responders who selected the puppet show as their favourite version of *Fashionable Immigration* indicated that they did so because of the text. Furthermore, 80% of the total audiences for the *Fashionable Immigration* project found the puppet show interesting. Although more research needs to be done in this area, I would question whether the combination of 1) the puppet (performance object) and 2) the illusion of it being alive and speaking make the audience actively listen to the performance, more so than they would with a performance containing human actors. In other words, without a human body to identify with, do audiences actively (cognitively) seek to identify with the object and, in doing so, absorb more of the dialogue than they would with performances with human actors? If they do, then this might mean that puppets have the potential to be more didactic than this study has been able to show.

As I noted in Chapter Three, some members of the 18-24 age group seemed to struggle with the material aesthetic elements of performance (puppets, masks, stilts). A minority of this group (roughly 10 – 15%) found *commedia* and puppetry too 'over-the-top' and confusing. In fact, this age group's favoured performance was the musical, which possessed minimal material aesthetic elements. Hence, I would advise that should this age group be the target audience, then the staging and aesthetics are kept quite simple. The statistics showed that older audience members (25 years and older) did not share in this confusion. If further research is done in the area of puppetry and comprehension, taking into account the question I posed a moment ago about the puppet form making a more cognitively active audience, then it might be seen that some members of the 18-24 year old age group do not like to be presented with the task of decoding the signs needed to identify with a puppet performance and are subsequently confused by it.

More research needs to be done on the shadow puppet form and its efficacy in relation to male and female genders. Due to time constraints, I was not able to explore this fully enough.

### **Section 3: The Efficacy of Musical Theatre**

The musical was the most popular production as determined by the audiences' responses. This is, as has been noted, largely a result of their recognition of the form

and being comfortable with it. In other words, it seems that audiences are able to identify with this form more easily than the others considered in the research projects.

Should a director or practitioner select to develop or direct a musical, then they should note that the form will ideally require performers with either some training or natural abilities in singing and dancing. Progress was made during the vocal workshops for *Fashionable Immigration* in developing the performers' voices, but I am undecided as to whether this was a result of the training, or their increased confidence in singing in front of others. If it is the latter, I think it might be advisable for directors who have inexperienced singers to train them together. Once their confidence has increased and rehearsals begin, more intensive work can be done with the performer in private training sessions.

Dance, on the other hand, proved problematic for *Ironland* and *Fashionable Immigration*. The students' inability to perform the choreography given to them for these productions is really a result of a lack of reinforcement of the training. I noted in Chapter Three that I believed had more time been given to dance training then their abilities to perform would have increased considerably. Unfortunately, we did not have this time. I can confirm that three days of reinforcement a week is not enough. Despite this, the performers' inability to execute the choreography in a polished manner did not seem to affect the outcomes of the performance.

With amateur performers, I would advise keeping dancing and singing at a basic level. An audience might be able to forgive the performer who struggles to maintain their pitch whilst performing a simple pop song, but perhaps less likely to forgive the director who assigns the novice, tone-deaf performer "The Wrath of Hell is Burning in My Bosom" from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Tread carefully.

To write *Fashionable Immigration* I relied rather heavily on knowledge of the musical theatre form that I acquired whilst studying for my undergraduate degree and through practical experiences. There are a couple of reference books, however, that I think anyone interested in writing a musical should be familiar with; these were mentioned in Chapter Three. The first of these is Stanley Green's *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show*, which is updated regularly. This book details every major musical written and performed in New York between 1866 and the present time. Kurt Ganzl's *Musicals* is perhaps the most detailed history of the form currently available, and is therefore a useful companion to Green's show guide. Knowing what musicals have been written and how the form has developed can only have a positive impact on any practitioner's work. For those who would like specific advice on how to write a musical,

I would recommend examining Richard Andrews' *Writing a Musical* and Tom Jones' *Making Musicals*. Both Andrews and Jones are practitioners and write about developing a musical in very accessible terms.

Ultimately, the practitioner's own musical abilities and the timeframe available should determine whether to experiment with the musical form. Performances that discuss contemporary issues of concern must be written, directed, and produced very quickly, otherwise there is a risk that the issue will be resolved prior to the performance opening. In Chapter Three I discussed the process I underwent to write *Fashionable Immigration: the musical*. It was certainly more difficult to write the musical than it was to write the *commedia* or the puppet show. This, in effect, almost makes the musical form the least suitable for creating didactic performances about immediate social concerns. Although music composition software like *Finale Songwriter* can speed up the music composing process, it will still take a considerable amount of time to write the lyrics and find the rhythms and tunes necessary before composing with the software can begin. The director/practitioner will need to gauge the time available and be honest with themselves about their abilities before settling on the musical theatre form.

#### **Section 4: Effective Skills**

Circus skills were used sparingly in the research projects. In fact, only two – juggling and stilt-walking – appeared in *Diplomacy in Ironland*. Juggling was not a skill I taught or considered when designing the audience questionnaires, so I will not discuss it here. Stilt-walking, however, is worth noting.

Stilt-walking is not a difficult skill to master *if* the appropriate training conditions are available. It is however a dangerous skill and I believe that directors of popular theatre performance should seriously consider their performers' abilities, available equipment, and rehearsal space prior to scheduling stilts into a performance. Although the visual effects created by the height can be impressive, this can be overshadowed by a nervous performer. Ultimately, there are other ways of achieving this visual impact without stilts – large-scale puppets, or the method we used to create the very large Madam Magnifico for *Fashionable Immigration: a Puppet Show* – are just two examples. The risks of injury using these methods are extremely small and can be achieved in a much quicker time (the stilt-walking training took a month and a half; Magnifico's dress was built over the course of an evening).

#### **Section 5: Conclusions and Further Research Questions**

What I believe this study does is provide the foundation for which further research into the efficacy of popular theatre forms might be conducted. I believe that the evidence collected in this instance hints at their *potential* efficacy (didactic, aesthetic and activist), but this will need to be pursued further, and in more suitable environments, if a more definitive answer is to be found. Despite this, I hope that directors and practitioners – particularly those with political and/or didactic aims – will consider these forms, the methods I have used to create the performances and the advice I have offered in this chapter and put them into practice. Fellow research-practitioners may also wish to explore the questions that remain unanswered from the research projects, like those regarding gender reception of puppet forms; an audience’s potential hyperactive cognitive state during a puppet performance; or why audiences are drawn to certain characters.

This study has not meant to imply that popular theatre forms are the best way of creating didactic performance. My selection of popular-political theatres of the alternative theatre movement was made as a matter of interest and because I share similar political and social ideologies with them. Contemporary trends in didactic and political theatre, like documentary and verbatim theatre, which were discussed in Alex Sierz’s article “‘Can Old Forms Be Re-invigorated’: Radical populism and new writing in British theatre today” (2006), discussed in Chapter One, might be equally as effective, but what these forms are incapable of is offering solutions to the issue, because they merely present it as it is. Legislative Theatre and the various methods used by Applied Theatres, however, do seem to be effective because in addition to presenting the issue, they provide opportunities for audience participation and together (troupe and audience) try to find solutions to it. I do remain sceptical of realism’s ability to appeal to audiences outside the middle class. Certainly, realism can tackle social issues, but what, if any, active response will it get from its audience? And, as has been questioned, does its focus on the individual (i.e., one character’s plight) distract from the delicate social issues that might be discussed with the form? I think a study of the efficacy of multiple performance genres and their ability to educate audiences is needed. This would undoubtedly be a very large research project, which might be beyond the capabilities of a single research-practitioner; rather, I think that this would need to be done with the cooperation of several troupes already expert in performing these genres.

Does this study answer the question posed in the title of Sierz’s article? Can old forms be reinvigorated? I hope I have made a very strong case that they can. As I have shown, popular theatre forms are flexible and can be made to discuss social issues with

ease. Furthermore, they can be used by troupes with limited financial and/or material resources and are subsequently ideal for director/practitioners that seek to create performances for a range of purposes – from grass-roots campaigns to more complex artistic experimentation. I would advise directors/practitioners to get to work – experiment, entertain and educate, and to remember John Fox’s words:

Just do it.

Don’t talk about it too much.

Be wary of the mainstream which can blunt the edge of radical ideas.

Critics prefer not to invite bulls into their china shops.

Follow your obsessions but take time out (Fox, interview with J. Price 2006: np).

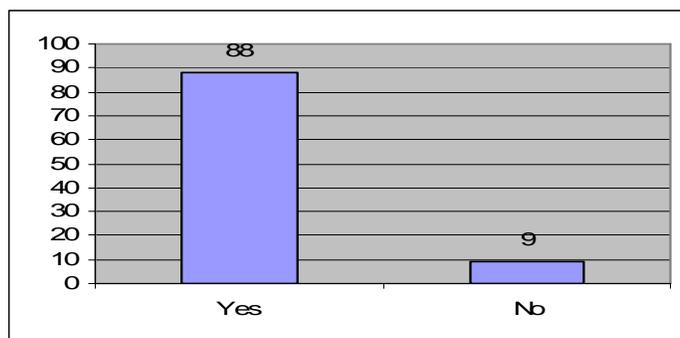
## APPENDIX A: AUDIENCE RECEPTION STATISTICS

### A.1 Reception to *Diplomacy in Ironland* (Project 1)

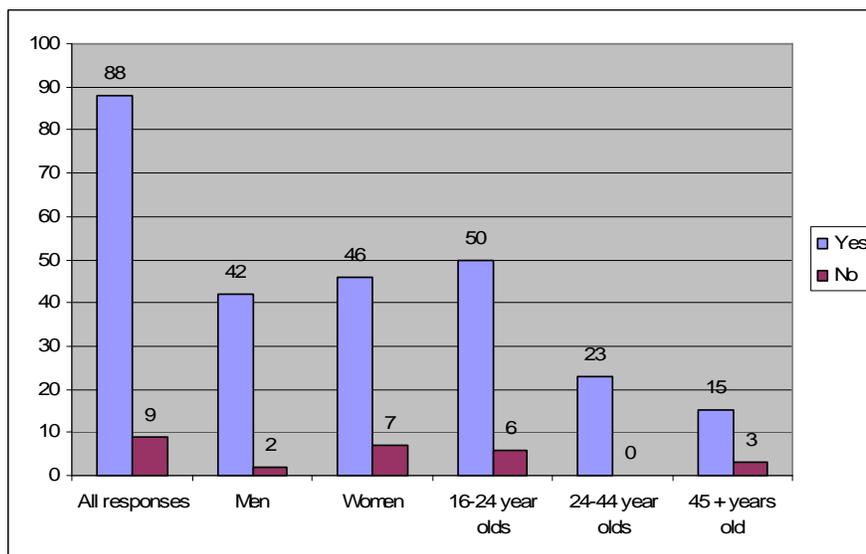
Following each question, I have included two tables. The first shows figures based on all audience responses; the second breaks down the responses into age group (16-24 years old; 25-44 years old; 45 + years old) and sex. Following each table, I have included a paragraph explaining what the statistics mean, and, when appropriate, discussed its significance in relation to this project and how this affects future ones.

General Information: Of the 97 total responders, there were 53 women and 44 men. 56 of the responders were between the ages of 16 and 24; 23 were between the ages of 25 and 44; and 18 were above the age of 45. Some questions allowed for more than one response to be given, hence, some questions have more than 97 total responses.

Question 1: Do you feel you know more about the Middle East now than you did before the performance?



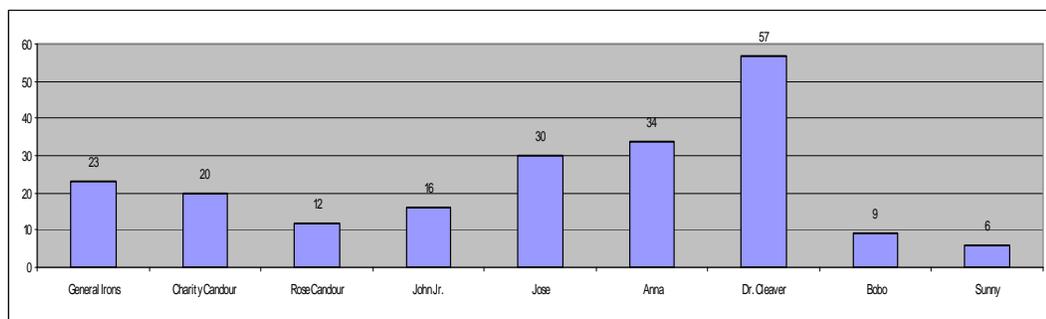
**Table A.1. 1**



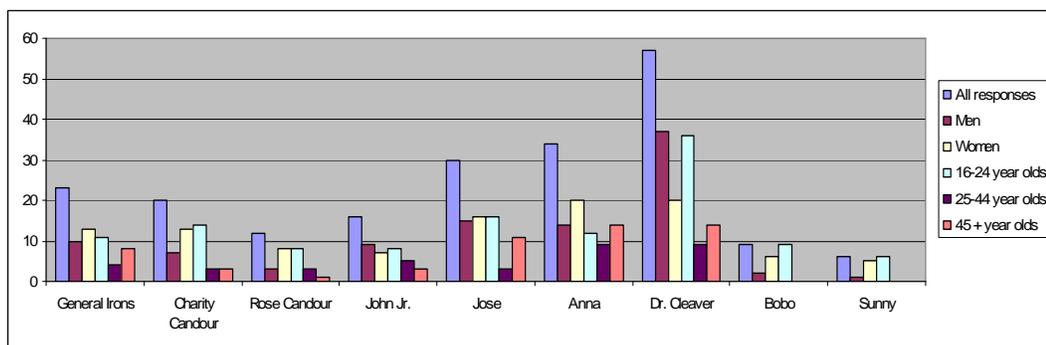
**Table A.1. 2**

Table A.1.1, which shows all responders, indicates that 88 responders felt that they did know more about the Middle East following the performance than they had done before it. 9 responders felt that they did not. When breaking these figures down into age and sex groups, seen in Table A.1.2, it becomes clear that 7 women and 2 men felt that they did not know more about the Middle East. Whilst 50 of the 16-24 year olds felt that they had learned something, 6 of them felt that they did not. All of the 23 responders aged between 25 and 44 years also felt that they learned something. Finally, 15 of the 18 responders from the 45 + age group felt that they had learned something new, whilst 3 responded that they had not. Although there are no significant differences between the groups to analyse further, it is important to stress that the performance, with an aim to educate audiences about the Middle East, did succeed with roughly 90 per cent of the audience leaving the performance feeling as though they had learned something new.

**Question 2:** Were there any characters in the show that you felt particularly drawn to?



**Table A.1. 3**



**Table A.1. 4**

Amongst all groups (age and sex), Dr Cleaver is the most popular character with 57 total votes. The second most popular character is Anna with a total of 34. Significantly, amongst women, Dr Cleaver and Anna were equally the most popular

character, receiving 20 votes each. Amongst men, although Dr Cleaver was still the most popular character, receiving 20 male votes, Jose was the more popular of the servant characters, receiving a total of 16 votes. Dr Cleaver was the most popular character amongst all age groups as well. In hindsight, I realise that I should have asked the responders to explain why they were drawn to certain characters; without this information I can only speculate that Dr Cleaver is the more popular character because he was the most engaging and was performed at a higher standard than the other characters. Additionally, Dr. Cleaver had more stage time than the other characters, and often engaged with the audience, something the other characters did not do, and this too might have affected how the audience related to this character.

Question 3: Did you feel particularly offended by any of the characters or situations presented in this performance?

