

**Beyond the Playwright:
The Creative Process of Els Joglars and
Teatro de la Abadía**

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PhD

I hereby certify that this thesis represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

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Abstract

The rehearsal processes of theatre companies are an oft-neglected area of research in Drama and Performance Studies. My study of the Catalan devising collective Els Joglars and the Madrid producing venue Teatro de la Abadía seeks to redress the balance with a close analysis of methodologies employed in rehearsal. In both cases I have witnessed rehearsals first-hand; with Els Joglars observing preparations for *En un lugar de Manhattan* (2005); in the case of the Abadía working as assistant director on *El burlador de Sevilla* (2008). These observations are fundamental to a thesis where I have sought to place both companies in a local, national and international context. The thesis examines Els Joglars' roots in mime and how they have generated a practice-based methodology by means of a hands-on exploration of ideas derived from practitioners as varied as Etienne Decroux and Peter Brook. With Teatro de la Abadía, the focus shifts to how the founder and Artistic Director José Luis Gómez developed exercises drawn from European practitioners such as Jacques Lecoq and Michael Chekhov in order to create his own actor-training centre in Madrid. In effect, both companies have created distinctive rehearsal processes by applying ideas and techniques from a wider European context to a Spanish theatre scene which had been seen to follow rather than develop trends and techniques visible in theatre across France, Italy and Germany. Critically, their hybrid rehearsal processes generate heightened theatrical results for the audience. This could be described as an experiential engagement, where the creative process has been consciously geared towards placing the audience in a 'distinct situation' and requiring them to respond accordingly. Thus the thesis shifts the focus of academic

study away from product and towards process, demonstrating how an understanding of process assists in the reading of the theatrical product.

Contents

Acknowledgments	7
Referencing	8
INTRODUCTION	9
i. A Methodology for Rehearsal	9
ii. A Spanish Legacy – Major Influences at Home	25
iii. Ramón María del Valle Inclán: The Polemic Commentator	29
iv. Federico García Lorca and the Avant Garde	36
v. Antonio Buero Vallejo and Censorship	46
vi. The Directors and the Rehearsal Room	55
vii. Positioning Boadella and Gómez	70
PART I – ELS JOGLARS	75
Chapter I – Els Joglars, Introduction & History	76
I.i Els Joglars: An Introduction to the Company	76
I.ii. Els Joglars: Company Aims	80
I.iii. History and Evolution of Els Joglars	88
I.iii.a 1962-1968 - Towards Mime	88
I.iii.b 1968-1977 - Towards Devising	90
I.iii.c 1978-2005 - Towards a Methodology	104
Chapter II – Els Joglars, Theory & Practice	108
II.i. Origin of the Idea: Practice Based Theory	109
II.ii. Beyond Mime	111
II.iii. Beyond Devising	117
II.iv. The Practitioner/Theorist: Making a Method	127
II.v. Origin of the Idea: From the Author to the Collective	137
Chapter III – Els Joglars - Development and Improvisation	165
III.i. Rehearsal as Play: The Context of the Rehearsal Room	165
III.ii. Involving the Collective	173
Chapter IV – Els Joglars - Experiential Performance	194

PART II – TEATRO DE LA ABADÍA	208
Chapter I – Teatro de la Abadía, Introduction & History	210
I.i. An Introduction to José Luis Gómez & Teatro de la Abadía	210
I.ii. Genesis of Teatro de la Abadía	215
I.iii. Teatro de la Abadía: Aims & Objectives	219
I.iv. Teatro de la Abadía: History & Evolution	228
Chapter II – Teatro de la Abadía - Rehearsal Room Ethos	236
Chapter III – Teatro de la Abadía - Theory & Practice	263
III.i. Practice Based Theory	263
Chapter IV – Teatro de la Abadía - Holy Theatre	286
CONCLUSION	307
BIBLIOGRAPHY	321
Els Joglars	323
Teatro de la Abadía	330
Theories and Practices of Theatre Making	332
Theatre in Spain	336
Cultural Theory	338
Other Works Cited	338
Interviews & Correspondence	339

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Referencing

This thesis uses the Author-Date referencing system.

INTRODUCTION

*Such a feeling life, such sensation, yes?
Then pile the words on top. And watch them seep down.*
Will Eno, *Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)*
(Eno, 2004: 35-36)

i. A Methodology for Rehearsal

There is a fundamental dichotomy between the nature of perception and the words with which we clumsily attempt to define those same perceptions – a dichotomy at the core of all art and one which is aptly recognised in the above excerpt from Will Eno’s 2004 monologue *Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)*. Effectively, we do not have the capacity to do justice to our experiences by recounting them verbally, and as a result, we encounter difficulties when trying to define any emotional experience. However, describing emotive involvement lies at the heart of the analysis of theatre. That some of these theatrical experiences should remain in our memories long after others have faded away is not simply a matter of personal taste, but undoubtedly an indication of how physically and mentally involved we felt at the time as spectators.

Speaking of Spanish theatre in particular, a chasm separates the violent promenade excesses of La Fura dels Baus and the placid proscenium texts of Alejandro Casona or Enrique Jardiel Poncela. This chasm is not necessarily just an artistic one, although clearly the concerns of all artists differ wildly. In terms of the audience experience, however, the key to the differences resides in how these artists choose to communicate and what sensations they choose to stimulate. This is a problem of definition that has always faced academics and theatre

practitioners: 'we find in language the notion of sensation, which seems immediate and obvious: I have a sensation of redness, of blueness, of hot or cold. It will, however, be seen that nothing could in fact be more confused' (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 3). Many strategies have been employed in an attempt to reduce the confusion, shifting the focus of academic analysis away from the product as a text and towards a live product that requires a more sensorial involvement. Even within the bounds of literature, the School of Constanza developed the theory of aesthetic response, again in an effort to explore the gap between the product and interpretation that takes place in the individual reader or spectator: 'As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analyzing the reading process' (Iser, 1978: ix). Theatre director Anne Bogart speaks in similar terms of how art can arrest the attention of its viewer:

An authentic work of art embodies intense energy. It demands response. You can either avoid it, shut it out, or meet it and tussle. It contains attractive and complicated energy fields and a logic of its own. It does not create desire or movement in the receiver, rather it engenders what James Joyce labelled 'aesthetic arrest'. You are stopped in your tracks. You cannot easily walk by it and go on with your life. You find yourself in relation to something that you cannot readily dismiss. (Bogart, 2001: 63)

However, it is more unusual to examine the process of creation in order to establish exactly how this relationship of 'aesthetic arrest' between creator and receiver is generated.

A rehearsal process is in its simplest terms a period of practice before placing a theatrical production in front of an audience. However, the artistic process that

informs this act of preparation can take many different forms. Speaking on the nature of art, Aristotle emphasised that primarily ‘all art is concerned with coming into being [...] art must be a matter of making’, and so he defined the particular state of mind necessary to enter a ‘reasoned state of capacity to make’ (Aristotle, 1998: 141). Hence the process of making art appears to be given as much importance as the art work itself, as well as identifying that a specific state of mind is necessary to engage with artistic creation. Aristotle already underlined the paramount importance of process in the act of artistic production, yet inexplicably and throughout the ages, in theatre only the written product, the play text remains the cornerstone of academic analysis, at the expense of performance and process, and yet any art or drama school will emphasise process above all else¹ as the nature of art, as Aristotle rightly recognised, depends upon it.

The text-centred theatrical culture had led director of UK-based theatre company Forced Entertainment Tim Etchells to cry out: ‘harping on endlessly about writing as if there was nothing in the theatre but words and writers’ (Etchells quoted in Giannachi & Luckhurst, 1999: 29). It is not a new debate, since as early as 1908, Edward Gordon Craig issued the following warning: ‘Those people who are interested at all times in creating a ‘literary theatre’ would do well to remember the dangers which beset such unnatural efforts’ (Craig, 1999: 15). Eugenio Barba argues that the partial view of theatre studies that has excluded the creative process from analysis has in fact hindered an understanding of the performing arts:

¹ I studied at Central School of Speech & Drama on the MA in Advanced Theatre Practices from 2002-2003, and from the very beginning we were encouraged to log our rehearsal processes and attempt to define how we wanted to work as much as what sort of work we wanted to create. It wasn’t just an exercise, the log book was an attempt to define a process of theatre making.

'Historical understanding of theatre and dance is often blocked or rendered superficial because of neglect of the logic of the creative process, because of misunderstandings of the performer's way of thinking' (Barba, 2005: 11). It is from this perspective that I wish to deal with the concept of process in the rehearsal room, as an artistic entity in itself that deserves academic attention. Furthermore, in order to define and contextualise the theatrical languages of the practitioners at the core of this thesis, at times I will draw on the examples of international theatre-makers to highlight similarities, influences or differences in processes. Ultimately, this is fundamentally a study of theatre in the making, albeit focused on two companies in Spain, but the cross-fertilisation of working processes on an international scale is a reality that must be acknowledged. I hope not only to shed light on the methods of Els Joglars and La Abadía, but also to indicate the importance of their development of process in its own right.

This thesis, then, will be equally relevant to students of the rehearsal process as to students of the specific companies. After all, process is increasingly becoming a focus not just of study but also a product that can be sold, particularly across the visual arts. The growing importance of process has reached the status of 'marketable commodity' in the commercial field, in what Stuart Marshall has called the encompassing of 'documentation of performance [...] in place of the work itself' (quoted in Armes, 1988: 202) speaking here specifically of video art. Furthermore, the fascination with products that reach a wide audience, such as

commercial films, has been matched by an increase of 'making of' documentaries.² The music industry too is beginning to take note, with bands such as The Smashing Pumpkins launching a twelve week online subscription service for video and sound file updates on the creation of their new album: 'The goal is to create a working model that is not profit motivated but rather information and access motivated. In exchange for a fixed resource base fans will be let inside in an unprecedented way to the creative process of preparing to make the next SP album while also inspiring an inter-active dialogue that will help shape the work' (Corgan, 2009). Process is not simply an unavoidable delay previous to the product itself, therefore, but also an artistic entity of interest to a wide audience who appear willing to pay to witness it.

Theatre has also noted this possibility of using the audience in an interactive dialogue in order to adapt the final product with the use of previews in commercial theatre or work-in-progress showings in experimental venues such as the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) in London and other venues hosting 'scratch' performances of ideas still in rehearsal. Setting these extremes aside, when an audience actively affects the performance outcomes of a production, the relationship is still based on a social contract that Susan Bennett defines as follows: 'Spectators are thus trained to be passive in their demonstrated behaviour during a theatrical performance, but to be active in their decoding of the sign systems made available' (Bennett, 1997: 206). These notions, nevertheless, still rely on differentiating between an act of performance and rehearsal. However,

² Indeed, Els Joglars' venture into film *¡Buen viaje, Excelencia!* (2003), when released on DVD included making-of documentaries in its features, and was accompanied by a book Franco y yo, *¡Buen viaje, Excelencia!* which also discussed the making of the film (Boadella, 2003).

theatres like the Teatro de la Abadía or companies like Els Joglars compile a large amount of documentation relating to the process of creation rather than recording performance, which is ultimately kept in their archives, revealing the importance given to rehearsal and process.

In too few cases, then, has the artistic process itself been explored as a subject, in an effort to define how it influences both the finished product and how it is received by its audience. Director, playwright and head of Els Joglars, Albert Boadella, highlights the importance of process for him, as contrasted to product, providing the analogy of watching his wife dressing up: 'Ya sé que que sin estar presente en el proceso el resultado final también puede ser una sorpresa muy atractiva, pero, debido a mi deformación profesional, siento mayor complacencia asistiendo a la tarea de composición' (Boadella, 2009 a: 277).

In terms of theatre studies, Shomit Mitter's *Systems of Rehearsal* represents a number of studies of theatre making that appeared in the 1990s which attempted to go beyond a purely textual analysis of drama: 'This is largely because scripts can be reproduced and are therefore easier to study than performance which is ephemeral' (Mitter, 1992: 1). Mitter's study is valuable for its rejection of the 'indiscriminate application of the critical methods of literature to theatre', where instead he attempts to express the concerns of Konstantin Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook within their respective rehearsal rooms. However, Mitter's focus on the conceptual grounding of rehearsal does not give a specific idea of what a rehearsal is like, nor is it his intention: 'I find that rehearsal logs [...] tend to be far too embroiled in the day-to-day details of workshop to give a

sufficiently substantial account of the principles and aspirations that underlie the work they discuss' (Mitter, 1992: 2), a criticism that is certainly applicable to David Selbourne's *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to which Mitter alludes. Whilst it also looks at the subject of rehearsal, in this case logging Peter Brook's production of Shakespeare's comedy at the RSC in 1970, its own author virtually disqualifies the study in his introduction: 'I have been able [...] to make more use now of the immensely rich possibilities with which that theatrical encounter presented me, than I could have done then. I have also lost some of the arrogant political dogmatism which led me, in the weeks and months following the rehearsals, bitterly to reject their validity almost entirely' (Selbourne, 1982: xxxii). The opposite occurred to Tirzah Lowen, who logged Peter Hall's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* (1987) with increasing awe: 'By now, having sat through rehearsals day after day, I find it impossible to remain detached, not to be caught up in the working process' (Lowen, 1990: 100). As Anne Bogart emphasises, the rehearsal room 'is a place of potential rapture. In a rehearsal room, like making love, the outside world is excluded. It is a process of arousal, of heightened sensation, alive nerve endings and sudden pinnacles. It is an extreme event separate from our daily lives' (Bogart, 2001: 75). The reason for this intensity, and the purpose then of rehearsal, Bogart explains, is that 'Actors and directors together are constructing a framework that will allow for endlessly new currents of life-force, emotional vicissitudes' (Bogart, 2001: 46). Mitter's own study relies on 'first-hand accounts' (Mitter, 1992: 2), which he explains he has attempted to rationalise, but we can only hope that these witnesses are not as biased as the accounts of rehearsal rooms appear to necessarily be due to the intensely lived experiences they often contain.

Ultimately, the subject of rehearsal is not easily taken on, as Lowen explains both its importance and its difficulties: 'I am as much interested in the making of a piece of theatre as by what finally appears onstage. Can one explain the creative process? It is presumptuous even to try, but by describing the steps taken, one may convey some of its magic' (Lowen, 1990: xiii). The situation is complicated further when the rehearsal room is often strictly off limits to people external from the company: it is telling that the introduction to Susan Letzler Cole's work *Directors in Rehearsal* is called 'A Hidden World' (Cole, 1992: 1). Cole explains that observing 'directors and actors in rehearsal is clearly a delicate undertaking; it can be perceived as an intrusion upon, and even a repression of, the conditions necessary to rehearsal (e.g., risk-taking, spontaneity, intimacy). But there is no other way to document the collaborative creation of rehearsal except to be present there' (Cole, 1992: 3). My own study itself relies on my experiences observing Catalan collective Els Joglars in rehearsal and working with the Teatro de la Abadía in Madrid, and my research aims to map out the creative processes of both companies. This thesis will attempt neither to merely log my experiences of rehearsal nor to rely instead on the stated rehearsal objectives of the practitioners. By studying the creative processes of these two companies based in Spain I will explore how the transition from text, to rehearsal to performance takes place, culminating in its reception by audiences. I intend to argue that the emphasis of both companies on rehearsal process is the direct cause for their status amongst the most influential theatre companies in Spain.

First of all, it is worth establishing a few differences between what I regard as conventional mainstream theatre at the end of the twentieth century and outset of the twenty-first as compared to some of the tenets at the core of Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía. We may locate the fundamental difference between mainstream theatre and the two companies in question within the notion of process, which is why it is so critical to make a consistent study of process as opposed to text or performance. As Brook points out in *The Empty Space*, if we look purely at results within the commercial theatre we will always find 'one great success [...] that succeeds not despite but because of dullness' (Brook, 1990: 13). If we consider the rehearsal circumstances of a mainstream company or director, we will find much of the artistic kleptomania and trickery that Jerzy Grotowski referred to as the paraphernalia of 'rich theatre – Rich in flaws' (Grotowski, 1981: 19). For instance, journalist Maddy Costa describes an instance of mainstream production and schedule issues in an article written for the *Guardian* on the occasion of the staging of Tom Stoppard's *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* at the National Theatre, London, 2009: 'While every member of the creative and production teams has a distinctive role, their work overlaps...the actors have five weeks to rehearse. On the technical side, we have three days [...] It's a wonder that the directors –let alone the production staff [...] don't exist in a permanent state of frustration' (Costa, 2009: 21). Costa then describes the mayhem of artists, technicians and countless people involved in the production and the compartmentalised nature of their distinctive crafts coming together for a theatre performance. This working system has been fruitfully employed for decades, although the thin line between a collective performance and a series of individual endeavours may result in the overlapping Costa mentions, although she does not

question it in this article. Peter Hall described the technical rehearsal as 'a test of endurance, patience and tenacity' (Lowen, 1990: 118), which only intensifies the question as to why such a frustrating system is never called into question nor replaced within the mainstream. Perhaps, as Guy Debord said of the spectacle, 'the attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances' (Debord, 2006: 15). The studied slickness of a technical exercise thus becomes a replacement for taking risks: 'Without embracing the risk, there can be no progress and no adventure. To attempt to perform from a state of imbalance and risk imbues the action with extraordinary energy' (Bogart, 2001: 48). Without this risk within the process the performance may be slick, but it will always be the success that depends on its own dullness, as Peter Brook expressed earlier.

During 2009, I worked on a large-scale production of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* (2009) with Spanish RAKATá company³ at the Teatro Canal in Madrid, directed by Laurence Boswell. Without entering into the relative merits of the production, there were issues relating to the overall workings of a theatrical company very close to Maddy Costa's description and worth mentioning to illustrate specific problems. The production featured a chorus of villagers in excess of twenty actors, as well as the named characters in Lope's play. Much of the rehearsal consisted in herding the assets of this 'rich theatre' around the space in an effort to establish entrances and exits often involving numerous props or bulky

³ I worked as assistant director on the production, which rehearsed from December 2008 to May 2009, so witnessed the entire rehearsal process.

carts; including other creative associates like fight directors and choreographers attempting to clarify the lines of movement across Jeremy Herbert's monolithic set; thus, the director's attention was necessarily turned towards making the paraphernalia of stage trickery function. Work with the actors consisted of narrations of context followed by an establishment of cursory Stanislavskian objectives. Laurence Boswell, an Associate Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC),⁴ could be seen as a representative of a staging method prevalent in Western theatre; whatever the results of any rehearsal process in this style, the emphasis of the process quite simply cannot be said to reside in communion between the actor and the audience, in the way that Grotowski advocated or envisaged. This is where companies like Teatro de la Abadía and Els Joglars diverge from the mainstream, each in their distinct way. Both have resisted an established pseudo-Stanislavskian method, irrespective of its merits, and not content with the processes of the theatre they saw around them, José Luis Gómez and Albert Boadella turned the focus of their careers towards finding a way of developing theatre by elaborating an alternative method of creation. This is not to judge the merits or demerits of any existing methodology, it must however be pointed out that Gómez and Boadella represent a conflicting notion of process when compared with the mainstream.

If then, we depart from the premise that Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía provide an alternative to the mainstream by means of constructing a methodology

⁴ Boswell's extensive experience as a director in London includes such credits as *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* (New Ambassadors Theatre, 2003), *Up for Grabs* (Wyndham's Theatre, 2002), and he was artistic director of The Gate Theatre between 1990 and 1995. He has won numerous awards including the Olivier Award, Time Out and Elle Style director of the year in 2002.

that enables them to communicate with an audience in a particular way distinct from conventional norms, then we must also define how this reaction against tradition is formulated. As already established, theatre has always existed in a paradoxical world of inadequate and incomplete descriptions, making product and process extremely difficult to document: hence the study of theatre has often referred principally to play texts, to the work of literature. This is especially the case in Spain where Theatre Studies does not exist as an academic discipline and play texts are regularly seen as the markers of theatrical culture. This is ultimately the point Miguel Romero Esteo made when asked about the process of analysing theatre and the critical establishment in the latter years of the Franco era:

[...] es que todo instrumental prefabricado de análisis configura un sistema en el que quieras o no, hay que encajar la representación y el texto, y así, en suma, todo acaba en labores de encasillamiento y clasificación. Digamos que, en general, el pensamiento sistemáticamente profesional, profesionalmente analítico, implica la lógica –poco lógica–deformación profesional de querer uniformarlo todo, de querer meterlo todo en un mismo saco. Y en concreto, en la crítica teatral, el saco suele ser el teatro decimonónico como tácito punto de referencia y tácito baremo irremediable. (Isasi Angulo, 1974: 396)

This remains a prevalent position today, where critical studies of modern theatre have continued to focus exclusively on playwrights and their texts, such as César Oliva's *La última escena* (2004) or María José Ragué-Arias' *El teatro de fin de milenio en España* (1996) which defines its intention from the outset: 'Del proceso seguido por el teatro en España en estos años, poniendo básicamente el acento en la autoría teatral' (Ragué-Arias, 1996: 12). We must fundamentally resist these acts of critical reduction when we are faced with theatre that likewise resists

classification and the nineteenth-century traditional theatre models Romero Esteo alludes to.

How then do we engage with pieces as visceral and distant from convention as performances by experimental artists such as La Fura dels Baus, Rodrigo García or Angélica Lidell? Shows which have attempted to challenge a status-quo of well-made theatre with neatly bottled messages have almost without exception been largely received with critical hostility. Angélica Liddell's performance of *El año de Ricardo* (2008) is described by *El País* critic Begoña Barrena in the following terms: 'la machaconería de la Liddell es tal que su reflexión sobre cuerpo y poder se hace si no insoportable, sí difícil de soportar' (Barrena, 2008). Miguel Medina Vicario describes Rodrigo García's *Tempestad* (1993) as an 'estrepitoso naufrago teatral' because García's company 'La Carnicería teatro nos ofrece [...] un laberinto de imágenes que confunden de principio a fin, y en consecuencia agotan hasta la desesperación' (Medina Vicario, 2003: 274). Medina Vicario viewed a later piece, *Macbeth, Imágenes* (1999), with equal bemusement: 'Un todo excesivo donde el espectador (no más de una docena en la representación que se comenta) se satura, pierde el hilo de cualquier conato de argumento, sufre con el desgaste del actor que no dosifica sus esfuerzos técnicamente' (Medina Vicario, 2003: 314-15). Theatre critic Enrique Centeno goes even further when faced with La Fura dels Baus, entitling his review of *Noun* (1992) 'Basura Nazi' (Centeno, 1996: 359). He goes on to explain: 'importa el ruido, la sorpresa, el temor del espectador que contempla todo entre el asombro y el desconcierto. Nadie entiende nada, pero eso es lo de menos, porque se busca premeditadamente el desconcierto, la violencia, la afirmación del vacío o la *performance* anticreativa [...]

inquieta que esta ideología fascista nos toque con su aliento y encima tengamos que pagarla' (Centeno, 1996: 360).

Perhaps the most striking common note in these reviews is the critic's bemoaning of a lack of linear and recognisable narrative. The problem lies in utilising outdated systems of critique for new products that do not relate to conventional theatre, an issue that London devising collective have encountered in the press: 'A frequent criticism of Shunt's work is that it goes out of its way to be abstract. It's almost impossible to pin down meaning in their shows. Narrative and form seem to be dirty words. "It's a very familiar kind of frustration," says Twitchin. "But what's the point of reviewing a show in terms of what it's not offering?"' (John, 2006). Therefore, whatever the merits of these productions, they cannot be analysed under the same conditions. Furthermore, it seems hard to believe that we should find it so difficult to come to terms with notions firmly set in place since the beginnings of the twentieth century; after all, none of this work could have existed without the precedents set by Artaud or Grotowski amongst others. Both advocated different theatrical models that nevertheless shared an interest in creating emotional mood and atmosphere over what they regarded as contrived narrative-driven mainstream theatre. Artaud in his oft-quoted *Theatre and its Double* expresses himself in the following terms:

Theatre will never be itself again [...] unless it provides the audience with truthful distillations of dreams where its taste for crime, its erotic obsessions, its savageness, its fantasies, its utopian sense of life and objects, even its cannibalism, do not gush out on an illusory make-believe, but on an inner level. (Artaud, 2001: 112)

Jerzy Grotowski's thinking runs along parallel lines:

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, "live" communion. (Grotowski, 1981: 19)

Grotowski goes on to an extremely eloquent attack on 'Rich Theatre', a theatre that attempts to match competing media like TV and cinema by 'drawing from other disciplines, constructing hybrid spectacles' in a form of 'artistic kleptomania' (Grotowski, 1981: 19), as previously cited. This is all tantamount to trickery for Grotowski, the illusion of theatre that can never replace an emotional connection between a spectator and a performer. The influence on Peter Brook's *Empty Space* is not hard to detect. However, even before these increasingly cogent theses reached Spain, Lorca had noted the rot of mainstream theatre, and attempted to challenge it on his own terms:

Una de las finalidades que persigo con mi teatro es precisamente aspaentiar y aterrar un poco... Estoy seguro y contento de escandalizar. Quiero provocar revulsivos, a ver si se vomita de una vez todo lo malo del teatro actual. (Luengo, 1987: 28)

The increasing reliance on the immediacy of emotional communication is patent throughout the twentieth century, as the intellectual process behind staging a play finds itself increasingly relegated to a secondary position. This school of thought has finally started to filter into some mainstream theatre makers, such as English director Rufus Norris, who has notably directed Lope de Vega's *Peribañez* (2003) at the Young Vic and Federico García Lorca's *Blood Wedding* (2005) at the

Almeida: 'Theatre is an emotive experience. It's not an intellectual one. What a sweeping gesture, of course it's both, but if you haven't got the emotional one, forget it... So much of it has to bypass the brain' (Norris, 2003).

Therefore, this study hopes to arrive at exactly that elusive definition, to see how Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía may be attempting to 'bypass the brain', as Norris would have it, in an effort to create their own set of conventions and communicate with audiences on their own terms. This aim implies the need not just for a new analytical engagement with the theatrical product, but also a new methodology geared towards establishing these replacement conventions. Before establishing exactly what they contributed, however, we must first examine the influences that have shaped both companies and inspired them to work towards alternative methodologies.

This introduction will now give a sense of the theatrical climate which conditioned the arrival of both Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía by looking at the ways in which the rehearsal process developed throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth century. In order to chart the progression of a more critically minded theatre in opposition to a perennially decadent mainstream, I will use three key practitioners to identify the major shifts taking place in Spain. These figures are Ramón del Valle Inclán, Federico García Lorca and Antonio Buero Vallejo, who I hope to demonstrate were aiming to challenge the establishments they so firmly opposed. The three playwrights are perhaps the most iconic and representative practitioners of their different eras. José María Rodríguez Méndez further indicates their importance in the development of a theatrical culture in Spain: 'Valle-Inclán,

Benavente, García Lorca, etc., tuvieron que luchar [...] y por eso constituyen hitos y no cadena lógica; cada uno de éstos supone una lucha aislada frente a la incultura teatral de nuestros intelectuales' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 54). Furthermore, in a theatrical climate which grants playwriting such importance, only the playwrights themselves could significantly challenge the system by writing plays that encouraged innovations because they demanded new modes of thinking about how to stage their works. Valle Inclán and Lorca were certainly innovators in form, and Lorca was himself a director and so had an affinity for the making of theatre. Buero Vallejo, whilst clearly not 'on a par with García Lorca and Valle-Inclán [...] such views are simply unsubstantiated by the derivative nature of Buero Vallejo's theatre' (Delgado, 2003 a: 3), does deserve credit for devising a more experiential style of writing that depended on its emotional impact in performance, thus presenting a staging challenge for the practitioners of his time. Finally I will look at the role of the director throughout the twentieth century in Spain, creating a context for Boadella and Gómez and their challenge to the playwright as the dominant figure in Spanish theatre. In the development of their practice, all these artists set the roots for the methods Albert Boadella and José Luis Gómez went on to apply. A literature survey on Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía is presented at the beginning of the corresponding sections dealing with each company and is therefore not covered in this introduction.

ii. A Spanish Legacy - Major Influences at Home

Both Albert Boadella and José Luis Gómez, the two individual theatre practitioners who have led the companies focused on in this study, looked beyond the frontiers of 1970s Spain in order to find inspiration in shaping their theatrical

language. Gómez spent significant time training in Germany while Boadella looked to the French mime masters Marcel Marceau and Etienne Decroux on the chances afforded to him during Els Joglars' international festival appearances. In his provocatively titled work *La incultura teatral en España*, Rodríguez Méndez goes so far as to suggest that most Spanish theatre practitioners were more familiar with international theatre trends than Spanish classics: 'El tipo de actor o actriz que aparece hoy [...] desconoce a Lope de Vega pero está muy al tanto de Grotowski' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 83). This dependence on external influences, in Rodríguez's opinion, has given rise to a mainly mimetic theatre scene of little or no personal identity: 'ese afán mimético de calcar estilos y modos y no de "refundirlos" en lo nuestro. Actualmente estamos viendo como una gran parte de nuestra juventud copia del extranjero' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 53). As a result of this, Rodríguez suggests there have been a minute number of achievements in Spanish theatre and as a result no theatrical investigation: 'Puede decirse que en España no existe la investigación teatral' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 117). Francisco Nieva agrees with this view, stating that works of theatrical investigation have almost all been foreign: 'Un tratado de "puesta en escena" para españoles, para directores españoles, nos falta de todas todas' (Nieva, 1996: 35) Indeed, both Boadella and Gómez have noted the lack of inspiring theories or practitioners within the Spain of their formative years; 'Las circunstancias históricas mantuvieron al teatro en España alejado de la evolución que se había experimentado en el resto de Europa' (Brouwer, 2005: 11) Gómez points out, while Boadella is even more dismissive in his words: 'hay poca cosa en España [...] no hay un estudio sobre el proceso de metodología' (Boadella, 2005 d). Whilst there is indeed a dearth of practice-based exploration within Spanish theatre, this does not mean

they are the first to note it. A number of practitioners within Spanish theatre from the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century have expressed their restlessness with regards to theatre. Perhaps one of the most telling anecdotes is attributed to Ramón del Valle Inclán's behaviour during *El hijo del diablo* (1927) at the teatro Fontalba:

Mediada la representación en el tercer acto, un parlamento de la Xirgú fue aplaudido calurosamente. Cuando se apagaban los aplausos, una voz clara, rotunda, gritó: "¡Mal, muy mal, muy mal!...". Era don Ramón del Valle Inclán, que quería tener un gesto de protesta frente a un asentimiento, al parecer común. Hubo unos instantes de confusión y, enseguida, una ovación cerrada al escritor insigne de las *Sonatas*. (Valle Inclán, 2000: 227)

Valle Inclán's frustration with the theatre of his time and the acquiescence of the audience is at least as telling as the audience's abrupt switch of allegiance in the anecdote, apparently confirming the impressionable nature of an audience that Valle Inclán repeatedly described as inclined to bad taste (Valle Inclán, 2000: 211). Further accounts of the limitations of the audience and the critical establishment abound: Buero Vallejo states that 'ya se sabe que en España este tipo de estudios sistemáticos ha sido siempre deficiente y escaso' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 48). Jeronimo López Mozo is even more cutting, stating that 'En España la crítica suele ser nefasta, salvo muy escasas excepciones. Yo personalmente no tengo ninguna confianza en sus juicios. A los críticos les falta formación para ejercer su función, son superficiales' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 342). José María Rodríguez Méndez joins the chorus of disapproval: 'abundó mucho el crítico que se enfrentó al teatro con una formación escasa, por no decir nula, de cultura teatral propiamente dicha, sino de cultura general' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974:

107). José Martín Recuerda expands his criticism of the Spanish scene, depicting a bleak scenario: 'siempre hemos escrito mutilados y cortados por una censura feroz y para un público mojigato' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 253). Perhaps there is also a useful distinction between those practitioners whose notion of theatrical theory is entirely practical, such as Max Aub, 'Jamás me importaron las teorías literarias, me aburren' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 17); and José Martín Recuerda, 'A mí la teoría me trae sin cuidado. No hay más verdad que ir descubriendo lo verdaderamente humano' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 254). Given this theatrical climate of discontent throughout the twentieth century, it is therefore worth looking at a series of key practitioners and how their concerns, when faced with what they perceived as an immobile theatrical tradition and an ill-educated audience, have to some degree conditioned or influenced the explorations now taking place within Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía.

This section therefore proposes to examine these writers and theorists chronologically, charting the course of a theatre of discontent in an attempt to evolve both practice and product within the confines of Spain. The goal of their theatrical explorations always centres on revitalising drama in order to reach their audiences in innovative manners, so the following section will focus on how they adapted their thought and craft to this end, thus creating the theatrical climate which Boadella and Gómez in time both came to form part of. Ultimately, what connects all the following practitioners is their overriding desire to have their audiences react to the experiences their plays formulate by distancing themselves from traditional conventions of theatre. There have always been lone innovators who have pushed at the boundaries of taste and mainstream culture. Without

looking at the advancement of a theory of theatre and sense of practical methodology in Spain, we cannot fully appreciate Boadella and Gómez's contributions to the field.

iii. Ramón María del Valle Inclán, the polemic commentator

Few playwrights have had more influence on the thought and practice of theatre in Spain than Valle Inclán. It is no accident that the Abadía's debut production was Valle's *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte* (1995). Indeed, his outspoken and polemic public figure is reminiscent of Albert Boadella, who much later also adopted the persona of outspoken satirist on the political realities of his time. Valle Inclán is a cornerstone and a reference point of Spanish theatre, but when we speak of his theatre, we must bear in mind that he repeatedly stated that he did not see himself as a writer of theatre. In a 1928 interview, he goes on record saying: 'Yo no soy autor, abastecedor de esos teatros... cuando la obra se editó yo no puse, yo no hice la más leve mención de que aquella obra de lectura había sido de teatro' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 264). Of course, one can tell Valle Inclán is making the point that he does not write theatre for the commercial venues of the time. Nevertheless, there is another critical artistic point for his claim:

Y a los cinemas, ya lo creo que voy. Ése es el teatro moderno. La visualidad. Más de los sentidos corporales; pero es arte. Un nuevo arte. El nuevo arte plástico. Belleza viva. Y algún día se unirán y complementarán el cinematógrafo y el teatro por antonomasia, los dos teatros en un solo teatro. Y entonces se podrá concurrir, perder el tiempo en el teatro. (Valle Inclán, 2000: 265)

Valle Inclán's point is that the theatre of his time is failing to stimulate dialogue, which means: 'no penetra en el verdadero sentido de la realidad teatral' (Valle

Inclán, 2000: 265). Hence he is not a writer of theatre, but rather a writer of dialogue: 'Yo escribo todas mis obras en diálogo porque así salen de mi alma; y porque mi sentido de la vida así me lo ordena' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 265). Without going into an in-depth exploration of theatre in Valle's time, one can nevertheless glean that he is pointing at a distinction between physical expression and vocal expression, and that theatre will only find itself in a heightened hybrid of the two. Throughout the years, his perspective changes little. In 1911 he stated: 'la acción sacude fuertemente lo que hay de temperamento emocional en el público [...] el laborar escénico debe girar en sentido de vigorizar nuestro teatro' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 48); the following from 1929; '[...] a la importancia que asume el escenario [...] es preciso añadir la del grito' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 275); and also from 1929; 'Todo el teatro es creación plástica. La literatura es secundaria' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 280); and in 1933; 'Si en el teatro algo ha de levantar con palanca de emoción el alma de las multitudes, sólo el tono obrará el prodigio [...] el teatro dramático ha de ser un teatro de tono o no ha de ser' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 418).

Such an emphasis on tone and on the power of dialogue makes Unamuno's interpretation of Valle all the more compelling: 'hay que leerle a ser posible con los oídos' (quoted in Valle Inclán, 2000: 400). The sum of the elements Valle enumerates combine to produce a theatre primarily of emotions, and it can be argued that Valle's theatrical output is a precursor to Artaud's *theatre of cruelty*. After all, both spoke of shaking the audience emotionally, of the irrational division between word and movement that has dulled the potential of theatre, and both created plays where the audience were confronted with the basest elements of

humanity. They even shared a love of the potential of cinema, as Artaud also proposed the notion of a multimedia theatre:

...we want to bring back the idea of total theatre, where theatre will recapture from cinema, music-hall, the circus and life itself, those things that always belonged to it. This division between analytical theatre and a world of movement seems stupid to us. (Artaud, 2001: 122)

Valle Inclán has perhaps become best known for his *esperpentos*, which he defined in 1921: 'Esta modalidad consiste en buscar el lado cómico en lo trágico de la vida misma' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 126). Luis Emilio Soto attempted to give some sense of the dramatic form of an *esperpento*, stating: '*El Mundo* guiñolesco [...] a base de realismo grotesco y bufón' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 269). This extreme world of grotesquely presented satire again is reminiscent of Albert Boadella and Els Joglars, who have also played with the grotesque and buffoonery in order to indict areas of society, such as the masks of *La torna* (1977) which turned the Spanish Guardia Civil into roosting chickens. Much of Valle Inclán's work springs from an intense political commitment. In all of Valle's interviews, he is called on to comment on the political situation of Spain just as often as on his work as a playwright, poet and novelist.⁵ On the rare occasions that his interviewers have the forethought to ask of how the two may be combined, Valle stated: 'En primer término [...] yo creo que la suprema aspiración del arte, y especialmente del teatro, debe ser recoger, reflejar, dar la sensación de la vida de un pueblo o de

⁵ This is true of Albert Boadella too. A recent article in *El País* described a breakfast meeting with Boadella, ostensibly in aid of the Día Mundial del Teatro, and yet the column deals with his stormy relationship with Catalan nationalism and his partnership with conservative politician Esperanza Aguirre who invited him to take up the artistic directorship of the new Teatros del Canal in Madrid (P.O.D., 2009). His involvement with the Ciutatans political party in opposition to Catalan nationalism has also thrust him into the public eye, and his interview on *La hora de Federico* for Libertad Digital Televisión featured questions as much about his politics as his theatre (Boadella, 2008).

una raza. Por esto afirmo que será mejor de todos los escritores el que sea más estadista' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 78). Therefore, his theatre strives to be as didactic as Brecht's: 'No he temido ser educador. Es más, he querido serlo, pues a ello entiendo debe encaminarse el teatro en todo tiempo y lugar' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 39). Even when probed about the classic authors of the genre, Valle's interpretation is telling: 'Calderón, Lope y Tírso, nuestros clásicos, respondieron a las necesidades de una época y un Estado' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 347). Elsewhere Valle expanded on what it meant to him to respond to the needs of his era and society:

Hay no solo el derecho de opinar, sino el deber de opinar lealmente, desnudamente... Hay que hablar, y opinar y protestar... Si alguna obligación tengo yo es... la de opinar, la de advertir al público cuando se trate de algo que no debe ser, la de decirle si una cosa es buena o no. Porque el público se desconcierta, y hay que decirle la verdad (Valle Inclán, 2000: 228-29).

Nevertheless, the weakness of contemporary art does not excuse the audience, as exposed in a 1926 interview:

Estevez Ortega: (Intencionadamente) ¿De qué forma se arreglaría la crisis teatral?

Valle: ¡Phs! ¡Fusilando a los Quintero!

Ortega: ¿En dónde está o radica la causa de la decadencia teatral nuestra?

Valle: En el público.

Ortega: ¿Incultura, acaso?

Valle: Peor. Mal gusto. Un público inculto puede educarse. Un público que se cree educado y que está viciado y corrompido, con comedias estúpidas, no tiene remedio. ¡Bah! (Valle Inclán, 2000: 211)

In 1926, Valle would hit on the same phrase as Lorca a few years later, on the subject of how theatre should deal with the audience: 'El artista debe imponerse al

público' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 211). Valle clearly intended to be polemic, and often his views on theatre express a certain feeling of futility within the medium:

El teatro es lo menos universal que existe. Cada país tiene el suyo... Además el teatro antes que nada exige un público, incluso antes que el propio autor. Y la condición específica de este público es estar ligado por un sentimiento común, lo cual es privativo de un solo ambiente. Esta imprescindible cohesión se perfecciona y encarece hasta convertirse en fondo religioso, íntima y suprema comunidad hacia donde debe converger el haz de incitaciones estéticas. (Valle Inclán, 2000: 272)

Theatre may impose this cohesive mood or atmosphere on an audience by drawing on society for examples: 'nos mueve la plástica antes que el concepto' states Valle (Valle Inclán, 2000: 273), to which Paco Vighi ripostes: 'De ahí la visualidad de una buena tarde de toros' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 273). In a later interview, Valle expands on this nascent thought: 'España tiene una expresión dramática... Hay dramatismo en la religión, sintetizado en las procesiones de la Semana Santa de Sevilla; el de los toros, que es un espectáculo dramático; en el canto, en la música de los contrapuntistas españoles y en ese claro-oscuro de nuestras catedrales...' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 283). Albert Boadella also speaks eloquently about the artistic value of bullfighting, stating: 'Nunca he sabido exactamente por qué los toros me han proporcionado las mayores emociones artísticas de mi vida' (Boadella, 2009 a: 186).⁶ However, he relates his passion to catharsis, a term coined for the theatre:

⁶ Federico García Lorca was of the same opinion, as he eulogises bullfighting in terms similar to those Boadella would later employ: 'es probablemente la riqueza poética y vital mayor de España [...] los toros es la fiesta más culta que hay hoy en el mundo; es el drama puro [...] es el único sitio adonde se va con la seguridad de ver la muerte rodeada de la más deslumbradora belleza'. (Lorca, 1974: 1024). Ortega y Gasset also spoke of bullfighting's roots in the popular festivals of Dionysian Greece (Ortega y Gasset, 1958: 81).

La tan cacareada catarsis que siempre citamos los del gremio escénico y que ha llenado innumerables páginas de especulaciones puedo afirmar que existe. [...] Público y oficiantes estuvimos ligados por unos lazos tan profundos que no existe en *El Mundo* occidental ninguna ceremonia capaz de conmover y elevar con semejante fuerza al ser humano. [...] nada es comparable al ritual taurino en el que participamos las dieciocho mi personas allí presentes (Boadella, 2009 a: 281-82).

The primal life and death nature of the struggle is at the heart of the experience for Boadella, whose passion for the ritual has spilled over into the theatre and his *La controversia del toro y el torero* (2006) took the form of a theatrical debate between a bull (Xavier Boada) and a bullfighter (Ramón Fontserè). One may borrow from the social landscape to construct a new form of viewing theatre, just as Bertolt Brecht saw the potential of the crowd at a sports event:

We pin our hopes to the sporting public... we have our eyes on those huge concrete pans, filled with 15,000 men and women of every variety of class and physiognomy, the fairest and shrewdest audience in the world. There you will find 15,000 persons paying high prices, and working things out on the basis of a sensible weighing of supply and demand... The demoralisation of our theatre audiences springs from the fact that neither theatre nor audience has any idea what is supposed to go on there. (Brecht, 2001: 6)

The parallel is poignant – for although we have seen audiences at sporting events descend into extreme anger or joy, the appreciation of the sport is to a great degree based on logic and reason – in a good football match, you would analyse the tactics of both teams, alter tactics to counter the others, and you can be assured that the attending audience will have an opinion one way or another. Brecht attempts to apply this notion to theatre, to shake out a dead and complacent audience who attend in search of nothing and leaving none the wiser. This appeal

to what Brecht understood to be 'reality', however, does not equate to realism in theatre, and Valle is particularly virulent on the subject: 'Lo absurdo, lo antiartístico, lo inadmisible es el realismo' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 221); '-¿Ibsen? – Lo detesto.' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 205). However, in attracting an audience one must find a way of communicating with them, and each show creates a unique new dynamic: 'Yo no sé lo que es eso de teatral. Las cosas son o no son teatrales según el público' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 180). Brecht's view of the audience links quite closely with these thoughts: 'The one tribute we can pay the audience is to treat it as thoroughly intelligent. It is utterly wrong to treat people as simpletons when they are grown up at seventeen. I appeal to the reason' (Brecht, 2001: 14). He even asserts categorically and highlighted in italics that '*A theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense*' (Brecht, 2001: 14). Brecht is particularly useful to my argument here because he accompanied his theories with a practical system for expressing them. In defining his notion of 'Epic Theatre', Brecht attempts to define a functional formula for how the audience ought to be treated, working out a balance between thought and feeling:

The epic theatre is against all emotions. But reason and emotions can't be divided. (The epic theatre isn't against the emotions, it tries to examine them, and is not satisfied just to stimulate them. It is the orthodox theatre which sins by dividing reason and emotion, in that it virtually rules out the former. (Brecht, 2001: 162)

Furthermore, Brecht was perceived as profoundly transgressive during the Franco dictatorship, as Adolfo Marsillach points out: 'Los espectadores, con mucha ingenuidad, creían que ir a ver una obra de Brecht era, más o menos, lo mismo que apuntarse al Partido Comunista. [...] Se asistía a los estrenos haciendo

apuestas sobre lo que tardarían en prohibir la obra por orden gubernativa. El público había decidido escuchar determinados textos como un acto de afirmación revolucionaria' (Marsillach, 2003: 113-14). Hence Brecht's plays were used as triggers for the very kind of debate he sought to raise. Ultimately, where Brecht, Valle Inclán, and Federico García Lorca all connect is in an urge to shatter a decadent theatre establishment, which they all saw as elitist and divisive. Perhaps what is most important is how Valle actively sought ideological conflict in order to challenge what he saw as unacceptable in politics and the arts. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Boadella's public stance is as confrontational as Valle's was in his time, from politics to the nature of theatre. Boadella refers to his own 'irrefrenable belicosidad' (Boadella, 2009 a: 106) in his book *Adiós Cataluña* which aptly alternates chapter headings between love and war: 'Esta breve declaración de principios hace patente mi resistencia ante cualquier "viaje" que pueda alejarme de la cruda realidad, al mismo tiempo que sentía, y siento, una enorme fascinación por hacer el amor y la guerra en justa armonía' (Boadella, 2009 a: 19).

iv. Federico García Lorca and the Avant-Garde

When we speak of a renovation and a modern conception of theatre, we have to reflect back on Lorca's work, just as director José Luis Alonso pointed out: 'Esa renovación arrancó de mucho antes, arrancó de Lorca' (Alonso, 1991: 168). We must necessarily underline Lorca's contribution in order to understand the theatre of the late twentieth century of Spain. The renovation of product goes hand in hand with the renovation of process a concept which is sometimes glossed over, but as process informs style it is one that should be constantly at the forefront of any analytical study. As Paul McDermid has noted, there has been an equation of

Lorca's self-professed 'impossible theatre'⁷ with a notion of experimental or avant-garde drama, which perhaps may more helpfully be defined as Lorca's creation of a multi-disciplinary approach to his work (as writer, actor, director and even producer): 'the poet in his theatre did not recognise any contradiction in style, happily embracing widely divergent forms' (McDermid, 2007: 111).

Just as Valle Inclán was prone to the highest orders of hyperbole in his statements, as Maria Delgado points out, there is 'an evangelism in Lorca's statements on theatre, professing his own superior position as messiah for a new order largely bereft of significant new dramatists' (Delgado, 2008: 134). Indeed, he was often as cutting as Valle Inclán and Brecht in his appreciation of contemporary theatre, referring to the Spanish scene of the 1920s and 1930s as 'un teatro hecho por puercos y para puercos' (García Lorca, 1933: 2). His unfinished act *Comedia sin título* seems to travel similar social lines to Brecht's work, including a decadent bourgeois audience of planted actors reacting angrily to the play. Lorca describes his own work best; 'acabo de terminar un acto completamente subversivo que supone una verdadera revolución de la técnica, un gran avance... un tema social, mezclado de religioso, en el que irrumpe mi angustia constante del más allá' (Luengo, 1987: 28). Of course Lorca's concerns are far from Brecht's zealous socialism, although McDermid notes 'the poet's engagement with the social realities he saw around him in his day' (McDermid, 2007: 202), connecting with his conscious efforts to link artistic innovation with inspiring an active social awareness in the audience. Ultimately there is a similar effort to appeal to reason through the emotional outbursts of the ridiculed bourgeoisie: 'Vamos, querida. Este hombre

⁷ 'Mis primeras comedias son irrepresentables' (García Lorca, 1997 b: 631)

acabará diciendo alguna atrocidad' (García Lorca, 1997 a: 772). This is the same unreasoning audience that Brecht and Valle Inclán were attempting to jolt.

In his 1935 'Charla sobre el teatro', Lorca made some of his clearest statements about the potential role of theatre in society:

El teatro es una escuela de llanto y de risa y una tribuna libre donde los hombres pueden poner en evidencia morales viejas o equívocas y explicar con ejemplos vivos normas eternas del corazón y del sentimiento del hombre. (García Lorca, 1974: 1178)

The similarities to Artaud's description of a 'mystic' theatre (Artaud, 2001: 108) should not surprise us.⁸ Antonin Artaud complained in *The Theatre and its Double* that 'if theatrically we turn to the subconscious it is merely to steal what it may have been able to collect (or hide) in the way of accessible mundane experiences' (Artaud, 2001: 108). Lorca, like Artaud, certainly never wrote plays dealing with 'mundane experiences', but rather heightened dramas of shocking intensity. In his own words:

Una de las finalidades que persigo con mi teatro es precisamente aspa ventar y aterr ar un poco. Estoy seguro y contento de escandalizar. Quiero provocar revulsivos, a ver si se vomita de una vez todo lo malo del teatro actual. Voy a llevar a escenas temas horribles. El público a que usted ha aludido se va a aspa ventar mucho más. Tengo un asunto de incesto, "La sangre no tiene voz", ante cuya crudeza y violencia de pasiones "Yerma" tiene un lenguaje de arcángeles. (Luengo, 1987: 28)

⁸ The similarities between the work of Antonin Artaud and Lorca's *El público* are discussed in Xon de Ros' article 'Lorca's *El público*: An invitation to the carnival of film', which notes that Lorca's first contact with Artaud's ideas probably occurred during his time at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid (Ros, 1996: 110-20).

While we may nowadays take exception to a potentially elitist viewpoint, in an homage to Lola Membrives in 1934, Lorca went so far as to say that 'el teatro es superior al público y no inferior' (García Lorca, 1974: 1172). As Valle Inclán before him had noted in 1926 (see pg. 32), theatre has the potential to impose its moral frame of reference on a captive audience. When pressed about the perennial notion of 'theatre in crisis', he replied that he saw no crisis other than a loss of authority:

El teatro ha perdido su autoridad porque día tras día se ha producido un gran desequilibrio entre arte y negocio. El teatro necesita dinero, y es justo y fundamental... La otra mitad es depuración, belleza, cuidado, sacrificio, para un fin superior de emoción y cultura. (García Lorca, 1974: 1171)

However, unlike Valle Inclán, Lorca (following Brecht and Artaud before him) does not blame an illiterate audience with poor taste for this imbalance of art and business:

El público no tiene la culpa, al público se le atrae, se le engaña, se le educa... El público va con emoción a los espectáculos que considera superiores a él, a los espectáculos donde aprende, donde encuentre autoridad. (García Lorca, 1974: 1172)

Here, Lorca seems to be identifying the same purposeless audience that Brecht and Artaud had earlier described as having no idea of what is expected of it. He is just as vitriolic in his condemnation of mainstream theatre that does not ask for any sort of commitment from its audience:

He empezado a escribir una cosa de teatro que puede ser interesante. Ahora hay que pensar en el teatro del porvenir. Todo lo que existe ahora

en España está muerto. O se cambia el teatro de raíz o se acaba para siempre. No hay otra solución. (Maurer, 1986: 78)

Indeed, whilst he may never have had the same degree of socialist commitment as Brecht, it is hard to ignore the similarities when he speaks of himself as an 'ardiente apasionado del teatro de acción social' (García Lorca, 1974: 1178). It is clear that Lorca made a distinction between 'social' and 'socialist' that perhaps is too naïve, but one cannot forget that he took it upon himself to lead a theatre company, La Barraca, which toured rural Spain with Golden Age plays, often to the vociferous opposition of a reactionary establishment: their 1932 production of *La vida es sueño* in Soria was sabotaged, allegedly by Monarchist students.⁹ Lorca's attempt to reach out, to take theatre to audiences who had perhaps never seen a play, was coupled with a belief that 'la humanidad tiende a que desaparezcan las clases sociales, tal como estaban instituidas, precisa de un espíritu de sacrificio y abnegación en todos los sectores, para intensificar la cultura, única salvación de los pueblos' (quoted in Gibson, 1987: 155). This is why theatre is his preferred medium of communication; it best expresses his social compromise:

En este momento dramático del mundo... el artista debe llorar y reír con su pueblo... Particularmente, yo tengo un ansia verdadera por comunicarme con los demás. Por eso llamé a las puertas del teatro y al teatro consagro toda mi sensibilidad. (quoted in Gibson, 1987: 155)

⁹ Although Gibson underlines that accounts of the incident differ, and that no one was ever found to be responsible, it appears that agent provocateurs interrupted the company's performance of *La vida es sueño* by turning off the lights and then hurling rocks at the stage. The police intervened to escort the company out of the theatre, who had to pick their way to their hotel once they found out that 'el enemigo los esperaba más allá para volcar los coches' (Gibson, 1987: 192). For a full account, see Gibson, 1987: 191-92.

Clearly Lorca felt that the theatre enabled him a more direct line of communication with his audience, the nature of which may even stretch to confrontation as he noted in 1935:

[...] caben las innovaciones verdaderas, y no hay autoridad ni espíritu de sacrificio para imponerlas a un público al que hay que domar con altura y contradecirlo y atacarlo en muchas ocasiones. El teatro se debe imponer al público y no el público al teatro. Para eso, autores y actores deben revestirse, a costa de sangre, de gran autoridad, porque el público de teatro es como los niños en las escuelas: adora al maestro grave y austero que exige y hace justicia [...] (quoted in Gibson, 1987: 445-46)

Sarah Wright's work *The Trickster-Function in the Theatre of García Lorca* (2000), goes into some detail about how Lorca generates this relationship with the audience, looking closely at the function of the narrators or prologues in his work: 'a trickster-figure whose function is to open a dramatic dialogue with the audience [...] to lead them into the liminal space which is theatre' (Wright, 2000: 13). Many of Lorca's works feature characters named variously Autor, Poeta or Director, who emerge to talk directly to the audience (Wright notes that Lorca himself played the role of the Autor in *La zapatera prodigiosa* in 1930 and 1933). Wright goes on to define the function of this device as 'becoming a meta-discourse, opening a liminal space between the framed performance of the text and the external world of the spectators' (Wright, 2000: 15). By the appearance of *El público*, Wright has traced a development of Lorca's work which is even more experiential for his audiences: 'the audience is confined within the liminal space, the fourth wall is broken down leaving no division between scenic action and spectating' (Wright, 2000: 105). Ultimately, Lorca is not satisfied with conventional notions of passive spectators, and his work aims to establish a new relationship with the audience, offering 'an

invitation to revel in the festive aspects of literature: the carnivalesque, the playful, the taboo' (Wright, 2000: 126).

The spirit of direct confrontation and imposition of a new set of theatrical rules is, once again, highly reminiscent of Artaud. With Artaud, however, the body was the key to this confrontation, and like Vsevolod Meyerhold he used the word 'hieroglyphs' to express the communicative potential of movement. Like Brecht, Artaud was influenced by witnessing oriental performances, Balinese and Chinese, and was struck by the sheer physical control the actors demonstrated. However, where Brecht was distanced and able to coolly analyse the significance of a particular movement, Artaud was emotionally moved concluding that 'meaning... only strikes one intuitively' (Artaud, 2001: 98). This introduces the manifesto of *The Theatre and its Double*, as he asserts:

I maintain the stage is a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language.

I maintain that this physical language, aimed at the sense and independent of speech, must first satisfy the senses. (Artaud, 2001: 103)

This statement is founded on the assumption that theatre is a unique form of communication or cultural activity because it makes distinct connections with the audience. This uniqueness springs from a desire to emphasise the space between 'gesture and thought' and thus it represents a break from 'theatre's subjection to the text' (Artaud, 2001: 112). Returning to the Balinese drama, Artaud speaks of how 'This theatre vibrates with instinctive things but brought to that lucid, intelligent, malleable point where they seem physically to supply us with some of the mind's most secret perceptions' (Artaud, 2001: 101). This process has an air of

mysticism to it, and Artaud is clearly disillusioned by having 'reached the point where we have lost all contact with true theatre, since we restrict it to the field of whatever everyday thought can achieve' (Artaud, 2001: 108). Instead, he advocates a new engagement, 'metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body' (Artaud, 2001: 117). As Grotowski pointed out, few tangible solutions are offered, and the statement 'Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show' (Artaud, 2001: 115) relies on a self-defeating notion which Grotowski described in the following terms: 'This seems striking, but note that he neither proposed to abolish the stage separate from the auditorium, nor to seek a different structure adapted to each new productions thus creating a real basis for confrontation between the two ensembles formed by the actors and the spectators' (Grotowski, 1981: 88). One rigid system is merely replaced by another. However, Artaud's note on changing the audience is telling: 'The Audience: *First, this theatre must exist*' (Artaud, 2001: 117). One cannot change an audience accustomed to its thinking being done for it without first changing what the theatre expects of its audience – and according to Brecht, neither theatre nor audience genuinely has any 'idea of what is wanted of it' (Brecht, 2001: 7). In Artaud's words, 'serious theatre... upsets all our preconceptions, inspiring us with fiery, magnetic imagery and finally acting in us after the manner of unforgettable soul therapy' (Artaud, 2001: 122). This self-discovery is what theatre should strive to achieve.

Perhaps the only problem with these thoughts is that Artaud's and Lorca's experience of the practical realities of theatre was limited, and neither left any form of applied methodology to achieve these desired results on-stage. Indeed, as

Maria Delgado points out, when Lorca took over directing the La Barraca touring company, 'he did not have a methodology *per se*' (Delgado, 2008: 29), but rather a notion of professionalism derived from working with Margarita Xirgú's company. On the other hand, Lorca did leave a series of plays whose expressivity may give us an inkling of a dramaturgy that refused the easy vocabularies of naturalism and in itself required scenic innovation. As a musician himself, he is almost more eloquent on the subject of music, as expressed by his article 'Las reglas de la música'. Departing from the notion that 'Nadie, con palabras, dirá una pasión desgarradora como habló Beethoven en su *Sonata apassionata*' (García Lorca, 1974: 1115), Lorca's description of the communicative and emotional potential of music is reminiscent of Artaud's passion for physical performance:

Para sentirla, es necesario poseer imaginación loca y nerviosa, y casi se puede afirmar que, una vez vencido el formidable dragón de su técnica, el que tiene dentro la fantasía y la pasión habla con ella inconscientemente. (García Lorca, 1974: 1115)

This instinctual discovery is not unlike Stanislavski's attempts to, if not harness, at least replicate moments of subconscious inspiration. Meanwhile, Lorca describes the intense experience that music constitutes:

Lo incomprendible para muchos de este arte de la música les impide poder sentir sensaciones que ningún arte da y sobrepuja al alma misma. Yo conozco a personas que se retiraron de oír música, abrumadas por las ideas que sentían. Un arte así no cabe en las reglas. (García Lorca, 1974: 1117-18)

Although Lorca seems to be saying that no other art-form can create such an effect, it is not too much of a stretch of the imagination to suppose that having

identified this potential he may have tried to apply it to his work in the theatre – indeed, all of his plays include music and dance, elements which may help push his audiences towards the level of emotional experience here exulted. Perhaps the most telling thrust of this article is the constant emphasis on how musicians have challenged establishments, broken the treasured rules of their medium and as a result transcended and created something new and beautiful.

