

**THE CHALLENGE OF THE  
CONTEMPORARY THEATRE DIRECTOR  
BRINGING *KING LEAR* TO STAGE**

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## Introduction

- Objectives

This PhD aims to analyse the challenges that a contemporary theatre director faces when working on Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear*. This work belongs to the field of performing arts, but it also contributes to the field of literary studies. I will embark on a journey that looks at the process that happens from the text into the performance. My investigation navigates the work of contemporary theatre directors in order to understand their vision of the play and to explore how they solve some of the problems that the text creates. I will observe the creative resources that these directors use as well as their success or failure at making this classic relevant for a modern audience.

My urge to look at the directors' work on *King Lear* comes from my passion to find how a classic can propel an imaginative engagement with the spectators. I am inspired to discover how to help the audience get the text's energy with the same strength than the Elizabethan audience did. It also excites me to examine how to transfer the symbols, the concepts and the imagery of the play into the stage. Can theatre directors bring a classic such as *King Lear* to stage and make it work for a modern audience? What is the formula to transfer it from one time-frame to another one? What is revealed and what is lost in the productions of *King Lear* done by contemporary theatre directors? What do they manage to illuminate about the play? What are the main challenges that directors face when directing *King Lear* and how are they solved?

- State of the Art and Methodology

There have been many studies both on *King Lear* and on the work of theatre directors. Nevertheless, these investigations have been either completely theoretical or they have come entirely from a practice-based perspective. Polish critic and theoretician Jan Kott has widely written about *King Lear*, which he recognises that is a masterpiece:

King Lear is compared to Bach's Mass in B Minor, to Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, to Wagner's Parsifal, Michelangelo's Last Judgment, or Dante's Purgatory and Inferno. But at the same time, *King Lear* gives one the impression of a high mountain that everyone admires, yet no one particularly wishes to climb (130).

The work of Kott studies Shakespeare's major plays, offering a thrilling critical point of view that has deeply influenced many theatrical productions. Kott started a new phase in Shakespearean criticism revealing in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* a new side of Shakespeare as well as a new way of looking at his work. Jack Trotter explains in *A Study Guide of King Lear: With Classic and Contemporary Criticism* that "however personal and exaggerated Kott's reading of *King Lear* may have been, his perspective spread rapidly in the academia where a somewhat domesticated variation on Kott's approach to the play remains the conventional paradigm" (334).

Trotter conveys how Kott's research connected *King Lear* and Beckett's *Endgame*; and how this investigation had a deep influence in many theatre directors' approaches to the play, including Peter Brook's. Kott was the first one to spread the idea that *King Lear* spoke more clearly to our age than to his historical period (334-335). In *Beginning Shakespeare* Hopkins says that "Kott began by abruptly severing the play

from its historical moorings and considering it instead under the timeless rubrics of art” (31).

Since 1948, there has also been an annual yearbook of Shakespeare studies and productions. Each year, this yearbook publishes essays that focus on different themes or plays by Shakespeare, offering reviews of the year's critical studies and major British performances of Shakespeare's plays. Their titles vary, for example, there are essays and articles on “Shakespeare in the Modern World”, “Shakespeare then til Now”, “Shakespearian Production”, “The Comedies”, “Shakespeare and Sexuality” or “Shakespeare's Language”, to name a few. The title of the yearbook number 55 was called *King Lear and the Afterlife*, and it was dedicated to *King Lear*. This yearbook, covered issues such as the connection of Lear and old age or the meaning of headwear in the play to convey status.

British author and journalist Jonathan Croall comes from an acting background; maybe this is one of the reasons why his investigation gets the closest to my aim of connecting theory with practice. In *Performing King Lear*, he offers a broad perspective of the performances that have been staged during the last century. The uniqueness of his study relies on the fact that his material draws from many interviews with distinguished actors and directors. He offers an excellent insight into the creative work that they carry on and discusses many of their ideas. Despite this, he does not go to the rehearsal room as a director to dig into the play and research the plays through his practical work; he still stays only in the academic sphere.

Katie Mitchell in *The Director's Craft* offers an invaluable insight into the world of the director and she addresses the many issues that appear in the directing process, from the preparation that happens before going to rehearsals, to the main issues that

show up in the rehearsal room or during the performances. Her book is essential reading for any director, as it offers a step by step journey into text analysis; it shares how she identifies facts in the play, how Mitchell does her investigation and how to deepen our character understanding. Nevertheless, her study is not geared towards one specific play but instead, she makes the connection between the directing process and different moments of the many plays that she has worked on. Her book is an invaluable resource but her approach comes exclusively from a practice-based perspective.

The novelty of my investigation relies on the methodology that I am going to use to approach it. This allows me to bring to my research the rigour of the academia and the vitality of the practical work. A play can be seen and studied as a piece of literature, separate from the actions used to perform it. Nevertheless, there is something lost about theatre when it is observed only from that perspective. Performance Studies is a field that allows me to get a deeper understanding of the play by seeing it from both an academic and practical perspective. Although it is a difficult field to describe, John McKenzie offers a definition of it on the online page of the department at Brown University “Performance Studies is an interdisciplinary field of research that draws from the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. It focuses on the pervasiveness of performance as a central element of social and cultural life” (Mackenzie).

Performance Studies allows the performance to be looked at as an object of study and as a lens to examine other elements, such as the text. As it is expressed in “Performativity, Performance Studies and Digital Cultures”: Performance Studies draws on methods and theories of a wide range of disciplines and they manage to reflect the circumstances under which the performance takes place (9–18).



The dynamism of Performance Studies is essential to look at *King Lear* in connection to the contemporary society where we live, and where more and more people are children of the new technologies. My innovative approach will allow me to move between the academic and the practice fields, and to nurture each other. My practical work on the play was informed by my research, and at the same time, this practical work helped me to acquire a unique and valuable understanding of it.

Exploring the potential of the text from a practice-based perspective was an essential part of my investigation. It allowed me to go back to the academia and to feed it with the discoveries I did in the rehearsal room. My practice-based research illuminated specific relations between the performance and the text while it also gave me a critical rethinking of the play's journey from the page into the performance.

I have a strong background working as a theatre director for more than thirteen years. In the UK, I worked at established theatres such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court, the Young Vic, and The Royal Opera House, as well as for fringe venues such as Southwark Playhouse, the Battersea Arts Centre or The Space. This has given me the knowledge and skills to direct a play and to be able to investigate a play from within. I have been carrying this practice-based research since I finished doing my Masters degree at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, in London. Since then, I have done international residencies at the Lincoln Center in New York, at the Odin Teatret in Denmark and at L'école de Lecoq in Paris, among others. These residencies enhanced and developed my theatre practice skills and expanded my practice-based vocabulary and repertoire. I also attended regular workshops in London on the topic of directing with companies such as Complicite, Told by an Idiot or Frantic Assembly. These workshops introduced me to the theoretical frameworks that informed

my directing and developed my understanding of the theories and practice of Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud, among others. In London, I became part of the Stonecrabs young directors' scheme. I also succeeded in winning the Jerwood assistant director scheme, and as a consequence, the Young Vic theatre mentored me.

At the Young Vic, I became part of the directors' network and I regularly attended research and development processes with established UK directors such as Katie Mitchell, Matthew Dunster, Bijan Sheibani, Carrie Cracknell, Natalie Abrahami, Joe Hill Gibbins, Ria Parry and many others. This opportunity allowed me to see firsthand how these directors adapted classics, how they targeted the problems that the text created and how they responded to the needs and desires of our contemporary audience. My communication with them was essential for my research. What makes this investigation unique is precisely that it does not only rely on books but that it also has original material taken from my interviews with established international directors who have completely different ways of approaching theatre directing. Spending time in these directors' rehearsal rooms and attending their workshops introduced me to different approaches to exploring both the text and the performance.

- Overview of the Chapters

In the first chapter, I focus on Cultural Studies. As John Storey says, Cultural Studies is a field of studies that looks at how culture is constructed, organised and also how it evolves during the years as well as changes over time. It also analyses what people do with the cultural products and messages they get as well as looks at how audiences negotiate the meaning they receive (25-30). Much of the research done on

literary studies or drama analysis uses Cultural Studies as a methodology. In this chapter, I explore how Cultural Studies is suitable to establish a general framework, but I also highlight how it falls too short as a methodology for the innovative analysis that I want to carry in a field such as performing arts. Using Cultural Studies would mean looking at the surface of theatre without plunging into the core of the subject analysed. It becomes clear by the end of the chapter that a more specific method is needed to explore the essence of *King Lear*.

In the second chapter, I present the chosen methodology and I explain why the use of Performance Studies is essential for the type of research that I want to develop. Performance Studies appeared as a response to the radically changing intellectual and artistic circumstances of the late twentieth century. It currently helps to observe the object of analysis from a different perspective. As a consequence, it has become a discipline designed to answer the need to deal with the changing circumstances of the global. Its uniqueness is that it is more interactive, hypertextual, virtual, and fluid than most scholarly disciplines (Schechner 25). In this second chapter, I explain the birth of this field, its connections to rituals, to performance and performativity as well as how it helps scholars to analyse theatre.

Chapter three offers an outline of all the different directing methods and styles used during the years. The uniqueness of the voice of many contemporary directors comes from some common influences that are studied and analysed. In this chapter, I go on a journey through directors' general influences, covering styles such as the naturalism of Stanislavski, the Brechtian style, Artaud's theatre of cruelty and the birth of physical theatre, among others. The chapter also

plunges into the craft of directing, entering the world of the director from the moment the creative idea is born to the rehearsal room. It manages to cover all the different elements that help the director create a unique approach to the play. This chapter is essential to understand the job of the director and the tools that a theatre director can use to convey meaning on stage.

The fourth chapter portrays my exploration of the work that different directors have done when approaching *King Lear* while also showing the discoveries of my practice-based research working on the play as a theatre director. I first study the play from an academic perspective. Later on, I dive into the essence of Shakespeare's tragedy to discover its heart, and I follow this by looking at the work of directors who aimed to make fresh productions of the play.

Across the chapter, I find the evidence offered by the dramatic text, I explore different forms of theatrical imprint and I look at the ways directors have reflected the significance of the writing in their productions. I analyse their work, observing if they showed the energy engineered through the text in their productions and, in the end, I highlight in which ways they managed to succeed or fail in their cutting edge approaches to the play. In the second part of this chapter, I establish a dialogue between my academic research and my practice-based investigation on the play as a theatre director following the physical process of creating a performance of *King Lear*.

- Main Arguments

The impulse to direct classics is consistent and quantifiable. During the twentieth century, we have seen across contemporary theatres constant productions of Shakespeare's plays. In the twentieth-century, directing Shakespeare has become extremely popular. Nevertheless, the complexity involved in directing Shakespeare not only shows the skills of the director but it also poses many questions. Why is Shakespeare still relevant nowadays? Why do directors still want to stage Shakespeare's plays when they have a vast array of pieces of new writing? Why is Shakespeare a constant source of inspiration for directors, actors, choreographers and writers?

According to Kiernan Ryan in *Shakespeare's Universality*, what sets Shakespeare apart, and the reason why he is within the canon is that, independently from the historical circumstances, his plays are compositions that represent essential human types and they allow us to adopt a human perspective. There is a timeless quality in his drama; this quality projects its essence into the future, which makes it easy to be transposed to different times and places (Ryan 12).

Shakespeare's plays show a human condition that anyone who reads, performs or studies them can empathise with, whatever their nationality, race, age, class or gender. Shakespeare's works have lived after his death because he managed to be attuned to his historical moment, but he also managed not to be constrained within it (Ryan 60). This universal and humanistic texture is achieved thanks to the perspective from which he invites the reader or the audience to watch his plays.

Certainly, Shakespeare's plays were written to be staged. Nevertheless, at that time, many people were illiterate, and what spectators enjoyed the most about going to

the theatre to watch plays was the possibility to listen to beautifully elaborated words. Our world has changed a lot since then and, as a consequence, this excitement of listening to a theatre play sounds out of date in our highly visual culture. On the other hand, imagery and visual excitement have become more and more relevant.

Contemporary theatre is a visual, aural, embodied and scenic experience that relies upon both narration and action. Theatre needs to be looked at both from the surface of the aesthetic and the depths of the content. Some productions might generate an impact because of their design and ground-breaking concept but they might lack conceptual depth in other productions the opposite happens. Nowadays, there is always a tension between form and content. Some years ago, when studying Shakespeare, text and performance were treated as separate entities. The text has quite often been privileged over the performance. Nevertheless, now a field such as Performance Studies allows us to look at theatre plays from a different perspective that generates a dialogue between text and performance, between content and form.

*King Lear* has long been considered the most troubling and problematic of Shakespeare's tragedies (Bickley 140). Why do I choose this play instead of any of his other plays? Why is *King Lear* relevant now? The answer is that the themes that appear in *King Lear* are both universal and timeless, and are open to a multitude of interpretations. Nevertheless, it is not only the themes that attracted me. The play contains both a domestic drama and a huge tragedy, operating in a local and on a global level at the same time. In no other play by Shakespeare can we see the projection of the inner tragedy into the universal soul. On top of this, *King Lear* is set on an undefined historical period and location. These facts have allowed the play to be explored in different contexts and through many perspectives by contemporary directors. Regarding

its structure, it has the attraction of a fairy story that manages to be both profound and simple while echoing quite deep within our souls, as it exposes the human folly and corruption (Mack 97).

Richard Proudfoot explains in *King Lear and the Afterlife: An Annual Survey*, that Shakespeare confronts through this tragedy many social, political and philosophical issues, which continue to concern contemporary writers and directors. The constant stage productions and adaptations of Shakespeare's play become exciting areas of investigation, as they offer a historical commentary on the text from which they derive. Because of this, in my investigation, I also plunge into the world of adaptations, confronting many purists. *King Lear* is itself a very radical variation on an old narrative. Shakespeare used this narrative, which was four hundred years old, as the basis for his play (Proudfoot 145-147).

The fact that *King Lear* was itself a variation breaks the rigidity that stops many directors from playing with a classic and, therefore, becomes in itself another thrilling reason to choose the play. *King Lear* is a story that translates well to many different historical settings, and this fact generates a unique opportunity for a director to explore it in different cultural contexts. For example, it can easily be seen in feudal Japan in Kurosawa's adaptation *Ran*, in a Celtic kingdom or in our contemporary society.

*King Lear* is the only one of Shakespeare's major tragedies that has a subplot. The story of Gloucester and his two sons has parallels with that of Lear and his three daughters. At the same time, it contains significant differences from it. The opening scene gives weight to Cordelia's rebellion against her father, while the next scene is dominated by Edmund's rebellion against his father. The two clans provide a contrast of two families and their relationships between parents and children (Bradley 302).

The play contains an emotional intensity that anticipates the twentieth-century Theatre of the Absurd. *King Lear* is not only one of Shakespeare's most pre-eminent work, but it is also a tragedy that shows the modern age in extraordinary depth. Twentieth-century directors and critics have come to recognize the deeper resonances of the play by looking at relationships in our lives. The society where we live in is one that is more and more fragmented, where the disintegration of families has already become the norm. *King Lear* has the breakdown of relationships at its core. The subject matter of family is very attractive to contemporary audiences because it deals greatly with the fissures that happen in many contemporary families. *King Lear* is a familiar story with a solid backbone that resonates with our society more than ever (Kott 162).

This play is also Shakespeare's most profound exploration of the nature of human's suffering. It combines a mythical quality with themes that have become more accessible and urgent than ever because they mirror the beliefs and values of our contemporary society. Its interrogation of authority finds an echo in our current social context. The way the eldest characters are cast out of their society and reduced to poverty has also a strong resonance with the current anxiety of many old people (Croall 1-5).

The modern validity of this text is also evident in its cruelty. I feel this play's cruelty is so extreme that could be taken from any of today's headlines. Lear's exposure to suffering does not seem outrageous for our contemporary society. Many historical events make us connect with such violence: concentration camps, bombs, anti-personnel mines, terrorism... Our society is increasingly violent. We are regularly exposed to constant horrors, many of which come to our homes through our television, for



example, refugees' crises, wars, murders, abuse of power or gang rape. The cruelty of the play connects with our times and has a clear transfer to the world we know.

As Sue Dunderdale expressed in her directing course, *King Lear* is a very chameleonic play whose thematic preoccupations vary from one stage to another, depending upon the interpretation of the director. In general, plays have a double life, one in the mind of the reader, and one on stage, when it is acted. The page is not the stage. Reading a play and seeing it on stage can be a completely different experience because when watching a play in a theatre you are seeing it through the eye of a specific director. Each director illustrates a different perspective from which we can look at the world of the play. *King Lear* has been directed both on stage and on screen. There have been many performances, adaptations and interpretations of *King Lear*, the play has also been constantly reworked and radically edited to suit the values of its contemporary society. Some directors have seen *King Lear* as a redemptive morality tale, while others have approached it as a family tragedy. *King Lear* provokes many conflicting interpretations, and the huge range of possibilities that the text offers is the best testimony of the play's vitality (Dunderdale).

An exciting element about this play for any director is that it is disconnected from chronicled time; we do not know much of Lear's antecedents. We do not find information in any part of the play about how Lear came to the throne, about how long he has reigned, about the previous existence or not of a queen, or about her death. There is not a past set in the text and all the references to the past are quite vague. The previous circumstances of the characters are part of a past in blank. As a consequence, the present of the play is what matters. Directors find in *King Lear* free reign to explore

the missing historical past and to find the contemporary resonance of the text by setting it in a relevant place (Trott).

The play offers numerous and stimulating opportunities. The universality of its themes allows for multiple interpretations, which makes this play a very exciting source for any director. As a result of the unknown past, different possibilities for staging the play and creating the character of Lear emerge. Many productions have given prominence to creating the character of an old man who goes mad, others emphasize the authority of Lear, imposing majesty in the production and looking at him as an authoritarian monarch who causes the violence that destroys him. Other directors might give more prominence to the paternal figure within the character, emphasizing the human attributes in him. Lear can also be seen as an everyman in the modern world, a victim of society or a person trapped in a hostile environment (Bratton 41).

Andrew Visnevski conveyed in his directing course at RADA, how there have been many productions of *King Lear*. In each of these productions, the director has selected one specific way of looking at the play, emphasizing one meaning at the expense of others. Each artistic decision will have a domino effect on the rest of the play. For example, if the stress is placed on Lear as a king, then the play may be seen as a set of actions that he does, he may be seen as an active subject that provokes all the events that happen. On the other side, if the focus is on Lear as an old man, then the play may be seen as the consequence of the actions that others do to him, and then, he is a passive subject. The whole approach, blocking, design and artistic choices for the set, costumes, music and other elements will vary completely if the director makes one decision or the other one (Visnevski).

Kott explains in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* how discoveries and developments in the technical aspects of theatre have also allowed directors to find flashy resources to stage scenes that otherwise become problematic:

Scene changes effected by means of new stage machinery, without bringing the curtain down, made it possible suddenly, almost miraculously, to transform a Gothic castle into a mountainous region, or a blood-red sunset into a stormy night. Lightning and thunder, rain and wind, seemed like the real thing. It was easy for the romantic imagination to find its favourite landscape: gloomy castles, hovels, deserted spots, mysterious and awe-inspiring places, and towering rock gleaming white in the moonlight (100 – 133).

Many contemporary theatre directors have done fresh and revolutionary productions of *King Lear*. Some of these performances have used a modern design, which has helped contemporary audiences to connect to the play's themes while others have made other bold decisions, such as cutting lines. The Royal Shakespeare Company did a questionnaire to young audiences after watching Tim Crouch's production of *King Lear* in order to see their honest response to the play. One of the children who went to see it said: "I know that it is a play, but some families are like that. I see some families out there and, well, loads of dads do not do what they are supposed to". Another child who watched the performance mentioned: "The father should know who loves him because obviously, they are his daughters so he should know without asking" (Royal Shakespeare Company). This feedback from young audiences gathered by the RSC is proof both of the shared, human understanding that is contained in Shakespeare's play

and the consequence of making an exciting staging of the *King Lear* that connects the text with the contemporary spectators.

As head of theatre programming at Oval House, in London, Ben Evans expressed in an interview that many theatre buildings programme classic plays as these tend to draw big audiences. They get thrilled about the well-known titles, and in general, they are more likely to buy their tickets. Although some of these audiences, in the end, might or might not like what they see, they know what to expect from the text. Many contemporary theatre directors who bring Shakespeare's plays on stage are not traditional with their staging of it. They are playful, experimental and inquisitive. They leave behind both the inhibition that a play that has a classic status generates and the weight of performance history. These directors dare to look at the play with bravery.

Many of these productions edit material from the original text in the hope of making the play more resonant for new audiences. They forget the nostalgia that comes with the play in order to explore its current possibilities. These directors are not scared to look at the text just like a new play and to take liberties with it. Nevertheless, there is an ongoing lively debate about the reinvention of classics because the vision of some directors infuriates those who are on the conservatism side of the theatre.

Sidney Lee said in *Shakespeare and the Modern Stage* how:

In the most influential circles of the theatrical profession, it has become commonplace to assert that Shakespearean drama cannot be successfully produced, cannot be rendered tolerable to any substantial section of the play going public without a plethora of scenic spectacle and gorgeous costume, much of which the student regards as superfluous and inappropriate. (2)

One of the aspects that I address in my research is the exploration of this debate: Is there such a thing as the ‘true’ Shakespeare? Can Shakespeare’s plays be transplanted from one age to another one? How far can a director update the text before it becomes something completely different? Do directors stage them because they continue to engage us, or just to keep “the piece of museum” alive?

Through an exploration of *King Lear* and the work of many established theatre directors, this investigation plunges into the complexities of directing this classic, and it examines how a director conveys nowadays the meaning encapsulated in the text. It looks both at the text and the performance finding the journey between them, which includes taking into account the audience’s needs and desire, the realities of our contemporary society and the difference between fidelity and reproduction. My goal is to step both into the academia and the rehearsal room to offer answers to the following question: What are the main challenges that contemporary theatre directors face when directing *King Lear*?

## **1. Cultural Studies**

### **1.1. Definition**

According to John Storey in *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, Cultural Studies is a field of studies that looks at how culture is constructed, organised and also how it evolves during the years as well as changes over time. It also analyses what people do with the cultural products and messages they get as well as looks at how audiences negotiate the meaning they receive (25-30).

This movement has a strong willingness to understand the uses of culture, and it offers a critical perspective at the different forms available of cultural domination. The focus of these studies is the analysis of all cultural products, for example those that are part of the mass culture (products known as popular), aiming to find the relationship between power and culture. They help us understand the mechanisms of cultural power and the ways to bring resistance to them (Storey 25-30).

Cultural Studies are becoming global along with fields such as trade, finance or communication and as a consequence, they are taught in most academic systems. Thus, teachers and students become agents for connections between globally dispersed events. As it is a global phenomenon, Cultural Studies cannot be studied in isolation from politics and social movements because at their core they offer a reaction to various power structures. They assimilate the subtleties transmitted in each of the networks, and the ideologies set around the structures give a frame through which to look and give sense to the experience (Nelson 52-65).

They started as an investigation in the academic world dedicated to revealing all the forms of power hidden under the cultural forms. Today it has become a discipline of studies, and sometimes it is even quite technical, taking distance from people's lives and realities because instead of listening to people's lives and doing a practical ground study it tends to stay in an academic sphere far away from the practicalities of the cultural world ( Nelson 65-70).

According to Sardar, Cultural Studies need to be aware of history, politics, diversity, race, gender, and also the realities of our modern society. Structuralism recognizes that relationships are essential to understand culture and its society (50-55). In order to understand the systems that operate in our world, we need to pay attention to the work of the French Philosopher Louis Althusser, who introduced structuralism in *Reading Capital*. As James Curran argues, this movement saw that society is made up of many different structures and it recognises that relationships within these structures are crucial to understanding society. Structuralists offer an account of society as an assemblage of relatively autonomous institutions, the education system being the most important of them, which in turn produce forms of knowledge that are organised to perpetuate the capitalist relations of production (20-25).

All structures in society have their influence. Religion, education, and family are as essential structures as economic conditions; every one of them is a joint in a robust network. Cultural Studies entail looking at all these structures, and understanding them in order to see their effect in cultural expressions. The relationships between all the structures operate at different levels (economic, political and ideological). Nevertheless, society does not have a complex structure just because everything interacts with

everything; there is something else. There is a configuration of power and domination (Curran 56-58).

Michel Foucault in *Society Must Be Defended* mentions that many Marxists see the state as an entity, there is an idea of togetherness, of unity (85). Nevertheless, the nation's formation is contradictory; it has lots of forces and actions; it does not have only one personality; there are lots of social contradictions. These forces determine what we do as a group. The task of the state is to join all the discourses and social customs. Some of these customs are not connected to politics but with family life, gender relationships or economic issues. The state puts together all these customs and transforms them into norm executing domination over certain groups (84-88).

Citizens become familiar with whatever surrounds them (people, places, images, and ideologies). These relations are present in all social formations. They are created in the superstructures; this means in the family, church or school. In these places, they will reproduce them, and then the media and political parties will help to transmit them to society (Curran 3-7).

To deconstruct how ideas are created we need to start by looking at signs. Ferdinand de Saussure in *Course in General Linguistics* broke communication into a sign, signified and signifier. The signifier is the word, which is arbitrary, the signified is the concept that the word brings to mind, which varies depending on the person, and the sign is the combination of both. Signs become blocks of language and meaning. Meaning changes over time depending on what occurs in these social structures. As an example, we can look at the development of the word "black". We can observe that this word has completely changed over the years. It has connotations which take us to a very long chain of meanings (50).



The term has been linked to adjectives such as "lazy or bad" because of its connection with slavery. The characteristics of social relations in that particular period articulated a distinction between black and white that has profoundly influenced future generations. Another chain of meaning was the one created by religion, where light is connected to god and darkness to the evil, associating black with sin, as explained by Saussure (75).

W.B. Gallie observed that the ideas from the past have significant weight. The semantics were built in specific moments of history, and they are continuously reactivated through time. It is important then to look at the semantics and check the chain of values hidden behind words. We can see, for example, the trace of religion in what we consider "modern ideas". These ideas enter in conflict if we look at them in depth with the trace of religion they carry, but normally we drag them as part of a chain without even noticing it. The conflict with an ideological chain begins to be exposed when people try to change it or substitute it for another term and also when they try to give it other associations, changing it for example from having a negative connotation to the positive one. For instance, going back again to the word "black" we can observe it has been part of race discourses, but it has also been part of the legacy of soul music and reggae, liberation and freedom. The word by itself does not have a specific connotation, but the social movements around it create a conflict around a specific ideological programme connected to the word (Gallie 121–122).

As Piaget mentions structuralism helps understand language through uncovering deep structures that exist behind each word (83-87). It takes an object, decomposes it and composes it again, attempting to describe it by looking at the structures that created

it. It is a movement that has been used in many fields, such as sociology, literary criticism, economics, architecture or cultural studies (85).

John Storey explains in *What Is Cultural Studies* that Cultural Studies examine culture as a text that can be deconstructed. Researchers expose how people have been responsible for creating culture; thus, culture is a product that has been built to organise our society. Within this product, we can find different ingredients, such as race, politics, gender or religion. Each of these elements can be studied and deconstructed; each part is a category that can be separated and analysed in order to understand what culture is (1-14).

The sign is a key concept in culture. A sign refers to something else, it is recognisable by most people, and the association we make to it becomes charged with meaning. As we have seen, language is a cultural phenomenon that generates meaning in a specific way, thanks to a series of connections where we look at differences and similarities. Everything in our world is charged with meaning and becomes a sign that we can read, from the way we dress, to what we eat. Our daily choices communicate who we are and they become signs of our identity (Saussure 11).

Those scholars who followed Saussure developed a study of these signs called Semiotics. Semiotics looks at how signs are organised by codes, which follow some strict rules. This way, those who understand the codes can get the meaning behind signs. A structure made of signs and codes is a text, and text can only be fully appreciated by looking at its context, at the relationships created around it and the historical circumstances that give shape to it. There is a process in order to give meaning to the signs; this process helps to find a specific form for abstract concepts, creating a unity, a coherent discourse. A discourse is a group of ideas that contain texts and texts have

signs and codes. A discourse represents a structure of knowledge and power, so by analysing it, we can access those structures and place the discourse in time and space, connecting it with the historical, political and social circumstances (Sardar 11-15).

Similarly to life the stage also has a deep structure that directors need to decode. They need to understand the vocabulary of theatre. There are many elements in the structure of theatre (text, acting, design...). A play can be analysed looking for example at the visual structures, which are linked to the dramatic space (gestures, facial expressions, props...), or the acoustic signs (such as dialog, sound of music...). If we plunge into the visual sphere, for instance, there is a specific layer of elements to observe and analyse. All the visual signs on stage (the costumes, makeup...), connect to a particular scene. By examining the signification of the individual elements we find a structure. As a consequence, we can understand that the performance is a system of signs. Its uniqueness is that all the meanings of the textual signs are transposed into gestures created by the actors. It can also be observed that in theatre anything can be represented by anything else. For instance, a dramatic space can be represented by a painting or an object. A theatrical sign can also change, for example an actor can be represented by a person or by a light, or by his voice...shifting from being visual to acoustic. Theatrical signs are very dynamic and they can be both linguistic and extra linguistic (Deak 83-94). “Nevertheless, the relationship between signifier and the signified does not constitute a full linguistic model; a third element, that of the relationship of a sign to the reality it evokes, completes the relationship” (Deak 91)

## 1.2. Cultural Studies and Power

In *Introducing Cultural Studies* Ziauddin Sardar states that Cultural Studies look at the different fields and their relationship with power, illuminating how this connection gives shape to each of the cultural expressions (1-6). It is challenging to study culture as a separate entity from everything around it. It cannot be isolated and dissected in order to understand its pieces. There is a successful approach to study the culture that looks at it as part of a bigger picture, as a piece of a whole that includes politics, social relationships or history. This way of looking at it aims to understand the complexity engrained in the term "culture" by analysing the context around it (Sardar 1-6).

Anthropologist E.B Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* explains that culture is not only an object of study but also a place where we can find specific actions and criticism because it evaluates our societies understanding their structures, and it also tries to change some of the basis for them. The ideas of race, gender, queer and identity are important elements of cultural studies because these ideas have been socially constructed (45).

### 1.2.1. Diversity

Life is diverse, and diversity is a reality in our world. Diversity comprises a group of various identities. Culture lives in a constant connection with life; it is a mirror for it, so it needs to reflect the diversity contained in our world. Racism is the belief that many separate sub-species create human species. However, almost all scientists agree that there is no such thing as race. Race is a product of prejudice. The issue with race today

is that it is tightly connected to that of ethnicity, although they seem easy to distinguish (Sardar 122).

Simon During explains in *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* that race is a biological notion whereas ethnicity is a cultural one. Yet ethnicity is in fact very much connected to blood. People of the same ethnicity share connections to a specific territory, to certain traditions and to their roots. Ethnic identity is, in fact, the part of the social construction that divides groups into different communities. Literature, theatre, art, cinema, TV, Music, and photography have reflected ethnic diversity (160-168).

As During elaborates when we scrutinise this cultural work, we need to plunge into how identities are created. The concept of identity is linked to domination and power because power relationships construct meaning. "The other", the person that does not belong to the group defines what the identity of the group is. That identity is born because of the comparison with an external element. The reality of diversity makes us look deeper and address the topic and the definition of identity. Identities are composed of a complex set of relations. It involves the creation of differences (concepts of otherness such as race) within a society. These differences provide a basis, but they are not natural or fixed; as a consequence, identities are in constant change and construction (160-168).

When we look at multiculturalism and how culture portrays diversity we can recognise that many times it tends to fall into outward manifestations, making these manifestations something exotic. It looks at other cultures checking what makes them different instead of looking at them in their own terms. As theatre director Melina Theocharidou explained in a personal interview, for any theatre director taking diversity

into account these days is crucial. Directors explore different universes and relationships, as diversity is part of our world it becomes essential to take it into account (Theocharidou)

*Guardian* Theatre Critic Lyn Gardner says in her article “Theatre Is Coming to Terms with its Diversity Problem” that “Every production on our stages should draw from the widest possible pool of talent and reflect the rich diversity of that talent.... The arts are waking up to the need for greater diversity in terms of race, disability, gender and socio-economic background”.

When analysing at a theatre play having diversity in mind, several questions come to mind: How does the staging reflect the multicultural world where we are living? How does the director address the changes in society responding to this diversity?

### 1.2.2. Gender

Society influences not only our identity but also the way we perceive things such as our bodies and our self-image. Femininity and masculinity are socially constructed labels. There is a reinforcement of the separation male-female in the concepts that are transmitted, and this fact has to do with power relations (Sardar 138-140).

Simon During mentions in his chapter “Sexuality and Gender” that during the 60s feminism started explaining the importance of equality in employment, education and at home; but feminism also looked at other important issues such as the portrayal of women in the media (169-171). Research on magazines has been critical in gender

Cultural Studies because for feminist authors, everything that was published there had to do with oppression. If we examine publicity, it is evident that the main selling products are self- image, love stories and fashion. We perceive how the articles connected to our bodies invites us to buy them in order to better ourselves. In the love stories that are shared in their pages, women tend to be in a submissive position and if we examine fashion we can see that it plays a huge part in magazines making women generate a need to buy certain items to be beautiful and successful. Sex also fills magazines to attract and manipulate readers.

Judith Williamson in *Decoding Advertisements* shows how publicity is the main force generating the concept of femininity, and how this one reflects a stereotype of the woman as objectified. Publicity keeps placing women as inferior or subordinated while becoming an expression of the feminism as consumerism (35).

Janice Winship across her book *Inside Women's Magazines* looks at the signs and meanings behind what we see and reveals the domesticity in women's magazines. There is a need to ask ourselves how we construct these images and stereotypes in the first place. Winship makes society look at what is beyond the text and analyse the offices where the designs were created. These are the places where the interests between editors, directors, designers, and clients clash. Moreover, they are the places where they build these gender ideas (60-65).

Over the years, linguists interested in the field of gender discovered that one of the most potent ways we communicate gender identity is by our use of language. If we pay attention to the language we use, we can quantify differences in the way men and women speak in particular situations. Most of these patterns are learnt. The linguistic

choices, together with other associations and behaviours, are patterns we learn through interaction with others, and by the information we consume (During 169-171).

Disney films are, for instance, essential tools to represent gender norms and expectations. During many years the characters portrayed were narrow versions of femininity. Nevertheless, we have seen a change in the development of these characters to respond to less traditional concepts of gender. How Disney characters look, act and talk have a significant impact on their audience and create the basis for the construction of new identities.

The concept of gender has changed through time because culture mirrors society and society changes over the years. This change has been evident in many cultural expressions. When investigating a theatre production, several questions arise regarding how gender is portrayed. For example, questions about how the role is designed in the text and what the choices of the director are in order to serve the text but also to respond to contemporary gender values. Natasha Tripney reflects about this topic in her article “Women are the Powerbrokers” in the *Guardian*:

Many of Shakespeare’s plays explore the power dynamics between men and women. The Taming of the Shrew is a play of its time, of course, but also the one most concerned with how misogyny manifests itself.... It lends itself to experimentation. Phyllida Lloyd cast Kathryn Hunter and Janet McTeer as Katherine and Petruchio in her all-female take at Shakespeare’s Globe (Tripney).

In this respect Mark Lawson in another article called “What a Piece of Work Is a (Wo) man” published by the *Guardian* states that “The two questions that arise in all



cross-dressed Shakespeare are whether the gender of the character changes along with that of the actor, and to what extent the text requires rewriting”.

As he develops, there has been a reaction against the masculinity of the classical acting canon by having female artists claiming male roles. The issue of gender and how to treat it in theatre has become more and more relevant and it is a question that directors need to consider when generating the concept of a play. At the same time this artistic decision requires from the spectators to assimilate women playing male roles as male and women playing male roles as female, which requires a tuning-in period.

Lawson explains that there have been many theatre productions trying cross gender ideas. Nevertheless, this requires some tweaks in the text. For example, Kathryn Hunter employed a framing device to justify the switch in *King Lear*. The play was presented as a reverie of an old resident of a nursing home who falls into a final sleep after seeing *King Lear* on TV. This structure helped to justify the switch. But once that the concept has been created in the mind of the director; the biggest question is if the text will serve sere that idea. Cross-casting is challenging in Shakespeare due to the iambic pentameters and as a consequence the rhythm required in the piece. On the other side, gender-reversal works for Shakespeare as the plays were written for single-sex companies. The side effect is that it asks the director to think carefully about all the relationship dynamics affected by this gender change.

### 1.2.3. Queer

Desire and sexuality have also been part of the area of control in our societies, as are race, gender or class. Queer is a term used for anything that is not conventional, and

it became the word used to refer to gay people. The queer theory analyses the codes in order to expose them and substitute them with a new way of looking at life that celebrates social differences. This theory also reveals how homosexuals have had a significant contribution to the development of western culture offering a long list of gay writers and thinkers (Penn 328-330).

Looking back at the theatre of the 50s, it can be observed that every play had to be approved by the lord chamberlain before it could be performed in public. Simon During expresses how between 1968 and 1975 being homosexual was seen as a psychological disorder, then the gay community was built (136-140). The 80s experienced the Aids crisis and this was reflected on stage in theatre plays that dealt with this topic. AIDS started to be the trigger for some reactions against gays and tolerance decreased. (183-190). In the 1970s the Gay Sweatshop appeared in Britain, while the Gay Theatre Alliance did the same in America. The 1990s saw the birth of Tony Kushner's play *Angels In America* that looked at sex, politics, religion and race (140-146).

Michael Billington conveys in *Q Is For Queer Theatre* how theatre always reflects social conditions. During the last 20 years, writers such as Bryony Lavery, Phyllis Nagy, Kevin Elyot, Alexi Kaye Campbell, Samuel Adamson, and Mark Ravenhill have all dealt explicitly with gay themes. Billington says that the gay and lesbian theatre movement has changed radically since the oppressive days of the 1950s, but he wonders if writers and directors can rise to the challenge generated by contemporary issues.