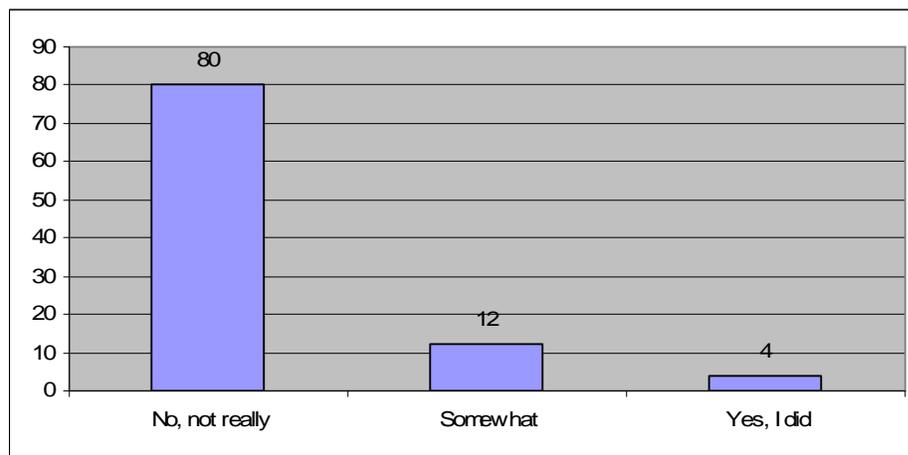


Table A.1. 5

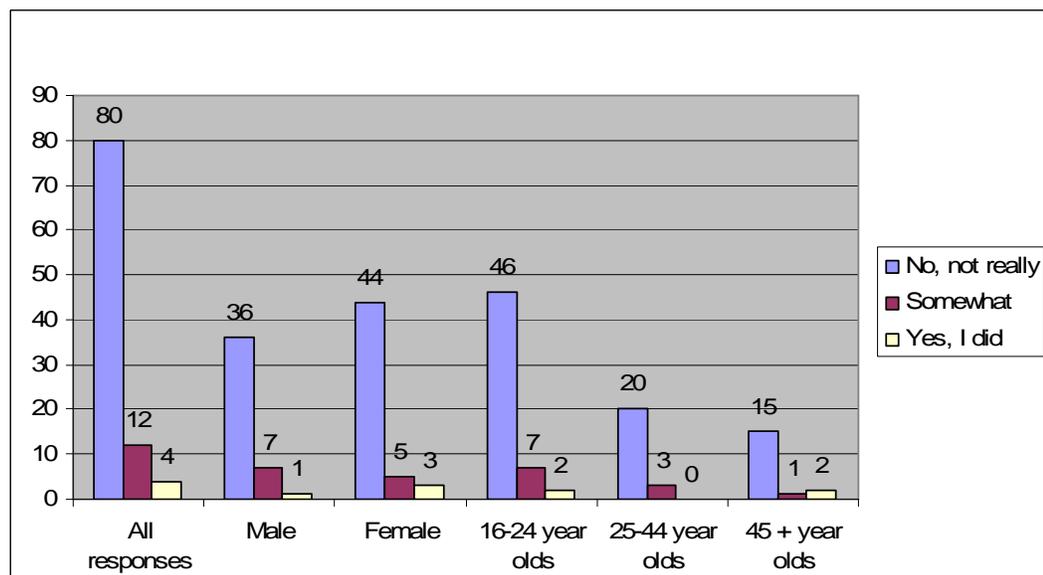


Table A.1. 6

In regards to being offended by material presented in the performance, 80 of the total responders claimed that they were not offended. 16 of the responders felt either somewhat offended or definitely offended by characters and/or situations presented in the performance. When asked to clarify their views, almost all of those who had confirmed being somewhat offended or offended mentioned General Irons' dictatorship, his view of women and immigrants or abuse of immigrants generally as the reason for feeling this way. Phil Bishop, a 19 year old male, wrote that "the General's view of foreigners" had offended him. He also claimed that "It is sad that there really are people like that in the world." Jarrit Phillips, a 49 year old male, claimed that he was most offended by the "caricatures of immigrants". However, he added that "[...] we need to feel offended at times to include us and prevent us from hiding away". Another responder wrote that he was offended at how the servant characters were motivated by food and money. It had not previously dawned on me that leaving the servants' traditional traits/motivations in tact might prove offensive when placed within the context of contemporary immigrants. As it was not my intention to make these characters controversial, I will need to consider what the repercussions of my use of these roles in future.

Question 4: In scene ii, Rose and John heard a lecture by Dr. Cleaver about the end of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the contemporary Middle East. Shadow puppets were used to visualise this lecture. Did you feel that the puppets were: too distracting, too silly/strange, somewhat helpful, very helpful, (Other) Too silly/strange/somewhat

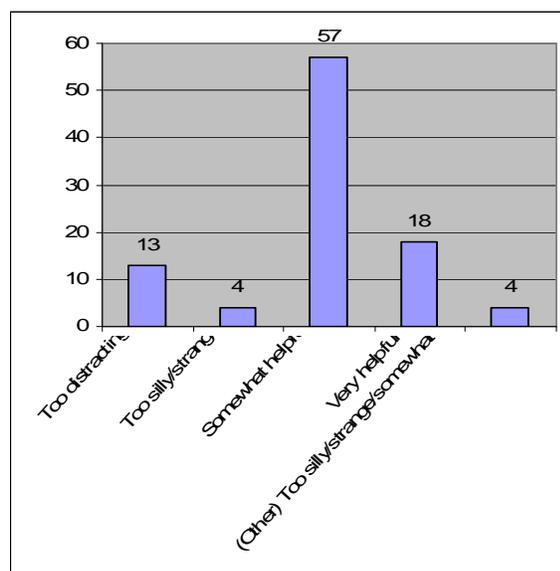


Table A.1. 7

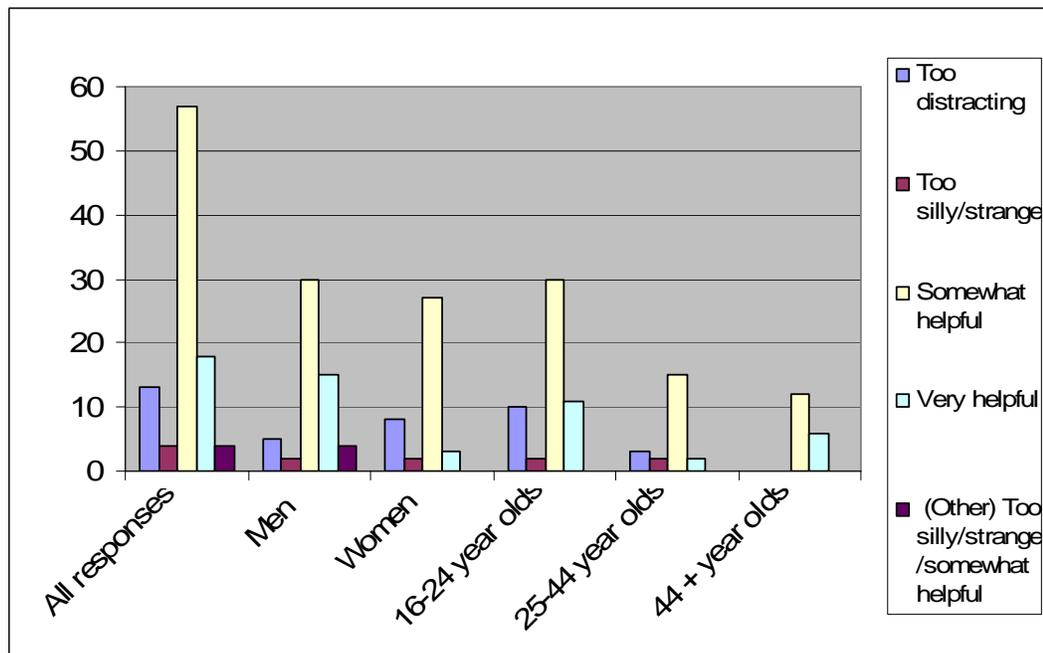


Table A.1. 8

57 total responders felt that the shadow puppet show was somewhat helpful as a visual to accompany Dr Cleaver's lecture, while 18 of the total responders found it very helpful. When considering the success of the shadow puppets in educating audiences about the Middle East, I can conclude that 75, a majority, felt that the shadow puppet show was either somewhat or very helpful. However, it should also be noted that 13 responders felt that the use of shadow puppets was too distracting, and 3 felt that it was 'too silly/strange'; therefore, a total of 16 felt that the shadow puppet show could either have been used in a different way, or, as it was presented during the performance, it was not useful for them in comprehending the lecture. Again, as I did not ask the audience to clarify their views on the puppet show, I can only speculate that these audience members do not like shadow puppets, are not visual learners, or did not approve of the way in which we used the shadow puppets in the performance. I must also take into consideration the problems associated with the puppet show that I discussed in Chapter Two and whether having the original puppet show, unaltered by technical problems, might have made for higher audience comprehension.

The differences between the responses of men and women, I feel are significant enough to require further analysis and study. Whilst a total of 45 men found the shadow show to be either somewhat or very helpful, only 30 women felt the same way. Even more significant is that 15 men found the shadow show to be 'very helpful' whilst only 3 women found it to be so. Additionally, more women found the shadow show to be too

distracting (8 women; 5 men). I am therefore able to conclude that more men than women appreciated the shadow puppet show presented in *Ironland* and felt that it was helpful in understanding Dr Cleaver’s lecture. Rather than speculate, I intend to study this further: under what circumstances might a shadow puppet show be as helpful as a didactic tool to women as the *Ironland* puppet show was to men? Additionally, is the puppet show’s success with men a result of the shadow puppets, or would alternative puppet forms (hand and rod, for example) be as successful? Finally, are these ‘other’ puppet forms more successful with women than the shadow puppets were in this instance? For future experiments, it will be necessary to consider these questions.

Question 5: In scene iv, Dr Cleaver lecture to Rose and John about Iran, the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War. Various techniques were used to visualize this scene – stilt walking, clowning, projections and dance/physical theatre. Did you feel that the combination of these techniques made the lecture: confusing; fun, but confusing; easier to understand; more interesting; other: fun, but confusing easier to understand; other: fun, easier to understand; other: easier to understand, more interesting; other: fun

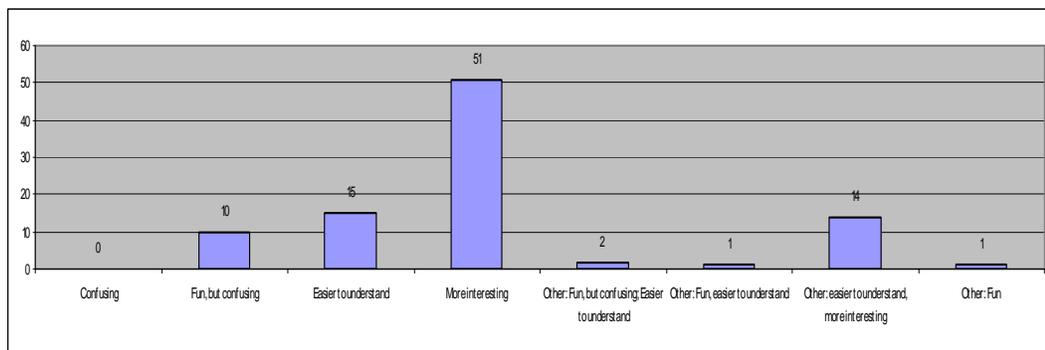


Table A.1. 9

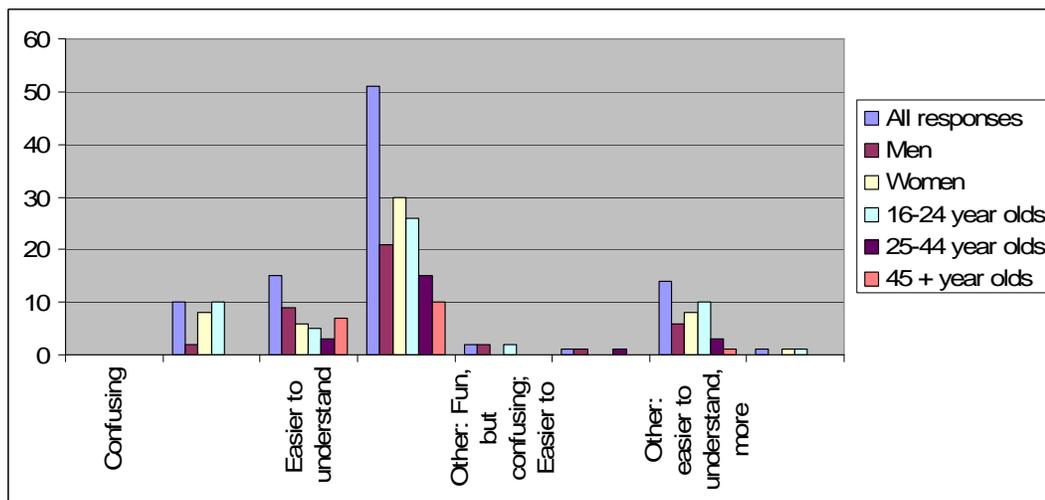


Table A.1. 10

Again, the responses to this question are relatively positive. 15 responders felt that portraying these events using a combination of popular techniques made them easier to understand. Furthermore, 51 responders felt that it made the scene more interesting. 14 responders claimed that the techniques made the scene both easier to understand and more interesting. Hence, 79 total responders felt that the scene was useful as it made the issues presented either easier to understand, more interesting or both.

10 responders felt that portraying the events in this way made the scene ‘fun, but confusing’. Significantly, all 10 of these responders were aged between 16 and 25 year olds; hence, roughly 20 per cent of this age group felt confused by the techniques being utilized in this way. However, the fact that they found the scene ‘fun’ as well as confusing indicates that the aesthetic aim was met on some level. What I must consider then for the second performance, in order to obtain a higher comprehension level amongst this age group, is whether arranging the techniques in a different way might make them less confusing. Additionally, I will also need to consider whether the combination of the techniques generally creates confusion for this audience, and whether isolating them eliminates this confusion; however, I must do so without destroying the ‘fun’ aesthetic which they acknowledged.

Question 6: Do you feel that your perceptions of the current conflict in the Middle East have been affected by the information presented in this performance?

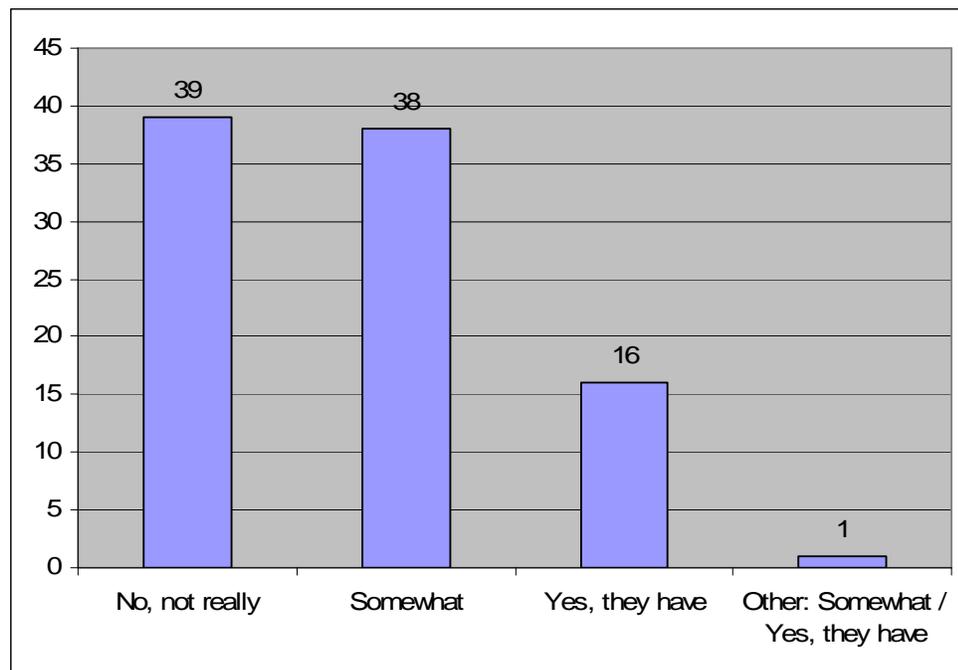


Table A.1. 11

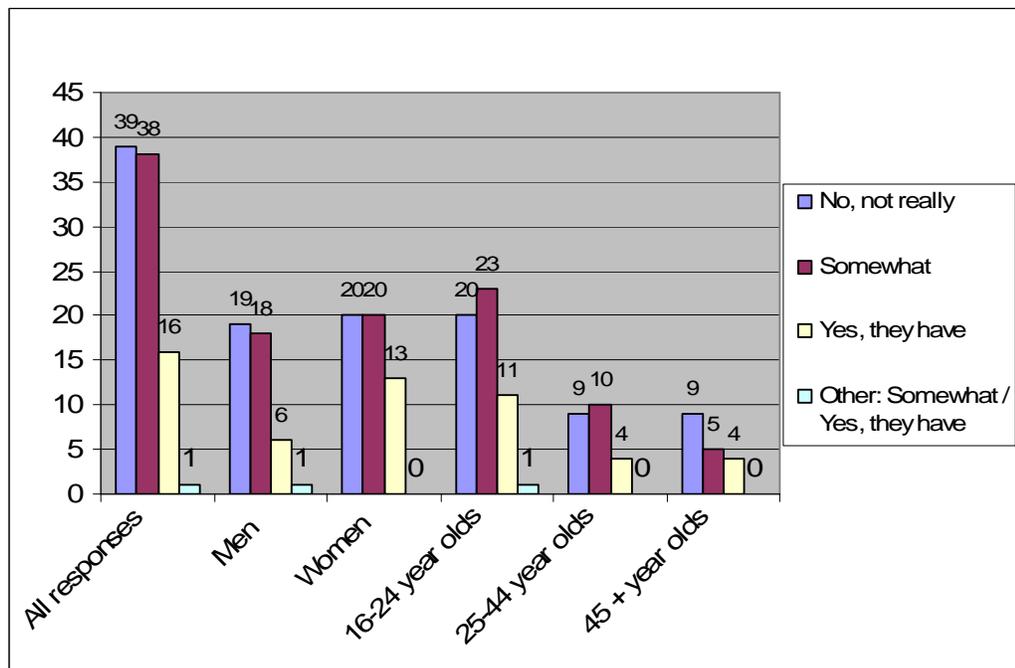


Table A.1. 12

Table A.1.11 shows that 39 of the 97 responders felt that their perceptions of the Middle East were not effected by the performance. 38 of all responders felt that their perceptions had been somewhat affected, whilst 15 confirmed that they had definitely been affected. Combined, a total 53 responders, a majority, felt that their perceptions of the current conflict had been somewhat or definitely affected by the performance. This indicates once again that, as a whole, the performance proved enlightening or informing enough to affect how the audience perceives the current conflict in the Middle East, and possible that performance met its didactic aim.