Desde luego que, para base, no hay más remedio que aprender las reglas; pero, una vez por encima de ellas, si se rompen, únicamente hay que inclinar la cabeza ante las obras... Siempre que la obra exprese un estado de ánimo con suma expresión, debemos callar ante ella.... (García Lorca, 1974: 1116-17)

It is telling then, that documentation of his work process reveals an engagement with theatre akin to music, as Maria Delgado describes: ‘He advocated a consistency of characterization and accents across all roles, fine-tuning the text in an approach that treated the texts like an operatic score’ (Delgado, 2008: 132). When we think of plays as revolutionary as *El público*, or even his more universally known tragedies, his own words on musicians could well be applied to him: ‘Y es que las reglas... son inútiles, sobre todo cuando se encuentran con hombres de temperamento genial...’ (García Lorca, 1974: 1115). Lorca knew that for theatre to survive, it had to be fundamentally changed and challenged. His efforts to bend or break all the accepted and conventional rules of theatre are key to the development of theatre and processes of theatrical production in Spain. Ultimately, his work inspires a sense of ‘restless movement, an endless search to discover the limits of the world in which we live. [...] not just on what lies beyond the limits of culture but also on the boundaries themselves’

(Wright, 2000: 126). Even more significant for this particular study are his attempts to locate the tools that could enable this communication to take place, and how to share this search with an audience: 'Theatre is a spectacle which imposes a limit between those tricky areas of culture which lie beyond boundaries, and ourselves as decoders, solvers of riddles' (Wright, 2000: 127). This activation of the audience is perhaps Lorca's most lasting contribution to theatre practice.

v. Antonio Buero Vallejo and censorship

Antonio Buero Vallejo has lately been rather dismissed as a mere commentator on a fascist regime, as actor and director Tim Piggott-Smith's response to *La fundación* indicates: 'It seems adolescent -making its themes and then punching them home too literally. It feels overlong and I am not sure that it would work in a non-political world' (Piggott-Smith, 2006). However, Buero's handling of drama under censorship and his manipulation of theatrical conventions, combined with an unswerving political commitment makes his contribution invaluable in any study of Spanish theatre in the twentieth century. No single Spanish playwright in the late twentieth century had conceived the audience's role within the performance in the way that Buero did (and here lies his key importance for this study), and so the needs of his theatre necessarily affected practice in order to make his immersive techniques function. Buero Vallejo represents a shift corresponding to that specific period in time, as María José Rogué-Arias states:

Nuestra tradición teatral inmediata comenzó en esa fecha que se señala como el inicio del teatro moderno español tras la guerra civil: el estreno en 1949 de *Historia de una escalera*, de Antonio Buero Vallejo, el

primero de los autores – junto a Alfonso Sastre – de lo que en 1962 se denominaría como “generación realista”. (Ragué-Arias, 1996: 22)

A few authors sought to reconnect with a popular audience and provide a more socially and politically committed theatre, a challenge to the superficial conformist drama of José María Pemán or Alfonso Paso. Perhaps what makes Buero most useful for this study is his consideration of the audience’s role and how to involve them in his theatre. However, he was faced with the problem of communicating his political indictments of Franco’s dictatorship under the yoke of censorship. It is necessary here to pause and take stock of the effect of censorship on late twentieth century Spain.

There are conflicting notions of the effects of censorship in Spain, depending on the circumstances of each particular artist. In the case of Els Joglars, Boadella recounts they had little initial trouble with censors who were only interested in ‘transparencias; de que no se transparentaran las bragas, exactamente’ (Joglars, 2001: 15-16). Their experience with *La torna*, an episode that ended in the arrest of the entire company for insults directed at the military, does nevertheless indicate the dangers of the time.¹⁰ Censorship clearly had a direct and enormous impact on theatre and on processes of production, and arguably forced practitioners such as Buero to be more imaginative in order to convey his concerns, whilst his work post-censorship suffers by comparison: ‘since the relaxation of censorship, a tendency to preach rather than suggest’ (Stanton & Banham, 1996: 48). A more extreme instance is the cinematographic phenomenon

¹⁰ A full account of the incident is discussed in the chapter on Els Joglars later in this study; see Part I, Chapter I: {97-99}.

of the 'destape', where the sudden disappearance of censorship meant that all Spanish films were flooded with much gratuitous full frontal nudity, simply because circumstances made it possible: 'After Franco's death the key draw for audiences was still sex, with politics a close second' (Hopewell, 1986: 108). However, the climate of openness and new possibilities after the dismantling of censorship proved fertile ground for new theatre companies such as Teatro de la Abadía. Luis Matilla is perhaps most expressive on the issue of the impact of censorship:

El hecho de que una obra pase censura de texto, pero la autorización quede pendiente del criterio de los censores a la vista del ensayo general... ¿no son suficientes motivos para apreciar el destacado papel que la censura está empeñando en el desarrollo cultural de *El País*? (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 301)

Such was the power of the censors, that much theatre went unstaged and so unnoticed by the general public, leading José Ruibal to answer a question on the quality of new writing in Spain with biting irony: 'En cuanto a nuevos autores, deja a los censores opinar. Son quienes mejor conocen sus obras' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 317). The fundamental problem that arose from censorship, according to Francisco Ruiz Ramón, was to generate a climate of 'confusión, escándalo, discriminación e injusta represión' (Ruiz Ramón, 1997: 443). He explains the deliberately nebulous grounds on which the censors could decide to ban a play: 'atenidos a la norma equis, si la obra en cuestión incurre o no en las motivaciones de carácter prohibitivo contenidas en dicha norma teniendo en cuenta [...] no sólo el contenido, sino incluso la forma (?) de la obra a estrenar' (Ruiz Ramón, 1997: 443). As Ruiz Ramón's inserted question mark indicates, the censors had the power to ban plays and performances for virtually any reason, and

there was little point in appealing the decision, as the attitude of the censorship was to 'dejar dormir el asunto hasta provocar, por consunción o desesperación, la retirada del autor' (Ruiz Ramón, 1997: 443). One of the results of the limitations imposed by censorship was that any kind of alternative performance become an alien event that audiences had little context within which to understand it. Alfonso Sastre blamed his dwindling audience on the social situation of the country: 'El público teatral es un reflejo de la estructura socio-económica y entre nosotros su margen de opción se ve además reducido por el control político (censura) de la producción' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 99). It is worth, however, also noting that the problems of censorship were not shared by all. Salvador Espriu, for instance, explains 'yo he sido muy afortunado en problemas de censura, sea porque no me hayan entendido o porque hayan creído que el catalán lo entendía poca gente [...] el caso es que a mí nunca me han surprimido ninguna palabra de mi obra. Yo siempre he escrito en plena libertad' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 133). Director José Luis Alonso bypassed the censors during 1948 and 1949 and staged international works hitherto unknown in Spain by performing them at his own home, a project known as the teatro de la Independencia: 'llamaba mucho la atención un repertorio de obras al margen de la censura y que no podían verse en cualquier escenario' (Alonso, 1991: 123).

This was a practice the censors were aware of and allowed, although any attempts to commercialise any such venture would be systematically banned as Ruiz Ramón observes: 'Cuando una representación va a tener lugar ante un público privado [...] la censura se permite el lujo de autorizar unas pocas representaciones' (Ruiz Ramón, 1997: 444). Even if we look at the case of Arrabal

and his problems with the censors, *El emperador y el arquitecto de Assyria* (1966) took ten years to be approved, it could even be argued that his problems were self-imposed, as Buero Vallejo points out: 'cuando Nuria Espert quiso estrenarle *Los verdugos*, la prohibieron por el montaje de Víctor [García]. A partir de esa fecha Arrabal ha radicalizado su actitud ante la escena española y la censura. Su comprensible irritación ha coloreado todo lo que ha hecho últimamente.' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 75). He goes on to add that previously 'ya estaban aprobadas algunas de sus obras' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 75). Ruiz Ramón underlines the self-defeating attitude of playwrights who effectively accepted they would never be staged: 'se deciden a escribir como si no existiese censura en *El País*, renunciando así a la función social de su teatro, y creando en solitario' (Ruiz Ramón, 1997: 446). Whilst we perhaps ought not to justify the attitude of the censors, it is worth pointing out that it was possible to bypass them employing metaphor, as Buero himself did on numerous occasions, providing social criticism within a notion of 'teatro posible', whilst authors less willing to compromise in order to propel their concerns did find themselves silenced, such as the cases of Arrabal or Ruibal. Director Adolfo Marsillach details one stratagem employed to distract the censors, to the point that he almost sees censorship as a positive influence:

La censura nos agudizó el ingenio. Muchos diálogos se escribían sabiendo que iban a ser cortados. Era lo que llaman en la guerra 'una maniobra de distracción'. Pensábamos que si en una escena un individuo con bigote y camisa azul pegaba a una mujer girtándole: '¡Putá, más que putá!', el censor iba a quitar ese insulto sin entender que lo que nosotros queríamos decir era que el hombre era un fascista y la mujer una heroica afiliada a Comisiones Obreras. Este perverso sistema de decir las cosas sin terminar de decirlas creó un lenguaje y una estética que, en algún momento, estuvieron bastante bien (Las películas de Saura..., las obras de Buero...) (Marsillach, 2003: 518)

As Marsillach indicates, Buero Vallejo attempted to write for the stage with a subversive objective. However, the evasions and abstractions necessary to avoid censorship meant that theatre stagnated in terms of form, and as Marsillach explains some conventions of protest that began to appear across Spanish theatres 'terminó aburriendo a las ovejas' (Marsillach, 2003: 518).

Buero was a firm believer in the power of drama to move his audience into a reflection on their freedom, rather than telling them what to think. However, his theatricality was not merely 'flashy': 'Sueños, luces de colores y otros efectos, son cosas gratas al principiante y como recursos del texto no me parecen, en general, buenos' (Buero Vallejo, 1994: 379). His use of such techniques is never gratuitous, rather employed to underline certain moments of the plays in order to achieve what he judged the most striking effect possible. Buero is explicit in his intentions: 'La purificación por la piedad y el terror – la vieja catarsis aristotélica – continua siendo, a mi juicio, la justificación última de todo drama' (Buero Vallejo, 1994: 327). As a means of drawing the audience into the struggle witnessed on-stage, Buero developed a striking technique that Doménech termed as 'efectos de inmersión' (Cuevas García, 1990: 28). He makes his audience a part of the play by forcing them towards suffering the same disabilities and disorientation as his characters. As a result, any criticisms of the system became implicitly understood rather than overtly stated.

Cristóbal Cuevas García supports the view of Buero's plays as dramatic provocations to catharsis:

En ella, la palabra, el gesto, el vestuario y hasta los decorados interpelan, exhortan y provocan. El espectador avanza desde una predinámica pasividad a un interés alerta; al final se convierte en cierto modo en actor... Todo se ordena en el teatro hacia el espectador, cuya complicidad se busca a cualquier costa (Cuevas García, 1990: 10).

Buero's principal means of connection with an audience, the 'efecto de inmersión', which makes the audience share the disability of the central character or characters, obliges the audience to suffer the same repression and seek the same liberation. Therefore, by seeing the world of *La fundación* (1974) through Tomás, we are made part of his psychological disorder and become immersed into his world. There is only the thinnest of lines between reality and fantasy, to the extent that the audience must grapple with the little information conceded to make the passage from the apparently comfortable foundation to a prison cell all the more effective. Initially we subscribe to the images we see and what Tomás tells us about the foundation: '¡Si vieras cómo brilla el campo! Los verdes, el lago... parecen joyas' (Buero Vallejo, 1998: 45-46). As his cellmates attempt to cure him, 'reality' asserts itself in the form of the gradual disappearance of all the commodities: '*Tembloroso, se dirige al frigorífico. Cuando está cerca se detiene, atónito, y retrocede un paso. [...] Al tiempo, una lámina del mismo color que la pared desciende y oculta por completo la puertecita esmaltada*' (Buero Vallejo, 1998: 97). It is revealed eventually that Tomás' fantasy was a defence mechanism to suppress feelings of guilt for causing the downfall of a resistance cell in a country we assume to be under a dictatorship, it is never stated. He attempts to escape this damning reality with a suicide attempt (previous to the action of the play) and subsequently by the sustaining fantasy world that we the audience are made to share and also lose. By means of our complicity with Tomás' worldview at

all times, we too join in Buero's 'pasión por la verdad' (Doménech, 1993: 331) as we too are made to lose our comforts and confront a less pleasant reality. Generating a prettified bourgeois fantasy, that most likely reminds the majority of an average middle class audience of their own homes, Buero leaves the struggle in the audience's hands: it is up to them to discover the reality of the prison. The author established a level of experiential involvement in order to convey his 'message' and 'messages' were important at a time where the dominant ideology was promoting its particular world view through all official channels. This was a technique that would leave a lasting mark on Spanish theatre.

Similarly we are plunged into the darkness of blindness during Act III of *En la ardiente oscuridad* (1950); or we share Fabio's daltonism in *Diálogo secreto* (1984); and when Goya is on-stage during *El sueño de la razón* (1970), we are all deafened to what other characters say. This subjectivisation of perspective forces the audience to share the disabilities of the protagonists and therefore ideally gain direct insight into their troubled minds. In order to heighten the pathos related to Ignacio's quest for light the audience is thrown into the disquieting sensation of darkness. With sympathy at its maximum, the public can achieve a greater sense of pity and therefore accentuate their understanding. Dixon further defines the immersion-effect as: 'When the spectator is made to share a peculiar sensory perception (or lack of it), not with all the characters of a play but (normally) with only one, with whom he therefore feels a stronger sense of empathy or *identification*' (Dixon, 1980: 160). However, the aforementioned instances show the immersion techniques functioning at their most simple level. By joining the characters in their sensory deprivation, the spectator's emotions are manipulated

to acquire a greater sense of empathy. This in turn, generates an understanding and, for Buero, a sense of liberation which allows us to shed the disability we have suffered from, and achieve an intellectual freedom to confront repression. Buero's dramatic flair overpowers our conformist mindsets and forces us to reflect on our position.

If we look at Buero's conception of the theatrical space, we will find similar notions in place. He left behind a set of drawings and sketches revealing just how closely he associated the theatrical experience of the space and the play as one single entity. Buero's collection¹¹ offers an insight into his visual world beyond the text to reveal intricate arrangements that would visually impact the audience:

[...] es obvio a juzgar por los diseños que la intención es desarmar las expectativas de la audiencia a través de enseñarles situaciones normales, lugares comunes y decorados conocidos para subvertir y luego alterar las percepciones. (Breden, 2005: 55)

Buero Vallejo's theatre may appear old fashioned and distant to us now, but he is still held as the greatest post civil war playwright: 'Buero Vallejo es hoy no sólo el dramaturgo más importante en la España de después de la guerra civil, sino –y esto hay que afirmarlo enérgicamente- un dramaturgo europeo cuyo lenguaje es válido y valioso' (Ruiz Ramón, 1997: 384). Furthermore, his blend of theatricality and political commentary remains a reference point for contemporary practice: 'Su dramaturgia es, por tanto, patrimonio común del mejor teatro contemporáneo, y no solamente del español' (Ruiz Ramón, 1997: 384). If nothing else, his desire to reach an audience by means of theatrical imagination rather

¹¹ See (Breden, 2005: 41-61).

than direct exhortation identifies his theatre as a major shift in approach within Spain. By plunging an audience directly into a conflict, and forcing them to fend for themselves, we could identify a precursor to an experiential engagement with an audience in his theatre, in the words of Tim Etchells, 'seeking not so much to describe a situation as to place the audience in one' (Etchells, 2004).

vi. The Directors and the rehearsal room

Playwrights like Valle Inclán, Lorca and Buero-Vallejo created possibilities for experimentation in written form, but of course it is up to the theatre practitioners to give them physical shape. A host of directors produced the work of the aforementioned playwrights, as well as returning to a canon of Spanish Golden Age drama to express their concerns. As Rodríguez Méndez indicated, 'Vivimos ahora en el teatro la gran era del director' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 85), while director Ricard Salvat noted in *El teatro de los años 70*: 'estamos convencidos de que la historia de los años 70 la habrán escrito los grandes directores escénicos más que los autores' (Salvat, 1974: 16). Well before Boadella and Gómez arrived on the scene, directors such as Enrique Rambal, Cipriano Rivas Cherif, Cayetano Luca de Tena, Luis Escobar, José Tamayo and Adolfo Marsillach, for instance, had shaped the audience's perception of theatre in Spain. It is worth exploring their particular contributions to the craft of theatre within the Spanish scene of the twentieth century, although quantifying this in any significant manner is made complicated for a number of reasons. First of all, very little critical appreciation of their work is available, and even less is preserved in video or even photography. Relying on eyewitness accounts or reviews is always problematic due to the necessarily subjective eye of the audience member, as director Ricard Salvat

notes: '¿Qué queda del actor, del director teatral, cuando el tiempo ha sepultado su trabajo? En realidad nada, o, en el mejor de los casos, muy poca cosa: unas fotografías, algunos comentarios críticos, discos, filmes, libros de memorias o biografías' (quoted in Rodrigo, 1980: 15), in short a few disjointed scraps. In addition, most theatre reviewers, even today, simply do not have the necessary appreciation of process and craft to pinpoint what directors specifically bring to the rehearsal process. The traditional academic emphasis on product rather than process also makes it hard to express the particular qualities of the rehearsal room, and as previously established, the critical faculties of Spanish academia has, until very recently, been severely limited as no infrastructure of analysis of process existed beyond a vague understanding of Stanislavski.

When asked to compare contemporary Spanish theatre with the rest of Europe in 1974, Ricard Salvat declined to answer directly: 'Francamente opino que no es nada serio comparar el teatro español actual con el europeo' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 470), alluding to the dictatorship to indicate that due to the 'nivel de dificultades' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 471) faced in Spain, it was impossible for Spanish theatre to be as advanced or organised as it was in France or Germany, nations Salvat had visited and worked in. Therefore, the following section will attempt to distil from other accounts how the role of the director has evolved and defined itself throughout the twentieth century in Spain. As those most responsible for the generation of a methodology for the rehearsal room, we must look at how the figure has developed up to the present day in order to put Boadella and Gómez in their appropriate contexts. First and foremost, Óscar Cornago Bernal has helpfully indicated a watershed in 1965 'a partir de la cual comenzaban

a proliferar las propuestas escénicas que iban a articular este nuevo clímax que algunos autores ya han denominado neovanguardia' (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 20). This avant-garde was fixed very firmly on the theories of Artaud, Grotowski and the spirit of collaborative creation, ideologies which Cornago Bernal identifies as entering Spain at the end of the sixties, with the Living Theater company touring Spain in 1967, with Artaud's notion of Theatre of Cruelty and the first translations of Grotowski's work emerging the following year (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 45).

According to Maria Delgado, the figure of the director did not emerge as a major creative force in Spanish theatre until the 1950s, well after European pioneers like André Antoine, Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt (Delgado, 2003 a: 12), and José Luis Alonso coincides in this conclusion: 'Este producto nuevo que es el director ha existido siempre en otros países. Al nuestro ha llegado con bastante retraso' (Alonso, 1991: 134). Rodríguez Méndez highlights María Guerrero's (1867-1928) contribution to the field of directing in Spain by introducing one of the cornerstones of rehearsal process in the twentieth century, a close study of the text with the cast gathered around a table: 'fue la primera directora escénica que impuso el ensayo "a la italiana" [...] Consistió este método en el estudio, durante varios días y aun semanas, del texto, con los actores inmovilizados' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 132), and once the ideas had been fully assimilated, then the physical process of rehearsal could begin. Two of the 'earliest recognised directors in Spain' (Delgado, 2003 a: 12) were Cipriano Rivas Cherif (1891-1967) and Adrià Gual (1872-1943). Rivas Cherif is perhaps most noted for his work producing Lorca's plays in the thirties, but as Alonso noted having observed his rehearsals, his role as director lacked a necessary depth: 'Fue la primera vez que vi a un

director en funciones. En aquellos momentos Rivas Cherif me parecía un dios. Al poco tiempo me di cuenta de que estaba equivocado. Era un valor falso. Machado creo que da en el clavo cuando en una carta a su Guiomar dice: “el tal Cherif, un poco zascandil” (Alonso, 1991: 121). Elsewhere, in the realm of popular theatre Enrique Rambal emerged, along with Ramón Caralt, as a significant director whose spectacles ‘served to articulate an alternative theatrical tradition to that of the single-authored play’ (Delgado, 2003 a: 84). Rambal (1889-1956) worked as actor, adaptor and theatre director, and his bombastic productions reveal an intent to bring a new energy onto the stage. Maria Delgado describes the spectacle that was *La vuelta al mundo en ochenta días*:

[...] performed in 1934 with twenty rotating backdrops designed by Amadeo Asensi and Joan Morales showing different sights around the world... involved a procession through the central aisle including three constructed elephants and the shifting of the action from the proscenium stage to other parts of the auditorium. (Delgado, 2003 a: 73)

It was undoubtedly a courageous staging very evocative of the spirit that later moved collectives like la Fura dels Baus to escape the confines of the proscenium stage. The subsequent generation of directors had to contend with the realities of Franco’s Spain, and perhaps amongst the most important was José Luis Alonso, ‘one of the most significant directors, alongside Cayetano Luca de Tena and Luis Escobar, of the Franco era’ (Delgado, 2003 a: 122), also described as the major exponent of ‘Stanislvskian practice’ (Delgado, 2003 a: 138) in Spain. Other major directorial figures of the time include José Tamayo, Adolfo Marsillach, and Miguel Narros. In spite of the dominance on the theatre scene that these directors all held in the second half of the twentieth century, their importance as artists is called into

question most notably by José Monleón: 'Su problema es que, salvo excepciones, han hecho un trabajo más artesanal que creador. No entro en el problema de si es ventajoso o no que el director sea creador. Lo que sí es claro es que en nuestro país no han sabido serlo' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 458). Rodríguez Méndez coincides in his appreciation, stating that 'de los directores actualmente en juego, más artesanos que artistas, más modestos albañiles del tablado de la antigua farsa, que genios creadores' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 89). The only exceptions that Monleón notes are Victor García, Argentinean born 'afincado en Paris' (Oliva, 2004: 50), who to Monleón exemplifies the difference between creator directors and the craftsmen that predominated in Spain: 'El espectáculo que monta Victor es suyo, imprevisible a partir del texto; de casi ningún montaje del resto de los directores se puede decir lo mismo. Todos son más o menos previsibles' (Isasi Angulo, 1974: 458-59). Even the directors themselves agree with this differentiation, as a round table with José Luis Alonso, Adolfo Marsillach, Alfredo Mañas, Julio Diamante and Miguel Narros, chaired by David Ladra, explain:

Diamante: Un Gordon Craig diseñaba los textos y los actores. Piscator troceaba, quitaba, metía, cambiaba la época del texto [...] Este fenómeno en España no se ha producido. Quizá era un tanto excesivo y un tanto romántico, pero para la vitalidad del teatro fue de hecho una etapa importantísima que aquí no se ha producido.

Ladra: ¿Hasta qué punto se podría decir generalmente que la labor del director en España no ha sido una labor ideológica, es decir, mediante un texto crear un espectáculo que refleje su visión del mundo, como mera representación de una obra?

Mañas: En ese aspecto es donde también el director puede convertirse en autor. Precisamente por eso es por lo que creo que, es España, un director no es autor todavía. (Alonso, 1991: 168)

In another interview, when asked if Spanish theatre was impersonal, Alonso is even more cutting: 'Contesto con un sí rotundo a esa pregunta. No hemos "creado"

nada. “Personalidad” y “creación” van a la par. Todos los que en este país nos dedicamos al teatro, a lo que aspiramos es a hacerlo “bien”, a que un espectáculo sea lo más perfecto posible, no a que sea “distinto”.’ (Alonso, 1991: 176). This is much the same distinction between creation and craft that Monleón was exploring. Within the confines of local Spanish talent, and sparked by Isasi Angulo’s question, only two directors can be said to stand out from the crowd according to Monleón:

-¿*Dirías lo mismo del de Marat-Sade de Marsillach?*

-Es que me citas al más seguro, sólido y brillante (con José Luis Alonso) de los artesanos españoles. Pero sigo en mis trece; Marsillach inventó muy poco; él había visto los montajes de la obra en el extranjero. Tiene un sentido de la eficacia, sabe cómo funcionará un espectáculo dado a partir de un público dado. (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 459)

The production of *Marat-Sade* that is alluded to here was staged in 1968 at the teatro Español and brought together director Adolfo Marsillach, Francisco Nieva as designer, and two independent theatre companies, Grupo Cátaro and Bululú. Cornago Bernal explains that the production fed on the trends of the theatre of cruelty that had recently entered Spain, and this production marks one of the ‘primeros hitos de esta corriente en un teatro estable’ (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 77). He goes on to describe how previous collaborations between Marsillach and Nieva had yielded spectacular results, and the introduction of Grupo Cátaro to create the lunatics of the asylum and Bululú to populate the chorus only served to emphasise the spectacle.¹² Fundamentally, therefore, the show was conceived as ‘el resultado de un concienzudo trabajo de creación que apuntaba a un modelo diferente de teatro’ (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 77). Perhaps what stands out the most about Nieva’s design, was that it included the audience areas as part of the performance

¹² For full details of the production, see Cornago Bernal, 1999: 77-81.

area: 'los locos se mezclaban con el público en la jaula dispuesta en el patio de butacas y en los laterales [...] todo el espacio de la sala era considerado espacio escénico, quedando así el espectador inmerso en *El Mundo* de la obra' (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 78). The key word in this description is 'inmerso', immersed in the world of the play. On one hand the production helped to establish the reputations of Marsillach and Nieva: 'consolidaban su posición como unos de los primeros renovadores de la escena en España' (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 81). Additionally, the production is important as it provided a taste of a more spectacular and immersive model of theatre at a mainstream popular venue, in this case the Teatro Español.

Indeed, Marsillach, along with José Luis Alonso, are particularly noteworthy, not just as the most skilled craftsmen as Monleón describes them, but as commentators with a body of written work about their own process and Spanish theatre. Certainly, both men share a methodology, although they admit it is imprecise:

No tengo un sistema preciso, y creo que sólo parto de una base segura: para empezar a montar una obra, antes tengo que haberla montado ya totalmente en la cabeza. Es una sorda batalla de la tiniebla hacia la luz. Luego trabajo sobre personajes y sobre escenas aisladas, siempre de dentro afuera, hasta que van conjuntándose y aquello comienza a parecerse a lo que yo tengo almacenado dentro. (Alonso, 1991: 190)

Marsillach's description is remarkably similar:

Para mi la dirección escénica de una obra es, de alguna manera, un problema matemático [...] procuro hacerme una visión completa del drama, algo parecido a "verla" en mi cerebro como una película. En realidad ésta es la etapa más intuitiva de mi trabajo, porque las imágenes aparecen en mí desde la primera lectura. Inmediatamente después intento estudiar lo más profundamente posible la psicología de los personajes, como si me hubiese impuesto la obligación de ser su biógrafo. (Marsillach, 2003: 201)

As the two foremost directors of the mid twentieth century, this methodology could then be considered the basis from which later developments emerge. José Luis Alonso has been more forthcoming on the specifics of his methods, which stem mainly from his work on Stanislavski.¹³ First invoking Lope de Vega, Alonso goes on to express his ideal of returning to what he understands to be the 'essence' of theatre:

[...] se nos ha olvidado que fue Lope de Vega, que es el primer teórico del teatro moderno, quien dijo que "el teatro consiste en dos actores, una manta y una pasión" [...] Se está volviendo a la esencia, que es el actor y el texto, y nada más; y si me apuras, sólo el actor, porque es lo único que no se puede prescindir en un espectáculo. (Alonso, 1991: 189)

These comments, first printed in daily newspaper *El País* in 1982, draw a clear line to Peter Brook's notion of *The Empty Space*, and it is fascinating to note how Lope de Vega was already describing the same idea centuries before. Although Alonso's thoughts on theatre are often extremely relevant to a more alternative study of theatre, we must perhaps not overestimate his contribution in terms of process. Rodríguez Méndez speaks of the 'decoro que puedan tener montajes como los de José Luis Alonso' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 92), but fails to find within them any signs of '*progresividad para el teatro en general*' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 92). For instance, the methods employed in the creation of his debut production at the Centro Dramático Nacional, Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in 1960, are hardly ground-breaking, nor did he ever pretend they were as

¹³ For a detailed appreciation of José Luis Alonso's affection for Stanislavski, Anton Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theatre, see his article entitled 'Testimonios sobre el "Teatro del Arte"', (Alonso, 1991: 157-62).

revealed by his reply to whether he considered himself an avant-garde director: 'Pues yo, no. En realidad, los admiro... pero, no' (Alonso, 1991: 183). Instead, he described his methods as follows, and studying his interviews from the fifties through to the eighties he changed little:

Leer muchas veces la obra, informarse de todo lo que, en torno de ella, podamos conocer, estudiarla y analizarla desde todos los ángulos, leerla ante la compañía y discutir con cada actor y con todos en conjunto las particularidades de cada tipo y de cada situación. Más tarde yo, particularmente, señalo todos los movimientos en los primeros ensayos: porque así los actores estudian y aprenden antes sus papeles al unir la palabra al movimiento. Una vez están marcados los movimientos –una especie de esbozo previo en la pintura-, relleno las líneas y empezamos a matizar cada palabra y cada gesto. Empezamos a dar forma a la obra procurando ensayar cuanto antes con todos los útiles que han de intervenir en la representación, sin esperar al ensayo general, para que los actores se familiaricen mejor con los elementos con los que tienen que actuar. Y más tarde... dejo vivir a cada personaje, interrumpiendo el menor número de veces posible y reservándome todas las advertencias para el final de cada acto. (Alonso, 1991: 164-65)

Ultimately there is nothing special in this account to lift us out of a standard Stanislavskian practice, particularly when we consider that international practice was beginning to tend towards Michael Chekhov and Jacques Lecoq, thus working inversely from body to psychology. Nevertheless, Alonso is a useful model for later directors in Spain because his methods were entirely practice-based. He describes in various autobiographical notes how he sought funding to train abroad, and spent significant time observing and soaking up rehearsals, mostly in France:

Uno empieza siempre como autodidacta. Obtuve una beca para estudiar teatro en París. Gracias a Anouilh, a quien conocía, pude ponerme en contacto con los grandes directores de entonces: Jean Louis Barrault, Jean Villar, Gérard Philipe [...] Y lo que hago es ver ensayos, que es la mejor manera de aprender este oficio. Aprender de los que ya tienen

experiencia y conocen los vericuetos de poner en escena un texto.
(Alonso, 1991: 145)

Like José Luis Gómez after him, who studied theatre in Germany instead of cooking (Brouwer, 2005: 22), Alonso had to struggle against the wishes of his family who hoped he would become either a diplomat or engineer, missing classes at the 'Liceo Francés' (Alonso, 1991: 120) in order to attend theatre rehearsals. Both directors learned their craft abroad, and brought back to Spain what they discovered in foreign rehearsal rooms. In Alonso's case, he was proudest of bringing to Spain the first notions of an ensemble: 'Creo que una de las cosas más importantes de mi gestión [...] al frente del María Guerrero, fue haber conseguido formar una compañía estable y fija. Diez años estuvieron algunos actores. [...] De tanto trabajar juntos se había conseguido la flexibilidad necesaria para pasar de un género a otro sin el menor esfuerzo' (Alonso, 1991: 129). Also, of critical importance, Alonso was one of the first to define a notion of the role of the director, describing himself in 1955 as: 'un anticipo del público. [...] El actor no puede ver el espectáculo si está en escena. Es imposible que asista a él desde el punto de vista del público. Y este punto de vista es el que importa, porque el director es quien ha de resolver las pegas que el público va a poner luego' (Alonso, 1991: 136). As a result, he was often seen as a humble director, as José Andrés Rojo noted in 1988: 'No es el suyo un trabajo que subraye una y otra vez la mano de la dirección, sino que ésta parece permanente en la sombra' (quoted in Alonso, 1991: 143). Ultimately, Alonso is most interesting for his lofty goals, his desire to challenge the predominant theatrical climate: 'En España predomina un teatro de evasión más que de enfrentamiento con las realidades y los problemas' (Alonso,

1991: 185), replacing this sedate theatre with an unfamiliar model for the audiences of the time:

Yo haría del teatro María Guerrero el teatro de la excepción. ¡Cuidado! La palabra excepción no quiere decir vanguardismos absurdos. Nada de alejar al público. Todo lo contrario. Digo excepción en la calidad, la importancia, lo fuera de lo usual de los montajes. Que el público supiera que en el María Guerrero iba a encontrar algo distinto que en otros teatros. Digo distinto, no digo mejor. (Alonso, 1991: 151)

So, Alonso was reacting against a theatre scene which offered homogenised theatrical results. Adolfo Marsillach offers us one possible reason for this lack of distinction in Spain, and he places the blame on a certain school of directing:

La llegada del director fue buena. La llegada del divo director ya no fue tan buena. [...] El divo director, y me incluyo, se ha opuesto al divo actor, algo que en principio estaba bien y era necesario. Pero eso ha ido erosionando poco a poco el trabajo del actor y asustándolo. El actor cada vez tiene más miedo a hacer cosas que al director le puedan parecer mal, del mismo modo que el alumno tiene miedo en clase a exponer unas ideas que puedan ser antagónicas a las que tiene el profesor. Esta idea del intérprete-alumno frente al director-maestro me parece muy peligrosa y ha producido toda una generación de actores que iban a los ensayos a escuchar las indicaciones de una especie de gurú que estaba en posesión de la verdad. Esto nos lleva a que todos los actores se parecen cada vez más entre sí. (Marsillach, 2003: 220)

As Marsillach explained with regards to his 1989 production of *El vergonzoso en palacio*, 'A veces se nos critica a los directores que elijimos los textos para nuestro lucimiento. Es un reproche que no acabo de comprender. Todo en el teatro se hace para que resulte lucido: desde la actuación de los intérpretes a la magia de la escenografía [...] El problema surge cuando el lucimiento general acaba desluciendo al autor' (Marsillach, 2003: 467). As a result, Marsillach always detailed his loyalty to the text: 'primero, estudiábamos lo que había pretendido

decir el autor; después imaginábamos cómo se hubiera escenificado aquel texto en su época y, finalmente, hacíamos una traslación –fiel, a nuestro juicio- de aquella representación al mundo de las imágenes de hoy’ (Marsillach, 2003: 234). Ultimately, Marsillach viewed the director as a facilitator for the company, a figure akin to that described by Brook:

Orson Welles aconseja, en sus memorias, que el director grite mucho desde el primer día de ensayo o de rodaje. No es mi método. Ni tampoco el de Brook, por lo que leo: “Tengo algunas ideas pero no me las tomo en serio. El secreto está en no creer en ellas.” El buen director debería limitarse a conducir a sus actores cuidadosamente. (Marsillach, 2003: 237)

Where Alonso was concerned with the construction of a method based on the introduction of Stanislavskian methods into Spain, Marsillach hit on similar notions but applied his writings towards identifying the character of the director, as opposed to his methods. As a result, most of his comments and writings in the press leaned towards whimsical or opinionated subjects, the most extreme examples being his ‘Cartas locas’ published in the glossy magazine *Interviú* and addressed to such figures as Don Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas (Marsillach, 2003: 639) or ‘A un censor’ (Marsillach, 2003: 515), a fiery 1977 article which ended in the indictment: ‘Y no me salga usted otra vez con eso de que no es –o era- nada más que un funcionario. Porque resulta, ¿sabe usted?, que hay ciertas funciones que por vergüenza uno debe rechazar. A ver si de una vez, coño, se entera usted de eso, señor censor’ (Marsillach, 2003: 517). The articles included in his complete writings on the theatre edited by Juan Antonio Hormigón reflect rather than a method, a state of mind and the disquiet that moved him as a director.

Cornago Bernal assures us that while ‘toda la crítica expresó su admiración por unas formas teatrales que [...] remitían a otros modos escénicos imponiendo un nuevo tipo de relación con el espectador’ (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 80) in relation to Marsillach and Nieva’s work, the same cannot be said for the critical reception of Victor García’s work, which polarised both audiences and critics. Opinion in Spain on his work is divided, but he nevertheless represents an extreme model of the role of the director, and his appearance on the Spanish theatre scene at a time of renewal is crucial. David Ladra, in *Primer Acto*, noted the importance of García’s production of Genet’s *Las criadas* (1969): ‘Reconozcámoslo: *Las criadas* está constituyendo una de las batallas más decisivas para la instauración de un Nuevo Teatro en nuestro país.’ (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 97). Nuria Espert, perhaps the most significant person in bringing García to Spain, is even more hyperbolic in her appreciation: ‘Víctor es uno de los acontecimientos más notables de mi vida. Sí; creo que es un genio.’ (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 430). However, subsequent productions of *Yerma* (1971) and *Divinas palabras* (1975) were less well received: ‘gran parte de la crítica acusó el falseamiento e instrumentalización al servicio de los intereses personales del propio director de unos textos que [...] todavía pesaban demasiado en la tradición cultural para aceptar su integración como punto de partida de un proceso libre de creación escénica’ (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 98). César Oliva describes how the emphasis on approach particularly with *Divinas palabras* had the effect of ‘ahogar el texto y no entender la mayoría de sus fascinantes matices’ (Oliva, 2004: 50). Rodríguez Méndez expresses a similar view, describing the production of *Yerma* as dependant on ‘un juego estético asfixiante y traicionero’ (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 105).

In spite of this, García's methods represent a new way of working in Spain, and are therefore invaluable in the development of Spanish theatre in the twentieth century, as Maria Delgado notes: 'Victor García [...] occupies a unique place in the post-War theatrical pantheon for his genius in interpreting the metaphorical resonance of texts' (Delgado, 2003 a: 8-9). Cornago Bernal places his *Las criadas* alongside Marsillach's *Marat-Sade* in terms of their importance in generating alternative relationships between the performance and the audience: 'el espectador quedaba introducido en el rito como participante a través de su misma presencia en la sala' (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 92). The cornerstone of this achievement was a reliance on the creativity of the actor: 'La capacidad creativa del intérprete, las infinitas posibilidades expresivas del cuerpo del actor, fue uno de los pilares fundamentales del montaje para huir del naturalismo o la interpretación sicologista' (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 92). For Espert, this was completely new and uncharted territory as an actress: 'A nosotras nos lo repetía en todos los ensayos: "Inventen, inventen, no estén vacías, transfórmense en cosas" [...] Primero no sabíamos lo que quería decir. Estamos acostumbradas a inventar en torno a un texto, a inventar lo que el autor ha decidido que inventemos, y aquí se nos pedía por primera vez una participación directa...' (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 92). This represents a rupture from known practice in Spain, and regardless of the results the importance of the methodology is crucial.¹⁴

¹⁴ Since the sixties, there have been a number of prominent theatre directors who have continued to develop the processes of their forerunners. Such figures would include Lluís Pasqual, Mario Gas, José Carlos Plaza, Ángel Facio, Guillermo Heras, Juan Carlos Pérez de la Fuente, Calixto Bieito, Eduardo Vasco or Gerardo Vera. However, many of these are contemporaries of Boadella and Gómez, and while cross-fertilisation of their processes is possible, the focus in this examination will remain on the influences of an established theatrical tradition. Furthermore, the vast majority of these directors, including Boadella and Gómez themselves, were more influenced by international trends, so therefore a detailed study of each individual director's work would be unrevealing in terms of a definition of process.

Perhaps the only remaining trend that requires examination is the emergence of the collaborative independent theatre companies. To put their emergence in context, in 1966 Narros stated: 'formar un equipo entre actores y director y autor. Esto no se ha hecho nunca en España' (Alonso, 1991: 170). As Guillermo Heras notes, a director who began working during the independent theatre movement of the late 1960s and later became artistic director of the Centro Nacional de Nuevas Tendencias Escénicas between 1984 and 1994, 'El teatro es un arte colectivo, una práctica en equipo que necesita de todos y cada uno de sus elementos para mostrar un producto coherente' (Heras, 1994: 234). Els Joglars were in fact one of the first companies to appear in Spain, so their direct influences came from beyond the Spanish borders, as we will go on to see. However, they were not the only company to emerge from the end of the sixties. Perhaps the greatest obstacle is the lack of documentation on the work of any independent company, as Cornago Bernal explains: 'los manuales, dedicados a autores dramáticos y sus obras, no consagran más que un rápido capítulo, en muchos casos a título casi anecdótico – por no decir folclórico- sobre el fenómeno de los grupos independientes y la creación colectiva' (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 14). However, they were clearly notable enough for Marsillach to call on them to animate the physical and choral aspects of his production of *Marat-Sade*. Ultimately, the approach and ideology behind groups such as Tábano, formed in 1968, is important in defining the creative atmosphere of the time. When Amando Isasi Angulo interviewed them in the early seventies, they urged him not to name their names, 'porque así queda más de manifiesto la labor comunitaria' (Isasi Angulo, 1974: 417). They explain in the interview that their process of collaborative writing may mean that their texts are lacking 'un elevado

nivel literario; de lo que sí estamos seguros, como contrapartida, es de que llegan plenamente al público al que nosotros deseamos aproximarnos' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 418). Indeed, their emphasis on the audience is perhaps as important in terms of development within Spain as García's emphasis on unlocking the creativity of the performers. Tábano explain that they constantly rewrite their shows, even well into a run of performances based on audience reactions: 'Hacemos cambios que reflejan el sentir de los espectadores, ya que es a él a quien va dirigido, y por tanto es también él quien deberá dar sentido al material que nosotros le ofrecemos para que el espectáculo progrese y logre su plenitud' (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 419). While later companies such as La Fura dels Baus made headline grabbing productions, spectacular promenade performances of great technical wizardry, the ideology they spring from refers back to these key experiences and productions of the late sixties, but we cannot speak of them as innovators to the same degree within this context. Tim Etchells, artistic director of Forced Entertainment, sums up their work from his perspective: 'I did see one piece by La Fura - some sort of collaboration they did in Germany, not a major piece. It used a lot of the tactics I'd heard about from them - loose audience, violent/macho images, 'confrontation', physical stuff very close to those watching, blood, sweat etc.. I found it very silly' (Etchells, 2004).¹⁵

vii. Positioning Boadella and Gómez

This introduction then, indicates the condition of Spanish theatre that welcomed Albert Boadella with Els Joglars in the early 60s and José Luis Gómez

¹⁵ For an alternative view on la Fura, see Mercè Saumell in 'La Fura dels Baus, 1979-2004' (Mauri & Ollé, 2004).

in the mid 90s with the Teatro de la Abadía (although he returned from his training in Europe to direct in Spain in the early 70s). Both artists entered a scene which featured few playwrights of stature, virtually no directors with more than a mere sense of dramatic efficiency, the tail end of censorship and dictatorship and an audience unaccustomed to anything but the most traditional of theatrical languages, notwithstanding the aforementioned exceptions. The means they employed in order to pave their way as two of the most important practitioners in Spain were very different, but both are crucial and worthy of detailed study due to their sustained and coherent dramatic output. Playwright Luis Matilla is categorical in naming his favourite director:

¿A quién considera el mejor director?

-José Luis Gómez. Trabajó diez años en Alemania (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 309)

It is certainly noteworthy that Gómez's ten-year apprenticeship in Germany is support enough for Matilla's preference. Calixto Bieito, when quizzed on admired directors, immediately states: 'I think that Boadella is a terrific director' (Delgado, 2003 b: 62). Francisco Nieva gives more detail for his predilection for Boadella's work: 'autor con una dramaturgia personalísima y moderna -, director lleno de broma y de rigor profesional' (Nieva, 1996: 370). Elsewhere, Nieva's description of Boadella belies his admiration for his work as director, writer and designer of Els Joglars' shows:

Albert Boadella (n.1943), el talentoso animador del "Els Joglars", concibe sus montajes de signo totalizante - y salvando las distancias - como pudo hacerlo el propio Calderón en sus comedias áulicas de gran espectáculo. Una comedia para un invento escenográfico ya dado, o un

invento escenográfico por experimentar. Su inagotable imaginación escénica es de una sorprendente versatilidad, a veces con grandes medios técnicos a su alcance, pero ejerciendo una muy aguda economía expresiva de base. (Nieva, 2000: 151-52)

Boadella and Gómez are important not just ideologically but also as two of the most important practitioner theorists in Spain, both adapting international trends to suit their idiosyncratic directing styles in order to contribute a new means of creating theatre in Spain, as I will go on to indicate in the main body of the thesis.

The following study is divided into two main sections, the first devoted to Els Joglars and the second to Teatro de la Abadía. Each section is further subdivided into four chapters. The first chapter of the section on Els Joglars will look at the history of the company since its beginnings as a mime company in 1962. I will examine how different influences on the company throughout the years have defined its identity and working methods. The second chapter will look in closer detail at the company's theories and how they have been applied. I will also explore the analytical process Albert Boadella develops before going into rehearsal. The third chapter will use the case study of *En un lugar de Manhattan* (2005) in order to chart the working process of the company in the present day. Finally, I will look at the company's products, in an effort to determine how the working process has resulted in an experiential performance for the audience. Throughout I will endeavour to put the company in a Catalan, Spanish, European and international context, not only to locate their process within existing trends and theories, but to indicate the importance of their methodology on the scale of world theatre.

The second section, on Teatro de la Abadía, follows a similar structure. The first chapter will look at the history of the Teatro de la Abadía, and the career of its director José Luis Gómez, as it must be remembered that the Abadía only represents the latest ten years of his directorial work. Chapter two will look directly at the rehearsal process of the Abadía's production of *El burlador de Sevilla* (2008) under the direction of British director Dan Jemmett. As a venue rather than a collective company, the Abadía's process is necessarily a less established entity, but there are common goals and intentions across the programmed productions. The third chapter will contribute to the discussion on *El burlador de Sevilla* by expanding on the venue's rehearsal ethos by reference to past productions, focusing on Artistic Assistant Carlos Aladro's production of Corneille's *La ilusión* (2007). Finally, I will refer to the Abadía's performances, using the notion of 'Holy Theatre' as a means of understanding the connection they seek to make with their audiences. As with the earlier section on Els Joglars, I will attempt to place Teatro de la Abadía in an international context to better understand the nature of the process they have developed.

While this thesis examines the rehearsal processes of two Spanish companies, by isolating their international influences and explaining the results of their working methodologies, the study should provide a valuable approach to analysing rehearsal and process. As the working process is not often tackled in academic work, this thesis provides a rare opportunity to gain an insight into the rehearsal room (both from the perspective of an observer and a participant) and look at the artistic implications of developmental work. My aim is to gauge the value of process in the assessment of performance and to discover any flaws or

problems in the methodologies. The particular idiosyncrasies of two distinctly individual projects should prove a valuable document even for readers not familiar with their work.

PART I – ELS JOGLARS

Els Joglars - Chapter I – Introduction & History

I.i. Els Joglars: An Introduction to the Company

The following section will lead the reader through the Els Joglars rehearsal process. To facilitate matters, I will be focusing primarily on *En un lugar de Manhattan* (2005) as a central case study, although references to the company's evolution and past shows will be used for support. Focusing on this particular show will provide a detailed study of the relatively overlooked aspect of rehearsal process, when compared to previous studies that have sought to define the ideology of the company or comment only on the finished products. Yet the final result for any stage play only represents a small part of the company's work in progress, and an understanding of Els Joglars' theatre needs to widen its focus to cover the company's theatrical identity.

Indeed, even the most dedicated studies are restricted to the company's recent years, and documentation of their work throughout the 1970s and 1980s can be found only in academic journals (such as *Primer Acto* or the now defunct *El Público* and *Pipirijaina*) or within anthologies of modern theatre (Cabal and Alonso de Santos *Teatro español de los 80* (1985) which features an interview with Boadella amongst other contemporary practitioners). Nevertheless, these inclusions are often either direct interviews with the company or reviews of shows, and very rarely represent an extended critical appreciation of the company. Notable exceptions include issue number 21 of the journal *Pipirijaina Textos* which used the publication of *Olympic Man Movement* in March 1982 to compile a series of articles commenting on Els Joglars' twentieth anniversary by Joan Abellán,

Jerónimo López Mozo and Moisés Pérez Coterillo. Five years later the theatre journal *El Público* published a special volume to celebrate the company's twenty-fifth anniversary (*Els Joglars – Venticinco años y un día*, December 1987), which included articles by company members Glòria Rognoni, Jaume Collell and further commentary by Gonzalo Pérez de Olaguer, Jaume Melendres, Jaime Boix Angelats, Joan Abellán, Iago Pericot, Miguel Bayón, Maryse Badiou and Santiago Fondevila. Significantly, with the disappearance of *El Público* and *Pipirijaina*, Els Joglars' presence in journals dwindled, and even *Primer Acto* stopped regularly featuring their work and presented only three pieces on the company throughout the 90s, two of which were only paragraphs within presentations of current seasons and therefore only mentioned the company in passing. Ultimately Els Joglars seem to have received little consistent critical attention.

Nonetheless, there has been an influx of writing in more recent years with the publication of Albert Boadella's play texts, including two volumes of his complete works, and Milagros Sánchez Arnosi's edition of Els Joglars' trilogy of *Ubú President* (1995), *La increíble historia de Dr. Floit & Mr. Pla* (1997), and *Daaalí* (1999) in the Cátedra Letras Hispánicas edition (2006). This edition observes the Cátedra house style of close academic analysis of the texts, along with a detailed contextualisation of the company and its history, thus mostly ignoring performance and process. The only book currently available entirely dedicated to the company is Enrique Herreras' *Los diez mandamientos de la ley de Els Joglars* (2005), a long overdue critical introduction that attempts to cover all the salient aspects of the company using the firm ideological context of their aims.

Nevertheless, the process of creating Els Joglars' shows still remains largely unstudied in depth in all these efforts.

Indeed, the only published material on rehearsal has been produced by the company itself, who have often sought to define themselves. The first effort we come across to look back at the company's progress was *Mester de Joglaría* (1987), a 25th anniversary coffee table volume that focused mainly on photography but also collected some press excerpts and notes penned by company members. The company also paused for self-reflection on their 40th anniversary with *La guerra de los 40 años* (2001), a co-written work by the entire company that attempted to give a sense of their practical work and ideology under a series of broad headlines. Furthermore, the appendix lists all of their work until 2001. Albert Boadella, artistic director and figurehead of the company, has also written works that reflect on the company, including *El rapto de Talía* (2000) a provocative work of social criticism, and his memoirs: *Memorias de un bufón* (2001) and *Adiós Cataluña* (2009) offering his personal perspective of his life and work. As the only founding member of Els Joglars still working under the company banner, his writings are of crucial importance to understanding his aims for the company and to help define his theatrical style. However, Boadella is not the only member of the company to have written about the group independently. Guillermo Ayesa was associated to the group during the mid to late 1970s¹⁶ and he describes their work and backstage activities in *Joglars, una historia* (1978). Actors Jaume Collell and Ramon Fontserè have also written about their personal involvement in the

¹⁶ He was never a member of the company, rather he describes his association through his then partner, actress Glòria Rognoni.

company's rehearsal process, respectively publishing *El via-crucis de Teledium* (1985) and *Tres pies al gato* (2002), detailing their specific issues within the rehearsal both ideologically and in terms of their own craft as actors. Rosa Díaz and Mont Carvajal also edited a jointly written effort entitled *Joglars 77, del escenario al trullo* (2008) which involved members of the company of the era of *La torna* (1977), Elisa Crehuet, Ferran Rañé, Gabi Renom, Andreu Solsona and Arnau Vilardebò.¹⁷ All these efforts at self-documentation are extremely valuable to this study, since I am fundamentally interested in defining the team's creative process. Of course, as personal accounts they only offer a one-sided perspective, so they cannot be taken at face value either. Therefore, this study aims to be the first dedicated account of Els Joglars' rehearsal process and how their distinct methods of working generate modes of expression that create heightened theatrical environments for their audiences.

The section begins with the company's aims as these are critical to an understanding of the evolution and practical work of the group. After establishing the intellectual basis on which Els Joglars operate, I will proceed to provide a chronological history of the company to give a sense of the major turning points in their work. Then I will begin to look closely at the rehearsal process as a chronological log of the process. Firstly I will define, with reference to international models of devising and improvisation from mime to contemporary devising, how the company have created a practice-based methodology by constantly building on their process, and how this concern helps to clearly demarcate shifts in the style of

¹⁷ It should be noted this work also attempted to vindicate the named company members after they were defeated in court by Albert Boadella in the legal dispute over co-authorship of *La torna*. For more on this, see Part I, Chapter II: {126-127}.

their output. Els Joglars fit into a trend of modern theatre makers who have laid particular stress on rehearsal methodology as a means of generating innovative theatre, including practitioners as internationally renowned as Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook and Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment. All the aforementioned practitioners share a desire to move away from tedious concepts of conventional theatre such as the primacy of text or the rehearsal technique of blocking, although this is still a standard artistic tool applied in the highest theatrical institutions worldwide. I will then look at Boadella's solo work before involving the company of actors and collaborators, in order to generate starting points for improvisation work. This indeed is the next stage of rehearsal, which will be preceded by a contextualisation of the rehearsal room itself, and the notion of rehearsal and theatre as play that shapes so much of their output. After looking at how the company generate material through improvisation, I will move on to the performance itself, looking at how phenomenological approaches illustrate the way in which the company's process sets their performance style apart from mainstream modes of creation.

I.ii. Els Joglars: Company Aims

Albert Boadella, Artistic Director of Els Joglars, has often railed against a 'teatro decorativista de buen rollo' (Boadella, 2005 d), dismissing the mainstream theatre that lacks a disciplined process of artistic inquiry and echoing Peter Brook's famous statement on a 'Deadly Theatre' that poisons the commercial establishment in his seminal 1968 work *The Empty Space* (Brook, 1990: 11). There is truth in saying that the process of rehearsal in contemporary mainstream theatre is far too often reducible to a generic set of steps. Peter Brook is particularly

eloquent on the subject: 'I shudder with horror at the Middle European technique which consists of sitting for weeks around a table to clarify the meanings of a text before allowing oneself to feel it in the body' (Brook, 1993: 74). Across Western theatre, middle-of-the-road directors and companies stick to conventional methods and this partly explains the remarkable similarities that most commercial productions share, with results that frequently appear lacklustre and soulless. Els Joglars reject this in their very conception of theatre making, hence arriving at their current rehearsal process by trial and error, by developing and changing, by not conforming and always pursuing an element of risk.

Any approach to a theatre company's process requires a close study of its aims and focus as it shapes and crystallizes in rehearsal. The creative process is necessarily a highly subjective and personal system of preparation. It is rarely fixed; it depends for its form not only on the material being explored but also on the people involved. The Els Joglars process has been shifting since the group's formation in 1962, but retains a consistency: 'El estilo se mantiene, sobre todo, porque hay una persona que ha hecho todo el recorrido y porque hay unos actores que llevan trabajando mucho tiempo aquí y tienen unas inclinaciones, unas manías, unas fórmulas y una manera de contar cosas comunes' (Joglars, 2001: 132). From their earliest performances, Els Joglars developed a strategy for the rehearsal room based on testing ideas as they emerge and on challenging existing performance theories. Instead of predefining their approach to rehearsal the company prefer to get up onto their feet to explore their ideas and then define their ensuing method. Xavier Boada, a performer and member of the company since 1995, describes the process as always trying ideas physically, 'Siempre se habla lo

mínimo, se prueban las cosas siempre. En todo caso hablamos después' (Boada, 2005); he explains how their aim is to avoid discussion in favour of practical exercises, which will guide them towards an agreed form of expression. When asked about the subject of practitioners' theories for rehearsal and performance, Boadella's mildly puzzled expression seemed ample proof that such things were not of direct interest to him; he merely pointed out that there is a prevalence of Stanislavskian methodology in Spain's theatrical industry, and that once theatre 'deja de ser noventa por ciento texto, los críticos etc... no saben analizarlo' (Boadella, 2005 d). It seems that Boadella does not define his work according to existing theories but rather adapts and mixes the methodologies that have influenced him in order to suit the purposes of the group and crucially the specific production in development. So, for instance, Els Joglars can no longer be described as a mime act in the way Tricycle¹⁸ can and yet the theories of the genre are firmly rooted in their ethos. Their efforts to redefine rehearsal as a personal functional system makes their example valuable to any theatre practitioner precisely because it enquires into the tricky subject of modelling a connection with an audience in a rehearsal room.

However, in constructing such a particular way of working, the risk of being misunderstood is ever-present. Boadella has always been scathing of the critics' capacity to analyse Els Joglars' theatre, concluding in *La guerra de los 40 años*

¹⁸ El Tricycle are a three man mime troupe formed by Joan Gràcia, Carles Sans & Paco Mir, active since 1982s *Manicomio*. Their first show was formed of a series of sketches all using the expressive potential of the body for comic effect, many of the sketches also using masks. Whilst the company have developed their work and now construct more cohesive dramaturgies for their pieces, such as the air travel focused *Exit* (1984) or more recently the history of the chair in *Sit* (2004), they retain a sketch structure and still rely on their bodies and some onomatopoeic sound to drive their shows, eschewing word and text entirely. For an introduction to the company, see Saumell, in George & London, 1996: 123-24

that 'de la crítica no hemos aprendido nada' (Joglars, 2001: 102). Never a man to mince his words, he has even described the vast majority of critics as 'ignorantes, analfabetos' (Boadella, 2005 d). As a result he has often sought to define the company himself, and has performed that task so comprehensively that much academic criticism written nowadays reads as a list of Boadella's key axioms. It is necessary, however, to repeat these self-imposed goals precisely because they define the aims of the rehearsal process. Els Joglars always depart from a set of broad concepts of approach, as identified in Enrique Herreras' recently published *Los diez mandamientos de la ley de Els Joglars* (2005) which uses a structure provided by Boadella on the occasion of a commemorative speech for the company's fortieth anniversary (XIII Encontre de Teatre a l'Estiu de Alzira, Valencia, July 2001).

The lecture was structured around ten key points to understanding Els Joglars, which Boadella jocularly referred to as their ten commandments. These were: 'Individualista', 'Agropecuário', 'Escéptico', 'Provocador', 'Vengativo', 'Llevar la contraria', 'Despreciar la fantasía', 'Practicar el mal gusto', 'Fomentar los enemigos' and 'Huir del teatro'. Perhaps some of these headings can be combined into more encompassing group headings, since they are occasionally different sides of the same coin: 'Sceptical', 'Provocative', 'Vengeful' and 'Encourage enemies' all refer to the company's particular satirical take on the realities of the contemporary world. To an extent these also refer to the group's activities outside the rehearsal room. These, of course, have an impact on the company but perhaps not directly. For instance, the company have developed a form of 'revenge' satire,

and the recurrent figure of Jordi Pujol¹⁹ in their *Ubú* plays indicates how they have used theatre to exact vengeance on their enemies whilst making broader political points. However, their use of revenge as a tool stretches well beyond the rehearsal room: the company tell of clogging up a road-surfacing team's machinery after getting their cars covered in tar in spite of the worker's assurance that it was safe to drive on the new surface (Ferrández: 2005). This gives a very clear impression of the activism of the company: the desire to act rather than theorise, a desire that applies as much to their social commentary as to their rehearsal process. In describing their voice as a company in the preceding terms, they are also indicating the conceptual goals of their rehearsal process, a process that must be necessarily geared towards achieving those very results.

We must first of all understand the nature of Els Joglars' social commentary and how it conditions and focuses the rehearsal process. When commenting on their process, the company describe their difficulties in starting and ending stories but stress they are always clear on what the production ought to be about: 'saber lo que se quiere decir [...] Nosotros procuramos saberlo. Y sabiéndolo, sólo hay que poner las condiciones para que los actores den lo que llevan dentro' (Joglars, 2001: 92). One of the major dramaturgical decisions the company have consistently made over the years is to respond to the political realities of the day and this urge to comment has a direct effect on the theatre-making process. During an interview conducted with Boadella in 2005 he expressed his disdain with regards to Barcelona's theatre listings, stating that he thought it was 'una

¹⁹ Jordi Pujol i Soley was President of the Generalitat de Catalunya between 1980 and 2003. A prominent politician, he was President of Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya 1974-2002 and a founding president of Convèrgència i Unió. In 2003 he retired from active politics.

programación digna de los últimos años del Franquismo' (Boadella, 2005 d), implying that it was as meek and unquestioning as under the repressive censoring mechanisms of the Franco dictatorship. Theatre for Boadella needs to be transgressive. Therefore, Els Joglars' theatrical forms have always transgressed the accommodating shape of traditional performance in Spain, and their shows have a distinct flavour not seen anywhere else on the Spanish stage. Joan Abellán has described the Els Joglars performance structure as 'la concatenació d'escenes o d'esquetxos independents' (Abellán, 2002: 20), a sequence of scenes where traditional act structures do not apply. This rupturing of tradition is very much a hallmark of the Els Joglars style, bringing us to the company's desire to consistently challenge the audience's preconceptions: 'Tenemos muy en cuenta la predisposición del público para rompérsela a cada minuto, para tratar de lograr que este público con Joglars al menos, no tenga ninguna predisposición en mente a la hora de ir al teatro...' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 117). The preconceptions of a theatre audience relate both to the theatre itself and by extension to the world that the play is observing. Therefore, Els Joglars bend theatrical rules to their advantage in order to shake up an audience they regard as potentially too placid: 'La gente va al teatro como cumpliendo un anacronismo, un deber melancólico' (Joglars, 2001: 132). This is a conscious decision which is taken during the rehearsal process and conditions the work that will emerge.