### 1.3. Culture and Society

#### 1.3.1. Television

Ziauddin Sardar describes in *Introducing Cultural Studies* how the media has its codes that need to be studied and understood to see the hidden manipulation contained in it. We receive a vast amount of information through the media, which send us consistent messages. Some codes feed other codes, and the world ends up filled with a vast number of codes that we are not always aware of, but that our subconscious processes daily (154-158).

As Sardar explains since the television emerged, it showed a high capacity to shape culture. In the beginning, television was still relatively tame. Nevertheless, it has become evident its capacity to shape people's thoughts and generate cultural waves amongst the population. Different nations have different television industries, and they also differ in how television is funded (i.e. by the government, advertising, or fees). However, despite the differences, all the countries share that they use television as a passive mechanism of power. This power is executed both through the content and the means of distribution of the content. It enters people's private space (as there is at least one TV set per home), takes them away from the "real" world, and it monopolises their focus. Television delivers the attention of those who watch it to drink marketers, toy manufacturers, film industries and so on. It drives people towards consumption and towards specific social apparatus upon which the market is built (154-160).

As Sardar elaborates, each media (i.e. TV, film, commercials) has its specific language and way of communicating. There is a never-ending amount of texts and

discourses we receive through it. Cultural studies examine what their codes hide, and check if media portray or not different points of view (154-160).

This power that the media has triggers a series of questions: What values does television encourage? What role models does it create? What society is it trying to construct? Who is behind this manipulation?

In the forties, Paul Lazarsfeld used different types of analysis to convey that those who watch television end up integrated into the domain of a capitalist society. Television reinforces the norms of capitalism and reduces its audience's capacities to critique society by providing a distraction. "Television transitioned from being a modern mass culture to becoming a medium of psychological control" (Sardar 138). The main problem is that television makes people believe they have control over their private lives and it creates a false concept of satisfaction that allows capitalism to maintain itself. Television is a valuable tool at creating the idea of a dream world; it builds a fantasy of freedom that seduces those who watch it, and it blurs the lines between fantasy and reality generating subconscious needs in their consumers (Sardar 138-140).

Television can be studied in relation to other cultural institutions, such as the education system, as a medium to communicate information and knowledge. As Simon During expresses in *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction*, television is interconnected with everyday life, not only does it reproduce reality but it also creates reality (109).

Fiona Sturges explains in her *Guardian* article titled "How TV Became a Cultural Force" that television is doing what novels did 100 years ago and has an immense

power. Theatre cannot overlook this, as it needs to reflect our society. A style of theatre that has seen an increase in its use due to the influence of TV is verbatim theatre. As Gary Nunn (Nunn 2015) mentions in *Verbatim Theatre Is Like Good Reality TV on Stage* most of the innovation nowadays is coming from verbatim theatre, where the script is formed using the recorded delivery technique where faithfulness to what is said is total. As he explains, “The genre arose out of staging court cases. Documentary theatre can be traced back to Hochhuth’s *The Representative* which was influenced by the televised trial of Adolf Eichmann” (Nunn 2015). This is one tip of the iceberg in how much television influences and affects theatre and why television needs to be taken into account as a key element in our culture when approaching theatre studies.

### 1.3.2. Cinema

Douglas M. Kellner in *Media and Cultural Studies* explains how everyone shares a cultural web. This web consists of a shared space where a series of ideas are transmitted from generation to generation, and it establishes the guidelines for actions and interactions. It is a socially constructed concept that includes who we are in life, our beliefs, norms, rules, language, and symbols (40-48).

As expressed by Rosalind Brunt in *Engaging with the Popular: Audiences for Mass Culture and What to Say about Them*, cinema is part of our shared culture, and it is one of the arms to make the cultural apparatus work. The film industry has changed a lot during the years, and these changes are due to transformations in society. The film industry listens to the audience’s needs to get their focus, to reflect who the spectators are and want, and to catch their attention. It is a mirror of the shifts in society. Social

change has to do with variations and alterations in the behaviour, patterns and structure of people. Some of these changes are controllable, but others are not, they can be gradual but other times they are rapid. Changes at one level often create changes at many other levels having an impact on all aspects of society and culture (67-77).

As James Curran expresses in *Cultural Studies and Communications* two key factors trigger a change in society, one is strain, and the other is stress. The strain has to do with internal pressures for change, such as conflicts in the belief system, religion or goals. On the other side, stress has to do with external factors that generate that pressure for change — for instance, the natural environment, population dynamics, technology or historical events. If we look at the 60s, all facets all life experienced a drastic change and American cinema adapted to reflect these changes. The appearance of the hippie movement, the emergence of the concept of free love, the success of rock and roll and the use of drugs started to be mirrored in cinema, and by the 70 restrictions on language and sex content in films had loosened up. At that time emerging experimental filmmakers started to appear to take more risks in their films. Hollywood started to be linked to the work of directors such as Robert Altman, which was a style completely different from the one of the classical period. In the 70s, there was a mixture of films like *Taxi Driver* with blockbusters, such as *Jaws*, aimed at the masses (101-117).

Culture is not static; it evolves and changes over time. It is an ongoing process as we can continuously create and transmit culture. Life is constantly evolving, and there is constant feedback between society and culture. In society, we are constant witnesses of new inventions, new products, new interests and new realities in our daily lives. Together with the appearance of new items that revolutionise our lives there are shifts in collective behaviour. Steve Neale, in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* argues

that the use of elements such as the zoom or slow motion has destroyed the dramatic unit and the other ingredients which are part of the classical *miss-en-scene*. Conventions have been replaced by a realism that is committed with the traditional dramatic values and the demands of the narrative (118-119).

We can observe in the films how the social context influences cinema as well as how ideas leak into the narrative. There have been many changes in the communication systems in the last years that have been crucial for a better life. In the 20th century, electronic media had an enormous impact on the cultural identity, changing the way we interact and what we include in our daily lives (Curran 83-87).

There has been an emergence of items, such as laptops, iPods, robots, or other electronic gadgets. We communicate and interact through social media, using what's up, skype, face time and other of the kind. A postmodern identity has born differing from the values of "modernity" that existed previously. In cinema, this is reflected in the birth of postmodernism. The recycling of genres, the pastiche, the nostalgia and the connection between author films and commercial films are part of postmodern cinema.

Curran points out that *Blade Runner* by Ridley Scott is a clear example of a postmodern film because of many reasons. The role of images plays an essential part to share the construction of identity, it unites a series of diverse people and architectural styles in an urban context alienated by publicity, it questions identity, trying to distinguish between human and non-human and it explores the themes of time and space around a compressed experience of time (110-112).

Cultural manifestations such as cinema help us discover where we are as a society. They are expressions of our current identity and the core of the culture that we are sharing as a society.

### 1.3.3. Theatre

Theatre is a big word, deriving from the Greek word “to see”, “to view”; and in that broad sense it is true that “all the world is a stage and all the men and women merely players”. Yet that play is humanity itself, not the mirror or art held up to humanity. ...the theatre is a place the man contrives so that we may see ourselves in all kind of imagined experiences, and so derive emotional and intellectual experiences which will give us pleasure and deepen our understanding of ourselves and society (Nichols179)

Theatre functions in society as a mirror where people see their reflection. Spectators see characters living through crises and conflicts, and through them the audiences extend their lives and gain more knowledge of life. Theatre has a social function, which is to unite people in a shared experience. The audience is part of the play in the same way that the artistic team is. Theatre and society are linked and interconnected. In fact, theatre can be anything that its society wants it to be (Nichols 179-184).



There are many types of theatre and it has increasingly become a powerful influence in recent times. As drama imitates life it comes a time when life also imitates drama, this has made theatre have a powerful effect in society. In order to hold the audience's attention it needs to be entertaining; not only does comedy entertain drama also entertains as it helps to purge emotions by allowing emotions such as fear or sadness to flow. Nevertheless, the purpose of theatre goes beyond entertaining or amusing. It is an educative force that makes people unconsciously connect what is on stage with their problems and to draw conclusions. Every moment on stage contains a potential lesson. The essence of drama is conflict and the basic conflicts within us are the ones between good and evil. People's exposure to theatre helps spectators to solve problems in their lives by making them understand them on stage. Society shapes its theatre as much as theatre shapes its society (Nichols 179-184).

#### **1.4. What Is Culture?**

Theatre is part of culture, so a clear definition of what culture is needs to be considered. According to the Oxford English Dictionary these are the definitions of culture: "The customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organisation of a particular country or group". "Art, music, literature, etc...thought of as a group". "The beliefs and attitudes about something that people in a particular group or organisation share" ("Culture).

Anthropologists state that culture is a result of social behaviour. According to the anthropologist E.B. Tylor in his book *Primitive Cultures*, culture is a complex term that

includes knowledge, arts, and beliefs as well as other habits that men have acquired as members of a social group (1-6). Sardar contrasts this with cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead's opinion, as her beliefs show that as a group we learn a specific culture, we inherit certain way to look at the world. Nevertheless, some other theorists think it is just a mental concept or even an abstract concept (Sardar 1-4)

Raymond Williams includes the family structure, the structure of the social organisations and the way people communicate as part of the term culture (Sardar 2). On the other side, Clifford Geertz in one of his lectures says that culture is all the stories that we tell ourselves (Sardar 3). All these definitions can make us ponder that culture can be anything or nearly anything.

Culture involves material, intellectual and spiritual elements, and the study of culture involves not privileging one over the other. Culture is "The very material of our daily lives, the bricks and mortar of our most common pace understandings" (Willis 185). Culture is understood as a way of life (including ideas, attitudes, languages, institutions and structures of power) and it includes a whole range of cultural practices. "It is the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society" (Willis 26).

Raymond Williams wrote in *Key-words* that culture invokes both the symbolic and material domains. If we look at the content in a culture, we can see there are some material objects that we can enjoy (pieces of art, theatre plays or films); they are artefacts. However, there is also a non- material content, which is invisible. This invisible content has to do with the values that we have, the rules we share, the norms that we observe and the language that we use. As Williams says values are shared judgements of what is desirable or not desirable. They have to do with what is

considered right or wrong within a society. They express the essential parts of a culture, and all members of that society intrinsically assume them. Because people in different societies or within the same one have different values (i.e. class values, gender values, money values) conflict arises between them. Beliefs are another example of a non-material component of culture; they have to do with traditions, religion and a spiritual side of us. Beliefs are created in different ways (through the school system, communicated by parents or friends, transmitted by the atmosphere that is around us and the experiences we have). Beliefs play a pivotal role to establish our values (29).

Another element of this non-material part of the culture is norms. Norms are rules of behaviour shared by members of society that become engrained in our value system. In these norms we can find general laws, what we consider acceptable and not acceptable as well as taboos. Values, beliefs and norms are transmitted through language. Language becomes part of how people learn behaviour, as it is an essential ingredient in the way we socialise. Language is made up of symbols, and symbols convey meaning and ideas (Sardar 30).

There are different types of language. There is verbal and non-verbal language. Verbal language includes spoken and written language whereas non-verbal language includes gestures, facial expressions and body postures. Language is a critical element of culture not only because it transmits information but also because it influences the way we perceive things and the way we think. People who speak a specific language make interpretations of the world based on that language. As a result, the use of language is crucial in our interpretation of reality. Language is closely connected to culture and learning more languages expands our ability to understand and interact with other cultures.

Culture is not a thing or a system: It is a set of transactions out of which events (such as films, poems or plays) are produced to be experienced. Cultural studies discover in culture an attempt to grasp all the changes society goes through: changes in the values, the beliefs, the norms, in language and in how each of the cultural manifestations transmits that. Cultural objects are produced by a social force field, and offer opportunities for both identification and pleasure (Bennet 17).

Culture is not static; it changes constantly. When studying culture, we realise that there is an emergence of different cultural movements through time that reflect the main characteristics of each social period. These movements can be seen in all the different cultural expressions, such as painting, cinema, theatre or music (Halpern 235-249).

We may take a look at two artistic movements, modernism and post-modernism, to understand how they reflected the essence of their societies. The word “modern” was first used to differentiate a Christian present from a pagan past, years later the same word was used to distinguish present from past in general. However, in the 18th century with the French Illustration, a new concept of modern was born. It was considered that those who were seen as modern were more advanced, refined and had a better grasp of the art than the others. Modern life has a constant need for transforming production. Capitalism dictates to change regularly to look for something better, faster...etc. As a consequence, technological innovation is constant, but innovation tends to break the unity of the pre-existent relationships. The artists emerge to reflect their knowledge about the new situation, the new values, and forms. Through movements such as futurism, cubism, constructivism artists tried to create new languages to express the complexity of a world in transformation because the forms of art they had did not

represent the modern world anymore. Modernity connects with topics such as progress, reason, and engineering. All the culture created during the period of the modernism was seen as revolutionary, but with the years they became part of the classical canon. What was new became old. For example, many buildings collapsed because of several mistakes in their structures consequence of modern architecture which included standard methods to prefabricate buildings, those have not taken essential elements in consideration and have followed models (Jameson 17-52).

During the years the word modern had itself lived the progress, and a new concept was born: Post-modernism. Post-modernism indicated the limits of modernity because of the promises of the modern worlds were not of any use. The technological improvements created a crisis by generating a rapid change in a speed that went beyond our capacity to adapt to it. Post-modernism, as described by David Morley in *Cultural Studies and Communications*, is a structure of cultural logic that appears because of a change in the social and economic structures. There has been a massive change in our post-modern societies which has created cultural changes (50-65).

The word post-modern can only be defined concerning what modern is. Urbanisation, industrialisation, and mechanisation are vital transformational points. The industrial look of a city is not there anymore as there is more and more life in the outskirts, industrialisation and mechanisation can be physically seen in the new gadgets that appear to take over manual jobs and in the appearance for example of items such as the laptop. Post-modernism can be described as the 3-minute culture, with short attention span, where politicians do not speak to us through discourses but with catchy sentences of thirty seconds (Morley 70-78).

We are so used to commercials, promotions or pop videos that films and theatre play seem too long. It is a culture of browsing the different TV channels instead of watching a full episode. It is also a culture of multitasking, where we are asked to do several things at the same time, and it seems impossible to work focused on one task for an extended period. It is a culture that feeds people who cannot or do not want to pause. It is a constant flux of movement that produces amnesia because as we do not focus, we do not remember everything. Each thing is mixed in a multitude of images and feelings. Commercials are the top piece of our age because they respond to the three-minute culture. They are continuously updated to keep the excitement, they are short, and aim to make an impact (Morley 80-88).

Nevertheless, everything is more of the same all the time; there is a repetition of what we see. If we look at most of the cities in the United Kingdom and we go to the city centre, they seem quite similar. Any time there is something new it is copied everywhere else. It is a world where nothing is permanent and where we throw away things too fast only to become nostalgic about it later on. Baudrillard said in *The Consumer Society* that we are seduced by images, nevertheless behind those images there is nothing. All articles become symbols for something else in a society where people prefer the copy to the original. We are living in a world that has a vast amount of information and less and less meaning (150).

Cultural studies look at the forms and practices that constitute the contemporary life. What becomes essential when looking at a cultural expression, for example theatre, is to see how this cultural manifestation responds to the challenges of its society.

## 1.5. Schools of Cultural Studies

### 1.5.1. The Origin

The Second World War had just ended in Great Britain, and education was pushed as one of the ways to reconstruct the country after the war. Nevertheless, the class system was still operating after the war in a society that was starting to change. Cultural studies emerged at the centre of contemporary cultural studies founded at the University of Birmingham in 1964. In 1972, a series of papers were published to define what cultural studies were and to draw attention towards them. The work of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, and Stuart Hall set up the spine for these studies. During the 1950s these scholars started asking themselves about the power of mass communications, about how canonical cultural touchstones were created and they investigated the criteria to choose certain books over others to teach children at schools. They questioned how society decides what pieces of culture become part of the classical canon (Sardar 30-37).

Sardar comments how all the founders shared a working-class background; they all worked in education, and they were concerned about the class system in England and how it affected the society and culture. They also shared the fact that they wanted to join forces against the culture for the elite. They all became fascinated with how people received and decoded culture, so they planted a seed to start asking ourselves what culture is telling us, how it can help ourselves to find our identities and how we give our lives meaning (37-45).

### 1.5.2. The Founders and Key Figures

- Stuart Hall

Stuart Hall was born in Jamaica, and in 1951 was awarded a scholarship to study in Oxford. After his studies, he decided to stay in the UK but never lost his Jamaican roots. During the 60s and 70s, he worked at the centre of contemporary cultural studies in Birmingham and in the 80s he started working at the Open University.

He is considered the father of the cultural studies, and his work is still a considerable influence with his hope of changing the world. His most significant contribution was to help people understand the idea of “the difference” and, to create a new sense of citizenship by embracing the complexity of society. He articulates the differences within society to create equality and to build new ways of co-living. He envisioned cultural studies as a space to understand reality and to take action (Bogues 177-193).

- Richard Hoggart

Richard Hoggart began his career working at the University of Hull; when he was teaching at the University of Birmingham, he founded the centre for the contemporary cultural studies. His book *The Uses of Literacy* gave shape to the constructions of the cultural studies. He examined popular entertainment within the framework of the family, community, social practices and language patterns. He applied the tools of the so-called “high culture” to analyse the social practices of working-class



communities. He stated that the point of studying culture is to reveal how structures of society interact with the lived experiences of individuals (19).

Cultural texts are media artefacts (television, theatre, films, books, radio). The issue is not so much what people do with texts but the relationship between complex cultural texts and people's lives. One cannot understand cultural changes and their impact without placing those changes in the context of everyday lives. In Hoggart's words:

Only art recreates life in all its dimensions...so that a particular choice is bound up with space, people and habits. Only here do we at the same time see ourselves existentially and vulnerable; and also as creatures who can move outside the time-bound texture of daily experience (249).

In his book, Hoggart discussed the difference between classes. His commitment was to capture the working class life experience and its struggle for legitimacy. Because he believed that elite power emerged from legitimacy to "high culture", he wanted to elevate the status of working-class culture. According to him, the aristocrats expressed their power by giving value to certain artistic expressions. On the other side, the taste in art of the working classes was not taking into consideration. He privileged the cultural form that emerged from ordinary people and expressed how the working class was trapped between the artistic elite and the media without having access to the arts (60-67).

In *The Uses of Literacy*, he demonstrated how the new cultural forms of the mass media and Americanisation were supplanting the traditional forms of culture of the English working class. Hoggart took a look at the culture that came from the USA (pop music, TV...) which had considerable importance in the UK and studied how mass media were colonising the working class. He expressed that the media increased the familiarity in the audiences. They started becoming familiar with certain products, lifestyles and needs. That is why it is essential to see what people do with the media and how people use TV at home. Mass culture, like commercial products, create a deterioration of past cultural forms displacing what he called “organic culture” and colonising it. He said that only through cultural struggle could political equality emerge. The critique made by Hoggart was similar in many ways to the one of Max Horkheimer, from the Frankfurt School, and the project of Theodor Adorno. Hoggart created a portrait of a suffering working class anaesthetised by the markets and explored the capability of human experience to resist indoctrination. He saw how these people who looked at art as entertainment or escapism, they compartmentalised their lives and art rarely intersected with their experience. Their real life was segregated from entertainment (50-60).

- Raymond Williams

Raymond Williams was a Welsh intellectual who taught at Oxford between 1946 and 1960. His books looked at how culture created on one side some cohesive links within societies and on the other side resistance to other values. He said that there was not a mass, as such; there are ways of looking at the mass and judging it. His research looks at historical process and social changes seeing how culture is intertwined with the

development of the forces within a society. In *Culture and Society* Raymond Williams analysed the history in which culture had been imagined as a bulwark against modern society's commercialisation. He tried to reconnect culture, in the sense of art and literature, with the culture of the ordinary. This moment was crucial in the emergence of British Cultural Studies. Later in his career, Williams 'central theme was the relations between the political, the economic and the cultural areas, as changes in the superstructure are determined by changes in the base (i.e. economy). Williams argued that culture consists of a series of practices that help shape the world. His theory remains based on the assumption that societies are interrelated wholes, practices that make collective meaning. Artistic issues keep a deep connection to social values, so art can only be understood in the context where it has been created (Gallagher 79-89).

- E.P. Thompson

E.P. Thompson changed the way people looked at British history. In his book *The Making of the English Working Class* he tried to show the emergence of the working class insisting that class is a historical phenomenon that cannot be understood as a structure because it is human connections that create a class. In order to understand classes, we have to see them as a social construction that is a result of many processes, which involve the process of the winners but also of the losers. He also insisted on distinguishing between culture made by the working class and for the working class (Currie 633-643).

- Antonio Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci was a political activist; his most relevant idea was hegemony. Hegemony is what keeps society together, a series of agreements vital to establish the democracies in Great Britain and France for example. Values and beliefs are not imposed but negotiated through meetings between sectors and classes. Culture is the place in which we see the conflict to get that hegemony. He developed his concept of hegemony because of the rise of Mussolini. Gramsci was concerned about why working-class Italians would support fascism, a similar puzzle to why 80s Britain working class support Thatcherism. Gramsci argued that the poor partially consented to their oppression because they shared certain cultural dispositions with the rich.

Intellectuals play a crucial part in the ideas of Gramsci. In general, the term "Intellectuals" is connected to a group of people that belong to an elite and who are intelligent, serious and independent but Gramsci said that everyone is an intellectual even if not everybody develops this potential. Cultural forms become either a reproduction of the social norm or a resistance to it (Adamson 20-40).

### 1.5.3. British Cultural Studies

In the late 1950s, people like Richard Hoggart in the *Teaching of Literacy* and Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* were recognising the limitations of analysing canonical texts to address the complexity of modern culture. Towards the end of the 60s in Great Britain labour was becoming stronger, and some theorists started supporting the working class against the dominant class. They examined how classes operate

within society, and they started wondering about the origin of most of the ideologies present in the country at that moment (Steele 222-237).

Nevertheless, there were some controversies. Birmingham and London Schools did not take into account worries that did not concern these two cities or that were marginal. In addition to this, although they started generating studies about working class people, these studies were done by white middle-class men. Not only have they been criticised for this but also because of their focus on local issues and because of putting too much emphasis on the study of class and forget elements such as race or sex.

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies is a school that was born out of different ideas that analysed society more complexly than the School of Frankfurt did previously. In contrast to this school, they took into account more disciplines, such as Marxism, structuralism and post-modernism. It was founded in 1964 in Birmingham by Richard Hoggart, and it was established to provide an institutional structure for a culture much broadly defined than traditional cultural (Steele 222-237).

During the late 70s under the directorship of Stuart Hall, the Birmingham school had its most significant impact, and lots of people joined the centre. There was a step in British cultural studies towards ethnography, the study not of representations (like TV shows or plays) or of institutions but the analysis of how culture is used and understood by individuals and groups. Ethnography takes two primary forms: The first one is a quantitative form, which involves large-scale surveys and statistical analysis. It can also involve interviews with small groups or individuals. The second one is called qualitative, with predominantly textual humanities disciplines such as a social theory or literary criticism.

At first, Cultural Studies ethnography concentrated on how audiences of varying class, gender or ethnicity accepted or rejected new programmes. In the 90s, ethnography involved reporting on fans of particular genres. British Cultural Studies also discovered the importance of seeing culture as a conglomerate of different practices, not just one, and to be aware that the media are the essential instrument for the change in society. The media installs new ideas in those who consume it, and they reactivate old concepts. They become essential at reproducing information. Culture has to do also with how the world is reproduced, so the owners of the media are the owners of the production.

Hall analyses television and he rescues the active role of the audience saying that the audience is not how the School of Frankfurt imagined it because the spectator constructs meaning and has an activity, he is not passive. Meanings are out there, but spectators can accept them or criticise them. There are several ways of receiving a message. The first possibility is the acceptance of the hegemony. The second option is the opposition to hegemony, and lastly, the third option combines elements of opposition and acceptance. The spectator has a critical interpretation of what she is seeing or listening (Baron 71-85).

It is evident that Cultural Studies have a great deal of diversity and originality in the themes they touch. They look at many topics, such as self-image, gender, race, history of sexuality, the behaviour of youngsters at school or how white people react to music such as reggae. During the government of Thatcher, Cultural Studies began to leave the UK and travel to USA, Canada, Australia, India, and France. They took specific characteristics in each country (Baron 71-85).

## 1.6. Methodology

Cultural Studies analyse all types of cultures (i.e. rock, gay, colonial) and all varieties (i.e. art, architecture, literature, theatre or cinema). The area that cultural studies cover is vast. Nick Couldrey in his book *Inside Culture* places method at the heart of cultural studies since it provides the path of reasoning (143).

However, this idea differs from those of many others who think of Cultural Studies as anti- methodological. Stuart Hall said Cultural Studies are not one thing, it is diverse and it encompasses different trajectories. As a consequence, it needs to remain open to the unexpected and unimagined possibilities. Cultural Studies are generally seen as anti-disciplinary, they have been reluctant to become a discipline, which creates an uncomfortable relation to academic disciplines. As they do not have a definite shape, anything can become part of their area of study, and there is also no distinct methodology. The choice of research practices depends upon the questions that we want to ask, and the questions depend on our particular context (Sardar 8-10).

Although there is a history of the development of these studies, the exact methodology used remains ambiguous as they take methods and theories from the different disciplines they cover. The methods used by Cultural Studies drift back from methods of traditional hermeneutic disciplines, including literary criticism, to methods which disavow the rigidity of methodology. Many methods can be used and can provide essential insights: Textual analysis, semiotics, deconstruction, ethnography, interviews, psychoanalysis, content analysis or survey. It moves from looking at political movements to investigating ancient studies and researching on post-colonialism and post-structuralism, jumping from one method to another one depending on the objective that is in place (Sardar, 10-15)

We cannot make sense of any experience without reference to conceptual and theoretical ideas or without applying specific methods. Utilising methods supplies us with principles for generating data and allows us to get to an understanding of how theatre plays are conjured and articulated. Methods supply us with a framework for analysing the theatrical experience and the forms in which it is expressed

Different methodologies used by Cultural Studies, such as text analysis or semiotics, can help us understand a theatre play such as *King Lear*. For instance, by analysing the text and connecting it with semiotics, there is a search to highlight the codes, the terms, the ideologies and discourses in the play. We need to understand what can be said about the story, the characters portrayed, and the symbols embedded in them.

Another method from Cultural Studies that can be useful is the sociological-ethnographical approach, based on interviewing and observation. It relies on interactions and exchanges between the researcher and the research participants. This expanded vision of observation designs and accounts for the impact of the research process on the fieldwork experience and the data it produces.

Other research practices – for example, historical research– may be used to complement the materials produced by text analysis, allowing us to have a cultural mapping of the world of the play.

When investigating a play in connection to the work of the director, it is vital to research the text, the context of the play and the writer as well as the frame of the actual production. We also need to look at the circumstances that helped create the



performance, the structure of the play, the relationships inhabited on stage and the effect it has on the society that is seeing it. Several questions emerge; such as how to dissect these events, and what aesthetics determine the performance. A director interprets the play, first by assimilating it and then by offering a vision. To study the work of a director on a play is crucial to observe the meaning of the signs that the director puts on stage, to see how well the director connects with the subject matter that runs through the play and to pay attention to the construction of world the characters. To get to an understanding of the work that the theatre directors bring to the productions and the texture of the work done by them is essential to look at the core of theatre, to assimilate its rules and to dig into the resources a director has when approaching a play.

Nevertheless, the nature of a field such as performance requires an alternative method of research that investigates the object from the perspective of the process of creation and not about the process of creation. It requires a practice based research. How can we analyse theatre from a field that stays entirely outside of the performing area? Is it possible to get to the essence of theatre if we look at it only from an academic perspective? How can performative elements be part of a research process?

In several email, telephone and face to face interviews that I have personally carried out as part of my field research with international actors, directors and drama professors such as Karen Quigley from the University of York, Ioli Andreadi from the University of Athens and Jens Peters who has worked at the drama department at the University of Exeter and is currently deputy head of theatre at Osnabrück theatre in Germany it became evident to me that theatre is a practical field that cannot be completely understood or analysed only from an academic perspective. The reason for

that, as these experts confirmed, is that staying in the academic sphere would mean looking at the surface of theatre without plunging into the core of the subject analysed.

As explained by these professors and artists nowadays several universities have even started to offer practical PhDs in Drama as they have realised that academic PhDs fall too short to get to the depths of theatre. As a consequence, finding the appropriate methodology to analyse theatre academically becomes a challenge in itself.

Some of the experts that I have had personal communication about the topic of directing theatre, either attending their talks and workshops at “The Young Vic Directors’ network” or assisting them in theatre jobs include: Matthew Dunster (Associate Director Of Shakespeare’s Globe and The Young Vic), Paul Hunter (Artistic Director of Told By an Idiot), John Tiffany (Associate Director at the Royal Court), Elyse Dodgson (International Director at the Royal Court), Oliver Mears ( Artistic Director of the Northern Ireland Opera), Amit Lahav ( Artistic Director of Gecko Theatre), Scott Graham ( Artistic Director of Frantic Assembly), Simon Mcburney ( Artistic Director of Complicite), Rufus Norris ( Artistic Director of the National Theatre in London), Bijan Sheibani ( Associate director of the National Theatre), Jenny Worton (Artistic Associate of The Almeida theatre), Ben Harrison ( Artistic Director of Grid Iron), Sasha Wares ( Associate Director of the Royal Court), Simon Parker ( Playwright), Adam Hemming ( Artistic Director of The Space theatre in London), Chris Smyrnios ( Artistic Director of Southwark Playhouse in London) , Rikki Henri ( Director and Visiting Lecturer at the Central School of Speech and Drama), Natalie Abrahami ( Artistic Director of The Gate Theatre), Lyndsey Turner ( Playwright), Carrie Cracknell ( Artistic Director of The Gate Theatre), Joe Hill Gibbins ( Associate Director of The Young Vic), just to name a few.

My conclusion after both my academic research and my ground research through personal conversations with these artists is that the methodology that Cultural Studies offers falls too short to analyse a field such as theatre directing. Although Cultural Studies offer a suitable general framework it becomes obvious through this research that a more specific method is needed to explore the essence of the theatre work done by directors in the play examined. It is vital to find a method that looks at the practice of doing theatre as an interrogative tool, and allows me to examine firsthand the work done in the rehearsal room and the collaborative practices that lead to finding directorial concepts of the theatre play. This enables us on one side to deal with the challenges that the creative team confronts when staging the production and to live the questions from the inside instead of staying outside of the object of study.

## 2. Performance Studies

### 2.1. Beyond Cultural Studies

Richard Schechner clarifies in his on-line lecture “Performance Studies: An Introduction” (Companion Websites) that Performance Studies go beyond cultural studies because it goes beyond the text. This helps to establish a dialogue between rationality and practicality. Schechner explains that Performance Studies look at behaviour not in isolation but in connection to the people that exhibit them, which means that it studies the text as a sociological phenomenon as well as a method of inquiry that brings a dimension of performance to all human behaviour. The conclusions of Shannon Jackson in *Professing Performance* connect with what Schechner expresses. Jackson looks at the genealogy of Performance Studies and argues that “performance Studies are the integration of theatrical and oral traditions” (9-10), showing that the link between the text and its society is essential in Performance Studies.

In the 1980s and 1990s, university theatre departments began to rethink their missions because teachers of theatre and dance saw their traditional curriculum growing gradually disconnected with the increasingly multicultural and media-driven world of the professional performing arts (Schechner 5-7). Nowadays, Performance Studies has become an established academic field. There are stand-alone Performance Studies departments, for example, at New York University, North-western, Texas A & M, and the University of Sidney and there are many departments that include Performance Studies in their names, such as Brown University’s Theater Arts. It is evident that there is a steadily increasing number of schools that offer Performance Studies courses (Schechner 5).

The programs and possibilities to plunge into the field of Performance Studies are many and each of these programmes offers their unique perspective of what Performance Studies is. For example, the Performance Studies Department of Arizona State University argues that “performance Studies is concerned with communication embedded in aesthetic texts and contexts” (Performance Studies). According to the Department of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies of Brown University, in Rhode Island, “Performance Studies focuses on the multiple modes in which life performance articulates culture, negotiates difference, constructs identity, and transmits collective historical traditions and memories” (Department of Theatre). The Centre for Theatre and Performance at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, highlights the importance of Performance Studies in the world saying that “It deals with the intangibles of our cultural heritage” (Centre for Theatre). The Department of Communication of the University of North Carolina describes how “Performance Studies focuses on performance as a method of textual study, as an aesthetic event, and as a social and rhetorical act” (Performance Studies). The School of the Arts and Media of University of New South Wales, in Australia, says that “Performance Studies engages with both theory and practice combining experimentation and intellectual exploration” (Study Theatre and Performance). The Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies at the University of California at Berkeley emphasizes how “Graduate study in the Performance Studies has undergone a renovation and performance itself has become critical to research across humanities” (Theater, Dance and Performance Studies). The Theater, Dance and Performance Studies Department of the University of Maryland in the USA says that Performance Studies “Allows scholars to use methodologies from fields such as anthropology, ethnomusicology, critical theory, sociology, cultural studies, Critical studies, race and gender” (PhD in Theatre).

In the UK and Ireland Performing Studies programmes include universities such as Birbeck University of London, Brunel University, Kings College, Liverpool Hope University, Queen Mary, Roehampton, Trinity College Dublin, University of Warwick and many others.

As Patricia Ybarra presents in *Contesting Performance: Global Sites of Research*: “performance research has gone global” (1-2). Most students and teachers of Performance Studies are also practising artists and while they expand the limits of their artistic practice through academic research, Performance Studies also stretched the limits of the academic discourse itself (Schechner 12).

## **2.2. What Is Performance Studies?**

Performance Studies was and continues being today an academic experiment. In its core, we can find a resistance towards institutionalization. It came into existence as a response to the radically changing intellectual and artistic circumstances of the late twentieth century and it has become a discipline designed to answer the need to deal with the changing circumstances of the global. Performance Studies is more interactive, hyper-textual, virtual, and fluid than most scholarly disciplines (Schechner 25).

Ronald J. Pelias and James Vanoosting argue that Performance Studies is placed in the field of speech communication but it has clear connections to theatre, ethnography, folklore, popular culture, and contemporary criticism (219-229). According to Schechner, Performance Studies summarise approaches from many different fields, such as performing arts, social sciences, feminist studies, gender studies,

psychoanalysis, semiotics media culture or cultural studies. It looks at the circumstances in which a performance was created and exhibited while it questions the embodiment, action and behaviour of that performance (2).

Ann Pellegrini in an interview conducted by Diana Taylor at the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics expresses that the lineages of Performance Studies are many, for example, speech act theory or live performance. She highlights that the key element in Performance Studies is that it helps us understand how we connect and how do people make meaning together. Although other fields, such as anthropology, question this too, Performance Studies looks at this from a different angle. An example of this is through the exploration of the use of the body as a tool for generating interactions and producing new meanings (“Interview with Ann Pellegrini”).

Patrick Anderson also agrees with Pellegrini and in his interview with Marcial Godoy Anativia at the Hemispheric Institute of Performance arguing that Performance Studies helps us to think about our bodies in new ways, with more awareness. Anderson adds that it opens a new perspective of thinking where everything can become a metaphor for something else (“Interview with Patrick Anderson”). The Performance Studies Department of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, in New York, highlights that Performance Studies looks at performance “as a vehicle for the creation of new meaning and the transmission of cultural values, memory and identity”.

In another one of these series of interviews carried by Diana Taylor at the Hemispheric Institute of Performance American performance theorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett conveys that Performance Studies can be seen as an organising idea to think about anything in our world (cities, space, food, bodies...). It is a field that manages to integrate many different concerns and observations while paying close

attention to the aesthetics of everyday life. What is unique about it is that it allows us to look closely at human behaviour and interaction (“Interview with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett”).

Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett also explains in her report “Performance Studies” written for the Rockefeller Foundation (Performance Studies) that Performance Studies helps interrogate the process, the text, the representation of characters in the text, the narrative accounts and to understand how the staging helps unfold the story. She diagnoses that Performance Studies is a field that does not give answers to historical questions, but instead, it analyses ideologies and events as behaviours that were presented by a particular culture at a specific moment in time creating a frame for a series of attitudes. Each environment in which, for example, a theatre play participates is unique, and it is the interactivity of that play with the context that is important for this field of studies.

To study performance, as an art form that lacks a distinctive medium, requires attending all modalities in play....Performance Studies is better equipped to deal with most of the world’s artistic expression, which has always integrated movement, sound, speech, narrative and objects.

Andre Lepecki was also interviewed by Diana Taylor regarding what Performance Studies is. He explains that Performance Studies can be best defined as a conceptual point of arrival from all the different disciplines; it is a point of convergence. The uniqueness about Performance Studies is that it offers open possibilities because it thinks of modes of analysing artistic practices in ways that are dialogical with the core of these practices. Performance Studies helps to observe the object of analysis from a different perspective. In dance, for example, it takes factors into account such as identity



politics, post-colonial conditions and it informs dance studies to help it step out of its regime (“Interview with Andre Lepecki”).

### **2.3. The Birth of Performance Studies**

Richard Schechner was an avant-garde theatre director and performer theorist who showed a deep interest in performance and social science. In his research into performance he started finding anthropology useful because this field studied people's behaviour. During the 1960s, Schechner met anthropologist Victor Turner, who was also involved in the avant-garde art scene. Both their insights presented their knowledge about their fields of study and at the same time their dialogue blurred the boundaries between art and life. From that encounter between disciplines a dialogue was established between theatre and anthropology and Performance Studies was born.

At their conferences, Turner and Schechner tried to discover if there was a language different from words, a way of communicating through physical movements, sounds, and bodily expressions. They found that the text is not only a written piece but it can also be made out of movement or sound (Schechner 5-25).