Question 7: Do you feel compelled to share or discuss the issues/information in this show with others?

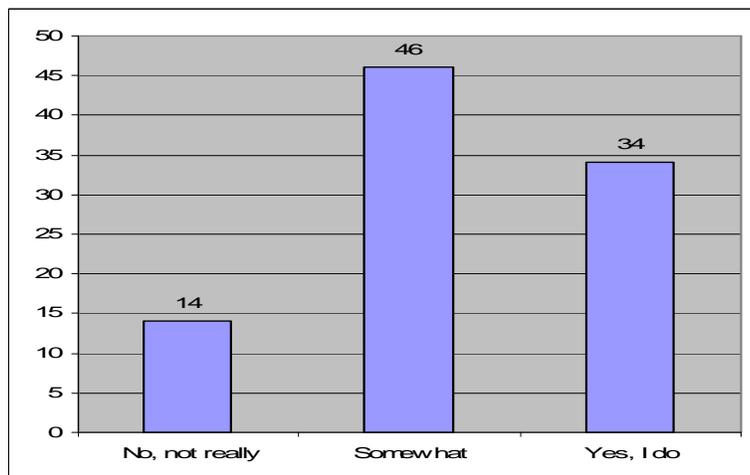


Table A.1. 13

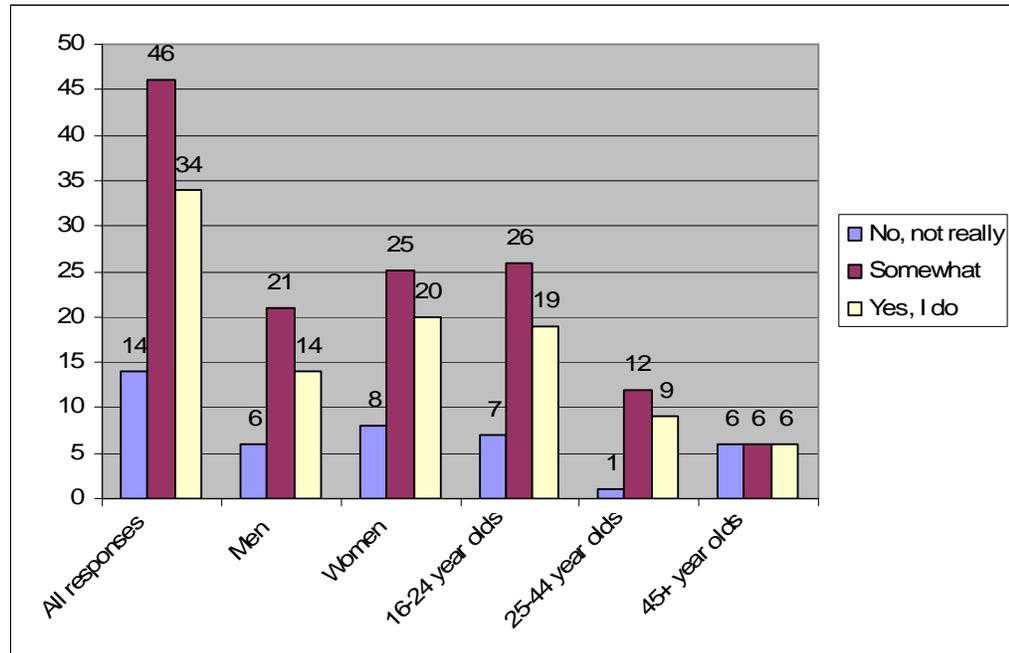


Table A.1. 14

Tables A.1.13 and A.1.14 show that 46 responders felt somewhat compelled to share the issues/information present in *Diplomacy in Ironland* with others, while 34 confirmed that they definitely felt compelled to do so. In total, 80 responders, a significant majority, felt somewhat or definitely compelled to share the issues presented in the performance.

In regards to making a 'passive' audience more 'active', another of the aims of this project, the responses this question elicits indicates that *Ironland* is relatively successful.

Question 8: Would you be interested in seeing more performances like this one?

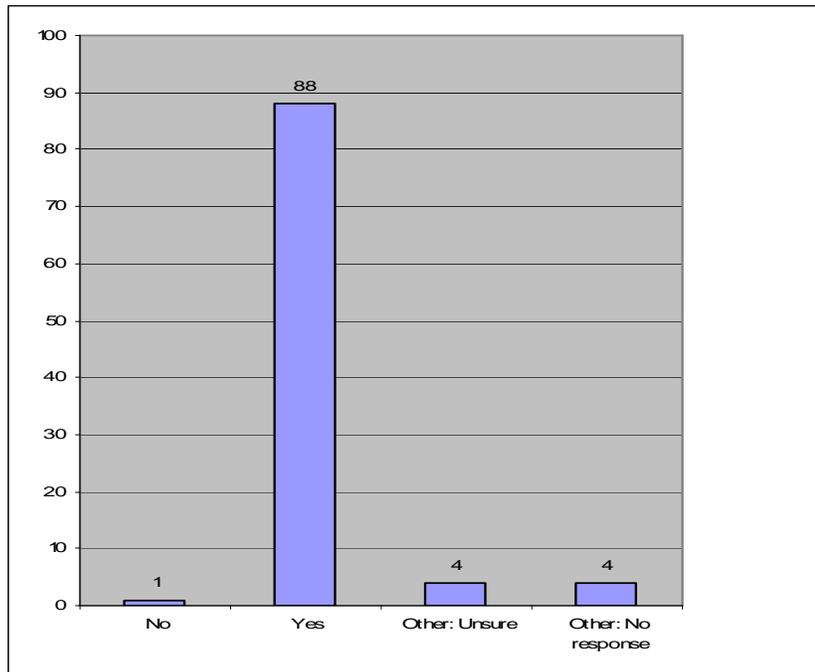


Table A.1. 15

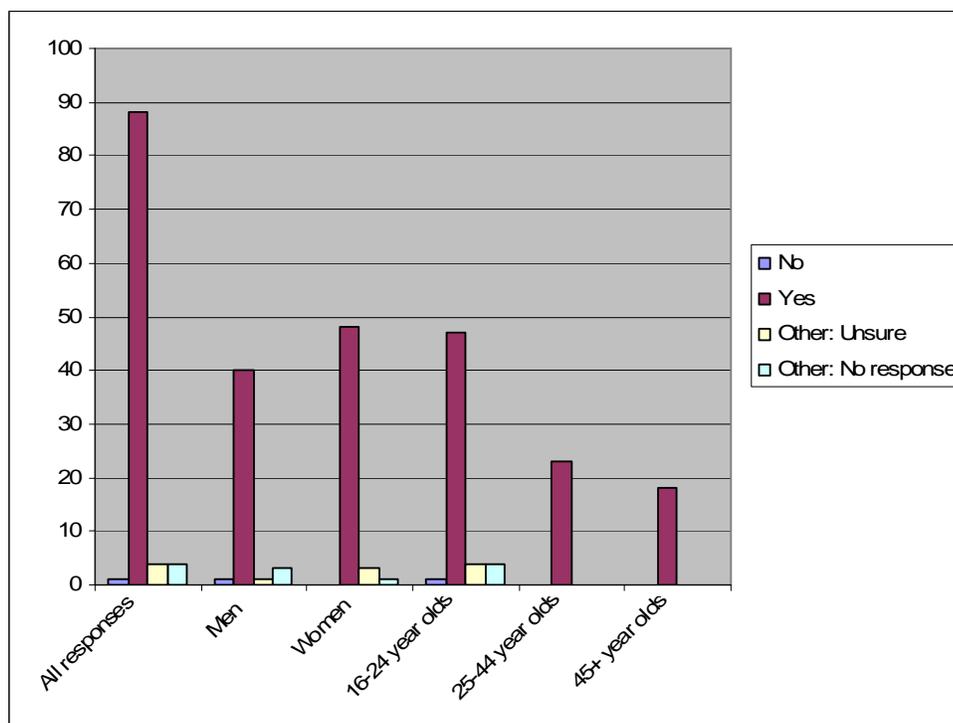


Table A.1. 16

As the tables indicate, 88 total responders, a majority, agreed that they would like to see more performances like *Diplomacy in Ironland*. 4 responders were unsure whether or not they would like to see a similar performance, whilst only 1 responder

claimed that they would not like to see a similar performance. Additionally, 4 responders did not supply an answer to the question.

Question 9: Would you recommend this type of performance to friends or family?

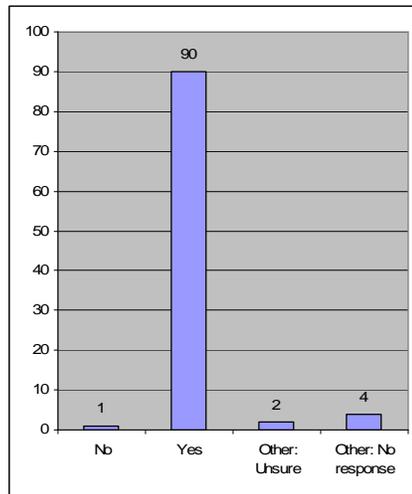


Table A.1. 17

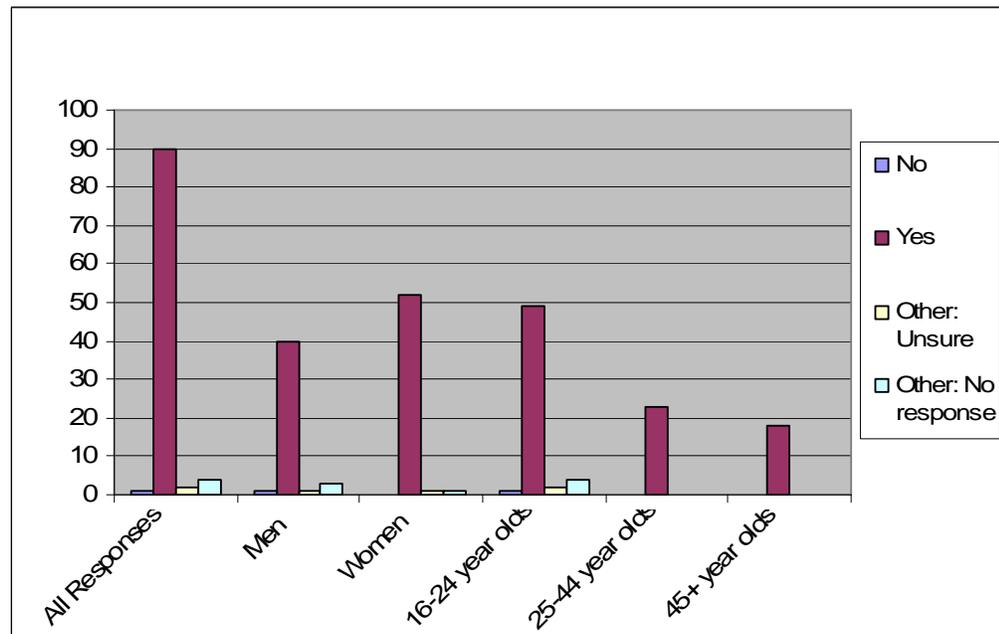


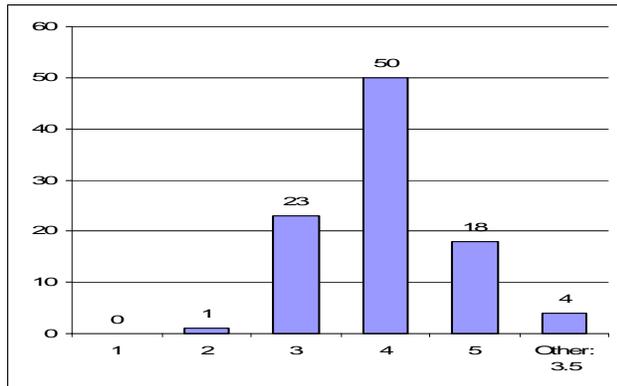
Table A.1. 18

A total of 90 responders confirmed that they would recommend performance like *Diplomacy in Ironland* to friends or family.

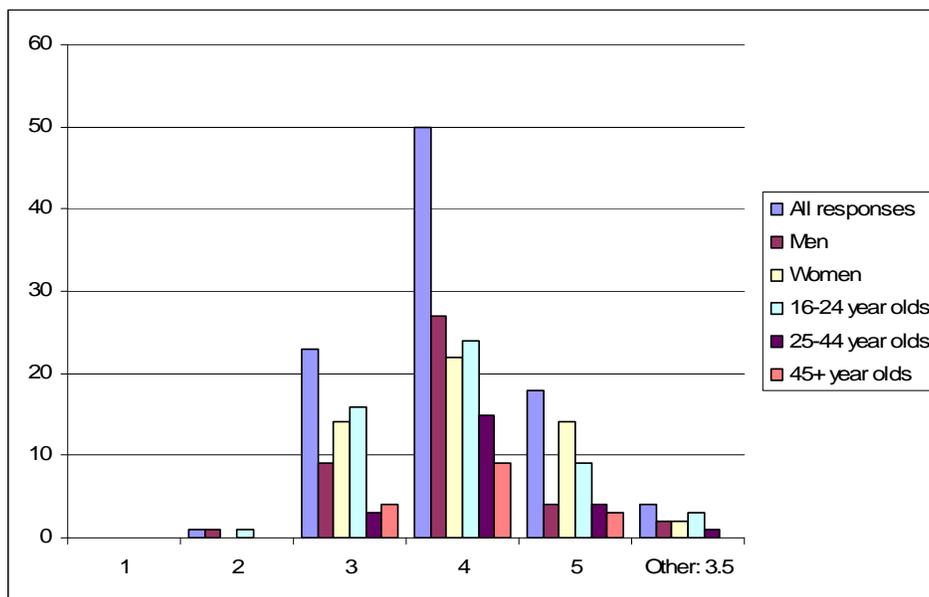
The responses to both questions 8 and 9, I believe, show that the audience enjoyed or were entertained by the performance which is significant as it shows my use

of the popular techniques and forms did not stray away from their historic functions. It should also be noted that I did not select these terms (enjoyed and entertain), but have taken them from additional commentary supplied by the audience.

Question 10: From 1 – 5, with 1 being the least effective and 5 being the most effective, how would you rate this performance in regards to discussing contemporary political and cultural issues?