However, the desire to transgress in form and content does not come at the expense of losing the audience, because perhaps on an equal footing with Boadella's desire to provoke is his desire to be entertaining: 'Porque para nosotros el teatro tiene una misión higiénico-benefactora. Y en esa misión el humor cuenta

mucho' (Joglars, 2001: 34). If Els Joglars are aiming to make direct political comments to stimulate their audiences into action, then they believe the message must arrive as undiluted and clearly as possible: 'tiene que llegar al máximo público posible [...] no se puede echar la culpa al público de que no te entienda' (Joglars, 2001: 97). The company conclude the chapter on the audience in *La guerra de los 40 años* by saying: 'A pesar de todo, no creemos que el público esté formado por ignorantes de los que nos tengamos que reír. Bien al contrario: lo queremos' (Joglars, 2001: 99), a stance that is remarkably similar to that of Bertolt Brecht: 'A theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense' (Brecht, 2001: 7); 'The one tribute we can pay the audience is to treat it as thoroughly intelligent. It is utterly wrong to treat people as simpletons when they are grown up at seventeen. I appeal to the reason' (Brecht, 2001: 14). We have only to look at Boadella's reaction to the critical acclaim received by *Mary d'Ous* (1972), a show he all but disowned feeling it was too avant-garde in its conception, as Óscar Cornago Bernal describes: 'el espectáculo había significado una concesión a la crítica, a los movimientos de vanguardia, al estudio teatral de laboratorio y la renuncia a una línea de teatro popular que... el colectivo no volverá a abandonar' (Cornago Bernal, 1999: 266). However, it is too limiting to view Els Joglars as purely popular, as Boadella comments: 'A veces nos tiran la palabra "popular" como quien escupe... No hemos hecho demasiado teatro popular. Al contrario, hemos tenido la habilidad de convertir en populares una serie de obras que no lo eran' (Joglars, 2001: 98). The key to enjoying an Els Joglars production, however, is to engage with it on the company's terms, not in terms of what commercial theatre would regard as entertaining. Therefore, whilst it is true that entertainment has always been at the core of Els Joglars' theatre, it is never in detriment of

communicating their standpoint. Both the debate itself and how the debate is communicated are two clear and interwoven goals to be attained throughout rehearsals, a dramaturgical process balancing clarity with content. However, there is an almost unavoidable conflict between the two strands when the company's work is not necessarily artistically satisfying nor entirely entertaining because on occasions both notions tend to cancel each other out, as we shall see.

At the heart of the creative process of theatre lies the performer, who attempts to find strategies to communicate the concerns of the group through the trial and error of rehearsal. Perhaps Boadella's most oft-stated axiom regards the primacy of the actor: 'el teatro es el Arte del actor. Ni del director ni del dramaturgo. Del actor. El teatro se convierte en Arte sobre el escenario. Con el actor. Lo único que hace el dramaturgo es organizar el festival para que el actor esté en buena disposición de transmitir aquello que es Arte' (Joglars, 2001: 130). Slightly cynically, Arcadi Espada footnotes this manifesto with the following qualification: 'un tipo que lo conoce bien dice que gracias a la proclamación repetida de este principio hace lo que quiere con los actores' (Joglars, 2001: 88). In terms of the internal politics of the company this may well be true, but without a doubt Els Joglars' theatre always uses the performer as the most communicative element of the performance – even in shows like *Daaalí* (1999) where they are potentially competing for attention with a projection screen, the focus remains on the actors and their interaction with the same screen. In one sequence, Fontserè memorably echoes Chaplin's barber scene (from *The Great Dictator* [1940]) to the strains of Brahms' Hungarian Dance No. 5, whilst additionally 'painting' *El atavismo del crepúsculo* (1933-34) which is gradually revealed on the digital screen: rather

than merely distracting the audience's eye, the screen is thus at the service of the actor. Boadella states that from the earliest stages of conception of any show, he lays out a synopsis according to the actors who are available: 'trabajo en función de los actores que tengo y de sus posibilidades' (Boadella, 2005 d). He goes on to add that 'todo está hecho en función del actor, y el relieve que tiene que tomar el actor. Que nadie imprima su firma. Nadie puede ser más divo que el actor'. Every single element of the performance is thereby present exclusively to empower the actor. As Boadella rightly indicates, theatre only occurs with the actor in front of the audience, but his focus on the actor belies just as much interest in the process of working with actors as the final product.

Surveying Els Joglars' aims defines the ideological basis from which the rehearsal process departs. The company's response to these concepts has been refined over the past forty five years, and it is necessary to identify the strategies they have deployed and how these have changed and evolved. Therefore we must chart the company's process to see how the resultant shows have defined a very personal theatrical language.

I.iii. History and evolution of Els Joglars

I.iii.a. 1962-1968 - Towards Mime

Els Joglars were first formed in 1962 by Antoni Font, Carlota Soldevila and Albert Boadella. From then until 1967 the company would enjoy some success as a mime troupe, presenting *Mimodrames* (1962), *L'art del mim* (1963), *Deixebles del silenci* (1965), *Pantomimes del music hall* (1965), *Mimetismes* (1966) and *Calidoscopi*

(1967). These pieces could be described as classic mime, with the company using their name as a reference-point: Els Joglars, translating roughly as the jesters, the minstrels, the buffoons or the jongleurs. There appears to have been a conscious decision to revert to a primary source of theatre-making based on body-language and instinctual performance, where the aim is to amuse an audience through expressive movement. The company's early work relied on the resources of mime, and in an interview with Boadella by CAYUS in *Diari Olot-Misió*n, November 1965, when Els Joglars were still perceived primarily as a mime troupe, the interviewer asks for his definition of the genre: 'Un arte escénico que intenta comunicarnos aquellos hechos, que la más vulgar palabra no puede proporcionarnos, la agonía, el sufrimiento, la muerte [...]' (Joglars, 1965 a). This is highly reminiscent of later Els Joglars thought, as exemplified twenty years on in an interview with Fermín Cabal, when the image of the mime company had long since been exorcised: 'La palabra la empleamos solamente donde no llegamos con el gesto' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 113). The notion that words are only employed where gestures cannot communicate with the audience has clearly been drawn from mime, and yet the company are no longer mime artists. The 1965 interview also enquires into Boadella's opinions of two giants of mime, Etienne Decroux and Marcel Marceau: '[Marceau] ama la taquilla [...] capaz de aguantar en París un programa de dos horas durante dos años, él es un mimo excepcional [...] Por el contrario Decroux posee un gran estilo, es menos comercialista, crea escuela [...]' (Joglars, 1965 a). By not aligning himself with either one Boadella seems to be already picking and choosing the elements that most interest him in developing his own theatrical identity. In this case Boadella evolves his notion of the primacy of

entertainment in theatre from Marceau and the sense of discipline and process from the more exacting Decroux.

From the outset, Els Joglars set themselves the task of producing comic theatre, popular entertainment that satirised and commented on a world that the vast majority of their audience could recognise. To achieve this, the company uses corporal expression to connect at a primary level and this choice conditions their creative process. In the aforementioned interview, the interviewer speaks of the success of the tour of *Deixebles del silenci*: 'El público enormemente satisfecho, aplaudió calurosamente su magna actuación. Nos cercioramos una vez más de que la pantomima es alegre, espectacular y lo más importante, popular' (Joglars, 1965 a). Els Joglars' very first show, *Mimodrames*, which opened in the Palau de les Nacions in Montjuïc, saw the actors portraying a selection of 1920s cinema types through mime. On the raised platform, designed to make them look like a projection on the back-screen, they portrayed archetypal scenes involving the seductress, the heroine or the hero, accompanied by a silent-movie style piano score. The show could only have been little more than a sketch with its half-hour length, but the seeds of physical expressivity and popular connection, two fundamental notions to Els Joglars, and which can still be recognised over forty years later, were sown. *En un lugar de Manhattan* (2005) still shows that fascination for humorous vignettes here drawn from *Don Quijote*, and from popularly recognisable types from the world of arts, in this case an overly pretentious Argentinean director seeking to realise a radical staging of *Don Quijote*. The same irreverent take on the world has been in place from the outset, with satire functioning as their theatrical backbone.

I.iii.b. 1968-1977 – Towards Devising

Els Joglars' early years saw them take part in festivals, both in Spain (Primer salón de la Imagen de Barcelona in 1963, III Ciclo de Teatro Medieval in 1965) and abroad (International Theatre Festival, Zurich, in 1967). The company were even able to secure some television exposure in 1965 with a televised version of *Deixibles del silenci*. However, the turning point for the company was the Zurich Festival, with well-received performances amongst the best mime companies in Europe, highlighting both the limitations and possibilities of the genre. The rupture with Font and Soldevila arrived in 1968, when Boadella sought to professionalize the company. The retrospective work *La guerra de los 40 años* describes this 'primera escisión' as 'amigable... Boadella quería pasar al profesionalismo y ni Carlota ni Antoni le siguieron' (Joglars, 2001: 80), albeit a view expressed by Boadella himself and which of course only records his perspective. Notwithstanding personal divisions, it would become increasingly clear through the following shows that Boadella was interested in pushing the boundaries of mime, not in perpetuating it as a life-long performative style. An indication of his ambition emerged in 1965 when the company produced a sonic-mime for Radio Barcelona, as reported in a February edition of *Diario de Barcelona*. The piece consisted of a soundscape created by the performers in which an operation took place:

[...] el radioyente pudo seguir y comprender el desarrollo de una escena, de una escena muda ante la radio [...] Pero la labor 'operatoria' de un supuesto cirujano, pudo ser comprendida también gracias a los sonidos -perfectos, exactos, identificables- de otro actor del grupo; sonidos que indicaban los momentos en que el 'cirujano' abría al paciente, extraía el apéndice, enhebraba la aguja, cosía... Asistimos a una 'operación' sin verla ni oirla. (Joglars, 1965 b)

This performance can hardly be described as purist mime, although the principles of understanding through sensorial expression and perception are still there. Aside from artistic ambitions, Boadella has always taken a role of responsibility. As early as 1965, in an interview for *Diari Olot-Misió*n, Boadella was perceived as the ‘alma del grupo y al que le podemos atribuir su creaci3n’ (Joglars, 1965 a). After the departure of Soldevila and Font, Boadella accepted the remaining company members’ decision to appoint him as the artistic director as, somewhat satirically: ‘generoso e inteligente’ (Joglars, 2009 b), proceeding to dissolve the existing group and select the performers he wished to remain as part of the team. The new Joglars’ first effort was *El diari* (1968), where the cast adapted a daily newspaper for the stage. The break from previous works was constituted by a new overarching concept to tie the sketches together, as well as the incorporation of object, set and words to mime. *El joc* (1970) was even more extreme, incorporating onomatopoeic shouts and words as a gesture-based language. Both shows exhibited a new seriousness of purpose, as physical expression was used to comment on the human condition and political repression. The opening sequence of *El joc*, for instance, featured the performers going through a series of gestures and discovering a lack of differentiated identity and freedom: they try to run away from each other, but all run away at once. As the company’s own synopsis describes: ‘viendo la imposibilidad de ser libres en sus decisiones, intentan matarse el uno al otro, pero dándose cuenta de que las fuerzas son iguales optan por conformarse y aceptar su encadenamiento humano’ (Joglars, 1970 a). At a time of political repression, with Spain under the rule of a dictatorship and individual freedom

severely curtailed, it is hard not to see such comic sequences as bearing a more sinister subtext: to highlight passivity against injustice.

In terms of rehearsals, the move away from mime signalled the greater relevance of a dramaturgical process. *El diari* had a distinct situation and context; *El joc* had recurrent characters and a sketched out plot based around the rolling of dice to generate different sub-plots. This is certainly a development from merely sending up the figures of 1920s cinema and, as such, required a different approach to rehearsal. From 1968 and leading up to *Cruel Ubris* (1971), the company began to define their collective rehearsal process, a development sign-posted by a 1971 article speaking of the principle of their rehearsal methodology:

Nuestro método es no tener método. Cada espectáculo ha creado, por sí mismo, sus propias necesidades. De hecho, antes de empezarlo ignoramos totalmente cuáles serán los resultados, cómo y cuándo acabará... Nos ponemos a trabajar sin casi ideas previas y con nuestras limitaciones, que son, en definitiva, las que garantizan que la obra creada sea a nuestra medida. (Joglars, 1971)

It is crucial to point out that this 1971 article emerged after *El joc* had been finished, formalising a process that they had already discovered spontaneously in 1970. Certainly, for the company today, *El joc* represents a turning point in terms of methodology, as they state in their autobiographical work, *La guerra de los 40 años*. Notoriously, on the first day of rehearsals for *El joc*, Boadella arrived with no specific ideas over how to initiate the creative process:

La creación del espectáculo fue de lo más innovador: entramos en el local de la calle Aribau el primer día de ensayo sin ninguna idea, sin nada pensado. Pero nada de nada. Podría decirse que fue nuestro

mayor acto de inconsciencia. Boadella [...] saludó a los actores, que ya le esperaban y sobre todo esperaban instrucciones; echó un vistazo a la sala y vió que en una estantería había un ejemplar del diccionario Pompeu Fabra, durante muchos años el diccionario normativo de la lengua catalana. Con la naturalidad del que cumple un movimiento largo tiempo previsto, se acercó a cogerlo, se sentó con él en la mano y empezó a pronunciar palabras, por la letra A, pidiéndoles a los actores que representaran lo que cada palabra les sugería desde el punto de vista físico y vocal [...] Boadella intervenía, manipulando la acción, engancho a unos y desengancho a otros, creando un juego que iba evolucionando como en un concierto de jazz [...] Cuando el juego daba todo lo que podía, Boadella grababa mentalmente la escena [...] tomaba apuntes, hacía incluso dibujos y pasaba a otra palabra. Al día siguiente, se volvía a trabajar sobre lo más interesante del día anterior. A partir de ahí Boadella empezaba a actuar como dramaturgo, dirigiendo a los actores con órdenes precisas... (Joglars, 2001: 150-51)

The seeds of adopting a more devised approach to creating theatre can be gauged from this extract. We sense their move towards a process of creative inspiration that grows out of spontaneity that distances itself from conventional methodologies departing from written texts. Once again, this description of method could still be applied in principle to the current team's process. However, the most important clarification of all is that this devised spontaneous occurrence is now a formal process; what occurred to Boadella that morning, as a possible starting point for a new show, is now the routine approach to the rehearsal process. Subsequent shows demonstrated a similar desire to remain open and incorporate disparate elements to the whole when and as they emerge. Likewise, *Cruel Ubris* (1971) originates from Greek tragedy; whilst this Greek influence acted as an anchor, the ten 'numbers' (as the company describe them), were all performed in different styles: 'pantomima melodramática, pantomima trágica, naturalista, absurda, parodia, pantomima clásica, etc' (Joglars, 1971). Els Joglars appear to take an external idea as a suggestive conceptual starting point (like the dictionary of *El joc*) and explore its potential through physical modes of communication. Their

following show, *Mary d'Ous* (1972), takes another non-theatrical starting point with music; the show was constructed as if it were a symphony with a score made of words and language, dictating the pace of the actors' movements. *Àlias Serrallonga* (1974) used the story of the eponymous infamous highwayman and divided the acting space into distinct areas, each with a distinct performance style. Elsewhere, Boadella explains how the company's rehearsal process altered to take in *commedia dell'arte* in preparation for *La torna* (1977). In each instance a new element is brought in to further develop the essential physical expressivity that is at the core of the company's methodology. As Boadella points out using the voice of his fictional English academic Arnold Goodfry:²⁰

Si observamos, por un momento, la trayectoria del grupo desde sus inicios, podremos ver como los años pasados dentro de la expresión puramente mímica han sido los cimientos sobre los que se apoyará todo el trabajo posterior y aunque últimamente estén ya considerablemente alejados de la convención del mimo, sus espectáculos continúan siendo ante todo visuales y, por tanto, comprensibles a todos niveles de público. (Joglars: 1972)

Once we accept the basis of the company's ethos, it is a question of discerning the particular influences that shape each individual show. Whatever the specifics of the show, we can be assured of its desire to be understood first and foremost through the primacy of physical movement and creative autonomy.

As the company's method and ethos was gradually arriving at a firm definition between 1970 and 1977, the team itself was in a state of flux. Referring back to

²⁰ At the outset, the company felt so confronted with a misunderstanding and outright hostile critical establishment, that they ingeniously invented an internationally renowned theatre expert, Arnold Goodfry: 'El docto intelectual escribía presentaciones en los programas de mano de la compañía... Algunas críticas de la época se hicieron eco del famoso estudioso de la escena' (Boadella, 2001: 207).

1974, Boadella describes the production of *Àlias Serrallonga* as cursed: ‘Por aquí debe ir la maldición. Boadella está convencido de haber tocado algo extraño’ (Joglars, 1987 b). The space, designed by the celebrated Catalan scenographer Fabià Puigserver, had been divided up, starting with a deliberately and ornately traditional proscenium space where the upper echelons of the sixteenth century performed. Meanwhile, two further spaces amongst the stalls had been separated for the actors, one an open platform, the other a tall metal structure, which acted as the centre of operations for the rogues and have-nots of the world of the play. Whilst this design was highly praised, the company paid a high price for it. Actress Marta Català fell from the structure before opening night, breaking an ankle. Another performer, Víctor Martínez, who is executed in the story, had the bad luck of being genuinely shot in a mix up with blank and live ammunition, fortunately his wounds were not fatal. More tragically, Glòria Rognoni also fell from the metal structure, irreparably damaging her spinal column and leaving her partially paralysed for life. Furthermore, during the process, actors Gabriel Renom and Ferran Rañé, suffered serious road accidents. Boadella’s brother was not as lucky, dying in a car crash soon after, coincidentally and sinisterly, leaving the restaurant ‘Joan de Serrallonga’.²¹ It is perhaps no surprise to learn that the company spoke of a curse. Aside from fanciful curses and omens, the fact remains that the rehearsal process involved a great deal of physical risk, which proves the demanding nature of their chosen modes of expression. The idea of risk is central to the company, as they are prepared to take risks both physically and ideologically in an effort to push at the realms of what is possible.

²¹ The production of *Àlias Serrallonga* dealt with the life of the bandit who lived and operated in the mountainous region of Catalunya where Els Joglars now rehearse.

Compounding the upheaval of the previous years their next show *La torna* brought even greater problems. The show opened at Reus' Bartrina theatre on the 7th of September 1977, and after only 40 productions it was banned by the armed forces, despite having already been licensed by the censors. It is worth noting that Franco, who had ruled over Spain for thirty-six years, had died in 1975 and at the time of *La torna* Spain was undergoing a political transition to democracy. Nevertheless, the company were arrested, submitted to a court martial and condemned to prison sentences. The entire Spanish theatre profession rallied round the stricken company, calling for freedom of speech. Even a cursory summing up of these facts underlines that the piece became, for better or for worse, a cultural icon, as Enrique Herreras has it, 'un símbolo de dicha transición' (Herreras, 2005: 71). Moreover, the nationwide debate sparked by the events surrounding *La torna* effectively ended censorship in Spain. Boadella's arrest generated international attention and mobilised the theatre profession in Spain into drawing up the *Manifiesto por la libertad de expresión* in 1978.²² Meanwhile, Boadella perpetuated the legend of the story by faking an illness and escaping from the military hospital from a fifth floor window, sneaking back in through another window, disguising himself as a doctor and simply walking out of the hospital, eventually fleeing to France. All this would have been enough to cause the company to disband, but Boadella had already told the actors that he would not be working with them again, well before they had run into any trouble with the army.

²² A summarised version of this manifesto is available on the Els Joglars website (Joglars, 1978)

Els Joglars' approach to the creative process yet again proves their uncompromising stance, refusing to be afraid of touching on potentially dangerous material: once they had realised the subject their improvisations were guiding them towards, they even held an emergency meeting to offer anyone the chance to leave the process: 'paró el ensayo para preguntar a todos si eran conscientes del riesgo que entrañaba lo que estaban montando' (Boadella, 2001: 261), but no one left. The stark narrative of *La torna* was inspired by the real events of the Heinz Chez case: the supposed Polish citizen (who was later discovered to be East German) shot a civil guard (a paramilitary local police force) at a camp site and was later arrested and sentenced to death. This event would not have gone beyond the crime columns had it not been because the army chose to execute him on the same date as Salvador Puig Antich, a Catalan anarchist and political prisoner accused of killing a policeman. Later investigations, including Raúl Riebenbauer's detailed study,²³ revealed the extent of the cover-up: it appears that Chez was chosen as an opportune distraction for the political cleansing taking place, as apparently the decision to execute Antich had practically been taken by a military command eager to see him out of the way. The idea was to execute two apparent criminals together, to imply that the unknown murderer Chez and Antich were on the same level of delinquency. Furthermore, according to Riebenbauer, the military command knew full well that Chez was German and a family man, but the portrait of a solitary Polish vagabond was preferred so that fledgling diplomatic links with East Germany would not be jeopardized. *La torna* followed the arrest and trial of Heinz Chez, focusing on plain-spoken civil guards, bystanders and local workers, without even a mention of Puig Antich. The word *La torna* itself means the

²³ For more information on this case, see: Riebenbauer, 2005.

act of rounding up to the nearest digit, an unsettlingly offhand parallel to the summary decisions that were made at the time of both executions. At this stage it is essential to talk of another turning point, since by the next show under the banner of Els Joglars, *M-7 Catalunya* (1978) only Boadella remained of the team who created *La torna*. It is worth noting all of these accidents, entries and dismissals from the company because we can begin to trace the current conception of the company in its new incarnation from 1978 onwards. Nevertheless, a stable line-up of personnel would not assert itself for a few years.

Aside from the changes in the line-up of the company, the period immediately previous to *M-7 Catalunya* is notable for the practicalities of rehearsal that were established. As Joan Abellán states, ‘pot afirmar-se que els ha preocupat més on fabricar el seu teatre que no pas on representar-lo’ (Abellán, 2002: 35). This concern with the creative process leads to two of the greatest stumbling blocks for any company to overcome: ‘espai i temps’ (Abellán, 2002: 35). First of all, the company had arrived at the decision that the rehearsal process should be much longer than any afforded or contemplated by mainstream theatres, often rehearsing upwards of six months. As their press officer Cristina Ferrández explains today when speaking of the extensive rehearsal periods: ‘ahora lo hacen porque pueden, y cuando no podían también lo hacían’ (Ferrández: 2005). The company managed to afford such luxuries through a series of loans and by establishing the Centre d’Estudis d’Expressió (Abellán, 2002: 36), a teaching centre devoted to their techniques and a stable and reliable source of income. This combined rehearsal space and teaching centre was based in Calle Aribau (Pl. Universitat area) in Barcelona, on the mezzanine of a warehouse space, described

as low-ceilinged: 'no gaire alt de sostre' (Abellán, 2002: 35). Clearly the gestation of a show is of paramount importance to the company, who went to great lengths to secure the stability necessary to proceed on their terms.

Apart from the duration of the process, the location of rehearsal has always been important to the company. Els Joglars rehearsed *Mary d'Ous* between June and December of 1975, but instead of working in the city of Barcelona, they packed their bags and went to live in the mountains near Pruit (a small village a couple of hours North of Barcelona) for the first time. There were many reasons for doing so at the time: 'El mercado teatral español nos obliga a hacer un montaje en dos meses. Nosotros necesitábamos mucho más tiempo' (Joglars, 2001: 70). Moving to the mountains gave them the six months rehearsal period they needed, a time frame they have used ever since. Furthermore, the company describe the city as an interfering obstacle, and that more tranquillity was necessary to give the creative process some much needed space. Joan Abellán supports this, suggesting that the pace of the city did not suit Boadella: 'va començar a trobar el gust a uns paratges en plena natura i a una vida de masia més a prop del ritme rural que de l'urbà' (Abellán, 2002: 36). However, the therapeutic distance from the noise and politics of the city also had the effect of allowing them to observe and comment on the realities of the day with a greater degree of detachment, less prone to getting caught up in anger and more able to coolly satirise. In the case of *Àlias Serrallonga*, the location was particularly important because they were living in the very hills that their subject had roamed: 'els arbres, els camins i una part de les masies eren els mateixos de quan ell era viu, però fins i tot els habitants de l'entorn no havien canviat d'aspecte ni de costums, perquè el món rural seguia

vivint com uns segles abans' (Abellán, 2002: 36). Using the land as a direct source of inspiration is still very much the company's ethos; for instance, Boadella explains that the Quixotic Don Alonso of *En un lugar de Manhattan* is based on a local villager who lived near their rehearsal space (Boadella, 2005 d).

From 1975 Boadella had initiated the process of living and working in a space that was able to avoid the distractions of negotiating rehearsals in the city, renting a house in the mountain village of Guilleres, generating a renewed company spirit with the knowledge and intimacy that cohabitation brings. Numerous photographs attest to the company's outdoor rehearsals on both the stage-structures that dominated *Mary d'Ous* (the cubic structure) and *Àlias Serrallonga* (the scaffolding).²⁴ But by far the most significant development was the building of the 'Cúpula' in 1976, the rehearsal dome that has been in constant use ever since, effectively separating the work and habitation spaces and emphasising a distinct disciplined work ethic against a place for relaxation. Joan Abellán underlines that 'Aquest dos fets van ser decisius per a la consolidació del mètode de treball experimentat durant els anys precedents' (Abellán, 2002: 36). Boadella had this unique space in mind as an ideal rehearsal space years earlier:

[La cúpula es] de veinte metros de diámetro. La linterna de poliéster traslúcido que remataba la cúpula y las numerosas ventanas que la rodeaban, inundaban su interior de una cálida luz natural. Otra pequeña cúpula, adosada lateralmente, albergaba los lavabos, duchas y vestuario. El suelo, recubierto de parqué, el grosor del aislante interior y

²⁴ *Memorias de un Bufón*, Boadella's autobiography, contains a section of unpaginated photographs between pages 160-61 of the text. These include photos of 'Los ensayos de *Mary d'Ous* delante de la Casa Nova' and 'Con Jaume Sorribas montando la escenografía de *Àlias Serrallonga* en un prado delante de la Casa Nova' (Boadella, 2001: 160-61).

la calefacción creaban un ambiente de trabajo agradable a pesar de las inclemencias externas. (Abellán, 2002: 36)

Abellán goes on to analyse this space at some length, underscoring how the design responds to Boadella's oft-stated maxim regarding the primacy of the actor in theatre: 'L'espai produeix un gran interrogant i alhora una maravillosa confluència de múltiples possibilitats espacials d'interacció. Es tracta d'un espai sense acotacions d'entrada que determinin el lloc d'*El joc* escènic ni la perspectiva visual de qui l'ha de conduir amb l'ànima doble de taumaturg i espectador' (Abellán, 2002: 38). In much the same way that Boadella stresses how the company's theatre seeks to redefine its audience's expectations at every turn, so too he encourages an elimination of expectations and preconceptions in his actors. Thus, the rehearsal space is thoroughly unlike the performance space where the show will eventually take place, and it does not have fixed entry or exit points. Likewise, in a round space there is nowhere to hide, and there is no definition as to where the space of performance may begin or end. Meanwhile, the actors are free of conventions regarding the direction towards which their improvisations ought to be played, they are also the sole and inescapable source of attention, thereby focusing them on the work in hand. The company rehearsal process is clearly aided by the philosophy embodied by their dome.

Much later, in 1983, the company were able to purchase a house and parcel of land in El Llorà, originally a holiday retreat belonging to the Tecla Sala family, a bourgeois Barcelona family fallen on hard times. The financial stability of owning their rehearsal space and a temporary residence has further allowed them to allot the half-year rehearsal periods that are a necessity to them but an impossible

luxury for most other theatre practitioners. This spirit of conviviality has since been at the heart of the company's ethos, enabling them to work together out of pure habit, a system akin to devising as defined by Chris Baldwin and Tina Bicât: 'Often the company who work together regularly are so familiar with each other's creative process that no one really knows where the idea starts' (Bicât & Baldwin, 2002: 8). The relation to the process is clear, Els Joglars' intimate knowledge of one another has allowed them to play off each other and know each other's strengths and weaknesses over the years:

Nosotros hemos encontrado una fórmula que fue probándose durante los primeros años [...] con los que tenía una relación humana particular [...] Con esas cinco o seis personas, que son las que empezaron en el año 62, y tras doce años de trabajo en común, se adquiere un nivel de comunicación que es casi intuitivo y que favorece la expresión colectiva (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 108).

This level of communication is vividly conveyed by Tim Etchells when speaking of his company Forced Entertainment and its approach to the rehearsal room: 'Is collaboration this: the 12 years' endless proximity to other people, physical, vocal, all day and into the night, watching people fade in and out of coherence and concentration – an intimacy that approaches that of lovers' (Etchells, 1999: 54). As with Tim Etchells' lovers analogy, intimacy characterises Els Joglars' company spirit: 'Con el tiempo nos hemos ido perfeccionando, y aquello que en su día fueron normas explícitas han pasado a serlo implícitas' (Joglars, 2001: 77). The advantage of this system is clear, rehearsals are already set out with a knowledge of each performer's strengths and weaknesses, thus beginning from a firmer preparatory base. Lev Dodin, speaking of his work with the Maly Drama Theatre,

describes this base as a 'common language' that grants the company a 'sense of going in the same direction' (quoted in Shevtsova, 2004: 37).

At this stage, then, the company realised the crucial need for enjoying flexibility of time and for acquiring an adequate space to rehearse. If we link this preoccupation with the need to evolve as a cohesive creative ensemble, we realise how a form of devising methodology was established at the core of their creative process.

I.iii.c 1978-2005 – Towards a Methodology

Nevertheless, not one single method adequately describes the company's process, which functions rather as an amalgamation of existing ideas and personal developments. From 1978 onwards the Els Joglars' process did not undergo any significant changes or alterations in its philosophy once it crystallised. In fact, we can see a transition in methodology apparently taking place within the previous seven years. In 1978, speaking of the early 1970s productions of *El joc* (1970) and *Cruel Ubris* (1971) which he witnessed in rehearsal, Guillermo Ayesa notes that 'Es muy difícil explicar cómo, de qué modo, empezaba Joglars a ensayar, a crear. No había nada escrito previamente. Iban directamente a los ensayos, partiendo de alguna, muy ligera, idea' (Ayesa, 1978: 47). Therefore, at this stage the company were still predominantly improvising instinctively, and Boadella was not providing an introductory sheet of ideas as he does today. However, by the time of *Teledium* (1983), the process sounds remarkably similar to that of *En un lugar de Manhattan* (2005). Ex-Joglar performer Jaume Collell describes the first day of rehearsal: 'L'Albert Boadella va a proposar-nos el tema de l'espectacle, a grans pinzellades,

perquè el més apassionant dels espectacles dels Joglars és que ni ell sap com acabarà el tema que planteja el primer dia de cúpula' (Collell, 1985: 22). This provides evidence that at least since 1983 Boadella has proposed a starting point and encouraged his actors to find their own way to the end of the show. The result of this establishment of a working method is that the ideas first expressed in 1970 are still quoted by the company as relevant and useful to their present realities. Looking back on their career in 2000, under the chapter heading 'El Método' in *La guerra de los 40 años*, the company describe the bare bones of their working process, in place ever since *El joc*:

Evitar el exceso de ideas preconcebidas. El director ha de tener la sangre fría necesaria para entrar en la sala de ensayo y enfrentarse a los actores sin haber pensado en demasía lo que hará; aplicar la fórmula de creación musical al teatro y elaborarlo con la voz y el cuerpo. Esto supone que la obra va escribiéndose a pedazos, recogiendo lo que más interesa de las improvisaciones (Joglars, 2001: 90)

This same open process has been applied to the company's work up to the present, including *M-7 Catalònia* (1978), *Laetius* (1980), *Olympic Man Movement* (1981), *Teledium* (1983), *Virtuosos de Fontainebleau* (1985), *Visanteta de Favara* (1986), *Bye, Bye, Beethoven* (1987), *Columbi Lapsus* (1989), *Yo tengo un tío en América* (1991), *El nacional* (1993), *Ubú President* (1995), *La increíble història del Dr. Floit & Mr. Pla* (1997), *Daaalí* (1999), *El Retablo de las maravillas* (2004) and *En un lugar de Manhattan* (2005). These shows share a common broad approach, defined as an initial research and definition of ideas, followed by a series of improvisations proposed by Boadella or the actors. These improvisations gradually coalesce into the dramaturgical construction of the shape of the play, culminating

in a more traditional process of polishing the piece into a fit state to perform in front of an audience.

There are very few exceptions to this process during the period. *L'Odisea* (1979) was conceived as a side-project under the company name La Xalana, and was based on Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. Although later works like *El Retablo de las maravillas* and *En un lugar de Manhattan* also take existing texts as starting points, these are described as free-versions with a distinct narrative or meta-narrative, while *L'Odisea* was a more direct adaptation. On another note, the show was also the first collaboration with performer Jesús Agelet, the longest-standing current performer of the company. Other past shows have been co-productions on commission from external venues: *Operació Ubú* (1981) was produced at the Lliure with a combination of Joglars and Lliure actors; *Gabinete Libermann* (1984) was commissioned by the now defunct Centro Nacional de Nuevas Tendencias Escénicas in Madrid and likewise did not feature the regular Joglars company members. Whilst Boadella would have used a similar process to that outlined above on these external projects, they certainly had a distinct flavour and are often described as exceptions by the company. Boadella speaks of sitting down and writing a play text for the first time on *Operació Ubú*, clearly adapting his methods for the needs of an artistic partnership. The company have also picked up other skills and registers over the years, including various television series; *Terra d'Escudella* (1977), *Som una meravella* (1988), *Ya semos europeos* (1989), *Orden especial* (1991), *¡Vaya día!* (1995). At the beginning of the twenty-first century they even made the jump to the big screen with *¡Buen viaje, Excelencia!* (2003) with the accompanying publicity street-theatre event of *Franco en Vic* (2003). As can be

seen, the creative energies of the company have allowed them to take in the language of television and cinema, developing a technical knowledge that has on occasion transferred to the stage, with the screen technologies of *Olympic Man Movement* and *Daaalí* or the behind-the-scenes TV-version of *Teledium*. It is also worth noting the clear establishment of the company as a viable business that has culminated in Albert Boadella's public recognition when in 2001 he was awarded the Premio Joan Planas, which is granted to successful balance of risk and stability in business management – a more than rare honour in the world of theatre and one that deserves to be highlighted because it throws light on Els Joglars' overall achievements.

Nevertheless, these side-projects are indeed exceptions, and not the subject of the current study. My purpose is to look in depth at the company's last ten years of existence, focusing on the process that has ended in the creation of *En un lugar de Manhattan* and how the years of refining a working method has generated a stable rehearsal process that guarantees the company tangible results, independent of any considerations of relative quality. The last ten years are particularly important as they represent a time of consistency within the company, with a core group of actors revolving around Boadella comprised of Jesús Agelet, Xavier Boada, Ramon Fontserè, Minnie Marx, Pilar Sáenz, Xavi Sais, Dolors Tuneu, and Pep Vila. Their intimate understanding of Boadella's conception of theatre combined with the specific training needed to negotiate a concrete theatrical language has allowed Els Joglars an unprecedented period of stability in the rehearsal room.

Els Joglars - Chapter II – Theory & Practice

Having explored the aims and history of Els Joglars, we can now begin to look in close detail at the Els Joglars rehearsal process. First though, we must contextualise the company's working methodologies, and how these emerged from exposure to a series of different ideas, culminating in a hybrid process. With the context firmly established, in this chapter I will attempt to define how the hybrid process shapes the overall product, beginning with the preparatory stages for a new project. As a central case study I will be using the company's 2005 show, *En un lugar de Manhattan*. My privileged access to witness some rehearsals, as well as viewing videos of other rehearsal sessions, and including reading Boadella's preparatory notes, are invaluable resources on which to base the following study.

Firstly it would be useful to provide a synopsis of the show in question: *En un lugar de Manhattan*. The plot involves a theatre company in search of a groundbreaking interpretation of Cervantes' novel *Don Quijote*, which is re-situated in trendy New York, hence the production's title. The cast play actors in a production under the stern leadership of temperamental and pretentious Argentinean director, Gabriela Orsini. However, the interruptions of a plumber and a less than enthusiastic cast thwart the rehearsal efforts. Don Alonso, the plumber and the incarnation of Don Quixote within the performance, has been called in to fix a leaky ceiling. His assistant Jordi (referred to as Sancho by Don Alonso), informs the actors that they are patients at a mental institution who have been given some odd jobs to keep them occupied, and that Don Alonso is obsessed with Cervantes' book. Gradually, the actors realise they can have more fun with these two

characters than with Gabriela's tedious rehearsal by developing improvisations based on scenes from the novel, which of course Don Alonso takes too literally in purest Quixotic fashion. Most of the performance develops therefore around how the actors can create scenes from the novel using the simplest of means. By the end, Don Alonso recreates Don Quixote's death scene while Gabriela Orsini storms out for the last time and the actors perform the end of the novel, heedless to the real tragedy that has unfolded before them.

Whilst this performance will be the case study for the following sections, supporting references will be made to other Els Joglars shows. However, before we look at exactly how Els Joglars arrived at the final shape of *En un lugar de Manhattan*, we must first understand how the practical application of their methods has evolved over the years.

II.i. Origin of the idea: Practice Based Theory

When asked about systematic theoretical approaches to theatrical creation in Spain, Boadella raises a quizzical eyebrow: 'hay poca cosa en España', qualifying it with 'no hay un estudio sobre el proceso de metodología' (Boadella, 2005 d). It is certainly true that in the field of theatre theoreticians, Spain has not produced significant internationally renowned figures who have advanced the understanding of how theatre is made in the way that Stanislavski, Brecht, Meyerhold, Gordon Craig, Michael Chekhov or Lecoq have done. Indeed, Boadella adds that it is virtually impossible to stretch the Spanish critic beyond Stanislavski when it comes to analysing a play, a fact we could put down to a critical establishment unaware of the phenomenological approaches of practitioners. If we

look at published works of theatrical theory, we find little written in Spain in the last century. Perhaps the closest is Alfonso Sastre's two volume *El drama y sus lenguajes* (2000), which whilst a useful work of reference does read rather like a good natured amble through existing philosophical and theatrical ideas that had been largely ignored or suppressed during the Franco era. In fact, Sastre backs up Boadella's assertions on the lack of Spanish theory: 'los españoles no han aportado, hasta el día de hoy, absolutamente nada. Lo he dicho así y vuelvo a repetirlo, por si no se hubiera entendido: *nada*' (Sastre, 2000: 10). Indeed, even if we look at the seminal works by internationally renowned theatre practitioners, we will find that their translation and publication in Spain is a recent occurrence: Jacques Lecoq's *El cuerpo poético (The Moving Body)* was published in 2003 and Michael Chekhov's works in 1999 and 2006 in two separate volumes. Both authors were published by Teatro de la Abadía, a theatre and actor training centre, and one supposes that were it not for their specialist interest in these works for the purposes of training a new ensemble of actors, they would remain untranslated, unpublished and unknown in Spain, even in 2007.²⁵

It is no surprise then that the only theatre theoreticians in Spain have had to find a direct practical formulation for their ideas based on years of rehearsal room toil. This practice has only recently begun to crystallise for Els Joglars into a series of self-reflective publications defining their ideal creative process; most notably including 2001's *La guerra de los 40 años* (co-authored by the entire company); Boadella's theatrical autobiography entitled *Memorias de un bufón* (also 2001);

²⁵ The first Spanish translation of Stanislavski's work was published in 1963 in Mexico (Stanislavski, 1963), while Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* appeared in the theatre journal *Primer Acto* in 1968 (Grotowski, 1968).

principal actor Ramon Fontserè's rehearsal diaries *Tres pies al gato* (2002); and an exhaustively detailed and regularly maintained website www.elsjoglars.com compiling articles by and about the company. The crux of the matter is that Els Joglars are only theoreticians insofar as their theories emerge from the direct practice of their craft. Without the development of a rehearsal methodology over the years, they would not have a cohesive theory and approach to the creative process.

II.ii. Beyond Mime

In order to trace the company's progress we must understand how their theory has been constructed, and how the group members were shaped professionally and individually. Evidently as a result of the dictatorship and censorship restrictions, contact with foreign trends was severely limited but the determined practitioner could uncover otherwise unavailable books, theories and theatre companies. By 1977 the influence of international theatre had become practically commonplace as Joan de Sagarra originally outlined in *Fotogramas* magazine:

El contacto con teatros extranjeros, se ha acrecentado considerablemente. Hoy es moneda corriente ver montajes en los que se percibe la huella del 'Living', de un montaje 'Magic Circus', de un 'Theatre [*sic*] du Soleil' (quoted in Miralles, 1977: 109).

The Catalan proximity to France proved particularly fruitful in this sense, so close to international festivals in Perpignan or Avignon. Joan Font, director of Els Comediants, certainly saw France as a release in the early 1970s when he trained with Lecoq: 'Necesitábamos salir de España. Vivir en París significaba un cambio

de espacio'; a change in scenery that fellow Comediant Anna Lizaran found equally instructive: 'Teníamos la necesidad de salir y la escuela de Jacques Lecoq me acercó a la diversidad, a gentes de otras razas y nacionalidades. Fue muy enriquecedor' (Saumell, 2002: 103). Albert Boadella was himself trained by Ítalo Riccardi who in turn exposed him to the teachings of Marcel Marceau and Etienne Decroux. Riccardi was a Chilean actor, possibly working under an assumed name, who claimed to have been Marceau's student, although Marceau is said to have denied it: 'Je n'ai jamais connu ce monsieur-là' (Boadella, 2001: 141). Nevertheless, he did attack the subject of mime with a passion that connected with the young Boadella, who had the opportunity to see Decroux's company whilst he was still a schoolboy, even though this first point of contact was not the epiphany we might expect: 'yo iba pensando que por mucho mérito que tuviera el asunto, antes de hacer aquellas mariconadas delante de la gente, prefería ser barrendero' (Boadella, 2001: 115). Evidently approaching the subject in maturity changed Boadella's perception, who in the group's earliest interviews speaks of his admiration for Decroux, as previously cited: 'posee un gran estilo [...] crea escuela' (Joglars, 1965 a); or how the company's work was indebted to Marceau: 'Al principio, la mayoría de las escenas eran copiadas de Marceau... Con un buen maestro, lo mejor que se puede hacer es copiarle sin contemplaciones, pues no existe pedagogía más eficaz' (Boadella, 2001: 148). Mime is a crucial starting point for Els Joglars, and its influence on their approach has not dulled, but evolved in contact with other methods, as Mercè Saumell noted of *El joc* (1970): 'mime was emerging from its ghetto in Catalonia and beginning to interact with theatre, dance and circus' (Saumell, 1996: 109).

Indeed, if we look at the basic tenets of mime, it is striking how many have been rephrased but nevertheless incorporated into the company's permanent ethos. Dario Fo, for instance, explains that 'Mime is not a sign language for the dumb. Mime is effective when, with the use of gestures, effects can be attained and a clearer, more efficient, more advantageous style of communication established that would be possible with words alone' (Fo, 1991: 144). This assertion is remarkably similar to Boadella's insistence that 'La palabra la empleamos solamente donde no llegamos con el gesto' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 113). Decroux and Marceau indicated how everything external from the body is unnecessary: 'acting naked on a naked stage, dispensing with a narrator and with musical support or accompaniment, and thus proving that the gesture can be self-sufficient' (quoted in Dorcy, 1961: 33), a pronouncement paraphrased by Boadella in his memoirs: 'El mimo se instala en la desnudez total: el escenario desnudo, el cuerpo también desnudo [...] incluso desnudez fonética' (Boadella, 2001: 143-44). As Fo explains, 'The art of mime is the art of communication by synthesis [...] to hint, to indicate, to imply, to goad the imagination' (Fo, 1991: 144). In order to do this, the simple physical movement needs to be infused with a meaning, as Marceau details: 'A gesture is not sufficient; it needs to be clothed in a thought. And the drawing which expresses the thought must be accurate' (quoted in Dorcy, 1961: 105). Ultimately, the intention of the mime is to activate the audience's imagination, as Decroux describes: 'The artist of the mime throws suspension dots into space, and the spectator writes his own letters on this curve' (quoted in Dorcy, 1961: xxv). Els Joglars make the same connection when they talk about the audience's engagement with 'Art': 'El teatro [...] provoca en el espectador la ilusión de que está allí donde han decidido esté

los que pisan el escenario' (Joglars, 2001: 130). Enrique Herreras explains what Els Joglars found so attractive about this methodology:

La mímica de Marcel Marceau [...] era un planteamiento alternativo a un mundo tecnificado. No en balde, la capacidad de comunicación de este mimo se basaba en la mentalización del actor y su capacidad para sugerir objetos no existentes. Y ello sin necesidad, ni siquiera, de la palabra para transmitir sentimientos... [Els Joglars] tenían que pasar etapas, como esta primera, donde todo el interés escénico estaba subyugado a la importancia de un actor que trabaja sin decorados, con mallas negras y cara blanca... (Herreras, 2005: 35)

The precise trappings of the genre may have been gradually stripped by the company, but the actor as the communicative core of the performance remains one of Els Joglars' basic tenets. Saumell notes the importance of the actor for Boadella, and how

[...] the actors of Els Joglars are distinguished by the precision of their gestures. Boadella develops actors with a mechanical body, capable of astounding transformations. They also have to be cunning enough to captivate the audience with their movements. Learning how to persuade and provoke are an important part of their training. The actors have to be able to invent new ways of performing (Saumell, 1996: 112)

The actor reigns supreme in the Els Joglars method, and is relied on to hold the attention and imagination of the audience: 'El teatro se convierte en Arte sobre el escenario. Con el actor' (Joglars, 2001: 130). Even right down to the smallest details, Boadella is often paraphrasing thoughts previously expressed by the principal practitioners of mime, including their position on scenery: Decroux is categorical on the subject: '*Use of furniture and scenery*. They obstruct' (quoted in Dorcy, 1961: 82). Boadella is equally disinterested in complex scenography: 'una puerta da muchísimas más posibilidades que toda una escenografía' (Boadella,

2005 d); he is referring here to the free-standing door used as a prop in *En un lugar de Manhattan* and which fulfils a number of narrative functions without resorting to more complex stage properties. In every situation that it is used, the actors animate it and redefine its significance in the space ensuring it does not become an obstruction but rather an extension of their expressivity. They interact with the décor and transform it so that one decorative element may become many things. Just as the performer often transforms him or herself into many characters so in the interaction with décor the prop or object can become many different things. This is just one example of how a practical application of an existing theory has been adapted in the construction of a practice-based theory of rehearsal.

Perhaps one of the first practical theoreticians to explore the further possibilities of mime was the practitioner and pedagogue Jacques Lecoq. He was a student of mime from the outset, as he describes: 'I discovered the theatre through Jean-Louis Barrault's demonstration of the man-horse' (Lecoq, 2002: 3), going on to study at Barrault's L'Education par le jeu dramatique school. He admitted that mime is at the core of his work: 'I have always favoured a teaching method that uses open mime [...] For me mime is an integral part of theatre, not a separate art form' (Lecoq, 2002: 23). However, he was always more interested in process than results, as Simon McBurney attests: 'What he offered in his school was, in a word, preparation – of the body, of the voice, of the art of collaboration [...] and of the imagination. He was interested in creating a site to build on, not a finished edifice' (quoted in Lecoq, 2002: ix). Albert Boadella was himself a recipient of this training, as Mercè Saumell explains: 'Boadella had finished his school baccalaureate in Paris and returned a number of years later to take courses with

the mime artist Pierre Saragoussi, a former pupil of Etienne Decroux. At this time he also participated in a stage run by Jacques Lecoq' (Saumell, 2002: 104). The admiration turned out to be mutual when Lecoq commented on Els Joglars' work at an international festival: 'I am thinking of Els Joglars [...] It was the spectators' first encounter with the transformation of mime and saw the burial of "picking flowers" mime' (Saumell, 2002: 106). Boadella likewise admitted that this public support was very useful for the group in its early stages: 'A él le gustaba nuestro trabajo, nuestra desviación respecto al mimo blanco. El hecho de que un hombre de prestigio nos apoyara públicamente fue importantísimo para nosotros' (Saumell, 2002: 107).

Ultimately the intellectual exchange between pedagogue and practitioner proved fruitful for the evolution of the company in a number of ways. Most notably, Lecoq's advocacy of a less 'ossified' form of mime found its practical counterpart in *El joc* (1970): 'The mime which I love involves an identification with things in order to make them live, even when words are used' (Lecoq, 2002: 23). *El joc* was never about the meaningless 'virtuosity' that Lecoq accused mime of becoming, but rather attempted to 'embody and therefore to understand better' (Lecoq, 2002: 22). Throughout the play, using only their bodies and 'ruidos guturales, risas, etc, hechos por los propios actores' (Joglars, 1970 a), the actors explore the intellectual notion of being prisoners; of chance, of love of their own wills or of each other. Each sketch explores the ideas through physical expressivity which on the other hand could not be described as mime: the company were mostly in modern dress and leather trousers, they used a few props and their faces were not made-up, offering a 'peculiarly urban and aggressive image' (Saumell, 2002: 107). It is

impossible to quantify Lecoq's influence on the group's move from silent mime to increasingly verbalised and naturalistic performances, but he does demonstrate a theoretical development in parallel to Els Joglars' own practical discoveries. Certainly, Albert Boadella held Lecoq's ideas in high enough esteem to launch his own theatre school in Barcelona with other contemporary practitioners: the *Estudis Nous de Teatre*. Mercè Saumell explains how the school used Lecoq's exercises (amongst others) in order to instil the 'great importance' of 'body language' (Saumell, 2002: 112), thereby introducing the methodology to Spain in its practical application. Lecoq's teachings not only helped Boadella to formulate his own methodology, but also helped fund the company's activities through the workshops held at the Calle Aribau rehearsal room. Furthermore we can surmise that the rest of the company likewise benefited from Boadella's training. Despite Els Joglars' embracing of the theory, mime imposed its own technical restrictions, and the company's more anarchic approach to theatre led them to explore alternatives.

II.iii. Beyond Devising

To establish a practice-based theory of rehearsal, a theatre maker will adapt existing ideas to suit their own needs in search of a theatrical language, and Els Joglars soon gave the impression of wanting to strike out on their own, as Maria Del Carmen Sarrion noted in *Tele-express* in August 1974: 'El camino de Els Joglars es encontrar un lenguaje propio' (Joglars, 1987 a: 80). Whilst theories may help to promote an active creative spirit, a blind adherence to them ultimately stagnates output. Therefore, the need to move forward in their research brought about the introduction of new tools in an effort to stretch the possibilities of mime. Milagros Sánchez Arnosi even states that 'De 1968 a 1971: en estos años el grupo

se ha vuelto anti-Marceau' (Boadella, 2006: 23), and certainly the introduction of new improvised scenes and an increasing reliance on the spoken word implies a move away from the core principles of mime as the company gradually 'dress' their productions. Nevertheless, describing the company as anti-Marceau, even in 2007, seems inaccurate. Rather the company moved on from the foundations laid in mime and added to their repertoire, gradually building their hybrid practical methodology. On the other hand, Sánchez Arnosi is right to point out how Els Joglars began to build scenes from improvisations just before becoming a professional company in 1968.

The International Mime Festival in Zurich, 1967, played a pivotal role in this shift of methodology, as the company were suddenly exposed to 'una corriente muy crítica con los manierismos técnicos y los clásicos del género como Marceau' (Boadella, 2001: 158). In his autobiography, Boadella draws particular attention to the host of practitioners he met at this festival: Dimitri and Pierre Bylan, Wogner and Lebreton. These encounters with approaches to theatre that he acknowledges were 'tan diferente de lo que hasta entonces había hecho' (Boadella, 2001: 159) were the spark for his decision to go professional, no longer satisfied with the compromises of amateur theatre: 'todo se quedaba a medio camino' (Boadella, 2001: 159). From this point forth, the improvisational techniques that Boadella applied took on an entirely different character, as exemplified by the creation of *El joc* (1970), which exhibited a devising approach more akin to collaborative alternative companies like Théâtre du Soleil or The Performance Group. 'Devised work depends upon, and utilizes, the ideas and chance discoveries that occur in rehearsal' (Bicât & Baldwin, 2002: 9), and *El joc* attempted to create such a work

ethic, as previously discussed (see page 93-4), by improvising on words picked at random from a dictionary, then developing the best ideas the following day. Shortly before this, Théâtre du Soleil produced *Les Clowns* (1969), described by David Bradby and Annie Sparks in the following terms: '[*Les Clowns*] consisted of a series of improvisations in which each member of the company presented a particular clown, mask or routine which they had researched' (Bradby & Sparks, 1997: 22), another early manifestation of devising in which the actor's experiments and research in the rehearsal room can be presented before an audience. Schechner describes the process of rehearsal in creating The Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69* (1969) as 'jerky and disjointed, often incoherent. The work is indeed a hunt, full of actions with "high information potential"' (Schechner, 2003: 206). Curiously, Lluís Elías also applies the image of hunting to Boadella's approach to rehearsal: 'Del azar que surge, Albert, como un cazador, detecta lo que podría ser' (Elías, 2002). Ultimately these descriptions of devising could be applied to the Els Joglars process as the company entered the 1970s, joining a current of devised theatre that even today is still mostly ill-defined.

As a term to describe a particular form of methodology, devising is far from new. It took a long time for the critics or academics to engage with it as a serious theatrical form, as attested by the fact that the first English language study published specifically on the topic arrived only in 1994 with Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre*. Already in the first line of her preface, Oddey makes her position clear: 'I felt there was a lack of information on the subject of devising theatre [...] I was unaware of any publication that addressed a general theory and practice' (Oddey, 1994: xi). However, the successors of her study, Deirdre Heddon and

Jane Milling, discovered in *Devising Performance* (2006) that the genre remains largely unstudied since Oddey's book: 'Ten years later [...] it is apparent that little has changed. Given the widespread use of the mode of practice that we might call 'devising', it is curious that the conversation that Oddey hoped would result from the publication of her book has never really taken place' (Heddon & Milling, 2006: 1). If devising is still a misunderstood term today, in 1970 this approach to rehearsing didn't even have a name, let alone a clearly defined methodology.

It is perhaps for this reason that Els Joglars soon began to speak about their own process, informing their audience on how the shows had been crafted. A year after *El joc* the company printed their first statement on their method, as part of the program for *Cruel Ubris* (1971), as if recognising that the kind of theatre they were beginning to make in Spain was of an unknown nature to the majority of the spectators and required a definition: 'Nuestro método es no tener método [...] De hecho, antes de empezarlo ignoramos totalmente cuáles serán los resultados, cómo y cuándo acabará [...] Nos ponemos a trabajar sin casi ideas previas' (Joglars, 1971). As mentioned before, the company used the figure of a fictional untouchable and respected foreign academic, Arnold Goodfry, in order to validate their work with the illusion of foreign endorsement, allowing for a seemingly impartial voice to comment on the goals and effects of the company. It also enabled them to comment on the Spanish inability to analyse homegrown work on its own terms, alluding to a superior foreign critical establishment. Indeed, Boadella himself mentions a Martin Esslin article, 'un estudioso inglés de primer orden' (Joglars, 2001: 104) on *El joc* (1970) as the only one that made an effort to understand what the company were trying to achieve.

Instead of analysing Els Joglars' performances in terms of physical communication as proposed by the company, Spanish critics became obsessed either with the absence or secondary role of text. Joan Manuel Gisbert insists that 'la palabra interviene como si fuese "la más fea del baile"' in *L'Odissea* (1979). Six years later, Fermín Cabal seemed unable or unwilling to accept that it was possible for a collective to co-author a play: 'Creo que has aclarado las interioridades creativas del grupo pero, una vez más, eludiendo el tema de la autoría del texto... ¿Qué pasa con el autor?' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 109). Perhaps Cabal is only provoking Boadella to elicit a reaction by insisting on applying a mainstream system of operations. Gisbert furthermore affirms that Els Joglars as a company are 'eminente anti-literario por definición' (Gisbert, 1979: 50), which is true only insofar as the company have always sought a popular audience. This is due in part to a critical establishment, as Gisbert demonstrates, which was equating text with valuable literary theatre, demonstrating an inability to measure performance that did not fit within such strictures, as Guillermo Ayesa noted at the time, speaking of *Cruel Ubris* (1971): 'Al principio los críticos no sabían lo que les había venido encima. Prácticamente ninguno se atrevía a dictar sentencia sobre la obra y se dedicaban a escribir frases incomprensibles e inconexas en sus críticas' (Ayesa, 1978: 98). In fact, most critics still write in this fashion, much to the company's chagrin: 'Los críticos, por lo general, están desconcertados con nosotros... no hablan de los actores, ni de la dirección. Su especialidad es ponerse a hablar de Boadella o del tema de la obra, en vez de centrarse en la crítica del espectáculo' (Joglars, 2001: 103). The mechanisms to analyse the kind of theatre that Els Joglars make do not appear to have existed and are still sketchy

even though the company themselves had started to outline a series of directions to understanding their creative process and work; nowadays they would have been instantly labelled as a devising collective, highlighting Boadella as the 'front man', an artistic director in the vein of Simon McBurney and Complicite.

Placing Els Joglars in an international current of devised theatre helps explain the development of their shows away from mime towards their current style. Alison Oddey's definition of devising emphasises from the outset that it is 'practical "on the floor" work' (Oddey, 1994: xii), going on to explain 'Devising is a craft, which is inevitably learnt on the job' (Oddey, 1994: 25). Craftsmanship is crucial to Els Joglars' conception of their own rehearsal process: 'Esto es artesanía. Más próximo al taller que al templo' (Joglars, 2001: 87). However, just as Alison Oddey points out, 'Devising theatre can start from anything' (Oddey, 1994: 1) and more often than not the roots for one idea can be traced to an earlier one, a skill British collective Forced Entertainment have promoted: 'a company whose starting points for a new show arise from the previous one' (Oddey, 1994: 35). Els Joglars were likewise faced with how to progress, and the next logical step from mime was to introduce improvisations where it would be possible to explore plotlines, characters and their interrelations. However, in order to stretch the possibilities of a genre through improvisation, you first need rules to give the improvisations direction and purpose, as Heddon and Milling note in relation to the rising improvisation troupes of the 1960s: 'such devising drew on conventional ideas of character and storytelling, and often used popular forms such as clowning, vaudeville or *commedia dell'arte* to structure work' (Heddon & Milling, 2006: 29). Both Lecoq and Els Joglars looked particularly to *commedia dell'arte* as a means

of introducing new ideas; just like The Performance Group found inspiration in ancient Greek theatre or Théâtre du Soleil in the tradition of clowning, Els Joglars attempted to infuse their productions with the humour and vitality of *commedia*. In fact very recent shows have seen the direct use of *commedia* characters, such as the *Retablo de las maravillas* (2004), but the techniques of the genre are visible in the masked characterisation and lazzi of *La torna* (1977). Perhaps *commedia dell'arte* is such a popular starting point for devising companies because it places the actor front and centre as a creative resource, as Heddon and Milling outline: 'the use of improvisation presupposed that a performer had an inner creativity that had been repressed, socialised, censored or hidden' (Heddon & Milling, 2006: 30). As Dario Fo explains, the typical *commedia* actors were 'past masters at dismantling and re-assembling the different elements, and in this style the most unlikely twists and turns could be extended over the entire script' (Fo, 1991: 9). Nevertheless, the *commedia* actors were not merely skilled improvisers, as there were a set of implicit rules that helped to generate the myriad variations on a simple plot that Fo refers to: '*lazzi* – situations, dialogues, gags, rhymes and rigmaroles which they could call up at a moment's notice to give the impression of on-stage improvisation' (Fo, 1991: 8). This balance of improvisation and preparation is the common ground between *commedia* and modern devising. A grounding in the improvisatory games of *commedia* helps to release the actors' creativity 'in order to hone the pre-rehearsal capabilities of the actor' (Heddon & Milling, 2006: 29), whilst also creating an illusion of immediacy within the audience and re-energising the audience-performer relationship.