As The Student's guide to Performance Studies of Harvard University indicates thanks to this research many scholars started to investigate performances taking into account other types of languages and they developed an interest in the relationships that performances create. They investigated what the performance did, how it interacted with other beings, and how it related to other objects, discovering that performances exist as actions, interactions and relationships. Since then, performance scholars have

been analysing each aspect of a performance to see what it illuminates about the stage and the society where it is presented.

In the chapter “Towards a Poetic Performance” in *Essays on Performance Theory* Schechner explains:

Victor Turner analyzes 'social dramas' using theatrical terminology to describe disharmonic or crises situations. These situations-arguments, combats, rites of passage-are inherently dramatic because participants not only do things, they try to show others what they are doing or have done; actions take on a 'performed-for-an-audience' aspect. ....For both Turner and Goffman, the basic human plot is the same: someone begins to move to a new place in the social order; this move is accomplished through ritual, or blocked in either case a crisis arises because any change in status involves a readjustment of the entire scheme; this readjustment is effected ceremonially-that is, by means of theatre (120-123).

Richard Schechner reveals in his on-line lecture “Performance Studies: An Introduction” (Companion Websites), how his conversations with Turner helped him to understand the roots of performance as well as observe the deep connection and links between performance and society. Victor Turner discovered in the 1960s the presence of a theatrical language in the cultural rituals that he was studying. He found out that all social groups have traditional rituals that they dramatise which help them to communicate certain aspects about their identities and beliefs. Turner realised that there were some similar elements in all of these rituals. For example, they all engaged in some ceremonies that had a theatrical component and these ceremonies helped the participants to manage a crisis or create a new state of affairs. In addition to this, these rites took place in a space that had a different intensity than normal lives; it was a

dramatic space where the intensity was heightened (A Student's Guide to Performance Studies).

As Schechner expresses in *By Means of Performance* cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances (1-5).

In 1965, Richard Schechner publishes his article 'Approaches' in the Tulane Drama Review. This was his first written articulation that performance is a category that includes play, games, sports, performance in everyday life, and ritual. Later on, in 1970, in Paris, British director Peter Brook founded the International Center for Theater Research. In 1980, Schechner co-founded the Department of Performance Studies at NYU, which became the first Performance Studies Department and inspired the creation of many others. From that moment onwards, Performance Studies started to develop and to become part of the academia. Since then it has been widely used as a methodology by scholars.

#### **2.4. The Connection Between Performance and Rituals**

If we look deeply at the core of performance we can see some recognisable ritualistic features that help us understand the essence of performance, and that allows us to reflect upon the requirements needed to analyse a field such as Performance Studies. Yann-Pierre Montelle suggested in *Paleoperformance* that rituals are in fact performances. In her research on Palaeolithic caves' users, she found out that in those caves there was an "undeniable sense of mise-en-scene and a degree of planning which indicates that the cave was a sophisticated place where the "otherness" was explored (2-

4). In *Performance Studies: An Introduction* Schechner conveys that rituals go back to many thousands of years. There is proof of that in many paintings found in caves such as Lascaux or Altamira, which go as far as 40,000 years ago. The art in those caves reflected the memories and desires of a group. These caves were sites for initiations and events that embodied the “as if” (57). This “As if” word is described as a subjunctive world of being under imaginary circumstances (Montelle 15).

Performances consist of ritualized gestures and sounds....a performance may feature highly stylised behaviour such as in kabuki, kathakali, ballet, or the dance dramas of Indigenous Australians. Or it may be congruent to everyday behaviour as in naturalism. Performances may also be improvised- as in jazz or contact improvisation dance (Schechner 52).

Roy A. Rappaport examines the aspects of rituals in *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* and he concludes that rituals have structures that contain sequences which are stylized, and repetitive. What makes a ritual unique is not one specific sequence but the conjunction of all the sequences it contains. On top of that, he conveys that all rituals take place in arranged spaces and times set by diverse circumstances (205-211). We tend to see rituals in religion and we connect them with the sacred or the supernatural. We can indeed find obvious rituals in the world religions and in variations of them, such as shamans or new age religions but secular life also full of rituals. For example, we can see rituals in secular wedding and in everyday life in the greetings or in personal sleeping or eating rituals, just to name a few (Schechner 53).

Richard A. Gould investigates how rituals are an inseparable part of the whole by studying the aborigines in *Yiwara* “Gradually I experienced the central truth: that it is not a thing itself but an inseparable part of a whole that encompasses every aspect of

daily life, every individual and every time. It is nothing else than the theme of existence” (103-104). As Schechner expresses, rituals put collective memories of society into actions. By doing this they help people deal with the challenges that life offers, such as relationships, desires, frustrations changes...while they also give the chance to experience the taboo. This holds a true connection with performance “You may never be Oedipus or Cleopatra but you can perform them in play. Ritual and play lead people into a second reality, separate from ordinary life. This reality is one where people can become other than their daily selves....Thus, ritual and play transform people” (52).

There are many similarities between rituals and performance. Emile Durkheim compared performance and rituals in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious* and stated that rituals employ the same processes as drama and both of them make people forget the real world through the imagination (424-427). Both rituals and performances communicate something and deal with the creation of a special energy connected with a sensory experience. In both of them how it is expressed and where it is expressed matters (Rappaport 175-178).

Emotions and intensity are also elements present both in rituals and performances. Konrad Lorenz asserts in *On Aggression* that the expression of the emotions is an indication of evolutionary development and thus, that rituals are connected to evolution and help cultural progress (54-74). Rituals give us space to plunge into the feelings of a specific group. My experience as a theatre director in plays such as *Hamlyn* by Juan Mayorga presented at the Space theatre in London has showed me that performances do the same: They portray the fears, desires, passions and doubts of a specific society. As a result they make both actors and audiences connect with their

own emotions. In the play I directed the playwright, Mayorga, transformed some true events that happened in Barcelona into a text that made spectators reflect upon social classes, abuse and power. This production triggered many conversations with artists and audience members after each performance and made me realise how performance can push people's emotional buttons and shake their beliefs.

Rituals are not only helpful in order to express feelings but they also root people giving them a sense of community and belonging. This notion becomes clear if we look at modern actions such as the ones that sports fans do nowadays (cheering, stomping, waving...), all of them derive from ancestral rituals. Being part of a team roots them and generates excitement as it does for the members of the group who attend a ritual (54-74).

There are many qualities taken from rituals that we can instantly recognise in our modern society. Rituals contain ordinary actions that have been taken away from their original function; these movements are normally exaggerated and there is some kind of repetition in them. There are normally body parts or artificial items on display, such as horns, tails....and the action is released according to some stimuli (Schechner 65). If we examine performances, we can find all these qualities in them. For example, the text said on stage is not part of a natural conversation but it was taken away from that context to be put on stage. The text that we see on stage has always been simplified and in many cases, it summarises days, months or even years. If in rituals there is a display of horns, tails or body parts in theatre actors provide costumes, uniforms, masks...and the text is released according to some cues.

According to Schechner, rituals help communication because they become redundant; they contain a meta-message (65). Similarly, the performance of a play always conveys a message to its audience.

Catherine Bell explores symbolic actions in public in *Ritual* and she argues that what rituals and performances have in common is a performative dimension: “The ritual-like nature of performative activities appears to lie in the multifaceted sensory experience, in the framing that creates a sense of condensed totality, and in the ability to shape people’s experience of the world...performances seem ritual-like because they model the world” (159-161).

When analysing rituals and performances we can also understand them from similar approaches. The first one is from a structural side: this perspective would allow us to observe what they look and sound like, how they use the space and how they are performed. The second one is the functionality, which helps us understand what it is that the ritual or performance accomplishes for that specific society. The process allows us to connect with the inner dynamics and how they are enacted. Lastly, the aspect of the experience itself helps us to understand what it is like to be in a specific ritual or performance (Schechner 56-57).

Arnold van Gennep studied rituals in *The Rites of Passage* and expressed that any ritual has three phases: The preliminal, the liminal and the post-liminal. “The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another...life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, puberty, marriage, fatherhood.....for every one of these events there are ceremonies” (3). Victor Turner examines in *The Ritual Process* the importance of liminality and expresses how

during the liminal phase the rites of passage occur and many new situations become possible (94-98). Liminal rituals are transformations.

Transformation and transportation occur not only in rituals but also in theatre. Actors train in order to be able to play a character. When they are performing they are not themselves and they perform in a liminal space-time. A limen is a threshold linking one space to another and what happens in a liminal space is always emphasized. As a consequence, an empty space in theatre is liminal because it is full of possibilities (Schechner 67). In *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* Turner clarifies “In liminality, *communitas* tends to characterize relationships between those jointly undergoing ritual transition. The bonds of *communitas* are anti structural....*Communitas* is spontaneous-it is not shaped by norms.....*Communitas* does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms” (274). This feeling of *communitas* allows people to get to an understanding of the existential level and to feel that their problems could be resolved. In *On the Edge of the Bush* Turner links performance and rituals and it is through this connection that we find the value of performances:

The stage drama, when it is meant to do more than entertain is a metacommentary on the major social dramas of its social context (wars, revolutions, scandals...) Not only that, but its message and its rhetoric feedback into the latent processual structure of the social drama and partly accounts for its ready ritualization. Life itself becomes a mirror held up to art (300-301).

Many sources link the origins of performance with rituals. Several anthropologists found reports about primitive cultures performing rituals using dance, music and theatre. Choreographers, such as Martha Graham and modern dance pioneer Ruth St. Denis were influenced by traditional Indian dancing and Balinese ritual dances



had a huge impact on theatre theorist Antonin Artaud (Schechner 83). It is evident that not only there are ritualistic elements in performances but also that specific rituals had led a revolution in the world of the performing arts. With the industrialization, many of the functions and elements of rituals were taken by the arts, as Turner argues in *From Ritual to Theatre* (45-48).

Rituals and performances help people to connect with the collective. Margaret Thompson Drewal shares in *Yoruba Ritual* the importance to have rituals to mark change in each society, there is a need for them to address specific current social conditions (8). The purpose is the most important factor to see if a performance is a ritual or not. If the play's function is to generate a change, then, it is a ritual. But if the performance's purpose is only to give pleasure, to show off or just to be beautiful then it is only entertainment (Schechner 80).

The functions of performance can be summarised as the dynamic tension between efficacy and entertainment....Performance originates in the need to make things happen and to entertain; to get results and to fool around; to show the way things are and to pass the time; to be transformed into another and to enjoy being oneself, to disappear and to show off, to be in trance and to be in control....the tendencies to move in both these directions are present in all performances (Schechner 81).

Zbigniew Osinski argues in "Grotowski Blazes the Trails" that the main difference between a theatre play and a ritual has to do with the place of montage "In the production, the spectators 'minds are the place of montage, in the ritual; the montage takes place in the mind of the doers" (391-392).

It would vary the percentage depending on the production but every performance both entertains and ritualizes. In a play, it is the work of the director to set up the frame where the story is told and to build the nature of that performance. It is also the directors' task to have a vision, a specific perspective from which telling something and to set up a particular vocabulary (which includes decisions in movement, lights, textures...) that will help communicate the heart of the play (Dunderdale).

The importance of rituals for the human being is highlighted by Edward O. Wilson in *Consilience* "If it did not exist in a culture, it would be quickly invented..... it has been everywhere, thousands of times through history. Such inevitability is the mark of instinctual behaviour in any species" (257-258).

## **2.5. The Relationship Between Performance and Playing**

As Don Handelman displays in "Play and Ritual", ritual and play are shadow images of one another in the type of messages that they convey about society. These messages try to solve what happens in people's ordinary reality. If what happens in a ritual, for example, can become a channel of communication with the gods or with mother earth, a play also opens a channel of communication between the audience and the artists to examine questions such as social relationships (190).

Schechner explains the connection between playing and ritual saying that a unique characteristic of players is that they are in a state of flow. As a consequence, even if they are aware of what they are doing they are in a state close to trance. At that moment the player becomes one with the playing. The actor becomes one with the character (97). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi elaborates this idea of flow that connects play

and ritual in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* “Flow is the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter, the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost” (227-228). Playing creates multiple realities and the biggest reward of the act of playing is the state of flow, which is a complete involvement in the activity (Schechner 93). Because of this flow play is, as Johan Huizinga highlights in *Homo Ludens*, a free activity which steps out of the ordinary life (13).

Jane McGonigal explains in *Reality Is Broken* the importance of what people get from playing games. According to him, gamers abandon reality to plunge into their games because they have had enough of reality and want to feel alive and focused. They want to get a thrill that they cannot experience in real life. Games give them pleasure (2-3).

As in games when watching a theatre play the audience members leave their ordinary lives to enter a new world. At the same time, actors when playing a part abandon who they are to experience the circumstances other characters and to the enter the “what if” world, a world where actors work on “what if I were under these circumstances...”

If actors endure in most cases challenging lives, lack of stability and rejections in auditions is because of the pleasure obtained when playing. This connects to the idea of deep play expressed by Clifford Geertz. As he mentions in *The Interpretation of Cultures* deep playing draws a person through any struggle required to be able to express their commitment and values (432-433). The biggest difference between play and games is that games are more structured, there are clear rules, they occur in

designated places and they have outcomes. Play, on the other hand, can happen in unexpected places and sometimes can also be anti-structural. Play allows freedom.

Playing is at the core of performance, but what is exactly play? As Schechner affirms play is very hard to define but what is evident is that everyone plays at one moment or another and that most people enjoy watching other people play (in films, sports, parties...). The ingredient that makes playing so attractive is that it subverts powers (Schechner 89). Playing in theatre breaks boundaries; it releases emotions, it even touches upon taboos. It has its own rules where everything is possible. This is what makes its world highly attractive both for players and for observers. Turner describes play in “Body, Brain and Culture”:

Play can be everywhere and nowhere. Its metamessages are composed of a potpourri of apparently incongruous elements... Yet, although “spinning loose” as it were, the wheel of play reveals to us the possibility of changing our goals, and therefore, the restructuring of what our culture states to be reality (233-234).

If we examine theatre in each country, we will notice that many elements of society leak onto stage. Audiences can recognize, for instance, familiar characters, topics or they can connect with a typical sense of humour from that particular place. Roger Caillois finds in *Man, Play, and Games* that there is a connection between society and the games it plays. These games reveal information about the characteristics and deficiencies of the players. As a consequence, it is through play that we can get to a deeper understanding of society (82-83).

Brian Sutton-Smith explains in *The Ambiguity of Play* that play is also connected to power. He gives the example of a child playing: “The child plays because he doesn’t have power and in the act of playing he is seeking empowerment” (75). Theatre has the potential to reach many people so that they reflect upon what is onstage. It has the power to agitate minds and make people think. Margaret Thompson Drewal reflects upon play in *Yoruba Ritual* saying that playing succeeds in engaging people and drawing them into action (7-8). Performance contains great doses of playing and according to James P. Carse in *Finite and Infinite Games* people who play (inventors, makers, artists, storytellers...) are makers of possibilities” (19).

We can examine playing in connection to performance through an example. We can observe Act 5, scene 2 of Shakespeare’s *Othello* and understand that when this scene is on stage there are several things occurring at the same time: Othello murders Desdemona, two actors play a scene and several spectators watch a theatre play. The actors are communicating, in fact, many messages. They are conveying that everything is a play, so it is not real, but they also need to be believable and communicate the intentions of the character. It is, in fact, that skill that specific skill gets the audience’s applause. If the acting is bad the play doesn’t get to the spectators (Schechner 104).

As Schechner expresses there are many types of playing but they all share the common element of subverting social structures and arrangements. Play and playing are on one side performative and on the other side they become an essential part of what performance is (121).

## 2.6. Performance Studies and Performance

Richard Schechner defines performance in *Performance Theory* as a twice behaved behaviour: “I both am and I am not the role I play. I am Hamlet, I am not Hamlet and I am not not Hamlet. This state of “not-not” is the transitional state that defines what performance is” (30-35). Jill Lane explains in her on-line lecture for the hemispheric institute called “Teach in: What is Performance” that Performance Studies is what we do when we try to make sense of events, actions gestures, and objects. She believes that Performance Studies is not interested in cataloguing forms of performance but in the collapsing boundaries between all the different categories that exist and in the effect of the performance itself (“Interview with Jill Lane”). According to Lane, a performance contains certain qualities that we can clearly identify in order to study it.

The first one of these qualities is repetition. Performances reproduce themselves through time and in that repetition there is precisely a unique quality. The key element in a performance is that special repetition because no action or sequence of actions of the performance may be performed the same way twice. They must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance.

Another essential element of performance is its ephemeral quality. I saw this idea of the here and now characteristic of the performance clearly in the exposition “The Redwood and the Raven” by Trisha Donnelly, which was shown at the Tate Modern in London. It was a black and white picture of a woman in nature. When I went there I saw one picture of this woman, but as part of the exhibition each day a different picture of her dancing was shown to highlight this ephemeral quality of performance. Diana Taylor in her book *Archive and The Repertoire* expresses that all performances are ephemeral acts where people participate in the reproduction of knowledge. She says that

part of what Performance Studies allows us to do is to take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices that are ephemeral per nature as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge (20-26). Peggy Phelan wrote in *The Politics of Performance* that once a performance is saved, recorded or documented it becomes something else. As soon as a performance enters reproduction it lessens the promise of its ontology. As a consequence, performances only live either in the present or in the memory (146).

Instead of thinking about this as the weakness of performance the fact of not being around is its strength. Performance is a fugitive that asks you to go with its essence. Every time we watch a performance, we have a unique encounter that makes us develop and strengthen our concept of performance. Allan Kaprov in *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings* gives an example of an extremely ephemeral performance called “Happening”. In Happenings artists make something new, that does not even remind spectators of any culture seen before. Happenings are not rehearsed because the thought is that rehearsing the production makes it unnatural because it will build the idea of what is supposed to be a good performance. They are performed only once because if they are repeated more they remind people of theatre. Although this form of performance is extremely ephemeral, all performances contain in themselves this ephemeral quality (20-40).

Performances are events that normally have gone through an intense process of rehearsal and then have been presented in a heightened fashion. The work involved in a theatre performance is multi-layered, and any performance is the result of several processes. Nevertheless, even if it has been rehearsed, studied and understood the result is always unpredictable (Schechner 1-10).

While it might be argued that as an art form, performance lacks a distinctive medium, embodied practice and event is a recurring point of reference within performance studies. Presence, liveness, agency, embodiment and event are issues at the heart of our disciplinary subject. (Carroll 78)

As Erika Fischer-Lichte explains in *Theatricality: A Key Concept in Theatre and Cultural Studies*, what is unique about performance is that there is a particular relationship between the signs of different cultural systems and theatrical signs. Theatre involves the doubling up of signs; this occurs because the signs created in theatre reproduce the signs produced by cultural systems. As Erica says, theatricality may be defined as a particular semiotic process in which signs are used as signs of signs (85-118).

Apart from repetition, theatricality and being ephemeral performances have a mobility quality because they are activators. Artists are instigators who understand that any of their creation completes itself with the participation of the spectator because if there is not an audience there is not a performance. According to Augusto Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* theatre is action. “Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself but it is a rehearsal of revolution” (134-135). He sees that the stage is only a representation of reality but he highlights that the spectator is real; it exists outside the scene and, as a consequence, he can take action inspired by what happens on stage.

Another element present in performance is fugitivity. Fred Moten in *Stolen Life* explains that fugitivity is a desire for escape and transgression, a desire for being outside. Performances help people escape their routine, their lives, in order to live other realities (131).



André Lepecki in his on-line lecture for the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw adds another element to analyse the concept of performance: embodiment. He explains that a body that is on stage is not only as a body but it is a conglomeration of space and time. In performance, we need to expand the notion of body, because it becomes an expanded entity that produces and reproduces temporalities. The body becomes much more than what is confined. The artist through the body escapes the person to become something else and it shows that there is a transformative power in performance.

Although a performance contains many qualities, the most important one is Performativity (Schechner 4). The word performance is normally linked to the performing arts (theatre, dance, or music) but any event, action, or behaviour can be studied as a performance. Performance Studies puts this under the microscope because when we take time to analyse it we can shed light on our identities and societies. John Langshaw Austin, a U.S. philosopher and linguist, gave a series of lectures at Harvard in 1962 which later became known as the book *How to Do Things with Words*. In this work he expresses that utterances are used to do something, they contain performative language (i.e. “Bring me my tea!” “I will marry you”, “Come back later”) and performative language is language focused on actions (30-38).

As Lepecki explains in his on-line lecture, J. L. Austin conveys deep notions about the philosophy of language saying that we normally look at statements in relation with their value, seeing if they are true or false but we also have to pay attention to the interaction of language because statements perform actions. For example, the sentence “I declare you husband and wife” has the power to change things. This statement provokes an effect; it transforms the physic schema of the world. Every time I say the word “woman” or “man” I am producing an effect. There is a choreography of words

that conditions behaviour around us. Language is made to produce an effect and many artists have interrogated who is the master that language serves to (20-38).

Erving Goffman wrote *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, where he illustrated how life has a dramatic structure: each of us is an 'actor' who plays different 'parts' in front of an 'audience' composed of colleagues, family and friends. Performance is the main component of our lives because all our behaviours have been socially constructed. There are many processes that can be researched to study the 'performative' component. Goffman establishes that there are performances of everyday life which are not 'acted' or 'put on' because the performer does not know in advance what he is going to do. Nevertheless, the person expresses feelings in a way that is dramatized. As a result, he argued that any event can be studied as a performance (20-45).

Schechner confirms that a performance does not just consist of what happens on stage but it is comprised of other processes. Three phases happen in any performance, the phase before the performance, the one during the performance and the phase after the performance. Before the performance there is training, where students acquire skills, they also attend workshops to specialise in certain subjects, and then the actors rehearse. During the performance, the actors perform the play, and after it, they get out of the character, take off the make up and costume and go home (8-10).

According to Goffman, if we looked at an act of everyday life (i.e. having a shower) as if it were a performance we would check what happened before (i.e. what is our concept of a shower, how many times we have had a shower so far in our lives or if we usually like or not the shower). We would also examine what happens in the shower (the steps we take, what we do first, how we feel there) and then what happens after.

Different people would react differently at the routine of having a shower, and the context and circumstances around having a shower would be different in one society or other (i.e. Africa, Asia or Europe) and in different periods (i.e. 15th century or 16th century). A performance would take all these elements into account. When staging the moment of “Having a shower” a theatre director needs to make several decisions, and many of them involve what happens before, during and after this action (Goffman 50).

Fischer-Lichte describes this element of performativity saying that everything that we do can become a performance. Performance Studies sees all reality as constructed by ‘doings’: This is actions, behaviours and events. Crossing the street, eating, growing up, loving, sneezing or smoking are all actions. We can study any of these actions; we can look in detail at those actions in life, learn about them and then reproduce them on stage: this is the core of Performance Studies (74-76).

## **2.7. Performativity**

### **2.7.1. Why the World Is Not a Stage**

The exposition “The World as a Stage” was brought to the Tate Museum in 2007; here many artists explored the concept of performativity questioning the relationship between theatre and daily life. For example, Mario Ibarra with “Sweeney Tate” showed a recreation of a colourful barbershop. Many barbers were invited to show their skills in a competition at that exposition. However, when I sat on one of the chairs like I would do when going to a barbershop, the security guards told me not to touch anything. There was a restriction there that I would not have had in a normal barbershop. So even if it was recreating daily life it was not daily life. This made me

reflect on life and stage and how the difference between these two is very slippery. How do we identify then what is a performance?

In order to explore this issue, we might start by using a very well-known quotation by Shakespeare:

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players:

They have their exits and their entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts,

His acts being seven ages.

(Shakespeare, *As You Like It* Act II Scene VII Line 138)

As Shakespeare expresses, the world is a stage where we are players. This can be true because we have our social roles (teachers, doctors, salesmen....) To play these roles we wear specific clothing and we behave in a particular way (being serious, authoritative, pushy, caring...etc.). As Sennet indicates in *The Fall of Public Man*, we have to perform our roles correctly and normally a person plays many parts (mother, daughter, wife, lover, friend...) that require different ways of behaving (45). As Goffman presents in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, some roles are very dramatic, they can involve tension; while other roles (like the president's role) require a script. In our roles, we can perform solo or we can interact with a crowd. "All actors are performers but not all performers are actors" (174). So, what is the difference between theatre and everyday life?

As Peter Brook claims in *The Empty Space*, “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A Man walks across this empty space, whilst someone else is watching him, and that is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged “(9). Many places can become stages but a stage is not real life because theatre exists under a set of clear conventions. A performance is condensed life. It contains in a short time (one or two hours) days, months, or even years of the lives of the characters. It also happens in the same space (the stage) that represents selected spaces from the characters’ lives. It shows the most important relationships of the characters, but not all the relationships. We can see how in theatre conflict is interesting; we want things to happen whereas in life we avoid conflict. Theatre is governed by emotions whereas in real life emotions are not so condensed. In the film by Catherine Sullivan *The Chittendens* she took stereotypes from 20<sup>th</sup> Century America and showed the work of actors on emotions. The focus was not on a story, but on the isolation and intensity of these feelings highlighting the importance of them in drama.

Theatre gives us an alternative vision of reality. What we see on stage is something unique but we do not care if it reflects exactly what reality is. Bert. O. States’ thoughts about Van Gogh’s painting illustrate this very well. We do not care if these are the real shoes; this is Van Gogh’s view of these shoes. In his painting, there is a reference towards reality but it is not reality. Geoffrey Farmer in his exposition “Hunchback Kit” took different items from Victor Hugo’s novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and presented them in a way that showed his response to the book. When observing his piece we do not care so much about seeing the novel but about Geoffrey’s creative adaptation of it.

In the piece “The Curtain” by Ulla Von Brandenburg the concept of the offstage is present. Beliz Gücbilmez says that the offstage is the place for messengers, entrances, exits and sounds but it is also an important invisible space between fiction and reality where the preparation for the imaginary world takes place (152-160). The offstage is where, among other things, the preparation of the actor before coming to the stage takes place; it is where the actor goes from reality to another place. The offstage is this unique space belonging to the performance where that preparation takes place.

Andreas Fraser’s installation piece “Hello! Welcome to Tate Modern” presented a voice and some images that turned slowly into a chaotic cacophony and a confusion of images criticizing the manipulation of the media, the invasion of technology and the creation of a world of noise and disturbance. Theatre helps to say things that people do not say in daily life; it gives voice to the unheard and makes people think. It can reflect the world with a twist. It can show dissatisfaction with life, it can question patterns, analyse relationships and roles; it can also help us to better understand ourselves and also to understand the world. Theatre is like the fool in *King Lear*, it has the power to express the truth because people are aware that there is a separation from reality. Theatre cannot lose sight the society that it serves because it aims to bring the audience to a better understanding of the society.

Life has strict boundaries. Many desires are oppressed in society, and some instincts are not acceptable; however, the stage is more permissive. You can bring taboos to the stage that would be difficult to see in real life because art is under other kinds of regulations as Fortier expresses in *Theatre /Theory* (30-50). The futuristic Manifesto by Marinetti was created as a critical answer to traditional values and opened a path to look for courage and excitement within the arts. Many companies nowadays

have been influenced by that manifesto, for example, La Fura dels Baus. Their show “XXX” was extremely violent and pornographic. If people would have seen what appeared on stage in their daily lives they would have probably said that it was extreme but the show was sold out for many weeks. The stage sometimes acts as a catharsis because it has a freedom that’s difficult to find in our daily lives.

### 2.7.2. The Transition Between Life and the Stage

All that is on stage is a sign that transmits ideas and that has a meaning. As Andrew Sofer explains in *The Stage Life of Props* in performance props serve to the extent of what they mean. Objects by being on stage acquire connotations, they bring ideas to the mind of the viewer, and their typical function is displaced (15-25). The exposition “Self Portrait of a Business Man” by Pawel Althamer showed several belongings on the floor. A suit, a tie, keys, tickets... During the performance he undressed and left everything there. These objects on the floor of my bedroom would not be art, but at the Tate Modern their normal function was changed because these objects made spectators think. They were not only clothes, tickets and keys anymore, but something else: an idea, a meaning. The work of Marcel Duchamp” Fountain” is another example. This piece of art is a toilet, but Duchamp changed its function by putting the toilet in another place. It was originally part of the daily life but the artist made people look at it in another way.

As a director, I have experienced that if a dog appears on stage it will make us laugh just because it is going to act like a dog. The intersection of its natural behaviour surrounded by the programmed behaviours of the performers will seem shocking to us. It clashes when there is something from daily life into stage behaving spontaneously.

We are on stage, another space, and another time different from daily life, so having something that operates under the world's rules clashes.

Jeppé Hein with his installation "Rotating Labyrinth" asks the spectator to have an active role. Jeppé's piece transmits a longing for the immersion of the spectator in the production. This connects with the objective of theatre companies that like breaking the feeling of security that spectators have. In their productions the audience is included as part of the show, moved from one side to the other or brought into the stage. Punchdrunk in the production "The Mask of the Red Death" showed at the BAC in London included spectators as part of the Edgar Allan Poe's story. They invited the audience to go on a journey and experience the play instead of just watching it. Companies such as Punchdrunk, Secret Cinema or Dreamthinkspeak are part of a movement called "Site-specific theatre" that blurs the boundaries between theatre and life. In their productions they submerge the audience in the play. As audience members walk through different rooms, they watch scenes, interact with the actors, join the dots of the story and experience the play more vividly.

As Brigit Panet explains in her acting course at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London (RADA), to the theatre you can get through two doors: the main entrance and the stage door. The main entrance is a step from life to this meeting point that operates under a set of conventions. The stage door is a step from daily life to this special place that requires different clothes, make-up and a change of identity. The world is not a stage, but the ways in which it is not are not easy to specify. Even if it is difficult sometimes to see the difference between performance and performativity in our daily lives theatre is not real life but a mirror of real life.



## 2.8. Analysing Performance

Sometimes it can feel quite daunting to analyse something as anarchic as a play. It presents the problem of capturing the intensity of a three-dimensional spectacle in two-dimensional language. Schechner finds different strategies to analyse the act of playing that can also be linked to the analysis of performance. When applying these strategies, it is necessary to understand that any performance has three phases: the text, the staging of the text and the performance. The staging of the text is the process of creation where artistic decisions are made and tried out in the rehearsal room, whereas performance is a unique event where there is audience involvement (93).

The strategies that Schechner presents coincide with some points of analysis that Joe Hill Gibbins suggested during the Directors Course at the Young Vic Theatre in London. The first strategy that can be used involves looking at the structure, which is a sequence that might use words or other elements. For example, it can be a text or choreography. Analysing the structure of a play entails actions such as identifying the type of play, the theme, the story, the plot and the dramatic techniques used in the text. Is it linear or non-linear? Is there a unity of time, plot, and action? What genre is it (comedy, tragedy...)? Is it an open play or a closed one? Is it an adaptation from a novel or film? Is it new writing or a classic? This strategy also involves paying attention to the relationship between the original script and the performance script as well as the dramaturgical changes and the language used in the text.

The second one has to do with observing the process and the phases of development. Some of the questions that need to be taken into account are: What is the interpretation of the play that we see through the director's work (faithful, free interpretation, adaptation...)? What staging is it using (Thrust, Proscenium, in the

round, traverse, open- air, promenade...)? What is the relationship between the audience and the performance area? What is the lighting like (its function, colour, symbolic value, the relationship between light and space? What types of props are used on stage (origin, real or figurative, function, changes they suffer, the relationship between props and characters...)? How many actors are there in the production? Are the actors doubling parts? What is their appearance like? What gestures, voice, intonation and movement do they have? How do they use the space? What is style chosen by the director (Epic theatre, absurd, naturalist? What imagery is the director using on stage? What is the concept for the set design? And for the costumes? What is the choice of colours? What is the temporal frame? Is there music and sound?

The third strategy is about the experience. Here we need to observe the mood of the players and the observers. In this part, it is essential to distinguish between the text and the performance and focus on the effect achieved. We check the process against the performance analysing some of the decisions made by the director to see if they worked.

How did the audience receive it? What was the atmosphere created? What did the reviews say about it? Did the performance achieve its potential? Did the actors fit the characters? What was missing in the production? What was worth seeing? What did stand out from the production? What was the timing, rhythm, pace and mood like in the performance? Where is this play presented? Which year? In which social context? In what space is the production performed? What are the characteristics of the place and space where it is shown?

The fourth one is to approach it from its function, the purpose that it serves. What does the director want to say with this production? What is the message? What ideologies are communicated? What values are hidden behind it?

To sum up, Performing Studies opens a dialogue with elements such as the text, context, the author, the creative process and the society where it is presented. It offers a methodology that can embrace several fields while helping the scholar to think through theatre and not about theatre. In Performing Studies theatre is not seen as an outside object to be analysed but it allows the researcher to analyse it from the inside and from there come out putting theory and practice together. This methodology allows practice based research and artistic research opening the opportunity of formation of ideas from practice itself. The researcher is a practitioner who plunges into the creation process in order to reflect upon it. The information gathered through this process and the material acquired is equivalent to knowledge produced through traditional research.

### 3. Theatre Directing

The directing styles that we can find in theatre are many. When working on a play and setting up a specific approach to it each director will have a vocabulary inspired by many different techniques which help shape their style. Nowadays, any established theatre director has developed a unique voice that can be recognised on stage, but this uniqueness draws from some common influences. Before directors build their toolkit and develop the unique vocabulary that defines their work they go through a process of digesting productions of all types, attending a wide variety of classes, reading books and being exposed to work from different artists until they finally create their very own identity, narrowing down their interests (Dunster).

How can we understand the work of a contemporary theatre director? The differences in each director can be appreciated from the very beginning of their creative process, not only by watching the play. The play is the end product of a journey where the director's vision has to lead every single step of the way. Each style will include a completely different process towards the play. For example, a UK director such as Katie Mitchell will start rehearsals by doing a lot of table work analysing the text, breaking it down into units and working out every single aspect of the text, whereas Paul Hunter, the artistic director of the company Told by an Idiot, will always start by building a company through improvisation exercises that support the bonding of the ensemble. The generation of this ensemble and not the text becomes his first focus (Hunter). Both the creative experience and the artistic result will be immensely different for each of these directors. This shows us how different directors can do their job from completely different perspectives. The spectators will always live the play from the director's eyes and what they will see on stage will not be the text but the director's vision of that text.

A good example of this is Ivo Van Hove's production of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*. Anyone who has read and watched the play would live Miller's text as something completely new if he would have seen Van Hove's production at the Young Vic Theatre. It was Van Hove's way of telling the story what made this play so different, fresh, and modern.

There have been plenty of productions of Arthur Miller's Greek tragedy-inspired drama about Eddie Carbone, the Italian-American longshoreman who becomes jealously fixated on his niece, Catherine. But you've never seen it staged like this. Ivo van Hove's revival is so merciless that it creates a sickening sense of awe. It's like watching a runaway train hurtle towards you and being unable to move. It runs uninterrupted for two hours and leaves you as broken as the characters..... Van Hove's great trick is to balance detailed, low-key and almost cinematic naturalistic performances within a non-naturalistic framework and let them bounce off each other in a series of dazzling reflections that enable us to see Miller's play anew. From the menacing tick of a clock to the under-scoring with Fauré's Requiem, this is a meticulously conceived production that reinvents Miller without ever getting in the way of the view (Gardner, "Ivo Van Hove Reinvents Arthur Miller").

The second half of this century has been a time of experimentation in theatre, including reviving styles from other periods. In order to analyse the work of a contemporary director, it becomes essential first to understand the starting point for directing and what directing involves. This chapter will navigate through all the different styles that are available to directors and can help them shape their craft. It is a journey through directors' general influences and directing tools so that we can plunge

into the world of a contemporary theatre director and better analyse their work on a production.

### 3.1. A Legacy of Styles

Many contemporary directors are said to produce a type of work that is called “avant-garde”, but what is exactly the “avant-garde”? As Borja Ruiz explains in *El Arte del Actor del Siglo XX*, this terminology was first used to denominate any artistic expression that renovated an aesthetic in order to generate a revolution. In the field of the arts, in general, this was seen when all the “isms” appeared (Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Futurism...). Nevertheless, after the Second World War, the number of new artistic tendencies multiplied and the term “avant-garde” started to lose its semantic precision. In theatre, avant-garde refers to any theatre form that becomes difficult to classify. However, even if the shape is so innovative that the work might seem even banal, the production is normally the result of an intense research process. It is important to be aware that in the past many avant-garde styles (such as La Commedia dell’Arte or Stanislavski’s ideas) later on became mainstream. This journey from avant-garde to mainstream is a natural transition that many of the voices that we are going to investigate suffered (Ruiz 28- 31).

#### 3.1.1 Naturalism

- Stanislavski

Stanislavski was the first actor and director who tried to create a system to master the stage practice. Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was not an acting training and actors learnt directly from their direct contact with another experienced actor. Stanislavski was deeply influenced by Emile Zola's naturalism and this was reflected in the theatre style he created. In order to achieve this naturalistic acting style, the Russian actor and director divides his training system into two parts: The first one is focused on the actor's work on himself. The second one has to do with the actor's work on the text (Stanislavski 31-34).

For Stanislavski, the art of the actor is the art of life. The actor needs to understand the body, emotion, thought and behaviour of a character in such a depth that gives honesty to the performance. To achieve this, talent is not enough and actors need a technique to develop their creative skills. For Stanislavski, the craft of the actor is strongly rooted in the text, because of this the text needs to be analysed in detail to get the necessary data to create a character. Each action that a character does is determined by the given circumstances that appear in the text. This includes elements such as the period where it is set, the age of the character and any information that we know about that character before the play starts. The actor researches and piles up all this information so that later on he can ask himself the following question: What would I do if I were under these circumstances? Acting will happen from living with truthfulness these given circumstances (Stanislavski 67-68).