**Table A.1. 19**



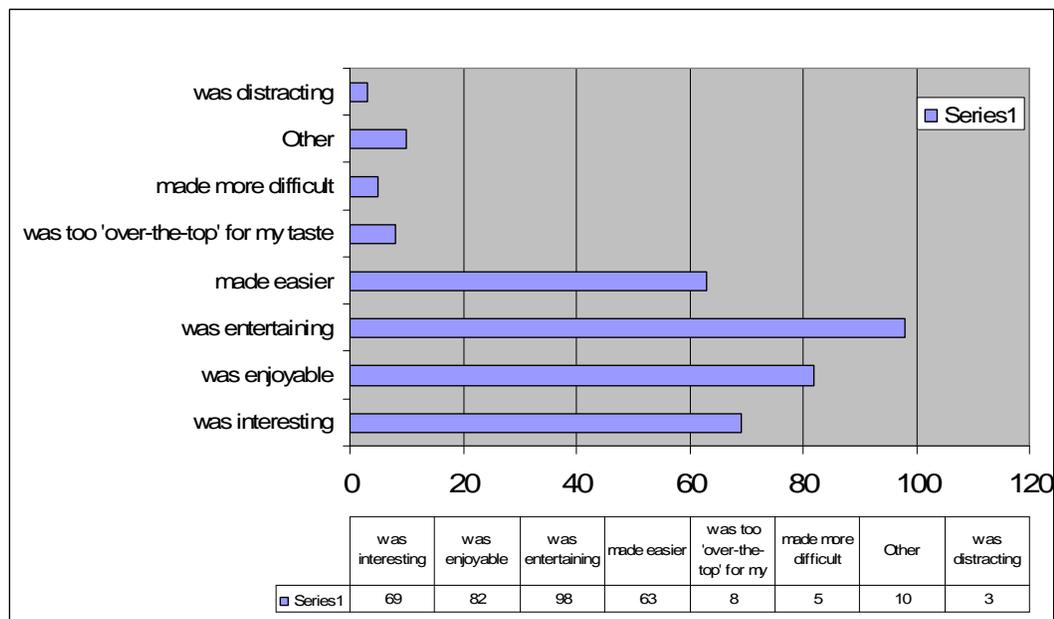
**Table A.1. 20**

In total, 18 responders scored the performance of *Diplomacy in Ironland* with a 5; 50 responders scored it a 4; 23 responders scored it a 3, 1 responder scored it a 2, and 0 responders scored it a 1. The average ‘effectiveness’ of *Ironland* amongst all responders, based on these figures, is 3.9. I therefore conclude that the majority of the audience found the performance to be quite effective in discussing contemporary political and cultural issues.

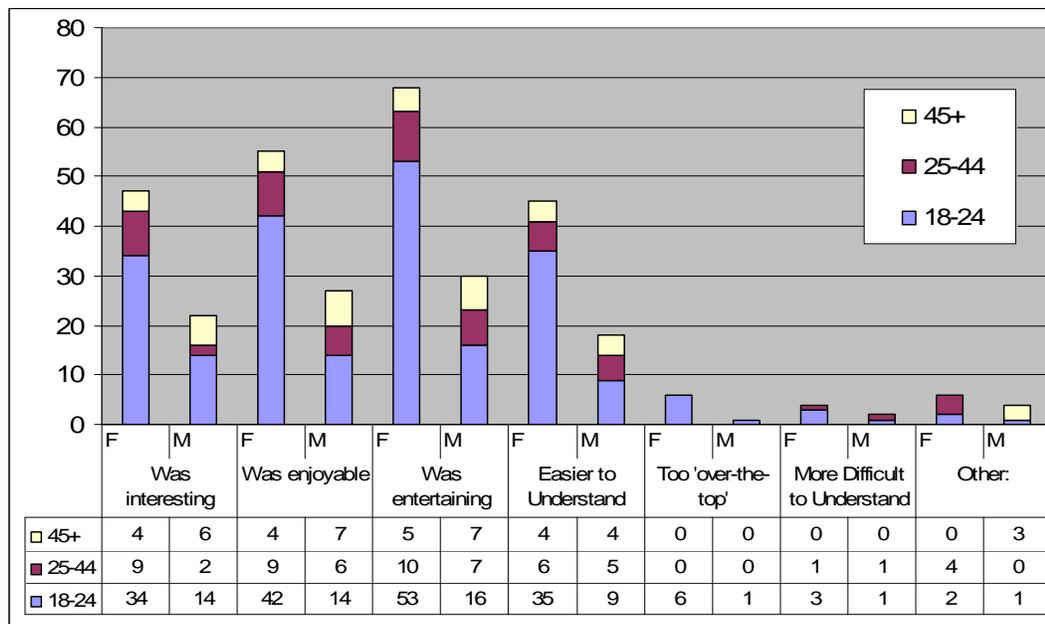
### A.2 Reception to *Fashionable Immigration* (Project 2)

General Information: Questionnaires were distributed to members of the audience following each performance of *Fashionable Immigration* on 8 and 9 March 2008. In total, 114 persons attended the three performances. Of these, 79 were women (69%) and 35 were men (31%). These figures have been divided further into age categories: there were 80 audience members between the age of 18-24 (approximately 70.2%), 21 between the ages of 25-44 (18.4%) and 13 over the age of 45 (11.4%).

Question 1: *Commedia* is a highly physical form, with large gesture and masked characters. Do you feel that the inclusion of these elements was: distracting, too 'over-the-top' for your taste, interesting, enjoyable, made the information being presented easier to understand, or made the information more difficult to understand? (tick all that apply)



**Table A.2. 1:** All responses.



**Table A.2. 2:** Responses by age and gender (M – male; F – female).

In regard to the *commedia*, responders indicated that they found the large gestures and masks to be entertaining, enjoyable and interesting. In addition, 63 responders, a majority, indicated that the inclusion of these elements made the information being presented easier to understand; only five responders indicated that these elements had made the information confusing.

Question 2: The puppet show utilized both large-scale and shadow puppets. Do you feel that combination of these two types of puppet forms with human actors was: confusing, too 'over-the-top' for my taste, interesting, enjoyable, entertaining, made the information being presented easier to understand, made the information more difficult to understand? (tick all that apply)

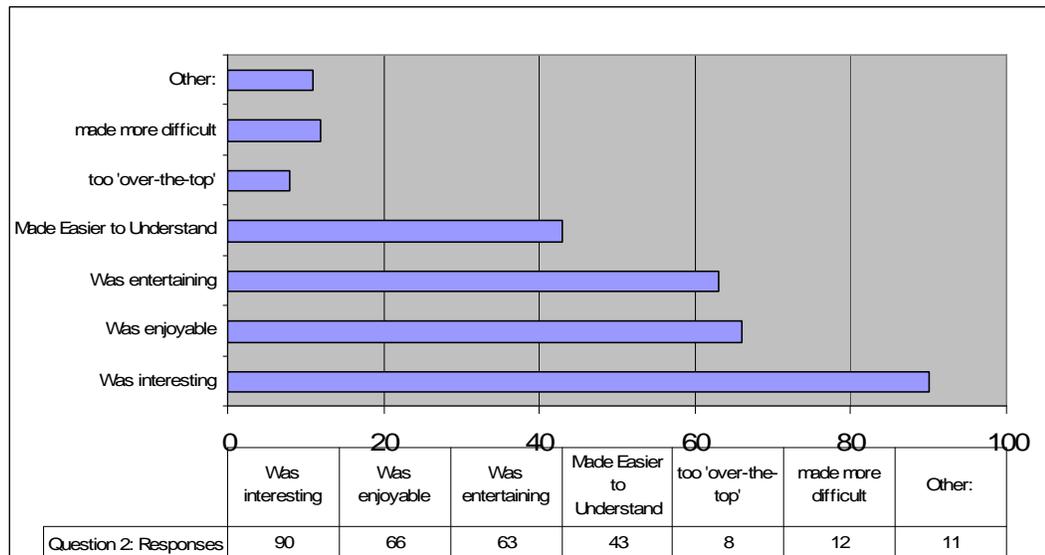


Table A.2. 3: All responses.

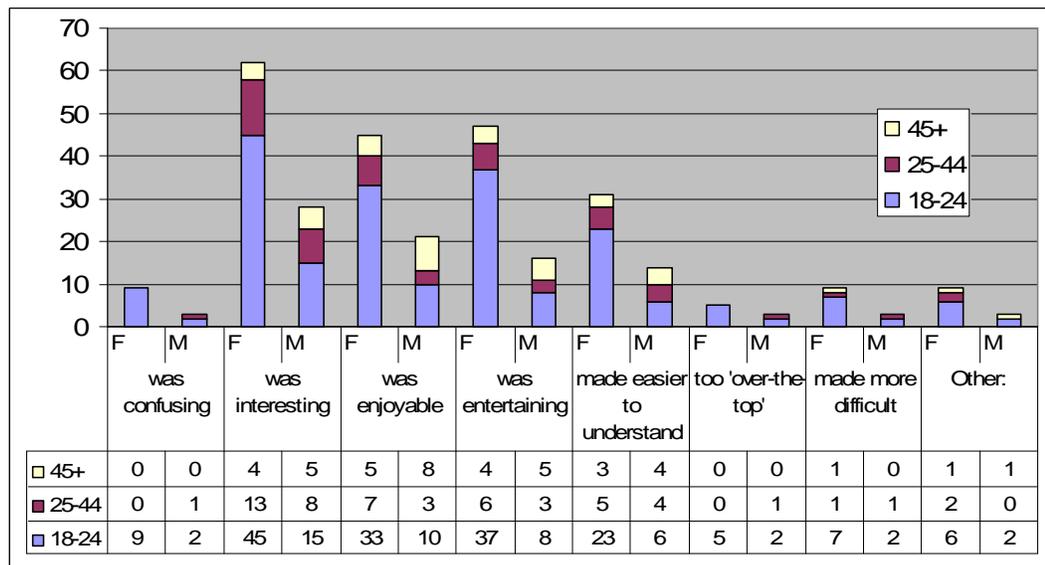


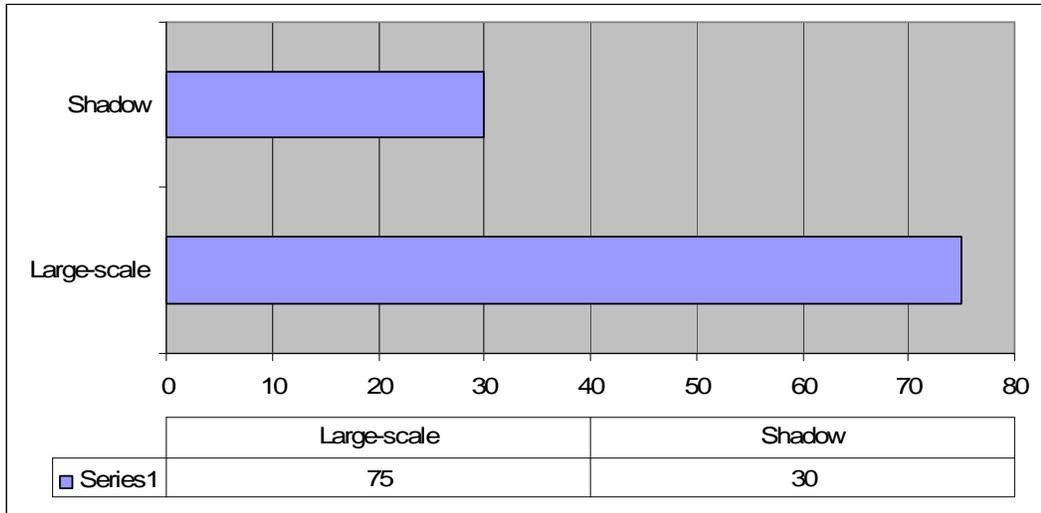
Table A.2. 4: Responses by age and gender.

What is evident in the above tables, is that a majority of responders found the puppet/actor combination to be interesting (90 responders), enjoyable (66 responders), and entertaining (63 responders). In addition, 43 responders indicated that the combination of puppets and human actors had made the information being presented easier to understand. Only 12 responders indicated that they had found the information being presented more difficult as a result of the combination of these techniques.

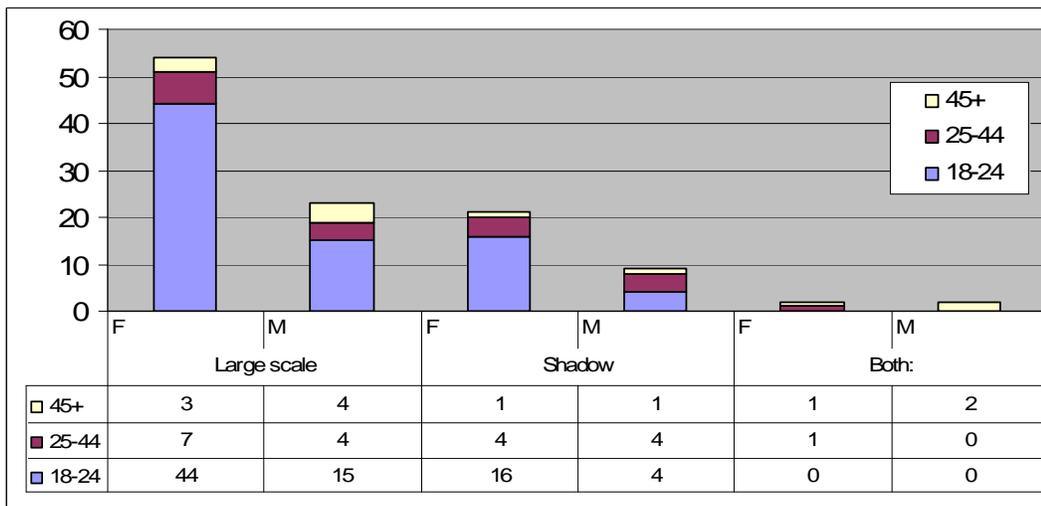
In regards to this project’s specific consideration of female responses to puppet forms, by looking at Table 2.2, it is evident that once again a larger number of women believed that the performance was confusing (9 women, 3 men) and that the information was had been made more difficult to understand by these forms (9 women, 3 men).

However, once these figures are considered alongside the gender demographic of the audience – 70% were women, 30% men – these figures become insignificant. It would appear that the way puppets were used in this performance was accessible to both sexes.

Question 3: Which puppet form did you prefer, large-scale or shadow?



**Table A.2. 5:** All responses.



**Table A.2. 6:** Responses by age and gender.

Question 4: Did you feel that the musical was: confusing, too ‘over-the-top’ for my taste, interesting, enjoyable, entertaining, made the information being presented easier to understand, made the information more difficult to understand? (tick all that apply)

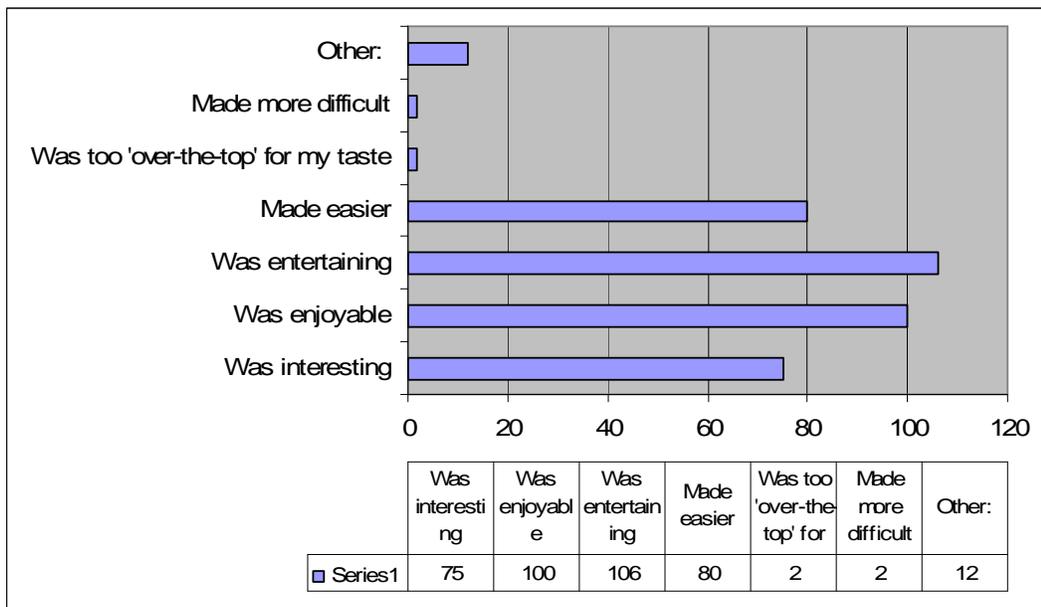


Table A.2. 7: All responses.

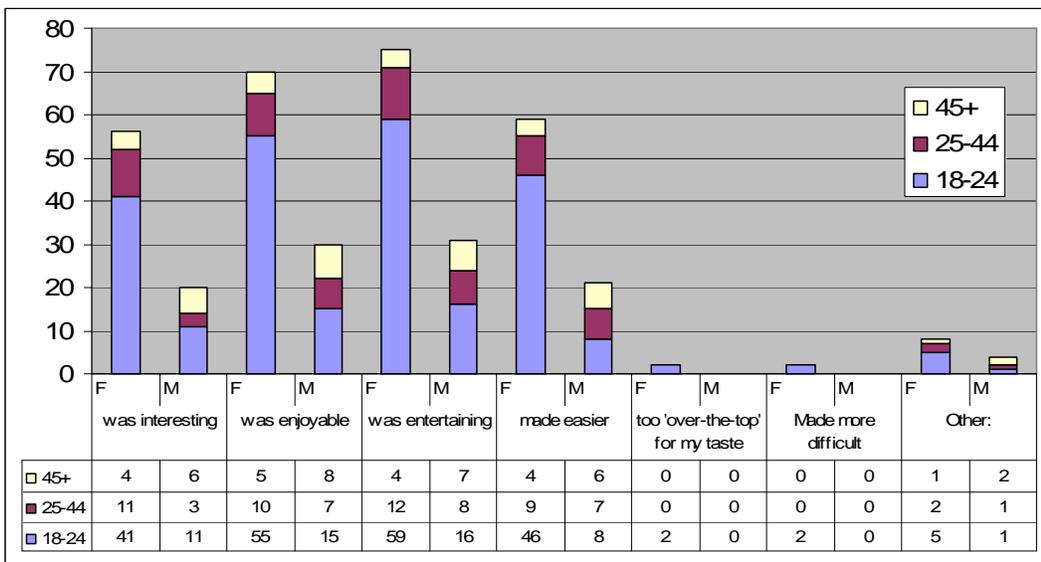


Table A.2. 8: Responses by age and gender.

