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Introduction

In the spring of 2015 the off-Broadway company Bedlam presented two Shakespeare productions in repertory. The trick was that the two productions were of the exact same script. The artistic director, Eric Tucker, explained:

The version we're calling *Twelfth Night or What You Will* centers around the theme that love can be difficult and extremely hard but in the end also very magical and rewarding ... Our other version, which we're calling *What You Will or Twelfth Night*, centers around the theme that love is absolutely maddening and doesn't always turn out okay in the end but it's a wild ride.

(Healy 2015)

This was some clever, buzzworthy marketing, and both productions – listed separately – were Critic's Picks in *The New York Times*. Same script, different approaches: a theatrical banality, were it not for the simultaneity and the inspired/tortured logistics of two separate productions of the same script by the same company with the same actors and same director in rep under two different names. Promotional genius? Perhaps. At the same time, something about the two titles gestures towards a crux of both surface nomenclature and underlying theory in the very practical world of theatre-making. Guiding idea, central theme, production concept: anyone who goes to the theatre on a regular basis gets it, and by 'it' we probably just mean 'directing'. But the two titles beg a greater question about scripts and productions and the director function that in some way mediates between them. We address that question with words that speak to our comfort level, our conservatism or otherwise, with what theatre people get up to when they try to make some new art that has an old script in it. Two themes. Two

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versions. Two interpretations. Two visions. Two productions. But *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will/What You Will* or *Twelfth Night* comes out and says the sacrilegious, or maybe just the obvious: concept be damned – two different ways really means two different plays.

In many ways, the director has become the central figure of the modern theatre – the person whose work, though at times the least directly visible, can eclipse the writer's and the actor's as the driving force in the theatrical event. While directorial functions have been around as long as the theatre itself, the director as single centralized focal point of (aesthetic) power and authority is a fairly recent phenomenon. There are many ways this power can be used in the theatre, in pre-planning, in rehearsal, leading up to public performance and beyond. There are also specific implications to this power being brought to bear on a script by Shakespeare.

A director works in words, images and ideas, but not in some abstract sense. Robert Lepage says that we make theatre to confirm intuition, and Peter Brook (1988, 3) says he begins his work from a formless hunch – but intuitions and hunches must be embodied in the theatre, *in action*, in time and space. To confirm intuition and give form to a hunch, a director works with actors and designers, for a company and sometimes as the leader of his or her own company, sometimes directly with a playwright and most often with some kind of pre-existing text. But what does a director do, and how does he or she do it, in this communal drive towards action? Is the director a glorified manager? A taskmaster? A collaborator? A curator? An irreverent instigator and then a rigorous editor? A guru and a visionary? An innovator or, more specifically (and problematically), *the* innovator? Along with how (the craft, the skill sets), we need to ask why: why does the theatre need a director? What is a director for, exactly? The how and the why, the what and the what for of directing are the subjects of this book. The theory is drawn from the modern theatre and a variety of contemporary approaches. The test cases are mostly Shakespearean.

Trust Us, This Is All Made Up, or, The Director Function in Real Time and a Theory To Go With It: First, the what: what is directing? I'm a fan of the counter-intuitive gesture, and so when I teach directing to my students I start by showing them something that doesn't actually have a director or a script. They aren't tempted to get hung up on individual personality in action – oh, that's how she/he does it! – or on thematic preconceptions – that's not how I see this play! Instead, they can just look at the director function in action. Whatever a *director* might look like – and we come in all shapes and sizes and expressive dimensions – this is what *directing* looks like.

TJ Jagodowski and David Pasquesi are Chicago actors who specialize in long-form improv. Together they take to the stage with nothing, and

with nothing planned, and an hour or so later wrap up a detailed, vividly imagined, multi-character, narrative-driven piece of theatre that they will never perform again. One of these pieces is at the centre of the 2009 documentary *Trust Us, This Is All Made Up* (dir. Alex Karpovsky), and it starts about 18½ minutes into the film. The lights come up in the Barrow Street Theatre in New York on two guys in nondescript street clothes with three chairs on an otherwise bare stage. They look at each other. After about 20 seconds one of them speaks. After another three minutes or so a detail drops that focuses things and drives the characters and story through to the end some 52 minutes later. It is not a skit, it is not a sketch, it is a fully realized, compelling, hilarious, memorable story, well-told. I let my students watch it through, and then I make them watch it again to try to figure out how that just happened.