One of Stanislavski main points is called the "magic if". The "magic if" means that the actor needs to fully believe in the possibility that these circumstances could be real. As a consequence, the biggest requirement for an actor is the imagination. Only through imagination can an actor transform fiction into reality. The actor's focus

becomes essential to fuel the imagination. This focus needs to be both an inner focus and an outer focus, so training is essential to achieve it. As a consequence, he details a series of exercises to achieve relaxation and get rid of unnecessary tension before going on stage. Through focus, an actor builds the fourth wall, a wall where he becomes alone in a theatre full of spectators, a wall that creates the illusion of intimacy and that makes the audience believe they are peaking into someone's reality. This is the part of Stanislavski's method that targets the work that an actor needs to do on himself (Ruiz 31-76).

The second part of the Stanislavski method has to do directly with the text. The Russian master expressed how it was of vital importance to divide the text into units to gain efficiency in the study of the play. This division is not the natural division of the author in scenes and acts but a division that the actor makes according to the objectives and super objectives of the characters. Each unit of text is built around a character's objective. To achieve this objective a certain action will need to take place. Each action is justified by an objective. All the objectives of the character in the units serve a common super-objective that is the compass which guides his behaviour (Ruiz 76-79).

There is one aspect of Stanislavski's work that has become controversial, which is the so-called emotional memory. This is the process through which the actor brings to the present past emotions and uses his very own experiences to jump into the character's emotions (Stanislavski 171-210). This controversial part of Stanislavski's work was further developed by Strasberg.



- Strasberg

After Stanislavski, a series of acting techniques were born in the United States. The branch of Stanislavsky's technique developed in the United States became known as "The Method". Lee Strasberg became part of "The Group", a group of artists interested in developing part of Stanislavski's technique. Although Strasberg was the main figure, other people also contributed to it, like Sanford Meisner or Utah Hagen. The starting point of Strasberg's ideas was the theoretical works of Stanislavski and the practical work of Boleslavsky. The emotional memory was vastly used by Lee Strasberg, as he explains in *A Dream of Passion* (Strasberg 73-76). Through this acting resource the actor recalls moments in life where he went through a specific emotion. By recalling all the small details, for example, what he was wearing, the weather, the objects that were around him...he dives into his subconscious bringing that experience from the past to the present moment. This is then used in the scene that he is playing enabling the character to share the truthfulness of the emotion caused by his past experience (Strasberg 124-125). In 1947, "The Group" created "The Actors Studio", a drama centre that offered professional training for actors. "The Actors Studio" acquired enormous international fame because actors such as Marlon Brando or Marilyn Monroe trained there and achieved acclaimed performances (Ruiz 190-199).

- Meisner

Meisner was a member of the group that created "the Actors Studio". His technique also needs to be framed as part of the psychological realism, as it searches for an honest creation of a character. Meisner asks in his training to react instinctively to the

given circumstances of the character and to avoid being too intellectual. Nevertheless, in contrast to Stanislavski or Strasberg, in Meisner's training the focus is not on the emotional memory, but on the other actors that are playing on stage. For him, acting is reacting moment by moment to the stimuli that the other actor gives you. He insists that an actor should not do anything unless something happens that makes him do it. During the training, the actor learns to follow his impulses and once that this is achieved the text is incorporated. Meisner's most popular students are Gregory Peck, Diane Keaton and Sydney Pollack (Ruiz 200-206).

If we observe these techniques of Stanislavski, Meisner and Strasberg we realize that all of them are part of a naturalistic style of acting. Nevertheless, theatre went from using naturalism into looking for new forms and these methods began to become more relevant for cinema and less used in theatre (Ruiz 208-209).

### 3.1.2. Moving Away from Naturalism

- Meyerhold

At the beginning of his career, Vsevolod Emilievic Meyerhold studied with Stanislavski and founded the Theatre of the Art of Moscow (TAM). Nevertheless, later on, he started to move away from naturalism, he left the TAM and investigated non-naturalistic forms. At that time, there were many movements which tried to get away from naturalism to respond to writers such as Maeterlinck, where naturalism did not work (Gladkov 116-118). Meyerhold created The Theatre-Studio, a space that became a theatre laboratory to find new ways to stage plays and to respond to that new type of playwriting that was emerging. Music started to be a key element in theatre. Up until

that moment, music had only been an accompaniment that generated an atmosphere but Meyerhold found out that music could be the main structure around which a non-naturalistic structure could be built. His new concept of theatre did not want to portray reality anymore but to show the evidence that what happened on stage was theatre and not reality, as a consequence, it became a heavily stylized theatre. It was at this moment when theatricality emerged. The body, the voice and space started to become the new artistic tools used to establish a connection with the audience (Meyerhold 135-144).

In 1920, Meyerhold developed a new training for actors called biomechanics. It was the principle behind a non-realistic, stylised and movement-centred system that contrasted with Stanislavski's system. This highly systematic training focused more on physical actions than on the psychology of the character where actors became puppets. According to biomechanics, movement design can trigger an emotional response in the actor so it becomes crucial in theatre. In each action, actors ask their bodies to go through what is called the *raccourci*, which is the French word for foreshortening. It means that the previous and future actions are mainly compressed in the transitions. In the *raccourci* you see the connection with the end and the beginning of the action (Gadkov 160-161).

Each action completed by an actor has three separate parts: *otkaz*, *posyl* and *tormos*. *Otkatz* is the impulse before the action; it is a movement that goes just in the opposite direction as preparation for what's next; for example, kneeling before jumping or moving the arm back before hitting something. After the *otkaz* an action is executed, this is called *posyl*, which means sending. The impulse created by the *otkaz* is sent and the body draws the action in space. To finish this action, the impulse slows down and *tormos* is produced. Not only did these concepts apply to the execution of movements

during the training but also to the whole concept of acting. Meyerhold thought that the work of the actor consisted both on acting and pre acting” Pre-acting prepares the spectator’s perception in such a way that he comprehends the scenic situations fully resolved in advance” (Tian 193).

Meyerhold thought that movement was the most powerful form of theatrical expression so biomechanics was made of études, which were stylized movement pieces. Actors began their training with exercises to develop the physical strength and then they rehearsed the études. On the one hand, expressive movement helped the actors connect with their emotions and on the other hand the use of music gave an emotional tempo and offered a clear structure (Meyerhold 154-157).

- Chekhov

Chekhov started studying Stanislavski’s method but as Meyerhold, he soon looked for new forms of theatre. During a life crisis that he went through, he started to become interested in the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, whose work deeply influenced him. Chekhov developed a method that focused on different areas: the acting technique, the development of imagination, the speech formation, improvisations and scene study. One key element for an actor, according to his method, is the imaginary body. The actor’s body can easily become the body of a character. In order to do this; the actor needs to create an imaginary centre. Chekhov believed that each character has an invisible centre, a point from which movement starts. For example, the centre of a selfish person can be the chin or an eyebrow while the centre of a curious person can be the nose (Ruiz 158-160).

Another of the main elements of his method is the creation of an atmosphere. There are two types of atmospheres: The general atmosphere and the individual atmosphere. Chekhov's concept of atmosphere shares similarities with Stanislavski's concept of given circumstances. The main difference is that, whereas for Stanislavski the given circumstances can be extracted from the text through an analytical process, Chekhov gives it a more subjective, intuitive tone where imagination plays a bigger part (Chekhov 123-126).

There are some similarities between Chekhov and Stanislavski but also many differences. Chekhov, unlike Stanislavski, thought that actors should not draw from their limited conscious life experience but from the subconscious. He felt that the subconscious mind stored much more information and that this subconscious mind could be reached through a technique called "the psychological gesture". Behind everything that is said or done in our daily lives, there is a gesture that reveals the attitude of an individual. For example, behind the action of a teacher there is an attitude of offering something and the student's attitude of receiving. A psychological gesture offers a subtext and can reveal the inner world of the characters: their fears, wishes and feelings. Chekhov finds that physicalizing an emotion through an external gesture is an effective way to build a character. Through the gesture, the character searches for a connection between a physical action and an inner response. Thus, the body becomes trained to connect with its psychological impulses. Chekhov's method makes use of images and powerful words that are highly visual to trigger this connection (Ruiz 157-158). The Michael Chekhov Acting Studio expresses on their website how:

All you experience in the course of your life, all you observe and think, all that makes you happy or unhappy, all your regrets or satisfactions, all your love or

hate, all you long for or avoid, all your achievements and failures, all you brought with you into this life at birth -your temperament, abilities, inclinations etc., all are part of the region of your so-called subconscious depths.....Thus purged and transformed, they become part of the material from which your individuality creates the psychology, the illusory "soul" of the character (michaelchekhovactingstudio.com).

Some of Chekhov's exercises were put into practice in a controversial staging of *Hamlet*, in 1924. These exercises included, for example, actors saying text while throwing balls to each other, aiming to connect the text both with movement and emotion (Ruiz 150-155).

### 3.1.3. Physical Theatre

- Jacques Copeau

The history of French theatre went through a radical shift thanks to Copeau. His goal was to create a drama school that could completely renovate the actors training, and with that in mind, he built The Theatre of Vieux Colombier. At that time, the French scene was dominated by a false acting style, which was over the top and exaggerated. Copeau aimed to get rid of that type of theatre to build a collective and rigorous type of work based on simplicity. Vieux Colombier became not only a drama centre but also a place of experimentation and research, giving birth to the concept that exists nowadays of a theatre laboratory (Ruiz 214-220). Copeau was one of the most influential figures and his legacy has been filtered in many other techniques and styles. He anticipated three main points that became crucial for theatre: the first one is the body

as the axis for theatrical expression, the second one theatre as a community and the last one theatre as an element available to anyone, showing a desire to bring theatre to all spheres of society (Copeau 190-193).

Copeau is also well-known because he became the father of mime. In Vieux Colombier, he explored the expressive possibilities of the body. The training of actors relied on a sporty preparation that included swimming, running, fencing and acrobatics. Copeau's interest geared towards the euritmia, as he thought this could be a good base to train actors in rhythm. Slowly, music started to be part of the actors' physical training and he introduced subjects such as corporal music, which was a subject inspired in ballet where students learnt about time, space, strength, speed, intensity and weight. Many of Copeau's exercises, such as the neutral mask, have become iconic in the actor's training and are now taught at many drama schools. His discovery of the neutral mask was completely by chance, as it happened when one of his actors got stuck during a rehearsal and she was unable to move. Desperate to release her physical expression he hid her face with a tissue. At that moment, all her effort went into her body instead of the face. Inspired by this, all the performers started to design masks with cardboard. This mask gives neutrality and theatrical presence to the face of the actor, distancing the person from reality. All mask exercises train actors in two main directions: neutrality and body expression (Copeau 196-275).

- Etienne Decroux

When he was a child Decroux attended regularly variety shows and he became fascinated by them. He then studied at the school of Vieux Colombier. Inspired by what he learnt at View Colombier, when he graduated, Decroux started developing corporal

mime. He founded his own company to continue his research on this matter and he also established his school, where one of his most relevant students was Marcel Marceau. His school acquired international reputation and he became recognized as one of the masters of modern mime. At the end of the 50s, he was considered one of the main avant-garde references in physical theatre (Ruiz 233-245).

Decroux's style is an anti-naturalist style that searches for visual metaphors. Mime helped him represent reality in an abstract way. In mime, time expands and actions become bigger than real actions. The articulation of each part of the body: head, neck, chest and pelvis is the base of a work from which the impulse is developed to communicate thoughts, desires and stories through movement (De Marinis 130-140).

- Jacques Lecoq

Lecoq made of the sport his first passion; nevertheless, his interest towards sport did not lie on competition but on the poetic side of it. Apart from this passion for sport, while teaching at The University of Padua in Italy he developed a deep interest in Commedia dell'Arte, Greek tragedy and chorus work (Lecoq 18-22). In 1956, Lecoq returned to Paris and all these influences came together in an idea to create a new way of approaching theatre. As a result, he opened a theatre school in order to develop this vision he had. This school grew fast; while teaching actors the school also allowed him to continue his own research into his areas of interest, which were all connected to movement. As he explained in *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, he felt that it was through teaching how he could learn best how the body worked. Lecoq managed to integrate both text and mime in the material he taught at his school (Lecoq 107-109).



Lecoq created a new term for the mime he taught called mimodynamics. Mimodynamics describes the process through which the actor incorporates the dynamics of an element: its space, its rhythm and the forces that create it. For example, he explained how miming the sea does not mean drawing the waves in the space with the hands to make people see it is the sea but to understand the sea movements in the body and to feel the secret rhythm of the sea (Ruiz 277). Slowly, new subjects started to appear at his school. One of the most representative ones was the study of the neutral mask, which is a mask in calm. This mask offers the student a state of neutrality. From that neutrality, the actor can be open and available to play and to channel all the expression through the body. It is a strategy that helps the actor to move from his daily life into becoming a blank canvas to create a character (Ruiz 272-275).

There are many actors who have trained at Lecoq but there are also many directors because the school offers a course called “LEM” where Lecoq’s techniques and philosophy can be applied to directing. Artists such as Steven Berkoff or Robert Lepage and companies such as Mummenschanz, Footsbarn Theatre and Complicite completed their training at Lecoq. Swiss Theatre Company Mummenschanz has developed a creative action that goes from object manipulation to mask work. Footsbarn is a referent itinerant theatre company that works on adapting classics generating an atmosphere that integrates music, circus and masks. Complicite is an international company that offers highly visual productions. The legacy of Lecoq is alive in the work of many of the directors who trained with him and still bring his essence to the productions they direct (Ruiz 294-295).

### 3.1.4. A Changing Point in Theatre

- Artaud

Artaud was one of the most complex figures of theatre in the 20th century. He started developing in Paris what he called his “Theatre of Cruelty” when Dadaism and Surrealism were giving their first steps. The cruelty Artaud refers to is not an external violence in the staging but an internal wild dynamic; it is the violence present in life where all good has a cruel impulse. Theatre can reveal this cruelty that lies at the bottom of the human being acting as a mirror that reflects the essence of life (Artaud 90-94). According to him, theatre at that time was stuck in the words and there was a need for a new language that could articulate space, light, music and movement. He thought that for theatre to transcend the word it needed to become like a hieroglyph with metaphysical signs that moved beyond the ordinary sphere evoking a dreamlike dimension (De Marinis 163-178).

Artaud’s style is a type of theatre that seems anarchic but has its own rules. If we examine his staging of *Les Cenci*, we can see how all the elements on stage aimed to alter the sensorial, emotional and intellectual perception of the spectator. The lighting worked to build effects of contrast, the sound in the production used electronic music and pre-recorded sounds, such as bells or whispers, which were either distorted or amplified. The space was also restructured because he was determined to break the distance between the audience and the actors (Ruiz 305).

Artaud’s book *Theatre and Its Double* became a stimulus for new artistic trends and there are many artists nowadays who have received his influence. For example, the theatre collective Living Theatre took Artaud’s ideas and shook the U.S. artistic world

directing a theatre that was immediate, alive and that questioned society's values. Their most best-known show was *The Brig* where they presented a day in a navy prison describing with meticulous detail the physical and psychological violence that marines used with prisoners. Their strategy for rehearsals was on one side to study the behaviour of the marines and on the other side to establish a schedule that followed the strict discipline lived on the boat by the military force; this included extremely long working days, a methodical organisation, and punishments for anyone who broke certain rules. The aim was to deeply connect with the situation that the characters were going through to understand the context (Ruiz 311-315).

- Brecht

The theatre of Brecht can be considered the exact opposite of Artaud. If Artaud looked at rituals and spirituality Brecht's theatre was extremely rational. Brecht was born in Germany in 1898, and after abandoning his studies in medicine he started to develop a strong interest in literature and the arts. At that time, in Germany, the expressionist movement was present in all in the arts. In theatre, it became present, for example, in the work of the writer Frank Wedekind and the director Erwin Piscator. Brecht got into directing in the 20s, aiming to develop a type of theatre which was politically and socially committed and that offered a new way of staging of plays and acting (Ruiz 315-320).

In 1926, he directed *The Threepenny Opera*, which was a criticism of the bourgeois society. The staging of the piece shook the German stage and also highlighted a key element in Brecht's theatre called "Verfremdung". Verfremdung is a German word that means to move something to an unusual context. It makes reference to the creation of a

distance between the audience and the events shown in the play and it became the very core of the theatre that Brecht created. As explained in *Introduction to Brecht*, there are different ways in which to create this effect, for example, in a Brechtian style the set is always non-naturalistic, the music tends to contradict the inner dynamic of the piece and songs are introduced so that drama is sung and not suffered. The lighting leaves transitions open to be seen by the public eye, giving a sense of theatricality. It is normal in Brecht's productions to use panels and posters with phrases that share objective ideas about the events presented in the play, to use projections or to interact with the audience (100-105). *Verfremdung* can also be applied to the acting where it is better to show than to live because the main job of the actor is to move away from identification with the character. The actor does not become the character, as it was with Stanislavski, but instead, he is the middle man between the character and the audience. For example, the actor is not Lear but he shows Lear to an audience (Ruiz 315-318).

Many productions bring *Verfremdung* on stage by reading the stage directions, which means that the actor moves between playing the character and saying stage directions. It is also frequent to see performers using masks and making use of what Brecht defined as *social gestus*. According to his theory, all characters have gestures that portray their individuality and social status. The way they use the body and the voice is determined by the social class they belong to, so the actor will need to work on the selection of a series of *gestus* to build their characters (Thomson 227-244).

In 1933, after the Reichstag fire (German Parliament) Brecht went into exile to Switzerland, Denmark, Finland and USA, where he wrote some of his most influential books and theories. In 1949, after his exile, he made his dream come true creating a theatre company set in Berlin called the Berliner Ensemble. The main objective of the

theatre company was to push the cultural education of a working-class audience and to renovate the repertoire of classics and contemporary pieces adapting them to their style, called “Epic Theatre”. Their approach to theatre involved a collaborative process that looked at all areas of theatre (directing, acting, lighting...) and at an investigation of the act of the performer. Brecht died in 1956 but The Berliner Ensemble still continues making theatre today (Ruiz 315-325).

Brecht’s theatre is called “Epic Theatre”. It is a rational theatre based on objectivity, and it is committed to political and social values. It underlines the narrative of the piece and the socio-political circumstances that condition the behaviour of the characters. This does not mean that it stops entertaining but that it looks in both directions (Brecht, 110-112). Brecht’s theatre runs away from any form of identification, where theatre is understood as a means to empathizing with the spectator. It believes empathy creates an emotional drunkenness that stops the audience from having an objective judgement. Events are presented on stage in a way that audience members can perceive them with enough distance so that they can hold a critical attitude towards them (Brecht 123-125). Brecht in *Brecht on Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic* explains the difference between Aristotelian dramatic forms and Epic Theatre in the following chart (46):

<b>Aristotelian Dramatic Forms</b>	<b>Epic Theatre Forms</b>
It is played	It is narrated
The spectator is involved in the action	The spectator becomes an observer
Emotions are awakened. Feelings are expressed	Decisions are triggered. Reasoning is key.
Life is shown	Images of the world are shown
Sensations are kept	Sensations lead to awareness
The audience emphasises	The audience studies
The human being is a known element	The human being is an object of research

- Peter Brook

Brook is one of the most influential theatre directors alive. He is the man who broke every rule in theatre, stripped performance spaces bare and let the audience's imagination do the work. Brook has been combining his work as a theatre, opera and film director with his research on the meaning of theatre. Born in London, he soon left school to direct. In the seventies, Brook worked as a director at the Royal Shakespeare Company where he created a research group. With this group he applied the techniques of Artaud and his Theatre of Cruelty. One of his most relevant staging during this period was *Marat Sade* (Ruiz 334-337).

After this period, Brook began to define his style trying to get rid of anything superfluous on stage. His second creative phase saw the creation of the Centre International de Recherches Theatrales in Paris, an international group whose aim was to research theatre both from an anthropological and from an artistic point of view. One of the main characteristics of Brook in this phase was transparency. Transparency

according to Brook involves a state of physical, emotional and mental openness. He believes that acting means emptying yourself of fears and reasoning in order to plunge into the essence of the human being. Brook sees the actor as a storyteller who manages to get the audience slowly into the play. One of his main concerns during this artistic period was how to be organic as an actor and how to show transparency in a way that inner impulses could match external shapes. The conclusion he reached was that to achieve this transparency all channels (the body, the mind, emotions) have to be interconnected. At the same time, the actor needs to listen both to the rest of actors and to the audience so that an exchange with the audience is created (Brook 23-27).

Brook's concept of theatre is that it has the power to make the invisible visible, which connects back to the idea of rituals. According to his theories, theatre is sacred. As a consequence, sound in theatre, as in rituals, becomes of greatest importance because through its musicality it can communicate in a deep level. A ritualistic aura of simplicity and depth always guides the style of his shows (Croyden 80-83).

Yoshi Oida narrates in *An Actor Adrift* his experience as an actor working with Brook. He explains how he asked actors to be like a football team, they had to imagine during a performance that they all needed to keep the ball in the game. They had to be alert to catch the ball at any moment; they needed to listen to the atmosphere created each evening and to work from there. They needed to become a contemporary tribe (145-165).

### 3.1.5. Theatre and the Human Being

- Boal

Boal was born in 1931 in Rio de Janeiro and he worked as a theatre director, writer and educator. Many of the educational projects where he included drama were inspired by the education theories of Paulo Freire. Freire wanted a type of education that offered both freedom and a dialectic process, allowing both teachers and students to learn at the same time. In 1974, he published *Theatre of the Oppressed* where he set up his concept of theatre: a theatre where people could analyse the social realities of oppression in society. According to Boal, theatre is an imitation of life. It is both a reflection of reality and also a way of seeing reality. Boal's idea of theatre is one that it should aim to transform what happens outside the theatre building in order to improve the world. With this in mind, he created a system of exercises, games, and techniques that could offer solutions to social problems. Under different methodologies, the main objective was to develop the human rights through acting techniques. In all situations, the spectator was the protagonist of a dramatic action that forced him to analyse and confront a conflict which ultimately helped that person to deal with this situation in real life. As a result, in Boal's theatre the spectator becomes the actor (Boal 25-28).



- Grotowski

Grotowski was born in Poland and in 1951 he went to Cracow Drama School to study directing. When he finished his degree he noticed that theatre can exist without make up, costume, set or lighting but that it cannot exist without the relationship between the audience and the actors. He found out that here lies the essence of theatre and what differentiates it from other arts. From this starting point, he developed his search for a scenic language. In his book *Towards a Poor Theatre*, he explains how he decided to destroy the physical separation between audience and the stage (Grotowski 10-15). According to Eugenio Barba, who was Grotowski's assistant director, for Grotowski breaking down spaces in theatre was like removing the lion's jail. If we are in the zoo protected by a jail we can feel confident, but if the jail disappears we will become more vulnerable. As he explains, theatre emerges from there, from a place of vulnerability (Barba 42-44).

In Grotowski's productions, he gave the audience members a special role, sometimes even making them become characters in the play. For example, in *Kordian* (1961) the spectators were sitting on beds and they became sick people at a mental hospital while in *Dr Faustus* (1963) they were the guests in a supper. Another change in theatre that Grotowski brought had to do with the text. Adapting the text had been an unthinkable task to do up until that moment but he dared to go where nobody else had been yet (Ruiz 367-369).

In 1966, the production of *The Prince* put Grotowski in the avant-garde. In 1970, his Teatr Laboratorium started looking for the essence of life while working in forests, valleys and hills. At the end of the 70s, Grotowski started a transcultural project rooted in ritual. He worked with artists who belonged to different traditions;

the project included expeditions to several countries to get close contact with those cultures as well as going back in time into the origin of everything. One of the key elements in his investigation were the ritualistic chants of Haiti and the arts of Korea, Bali and Japan (Wolford 357-359).

In the 80s, Grotowski moved to Italy and he started looking at theatre as a spiritual vehicle that could lead to a deeper state of perception. This is the moment when the word actor changed to become the word performer. For Grotowski, the word performer describes an artist who becomes active in his creative search and whose characters are the vehicle to discover more about his human essence. As a consequence, each character and each rehearsal becomes a way of better knowing himself. The biggest obstacle for an actor is not being able to empty himself of his identity. Because of this, the actors' training included exercises from acrobatics, yoga or kathakali (a major form of classical Indian dance). Those exercises were practised nonstop, sometimes even without any rest whatsoever aiming to get rid of the body's resistance. Grotowski's Theatre Company looked at each play as a ceremony which took place in a sacred theatre. Grotowski died in 1999, and he is considered one of the biggest influences of 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre. It is difficult to understand contemporary theatre without him because his process opened many questions that are yet to be answered (Richards 160-162).

- Eugenio Barba

Eugenio Barba was born in Brindisi (Italy) and in 1961 he moved to Poland to study theatre. Although in Poland he became the assistant director of Grotowski,

when later on he tried to work as a theatre director no theatre hired him. Because of this, he created his own theatre company, choosing actors who were in the same situation that he was going through. As a consequence, most of the members of his theatre company were rejected artists who had an amazing discipline, no money and who were all excluded from the mainstream theatre. In 1964, he created with them the Odin Teatret. In 1966, the Odin moved to Holstebro. The Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium was born in Holstebro to develop theatre activities, hold seminars, publish magazines and present shows. Barba realized that there were other theatre collectives like them who were not part of commercial theatre and were not part of avant-garde theatre either. He noticed that what all these groups shared were the work ethics and their vision of what theatre is. Barba called these groups the Third Theatre (Ruiz 407-409). The strength of these groups is that they represented a blunt movement of creators who suggested a new lifestyle: artists living together, working on their craft together and performing together (Masgrau 15-17).

In 1979, Barba founded the ISTA (International School of Theatre anthropology) which investigates intercultural acting techniques. The ISTA organizes public sessions where specialists from different fields analyse theatre (Ruiz 420-423). As it appears in *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, what stands out from Odin Teatret's training is the strong self-discipline of each artist and the intensity of the sessions. On the other hand, what makes their productions unique is that they always include the use of several languages. The audience understands the text not so much by the meaning of the words but by the way actors say those words. The Odin has developed a specific technique to train the voice which includes applying imagery in order to find different vocal textures. Their productions don't have a narrative logic but an associative logic that allows the actor to jump from one character to another

and from one space to another. The use of the physicality and voice becomes their trading mark, recognized by their energy and the associations they generate in the spectators minds (Barba).

### **3.2. The Craft of Directing**

As Peter Hall expresses, the word “director” is hideous because it is a word that tends to be associated with power, but a theatre director does not tell people how to act. Directing is not about telling or insisting but about something else. The question then is, what is directing and what does a director do? Peter Hall believes that a theatre director provokes performers to act and helps them select what they have acted, fulfilling an editing function (“The Role of a Theatre Director”). Lionheart Theatre Company adds to that description saying that:

A theatre director is a true maestro in the sense that they must bring together hundreds of different elements in order to make the play work. Directors bring a unique vision to a production and coordinate everything from performances, stage design, blocking, sound production, lighting and more in order to meld everything together into that cohesive vision (Lionheart “The Role of the Director in the Theatre”).

In an interview carried out by the American Theatre Wing, Anne Bogart expresses that a theatre director builds a creative space in the rehearsal room where people feel heard. On the other side, if we look at the result of a production, good directing manages to take the audience both to the past and future, to the past in terms of energy and to the future in terms of optimism. The voice of the director can

be heard and recognized in any production because through the actors and through the production itself this voice asks something particular to any audience and as an audience member, you know in the first ten seconds of a play what the director is asking from you ( “Directors on Directing ”).

As Michael Bloom explains in *Thinking Like a Director*, understanding the play and effectively portraying the story becomes the core of the director’s job. The director is both a storyteller and the medium between the text and the physical elements of the play; it is the person who essentially makes it happen. Any director needs to employ two points of view simultaneously. One point of view consists of living inside the play and discovering its energy while the other one is focused on its structure. Not only does the director provide the overall vision of the play, but also ensures that all elements are unified (Bloom, 10-15).

Nevertheless, there are many ways of achieving this and many different methods of approaching the script, as explained by Sue Dunderdale at RADA’s MA in Text and Performance. To compete with television and cinema many theatre directors aim to exploit what is special about live performance, others see theatre as a strong political tool while other directors make strong use of technology to create effects. All styles and influences collide and there is no single dominant way of directing.

Investigating the script is always the first step in the directing journey because all the information a director needs is in the script. Hugh Morrison explains in *Directing in the Theatre* that the directors’ task is to serve the play and not to battle against it in order to impose his interpretation. The script is where the story is, and where all essential information lies. A director needs to start by interpreting the play according to dramatist’s intentions. The initial steps for a theatre director is to read the

text over and over again and to work out how to edit the text so that when the director is in the rehearsal room can present his or her own version to the company (10-15).

As Sue Dunderdale explained in her directing course at RADA, the most challenging task for the director, once that the script has been thoroughly investigated, is to develop a concept for the play. Theatre is storytelling and a director is an interpreter. The director's interpretation is necessary because language carries multiple meanings. Having a clear directorial vision helps the rest of the creative team to tell the story better. Changing the original time and place of a classic can be effective but before making any bold interpretations the director will need to consider the themes in the play, the characters' relationships, the mood of the play, the style that is going to be used, and the rules of the fictional world that she is going to create. Researching is a key step for any director in order to develop a vision that has clear roots in the text. As Katie Mitchell explains in *The Director's Craft*:

Research helps you know the play better, it clarifies the world you would be building and makes you feel more secure as a director....It will root your understanding of the text in a strong sense of the historical period in which the play is set...Good research will help you to answer a substantial proportion of the questions.....remember, however, that you are not doing research to present a historical reconstruction of a period ( like those stale period room displays in museums, with plastic dummies representing people). Rather, you are collecting information that will help the actors to say and do everything they have to say and do in the action of the play". (7)

Mitchell explains that even if a director plans to change the setting for the play research will be important in order to understand what the pitfalls are of making the transition from one era to the other (6-10).

As I observed during my time assisting John Tiffany in the play *Hope* at the Royal Court, in London, once that the director has a clear vision for the production he leads meetings with designers and producers in order to discuss initial ideas and deadlines. After this, he holds auditions and plans rehearsals. A crucial part of rehearsals that defines the style of the director has to do with the blocking of the play. Blocking, as explained by Tiffany, will communicate specific information to the audience and will also convey the nature of the action to the actors. Blocking is the general movement and specific location of the actors at given moments of the play. Blocking includes taking into account the place that the actors occupy on stage, the levels that are created on stage and the distance that actors hold from other actors. At the early stages of a production, a director might have general ideas about the concept for the play but at this point, the director's concept has a specific application to each scene and more and more precise positions are decided by what feels and looks right. Blocking is very powerful as it can create pictures that emphasize the action. It is the language that the director will use to translate his ideas on stage.

Depending on the style of the director, rehearsals might include different processes. For example, if the director is following a naturalistic style, based on Stanislavsky, rehearsals will include breaking down the play, dividing the text into small units to study or examining the intentions of the characters and the objectives. Nevertheless, if the director wants to use devising or physical theatre it will entail a completely different rehearsal process. During the last days before a show goes on stage, the company works

on the theatre building, rigs the lights, puts up the set, does technical rehearsals, sees the actors working in costume and finally does a dress rehearsal before opening the play (Dunderdale, “Directing”).

As explained in *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing* the director has become a crucial figure in theatre and more and more audiences are drawn to productions by name of the directors. We can track the development of modern theatre thanks to the work of contemporary directors (1). Nowadays many directors have developed their unique voice on stage, such as Robert Lepage,

...whose trademark is the use of highly contemporary, cutting- edge technology in his performances. The action in his pieces is aligned with cinematic principles to capture a contemporary mindset. One defining quality of contemporary life is its rapidity: the sheer pace of cultural change, transcontinental travel and instantaneous communication; and high- speed movement is one of Lepage’s central images (168).

If we look at London theatres, more and more often we can see the voice of directors who make bold choices and have the urge to shake the stage while they also respond to our ever-changing society. Contemporary directors play with new looks, new sounds and new subjects and at the same time they aim to find stories that are relevant to the audience. Michael Billington says, “what fascinates me is the way plays uncannily reflect the temper of the times; you can chart Britain since the second world war through the history of its theatre” (“What I’ve Learnt from 10,000 Nights at the Theatre”). Although new writing is trendy, many directors are also searching how to tell old stories in a new way that reflects our society. Susannah Clapp analyses the British contemporary scene in her article



at *the Guardian* reminding the audiences of contemporary directorial choices that have been a turning point in theatre: “The Donmar’s 2012 all-women Shakespeares were a turning point. The publicity was about their femaleness but the productions were Trojan mares, shifting the norm: they featured more black, more brown, more short and more round bodies – and more non-RP accents. We saw talent of which the stage had been starved” (“All Change: Meet the new Artistic Directors Shaking up the British Theatre”).

### 3.2.1. The Design

The design is an important determining factor in the production as it enhances the experience that the audience can get from the performance. The architectural elements that are thought to improve the experience will vary from culture to culture and even between subcultures that belong to the same culture. The look of the production is largely the director’s responsibility, and it can be as imaginative or realistic as the director wants to make it. According to Franko Figueredo, director of East London based Theatre Company StoneCrabs; a theatre director oversees all the creative choices made on set, costume, lighting and sound so that they support their vision. Design is an important part of any theatre production. The design can be abstract, highly realistic, or anything in between. Although the primary function is to give some context for the play, it can also show the unique stunning perspective that the director has of a play and define the way that the director tells the story. Everything that happens in the design of a play comes from the director’s vision and the collaboration that is established between the director and the artistic team. Figueredo expressed that,

for example, all Stonecrabs' productions have in common that their designs are physical representations of an inner reality of the play.

### 3.2.2. The Set

There has been theatre since the first humans gathered around a fire to share stories. As time passed by, humans evolved, society evolved and so did the stories they shared and the settings where they presented them. The essence of storytelling is still there but everything else has become more and more sophisticated. One of the biggest changes has to do with the theatre buildings where plays take place. As Andrew Visneski explains in his course "Scene Study" at RADA, theatre is not just a space where people can watch a performance; it supports the creative exchange between the actors and the audience. Productions can be performed indoors or outdoors, in traditional spaces or in buildings that allow experimentation. When it is not in use a stage is just an empty space. When a play is on, a special acting area is created on the stage. This defined and decorated area is known as the set. It may represent a particular place, or just provide different levels and spaces for actors to work on and in. Making exiting and ambitious sets takes courage. The set is usually the first thing people see at the start of the play. It sets the tone for the whole performance and it aims to generate an impact (Andrew Visneski "RADA Course").

According to Katie Mitchell in *The Director's Craft*, the set has three main functions: communicate time and place, help focus the eye of the audience on the key action and support the actors in transmitting the ideas. She says that:

Place, like time, affects how we behave. There is a difference between having a conversation in an open field and having a conversation in a stuffy office in a tower block. Building a complete picture of the place in which the action of the play occurs helps the actor enter and believe in the world in which their character exists (22)

How do the director and the set designer get their ideas about the set? As I observed during the creative process of the play *Hope* by Jack Thorne at the Royal Court, a director will meet regularly with a set designer to devise an imaginative set that is also practical. Normally a play's writer gives clues in the text describing rooms and atmospheres. Everything starts by knowing the play thoroughly and researching the author and the era in which it takes place. The director will begin his approach to set design by understanding the different locations that are mentioned, the characters and the mood of the play. All this information may suggest ideas for themes and colours. The following step will be to take into account the specific space where the play is going to be presented or, in case it tours, the fact that it is a touring production. Once that all the practical elements have been considered the director also communicates her ideas to the designer based also on the style she wants to develop. A director should know what style of set she wants. It can be, for example, a symbolic set where every single object enhances the play's meaning, a naturalistic set, that is as close to life as possible, or an artistic decision will also be to have a neutral, unadorned set.

At the Springboard Course at the Young Vic Theatre, theatre director Ria Parry explained how nowadays there are many possibilities to play with the set. Theatres have moved from the open-air amphitheatres of the Greeks and Romans to the vast amount of forms we see today. Some forms work better for specific types of performance, and in

general, there is no ideal shape for a theatre. A traditional set, a proscenium arch stage where the audience is placed on one side of the stage, is easy to design for as both the potentials and limitations are well known to designers. This type normally works well for a naturalistic play as it creates the illusion of the fourth wall and the arch helps to frame the piece. The advantages include the opportunity to hide performers and sets in the wings. The biggest restriction is the lack of intimacy between actor and audience as the engagement with it is more forced than with other sets.

Contemporary directors usually try to explore different layouts and to be original with the set, which makes them face all types of challenges. While working with Stonecrabs Theatre Company as part of the Young Directors 'course we explored the different layouts available as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using each of them for a director. In a theatre in the round, the audience sits all-around a central acting space which can be either square or circular. Here, normal scenery would block sight-lines, so scenes have to be suggested with just a few props or by playing with lighting and colours. Apart from that, there is no curtain to hide scene changes, so normally things need to be moved by actors. The three-sided stage, called thrust, was the preferred option for William Shakespeare. Using a thrust stage, like the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford upon Avon or the Olivier at the National Theatre London, entails having a thrust into the auditorium with the audience sitting on three sides. The positive aspect of using this set is that the production increases the intimacy between actors and spectators while the negative side has to do with the number of problems that the blocking brings, which requires a lot of attention from the director and the need to check sight-lines. In a traverse set the audience sits on two sides. This option gives a catwalk feeling and although unusual, it is used by avant-garde theatre directors. The advantages include that all the seats are close to the stage but it poses a huge

challenge to the director so that spectators do not see either the backs or the profiles of the actors much of the time. The design for this set will also need to be minimal and work from all different angles, ensemble numbers is very difficult and entrances or exits are limited. If the director chooses to set the play in a studio she knows that seating can be moved to form an unusual acting space. This offers the opportunity to be striking, but sight-lines are again one of the main problems. The positive aspects of this choice are that the audience is closer to the actors and can connect better with them and that the director can play with the space to generate a specific mood. Promenade theatre, also called site-specific theatre, has become more and more fashionable as it blurs the line between audience and actors. It is a form of interactive drama where the audience moves from place to place under the direction of actors. Normally it is performed in a non-traditional space such as a pub, an old factory; a warehouse...The obvious disadvantage is that it occupies a lot of space and that spectators will notice every small detail of the set so it requires a lot of work from the artistic team (Figueredo and Locke).