In regards to the musical, most responders indicated that they found it to be entertaining (106 responders), enjoyable (100 responders), and interesting (75 responders). While 80 responders felt that the musical made the issue of immigration easier to comprehend, only 2 felt that it made it more difficult to comprehend.

Question 5: Which of the three performances did you feel was the most effective in discussing the issues of immigration in Britain, the *commedia*, the Puppet Show or the musical?

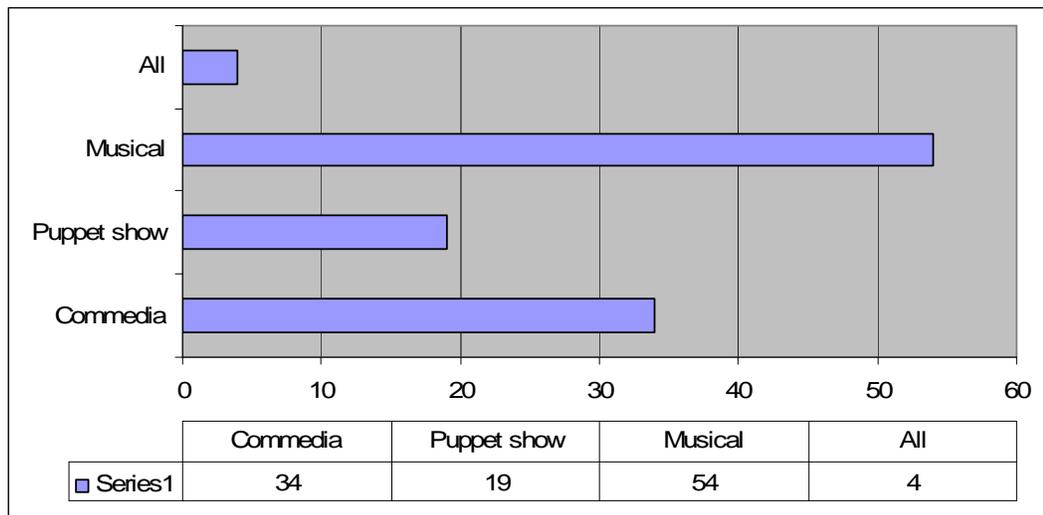


Table A.2. 9: All responses.

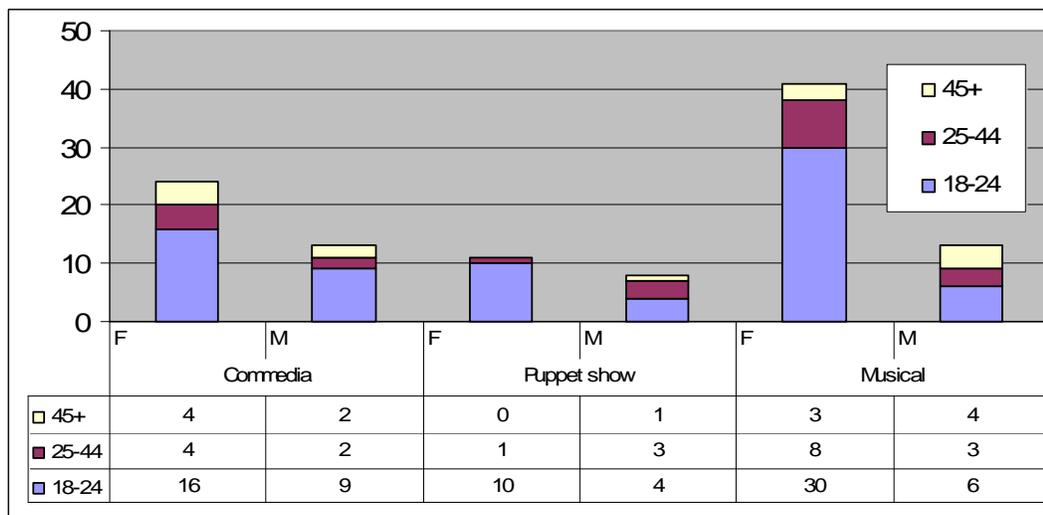


Table A.2. 10: Responses by age and gender.

Amongst all responders, the musical was perceived to be the most effective performance in discussing the issue of immigration in Britain (54 responders); the *commedia* was the second most effective (34 responders) and the puppet show the least effective (19 responders). However, the *commedia* and the musical are equally as effective with men, with both performances receiving 13 votes each.

Question 6: (Continued from Question 5) Was this because: you preferred that particular performance style; you were familiar with or recognized the theatrical from being utilized and felt more comfortable with it; it was unique and/or unusual; you appreciated the aesthetics of that particular performance; you found the performance to be the most entertaining; the dynamics of that particular cast; the text; or some other reason? (tick all that apply)

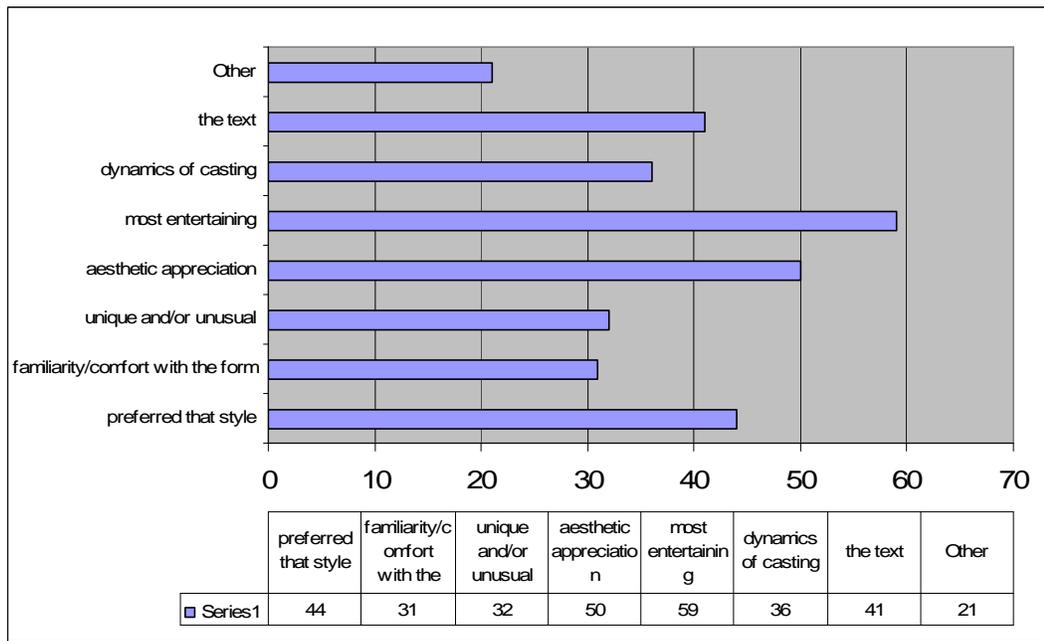


Table A.2. 11: All responses.

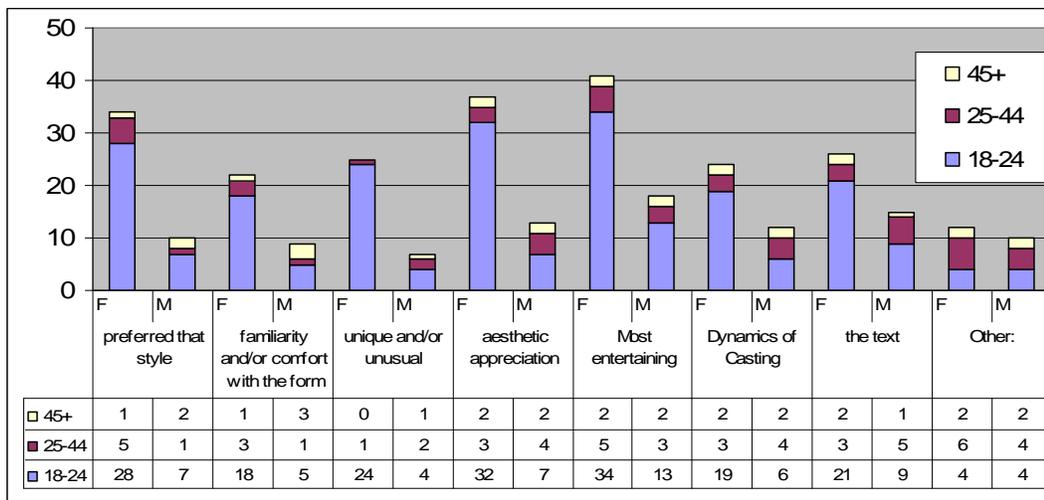


Table A.2. 12: Responses by age and gender.

59 audience members indicated that they believed a performance to be the most effective because it had succeeded in entertaining them; 50 indicated that the performance’s ‘aesthetics’ as the reason for its effectiveness; and 41 declare a preference for a particular performance style. Once all responses are separated into age and gender groups, the results only vary slightly. For women, the top three reasons for selecting a particular performance are: entertainment value (41 responders), the aesthetics of the performance (37 responders) and a preference for the performance’s style (34 responders). Amongst men, entertainment value is also the most frequent

response (18 responders); this is followed by the text (15 responders) and the aesthetics (13 responders).

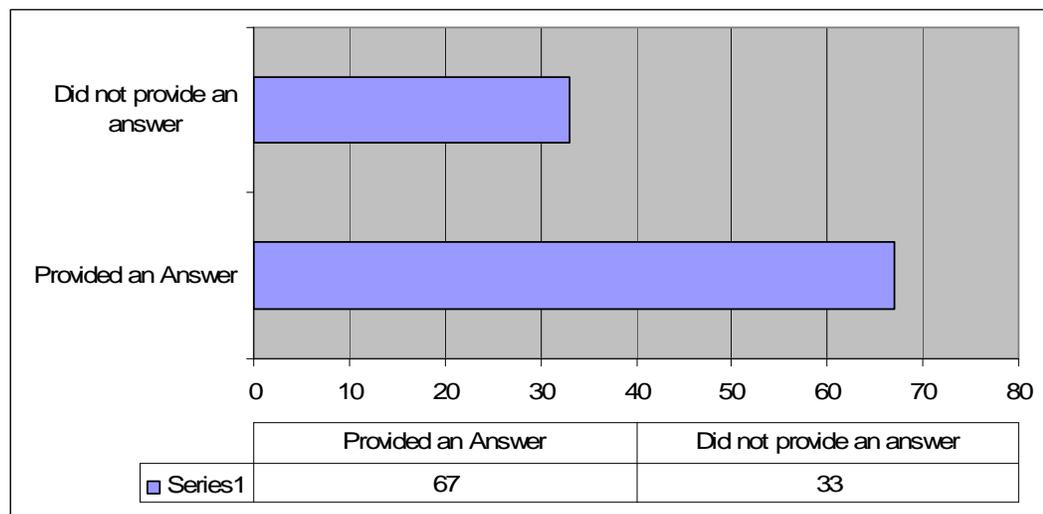
In regards to the performances specifically, those who selected the musical as the most effective did so because: (1) It was the most entertaining (34 responders); (2) they preferred that style (23 responders) and because they were familiar with and felt comfortable with that style (23 responders); (3) they appreciated the performance's aesthetics (20 responders).

The *commedia* elicited similar responses. Its audience indicated that: (1) It was the most entertaining (23 responders); (2) they preferred the *commedia* style (18 responders); (3) they appreciated its aesthetics (17 responders).

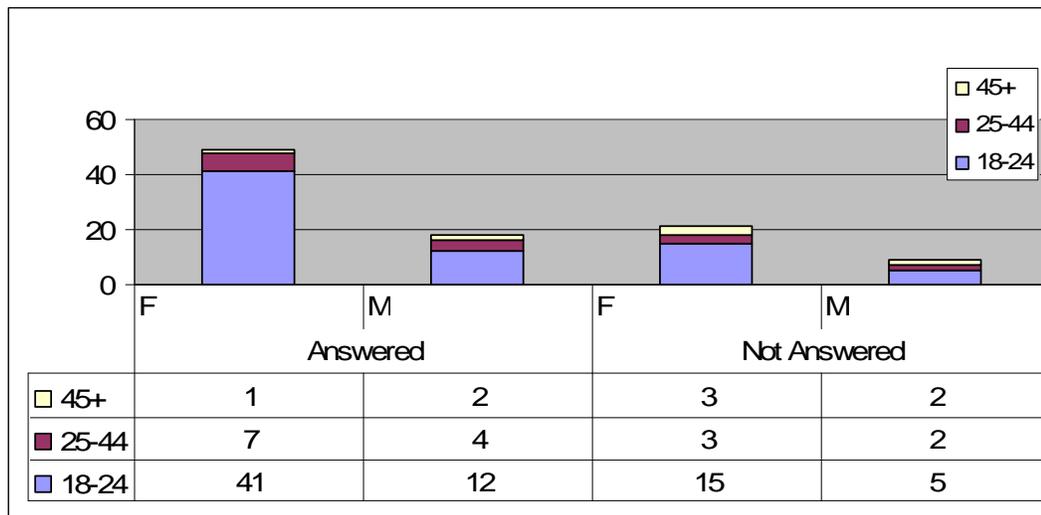
The puppet show, on the other hand, elicited quite different responses. Those who selected it as the most effective performance did so because: (1) of its text (11 responders); (2) it was unique/unusual (9 responders); (3) of its aesthetics (8 responders).

The differences between the puppet show's audience's responses from the others are, in my mind, significant. It would appear that the combination of large-scale and shadow puppets with human actors has resulted in an audience that is able to appreciate the text more thoroughly than with the other forms. I will return to this question in the conclusion of this chapter.

Question 7: Could you please name one thing you learned from one of the performances and specify which of the three performances you took that information from?