TJ and Dave take to the stage with ‘nothing’ – but only if you understand ‘something’ in the theatre to mean on the one hand sets and costumes and on the other a script that is supplying the dialogue and characters and incidents etc. Like Cordelia’s ‘nothing’ there is a lot more to it. I try to get my students to see how incredibly full the first few minutes of this piece actually are, and to identify the many specific theatrical elements that are in play. There are two bodies, occupying space, with exactitude. There is stillness, but it is a fully inhabited stillness. This inhabited stillness creates tension in the space and between the characters, tension because something, perhaps something big, has just happened. Then a gesture emerges: there is a slow nod. That gesture seems to generate emotional content in an accompanying facial expression, a distinct look of sympathy and support. The look eventually generates a line: ‘You’ll bounce back, man.’ That little bit of sympathy establishes a protagonist in crisis and an observer of that crisis – a sidekick? A Sancho Panza? Little details start to emerge in small talk, personalities develop based on that initial look, an instigating incident becomes apparent (if not yet its cause, content or effect) and an offstage antagonist is established and reacted to. ‘Narrative’ emerges in a fairly traditional way as dialogue accumulates, but it does so in the context of what looks and feels like – is – clear and careful *direction*: exquisitely modulated pacing, visual focus and variation, charged silences and sudden rushes of feeling, vocal styling that is distinctive and differentiated, idiosyncratic line deliveries, detailed attention to gesture and physical shapes, a clear floor pattern delineating multiple spaces and facilitating the additions, entrances or revelations of further characters in different locations, etc. etc. etc.

And so I ask my students to look carefully at all the elements of direction in this piece that has no director. I encourage them to consider ways of handling text from this play that doesn’t have a script. I suggest they

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extrapolate rehearsal methods from a performance that isn't rehearsed. I do this because there is rigorous methodology on display, with a simple philosophy – a theory – that is driving how it happens. It is first principles stuff, but the kind of stuff that both beginner actors infatuated with improv games and experienced directors of supposedly rock-solid scripts have a habit of ignoring. As Pasquesi puts it in the documentary, 'If you pay attention instead of trying to make stuff up, everything's already there.' It's a methodology based on patience – nothing needs to be forced since something is always happening – and on decisiveness – if you are attentive to what is already happening, you'll know what to do and when to do it. Pasquesi thinks of it as a kind of directing without dictating:

If we force our ideas into it, then we spend the rest of the time justifying it which is not exploring anymore ... that's why we walk out kind of empty, to be available to anything that might be there, rather than 'my great ideas.'

Yes, the actors are directing themselves, and they are doing it from within a show they are, in real time, making up. But they are doing it with qualities that I would argue any director needs. By being wholly attuned to what is going on in the room, they are *open to* and are *generating* constant stimuli and provocations, which they then deftly, simply, ingeniously handle, in bold and satisfyingly theatrical ways.

Of course, an example that utilizes a couple of comparative brain surgeons in long-form improv must yield, somewhat, in the face of the cold, hard fact of a script by Shakespeare. A Shakespeare script is a lot to bring into the room, with its particular theatrical challenges and opportunities and cultural baggage. But what is it? What is it really? Does it require, or just attract, certain ways of directing? Is it possible for a director to be available and pay attention to – or to prioritize – anything else when Shakespeare is in the room?

Two Trains Running: The 2012 collaboration between The Wooster Group and the Royal Shakespeare Company on *Troilus and Cressida* – with The Wooster Group actors (directed by Elizabeth LeCompte) playing the Trojans as ersatz Native North Americans sprouting spray-painted Styrofoam statuary and often moving in synch with an eclectic variety of film clips, and the RSC actors (directed by Mark Ravenhill) playing the Greeks as sometimes loud, sometimes camp but generally recognizable modern soldiers – offers a fascinating case study where radically different notions of the relationship between text and performance were bundled into one strange hybrid creation. Not surprisingly, this was a production with defenders and detractors.