### 3.2.3. Costume, Lighting and Sound Design

During my time collaborating as an actor with the graduates from the MA in Theatre Costume Design for Performance from the London College of Fashion, I observed that costumes complete the impression of the play and they can also give us invaluable information about the world of the character. Costume design brings to life a wide variety of worlds locked inside the texts. The choice of costume will vary depending on the demands of the play and it will also respond to the director's vision and chosen style. For example, a naturalistic production will dress a character in a

costume that is as close as possible to what the characters would have worn. Some costumes designs are a representation of real clothes, while others are more impressionistic and they evoke rather than depict. During our rehearsals and at the final show at Sadler's Wells Theatre, Agnes Treplin conveyed to the designers how the shape, colour and textures used can make a strong statement to the audience; they may reinforce the mood of the play, help distinguish between major and minor characters, suggest relationships and portray changes in the characters. It became clear that costume design is one of the essential elements that enhance the magic of theatre through the creation of a visual impact. Nevertheless, being part of that production as well as collaborating with many designers made me realise how important it is also for the director to make sure that the play does not become a catwalk for designs but that all designs are there to support and serve the story.

Andrew Dickson explains how Michael Boyd's Shakespeare history cycle which were designed by Tom Pipe "came to life when the cast evolved from generic medieval into modern dress: given shirt-cuffs to tug, glasses to peer through, they seemed more humane and more malevolently real" ("Style over Substance"). There are companies, such as Punch-drunk, that can conjure entire worlds out of junk shop finds. Intelligent costume design can push a play but a bad choice can also ruin a production. Clothes not only affect the audience but also the actors, how they breathe and how they move; many elements need to be considered when approaching the use of costumes in a play (Dickson, "Style over Substance").

Another key element in theatre is lighting. Lighting has become an integral tool to generate exciting theatre productions. For good basic lighting, the designer creates a balanced light enhancing textures and scenery, which allows making objects or actors

three-dimensional. To achieve a final effect the designer plays with a combination of lamps shone from different places: the front, the sides and the back of the stage. Each lighting decision will have a specific impact on the scene. For example, front lighting covers the stage well but it makes things look flat and boring. Side lighting imitates daylight and shows natural shadows, back-lighting makes people and objects stand out from scenery whereas top lighting cuts out shadows and highlights colours and textures. The director and the lighting designer will work together to get an overall lighting that serves the concept for the play, also looking at the effects that want to be achieved in particular scenes, such as creating the moonlight using a blue gel or a clouds gobo. Although many spectators might think that lighting is not that important element, lighting is a key tool that a director has as it can make the best out of the set and costumes and it can also help to tell the story (Cattaneo).

In the past, lighting was only part of the landscape, it was not a partner in the production, and its role was only to draw the audience's attention to a specific part of the stage or character. In the 70s, most of the lighting was flat, white and frontal. Nowadays, lighting has stepped out from the dark and it has become an exciting tool for the director because a good lighting designer will boost the emotional impact of a scene and sometimes even replace sets creating spaces and spectacular scene changes through intelligent manipulation of light. It can create poetic images, make use of innovative colour schemes and become an art by itself. The power and possibilities of the use of light are many because light affects everything in life. Through carefully analysing it with a light designer a director can find how to transport the desired effect to the theatre. For instance, we might feel depressed because of the lack of light, tired or energized because the type of light or even become emotional in a space that is properly warmly lit (Hill Gibbins).

Andrew Dickson describes that light “helps to control the look of the show but also tells the story. “You create rhythm, pace, move the audience’s focus, control the frame, cut between long shots and close-ups” (Dickson, “From War Horse to Wolf Hall”). Lyn Gardner expresses how “Canny directors know that lighting can transform a play”. She gives the example of Jamie Lloyd’s production of *Piaf* “Lit by Austin so it looked like an impressionistic painting, with a spotlight that always seemed to follow the doomed Piaf as if it were the luminous hand of fate itself” ( Gardner, “Bright Spark: the Rise of the Lighting Designer”). Imogen Russel Williams says that in her top list in the use of lighting is the Bridge Project’s double bill of *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Cherry Orchard* at the Old Vic, directed by Sam Mendes, where the set was very simple but the use of light made the audience put their imagination to work while remaining simple, fast and effective:

...the work of mood-setting and place-making is done through clever lighting design. *The Winter’s Tale* opens with hundreds of glass lamps suspended from upstage...in *The Cherry Orchard*, pale squares of window-light stretch across the stage to convey the relative scale of the mansion the cast inhabits. Skylights, French windows, the slit-like hint of a dungeon casement or the wide sweep of windows looking onto the unseen orchard are all understood through key light changes. Any attempt to render them with a physical set would have to sacrifice that fast-moving simplicity (Russel Williams, “Theatre Trips the Light Fantastic”).

Sometimes in a play, a sound is necessary, for example, a telephone rings or there is a knock on the door, but the use of sound goes beyond this as explained by Phil Bateman during my time assisting at the Young Vic. In a theatre production, there can



be pre-recorded sounds or music as well as live music. A good use of sound can set the scene, create a mood and set the emotional temperature because any sound has the potential of evoking an atmosphere. Nowadays, more and more directors take into account the importance of using sound and music. As Maxieen Szalwinska explains in *the Guardian*, “The relationship between the stage and the audio has never more exciting”. She says how up until some years ago the sound design was more traditional and only accompanied scenes while now new technologies have changed the way theatre uses sound design: “It goes hand by hand with the trend towards more immersive theatre, and cross- fertilization between theatre, film and radio”. As a result, it is more and more common to find productions where directors experiment with the use of sound. For example, you might listen to the whole play through headphones or watch performers wearing headphones because they do verbatim theatre and they are feeding them the words they say. Szalwinska reminds spectators of the work of Gareth Fry’s sound design on *The Waves* at the National Theatre where foley artistry, radio techniques and voiceover got Woolf’s stream of consciousness narrative across to a theatre audience (“Now Hear This: Theatre’s Revolution in Sound Design”).

Lyn Gardner agrees with Szalwinska, saying that “sound design is now sitting at the heart of theatre productions” (“Big Audio Dynamite: How Theatre is Moving at the Speed of Sound”). She argues that this is all part of a shift in theatre where there is more and more collaboration between the director and other artists, such as sound designers. An example that Gardner shares is the binaural sound used in Simon McBurney’s *The Encounter*, the Foley work in Theresa Heskin’s *Dracula* and Max Pappenheims’s sound design for Katie Mitchell’s *Ophelia’s Zimmer* “where the crunch of feet on gravel and sounds from the Danish court heightened the sense of Ophelia drowning in silence in her cell-like room, but also provided the audience with the information necessary to

understand Ophelia's unfolding story as reflected back through Shakespeare's original play" ( Gardner, "Big Audio Dynamite: How Theatre is Moving at the Speed of Sound"). Michael Billington also believes the power of sound in theatrical productions has become evident in the last years "Sound design is increasingly dominant in theatre, leading to what you might call a sonic boom. This is clearly influenced by cinema" (Billington, "Berberian Sound Studio Review").

Imogen Russell Williams explains that there has been a huge change in the process of using both sound and other technologies in theatre. It was only a few years ago when multimedia was badly used, it was normally intrusive and made the play lose coherence for the sake of introducing new technologies. Using film on stage was a cheap resource to attract new audiences or to easily support storytelling. Nevertheless, now there are productions " which make inspired use of projections, AV, techniques and tricks filched from film and TV, pushing the limits of what's possible on stage while never letting you forget you are in theatre" ("Multimedia in Theatre: Sound and Fury, Signifying Something").

The cinematic techniques are becoming a trend in theatre not only because of the use of sound but also because of the use of other techniques, such as the flashback and flash-forward. Russell Williams refers to Rupert Goold's 2007 production of *Macbeth* where he kept playing with showing the story from different points of view. An example of this was the banquet scene where "Macbeth presided a grim banquet, the walls riling eerily with projected blood, a gore blazoned Banquo lounging in the usurpers chair....Goold made us watch the scene a second time, this time with no blood and no Banquo" This helped the audience see everything from Macbeth's perspective

and then to experience it again from the feast goers perspective (“Multimedia in Theatre: Sound and Fury, Signifying Something”).

Theatre is an aesthetic experience that also questions the social and political model of a society. In the 21st century, theatre is going through constant changes. Some of these changes concern the director. The role of the director might not be as old as the role of the actor but it has established itself as a strong force in contemporary theatre. The director inspires teams, prepares the actors, generates the impulse of a vision for the production, translates the text from the page into the stage, observes all the process of creation, communicates his idea to others and supervises every single aspect of the play. There have been many directors throughout the years, such as Stanislavski, Brecht, Artaud or Copeau, who have left a legacy of methods and approaches to theatre - making. These influences inspire new directors who draw from different techniques trying to find their unique voice. These contemporary directors develop their own aesthetics by how they connect with the storytelling, how they rehearse and how they use the different tools available in theatre (lights, sound...) to share the story.

There are many contemporary directors who, even if they have not established any specific method, they have suggested new languages. Their approaches stand out because of the symbols they put on stage, their interpretation of the texts, the visual world they create, or their use of new technologies. Theatre directing has a profound transformative power and it has more and more ambition to reflect current issues and to connect the text with the society. Today being a director is a multi-layered task that requires understanding the script and responding to the challenges of the technological, fast- paced lifestyle of society we live in. Nowadays, productions are good not only because of the text but also because a director has succeeded to design a unique world

for the play. As Terry McCabe says in “Mis-Directing the Play” directing is currently at a point of great prominence and radical reinterpretation of dramatic texts has been a big part of theatre directing in the last years (3-10). Sometimes the director’s imagining of a play can even open new doors to understanding the playwright’s intention. Many theatre directors make adaptations of classical texts. This poses a series of questions regarding the boundaries between the freedom of the artist and the reconstruction of the play as it was originally done. Where are these boundaries? What challenges do directors face when working on a classic?

## 4. *King Lear*

### 4.1. Directing Shakespeare

Why do writers, poets, performers, film-makers or theatre directors continue recreating Shakespeare's plays? Neema Parvini expresses in *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theatre* that:

Few writers have ever received as much critical attention as Shakespeare. A cursory search of available books on Amazon.com pulls up over 94,000 results and a search for any of the individual major plays over 9,000 results. Even if these figures are far from accurate, they give us an impression of the sheer amount of ink that has been committed to paper in discussing Shakespeare's plays (8).

Shakespeare has managed to tell us stories in a way that has made a significant impact on creative people around the world. As Graham Holderness says in *Nine Lives of Shakespeare*, "Shakespeare is celebrated as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of *writers* – above all other writers (Holderness 24)". Nevertheless, the reason why he is so successful does not rely merely on the excellence of his writing. The quality of his work is evident, but Holbrook highlights that what makes him be represented in most of the theatres worldwide nowadays is that Shakespeare does not give us a simple, unified, vision of the world. His stories contain a truth about human existence that preserves a contemporary consciousness (Holbrook 5-6). His greatness is that both his stories and characters evoke the richness of life (Holbrook 171). Shakespeare's plays are captivating because their themes are universal and timeless. The dilemmas presented in

the stories are very modern. According to Holbrook, the fact that these timeless stories are kept alive, and at the same time, are made continuously new by contemporary directors is a powerful tool. It can connect us to the past and link ancient times to our present. The result of connecting times is that it also connects people, despite their differences. On top of this, his plays resist having a didactic message, giving, as a consequence, autonomy to the audience to draw their conclusions (Holbrook 155-156). This fact is the greatness of Shakespeare's legacy: "Bringing these topics today to stage enables young audiences to gain perspective and to deepen their understanding of the human condition (Banks 10-30)."

A contemporary director who wants to direct one of Shakespeare's plays not only faces the challenge of bringing a story to the stage. Each play brings to the present times a plot, and it also carries information with it from the Elizabethan theatrical practices and its cultural background. The contemporary director does not necessarily need to copy everything from these Elizabethan practices, but these conventions need to be examined and embraced before the process of transferring the play to a different time and period takes place. The text brings raw material but together with this, it also brings many complexities that the director needs to address (Baldwin 80).

Adaptation from one stage to another stage or from the page to the theatre is a creative act that entails a transposition of a particular work. This transcoding can involve a change in medium, genre, and context. When doing that movement is vital to mirror the human conflicts proposed in the text. Nevertheless, this action does not come from absolute fidelity to the text but from a deep understanding of the play's configuration. In theatre, audiences both expect and want retellings. The reinterpretation of stories is central to the core of theatre. The fact that a play from the 17th century is

still fashionable signals that the play is still alive. But for any play to breathe and be alive, it needs to move through a continuous process of altering its materials (Baldwin 16).

If the Elizabethan audience had experienced a globalized world, like the one we have now, the entire context for the staging of the plays would have probably been different: the tensions, rivalries, society... Globalization might have meant many things to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. During the years, the world within which theatre directors have lived has profoundly influenced their practices. As Carlson says in *The Haunted Stage*, the theatre's meaning and reception changes continuously. A director needs to forge connections with society; at the same time, the creative work needs to understand what has been done to take the next step. Theatre needs to look back in order to move forwards. From that perspective, the director will find fresh means to speak old texts in new times. The director cannot leave the background of the text or his society aside; a connection needs to be established between the audience and the creative work (Carlson 15).

Although this research is not going to plunge in-depth into the Elizabethan times, a contemporary director needs to be aware of the general circumstances and context where the play was generated and presented. This research can give the director valuable information about why Shakespeare's productions were done in a particular way. In Elizabethan times, spectators loved theatre. Theatre was the equivalent to the cinema of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so people made lots of money through theatre. In the beginning, innkeepers allowed plays to be shown in their yards in order to make a profit. Later on, due to the growing commercial success, they constructed open theatres and playhouses. In late Elizabethan London, many permanent playhouses were created

and, as a result, people could watch plays daily, which led to an explosion in playwriting and the emergence of the professional playwright. Between 1580 and 1642, around 900 plays were written for the commercial theatre. The number of people involved in the London theatre industry expanded rapidly in the early seventeenth century. Theatre was also affordable, and it was opened to everyone. The starting price was quite low, only one penny, so that anyone could go to the theatre. As a consequence, theatre soon became part of the social life (Keenan 53-54).

As explained in *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, in Elizabethan playhouses, hearing theatre was much more important than seeing theatre. Theatre was a place for language rather than the visual. It was the theatre of the word; so people went to the theatre to hear the play, not to see it. That is why language is so flourished in Shakespeare's plays. This importance of the words creates a huge contrast with the realities of our current times (Gurr 108–10). During the Renaissance, dramatists were more familiar with paintings or statues through books than through direct contact with them. Much of the poetry at that time aimed to establish a direct connection with paintings and their visual eloquence. The concept of *ut pictura poiesis*, which means as is painting so is poetry, comes from Horace and his *Ars Poetica*. Language aimed to reflect the beauty of paintings through the choice of the words. This fact is immensely different from our contemporary context (Sabatier 8).

Nowadays, the contemplation of images gives rise to contrasting reactions, from fascination to repulsion. Contemporary artists look to create through the use of images an apparent reaction from their audience. As we live in a visual society, the aim is not to translate the image into words but to generate compelling images and visual signs on stage. The considerations that designers have now when approaching a play did not



exist before. Nowadays, the visual appeal matter, so there is much artistic investment in deciding the aesthetic, the materials for the set and the general impression that the production wants to build (Sabatier 2). De la Torre explains how nowadays our culture is the culture of the image. A visual language has a more profound influence, especially on younger generations, who communicate nowadays through mass media, such as mobile phones, tablets and internet (De la Torre 39- 40).

As Elizabethan society connected more with the aural than with the imagery, set design was not as crucial as nowadays. Playhouses offered a simple background that could not be changed or adapted to fit each production because the theatre building had fixed features, such as pillars. As a consequence, all the plays presented in the same theatre shared the same set. The scenery for the productions was always quite empty; typically, there was a bare stage and some minimal props that offered a context for the play. For example, to represent a forest, they used a tree and to show a castle they brought a throne to the stage. Most playing companies owned stock of props that they could use in different plays. In the stage there were no wings. This means that all the entrances and exits were done using the rear of the stage. The only resource used was the trap door in the floor, which became the place for heaven, or hell, and a balcony, sometimes used for the appearance of ghosts. The lack of props and set explains why imagination was essential at that time. The general absence of scenery on the Renaissance stage is probably one of the most significant differences between the playhouses of Shakespearean London and those of the modern-day. Regarding lights, there were no stage lights of any kind. Plays were only performed during the daytime, so the mood created in the play was imposed by these restrictions (Keenan 107-108).

The only element on stage that was elaborate was the costumes. Elizabethan dramas used colourful costumes, which helped to show the character's status. Acting companies traditionally owned a stock of playing clothes and permanent playhouses provided secure storage for them. This opportunity allowed actors to expand their wardrobes. Companies spent more on costumes than on any other aspect of their productions (Keenan, 109). At those times, social class was dictated by what people wore. Costumes communicated specific information about the qualities of each character, so spectators were accustomed to reading colours symbolically. Shakespeare is rarely performed today in Elizabethan costumes. Directors tend to look for an angle from which to address the play, often finding a recent parallel that fits (Cooper 50-60). In terms of style, plays during the Renaissance sometimes used theatricality on stage, although in general, they looked for realism in their performances (Keenan 109). As explained in the previous chapter, the birth of many acting methods gave rise to a variety of styles that directors can now use in their productions. As a consequence, realism is only one of the many options of style available when approaching a play.

Seeing the context, we can understand how the choices of the director at that time were narrower. The context of the period dictated many of these choices. The use of an open-air theatre, no lights, or an empty stage was not part of an artistic decision but the only option available at that time. The use of costumes and the embellishment of language were the only means they had at that time to bring something different to the audience, to convey meaning and to engage with them. Andre Gurr talks in *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* about the importance of understanding the symbols of that time so that we can find their transfer to the modern stage. For example, headwear was a feature of social status that signalled a man's rank. As directors, we need to understand

these symbols to find the same meaning in our current context, which does not mean copying precisely what was done in 1606 (Gurr 46).

Casting a production nowadays is another crucial artistic choice in the process of staging a production. In Elizabethan theatre, there were also several restrictions in that sense. During that period, there were only male actors. As a consequence, young boys used to play women's parts. Acting in Elizabeth's England was an unsuitable profession for women because it was considered to be too rough for them. This fact was the reason why women were not legally allowed to perform on stage. Although female actors were performing in several European countries, women did not step on the English stage until King Charles II was crowned, in 1660 (Foakes 145).

Another casting restriction was connected to doubling in plays. The practice of doubling of roles happened because of emergency, deficiency or virtuosity. The last one reflects the desire of some performers to show their talent at quick changes. It was also very typical to see conceptual doubling; this is doubling parts that relate to one another. For example, in *King Lear*, conceptual doubling tended to happen between Cordelia and the Fool because they are linked in the text emotionally, and they are the closest characters to Lear (Foakes 146-148). Hence, doubling characters is not a modern strategy. Nowadays, similarly than before, there are also many different reasons why a director might choose to double characters. It can come from a financial restriction, as many theatre companies are not funded, and they can only afford a few actors, or it can be merely an artistic decision. For example, the director might want to double parts to highlight a specific point about a relationship. Cutting down on the cast instead of doubling or tripling might also be a choice, and this will mean that the text, somehow, will need to be altered as a result of this choice (Goodman 177).

The circumstances that surrounded the theatre profession were utterly different from now. Before the founding of the first playhouses in Elizabethan London, players were travelling troupes accustomed to performing in a variety of spaces, from markets and town-halls to monasteries and country houses, and even when they started acting in theatre buildings, they kept performing in other spaces. Some were lucky enough to be asked to perform at court. By the mid-sixteenth century, companies were of two main types: adult companies and boy companies. Most troupes consisted of three categories of player: sharers, who were adults that formed the core of the company, hired men and boy apprentices. The boy members of the adult companies were apprentices and varied in age from around thirteen to twenty-two years old (Keenan 12). As explained in *The Shakespeare Company*, traditionally, adult troupes travelled under the name of an elite patron, who was not directly involved in the day-to-day organization. Shakespeare belonged to a company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which consisted of a core of eight adults. As they performed daily, acting companies were in constant competition, which led to a fierce rivalry between companies (Gurr 12-14).

The day to day of companies implied staging one play a day. It took them around two weeks of rehearsals to prepare a new play, but on many occasions plays were prepared in a matter of a few days (Stern 54). This organisation contrasts considerably with the current rehearsals schedules in established theatre companies, where they rehearse for at least four weeks before going to the technical rehearsal. In the Elizabethan era, the little time allocated for rehearsals has raised questions about how players prepared for productions and how performances were managed. The evidence says that there was no equivalent of the modern theatre director. The book holder was the person in charge of controlling the entry and exit of actors, the preparation of props and the timing of special effects (Stern 231). The first record of a director in the

contemporary sense appeared over two hundred years after Shakespeare wrote and performed his plays (Banks 140).

Another peculiarity of the Elizabethan stage is that theatre at that time was highly collaborative. Shakespeare's plays were often the result of an intense collaboration. Before the play went on stage, it went through a process of adaptation, for which the whole company was responsible, not only the writer. It was very reasonable at that time to cut the text during the creative process (Erne 2 -3). In *Lear from Study to Stage*, it is said that:

A playwright completed a manuscript to the point that it contained the whole action of the play...then the manuscript was prepared for theatrical production: actors parts were written out, and various lists of properties and suchlike were made as the play was fitted to the stage. This part of the process could include adjustment of the text to suit the present composition of the acting company. Minor parts could be cut or merged to fit the number of actors available, or at some point of the play, it might be necessary more lines to be written to give time for an actor to exit, change his appearance and re-enter as a different character...consequently, a play text would exist at different times in two general textual conditions, one pre-performance, the other post-performance (Ogden 31).

This fact tends to be ignored by purists who are reluctant to change or cut lines in modern productions. Nowadays, when directing *King Lear*, some directors might not cut lines at all, some directors might make some cuts to the play before rehearsals and other directors might make these cuts throughout the rehearsal process, where actors might suggest some of these cut, or others might fight to keep their lines. This option of

cutting the text does not differ much from what happened when Shakespeare was alive. Cutting or not cutting lines depends on the objective that each director has. No two productions will feature lines cut in the same way because there is no single correct interpretation of the play. What becomes clear is that Shakespeare's plays are not sacred, and evidence shows that they were not sacred in Elizabethan times either. Cutting the text is one of the strategies available to directors to experiment on how to establish a more active engagement with the audience, which is not a new resource (Banks 30-33).

In April 1616, the life of William Shakespeare ended, and his afterlife commenced (Callaghan 1). This afterlife is present in all the productions that we can see nowadays on stage. Since Shakespeare's death, many companies have staged productions of his plays, and throughout the years, many different versions started to appear. In some productions, lines were cut, in others, scenes were deleted, episodes rearranged or violence reduced. Many earlier generations of directors romanticised the horrors of *King Lear* to mitigate its cruelty, whereas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century other directors emphasised the violence in *King Lear's* productions. What changes in these two scenarios is that it is an entire different context and audience. The audience of the 60s lived through two world wars, knew the Nazi camps and the famine, so they did not need to mitigate the cruelty of the play, as it was part of the world they knew (Croall 1-5).

The history of drama is a history of transformation. Theatre is an art where repetition, re-presentation and revision are integral of it. Each production serves as a window to the original text, providing a distinctive way of understanding it, as well as

another window to the contemporary world in which the performance takes part (Babbage 215).

Theatre returns, it always does. It returns to places where it has already been before, and to times in which it has already appeared. And while it does so, it sends us too, the spectators, to those places and times, performance after performance. Theatre also rewrites. It constantly does. It rewrites history, relationships, stories and rules. It refashions beliefs, recycles old and used objects and reassembles them into new embodied experiences. Above all, theatre repeats, and incessantly so. It repeats itself and the act of returning and rewriting, as though it were struck by an obsessive compulsion to reiterate and re-enact, again and again, the vestiges of its past. In so doing, it adapts itself to present contingencies and situations, like an animal species struggling to survive through evolution. Theatre, however, does not reshape its coordinates simply to remain alive or to remain itself through time, but also to change the world around it (Laera 2).

Simon Palfrey asserts in *Doing Shakespeare*, how productions must speak with immediacy and urgency to their spectators (30). However, it is not always easy to feel confident in leading this task. Some directors have succeeded in transferring Shakespeare's plays to the modern stage, others have failed, and many have managed to illuminate aspects of these plays through their artistic approach (Palfrey 8).

## 4.2. King Lear

*King Lear* was probably composed in 1605, though there is no direct evidence to show when it was written. The play has been linked to Shakespeare and tragedy. Nevertheless, the roots of it were in many other texts, and some of them were not even tragic. As Bradley explains, many sources served Shakespeare as inspiration to write *King Lear*. Stories of a king called Leir or Lyr can be traced in both English and Irish mythology. On top of that, there is a long tradition of a Celtic ocean god called Llyr (Bradley 12). The story of Lear finds its roots also in a folk-tale. In this tale, which is more than four hundred years old, a father submits three daughters to a love-test. Two daughters gave answers that pleased the father, while the youngest failed the test; by saying she loved him as food loves salt. In the end, her father discovers he has been mistaken, and he is reconciled to her. Although this folk tale might have been the main inspiration, evidence shows that Shakespeare's play has been constructed from a wide range of existing narratives (Foakes 3).

Another source was the anonymous play *The True Chronicle History of the Life and Death of King Lear*. This play was about the battle of good against evil, and in its plot, Cordelia was rescued, and Lear got his power back. Shakespeare changed the plot and added the sub-plot of Gloucester. For this sub-plot, he received the influence of Sir Philip Sidney's account of the Paphlagonian prince *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, published in 1590. The parallels between Sidney's story and Shakespeare's sub-plot are apparent. In his introduction to the Arden *King Lear*, R.A. Foakes argues that Shakespeare enriches and complicates this story. Shakespeare's tragedy also owes clear debts to the anonymous play called *The True Chronicle History of the Life and Death of King Leir and his Three Daughters*, which was performed in 1594. In this one,



the narrative arc begins with the love-test, it escalates with Leir's mistreatment at the hands of his daughters, and it is resolved by his reconciliation with Cordelia. Edmund Spenser included an account of the fall of a great man in his poem *The Faerie Queene*, which dates back to 1590. In this poem, the youngest daughter called Cordelia is hanged. Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* tells the story of a King who decided to divide his kingdom between his three daughters (Bradley 14-16).

Montaigne's essays, which were translated into English by John Florio in 1603, also inspired Shakespeare. On top of this, in *King Lear* it can even be heard the echo of the Biblical story of the Prodigal Son. It is evident that *King Lear* is a play that was inspired by a wide combination of myth, legend and history (Bradley 14-16).

As the Royal Shakespeare Company expresses on their website, the first performance of *King Lear* was done on the 26th December 1606. The King's Men performed the play at court for King James. The history of this tragedy has had its ups and downs. Nahum Tate re-wrote many of Shakespeare's plays to provide them with happy endings. In 1681, he released a version of *King Lear* where Cordelia survived and married Edgar. In this version, Lear also survived, and Cordelia took care of him until his death. On the Victorian stage, *King Lear* was one of the least popular tragedies because it was considered the most troubling and problematic of Shakespeare's tragedies.

In 1811, the critic Charles Lamb said that *King Lear* was impossible to be represented on stage. Critic A.C. Bradley agreed with him saying that the tragedy was too big for the stage. The play was also considered unstageable, due to its excessive display of cruelty and suffering. From 1810 to 1820, *King Lear* was banned because

King George III suffered from insanity. As Lear goes mad, this play was not considered appropriate to be shown on stage. During many years there were no productions of *King Lear* at all. Nevertheless, after the war, it started to become more and more popular, and by 1960 it was considered a great play. From 1980 onwards, there were many productions of *King Lear* that showed an increasing interest in offering different approaches, looking, for example, at the political and social aspects contained in the play (Croall 1-5).

The plot-line of the *Lear* story is notably similar to that of a fairy tale. *King Lear* tells the story of a king who decides to give the leadership of the country to his daughters. Nevertheless, for them to receive their part, they are asked to perform a public declaration of love for him. Cordelia, the youngest, refuses to give him the response he expects and that fact sets the narrative of the play. Goneril and Regan start controlling the divided kingdom while Cordelia is exiled. From this moment onwards, we see how Lear's power decreases, whereas the daughters' power increases. The play is a journey through Lear's physical disintegration, his loss of sanity and his re-encounter with Cordelia. The sub-plot extends the exploration in the father-child relationship illuminating the examination of filial love and loyalty. *King Lear* is considered one of Shakespeare's most significant achievements because it involves a whole society. The characters range from a king to a beggar, and the sets go from a palace to a hovel. Its emotional range also goes from one extreme to the other, moving from violent anger to the intimacy of loving reconciliation (Mack 96).

*King Lear* is one of Shakespeare's most complex texts, presenting a range of themes for exploration. These themes are universal and timeless, which have allowed the play to be studied in different contexts (Mack 97). As Sue Dunderdale expressed in her

directing course at RADA, *King Lear* is a very chameleonic play, whose thematic preoccupations vary from one stage to another, depending upon the interpretation of the director. During the last four hundred years, *King Lear* has been directed and performed to respond to the pressing concerns of the moment. It has also been radically edited in some productions to suit the values of its contemporary society (Dunderdale).

One of the themes of *King Lear* is the decay and fall of the world. The play opens with Lear's abdication, and the consequent division of his kingdom, in the middle, there is a civil war, and the play ends with the proclamation of a new king. Overall, it portrays the change from one social order to another one (Mack 98-99). Jan Kott expressed in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* how in *King Lear* all the values disintegrate. In one of the chapters, called "King Lear or Endgame", he suggests reading the play in terms of Samuel Becket's absurdist drama. This nihilistic interpretation highlights the absurdity of the story, which mirrors the absurdity in life (Kott 116).

Kott explains that when the world order has been destroyed, it is useless to look for God, nature or even history. In Becket, the grotesque replaces the tragedy. This tragic situation becomes grotesque because all the options are absurd and Lear is a ridiculous king who moves towards a complete emptiness (Kott 108-118). *King Lear* can be seen as a morality play too because Lear goes through the depths of despair to emerge as a man who has learnt from his mistakes, exemplifying Christian forgiveness. As in any morality play, there are bad and good characters, unjust and fair people. Nevertheless, the torturers and the tortured, the noble and the base ones get destroyed (Kott 130-133).

*King Lear* also shows a change from feudalism to Renaissance. It demonstrates the fight between a system that is dying and another system that is about to get born. All the characters in the play belong either to the old order or to the new one. *King Lear*

catalyses the feudal order where people serve those in power. His status resides mainly on the ownership of the land, and he gets angry because he cannot keep his knights (Hidalgo 123). While Lear, Gloucester and Kent are part of the old feudal order, Delaney sees Edmund as a Machiavelli character that belongs to the new order. Goneril, Regan and Edmund are strong portrayals of individualism. Even when they die, they have managed to destroy the old order and with it, all the things they did not approve of (Hidalgo 126).

The feminist criticism has seen this play under a psychoanalytical lens that explores the maternal absences. It observes that there is a connection between the lack of mothers and the childish attitude of Lear who discovers at the end that he does not own the love of Cordelia. The Cordelia that appears in Act IV is the Cordelia that Lear fantasizes with at the beginning. Her nature has changed as she takes Lear to the promised end (Hidalgo 129). This feminist criticism also looks at the paternal figures in the play. It plunges into the relationship between Lear and his daughters, revealing that there is a frustrating incestuous desire in him. It also highlights the contradiction between the absolute control he wants to execute over them and his dependence upon them (Hidalgo 128).

Pamela Bickley finds that the opening scene of *King Lear* is an example of materialism. According to her, Lear's main fault is that he confuses love and material value. Lear asks his daughters for a performance to show their love in public. She compares this scene to a circus, explaining how it becomes extremely uncomfortable to watch adult women declaring their love to their father. Lear's aim through that performance is to quantify their love and to create a competition between them. The eldest daughters understand this and reply accordingly, entering the suggested game. As

a consequence, they win the prize. Lear anticipates not only that Cordelia will do the same, but that her answer will be even better (Bickley 145).

Cordelia's answer "nothing" only means she does not want to be part of that game. Nevertheless, Lear takes it as a rejection. Because of this, he humiliates her publically. Lear's main mistake is that he objectifies Cordelia and that he measures love as if it were money. This fact seems to be one of his most significant flaws as a human being, as he shows this in other moments of the play, for example, he also measures Goneril and Regan's love according to the knights that he can keep. Lear's love is wholly connected to materialism and domination. He assumes his authority, seeing himself as a god with divine power. He executes this power in his relationships, creating an oppressive family model (Bickley 154).

The concept of competition and materialism is also present in other characters. For Danby, Edmund represents "a society based on unfettered competition and the war of all against all" (Danby 185). Paul Delany also says that "King Lear represents the neocapitalist economy of the Renaissance, not directly, but rather through an exploration of the philosophical concepts and moral values that are typically associated with that economy (Delany 15)".

In "King Lear and the Rhetoric of Alienation" Bucks says how "King Lear is a play about a monarch who legally alienates his property, and as a consequence, he suffers personal alienation (Buck 49)". Radin expresses that alienation means "a feeling of being cut off or ostracised from one's appropriate social environment, a psychological malaise caused by lack of commitment or loss of meaning in life (Radin 192)." Radin explains that the main problem is that Lear's property and personality are merged. As a consequence, when he alienates his land his personhood is also alienated (Radin 50).

Kenyon connects the alienation that happens in the play to the Bible. He makes the link between the story and the moment when the human being is cast out of the Garden of Eden because it is at that time when evil comes into world. Man's sinfulness introduces chaos in the universe because it breaks the great chain of being, in which spiritual and temporal elements existed in a balanced order (Kenyon 30).

In the play, we get different types of alienation: psychological, emotional, physical and geographical. The Royal Shakespeare Company highlights on its website the importance of alienation and banishment in the play. Cordelia's unwillingness to give his father the answer that he expects infuriates Lear and he banishes her. Nevertheless, her alienation is not only geographical, but it is also her way of thinking what alienates her. She is unable to behave like her sisters and to play the game her father wants. Cordelia's nature is different from the others, so she cannot satisfy the ego of her father. Cordelia's alienation mirrors Edgar's alienation. Both Edgar and Cordelia love their fathers but they are both rejected by them. At the same time, their fathers also parallel each other as they both favour children who do not love them and only seek their wealth. When the Earl of Kent challenges Lear's temper, Lear also banishes his faithful servant. Soon, Lear's relationship with Goneril and Regan is damaged, and he finds himself banished in the storm, suffering rejection by his daughters. On the other side, Gloucester is also cast out because he supported the displaced King. Similarly to Lear, he ends up utterly defenceless while Edmund, by the mere fact of being a bastard, also suffers a type of alienation (Kenyon 31-32).

Jaffa sees that a strong theme of the play is the legitimacy of the monarchy. He expresses how *King Lear* is a typical Renaissance play because, in the Renaissance, the man was considered mostly a political animal. He argues that the decision to divide the

kingdom was thought beforehand and did not come to Lear's mind spontaneously. Lear had already thought about giving the south and north to Goneril and Regan, and to leave the most important part of the territory, the central part, to Cordelia. He observes that we can see in the play typical alliances that happen in monarchies, such as marriage alliances. Based on this, he suggests a very blunt idea, that Cordelia's attitude is a deliberate strategy to try to marry the king of France. Under his point of view, Cordelia is not an honest woman but an ambitious character that also had a different plan in mind. Nevertheless, her pride made her reject her father's request. Jaffa sees the end of the play with the death of Cordelia and Lear as a fair punishment (Jaffa 405-408).

Although *King Lear* is a tragedy, the play subverts many of the tragedy conventions of the genre, moving away from the classical elements of Greek tragedy. Griggs expresses how the play can be seen from many different perspectives, and directors might decide to highlight one theme at the expense of others. The play offers a narrative that contains mythical properties; so many directors have presented it as the mythical journey of an everyman who goes through a redemptive path. Other directors' focus relies on exploring the perspective of a family; others look at the boundaries of sanity or the identity crises, the humanity's march towards the apocalypse or even the repressed sexual energies within patriarchal institutions. We can find many productions with contrasting approaches (Griggs 1-12). The fact that this text contains so many possibilities is one of the most exciting elements for any director. The deep connection that the play has to many universal themes allows directors to plunge into a perspective of their own that will allow the audience to navigate the play from that specific approach.

### 4.3. Directing King Lear

In August 2004, the Spanish national newspaper *El País* published an article called “The Vital and Renewed Addiction to Shakespeare” that expressed how directing Shakespeare was like a drug that created addiction among directors (Gregor 1). Over the last four centuries, Shakespeare’s works have been creatively reproduced in theatre (Holbrook 12-13). One of the first challenges for a theatre director who wants to direct *King Lear* would be to target the debate of whether it is possible or not to adapt Shakespeare and the second one would be to face how to do it in terms of fidelity to the text (Baldwin 80). As Holbrook says, adapting Shakespeare is:

a catch-all word for a piece of theatre modelled on or inspired by a work or works of Shakespeare. Etymologically: to fit to a new context (with Darwinian under- and overtones). Much ink has been spilled in assessing the finer taxonomical distinctions between what counts as an adaptation, an offshoot, an appropriation, a spin-off, etc. Some argue (plausibly) that every production of a Shakespearean play – no matter how apparently ‘faithful’, straight or neutral – is, in fact, an adaptation, involving as it (usually) must cutting and other key interpretative choices relating to casting, scenography, direction, costume and the vast array of non-verbal meaning generated by any performance (Holbrook 12-13).