**Table A.2. 13:** All responses.

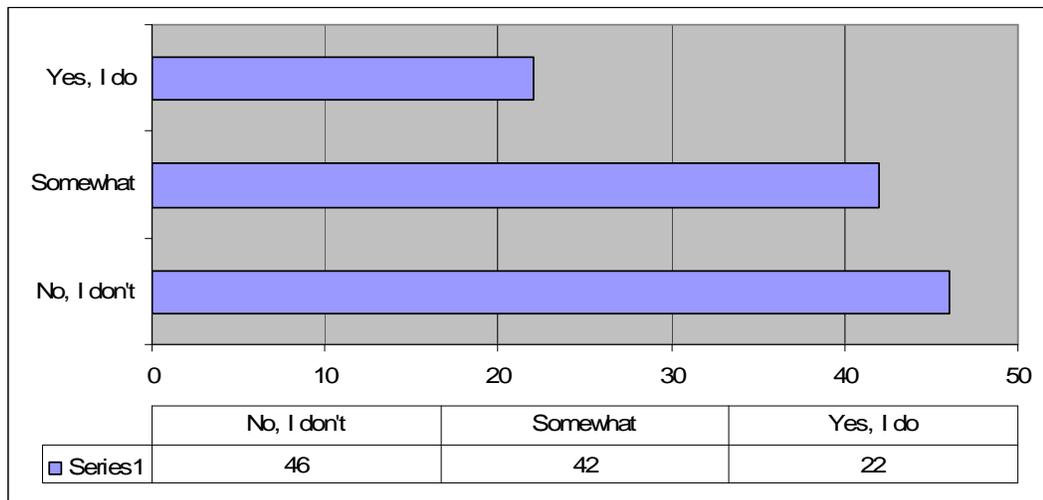


**Table A.2. 14:** Responses by age and gender.

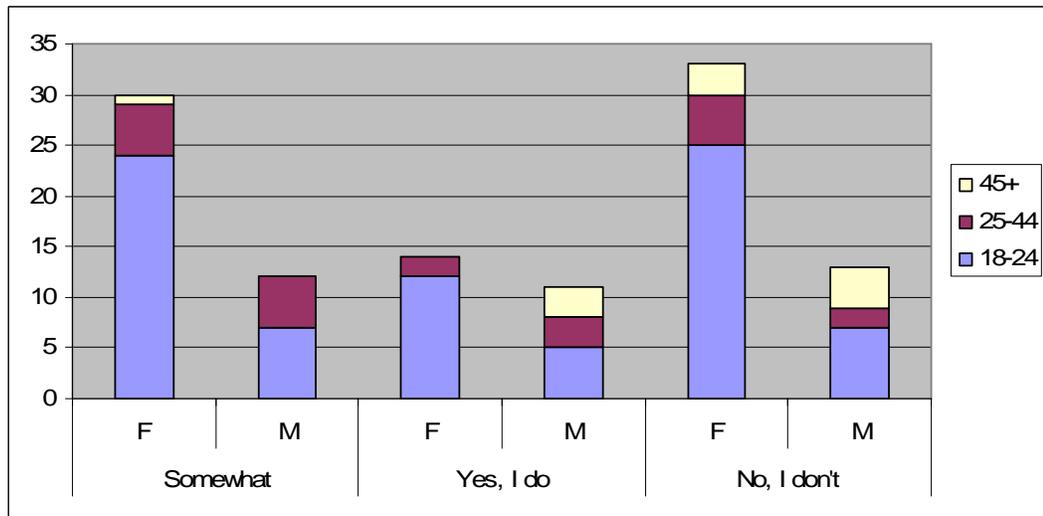
67 responders were able to name at least one thing they had learned from the performances. The answers varied greatly, and this is why, ultimately, a graph of all responses to this question has not been provided. Several responders only provided generalized ‘facts’. For instance, a 19 year old female indicated that she learned “the extent of paper work tied up in immigration.” The scene in which she ‘learned’ this ‘fact’ appeared in the musical; it was a completely fictional scene that had been composed out of generalizations I had collected through conversations with other people; it was completely satirical and not founded on any facts at all. Being an immigrant, I can, however, confirm that there is a great deal of paperwork involved in applying for visas, so she is not entirely wrong. These generalized responses were not tallied in the ‘Answered’ category in the tables above. However, what some of these responses do indicate is that the fictional and nonfictional aspects of some of the performances need to be considered more carefully.

In regard to the didactic aim of the performances and my research, it does appear, however, that the majority of audience members did learn something and that the performances succeeded in meeting this aim.

Question 8: Do you feel that your perceptions of immigration have been changed or altered as a result of one of the performances today?



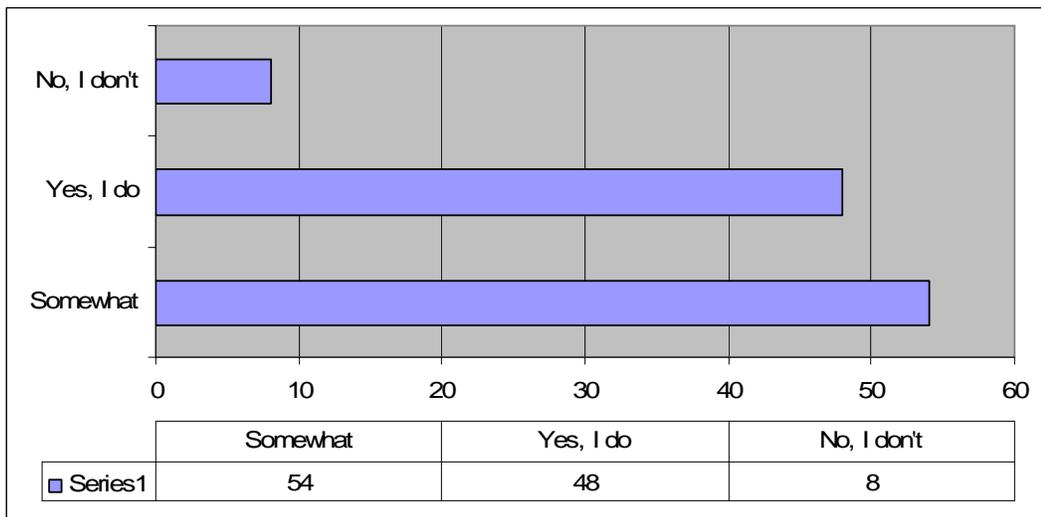
**Table A.2. 15:** All responses.



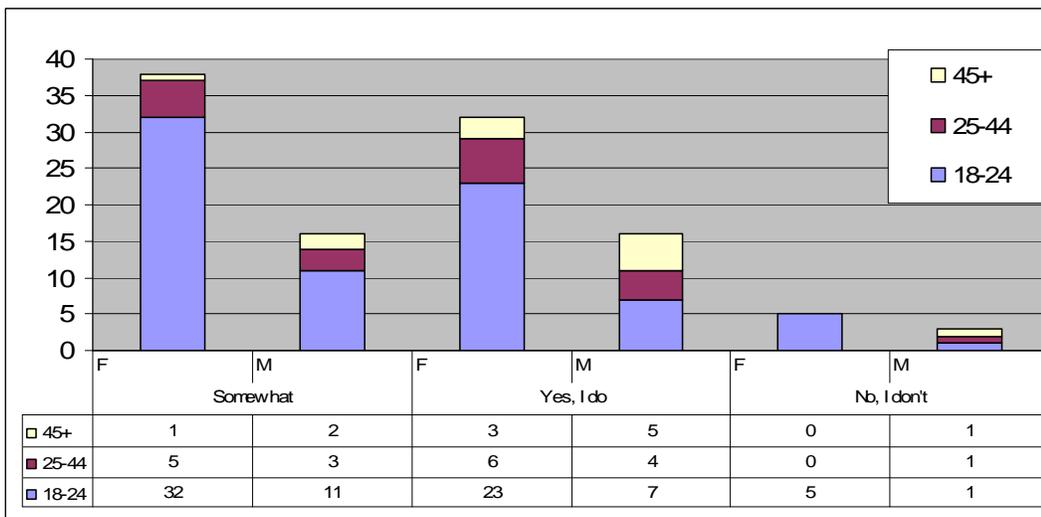
**Table A.2. 16:** Responses by age and gender.

What is evident in these tables is that although 46 responders did not feel as though their perceptions had changed regarding immigration, 64 believed that they had somewhat or definitely been altered.

Question 9: Do you feel compelled to share or discuss the issues/information in these shows with others?



**Table A.2. 17:** All responses.



**Table A.2. 18:** Responses by age and gender.

The majority of audience members indicated that they somewhat or definitely felt compelled to share the information provided in these performances with others. Only eight did not. To me, this indicates that the performances succeeded in making audience members more ‘active’ as opposed to ‘passive’ as a response to the performances; hence, another aim of the project was met.

Question 10: Would you recommend any of these performances to friends or family?

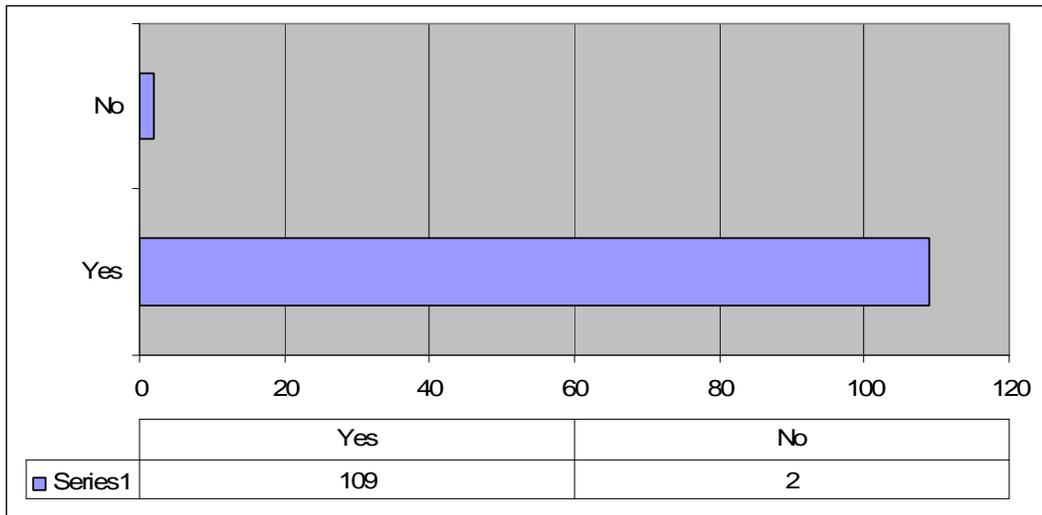


Table A.2. 19: All responses.

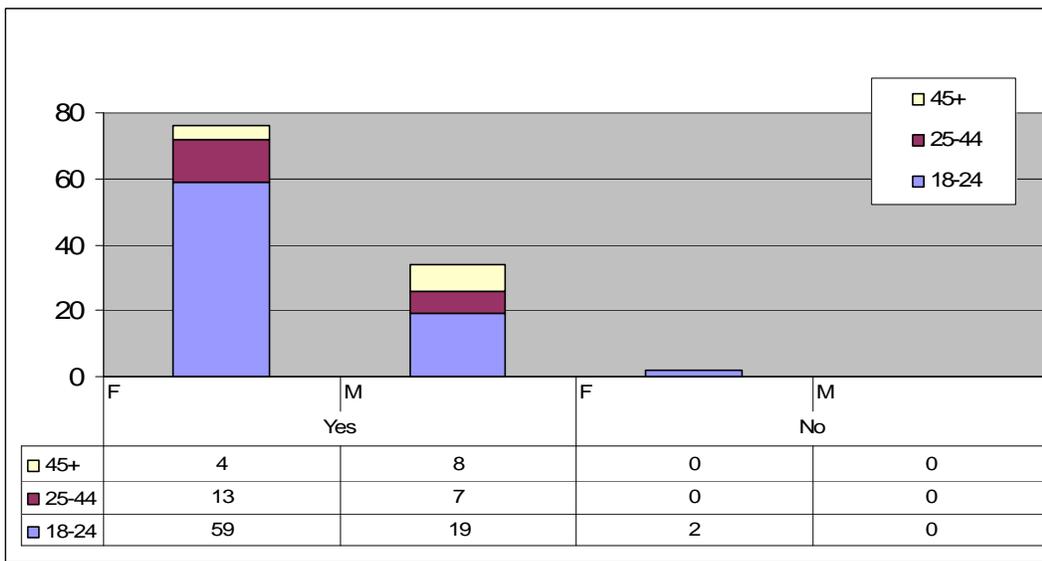
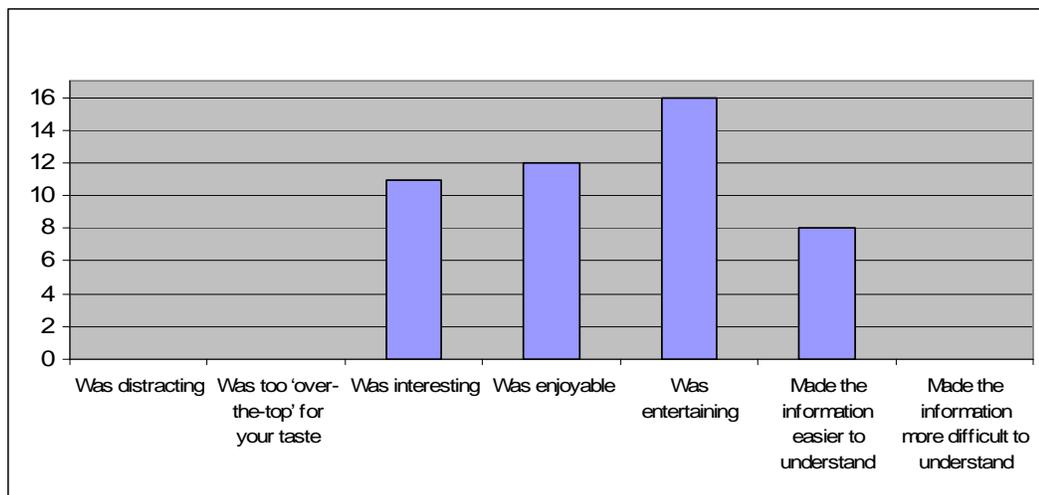


Table A.2. 20: Responses by age and gender.

### A.3 Reception to *Fashionable Immigration: a Commedia* (Project 3)

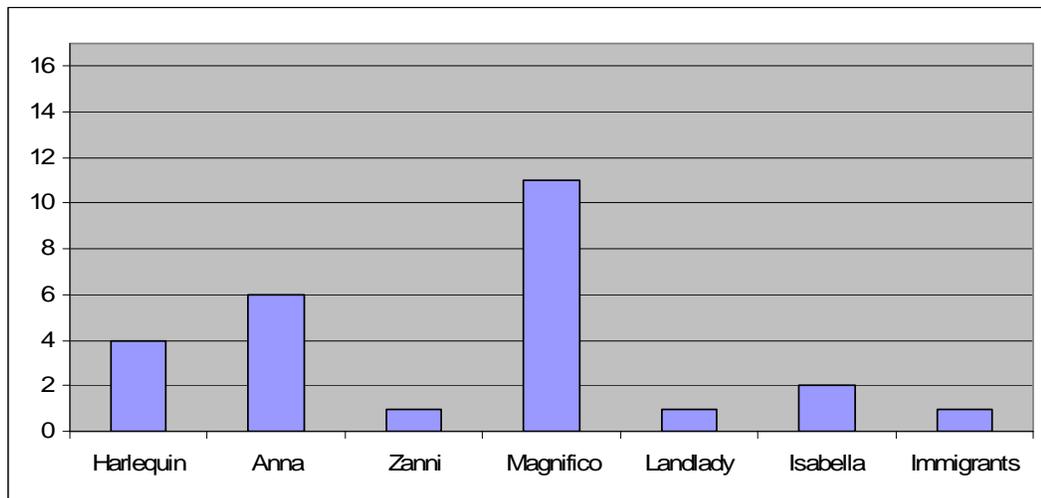
General information: Three performances were held on 7 June 2008 at Exeter Guildhall Shopping Centre. Following each performance, the cast would exit the stage and ask audience members if they would be interested in completing a questionnaire. Out of all three performances, a total of 17 people volunteered to complete questionnaires following the performances. Of these, 15 were women, and 2 were men. 7 responders were between the ages of 17 and 24; 4 were between 25 and 44; and 6 were over the age of 45. As before, most questions allowed responders to indicate several responses; subsequently many questions will have more than 17 total responses. Because there were so few responders to this project, I have not created two tables detailing age and gender statistics for each question.

Question 1: *Commedia* is a highly physical form, with large gesture and masked characters. Did you feel the inclusion of these elements: was distracting?; was too over-the-top for your taste?; was interesting?; was enjoyable?; was entertaining?; made the information being presented easier to understand?; made the information more difficult to understand?



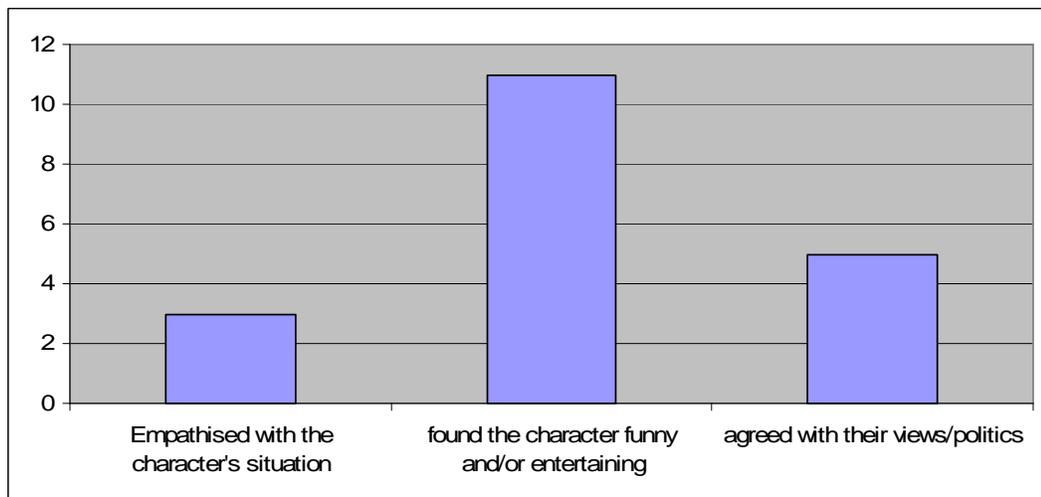
#### A.3.1

Question 2: Did you feel drawn to any of the characters in this performance. If so, which one(s)? Anna, Harlequin, Zanni, Madam Magnifico, Landlady, Isabella, the immigrants.