This defence and detraction rather neatly unsplices the collaborative efforts (if they could even be called that) along an obvious aesthetic faultline of differing priorities – priorities both on display from the practitioners and revealed in audience responses. Paul Prescott's and Andrew Cowie's takes on the show posted on bloggingshakespeare.com outline some of the important issues. Prescott characterized it as a train wreck (Prescott 2012), and perhaps having two trains – two casts, two companies, two directors, two rehearsal periods mostly in two different countries – running at each other in one production could not have resulted in anything else. But the train-wreck analogy might imply that there is some sort of solid Shakespearean track – 'the play', if you like – from which this production spectacularly derailed. Alternately, Cowie suggests we might need to look carefully at priorities and process (the working methodologies rather than interpretive intentions) in order to come to any useful assessment of the results of this particular experiment (Cowie 2012). Cowie asks: is a production meant to explain and illustrate 'the play' or is it a response to it, and therefore always a new work in its own right?

For me, this argument hearkened back to a seminal moment from another country and century. After I finished my undergraduate degree, I spent a number of years in Toronto failing to become an actor and thinking about maybe being a director. So, when the World Stage Festival at Harbourfront in 1988 held a two-week 11-session round-table forum, 'About Directing', to accompany the official performance programme – and it was free – I attended as many as I could. I still have the file folder with my hastily scrawled notes, peppered with stars and arrows and feverish underlinings to mark the most important ideas: like Lev Dodin of the Maly Theatre talking about how an ensemble company should have a 'common soul' and how the key to theatre lies in what you don't know; like Mladen Materic of the former Yugoslavia's Open Stage talking about text vs body and language vs movement in the theatre, and how a director has to decide for him- or herself which comes first and what is the most important, and how for Materic it is both – text isn't bad, movement isn't best, he doesn't elevate one at the expense of the other but sees how they can exist complementarily in the best way possible; and like Robert Lepage talking about making theatre from 'sensible resources' – working from a sensation, an emotion, a colour, an object, a piece of music that you don't necessarily know the meaning of but realize that there is a lot of 'something' in, and how directing company-created work is about moving from rich obscurity towards more cohesive themes and ideas.

Very heady stuff, but for me the real take-away of the whole festival, and the biggest buzz that its events generated that I can recall, wasn't

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in the forum or on the stage but centred around a review of one of the shows. In my file I still have the clipping, a carefully folded yellowing talisman of something that I knew was important at the time even if I didn't wholly understand why. The show was Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine*, the company was the Quebec group Carbone 14, the director was Gilles Maheu, and the review was by Ray Conlogue, the theatre critic for *The Globe and Mail*, which is English Canada's equivalent of *The New York Times* or *The Guardian*. The show arrived at the Festival with a lot of hype – so much, and so persuasive, that it was the only production I collected my scarce pennies to go and see. I liked the show; Conlogue hated it – but his review really smacked me in the face with the bigger theatrical/theoretical question of 'what we are doing here?' Conlogue appreciated Maheu's 'command of stage imagery' and commended the 'physical discipline' of all the performers, but ultimately director and performers, imagery and physicality, served only to 'distract the viewer from wondering whether they are communicating anything either of Shakespeare or Muller' (Conlogue 1988):

Take the celebrated set-piece in the middle of the show where the German Hamlet (Rodrigue Proteau) and one of the Ophelias (Johane Madore) do a terrifying dance using a large electric fan as a prop. It is weighted in such a way that either dancer can sprawl over the fan without crashing ignominiously to the floor, even as the fan is hauled around the stage by the other dancer. To add further visual interest, the fan is plugged in, so that we have billowing skirts and hair as well.

There is no denying the effect is drastic and overwhelming. But is it in any way connected to the earlier scene where the Ophelia in delicate white, with smeared, girlish makeup (Pascale Montpetit), enacts the 'remembrances' scene with a reasonably intact Shakespearean Hamlet? And is there any way to connect this with John Gielgud's recorded voice reciting 'to be or not to be,' with the record deliberately scratched so that the final phrase will be repeated endlessly?

Critics, including this one, tend to start at this point talking about historic resonance, the deconstruction of classic texts, European history consuming itself, and heaven knows what else. But in this case it's hard, because what you really believe is that Maheu is showing off. Muller's script seems little more than the inspiration for a Carbone-14 improvisation, in the same way that a jazz pianist might borrow a bar of Beethoven and go on to create a piece that has nothing to do with Beethoven.

(Conlogue 1988)

Conlogue's dissatisfaction seems to stem from his belief that a company's choices, and a director's decisions, should be firmly rooted and should all add up. A director's ideas and a company's actions are interpretative elements of staging that in a real sense come *from the text*, rather than something to be imposed on the text or set against the text or offered into some kind of competition with the text – or, that seemingly go their separate ways from the text. Of course all choices and decisions of staging will 'do' things to/with the text, but ultimately what they should be doing is 'communicating' something of the text: explaining and illustrating ideas and themes and meanings and intentions that are already there. When all is added up, a production is, precisely, a product of (enlightened and enlightening) script analysis.