In the case of Els Joglars, like many other devising companies, exploring the audience-performer relationship has a political significance. From the outset Els Joglars have always sought to explore the realities of the day and one of their earliest shows, *El diari* (1968), literally presented their spin on the daily newspaper. Alison Oddey indicates that a devising company is often characterised by a desire to 'address the changes brought about by the socio-political and cultural climate of the time' (Oddey, 1994: 2). Heddon and Milling concur, explaining that many groups who 'positioned themselves as alternative or non-mainstream [...] tended to claim their work as radical or innovative on political grounds rather than because it was devised' (Heddon & Milling, 2006: 30). Indeed, Els Joglars devised primarily in order to avoid Franco's censorship:

[...] el delegado de cultura, nos llevó al Teatro Español con *El diari*. Era el único grupo de mimo que tenían y pensaban que al no hablar no podíamos ser antifranquistas. Nosotros éramos antifranquistas y de izquierdas, pero mudos. Nuestros censores eran de circo y variedades, y no de teatro. Sólo se preocupaban de las transparencias; de que no se transparentaran las bragas, exactamente. (Joglars, 2001: 15-16)

Franco's theatrical censors were only really looking for transgression in written texts, which explains how Els Joglars managed to pass under the radar until *La torna* (1977). The problems that surrounded *La torna* are well documented, and ended with the military court-martial of the entire company, as previously discussed.²⁶ Ironically however, the show had previously been approved by the censors, as the text did not offer clear indications of how they intended to send up the Spanish armed forces. After all, it was not so much what was said in the final court-martial scene that the army took exception to, but rather the aquiline masks,

²⁶ See Part I, Chapter I: {97-99}.

grotesque characterisation and surrounding slapstick routines, all visual techniques derived straight from *commedia* and mime. The accusers surmised, probably rightly, that the exaggerations were a direct mockery of the system and its figureheads. Devising a whole new play based mainly on a language of gestures was of course an aesthetic decision, but it also responded to the realities of the day, allowing the company to comment on a socio-political climate in a more oblique way. Whilst the company's decision to communicate primarily through body language rather than the spoken word may have stemmed from a practical need, it did nevertheless condition a process that the company have remained faithful to and has become a part of their ethos.

Oddey explains that another of the major hallmarks of devised theatre is its collaborative ethos: 'Devised theatre is concerned with the collective creation of art (not the single vision of the playwright)' (Oddey, 1994: 4). The collaborative approach is certainly important to the company, although they are not quite as bold as other companies who entirely eschew compartmentalising their roles within the group, like the People Show:²⁷ 'everybody in the group has to have an understanding of lighting, an understanding of building and a definite visual comprehension of costume' (Oddey, 1994: 6). Els Joglars may be co-authors of their shows in the sense that Albert Boadella shares his author rights with the actors, and the company emphasise how they all put in their fair share of set-up work in moving and building the set. The actors also believe the importance of their role in creating each piece: 'podría sentarse a escribir, pero nunca sería tan rica la obra como trabajando con grupo' according to Boada (Boada, 2005); Jesús Agelet

²⁷ A collaborative theatre company formed in 1966 in London.

maintains: 'yo tengo la teoría de que con la misma idea suya, y con dos equipos de actores diferentes, saldrían dos obras distintas' (Cáceres, 2004). The ensemble approach, not only to rehearsal but to technical issues, aligns the company with the tradition of the devising company.

However, it seems to me there is a contradiction between their statements and the realities of the company, which is best exemplified by the situation surrounding the recent revival of *La torna* as *La torna de la torna* (2005). Boadella ended his professional association with the company of actors who created the original *La torna*, and had indicated he would no longer work with them while they were still rehearsing the show. When the actors discovered the show was being revived, they took him to court claiming co-authorship of the play: indeed, during the court martial the company stood together in saying they all created it, in order to prevent all the blame from landing at one person's feet. However, *El Mundo* reported on October 24 2006 that a judge had ruled in favour of Boadella as sole author of *La torna* (Anon, 2006 a), echoed by *El País* the following day: 'Desestimada la demanda de los actores de 'La torna' contra Boadella' (Anon, 2006 b). In the eyes of the law there is sufficient evidence that the source ideas for the play belonged to Boadella, if anything widening the gap between the company's claims of collaborative creation and the reality of Boadella's creative dominance.²⁸ Having said that, it is worth simply noting that the company have never tried to hide Boadella's dominance:

²⁸ The press also commented on the court case in the following articles: (Punzano, 2006), (Ríos, 2008). For Boadella's perspective on the situation, see: Boadella, 2009: 263-67. For the actor's perspective and the court's complete ruling see: Díaz & Carvajal, 2008: 179-90. The press also commented on the partisan nature of the dispute, noting that the Díaz and Carvajal book was a

Quiero repetir una vez más que los montajes de Joglars fueron siempre de todos los miembros de la compañía [...] Pero lo que no se debe dudar, ni olvidar, es que cada una de las ideas puestas en marcha por cada uno de aquellos espectáculos vino de Albert. El era el miembro más clarividente en cuestiones teatrales que jamás tuvo la compañía, perfilando, encauzando, redondeando y poniendo el toque final a todos ellos. (Ayesa, 1978: 43-44)

The company may not be a truly collaborative outfit in the sense that Boadella is highlighted as the main creator, but neither is he a director, or playwright, or dramaturg in the traditional sense of those terms. Whilst the methods and approaches of devising and of collaborative creation go some way towards defining the Els Joglars rehearsal process, they do not adequately represent the company. The history of the company has often been linked with controversy, and Boadella's polemic stand on many issues, be it social, political or cultural, has singled out his figure above the rest. Indeed, his political profile means that he is often seen as the company's spokesperson, its façade. The fact remains that within the company's conception of rehearsal, the collective remains the single most important element.

II.iv. The Practitioner/Theorist: The Making of a Method

Of the major theatre practitioners and theoreticians of the twentieth century, Peter Brook is the one Boadella seems to feel most akin to. Boadella immediately qualifies his appreciation of Brook, specifying he is mainly interested not in his productions but in his theories and certainly not those of a mystical nature: 'Els Joglars es muy anti místico, Brook sí es místico' (Boadella, 2005 d). Director Calixto Bieito also compares the two in similar terms: 'perhaps closer to Peter

direct response to the court defeat: 'Los actores de *La torna* rebaten a Boadella en un libro' (Punzano, 2006).

Brook than anyone else in Spain. Peter Brook's work is perhaps more philosophical, metaphorical and human; Boadella is more concerned with satire and with vocabularies of clowning but both spend long periods preparing each production, bringing together a team of actors who work with them on researching the show. Their methodologies are not dissimilar' (Delgado, 2003 b: 61). Certainly, if Boadella's response to Jerzy Grotowski is anything to go by, mysticism and 'holy theatre' are of minimal interest:

Nada más entrar en el edificio del teatro laboratorio de Wroclaw, todo tomaba un cariz de religiosa solemnidad con la intención de hacernos sentir privilegiados por el simple hecho de presenciar su trabajo [...] rodeado de una mística que simulaba ser laica, pero que soterradamente pretendía usurpar las prerrogativas del espíritu religioso más truculento. (Boadella, 2001: 192)

Boadella has always stressed the importance of 'popular' theatre to Els Joglars in the company's firm desire to reach as wide an audience as possible without anyone feeling excluded: evidently Grotowski's entire approach to theatre feels too elitist for Boadella's tastes. Nevertheless, Grotowski and Boadella probably have more in common than Boadella's intense dislike would indicate. Certainly, for Brook, Grotowski remains wholly unique, precisely because his Theatre Laboratory in Poland (1965-1973) generated results that astonished even the actors in Brook's own company:

What did the work do?

It gave the actor a series of shocks.

The shock of confronting himself in the face of simple irrefutable challenges. The shock of catching sight of his own evasions, tricks and clichés. The shock of seeing something of his own vast and untapped resources. The shock of being forced to question why he is an actor at all. (Brook, 1987: 38)

Both Boadella and Grotowski work collaboratively with a more or less stable group of actors who create their own performances; and both are the figureheads and spiritual cores of their respective companies. Furthermore, there are important conceptual connections in their theory of theatre, particularly when it comes to a conception of the audience. In the seminal *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski argues that theatre can only exist with one fundamental element in place: 'It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, "live" communion' (Grotowski, 1981: 19). Els Joglars were also quick to arrive at this aim, explaining in an interview by Moisés Pérez Coterillo: 'Buscamos en cada caso la comunicación de un grupo (Els Joglars) con otro grupo (el público)' (Joglars, 1987 a: 79). It may seem obvious to link two companies based on a shared desire to communicate with an audience, but the means Grotowski and Boadella have discovered are remarkably similar. Grotowski's own method centres on the celebrated 'via negativa', the 'eradication of blocks':

The education of an actor in our theatre is not a matter of teaching him something; we attempt to eliminate his organism's resistance to this psychic process [...] Impulse and action are concurrent: the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses [...] Years of work and of specially composed exercises (which, by means of physical, plastic and vocal training, attempt to guide the actor towards the right kind of concentration) [...] (Grotowski, 1981: 16-17)

Boadella may of course object to the terminology, but the effect on audiences seems to have been comparable, reaching a heightened state of communication with the audience that does not rely on words, as *Asturias Semanal* noted in 1987: 'llegan a establecer una comunicación con los espectadores

infinitamente más viva y unívoca [...] que la del teatro verbalizado [...] constituyen una de las mejores ilustraciones de las posibilidades de la comunicación semiótica' (Joglars, 1971: 67). According to this review, Els Joglars achieve a more elemental mode of communication with the audience than through words merely by using their bodies as their principal expressive tools. The ultimate formulation of these ideas is of course wildly different, as Grotowski is referring to a sense of collective memory and consciousness that he argues all humans share. However, arriving at this state requires a process which Grotowski describes as a form of theatrical 'poverty' that makes the actor central and removes anything superfluous, meaning that the audience have only a body in a space to study closely: 'We can thus define the theatre as "what takes place between spectator and actor". All the other things are supplementary [...]' (Grotowski, 1981: 32). For Grotowski, the human body is the site of communion between those observing and those observed, the human body is the one fixed and universal human truth: '[...] even with the loss of a "common sky" of belief [...] the perceptivity of the human organism remains.' (Grotowski, 1981: 23). No matter what ideas are under scrutiny, the body is still communicative, capable of evoking moods, atmosphere and emotions:

In order that the spectator may be stimulated into self-analysis when confronted with the actor, there must be some common-ground existing in both of them, something they can either dismiss in one gesture or jointly worship [...] I am thinking of things that are so elementary and so intimately associated that it would be difficult for us to submit them to rational analysis. (Grotowski, 1981: 42)

Curiously, Boadella made much the same point to his actors in rehearsal (witnessed 2005), as Dolors Tuneu rehearsed an interaction with a dog (indicated

by an indistinct ball of fluff) in *En un lugar de Manhattan* (2005). Tuneu had to reach out to pet the creature affectionately, which responds by nipping her fingers with a bark (a sound cue played on the sound system). Boadella stopped the rehearsal and remarked: 'Hay cosas que están grabadas mentalmente y tienen que corresponder' (Boadella, 2005 d), explaining that the timing of the gesture and the sound-effect had to correlate with the way that people naturally perceive such actions. Clearly this was not just a question of making the scene purely realistic, because there was no dog, only a generalised signifier. Boadella was recognising the same thing as Grotowski; that the theatrical event has to respond to the instincts and life-experiences of the audiences and be registered as 'real' in spite of the evident artifice. There are few things more elementary and instinctual than a startled reaction to an animal causing injury, and Boadella was adamant that the tone of the recorded growl had to be of a particular quality as did Tuneu's reaction. This effort indicates a desire to share the same wavelength as the audience and in a sense Els Joglars apply a version of Grotowski's 'via negativa' to the audience by attempting to eradicate the blocks that exist within them as spectators. When Boadella speaks of the audience's preconceptions, he always talks of challenging them: 'Tenemos muy en cuenta la predisposición del público para rompérsela a cada minuto, para tratar de lograr que este público con Joglars al menos, no tenga ninguna predisposición en mente a la hora de ir al teatro...' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 117). In raising polemical subjects, either socio-political or artistic, Els Joglars are in fact attempting to redefine the audience's interaction with performance, recognising a potential line of communication that mainstream drama fails to fully tap into.

Ultimately, the goals of both practitioners are analogous, but the differences in execution demonstrate the leaps that are made from a theory to a practice of theatre. Boadella's own actors recognise the parallels, as Xavier Boada comments, stating that 'a Boadella le interesa lo pobre' at least in terms of the aesthetics of space and design (Boada, 2005), a direct paraphrase of Grotowski. Both Boadella and Grotowski recognise and can agree that theatre is most communicative in its elemental state: 'Thus the number of definitions of theatre is practically unlimited. To escape from this vicious circle one must without doubt eliminate, not add. That is, one must ask oneself what is indispensable to theatre' (Grotowski, 1981: 32), a musing that led Peter Brook to his 'empty space'. Boadella, Grotowski and Brook all coincide on removing the superfluous from the theatrical performance, a stance formulated in Brook's iconic notion: 'A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged' (Brook, 1990: 13). When Brook expands to say that 'Emptiness in the theatre allows the imagination to fill the gaps' (Brook, 1993: 27), we are reminded of Boadella's emphasis on the expressive potential of the body with minimal but suggestive set and props. However, this is not the only similarity between Brook and Boadella, as both arrived at their like-minded conclusions through the exercise of practice rather than theoretical approaches. Brook speaks of his origins in theatre, noting that 'there was no school, no master, no examples [...] There were no theories, so people doing theatre slid naturally from one genre to another' (Brook, 1993: 7). In fact, Brook recounts being asked to write a prologue to an edition of Artaud's work in the early 1960s and admitting that he had no idea who Artaud was: 'I was so far from any theoretical approach to theatre that I had not the remotest idea who Artaud might be' (Brook, 1987: 41). Brook, however, discovered

that much of his work had been pre-empted by Artaud's thoughts, but at the same time was not in thrall to Artaud. On the issue of the theory of theatre, Brook asks: 'For Artaud, theatre is fire; for Brecht, theatre is clear vision; for Stanislavski, theatre is humanity. Why must we choose between them?' (Brook, 1987: 43). Brook and Boadella's approach to the construction of a rehearsal methodology is very similar, as both decide to combine the ideas of a series of practitioners: in Boadella's case his amalgam of Marceau, Decroux and Lecoq springs to mind. Since their approach to theory in practice is largely the same, it follows that they have both uncovered analogous strategies within the rehearsal process.

Throughout his writings, Peter Brook is at great pains to emphasise that his work relies on a collaborative ethos with the company and principally the actors: 'A few weeks into rehearsal, the director is no longer the same person. He has been enriched and broadened by his work with other people. In fact, whatever understanding he had reached before rehearsals began, he has now been helped to see the text in a new way' (Brook, 1987: 17). The results of this process of mutual enrichment allow the company to understand what their collective goals are, and thus channel all their work most efficiently: 'The director can listen to others, yield to their suggestions, learn from them, radically modify and transform his own ideas, he can constantly change course, he can unexpectedly veer one way and another, yet the collective energies still serve a single aim' (Brook, 1987: 6). In this respect, Boadella and Brook are largely in agreement, and indeed both speak of the richness that results from collaborative work. However, there is also a point of contention which throws Boadella's own theories into some doubt. Brook repeatedly states that whilst the director must prepare his work, he must also be

ready to ignore it from the first day of group rehearsal: 'Before rehearsals, not only is the very best work of director and designer limited and subjective – worse, it imposes cast-iron forms [...] and can often crush or handicap a natural development' (Brook, 1993: 104). As we will go on to see in the next section, Boadella makes exhaustive notes, the results of which are often plainly visible in the final production. Nevertheless, Brook does not completely discount the process of preparation:

There is a great temptation for a director to prepare his staging before the first day of rehearsal. This is quite natural and I always do it myself. I make hundreds of sketches of the scenery and the movements. But I do this merely as an exercise, knowing that none of it is to be taken seriously the next day [...] If I were to ask the actors to apply the sketches that I did three days or three months earlier, I would kill everything that can come to life at the moment of rehearsal. (Brook, 1993: 25)

In theory, Brook and Boadella agree on this point too. Boadella explains that 'De manera casi accidental observé que era mejor enfrentarme al ensayo con pocas cosas preconcebidas, en lugar de excitar la fantasía en la soledad de un despacho, como hace el dramaturgo tradicional. Esto me ofrecía la oportunidad de construirlo directamente sobre la realidad, con personajes y espacio auténticos' (Boadella, 2001: 186). Just like Brook, the idea is to enter rehearsals with few fully formed ideas and allow the company of actors freedom to explore them. However, it is not immediately clear how we can square this goal with the exhaustively detailed notes of recent Els Joglars productions and the fact that often the broad plot-lines of the notes remain virtually unchanged by the first performance, implying that Boadella's private imaginings do indeed characterise the rehearsal process. Clearly this is a question of degrees, and Brook and Boadella draw the line in

different places with regards to what constitutes too many preconceived notions. However, what they say and practice coalesce in rehearsal with the notion of departing from a 'formless hunch' (Brook, 1987: 3) or from the equally intangible impetus of 'imágenes' or a 'composición musical' (Boadella, 2005 d); furthermore the role of the director in rehearsal must be to give 'sense of direction' (Brook, 1987: 6) and act as an 'animador de juego' (Boadella, 2001: 164) for a creative collective. However, perhaps where Brook and Boadella are closest in ideology is in their desire to provoke and question the mainstream of theatre.

Boadella believes that 'teatro tiene que ser transgresor' (Boadella, 2005 d), whilst Brook offers: 'The theatre must not be dull. It must not be conventional. It must be unexpected' (Brook, 1993: 95). Superficially it appears both are in agreement, but two analogous theories may be expressed in different artistic visions, as we can see when practitioners become spectators of each other's work. Els Joglars take a dual stance on Peter Brook's oeuvre: 'Me acuerdo de que fui a ver el *Mahabharata* y me largué a cenar a la primera ocasión. Luego llegué para ver el final' (Joglars, 2001: 115); 'La insuperable *Carmen* de Peter Brook, una de las mejores cosas que hemos visto en nuestra vida. Peter Brook puede ser magnífico o insoportable. Él, que es un místico, cuando se enfrenta a temas terrenales reacciona bien, pero cuando lleva temas que tienden al misticismo se vuelve insufrible' (Joglars, 2001: 121). Evidently we cannot expect wholehearted agreement on specifics, but Peter Brook and Albert Boadella seem to take the same delight in attacking the establishment. In an age of commercial theatre where the products must be economically viable, making theatre has become a deathly

serious affair. As previously noted, Peter Brook defined this as the so-called “Deadly Theatre”:

We see his (Shakespeare’s) plays done by good actors in what seems like the proper way – they look lively and colourful, there is music and everyone is all dressed up, just as they are supposed to be in the best of classical theatres. Yet secretly we find it excruciatingly boring – and in our hearts we either blame Shakespeare, or theatre as such, or even ourselves [...] In his heart (the spectator) wants a theatre that is nobler-than-life and he confuses a sort of intellectual satisfaction with the true experience for which he craves (Brook, 1990: 12-13).

Boadella notes a similar mentality in the average spectator, explaining that ‘La gente va al teatro como cumpliendo un anacronismo, un deber melancólico. Van al teatro como si fueran al cementerio’ (Joglars, 2001: 132). Both Els Joglars and Brook ascribe the problem to two sources: firstly to a ‘deadly spectator, who for special reasons enjoys a lack of intensity and even a lack of entertainment’ (Brook, 1990: 12), and secondly to the purveyors of this same theatre. Having described the theatre listings at the end of 2005 as ‘digna de los últimos años del Franquismo’, Boadella goes on to explain that such mediocrity is due to the ‘miedo al fracaso económico [...] es un teatro de buen rollo, sin ofender a nadie’ (Boadella, 2005 d). Els Joglars have never been afraid of provoking a reaction from their audience, the most extreme examples of which include the court-martial that resulted from *La torna* (1977), and the enormous controversy stirred up by their satire of organised religion in *Teledium* (1983), which had violent consequences: ‘en Valencia dispararon tiros contra la fachada del teatro y en Madrid el actor Jaume Collell recibe diecisiete puñaladas’ (Boadella, 2001: 75). As Brook states, ‘If a play does not make us lose our balance, the evening is unbalanced’ (Brook,

1987: 54), and Els Joglars have clearly hit a few nerves in their time, attesting to their capacity to 'unbalance'.

The fact that both practitioners regard balancing social comment with entertainment as an important part of their craft is telling in itself. Boadella and Brook have both recognised that the average production and spectator are taking part in theatrical events that are stagnant, and so it becomes possible for them to strategise the reactivation of that vital line of communion between actor and audience. Indeed, the fact that they have both made it their task to address the issue of passive spectators means that the rehearsal process must necessarily be rebuilt. Els Joglars have employed self-evaluation by means of practice-based exploration, arriving at a theory of theatre and thereby a process unique to them, in order to rise to a challenge they have set themselves. This in itself makes their creative process a valuable subject of study.

II.v. Origin of the idea: From the Author to the Collective

There is always a certain confusion in devised and collaborative theatre regarding authorship. In general terms, most companies maintain they work in a collaborative fashion and will claim joint creation of a particular show: 'In devised work, if there is a writer, he or she is generally there to articulate the group or the director's vision [...] sometimes there are more than two. Sometimes the project demands an altogether different set of relationships' (Teevan, 2006: 21). This leads to a form of branding, where the company's identity becomes the major selling point. This partly explains the eventual commercialisation of other Catalan companies like La Fura dels Baus, Els Comediants, Dagoll Dagom and El Tricicle,

all of whom use their built-up reputation as a devising company to advertise their work. On occasions this form of branding, to a lesser or greater degree, hides the fact that most of the weight rests on only one or two people. For instance, the British devising company Complicite are defined by the work and personality of artistic director Simon McBurney, who works with a shifting line-up of collaborators. Ultimately, the character and make-up of any devising collective is unique because it is a fairly recent hybrid theatre model that so far lacks a holistic and widespread definition; indeed, one can argue that it is impossible to define the term devising because every group approaches the form in a distinct way. As we have already seen, the particulars of Els Joglars' methodology have changed immensely since the company's inception in 1962, but perhaps the single most important shift has been away from purely physical expression and towards embracing language as a theatrical tool. In a 1985 interview with Boadella, Fermín Cabal notes the shift in approach that *Operació Ubú* (1981) represents:

F.C.- En Joglars ha habido una evolución desde un lenguaje teatral más primitivo, más elemental, muy apoyado en el cuerpo y en el ritmo del espectáculo, hacia un encuentro con la palabra, que, a mi modo de ver, ya predomina en los últimos espectáculos, y que permitiría hablar casi de textos tradicionales [...] Por ejemplo, en *Operació Ubú*, para mí tu mejor trabajo de los últimos tiempos, donde la palabra, el diálogo...

A.B.- *Operació Ubú* es, en cierto modo, una excepción. Fue una propuesta hecha en concreto para el Lliure. Y no hay que olvidar que el Lliure es un teatro [...] literario. (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 111)

Whilst in 1985 *Operació Ubú* could have been described as an exception, Els Joglars have been exhibiting a more word-based approach to preparing their shows in recent years. Gone are the days of open-ended improvisation, like the

first day of *El joc* (1970) and the inception of the ‘método Fabra’.²⁹ Indeed, speaking of the distribution of rights, Boadella points out that ‘yo he repartido [...] cuando hicimos *Operació Ubú*, mis derechos de autor con los actores, a pesar de que la obra era casi totalmente mía’ (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 109). In many respects he considers the writing of the play to be his own work. However, in the same interview Boadella expresses his rejection of the ‘autor de despacho’ (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 111), so we cannot speak of a reversion to a purely conventional method either. Fermín Cabal finds this apparent contradiction puzzling, spending a significant proportion of the interview trying to coax Boadella into admitting that he writes Els Joglars’ plays: ‘Pero tú has firmado a veces [...] También has firmado *La Odisea* [...] Hay algo ingenuo en esta pretensión de suprimir al autor’ (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 110). Boadella has found a balance for his roles as director and author within the company, a system through which neither role overshadows that of the actor, the core of theatre for him; and as the Els Joglars’ process has gradually coalesced into a stable format that has replicated itself through the years, it has also become easier to observe and define it. Boadella, then, appears to have positioned himself very carefully in order to facilitate the work of the actor, even from the earliest stages of preparation. This is certainly true insofar as rehearsals are concerned, where the actor’s improvisations are the focus of creativity; perhaps on the other hand Boadella’s political visibility overshadows the productions and how the audience receives them.

²⁹ This term was coined to describe the rehearsals that Boadella came up with for *El joc*, where the company would improvise based on words randomly plucked from the Fabra dictionary, as discussed earlier in Part I, Chapter I: {pp. 95-96}.

It must be stressed, though, that the initial impetus for a show always comes from Boadella. Even in *El joc*, Boadella was the one who stood up, picked up the dictionary and started reading out loud; he didn't leave it to one of the actors or ask anyone's opinion for a good starting point. As he points out himself, 'a partir de cierto momento el director de la compañía soy yo, y yo el que decide lo que hay que hacer y cómo vamos a hacerlo sin ninguna pretensión totalitaria' (Boadella, 2006: 16). And since Boadella is responsible for initiating the process of work on a new show, he does the majority of the preparation on his own. In the case of *En un lugar de Manhattan*, a production I will be using henceforth as a case-study of the Els Joglars rehearsal process, the show originated as a commission by the Comunidad de Madrid for the celebrations of the fourth centenary of the publication of *Don Quijote*. Boadella tells of his re-reading of Cervantes' novel as a starting point and how he instructed his actors to do the same. The company did so, reading the novel while touring *El Retablo de las maravillas*, an adaptation of one of Cervantes' theatrical interludes. We can therefore conceive how the actors were beginning to immerse themselves into the world of *Don Quijote*, whilst still focusing on the show they were performing, and how Boadella was already laying out the groundwork for the new project.

Boadella's preparatory notes pick up from this stage, documenting his thought process after having re-read the novel. This process is extremely systematic, and the notes for *En un lugar de Manhattan* are an indication of the extent of his disciplined thought. What follows is an abbreviated list of the headings within Boadella's typed research notes:

Notas sobre una relectura de El Quijote
Síntesis de acciones y el ánimo de Quijote
Primeras aproximaciones
Ampliación de dos posibilidades
Decisión final (Boadella, 2005 a)

A clear line of thought can be traced from Cervantes' *Don Quijote* and Els Joglars' *En un lugar de Manhattan* following this systematic structure. As we will see, Boadella ostensibly began by rereading the novel and taking some notes of his initial impressions. These impressions formed into an argument that was then given shape through seven alternative stage narratives; then, narrowed down to the two most promising situations; and finally the selected option was gradually fleshed out, using ideas suggested throughout the entire set of notes. Analysing this process will inform how Els Joglars arrived at their final product, as well as giving us a more complete understanding of the thematic purpose of *En un lugar de Manhattan*.

The pre-rehearsal notes immediately express the nature of Els Joglars' devising style. The systematic ordering of ideas before proceeding to physically generating the story sets them aside from more anarchic companies who prefer to opt for a collaborative practical research process (such as the London based Shunt, whose group process entirely eschews linear narrative). Indeed, there is a clear development within the company's methods when we compare these detailed notes to the improvised working methods of the 1970s as exemplified by *El joc*. This change in process was gradual, as we have seen, but reflects the group's increasing interest in ideas and in communicating with the audience. Likewise, if we compare the members of Els Joglars in *El joc* and *En un lugar de Manhattan*,

we will see that only Boadella was involved in both productions; it is clear that devising hinges too much on all the people within the group to suppose that the system could have remained unchanged with a whole new creative team. Nowadays Boadella has gone so far as to reject some of the compromises forced on the work by the group dynamic of the 1970s incarnation of Els Joglars. Taking the group's political commentary as an example, on many occasions Boadella has commented on the eagerness of certain performers to introduce blunt anti-Franco messages in pieces where these were perhaps obstructive, as in *Mary d'Ous*:

Como estábamos bajo la dictadura de Franco los militantes antifranquistas de la compañía –Ferran Rañé y Lluïsa Hurtado– empezaron a protestar porque les parecía que estábamos haciendo una frivolidad mientras el proletariado estaba sometido a la más horrenda persecución [...] La obra quedó abortada. Quizá con la fórmula inicial, sin el mensaje antifranquista, habríamos tenido menos éxito en España, pero habría quedado más armónica, más redonda. (Joglars, 2001: 157-58)

The suggestion is that some elements within the company wanted to introduce overtly political comments too blunt to fit easily within the piece, while the current team seem more intent on structuring a clear argument that will make their socio-political messages more reasoned. Indeed, Boadella's instinct has led him to a satirical approach rather than agit-prop. The mimed generic representations of repression in *El joc* are a far cry from the sophisticated satire of *Ubú President* (1995). We can also begin to trace Boadella's procedure of producing introductory notes for the actors providing a starting point for improvisation, to the early 1980s and the arrival of such long-standing performers as Jesús Agelet, Ramon Fontserè and Pilar Sáenz. This could be ascribed to a greater urge to maintain control of the rehearsal room as a result of dissatisfying experiences. Boadella has often

disowned *Mary d'Ous* in terms similar to the above, an attitude that has a lot to do with the working conditions:

La armonía dentro del equipo es esencial para la buena marcha de la obra. Si no hay armonía se desbarata el sistema de trabajo [...] Boadella necesita la colaboración y la fe ciega de los actores, no sólo hacia él sino entre ellos mismos. Tenía dos opciones: echarlos a todos o buscar el consenso. (Joglars, 2001: 157)

As we know the decision to expel the actors was delayed until 1977's *La torna*, a decision borne exclusively of Boadella's dissatisfaction with the company's direction: 'Al final Boadella les dijo que no volvería a trabajar con ninguno de ellos. No estaba a gusto, eso era todo' (Joglars, 2001: 81). In re-imagining the company from scratch, Boadella can only be exerting a form of creative control, deciding to surround himself with actors who would share his creative vision: 'Lo que Boadella buscaba era gente menos dependiente de la moda, con capacidad de encaje, poco susceptible, ni arrogantes ni demasiado exhibicionistas' (Joglars, 2001: 82). This leads to a paradox in Boadella's work as director/writer of Els Joglars, which he discusses in an interview with Fermín Cabal: 'Esta es la autocrítica que me hago. Temo que haya un exceso de control que limita la posibilidad creativa diaria del actor' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 115). Noting the change in methodology throughout the 1980s, Boadella displays an awareness that, in controlling his vision of the company more firmly by means of much more guided improvisations and systematic research, the actors were no longer the paramount sources of creation that they may have been in earlier pieces. Much of Boadella's methodology has therefore become a careful balancing act which he himself compares to his own garden: 'El jardín del Bufón [Boadella] simboliza su estilo

teatral: una combinación bien proporcionada de espontaneidad y orden' (Boadella, 2001: 53). The success of the company is very much predicated on the success of a balancing procedure brought to fruition as early in the process as Boadella's own notes, which certainly attest to his artistic control. The company has been structured around a devising process dependent on his presence to both organise and discipline a rehearsal methodology not anchored by a pre-written script.

II.v.a Notas sobre una lectura de 'El Quijote'

The set of preliminary notes to *En un lugar de Manhattan* provides ample proof of Boadella's focus whilst developing the piece, and how he comes to devise physical action from an already carefully outlined plan. The forty-three pages of notes, recording that early process, are largely alternative starting points for improvisation, which accept the need to have a clear but non-restrictive purpose. This was a lesson learnt from the *El joc* process, from which Boadella concluded that:

Era mejor enfrentarme al ensayo con pocas cosas preconcebidas, en lugar de excitar la fantasía en la soledad de un despacho, como hace el dramaturgo tradicional. Esto me ofrecía la oportunidad de construirlo directamente sobre la realidad, con personajes y espacio auténticos. (Boadella, 2001: 186).

Whilst we can clearly recognise this practice-based ideology in Boadella's current output, it must also be critiqued to some extent. The statement returns to Boadella's usual rejection of the 'autor de despacho' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 111), but many of his notes for *En un lugar de Manhattan* could be described as the exercise of imagination that he claims to avoid: 'la fantasía me interesa

poco' (Boadella, 2005 d).³⁰ Indeed, in spite of his apparent disdain for Stanislavski and his emphasis that his actors do not use a psychological approach, many of the notes are constructions of back-story for the characters and the situation, elements that Stanislavski and even Lee Strasberg might have approved of. Clearly there is a constant exchange of ideas between physical improvisation and his role as a writer: he emphasised that he was unable to write a story without having a physical situation in mind (Boadella: 2005 b). In the case of the rehearsal room of *En un lugar de Manhattan* I believe we can safely assume that he has a great deal of empirical knowledge of rehearsal room process, as well as the personalities of his actors, in order to draw up the imagined scenarios that he explores in his notes. Therefore, whilst his annotations may have the appearance of flights of writerly fancy, they are still firmly rooted in people and places with which he is familiar. Ultimately this balancing of imagination with reality parallels the balance between the ordered prescriptive notes and the actors' freedom of creativity. Although Boadella goes into some minute detail in describing his envisaged plot synopsis, the characters still feel sketchy, as if awaiting the input of the people who will be playing them. In effect he provides a context or scenario, but the actors have liberty to create, change or expand their own characters.

Looking at the first section of the notes we immediately see how they attest to Boadella's thought process for this project. We perceive his specific interest in the text itself; here looking at the interactions between classic canonical texts and the

³⁰ The imaginative element of cultural literary inheritance covers ample ground, not just high literature but popular culture, with the comic book world of Francisco Ibáñez's *Mortadelo y Filemón* widely taking hold of Spanish imagination. He too published an anniversary edition of his comic that revolved around the world of *Don Quijote*, and the playfulness of the spirit of the medium seems closely related to that of *Els Joglars'* equally lively comic characterisations, right down to the social and political parody that both indulge in (Ibáñez, 2005).

realities of day-to-day life in modern society: 'La irradiación de las obras llamadas clásicas tiene a lo largo de la historia distintos volúmenes de asimilación' (Boadella, 2005 a). From the very first sentence Boadella sets the tone, fixing his interpretation of *Don Quijote* on its relevance and interaction with the world of the present. He relates the ebb and flow of interest in a particular work to the climate of the times, pointing out historical parallels: 'Si pensamos, por ejemplo, en la Roma antigua, podemos observar cómo su influjo queda apagado durante más de un milenio, hasta que en la Italia de los siglos XV y XVI reaparece como motor de inspiración de uno de los mayores impulsos artísticos y humanísticos creados por el hombre' (Boadella, 2005 a). Indeed, the tone of the section dealing with the re-reading of *Don Quijote* is that of an intellectual essay, presenting a clear, compelling and logically constructed argument, including supporting examples and evidence (such as the parallel with Rome). Having recognised that art and culture have a varying influence depending on the contemporary world, Boadella goes on to define what he believes the cultural inheritance of Cervantes' novel has been: 'Cervantes fue capaz de iluminar, justificar y magnificar un insólito código para enfrentarse individualmente al mundo, fundiendo la corriente realista y la mitológica en una sola emoción' (Boadella, 2005 a). Eventually this thought leads Boadella to the thesis of his production:

Sin embargo, cuando tratamos de aislar algunos influjos Quijotescos en nuestra sociedad contemporánea, asombra constatar que hoy ya no queda un solo rastro de aquel pasado [...] en muy poco tiempo han desaparecido las huellas de algo que había perdurado durante siglos. (Boadella, 2005 a)

More refined expressions of these very same thoughts can be found in the published programme for the show under the director's notes: 'Asombra constatar cómo no queda un solo vestigio quijotesco en nuestra sociedad contemporánea [...] Aquella herencia estilística y moral [...] no sólo ha dejado de tener vigencia, sino que resulta imposible captar hoy analogías con el entorno inmediato' (Boadella, 2005 c). However, the programme notes go one logical step further, expressing how the company's show proposes to engage with this issue, which of course the pre-rehearsal notes could not have predicted: 'Nos hemos sumado al IV centenario con la buena intención de hacer visibles determinados rasgos del auténtico Quijote, enfrentándonos en desigual batalla a esta obsesión timadora que caracteriza el momento artístico' (Boadella, 2005 a). Here we see a clear development in the argument of the piece, where a decision has been taken to comment on the apparent irrelevance of *Don Quijote* to the modern citizen, but also by extension to criticise the current artistic climate as banal by comparison. Returning to the first notes, Boadella explains the artist's creative process, pointing out: 'Una vez construida la obra, esta evoluciona al margen de los objetivos y de la propia existencia del artista [...] cuando la obra sale de las manos del artista, son los hombres quienes deciden su utilidad' (Boadella, 2005 a). In exploring the novel from the perspective of its creative role in society, Boadella focuses on the nature of artistic creation itself. He ends his notes complaining that his generation of artists is partly to blame for extinguishing the last flames of the spirit of *Don Quijote*, 'para después, teatralizar el derrumbe final como el triunfo de la revolución progresista' (Boadella, 2005 a). Without making it clear that the so-called 'progressive artists' will be a target of his show, the idea is sown and clearly picked up as a thematic thread in the piece itself. For the time being the notes merely

emphasise that the spirit of *Don Quijote* has been lost: a clear and simple starting point for the company to research.

Having drawn up the boundaries of the exploration, Boadella undertakes more detailed notes to define the exact nature of the character of *Don Quijote* and the spirit within which his actions are framed. Already the character has been described as ‘mezcla de ideales góticos y caballerosidad cristiana’ (Boadella, 2005 a). He comments that after re-reading the work he explored around the novel, laying particular stress on the works of Miguel de Unamuno.³¹ Although Boadella describes the current climate as lethal to *Don Quijote*, Unamuno was already relating the same malaise as far back as 1930, as the opening to his *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* indicates, tellingly entitled ‘El sepulcro de Don Quijote’: ‘Si nuestro señor Don Quijote resucitara y volviese a ésta su España, andarían buscándole una segunda intención a sus nobles desvaríos’ (Unamuno, 1971: 11). Looking forward to *En un lugar de Manhattan*, we see the same attitude prevalent in the characters who interact with the Don Quixote figure, attempting to ascertain exactly what he stands to gain from actions which, to all intents and purposes, are transparently noble. So, when encountering the Quixote and Sancho plumbers in *En un lugar de Manhattan*, the director Gabriela reacts suspiciously: ‘Por lo que parece, se trata de impedir que yo realice mi Quijote...’ (Boadella, 2005 b: 52). Thus the link to Unamuno seems clear: ‘Si uno denuncia un abuso, persigue la injusticia, fustiga la ramplonería, se preguntan los esclavos: ¿Qué irá buscando en eso? ¿A qué aspira?’ (Unamuno, 1971: 11).

³¹ 1864-1936, Spanish writer and philosopher and key figure in the ‘Generation of 98’.

In devising the basis for a scenario, Boadella parallels Unamuno's social and artistic dissatisfaction, as he often refers to the Spanish theatrical scene as staging nothing but 'teatro de buen rollo' (Boadella, 2005 d) in an overall climate of theatrical fraud. Furthermore, the connections between *En un lugar de Manhattan* and Unamuno go deeper than commenting on the dying spirit of *Don Quijote* in Spain. One of Unamuno's most recognisable stylistic elements, drawn from Cervantes himself, is the use of metafiction, often drawing in his novels a very faint line between fiction and reality.³² Of course this blending of fiction and reality is also a hallmark of *Don Quijote*, where various 'authors' of Don Quixote's actions are mentioned and even interact with the fictional characters. However, returning to Unamuno's work on *Don Quijote*, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Basque writer goes as far as not drawing a distinction between the reality and fiction of Don Quixote. In proposing the notion that if Don Quixote were to be resurrected, he is also implicitly suggesting that Don Quixote indeed lived, as if he were a historical figure. More than that, Unamuno goes on to question the very existence of his contemporaries, people who are living flesh and blood: '¿Existen de verdad? Yo creo que no; pues si existieran, si existieran de verdad, sufrirían de existir' (Unamuno, 1971: 12). Here Unamuno is blurring the distinctions between reality and fiction to drive his point home, describing the living legacy of Cervantes' work and how it is more vital and life-affirming than the dull smugness of his contemporaries: 'Esto es una miseria, una completa miseria. A nadie le importa nada de nada. Y cuando alguno trata de agitar aisladamente éste o aquel problema, una u otra cuestión, se lo atribuyen o a negocio o a afán de notoriedad y

³² In his novel *Niebla*, the main character Augusto eventually meets Unamuno himself who not only informs him that he is a literary creation but, more than that, he will die upon departing their meeting (Unamuno, 1971).

ansia de singularizarse' (Unamuno, 1971: 11). Boadella and Unamuno are moved by an identical desire to shake up a staid and inert contemporary society, and both use the same source text to achieve a similar effect: to denounce 'buen rollo' theatre. Just as Unamuno makes Don Quixote as real as any other human being, Boadella incarnates his spirit in *En un lugar de Manhattan* with the figure of Don Alonso, a man who has become obsessed with the character and taken on his personality and objectives. By fully researching the possibilities of the source text and surrounding materials, Boadella is constructing the basis for further devising a scenario.

II.v.b Síntesis de acciones

Whilst Boadella's first section of notes feels like reasoned thematic approaches to the material, the second section resembles sketched out visual ideas. *Apuntes hechos una vez leído El Quijote* consists of a series of short paragraphs which flesh out the intellectual argument of the first few pages by assigning images from the novel to the ideas: 'Esa figura escuálida que transitaba por los polvorientos caminos de la Mancha, venció la destrucción y la adversidad por la fuerza tenaz de su individualidad. ¿Apología de la individualidad?' (Boadella, 2005 a). Boadella uses the visual suggestions of the novel, the dusty roads and the thin knight, to push him towards formulating a question, allowing him to end on a possible thematic thrust for the performance. The rest of the notes continue to flesh out the ideas by arriving at an understanding of the character. Boadella annotates his vision of the thought-processes of Alonso Quijano, the Quixote figure of the play: 'La locura se constata porque no piensa como el común de las gentes [...] cree que el hombre es superior a las circunstancias en que vive y no deja que las

circunstancias prevalezcan sobre él' (Boadella, 2005 a). This subsequently leads Boadella to hypothesise why Cervantes would have been interested in seeing a character revive the order of the knights errant: 'Desde el punto de vista de alguien que conoce profundamente la forma de proceder "Castellana" es posible deducir que a Cervantes le moviera también una intención satirizadora sobre sus propios conciudadanos' (Boadella, 2005 a). This firmly roots the interpretation of the novel in familiar Els Joglars territory, that of social satire. Moving back towards the modern world, Boadella looks at the processes of Franco's dictatorship, linking them to his interpretation of the novel: 'Determinados destellos de un estilo "castellano-cervantino" podían aparecer en cualquier rincón de las administraciones oficiales' (Boadella, 2005 a). In his re-imagining of the novel, Boadella hits on the angle that interests him, that of social satire and commentary. This is how he maintains the consistency of his work and remains true to the spirit of the novel as he sees it, by noting that Cervantes wrote a satire he grasps the possibility of building upon it and bringing it into the modern world in keeping with the spirit of Cervantes' own work.

The final subheading before entering into the various situations and starting points that Boadella created before rehearsals is entitled *Síntesis de acciones y el ánimo que actúa en ellas Don Quijote*. He has already established an argument and a point of contention, the notion that the spirit of *Don Quijote* has departed from the modern citizenry. Likewise he has begun to hit on ideas that could lead him towards a staging, including a study of the abstract notion of creative process coupled with the urge to satirise the modern world of arts and politics. He has also arrived at a definition of the character of *Don Quijote* himself, both in terms of

personality and dramatic function within the overall work. However, so far there are only a handful of visual ideas, and no physical actions for the actors to explore. Therefore, before coming up with synopses, Boadella has written a list of active definitions that suit the novel:

Protector de amantes en apuros
Verdugo de monstruos
Mantenedor de su honra
Pacificador Defensor de doncellas
Paladín de Dulcinea y otras princesas
Reparador de agravios
Enemigo de encantadores (Boadella, 2005 a)

This is the only brief list of actions and ideas that the notes package includes. When creating work from scratch that is nevertheless derived from an external source it is paramount to stay focused on the core concepts and have a handy checklist of elements that need to be incorporated. The above list is a perfect example of plot and situation elements that need to be maintained in order for the character to behave in a consistent manner, both within Els Joglars' own show and in synch with Cervantes' source character. The final show incorporated all of the above-mentioned actions in some measure, responding to the salient elements of the novel. Thus, Don Alonso in *En un lugar de Manhattan* fights against all manner of monstrous depravity; he maintains his honour by remaining loyal to Dulcinea; he struggles to defend the ladies he encounters through his adventures; and memorably rails humorously against the wizardry of Leroy Merlin, a DIY chain in Spain, hence linking the mythological Merlin to the character's trade as a plumber.

II.v.c. Primeras aproximaciones.

With these preliminary processes completed, Boadella moves on to a list of possible scenarios, each a short paragraph in length. They all have in common the search for potential Quixote figures within society, and most have had elements exploited for performance. Boadella suggests possible character-types who may have become obsessed with Don Quixote, including for instance a writer or actor who has worked on some form of adaptation. We can immediately recognise how this option has been taken on board with the theatre company rehearsing an adaptation. A further variant is a group of foreigners who are studying *Don Quijote* and staging some form of performance. Again the performance element dominates the idea, but we can also see the input of foreigners in *En un lugar de Manhattan* with both Pilar Sáenz's Argentinean director and Minnie Marx's English actress. Another option, which was clearly developed, was a version exclusively about plumbers, in which Don Quixote travels around the city fixing both piping and various Cervantine muddles. Another situation that was cannibalised for the final show is the so-called *variante femenina* in which Boadella outlines the character traits that were ultimately used by Sáenz's director when devising her feminist Quixote with a lesbian Quijote-Sancho double act.

In a couple of cases the ideas come from past shows rather than being adapted for the new piece. For instance, *Variante en la línea M-7 Catalònia* is self-explanatory and takes the same structural conceit as the 1978 Els Joglars show. Thus, scientists from the future would confuse the literature of the time for reality, showing Quijote and Sancho-like figures and how they behaved in day to day life. Likewise, the *Variante asilo o albergue de la pobreza* bears a resemblance to the

setting of *El nacional* (1993), where a Quixotic usher has taken possession of an abandoned theatre in order to re-create its former glories. Here, Boadella proposes that Quijote and Sancho could be homeless people who perform as buskers and living statues on Barcelona's Rambla, rallying other beggars to their Cervantine cause. In spite of the similarities, the development of the plot hints at the solutions later adopted by the company for *En un lugar de Manhattan*. For instance, it turns out that the Quijote-statue has no real idea what the novel *Don Quijote* was about and it is in fact a different eccentric old man who takes on the role and hence command of the situation. This is the same conceit in which the actress Quixote is replaced by the plumber-Quixote who is considerably more in-touch with the spirit of the character. Indeed, of all the possible story-lines, this is the only one with a cast-list, including the real and fake Quixotes and Sancho, the shelter owner, a gay/drug-addict who wants a sex change, someone who lives off charity, and a windscreen cleaner. Although not all of these figures were transported to the resultant show, Xavier Boada's character is indeed gay, and the immigrant Quixote and Sancho double-acts are used in various guises in the play within a play: as lesbian South-American immigrants in New York for instance.

A couple of synopses remain. One is entitled *Variante casa de putos para mujeres*, and is perhaps the only one not obviously used to devise a specific event within the show itself – although the tableau of sexual depravity in the club-scene toilets may have derived from this starting point. There is also an expanded *Variante dentro del escenario*, which is specifically about 'el proceso de creación de una obra sobre El Quijote' (Boadella, 2005 a). As Boadella indicates, this option could house other storylines: 'puede integrar las anteriores en forma de líneas

dramáticas que se prueban y se abandonan' (Boadella, 2005 a). Although he does not immediately develop this particular option, Boadella does note the flexibility of the idea as promising. Only one initial idea remains, the *Variante del viejo militar*, one of the two selected to generate a more detailed synopsis. In this idea, Boadella envisions an aged and decrepit general from Franco's era as the Quixotic figure, and subsequently decides to continue exploring it along with the *Variante Fontaneros*. Although the next section only explores these two concepts, it is clear that all the different alternatives fuel Boadella's creative process as he continues to build the story-line according to the governing idea. In a sense, *Las primeras aproximaciones* feel like uncensored ideas, simply noted down as possibilities in a brainstorming process, regardless of their quality. Most brainstorming processes function on the same principle, to note down as many ideas as possible, rejecting nothing. This partly enables the creator to remain uncensored and to allow more unusual ideas to emerge after all the obvious alternatives have already surfaced. Indeed, Boadella himself recognises this natural process in his *Variante dentro del escenario*, explaining how the fictional creative team stage 'las primeras aproximaciones tópicas y las posteriores improvisaciones que van depurando lentamente en una obra' (Boadella, 2005 a). Continuing with the discipline, Boadella then takes further notes exploring the two alternatives he finds most promising for development.

II.v.d. Ampliación de dos posibilidades.

Boadella begins his *Ampliación de dos posibles líneas argumentales* with the full storyline for the aforementioned old soldier. The starting point for this idea originates in the earlier conceptual notes in which Boadella wryly commented on

the regime's resemblances to the world of *Don Quijote*. He begins by outlining the character's back-story and ties in the Quixote obsession: 'siempre estuvo convencido que el caballero de la Mancha era un antepasado suyo' (Boadella, 2005 a). In his current state of infirmity, this obsession has increasingly become a reality to him. The action would begin with a family reunion, in which the family, confronted by his eccentric attitude, would play along in order to avoid angering him. In essence, we can see that Boadella is borrowing from the already cited uses of performance within performance: here too the family are forced to act out scenes from *El Quijote* in order to pacify the sick patriarch. However, the seeds for the final scenographic decisions can also be seen in this expanded idea.

Boadella's disciplined thought leads him to a final sub-heading, *Características y problemas de esta variante*, in which he weighs up its pros and cons. Many relate to specific issues of how to communicate the pre-determined theme, pointing out that the dying fascist order matches the dying influence of Cervantes' novel, ultimately pointing towards 'la representación ética y moral del pasado frente a un presente de tonos desquiciados' (Boadella, 2005 a). However, of more direct bearing to *En un lugar de Manhattan* is Boadella's analysis of the set, stating that by having a family re-enacting scenes that are imagined by the general, 'tiene la aparente facilidad de inducir a un solo espacio' (Boadella, 2005 a). On the other hand, as Boadella subsequently points out, 'la contrapartida estriba precisamente en la posible inmovilidad'. Boadella's encounter with this problem does not conclude in a potential solution, but we can imagine that this notion remains planted in the back of his mind.

The resolution is the theatre-space set of the final show, a single set which acts as a malleable blank canvas on which to paint various different scenes. The pitfall of immovability is thus avoided, with visual suggestion positioned as a goal worth attaining. As Boadella explains, 'una puerta da muchísimas más posibilidades que toda una escenografía' (Boadella, 2005 d), clearly referring to the free-standing door frame, the only scenographic element which ably converts the space at every turn without recourse to greater complexities. Nevertheless, the old general option was later rejected for this show, although a similar character appears in *La torna de la torna* (2005), a re-envisioned version of *La torna* (1977) created by Boadella with a cast of drama students from Barcelona's Institut del Teatre. Boadella introduced an aged intransigent Francoist general in a retirement home, based on the military elite who gave the order to shut down the original performance of *La torna*. The framing device parts from the notion that General Prieto is still obsessed with the 'cómicos' (players) who staged the original *La torna*, having caught wind of the new production from the cocoon of the home. Their presence haunts him as the scenes replay in his mind and he blusters on unrepentant of his actions in an increasing state of mental instability. There is something vaguely Quixotic about the re-imagined *La torna*, in the sense of a company riding out again to right the wrongs of the past. Since both *La torna de la torna* and *En un lugar de Manhattan* were being prepared at around the same time throughout 2005, it is not too much of a stretch of the imagination to suppose that there was distinct cross-feeding between the development of the Cervantes adaptation and Boadella's side-project.³³

³³ For more on *La torna de la torna*, see my article in the international theatre journal *Gestos* (Breden, 2006 a: 148-57).

II.v.e. Decisión final.

Having now settled on an idea for a setting, the rest of the notes deal with fleshing it out. For the time being, however, the idea focuses solely on the plumbers, not yet combined with the rehearsal room. As a result the notes are entirely centred on Quijote and Sancho, building a back-story to contextualise later actions. For instance, Boadella decides that the plumbers should be interns in a mental asylum, once again linking back to a previous Els Joglars show, *Yo tengo un tío en América* (1991). In this original scenario they have escaped from the asylum, although later versions amended this situation, suggesting instead that the two plumbers do voluntary odd-jobs to assist their re-integration into society. Nevertheless, Boadella starts with a breakout and he begins by writing a series of letters between the doctors at the asylum and the police. It seems that in generating this back-story Boadella is trying to generate ideas for actions without recourse to actual physicalisation, thereby not impinging on the work of his actors in generating the actual material of the show. Therefore the first letter merely acts as a creative writing exercise to define the character later to be incarnated by Ramon Fontserè: 'sufre un brote esquizofrénico, lo cual se manifiesta en un trastorno agudo de personalidad [...] El posible desencadenante del desequilibrio, lo situamos en la coincidencia de su nombre con el personaje del Quijote' (Boadella, 2005 a). Although the doctors never appear and are only referred to in passing in the show itself, this information is explained by Sancho: 'resultando que del poco dormir, del mucho soldar y venga que venga que venga leer siempre el mismo libro del de la Mancha, se le fue resecaando el cerebro, de tal manera que vino a perder el entendimiento' (Boadella, 2005 a). Later in the notes, the police

inform the doctors of the progress of their investigation, relating an entire episode in which *Don Quijote* and Sancho arrive at a male lingerie shop to fix a leak: ‘el viejo mascullaba incoherentes discursos sobre el pudor o la contención con la que debían vestir los machos’ (Boadella, 2005 a). Whilst it is possible that Boadella generated this entire scene with a view to including it in the show, it seems more likely that he was exploring the ways in which the character might react when faced with modern shamelessness: ‘el tipo les amenazó con una enorme llave inglesa’ (Boadella, 2005 a). His reaction to debauchery follows similar lines throughout the play, using Quixotic pastiche language and his huge monkey wrench. Boadella begins to arrive at these specific elements of character and event by means of a guided creative writing tool, setting aside the more objective narrative distance of his synopses.

Whilst we can begin to recognise the resultant play from the descriptions of the letters, Boadella continues to fine-tune the plot-line by means of more detailed character notes and backstory. The notes later describe how Pancho Sanchiz joins Don Alonso to become his Sancho: ‘No fue difícil convencerlo para que le hiciera de ayudante, pues Sanchiz era incapaz de dar una sola respuesta negativa’ (Boadella, 2005 a). Boadella also establishes that Don Alonso’s Dulcinea will be the nurse who gives the patients their pills, a fact that is rendered clear by Alonso himself: ‘me encomiendo a la sin par Leonor del Sanatorio de San Blás’ (Boadella, 2005 a). Having found parallels for the central characters, Boadella proceeds to a list of possible encounters, echoing the episodic nature of Cervantes’ novel. Almost all of the ideas are adapted and used more or less prominently in the show:

Reparar avería en piso con episodio de violencia de género
Reparar avería en piso con episodio de mujeres liberadas
Reparar avería en piso con episodio de homosexuales casados
Reparar avería en piso con episodio entre infieles suicidas (moros)
Reparar avería en piso con episodio entre separatistas (Boadella, 2005 a)

The list goes on at some length, and in some cases we can see how Boadella mixes ideas from different aforementioned synopses: ‘Encuentro con un Quijote estatua de La Rambla’ (Boadella, 2005 a). We also witness how Boadella works in the elements of social satire that are the hallmark of his company: ‘La perversidad de los curas (reparaciones en una iglesia) La desfachatez del poder (reparaciones en un despacho político)’ (Boadella, 2005 a). He effectively explores all the possibilities that the plot-line affords him, illustrating its malleability.

II.v.f. Problemas y características que presenta este tipo de narración

The notes progress to an evaluation of the plot idea itself addressing problem-solving issues, noting immediately that ‘la reproducción de la novela parece más cercana que en otras variantes [...] es la que promueve mejor la idea esencial del viaje y el encuentro con aventuras distintas’ (Boadella, 2005 a). Boadella then plunges straight into an evaluation of the scenographic potential of the idea, concluding that: ‘una grave dificultad en la descripción y en los cambios de los distintos espacios, o sea, un auténtico problema escenográfico de solución complicada’ (Boadella, 2005 a). This analysis allows for possible pitfalls, where the General scenario enabled quick scene changes, the plumber version cannot easily accomplish the same. Furthermore, the plumber scenario, as envisaged at this point, has other problems: ‘Con relación al oficio de fontanero, encontramos diferencias fundamentales con el anacronismo que representa ya el caballero

andante [...] Un fontanero sigue hoy siendo una profesión perfectamente contemporánea, y por lo tanto, tendríamos cierta dificultad en presentarlo como persona anticuada' (Boadella, 2005 a). The eventual solution on this front was to have Don Alonso searching for water leakage with a willow branch (a rural solution), carrying old-fashioned instruments and railing against PVC materials. This is not the only problem established from the outset: 'si el espectador establece un paralelismo muy conectado con la novela, puede ser entonces necesario la inclusión de cierto "suspense" para evitar que todo acabe siendo previsible' (Boadella, 2005 a). Boadella immediately provides a solution: 'cabría plantearse el conjunto del relato fuera de la fórmula estrictamente realista [...] que, por ejemplo, todo ocurriera en su mente enfermiza, en una simple habitación de hospital o en un ensayo teatral' (Boadella, 2005 a). Ultimately, Boadella concludes that the idea in its current state promises 'bastantes posibilidades de moverse en una franja suficientemente amplia' (Boadella, 2005 a). In seeking out the problems with the scenario, Boadella is again demonstrating good practice by establishing possible loopholes from the outset with a view to plugging them pre-emptively.