There have been constant attempts to free performance from the bondage of the text. All productions of *King Lear* have some references to the original and some differences from it (Foakes 47). Ryan says in *King Lear and Its Afterlife, how “King Lear affords innovative new readings (Ryan 1).”* Nevertheless, purists seek fidelity to the text above artistic freedom. In the on-line conference held by the ESAD, in Murcia,



it was said that theatre aspires to have freedom but that, at the same time, some contemporary productions of Shakespeare are so experimental that the audience would not know what the play is about unless they have read it previously.

Since the end of the eighteenth century, the influence and presence of Shakespeare on stage have been increasing. In modern theatres, his plays coexist with contemporary plays. Peter Brook's assistant director, Charles Marowitz expresses in "Lear Log" that there is the need for a continuous process of recycling and the creation of a dialogue between time frames. In order to overcome the canon where *King Lear* has been kept, there is a need to adopt a quantum leap approach (Marowitz 15).

In recent years, there have been not only theatre productions but also many reimaginings of the play, such as Edward Bond's *Lear*, even prequels such as *Lear's Daughters* by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group, and *Seven Lears* by Howard Barker. *King Lear* emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the most potent rival to the dominance of Hamlet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The period between the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century has also seen the birth of many of new exciting approaches to see the figure of Lear "There have been tyrannical Lears, vain and foolish Lears, spoiled-child Lears, senile Lears, and various combinations of these (Ogden 226)". Throughout its performance history, many productions have managed to accommodate the preoccupations of each era. The fact that we know little about Lear's past, and that he tells us little about himself, has allowed the part to be given a wide variety of interpretations. During the Victorian era, *King Lear* was played in a Stonehenge-type setting, and Lear had a druid aspect. In recent productions, there have been many interpretations, and Lear has been played, by actors of differing ages. Sometimes he has been portrayed at the beginning of the play as a man already showing clear signs of

senility or madness. More and more similarities are found nowadays between him and a contemporary dictator (Croall 1-5).

As Kott expresses in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, the staging of *King Lear* has widely changed during the years also influenced by the artistic movement that what going on at each moment. There have been realistic productions that aimed to be “authentic” Shakespeare productions, where copies of Elizabethan furniture, costumes or jewellery have been made. These productions became nearly an exhibition of historical elements. Some of the resources in these productions seemed ridiculous when contrasting them to the realities of the moment (Kott 100-133). In contrast to this type of productions, there have also been radical productions of *King Lear*. For example, Footbarn did a reconstruction of the play using only 25 per cent of the text. In *Lear from Study to Stage* it is expressed how:

It goes without saying that there is no such thing as a complete production of *Lear*. The biases of the director, the design he chooses, the peculiarities of the actors he casts, ...the theatre in which they are performing, the nature of the audience to whom they are performing, and intangibles ranging from the atmosphere of the evening to the cultural context in which the event is occurring, together they will obviously slant and therefore in some sense limit the play. Thus is it possible to distinguish particular emphases in recent productions, which may be roughly summed up as domestic, political and metaphysical. The challenge perhaps is to embrace all three....A man and his family disintegrate; England is dangerously divided and, by the end, at war, the very idea of an ordered universe is in question (Ogden 229).

In its 400-year history, *King Lear* has seen periods of immense popularity as well as long stretches of critical scorn. *King Lear* is a story that was simply too large for early nineteenth century audiences but it has grown in popularity in the twentieth century. Our century has seen a revival of interest in the play, and it is easy to understand the reasons. Whereas in earlier years there was a need to reassure the world about the benevolence of the universe we are now more open to see on stage the horrors that surround our lives. Nowadays there are productions focused on a wide variety of themes, including death and violence, ruthless leadership and questioning God's presence in an unjust universe. One of the greatness of art is that it absorbs changes, and time can also add dimensions to a work of art (Kennedy 42).

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the role of Lear has been played by the leading actors of the English stage and there has been an overwhelming interest in the play worldwide. It has been staged in Canada, Australia and South Africa, among other places. There is a need to stage Lear because it teaches us something about the nature of the human experience. Nevertheless, Charles Lamb said that *King Lear* should only be read and not staged. He insisted that it should be protected from the excesses of contemporary theatre practice. Under his point of view, there are not resources to represent the horrors that appear in the play because the corporal and intellectual dimension in it is huge (Park 160-167).

As Lamb expressed, the individual performances might be good, but, overall, a performance would betray the text as it cannot reflect the complexity of Shakespeare's work. He argues that the disproportion between reading and seeing the play acted is such that "Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on stage" (Park 167). He

believes that in the transition from the mind of the reader to the stage there is something that gets lost (Park 168).

A growing desire of a more personal connection with Shakespeare's work and excitement about directing *King Lear* has questioned whether or not the staging of the productions could do justice to Shakespeare's text. Esther Merle Jackson sees the problem exposed by Lamb and explains that there have been many other critics who believe that Shakespeare should be read rather than seen, but she argues that this is a disturbing affirmation. Confining Shakespeare to the realms of literature is a process of aesthetic reduction. Drama is very complex and ignoring the performance means depriving the drama of its plastic form and, as a consequence, of many of its essential components. The language of theatre is more than words. The main challenge when bringing a play from the text into the performance is that it needs to make use of a second language to be articulated. This particular grammar involves elements such as sound, gesture, costume, design or artistic ideas (Jackson 25).

Experimentation has given Shakespearean drama a great vitality, but it has also been the source of many problems. *King Lear* has been subject of continuous controversy. The Lear question has to do with a search for an absolute truth that does not exist. There has been an inability to accept Shakespeare in the full concept of its meaning. The issue is that there is not only one way to stage *King Lear*. The process of staging asks the director to translate the words of Shakespeare into signs. Bradley expressed how this articulation requires a complex language that generates connections between the author, the director and the audience (Jackson 26-28).

Apart from the criticism that doubts that Shakespeare's plays should be staged, there has been another attitude since the 19<sup>th</sup> century that argues that the text is sacred and that the director cannot alter the words. Nevertheless, from 1660 to 1900, there was not a single production that presented the complete text of the play. What happened on stage then was not that different from today's standard practice, where it is seen as usual to cut lines or rearrange scenes. Each new production is a new attempt at understanding the play. The problem is that this type of criticism that seeks absolute fidelity has not considered some elementary issues about theatre (Kennedy 43). As Foakes expresses in "Performance and Text", the term "fidelity criticism" describes interest in over privileging the parent work and the source over the production. Foakes explains that performance is not tied to the text. The text is taken to the stage where it starts operating in a specific social and historical context; it is precisely this interaction what produces a specific meaning. Shakespeare's intentions for the staging are not clear as there are not many stage directions in the play. He leaves much freedom to the director. As a result, the director makes some choices to transform the text into an acting script and to frame what we see in a production (Foakes 86).

Some of the decisions in a production of *King Lear* might be affected by the choice of the quarto or the folio as a starting point, a production might also be influenced by the times in which it is staged, by their society and the issues that matter the most to it. In some approaches to the play, the aura of royalty will not be as important as other problems, such as, aging, homelessness or family disintegration. Directors make decisions that stress some elements over other ones. They also choose a particular style that, under their point of view, aims to give a visual coherence to the production. *King Lear* is not set in a specific historical time. This gives the opportunity to directors to look for a suggestive visual setting. The portrayals of the characters can also vary. The

creation of Lear can move from being a tyrant to a weak old man, the same happens with the rest of characters, because all of them are open to many interpretations. The fool may be young or old, it might be played by a woman or a man, Goneril and Regan might be mature women who are hurt or they might be the embodiment of nastiness, Cordelia might be a Joan of Arc warrior or a passive submissive figure. There are many decisions that are not marked by Shakespeare and that become part of the choices that the director can make (Foakes 89).

Watching the performance of *King Lear* is a different experience from reading it because the performative language conveys meaning by creating connections between actions and words. The reaction of the audience would depend on how scenes are presented and how the characters are portrayed (Foakes 92). We receive information about the characters not only through language but also through their visual and bodily interactions. Shakespeare establishes multiple textual meanings through the complexities of the characters, opening with this a wide range of possibilities for the directors. Watching a performance of *King Lear* offers a visual context that enriches the text. New productions can make spectators aware of new aspects of the play (Foakes 96).

As Bradley says in *Adapting King Lear*, the popularity of 20<sup>th</sup> century Shakespeare productions suggest that directors want to explore the resonance of Shakespeare's play in today's culture. These productions investigate if it is possible to have repetition without replication, repetition with specific variation, they reference the original, but some of them also have divergences from it (Bradley 12-15). Director Isamu Noguchi said that "The many problems presented by *King Lear* are a measure of its greatness. Its essence is change and growth: nothing stays put, either in pace or in characterisation. It

deals with a tale of Ancient Britain, yet it seems to be timeless and universal (Noguchi 10)”.

It is evident that the connection of contemporary spectators with this tragedy depends first on the quality of the literature. Nevertheless, this is not the only thing that matters. This connection also depends upon the theatrical language used in the production. Shakespeare’s plays are burdened with centuries of theatrical criticism, and this becomes the first obstacle for the staging. The demands for the director who wants to stage *King Lear* are enormous, not only has to face the weight of all this criticism but also deal with a text that brings many complications with it. Plays are embodiments of ideas and directors become the interpreters these ideas, but this is not an easy task, especially with *King Lear*, as there are some scenes and characters that have proved to be extremely challenging to deal with (Chinoy 11). For example, since the time of Restoration, where they emphasized realism, the scene of the storm has been a great challenge. Even today, when directors have many other styles to choose from and they also count with the use of modern technology, they still struggle to solve the problem as this scene is sometimes too loud to hear the actor or too surreal to connect with the character. This is not the only difficulty in the play, *King Lear* has too much in it, there are too many themes, and it is too complicated to show them all (Kennedy 43). The text stretches the human imagination, and as theatre tries to make the invisible visible, the director has a great difficulty keeping up with it.

Exploring the work of different productions of *King Lear* is a unique opportunity both to plunge into the nature of directing and to explore the challenges that the text brings to the stage. The following part of this research shows a synthesis of directors whose work reflects different contemporary approaches. Their articulations of the

theatrical language will let us understand the different ways of dealing with the complexities of a mountain text like *King Lear*. The following directors managed to illuminate different aspects of the play, and their productions have brought to the text many extensive meanings. On top of that, some of these directors also wanted to trademark their production by adding something different. We can see, either through their success or failure, how they targeted complex scenes, built characters and made their approach to the play. This section shares a variety of approaches to deal with the text, and it goes more in depth in the work of those directors that made a more significant impact in their achievement to generate a dialogue between the text and the contemporary audience. There have been many productions of *King Lear* but this section does not aim to cover them all as it is not a guide of its stage history. Although it moves in chronological order it only features those productions that stood up from a specific reason.

- Harcourt Williams

In 1931, Harcourt Williams directed John Gielgud in the title role at the Old Vic Theatre, in London, where Williams was the artistic director. During the years that Williams spent leading the Old Vic, he managed to transform the venue from a community centre to a space that has become a house for many exciting theatre seasons. This production marked a critical moment for the stage history of *King Lear* because up until that moment, people thought that the play was unstageable. It was not easy for Williams to face the decision to direct this classic. The first and biggest challenge was to go against that general belief that had been created around *King Lear*. It was not the



easiest task for a director to find the resources to put the play on stage when everyone thought it was not possible (Rowell 2).

Gielgud created a very majestic Lear, full of physical strength. However, he realised he did not manage to embody the complexity of Lear's journey properly because his strength was not adequate after Lear lost his mind; there was not enough change in the character. Critics said that this was a Lear "who would bend but never break" (Croall 12). Regarding the concept for the play, Williams' ideas seemed rather unimaginative. Painted curtains were the main elements used for the set and to represent the different locations; the curtains' change marked each change in the play. One of the most challenging scenes to direct is the storm. In this production, the artistic choice for the storm was a complete failure as it made Gielgud struggle in a battle between his voice and a loud thunder sheet. Williams did not manage to change the myth that was created around the play, as his production was very weak, lacking both weight and power. Nevertheless, Williams opened the path for a line of modern productions that dared to face the challenges that the tragedy creates (Croall 10-13).

- Theodore Komisarjevsky

In 1931, the Memorial Theatre's artistic director William Bridges-Adams directed Randle Ayrton as Lear in the Stratford Picture House in a simple production. Five years later Ayrton played Lear again in a radical, expressionistic production by the pioneering Russian director and designer Theodore Komisarjevsky. Komisarjevsky's style drew from Meyerhold's expressionism, and his artistic language used the visual

and oral figuration, borrowing the language of the plastic arts and creating an architectural work of abstraction (Jackson 35).

Up until that moment, most productions of *King Lear* had had a barbaric atmosphere, but Komisarjevsky was an *Enfant terrible* determined to break with that tradition. “His productions amused and outraged...they anticipated much of what has come to be regarded as normal, on today’s stage” (Wells 73). The production schedule brought a massive issue to the company as, due to financial reasons, they could only have a week of rehearsals. Komisarjevsky made the brave choice to cut the text quite heavily; he made textual transpositions and turned the knights into a chorus who commented on the action, repeating some of the fool’s sayings in unison (Croall 13-14).

The set showed a long staircase of narrow steps, apart from that, there was only one piece of furniture, a throne. The idea for the design was to rely on the dramatic use of lighting to change the moods, which was an entirely new thing for that time. During the production, for example, the lights changed from being bright blue at the beginning to becoming blood-red at critical moments. For the storm, he went for a bare stage where he could play with the drama generated by the lighting. The audience could see the actors’ silhouettes and clouds projected onto the cyclorama. This part succeeded at symbolizing through the use of shadows the burden of a person carrying his affliction. Komisarjevsky showed an incredible mastery of the technical elements in theatre and an enormous capacity to portray atmospheres with clarity. He also succeeded at introducing the use of symbolism on the staging of the play. The lights in the final scene were extraordinary as light and darkness were used in a poetic way that paralleled what was happening to the characters. It closed with a mesmerizing visual reflection on life and death (Wells 79).

Komisarjevsky's production offended the traditionalists who sent many letters to the local press complaining about his play and asking if that was really Shakespeare. This fired the debate of the identification of Shakespeare with a specific way of staging his plays. Nevertheless, his production of *King Lear* succeeded at using an imaginative staging that reinforced the cosmic elements in the play. His approach was very far away from being traditional; it was distinctive, brave and playful. He made use of an innovative stage vocabulary that managed to tackle in a very clever way all the problems that the text created (Croall 15).

- Laurence Olivier

In 1946, the New Theatre in London presented a production where Laurence Olivier was directing himself as Lear. Olivier worked everything out in great detail, planning every move according to the text before going to rehearsals. He managed to introduce some interesting ideas in his production, such as Regan having an orgasm when Cornwall trampled on Gloucester's eyes to portray how aroused the sisters get by power. Although there were some interesting touches, the production did not bring anything exciting to the performance history of the play. As Matthew Dunster expressed in his research and development work at the Young Vic when he was exploring *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a big challenge that a director faces when staging Shakespeare is to bring something new to the stage. It is frequent to see productions that do not have anything new to say. It is, thus, valuable for any director to understand why there is a need to direct that classic at that particular moment in time. It is also vital for a director to think about what his production is going to bring to the stage history of *King Lear* (Dunster).

One of the most challenging things to do in theatre is to direct and perform at the same time. The difficulty relies on the fact that the director cannot have a clear overall vision of the show because he is inside it. Moving between these two roles is challenging in any production, but if it is a play of the dimension of *King Lear*, it becomes even more problematic. Olivier tried to instil humanity to his portrayal of Lear. According to Brown he played “an old and testy curmudgeon of a king, veritably breaking and wounding himself on the flints of his own folly, most believable in his vanity and petulance, infinitely pathetic in his final collapse” (Brown 140).

But as Olivier struggled to deal correctly with the technical and dress rehearsals as he could not assess the effect of his production. As a result, his production ended up being clumsy (Croall 17-20). Although it was not an innovative production and from the director’s perspective it did not bring anything new to the stage it became evident that the audience enjoyed watching *King Lear*. This showed that the taste of society had changed and that the tragedy was not, as some critics said unstageable, as Brown expressed:

We live in harder days and amid more horrifying circumstances than our forefathers, who found this huge, relentless tragedy either too fierce a thistle to be grasped by the actor or too ugly a cactus to be enjoyed by a public which preferred its theatre to be orchidaceous. Now with the terrors of the atom bomb on one side, and the magnetism of Mr. Olivier on the other we have altered all that (126).

- George Devine

In 1955, John Gielgud played Lear for the fourth time in a controversial production directed by George Devine. Devine decided to put together a traditional actor with a very experimental designer. He wanted to be innovative with the play, trying to combine the tragedy with heavily stylised movement. Devine said that he wanted to create an abstract world that reflected human emotions. His aim for the design was to find a set and costumes which would be free of historical association and that, at the same time, reflected the timeless, universal and mythical quality of the story. He had a futuristic set created by sculptor and furniture designer, Isamu Noguchi (Croall 31).

Jennifer Mae Hamilton expressed in *The Contentious Storm: An Ecocritical and Performance History of King Lear* how Devine's conceptual approach wanted to convey a psychological universe. In order to do that, Noguchi went back to the essential shapes: the form of an egg, a triangle or a cavern. He brought this type of shapes to the stage in an attempt to present primitive symbols from the collective memory. He wanted to do a modernist representation of nature, employing a minimalist style (Jackson 12).

Unfortunately, the design ended up being extremely distracting, with elements hanging from the ceiling like large bananas that actors had to stop from swaying as they walked past them. He also did fashionable costumes that aimed to reflect the essence of each character. However, in the end, on top of a weird set, his production had impractical costumes. Not only did these costumes fail to show the hierarchy that they aimed to convey, but the actors could not even walk in them, because moving with them was like walking with armours (Hamilton 164).

As Billington wrote in his article “Walking a Tightrope to Great Acting”, “Isamu Noguchi's experimental Japanese costumes killed the cast's efforts to act in them” (Billington). The audience did not like the production and said it was a complete failure. Critics blamed Devine for giving more weight to the form than to the content in his vision (Croall 31-33). This fact brings out a significant conflict that tends to appear in some production, the issue of form versus content. The aesthetics and the content need to go hand by hand, all mechanical aspects of a production, all the costumes and sets fulfil a function. This function is to communicate the substance of the play; they are used to serve the story. That substance needs to be the spirit behind every decision. The external form should come from a deep understanding of the content (Odom 52).

The form is an essential part of everything that exists, as it is a way of materialising and condensing the content. The relationship between form and content needs to have a fluid dialogue; there needs to be a transformation where the content is the meaning, and the form is the signifier. The successful productions are those where form and content go hand by hand and manage to represent the identity of the idea to the eyes of spectators (Trancó 389).

Brook said that there is not anything in life without shape; we are pushed towards finding it constantly. For example, when we speak, we materialise thoughts into words. But we need to be aware that form can also become an obstacle. This is a constant battle: the form is necessary, but it is not everything. When a director stages a play at the beginning of the process, it does not have any shape; there are only words written on a piece of paper. The challenge is to give form to the form, the director needs to search for the appropriate form, and this is a huge task (Brook 65-68).

- Herbert Blau

Herbert Blau has been an influential director in the American theatre for decades. He co-founded the actor's Workshop, a space in San Francisco where he presented the work of Brecht, Pinter, Genet and Becket. He also found the experimental theatre Kraken. His theatre wanted to communicate the moral stupor of the cultural explosion, and his productions had an activist dimension (Blau 1-32). In 1961, in the actor's workshop, he did a production of *King Lear* rooted not in metaphysical but in history. The style was Brechtian, and he associated the play with recent anxieties of the time. The tensions of the cold war, the proliferation of missiles, the threat of war, the building of the wall of Berlin and the effects of the atom bomb in Japan influenced him to present a doomed world (Foakes 33). His concept was that what remains at the end of the play is a brutal incomprehensibility of life and the desolation produced by our efforts to interrogate it (Kott 145-150).

- Peter Brook

In 1962, Peter Brook directed Paul Scofield as Lear for the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford. His production changed people's perception of the tragedy, and it had a massive influence on the work that directors did after him, becoming one of the most influential productions of *King Lear*. For Brook, *King Lear* can only get the full meaning and be comprehended existentially on stage; it is not enough to read it. His production was affected by the essay 'King Lear, or Endgame' by Polish critic Jan Kott who saw that the play was about the disintegration of a world in a constant state of decomposition. Taking Kott's words into account, Brook builds a *King Lear* that

becomes a metaphor for the fall of humanity, not just the fall of a kingdom. His production does not show any hint of hope. Brook thinks the play is about sight and blindness. Gloucester does not see Edmund's villainy, and then he loses his eyes. Edgar does not see his brother's nature, and as a consequence, he loses his freedom. Lear does not see the corruption in his family and loses his life. He frames this theme in production that creates a Beckettian world. Brook's nihilistic version annoyed and angered many critics, who felt Shakespeare's play had been distorted to fit in with the director's bleak vision (Croall 1-2).

Brook decided to design the play himself. He did not know in which period to set it in, but he aimed to make a world that was believable, close to spectators and yet far away from them. Brook rejected the traditional Stonehenge option, as he wanted to highlight the cruelty of sending a man outdoors and it would not be effective if he was already there. In the beginning, he went for the creation of a Renaissance world but later on, he changed his mind, he abandoned his initial design, and he created a model for a very different kind of set. He decided to have one that was simple, austere, empty and sterile. It consisted of geometrical sheets of metal that became the place for a violent society. The minimalist set made the actors look as if they were drowning in the openness of stage. The setting portrayed gelid geography that enhanced the cruelty of the place reminding of a Nordic or Mongol primitive world and it. This set made all the softer moments of the play harsh, and it strengthened both the negativity and cruelty in it. There were only a few props, but they were all significant. Brook also sought simplicity in the costumes, avoiding distracting the audience. All the costumes were made of leather, in black or brown with not much colour, apart from the fool's red hat. To reinforce his vision of simplicity, he did not use any music (Leggat 32).



Brook thought carefully about how to stage the storm, which proved to be one of the most challenging scenes. He did not want to be realist because in previous productions he saw how actors' words were completely drowned out by the sound, but he did not want to put the storm only in the audience's imagination either. In the end, he had some coloured thunder-sheets hanging; they had small engines that made them vibrate. This vibration offered a visual and aural effect to provide Lear with conflict without creating a problem for the actor. In the meantime, the other actors mimed the storm's effect and wind. The thunder sheets had small motors that allowed them to vibrate. They orchestrated the vibration and the words so that the thunder could accompany the words rather than clash (Croall 39).

Brook cut all the lines where the audience might get any hint of compassion or tenderness, such as when the scene Cordelia expresses to Lear her sorrow for all the hardships that her father might have endured (Hidalgo 121). He also eliminated any notions of good and evil among characters; the villains and heroes were all kind and mean, bad and just. The sisters were not monster-like, but somewhat understandable in their struggle to deal with their father's unruliness; His concept also entailed highlighting the difference between Goneril and Regan, arguing that most times the audience sees them as identical but they are very different. He made Goneril more dominant, wearing the boots while Regan became softer, wearing a skirt. All the characters in the play were not black and white but grey. For instance, Kent was loyal to Lear but sometimes he also showed a cruel side and Gloucester slapped Edmund while introducing him (Croall 1-5).

Brook did not see Lear as a feeble old man but as a vile tyrant. He thought the decision to divide his kingdom was a reflection of a man of the world (Mullin 190). He

was presented as a rigid figure, cold and arrogant, a ruler with no redeeming qualities. He had been the supreme ruler, and the only thing that is left is to see what the effect of his aura will be. He also took a radical view of Cordelia's character, not stressing her sanctity but instead suggesting she is similar to Lear, she is as stubborn as he is (Croall 40-47).

Brook and his assistant director agreed that one of the most challenging characters in the play is Edgar. The main problem is that Edgar suffers a massive transformation into Poor Tom in only a couple of scenes, this change happens very quickly. Apart from the speed of that change, they see that Poor Tom has much more definition as a character than Edgar, whose design is very general. They thought it was necessary to think in depth about Edgar to him more definition. In their brainstorm before rehearsals, they talked a lot about Edgar and his family. They decided that Gloucester had a favourite and this one was Edmund, even if he is illegitimate. The reason is that he is more ambitious and lusty than Edgar and he might be closer to Gloucester in his personality. Brook used lots of improvisations in rehearsals to understand the character and the relationship between Edgar and Edmund. Thanks to this they managed to fill in the gaps and deal with the lack of information about Edgar (Marowitz 103-110).

Regarding the fool, Brook sees the fool as someone with who has an ethereal quality. He is Lear's conscience and a personified stream of consciousness. The main problem that the fool creates is that the character needs to breathe a sense of spontaneity. Brook worked this through several improvisations to instate than in the actor. Marowitz said that Brook's production was more cerebral than moving but in removing sympathy is when the depth started to appear (Marowitz 103-121).

- Sam Walters

In 1982, Sam Walters directed *King Lear* at the Orange Tree. This is a pub theatre in Richmond, in West London. There was a restriction in this production that became an essential point to be taken into account by the director: there was no budget. As a consequence, there were no costumes, and the crown became the only prop. The actors were dressed in sweaters and for the storm scene actors wore wellington boots. The biggest challenge of this production was not only to do it with very little money but also to stage such a massive play in such a restricted space. The theatre was quite small with room for just eighty people placed on all four sides, and there were no curtains at all. At that time, there were still no designers, so there was not an exciting design concept in place. It was a very bare production with straightforward staging. The exits and entrances were through the theatre's kitchen. Walters is a text purist and did not want to cut lines, because he thought that, typically, the speeches that tend to go are the philosophical reflections. As a result, the production was around three hours long (Croall 91-92).

As a director, he did not have a concept before stepping into the rehearsal room, as he wanted to create that concept with the actors. What was clear to him is that he did not want to have an ancient Lear. He saw Lear as a vigorous man. Instead of having senile dementia, he presented a *King Lear* in his late thirties with a lot of anger and vigour. One of the most serious difficulties Walters found was directing the storm in such a small space. The reality is that in our contemporary society theatres are not as they used to be, and many of them have a very reduced capacity. In London there are many fringe theatres, so the issue of the space is a typical challenge that contemporary directors face. Nowadays, it is very common for young directors who are at the early

stages of their career to deal with this problem, as none of them can access big stages such as the National or the Young Vic. The solution that Walters found was doing the storm using physical theatre. He worked with the actors' bodies in a stylized way, generating movement and he decided to do this scene in silence, not adding any sound effects. This was the same resource used for the fight between Edgar and Edmund. The production played to full houses, and it succeeded because Walters succeed at staging such a huge production in very small place. It also stood out because it got rid of traditional costumes and props (Croall 93-94).

- David Hare

In 1986, Anthony Hopkins played Lear in the Olivier at the National Theatre directed by David Hare. Hare set the play in an unspecified period, and the costumes were a mixture of ancient and modern. Hilary DeVries says in her review how the production had a design that was classical and simple, using cloths that shaped the playing area. The design showed a very spartan landscape (Devries). Milton Shulman criticised the design saying that “On a bare stage against the huge tarpaulin of Hayden Griffin’s set, the audience needs a keen imagination to conjure up the grandeur of palaces or the bleakness of a blasted heath. Carnage is, however, symbolised by hanging bodies in the closing scene (Shulman, “A King among Lears”)”.

Hare was curious about Lear’s relationship with Cordelia. He thought that this relationship hid Lear’s subconscious need of a woman who could nurse him. In Lear’s mind, Cordelia is the ideal woman; as a consequence, what she says breaks his heart. It

is something he did not expect. Cordelia is a fundamental character as she is the one who sets him on a spiritual path of self-discovery and absolution (Croall 222).

When asked about the challenges of playing Lear Hopkins expressed that Lear cannot be seen as if it were Mount Everest because if any director or actor looks at it with awe, he will never climb it. Hare said that the biggest challenge of this play is that Lear has too many epic scenes. This entails a high level of intensity that is difficult to maintain. The demands of the play are so high there is a constant need for the director to push the creativity, so it becomes exhausting. Hare found that a director might have many initial ideas for the play but that it is very complicated to face the reality of materialising those ideas (Croall 221). Billington said about this work that:

Productions of King Lear tend to fall in two groups: The timeless-mythic and the rigorously specific. Surprisingly, in view of his keen social instincts as a dramatist, David Hare's new version at the Olivier is one of the former. Against a background of Hayden Griffin's chaste sheets unfurling like wind bellied sails, it could be happening in any place at almost any time. The result is a production that lays out clearly before us, that boats a fine Lear from Anthony Hopkins and one or two vintage supporting performances but lacks the tang and spice of a strong directorial vision (Billington, "Majesty in the Kingdom of Limbo").

- Deborah Warner

In 1990, Deborah Warner directed King Lear at the National Theatre. Warner admitted that she is drawn towards texts that are ambitious, deep and complex, which

makes them difficult to direct. This is one of the reasons why she enjoyed the opportunity of staging *King Lear*. She thinks her role as a director is one of a discoverer that goes into an unknown territory that was known to be difficult to explore and this is the spirit she used to tackle the challenges of the play. In the rehearsal room she created the conditions so that the whole company could become part of that exploration of the text (Giannachi 136-138).

Warner was keen on having a minimalist design, so the production was stripped to basics. She set the play in an abstract modern limbo. Her opening scene showed a very old Lear wheeled to the stage by a nurse ready to join a family party. Lear made of the love test a game with party hats, trumpets and whistles. The opening scene started building the concept of a party that goes wrong. This artistic choice was astonishing, and it made an impact. Warner envisioned a vain and spoilt Lear, a selfish old man who acts like a child and feels deeply humiliated. His love test was a plan difficult to understand, and can only come from a person who is not thinking straight. Warner was excited about Lear's journey and his realisation that his life had been a mistake. The guilt he feels is a difficult thing to digest (Croall 223-224).

Warner made a bold decision regarding the death of the fool. She decided that it was better to avoid having him disappearing without notice and preferred to show him suffering into his death. Spectators could see the fool struggling in the storm, where he was forgotten by Lear in the darkness. After the interval, the audience could see him lifeless. For the creation of the storm, there were torches flashing across the stage, drums, a bull-whip and a pair of visible percussionists on stage. One of them gave Lear a cymbal, and he used it as an umbrella. The images during this scene were impressive, but the concept did not manage to convey the strength of the storm. Overall, the

production did not have spiritual and intellectual energy at its core (Croall 225-228).

Frank Rich agreed with that, and explained at *The New York Times* that:

What's missing, unfortunately, is the depth of acting needed to draw us to the people adrift in an indifferent absurdist universe of cruelty and nothingness. Mr. Cox's performance, while more affecting than such dry English *Lears* of the 1980's as Michael Gambon's and Anthony Hopkins's, is not yet up to his highest standard, and some of his fellow players are dreadful. It's hard to imagine how Miss Warner, a champion of intimate ensemble acting, could tolerate, among others, a Gloucester who never loses his cool elocutionary diction even when losing his eyes (Rich, "Of Dueling *Lears*")."

- Nicholas Hytner

In 1990, Nicholas Hytner directed John Wood at Stratford, for the Royal Shakespeare Company. The setting was anachronistic; it was abstract, simple and uncluttered, suggesting a cold, clinical place that enhanced the dysfunctional quality of the families. The alienating design of David Fielding portrayed a revolving cell, which looked like a clinical cube. It was open on two sides suggesting an enclosed universe, and it revolved. The revolving set could also be interpreted as the fortune's wheel in constant motion. The fact that it revolved allowed the director to play with different positions in the scenes, having it either with the closed sides or the open sides facing the audience. It also revealed different characters, and brought some scenes, such as the soliloquies, in closer proximity to the audience. All the action took place around that

box or inside the box, from the domestic interior to the events in the outside space. During the storm, the box moved from side to side. This constant movement became a metaphor that reflected both the constant movement within the world of the play and inside Lear's state of mind. This inner movement of the play was pushing all the characters to spin out of control. The box also had a symbolic purpose; it allowed the audience to see the characters as if they were scrutinizing the behaviour of jailed animals (Croall 101).

Hytner chose a partially modern-dress production; it was a mixture of modern and Renaissance because he did not want to be in a world rooted in history. He wanted to reflect the historical aspect of the play and to highlight simultaneously, the play's relevance to both the past and the present (Rokison Woodall 67). He wanted to portray a real father and a real family. He also filled the play with original touches. For example, he presented Goneril and Regan not as embodiments of evil but as daughters in need of their father's love. In many productions, Regan and Goneril appear as fairy-tale characters out of *Cinderella*. *Nevertheless*, Hytner wanted a different approach. He did not want to demonize them (Holland 182).

Another thrilling moment of his production was when Goneril arrived at Regan's house with a wheelchair and two attendant nurses, as if to have Lear certified as mad (Rokison Woodall 67). Regarding the portrayal of Lear, Hytner sees him as a neurotic man whose mood sways from anger to geniality, always between madness and sanity. His Lear is a king who manipulates those dependent upon him. In his approach, it is Lear's ego what unleashes a catastrophe. However, he does not see any kind of redemption in the play. He thinks that Lear is as possessive of Cordelia at the end as he was at the beginning. He does not learn anything (Croall 98-100). Another vital decision



concerns the character of the fool. Hytner approached the fool as a little androgynous figure, a character with a non-human aspect that exploited her size and physicality during the production (Croall 100-102).

One of the discoveries done in the rehearsal room was that in the play, few characters want to do evil in fact; a lot of them want to act well. In the first scene, Lear thinks to divide his kingdom is the best thing to do; the problem lies in the way in which he chooses to do this (Rokison Woodall 72).

In rehearsals, they also discussed if this decision was made before the scene began or whether it was an impulse he had at the moment because each option would imply a different picture of Lear. The first one will lead to the creation of a calculating and manipulative Lear, whereas the second one will reflect his madness. Hytner decided to go for the second option because, under his point of view, Lear is mad before the play starts and he wanders in and out of reality. Hytner's production was both human and complex. It managed to find an echo of the moral confusion of the world we live in (Rokison Woodall 73).

- Adrian Noble

In 1993, Adrian Noble directed his second production of *King Lear* at Stratford, and Robert Stephens played the leading role. Noble's focus was on the domestic element; he wanted to create a lucid family portrait so that people could connect with it. In this family, Goneril appears as the older sibling who has to fight always to get anything. He sees her as the smart sister who married an aristocrat, while Regan is the crazy sister

who married the crazy boy on drugs. Cordelia, on the other hand, came last, and although she is virtuous, this is not a valued quality in that world (Croall 104-107).

The design included having a map of old England spread across the stage. Noble achieved to make the storm work using real rain, which made it a very compelling scene. In his approach, he also wanted to emphasize the cosmic element in the play by having a large moon hanging over the stage. The moon became a metaphor of the eye, and after the blinding of Gloucester, it opened, creating a painful landscape. From this open eye, what were supposed to be the seeds of time came out as if the world had cracked and nature's seeds had spread out. Although it was a beautiful image full of metaphors, the idea became too distracting because the audience was looking more at the set than at the action that was going on stage (Halio 55).

- Max Stafford-Clark

In 1993, Max Stafford-Clark staged *King Lear* at the Royal Court Theatre in London, where he was artistic director. Tom Wilkinson played the King. Stafford-Clark said that one of the most important things to have into account when staging *King Lear* is that the director needs to have something to say about it. Stafford-Clark focused on the political elements of the play and the disintegration of the state as a result of Lear's behaviour. He had as an inspiration the civil war in Bosnia and the production provided images of the horrors of war, the sound of artillery, fire, and people pursued by soldiers. He created a militaristic, male-dominated setting. At the beginning of the play, the audience could see war generals dressing Lear in a riding coat and boots. At the end of the play, two grave-diggers got ready to bury the corpses of Lear and Cordelia. He

added this type of vivid images throughout the play to make it resonate with the spectators (Croall 178).

One of the more original features of his production was the fool. The character was played as a camp drag queen who played the ukulele in a satin frock and black stockings with a big hairdo. He played with his voice moving from a feminine falsetto to ordinary cockney. In some scenes he spanked Lear, in others kissed Kent on the mouth...It was also controversial that the fool did not fade out but instead reappeared in Act 5 spraying graffiti on a wall, where it could be read 'What a piece of ...'. The phrase was left unfinished so that it was open for interpretation. As a consequence of doing this act, he was hanged by soldiers. Like other directors, he found the storm problematic, and he dealt with it rather unimaginatively, having people spraying water down on to the stage. Nevertheless, the blinding scene was very strong in his production. It looked extremely gore, and people even fainted in the audience (Croall 179-180).

- Jack Shepherd

In 1996, actor and playwright Jack Shepherd directed *King Lear* in the Southwark Playhouse in London. Jack Shepherd says that the main challenges he found had to do with bringing this massive tragedy to a small venue such as the Southwark Playhouse. This is a fringe theatre with restricted acting space. Because of the space and the lack of money, the best option was to go for a bare stage, using only a couple of tables and chairs, and to use modern costumes. As the cast was reduced, he had to push the imagination and he found some creative options to make up for the lack of enough actors; for example, Lear's knights were heard but not seen. The challenges with space

made him concentrate on the domestic scenes and the dysfunctional relationships within the families (Croall 182).

Under his point of view, the play starts as a domestic tragedy, and then the scale changes becoming one about revolution and a change of word order. During rehearsals, the director explored the nature of each family. They did many improvisations to investigate scenes and themes, such as old age and mental breakdown. They covered the play through improvisations, which helped them find their way into what happens in each scene. He thought that a classic might sometimes seem that it is too inaccessible because the language is difficult, which can become a huge obstacle for the audience. Exploring the text through improvisations helped the company find the social resonance of the play and the clarity of the storyline. Through improvisations, they also found essential points of relevance such as homelessness, the parent-child relationships or discovering that Lear was a very old man with an inability to be in touch with his feelings. The main problem of this production is that it struggled to show the catastrophe and the breakdown in society. It did not reflect the dimension of the play (Croall 183-185).