Interestingly, in his final swipe Conlogue reverts to vocabulary that seems to contradict his assessment of what Maheu was up to:

It would be a shame if this had been done to a disciplined theatre script, but in Muller's case one tends to feel little sympathy. After all, it is Muller who encouraged the rumour that he chose the title *Hamlet-Machine* because it has the same initials as his name. A writer like that deserves an interpreter like Maheu.

(Conlogue 1988)

So not only is the physical discipline of the performers/performance not communicating anything of the text, it is wasted anyway on undisciplined writing. Still, Conlogue calls Maheu an interpreter, which is what he thinks directors are and speaks to what he thinks they should do, even though he has been arguing that Maheu *wasn't* interpreting so much as going off doing his own things, seemingly unconnected to each other or to the script, and seemingly unconcerned with an audience's ability to 'get' it all in a meaningful, coherent way. Perhaps there is just something essentially contradictory in the closely held belief that a good theatre director is a disciplined textual interpreter while a bad theatre director is just too, well, theatrical. But this was, is, and remains a standard line of argument. I found Michael Billington saying something similar in his 2014 review of Russian theatre company SounDrama's *The War* at the Edinburgh Festival as he 'wonder[ed] what would happen if [director Vladimir] Pankov's formidable theatrical talents were put to the service of a great text' (Billington 2014). Productions, and directors, serve texts.

I dug out my old Conlogue clipping again when I read Prescott and Cowie on *Troilus and Cressida*. One of the things Prescott found deeply problematic about the production was something he learned in a post-show talk-back: 'The original invitation to collaborate on the play arrived when The Wooster

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Group was already experimenting with the Upper-Midwestern accent, so their interest in the sound preceded their interest in the play' (Prescott 2012). This revelation meant that some of the choices The Wooster Group 'made' for this *production* came before they knew they were working on this *play*. For Prescott, this just went along with his 'strong suspicion that the central interpretive choice of this production was haphazard [and] whimsical' (Prescott 2012). This is all true, if perhaps dependent on a theatrical flow chart that goes text–interpretation–production. This is very different from working with what's in the room when everybody (not just Shakespeare) has their own intentions, brings with them their own (equally) important things, and isn't in the business of textual interpretation.

Directing, whether perceived as transparent, transformative or transgressive, whether mundane, busy, tasteful or quite-possibly-insane, will always engage with the questions of authorship and intention in the theatre. A director's and a company's rehearsal process can offer strikingly variant answers to those questions – from positioning the director as the (highly disciplined) explainer-in-chief of pre-existing and somehow independent literary meaning that then gets transcribed ('interpreted') into performance, to the ways in which a group of practitioners can go about devising and determining the immediate and available narrative of any text, in terms of what they are most interested in rather than what the play is 'about'. In the case of the latter, Conlogue exactly identifies the issue even if he doesn't particularly like it: rehearsals are improvisations, and productions are the inspired result of improvising a script in its new, immediate, available contexts.

Whether or not it's seen as a spectacularly embarrassing collision, is it accurate or useful to call the RSC/Wooster *Troilus and Cressida* a collaboration? What is collaborative about having two opposing aesthetic camps talking past each other in some dialectical meta-conversation on theatre-making that only the audience could resolve – if we cared enough or were at all interested in or intrigued by what we were watching (a big 'if' for many)? Interpreting vs devising: was the RSC doing a version of the play – highly conceptual, highly directed, full of strong choices, but nonetheless a version of *Troilus and Cressida* – while The Wooster Group was doing ... something else? They were both 'doing' the text in that the lines were there, but the Woosters were doing the text while they were also doing a lot of other things and those other things seemed to be just as important if not always directly/understandably/clearly related to ('communicating') the text. It would be one thing to watch a production of *Troilus* or of *Hamlet* by the RSC and watch a production of the same play by The Wooster Group and then consider each company's approach, their

strengths and weaknesses, along with one's own personal preferences. But the brilliant/infuriating thing was that both were on display in the same production, exhilaratingly or hopelessly juxtaposed. Two trains running: the real question is, which track are we standing on?