On the very next page we see how Boadella has approached the problem of the quick multiple changes of location, by opting to return to the rehearsal scenario. The final section of the notes is devoted to a *Decisión final sobre la línea argumental*. In essence, these are even more detailed and fictionalised creations of back-story, all now geared towards generating a single and consistent theatrical world. At this stage, all the familiar plot elements begin to fall into place, with the entire play paralleling a specific episode from *Don Quijote*, by Boadella's own admission: 'los actores aceptan el reto y (tal como lo hicieron los duques de la

novela) se dedican a divertirse a su costa' (Boadella, 2005 a). From the very first page of his final notes, Boadella has practically written the plot progression of the whole show, all before beginning work with the actors. When he then moves onto a first person narrative account of the rehearsals and the plumbers' arrival on-set, he merely adds specific actions and reactions to a very clearly developing plot. These indications occasionally go into some close detail. For instance Boadella already envisions Quijote's interaction with the lesbian lovers, or the arrival of the actors dressed as Romans:

[...] continuaron con la escena, confiando que aquellos supuestos guasones se retirarían del tema [...] Al observar lo que estaba sucediendo, el fontanero intervino amenazadoramente en la escena, dispuesto a no permitir semejante degradación [...] el actor, con las prisas, optó por un disfraz de legionario romano, pensando quizá que así impresionaría más aquellos desequilibrados. (Boadella, 2005 a)

However, it is still only Quijote and Sancho who feel like fleshed out characters, indicating that Boadella had still not hit on a very clear way of using the rehearsal situation to add to the theme of the play. Within the extended narrative, the rehearsal room still feels like a convenient spatial choice to allow Don Alonso to take part in a wide variety of episodes that would otherwise be impossible to stage. Seemingly becoming aware of the non-descript theatre troupe, Boadella interrupts his narrative and begins to describe the rest of the characters. He begins with an extended exploration of the director, who for now is called Max. We can travel right back to the first set of notes for Max's character traits: 'es lo que podríamos llamar una caricatura del progre adoctrinado en la escuela del esnobismo izquierdista' (Boadella, 2005 a). Although the sex and nationality of this character are later modified, the target of the satire remains unchanged, that is to attack the

exhibitionism that Boadella so loathes in the theatre industry and society in general: in *El rapto de Talía* (2000) he devotes an entire chapter to isolating, as he terms it, a 'virus exhibicionista' (Boadella, 2000: 37). Indeed, Boadella shares the same goal as his fictional counterpart, 'ver en qué puede asemejarse el héroe cervantino con la realidad actual' (Boadella, 2005 a), but the difference lies in their opposing methodologies. Where Boadella applies consistent and disciplined thought for a fully rounded adaptation, Max's 'sistema dramaturgico [...] pasa por reducirlos a una anécdota con ligeros paralelismos contemporáneos' (Boadella, 2005 a). This search for a superficial Quixote eventually becomes the backbone of the first hour of the show.

The final three sections appear to be three different drafts of *El primer ensayo*. According to Boadella, he only gives his actors between two to three pages of his notes before beginning rehearsals and these focused and distilled options appear to be the indicative notes to be handed to the cast. In these, he limits himself to setting the scene and outlining the main plot elements, excluding the end of the play, which Boadella has not explored in any stage of his notes. There is no suggested dialogue, there are only a handful of specific actions that could be literally recreated, and many ellipses: 'A través de las diversas situaciones, vamos conociendo la vida del apócrifo Quijote y su escudero' (Boadella, 2005 a). Of course, Boadella already has an extremely clear idea of what these situations will be, as we have seen how his previous notes recreate some scenes in vivid detail. However, the selection of shared material is significant, and perhaps more importantly what he chooses not to share and why. Boadella uses the physical improvisations in a very specific fashion, as we will go

on to discover, but clearly not to generate plot since the majority of the events of *En un lugar de Manhattan* are pre-empted in some form by his notes. However, he still speaks of the paramount creativity of the actor and Boada, one of his collaborators backs him up: 'Boadella dice que podría sentarse a escribir, pero [la obra] nunca sería tan rica como trabajando en grupo' (Boada, 2005). How the actors, the core of Boadella's theatre, contribute towards generating material for the show will help us understand the next stage in the Els Joglars rehearsal process, moving now beyond Boadella's process as a writer and taking on the role of director. The stages of the process are jocularly described in the following terms, although as we will see there is always some accuracy in such hyperbole:

Decálogo del proyecto colectivo

1. Optimismo general
2. Fase de desorientación
3. II Fase de desorientación
4. Confusión total
5. Período de cachondeo imparable
6. Búsqueda implacable de los culpables
7. Castigo ejemplar a los inocentes
8. Sálvese quien pueda
9. Discreta recuperación del optimismo perdido
10. Finalización inexplicable de la obra (Boadella, 2002 b)

Els Joglars – Chapter III - Development and Improvisation

In the first half of this section, we have dealt with the context of the Els Joglars rehearsal room, analysing how the company have adapted their methodology and responded to the practice of other international practitioners and companies. We have also seen how Boadella, as director of the group, positions himself for a new show by preparing exhaustive notes for improvisation. The next step is to study the rehearsal room dynamic and what it means for the company, and this will help determine the way in which all these theories and notes are applied practically. First of all, again it is worth contextualising the concept of the 'rehearsal room', and we will look at the notion of rehearsal as an opportunity to play in a safe environment. Then, we will return to the specifics of the case-study *En un lugar de Manhattan* in its rehearsal stage, once again relying on the videos, notes and eye-witnessed sessions in order to explain how the company works practically. This section will therefore comment on how the company receives and approaches an initial idea, by concentrating on a detailed analysis of the process.

III.i. Rehearsal as Play: The Context of the Rehearsal Room

It cannot be denied that Albert Boadella and the rest of Els Joglars have developed a theory of theatre that is based on years of honing their craft in the rehearsal room. It is also evident that Boadella exerts control over the current Els Joglars process by establishing detailed written notes before introducing the idea to the company. However, part of the mystery of the theatrical rehearsal process is how to create appropriate working relations so that a theoretical approach can then be practically applied. It is not a question of simply aiming for a series of pre-

defined goals; Els Joglars have chosen to collaborate in the creation of work whose form is not fully defined at the outset, in spite of Boadella's copious notes. It is worth considering how the company generated the adequate working relations to make such a process viable.

Coming up on their fortieth birthday in 2000, Els Joglars prepared a retrospective of their work in the form of *La guerra de los 40 años*. The book stands apart from any other celebratory anniversary edition in its desire to communicate the ideas of Els Joglars' work rather than the façade that most coffee table tomes choose to document in the form of photographs. The book is written by Arcadi Espada from transcripts of round-table discussions with the entire company present – tellingly, the book feels collaboratively written, with Espada merely giving an understandable shape to the reader, who feels ineluctably present at that discussion table. The narrative provides a suitable vehicle to defining the company because it utilises the same collaborative approach that the company apply to rehearsal, with all their voices intertwined and inextricably linked as a unit. The tone of the work is not unlike that of a manifesto; indeed, everything that Els Joglars have produced in print is strewn with written rules of engagement (such as their 'ten commandments'). This is extremely common in any form of devised theatre; to maintain the rehearsal room discipline and focus that the absent focal point of a pre-existing text would provide, the company must adopt a series of rules. In the generation and application of rules, devising begins to have more in common with games than with work.

It is a happy co-incidence that in the English language the words that describe games and acts of representation on-stage coincide: play. In fact, after categorically stating that he has a 'firme propósito de perpetuar el juego como necesidad vital' (Boadella, 2001: 119), Boadella draws attention to an anomaly in the Spanish language:

No hay que olvidar que la lengua castellana es una de las pocas en las que la actuación teatral se designa con la palabra "trabajar". En la mayoría de los demás idiomas europeos se utiliza, para lo mismo, la palabra "jugar". (Boadella, 2001: 120)

If we look at the works that describe the rehearsal process of any self-respecting alternative theatre company, we will see copious references to playing games. Heddon and Milling note how 'the rhetoric of many groups contained a nostalgic yearning for a childlike attitude [...] Improvisation was the means by which this 'return' to the prelapsarian innocence of creativity could be achieved' (Heddon & Milling, 2006: 30). For example, Forced Entertainment's Tim Etchells has often defined the Forced Entertainment method as 'mucking around', describing the rehearsal room in terms of his son's room: 'a playhouse: balloons, large inflatable hammers all from *Showtime* (1996) rehearsals, costumes for dressing up – as trees, as gorillas, as a horse, as a ghost, as a dog, as a thief [...]' (Etchells, 1999: 51). Els Joglars are no exception, emphasising their 'espíritu lúdico' (Joglars, 2001: 145), elsewhere helpfully defining their methodology as 'pachorra' (Joglars, 2001: 93).

As Heddon and Milling predict, this rehearsal room scenario is designed to generate an atmosphere of liberated creativity:

Play as a state in which meaning is flux, in which possibility thrives, in which versions multiply, in which the confines of what is real are blurred, buckled, broken. Play as endless transformation, transformation without end and never stillness. Would that be pure play? (Etchells, 1999: 53)

The notion of playing as a source of artistic creation is now deeply imbedded in our cultural make-up thanks to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical studies, as Richard Schechner notes: 'Freud believed that art was the sublimation of the conflict between the pleasure and reality principles; and he felt that artistic creation was an extension of fantasy life – he identified art with play' (Schechner, 2003: 13-14). The link between art and play is made clear by Freud's definition of play in its role in the process of creation of meaning: 'Play [...] appears in children while they are learning to make use of words and to put thoughts together. This play probably obeys one of the instincts which compel children to practice their capacities' (Freud, 1991: 178). Perhaps this is the reason that theatre companies who are looking to create a wholly new piece of work use play as an analogy, for its role in the childhood process of construction of meaning. Heddon and Milling point to the influence of works by Huizinga and Caillois on contemporary devising companies, indicating that 'These studies argued for the importance of play and games in the development of the individual, in the growth of a child into maturity' (Heddon & Milling, 2006: 34), whilst even more specifically psychoanalyst Melanie Klein states that play is 'a means of expressing what the adult expresses predominantly by words' (Klein, 1991: 37). Thus, if we revert to a childlike state by means of games, then it becomes possible to remove self-censoring obstacles and so liberate the imagination. Freud goes on to explain that 'play is brought to an end by the strengthening of a factor that deserves to be described as the critical faculty or

reasonableness. The play is now rejected as being meaningless or actually absurd' (Freud, 1991: 178). In much the same way, a theatre company moves beyond the starting point of play and by critically approaching the material that has been created they end up with a finished theatrical product that by and large remains the same once it is presented to an audience. Play has a distinct psychological role in the development of the individual, and by returning to play as a group a devising company may be able to create their own shared language and meanings.

Boadella makes a useful distinction with regards to theatre and play: 'Aunque el teatro debe ser practicado como juego, al Bufón, mucho más que jugar sobre la escena, le complacía mofarse y hacer befa de los *entendidos*' (Boadella, 2001: 221). Once again we must return to Freud to shed some light on this transition from play to the joke in Els Joglars' work. We have previously established that play is rejected as meaningless, 'as a result of criticism it becomes impossible'. So, Freud explains, the child 'looks about for means of making himself independent of the pleasurable mood, and the further development towards jokes is governed by the two endeavours: to avoid criticism and to find a substitute for the mood' (Freud, 1991: 178). This very thought process is operative in *La guerra de los 40 años* under the chapter conveniently entitled 'La risa': 'El peligro, sin embargo, es que el gag rompa la continuidad de la obra. El gag es como una droga: puede dejarte *orsay* con una sobredosis o bien estimular tu percepción para conseguir las mejores sensaciones si lo utilizas en su justa medida' (Joglars, 2001: 32). As Freud would have it, we can see the company rejecting play and moving on to the joke: 'a good joke makes, as it were, a total impression of enjoyment on us, without our being able to decide at once what share of the pleasure arises from its joking

form and what share from its apt thought-content' (Freud, 1991: 182). Els Joglars are well aware of the power the judicious use of a joke can wield: 'La risa, que provoca un efecto físico de alta intensidad, requiere un control muy estricto que sólo se aprende con los años' (Joglars, 2001: 33); likewise the company have a clear goal in mind when using humour: 'Porque para nosotros el teatro tiene una misión higiénico-benefactora. Y en esa misión el humor cuenta mucho' (Joglars, 2001: 34). By this stage we must begin to include the audience, the receptors of these jokes. Boadella explains how he was possessed by 'el gusto de jugar perversamente con el público' (Boadella, 2001: 368), demonstrating an almost Brechtian desire to engage the audience directly, drawing them into the joke and by extension into the playfulness the joke arose from. The theatre then becomes a symbol for Els Joglars, in terms of Melanie Klein's understanding of child psychology: 'Play analysis had shown that symbolism enabled the child to transfer not only interests, but also phantasies, anxieties and guilt to objects rather than people. Thus a great deal of relief is experienced in play'³⁴ (Klein, 1991: 52). The relief Klein discusses is reminiscent of the 'misión higiénico-benefactora' Els Joglars have set for themselves, where they are able to make fun through the artifice of theatre (their 'toy') without actually physically hurting anyone in the real world. Most importantly, the jokes reach out to the audience who can partake of this relief and enjoy it as a community.

Theatre practitioners may not be actively viewing their process as an attempt to create a shared psychology of rehearsal with the audience, but they

³⁴ Klein exemplifies this notion by referring to one of her case-studies, where a child discussed how he was able to break a doll that represented his brother, but he would never actually hurt him: 'by symbolic means he was able to express his destructive tendencies' (Klein, 1991: 52).

nevertheless instinctively understand the effect the process can have. Stanislavski spoke of an unquantifiable experience of elation resulting in powerful performance, analysing a moment of inspiration in Kostya's interpretation of Othello: '[...] you who were *playing*, [my italics] and we who were watching, gave ourselves up completely to what was happening on the stage. Such successful moments, by themselves, we can recognize as belonging to the art of living a part' (Stanislavski, 1988: 12). The translation coincidentally hits on the key to Kostya's small victory, the sense of playing which Stanislavski hoped to re-capture with self-analysis and rigorous discipline. However, by returning entirely to that sense of play, many theatre practitioners have managed to rediscover a methodology that allows them to invigorate their work and their audiences. In some cases, the rejection of any form of serious terminology is almost pathological. Tim Etchells speaks of Forced Entertainment in the rehearsal room:

For years they couldn't quite bring themselves to use the word 'improvising' – they'd call it messing about, having a bit of a run around in the space, playing around. In any case often the best of these 'improvisations' would start without anyone noticing – during a lunch break perhaps when someone might get up and start messing about in the performance area – waving a gun maybe, trying out some text. Then someone would join in and someone else, and someone else. Before long they'd be somewhere else too – pushing the material into unexpected territory. It seemed fitting that these good improvisations so often began in the blurred space between lunch break and performance, between the everyday and the fantastic. (Etchells 1999: 52)

It may sound like chaos, but like so much associated with Forced Entertainment, it is merely a case of a radical reordering of the rules which allow space for simply playing, without the pressure of having a show ready within a four week period. It is likewise worth underlining that Els Joglars spend months in their

mountain retreat, El Llorà, giving themselves the time and space to play until they find the format they are looking for. At first, this was necessary just to cement the process: 'Cuando nos fuimos a vivir a la montaña, empezamos a ensayar [...] pasaban los meses y no surgía nada de aquellos ejercicios de experimentación y de aquel ir haciendo el imbécil' (Joglars, 2001: 38), an impasse solved by Boadella summarily deciding to devise around the Heinz Chez case, resulting in *La torna* (1977). Often the process involves totally rethinking and restructuring the rehearsal room on a show by show basis, as Boadella states in an interview with Fermín Cabal:

Ante cada espectáculo trato de que el actor se encuentre con un método distinto, que él y yo debemos buscar juntos. En el caso de *Olympic Man*, el actor se encuentra con un espectáculo donde no puede aplicar a Stanislavski, porque no me puede dar personajes concretos, no puede plantear que un Olympic Man es un señor que va todos los días al trabajo y que vive en un determinado sitio y tal y cual... En *La torna*, por ejemplo, trabajamos la comedia del arte... (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 111-12)

By constantly redefining their set of rules, Els Joglars are able to keep developing their craft and also challenge their audiences, as previously cited: 'Tenemos muy en cuenta la predisposición del público para rompérsela a cada minuto, para tratar de lograr que este público con Joglars al menos, no tenga ninguna predisposición en mente a la hora de ir al teatro...' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 117). Rearranging the rules is all part of their game.

Of course, the use of playing for artistic inspiration is not new; the Surrealists drew inspiration from Freud's theories of liberating the unconscious through free association in play. So, there is a certain amount of shared collective knowledge in

Els Joglars' own methodology that is also partly inspired by their artistic predecessors; after all the Surrealist movement was rife in Catalonia, and Boadella has often expressed an admiration for Dalí which coalesced in Els Joglars' production *Daaalí* (1999). Yet, what concerns us here is the understanding of the process of creating a piece of theatre that uses basic psychological tools for freeing the imagination during the rehearsal process.

III.ii. Involving the Collective

Boadella's initial thought-process is conditioned by the circumstances of the company itself: 'yo siempre trabajo en función de los actores que tengo, de sus posibilidades' (Boadella, 2005 d). Before he puts pen to paper, he already knows that he has a core group of loyal actors who have been with him between nine and twenty-seven years. To gauge the importance of the collective, I have deliberately postponed one section of Boadella's notes for *En un lugar de Manhattan* (2005) until now, entitled *Los actores*. Within it, Boadella takes each of his eight actors and describes the stereotypical actor that they could play within the envisioned show – only Francesc Pérez is excluded from this list as he joined the production at a later stage of rehearsal. Everyone else has a short paragraph dedicated to them where Boadella assigns a set of personality traits. Considering that these notes are all pre-rehearsal notes it would appear that Boadella is living up to his axiom of preparing work with his cast already in mind. Although the descriptions are general, they are nevertheless written with the knowledge that the actor in question is going to be able to carry the role. Therefore, Jesús Agelet is described in the following terms: 'actor histriónico [...] un divo patológico [...] en la vida real parece que haga más teatro que sobre la escena' (Boadella, 2005 a). Indeed, the

final show reflects how the actor has taken this notion on board, as he recites his achievements and yearns to work again with Robert Wilson (familiarily referred to as Bob). Once again the notes demonstrate that even before rehearsal, Boadella is preparing to empower the actor's work.

A similar set of notes accompanies each actor, all of which have a direct bearing on how the characters were eventually portrayed in *En un lugar de Manhattan*. Boada is already set in place as the 'actor esencialmente homosexual'; Minnie Marx is established as the 'actriz que se cree aún un sex-symbol'; Dolors Tuneu 'ingenua y juvenil [...] mete la pata a cada instante' (Boadella, 2005 a); Xavi Sais is described as an actor who aims to 'conducirlo todo a lo anecdótico y gracioso. Cuando mete el pie en una escena el drama se reduce a lo más zafio' (Boadella, 2005 a). Even the other members of the company, those who eventually play non-actor roles (Pilar Sáenz the director, Ramon Fontserè Don Alonso and Pep Vila his sidekick) are handed a set of character traits for their potential roles as rehearsing actors: Fontserè the 'actor psicológico', Sáenz the 'actriz pija' and Vila the 'especialista en personajes en perpetuo cabreo' (Boadella, 2005 a): indeed, a video of rehearsals in mid May (Els Joglars, 2005) reveals that Pep Vila was not yet playing the Sancho character (Video of rehearsals 24 – 27 May 2005). These notes are further proof of Boadella's development process, where he does not impose limits on himself but leaves options open. Indeed, the various versions of notes indicated that he potentially had several actors in mind to play different aspects of *Don Quijote*. For instance, the night-shelter synopsis features a *Don Quijote* who literally dresses up for the role to earn loose change on the street at La Rambla, while a second character embodies the spirit of *Don Quijote*. Here too

he explores how each of his actors could fit within the idea of a staged rehearsal room. However, the question still remains as to how his notes were transposed into a physical creative process.

The first step for Boadella is to inform the actors of his ideas. According to different members of the company, Boadella tends to circulate a page or two of distillation of his notes. As we have seen, Boadella usually has a very clear notion of how to proceed, and *En un lugar de Manhattan* is no exception. In his diaries compiled in *Tres pies al gato*, Ramon Fontserè describes the process of rehearsal for *Daaalí*, and the events of the first day, Thursday March 4, 1999:

A las diez y media nos encontramos en el Llorà [...] Lluís Elias [...] llega cargado de material sobre el tema: libros, vídeos, etcétera [...] Albert nos explica las líneas generales del proyecto, que nos ocupará casi los próximos cinco meses. Básicamente son dos. La primera es la teoría según la cual Dalí es el niño eterno que se niega a crecer y alarga la infancia hasta su muerte. La segunda es que partiremos de un Dalí moribundo que en medio del delirio agónico hace un repaso de su vida (Fontserè 2002: 11).

These two rules not only set the tone for the direction rehearsals will take, they also describe the show as it will eventually take form. Xavier Boada offers a similar perspective, describing how Boadella brings the actors ‘una idea genérica’ (Boada, 2005) from which he generates a series of improvisations. A significant proportion of the early exploratory work of the company is devoted to allowing the actors to explore the characters. Boadella describes that in the case of *En un lugar de Manhattan* he devised an exercise to get them into the right mind-set for the play: he had them come in for auditions in their characters. Thus the notes on the actors were brought to life through a series of improvisations where Boadella

simulated the audition process that his fictitious actors would have gone through. Boada comments on how these preliminary improvisations in character are occasionally filmed: 'Se graban a veces las primeras aproximaciones a personajes, para que no se nos olviden' (Boada, 2005). The purpose of filming these exercises is to be able to return to them at a later date in order to 'recobrar el sentido de espontaneidad' when ideas become stale in the normal process. As Boada explains, the Els Joglars process can be described as one of 'fijar lo espontáneo' (Boada, 2005).

Indeed, spontaneity is fostered in Boadella's initial approach to work, an attitude in place ever since the spontaneous explorations of *El joc* where Boadella simply read dictionary definitions of randomly selected words and allowed the actors to play with them, gradually drawing scenarios and characters out of them. However, in the thirty years since *El joc* this process has evolved into something undeniably more controlled: 'Pido improvisaciones muy acotadas, con objetivos. Improvisaciones muy cortas, que no se extiendan ni se repitan ni se pierdan. Si no puedes estar días improvisando sin llegar a nada. Los actores tienen que estar muy bien informados' (Boadella, 2005 d). Boada highlights that Boadella never interrupts their improvisations, but rather has very clear goals in mind for the actors from the outset. On the other hand, this process of empowering the actors by giving them priorities also prevents one of the most common snares of devising, the propensity for open-ended discussion. Boada emphasises that 'Siempre se habla lo mínimo, se prueban las cosas siempre. En todo caso hablamos después'. He adds, however, that on occasion ideas are tried out without the necessity for a lengthy preamble: 'normalmente se prueban las cosas, sin explicaciones' (Boada,

2005). Lluís Elías seconds this, summarising Boadella's instigative methodology as: 'Prueba; jugando.' (Elías, 2002). Once again, Boadella's propensity for a balance of opposites can be perceived, on the one hand striving for spontaneity in performance which can nevertheless be controlled and ordered by clear objectives.

One of the keys to this process of improvisation, as previously established, is that the company members already have a level of shared intuition for the creative process, which allows for a certain code of practice that all the actors are aware of, and so avoids the uneasy preamble that often marks the early portions of any rehearsal. As a result, clarifying goals amongst a group of people who understand each other implicitly is potentially a very quick and simple process. Witnessing an Els Joglars' notes session (Rehearsal witnessed 2005) is something akin to a schoolroom experience, where the respectful silence that greets Boadella's comments is palpable and the only movement comes from a rebellious Minnie Marx who mischievously pulls faces as the company are chided for a lacklustre run: 'Bueno, ha sido un pase un poco tonto, ¿no?' (Rehearsal witnessed 2005). Indeed, the trust appears so complete that Boadella gives his notes to the actors with the air of a man who is making decisions, not inviting discussion. Although this is a later stage of rehearsal, the same respect and trust must pervade the first rehearsals, a harmony maintained by not allowing access to anyone external to the company: 'son solo ideas y algo muy personal que prefieren trabajar a solas' (Ferrández, 2005). These exploratory sessions are furthermore described as intimate, a time when the group 'van muy perdidos aún y prefieren trabajar en la intimidad' (Ferrández, 2005). The concentration of the company members clearly must not be taxed at an exploratory stage when everyone needs to be at their

loosest and uninhibited, at a time when their rehearsals may resemble ‘El juego aparente de un niño de nueve años’ (Elías, 2002).

The group’s full-time assistant director from 1989 to 2005, Lluís Elías, is particularly forthcoming on the subject of the early Els Joglars improvisations. He categorically states that: ‘La improvisación es el núcleo fundamental en el que se basa el método de trabajo de Albert Boadella y Els Joglars’ (Elías, 2002). His description of the process would seem to adequately define the aforementioned example of the fictitious audition session: ‘Reglas sencillas basadas en la espontaneidad de un actor que conoce bien los fundamentos de esta técnica’ (Elías, 2002). Once again, the emphasis lies on the experience and technique of the actor, which fits in with Boadella’s insistence on the primacy of the actor. In the conception of this process, there is a requirement of a level of rapport that can only be acquired after years of collaboration, indicating exactly how personal, ingrained and instinctive the method has become. It is as if the methodology were impossible to pursue with a new cast who were not as aware of the implicit ‘fundamentos de esta técnica’ (Elías, 2002), methods that the company are often loath to describe in specific details. Indeed, as if to prove Boadella’s need for trust in the rehearsal room, his revival of *La torna de la torna* left much of the day to day rehearsing of the young actors of the Institut del Teatre of Barcelona to Lluís Elías – and clearly, being a revival of an existing scripted play, the need for free-form improvisation is much reduced. The result is that introducing a new actor and breaking them into the company is a major event – even Francesc Pérez was not involved in the earliest stages of rehearsal of *En un lugar de Manhattan*, a situation similarly experienced by Xavi Sais when joining on-going rehearsals for *El Retablo de las*

maravillas in 2004: 'En un principio este espectáculo se iba a realizar únicamente con siete actores. Tiempo después, se dieron cuenta de que hacía falta uno más [...] yo no entro desde el inicio' (López, 2004).

Nevertheless, where all accounts converge with reference to the earliest stages of the exploratory process, is in describing Boadella's capacity to latch on to improvisations that interest him; a lonely and potentially self-absorbed process as Tim Etchells notes of his own work: 'I watch all the rehearsals and I basically think about me. What am I laughing at, what am I fascinated or horrified by, when am I exhilarated. Also - when am I bored, when am I irritated, when am I fed-up with what I'm looking at. I guess I assume that if it is funny, fascinating, horrifying, exhilarating for me then it will be so for other people' (Etchells, 2004). Boadella describes how he functions in rehearsal, and how he too pursues ideas that he finds interesting: 'se me quedan grabadas imágenes, conceptos. Insisto en cosas que me interesan' (Boadella, 2005 d). Jesús Agelet, the longest standing actor within the company, backs up his director: 'Boadella es un gran genio, con esa visión que tiene del público en el momento de las improvisaciones, de decidir qué va a ir o no, cómo ligar las escenas...' (Cáceres, 2004). Lluís Elías expands on this process: 'Del azar que surge, Albert, como un cazador, detecta lo que podría ser, y no es. Entonces, se sumerge con los actores y, rechazando la autocensura, transgrediendo ideologías, sin prejuicios, sin intelectualismos, exprime el juego hasta que lo agota' (Elías, 2002). Indeed, the video record of rehearsals between 24 and 27 of May supports this axiom, as Boadella occasionally interrupts, corrects and often even stands up and demonstrates to the actors what he is looking for. His attention to detail is likewise millimetrical, often requiring actors to go over the

same line several times until they have hit on the delivery that Boadella has shown them: the video sees Boadella drilling Xavi Sais until he feels he has hit the correct note. Boadella is just as animated when he becomes excited with an idea, jumping up and making the actors repeat the new development in order to reaffirm it. The essence of the process does not appear to have changed since *El joc* despite the shift in interest towards verbal language as a tool of performance. Boada himself states how the company often improvise based on words: ‘se hacen improvisaciones sobre ideas, palabras...’ (Jané, 2001), reminiscent of their aforementioned ‘método Fabra’, defined in 1987 by ex-actress and assistant director Glòria Rognoni in the following terms: ‘El “método Fabra” consistía en coger el diccionario de Pompeu Fabra, abrirlo al azar y coger la primera palabra que encontrásemos, “absorción”, ¡pues adelante!, ¡a improvisar todos sobre la absorción!’ (Rognoni: 1987: 17-18). The accounts of this method state how Boadella gradually involves himself in the resulting improvisations, suggesting new avenues, and pushing the actors towards finding a consistency in the work. When Elías speaks of Boadella submerging himself in the improvisations in the present, it proves how unchanged the essence of improvisation is for the company.

With the same practiced ease, it also becomes apparent just how quickly ideas emerge. Rehearsals for *En un lugar de Manhattan* started in April 2005, and by 24 May, where video documentation begins, a good forty-five minutes of the show are already in place, and will remain virtually unchanged until opening night in November. We have seen how Boadella has a narrative and specific characterisation in mind, but the actors waste no time in following the instructions they are given. Within two months, the exploratory improvisations are over, the

actors are already comfortable in characters who also seem surprisingly slickly constructed, and the devising process only requires the actors to find the means of travelling from one predetermined plot element to the next, as Boada explains the step following the improvisations: 'los núcleos dramaturgicos se fijan' (Boada, 2005), which means that bridges must be built between them. The actors all hasten to point out how liberating they find such a method: 'Ésa es la libertad que tenemos los actores en Els Joglars: que nos sentimos creadores' (Cáceres, 2004). Boada adds the actor's privileges in rehearsal: 'tenemos máxima libertad para proponer' (Boada, 2005). Boadella also explains his ideology: 'En mi compañía he aplicado el socialismo como ninguna otra empresa' (Boadella, 2005 d), indicating an interest in sharing a process of creation which everyone can be a part of. In a sense, however, this might appear limiting, since the actors do have a creative input but only within the 'improvisaciones muy acotadas' (Boadella, 2005 d) that Boadella requires.

Nonetheless, freeing the actors of any dramaturgical responsibility for creating a narrative and theme is indeed in some ways a liberation, enabling them to concern themselves strictly with developing a consistent character through improvisations where they already know the outcome. Boadella's road-map approach not only means that there are no counterproductive discussions about what course the work should take in terms of plot and theme, but the actors are indeed empowered to do their job. After all, when Boada reports that Boadella 'podría sentarse a escribir, pero que nunca sería tan rica la obra que trabajando con grupo' (Boada, 2005), there is a suggestion that he could indeed forget about the actors and simply write a play but chooses not to, demonstrating his balance of

control over the process and of delegation of creativity: 'Pero, de algún modo, mis bolígrafos son los actores. Construyo la obra jugando con ellos. Los actores tienen una participación muy activa y exijo mucho de ellos, poniéndoles en unos procesos de juego, de improvisación, etc' (Boadella, 2005 d). So often the difficulty of devising a wholly new piece of theatre is that no one really knows where they are heading and so drive the work toward their own potentially conflicting agendas, and indeed Els Joglars state they are no exception and do lose sight of the target from time to time. The company have deployed a strategy to prevent this from happening, establishing Boadella as the dramaturgical curator of each project: 'ahora existía una pauta dramaturgica que hacía necesaria una participación más razonada, pues cualquier desvío de lo pautado entraba en disonancia, o creaba un sinfín de acciones inútiles' (Boadella, 2001: 364). It is for this reason that the Els Joglars actors are in a particular position when compared to other collectives in the sense that whilst they are co-authors of the show, they have clearly defined creative boundaries to enable them to reach their equally clearly demarcated goals. So too does Boadella, who has the task of overseeing the construction and eventual shape of the show as it emerges. He formulates this as the 'efecto Maigret':

La fase inicial de aproximación al esclarecimiento de una acción escénica, es a mi entender, semejante al método de investigación empleado por el famoso comisario Maigret creado por Georges Simenon. El astuto policía se acerca siempre cautelosamente y sin prisas al esclarecimiento de un crimen. A través del olor a Calvados de un mugriento café, una frase escuchada al azar o una imagen fugaz retenida en la memoria, el comisario va construyendo lentamente el móvil y la escena del crimen, hasta llegar al retrato exacto de su autor.

Al igual que el mítico comisario nada tengo claro en principio. Mi único aliado es el tiempo y la certeza de que a pesar del aparente vacío, todo

se halla a mi alrededor. No parece pues especialmente necesaria la fantasía sino sólo una cierta capacidad de observación para detectar algo más profundo detrás de la realidad superficial, y consiguientemente de naturaleza mucho más compleja emocionalmente que esta. Me refiero a una realidad de carácter superior porque contiene infinidad de matices indescifrables a primera vista (Boadella, 2002 b).

He goes on to define this as a process not of discovery but of disclosure, of revealing the ideas that lie beneath the spontaneous reactions. Critically, this is Boadella's task, and he uses the actors' work to reach his own conclusions. Thus the actors have their authorial influence without ever having to worry about putting pen to paper or initiating protracted discussions to push their own ideas forwards. Agelet is nonetheless clear about the value of his creative input as an actor: 'yo tengo la teoría de que la misma idea suya, con dos equipos de actores diferentes, saldrían dos obras distintas' (Cáceres, 2004), which ties in with Boadella's own notion that preconceptions should be left at the door of the rehearsal room. Clearly he has ideas he wants to explore before he includes the actors, his pages of notes attest to that, but he is nevertheless able to allow them to be shaped and changed by practical work with the actors, explaining Agelet's conviction that a different set of actors would inspire Boadella to express his ideas in a wholly different manner. It is this willingness to work in a compartmentalised and yet collaborative fashion that allows Els Joglars to function at all.

Viewing a very early and incomplete run of *En un lugar de Manhattan* on video (rehearsals from May 24 - 27), it becomes apparent how Boadella interrupts work to interject new ideas and new directions, so prodding it towards taking the desired shape (Joglars, 2005). The actors are encouraged to improvise new sections of dialogue to lead them into other ideas that had already been arrived at.

To accomplish this, Boadella feeds one actor a line to start him off, and a new improvisation unfolds. When specific ideas occur to him, he calls them out and the actors immediately apply them to the situation – crucially, it does not matter if the results are immediately brilliant, and if they are not Boadella takes them back to the beginning and offers a new starting point. Indeed, this is not even time wasted, as Agelet remembers: ‘yo recuerdo incluso trabajar una posible escena dos o tres días sabiendo que no va a ir; nos divertimos, y luego a lo mejor en otro espectáculo se aprovecha’ (Cáceres, 2004). Elías gives us a specific example, dating back to his entry to the company in 1989:

Albert propuso improvisaciones abiertas con el objetivo de intentar que los actores se desprendiesen de los tics que arrastraban de los personajes de *Bye, Bye, Beethoven*, la obra anterior. Se tenía que empezar otra vez de cero. Y a pesar de tener alguna cosa entre manos, prefirió no decir nada a nadie y ponerse a trabajar sin ideas preconcebidas, haciendo improvisar a los actores sobre otros temas. Sobre la moda, ¿por qué surge la moda?; la prensa, ¿por qué los banqueros salen en la prensa del corazón?; sobre los guardias de seguridad del Vaticano, ¿por qué algunos cristianos llevan pistola? (Elías: 2002)

From these improvisations on three separate topics a new focus was found, leading the company to devise *Columbi Lapsus*. The unused improvisations were then returned to on later shows: the notions of fashion re-emerged in *Retablo de las maravillas* (the direct reference to Ferran Adrià’s fashionable restaurant *El bulli*) and *En un lugar de Manhattan* (the fashionable theatre company). Indeed, *Columbi Lapsus* itself returned to improvisations from the *Teledium* era, six years earlier: ‘Cuando buscábamos a gente para *Teledium* hacíamos una improvisación de unos mecánicos que arreglaban el papamóvil. Después de una semana de ensayos ya teníamos mucho trabajo con guardaespaldas, mecánicos, técnicos de

protocolo, monjas especialistas' (Joglars, 2001: 182), work that was shelved and re-emerged to help build *Columbi Lapsus*. This is a constant feedback process within the company, where ideas that are not used are held over for a new process, helping the initial rehearsals to get off the ground by giving them a familiar context. Boadella also explains that the actors always have notepads to record particular ideas, corrections and notes from rehearsal and be able to refer back to them, hence promoting a meticulous sense of organisation within the process.

Once the sessions are off the ground, however, the process is remarkably chronologically linear for a devising company, and Boadella states how on *En un lugar de Manhattan* 'empezamos desde el principio, en este caso el trabajo ha sido cronológico' (Boadella, 2005 d) meaning that they developed the show in the same narrative order in which it was eventually presented. In his diary, *Tres pies al gato*, Ramon Fontserè talks about rehearsing the first scene of *Daaalí* on 11 March, only a week after the official start of rehearsals on 4 March. By 6 May, he comments that they have 'unos treinta minutos' (Fontserè, 2002: 53); on 27 May they had 'sobre la hora y quince minutos' (Fontserè, 2002: 65) of what would become a two hour show. However, these are not runs of disconnected ideas but a sequential set of more or less completed and linked scenes, allowing them to even perform incomplete runs: 'Hemos hecho una especie de pase' (Fontserè, 2002: 53). The very same month, on 23 May, he is already even talking of learning his lines: 'He memorizado textos' (Fontserè, 2002: 62). Although the show is not yet finished at this stage, the sections that have been worked on are more or less considered locked down, hence Fontserè is able to learn lines he is fairly certain won't be cut or significantly changed. As time goes by, so it appears that the company build the

play scene by scene under Boadella's guidance. Speaking still of the generation of ideas, Fontserè adds: 'Albert se saca de la manga estas escenas como si nada, y mientras uno todavía intenta asimilar lo que le han explicado, él ya tiene otra cosa pensada para probar' (Fontserè, 2002: 43); 'Albert se saca de la manga una nueva escena' (Fontserè, 2002: 56). As a result of Boadella's prodigious instinct for ideas, the actors can concern themselves only with creating character, and Fontserè's diary is full of references to him spending significant time working on the character: 'Trabajo el Dalí' (Fontserè, 2002: 21). Exactly what he does to work the character is not explained in his notes, although he does seem to fall into the bracket of the actor-stereotype that Boadella designed for him to improvise around in his preliminary notes: 'Actor psicológico. Necesita grandes dosis de concentración' (Boadella, 2005 a). Indeed, elsewhere Fontserè broadly defines his personal process, as he teaches it to acting students of the Institut del Teatre: 'A la hora de construir un personaje, ya sea real o inventado, lo que uno debe tener primero es una gran dosis de observación [...] El actor debe ser como una esponja o un vampiro que chupa el personaje que tiene en el coco' (Pla i Vivoles, 2004), using a terminology curiously similar to Boadella's heightened stereotype.

Nevertheless, what is interesting to note from Fontserè's diary notes on *Daaalí* is that much of the character work is carried out externally from the rehearsal room. Systematic rehearsals on the show did not begin until 11 April, which meant that most of March constituted individual work. Indeed, every so often Fontserè talks of his progress, or lack thereof, on the character: 'Preparo el personaje de Dalí', (Fontserè, 2002: 34) 'No he hecho nada de Dalí' (Fontserè, 2002: 30), 'Tampoco he avanzado con Dalí' (Fontserè, 2002: 30), 'He estudiado un

poco a Dalí' (Fontserè, 2002: 31). On occasion he speaks of the books and videos that he is using to situate the characters: 'Leído a Ian Gibson, su libro sobre Dalí' (Fontserè, 2002: 37); 'He visto vídeos de Dalí' (Fontserè, 2002: 69). He also speaks of visiting Josep Martinell, 'amigo de Pla' who also knew Dalí: 'Nos cuenta cosas de Dalí, a quien el conoció personalmente' (Fontserè, 2002: 24). This is a process of research in part stimulated by Boadella and Elías by providing a wealth of book and video documentation to refer to, but also pursued proactively by the actors as Fontserè's initiative proves. Fontserè is putting his skills of observation into practice, a process even more fruitful when dealing with a living character, as was Jordi Pujol. Describing the process of *Ubú President*, he talks about travelling to a public meeting to see the man himself: 'el acto de clausura de la escuela de verano de las Joventuts Nacionalistes, con la presencia de Pujol. Asisto para observar in situ al personaje en su hábitat' (Fontserè, 2002: 141). Boada describes a similar encounter with his own subject, Pasqual Maragall³⁵ in *Ubú President*, *Los últimos días de Pompeya*: 'Lo he visto tres o cuatro veces y he llegado a hablar brevemente con él – aunque de forma no excesivamente cordial' (Jané: 2001). Boadella is evidently not the only member of the company who seeks initial inspiration outside the rehearsal room.

The only other major rehearsal element that must be covered in the initial stages of rehearsal is that of the design for the show. Boadella always starts by designing a performance space, and for that reason incorporates a designer from the outset: 'no puedo pensar en una sinopsis sin un espacio' (Boadella, 2005 d).

³⁵ Pasqual Maragall was Mayor of Barcelona from 1982 to 1997. He was President of the Catalan Socialist Party from 2000 to 2007 and President of the Catalan Generalitat from 2003 to 2006.

Fontserè's notes again support Boadella's statement of intent, referring to two distinct rehearsal processes. The first is *Daaalí*, where he details how a few days before rehearsals were due to begin, 'Jordi Costa [...] el jefe técnico de la compañía, trabaja en la Cúpula construyendo el símil de la escenografía de *Daaalí*' (Fontserè, 2002: 36). A similar statement opens his diaries for *Ubú President*, on the first day of rehearsal, 16 May 1995: 'trabajamos en la Cúpula. Albert ha diseñado el espacio escénico' (Fontserè, 2002: 137). *En un lugar de Manhattan* also had a design in place before rehearsals began, but for the first time in years, the design was not co-created by Boadella and technical director Jordi Costa. In this instance they requested design ideas from a series of artists, eventually picking Anna Alcubierre's work. As usual a working version was installed in the rehearsal dome before rehearsals, and it was still firmly in place when I visited the company in September 2005. Aside from being of slightly smaller dimensions to fit the dome than the version that the company eventually took on tour with them, it remained unchanged in its details and interaction with the performers. This approach is based on the notion that the actors must know what space they are occupying so that they may inhabit it convincingly. This is a luxury unavailable to conventional theatres. Although a design team will always meet and arrive at firm design decisions before rehearsing, the actors will only ever work with a finalised set in the last week of rehearsals at best. Els Joglars work with their final set for the full five-month period of rehearsal, the intention being that: 'todo está hecho en función del actor, y el relieve que tiene que tomar el actor' (Boadella, 2005 d).

On a different note, this is a process that has threatened to ruin the company, even in a period of apparent economic stability as the late 1990s had been. The cost of running and repairing the digital screen throughout the rehearsals of *Daaalí*, the same one they used in the performances, almost ruined the company – Fontserè records how actors were not paid and emergency meetings were held: ‘Reunión de vacas sagradas o de societarios. La economía de la compañía ha entrado en la UVI. Qué se la va a hacer. NO SURRENDER’ (Fontserè, 2002: 71). The economic risk of maintaining expensive technical equipment only for rehearsals would be considered unthinkable for almost any other theatre company, particularly within the mainstream who only ever work with set in the final stretch of rehearsals. The pay-off for Els Joglars is that unlike most mainstream work, their multimedia techniques in *Daaalí* felt lived-in and fully incorporated within the actor’s work, rather than a secondary or superimposed external element as is so often the case. Ultimately, the actors are able not just to improvise characters and situations, but improvise around their surroundings, reacting to them as spontaneously as any individual would to a new space, and then growing comfortable and uninhibited within them, once again a process of ‘fijar lo espontáneo’ (Boada, 2005).

It is also worth considering the company’s design ethos at this stage. Since the entire process is geared towards empowering the actors, it follows that every other element of the production must fall in line. Boada describes this as an ‘efecto total’, where ‘todos los elementos se diseñan para responder a y potenciar el trabajo del actor’ (Boada, 2005). Therefore, the spatial design is defined as ‘pragmático’, and Boadella expounds that ‘la mayor belleza es la funcionalidad’ (Boadella, 2005 d). This is an ideology that the technical crew of the company are

well aware of, and Jordi Costa understands the role Boadella wants him to assume:

El técnico tiene que asumir que está al servicio de la obra para que aquello salga bien. Si se quiere defender más la simplicidad escenográfica, y por tanto dar menos importancia a los aspectos técnicos, el objetivo es pasar desapercibido (García Bertolín, 2001)

Within this concept, it is understandable that Boadella regards a luxurious design as overly baroque, an unnecessary appendage when as Costa highlights 'A Boadella le encanta aparentar simplicidad en el escenario' (García Bertolín: 2001). Even the technical difficulties that the screen in *Daaalí* constituted fit this design concept because the screen only ever responded to the actors' actions – most obviously the paintings that emerged along the brushstrokes that Fontserè's Dalí cast in the air before it: the technical magic was in fact a signifier for Dalí's own creative 'genius'. From this basis we arrive at the notion that 'allí donde el actor no puede sugerir una cosa, hay un objeto' (Boadella, 2005 d), once again describing scenography and props as supports for the actor only. Hence the design for *En un lugar de Manhattan* reflects this suggestive potential: 'Una puerta da muchísimas más posibilidades que toda una escenografía' (Boadella, 2005 d), referring to the free-standing door frame which in terms of semiotics represents exactly what it is, a free-standing door-frame for rehearsals. For Els Joglars it is their design; for the fictional theatre company in the play it is a rehearsal tool and therefore still functional, and only in Don Alonso's fevered imagination does it become a doorway to different spaces: memorably he instructs his sidekick Pancho to go back the way he came and come through the futile door. The entire design likewise responds to the blank-canvas world of the theatre, as red-upholstered studio seats face the

audience and surround the actors onstage on three sides. Constantly we are reminded that the space is a rehearsal room, it never is what the actors pretend it is, forcing the audience to use their imagination to create the space – in exactly the same way that in Don Alonso's mind he is travelling great distances and encountering strange folk and new architectures along the way, when only the barest suggestive elements have been set in place by the mischievous actors – the doorframe, iconic elements of costume, spinning umbrellas as windmills, plain wooden staves that variously become shotguns, swords, window-frames and a long etcetera. At every stage the design is a suggestive support for the actors to constantly re-imagine the space they are occupying, empowering their work in propelling the narrative forwards.

None of this thought is new to the company, however, as Boada traces Boadella's ideology all the way back to the 1970s: 'el diseño de *La torna*, es la síntesis de la ideología de Boadella sobre la sencillez y funcionalidad del diseño' (Boada, 2005). The idea could not be simpler, a large wooden table was used to create a multitude of different locations simply by repositioning it and redefining it – it is only used literally as a table in two scenes. Elsewhere it is turned upside down to become a series of cells; on its side it is the back-wall of a bar; with the actors seated on chairs on its surface it becomes an elevated rostrum at a trial. Ever since *La torna*, the Els Joglars designs have sought to be simple and functional, to interact exclusively with the needs of expression of the actors. Thus, as the shows are pieced together the space becomes a defining aspect of the work, 'que estén integrados todos los elementos' (Boada, 2005).

Ultimately, it becomes very hard to divide the improvisational and selection processes of Els Joglars as both are ongoing. As work continues, new improvisations provide links to the next scene, and a simultaneous editing method is in place to keep the actors focused. As Fontserè records in his diary, the show is built chronologically scene by scene, with each run slightly longer than the previous; even by 11 June, at a stage when visitors were beginning to see the work (such as the Fundació Gala-S. Dalí in order to decide whether to grant the company reproduction rights for Dalí's work), the show was still very much incomplete as only the day before Fontserè describes preparing the Picasso scene, nowhere near the ending they would eventually find (Fontserè, 2002: 71). Boadella himself admits that although he usually has clear plot-lines in mind to guide rehearsals, just as often he has no idea how these stories will end. Nevertheless, the company do have strategies and systems in place to cope with this uncertainty. Elías' role as Assistant Director, for instance, implies the objective distance of an observer or documenter: he describes his job as 'escribir todo aquello que pasa ante mí. De vez en cuando, un asistente graba en vídeo algunos de estos juegos de improvisación. Así se memoriza lo que las notas que voy tomando no pueden recoger' (Elías, 2002). Although Boadella clearly has the final word in all decisions, the whole team have a distinct role in shaping the specifics of each show. The result of this approach to rehearsal is that one often gets the impression that when the company explain their methods, they are explaining the most natural process in the world. For instance, when asked about how the company select and edit their improvisations, an implicit set of standards are clearly in operation: 'si gustan se quedan, no hay otros métodos' (Ferrández: 2005). On the surface, this is a very uncomplicated attitude, but it begs the

question: what do Els Joglars like, and how do they guide the work towards it? One is reminded of the self-professed influence of Monty Python (Joglars, 2001: 120), who have described their own process of selection whereby the material had to make them all laugh to be in the show, an equally eccentric, subjective and unquantifiable process. How the audience then receive this material and interpret it themselves is an equally hazy area of theatre studies, but I propose that this eccentricity of method has a direct influence in redefining Els Joglars' theatre and generates heightened vivid performance experiences for their audiences, as I will go on to explore in the next chapter.

Els Joglars – Chapter IV - Experiential Performance

This final chapter on Els Joglars concludes the section on the company's rehearsal process. I will examine the company's performances as they emerge from rehearsal in the light of the School of Constanza's theory of 'aesthetic response', coupled with the notion of 'experiential theatre'. The chapter illustrates how the company's preparatory work and thought-process leads to an audience engagement with the show at a heightened level of intellectual and emotional participation, thus exploring the notion of 'experiential' as encompassing or merging reason with sensation.

Much of the difficulty of analysing theatre stems from the limitations of analytical tools when it comes to quantifying performance, a necessarily both transient and subjective area of study. Phenomenology, as described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, goes some way towards generating a methodology for acknowledging the difficulties inherent in interpreting art, by attempting to define the notion of lived experience: 'Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness' (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: vii). This is not, however, a straightforward process: 'At the outset of the study of perception, we find in language the notion of sensation, which seems immediate and obvious: I have a sensation of redness, of blueness, of hot or cold. It will, however, be seen that nothing could in fact be more confused, and that [...] traditional analyses missed the phenomena of perception' (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 3). Critics mostly centre on the notion of a fixed text or on performances with 'single' meanings:

'Traditional ways of analyzing drama and theatre have tended to focus on what happens on stage or in the script, assuming that theatrical scripts and productions "have" universal meaning that is available for interpretation by audiences anywhere' (Knowles, 2004: 9). One exception to this generalised school of thought is the School of Constanza which under the guidance of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss devised the notion of aesthetic response that focused almost entirely on how the reader understood and was engaged by the novel. The prominent Spanish playwright, director and pedagogue José Sanchis Sinisterra has noted the potential impact of the school of Aesthetic Response on theatre:

Esta escuela, que tiene a Jauss e Iser como principales maestros, se ha desarrollado fundamentalmente en el terreno de la crítica literaria aplicada a la narrativa y a la poesía, a la evolución de los géneros, a las relaciones entre la obra literaria y su público, etc. Pero yo creo que tiene además una aplicación potencial muy práctica y útil en el terreno del teatro. Conozco, sin embargo, pocos intentos de aplicación de los conceptos propios de la Estética de la Recepción a la práctica teatral (Sanchis Sinisterra, 2002: 249).

Wolfgang Iser expressed the main focus of the School of Constanza in his work *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1976): 'the text represents a potential effect that is realized in the reading process' (Iser, 1978: ix). Whilst the work proceeds to study the literary genre of the novel primarily, it does not however require much of a stretch of the imagination to perceive that potential effect in the act of representing dramatic text as the rehearsal process is all about unlocking that potential. In any case, Iser's work on literature appears to respond to a similar desire to give expression to the hazy process between text and interpretation; more specifically to us in the field of drama research is the issue of analysing performance: 'As a literary text can only produce a response when it is

read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analyzing the reading process' (Iser, 1978: ix).

Analysis of theatre faces the obstacle of quantifying performance which is by definition abstract and subjective, and likewise analysing the viewing process of the audience. This would all be complicated enough without considering that some performances are by design more vivid and experiential for their audiences than others, as academic Óscar Cornago Bernal points out: 'Para mí esa experiencia teatral está muy ligada justamente a esa sensación de espacio, de estar ahí, en una sala, frente a unos actores. El problema es que no todos los espectáculos te hacen sentir de forma intensa ese espacio y esas presencias escénicas' (Cornago Bernal, 2004). It is not enough that the act of representation is complicated to read and interpret in itself, but particular shows address the act of representation directly with the intention of heightening the audience's experience of the event, hence the hazy term 'experiential theatre', which we may compare to Bakhtin's notion of carnival, where the 'viewer is also a participant' (Vice, 1997: 187). Director Peter Sellars notes the important distinction in the conception of an experiential performance: 'I'm very influenced by theatre that is primarily experiential; rather than being about an experience, it actually is the experience' (quoted in Delgado & Armitage, 1996: 234). Aleks Sierz, referring to British theatres in the 90s with the term 'In-Yer-Face Theatre', explained how it functioned in terms of its effect on the audience: 'it is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm' (Sierz, 2001: 4). Notwithstanding these difficulties in defining an experiential

and hence subjective engagement with performance, Iser's work on the notion of Aesthetic response in relation to the 'ideal and implied reader' may help shed some light on practitioners like Albert Boadella who look on the act of performance and not just its text as a means of communication in itself: 'no se puede leer, porque el teatro es todo lo que no está en el texto. El texto es una cosa mecánica' (Joglars, 2001: 116). Juan Mayorga takes this step even further, stating that 'El teatro sucede en el espectador. No en el papel que escribe el autor. Tampoco en la escena que ocupan los intérpretes. El teatro sucede en la imaginación, en la memoria, en la experiencia del espectador' (Mayorga, 1999: 122). Text is realised by the act of reading, as Iser underlines, and during reading its meaning is 'assembled in the responsive mind of the recipient' (Iser, 1978: 34). So, it is processed and compartmentalised between reason and sensation.

It would appear that Iser and the theory of aesthetic response is fundamentally based on the notion of defining the reader's experience of a text. At the same time as introducing the problems inherent in traditional modes of literary criticism, Iser comments on the basis of comprehension: 'the establishment of consistency' (Iser, 1978: 16). He goes on to cite Henry Fielding and Walter Scott:

The metaphor [...] whereby the reader is likened to a traveller in a stagecoach, who has to make the often difficult journey through the novel, gazing out from his moving viewpoint. Naturally, he combines all that he sees within his memory and establishes a pattern of consistency, the nature and reliability of which will depend partly on the degree of attention he has paid during each phase of the journey. At no time, however, can he have a total view of that journey. (Iser, 1978: 16)

Tellingly, this metaphor relies on likening the novel to an actual lived experience, that of a journey. So too, the spectator at a play is unable to have a total view of the whole production, and his/her experience will be dependant on how involved they have been throughout the entire performance. Ultimately, however, the art work relies on the audience's capacity to establish consistency for themselves in order to understand what they are seeing. Iser points out that 'consistency building [...] depends on the reader and not on the work, and as such it is inextricably bound up with subjective factors' (Iser, 1978: 18). Therefore, understanding the work of literature passes through understanding the reader and how they subjectively interpret the work. Iser indicates that this understanding stems from the knowledge that reading 'brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader' (Iser, 1978: x). These necessarily rely on the life and experiences of the individual reader, so that author and reader share a certain common ground of lived experience. After all, the texts do not constitute meanings in themselves, but rather they 'initiate "performances" of meaning [...] Their aesthetic quality lies in this "performing" structure, which clearly cannot be identical to the final product, because without the participation of the individual reader there can be no performance' (Iser, 1978: 27). As Sanchis Sinisterra explains, aesthetic response relies on the notion of the 'receptor implícito, o lector ideal, o lector modelo' (Sanchis Sinisterra, 2002: 251), and notes that the reader is 'un ente [...] del cual no sabemos absolutamente nada, ni siquiera si existirá' (Sanchis Sinisterra, 2002: 251). He goes on to differentiate between those authors who never find public recognition, and the authors of best-sellers who have a seemingly instinctual knowledge of the 'distinción entre espectador ideal y espectador real' (Sanchis Sinisterra, 2002: 250). Hence, the best-selling novelist is clearly pitching

his work in the realm of experiences that the average spectator knows and understands already. However, creating a piece of theatre for Sanchis Sinisterra does not consist of arriving at an understanding of who the real spectator is and creating tailor made work, but rather the opposite: 'todo el problema [...] de la puesta en escena consiste en la mutación del espectador real en el espectador ideal que hemos construido' (Sanchis Sinisterra, 2002: 250). Likewise for Els Joglars, bearing in mind Boadella's aim to shatter his audience's preconceptions, theatre consists of a process of transforming and involving the audience on the company's own terms. This approach is distinct from mainstream theatre, and if we look at the stated aims of, for instance, the London-based Royal National Theatre in their 2005-06 annual review, we will note that if anything they are exploiting the public's preconceptions in order to find an audience:

We are committed to making our work available to the widest possible audience and use our marketing department not just to shift tickets but to reach out to a much larger constituency than our valued core of regular theatre-goers. If we have a show in our repertoire that is of particular interest to a specific corner of the wider community, we let them know about it. (Hytner, 2006: 4)

In targeting 'corners' of the community for specific shows the National Theatre is demonstrating an assumption that theatre is far from universal, as they claim: 'the air is heavy with the promise of the communal fulfilment that comes with participation in the arts' (Hytner, 2006: 3). This pleasing rhetoric stands in contrast to the desire to find ready-made audiences in 'corners' of the community rather than probing how to explore the transition from 'real spectator' to 'ideal spectator'.

They are not the only theatre to do so; members of the programming team at the Royal Court were overjoyed to welcome a principally black audience for Tanika Gupta's *Sugar Mummies* (2006),³⁶ proud to have found a piece that would make a specific audience come to the theatre. This delight on the other hand can be seen as patronising and no lasting efforts to retain them seem to have been made; by the production of *Rhinoceros* in 2007 this very same audience had disappeared again. Whilst this demonstrates that there is a level of complacency when programming, it also demonstrates the level of preconception existing within venues and also within the audience perspective. Most shows are perceived as niche events by the general public, and Els Joglars are no different on this front. One need only look at unfavourable press reviews to see the sort of preconceptions they are victims of, mainly related to their (or at least Boadella's) radical political agenda.³⁷ However, unlike the current British artistic directors Nick Hytner, Ian Rickson or Dominic Cooke, Boadella does not pretend to court a particular audience depending on the subject matter of the show; although of course Els Joglars have a core audience who consistently support them and the company do not have large commercial venues to maintain as the National Theatre or Royal Court do. Boadella's stated aim to break down preconceptions nevertheless indicates that he is only interested in his regular audience insofar as they accept the rules of the game on his own terms. Indeed, he says this himself in a recent interview conducted by Lourdes Orozco: 'Above all, I think that the

³⁶ The play dealt with white middle aged women indulging in sexual tourism in Jamaica (Gupta, 2006).

³⁷ For instance, the company comment on the media frenzy surrounding *Teledium* which culminated in shootings outside theatres playing the show and the stabbing of performer Jaume Collell, as previously mentioned (see page 136). However, they do not blame the audience: 'Se ha olvidado que el grave conflicto que se desencadenó en España a consecuencia de *Teledium*, y exclusivamente por razones religiosas, nació con una homilía del obispo de Barcelona, monseñor Jubany' (Joglars, 2001: 98).

audience who come to see Els Joglars now don't do it solely for the ideological content, but also because of the dramatic structure of our shows' (Boadella, 2007: 303).³⁸ A similar desire inspires Forced Entertainment to even greater extremes, as they do not shrink away from alienating their own audience in an effort to explore their dramatic language. *Bloody Mess* (2004), an engaging and theatrical piece of ensemble devised theatre was followed by *Exquisite Pain* (2005), using texts by Sophie Calle where two seated performers read the same short story with small variations over and over for three hours. Audience walk-outs are something of a tradition in Forced Entertainment shows, but they act as an illustration of the group's desire to challenge the spectator and engage them on the show's own terms, not those terms advised by a marketing department. Ultimately, independent devising companies exist under vastly different conditions to large scale producing venues, but the fact remains that they perceive the audience in radically different ways, and it is worth distinguishing between the two. After all, Els Joglars or Forced Entertainment adapt their rehearsal process to actively challenge their audience, to turn them into the ideal spectators their shows require.

The definition of how exactly one challenges the audience and turns them into ideal spectators remains to be answered. Iser proceeds by continuing to assert the experiential nature of reading and interacting with a work of fiction, defining the nature of the reader's involvement: 'No matter who or what he may be, the real reader is always offered a particular role to play, and it is this role that constitutes the concept of the implied reader' (Iser, 1978: 34), once again using the language

³⁸ The interview was held in Spanish, and the original transcript reads as follows: 'Sobre todo yo creo que el público que ahora viene a ver a Els Joglars no lo hace únicamente por cuestiones de contenido ideológico, sino por la estructura dramática de nuestros espectáculos'.

of theatre to explain the theory, with specific references to playing a role. Here we would need to distinguish why the audience at an Els Joglars show is being treated differently to that of a commercial venue. As Lorca said in his unfinished *Comedia sin título*, '¿Por qué hemos de ir siempre al teatro para ver lo que pasa y no para ver lo que nos pasa?' (García Lorca, 1996: 770). Traditional proscenium arch theatre requires little from the audience but to sit, watch and listen, which to Lorca's thinking was not much of a challenge. Likewise Els Joglars are not content to let the audience merely have the production wash over them and as a result often attempt to give the spectator a role to play, just as Iser notes in the world of the novel. Specifically in *En un lugar de Manhattan*, the audience are confronted with a metatheatrical design that they can instantly associate with, since the playing space has been laid as if it were a small-scale fringe venue. Three rows of raked red upholstered folding seats face the audience as they arrive, mirroring the very space the audience are entering. With this simple design Els Joglars are reaffirming the theatre space and making the public aware of their role as spectators. This is particularly useful for the production as it unfolds, while the actors play out scenes from *Don Quijote* to trick the hapless Don Alonso – the audience become active participants in the torment endured by the character played by Ramón Fontserè, just as the reader is forced to participate in the Duke's trickery of *Don Quijote* within Cervantes' novel.