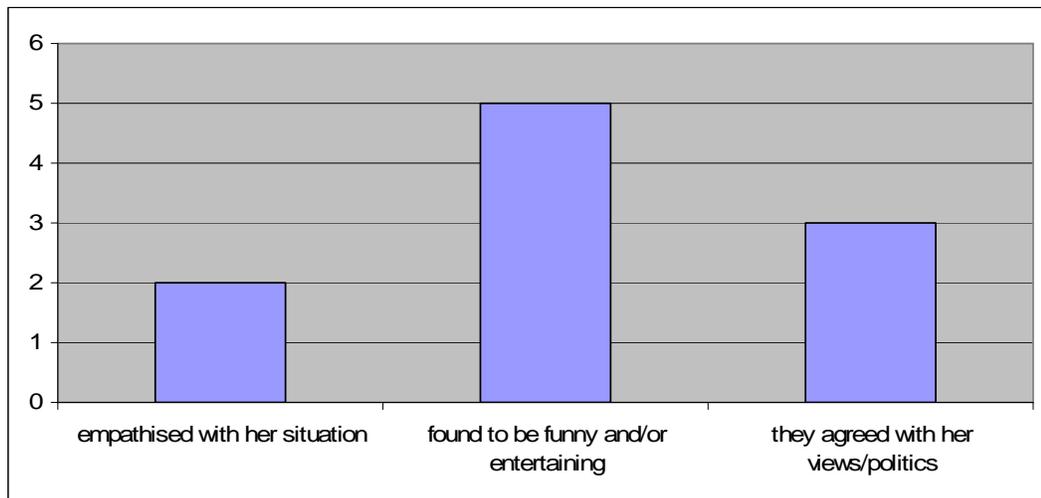
## A.3. 2

Question 3: Was this because: you empathised with their situation?; you found the funny and or entertaining?; you agreed with their views/politics?

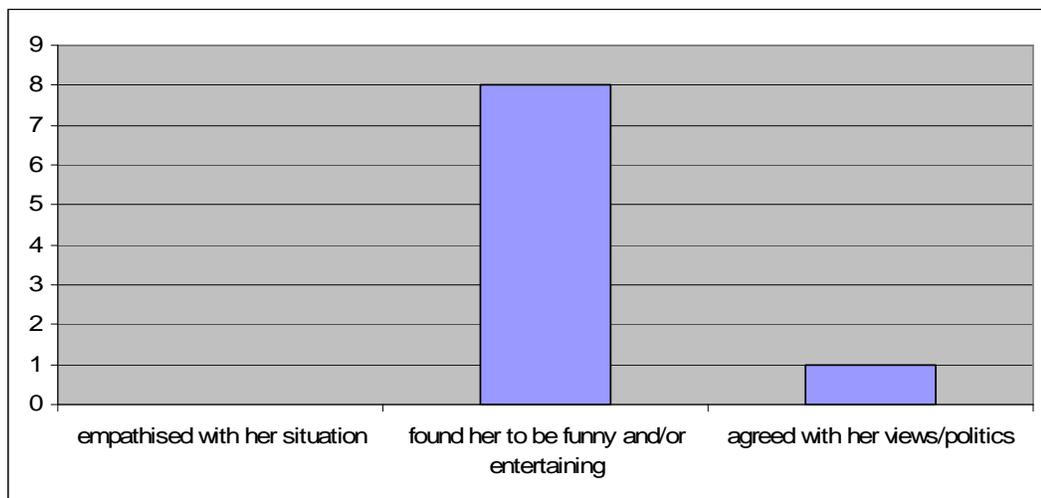


## A.3. 3

Question 3 (continued): because Anna and Magnifico were more drawn to than other characters in the performance, I have broken down the responses to their characters separately to get a better idea of why people are drawn to these characters.

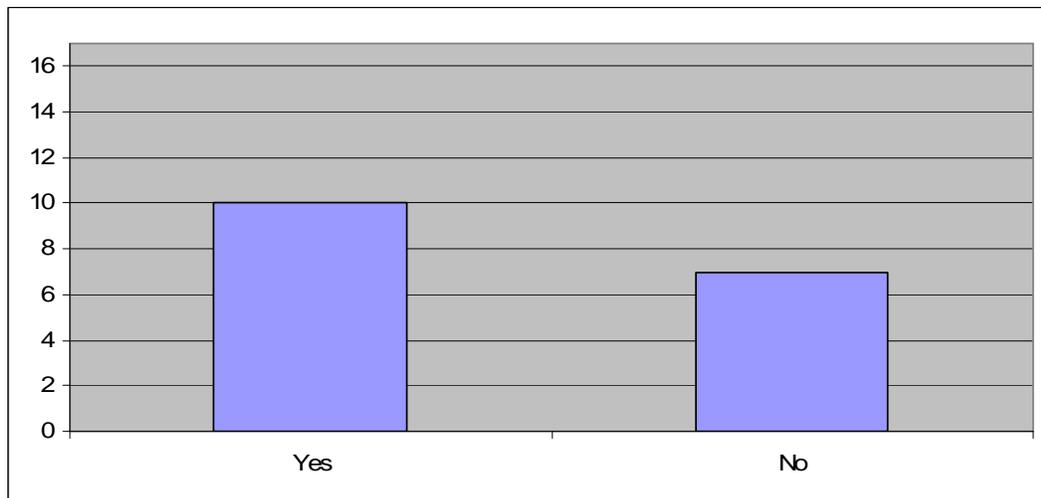


**A.3. 4:** Responses to Anna.



**A.3. 5:** Responses to Madam Magnifico

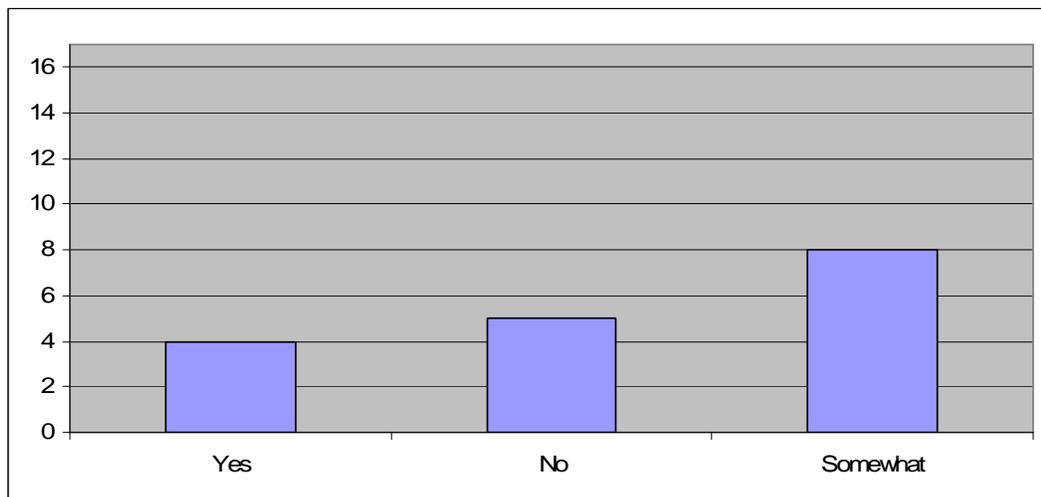
Question 4: Do you feel that you have learned anything about immigration through the performance today?



### A.3.6

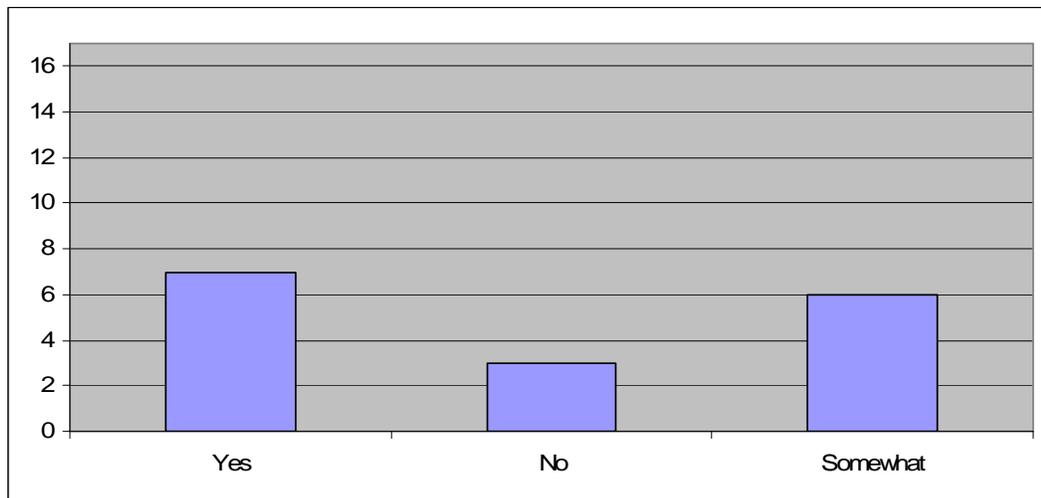
Responders were then asked to indicate what they had learned. 70% of those who had indicated that they had learned something were able to indicate what this was.

Question 5: Do you feel your perceptions about immigration have been changed or altered as a result of the performance today?



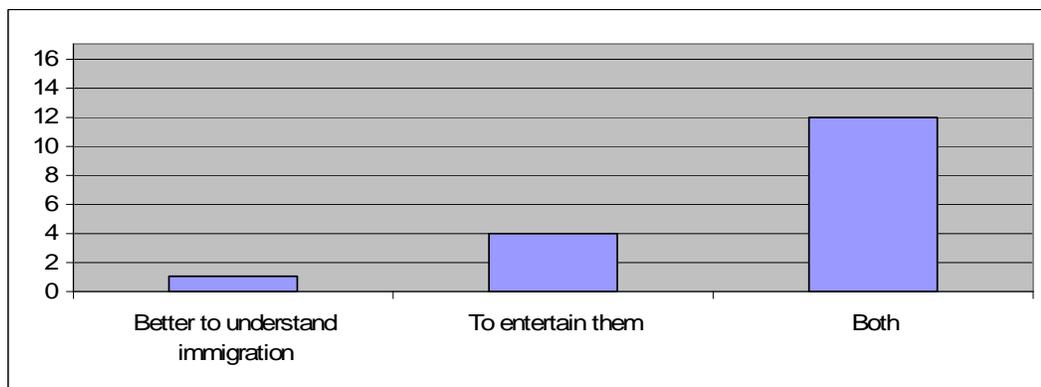
### A.3.7

Question 6: Do you feel compelled to share or discuss the issues/information in this performance with others?



A.3. 8

Question 7: Would you recommend this performance to friends or family to help them better understand immigration, to entertain them, or both?



A.3. 9

**APPENDIX B:  
NOTES FROM TRAINING**

**B.1 Notes on *commedia* training:  
Character types, movement, and gesture**

*The following notes come from my private commedia training sessions with Teresa Rodrigues, former member of the Unfortunati Company. The sessions were held between November 2006 and January 2007. Scenes from these sessions can be seen on DVD 1.*

	(Masked)	(Multifunction roles)
	Magnifico	
	Pantalone	Dottore
	(Lovers: unmasked)	
1 <sup>st</sup> Actor	1 <sup>st</sup> Actress	Capitano
2 <sup>nd</sup> Actor	2 <sup>nd</sup> Actress	
	(Servants, zanni's – also masked)	
Harlequin	Zanni	Brighella
Columbina		

**Table B. 1:** Teresa Rodrigues' illustration of the hierarchy of the *Commedia* characters. The characters which appear in the 'Multi-function' column are more versatile than the others, and can serve multiple functions.

*Il Magnifico* is wealthy, older gentleman, but the term '*Il Magnifico*' can also be used to describe Pantalone, Dottore or Magnifico. He is confident and easily angered. Most often, he is the father of one of the lovers (1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> actor/actress). A zanni will work for his house, either for him or his son/daughter.

Playing Magnifico: remember to present the body 'openly' and out. Begin with the feet and ensure that they are shoulder-width apart; carry the weight the body with the heels. His arms are big and circular shape (extended away from the body). When he walks, his pace is steady, but not quick. When he is angered, he will raise his hands over his head (still circular-shape) and shake his fists.

In a slightly shallow 2<sup>nd</sup> position, Magnifico will walk on his heels. His chest will be out and his arms away from his sides in an 'O' shape. When he changes direction, his turns will be sharp (almost like a pencil-turn in dance). Because he is a masked character, his head will remain forward at all times (e.g. when he turns his body

to the left, his shoulders will turn with the rest of his body, but his head will remain forward).

The 1<sup>st</sup> Actor and Actress are beautiful, very presentational, unmasked characters.

1<sup>st</sup> Actor: tight legs, circular arms, and although unmasked, his face will also face the audience at all times (to show off his beauty). He is the son of the Magnifico, Dottore or Pantalone. He will appear to be very brave and carries a sword.

1<sup>st</sup> Actress: she walks on toes, and her hands should be carrying skirt. She too is beautiful and will be as presentational as 1<sup>st</sup> Actor. She is also a singer. When she stops moving, she will lower herself off of her toes and gracefully put her skirt down and pose. Again, because she is beautiful, she will not turn her face away from the audience.

Both 1<sup>st</sup> Actor and Actress are capable of spending their entire time on stage facing the audience. If they choose to leave the stage, they may even exit backwards as to avoid losing eye-contact with their audience. They can, however, turn sharply (depending on their temper) and exit the stage (maintaining the above movement) quickly or angrily.

Harlequin: a peasant from northern Italy. Teresa Rodrigues describes him as 'de-humanised'. Allardyce Nicoll (1963) describes him as having the grace and innocence of a 'kitten'. He is extremely forgetful and clownish, but never vindictive. All of Harlequin's tricks are played merely in jest.

His movement might be compared with a Scottish dance. He is very rhythmic and his feet are always moving. Upon entering the stage, he will raise one leg up over the other (Scottish dance), and then skip into the space (very quick counts of three). He, like Magnifico, will walk/move on his heels, but he is much quicker and slightly lower to the floor. His hands, when not moving, are situated on his belt (his thumbs are tucked into his belt) and his bottom sticks out. His arms are very presentational, and when not located in his belt (see above), he will have them bent at the elbow, palm facing up, and presenting something (an idea, a speech, the Columbina). His feet NEVER stop moving. Once he has found a place to present, he will shift his weight from one foot to the other. His motivations are food and Columbina.

Pantalone: another father figure, but slightly older and more irritable. To build that character, begin with Magnifico (big, tall, open body) and collapse it. Pantalone's hands rest behind his back. His legs are in *pliea*, lowering his upper body closer to the floor (but his back and head should remain straight and upright, looking out to the audience). He is generally angry and will use his hands to point and shake his finger in

the direction of his anger. He will walk slightly bow-legged (again, *pliea* best describes this) in short, agitated (quick) steps. Like so many of the male *commedia* characters, his weight will be on his heels.

Columbina: Harlequin's companion. She is the female version of Harlequin. She also moves very quickly, is always presentational, and silly. Like the 1<sup>st</sup> Actress, the Columbina can sing. She is unmasked and usually very beautiful.

To create Columbina, begin by placing both hands on the hips (as she wears a corset, the hands should be placed on the 'small' outside region of the abdomen). When she 'skips' onto the stage, she will hold her skirt (like 1<sup>st</sup> Actress); unlike Harlequin, she will skip on her toes. Once she has found a place to stop walking, she will slap her knees and place her hands back on her corset (waist). It might be best to think Columbina's corset as being similar to Harlequin's belt in that it is a resting place for their hands. Again, like Harlequin, she will never stop moving. She will constantly shift her weight between each leg and present with her free hand. Unlike many of the other characters, the Columbina can leap down from the stage to speak/flirt with or irritate the audience.

Capitano: unmasked, very frightening demeanour (but really a coward). Capitano might be Spanish; he was created to lampoon military braggarts. The physicality: bottom out, chest out, chin up, weight on heels, big arms. When he walks, he will raise each leg up as if to step over large buckets. His mouth is open and teeth barred. Once he has arrived at his position, he will wield a sword from under his cape and pose with it and (often) grimace at the audience. Once he has his sword in place (at head height), he will shift his weight onto one leg and present the other in almost a K formation. It is to be remembered, he is merely a showman; in actuality, he is a coward.