Text and Performance: Again, Still, Whatever...: The 'why and what for' of directing is especially important in the case of Shakespeare, because it determines the kind and quality of the relationship that exists between the text and the event. This is not meant to harp on text vs performance yet again, but it is a question of the working relationship between literal and latent textual imperatives and possibilities, and the varied acts of performance that constitute storytelling and meaning-making in this particular medium. RSC vs Woosters; Prescott vs Cowie; Conlogue vs Maheu; careful analyst vs theatrical show-off; interpreting vs devising; text vs performance ... Maybe binaries are unavoidable, and while a binary is a better tool for analysis than, say, a singular monolithic unquestioned and immovable perspective, binaries, too, need to be pushed and pulled and stretched and remade into thinking that is a bit more three-dimensional. The stakes are not small, nor is the issue narrow and specialized. What we're talking about when we talk about directing today, and directing Shakespeare in particular, are the big questions about what stories we're telling, and how we go about telling them. And so, in the practical world of theatre-making, is the play really the thing, or is something else the thing?

Catherine Love's thoughtful *Exeunt* review for *Show 1* and *Show 2* of the Lyric Hammersmith's 2013 Secret Theatre project offers insights easily extended beyond *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Woyzeck* (the first two secret shows) to Shakespeare and to theatre-making in general:

My initial thought, on emerging from *Show 2*, was that this is theatre that turns the text inside out. Theatre that grabs something from deep inside the guts of a play and holds it up for an audience to see; theatre that excavates from within rather than imposing from outside. But on reflection, perhaps even to distinguish between internal and external is a misguided project which continues to implicitly judge a production based on its relationship with the text. It might be more accurate to say that this is theatre in which the text is in dialogue with the rest of the stage vocabulary, neither raising its voice nor dwindling to a whimper.

(Love 2013)

Is the director function an active one? It is hard to imagine it not being so, if one accepts that there is so much 'stage vocabulary' to a production aside

from what is spelled out in the text. But is directing creative and transformative, rather than a more service-orientated or managerial position? And what is a director's and a production's responsibility to an audience? Michael Billington, in his pan of the RSC/Wooster whatever-it-was, opined that the production 'does nothing to enhance our understanding of the play' (Billington 2012). Love defended both Secret Theatre's choice to open with two very well-known plays – 'How better to challenge the structures of literalism and "serving the text" than to reimagine a pair of plays with a long lineage in this tradition?' – and the gimmick of not telling the audience in advance what incredibly famous play they were about to watch:

[I]t allows for a viewing experience that does not immediately hold the production to the example of the text [so that] instead of measuring the show up to an imagined ideal, we are freed to watch what is actually happening on stage, in this moment, now.

(Love 2013)

Instead of presenting a director's and production's interpretation – and by interpretation that is to say something which communicates the meanings and intentions and enhances our understanding of the script, something that 'serves the text' by serving up its meanings fully cooked and ready for our consumption – Love felt the Secret Theatre 'respects its audience's ability to think and interpret' (Love 2013). There's an old acting axiom that it's not the actor's job to cry but rather to make the audience cry. In Love's (and perhaps Cowie's) understanding of how theatre works it's not the director's job to interpret but rather to give the audience something to interpret. Extending this notion a bit further, it is not the director's or the production's job to enhance our understanding of the singular text in question, but rather to ensure our engagement with any and all of the elements of theatre-making that compose this particular event.

Even so, and especially with Shakespeare, it may not so easily be possible just to move past old debates about text and performance and interpretation and authorship, even if sometimes it seems so obvious that directors and companies create pieces of theatre and so author the particular event the audience sees on the particular night. The event, and the story of the event, is made out of all the elements put into play. The text isn't the holy grail, and neither is it the adversary to be demolished, defeated and abandoned. It's one of the things in the room. It is one part of the process, not so much there to be explained but waiting to be set in motion.

Not Meaning But Action: What are we making? How do we make it? Here's what French filmmaker Patrice Leconte has to say about making movies:

I don't think that a filmmaker is manipulating puppets. On the contrary, I believe a filmmaker is more like a chemist. You mix elements that have nothing to do with each other and you see what will happen.

(In Ebert 2012)

Similarly, here's what musician Nick Cave has to say about another creative process, in his case making songs:

Counterpoint is the key. Putting two disparate images beside each other and seeing which way the sparks fly. Like letting a small child in the same room as, I don't know, a Mongolian psychopath or something, and just sitting back and seeing what happens. Then you send in a clown, say on a tricycle. And again you wait, and you watch. And if that doesn't do it ... You shoot the clown.