Indeed, Els Joglars are often interested in heightening the spectator's awareness of their presence as spectators. In *Laetius* (1980), the audience were cast as spectators of a documentary on the creatures emerging from a possible nuclear winter, while alternating actors narrated the action to the audience, and

even interacted directly, inviting them to participate by commenting into the microphones the actors carried around. The re-imagined version of this show, *Bye, Bye, Beethoven* (1987) featured a similar narrative structure while a futuristic team of Russian military historians presented their findings on the Laetius creatures as if it were a lecture; the show combined *Laetius* with the structure of *M-7 Catalònia* (1978) which also used lecturers from the future who were commenting on the daily habits of twentieth century citizens. This notion of asking the audience to imagine they were spectators at a different staged event (a documentary, a lecture) is prevalent in the companies' work; *Virtuosos de Fontainebleau* (1985) asked them to imagine they were spectators at an orchestra concert; *Teledium* (1983) was set at the filming of a television programme; *Olympic Man Movement* (1981) was presented as a political rally. This device has the effect of heightening the audience's awareness of the event they are being asked to participate in, a fact Iser too has noted: 'The ability to perceive oneself during the process of participation is an essential quality of the aesthetic experience' (Iser, 1978: 134). By comparison Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment notes his own process of engaging with an audience experientially, which also requires identifying the nature of the audience's participation:

We've often talked about our working as seeking not so much to describe a situation as to place the audience in one. It's the difference between being 'told about' or 'presented with' something and being thrown into something at the deep-end. For us this 'placing the audience in situation' means that the audience has to 'surrender' to the structural and associative logics of a piece/world, as well as to its temporal economy all of which may well be different from those experienced in the everyday. It also means that the position of the audience -their role, their expectations, desires, reactions etc - are often all an acknowledged part of the territory that the work seeks to explore or play with. The work doesn't just take place down there on the stage where the fictional world

of a play unfolds -instead it takes place in constant to-and-fro between the stage and the audience. (Etchells, 2004)

This is a particularly revealing definition of the notion of experiential theatre, which notably excludes the more 'hippie-inspired' embarrassing extremes that Etchells rejects: 'bringing to mind images of performers massaging the bodies of the audience or wafting 'exotic' smells towards them' (Etchells, 2004). Instead, Etchells explains that his goal is not just to make the audience feel, but also think: 'So the rather cathartic/orgiastic image I have when I think 'experiential theatre' isn't there in our work - we're too interested in getting people to think about how they are watching' (Etchells, 2004). The notion of how an audience experiences a performance is an important concern for theatre companies around the world. These concerns tie in directly to Els Joglars, who employ a similar process of locating the audience experientially in order to attain a level of critical reflection on the subject matter. Very often, the company make a distinct effort to define the space the audience enters, rather than simply leaving the audience in the traditional theatrical limbo, safely tucked away behind a fourth wall. After all, if the audience is predominantly passive then the transgression that Boadella so actively seeks cannot take place. Therefore it is of vital importance for him to make them aware of their role within society as well as within the play.

Evidence of this emphasis is found in Boadella's book *El rapto de Talía* (2000) as it represents a series of polemical observations of society, enhancing his figure as commentator. It seems that Boadella wants to make us aware of how we are constantly members of an audience witnessing events in society, as noted by Moisés Pérez Coterillo: 'Una conferencia, un reportaje, ahora un mitin. Esta

excursión de Albert Boadella, extramuros del viejo edificio del teatro parece tener la justiciera intención [...] de reclamar para la escena un lugar de interrelación, de cruce, con los demás lenguajes de nuestra civilización contemporánea desde el que intervenir de forma adulta en los grandes debates ciudadanos' (Pérez Coterillo, 1982 b: 39). Theatre is the ideal interactive medium to express this concern because, as Sanchis Sinisterra indicates, the theory of reception enables this communication with the audience:

Un espectáculo, una obra, no es una emisión unilateral de signos, no es una donación de significados que se produce desde la escena a la sala – o desde el texto hacia el lector - sino un proceso interactivo, un sistema basado en el principio de retroalimentación, en el que el texto propone unas estructuras indeterminadas de significado y el lector rellena esas estructuras indeterminadas, esos huecos, con su propia enciclopedia vital, con su experiencia, con su cultura, con sus expectativas. (Sanchis Sinisterra, 2002: 251)

This idea is expressed in Iser's work, linking the product to how the audience interpret it: 'literature is an experience and, further, an experience not discontinuous with other experiences...' (Iser, 1978: 39). If we are instigating the audience to respond to a piece of art, then we must rely on their 'own store of experience' (Iser, 1978: 132) in order to communicate effectively. Perhaps it is for this reason that Albert Boadella has categorically stated that 'la fantasía me interesa poco', indicating instead that 'la mayor influencia es la vida' (Boadella, 2005 d). This apparent contradiction is initially striking, particularly when we consider the tricks derived from science-fiction that Boadella utilises: narrators from the future, imaginary beings from a nuclear winter, the interior of Dalí's dying mind, etc. Nevertheless, these applications of fantasy are not incompatible with his statement when we consider that he is speaking of influences on his process, not

the means by which he expresses himself. In each case we can trace his fantasy back to an 'observación de personajes en el entorno' or a 'toma y daca con la propia sociedad' (Boadella, 2005 d). The narrators of *M-7 Catalònia* are indeed from the future, but they are presenting their findings based on observations of humans from the end of the twentieth century, hence the piece takes on a tone of social commentary because we recognise the world that is being commented on as if it were incongruous. Likewise, the *Laetius* creatures are indeed products of make believe, but they represent the company's commentary on humanity's persistent efforts to obliterate one another. Even their most recent piece, *En un lugar de Manhattan* uses fantasy as a principal tenet of performance, in this case drawn from Cervantes' own illusory world built inside the head of Don Quixote/Don Alonso. However, *Els Joglars* invert the game of illusions, as the readers of the novel are made constantly aware of how Don Quixote is engaging with the world around him. However, we never see the world directly through Don Alonso's eyes, we only ever see the actors generating broad theatrical presentations which fool Don Alonso – and hence we are able to imagine what he has seen based on his reaction. For instance, the finale when he fights the Caballero de la Blanca Luna is portrayed in a distinctly theatrical style, with each actor holding up a different piece of armour in order to construct a larger-than-life puppet. Don Alonso does not see the 'strings' as it were, but fights the semiotic construction of a knight as if it were real. In this manner the audience's consistency building tools are brought into play without requiring literal constructions of the fantasy world. Indeed, the result is a heightened complicity with the actors fooling Don Alonso, as we can see straight through the illusions and also derive enjoyment from his infinite capacity to invent scenarios based on what he is actually seeing. Don Alonso could even be viewed

as Iser's 'ideal reader', who uses the broad images delivered to him (like the words in a novel which self-evidently are not images themselves) and generates meaning:

A reality that has no existence of its own can only come into being by way of ideation, and so the structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into the reader's consciousness. The actual content of these mental images will be colored by the reader's existing stock of experience which acts as a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed (Iser, 1978: 38).

Aside from describing Don Alonso's experience of the actors in the rehearsal room precisely (through ideation he arrives at a reality that has no existence of its own), Iser's explanation mirrors the audience's reception of performance, since we do not see windmills (as Don Alonso does), but instead we follow the same process as the character and we use the incomplete visual stimuli to see the implied reality of the scene. Ultimately, Boadella is very interested in activating the audience's imagination, so his stated distaste for fantasy is not located within these visual games but instead within the director figure, Gabriela Orsini, who is indeed applying a brand of thoughtless fantasy which has little or no rooting in reality: for instance, the lesbian Quixote and Sancho plotting to bomb a New York sperm bank. Whilst it functions as a joke, it is also a comment on a kind of avant-garde theatre's absolute disregard for consistency. Gabriela's idle imaginings have no real link to the text nor in fact to reality. Meanwhile, Boadella's script constantly draws on reality for its biggest punches: Gabriela Orsini herself, as a creation of actress Pilar Sáenz and Boadella, is a direct representation of avant-garde Argentinean theatre-makers, particularly those most familiar to a Spanish audience

such as Rodrigo García and La Carnicería Teatro who live and work in Spain. Life is the greatest influence, and so Boadella draws on the audience's pool of knowledge to involve them emotionally and intellectually, forcing the audience to draw connections and build consistency for themselves in the very way that Iser indicated in *The Act of Reading*.

The term 'experiential theatre' has ordinarily been applied to physical companies who seek to connect with their audiences on a gut level. La Fura dels Baus, for instance, used to have the audience standing in their first few shows, while semi-naked actors on wheeled contraptions stormed around large open spaces, directly forcing audiences to move and participate by sharing the same dangerous space as the performers – *Accions* (1984) for example used these tactics. The ex De La Guarda team who produced *Fuerzabruta* (2006) used the language of the night club, as the physical performance of the show was backed by a persistent beat-driven soundtrack while the audience stood crowded in the middle of London's darkened Roundhouse. The company's program notes stated their intentions unequivocally: 'That the public forms part of the action, allows for its behaviour to modify the work [...] The public doesn't take part, they form part. Injured. Celebrating.' (*Fuerzabruta*, 2006). Such efforts to completely redefine the theatrical event have become synonymous with 'experiential drama', forcing audiences to engage with performances as spontaneously as if they were lived experiences, rather than the 'intellectual submission of the language' that *Fuerzabruta* attempt to shatter (*Fuerzabruta*, 2006). However, heightening the theatrical experience for the audience does not necessarily need to be as radically conceived as La Fura dels Baus or *Fuerzabruta* propose. Els Joglars demonstrate

that by considering the conditions of audience reception it is possible to make an audience as much a part of the work as if they were right in the space with the actors. After all, the effect of both strategies is the same, to make the audience aware of their role in the performance, and arguably both achieve their goals. It is hard not to feel involved with Fuerzabruta when you see an immense swimming pool descending slowly over your head, but Els Joglars are just as capable of making the audience aware of themselves through a show, albeit at a more intellectual level rather than physical interaction, by forcing them to consider their standpoint on the subject-matter of the show and within society at large. However, this is not solely down to qualities of the performance itself, we must refer back to the rehearsal methodology of the company. A combination of the significant time spent on each show coupled with clearly articulated aims and methodological approaches demonstrate the influence of their rehearsal periods on their shows.

It may sound like an obvious statement, but Els Joglars meticulous rehearsal room techniques and efforts, as described throughout this section, have not received the critical attention nor the appreciation they deserve in their considerable contribution to the company's theatrical output, after all to touch an audience at an experiential level requires more than the mechanical reproduction of a text.

PART II – TEATRO DE LA ABADÍA

Teatro de La Abadía - Chapter I - Introduction & History

I.i. An Introduction to José Luis Gómez & Teatro de La Abadía

'Gómez y La Abadía son una misma cosa, ya lo sé' (Brouwer, 2005: 200) wrote Nuria Espert in a congratulatory letter to the theatre on its tenth anniversary. Even though by 2008 much of Gómez's day to day running of the Teatro de La Abadía in Madrid has been delegated to other members of his team, it is undeniable that the genesis and impulse for the Teatro de la Abadía project are primarily Gómez's responsibility, and thus we must first look at his own professional trajectory for an overview of the theatre's emergence.

The link between José Luis Gómez and Albert Boadella is not merely artistic but personal. They coincided while they were both still young (circa *El joc* [1970]), under the unlikely circumstances of filming a language teaching programme on German television entitled 'Hablamos español': Boadella explains; 'Me había dejado convencer por mi amigo José Luis Gómez [...] se trataba de enseñar el español a través de 39 capítulos, dramatizados con muy diversas situaciones [...] Gómez estaba desesperado, pues quería tener un buen compañero durante el largo tiempo de grabación' (Boadella, 2001: 195). Boadella relates how the production company suffered the 'implacables críticas' (Boadella, 2001: 197) of both men, but also how their 'entrañable amistad' (Boadella, 2001: 200) cooled off over the age-old stumbling block of money,³⁹ probably a predictable clash given their uncompromising personalities. In spite of the rupture, both men have much in

³⁹ For a full account of his friendship with Gómez and their subsequent falling out, see (Boadella, 2001: 195-201).

common, particularly in terms of their conception of theatre. Albert Boadella, even today, recognises the value of Gómez's work at the Abadía: 'es un teatro muy riguroso [...] tienen un enorme sentido de la teatralidad, tienen una calidad' (Boadella, 2005 d). Undoubtedly, it is their tenacious pursuit of expressing their aesthetic through professional development in the rehearsal room that links Boadella and Gómez in this study.

According to Ronald Brouwer, Artistic Co-ordinator at the Abadía, who authored all the introductory texts and collated production details for the theatre's tenth anniversary volume (entitled "*Nada es como es, sino como se recuerda*": *Teatro de La Abadía 1995-2005*),⁴⁰ José Luis Gómez first went to a catering school, the Escuela Nacional de Hostelería, then moving on to a restaurant in Paris and a hotel in Frankfurt for training as a cook and waiter (Brouwer, 2005: 22). This extended period abroad exposed Gómez to trends in European theatre that would have been unavailable under the censored strictures of Spanish theatre, and allowed him to meet and train with practitioners of the stature of Jacques Lecoq or Jerzy Grotowski. Described by Mercè Saumell as 'one of the most influential innovators of the contemporary Spanish stage' (Saumell, 2002: 103), Gómez 'participated in numerous training stages (introductory workshops) run by Jacques Lecoq in the 1960s' (Saumell, 2002: 103). Between 1960 and 1964, Gómez trained as an actor at the Westphalia Institute of Dramatic Art in Böchum, and spent the rest of the decade working as an actor in Germany. In 1971 he returned to Spain with a show he had been working on in Germany, an invitation that came through the German Institute in Madrid. The piece was *Kafka's Informe para una academia*

⁴⁰ For my review of this book in *MLR*, see (Breden, 2006 b: 564-65)

(1971), which opened on 2 November of 1971 at the Teatro de la Zarzuela, alongside Gómez's version of Peter Handke's *El pupilo quiere ser tutor* (1971). Theatre critic Enrique Centeno recalls these first productions in his collection of writings *La escena española actual*: 'No es exagerado constatar que sorprendió y deslumbró su inteligentísimo trabajo, su singular preparación como actor, su inteligencia en dos obras en las que el cerebro y la expresión corporal de Gómez constituyeron un verdadero recital' (Centeno, 1996: 306).

The years following his return to Spain saw Gómez direct and act in a succession of German plays including *Gaspar Gaspar* (1971) by Peter Handke, *Mockinpott* (1972) by Peter Weiss, *Woyzeck* (1973) by Georg Büchner and *La resistible ascensión de Arturo Ui* (1974) by Brecht. He also reached a high point in his career as a film actor, with *Pascual Duarte* (1976), directed by Ricardo Franco and which earned him a best actor award at the Cannes Film Festival. Gómez does not however remember the time fondly as he explained in an interview with Fermín Cabal in 1981:

Cuando volví de Alemania en el año 70 mi propósito era incluirme en mi país, pero desgraciadamente me encontré con que este propósito no era fácilmente realizable. Yo no era asimilable por ningún teatro, ni por el independiente ni por el comercial, y durante años me ví obligado a hacer obras sólo alemanas. Esto es terrible y he padecido mucho; no tenía la fama ni el prestigio ni el dinero suficientes para hacer obras españolas, como yo quería hacer (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1981: 73)

Gómez expands in a later interview: 'he perdido toda confianza en el teatro de España... Yo he sacrificado una carrera que tenía en el cine por el teatro en el momento de más éxito de mi carrera' (Monleón, 1993: 50). Shortly after his

success at Cannes, in 1978, Gómez travelled to the United States to study under Lee Strasberg, and on returning the following year he took over the Centro Dramático Nacional as part of a triumvirate of artistic directors, alongside Nuria Espert and Ramón Tamayo. After two years, he moved to the Teatro Español as artistic director for a further three-year period. Following this experience of institutional theatre, Gómez continued to act and direct for the CDN, most notably appearing as *Hamlet* in 1989 and directing *Azaña, una pasión española* (1989), a production that would live on at the Abadía. He also returned to the cinema with *Beltenebros* (1991) directed by Pilar Miró. The early nineties saw him returning to direct in Europe, with two productions at the Odeón-Théâtre de l'Europe in Paris commissioned by the then artistic director of the theatre, fellow Spaniard, Lluís Pasqual: *Lope de Aguirre, Traidor* (1992) by Sanchis Sinisterra and *La vida es sueño* (1992) by Calderón de la Barca, as well as Bizet's *Carmen* (1993) at the Opera Bastille. Having completed these projects, his attention turned fully towards initiating his own artistic venture in Spain, with the Teatro de la Abadía project gradually taking shape.

It should be further noted that very little scholarly work has been published about the Teatro de la Abadía, except in the theatre journal, *Primer Acto*, and even then many of its appearances in the journal's pages are merely references to current programming or reviews of particular productions. Carlos Cuadros' article on the inauguration of the theatre documents the theatre's beginnings (Cuadros, 1994: 16-19), and is a notable exception. In 2004 Antonio B. González published an article on how the Abadía is managed, detailing its internal structure (González, 2004: 31-50). As in the case of Els Joglars, it has been left to the company to

document their own progress, with two publications marking the five and ten year waypoints in the development of the venue: *Cinco años de placer inteligente* (2000) and *'Nada es como es, sino como se recuerda', Teatro de la Abadía 1995-2005* (2005). Just like Els Joglars' works, these offer insights into the development and history of the theatre, but also tend to avoid self-critique. As a result, the Abadía remains largely unstudied and open to detailed analysis.

I.ii. Genesis of the Teatro de La Abadía

Speaking in 1993 about his career, Gómez admitted that the prospects of working abroad did not exactly excite him: 'Yo emigré en el 59 a la búsqueda de ámbitos formativos [...] Pero no pienso emigrar más, tengo cincuenta años, soy muy mayor y hoy España vive en democracia' (Monleón, 1993: 52), but on the other hand he felt that Spain had not been entirely fair with him, explaining his decision to work in Paris at the Odeón and the Bastille: 'Ya una vez sentí que pasaba un tren que me decía que mi trabajo podía ser útil en otra parte, y esta vez, no lo voy a dejar pasar' (Monleón, 1993: 50). However, Angela Monleón's interview is of interest principally because Gómez reveals the earliest stages of an as yet unnamed project:

JLG: Mi sueño es formar mi propio estudio y allí trabajar con un grupo de actores. Pero ya digo que éste es un aspecto que no ha interesado a las instituciones. Que no interesa. Hay una pequeña esperanza, pero pequeña, y si, desde luego, ganara la derecha y mantuviera sus posiciones, no habría nada que hacer porque ésta ya ha demostrado su rechazo cultural.

AM: ¿Se refiere esa pequeña esperanza al proyecto que la ha encargado la Comunidad de Madrid?

JLG: Sí. La Comunidad contactó conmigo hace tiempo para que me incorporara a un proyecto cultural. Mi idea era estructurar un núcleo de trabajo, de una manera modesta, sin necesidad de un gran

presupuesto, mucho más pequeño que cualquier centro dramático de los que hoy funcionan en España, con una sala estable, con un énfasis muy grande en la formación: en la palabra y la voz, un aspecto en el que estamos absolutamente huérfanos en España; en el cuerpo, pensando en un trabajo muy específico [...] Trabajar, en definitiva, por un teatro de arte, sin ningún énfasis minoritario ni de vanguardia, pero con mucha contemporaneidad, atento a los clásicos más clásicos que tengan algo que decir al hombre contemporáneo. (Monleón, 1993: 53)

Of course, by the time this interview took place in 1993 many preliminary conversations had already been held. Ramón Caravaca, who in 1992 took up the post of Viceconsejero de Cultura (Vice-Counsellor for Culture) in the Comunidad de Madrid, describes the evolution of the idea in the following manner: 'Gómez vino a hablar conmigo en septiembre [1992]. Dos meses después se concretó una primera idea, la pensamos y discutimos, tuvimos largas e intensas conversaciones y firmamos la escritura de constitución en 1993. [...] cuando entré de viceconsejero, Gómez vino con un proyecto completamente diferente. Quería comprar la Sala Mirador [...] para hacer únicamente exhibición escénica; no se planteaba absolutamente nada de formación' (Cuadros, 1994: 18-19). According to the Abadía's own chronology as presented in *Nada es como es, sino como se recuerda*, by October 1992 the church of the Sagrada Familia, where the theatre is now based, had been discovered, 'tras visitar y desestimar varios espacios propuestos' (Brouwer, 2005: 37). We can also tell that the conceptual foundations of the theatre were well established by 1993 as attested to in Angela Monleón's interview, since many of Gómez's statements are reiterated as basic tenets in 2005. For instance, Gómez speaks of his dream to work and train a stable group of actors, a notion the Abadía was founded on, as the first company of actors were sourced from their own training programme. Indeed, as early as January 1993 Gómez had devised 'una posible programación [...] y se organiza un curso piloto'

(Brouwer, 2005: 37). Therefore in time those preliminary ideas became fixed working concepts.

Gómez also spoke of training the voice as a point of urgency in Spain, while Gregorio Marañón and Bertrán de Lis, presidents of the Foundation Teatro de La Abadía note in 2005: 'José Luis define La Abadía como un taller de la palabra: templo, diría yo, en el que la palabra se alumbró gozosamente y se transmite sin pérdida de su luz' (quoted in Brouwer, 2005: 9). On opening the theatre in 1995, Gómez stated 'El alma de La Abadía son los actores' (Brouwer, 2005: 26), and this basic tenet remains an accurate description of the theatre as we will go on to see. But it was in February 1994 that conversion works began, as well as the selection process for the very first training course, which would begin on 4 April. In spite of delays in the building works, 11 February 1995 witnessed the unofficial opening of the theatre for friends and theatre professionals with Gómez reading San Juan de la Cruz poems⁴¹ accompanied by a concert for bells arranged by Llorenç Barber. The following 14 February, the first production at the Teatro de La Abadía opened, the cast entirely drawn from the initial actor training course. The production was Ramón del Valle Inclán's *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte* (1995) under Gómez's own direction.

There are other significant factors regarding the Abadía's inception that are worth noting. Perhaps most importantly is the theatre's status as a private cultural foundation, making it in the words of Antonio González: 'teatro *semi-oficial* –

⁴¹ The main space, the church, was named Juan de la Cruz; the second space, originally intended as a rehearsal room, was named the Sala José Luis Alonso after the celebrated Spanish director discussed in the introduction to this study, within the section on Spanish directors (see pp. 55-71).

financiación pública, gestión privada' (González, 2004: 31). In spite of depending on government bodies for funding (central government, the autonomous community of Madrid and Madrid's city council), Gómez stipulated that the theatre be independently run, 'con menos ataduras que un teatro institucional al uso, con mayor libertad de riesgo o de investigación' (Brouwer, 2005: 15). As Gómez noted of his experience at the helm of institutional theatre: 'Después de haber sido director del Centro Dramático Nacional y del Teatro Español, conozco esas coordenadas. Ahora me gustaría que el tiempo profesional que tengo, la fuerza física e intelectual, pudiesen fructificar y dejar una semilla más duradera de la que uno puede sembrar en un CDN' (Cuadros, 1994: 19). Certainly the desire to form an alternative theatrical base came in part from a wish to avoid the 'colosalismo en la mentalidad de la cultura española' (Brouwer, 2005: 14), and likewise ensure that the Abadía did not become a Centro Dramático of Madrid, as Ramón Caravaca underlined: 'al punto afirma que éste no aspira a ser el Centro Dramático de la Comunidad de Madrid, "que, de crearse, sería dentro de la fábrica de cervezas El Aguila"' (Cuadros, 1994: 18). Coincidentally this beer factory was one of the spaces that Gómez looked at when seeking a suitable home for the project. He too points out that the project should not be perceived as institutional: 'No se puede comparar con ninguno de los centros dramáticos, porque no llega ni a un tercio de la dotación presupuestaria de éstos. Pero es voluntariamente modesta. No queremos más' (Cuadros, 1994: 18). As Caravaca signals, 'aconsejé que fuese una fundación [...] para permitirle una continuidad en el tiempo' (Cuadros, 1994: 18). The ultimate effect is to operate from a certain degree of poverty whilst facilitating the time and space for training and the perfection of a craft under laboratory conditions. Significant here is the legacy of Grotowski, whom Gómez

briefly met before his return to Spain. Certainly, the Teatro de la Abadía responds to the tenets exposed in Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968),⁴² including a voluntary poverty of means, a consistent training period, the basing of the project in an old church and the inevitable suggestion of a holy theatre. Although the eventual naming of the project as the Teatro de la Abadía was arrived at as a joke and by accident, Gómez leapt on it:

El nombre de Abadía en realidad surgió como broma, cuando el equipo gestor estaba levantando el proyecto. Pero pensándolo bien, según comentó José Luis Gómez más tarde, en las abadias se hacían quesos, cervezas y vinos magníficos, se conservaban secretos, se transcribían libros con admirable esmero... “y nos pareció un nombre bueno, que tenía algo que ver con lo queríamos hacer en este teatro” (Brouwer, 2005: 18)

The ritualistic nature of theatre is thus carefully linked to the religious history of the Abadía and all the socio-cultural connotations that go along with it, as we will go on to see in Chapter IV which deals centrally with a reading of the space itself as well as its connections to Holy theatre.⁴³

I.iii. Teatro de la Abadía: Aims & Objectives

The five year retrospective, *5 años de placer inteligente*, suggests that the Abadía was a direct response to the poor theatrical climate of the early 90s: ‘El momento era de grave crisis en la escena española y madrileña: con una precaria tradición heredada en las enseñanzas escénicas, un descenso continuado de la cifra de espectadores y una gran pobreza artística del repertorio presentado en los teatros’

⁴² Translated into Spanish and published in 1968 in the theatre journal *Primer Acto* (Grotowski, 1968: 8-13).

⁴³ See Part II, Chapter IV: pp. {286-306}

(Gómez, 2000: 7). Gómez traces this problem to a lack of research into the process of creation: 'Es inquietante la ausencia de reflexiones escritas de directores y actores del pasado, acerca de los problemas de su oficio' (Gómez, 2000: 17). He goes on to express similar disquiet at the technical ignorance exhibited by actors and directors alike. The Abadía thus was conceived as a remedy to these ills of the profession, by using as a model 'la tradición europea de los teatros de arte' (Gómez, 2000: 7). The solution was formulated as a constant learning process: 'la formación continua de actores y directores en torno a diversas formas de entrenamiento y pesquisa' (Gómez, 2000: 7). As a result of this emphasis on process in order to improve product, the audience should thus be encouraged to reflect actively on 'la realidad que nos toca vivir en este cambio de milenio' (Gómez, 2000: 7). This is further defined as 'una forma de teatro que sea fiesta civil, lúdica y lúcida, de nuestros días, y no mero pasatiempo' (Gómez, 2000: 8). Ultimately, therefore, the Abadía has aimed to be 'brújula del trabajo del arte para la vida' (Gómez, 2000: 46). It remains to be seen exactly how these aims have been implemented since the theatre's foundation, and if indeed we can say whether they have been successful throughout the theatre's lifetime.

Catalan director Àlex Rigola, now artistic director of the Lliure theatre in Barcelona, has often travelled to Madrid to either present work at the Abadía or work with the resident team of actors in the production of new shows. Over the past six years, he has produced *Ubú Rey* (2002), O'Neill's *Largo viaje hacia la noche* (2006) and Richard Dresser's *Días mejores* (2009) with the Abadía actors as well as bringing numerous visiting Lliure productions to the venue. Like many other practitioners linked to the theatre, he provided a congratulatory note to the

Abadía's ten year anniversary publication, which in his case was comprised of a list of epithets describing José Luis Gómez. In spite of being a rather strained device, we can detect a note of some importance, mid way through the stream of superficial observations: 'creador de compañía • elenco • elenco • compañía' (quoted in Brouwer, 2005: 179). The repetition of the words company and 'elenco', a word that specifically denotes a company of actors, is as descriptive of Gómez himself as it is telling. The essence of 'elenco' or ensemble is at the root of collaborative theatre making, and clearly integral to any attempt at dealing with Gómez's body of work at La Abadía.

The production of *El burlador de Sevilla* (2008) gave me the opportunity of studying the Abadía's methods from within.⁴⁴ The word 'elenco' is repeated as a buzzword around the building, a term of more weight than its literal meaning indicates. The urge to build a sense of company for every show is in-built into the process, even when a visiting director is brought in as was the case with *El burlador de Sevilla* and Dan Jemmett. When the team speak of 'elenco', they are referring to a sense of cohesion and togetherness both as individuals and on-stage that stems from Gómez's experience of Lecoq and Grotowski in terms of synching a group of actors ideologically and stylistically. These days the Abadía is neither as exacting nor as specific as Grotowski in its training of actors, but there is still a search for a notion of 'elenco' that is more reminiscent of modern-day devising methods, in the ensemble work of companies like Complicité or to an even greater extent Forced Entertainment. The concept of an ensemble is described by

⁴⁴ From 3 January to 24 February I worked at the Teatro de La Abadía, acting as assistant director and interpreter for British director Dan Jemmett on his re-imagined version of *El burlador de Sevilla*.

Boadella of Els Joglars: 'un nivel de comunicación que es casi intuitivo y que favorece la expresión colectiva' (Cabal & Alonso de Santos, 1985: 108). Whilst this is harder to achieve over a two-month rehearsal period with a visiting director, it is worth noting that four of the six cast members of *El burlador de Sevilla* had worked together before at different times due to the theatre's reliance on working with a regular core of actors trained at the Abadía. These actors are formed with three basic tenets in mind: '1° la relación entre la palabra y el movimiento del actor, 2° la pericia verbal y 3° la energía común y la cohesión del elenco'. In other words, it is about creating 'una cantera de actores habituados a un código común y a una "manera de hacer" que distingue al Teatro de la Abadía' (Brouwer, 2005: 26). The productions cannot help but be shaped by the company's rehearsal room ethos.

The Abadía training course was given a preliminary shape before the project even had a name, as evidenced by the interview in theatre journal *Primer Acto* with Angela Monleón: 'Agustín García Calvo ya ha aceptado dar las clases de prosodia; para las de voz contaríamos con un maestro de Tai Chi y con un experto en técnica consciente del movimiento... y mi aportación, intentando, entre todos, formar un actor directo, expresivo, sonoro, limpio e inteligente cuando habla' (Monleón, 1993: 53). The list of teachers credited with the 1994 course include García Calvo, as well as 'Jesús Aladrén (voz y palabra) [...] José Luis Gómez (actuación y habla escénica), Manuel León (Tai Chi), María del Mar Navarro (movimiento escénico), Rosario Ruiz Rodgers (elenco y Chejov) y Silvia Strin (sistema consciente para la técnica del movimiento)' (Brouwer, 2005: 39). Ester Bellver, one of the performers on the original training course describes the experience in some detail:

Mientras finalizaban las obras hacíamos el curso de formación en la Sala Jorge Juan, una dependencia creo que prestada por el CDN, o una institución teatral importante. El curso se alargó casi el doble de lo previsto, porque hubo un problema de desniveles en el suelo y tuvieron que rehacerlo todo. Cuando entramos en la Abadía empezamos los ensayos de Retablo con el suelo todavía sin barnizar, con el polvillo de las obras, y hacía mucho frío porque todavía no había calefacción. Nos trajeron unas mantas de esas de los militares para hacer los ejercicios encima, y enfundarnos en ellas mientras esperabas sentado en tu silla a que llegara tu escena. La primera promoción de actores (21 en total de los que quedamos 14 para el reparto final de Retablo) tuvimos profesores de la talla de Agustín García Calvo en prosodia, Mar Navarro en movimiento Lecoq, Manuel León en Tai-chi, Rafael Salama y Silvia Strin en técnica de Fedora, José Luis Gómez en Palabra, Rosario Ruiz Rodgers y José Luis Gómez en técnica Chejov y Jesús Aladrén en Voz. El proceso de formación fue de 6 meses, continuados con otros 6 más de ensayos para Retablo. Un año de trabajo con una implicación total por parte de todos desembocó en *El Retablo de la Avaricia, la Lujuria, y la Muerte*, el espectáculo más memorable de la Abadía y creo que el de los currículos de todos los que participamos en él. (Bellver, 2008)

The basis of this teaching system comes from Gómez's own methodology as an actor. The inclusion of Tai Chi so prominently is in fact a direct result of Gómez's training under Lee Strasberg: '“el único ejercicio sin contraindicaciones”, le dijo Strasberg' (Brouwer, 2005: 25). In 1971 José Luis Gómez explained the creative process behind his one-man show, *Informe para una academia* in *Primer Acto*. His article begins with a summary of the textual analysis that he produced before beginning to work physically on it. First, he establishes the reasons for his interest in the text: 'Entre las crecientes presiones sociales, la neurosis civilizada, la polución, la castración de la Naturaleza, las imágenes poéticas de Kafka adquirirían una vigencia alucinante' (Gómez, 1971: 55). This leads him to list specific observations on the character of the ape. These analytical observations of the text are then translated into a list of actions or goals to be achieved physically: 'Luego me hice algunas notas más, en cierto modo circunstanciales, que debían

ayudarme a determinar escénicamente la situación y el “gestus” del conferenciante’ (Gómez, 1971: 56). He identifies that the ape becomes nervous at the act of public presentation; that he is filled with an innocent pride in his achievements; that the ape does not seek to become human but is proud of having reached the level of an average European; that he performs in an elegant music-hall style and finally that he hides his nerves by imitating the gestures of a public speaker: ‘Abreviando resumiré que todas estas reflexiones me indujeron a marcarme unos “leitmotivs” en el trabajo’ (Gómez, 1971: 57). This kind of close textual work, aside from being highly reminiscent of Stanislavski or Michael Chekhov’s process of detailed textual analysis leading to clear goals for physicalisation, is well represented in the Abadía’s original training program, and even more so with the addition in 1995 of ‘Vicente Fuentes (voz y palabra) [...] Jorge Saura (análisis activo)’ (Brouwer, 2005: 58), and a ten-day Michael Chekhov workshop led by Jobst Langhams, ‘miembro de la junta de la Michael Chekhov Association y en la actualidad dirige la compañía Werkbühne y el Michael Chekhov Studio, ambos en Berlín’ (Brouwer, 2005: 59). Detailed textual analysis as a key tool in preparing the performance is a hallmark of the venue, a methodology that Gómez had already perfected in 1971.

The methodology takes shape in its transition from textual to physical work in the process as described for *Informe para una academia*. He prefaces his process stating that ‘Las dificultades de actuación, las técnicas, eran básicamente de voz y movimiento’ (Gómez, 1971: 57), again pointing to the heavy emphasis on voice and movement training at the Abadía. However, what is most noteworthy here is Gómez’s attention to detail: ‘A nivel de voz busqué, a base de improvisaciones

sobre el texto, la utilización de los resonadores superiores, el nasal, el frontal y el occipital; y los del pecho y el vientre, intentando “casarlos” lo más posible, romper los tonos, para conseguir el efecto de la criatura que ha aprendido recientemente a hablar’ (Gómez, 1971: 57). Voice as a tool that can be used malleably to generate a performance is evidently important to Gómez, and his attention to physical movement is just as meticulous: ‘A nivel de movimiento busqué una síntesis de movimientos simiescos y sus características, no las de un animal determinado [...] Quise evitar un exceso de saltos [...] Todo debía estar al servicio del texto, pero con calidad muscular, rítmica y plástica’ (Gómez, 1971: 57). This line of thought then leads Gómez onto a key axiom that is repeated throughout his work, in particular with reference to the kind of actor he wanted the Abadía to produce. He narrates the preparatory strategies behind *Informe para una academia*: ‘Estuve casi diez días pasando el texto con movimiento, con ninguna otra intención que la de que aquél estuviera perfectamente articulado y fuera rico en intención’ (Gómez, 1971: 57). The key phrase is ‘rich in intention’, referring here to a clarity and focus in performance that is the cornerstone of his training ethos: ‘No quiero formar actores decidores, sino actores en los que la conexión mente-cuerpo sea muy estrecha... la palabra que sale de las entrañas, no puede salir de un recitador, sino de la integración en el actor’ (Cuadros, 1994: 18). In 1994, theatre critic Rosanna Torres of *El País* spoke to some of the original participants of the first training course, who explained Gómez’s imperative in the following terms: ‘Nuestro trabajo consiste en convertirnos en actores completos, en lo que llama Gómez ‘la elocuencia’, algo que permita una ductilidad, que nos lleve no al naturalismo, sino a la naturalidad’ (Torres, 1994). Naturalism as a literary term, for all its intentions of replicating reality is nevertheless an externally imposed system, while what Gómez

seeks from his actors is a level of commitment and involvement in the work that is more akin to the terminology of Peter Brook, Grotowski or Artaud: 'Entonces habrá un teatro donde los actores tendrán esa cualidad maravillosa de la incandescencia: uno los ve arder, sin llamas, desde dentro' (Brouwer, 2005: 27). Crucially, however, this intense involvement is not the exclusive preserve of the actors, as Ester Bellver notes the backstage efforts surrounding *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte*:

La realización de la utilería los maravillosos utileros de aquel momento en la Abadía y José Ramón, el carpintero, que repitieron, por poner un ejemplo, la fabricación del ataúd de La encamada de La Rosa de papel por lo menos 10 veces, o la mesa de la pepona de La cabeza del Bautista otras tantas y así todo. La exigencia fue extrema, la entrega de todos total. Se levantaba un teatro, La Abadía. (Bellver, 2008)

Invoking the efforts of the carpenters recalls Brook's comment, as reported by director Dan Jemmett who has maintained an extensive personal relationship with the Paris-based director, describing theatre not as an art but as 'an honest trade' (Jemmett, 2008). Eugenio Barba, an influence on Gómez and whose productions have regularly toured to the Abadía, also describes himself as 'an artisan in a craft' (Barba, 2005: 8). Indeed, Grotowski's influence and the notion of 'holy theatre' is present in the very inception of the entire project, not least because the theatre is located in an old church: 'en 1990 fue desacralizada' (Brouwer, 2005: 16). Carlos Cuadros noted this as the Abadía prepared to open: 'nada mejor para realizar el valor sagrado del teatro que una iglesia', a fact that Gómez is quick to pick up on:

No me es ajeno el hecho religioso. Quisiera que La Abadía recuperase el sentido del teatro como fiesta más que como pasatiempo [...] Me gustaría recuperar esa comunicación de energía del hombre en el grupo

que nos hace salir de la reclusión de nuestro ego mierdoso. (Cuadros, 1994: 19)

Indeed, the opening ceremony of the Teatro de la Abadía was rich in spiritual overtones, from its unofficial opening event with readings of San Juan de la Cruz and the concert of church bells, to the choice of starting tableau of the debut production *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte* (1995) by Ramón del Valle Inclán under Gómez's own direction:

El tintineo de una campanilla anuncia que la función va a comenzar, como antiguamente en este mismo lugar los monaguillos marcaban el momento más sagrado de la liturgia. Se apaga la luz de sala y aparece en escena una bruja cuyo poderoso soplo pone en movimiento un botafumeiro que pende de la cúpula (Brouwer, 2005: 14)

One need only note the portentous tone of the passage that speaks volumes of the solemnity of the venue and the idea of entering a shared space of concentration. Indeed, the detail of the bell announcing the opening of the house has been used on every production at the Abadía since its opening, a constant and brief reminder of the nature of the space which is being entered into. Clearly for Gómez, this spiritual communion is of critical importance: 'Ese caudal es el *ethos* de entrega y de energía, sin el que un proyecto como La Abadía nunca habría podido realizarse; la conexión con ese núcleo de naturaleza espiritual en las personas' (Brouwer, 2005: 11). Fully defining and establishing how this spiritual connection is constructed and what it means for theatre in Spain becomes the subject of the present section on the Teatro de la Abadía.

I.iv. Teatro de la Abadía: History & Evolution

We have already seen how José Luis Gómez approached the Teatro de la Abadía project, but since its opening in 1995 the theatre has developed a substantial body of work and firmly established itself as a prominent theatre in both Madrid and the wider body of Spain, and a major receiving house for international touring companies of the stature of Odin Teatret or Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord. It is worth exploring the company's in-house productions to arrive at a fuller perception of the theatre's current identity.

The first season saw Gómez lead his newly trained troupe in two in-house productions: Valle Inclán's *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte* (1995) and Cervantes' *Entremeses* (1995) while a more experienced cast took on Fermín Cabal's *Castillos en el aire* (1995) which earned the Premio de la Crítica de Madrid (Brouwer, 2005: 42). Both, Valle Inclán and Cabal's plays were thematically linked as the "ciclo del dinero" (Brouwer, 2005: 28) in an attempt to comment on the realities of the day. Speaking of the *Retablo*, Carlos Cuadros dedicates some time to the young company:

La primera promoción de 14 actores de *La Abadía* pone en pie a los personajes de este **Retablo** con limpieza. No existen interpretaciones postizas, sino soltura para *encarnar* [...] Apostando por una buena interpretación coral, en esta joven compañía no destacan individualidades, sino todo un conjunto de actores y actrices que, como los instrumentos para una sinfonía, han sido afinados cuidadosamente en la misma clave durante los varios meses de preparación que les ha ofrecido este nuevo centro. (Cuadros, 1995: 45)

Theatre critic Haro Tecglen of *El País* concurs with this view, praising both the actors and Gómez's work with them, albeit noting that the company have discovered nothing new in Valle's plays:

Sobre esta palabra artificial, literaria, ha hecho trabajar José Luis Gómez a sus numerosos actores y actrices. No ha forzado ninguna clase de extremos o de imitaciones y ha conseguido que el texto llegue con claridad [...] todo ello es un buen paso, incluso magnífico, para una promoción que sale de una escuela por primera vez, y de la que pueden estar orgullosos profesores, directores y promotores. (Haro Tecglen, 1995)

Haro Tecglen's response to the following ensemble piece, Cervantes' *Entremeses* was similar, firstly underlining how co-directors Gómez and Rosario Ruiz had carried out a 'salvamento' (Haro Tecglen, 1996 b) of texts that had been mistreated as superficial by countless amateur companies, later commenting that it had been 'bien interpretado por los jóvenes actores' (Haro Tecglen, 1996 b). However, where *Retablo* and *Entremeses* seemed to have failed to spark major reactions (although Gómez underlines that his production of *Retablo* attained 75% occupancy compared to a city wide average of 30% [Solana, 1995]), *Castillos en el aire* by Fermín Cabal certainly managed to stir up a great deal of attention given the topical subject of political corruption, illustrating the degree of risk that Gómez and the Abadía were willing to take. Director Itziar Pascual notes that the moment Gómez announced the play in his season presentation, 'ya empezó a generarse una curiosidad y un morbo muy particulares sobre cuál iba a ser el contenido de la obra de Cabal' (Pascual & Ladra, 1995: 81). In his introduction to the play, Antonio José Domínguez also references the media storm: 'las reseñas abundaron en el fenómeno de la corrupción política ya que, después de las elecciones de 1993

ganadas por el PSOE, era la noticia habitual en los medios de comunicación' (Cabal, 1997: 62). Indeed, Domínguez summarises the critics' stances, and the commentary is almost exclusively to do with the politics of the play, only Santiago Trancón speaking of the production itself: 'el texto mediocre, el argumento sobrecargado, reiterativo o forzado; el director salva todos estos fallos' (Cabal, 1997: 62). The relative merits of the production and play aside, as only the Teatro de la Abadía's second in-house production, it demonstrates the ideological impulses of the building if not necessarily the artistic training of the debut (*Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte* went on a worldwide tour, performing at Belo Horizonte, Bogotá, Lisbon, Recklinghausen and Rome clocking up 315 performances [Brouwer, 2005: 49]). *Castillos en el aire* represents the Abadía's 'impronta contemporánea' (Brouwer, 2005: 28) and the importance of staging new works 'que tengan algo que decir al hombre contemporáneo' (Monleón, 1993: 53). 'El Teatro de la Abadía aspira a relacionarse con lo que sucede en la sociedad' (Brouwer, 2005: 15), a fact attested to by the tenth anniversary volume on the theatre, which lists the major social events both in Spain and internationally alongside events and productions at the Abadía itself. Independent of any considerations of its quality, the Abadía's debut season was a statement of intent. Its first year of existence earned the Abadía the Premio Nacional de Teatro as Rosanna Torres reports: 'Gómez afirmó ayer, al conocer la noticia, que sentía alivio porque llevan un mes de tremenda angustia al no poder hacer frente a los sueldos de los actores que están de gira y a las becas de los jóvenes que preparan el nuevo montaje' (Torres, 1995).

The 96/97 season witnessed a small shift in the director's chair, with Gerardo Vera invited to produce *La noche XII* (Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*) and Carles Alfaro directing Gómez in Ionesco's *Las sillas* (1997). Gómez had always intended to appear as an actor at the Abadía, but when it comes to explaining his appointment of another director his reasoning again rests on what is best for the development of his ensemble: 'no es bueno que se acostumbren a una sola dirección, porque la autonomía es imprescindible para que un actor sea un artista maduro' (Torres, 1996). Gerardo Vera had been involved in early discussions to start up the Abadía project, and in 1994 Gómez invited him to join the board of directors, 'Patronato de la Fundación, al que pertenezco desde el año 1994' (Brouwer, 2005: 63). Speaking of his experience with the Abadía actors, Vera states that: 'actores que siempre serán para mí un ejemplo de disciplina, de esfuerzo, de dedicación entusiasta y, sin duda alguna, de talento' (Brouwer, 2005: 63). Theatre critic Haro Tecglen appears to agree, highlighting the actor's work: 'las voces de los intérpretes, dan belleza añadida al gran texto de Shakespeare. Todo ello sale de la excelente dirección de Gerardo Vera' (Haro Tecglen, 1996 a). Meanwhile the production of *Las sillas* also managed to stir up some expectation thanks to the reunion of José Luis Gómez and Verónica Forqué on-stage together for the first time in ten years since 'la inolvidable ¡Ay, Carmela!, de Sanchís Sinisterra' (Torres, 1997), referring to a production performed in 1988 at the Teatro Figaro with Gómez directing and also starring Manuel Galiana.

The 97/98 season opened with Goethe's *Fausto* (1997) with German director Götz Loepelmann accompanied by Gómez who was responsible for directing the Spanish text. However, it was a season marked prominently by Bertolt Brecht, with

El señor Puntilla y su criado Matti (1998) and *Brecht cumple 100 años* (1998), the latter directed by Ernesto Caballero and compiling various texts by Brecht on the occasion of his 100th birthday. Santiago Trancón analysed the season for *Primer Acto*, but found *El señor Puntilla y su criado Matti* particularly praiseworthy: 'Rosario Ruiz en la dirección y José Luis Gómez en la interpretación magistral del señor Puntilla, entienden perfectamente todo esto y el resultado es una maravilla escénica e interpretativa. Todo el espectáculo está medido, cuidado, con un ritmo ágil, sin caídas de tono ni de interés' (Trancón, 1998: 127). The 98/99 season featured only one new in-house show, *¡Santiago de Cuba y cierra España!* written and directed by Ernesto Caballero, the rest of the season made up of a repertory of the two Brecht shows alongside a revival of *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte*. The following season continued to emphasise contemporary Spanish playwrights, with Antonio Álamo's *Los enfermos* (1999) and Agustín García Calvo's *Baraja del rey don Pedro* (2000). The former sourced actors from outside the Abadía ensemble and was directed by Rosario Ruiz Rodgers. On the other hand *Baraja del rey don Pedro* was more of an Abadía product, under Gómez's direction with regular actors many of whom had studied under García Calvo in the first training courses: 'Eran un puñado de aprendices de actores, los más de ellos de las primeras hornadas de La Abadía, que habían andado adiestrándose conmigo en ritmo y declamación' (Brouwer, 2005: 109).

Teatro de la Abadía entered the new millennium with a new production of *El mercader de Venecia* (2001) under the direction of Hansgünther Heyme and a revival of one of José Luis Gómez's most successful productions, originally performed at the Centro Dramático Nacional in 1988: *Azaña, una pasión española*

(2000). The 01/02 season saw Gómez direct Berkoff's *Mesías* (2001), Isabel Carmona and Joaquín Hinojosa's *Defensa de dama* (2002) and invited director Àlex Rigola producing Jarry's *Ubú Rey* (2002). For the 02/03 season, José Luis Gómez compiled texts by Luis Cernuda in *Memoria de un olvido. Cernuda (1902-1963)* (2002). Hansgünther Heyme returned to the Abadía with *El rey Lear* (2003) and the season closed with Joaquín Hinojosa's direction of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's *El libertino* (2003). The following season, 03/04 saw long term assistant director Carlos Aladro's directing debut at the Abadía, *Garcilaso, el cortesano* (2003), a show that combined texts by Garcilaso de la Vega along with others by Juan Boscán and Baldassare Castiglione. Later in the year Gómez returned to Ionesco with his production of *El rey se muere* (2004) and Hernán Gené produced *Sobre Horacios y Curiacios*, a piece that used the work of Bertolt Brecht as a starting point. The 04/05 season opened with Aladro directing again, this time the Presnyakov brothers' *Terrorismo* (2004) while the rest of the season consisted of repertory shows from the previous season along with revivals of *Azaña, una pasión española* and *Memoria de un olvido*. The 05/06 season opened with invited director Luis Miguel Cintra's production of *Comedia sin título* (2006), a hybrid text primarily built on Lorca's unfinished play but incorporating other texts. Àlex Rigola returned to the Abadía to direct O'Neill's *Largo viaje hacia la noche* (2006), while Gómez again revived a classic production from his past, the production that brought him back to Spain in 1971, Kafka's *Informe para una academia* (2006). The season was also notable for the acquisition of Alcalá de Henares' Corral de Comedias, a re-converted space fifteen minutes out of Madrid which was originally a traditional Spanish corral theatre: it officially opened on 2 April 2005 and has its own programme, although of course all the Abadía productions have pride of place

in the theatre's programming.⁴⁵ 06/07 brought Pinter's *El portero* (2006) under Carles Alfaro's direction and Dürrenmatt's *Play Strindberg* (2006) under Georges Lavaudant's direction. The latter was performed by José Luis Gómez, Nuria Espert and Lluís Homar, the first time three such prominent Spanish actors had all been on-stage together. The season was wrapped up with Aladro's direction of Corneille's *La ilusión* (2007) and a devised piece by Ana Vallés entitled *Me acordaré de todos vosotros* (2007).

The 07/08 season opened with a re-cast *Play Strindberg* (with Jordi Bosch in place of Lluís Homar), and a co-production with Animalario theatre company,⁴⁶ a re-imagined version of Goldoni's *Servant of Two Masters*. Under Andrés Lima's direction and penned by Alberto San Juan, the version altered the title from *Arlequino* to *Argelino, servidor de dos amos* (2008), which re-situated the action in modern Spain and the plight of immigrants in an intolerant society. Ernesto Caballero returned to the Abadía to direct Juan Mayorga's *La tortuga de Darwin* (2008) and British director Dan Jemmett, whose past productions *Shake* (2003) and *Dogface* (2005) had toured to the Abadía in the *Festival de Otoño*, was asked to place his stamp on a Spanish Golden Age play with the resident Abadía actors, in *El burlador de Sevilla* (2008).

Therefore, as we can see, the Abadía Theatre provides a relatively wide repertoire, with a marked inclination for international drama and practitioners. The issue of foreign languages is certainly of importance to an establishment that has a

⁴⁵ On 2 July 2009, Carlos Aladro was named the artistic co-ordinator of the venue, indicating how seriously the venue is considered as an extension of the Abadía.

⁴⁶ For more information about the company, see Animalario (2005).

policy of employing personnel who can offer other language skills besides Spanish. This tendency is very revealing of just how much the Abadía values the international input. From this perspective, the following study proposes an in depth analysis of the Abadía rehearsal process, using as case studies periods of observation on *La ilusión* (2007) and *El burlador de Sevilla* (2008). Primarily I am looking at recent productions and how the Abadía has constructed an identity and methodology which is now implicit to the workings of the building. This will be substantiated with interviews with members of the artistic team and performers in order to identify the Abadía's unique role within the Madrid theatre scene.

Teatro de la Abadía - Chapter II – Rehearsal Room Ethos

The following section describes the rehearsal process at the Abadía theatre as witnessed in January 2008. My role as an assistant director in the 2008 production of *El burlador de Sevilla*, directed by Dan Jemmett, allowed me to follow the entire rehearsal process and the discussion that follows pinpoints the salient features within the confines of this analysis. The following eye-witness account, therefore, intends to present the rehearsal process as I perceived it employing the terminology applied by the creative team at the time. As a result, I do not propose to interrupt the account of the process during the following section. Instead, a more analytical approach will be used in a subsequent section and this will allow ample time to analyse the conclusions that can be drawn from this specific rehearsal process as documented in this section.

Firstly a note on the text used for *El burlador de Sevilla*: given the significant cuts and alterations in sequences indicated by Jemmett, with the small modifications and consistency of the verse structure penned by Alberto Castrillo-Ferrer, a whole new text was typed out and used throughout rehearsals. The complete version of the text relied on for reference was Alberto Rodríguez López-Vázquez's Cátedra Letras Hispánicas edition, and all subsequent references to the text itself will refer to this edition,⁴⁷ although Ignacio Arellano's Austral edition was also used as a contrast.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Tirso de Molina, (atribuida a), Alfredo Rodríguez López-Vázquez (Ed.) (2005).

⁴⁸ Tirso de Molina, Ignacio Arellano (Ed.) (2007).

Jemmett himself is a British director who has worked extensively internationally, particularly in Paris where he resided until very recently having moved in 2008 to Pittsburgh in a bid to form his own company and use the derelict industrial infrastructure of the American city as a site-specific backdrop for his work. He began creating work in London, forming the company Primitive Science with Marc von Henning. In 1998 he moved to Paris, and whilst there created two shows that would be seen at the Abadía in the *Festival de Otoño: Shake* (2003) and *Dogface* (2005). Recent works have seen him adapt Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (2007) and *Les précieuses ridicules* (2007) at the Comédie Française, thus becoming the first British director to work on a Molière play at the venue. It is worth remembering that although two of Dan Jemmett's shows had appeared at the Abadía, this was his first rehearsal process at the theatre with Spanish actors and he did not speak Spanish. Therefore, whilst the rehearsal process responds to many of the tenets of the venue, his personal vision and methods do not entirely represent the ethos of the Abadía. Nevertheless, there is a sympathy with the house methodology as defined by José Luis Gómez and encouraged by the core ensemble of Abadía actors, and it is also worth underlining that the theatre has a long tradition of bringing in visiting directors to offer contrasting ideas and methods and prevent the resident team from becoming stagnant, as detailed in the season breakdown at the beginning of this section. In any case, the two-month residency at the theatre allowed me to arrive at an understanding that, in the present day, there is no longer a fixed and fully defined Abadía method as there may have been at the outset. In its place, there is an openness on the part of the actors to work and experiment with whatever method the director is bringing to the fore. Likewise, the actors are no longer all fully trained

resident Abadía actors. The cast for *El burlador* was led by Antonio Gil in the Don Juan role, an actor mainly resident in London who has worked with Theatre de Complicite on *The Street of Crocodiles* (1992-1999); indeed an actor who had not performed in Spain for years. Likewise, Marta Poveda was a new introduction to the in-house company having been plucked from the cast of the Sala Beckett's production of José Sanchís Sinisterra's *Flechas del angel del olvido* (2004) that was seen at the Abadía in 2005. Of the remaining four cast members, all Abadía regulars, Ester Bellver, Lino Ferreira, David Luque and Luis Moreno, only Bellver actually underwent the original training course. Ferreira did attend some workshops and courses at the Abadía, while Luque and Moreno have had very little formal Abadía training, having mainly trained elsewhere in the same methodologies (Lecoq and Michael Chekhov).⁴⁹ It seems that a laxness has crept into the exacting founding notions of the theatre, perhaps relaxing a certain rigidity of thought and allowing a variety of skills and methods to coexist in hybrid rehearsal processes through a natural process of evolution and company development. Nevertheless, the notion of working as an ensemble or elenco remains true today, as we will see through this process.

The actors themselves began auditioning for the show in March of 2007 where a number of hopefuls were interviewed by Dan Jemmett. Later that year in September, a selected ensemble of ten actors and Antonio Gil (who was to play Don Juan and had worked with Jemmett on *Shake*) gathered at the Abadía for a

⁴⁹ Luque attended the Michael Chekhov Acting Studio in New York and also trained with Lenard Petit and Anne Bogart at the Siti Company. He has been a permanent fixture in the internal Abadía workshops since 2001. Meanwhile, Moreno joined the Abadía in 2004 through an external workshop introducing the Abadía method: 'El trabajo actoral en el Teatro de la Abadía... habla escénica, equilibrio psicofísico, trabajo de elenco' (Brouwer, 2005, 197).

week long audition/workshop. Unlike more traditional audition processes, Jemmett opted to gather a group together in order to gain a sense of group dynamics as a way of beginning to explore his ideas for the play itself. In addition to the five actors he eventually selected, other participants in the workshop were performers Carlota Ferrer, Fernando Sánchez-Cabezudo, Fernando Soto, Rebeca Valls and Deborah Vukusic, all of whom had collaborated extensively with the Abadía in the past, as well as resident assistant director Fefa Noia and myself as translator/assistant. Jemmett designed a series of sessions which aimed to gauge the openness and willingness of the actors to his methods. All the sessions would begin with an informal warm-up where actors would stretch individually. Then Antonio Gil would lead an extended ensemble warm-up, which the directing team would generally also participate in. These sessions usually focused on working as a group, often starting with passing impulses around a circle (sound, gesture, rhythm or combinations). Some of these games were designed to break down inhibitions (passing an impulse around a circle by means of big and loud karate gestures), whilst others allowed the group to collaborate towards achieving goals as a unit (keeping a ball in the air for one hundred beats for instance). Jemmett also introduced a number of ball games at this stage, to generate a healthy but controlled competitiveness in the group.

One such game played all week was called 'square ball', where four players play a kind of four-corner tennis, and which Jemmett particularly enjoyed because he described it as being impossible to win; the ease with which any player can be knocked out means a new player is constantly joining the game without frustration or thirst for victory getting in the way. This seems a more playful version of another

exercise that Jemmett ran a couple of times over the week, which he claimed to have borrowed from Peter Brook:⁵⁰ the exercise consisted in having a 'director' seated on stage with an actor coming to him with a line to deliver, 'Come quick! Your house is on fire!'. The actor then had three attempts to convince the director who must always reply "No, that's not it" and inevitably fire the actor; unless the performance is so convincing that the director must grudgingly admit, 'that's not bad' at which point the director is fired. Here actors are set to judge each other in a context in which they can never fully convince (under the strictest interpretation of the rules, only two or three individuals elicited a 'not bad' response out of a huge number of attempts). On one level actors become aware of the futility of aiming for realism, whilst finding rejection almost playful. Competition is thus treated in a fun and safe environment where operating as a group is paramount and individual flashiness unrewarded. Most of Antonio Gil's warm-ups nurtured this sense, with many hands-on massage sessions to get actors working for each other, and other simple improvisation sketches that aimed for ensemble group thinking, much in the Complicite vein. Perhaps the most striking was an exercise involving following a leader, who sets a way of walking and the rest follow in a tight group. As the group turns, whoever finds themselves at the forefront of the group then begins to lead, which means that the actors must always be attentive to each other, to make sure of a physicality in synch with each new leader and not allowing others to lag behind. The exercise then evolved to have two separate units responding to each other's presence under the same rules. Attentiveness and a capacity to respond as

⁵⁰ Jemmett's career has not only been linked professionally with that of Peter Brook, but also personally through his relationship with Brook's daughter, Irina, also an internationally renowned theatre director.

a group was paramount and exactly what Jemmett and Gil were promoting and hoping to recognise in the ten hopefuls.