- Helena Kaut-Howson

In 1997, Helena Kaut-Howson did a production of *King Lear* with Kathryn Hunter playing the king. It opened at the Leicester Haymarket and then moved to the Young Vic. Although she did a cross-gender production Kaut-Howson did not see in it a feminist statement. The inspiration to make this decision came from her Polish Jewish mother. She was a vital woman who survived the Holocaust, but then she started to

decline, her memory went, and she ended up in an old's people home. Her loss of power was traumatic both for her and for her family. Kaut-Howson saw her as a Lear figure and became the impulse for her to direct the play. Kaut-Howson chose Hunter because of her ability to transform her body entirely and transcend gender. Hunter was determined to capture the fragility of an 80-year-old. Kaut-Howson set the play in the world of her mother, a world where she was constantly hunted and where she went from place to place trying to hide. It was the world of war and a landscape that reminded of Eastern Europe. The concept of Kaut-Howson was bold and robust. The play began as a hallucination of an old woman in a geriatric hospital. She appears watching television, and after having a heart attack, she is taken to intensive care. It is there where she has hallucinations about her life, and the audience enters into the play (Croall 69).

Kaut-Howson saw the storm as a moment where Lear calls for the end of the world; it is a scene where Lear even wants to destroy himself. The human being moves through different periods on life when inner storms occur. Adolescence is like a storm because of all the changes and inner movement; old age is also like a storm. When people get older they give up their projects and they surrender to life, but this surrender is not an easy task and normally comes after a massive inner battle. Lear is part of this group and up until the storm he was not completely aware of his age. In this scene the inner turmoil reveals that he does not know who he is anymore. He enters into the storm with a deep question about his identity (Oddey 149).

Some critics did not like the idea of a woman playing Lear because it changed the original concept for the character, but the response of the audience was in general positive, and the decision to change the gender turned out to be a successful experiment. Overall the production found interesting things. Dominic Hill praised the non-

naturalistic mythical quality in the story that succeeded at making it a very moving production (Croall 70).

- Richard Eyre

In 1997, Richard Eyre directed Ian Holm in the *Cottesloe* at the National Theatre. Richard Eyre highlighted the difference between directing *King Lear* and any other play. He explained that when a director works on a contemporary play, there is a certain freedom, there are not critics waiting to see his approach to it and, apart from that, the play does not carry that much baggage with it. Nevertheless, there is a lot of pressure when directing *King Lear* (Croall 228). Eyre admitted the big step that directing *King Lear* meant for him: “I have been a director for over 30 years and by the time I decided to do *King Lear* I had directed at least two thirds of Shakespeare’s plays, but I had always fought shy of *Lear*” (Maver, “Nothing will Come of Nothing”).

Eyre feels that Shakespeare has a filmic style; but, that in order to experience that flow from one scene to another one, the staging needs to be appropriate. The biggest challenge lies in finding the correct physical world for the play, but it is also essential to avoid getting attached only to the visuals. He thinks a director needs to be expressive and poetic with the staging, but that it also needs to be specific. As a consequence, that step becomes both crucial and difficult. His rule for the staging was to try and keep it simple. He used a traverse stage with two different entrances at both ends. The production started with an empty stage. There was only a long conference table; this image conveyed both hierarchy and order. He insisted on showing a room and set that would resonate with everyone. During the play, as it reached the scene of the storm, one

of the walls collapsed. The aim was to create a certain element of fear in the audience. All the pieces of scenery were thought not only in their literal use but also their expressive and poetic use (Croall 230-232).

He wanted to avoid speculating about previous circumstances or facts so in order to establish his vision he first looked at the text for evidence. According to Eyre, even if the text is profound and the language is elaborate Shakespeare was trying to convey a simple story that anyone could understand. In rehearsals, Eyre asked actors to connect to the world of the play through their very own experiences, that way they did not see it as a canonical text but as a text that deals with a familiar topic. Eyre wanted to emphasize that this is a play about two fathers; one father who has three daughters and another one who has two sons. Anyone can connect with that, if actors can do it, so can the audience. According to Eyre, Shakespeare was not a messiah, or a god, only a playwright, so when directing this play we need to take him down from that pedestal (Croall 229-230).

Eyre understood that the play was about the contrasts in life, which included the outer spaces and the inner spaces. This thought also took him to the horror of being locked out of your own home by your children. These ideas led him to see that he needed walls and doors. He wanted to build a sense of being inside, protected, and a sense of being outside, exposed. He also decided to start the play with Edgar watching the eclipse of the sun. This was a way of establishing him as a thinker, a rationalist and a student scientist (Maver).

Eyre was also aware of the importance of verse. He thinks that verse speaking should be like jazz; it should be melodic and flow. He thought that an Elizabethan audience would have responded to the pulse, the rhythms, the shapes and sounds of the

verse because they were an audience who listened, so he worked much on this area (Maver). Matt Wolf said in his review that

Richard Eyre’s new Royal National Theater production of the play will be remembered for its moments of piercing quiet... Eyre’s is a focused “Lear,” compressed but not diminished. If it doesn’t strike the knockout blows to the heart that one might wish, that’s because of a failure to attain the otherworldly, unnamable grief of which this play is uniquely capable (Wolf, “King Lear”).

- Yukio Ninagawa

In 1999, The Royal Shakespeare Company presented a production of *King Lear* directed by Yukio Ninagawa, and with Nigel Hawthorne as Lear. What stood out from this production was the intention to establish a dialogue between two cultures, because this was aimed to be an inter-cultural project where “East meets West”. Ninagawa tried to translate Shakespeare’s dramatic world into one that could be easily understood. He stepped outside the Elizabethan context and also broke down the barriers between different forms of theatre, combining ritual, naturalism, kabuki, and noh. He used many different styles because he said that the vastness of the world of Shakespeare could not be represented by a single style (Im 7-30).

Noh theatre became the inspiration for the set, whose design was evocative instead of realistic. Ninagawa suggested the different locations without really showing them. His concept departed from the idea of the word “nothing” that Cordelia says in the play. As this word was the driving force, everything in the production aimed to move towards



simplicity. The set had a black wooden walkway, and at the back of this walkway characters seem to disappear into the darkness like mythological figures. The use of costumes also responded to the idea of nothingness. Lear started the play wearing furs and a crown, but during his journey, the circumstances stripped him away, and spectators could see him wearing less and less. There were percussive sounds, heavily influenced by Kabuki that created a musical atmosphere. This musical part also geared into the idea of nothingness, moving into silence towards the end of the show (Hanratty 73).

Many directors struggle to stage the storm scene, and Ninagawa found it especially difficult because he decided to add excitement by having rocks dropping from the flies during the scene. It was very typical from Ninagawa to drop sand, flowers or water in his productions to have robust visual spaces. For this scene, he wanted to draw attention to the dark forces of nature. Dropping rocks in the storm wanted to be a dramatic portrayal of the chaos that was shaking the earth. Nevertheless, this affected the actors negatively as they were sometimes in real danger, and spectators could see their faces in panic during the show. Even if the actors were not comfortable with the scene, Ninagawa did not want to change his vision and only reduced the number of rocks (Croall 108).

Another challenge that ended up in failure was the director's work with the main actor. Nigel never found the essence of Lear and Ninagawa did not know how to help him because their approach to acting was fundamentally different. Ninagawa was used to an exaggerated acting style that was a version of melodrama, and Nigel was a classic actor (Croall 109-112). Because of these different acting styles, Nigel received no notes and had no conversations with Ninagawa regarding Lear's character. The result is that

Nigel felt overwhelmed by the role. His insecurity ended up in the creation of a Lear who was continually shouting because the actor was trying too hard to establish himself as the leading man. Actors are at the heart of theatre, and no production can succeed if a director cannot find a way to work with the actor and help him to embrace the part (Unwin 32).

Ninagawa's pitfall was that he was primarily interested in the visuals of the show, which were impressive, but he did not pay enough attention to the language or the story. In the end, East did not meet West. The combination of western actors, oriental costumes, noh design and a mixture of styles left the production in a very uncertain cultural place. The press said that the production was ridiculous (Hanratty 75).

- Barry Kyle

In 2001, Barry Kyle directed *King Lear* at Shakespeare's Globe with Julian Glover playing the king. The Globe is a challenging theatre for any director. It is an open-air theatre, so you can hear the horns of the boats on the Thames and the helicopters. This issue always generates extra demands on the actors' vocal work that the director needs to take into account during rehearsals. Regarding the design, at the Globe, directors cannot change the stage, and they can only use minimal lights. As a consequence, the production needed to have its focus on the relationship between the actor and the audience. Kyle and his designer Hayden Griffin covered the stage with wooden planks to generate more intimacy, and they also put a post up in the yard, from where many passages were spoken (Croall 114).

Kyle showed *King Lear* from the perspective of redemption and used Christian references throughout the play to build this idea. He sees a clear contrast between the selfish leader shown at the beginning of the play and Lear in the scenes after the storm. Kyle thought that it was Lear's relationship with Edgar what triggered his transformation. It is precisely in the storm when Kyle offers the image of a half-naked man that resembles Christ on the cross and conveys another visual reference in Lear wearing the crown of thorns. Kyle continued the exploration of his concept showing the image of a king weeping about his mistake and building the feeling of compassion at the end of the play. Kyle showed that he had a clear and consistent vision for the play. Apart from this general concept, Kyle wanted to tackle many of the difficulties that the play brings to any director, such as the portrayal of the sisters, the use of verse and the disappearance of the fool (Croall 115).

In order to deal with the portrayal of the sisters, Kyle decided to explore the missing mothers in the play. On one side, he observed that the three daughters never speak about their mother and on the other side, he was very curious about Edmund and the element of bastardy. Because of these things, he developed the idea that the daughters are all from the different mothers. So, he cast three very different women: Goneril was redhead; Regan was blonde, and Cordelia had an exotic appearance. Kyle realized that it was vital to make verse accessible to the contemporary audience because verse might be one of the obstacles that prevents contemporary audiences from connecting with the play. He was very keen to work on the use of language so in rehearsals they did a lot of verse work using the sonnets as a departing point. The next challenge was to fool at the character of the fool. Directors have come up with many different ideas of how to handle the fool's disappearance from the play. Kyle provided a strong image before the interval showing the suicide of the fool. As Poor Tom exited people could see the fool's

corpse hanging. Kyle thought that the fool committed suicide because he could not stand to see Lear suffering. His production was clear and intelligent but unfortunately it lacked intensity. With productions like this one it is clear that the director needs to bring not only clever ideas or answers to the questions that appear in the tragedy but also a sensibility that can explore the full range of emotions contained in the play (Croall 116-117).

- Stephen Unwin

In 2002, Stephen Unwin directed Timothy West at the English Touring Theatre. The production toured the UK and then had a run at the Old Vic. The settings were minimal, there was a raised wooden platform and the locations were suggested by images that went in and out. His production was set between the reformation and the Civil War, a very dark period. There was a Brueghel-like aesthetic that painted a very vivid picture of a society with clear social distinctions. Unwin's production adopted a realistic and austere style, where actors wore furs. His focus was not so much in the design but on the actors. He wanted to make sure that the production could reach as many people as possible, so he decided to focus on the truthfulness of the acting and on creating a version that by cutting lines got rid of anything that was not strictly necessary (Croall 132).

Unwin was deeply influenced by Brecht's work and some of the productions of the Berliner ensemble, so he looked at the play through a political lens. The spotlight was on the social issues of a well-structured society that started to collapse. Regarding the portrayal of Lear, Unwin decided to reflect the human being in Lear instead of the king.

As a consequence, he looked at him as a man who is caught up in being a king. He thinks that Lear pays his frustration on other people because he struggles to cope with rejection, he does not know how to deal with certain emotions. This Lear was quite restrained, and Timothy West's performance showed madness that crept in very slowly. Nevertheless, some critics said there was a lack of rage in his performance (Croall 133-136).

Lyn Gardner said about the production that "There is something quite forensic about it, quite harsh and white. Watching the play makes you feel as the gods must feel as they look down on us in amazement and laugh mirthlessly... In many respects this is a strongly traditional production: traditional, but not dull" (Gardner, "King Lear").

- Jonathan Kent

In 2002, Jonathan Kent directed a production at the Almeida theatre's temporary London home, the converted King's Cross Bus Station. Kent was intrigued about Lear's madness, and he struggled to understand if it was a case of insanity or a case of Alzheimer. He also found difficult it to grasp the character of Cordelia, and he went for the option where she appears more as a Christian figure. Kent believes the challenges that a director has to face are also challenges that Shakespeare created for himself. For example, he found Edgar and Edmund speeches very difficult to direct, as they are incredibly long. He thought it is challenging to portray Lear's descend into madness as it is difficult to show that gradation effectively (Croall 184).

On the other hand, Kent found easy deciding the period for the production because it was vital for him to find the immediacy demanded by a modern production. He went for

a production where actors wore suits, and Lear made use of the television to announce his retirement. That moment was shown on screens placed around the auditorium. The set was highly imaginative; it consisted of a study with armchairs, chandeliers, a mirror, desk and chair. The set reflected the journey of Lear's mind. As his mind started to be fragmented everything in the set started to break down. During the storm, the walls collapsed. As the rain kept falling, the set started to become a surreal world, and the laws of reality and normality changed. The aim for the design was creating a reality that started to shift and to turn threatening, for example, the voice of Poor Tom and a hovel appeared under Lear's desk. The real and the surreal worlds started to blend. The negative aspect of this design is that it created a practical problem for actors who had to be very careful with the set during the play. The actors needed to be aware of where the set was collapsing and which pieces were falling so that they did not fall on their heads (Croall 185).

Kent is the son of an architect, his brother is also an architect, and he was a painter. He spent much time with designers preparing his approach to the classic, so his response to the play was very visual. Creating an exciting picture of that world was of vital importance for him. Kent's grandmother suffered Alzheimer, and he used this experience to build the disintegration of the personality of Lear. Nevertheless, Kent struggled to make some characters work, especially Goneril and Regan. Kent thinks it is really complicated to make them work because they change too quickly, and it seems scenes missing in their transformation. As a result, it is very easy to fall into creating flat characters rather than round characters. They do not have a journey into themselves, so it becomes a challenge to explore them in-depth. He thinks the first two acts are tough for a director, especially the scene before Lear goes to the storm, whereas acts four and five became more accessible for him. His concept of the collapsing set was

admired, although the visual and aural elements put it difficult for actors to compete with them. (Croall 185-188).

- Jonathan Miller

In 2002, Jonathan Miller directed *King Lear* in North America, with the Canadian actor Christopher Plummer playing the king. Miller took inspiration from Hobbes' *Leviathan* to get his ideas for *King Lear*. He drew from there his notion of sovereignty and the metaphorical relationship between the family and the kingdom (Chinoy 12).

Miller explained that *Lear* is not a cosmic drama; it is a play about homelessness, about what happens when you lose everything and the learning that results from loss. During the play, *Lear* finds out what his basic needs are and what it is like when he is deprived of them. There is one line of the play that stands out for him: "nothing will come of nothing". *Lear* has to go through that experience of complete loss to realize that in fact, there is a lot coming from nothing because learning takes place. Miller says that people are misled by the storm thinking that the play is about the man versus the cosmos, but it is not. The storm has to do with homelessness. *Lear* did not know about the life of the wretched, the unemployed or the beggars because he was high up in the social rank. It is by suffering that he understands the human soul. Edgar becomes an essential character as he is the Christian figure of the play. In his production Poor Tom wore a crown of thorns and had blood running down his face to establish that parallelism. He does everything that Christ does: he goes into the wilderness, he cures a blind man, he rises of the third day, and he defeats the evil. Miller conveys how

Shakespeare is about the choices people make and the reflection of those choices (The Miller Tapes Youtube).

Miller was keen to extract the black humour in the play to relieve the pressure. This idea of the comedy within the tragedy became one of the biggest features in his production. He set the place in the seventeenth century, and his design went for an unadorned stage that only had a couple of stools and a table. The costumes suggested the Civil War and his focus was on Lear's senility. As Jonathan was a doctor, he had a deep understanding of the medical aspects connected to the mind. According to Miller, the senility was present from the beginning, but in a very early stage. For example, Lear could not remember Burgundy's name, and they had to remind him of the name. For the reconciliation scene, he decided to go for Lear having a stroke, which made Lear blur the lines of the speech (Croall 204-207). Clare Brennan said in her review at *The Guardian* how:

Jonathan Miller's production is revelatory. It looks simple and straightforward ..... every situation is crystal clear and its part in the patterning of the structure is plainly seen.....An intricacy of interconnecting opposites (parent/child, frailty/strength, intransigence/compassion, good/bad...) clash around the question: "Is man no more than this?" It is voiced by Lear when he catches sight of the disguised Edgar, Christ-like in his beggar's battered and bloody near-nakedness, during the storm on the heath (Brennan, "King Lear").



- Declan Donellan

Declan Donellan directed in 2002 a stripped-down production of the play for the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Swan Theatre in Stratford. He had a young cast lead by black actor, Nonso Anozie who played the king. Declan Donellan's unusual production had youth at the heart of its focus. There were sixteen young actors in the cast; for example, Anozie was only twenty-three, and Donellan did not try to age them up. He wanted the audience to use their imagination instead and to let the cast's youth and excitement for experiment to emerge (Billington).

The actors performed on a bare stage in a production that aimed to take spectators directly to hell through an epic journey. Donellan thinks that the play is about life and death and about the fact that perhaps there is nothing after death. The idea of nothingness always reappears in his production. The horrifying idea that he wants to underline is that in the end there might be no love, just a cold void. He decided to set the play in a modern, post-holocaust world. Donellan also decided to play with lines. For instance, he moved Edgar's final lines to the beginning of the play, transforming that speech into the prologue and playing with the idea of a flashback for the rest of the play (Croall 156).

Billington highlighted Donellan's concept for the fool. This character was portrayed as a stand-up comic wearing a glittery jacket and at some point sat on Lear's lap like a ventriloquist's dummy "Edward Hogg turns the fool into a stand-up comic ..... In one of the best touches, he even squats on Lear's lap like a ventriloquist's doll and mock-masturbates as Goneril launches into her tirade against the king's riotous train" (Billington, "King Lear"). The production succeeded at being an energetic version full

of innovation. It managed to be both revolutionary, and modern while capturing the exhaustion that accompanies extreme suffering (Croall 157-158).

- Calixto Bieito

In 2004, Calixto Bieito did a trimmed down version of the play at the Albeniz Theatre, in Madrid. His production placed the action in an Eastern European country, where torture is possible and where a dictatorship governs. Bieito tried to find parallelisms with our world to renew the classic. The image of Saddam Hussein leading his country in opposition to his image when captured inspired Bieito. He wanted to develop the change in Lear from powerful to powerless based on this. At the beginning of the play, Bieito shows the idea of power with the presentation of a mafia clan led by Lear who has an Al Capone style. The gang arrives on stage armed with guns and dressed in furs. This will contrast with the image of Lear at the end of the play; at this point he appears as a homeless man with a supermarket trolley as his only belonging. The opening scene develops the humiliation that Lear brings to his daughters with the love test. Lear stands in front of a big cake. As soon as a daughter finishes her love- test speech, he throws a piece of cake at her face, and we see her licking the remains and devouring her piece, also conveying Goneril and Regan's hunger for power. A violence typical of Tarantino became one of the most significant features of his production; for example, Goneril suffocated Regan with a plastic shopping bag and then she blew her brains with a gun. This violence made use of very strong images, for instance, at the end the spectators see a bag containing the dead Cordelia, and during the the production, there were references to the televised executions in Iraq. As in Tarantino's films, the

music was extremely present. In the play, Oswald appeared as a track-suited DJ who added the suitable tracks to each scene (Gregor 148-149).

Calixto Bieito brought the text to the performance in a way that aimed to draw young generations to Shakespeare.

- Trevor Nunn

In 2007, Trevor Nunn directed *King Lear*. It was his third production of the play; this time it was presented at Stratford, with Ian McKellen playing Lear. Nunn likes having his concept sorted out before stepping into the rehearsal room so that rehearsals become the place to investigate the details of the characters. He placed much importance on mastering the language, so the actors worked intensively on the iambic pentameter and they read-aloud extracts and sonnets during rehearsals. Trevor tends to pay full attention to the smallest of the scenes and parts to bring all the colours in them. For example, one of these choices was to establish that Burgundy and Cordelia had a romance before the play started so that his rejection becomes even crueller. He also created a back story for Lear, assuming he had two wives. From one marriage Lear had Goneril and Regan, and from the second wife, Cordelia was born. Trevor nun imagined that she died when giving birth to Cordelia, and Lear brought her up by himself, so all these circumstances make her his favourite (Croall 167).

Regarding the design, Nunn gave it a Russian flavour; all the nobles wore Tsarist uniforms, the daughters wore ball gowns, Lear's first costume was a decorated, elegant military uniform; and his soldiers were dressed to resemble Russian Cossacks. The world of the play was a militaristic kingdom grounded in meaningless custom and

ritual. Nunn wanted to push the contrast of the initial grandeur to Lear's next appearance on the heath without his clothes (Croall 168-171).

As the nothingness of courtly materialism became evident, the world of the play transformed from a stately palace into a war-zone where everything geared towards ruin. The set crumbled, the cracks in the ceiling could be seen. Nunn's world resembled an apocalyptic battlefield with no hope (Kahan 57).

As it was discussed in Andrew Visnevski class" Scene Study" held at RADA after the whole class watched the production, the powerful powerless dichotomy was excellently shown on stage. In the beginning, there were different kinds of reverences and bows, but everyone's body language changed as soon as Lear came into the room. This scene contrasted with the end of the play, when Lear and Gloucester are powerless. At that point, both fathers lacked power, but they were full of exquisite humanity. Leggat agrees with that, saying that Nunn enhanced Lear's transformative story (Leggatt 25). Nunn's staging resonated on a more human level. It posed questions about godlessness and the destruction of society, ending on a hopeless note.

- Dominic Dromgoole

In 2008, David Calder played *King Lear* at the Globe, directed by the Globe's artistic director at that time, Dominic Dromgoole. The characteristics of the Globe imposed using no set, no lighting and no sound. Dromgoole did a Jacobean-dress production focused on making a deeply human connection. As Zafar- Arif explains:

Today this playhouse is one of the most significant props, as directors can make full use of a set that moves people back in time. The Globe has the trapdoor in the roof, which is typically used for celestial beings and the trapdoor on the stage floor from where the evil creatures emerge. Shakespeare made great use of these two worlds, the celestial and the infernal, and many characters in *King Lear* have associations with these worlds. Although society has changed extensively, when a director stages a production at The Globe there are some unique resources there that are only available there, and that cannot be ignored (“How have Performances of Shakespeare Changed over Time?”).

According to Dromgoole, one of the main challenges directing this play is to make sure the story lands in the audience. As a consequence, the storytelling became his main area of work, and as part of the components of this storytelling, he worked a lot on the delivery of language. Philip Fisher expressed in his review of the *British Guide* that “the main achievement is to ensure that the verse speaking is very clear, a trait more regularly associated with the RSC than this open-air theatre where contemporary actors have to compete with helicopters and aeroplanes and on this occasion win the battle”(Fisher).

Dromgoole did not want to have a concept before working with the company into rehearsals. The only thing clear in his mind was that he wanted to have a dynamic production. He felt it was vital to keep the pace, as many audience members think classics can be too long and slow. He deleted all the self-indulgent speeches so that all the scenes kept the rhythm. He aimed to hold the audience’s concentration so this was

his constant focus. When directing the actors, he asked them not to rush the text but not to take unnecessary pauses. What the director wanted to highlight about the text was the entire state of despair, the lack of hope in that world (Croall 119).

Dromgoole's set aimed to connect actors and their audience. Zafar Arif explains that:

Modern audiences, meanwhile, are accustomed to sitting in reverent silence during a performance, and find the breaking of the fourth wall more jarring. However, it has become a feature of Globe productions to have actors address the audience or even move among the spectators in the yard – not a practice from the early modern period, notably – incorporating them into the performance. The structure of the Globe makes it easy for the actors to connect with the audience, especially those in the pit (“How Have Performances of Shakespeare Changed over Time?”).

Dromgoole wanted to take advantage of the uniqueness of the Globe, and he created a bridge from the stage to a space in the middle of the courtyard. That space was used for the moments of intimacy so that actors could feel closer to the audience, and they could generate more direct contact with it. The storm is always a scene to look for, and Dromgoole approached it by using an old fashioned wind machine and drums accompanying the beat of the verse (Taylor).

Dromgoole does not like the segregation of genres into different boxes. So in his direction, he decided to explore the humour within the tragedy because he thought these two elements can coexist. His approach to the fool was to make it much younger than Lear. He was aware of the importance of getting right the complex and beautiful

relationship between Lear and the fool. He wanted to communicate how much Lear relies on the fool. There is a desire in him to aggravate Lear, but at the same time, there is much tenderness. He uses jokes to make Lear see things because the fool loves him and wants him to open his eyes to the truth. Dromgoole's production was fast-paced and discovered the humour within the text (Croall 119-122).

Lyn Gardner said when she wrote the review at *The Guardian* that "Dromgoole's production gets down to the storytelling with minimal fuss and it understands that there are many kinds of fool and many kinds of families ..... There are also some genuine five-star moments: Lear and Edgar hugging each other in recognition of shared pain, Lear's sudden flash of understanding of his vulnerability in the cry, " `I would not be mad (Gardner)". Matt Wolf expressed at the *New York Times* that "This may not be the most cosmic Lear you will ever see, or the most radical or high-concept. But it taps into this text's infinitely wounding core (Wolf)".

- Gerardo Vera

In 2008, Gerardo Vera directed *King Lear* at the Centro Dramático Nacional, from a translation by Juan Mayorga. As Vera said in the newspaper *El Público*, this play is like the Noah's ark of the human experience because the audience can find in it all the good and bad that humans can do on earth. It takes spectators to the bottom of the human being while dealing with a critical issue: age. According to Vera, *King Lear* is about a world that ends. The play portrays the relationship between the old generation and the young generation, between the world that is dying and the new order (*El Público*). Vera focused on portraying the four types of old age that Shakespeare brings to the play.

Kent reinvents himself into a new man and goes on an adventure into the route of loyalty, the fool is the embodiment of a bitter lucidity that keeps laughing, Gloucester is the betrayed man who learns through a symbolic suicide and Lear is the howl of the eldest (Ordoñez, “Cenaremos por la Mañana”).

Vera sees that *King Lear* is a contemporary text with global roots. In his staging, he wanted to be faithful both to the text and to the contemporary audience. His production was simple and austere. All the action happened on a very dark cold set with very few props. The time frame was not precise as he tried to make it universal. He used a big cast of twenty-three actors who were all modern dressed and wore suits (Gregor 157).

When watching this production of Vera I felt that he did not listen to the needs of the contemporary society. During my time learning about directing at the Odin Teatret in Holstebro I listened to Eugenio Barba talking about the importance of not making the audience passive and to keep them always at the centre of your work as a director. My feeling after watching this production was that the centre was clearly not in the audience. The play was three hours long without an interval. Nowadays any spectator would struggle with more than two hours without an interval, and even for the more avid Shakespeare followers three hours without a break make the interest in the play disappear completely. Not only this production did not have clarity in the concept, the design was very cold and as the director neglected the reality of the audience he lost them half way.



- Ruper Goold

In 2008, Ruper Goold directed his production of *King Lear* at The Everyman Theatre, in Liverpool. Gardner says about his work that there is rarely a dull moment in his production (Gardner).

Goold took a very experimental approach to the play, where he even dared to introduce new lines. He set the play in the late seventies in an anarchic modern Britain where the social order is breaking down, and the atmosphere has the desolation of a kingdom running on empty. He opened the production with the lines “Where there is disorder, may we bring harmony”, from a Margaret Thatcher speech. During the play, the audience could hear a lot in music, for example, “My Way” was heard while Lear was dividing his territories, during the storm the fool sang “*Singin’ in the Rain*” and the reconciliation scene had pop music in the background. Goold offered some other daring suggestions, such as Goneril being pregnant or the knights becoming football thugs (Griggs 192).

As Gardner expresses in her review at *The Guardian*, Goold moved away from the idea of *King Lear* as a mythic drama that takes place near Stonehenge but failed to create a plausible world on stage. She explains that “For much of the time, what happens on stage seems less about the civil war between Lear and his daughters and more about the internal battle of a director torn between a high-art European aesthetic and a classic repertory theatre pot-boiler. It's as if Goold has approached each scene as a complete play. There is no coherent overview”. Goold’s aim was to revitalise the play, but his production was heavily slashed by those more conservative (Gardner, “King Lear”).

- Michael Grandage

In 2010, Michael Grandage directed *King Lear* at the Donmar Theatre in London, where he was the theatre's artistic director with Derek Jacobi playing Lear. He decided to set the play in an abstract, pagan world made of white wooden boards that only had a couple of props in sight. Grandage expressed how one of the main challenges when directing *King Lear* was dealing with the archaic words that appeared in the text. He found sometimes it was not easy to make them work. During rehearsals, the company decided to translate each scene to modern English to make sure they could understand everything that was going on. Grandage thought that if actors fully understand the text, they would be able to communicate it on stage. Spectators might not understand the exact meaning of the words, but they can understand the actors' tone of voice, the body language and the facial expression (Croall 190-193).

Grandage also threw a lot of creativity to the most challenging scene of the play: the storm. He was aware that in many productions the actors have to battle against the sound design, so he decided that Lear would whisper it as if it was coming from inside his head. The storm became an inner storm, a vocalization of his thoughts and the words that Lear was saying to himself. He also spent time understanding each character and finding their subtleties in them, so that they were not black or white. "Shakespeare's *King Lear* makes it clear which characters are good and which are bad. However, Grandage's version makes things a little less crystal clear for audiences as he delves deeper into characters' psyches" (Macdonald, "Grandage Sheds New Light on Old Lear").

Regarding Cordelia, Grandage did not want to make her a passive, innocent character. He saw her as a woman who stood for what she believed in. The problem is that her honesty became a negative trait because of the circumstances that surrounded her (Croall, 189). Billington expressed in *The Guardian* that “there are times when Mount Lear, as a critic once called it, can seem as daunting a challenge to playgoers as to performers. But the miracle of Michael Grandage's production is that it is fast (Billington)”. Macdonald expresses in her review that “This instalment shows *King Lear* isn't just some seventeenth-century dramatic play, but it is an understandable, funny and relevant story which remains a classic” (Macdonald, “Grandage Sheds New Light on Old Lear”).

- David Farr

David Farr directed Greg Hicks at Stratford in 2010. As The Royal Shakespeare explains on its website, the production was anachronistic, mixing elements from different time frames. Farr's first idea was to make it modern, but then he wanted to add both a poetic touch and tension between the old world and the new one. Farr went for a setting that had an industrial-style. This set consisted of a metal and wood structure that recreated a disintegrating warehouse with broken windows and walls. There were neon lights, broken glass and music. The period was not clear; it seemed located around World War I, but Edgar and Edmund carried swords, which clashed with the time frame presented. The idea that Farr wanted to reflect was a cruel and nerve racking world but he did not care that much about being specific (Croall 171).

This production portrayed a complex and multifaceted Lear. Farr played with the expectations from the audience as Lear was presented as a young and spiky figure. It also surprised his first entrance because Lear was not where spectators thought he would be in the opening scene. He was not on stage, and came through the walkway, from the audience. The initial narrative presents us a Lear who enjoys playing games, telling jokes and having a good time. He also appeared as a king who loved to be in control, who demanded loyalty and manipulated those around him. There was an atmosphere of unease around him. There was a feeling among the other characters as if they did not know what Lear was going to do next (Heijes 531).

Farr made a bold decision to cast Kathryn Hunter as the fool, playing with gender. She portrayed a very eerie and mischievous character. There were wonderful moments between Lear and the fool in this production full of emotionality and immensity (Croall 172-174).

- Andrew Hilton

In 2012, Andrew Hilton directed John Shrapnel at the Tobacco Factory in Bristol. Hilton dealt with the challenges of doing it in the round, which requires a stern discipline to monitor the audience's experience continuously and to move the actors around accordingly. The Tobacco Factory is an intimate space that reminds of a boxing ring; it has an acting area surrounded by the audience who sits on four sides. In the production, the audience sat in tiers on all sides of the rectangular acting area. Spectators were very close to the actors. As a consequence, actors needed to be careful with how much they let go and make it more intimate (Croall 93).

Hilton's focus was on the text because he saw that one of the greatest challenges for a director is to make a contemporary audience connect with the verse. His effort geared towards making the audience understand *King Lear* as if it were a contemporary text. The company spent a lot of time in rehearsals investigating the many questions thrown up by the complexity of it. He did not want to fall on stereotypes for some characters, for example, he did not want to portray Goneril and Regan as cold-hearted witches because in his concept they were just reacting to the reality into which Lear has thrust them. It is not until the two sisters find themselves in competition for Edmund's love that they start scheming. Hilton spent many hours discussing the play and considering substantial cuts. He decided to take out Edgar's asides, as under Hilton's point of view he is only playing at being a madman. The set was very simple, with only a table, a throne and a few chairs. The costumes were suggestive of the era in which the play was written, but some modern touches were introduced so that the audience could relate the action to our own times. Hilton wanted to move away from directing a traditional production, but in the end, he struggled to find a clear concept for it (Croall 94-95).

- Dominic Hill

In 2012, Dominic Hill directed *King Lear* at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, where he was artistic director, with David Hayman playing Lear. In an online interview, Hill said that the play is about society and a man finding his humanity after going through periods of dramatic madness. Lear is a king full of strength who must descend to the lower depths of despair. The play is also about how rulers should behave and the importance of responsibility in leadership. Hill decided to have a chorus of vagabonds occupying the stage to tell the story. His focus doing that was to enhance the current

relevance of the play and to instil a deep sense of social awareness and justice (Citizens Theatre, “Conversations”).

The design of Tom Piper sets the action in a contemporary world, a non-specific timeless landscape made of black walls and metal-framed perspex where the characters wear suits, fur coats and hats. There was a sense of it being an Eastern European dictatorship of the 1980s whose streets are haunted by homeless that remind the audience of social inequalities. It is a space where battles for power and resources take place (McMillan, “Theatre Review: King Lear”). He presents an apocalyptic vision of a world moving from decadence to decay. It is only at the end, when the audience sees Lear entering an asylum, when they are allowed to feel compassion (Fisher, The Guardian).

The storm was done on a bare stage full of old pianos while the homeless were playing abstract music that mixed with the thunder and lightning. Hill put some personal touches in the production. For example, Cordelia was pregnant on her return from France, and they used a corkscrew and a stiletto heel for the blinding scene. The production was dark, shocking and effective (Croall 145-148).

- Michael Attenborough

In 2012, Michael Attenborough directed *King Lear* at the Almeida theatre in London, where he was the artistic director. Attenborough was shocked by the masculinity in the play, which he found very male-oriented. This fact is evident with the lack of a Queen Lear or a Duchess of Gloucester. Out of three daughters, two have masculine attitudes, show fierce competition and are ruthless. Attenborough thinks the

play lacks gentleness and softness. It is a harsh world where Lear comes to terms with his emotional side at the end of the play. Until he is not stripped down of his power, he does not find his delicate, gentler part. Attenborough also played with the idea of gender, changing the gender of some minor roles. He also pushed the masculinity in Lear, showing his abusive attitude as a father. As Billington expressed at *The Guardian*:

There are strong hints that Lear has abused his older daughters. When Lear, having divided his kingdom, turns on the recalcitrant Goneril, Pryce savagely kisses her ... And when he later tells Regan it is not in her nature "to oppose the bolt against my coming in" the words acquire an ominously sexual ring (Billington).

The daughters appear as victims of a sexually abusive father. This production has an exciting commitment to explore the roots of Lear's despotism as a father more than as a king (Edmondson 111).

Attenborough thought *King Lear* was a pre-Christian play. He believed it happens in a pagan world because the text does not communicate information about the gods. He discarded doing a modern-dress production as he thought this would be ridiculous, and he also knew that he wanted to go back in time. Nevertheless, Attenborough did not know how much to go back in time because each period would impose its particular rigidities. In the end, the set was a medieval castle. Attenborough decided to play with the design concept of a prison and the brutality that this place can bring, as if all the characters are slaves of this harsh universe. Based on this, many scenes had doors slamming, doors shut, and grills coming in and out to push that idea (Croall 193-197). Nevertheless, Billington expressed that this is a Lear one understands rather than sympathises with (Billington).

- Belarus Free Theatre

Belarus free theatre is a theatre company who works in exile from a totalitarian state. Natalia Kaliada, a co-founder of the group, said in the interview with Ella Parry-Davis, how the production wanted to remind the audience about the power of theatre itself. She explained how they performed as an act of non-violent resistance, to prove that as theatre-makers they are much stronger than any dictatorship in the world (Parry Davies, “The Total Immersion Method”).

In 2012, The Belarusians created a stunning piece of physical theatre using only simple props, no setting and the absence of recorded music. They staged an intense theatrical experience where they refocused the play on issues that resonated with their own experience of homelessness at the hands of a despotic regime. The piece focused on the cruelty, violence, and vulnerability generated under the conditions of dictatorship (Edmondson 108-110).

In this complex and visceral piece of theatre Lear appears as a violent and abusive autocrat, a king who emanates power and strength, but also conveys that there is something wrong about him. The real symbols of age in this production are the characters of Gloucester, who suffers helpless incontinence, and the king of France. The action is fast and frenetic; many of the most challenging moments of the play are targeted without fear, for example, the storm. The susurrations of Lear's daughters whispering in his ears bring the scene of the storm, which is staged using a simple plastic blue tarpaulin as buckets of water are thrown at Lear. Belarus Free Theatre dares to turn the daughters' battle for his father's affection into a disturbing rival striptease,



with erotic songs; to thank them; Lear kisses them full on the mouth. Belarus shows the thrilling company's inventiveness to approach the classic with a young, energetic and anarchic spirit (Billington, "King Lear Review").