(*20,000 Days On Earth*, dir. Jane Pollard, Iain Forsyth)

Leconte is a genius, and Cave has always had a wonderful way with words, but I take their points very seriously. Directing for the theatre isn't really about interpretation, or illustration, or explanation – where both actors and audiences are the director's puppets, manipulated to convey and to consume the meanings the director has determined ('our big ideas', as Pasquesi put it earlier). For me, when a pre-existing script is involved, directing is often about working in productive counterpoint to that script, meeting it as a challenge and then introducing new challenges, tasks, provocations and obstacles, in order to create, to provoke, and to instigate action.

The script provides the plot and the incidents that make up the plot. The first time we read a script, we are not shallow if it is these aspects we are most interested in. We want to know, basically, what is happening. But there is *what is happening* and then there is *what is going on*. Actors and directors are more interested in the latter, and that is where their work is geared. What is happening is what happens – the incidents. What is going on is what gets played – the action. Similarly for an audience: there's the story, and then there's what we get out of it. What we get out of the story has something to do with the incidents it contains, and with the structuring of those incidents in the plot, but it also has a lot to do with what gets expressed through the action – the way the plot gets played. The action determines how we take those incidents on board and process the way they are plotted/structured in our experience of the event. This is *not* the same thing as spoon-feeding what a play is 'about.' It would be an odd production of *Henry V* indeed if we came away from it only thinking, 'Boy, he sure did win that war!' It would be an equally terrible night in the theatre

if we came away only thinking, 'Empire sure is good!' or 'War sure is bad!' American director, teacher and writer Anne Bogart maintains that 'it is the job of the director to develop the point of view' (Bogart 2015). Point of view is neither reportage nor explanation. It is developed in action, not delivered through interpretation. For actors, what is going on, the action, is often about wants and objectives: the best contemporary way I've heard it expressed is: '*What is the character's deal?*' For directors, what is going on is about staging: the physical narrative, between characters, in time and space, in some kind of context, and expressive of some kind of point of view on the incidents even as the incidents unfold. If you like, a director asks: '*What is this play's deal?*' Again, staging isn't a particular interpretation of the action – staging is the action. A good script provokes action and necessitates its staging, but it doesn't always dictate how to do it.

Staging the action is different from choreography, although many directors are superb choreographers. It is not the same thing as basic blocking, or stage business, although all directors need to develop those traffic-direction and observation-and-replication-of-human-behaviour skills. Perhaps action is often most acutely felt in its absence. Almost all professional productions are well choreographed and competently blocked and filled with interesting stage business – that is not what explains all the unsatisfying theatre out there. The last show I walked out of at intermission was a well-reviewed production of *Julius Caesar* by a well-established professional company in a major urban centre. This production had a lot of choreography and carefully crafted stage pictures. But while there was activity, there didn't seem to be much action. For all the imagery to observe, there seemed to be no particular point of view. There was no glaring incompetence on display anywhere. It was a well-made production: well designed, well spoken, well lit, etc. But for me at least there was nothing going on – between the characters, between the lines, between the dialogue and the imagery, between the incidents and their context, or between the stage and me. Everyone's threshold for instruction and delight may be different, but I would argue that theatrical satisfaction has something to do with a production's and with our own engagement in the action.

As a director, how do I engage with what is going on in order to stage the action? One piece of staging that I'm glad I had a hand in creating was for a production of Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*. The final scene of her dystopian speculative fiction is bizarre: an extended conversation between two characters about how everything in the world – people, animals, insects, inanimate objects, geographical features, noise, gravity – everything is at war. What is happening? Two people are talking. And it certainly could be staged with two people sitting at a table talking while the audience listens

to what they say. But what is going on? Since the conversation is so strange, I thought it might be useful first to the actors and later to the audience to stage one small corner of that world war. On stage were a couple of chairs and a table. There were also about 25 lamps hanging, standing, or strewn about the space on the floor. One of the characters – whose home we are supposed to be in – had a garbage bin and a box. Through the scene, light bulbs in the many lamps would suddenly go out. As conversation continued, and without making a big deal of it, the character would remove the errant bulb, place it in the sturdy, sealable garbage bin, and replace it with a new bulb from her box. This happened over and over again – same problem, same response. Eventually, as the script neared its conclusion the character could no longer keep up. The last working light bulb in the 25-odd lamps went out at the end of the show when the dialogue just seemed to come to a stop. What was happening? Two people were having a conversation. About everything being at war. What was going on? We watched a woman fight a very real battle against darkness with some light bulbs she had thought were on her side. The dialogue ended and the darkness came before we found out what else might be marshalling against her. Nothing was explained, really. But there was action. Audiences were scared, excited and charged up, and they really wanted to talk about it after the show.