Zanni: Harlequin's serving companion (masked); generally regarded as the lowest of the servants. He is always in trouble and is subsequently starved or beaten by Pantalone (this could also explain his motivation for food). He might best be described as bird-like (and his mask reflects this: long nose, curled, almost confused, eye brows). His body is positioned similar to that of Pantalone, except his hands manoeuvre from chest height (almost like wings). He is not generally regarded as being clever, but is most certainly quick and scheming (most often he will come up with the plots/tricks that he and Harlequin will play on the others). When he walks (again from his heels) his upper body will be slightly hunched over and his neck and head are up, as if to see what's going on (this 'hunched' back could be a result of his serving status: he has probably carried many heavy things on his back); his legs are in *pliea* position. His head

bobs like a chicken. Teresa Rodrigues describes him as being like one of the veloceraptors from *Jurassic Park*; he can certainly be that devious/scheming.

2<sup>nd</sup> Actor (unmasked): attempts to imitate Capitano, but fails miserably. When trying to wield his sword, he will find that it is caught in its holster; he will try endlessly to get it untangled from his cape or the sword's holster. He is silly and constantly misunderstands and makes mistakes.

2<sup>nd</sup> Actress: she tries to be 1<sup>st</sup> Actress. She is very ditsy and giggly. She will walk in the same manner as 1<sup>st</sup> Actress, but she not quite capable of getting it right: she is too quick; when she attempts to stop, her upper body responds as though someone has slammed on the breaks (and will tilt backwards and then forwards before arriving in an upright position). She is a vulnerable character because she is so naïve.

Il Dottore: body like Pantalone, but more upright. He is either too smart for his own good (making him appear foolish), or very clever and wise (depending on how he is needed). Most often he will take a very long time to explain a very simple idea and is known for mispronunciations, particularly Pantalone's name or basic Latin. His hands rest on the front of his gown; his legs (like Pantalone) reside in *pliea*; he has a steady-slow gate and will often raise a hand from his gown to point and ponder over an issue being discussed.

## **B.2 Introduction to Circus Skills: Warm-ups, methods and techniques for trapeze, juggling, flying trapeze and acrobalance skills**

*The notes below come from the circus training I underwent in November and December 2006 at The Circus Space in London. Before attempting any of the circus-based skills detailed below an appropriate warm-up is absolutely necessary. Any performers wishing to participate should notify the warm-up leader/trainer of any medical conditions or disabilities. Below I have detailed the warm-up which prefaces any training at the Circus Space.*

The group forms a large circle; in a follow-the-leader format, the group begins to walk briskly with their arms in front of them. As the pace increases to a jog, the participant's hands begin to shake frantically from the wrist (wrists must be loose); this continues for 16-32 counts. The arms then move above the participants head; their wrists still shaking; they continue moving in this position for the same amount of time as before. The arms then move out from the body (crucifixion-style); the wrists continue to shake; the time limit remains the same.

With the hands still extended out from the body, the wrists stop shaking and the hands begin to clench into fists (clench, relax, clench, relax, etc.) for 16-32 counts.

Then, following the same arm patterns as before, the hands continue to flex into and out of fist position, each arm position is held for 16-32 beats.

Throughout the above, the participants continue to jog in the same direction.

The group then begins to skip. The objective here is to make sure the legs are brought up to waist-height, with the knee forming a perfect 90 degree angle. The grounded foot is responsible for bringing height into the 'skip'; this is done by flexing the foot into the ground (toes into the mat). Beginning with the left leg on the ground and right leg in the air, the pace (jogging) remains the same, although, as the objective here is to work both legs (and to get as high as possible) it will be impossible to keep up the appearance of a quick pace.

Following this, the legs will kick forward. The knees do not move and the heels should not touch the floor. After 32 counts, this should be reversed: the legs kick backwards. Again, the knees should not move and the heels should not touch the floor. The circle, pace and direction are unchanged through both of these exercises.

After all of these exercises have occurred in one direction, they should ALL be repeated counter clockwise. Although it is not always important for the arm movements to be repeated in this direction, but because many of these circus skills require the legs to be most active, it is very important to make sure that the legs have been adequately stretched and warmed up.

Once the last rotation of the warm up has been completed counter-clockwise, the circle should come to a halt. Standing with the legs shoulder-width apart, raise the right leg at a 90 degree angle and rotate the ankle clock-wise then counter-clock-wise for 32 beats each. The same exercise should then be repeated with the left leg. The performer's body should go from upright, to slouching: hands and feet are flat on the floor, knees bent, head down. Using the legs as a springing device, the performer should "bounce, bounce, bounce" (3 times) and then straighten the knees (the hands, however, are left flat on the floor). The hands should remain flat on the floor (if the performers are not capable of straightening their knees totally, for safety, they should be told that it is okay to bend them slightly for comfort ... their stretch will eventually develop). Hold this position for 10-20 seconds, and allow the performer to situation himself back in the resting position (described above). Allow the performer a breath or two and then "bounce, bounce, bounce and stand" again. They should repeat the same position (hands flat on the floor; knees straight; head down) for the same timeframe as before. Instead of going back into 'rest' position, however, this time, the performer should be instruction to 'walk on all fours'. In this position, the performer should try to keep his bottom as

high as possible: knees may be slightly bent, arms straight, head up (as to see the person in front of them). As this position is quite difficult to manoeuvre, one lap around the circle is perhaps all that will be necessary. Following the rotation, the performer should be allowed to sit back in 'relax' position (as described above). The performer will then, in the same manner as before, straighten his legs, but allow his upper body to remain close to the floor (this time it is not necessary to keep the hands on the floor); the performer can then allow the upper half of his body to stand upright too, but slowly, allowing each vertebrae to slowly 'roll-in' to place; the head should be the last thing to 'roll into' place.

Standing in an upright position, the performer should then tilt his head to the left. The objective here is to stretch the neck. In order for an adequate stretch to be made, the right shoulder and arm should be extended towards the floor. This should be repeated with the right side of the neck. Each position should be held for 10-20 seconds. Finally, the head should come forward, the chin touching the chest, and allow for the muscles in the upper back and neck to stretch as well. Once all three positions have executed, the head should be allowed to relax. Beginning in a clock-wise direction, slowly rotate the head in a complete circle; this should be repeated three to four times and should then be repeated in a counter-clockwise formation.

The final section of the warm-up focuses on the muscles on the sides of the body and, once again, on the legs. With feet shoulder-width apart, the performer should place his hands on his hips. The right hand should then extend out from the body and extend up over the head, reaching as far as possible to the left; the palm should be facing up. The eyes should follow the right hand. Hold this position for 10-20 seconds. Then allow the right arm to continue its journey over the head and down towards the left foot; to execute this, it will be necessary to remove the left arm from the left hip. Once it arrives at the left foot, the right hand should be placed on the outside of the left ankle. The right hand should be placed on the inside of the left foot, palm on the floor. Hold this position for 10-20 seconds. Take the right and left hand and move them evenly between the legs. Hold. The hands should then move to the opposite leg, repeating the position from before, except with the opposite hands. Hold for 10-20 seconds. Then, with the left arm, complete the circle started with the right arm (make sure that the palm is facing upwards). When the left arm reaches the 10 or 11 o'clock position, move the right arm up to the hip and allow the muscles on the right side of the body to stretch. Complete the circle until the actor is again in the upright position and both hands have once again found the hips. This will complete the warm up cycle.

### *Static Trapeze*

The first position needed for the trapeze is the **pike** position. This position is literally when the upper body meets the lower body creating an 'A' position. When a trapeze artist mounts a trapeze, they first grip the bar firmly with both hands, four fingers on the top of the bar and the thumb under the bar. To take stress off of the arms and legs, movement should come from the abdomen. With arms extended up to the bar, using the abdomen, pull the legs up and under the bar and enter the pike position. Once in this position, the back of the knees should be placed over the bar; the toes should be pointed; pointing the toes will keep the artist on the trapeze. Once the toes have been pointed, the artist may remove his hands from the bar. This position is referred to as **hoc**. In order to sit on the trapeze, the actor should firmly grip the ropes on each side, point the toes, straighten the legs and, again using the muscles of the abdomen and the strength of the arms, pull and 'slide' into sitting position. To exit the bar, a performer should enter hoc position first, followed by the pike position in reverse (legs must go back under the bar to find the floor; never follow the pike position backwards to the floor as dislocating the arms/shoulders will most likely occur). These are the two basic tools needed for the trapeze.

The 'Mermaid': Using the tools above to mount the trapeze, one of the simplest manoeuvres to perform on a static trapeze is known as the 'mermaid'. Once the performer is in sitting position, they should move their bottom to the right side of the bar. Placing the hands at head height on the right rope, the legs should be straightened out towards the rope on the left side. Once comfortably in this position, and the ropes are tightly gripped, the bottom can then be allowed to slide off the back of the bar; the tightened legs and grip on the ropes will keep the performer from falling. The upper body should then be allowed to move with the bottom off the trapeze bar; the hands should slide down the rope to permit the body to slide further off the bar. Once the artist's toes have locked against the left rope, the left arm can come away from the right rope. The upper body and head can then twist around, looking away from the trapeze, and the free arm is then allowed to present the 'mermaid'. To re-mount the trapeze, the artist's hands should find the rope, the legs should be centred on the trapeze and finally go into hoc position and the proceeding as described above.

The key to standing on a trapeze is remembering that the toes must remain locked on the bar. Once in sitting position, the hands should come up to ear-height on the ropes. The artist should use his arms to secure the ropes; bringing one foot up from

the knee, he places his toes on the bar. The toes are then responsible for the artist's weight. By flexing the foot and straightening the knee, the artist is then allowed to raise himself off the bar, thereby allowing his other foot (once again, his toes!!) to find and secure his weight on the bar. His hands should slide up the rope (careful not to go too quickly or the flesh will burn on the rope). The artist is now standing, albeit on his toes; his heels should be above his toes (this will be difficult for anyone with bad ankles or weak toes ... ballet training comes in very useful here).

In order to go into the statue position, the artist, in standing position will slide his hands down the rope and the torso should extend away from the ropes. The arms and toes will be responsible for keeping the artist actually on the trapeze. The lower the arms, the more impressive the statue as it will permit the torso to come further away from the trapeze. Finally, for the full effect, take one foot (your weakest) away from the bar; bend that particular leg at the knee and bring it towards your chest (obviously it will not reach the chest, but it does create a strong pose). To exit this position, place the weaker leg back on the bar (secure the toes); bend the knees and lower the body towards the bar; the hands should slide down the rope (again be cautious of burning the skin); remove one foot from the bar and then the other; the artist should then be sitting back on the bar.

### *The Flying Trapeze*

All the above rules for the static trapeze are not valid when attempting the flying trapeze. At the early training stages, two handlers should accompany the flyer up the ladder. Each of the handlers is responsible for collecting, holding and releasing the trapeze. The platform, roughly a foot across, is suspended by two cables. The handlers should wrap one leg around the cable, securing it at the base of the cable, and place one hand 6-8 inches above their head (which leg and arm selected will be decided by which side of the platform the handler is stationed: on the right side of the platform, the handler will secure his left leg and left arm, allowing his right arm to collect/secure the trapeze; reverse this for the handler on the left side). The person flying, or flyer, should stand in the middle of the platform, legs evenly spread (a bit wider than shoulder width), with their toes near the platform edge, and their hands gripping the ropes/cables which secure the platform to the ceiling (the arms should extend out from the body forming a 'T' shape).

To fly, the flyer should step to the edge of the platform. Their toes should extend slightly over the edge; their hands should still be gripping the ropes. Once the trapeze

has been collected by one of the handlers, the other handler should reach out (palm up and flat) to catch the other side of the trapeze when it is thrown, thereby balancing the trapeze and bringing it in closer to the flyer. The flyer should extend his good (strong arm) and firmly grip the trapeze's bar (four fingers and thumb all go OVER the bar; locking the thumb UNDER the bar could result in a broken thumb). As the trapeze will not come directly to the platform, the flyer should be instructed that once their other hand arrives at the bar, they should prepare to step off the platform (as the weight of the trapeze will pull them off anyway); the handlers should continue to hold the trapeze until the flyer has stepped off the platform; the weight of the trapeze and flyer should force the trapeze out of their hands (releasing early could result in the flyer falling or unbalancing the platform, putting both handlers at risk of falling).

Once the flyer has stepped away from the platform, they need to remember four things: always face forward; bring the legs up towards the end of the swing; pull the legs back to gain moment for the next swing; and bring the legs up again to not strike the platform. All in all, the flyer should be either bringing his legs up or back, depending on where he is in flight. All flyers should be warned that the flying trapeze is incredibly painful to manoeuvre, particularly on their hands. For beginners, three to four swings per 'flight' is probably all they will be able to handle. There is no way off the trapeze but to release the bar and fall. At the Circus Space, we fell onto mats; they recommend trying to land on your feet (which I somehow managed to do!).

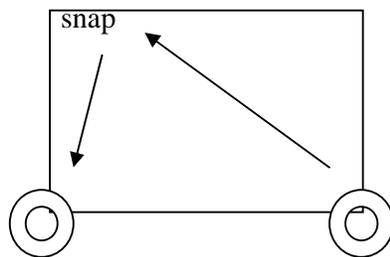
### *Juggling*

Gather a group of six to eight students into a circle. Once in the circle, one member of the group should take a single ball and throw it to another member of the group; however, before throwing the ball, the first person must say the name of the person that the ball is intended for. This person does the same thing with another member of the group. Allow this to continue until everyone has had the ball several times and then add another ball and then another. The objective of this exercise is to focus on the ball(s) and learn the names of those around you.

Each member of the group gets a single ball. They should be instructed to throw the ball straight up and catch it; they should be instructed to throw the ball comfortably and not too high. After they have acquainted themselves with their ball and catching it, allow them to throw the ball higher (double the height from before). Again, allow them several attempts to familiarize themselves with the new height. The final time, the ball

should be thrown three times as high. Once they have familiarized themselves with this new height, instruct the following:

1. Pretend that there is a window in front of you. It is rectangular in shape; it is about as wide as your shoulders and comes up to the top of your head; it is probably a foot or so away from you.
2. Place your ball in your strong hand. Then, aiming toward the opposite side of the window, try to strike the corner with your ball; when the ball reaches the corner, snap the fingers of your free hand to acknowledge that it made it and then catch the ball with this free hand, saying the words: “Throw, Snap, Catch” might make this easier to understand. It is imperative that your eyes remain on the ball the entire time. See illustration below:



Repeat this until throwing and catching the ball in this way becomes natural.

3. Give each member of the group a second ball. Placing one ball in each hand, the students should be instructed to throw one, throw two, as if they were beats. “Throw 1, Throw 2”. The ‘throw 2’ replaces the ‘snap’ from the previous exercise. Again, they should be aiming for the corners of their imaginary window. Add to this, “catch one, catch two.” Combined: throw one, throw two, catch one, catch two. Once they can do this, continue on to step 4.
4. The addition of the third ball. Placing two balls in your strong hand, and one in your weaker hand, the object becomes: throw, throw, catch, throw, catch, throw, etc. It might be easier to stop after one rotation; however, as I myself experienced, this got me into the habit of only being able to do one rotation for the rest of the session. If you get the students into the habit of thinking: throw, throw, throw, throw, throw ...they will begin to complete two, three, four or five complete cycles with the balls.

Easy tricks with one ball:

1. Throw the ball straight up in the air and watch it. Then, take one step (under the ball), place your stronger hand behind you (palm up) and allow the ball to fall into your open hand. If you watch the ball hit its peak height, you should be able to get it to land in your hand without looking or bending.
2. Placing the ball in your strong hand, flick the ball over your wrist towards your elbow. As you do this, place your free hand, palm up, behind your back and turn your body so that you may catch the ball. If you get the hang of this, make it a cycle: flick, turn, catch, flick, turn, catch. Again, a simple, but effective trick.

### *Acrobalance*

Acrobalance is essentially the use of several bodies to sculpt or build large body structures, i.e. human pyramids. These exercises were pretty simple, so I am not going to go into great detail here, but I will go over tricks and tips that make the pyramids possible.

1. Chalk! Many of these structures require good balance and good grip.
2. When building a human pyramid, people climbing on top of others should remember to place their shins and knees on the fleshy area of their supporters' lower back; their hands must be placed on their shoulders first. NEVER allow someone to use knees for support; NEVER step on someone's vertebrae; NEVER allow more tiers of the pyramid to continue if someone near the bottom is in obvious pain. Once the pyramid is complete (and if done correctly), the people forming the ends should be able to raise their heads and outside arm to show off the sculpture even further.
3. When standing on someone else for support; please ensure that you are stepping on a broad, fleshy area.
4. When balancing someone on your knees, you must grip the insides of their legs for support. This should allow them to release their grip on your wrists and showcase the effect.

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