The afternoons saw Jemmett take full control of the rehearsal room, devising a series of very simple and structured improvisations to gauge willingness to participate and engage. In collaboration with British designer Dick Bird,⁵¹ Jemmett had already devised a preliminary layout for the show, with a bar on stage-right and a changing area with racks of clothes on stage-left. Jemmett asked the actors to imagine a huge red curtain upstage, as if from a cabaret, with the audience facing the front. The improvisations then centred on the actor's capacity for transformation, and structurally deviated little from the following sequence of events: an actor starts at the bar, crosses the stage to change into any available clothes (the Abadía's costume department had evidently been raided for a selection of costumes from past productions), and then makes an entrance through the curtains. There were a number of variations on the theme; in some instances the exercise ended there, but on other occasions Jemmett had them change back into neutral clothes and return to the bar, or perform simple routines after making their entrance, telling a joke or singing a song for instance. Linking it more closely to *El burlador de Sevilla*, Jemmett had some of the actors explore the high sexual energy that he hoped to foreground in the production. One such exercise saw a male and female actor entering through the curtain to the strains of a selection of

⁵¹ Dick Bird has designed extensively internationally for theatre and opera, a body of work including *Rainbow Kiss* dir. Richard Wilson; *Harvest*, *Chimps*, *Defence of the Realm* and *Mr. Placebo* dir. Wilson Milam; *King Lear* dir. Jonathan Kent; *La Boheme*, *La Cenerentola* and *Fidelio* dir. Annelise Miskimmon; *Heavenly*, *Peepshow* and *Rabbit* dir. Frantic Assembly; *A prayer for Owen Meany*, *The Walls* and *Monkey!* dir. Mick Gordon; *Light* dir. Simon McBurney. Furthermore, he had previously worked with Jemmett on *Little Match Girl*, *Scenes from the Life of Mozart/Un segreto d'importanza* and *Thwaite*.

punk rock songs whilst using any means to pull the other towards the opposite wall. The intention was not to portray sex literally, as the play opens with Isabela and Don Juan entering after having slept with each other, but to portray the violent energy of what is effectively a violation as Don Juan has impersonated Isabela's lover, the Duque Octavio.

Already Jemmett was exploring a series of ideas connected to the production, including the prominence of raw sex as opposed to sanitised conventional depictions of courtly love, alongside matching concepts of energetic punk rock, on-stage costume changes and multiple theatrical worlds co-existing in one space: in this case the world of the play pitted against the world of the bar, which at the outset Jemmett asked the actors to view as a seedy 3 a.m. cabaret bar where the patrons emerge on an elevated stage to perform impromptu numbers, so the play itself becomes one such number. Whilst many of these notions became diluted or changed completely in rehearsal, it is important to note that the workshop week was not solely to find actors but to allow Jemmett an opportunity to begin to define his vision for the play. Indeed, according to him he had made up his mind on who to pick after the first two days, which whilst not entirely true as it turned out,⁵² did perhaps allow him to shift his focus away from actor selection and towards exploring ideas that he would have to shelve until the beginning of rehearsals in January 2008. In any case, his position allowed him to give the workshop a day's rest for the most unusual session of the week.

⁵² His initial list of five selections suffered minor alterations after our initial discussions during the week. He had initially considered the idea of casting a woman in the role of Catalinón, Don Juan's servant and 'gracioso' as a means of further exploring his sexuality: however, ultimately the gender issues such a decision would have inevitably raised seemed so overbearing as to make it impossible to comment on anything else and so the idea was dropped.

The whole creative team arrived on Thursday 13 September to discover that the director had decided not to go ahead with the usual workshop and instead we had been booked into a nearby restaurant for lunch. However, conversation over lunch had to obey strict rules: we could only discuss Don Juan, the play or the character or the myth. On finishing lunch, we then had to remain absolutely silent and walk to the Prado Museum and spend an entire hour in the two rooms housing the El Greco collection. Still in silence we then walked to spend another hour at a nearby church (a modern Roman Catholic church Jesucristo de Medinaceli on the calle Duque Medinaceli), and then on to a sex shop in the Lavapiés neighbourhood. Initially we had planned to conclude our silent walking tour in a graveyard to complete our circuit of prominent images from the play, but there were none nearby that were open at that time of day. Finally, we convened in a café to discuss our impressions of the day's events. The intention was evidently for the group to make a series of discoveries in terms of mood and location that might elucidate the play, but also to make these discoveries as a group and be able to refer to a common stock of knowledge, particularly by underlining the events with the rule of silence and concentration forcing us to share our impressions and moods more implicitly. This process of research for *El burlador de Sevilla* matches American director Peter Sellars' observations: 'to recognise the value of community work and a community based learning process that is not about individual brilliance and mastery but is about shared knowledge held across a community in which all knowledge is negotiated and it's about the skill and the sensitivity in the negotiation' (Sellars, 2008). Whatever discoveries each individual made could only in any case have been personal and superficial, ultimately the intention was partly

to see how people responded to the exercise and also to help bond everyone as a group. The creation of ensemble work was already taking root.

The week long workshop in September yielded some exciting results and allowed Jemmett to select the five actors joining Gil, whom he felt would best engage with the process. The creative team reconvened on 3 January 2008 and immediately began rehearsals. In the almost four months since the workshop, Jemmett had made a number of cuts (using Gwynne Edward's English translation for reference)⁵³ aiming for an hour and a half running time for the production. However, for the first week the text itself was barely touched. Jemmett opted to begin with a read-through of the play, something he noted that he never usually did but which he felt would be helpful for everyone given the fact that he spoke no Spanish. The rest of the week, however, consisted of games geared towards bonding the team and exercises for unlocking the world of the play and approaching the production. The structure for rehearsals was set from the start, the actors would arrive a little while before the official start at four in the afternoon, and begin solo warm-ups and stretches – tellingly, the two more established members of the Abadía, Bellver and Ferreira, spent this time performing Tai-Chi while the rest went through their own rituals of readying themselves physically. Most days Jemmett would play music from his arrival for about half an hour while stretches continued, partly out of personal enjoyment but also to situate the actors in the world he was after: as his initial idea was to use punk music for the show, this was mainly the style of music that was playing, although it shifted towards the Rock Steady that eventually underscored the show. The presence of music also meant

⁵³ Tirso de Molina, Gwynne Edwards (Trans.) (1986).

that warm-ups occasionally became informal dance sessions, where usually Luque and Poveda would improvise dance routines depending on the style playing. The production eventually featured a couple of dances as set pieces, but Jemmett was always keen to have the actors responding to the rhythmic stimulus provided by the music, so this wordless and spontaneous engagement helped generate the playful mood of the performance.

We would begin to work as a team usually with a game of volleyball, a good physical warm-up with a mood-setting purpose for rehearsals. The Abadía technicians set us up with a makeshift rope as a net and in two teams of four we played a version of indoor volleyball where each member of the team had to touch the ball before lobbing it over, playing to eleven points. However, smashes were forbidden and the mood was always one of friendly teamwork making it the most popular warm-up of the entire two-month rehearsal process. Again, playfulness and a sense of competition combined with little sense of individual victory added to the construction of the mood of the rehearsal room and hence of the show. Following this, generally Gil would lead a workshop lasting around an hour using many of the aforementioned games and massage sessions (see page, 239). Unfortunately for everyone, however, Gil suffered a back injury outside the rehearsal room and spent a significant period of rehearsal either having to lie down or moving gingerly about, which meant that we only had the benefit of his workshops for the first couple of weeks. Perhaps his emphasis on physical expression and movement would have helped to place the actors in tighter synch than they were, as Jemmett did not attempt to fill in for Gil in this sense, a fact that perhaps allowed for a certain laxness and lack of cohesion to creep in. For

instance, some methodological clashes occurred between Luque and Jemmett in the last few days of rehearsal which would perhaps not have taken place had Jemmett instilled a common physicality and methodology. In Luque's case, his expertise in Michael Chekhov was operating directly against Jemmett's vision, which Gil had been articulating visually with his *Complicite* training and exercises. Luque's emphasis on details of gesture and reliance on props was in constant conflict with Jemmett who would often ask him to stop focusing on the very things that gave Luque a sense of clarity. This was a conflict of training rather than creative vision and besides the two methods are not mutually exclusive; however, since the aforementioned circumstances caused an abrupt end to the construction of a common process and physicality, the actors never quite gelled together during rehearsals as much as they could. Evidently Gil was at least able to recover in time for the performances, but there were a concerning few days in the second week in which he was out of rehearsal and receiving hospital treatment.

Before beginning with the process of rehearsal itself as led by Jemmett, it is perhaps also worth noting the exceptionally positive team spirit that emerged amongst the whole group. Of course there were the occasional and inevitable tensions that come from close work with a group of artists for an extended period of time, but many of the actors mentioned that they had never experienced such a happy rehearsal period, and that the 'buen rollo' as they all termed it was by no means a regular occurrence. In general the credit for this was given to Jemmett, whose openness, relaxed and energetic nature meant he was able not only to motivate but allow people to feel safe with an unusual rehearsal process with the added complication of the language barrier. My own role as interpreter included the

tricky task of translating jokes and play-on-words for the general merriment of all involved, but it helped in the creation of a less formal rehearsal room. Furthermore, there is a cultural dimension, as contrasted to my experience of working on shows at The Gate or the Royal Court in London, where theatre is treated as any other job, arriving at 9 and clocking off at 5 when everyone goes home.⁵⁴ In Spain, however, rehearsals are conducted from 4 to 10 p.m. and this may have contributed to our group spirit, as we would all gather in the nearest bar after rehearsals and continue to enjoy each other's company well into the night. Again, Jemmett was in the slightly artificial situation of living in a city for two months having no connections to the place or its people and not speaking the language, which perhaps made him bond more closely with the people he was working with. In any case, his philosophy was very clearly that we all had to have fun, both in and out of the rehearsal room, and the time we spent together socially I firmly believe was as important to the well-being of the show as the rehearsals themselves. Although some of the cast spoke some English (Gil, Luque and Moreno all had excellent English, Bellver, Ferreira and Poveda much less), most of the post-rehearsal conversations had to be conducted in English due to Jemmett's non-existent Spanish and so I was called on to interpret well into the morning, a necessary formality which perhaps helped to keep the evenings focused on the production.

⁵⁴ I have worked as assistant director to Thea Sharrock at The Gate Theatre on *Tejas Verdes* by Fermín Cabal (2004-2005); Ramin Gray at the Royal Court Theatre on *Way to Heaven* by Juan Mayorga (2005) and Hettie Macdonald at the Royal Court Theatre on *On Insomnia & Midnight* by Edgar Chías (2006).

If we briefly return to Els Joglars, Boadella does not just rehearse with his actors, he lives with them during rehearsals, taking the social convivial aspect even further in the hopes of arriving at a state where the group all know what they are thinking without needing to stop and discuss it. Similarly, the social events within the *Burlador* team were as important to building a safe and comfortable environment in rehearsal as any games and warm-ups. Particularly with a two-month rehearsal period, it was important that we like each other, but the trust we built as a group emerged exceptionally quickly. Given that Jemmett consistently forced the cast towards an ensemble performance with actors playing three roles each in a stage-world that required a sense of implicit togetherness, I would argue his live-wire socialising was an integral part of his method.

The first four weeks of rehearsals took place in the Abadía's Sala José Luis Alonso until the previous show (*Animalario's* co-production with the Abadía, *Argelino, servidor de dos amos*) had come down and the *Burlador* set had been installed. The theatre's seating grid was folded away giving us an ample rehearsal space. Several tables ran along one side of the room and were used by the technical and directing team as desk space and for the sound system that Jemmett asked to have available throughout rehearsals in order to begin his personal process of scoring the show with music. Most of his improvisations also used music, but the main intention was to provide mood and ambience, leading to the mid-sixties Jamaican Rock Steady aesthetic of the production (Rock Steady or Lover's Rock as Jemmett described it, is a precursor to Reggae and was apt given the subject matter of a play fundamentally about relationships in Jemmett's view). Once again the space had been laid out according to Dick Bird's now finalised

design, with a changing area and clothes stage-left, a bar stage-right and a small mock-up of a curtain for entrances upstage. Assistant director Fefa Noia had even taped out a floor plan following Dick's measurements before the first rehearsal, although Jemmett asked for it to be removed saying it was too soon to worry about the specifics of the space.

The first week of rehearsals was given over to free explorations of the play without using the text itself. So each day was devoted to a segment of the action, where first Jemmett would ask the actors to go through the sequence of events. After they had established the action to their satisfaction, Jemmett asked them to walk through it a couple of times, improvising and paraphrasing the text again as a group. Finally he would watch their improvisations and move on to the next sequence of actions until the end of each act. Indeed, Jemmett had initially broken the play into a new ten scene structure, disregarding the original three acts in search of a more fluid pacing. Some time was spent detailing the ten scenes to the actors and used as an initial shape for rehearsal, although it must be said that after a couple of days no further reference was made to the ten scenes. Nevertheless, the actors would broadly improvise the action in each new 'scene' before moving on to the next. At the end of a week of working in this fashion, Jemmett set up a series of rules for a fast, improvised, paraphrased run-through of the play that summed up much of the work of the week. The actors, using a single element of costume had to create all the characters in a tiny square space outlined with tape. Chairs surrounded the box on four sides, where actors not in the scene would sit waiting to come on. The two assistants also had a job to perform during the run, if one of them felt that the actors were not making sufficient eye-contact or

performing to those watching then they had to clap to remind them to do so. On the other hand, I was asked to clap if I felt the action was not progressing fast enough and they were getting bogged down in a scene, so the signal forced them to finish the scene instantly. The intention of the exercise was to have the actors cement the narrative of the play but not without also understanding the energetic world that Jemmett wanted to portray, with direct address to the audience and high energy delivery.

Jemmett also asked me to select evenly spaced out key moments in the play at which times I would shout stop and the actors would have to pause and perform a brief interlude previously set by Jemmett – these were performing a dance routine, singing a song, telling a dirty joke, and finally Don Juan appearing with his hands tied in a tableau. The rules were relatively strict, the actors had to go to a nearby table to prepare their character before coming on, and they had to leave the costume behind before sitting back down after leaving. There are a number of key ideas in this improvisation, beyond the obvious desire to get the actors to understand and cement the sequence of actions of the play. Having performed the exercise, Jemmett spoke about the influence of Punch and Judy and of the *tretaux*, which explained the high energy delivery straight at the audience. From the start Jemmett was intent on making the production wholly front-foot, so his most common note through the whole two months was to instruct the actors to be ‘bigger’, to be unafraid of being loud and gestural in their actions as long as they, in his words, maintained an honesty and connection to the reality of the situation. The interruptions instructing either to accelerate or make eye contact with the audience also served to make the audience an active presence in the actors’

minds rather than merely onlookers, cementing the desire to treat the spectator as if at a performance of Punch and Judy. The improvisations in the actor's day-to-day language also helped to bring the action to a recognisable contemporary world and help them to find a degree of reality in the heightened poetic world and text.

A number of other exercises were carried out throughout the week designed not so much to advance the plot of the drama, but rather to create the world in which it would exist. Although Jemmett did not give as much freedom in terms of improvisation as he had done in the exploratory workshop in September, he used many similar approaches. For instance, he would still require unoccupied actors to be stationed at the bar area, and would occasionally give them a simple action to perform either during or after a scene taking place centre-stage; sometimes it would simply consist of listening to a piece of music, or at the other extreme, a collective break down in tears. In addition to these ruptures from a world distinct to that of the play, other problems became quickly apparent such as the fact that no single actor was going to be able to play the role of Duque Octavio according to the cuts and doubling up that Jemmett had indicated. Therefore, he asked the actors to spend a little time improvising possible solutions to the issue, with varying results – several actors animating elements of costume as a kind of puppetry, with a particular actor gradually putting the apparel on and so becoming the character; exchanging simple and recognisable elements of costume from one to another such as a wig or a vivid red suit; exploring common traits of physicalisation that all the actors could step into. Again the intention here, aside from finding a solution to a particular issue, was to gain a clearer idea of what could exist in the theatrical world under construction, and which ideas seemed to be breaking or rupturing the

world established for the play. Therefore, whilst the animated costume was fun to watch its overbearing appearance would have to interrupt the rhythm of the text and the story, and so a simpler solution was identified; Duque Octavio became a suit that three different actors ended up wearing to embody the character, coupled with a simple but recognisable gesture that matched his persona as suggested by the play, and which each actor had to carry out as soon as they put the suit on as a signal to the audience. Jemmett also occasionally shifted the direction of rehearsal altogether, encouraging the actors to perform a dance routine, at first based on a line-dancing routine to a Johnny Cash song. Every so often Jemmett would instruct them to perform the dance at the end of a scene, or as an interlude in a deliberate rupture of mood and rhythm. Of course the improvisations were guided towards finding specific ideas that could be carried forward into performance (the dance, or the multiple actors playing Octavio for instance), but more important was the sense of play, of being able to try ideas out in a safe environment where it would then be possible to identify the consistent and coherent elements that the production would require.

After a week of work without the text, the company returned to the beginning of the play and began more detailed work on each scene, spending approximately a week on each act. At first Jemmett's approach was unchanged, the actors would first go over the sequence of actions, then paraphrase the scenes, and finally engage with the text itself, often improvising their movement through the scene, with Jemmett occasionally anchoring certain moments. However, as the most basic elements of confusion began to be less intrusive, such as interruptions due to forgetting lines or plot-related mix-ups, Jemmett became more and more physically

involved with the actors as they worked through the scene. He would usually perch on the edge of his seat, as if willing the company on, his tension and attention helping the actors to maintain a similar level of energy. He would also gesture occasionally, either to indicate variations in pace or to suggest or remind actors of movements and actions during the scene, to the point of moving into the scene and echoing the actor's movements as they performed. It is curious to note his physical involvement with the work as opposed to more conventional methods where the director might stop the actors or give a list of notes at the end of a run. Instead, Jemmett would gesticulate his direction as the scene unfolded, to a degree conducting the rhythm. It is also reminiscent of Boadella's approach in rehearsal, who uses the oft frowned upon method of demonstrating to the actors what he wants them to do; some directors suggest that demonstrating stifles the actor's creativity. Jemmett doesn't so much demonstrate the actions he wants the actors to perform, but rather the energy and commitment with which they should perform them. Since most often he was exhorting the actors to perform with high energy, he would tend to leap onstage and demonstrate the energy levels he was looking for, leaning forward into the action. As a result, these were not so much demonstrations of how specifically to perform an action, but rather the energy and intention that was needed to inform it. It is perhaps also worth noting that he has some experience as a performer himself,⁵⁵ which perhaps explains his desire to be directly involved – a desire that culminated in his joining the actors on-stage for the third preview before opening night, an event for which he donned an appropriate suit and found areas on the stage to stand or sit and watch the action occurring

⁵⁵ Marc Von Henning, the co-founder and co-director of Primitive Science often directed him.

around him, becoming a mysterious silent onlooker from the audience's perspective for one night only.

Towards the end of the month, Jemmett began to allow other more peripheral members of the team into rehearsal, up until then preferring to maintain the actor's focus on his explorations of the world of the play. For instance, Vicente Fuentes came in as voice coach for the production. He is a prominent theatre professional in Spain, with a long established association with the Abadía, collaborating on their training programme since 1995. For the first couple of weeks Jemmett asked for no one else to be present in rehearsal, but eventually Fuentes was given a full rehearsal session on Sunday with the actors, and also began to come in from 9 p.m. to work with unoccupied actors, sometimes until 11 p.m. after Jemmett's rehearsals had ended. Eventually he began to attend run-throughs of the play and continued to offer the actors coaching on how best to deliver the verse. Occasionally Jemmett would have to instruct the actors to disregard some of his notes as they conflicted with his own tone for the play, and instead attend only to notes on delivering the sense of the verse clearly. Nevertheless, clearly Fuentes' work on the show was crucial, as Jemmett was unable to work closely on the text not understanding the nuances, and this acts as further demonstration of the Abadía's commitment to training the actor towards the clear connection and interdependence of word and gesture. Gómez's obsession with this aspect of training led him to make some remarks after opening night, pointing out that in spite of his satisfaction with the overall show, there was further need to make textual clarity more pronounced. One can agree or disagree with his judgement, but the fact remains that clarity of text and intention is of paramount importance

and was given attention throughout rehearsals, and most tellingly it was the Abadía that insisted and arranged for this work to be carried out, not necessarily Jemmett.

On 29 February the company moved from the Sala José Luis Alonso rehearsal room into the church, where the set was already largely in place. It is a crucially important fact that the company were able to work for three and a half weeks on the performance set, instead of a single 'tech week' as is habitually the case in much commercial theatre. The crew were in and out of the theatre between our rehearsals sorting technical issues out gradually and enabling a smooth transition from rehearsal room to performance. However, for the first couple of weeks all the technicians and personnel external to the rehearsals were banned from the space, again as a means of maintaining the delicate balance of concentration. Jemmett continued to work through the play, starting again from the beginning and ironing out issues arising from working on the set itself. During this late segment of rehearsal the company also explored ways of staging the end of the play, an issue that had been avoided for the first month. Jemmett was categorical in cutting the very last scene after Don Juan's death and the tidy resolution of the original text, finding it a dissatisfying conclusion to the play. His initial intention had been to end the play on Don Juan's descent into hell, but it became apparent that the other characters required some sense of closure, since the third act sets up the pursuit and arrival in Seville of characters from Naples and Tarragona, all wronged by Don Juan. However, Jemmett's solution was not to arrive at a resolution for the characters but rather for the actors themselves. The newly devised conclusion to the play saw Don Juan rush offstage having tricked death itself by giving a false hand to Don Gonzalo's statue. Meanwhile, the

remaining actors, aside from Catalinón who watches with amusement from the bar, rush to the changing area stage-right and grab all the clothes from their different characters and line-up centre stage. Tossing the clothes down, they begin to deliver the final complaints of all of their characters from the final scene, each one eventually retiring to the bar to continue complaining to the barman-king, who instructs Don Juan's capture and execution. Music drowns them out at this point, and Catalinón walks past them and appears to tug on the large red curtain, bringing it down. Behind stands Don Juan, now in the persona of Punch, who advances on the audience threateningly, a blackout plunging the auditorium into darkness as he is about to leap into the front row. With this transformation, Jemmett hoped to demonstrate the indestructibility of the Don Juan archetype through the breakdown of all the theatrical conventions that the production had so painstakingly constructed, with actors effectively throwing off their characters. Ultimately everything collapses and breaks down except the archetype that survives, albeit in a different form.

The structure of this final sequence originated from a trial and error process of reducing three scenes into their core elements. When Jemmett decided that the production required some kind of theatrical closure beyond Don Juan's death, he returned to the final scenes and initially had the actors working on the complete text.⁵⁶ However, aside from his disinterest in the closing scene, there was another practical reason for cutting it, which was the impossibility of maintaining the

⁵⁶ The content of the scenes were Don Octavio receiving some compensation from the King, having made his complaints of Don Juan. He then intercepts the arriving Gaseno and Arminta and concocts a plan for revenge. The final scene is the accumulation of complaints made to the King, culminating in Catalinón's arrival to inform the court of Don Juan's death. Ultimately, the narrative content of these scenes was entirely cut, leaving just the boiled down complaints. Act 3, pp 340-52; 364-70. (Tirso de Molina, 2005).

doubling up of parts that had functioned for the rest of the play. He immediately suggested the convention of lining the actors up and having them make frantic changes between the characters as they appeared. At first it was possible to make the scene flow fairly well by changing hats from one character to another, but the improvisation deliberately descended into chaos where the actors became muddled and changed into the wrong costumes as they maintained the same inexorable rhythm. The lined up actors would deliver their lines straight out at the audience and then immediately snap their heads from side to side to give focus and follow the dialogue. Jemmett encouraged them to speed up, to make an increasing mess of their changes of costume until the whole routine broke down. Clearly the resulting mess was not exactly what he had in mind though, as the eventual performance version was much shorter and much simpler – since all the actors were playing two or three roles, due to the requirements of the doubling up the routine seemed unbalanced, with two actors changing virtually constantly while the others had nothing to do. Also, the delivery of the text in this fashion distracted from the substance of what was being said, none of which was particularly relevant or forceful as a finale to the show. Therefore the scene was reduced to each character having a single speech of final complaint, with no costume changes; instead of which all the costumes were tossed down all at once before launching into the text.

Finding the formula for the final scene constituted a major part of the last two weeks of rehearsal, alongside run-throughs of the rest of the play, all of which remained more or less fixed. However, at the same time Jemmett was attentive to the overall tone of the play and made changes up to the previews, some quite

major. Indeed, Jemmett's process often consisted in reducing some of the scenes to more manageable and simple routines that the actors could perform unaided by props. One example featured a bar fight used as a link between scenes which was carefully choreographed and rehearsed by the actors for approximately three weeks until finally Jemmett asked them to drop it, considering it too major a rupture coming too early in the performance. Elsewhere Gil and Ferreira devised a long dance for a lengthy costume change between act two and act three, which again Jemmett asked them to drop, insisting that it was enough to watch the cast changing and preparing for the next act.⁵⁷ The last major change centred on the three exchanges between the King (Luque) and Don Pedro Tenorio (Bellver),⁵⁸ scenes which Jemmett entirely re-rehearsed right through to the previews in search of an appropriate register. All three scenes between the two characters are narrative driven, simply recounting offstage actions to keep the play's intricate web of plots clear. Bellver in particular was very keen to avoid the scenes becoming simple vehicles for information, and early in the process suggested playing the scene as a sequence of magic tricks where Don Pedro accompanies each solution he provides to the King with a flourish; she accompanied the scene by making coloured handkerchiefs appear and disappear, and even concocted a complicated colour coded routine where each handkerchief symbolised a particular character. For a while Jemmett allowed the idea to expand, with similar routines filling the other two scenes (using a deck of playing cards in one and a series of rope tricks in the third). However, entering the last few days of rehearsal, Jemmett became concerned that the tricks were superimposed on the text and were entirely

⁵⁷ Act II, pg 283. (Tirso de Molina, 2005).

⁵⁸ Act II, pp 239-42; Act II pp 282-83; Act III pp 340-43 (Tirso de Molina, 2005).

distracting, to the point that they were much more interesting than the information given in the scene; information that needed to be brought across to the audience. In an effort to retain the work the actors had put into the tricks, he asked them to experiment with aging the materials used in the tricks to give them a run-down appearance; to try and perform the tricks but none of them worked and so playing the scenes with an air of failure; to perform the tricks in a variety of moods and emotions like anger or joy; to make the King an apprentice magician who enjoys Don Pedro's performances; conversely to have the King fed up of Don Pedro's flashiness. None of these options convinced and finally the magic tricks were entirely dropped, and Jemmett asked them to play the scene simply to communicate the information. A new idea emerged, which again spread throughout the performance. The magic became less of a party-trick and instead more impossible or silly, but somehow more connected to the playful world of the production. For instance, Don Pedro began to materialise chairs that were already there in the first place;⁵⁹ or could turn lights on or off; or make a tray with drinks appear from behind the bar held up by a plainly visible hand, the actor who had produced them later appearing surreptitiously at the other end of the bar with an air of innocence.⁶⁰ Following this pattern, the final scene between the King and Don Pedro then became a set up for Don Juan's death in the following scene. Using his 'magic' Don Pedro makes the statue appear⁶¹ and both characters dress him and leave him in place for Don Juan to find on his arrival in the church.⁶² All these examples illustrate the attention to detail and cohesion of theatrical world that

⁵⁹ 'Gustaré de oírlo. Dadme silla.' (Tirso de Molina, 210: 2005)

⁶⁰ These visual gags accompanied the three aforementioned scenes.

⁶¹ Appropriately these characters commission the manufacture of the Don Gonzalo statue in the first place.

⁶² Act III, pg 357 (Tirso de Molina, 2005)

Jemmett pursued throughout the process, in search of an appropriate balance of irreverence and service to the text.

However, there was one more rehearsal or run-through that marked the show more profoundly than any of the previews. On 17 February, at mid-morning, the entire company travelled to the El Retiro park in the centre of Madrid. As a group we scouted out a good location to perform a run of the play to the passers-by. We walked past the artificial lake where most of the street performers usually go, and briefly watched the puppet shows and musicians setting up shop and launching into performance. Eventually, we found an alcove on a corner of the lake with a small rocky outcrop as a backdrop (one of the old bear cages from the time that the park was a zoo). Each actor bearing a single element of costume to identify them as actors, they launched into the play, which attracted significant attention from the Sunday morning walkers, some of whom stayed for the full hour and three quarters to watch the entire show. Others had to tear themselves and their engrossed children away from the spectacle and we ended up with a hatful of cash (a sum of over eighty euros) at the end of the event. However, the intention was not to raise money for opening night drinks, but rather to give the actors a first hand indication of what they needed to do on the Abadía stage to reach the level Jemmett had set for them. It became apparent to the actors then, whenever their energy dropped or they became too quiet, that the audience would slowly drift off, while the moments that raised the tension saw more people stop. Evidently in the comfortable seats of a theatre people are less likely to simply wander off, and likewise the actors don't need to work nearly as hard to retain their attention; however, the Retiro exercise demonstrated the exciting potential of Jemmett's

vision to the actors, and to a great extent what ensemble work really means in terms of energy and delivery. It was a tremendous satisfaction to engage with an audience in an entirely impromptu fashion, and have them engage with the playfulness of the interpretation in such a spontaneous manner. Many members of the team commented on the fact that our audience that midday would probably rarely be seen in a theatre, but that it was worth attempting to revitalise the more staid conventional theatre audience in the way which our outdoor performance demonstrated.

Whilst this account of rehearsals at the Abadía is necessarily most representative of Dan Jemmett's own process, it does nevertheless shed light on the venue too. The Abadía's own ethos is reflected in its influence on the actors themselves, all well aware of what the Abadía stands for, having trained or performed there on numerous occasions. Even the venue's willingness to allow Jemmett to work in whatever way he saw fit is telling, representing their respect towards the creative process and allowing it to exist in a relatively stress-free environment, with little pressure to show work to the resident team for them to keep an eye on the show. Ultimately, however, Gómez would not have asked Jemmett to direct for the Abadía if he did not think there was common ground between Jemmett's work and the theatre. Likewise, his venue and actors would benefit from the different ideas Jemmett could bring to the table, as occurred with past visiting directors, both national and international. Indeed, the connections with the Abadía are clear, as the production was very much rooted in an appreciation of the text and a desire to find a physical register with which it could be communicated anew. The production of *El burlador de Sevilla* opened for its first night on 22 February

2008, and ran until 30 March at the Abadía's Sala Juan de la Cruz. Subsequently it embarked on a tour of Spain which ended on 7 August 2008.

Chapter III – Teatro de la Abadía, Theory & Practice

III.i. Practice Based Theory

The following section will expand on the rehearsal process laid out in the preceding description of the rehearsals for *El burlador de Sevilla*. Yet, I am also referring to observed rehearsals of *La ilusión* under Carlos Aladro's direction, because this allows for a more rounded account of the Abadía process as a consistent entity even when rehearsals are led by different directors and with different actors.

Certainly practice at the Abadía is solidly based on theories that originate from José Luis Gómez's own experience as founding member and creative motor. Gómez spent a significant formative period of his career abroad, generating a particular view of the state of Spanish theatre:

A lo largo de los años de “formación y peregrinaje” que me tocó experimentar durante toda una década fuera de España, tuve el privilegio de entrar en contacto con algunas tradiciones escénicas europeas, vivas gracias a la transmisión tácita de artistas de referencia para las nuevas generaciones y a la acción amorosa de maestros y estudiosos. Nada similar encontré en mi país al regresar, o, al menos, no en la misma medida. Las circunstancias históricas mantuvieron al teatro en España alejado de la evolución que se había experimentado en el resto de Europa (quoted in Brouwer, 2005: 11)

Gómez explains here that not only had no artist developed a significant theory or approach to theatre, but there was no culture of a practice based theory being handed down. Like Els Joglars and Boadella before, who as previously discussed also noted the lack of theoreticians in Spain (see page 26), Gómez too had to turn

to Europe for inspiration and training, bringing foreign models back to his home country, a fact attested to by the Abadía website: 'Desde este espíritu se han configurado un elenco y un equipo habituados a un trabajo en sinergia, en la tradición de los teatros de arte europeos' (Abadía, 2008). While the process for *El burlador de Sevilla* may go a long way towards identifying these characteristics, particularly placing La Abadía in a European current thanks to Jemmett and Gil's international profile, it does not quite represent the venue's identity for precisely the same reason. Fortunately, I was able to attend a week of rehearsals for *La ilusión* (2007) under the direction of then resident Artistic Associate Carlos Aladro, which will helpfully allow for a clearer contextualisation of the Abadía rehearsal process.

Carlos Aladro trained at the RESAD drama school in Madrid in acting and directing, continuing to do both professionally. He entered the Abadía as an assistant director during the 2001/2002 season, working regularly on in-house productions until 2003 when he directed his professional theatre debut *Garcilaso, el cortesano* at the Abadía, earning him the Premio José Luis Alonso for young directors. Since then, he has directed two further shows at the Abadía, the Presnyakov brother's *Terrorismo* (2004), Corneille's *La ilusión* (2007) and *Medida por Medida* (2009). Aside from assisting Gómez on several productions, including *Mesías* (2001) and *Informe para una academia* (2006), he has also worked with Animalario and Portuguese director Luis Miguel Cintra, first on the latter's *Comedia sin título* (2006) at the Abadía and then later travelling to work with Cintra's company La Cornucopia. In his time at the Abadía, he has also assisted on workshops and in turn led sessions himself on Michael Chekhov. All of this indicates how he is in tune with the Abadía process, having experienced it himself

since 2001 and engaged in the training processes of the building. As a result, the process that I was able to witness in February 2007 will effectively complement that of Dan Jemmett in 2008.

The week of rehearsals of Corneille's *La ilusión* ran from 3 to 8 February 2007. Under Aladro's direction were an ensemble of eight actors; Mario Vedoya, Jorge Gurpegui, Jesús Barranco, Lidia Otón, Daniel Moreno, Rebeca Valls, Ernesto Arias and Luis Moreno. Some useful information can be gleaned from the presence of these particular actors, as almost all of them have a long history with the Abadía. Luis Moreno would later also take part in *El burlador de Sevilla*, and Rebeca Valls also took part in the initial *El burlador* workshop, making her one of a younger generation of performers who are being regularly considered for Abadía productions. Meanwhile, Daniel Moreno and Jesús Barranco have been members of the Abadía company since 1998 and 2001 respectively, while Lidia Otón and Ernesto Arias have both been involved with the theatre since its inception; Arias in the original 1994 training course and Otón the second training course in 1995. Therefore only Vedoya and Gurpegui had little previous connection to the theatre, while the rest of the ensemble were entirely drawn from Abadía regulars. Again, this acts as an illustration of the importance given to the Abadía ensemble and training, and how the in-house productions tend to favour the company members and also endeavour to introduce new performers to the company ethos: in this case it would be Rebeca Valls, in *El burlador de Sevilla* the newcomer was Marta Poveda. Ernesto Arias is a particularly notable inclusion in the cast, as one of the few actors to have a sustained relationship with the Abadía since the very first training course in 1994. In addition, he was until very recently the co-ordinator for

artistic training at the theatre, responsible for the maintenance of the training courses for the resident company. What emerges from this cast is the continued presence of an Abadía company, a self-sufficient way of working that exists independently of the specific show and director. With Carlos Aladro directing, the show becomes very much an exhibit for the results of the Abadía process (represented by Aladro, Arias and Otón) but also an opportunity to renew the method through new inclusions (Valls, Vedoya and Gurpegui).

It is all the more notable that unlike under Jemmett, the actors had a very structured warm-up routine: at 3pm the actors would gather in the Sala José Luis Alonso (the company rehearsed in the space where they would eventually perform), and took it in turns to lead a daily one hour workshop and warm-up. The week that I was present I witnessed Luis Moreno guide the group through an extremely strenuous Capoeira session with most of the other actors struggling to keep up with the balance of dance and acrobatics. Within the hour he gradually added new steps and sweeps to a basic repeated rhythmic movement, and one could immediately see the difference in the quality of movement. Moreno moved with a grace and lightness that is equally visible in his work on-stage. On day two, Daniel Moreno led the group through an extended series of massages designed to wake up the body and muscles without recourse to intense physical movement. So, the cast would take turns to massage each other, devoting significant time and attention to specific areas of the body: shoulders, arms, back, legs and so on. Antonio Gil also led the *El burlador* cast through a variety of massages, which not only act as an individual warm-up but also help in the bonding of the group through

close physical contact and trust. So, there is certainly a similar approach that links both productions.

Ultimately, however, the rehearsal process of *La ilusión* seemed markedly more systematic in its physical approach, and Aladro stresses ‘prefiero ponerme de pie’ rather than talk about how to perform a scene (Aladro, 2005). Indeed, he indicated that he spent significant time at the beginning of the process working with Michael Chekhov exercises as a way of unlocking the characters and the play for the actors. It is worth noting that the first translation into Spanish of Chekhov’s *Lessons for the Professional Actor* was carried out by regular Abadía actor David Luque in 2006. He recounts the process leading up to translating the work into Spanish from English: ‘Dos años antes de la publicación del libro, estuve tres meses en Nueva York entrenando con la SITI Company dirigida por Anne Bogart y en la Michael Chekhov Association [...] Cuando volví a España propuse a la Abadía la publicación de este libro y para eso les pedí que me pusiesen en contacto con Alba Editorial (con quien la Abadía había colaborado en otras publicaciones)’ (Luque, 2008). So, his translation appeared in June 2006 entitled *Lecciones para el actor profesional*,⁶³ bearing an Abadía logo on the jacket alongside that of the publishing house, Alba Editorial. Ultimately, La Abadía demonstrate their commitment, with projects such as this, (as well as Luque’s newly published translation of Anne Bogart’s *A Director Prepares*⁶⁴ also bearing the Abadía logo, as does Jacques Lecoq’s *Le corps poétique*⁶⁵) to analysis of

⁶³ Michael Chekhov, (Trans. David Luque) (2006)

⁶⁴ Anne Bogart, (Trans. David Luque) (2008)

⁶⁵ Jacques Lecoq, (Trans. Joaquín Hinojosa and Maria del Mar Navarro) (2003)

process and documentation with particular emphasis on methodologies employed by the acting company.

However, Luque is not the only Abadía collaborator to note the value of Chekhov, as Aladro regularly uses his techniques in rehearsal, ex-assistant director Luis d'Ors founded his own Escuela de Actores Michael Chejov and of course Chekhov's methods have been one of the cornerstones of actor training since the foundation of the Abadía. At this point, it becomes necessary to map the major facets and function of Chekhov's work to better understand the Abadía's working processes. Michael Chekhov was the nephew of playwright Anton Chekhov, and was born in 1891 in St Petersburg. He trained under both Konstantin Stanislavski and Evgeny Vahktangov, and went on to join the First Moscow Art Theatre as an actor in 1921 and then became artistic director of the Second Moscow Art Theatre in 1924.⁶⁶ Chekhov's methods derived principally from Stanislavski, often altering them subtly, so we should first understand the principles of Stanislavski's teachings. After all, Stanislavski must be amongst the first practitioners to construct a practical theory of actor training to advance theatre.

Previous to Stanislavski, theatre had striven to remove the audience from the venue and figuratively place them elsewhere. The German Meiningen company were renowned for their attention to detail, and *Julius Caesar* (1867) featured 'statues, armour, weapons, drinking cups... modelled faithfully on Roman originals' (Braun, 2001: 14). The intention was for the action to seemingly unfold before the audience's eyes as a faithful replica of the real world with hundreds of extras

⁶⁶ See Chamberlain, 2004: 5-21

adding the necessary local flavour. Stanislavski, however, directed attention to detail towards developing the performer rather than the ensemble. In *An Actor Prepares*, he emphasises the importance of discipline and training, differentiating between instinctual subconscious performance and conscious creation:

[...] the very best that can happen is to have the actor completely carried away by the part. Then regardless of his own will he lives the part, not noticing *how* he feels, not thinking about *what* he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively... Unfortunately, this is not within our control. Our subconscious is inaccessible to our consciousness... To rouse your subconscious to creative work there is a special technique... When the subconscious, when intuition, enters into our work we must know how not to interfere (Stanislavski, 1988: 13-14)

In his fictionalised recounting of an actor training under the authorial figure of Tortsov, Stanislavski tries to define the element that generates the great performances that Meyerhold had referred to as 'gripping the audience' (Meyerhold, 1998: 199). He is also quick to embrace the almost spiritual, consuming sensation of intuition taking over:

I cannot remember how I finished the scene, because the footlights and the black hole disappeared from my consciousness, and I was free of all fear. I remember that Paul was at first astonished by the change in me; then he became infected by it, and acted with abandon. The curtain was rung down, out in the hall there was applause, and I was full of faith in myself. (Stanislavski, 1988: 11)

Stanislavski analyses the actor's craft at great length, and in the first chapters of *An Actor Prepares* he attempts to come to terms with the necessary elements to create a gripping performance. Nevertheless, the audience itself seems to be taken for granted, and only referred to at one point, when the joyous young narrator, Kostya, declares that for a few moments he held 'the whole audience... in my

power' (Stanislavski, 1988: 11). The assumption is that if the actor is swept away in the sort of spiritually disembodied frenzy previously quoted, then the audience will likewise be swept away: '...you who were playing, and we who were watching, gave ourselves up completely to what was happening on the stage. Such successful moments, by themselves, we can recognize as belonging to the art of living a part' (Stanislavski, 1988: 12). Although of course Stanislavski's emphasis here is on actor training, it seems that audience engagement happens more by accident and coincidence – it would take later practitioners to truly set out a methodology for actively connecting with an audience.

Chekhov's work can be best understood as a meeting point of Meyerhold and Stanislavski's methods, although the practitioners themselves were fundamentally in disagreement in their approaches to theatre, leading to numerous collisions: Stanislavski regarded Meyerhold's actors as 'puppet-like', and prevented his production of Hauptmann's *Schluck und Jau* going on-stage at the Moscow Art Theatre (Meyerhold, 1998: 240). Their methodologies were diametrically opposite – where Stanislavski advocated a psychological understanding and re-enactment of character, Meyerhold believed conversely that the body ought to be the principal communicator with the audience, and his work often felt like a riposte to the Stanislavskian school of thought:

There is a whole range of questions to which psychology is incapable of supplying the answers. A theatre built on psychological foundations is as certain to collapse as a house built on sand. On the other hand, a theatre which relies on *physical elements* is at very least assured of clarity... By correctly resolving the nature of his state physically, the actor reaches the point where he experiences the *excitation* which communicates itself to the spectator and induces him to share in the

actor's performance: what we used to call 'gripping' the spectator...
(Meyerhold, 1998: 199-200)

Not only does Meyerhold immediately postulate a clear line of communication with the audience, but he developed the tools to support his work. He devised Biomechanics, an exacting physical training of the actor's body 'so that it is capable of executing instantaneously those tasks which are dictated externally (by the actor, the director)' (Meyerhold, 1998: 198). As a result, the exercises he developed target specific sections of the body, encouraging expressivity based on imagination. Therefore, when an actor imagines s/he is spinning a hoola-hoop around his/her waist, not only is s/he warming up muscles, but also focusing on the clarity needed to communicate his/her actions to the spectator who can then imagine the invisible hoola-hoop. A similar exercise involves the actor moving around an invisible cube, arranging the arms in a set sequence of positions that enable both audience and actor to visualise this cube. Holding the arms up at right-angles to the body once again allows for the muscles to warm-up, and the more prepared the muscles are for movement, the more expressive they are. In addition, the actor must focus on maintaining the right angles as the arms search for the corners of the box; the feet must also shuffle in straight lines; and when the torso shifts to turn the corner onto a new side of the box, it too must be at right angles to its previous position. The exercises encourage a level of instinctual clarity which enables the actor to signify almost any possibility merely through the movements of the body. With discipline, eliminating superfluous and confusing movements, the body becomes highly expressive to the audience: 'Every movement is a hieroglyph with its own peculiar meaning. The theatre should employ only those movements which are immediately decipherable; everything else is superfluous' (Meyerhold,

1998: 200). Meyerhold does not think of the audience in the implicit abstracts of Stanislavski, although his references to 'excitation' (Meyerhold, 1998: 200) sound reminiscent of Kostya's moment of inspiration. Although the approaches differ wildly, the point remains the same, to communicate a particular emotional state by means of fully committing to that emotion, be it psychological or physical. It is the fact that Meyerhold viewed the audience as an active participant in the creation of theatre that genuinely sets the two apart:

[...] I should like to mention two distinct methods of establishing contact between the director and his actors: one deprives not only the actor but also the spectator of creative freedom; the other leaves them both free, and forces the spectator to create instead of merely looking on (for a start, by stimulating his imagination). (Meyerhold, 1998: 50)

The key to this ideology is to note the connection between creative process and the finished product. If a director helps the performer in rehearsal to find a methodology through which s/he is able to arrive at a state of 'excitation', then it will be possible to share that feeling with the audience. Whilst this still presupposes a huge leap of faith on the part of the audience, it reflects a concerted attempt to consider the audience within the process of creation itself.

With the publication of *To The Actor* in 1953, Michael Chekhov formalised his own methodology, one that seemed to feed on both Stanislavski and Meyerhold in equal measure, as a combination of psychological understanding and corporal expression: 'But the actor, who must consider his body as an instrument for expressing ideas on the stage, *must* strive for the attainment of complete harmony between the two, body and psychology' (Chekhov, 2002: 1). When Chekhov says

that 'First and foremost is extreme *sensitivity of body to the psychological creative impulses*' (Chekhov, 2002: 2), he seems to be rising above the rivalry existing between previous drama-theorists in Russia, although even Stanislavski had to end up conceding that 'sometimes it is possible to arrive at inner characteristics of a part by way of its outer characteristics' (Mitter, 1992: 17). The point is that physical and psychological impulses should be able to coexist in a rehearsal methodology, arriving at a more rounded portrayal of character. If we look at how Chekhov altered Stanislavskian exercises, we can see how the shift in the actor occurs: one of Stanislavski's relaxation and focusing exercises involves a resting actor, with eyes shut, going through the play mentally, making a mental list of all the things that s/he will do on stage, what the motivations, actions and objectives are, systematically from the start of the play to the end. Chekhov subtly alters this same exercise, and has the actor visualising him/herself on stage, observing themselves move, what actions they take, how they move about the stage and interact with other characters. Stanislavski soon encountered the problem that those actors who couldn't trust their subconscious to cut in and carry them away, were unable to hit on a consistent physical delivery, so breeding self-consciousness, since the actors no longer knew exactly what it was they were conveying to the audience. The shift towards physical clarity in Meyerhold, and subsequently Chekhov, reflects an attempt to remedy this situation, and empower the actors with confidence in their ability to communicate physically with the audience.

Perhaps Chekhov's most lasting and useful exercise is the psychological gesture,⁶⁷ the technique that Aladro relied on while exploring *La ilusión*, an exercise that aims to balance the physical and the psychological. The actor selects a mood in broad brushstrokes, it could be something as general as anger; and with that word in mind, they allow their bodies to instinctively perform a simple, solid, well-formed and finite movement. They add ingredients both physical and psychological. Perhaps the anger in the scene calls for defensiveness, and this affects the psychological gesture by making the body language more closed. However, the actor also experiments with the body, asking how the mood can be altered by taking a step back or forward, by tilting the head forwards or to one side, etc. In a nutshell, 'the PG stirs our will power, gives it a definite direction, awakens feelings, and gives us a condensed version of the character' (Chekhov, 2002: 76). Of course it is intended to portray in abstract form the psychological state of a character, but the emphasis on how to deliver this movement is telling: 'The PG must also have a very clear and definite *form*. Any vagueness existing in it should prove to you that it is not yet the essence, the core, of the psychology of the character you are working upon' (Chekhov, 2002: 71). Thus exploring psychology becomes a performative search, not a theoretical one. As noted earlier, La Abadía emphasise at the core of their teaching 'el profundo respeto por el idioma, la consciencia del valor de la expresión física y el deseo de comunicar algo *de interés* al público' (Brouwer, 2005: 25). Therefore, the balance and correlation of mind, body and text that the company uses as a heading finds itself well supported by Chekhov and a methodology that aims specifically for instinctual corporal

⁶⁷ For more information on the specific exercises and process behind the psychological gesture, see (Chekhov 1991: 58-94).

expression as inspired by text. Even the urge to communicate something of interest to the audience seems to come straight from Chekhov, whom he refers to as a co-creator of the show:

You appeal straight to the *audience*... Would it not be simpler to consult the author directly, by studying his play with a view to discovering *his* guiding idea, *his* conception of the superobjective? Won't the result be the same?

No, it will *not* be the same!... it is what the audience interprets from his play that is the decisive superobjective. (Chekhov, 2002: 145)

Earlier in the work, Chekhov has already introduced the importance of the audience, stating that the theatre 'follows the spectators' experiences, shares their enthusiasm, excitement and disappointments' (Chekhov, 2002: 91). The result is that the questions the actor must ask of his character must necessarily be followed by questions pertaining to the state of the audience:

What is my audience experiencing tonight, what is its mood? Why is this play needed in our time, how will this mixture of people benefit from it? What thoughts will this play and this kind of portrayal arouse in my contemporaries? Will this kind of play and this kind of performance make the spectators more sensitive and receptive to the events of our life? Will it awaken in them any moral feelings, or will it give them only pleasure? Will play or performance perhaps arouse the audience's baser instincts? If the performance was humour, what kind of humour does it evoke? (Chekhov, 2002: 91-92)

It is important to realise that Chekhov was not just interested in how the actor creates a part, but also how that actor may have a sense of social responsibility by developing a 'new kind of audience sense' (Chekhov, 2002: 92). This eventually translates into a capacity to ask questions of an *imaginary audience*: 'you can *imagine* your audience and anticipate its future reactions' (Chekhov, 2002: 145).

Thus, Chekhov becomes one of the first theoreticians to put such a high premium on the actor-audience relationship by encouraging practitioners to ask themselves how the audience may react to their show. Curiously, this seems remarkably similar to Jauss and Iser's implied reader and the school of Aesthetic Response. As discussed earlier in Part I Chapter IV (see pp. 192-207), Iser spoke of the consistency building capacity of any reader of a novel, and how the work of art 'represents a potential effect realised in the reading process' (Iser, 1978: ix). Chekhov's thoughts seem to slot right into the process proposed by Iser:

We may assume that every literary text in one way or another represents a perspective view of the world put together by [...] the author. As such, the work is in no way a mere copy of the given world- it constructs a world of its own [...] Since the world of the text is bound to have variable degrees of unfamiliarity for its possible readers [...] they must be placed in a position which enables them to actualize the new view [...] The text must therefore *bring about* a standpoint from which the reader will be able to view things. (Iser, 1978: 35)

The key here is even italicised by Iser, the fact that the text must *bring about* the standpoint from which a reader can then enact a construction of meaning. If we replace the novel with the play, where the act of receiving an imaginary world remains the same, then the act of rehearsal becomes an effort to create the implied spectator: the rehearsals serve to arrange all the semiotic signals that the audience are to receive and reinterpret to arrive at their personal perspectives. Even Iser's discussion of the multiple perspectives of the novel is useful to us here, as the theatre too is founded on the notion of various perspectives both feeding into and then receiving the production: '[...] the literary text [...] is also, in itself, composed of a variety of perspectives that outline the author's view and also provide access to what the reader is meant to visualize' (Iser, 1978: 35). Clearly,

the theatre represents a slightly different process to that proposed by Iser for the novel. The act of rehearsal represents a similar process of unpacking 'the individuality of the author's vision' (Iser, 1978: 35) as the reading of a novel. Crucially though, the audience at a play do not need to visualise the split perspective of the novel because it has been visualised for them. Instead, we witness an inverted version of Iser's process, where visual and aural stimuli are then decoded in the formation of an internal process within each spectator, from which the meaning of the play is then derived, or as Martin Esslin puts it: 'we are also constantly responding to elements of mood, atmosphere and other subliminally absorbed impressions that underlie the consciously perceived elements of our experience' (Esslin, 1988: 20). Slightly less idealistically, but certainly more realistic than Chekhov, Esslin also notes that:

A dramatic performance is never the work of a single individual [...] Neither the author, nor the director, however masterly their effort at co-ordinating the work of the team, can ever be wholly in control of the total product, the ultimate 'meaning' of the 'message' that reaches the spectator. [...] What this amounts to is that dramatic performance, whatever its originators have intended by their selection of the meaning-creating elements [...] must, with its plethora of signifiers, be widely 'over-determined' for every individual spectator. And any attempt to predict what 'meaning' the performance as such contains, is bound to be doomed to failure, simply because that meaning must be different for each individual member of the audience. (Esslin, 1988: 20-21)

Whilst there is no denying that the message cannot always be fully under the control of the company, there is still some hope. Esslin notes that a 'bad actor will lessen the significance of his speeches' (Esslin, 1988: 21), again leading company and spectator away from clarity of communication. However, practitioners can

address this problem by not casting 'bad' actors,⁶⁸ or at the very least training them in very particular ways, as indeed Chekhov and the Abadía do. By approaching actor training and rehearsal in terms of what the audience are going to interpret, there is certainly a danger of blinding ourselves to the impossibility of actually being able to anticipate an audience's reaction. However, theatre practitioners are clearly able to go some way towards understanding their audiences. Chekhov's work on psychological gestures and atmospheres indicates an urge to control at the very least the mood of the space the audience are entering, and by connecting on a visceral emotional level there is less room for equivocation in terms of interpretations. After all if the audience are the recipients of a clear atmosphere or emotional register, the specifics of interpretation begin to matter less as long as they all share a fundamental base. In applying Chekhov's rehearsal methodology, Carlos Aladro and the Abadía team are selecting a working method that requires attention to detail and perfectionism in its execution in a rigorous attempt to control what message the audience are to receive, training the ensemble to maximise this connection. This effort is aided by the presence of José Luis Gómez overseeing every product at the Abadía and demanding commitment and perfection from every cast, including those he does not happen to be directing at the time. His influence then filters down through the company, with Carlos Aladro as an associate artist and then specially chosen assistant directors. For instance, in the rehearsal process of *El burlador de Sevilla*, assistant Fefa Noia was the de facto voice of Gómez in the room and during the run, arranging for voice and text workshops with Vicente Fuentes and also issuing notes mainly to do with clarity of delivery. Ultimately, her role was in part to ensure that whatever Jemmett was doing in

⁶⁸ After all, what exactly is a 'bad actor' and who is in a position to unequivocally classify one?

rehearsal, the show should match the established Abadía style in execution.⁶⁹ Even the notion that the audience expect and recognise a certain standard in Abadía productions indicates a fixation with audience reception. Such perfectionism in craft indicates that in some measure and thanks to Chekhov amongst others, the Abadía has identified an ideal end product and how to achieve it in rehearsal.

Furthermore, the very nature of Carlos Aladro's *La ilusión*, using Kushner's adaptation as a basis, could be seen to respond very directly to an exploration of the audience's perspective of theatre, as the production opened with a statement of intent regarding the fourth wall and the audience's participation. No sooner do you set foot in the Sala José Luis Alonso than you are confronted with the mess of a construction site (designed by Dietlind Konold): a large pile of sand anchors a small beached boat and two actors in work overalls, apparently on a break, survey the scene and the arriving audience. The pre-performance is based on a play on words that is explained by the Spanish meanings of the word obra: both a play and road-works, hence the quip in the program: 'Ah, y disculpen las molestias por la "obra"; estamos trabajando por su bienestar' (Abadía, 2007). Instantly the creative team are playing with the fiction/reality dichotomy of theatre and proceed to tear down the fourth wall when one of the unoccupied workers begins to offer pieces of

⁶⁹ The Abadía put great stock in being a member of 'la casa', a distinction that is often noted by newer inclusions to the company. By a member of 'la casa', it seems the company are referring to individuals who have years of connection to the rehearsal processes of the venue, not just as actors who have received training at the Abadía, but also directors or even technicians who are accustomed to the workings of the venue. While this distinction can be frustrating to begin with (I have experienced this directly, as have actors who have either just started working for the company or been peripherally involved for longer periods of time), placing such emphasis on being in tune with the building and its personality is also a way of maintaining a narrow focus on the work that is produced and how it is rehearsed, allowing for a level of consistency impossible to achieve if the selection of artists were less stringent or indeed less mystical.

his sandwich to the audience, and unsubtly eyeing up the more attractive young women in the audience. Indeed, as the actor who becomes Alcandro's servant (played with delightful mischievousness by Jorge Gurpegui) attempted to discomfit two women seated behind me, one of them cried with amusement, '¡Eres un actor!'. Whilst on one level this reaction makes the audience feel safer, it also reaffirms the world of fiction by distinguishing a real nuisance from one that can be endured because it is an illusion: 'the actor remains an uncanny, disturbing "other," inhabiting a world with its own rules, like a space traveler within a personal capsule, which the audience, however physically close, can never truly penetrate' (Carlson, 1989: 130). Little did the audience member realise just how insightful her throwaway comment actually was in the context of the production. The interaction provoked an appropriate reaction from the audience, and thus proved how the rehearsal room methodology had a direct impact.

Corneille's *Theatrical Illusion* was always about the blurred line between reality and fiction that is so particular to theatre, even before it was mediated by Kushner and later La Abadía. The original premise of the play centres on a series of visions presented by the wizard Alcandro to Pridamante as he tries to discover the fate of his estranged son: he later discovers that the scenes he has witnessed and believed to be real are in fact scenes from plays and his son has become an actor. This production as a result seeks to demonstrate the manners in which the illusion can be both constructed and deconstructed by drawing attention to the process of creation implicit in all theatre but not often overtly defined. Corneille had already shown us the way by mysteriously having the characters of the vision

change their names in each scene, a mystery resolved when we understand each scene belongs to a different play.

The Abadía team have used this same subtle touch in drawing attention to the artifice of theatre by playing each scene in a distinct theatrical register. The first vision of Calixto and Melibea in a medieval setting is played as a commercial comedy, accompanied by a musical style song and dance, colourful and playful costumes (Pléríbo is memorably dressed in plastic knight's armour), and the constant threat of spraying water on the audience. The actors consistently clock the audience as the scene unfolds, and attack it with lively fast-paced performances. The second vision is played as a baroque drama, with more formal and sober costumes. The final vision brings us all the way up to date with contemporary tragedy, as modern dress is accompanied with restrained performances and the high drama of the deaths of Teógenes and Hipólita. Each scene not only presents a different genre of theatre (comedy/drama/tragedy), it is also played in a different period and register, from medieval bawdiness via baroque artistry to minimalist modernity. At every stage we are reminded of the conventions of drama as the fourth wall is consistently brought up and down: from the playfulness of the two actors watching the audience's arrival, to the more contained visions presented to Pridamante. The ultimate effect is to make this production of *La ilusión* become part of the meta-theatrical game: as the play prepares for the interval, Pridamante apparently falls ill, a fact blamed on the *cocido* (pulse and meat soup) the actor had presumably ingested before coming to the theatre – the interval becomes an excuse to let the actor recover, reminding us that the reality of Alcandro's cave that the play comfortingly returns to after each vision is also an

illusion. The Abadía's production is not just what could be termed a 'faithful' interpretation of the text, it also takes into account the realities of its specific audience in order to heighten their theatrical experience. The team manage the not inconsiderable task of constantly reminding us of the theatrical illusion whilst still allowing us to suspend our disbelief and be carried away by the show.