In this sense, staging is not in the script, or directly implied by the script. Certainly it may be suggested by elements of the dialogue or the plot, but it comes from a director's and a company's imperative to make sure something is going on, to make sure a point of view on the incidents is expressed through action. Everyone who has been to the theatre is likely to have an example of memorable action that they would not exactly find spelled out in the script: like Karin Beier's 1993 *Romeo and Juliet* in Dusseldorf that had the 'Balcony Scene' not on a balcony but with the two lovers 15 feet in the air on trapezes, desperately, dangerously, exhilaratingly swinging about trying to get closer; like Simon Russell Beale as Ariel spitting in Prospero's face at the end of Sam Mendes' 1993 RSC production of *The Tempest*, a gesture that 'clarified' Beale's oddly neutral affect with a ferocious cap to that relationship. Sometimes the action can be more subtle. One of the most perfect pieces of staging I've ever seen I at first mistook for mere business and setting. The final scene of Robin Phillips's production of *Cymbeline* in 1986 in Stratford, Ontario was set in a makeshift field hospital: in the aftermath of war, the characters sorted out the final twists and revelations of a convoluted plot among doctors and nurses sorting the dead from the injured. At first I thought this seemed an appropriate backdrop to the action. As the scene went on I realized it *was* the action. Everyone in that scene is a member of the walking wounded, whether they

are covered in bandages or not. That's *what was going on*, as Imogen and Posthumus and Iachimo and Cymbeline struggled to make sense of things. The staging didn't provide background, and it wasn't abstractly metaphorical. The walking wounded provided and developed a context and point of view for the dialogue of all these scarred survivors.

For a director, the script isn't anything like a blueprint, or a score, or a set of instructions. The script is a prompt, a provocation, and a problem – a *good* problem, and one you have to deal with. Dealing with it is how you make theatre. In its practical, creative problem-solving, directing is additive, not neutral. It is not about doing things the hard way or moving away from the text, and it's not like it's incommensurate with or somehow the opposite of Billington's 'enhancing our understanding of the play' – I think light bulbs and trapezes and spitting and field hospitals are all communicative and enhancing of their respective scripts. But directing is a theatrical rather than a textual imperative. It's more about making sure there is a 'there' there, in action, created and invested in by whomever is in the room: director, actors, audiences.

Directing: the process of making a 'there' there. This book explores some of the philosophies and methodologies around such a process. The section 'In Theory' charts perceptions of the director's job. The first chapter, 'The Play's the Thing', looks at 'doing plays' with a text-centred approach, and along with that the particular pressures and priorities of theatrical realism and straightforward representation. Realism remains the default, the weapon of choice, the looming and unavoidable template for storytelling on the stage: plays are about 'real' people doing at least recognizable things in a way that somehow reflects life as people in the audience understand it. The play can be set in Elizabethan England or on a space station in some distant future, but the basic (and basically Aristotelian) building blocks of storytelling will be the same – the creation of a world that is coherent in form, fairly literal in expression and (in significant ways) closed for the duration of the event, i.e. contained in and of itself. The second chapter, 'The Thing is the Thing', looks at other ways of telling stories and creating theatrical events – not necessarily anti-realist or post-modernist (or even completely non-Aristotelian), but ways that open things up a bit for all involved, that are not quite so text-centred or literal-minded.

The section 'In Practice' ranges over a number of productions and a variety of practitioners, most of whom are not the usual suspects of Shakespeare performance studies. I've tried to maintain the emphasis on *directing* rather than on directors, and on performance *practice* rather than performance history. While there are recurring issues that get revisited at almost every

turn, each individual chapter addresses some key aspect of the situation a director will find him- or herself in when directing a production: things like the *schedule* a production is on; the *scope* of a production and the *time* and *space* it inhabits; the *company* and its particular context, aspirations and ways-of-doing; the *point of view* on the action that a production will in some way be expressing as it tells its story/stories; and, especially and unavoidably for Shakespeare in performance, the *text* and what we make of it.

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