A major reason why La Abadía's production worked so well is down to the conviction and commitment of the uniformly strong cast, and therefore by extension the time and training that has been invested in them by the Abadía, from Jesús Barranco's Alcandro who is delightfully surprised by his successful conjurations; to Luis Moreno's perfectly timed transitions from boastful pride to irrepressible cowardice as Matamoros. Elsewhere in the plays within the play Ernesto Arias, Rebeca Valls, Lidia Otón and Daniel Moreno make effortlessly convincing transitions between genres and seem equally comfortable in each scene, therefore making sense of the tricky issue of consistency from one vision to the next. They effectively fool the audience into believing they are seeing a single story, a task made harder by the extreme differences between the vaudeville opening vision and dramatic final vision. Jesús Barranco and Jorge Gurpegui are also an effective double act as Alcandro and his servant, as they spend significant portions of the play observing the action and yet remain an active visual focus. They interact physically with the visions throughout and even react to the artificiality of the fictions – for instance, when piped music is heard over the speakers, they both pause and look around as if wondering where the dramatic music is coming from, subtly drawing attention to the theatrical nature of not only the visions but also of the production itself. Finally Mario Vedoya anchors the cast in the straight role of

Pridamante, in addition to being the audience's accomplice as he too is supposedly an observer – except of course he's not, he's an actor whose meal didn't agree with him, once again introducing new levels of reality from the world of the performers outside the theatre since that too is a scripted fiction.

What seems most noteworthy of the preceding observations is the clarity with which they were communicated to the audience. Even the tiniest hint of the actors reacting with surprise to the dramatic music, for instance, was brought across with the subtlest of gestures, which could be and most likely was easily missed by the audience, but represents a direct result of the methodology employed – Chekhov is about attention to detail from the actor's perspective. Chekhov and the psychological gesture are aimed towards allowing the actor to understand how their body expresses emotion instinctively, and then bringing this under the conscious control of the actor for maximum expressivity: "It lives in his hands, arms, torso, feet, legs, and in his voice. He feels capable of expressing it as an actor, but not as a critic or an analytical scientist' (Chekhov, 1991: 62). The actors in this show deliberately trained themselves to experience the performance in this way, and as Chekhov highlights the approach is 'fresh, independent, direct, free, creative, and, most important of all, an actor's approach' (Chekhov, 1991: 62).

The choice of methodology amongst all of those available is significant because the Abadía have elected to rely crucially on a self-professed 'actor's approach'. Witnessing the rehearsals for the show in February of 2007, it was clear that Aladro's goal of helping the actors make their own discoveries was paying off, although the ride was not always easy. Before entering rehearsals, Aladro

informed me how important it was to him that the work 'sea de los actores' (Aladro, 2005), and that his initial reliance on Chekhov had helped him considerably in this: 'He conseguido que lo descubran' (Aladro, 2005). Certainly, watching him work, it was clear that he did not want to give prescriptive directions, to the point of occasionally giving no answers at all to the actor's concerns. At the beginning of the week I observed how in the middle of the rehearsal process, Aladro sat the actors in a circle and asked them how they felt about the show and the process, seeking their opinions. During this discussion he spoke little, but instead facilitated and guided an open debate. Then during rehearsal, he let the actors play scenes through regardless of the quality of the run, and at no point gave out direct impulses to alter the work. Instead, he would only give general instructions if it was becoming clear that the actor could not find a way through the scene without guidance. Then, he would give notes quietly on a one to one basis, offering options when needed but preferring to work with the ideas that they provided themselves. Even when guidance was required, he would often ask the actor questions, gently nudging them towards making decisions themselves: for instance, when trying to find a starting energy for a scene, he asked one actress, is this the place you are looking for, and have you been looking long? Clearly these two simple options allow for a number of different possibilities that the actress then went on to experiment with throughout the scene. The benefit of this system is that it reduces the time spent talking about scenes, although occasional expressions of frustration from the actors proved that Aladro had not explained his ideas or vision for each of their characters in the close detail some actors may have been looking for. As a result, the actors seemed very keen to work out the emotional transitions in their characters for themselves. Perhaps the downside was that they were certainly

more attentive to their own problems than to working as a group at that particular point in the process. Nevertheless, the performers in *La ilusión* represent a fine example of the Abadía's ethos of training and physical commitment, even for Gurpegui and Vedoya who had absolutely no previous Abadía training. The effects of the philosophy on acting are patent in consistently excellent performances from all involved.

The Abadía's psycho-physical approach to the rehearsal room has evolved into a hybrid process that draws heavily from Michael Chekhov, but is nevertheless open to new ideas and interpretations through the medium of master-classes or week-long workshops: the likes of Marcello Magni, Lenard Petit, Hernán Gené, Odin Teatret and Eugenio Barba have all led some form of education workshops with company members over the years. In any case, the practical intention of these methodologies is to train the actor's body to maximum expressivity and to achieve the sense of an ensemble, or a company in tune with one another on and off stage and able to present a coherent front to the audience. There is, on the other hand, an ideological level to the aforementioned Chekhov, Grotowski and Brook, that has also played a significant role in defining and forming the Abadía's philosophy of theatre, which will be further examined in the following chapter.

Chapter IV – Teatro de la Abadía - Holy Theatre

The reappropriation of spaces and their conversion into theatres is not a new phenomenon: even in Spain, the Mercat de les Flors in Barcelona and the Teatro Lliure both took over existing structures, the former a market and the latter a workers' cooperative. Perhaps the first thing you notice on arriving at the Abadía theatre is that it is indeed a small church, a fact that must shape how the audience perceive the space and to some extent inform their preconceptions, so that the sense of enacting a 'holy' ritual becomes inevitable. The following section will seek to put the nature of performance at the Abadía in an experiential context, with reference to Grotowski and Peter Brook's notion of the Holy Theatre. The chapter will look at the space, its origins and resonances and then look at the theatrical ideologies underpinning the idea of 'holy theatre' that shapes the venue. I will demonstrate that the Abadía's methods and ethos create a distinct immersive theatrical experience for its audiences that taps into the ritualistic texture of the building.

The importance and impact of location on performance has become an increasingly important area of study, as Alan Read indicates: 'A spatial analysis is important to begin to take the specifics of place, rather than the idealised empty space, seriously' (Read, 1995: 159). Marvin Carlson's *Places of Performance* gives many indications on how to create a semiotic reading of a space in order to measure how the audience then engage with the performance: 'We are now at least equally likely to look at the theatre experience in a more global way, as a sociocultural event whose meanings and interpretations are not to be sought

exclusively in the text being performed but in the experience of the audience assembled to share in the creation of the total event' (Carlson, 1989: 2). His study goes on to look at how performance has been conditioned by the circumstances of its location, identifying how audiences in attendance would have been aware of the wider context of the event. This is an inevitable part of the experience of visiting the Abadía, a converted church. Carlson begins his historical journey with performances held in medieval churches and cathedrals:

Legend, allegory, doctrine, the whole sum of medieval knowledge of the world, divine and human, was here represented in painting, sculpture, stained glass and space. At the same time this fabric of symbols, rich as it was, also served as a setting, a container for the even more central symbolic systems of the performed rituals of the church, by which the citizens of the city were led to a direct participation in the divine mysteries. (Carlson, 1989: 14)

As Hegel indicated, the church is a space particularly conducive to such reveries as it is disconnected from 'external Nature and all the diverting occupations and interests of finite existence' (quoted in Carlson, 1989: 61). However, the church space is also closely linked to the function of theatre: 'The church or temple has perhaps the closest systematic architectural relationship to the theatre, since it involves the meeting of a secular celebrant with a sacred celebrated' (Carlson, 1989: 129). These convergences must be kept in mind when analysing a space such as the Abadía that makes conscious reference to its building's previous role, which is in this sense similar to Peter Brook's Bouffes du Nord in Paris: 'simultaneously architecture and scenography' (Carlson, 1989: 200). Indeed, in remodelling the Majestic theatre in New York, Brook has been accused of being self-referential, seeking to 'evoke the connotations of avant-gardism and

experimentation now internationally associated' (Carlson, 1989: 201) with the Bouffes du Nord. Following this logic, it is hard not to think that Gómez and the Abadía are also referring to the notions of Holy theatre established by Brook and Grotowski, two of Gómez's most important self-confessed influences. By locating the theatre in a church, the Abadía is in a constant search for a 'balance in this "found" space between the semiotics it already possesses in its previous role and those that might be imposed upon it as it is used for performance' (Carlson, 1989: 207).

The Abadía is located in theatrical isolation, well outside the usual cultural circles of Madrid, which are mostly centred on the Gran Vía Avenue, Plaza Santa Ana or Recoletos Avenue. The Abadía's location was first appropriated by Madrid's city council in 1876 who initially built a hospital for those suffering from epidemics at a time when the area was well outside the city centre, calling it the Casa especial de socorro de Vallehermoso, which opened in 1885. From then until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the buildings were repurposed to house the homeless as the city advanced and absorbed the quarter. On 11 November 1936 a shell destroyed some of the original buildings, the remains of which were employed as a weapons cache. After the war the installations underwent reparation and a new school was opened, the Sagrada Familia. On 20 March 1944 the church itself was built, now housing the Sala Juan de la Cruz. As part of the school, and given the trapezoidal shape of the building site, the architect José María de la Vega hit on the striking layout of twin converging naves as a means of separating the boys and the girls, and so prudishly preventing 'que se distrajeran unos con otros' (Brouwer, 2005: 17). The adults would sit in front of them, facing

the altar beneath the dome. In 1970 an adjoining hall was built, where the theatre offices are now located. However, after 1977 the church was abandoned, became derelict and was desacralized in 1990. By 1991 activity in the next door school also ceased.⁷⁰ Brouwer describes discovering the availability of the site as 'todo un hallazgo', noting that 'las transformaciones de este emplazamiento parecen formar un espejo de la historia política y social española' (Brouwer, 2005: 16). Basing the theatre in this particular church was no accident, as the team behind the Abadía had already turned down the Sala Mirador, the old El Águila beer factory, a biscuit factory on the Ronda de Atocha and an old discotheque underneath the Albéniz theatre as the venue for their training school and theatre (Brouwer, 2005: 37). The project required a base that spoke of the country and city, in order to match the aspiration of 'relacionarse con lo que sucede en la sociedad, a interrogarse sobre cuestiones esenciales de la condición humana y a hacerse eco del legado que aún nos atañe: la Historia, a veces tan cómodamente olvidada' (Brouwer, 2005: 15).

The ideology behind the Abadía's statement of intent has notable precedents in theatre, particularly in the works and theories of Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook, both highly active figures in the 1960s while Gómez himself was still training. And so, if the principles of Teatro de la Abadía's methodology derive from these sources, then we must come to grips with their tenets to understand the influences. Brook defines arriving at the now popular term 'Holy Theatre' as: 'it could be called The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible: the notion that the stage

⁷⁰ For a detailed and annotated account of the history of the building, see Ronald Brouwer (2005): 16-19.

is a place where the invisible can appear has a deep hold on our thoughts. We are all aware that most of life escapes our senses' (Brook, 1990: 47).

For both Grotowski and Brook, the history of theatre becomes an exploration of this sensation within the spectator: 'audiences all over the world will answer positively from their own experience that they have seen the face of the invisible through an experience on the stage that transcended their experience of life' (Brook, 1990: 48). Meanwhile, Grotowski puts this search into a context of theorists and practitioners:

I do not claim that everything we do is entirely new. [...] When we confront the general tradition of the Great Reform of the theatre from Stanislavski to Dullin and from Meyerhold to Artaud we realize that we have not started from scratch but are operating in a defined and special atmosphere. When our investigation reveals and confirms someone else's flash of intuition, we are filled with humility. (Grotowski, 1981: 24)

Brook highlights that for Grotowski, the theatre is 'a collective experience' (quoted in Grotowski, 1981: 12) to be shared with the audience.

We are concerned with the spectator who has genuine spiritual needs and who really wishes, through confrontation with the performance, to analyse himself... who undergoes an endless process of self-development, whose unrest is not general but directed towards search for the truth about himself and his mission in life. (Grotowski, 1981: 40)

Ultimately, he claimed his main concern was 'finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each type of performance and embodying the decision in physical arrangements' (Grotowski, 1981: 20). As a result, Grotowski's productions have always sought to redefine the audience's position in relation to the actors,

and Edward Braun summarises just a few of these arrangements, of which as Grotowski points there are an ‘infinite variation’ (Grotowski, 1981: 20):

[...] an attempt in *Forefather’s Eve* (based on Mickiewicz, 1961) at both total spatial integration of actors and spectators and a partial elimination of the intellectual division between the two, by designating the latter as ‘participants’ and assigning them ‘roles’. [...] In *Kordian* (based on Slowacki, 1962), set in a psychiatric ward, the audience became ambivalently patients together with the hero; in the production of Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* (1963), they were guests invited to Faustus’s Last Supper as which he served up episodes from his life. And in the penultimate play from the Laboratory Theatre, *The Constant Prince* (1965), the audience were made to watch the drama of persecution from elevated positions surrounding a wooden enclosure with the guilty curiosity of voyeurs. But in the final production, *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris*, Grotowski at last dispensed with these charades. Actors and audience, without pretence, and on equal footing (as far as this is possible within theatrical convention), together entered the playing-area, a large empty room... (Braun, 2001: 195-96)

Indeed, *The Constant Prince* is particularly useful to this study since, as a Calderón de la Barca play, it attracted some occasionally bemused attention from Spanish critical circles. José Monleón’s two page piece in *Primer Acto, Grotowski o el teatro-límite* spends over half of the article explaining how distant Grotowski’s work seems in Madrid whilst also making puzzling excuses about why *Primer Acto* had not written about him sooner, eventually congratulating himself for bringing it to the public eye: ‘Poder explicar, pues, quién es y lo que pretende Grotowski resulta, en definitiva, una de las aportaciones que PRIMER ACTO ha hecho al teatro español’ (Monleón, 1968: 6). He goes on to paraphrase *Towards a Poor Theatre* (which follows in its entirety, translated from Italian by Renzo Casali), eventually graciously noting that Grotowski’s thought ‘merece ser repensada’, whilst also hedging his bets with a non-committal, ‘No quiere esto decir que tenemos el “modelo” de Grotowski como la adecuada manera de representar hoy “El príncipe

constante". Es seguro que hay otras maneras igualmente vivas o quizá más ricas y complejas' (Monleón, 1968: 7). Perhaps one of the reasons why the first half of Monleón's article is so circuitous, is that the critical faculties of 1968 Spain were simply not ready to understand or coherently formulate what Grotowski was doing: after all we have established the shortcomings of critical thought in Spain according to a variety of theatre professionals as well as Gómez and Boadella (see Introduction: pg 25-6). Monleón even virtually admits this: 'Es como si el teatro empezase de nuevo, liberándose de preceptivas, industrias y oropeles' (Monleón, 1968: 7).

This glimpse of a more direct engagement with the audience indicates the shock to the system that Grotowski represented to a stagnant and reactionary theatrical establishment dealing with the pressures of censorship, as Grotowski himself faced dictatorship and censorship in his homeland of Poland. In spite of this, Monleón seems to be in little doubt that 'Grotowski nos es, remitiéndonos a los escenarios madrileños, ajeno' (Monleón, 1968: 6), and confesses that this very distance almost convinced the *Primer Acto* editorial team not to publish it at all, due to its 'distancia cultural respecto de nuestro teatro de cada día' (Monleón, 1968: 6). However, the distant experiment to which Monleón refers is linked to an interest in stirring the audience's emotions, an engagement at a visceral level which challenges the audience's preconceptions and employs a spirituality in performance in its consecution that seems almost religious. After all, the line of communication between actor and audience is described as a 'communion' (Grotowski, 1981: 24). This is not cold unemotional detachment, but a level of participatory experience more extreme than any previous theatre-models explored

here, as Braun notes of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris*; 'It was the furthest Grotowski could proceed in his obsessive manipulation of that elusive actor/spectator relationship while still remaining within the bounds of theatre' (Braun, 2001: 196).

'We can thus define the theatre as 'what takes place between spectator and actor'. All the other things are supplementary...' (Grotowski, 1981: 32). This tight focus on the actor leads to an audience required to observe and participate emotionally, so, consequentially, analysing and understanding themselves more fully. For Grotowski, the human body is the site of communion between those observing and those observed, the human body is the one fixed and universal human truth: '...even with the loss of a 'common sky' of belief... the perceptivity of the human organism remains.' (Grotowski, 1981: 23). Life, and theatre as a part of life, must strive to be total, but above all human: 'a total acceptance of one human being by another' (Grotowski, 1981: 25). No matter what ideas are under scrutiny, the body is still communicative, capable of evoking moods, atmosphere and emotions:

In order that the spectator may be stimulated into self-analysis when confronted with the actor, there must be some common-ground existing in both of them, something they can either dismiss in one gesture or jointly worship... I am thinking of things that are so elementary and so intimately associated that it would be difficult for us to submit them to rational analysis. (Grotowski, 1981: 42)

The result is that Grotowski is perhaps the first practitioner to genuinely conjoin the mind and the body in the process of training a performer and developing a performance. In his *Statement of Principles*, distributed internally within the Laboratory, he stresses that 'we play a double game of intellect and

instinct, thought and emotion; we try to divide ourselves artificially into body and soul' (Grotowski, 1981: 211). Grotowski searches for a formula of total immersion to challenge what he sees as the chains that restrict us: 'We suffer most from a lack of totality, throwing ourselves away, squandering ourselves' (Grotowski, 1981: 211). Here we may find a point of connection with another of the Abadía's preferred practitioners, Michael Chekhov, who arrived at an analogous spirituality in performance. As previously noted (see pp. 276-96), Chekhov also sought to make a distinct connection with the audience, as Simon Callow explains: 'Chekhov increasingly believed that the core of the theatrical event was to be found in the actor's relationship with his audience [...] It was vital, he said, to engage with what he called 'the will of the auditorium', to reach out to each member of the audience and share the creative act with him or her' (quoted in Chekhov, 2002: xx) like a priest reaching out to his flock. Reminiscent of Antonin Artaud's oft-cited description of ideal self-immolating actors: 'like those tortured at the stake, signalling through the flames' (Artaud, 2001: 145); or of Grotowski's gentler expression: 'the actor's wretchedness can be transformed into a kind of holiness' (Grotowski, 1981: 34); Chekhov too spoke 'mystically, of the actor *sacrificing* himself to the audience' (Chekhov, 2002: xx). As Artaud went on to explain, his words were hoping to 'rediscover a religious, mystical meaning our theatre has forgotten. [...] we have reached the point where we have lost all contact with true theatre, since we restrict it to the field of whatever everyday thought can achieve' (Artaud, 2001: 108). Likewise, Chekhov had high hopes for theatre, in the words of Mala Powers: '[Chekhov] was concerned with preparing an *Ideal Theater of the Future*. He envisioned the time when Theater, in addition to entertaining, would be the major influence of bringing positive, healing enlightenment to our entire world

culture' (quoted in Chekhov, 2002: xxv). One of Chekhov's most famous students, Marilyn Monroe, quickly realised the potential of the work she was doing with him: 'Acting became... an art that increased your life and mind. [...] with Michael Chekhov, acting became more than a profession to me. It became a sort of religion' (quoted in Chekhov, 2002: xxvii). The word religion reappears, again linking theatre making to the church dome that dominates the Teatro de la Abadía.

It is nevertheless also worth noting that Artaud, Grotowski and Chekhov all disconnect the spirituality of their ideal envisioned theatres from any particular religious connotations. Artaud does so in a characteristically cutting fashion: 'one has only to say words like *religious* and *mystic* to be taken for a sexton or a profoundly illiterate bonze barely fit for rattling prayer wheels outside a Buddhist temple, this is a simple judgement on our incapacity to draw all the inferences from words and our profound ignorance of the spirit of synthesis and analogy' (Artaud, 2001: 108). Chekhov also resented the application of the term *mystic* to his work, commenting: 'Try the exercises and you will see that they are *not* mystical. Try them, and you will see that they are truly practical' (Chekhov, 2002: xxix). Grotowski makes much the same point as Artaud and Chekhov, eloquently expressing the space between religion and theatre:

Don't get me wrong. I speak about 'holiness' as an unbeliever. I mean a 'secular holiness'. If the actor, by setting himself a challenge publicly challenges others, and through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration. If he does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from every resistance to any psychic impulse, then he does not sell his body but sacrifices it. He repeats the atonement; he is close to holiness. (Grotowski, 1981: 34)

Holiness in these terms is not meant to convey any religious connotations, but rather represents a form of elevated spirituality that allows the audience to arrive at self-understanding. Michael Chekhov, who spoke of sacrifice in the same terms as Grotowski, arrived at similar conclusions by engaging with Rudolf Steiner's works. Known mostly for developing Anthroposophy, Steiner was also a playwright and active in the arts, believing like Grotowski and Chekhov that 'the arts, including theatre, were an important aid to spiritual development' (Chamberlain, 2004: 14). Specifically, 'Steiner believed that man once participated more fully in spiritual processes of the world through a dreamlike consciousness but had since become restricted by his attachment to material things. The renewed perception of spiritual things required training the human consciousness to rise above attention to matter' (Doniger, 1999: 1027). Narrating Chekhov's biography, Mala Powers and Franc Chamberlain explain how Steiner's works helped Chekhov to overcome personal difficulties in his life,⁷¹ and subsequent works were empowered with a positivism derived from Steiner. One spectator recalls Chekhov's production of *Hamlet* in 1924 at the Moscow Art Theatre: 'At the end of the tragedy everything changed into light, for he shed spiritual light upon the darkness, so that spectators, grateful for the beauty he had given them, ran after his sleigh – as far as his house' (Chekhov, 2002: xxxiv-xxxv). Whilst this does seem to be a rather fanciful description of the production, it is nevertheless apparent that it left a particularly intense emotional residue within its audience. It demonstrates an intention in developing a theatre that can occupy the place of the church as a place of cleansing and community.

⁷¹ See Chamberlain, (2004): 13-15

This apparent veneration of the theatre artist in part informs Peter Brook's stance in *The Empty Space*: 'The actor searches vainly for the sound of a vanished tradition [...] we have lost all sense of ritual and ceremony [...] but the words remain with us and old impulses stir the marrow' (Brook, 1990: 51). The notion of lost ritual is at the core of the work of Chekhov, Artaud, Grotowski and Brook, and much of their written theory and practice is geared towards finding some way of recovering it. In many cases this search becomes partly mystical in nature: one of Brook's exercises consists of two actors attempting to connect spiritually with one another. One actor kneels and touches the heels of another actor standing directly in front of him/her, both with eyes closed. The kneeling actor releases the other's heels, and the latter very slowly walks straight ahead. Then, at any time, the kneeling actor, without moving or making a sound or any kind of physical action, transmits an impulse compelling the walking actor to stop. Perhaps what is most unnerving about the exercise is that it appears to work. I can attest to this as I experienced it whilst working under laboratory conditions under the tutelage of Natalia Alexeevna Zvereva and Oleg Lvovich Kovdriashov at GITIS, where I regularly carried out this exercise, and whilst it did not always work, there was always at least a handful of moments of awe when a member of the group apparently halted another actor solely by use of willpower. Perhaps there is no power in the exercise beyond the gesture. If you do it often enough, the two actor's wills must inevitably coincide. Perhaps what is most important about the exercise is the willingness to believe that it is possible to stop another actor by thought alone, and hence personal bonds between individuals are reinforced and some sense of spiritual energy hangs over the process. Similarly, Brook details his search for the

ritual in the following terms: 'We set an actor in front of us, asked him to imagine a dramatic situation that did not involve any physical movement, then we all tried to understand what state he was in. Of course, this was impossible, which was the point of the exercise. The next stage was to discover what was the very least he needed before understanding could be reached' (Brook, 1990: 55). Brook is after all pursuing an openness and willingness to counteract what he views as a frustrating mainstream trend of 'deadly theatre': 'They are not searching for a holy theatre, they are not talking about a theatre of miracles: they are talking of the tame play where 'higher' only means 'nicer', being noble only means being decent' (Brook, 1990: 53), reminiscent of Boadella's comment on the 'teatro decorativista de buen rollo' that he saw all around him in Spain (Boadella, 2005 d).

In its selection of practitioners to emulate and whose methods to apply to rehearsal, the Teatro de la Abadía appears to be situating itself from its inception in the tradition of the great art theatres of Europe. The emphasis on actor training as a means of generating a consistent theatrical language, as previously discussed, is drawn directly from the practice of Michael Chekhov and Jerzy Grotowski, basing itself on the notion that a well trained actor is a more expressive actor. However, the context in which the Abadía actors operate is distinct even from a laboratory or drama school, since the performances must fill and in some way respond to the nature of the space, in this case a converted church. In effect, the Abadía is a meeting place of two distinct and marked rituals, that of theatre and of religious rites. As previously cited, the opening of the Abadía responded very directly to the history of the building. The church itself was renamed the Sala Juan de la Cruz after one of Spain's most important mystic poets, and a handheld bell summoned

the audience to the opening production, a performance of *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte* (1995) by Ramón del Valle Inclán, which opened with a ritualised sequence of a witch blowing on a *botafumeiro*⁷² which began to swing slowly in the space. Even the private opening of the theatre the night before had a solemn air to it, with Gómez reading San Juan de la Cruz poems alongside a presentation of Llorenç Barber's concert for bells. To this day the audience are called to performances at both of the venue's theatres by the front of house manager ringing a small bell, a tradition that has not been replaced with pre-recorded sounds or buzzers. Even each individual production, whoever the director, has had to find some way to respond to the architecture of the space, to allow the audience to recognise the nature of the room they are entering. After all, the audience's journey into the auditorium should be taken into account, and the inevitable impressions that are formed.

First of all, the Abadía sits just off Calle Fernández de los Ríos, in the relative seclusion of a private driveway lined with trees opposite a kindergarten that shares the same entry gate. Carlson speaks of the varied locations of theatres around the western world: 'They have been [...] clandestine hideaways whose location was only known to a few initiates [...] They have been designed as temples of art, seeking to remove their audiences from the concerns or even any visual echoes of everyday life' (Carlson, 1989: 205). By simply steering the audience off the main road and into a quiet patio before entering the theatre, the space summons a sense of rest and also of exclusivity, a sentiment echoed in the theatre's maxim of

⁷² A thurible, a large incense burner that is traditionally hung from the ceilings of churches. The Galician name literally means 'smoke expeller'.

'placer inteligente'. Once off the street, almost at once you see the main entrance to the Sala Juan de la Cruz on the left, with the sculptures of the Sagrada Familia still presiding over the doorway and attesting to the old name of the temple. Further up the façade two bells are visible and finally the Christian cross presiding over all. The area has been transformed into a small patio, with trees and benches where audiences wait for the house to open. Once they enter, marble floors and vaulted marble ceilings greet them in the small atrium just through the door. The audience are then shepherded into one of three directions, two of which branch off to the left and right towards the separate naves, where now two raked seating areas await. One can also go straight ahead, emerging facing the stage through a small curtain that is drawn once the performance has begun. The faint house lights still recall the uneven flickering light of candles, although few productions have opened the light-excluding shutters to reveal the original stained glass panes that surround the central dome. The dome itself is now painted black, but still visible beyond the lighting rig that is suspended high above the stage. Although there is now little inside the theatre to openly suggest it was once a church, the architecture is still expressive of its former function, and one cannot ignore the relative architectural grandeur of the surroundings compared to the more habitual overtones of the proscenium arch theatre or the black box theatre of most performance venues. There are no plush red seats or ornate decorations or red curtains or other Italianate theatre ostentation, but rather a quiet elegance of subdued blues and greys set against marble floors and stone walls.

If we bear this journey from street to stall in mind, then it is hard not to convey a certain peace to an audience, as if entering a sanctuary. Curiously, while

traditional Spanish audiences will talk loudly and incessantly well into the rising of the curtain in a more traditional proscenium theatre, the Abadía audiences tend to be lulled into a certain reverent hush even while they wait for the show to start. Perhaps part of the reason, aside from the associations of the space, is the fact that with no red curtain to divide audience and stage until the show is ready to begin, there is a sense that the performance has begun from the audience's entry. Indeed, the notion of an 'intensa proximidad en la relación especial del espectador y el actor' (Gómez, 2000: 8) was set in place as one of the founding tenets of the venue. Dan Jemmett seemed to realise this, as the performance of *El burlador de Sevilla* (2008) featured a form of pre-performance prelude in an effort to engage and redefine the audience's perspective of the space. Dick Bird's design, confronting the arriving audience as a first point of contact with the production, also went some way towards setting up a more informal engagement with the space, as a monumental bar occupied half of the stage area, with three cabaret-style steps complete with lines of light bulbs at the foot of a large red curtain upstage. Although the red curtain was back in the Abadía, it recalled cabaret and nightclub variety shows more than a proscenium theatre, and in fact sat behind the set rather than concealing it. Bird's design was all the more striking as it skilfully occupied a space between bar and church without feeling like a provocation in the space – the marble counter and dusty bottles and mirrors behind the bar added a certain faded grandeur that did not seem out of place. Once the house was settled and the actors ready, all six filed onstage, engaging the audience with eye-contact from the very outset. They sat down at the bar, each with a glass of wine or beer, and turned out to look straight at the audience, smiling openly and engagingly. This silence lasted a minute or so, and finally the opening tune began to play (Ba Ba

Boom by The Jamaicans, a mid-tempo Rock Steady tune which was ostensibly played from an onstage tape deck by Catalinón), during which the actors who would begin the play initiated their flirtations, setting up the themes of sex and seduction that Jemmett wished to put at the forefront of the production. However brief, this introduction was a recognition of the need to redefine the audience's reception of the production, given the potentially overbearing space and preconceptions associated with the myth of Don Juan. This is merely a more recent example of pre-show performance at the Abadía in an effort to set the agendas of particular productions ahead of the other more immediate influences of the space.

The co-production between the Abadía and Animalario that occupied the Sala Juan de la Cruz before *El burlador de Sevilla*, also endeavoured to re-situate the audience once the show was ready to begin. *Argelino, servidor de dos amos* (2007) by Alberto San Juan and directed by Andrés Lima saw the ensemble arriving down the aisles of the theatre whilst wearing half-face masks with stereotypical Chinese features, attempting to sell their one euro wares (cheap plastic sparkly objects, the sort of very cheap children's toys that Chinese shops tend to sell around Spain, with some audience members entering the game and purchasing them) as they gradually made their way to the stage. Since the show was attempting to comment on Spanish attitudes to immigration, the company opened with a particularly direct engagement that the audience could quickly recognise but which would also create the uncomfortable humour of racial stereotyping. After the initial set-piece, the production then moved on to its re-imagined version of Goldoni's *Servant of Two Masters*.

In any case, the prelude had the desired effect, setting up an uncomfortable vaudeville tone for the whole production. Carlos Aladro's productions at the Abadía also often employ the technique of immersing the audience in a distinct theatrical world, as previously noted of *La ilusión* (2006),⁷³ although in that case the performance took place in the Sala José Luis Alonso. The show opened with a building site and the actors playing Alcandro and his servant engaging directly with the arriving audience. However, Aladro's past work in the Abadía has used similar techniques, such as the newly devised introduction to *Terrorismo* (2005) by the Presnyakov brothers for the church space which was even more striking: the disjointed feeling of the theatre-cum-church was further heightened by Ana Garay's airport set-design. Even as the audience took their seats, the familiar recorded flight departure announcements could be heard. The lights were also up on the entire theatre, giving the domed space the air of a sterile airport lounge; actors appeared before the start of the play asking which gate the flight to Amsterdam departed from. The production itself then segued into the choreographed arrival of the passengers, and a stylised representation of an aircraft pilot discovering two suitcases on the runway. The company took great care that this powerful visual opening was not however lost once the text took over, and each transition between scene was a choreographed movement sequence set to a selection of modern rock songs – most notably Radiohead's *Sit Down. Stand Up.*, where the ill-informed passengers made way for the next scene to the jarring rhythms of Radiohead's universe of dehumanisation and despotic technology. Ultimately the church literally became another place, and the distinctive architecture could not be

⁷³ See Part II, Chapter III: pp. {277-82}

a greater antithesis to the cold modernity of an airport. All of these examples nevertheless hint at the importance of redefining the ritual nature of the space, as if it requires constant redefinition in order not to return to the default setting of a church or indeed the recognisable rituals of a traditional theatre. However, in redefining it the shows are also tacitly acknowledging its presence, and a consistent strain of holy theatre begins to emerge from the venue, where ritual is at the core of the audience's experience.

Ultimately, we are faced here with a problem that Peter Brook has designated as 'the two-room theatre' (Todd & Lecat, 2003: 33), which he defines as an 'architectural division between audience and performer' (Todd & Lecat, 2003: 33). Part of Peter Brook's solution to the division that occurs in traditional theatre configurations is to alter the performance area: 'a three-quarters embrace of an acting area by an audience' (Todd & Lecat, 2003: vii). Whilst not entirely accurate of the Abadía, it is important to remember that the Abadía's stage curves out into the audience, with a front row that perhaps represents about a third of the stage's diameter. The intention of having a system of rehearsal, 'the aim of this process' (Todd & Lecat, 2003: 33), as Brook points out, is 'to make the "inner" and the "outer" merge, to convert a "show" into an "experience"' (Todd & Lecat, 2003: 33). Part of the necessary transition from show to experience is to make the audience more than mere spectators, and engage them as participants, a search that Brook explains has led many to link religious rites with theatre: 'the ritual takes place within a pre-existing body of belief. One is no longer an observer: one is part of the experience' (Todd & Lecat, 2003: 34). Arriving at this state passes through re-

imagining the entire manner in which an audience engages with theatre, and it is a search that Brook states he has spent his career addressing:

More than forty years ago it was clear to me that space is of vital importance in any theatrical gathering, in that it can kill or nurture a vital rising to another level of perception. The search for all the possible ideal, ephemeral, lasting, clear, obvious and unexpected forms that a theatre could take became an obsessive quest – something no less important in our research than the work of an actor or the work on the text [...] a vast field of surprises and discoveries opened itself up as soon as we sincerely faced the question ‘What should a theatre be?’ (Todd & Lecat, 2003: 34).

The Teatro de la Abadía may not quite fulfil the lofty aims of Grotowski, Artaud, Chekhov and Brook, in part because whatever goals were set in place, having such a heterogeneous and varied series of collaborators makes them impossible to achieve without the single creative input that other aforementioned practitioner-theorists have been able to imprint on their own companies. In effect, we cannot accurately compare the Abadía to Grotowski’s Theatre Laboratory or Brook’s Bouffes du Nord because they are the sole directors and artistic cores of their companies. José Luis Gómez may speak in similar terms to his European influences:

El trabajo del actor nace desde una profunda ocupación con el ser humano que, con alguna frecuencia, rebasa lo meramente escénico y representacional para convertirse en búsqueda existencial. Quizás lo que en última instancia permanece sólo es una cierta resonancia, en el actor y en el espectador, de emociones suscitadas y atisbos de trascendente lucidez, pronto olvidados pero nunca borrados. (Brouwer, 2005: 11)

However, Gómez’s aims also need to be put into effect by three or four different directors in each season at the Abadía, not including the host of visiting

Spanish and international companies. We cannot expect them all to share an identical ideology to Gómez, or indeed to Grotowski and Brook. Even if we assume that the arriving companies share an affinity with the aspirations of the artistic team, putting the mandate of the venue ahead of their own goals, it is nevertheless impossible nor would it be desirable to entirely marry the two in every instance: various members of *El burlador de Sevilla* often expressed fears as to whether the production would enjoy the Abadía's approval, and of course, as reported in Part II, Chapter II (see pp. 252-53), Gómez's concerns regarding clarity of diction in the performance reveals his commanding presence and authority. Given the potential for such artistic disagreements, the Abadía have also created a more public aim, perhaps more general and easier to attain, a motto that has appeared on flyers and season programs: 'El placer inteligente'. Brouwer expands on what this means: 'Un teatro de fiesta y no de pasatiempo, un teatro lúdico a la vez que lúcido. No pretendemos aquí 'divertire', que significa 'apartarse', como señaló Gómez, para quien ese placer y esa inteligencia residen intrínsecamente en el lenguaje y en el juego' (Brouwer, 2005: 15). In effect, this becomes a form of theatre laboratory, quite an achievement for a mainstream programming venue, and a goal which can only be achieved by a systematic training in Michael Chekhov and Lecoq whilst relying on the theories of Brook and Grotowski to underpin the methodology in a performance space that can only be described as holy. The Abadía was a unique space in Madrid when it was founded over a decade ago, and it still offers a form of theatrical exploration that the modern constraints of commercial programming have made all too rare.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the claim that the creative process determines the qualities of performance, by looking at the examples of Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía, two Spanish companies who have developed a particular methodology in rehearsal and raised the bar in terms of performance in Spain towards the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first. The two main sections of the study have dealt with the creative process of both companies by constructing a record of rehearsal for two case study productions and contrasting them with past productions as well as including a necessary international contextualisation. The result has been to clarify the rehearsal process of the companies and situate them within an international theatre climate, at the forefront of a methodology based on a collective and physical approach. Furthermore, I have argued that their systems of rehearsal serve to create cohesive collective working units which in turn generate heightened engagement with their audiences, by redefining the audience's experience of viewing theatre. It remains to evaluate the success of these models as well as identifying the current state of both companies. This conclusion will establish process as the main artistic thrust that has contributed to the development of the two companies. Finally, my aim has been not only to research the work of Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía, but also to demonstrate how a carefully devised rehearsal may evolve into a coherent and organic artistic entity in its own right.

If we use Forced Entertainment as an example of a company who define themselves according to the process they have devised, we can see how they

conceive their process as inseparable from the oft studied text or performance: 'We don't hate theatre [...] We're gripped by it – and its liveness. We love its codes and conventions, but we are also frustrated by them and wage war on them. [...] Every time we set out to break theatre up, we are trying to find a way to put it together again that really allows it to fly' (quoted in Gardner, 2009: 22). Their methodology entirely embodies the act of breaking up and remaking theatre according to this quote, and as such this makes their rehearsal process as interesting as performance, if not more. Forced Entertainment define their goals in terms of what their explorations in rehearsal can uncover, and Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía share a similar desire.

Studying the rehearsal processes generated by Boadella and Gómez is fundamental to understanding their work and identity. Where other companies define themselves by texts or productions, both Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía define themselves by their process. To this end, even their websites, spaces otherwise normally used only for advertising productions and giving basic information, dedicate space to defining their working methods and how crucial these are to the company.⁷⁴ However, method is not only important to the company as recent efforts on the website demonstrate a public interest in what goes on in the Els Joglars rehearsal room. In July 2009, Pilar Sáenz and Dolors Tuneu, two of the company's performers, inaugurated a blog documenting the rehearsal process for the forthcoming Els Joglars production (*2036 el homenaje*,

⁷⁴ Both company websites also include a significant proportion of the company's archival files related to each production, including press releases, newspaper reports, and commentaries by company members. Again, this act of online documentation reflects not just the company's desire to demonstrate their process, but also the level of interest in the general public for such documents. Furthermore, it is a way of inscribing the importance and validity of what they do and how it is achieved.

scheduled to open in February 2010). Albert Boadella also launched his own blog in the form of a daily record on a variety of subjects related to the arts, politics and society.⁷⁵ On the subject of methodology, the Els Joglars site also compiles texts by Lluís Elías and Albert Boadella explaining the ‘método emergente’ employed in rehearsal and which could be defined ‘gráficamente a partir de una espiral: girar alrededor de un punto en concreto con la intención de ampliar las posibilidades para volver a concretar de nuevo’ (Elías, 2002). This definition of process is important, as the same page defines the ‘temas de las obras’ (Joglars, 2009), thus linking method and message in a way which is intrinsic to Els Joglars: ‘Y otro factor no menos determinante en el estilo de Els Joglars es la claridad ideológica con qué son abordados los temas que tocan, por comprometedores que sean’ (Joglars, 2009). The company’s method is therefore a means of inscribing the themes that they have chosen to explore in rehearsal. The decision to link theme and method so closely is revealing of the company’s commitment to communicating its message from the outset.

Teatro de la Abadía likewise define themselves first and foremost by their method, devised by José Luis Gómez and employed in order to train and establish the original company of actors. Again, the website contains an article by Gómez detailing the critical importance of actor training and methodology:

Ante la avalancha de manifestaciones de la cultura de masas, [...] los amantes del teatro suelen subrayar su excepcionalidad aludiendo a su condición de espectáculo "en vivo" que tiene lugar, como la existencia misma, en una sucesión de instantes irrepetibles, en puro presente sin retorno. [...] En sentido estricto, para que esa condición se cumpla el

⁷⁵ Both blogs are accessible from the Els Joglars homepage: <http://www.elsjoglars.com/index.php>

actor ha de estar -como tan bien lo definió Eugenio Barba- continuamente "en vida", es decir en constante apelación y en ejercicio de todos sus resortes psicofísicos, sin posibilidad de distracción, en acrecentada presencia. (Gómez, 2009)

The article goes on to conclude, with notable allusions to Artaud and to Grotowski, that the only way to maintain the liveness of this dialogue with the audience in which these unrepeatable encounters may take place, is permanent training:

A mi entender el estímulo y acrecentamiento de las facultades del actor que permiten que lo irrepitable del teatro se manifieste no es alcanzable únicamente a partir de la formación [...] sino, más allá de todo esto, mediante el permanente aprendizaje y el entrenamiento [...] a intención y urgencia de decir algo, de transmitir ideas y sentires particulares con relación a nuestro entorno y extenderlos al prójimo. (Gómez, 2009)

This definition of an experiential connection between audience and actor depends entirely on a notion of process which can be defined as a permanent apprenticeship. Therefore, process is the hinge that performances at the Abadía are fundamentally articulated upon. It is an artistic entity that requires as much definition in its creation as any individual performance.

When the processes outlined throughout this study are followed in a disciplined manner, they may achieve as a result the level of connection that Gómez alludes to, and which Anne Bogart demands of the theatre as a spectator: 'When I go to the theatre, I want to sense the energy and power of the event. And I want to be considered part of the act. I want to be in a relationship. And I want something to happen' (Bogart, 2001: 69). At their best, both Els Joglars and Teatro de la Abadía have managed to attain this level of emotional and intellectual involvement in their audiences. Having demonstrated that the rehearsal process is

not only a tool but an artistic entity, we cannot nevertheless dismiss the fact that it is not without its problems. The primary problem arises when rehearsal becomes a mechanical habit and the urgency dissipates. Indeed, the issue of creating a theatre where the actor is constantly 'alive', is not a new debate and we can trace it back to Denis Diderot and his dialogue *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1773), where he explained that the perfect actor should be devoid of all sensibility, thus becoming himself one of the first commentators on rehearsal process: 'At the very moment when he touches your heart he is listening to his own voice; his talent depends not, as you think, upon feeling, but upon rendering so exactly the outward signs of feeling, that you fall into the trap. [...] Extreme sensibility makes middling actors [...] in complete absence of sensibility is the possibility of a sublime actor' (Diderot, 1883: 16-17). Effectively Diderot argued the paradox that is represented by an actor inspiring great feeling in the audience without feeling it himself.

Diderot's paradox can help express the problems of a methodology that can become too entrenched in habit, and I would argue that a similar paradox exists in both companies, where the dominance of their key figures, Albert Boadella and José Luis Gómez, is at once both the central factor in the success of the collective intention and also the reason for a recent decline. The paradox in this instance is embodied in their role as creators of the company and methodology as well as the current centres of immobility. Whilst their very dominance over the company process is responsible for their greatest achievements, recent years have seen their personas overwhelming and dissipating their own creation. Although the emphasis of their work is on generating a sense of ensemble, specifically collective creation with Els Joglars or laboratory actor training with the Abadía, the

dominance of a single figure over the process acts in opposition to this ideal. Els Joglars now cannot escape the political labelling that Boadella's activities has attached to them, and Gómez's distant involvement with the Abadía is preventing it from continuing to evolve and develop its identity as a venue. There appears to be a limitation inherent in their processes, where it can only function at its best for a brief period of time. The most recent productions at both venues may help to indicate the problems that arise when the process stagnates.

The situation in Els Joglars is perhaps the most marked of the two due to the permanent nature of the company when contrasted to a host of collaborators at the Abadía. However, in recent years we can detect a shift in the company's mood which is attributable to Boadella's increasingly antagonistic position to certain political institutions. Since the 2005 production of *En un lugar de Manhattan*, Els Joglars have produced a full length show, *La cena* which toured extensively around Spain during 2008 and 2009, but notably not to Catalonia, due to Boadella's political controversies, or as he describes it: 'un litigio provinciano' (Boadella, 2009 a: 275). With *En un lugar de Manhattan*, the company had already experienced the backlash of an audience boycott orchestrated apparently by the entrenched Catalan nationalists reacting against Boadella and Ciutadans, a political party formed to 'hacer frente al deterioro y al disparate en el que ha entrado la izquierda en Catalunya' (Boadella, 2009 a: 238). The box office failure of *En un lugar en Manhattan* in Barcelona when faced with a reality where 'nuestros conciudadanos nos hicieron sentir su desdén dejándonos vacío el teatro' (Boadella, 2009 a: 271) was a psychological blow for a company fresh from 'el reciente triunfo de Madrid' (Boadella, 2009 a: 271). This experience led Boadella to the conclusion that 'tengo

claro que no volveré a trabajar más en Cataluña. Mis obras girarán por tierras donde nos acojan con el afecto natural que los ciudadanos conceden a los artistas [...] No hay nada más agradable que representar en un teatro repleto de espectadores sin más preconcebidos que el goce natural ante una obra' (Boadella, 2009 a: 274). Indeed, the company's sell-out run of *La cena* at the enormous new 851 seater Sala A of the Teatros del Canal from 26 February to 12 April 2009 is testament to this.

However, perhaps what becomes apparent from a discussion of the company's recent activity is that much of it hinges on Boadella's political interventions. Boadella has always been the core of the company throughout its myriad forms, and it has always been impossible to speak of Els Joglars without focusing on him. Likewise, he has always been politically active, and his work has often satirised and provoked the establishment. However, perhaps when it becomes impossible to discuss the artistic merits of a production without referencing the external battles of its director, then we may feel that his focus is not on the artistic well-being of his company or his process. Of course this political stance has always been the case with the company, but maybe the personal nature of the battle between Boadella and the Catalan establishment has dented the company's artistic ethos. Ultimately, it is increasingly hard to regard Els Joglars as a collaborative collective, but rather as a platform for the polemic figure of Boadella. Boadella's own description of the company's collective methodology feels openly contradictory: 'Un auténtico método colectivo [...] los sobresalientes tienen su justo reconocimiento, y los menos dotados se sienten satisfechos, luchando codo con codo, junto a tan buenos guerreros que les sirven de maestros'

(Boadella, 2009 a: 76). This supposed meritocracy has evolved into Ramón Fontserè's dominance as leading actor of the company, to the extent of now taking solo curtain calls separate from the rest of the company. Setting aside the curious judgement of superior or less skilled actors within a self-professed collective company, one wonders if there is not a degree of self-indulgence in Ramón Fontserè's emphatic performances and his director's leadership which means we are always too aware of him as a performer rather than a character within a narrative. Even the 2006 duologue, *Controversia del toro y el torero* feels more like an opportunity for Boadella to voice his support for bullfighting as an art form and as a vehicle for his two leading actors, Xavier Boada and Ramón Fontserè, than it does a balanced piece of theatre.

If we look at his recently published autobiographical work, *Adiós Cataluña* (2009), we will also detect a shift in style since his previous autobiography, *Memorias de un bufón* (2001) or the Els Joglars company autobiography *La guerra de los 40 años* (2001). Boadella until recently had repressed his criticisms in print, for instance alluding to disagreements within the company throughout the years in *La guerra de los 40 años* (Joglars, 2001: 80-83), often without even mentioning names. However, no such caution is exercised in the pages of *Adiós Cataluña*, where Boadella not only openly names his enemies, but goes into great detail in order to defend his opinions. For example, where until now Boadella's takeover of the company in 1967 had been described as 'amigable' (Joglars, 2001: 80), he now devotes a number of pages to a systematic ridiculing of 'general Font'

(Boadella, 2009 a: 28), referring to Antoni Font the original director of Els Joglars.⁷⁶ This is only one example, but the book is full of attacks and revelations of political battles. Whilst Boadella has always indulged his belligerent side, he had not, until now, ever been so outspoken in his aggression. It is telling that the book is introduced by a four page selection of quotes from the Catalan press engaging in the defamation of his work and character (Boadella, 2009 a: 11-16), where the least insidious lines are merely insults such as ‘hijo de puta’ or ‘puerco’. To all this provocation, Boadella ripostes: ‘Debo reconocer que su contribución se ha revelado imprescindible para realizar la quimérica dualidad de artista y guerrero a la vez’ (Boadella, 2009 a: 18). The very structure of the book, alternating accounts of Amor (predominantly dealing with his personal life) and Guerra (a chronological succession of disagreements) indicates the contradictions and oppositions the company is now prey to. Of course, I am not concerned here with judging Boadella’s words, and he certainly appears to have been thoroughly and probably unjustly provoked, but the result is a director with a personal political grudge.

Perhaps the most striking contradiction, and the most notable absence of reference in *Adiós Cataluña*, is Boadella’s acceptance of the Artistic Directorship of the Teatros del Canal, opening with the Els Joglars production of *La cena* (2008) running from 26 February to 12 April 2009. The theatre itself belongs to the Comunidad de Madrid and he was recruited by conservative politician Esperanza Aguirre. Boadella himself had mostly been affiliated with the political left and the Catalan socialist party (Partido Socialista Catalan, PSC), although *Adiós Cataluña*

⁷⁶ The first two chapters headed with war (Guerra I, pp. 27-34 & Guerra II, pp. 41-48) describe the early days of the company under Font in a disparaging tone hitherto not applied by Boadella to his own company at any stage of its development.

suggests he only joined in order to gain some much needed political support although 'se aprovecharon de mi nombre todo lo que pudieron, y me tocó mostrar públicamente mi adhesión' (Boadella, 2009 a: 109). However, past shows such as *La torna de la torna* (2005) and *El Retablo de las maravillas* (2004) did not hesitate to mock figures from the political right and Aguirre's own party (Partido Popular, PP), including the then President of Spain, José María Aznar. Admittedly Els Joglars have also often mocked the political left, equally mercilessly, and Boadella replies to his doubters: 'a todos aquellos que me tachan hoy de bufón decadente y vendido a las magnificencias del poder, que lo que mi nuevo empleo no me podrá ya cambiar a estas alturas, es este endiablado vicio de expresar en todo momento aquello que me pasa por la mente, guste o no guste al respetable y sus dirigentes' (Boadella, 2009 b: 11). Whilst this excuses him from necessarily agreeing with the powers that be, it is also perhaps the very problem that plagues Els Joglars today, Boadella's habit of expressing whatever is going through his mind, as he concedes. This would appear to indicate a greater interest in expressing an opinion through his work rather than worrying about how it should be presented aesthetically. In his novel, *El disparatado círculo de los pájaros borrachos*, one of Aparicio Belmonte's characters voices an extreme opinion on the cultural differences between Spain and Italy: 'los italianos son los europeos menos parecidos a los españoles, pese al tópico: son tramposos y prefieren la estética a la política. Nosotros somos gilipollas y preferimos la política a la estética: por eso nos gusta matarnos cada setenta años' (Aparicio Belmonte, 2006: 203). While within the context of the novel this is an intentionally glib statement, it holds an element of truth which we can recognise in Els Joglars' recent work, where what is being said appears to be given more weight than its artistic packaging.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of this aesthetic laxness is the company's lack of skill when editing their performances.⁷⁷ Since settling into the current method and company of actors, Els Joglars have effectively applied a form of picaresque satirical structure to their works, where a sequence of events propels the story forwards, and the recent *La cena* is no exception. At over two hours duration, the initial satire of a progressive ecological ministry is replaced by a repetitive central plotline involving an eco-friendly master chef who advocates cannibalism as the only sustainable form of cooking. Once the gag has been established with the introduction of this character (played by Ramón Fontserè), the same routine seems merely to repeat itself until the culminating scene where the team of cooks prepare a state banquet. Ultimately, if the standard is represented by whatever is going through Boadella's mind, then there would appear to be few editing strategies in place within the company to avoid repetition in performance. This is just one example of how the aesthetic side of the company's work is often set to one side in order to incorporate as much side commentary as desired. If we consider two of the company's most resonant aesthetic achievements, *Mary d'Ous* and *La torna*, as Cornago Bernal there were marked shifts away from these theatrical models immediately afterwards in rejection of the formats these productions proposed (see Part I, Chapter I.ii. pg. 84). As already discussed, the Els Joglars rehearsal method combines an absolute clarity of aim with a meticulous process borne of years of development and trial and error. However, a necessary

⁷⁷ This is not a new problem for the company. When *Daaalí* toured to London in the BITE:01 season in the Barbican Theatre, 12-16 September (it is the only Els Joglars show to have visited the UK), the national press almost unanimously coincided it was too long: 'The main problem with this production is that it lacks direction [...] there are times when the two hours seem endless' (Halliburton, 2001: 1206); 'This two-hour show would seriously benefit from being sliced in half' (Costa, 2001: 1206); 'Some repetitive and overlong moments' (Chappell, 2001: 1207).

side effect of this process is the subjugation of form to content. Ultimately, we return to the figure of Boadella, who in creating this working system has generated notable results, but in being unable or unwilling to adapt it in recent years, the company may have entered a phase of repetition and diminishing returns in performance, all eclipsed by the notoriety of its artistic director.

Meanwhile, In its 2008/2009 season, the Abadía produced its usual number of three productions with uneven results: Ana Zamora's company Nao d'amores produced the *Auto de los Reyes Magos* (2008) from 3 December to 11 January; Àlex Rigola directed Richard Dresser's *Días mejores* (2009) from 22 January to 8 March; and resident director Carlos Aladro directed Shakespeare's *Medida por medida* (2009) which ran from 11 March to 26 April. The season responds to the theatre's usual reliance on regular collaborators, with two directors formed at the Abadía having started as assistant directors, Ana Zamora and Carlos Aladro. The third director, Àlex Rigola, artistic director of Barcelona's Teatre Lliure, is another regular collaborator, *Días mejores* being his third production with the Abadía company. Perhaps the most notable absence is that of José Luis Gómez, who maintains his apparent distance from the theatre, delegating its daily running to artistic assistant Ronald Brouwer. The result is a conservative programming of known quantities (Aladro, Rigola and Zamora) with some hits and misses and little sense of a season with a clear cohesive identity. Harking back to its debut performance of *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte* (1995), a botafumeiro hung once more from the dome of the Teatro de la Abadía with Ana Zamora's Christmas production of the *Auto de los Reyes Magos* which brought the rituals of holy theatre and of religious rite back to the venue. It overlapped with Rigola's *Días*

mejores which could not have been more different, pursuing Rigola's anarchic style with significant reliance on the language of the television sitcom, down to opening theme and projected titles: *El País'* critic Marcos Ordóñez concluded ironically that 'Rigola ha tenido días mejores' (Ordoñez, 2009).

Ana Zamora's *Auto de los Reyes Magos* did respond to the tenets the Abadía was founded on. It re-imagined the church space of the Abadía, reducing the audience capacity to a smaller purpose built wooden seating area, which occupied the stage beneath the dome. Drawn into this proximity with the actors, who performed in a thrust space with the audience on three sides, the company produced a highly ritualised performance alternating simple folk dances, medieval music and the text in its original old Spanish and Latin. This was the epitome of the Holy Theatre, connecting emotionally with an audience in spite of the apparent obstacle of the text, which nevertheless communicated without hindrance thanks to the vivid performances of Jorge Basanta, Francisco Rojas, and Alejandro Sigüenza, with Nati Vera singing. The production felt almost like a return to the outset of the venue, by focusing on the communicative potential of the actors in order to connect emotionally and intellectually with an audience: 'Un acto de comunión fundamentado en la concepción cíclica de la vida y de la existencia, en esa necesidad de destruir un mundo viejo y agotado para que vuelva a nacer, pero con energías renovadas' (Zamora, 2008). This description of the ideology behind the play ought perhaps to be applied to the Abadía itself. Nevertheless, the venue is currently far from the clear artistic purpose and theatrical identity it had, with

Gómez absent for extended periods of time and concerned with other activities,⁷⁸ but remotely approving every choice of text and company member; and Carlos Aladro the only resident director in the theatre unable or unwilling to take up the reins of the theatre and lead it or even progressing its methodology. Even his production of *Medida por medida* seemed to lack identity as a production, with no clear thematic thrust applied to the play and instead demonstrating a reliance on applying visual elements clearly inspired by and derived from Àlex Rigola and Dan Jemmett amongst others. *ABC* critic Juan Ignacio García Garzón coincides in describing the production as ‘un montaje confuso, monótono y distante, de estética contemporánea escarchada de farsa, y que no parece decidirse a auscultar el corazón profundo del texto’ (García Garzón, 2009). There is a sense that the company has settled into a comfortable routine which can give rise to a relaxation in a process that needs to be alive and energetic rather than a mothballed immovable object that must be maintained intact at all costs. This rigidity then becomes an obstacle which gives rise to the cold and distant productions that García Garzón notes.

Fortunately, for the first time since 2000, the Abadía ran its training course for actors between April 2007 and June 2008. Tutors included Carlos Aladro (Michael Chekhov), Ernesto Arias (speaking on stage – the word), Carlota Ferrer and Mar Navarro (stage movement), Vicente Fuentes (voice), Jesús Barranco, Daniel Moreno and Luis Moreno (ensemble work). Only Vicente Fuentes remains from the team of original tutors, the rest being students of past courses who have

⁷⁸ Gómez recently directed Juan Mayorga’s *La paz perpetua* (2008) for the Centro Dramático Nacional, opening on 24 April 2008, although this was nominally produced in collaboration with the Abadía. He also had a major role in Pedro Almodóvar’s latest film, *Los abrazos rotos* (2009).

collaborated regularly with the Abadía. Yet again, José Luis Gómez seems strangely absent from the proceedings. Perhaps, however, the return of an ethos of training in order to establish a permanent company coupled with productions such as *Auto de los Reyes Magos* will bring about a much needed renovation in the hierarchy of a venue that has seen its audiences dwindle to regularly half-full houses. In dominating the venue from afar, José Luis Gómez is also generating a paradox, where his leadership and ideology formed and cemented its reputation and yet now his actions are resulting in a self-destructive atrophy of the artistic output of the Abadía. The collective ethos he instilled with the training course is dissipating in a climate where no-one is working together because no-one is quite sure where the theatre is headed. The Abadía and Els Joglars are both suffering from a paradox which is expressing itself as a problem of collective engagement.

The conclusion to this study, however, cannot and must not depend on the companies latter productions because they are not representative of their complete output and past achievements. Furthermore, in spite of any reservations that may arise from the close examination of the rehearsal processes that we have observed, their impact on the Spanish theatre scene cannot be understated. Within the theatrical profession Els Joglars are still one of the most respected companies in Spain; and the actors the Abadía has produced are some of the most highly regarded and sought after by the major theatres of Spain. Both companies have consciously adapted the thought and process of international theatre professionals of the stature of Grotowski, Artaud, Chekhov or Brook and generated new rehearsal methodologies for contemporary Spain.

However, they have not simply imitated existing models, but rather devised a method that suited the needs and realities of their companies. In creating their own systems, they have imprinted a particular style and identity onto their finished products. By defining their theatrical language and identity as a company by means of developing a process that would enable them to produce works unique to the environments they were founded in, Boadella and Gómez have demonstrated the critical need for attention to detail within the crafting of a piece of theatre. Furthermore, they have written a new chapter in Spanish theatre by leading the way in generating a truly involving production, affirming that it is not enough to focus on the final production, or developing an abstract piece of writing before considering what physical shape it might take: the construction of the process requires just as much attention and definition. Of course they are not the first practitioners to realise this, but their desire to develop their work has led them to contribute to the theatrical landscape in a more consistent way than any one of their individual shows might have achieved. Indeed, regardless of the merits of their productions, I would argue that Boadella and Gómez's main contributions, as the principal figures in both companies, are as craftsmen of process, and in developing a methodology they have created tools and structures for the creation of work that has sought to further understand how and why theatre is made in Spain.

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