As Dickson expresses in his review at *the Guardian* Belarus did a believable portrait of a man who collapses because he fails to connect with his family (Dickson, "King Lear Review"). Andrew Haydon said how Belarus "certainly inhabited the play and made it theirs. This is *King Lear* as a strange, savage act, full of brutality" (Haydon, "Belarusian King Lear").

- Tim Crouch

As part of the Royal Shakespeare Company educational project, Tim Crouch directed in 2012 a shortened version of *King Lear*. His stripped-down version was only 80-minute long. His target audience was clear: A young audience of children aged eight upwards, their families, and other young audiences. As the Royal Shakespeare Company explains on its website, the production was staged in theatres around the UK; the venues vary a lot, from school canteens to mainstream theatres. His impulse to do it was that he heard people say that it was not possible to do *King Lear* for eight-year-olds, so he took the challenge to look directly in the eye at the young contemporary audiences, and he decided to stage *King Lear* for those with no previous knowledge either of Shakespeare in general, or the play in particular.

He wanted to engage this young audience and observe their reactions to the story. Based on that, he pushed forward the idea of family and the domestic situation, having that as the motor for his text edit. He deleted the scenes that had to do with

France, the battles, the politics, Poor naked wretches' speeches and much of the philosophy in the play. He also shortened some of Lear's longer speeches. The cast was made up of eight actors, and he used colour-blind casting, with a mixture of black, Asian and white actors, as he decided to challenge stereotypes. Crouch believes that theatre is an art form that plays that pushes the boundaries of what is possible. He also thinks that it is vital in order to make the production work for a young audience to represent the world around them. As the rehearsal process was not very extensive, Crouch arrived at rehearsals with the text already cut. In rehearsals, they discussed family's structures and family behaviour; they also explored the idea of patriarchs who are dominant in family gatherings, while the younger ones tend to organise things and allow the patriarch to have the idea of an authority which he no longer has (Croall 159).

Tim Crouch was attracted to the play because of the theme of families and siblings. There are two families in break down, two sets of siblings in crisis and two fathers. He did not want to have Lear as a tyrannical king and was more eager to portray a father who loses his temper with his family. Lear is demanding and difficult, irascible as well as playful. He needs the kind of care that comes not only from a sense of duty but also from love. Another critical choice made by Crouch was to enhance the subplot. He wanted to find more balance between Lear and his daughters, and Gloucester and his sons. This was done through the edit and the staging. Lear and Gloucester are different types of fathers, but both share that they are far from perfect (Winston 88).

His concept for the play was to compress the action into the seven days between Christmas and the New Year. For a young audience, this presented a tidy timeline. He decided to set it in this period because emotions during this time of the year are very extreme; there are always resentments coming to the surface. It is a time when families

come together, to celebrate and have a good time, but it is also a time when tensions often break to the surface. It is also a time when homelessness is often in the news, and it is not a good time for a beggar to be out there, as it usually is cold (Crouch 159).

Crouch also adds an exciting idea: when the audience comes into the theatre, the Christmas party is already taking place. All the characters are playing games, taking pictures.... etc. Lear enters on a wheelchair wearing a paper crown; a servant serves drinks wearing Rudolph's nose. Lear confuses Goneril with Regan when initiating the test of who loves him most, which sets the tone for a man who is losing his mental capacities, the scene seems very light. When Cordelia refuses to tell him what he wants to hear, he reacts as a child would. The moment of his irascible explosion is powerful because it contrasts with the fun-loving, figure that Lear had been playing up to that moment. The change becomes abrupt because the audience does not anticipate anything. The production made use of Christmas hits from the 50s and 60s as the soundtrack, which added irony to the scenes. "Let it Snow" played during the storm, "Silent Night" in the hovel scene and "Jingle Bells" during Gloucester's blinding. Crouch did not want to be explicit with violence or with the idea of dementia, but he wanted to introduce the idea of Lear having dementia in a subtle way (Croall 160-162).

Crouch recognized the fool's dramatic function he also saw a problem with this for his young audience. The fool communicates through riddles and a language that is difficult for them to understand, so he adapted the language. He also made a huge change in the script and disguised Kent as the fool. In his production, we see that Edmund abandons his reindeer costume at the end of the opening scene and that later Kent rediscovers and uses this costume as his fool's disguise. In this role, as well as

warning Lear, he greatly amuses him and the audience alike, bringing many moments of lightness into the play (Winston 88-104).

Statistics gathered by the RSC show that of the audiences were young as well as ethnically and socially diverse. Their comments were very positive, for instance, one girl said, “I know that it’s a play, but some families are like that (Winston 105)”. Crouch’s production was very clear, it had an exciting concept and it connected with its audience, as it really managed to hold the audience’s attention (Winston 106-115).

- Song of a Goat

In 2012, Song of a Goat brought *Songs of Lear* to the fringe festival in Edinburgh and then to the Globe. Song of the Goat is an avant-garde Polish theatre company that challenges the traditional understanding of theatre. Their practice integrates movement, song, and text to offer a fresh insight into the plays. Their productions normally do not only rely on astounding visual revolutions but on sonorous waves created by polyphonous voices. The company’s director Grzegorz Bral opened *Songs of Lear* by telling a personal story that set off a non-linear dramatic piece that shows the world of subtle energies and rhythms that govern *King Lear*. It consisted on a composition of different non-linear metaphorical paintings. Each painting is a song accompanied by physical movements and live instruments. The ensemble chooses crucial scenes and makes them flow through gestures, words and music. The company plunges in a style of aboriginal music unknown to urban audiences while it excavates into the spirit of *King Lear*. The production maintains a ceremonial and ritual sense that also establishes a contemporary bridge to modern audiences. It is multidimensional experience of the story that conveys the storm in Lear’s soul that shows the world of subtle energies and

rhythms (KaiChieh tu. “Song of the Goat Sings the Tragedy of Cordelia in Songs of Lear”). This production creates emotional soundscapes that evoke the spirit of the story of Lear; it addresses the play’s themes, and does not shy away from the play’s harsher and tragic aspects (Schlosser, “Songs of Lear”).

- Angus Jackson

In 2013, Angus Jackson directed Frank Langella at Chichester’s Minerva. Angus Jackson explained in an interview with *World of Books* that it is daunting for any director to stage *King Lear*. For him, the focus always was telling the story because this involves all the different actions that have to be done, such as cutting lines, updating or not the text, the design....etc. According to Jackson, the crucial part must be the urge to communicate the story with clarity; everything else is just a consequence. He expresses how Shakespeare did not write many stage directions, so the director has to do much investigation on the text to gather information. He thinks that doing a modern production is a good idea as long as it adds something. The biggest challenge for a director who wants to direct this tragedy is precisely to find the rules of the world that he needs to create. This is not an easy task, especially because *King Lear* is the biggest roller-coaster ride into human life (*World of Books*).

Jackson did not see the character of Lear as an old fragile person; he thought the play was about the fall of a powerful man, so it was important for him not to give things away from the beginning in order to offer a clear journey for Lear. The character of Lear that appears in the first scene of the play is a king at the top of his game. The arc of this character shows a man finding his mind, not losing it. The director and Langella

discussed ageing in-depth to design this path for Lear. One of the relationships he was keen to explore was the one between Lear and the fool. He cast a very young actor for the role to communicate the idea that the fool was the son Lear never had (Croall 207).

Design-wise, Jackson did not want to make a modern production, and he set it around 1600. He used elemental materials, such as stone, wood, water or fire and created structures with these elements to portray the different locations. For example, he used vertical wooden beams to represent the castle and the forest. The result was very austere but practical. One of the best features of his production was the floor of the stage where it could be seen the outline of a map. This map was stripped away during the play foreshadowing the destruction of that world. For the storm, Jackson created a curtain of rain, and he had a completely naked Lear, to show the vulnerability of the moment (Croall 208-2011). Kate Havard said in her article “Lear vs Lear” at *First Things* that:

When Jackson’s *Lear* reaches the storm—where Lear, cast out by his daughters, rages amongst the elements—it’s very realistic. It even rains on stage, and Langella has to shout to be heard over the din. Nature doesn’t care if you’re a king. For the rest of the play, we see a diminished Lear—a humbled Lear, stripped of his vanity, a man who believes he is a god realizing he is a man. This Lear does not stay mad. But he also does not stay a king. The storm washes away convention: He relinquishes command. When he sees Cordelia again, he collapses into vulnerable, frail, begging forgiveness. When he brings her body onstage, he’s completely broken. In short: be humble, for you are weak and the world is wide. This is the “real world” (Havard).

- Bill Buckhurst

In 2014, Bill Buckhurst directed the Globe's touring production of *King Lear*; where Joseph Marcell played the king. In the same way that the staging of this tragedy in Elizabethan times was tied to the theatre company, the theatre practices and acting practices and both the social and political circumstances of that time. Current theatre practices also involve touring theatre, as it is vital in our current world to bring plays to smaller cities. Nevertheless, the challenges of touring *King Lear* are enormous. This one was a touring production, so the design needed to be very stripped-back and it became essential to have a flexible set that could fit into all the different theatre buildings and that could travel easily. All the scene changes were done using very simple resources, for example, for the storm; Buckhurst drew a curtain across the stage. Everything was kept to the minimum in the design. Regarding the acting company, only eight actors were playing twenty-eight parts, so there was a lot of doubling and tripling of roles. One of the most exciting elements in his approach was that the theatricality was always present. For instance, the costumes changes happened in full view of the audience and actors were clearly seen by the audience waiting for their next entrance. The change of character was also done in front of the spectators by doing a simple change of headgear. Imagination and simplicity were the main elements in this approach. Buckhurst's *Lear* was full of violence; he was portrayed as a terrifying king in a very male-dominated environment. He was a king who liked to keep things under his control (Croall, 123-128).

The performance result was mediocre. The director struggled to convey the emotional depth of this tragedy, and the play did not transcend as the concept did not bring anything new (Kabatchnik 173).

- Arin Arbus

In 2014, Arin Arbus directed *King Lear* in Brooklyn, at the Theatre for a New Audience. Arbus did not want to set the play in a specific period; nevertheless, she wanted it to resonate with our current world. She thought it was an incredible challenge to find the balance between an ancient and a contemporary setting. Her designer created a militaristic set. Arbus did not think that Lear's decision of dividing the kingdom was a bad idea at all. Lear is old; so he is getting close to the time to retire. His mistake is not about dividing the kingdom but about making the test to find out how much his daughters loved him. The love test came as a surprise to everyone because it was not planned. It came from a deep need inside him to be loved (Croall 211).

Arbus argued that there is very little information about the fool in the play, so it is tough for a director to come up with a clear choice for this character. The fact is that we do not know much about his past; we do not know how long he has been with Lear or what he is like. The only clear thing is that the fool loves Lear deeply. Based on that, she decided to cast a very young boy to play the fool. Arbus envisioned him as an orphan, a Dickens like figure, who had lived on the streets for years, trying to survive until Lear asked him to work for him. Lear is for him a kind of adoptive father figure. As a consequence, it becomes excruciating for the fool to see Lear falling apart, and he



ends up completely desperate. The fool is aware that in those new circumstances, there is no reason for him to be there, and that is why he commits suicide.

Regarding the storm, Arbus thought that it is both a literal and a metaphorical storm. She wanted to make the storm both an internal and an external because she believes the landscape in the tragedy reflects what is happening in Lear's mind. She was aware that many times water could become distracting for the audience, so the creation of the storm was done through the use of sound, lights and musicians on stage, who played a score of abstract music (Croall 212-216).

- Sam Mendes

In 2014, Sam Mendes directed Russell Beale at the The National Theatre. Lloyd Evans says in his review at *The Spectator* that

directors appear to have two design options when approaching a Shakespeare tragedy: Woodstock or jackboot. Woodstock means papal robes, shoulder-length hair and silver excaliburs gleaming from jewelled belts. Jackboot means pistols, berets, holsters and submachine-guns. Sam Mendes sticks the jackboot into *King Lear* in an attempt to find a modern understanding of the story (Evans, "Sam Mendes's King Lear is a Must").

Mendes expressed that *King Lear* is enormous; in the play, we see the destruction of an entire nation because of a family breakdown. For the set, he wanted to do a big production that reflected how enormous the play is. He used more than thirty supernumeraries. The design created a non-specific post-war atmosphere of a

totalitarian state. The company studied dictators such as Gaddafi, Mubarak, Ceausescu, Tito, Lenin and Stalin, finding similarities with Lear and the way he executed his power. He saw Lear as a king who caused fear around him. The character became a shaven-headed dictator, a ruthless monarch who has killed many and ordered the death of many others. In order to develop the idea of a dictatorship, Lear's soldiers were portrayed as a private army that wore black shirts. Torture was probably one of the weapons used in his kingdom. Mendes wanted to portray all that violence and darkness. His main challenge was to make the audience believe that Lear is also a good man because what we get from him is that he is not nice and that he is profoundly cruel. However, he should also have a good side because both Kent and Cordelia love him. It was very complicated with the choice of Mendes to feel sympathy for Lear or to feel sorry for him. Mendes also found that it was very challenging to graduate Lear's journey into losing his power and getting more and more isolated. He explained that this transition is very abrupt and becomes an issue for the director (Croall 234-235).

They explored in depth the final scene discovering that with the approach of portraying Lear as a dictator the end was not a marvellous reconciliation, instead it was a moment where he felt uncomfortable and ashamed, because it was not easy for him to see her. There is not a real forgiveness at that point, according to Mendes their relationship is already too damaged and broken to have forgiveness. They would have needed time to heal but in the play they do not have that time. During rehearsals they tried many ways of approaching the end to understand and convey the devastating circumstances of their relationship. Many of the ideas that appeared were too complicated to be put into practice (Croall 234).

Another scene that required much work was the short opening scene with Gloucester and Kent. They discussed many options of where to set it. They consider some extravagant ideas, such as doing it in a urinal or in an airport waiting-room. The main option for the opening scene of dividing the kingdom was to place it in a party. There were many alternatives regarding which kind of party. In the end they chose to set it at a cocktail party, a kind of birthday party at a men's club. The daughters appeared in a corner in the dark, entering only when allowed. The love-test of his daughters became a ceremony where Lear maintained the distance with his daughters by speaking to them through a microphone. He showed a reaction full of rage, throwing around tables when Cordelia refuses to prop up his ego. Another scene that created a challenge was the one when Goneril and Regan asked Lear to get rid of his knights. He wanted to convey the importance for Lear to have his knights, his possessions as a king. As a result, they played with removing Lear's real possessions; first they took his duvet, then more and more things until he is left only with a bean bag (Croall 235).

It is always a puzzle to solve the enigma around the disappearance of the fool. Mendes thought there had to be a purpose for him to leave. He suggested the idea that Lear killed him, and this was a clear sign that his mind was almost gone. This suggestion was very controversial, as many critics said this was not what Shakespeare wrote. Nevertheless, Mendes explained that Lear only knows how to communicate through violence. He continually uses a violent language, and people in his kingdom are used to this behaviour. As a consequence, killing the fool in a moment of madness is another external expression of his aggression (Croall 236).

The production indulged in having special effects, such as lightning flashes, haze, smoke, sounds, projected clouds.... There were so many things on stage that there

was not much need to activate the audience's imagination. Nevertheless, As Billington expressed, Mendes' play manages not to be imprisoned by an intellectual concept, and many scenes had both an epic quality and many human details. The production "sharpens our understanding of Shakespeare's analysis of human folly and the primacy of contradictory feeling over calm rationality" (Billington "King Lear").

- Gregory Doran

In 2016, Artistic Director Gregory Doran directed *King Lear* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and at the Barbican. The production was also broadcast to cinemas worldwide. As explains the Royal Shakespeare Company on its website, the minimal and symmetrical design emphasized the importance of ritual as well as the old king's isolation as he entered carried in a glass box. This cube becomes later a blinding box splattered with Gloucester's blood. The set design featured an enormous solar disc that also appeared in the characters' costumes in different ways. According to Hellen Shaw, it was an unsurprising, incoherent and emotionally vacant production:

This is the homework *Lear*, the anxiety of Influence *Lear*, the research *Lear*. It is full of borrowed images: The raggedy poor come stumbling in from the Grigori Kozintsev film; the glass box prop recalls Francis Bacon's Screaming Pope paintings... Shakespeare hung this difficult play like a garland around one man's neck, and when the man is wrong, it starts to stink like an albatross (Shaw, "King Lear").

There is no a play as terrifically human as *King Lear* because it embodies the heights and depths of the human experience. The magic of theatre relies on the

fact that good theatre creates relevant questions. These productions of *King Lear* served as a reflection of a specific age, not necessarily giving answers but propounding interrogations about life and society. Many troubling questions reappeared in each and every one of the productions. It becomes evident that *King Lear* attracts many directors because of its complexity. Each director looked at it from a specific perspective influenced by his particular experience of life. As it can be seen through the analysis of their work, one of the director's most challenging task is to define the world of *King Lear*, to be clear about the characters that inhabit it and then to give an exciting and coherent journey to the destruction of that world. Every age creates its own Shakespeare and every director his very own *King Lear*. Their successes and failures help us get to the core of this play and to enlarge both our both our perception of it and our understanding of life.

#### **4.4. A Practice-Based Research**

After investigating the challenges that many directors faced when directing *King Lear*, I decided to go to the rehearsal room myself, do a practice-based research and explore the play as a director in order to reach my conclusions. I worked with a team of fifteen drama students during one month and a half at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London.

The first part of the rehearsals was used as a research and development process, and during the second part of the rehearsals we developed the initial ideas to put on the production. I presented my practice based research at the Gielgud Theatre Studio, at RADA, in June 2009. The following part is the analysis of my artistic process as a

theatre director working on *King Lear*. All the discoveries that I share reflect the process of brainstorming and creative input of my theatre company before, during and after rehearsals. The aim of this part is to connect a practice-based research with the academic research. In theatre, there is nothing such as the right way; each production follows the instincts of a director; each production is the result of the director's perspective on the play. In rehearsals each small achievement becomes the base of what it follows. At the beginning of my process there were no answers, only questions. The answers started presenting themselves as we tackled each challenge that *King Lear* presented.

#### 4.4.1. Approaching the Play

As William B. Worthen said during his lecture “The Imprint of Performance” at Kings College London, the text of a play cannot imply a specific performance. As directors, we depart from the same text, but then there is a transformation from this text to action. This transformation can occur in many different ways. There are many paths of generating performances (William B Worthen).

In another lecture at Kings College London, Professor Alan Read explained that theatre is made of different elements and that it contains metaphysical qualities. The world of the stage speaks about life; we have to acknowledge that theatre is not disconnected from the everyday. The “Theatre Mundi” metaphor has always been a dominant image where God has been considered as the writer of everything that happens in the world. The connection between theatre and the world has always existed. A performance can excel at bringing the whole world to the present, it can transpire life;

this can help audiences to observe life and reflect upon it. Theatre does nothing more than playing out all the different options that are out there in the world. It represents and gives shape to the many conflicts that humans go through. Theatre is bound by its context because of the unique relationship between audience, performer and everyday life. Performances enact events that surround us, imitating what takes place in our world and becoming a mirror of it. During the years, theatre has redefined itself and has found its resources not only to show life but to throw questions about life (Read).

*King Lear* is a mirror of conflicts, emotions and relationships that happen in the world. The task for the director is to see how to choose wisely the shape that the text has on stage so that the connection between the play, the audience and life can be as strong as possible.

As Mark Fortier explains in *Theory/Theatre* drama is connected to written language and to the words ascribed to characters but theatre is not about words on a page. Theatre is about performance; it entails not only words, but space, actors, props, audience and the relationship between all these elements (4). The purpose of theatre is “to put the audience in a better position to understand the world around them, a world which is social and changeable (Fortier 29)”. Taking this into account, I was aware that changes in the world are bound to produce changes in theatrical productions. My job as a director was to find a system of signs to bring Shakespeare’s text to a contemporary audience and make them understand and reflect upon the themes that are highlighted in *King Lear*.

During the twentieth century, energies deriving from the text of *King Lear* have been released in performances other than theatre, for example, film, television, radio and sound recordings. They reach a wide variety of audiences and offer great

opportunities for experimentation. As a director, I did not want to escape from life and forget that all these media are part of our society. There is a radical proliferation of information and culture through all these channels. New media are extension of our bodies, especially the sensory system: we hear, see, and touch in new ways because of the radio, television and computers (Fortier 178).

Ideas are made by the world around us, if we want to understand ourselves through theatre; theatre needs to have a conversation with our world. Going to the cinema, watching films and series at home or accessing different technological devices has become a long established social habit. Moving images enter millions of households, the expansion of the image is evident, the population has shifted and there are new forms of youth culture. Audiences go to see theatre because they are drawn to good stories and there is something that the human being craves about live experiences. However, as directors we cannot ignore that we need a new vocabulary to tell old stories. Today's directors need to embrace new ways of communicating in order to captivate people and generate bonds with them. The language we use is crucial as it might prevent us from engaging with our audience (Figuereido).

When I plunged into the world of the performance, I could not afford to ignore our society and the importance of the visuals. As S.Viswanathan said, "Imagery is a mode of apprehending experience, thought, feeling and sensation together, as well as a mode of communication; the dramatist, and the characters through him, think and feel through images (163)". Imagery is not only used to adorn a production; it can be used to serve dramatic purposes. It can present a concatenation of actions, giving them some tempo while making use of an economy of expression. On one side, an emotion finds its most expressive vehicle by way of imagery, and on the other side, a world of thoughts



can be packed into a single image as it has an effect of condensation. Sharp images can intensify the play's tone and depth while generating an atmosphere. Through different images, a director can build up a world of his own, an aesthetic that holds together the plot (Ellis-Fermor 79).

The first challenge was to use a stage language that could become appealing and fresh even if the story was old. I aimed to stage *King Lear* in conversation with the contemporary world. It was evident that I needed to take into account the current importance of images to define an aesthetic that could be exciting for the contemporary spectators. As observed, this audience is most time of the day in front of a screen; so the first decision was to watch films about *King Lear* before going to the rehearsal room.

Shakespeare's plot is full of good material for the screen. He offers battles, murders, deaths, conflict, tension and humour. There is something interesting happening all the time. But it is not only the plot that matters, also the rhythm and the proportion. If the director alters these elements the spectator might end up seeing something completely different. Shakespeare's characters were created as roles for actors. They come to life only when they are played, and they can be played in many different ways. Nevertheless, the films offer the actors great assistance, and special advantages. The camera can make sure that every gesture is noticed, for example, a close up will oblige the audience to focus their attention where the director chooses. There is also some extra help with the background, the lights, the shadows and many of the other resources present on set. The voice work is completely different, for instance, the actor can rely more on whispering, as any sound will be heard. On top of that, the soundtrack will manipulate the emotions of the viewer, adding an extra layer to the dramatic performance. It is the director's choice to see if he wants to underline the poetry, if he

wants to stop the camera on the actor's face during a soliloquy and if he wants to play with metaphors with the images he shows on screen. The language used in a film has a wider vocabulary to tell the story. The moving background is part of that vocabulary. This moving background brings some extra layer to the text. Directors know that a conversation that in theatre would happen on a sofa can take place on a cab running through a crowded city (Thorp 357-366).

The film opens many possibilities. Film has its own magic by the way it tells stories and I wanted to see how some film directors transferred King Lear on stage and how their screen language could potentially illuminate something new about the play. These films were incredible inspiration to build a toolbox of sharp images and cinematic techniques that I could apply on stage.

In the same way that happens on stage, together with the release of these films comes a body of criticism about the discipline of the directors. Transferring the text to the screen has also generated discussions about the faithfulness to the original text. For some critics, celluloid closes down the complexities of the text and fails in the fidelity stakes. For others, it provides invigorating reinventions. There are many versions of *King Lear* on screen, for example, Grigori Kozintsev's *Korol Lir*, Peter Brook's *King Lear*, Akira Kurosawa's *Ran*, Peter Yates *The Dresser*, Jean-Luc Godard *King Lear*, and Kristian Levring *The King Is Alive*. What these adaptations have in common is a resistance to the period drama treatment. They also have other similarities; for instance, the screen adaptations of Brook and Kurosawa embrace the loss of faith.

I started watching *Ran* by Kurosawa. As Ann Thompson explains, *Ran* has been acclaimed as part of the Shakespearean heritage. Many scholars have insisted that it is a version of Shakespeare's play, even if Kurosawa denied it (Griggs, 1–13.) In his

production, I found a lot of directorial freedom, and at the same time, there is accuracy conveying the essential elements of the play. Although there are lots of changes from Shakespeare's original text, the essence of *King Lear* is there. I was interested in Kurosawa's work because this was the approach I wanted to take for my production, an approach that respected the essence of the play, but that also enjoyed freedom.

*Ran*'s narrative follows a classical story design where the plot of *King Lear* can be recognised, but at the same time, it manages to get rid of the sanctity of Shakespeare's verse. This gives Kurosawa the freedom to play with the story and to offer his very unique perspective on the classic (Davies 23). Kurosawa also excels at bringing the elements of *King Lear* into a completely different culture. The production is bold enough to move close to Japanese costume drama. He used the conventions of Noh theatre to tell the tragedy, giving the story a clear aesthetic that was both simple and full of complexities (Griggs 142).

His apocalyptic approach shows the crisis of the patriarchy system. This critical situation leads to an end in which there is no redemption, this is an end with no hope, and where all is left is suffering. The conclusion that Kurosawa conveys is that patriarchy is linked to violence and destruction, showing disbelief about the validity of the patriarchal institutions at all levels. The element that makes *Ran* so unique is that although it shares many similarities with the original text, it also honours its cultural Japanese symbols, such as the samurai codes and values. Another strong aspect of this film is that Kurosawa uses compelling images, which are both violent and symbolic. Many of these images manage to portray with clarity emotions such as pain and guilt (Griggs 80-90). The film contains a strong sense of freedom, for instance, Kurosawa adds dialogue at the beginning of the film to provide a general background. A challenge

in *King Lear* is that we are thrown into the first scene without knowing much about the characters or why they behave the way they do it (Hoile 29–34).

I found Kurosawa's directorial choice very bright as he managed to provide a frame for the opening scene, and he also connected the tragedy and the cultural aspects in order to draw the audience in. The use of imagery in *Ran*, Kurosawa's directorial freedom and his playfulness with cultural values were elements that influenced my vision of *King Lear*. I decided that, in the same way that Kurosawa found a cultural equivalent for the Japanese culture, I wanted to do the same for the contemporary European society. I needed to investigate with my theatre company cultural equivalents that resonated with our future spectators. I started brainstorming with the company ideas about current imagery around the theme of power contained in the play. The actors understood that power is essentially that which represses nature, instincts, a class or individuals. All actors shared the thought that one of the current signs of power used by countries is the flag. As soon as a country conquers another country, the moon or a mountain, it puts a flag there to show its power; it is also a strong symbol of belonging to a specific tribe.

Another symbol of power the company observed is the use of clothes. Clothes are an essential type of social sign because they have a definite social meaning. Expensive clothes show status so I decided that we would develop this concept for the costumes used in the production. It would be a modern dressed production where the audience could quickly identify themselves with the context. We also analysed cultural activities, practices, discourses, images and popular icons as a hidden way of infiltrating ideas in a society, and executing power. Some actors expressed how people who are in a position of power ( politicians, stars, models...) show us what is right and wrong; we

naturalise these ideas and see them as usual. For example, we all have smart-phones; even if it has been proved that they are continually recording us for marketing purposes, we allow CCTV cameras everywhere because they are supposed to be there for our safety, we allow cameras in our homes (laptops...) because they are supposed to help us. This research into the use of power opened a big discussion about how governments execute their power by showing and hiding information.

Our brainstorm and investigation on this topic took us to visit an exhibition called “An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar” by Taryn Simon. This exhibition investigated the hidden places, artefacts and rituals of the American government, capturing the vision of a Bush-era America. It was a sinister trip into the nation’s underbelly that offered a great level of detail. Among the pictures that we could see in the exhibition, there were those of a nuclear waste storage facility or a room at John F. Kennedy Airport, in New York, where the seized contraband is kept, we could also see the Forensic Anthropology Research Facility where they study corpse decomposition. The photos managed to document hidden truths, showing several government secrets and experiments that did not want to be in the public eye. The words that came up from the actors to try to summarize the exhibition were: death, disease, threat, control, fear and surveillance. It was clear to me that I wanted to include this type of world of control and hidden truths in the staging of the tragedy. This exhibition was the inspiration for the design and atmosphere of Lear’s kingdom.

Peter Brook’s film about *King Lear*, which was made in 1970, also became a point of reference to me. The decadent images in the film show an atmosphere full of harshness and solemnity. The beginning of the play is set in a cold, dark room made of stones where the characters wear fur coats. The weather is extremely present in the film,

becoming nearly another character. The violence and cruelty in the images are very striking (Marowitz 103-121). For instance, images that stood out for me were the ones shown when they blind Gloucester with a spoon, the scene where Edmund and Edgar fight with axes or the scene when Goneril kills her sister and later herself with a stone. The story contains enormous brutality.

His perspective on the tragedy offers a sense of the absurdity that surrounds the human being, and it also underlines of the diminishing powers of the patriarchal system. Brook's *King Lear* does not embrace the epic grandeur; instead, he prefers to explore the characters' internal conflict as a projection of the catastrophe. The film gives an enormous focus to the characters through the use of many close-ups to show us not only the age and quality of each character but also their thoughts, feelings and reaction. He has an expressionistic perspective that aims to reflect the psyche of the characters. Thus, in his *King Lear*, the conflict is internalised. At some moments, he frames some shots in a way that suggests that we are standing behind characters. Other times, the characters speak in direct address to camera, which functions as a soliloquy in staged Shakespeare, while reminds us that we are watching a reconstruction of reality. Brook makes full use of the possibilities that the medium offers him to make spectators dive into the inner universe of the characters (Griggs 30-36).

The film shares with Brook's stage production his nihilistic reading of the text. This nihilism was influenced by the writings of critic Jan Kott and well as by the social and political context at that time. Alienation is appealing to Brook and he achieves this Brechtian effect, for example, by using titles to tell us where we are (Brook 80). The peak of the nihilism in his film comes at the end, Brook's apocalyptic vision makes Lear go out of the frame, leaving spectators with a white screen held for several seconds

aiming to convey the idea of nothingness. The conclusion that we get by watching his production is that human life is insignificant (Sharrett 5).

Brook made the journeys from one castle to another castle a big part of the narrative. The film becomes a series of episodes linked by journeys. Brook *uses* cinematic techniques such as non-conventional editing and framing to give a sense of fragmentation. The storm was communicated through the use of filmic resources such jumps, cuts, visual discontinuity, fades to black and superposed images to create the effect of the storm in Lear's mind (Mullin 190-193).

During the film, the rules of linear time are broken by having gaps in the narrative, as well as disjointed images. Brook thinks that Shakespeare's verse is filled with surreal images, and he tries to project the impression created by his verses in the screen. He jumps from shot to shot, blurs the focus, the camera zooms into, and out of the images and he introduces constant pauses to mirror Shakespeare's language (Griggs 50-55). He says that there is anarchy in his writing and exploits this idea in his film adaptation by also showing many surreal images (Griggs 89).

Brook's film inspired me to play with the use of the narrative. I introduced flashbacks and flash-forwards in the production in order to highlight the contrast between the beginning of the play, when Lear was powerful, and the end when he became powerless. Playing with time was also a powerful tool to highlight the change in the world order.

Another film that I watched was Grigori Kozintsev's production. This piece is seen as a classic rendition of *King Lear*. Kozintsev looks at Shakespeare's text as a tragic poem and translates each verse into images. He shows an exciting directorial

concept because he frames the story through the use of contrast; he continually uses this resource to make the audience see good versus evil (Kozintsev 37).

Kozintsev develops the idea of the savage animal hidden behind a civilized exterior working once more the idea of contrast. On one side, he shows the social mask and, on the other one, spectators can also see the real nature of the person behind the mask. He uses imagery to throw interrogations about the nature of the human being (Kozintsev 42-43). There were animals in cages when Lear went to his daughters' castles as a metaphor of how imprisoned he was becoming by his own choices. In the scene of the storm, Lear's psychological state and pain is reflected by the image of him eating the earth. The way he links characters and nature is memorable. Goneril and Regan are connected through symbolic editing to angry dogs that are chained and salivating, portraying the savage animal in them. In contrast to this, Cordelia appears as allied to naturalness; she is dressed in simple white attire, with all the associations this has, with innocence (Griggs 71-74).

It becomes very satisfying to see how he manages to show the duality in the human being, conveying both his humanity and his animality. The two sisters are portrayed as cannibals that would devour Lear; Goneril is a mature woman with a wrinkled face while Regan is more voluptuous and actively repugnant. Lear is old but vigorous (McNeir 239-248).

Kozintsev also develops the concept of contrast by playing between the use of claustrophobic interior scenes, and exterior scenes that are expansive. As explained in his diaries, Kozintsev makes a conscious choice to play with inner spaces and outer spaces because this helps him to portray a metaphorical landscape. The landscapes are always present in the film to convey the emotions and themes. He gives nature a



specific role in the film as if it were the chorus of a Greek tragedy. Kozintsev shot the film in a polluted terrain near Narva, a place spoiled by the State Regional Electric Power Station. It is an utterly lifeless space that portrays destruction perfectly well and manages to take people both to the past and the present. During the film, there are recurrent images of fire as a reflection of power and of the destruction of the world order (Griggs 66-68). Kozintsev's stresses the redemptive nature of *King Lear*; he looks at the story as a journey into self-discovery where isolation is what allows a transformative experience (Cohan 5-6).

Thinking about my ideas for the set design of the production it was clear to me that I wanted to create a context that helped the audience to understand the story. I knew that if I built a Stonehenge world it would become more difficult for a contemporary society to connect with the barbarity of the play. This decision led me to a functional world. I completed a portfolio with pictures from European cities, business offices, media conference rooms, the tube, prisons and a bridges as a source of inspiration. Nevertheless, I realised that it was very difficult to show all of this in a low budget production. My idea of setting it in a modern world could potentially work, but the immensity of the play proved to be extremely challenging. As a consequence, I decided that I needed a clear and simple concept that could become a driving force for the design, the aesthetic and the general style.

Watching Kozintsev's film inspire me to decide that my production would rely heavily on symbolic and literal images. This choice took me to investigate the most used instrument in our modern world to receive and spread images: the media. We discussed in the rehearsal room how the media has a lot of power, especially because people tend to believe what it tells us. As a consequence, it is easy for the media to

control society by imposing fear. The media is the god of our times; it has the power to create, to destroy and to modify. Society can be brainwashed through the media and even become puppets of it. We started doing improvisations to explore how to include the media in the play. Thanks to these improvisations I decided that my production would have continuous projections, sometimes these images helped to give a context, others they became TV sets that showed events, or mobile screens that showcased recorded audios and videos, while other times they were windows to the soul of the characters. Projections a useful tool to integrate still and moving images in the scenes. This technological resource seemed a good solution to accommodate the multiple locations that appear in the tragedy while they also enhanced the transitions from scene to scene.

A further analysis of film adaptations of *King Lear* seemed crucial to illuminate some dark corners of Shakespeare's work and to build my creative vision inspired by the use of images. Jean-Luc Godard directed an exciting adaptation of *King Lear* in 1987. Watching Godard's production allowed me to dive deeper into the mystery of connecting times, spaces and cultures through visual elements. Godard's film deconstructs Shakespeare's tragedy while exploring the meaningless nature of existence. He dislocates our preconceived notions of the text forcing us to realise that there is no fixed meaning in any given text even if it holds an untouchable cultural status (Griggs 150-165). As Susan Bennett expresses, Godard's focus explores the failings of patriarchy and finds a language that connects words and visual images. The storyline shows a mafia boss who has retired. Godard uses experimental cinema techniques to depart from Shakespeare's play as a referent but also to introduce a wide range of works from different artists. He takes inspiration from Velazquez, Botticelli, Renoir and Goya.

The film does not have a narrative cohesion and presents an intellectual puzzle that interrogates all facets of patriarchal power (Bennet 12).

Watching Godard's adaptation pushed me to research paintings that showed both power and lack of power. I came across the *Portrait of the Pope Innocent X* done both by Velazquez and Francis Bacon. The theatre company played with these two images in the rehearsal room using physical theatre techniques to explore the character of Lear. The actors discussed how one of these paintings conveyed the dominant social role of the king versus the other one that showed his true identity. These images became an excellent departing point to build the character of Lear. *El Guernica* by Picasso, Goya's dark paintings, and the works of El Greco and Caravaggio were present in the rehearsal room to inspire us for the creation of an aesthetic. The dark palette of colours in my production was inspired by these paintings and artists. At the same time, my blocking of the scenes aimed to create pictorial compositions. I used a mixture of Laban's technique, Anne Bogart's Viewpoints and Lecoq physical theatre exercises to develop the idea of composition and creation of scenes that looked like paintings on stage.

After watching all these films based on *King Lear*, I already had an idea of the aesthetics of my production. The next step was to look for inspiration to create a bond between the classic and the modern world. This impulse drew me to investigate Bond's *Lear* because of its connection to the modern world. Bradley sees Edward Bond's *Lear* as an exciting modern adaptation which "drags Shakespeare's masterpiece into the twentieth century and challenges audiences to see its relevance (Bradley 123)".

As I decided to investigate the element of brutality in the play, it became really stimulating to read Edward Bond's *Lear*, as he wrote a much more violent text. Reading it was of great value as it helped me to understand the core of violence in our modern

world, and it also helped me how to find ways of portraying violence in my production. According to Bond, nowadays we live in ways for which we are not designated for, and this provokes alienation, it makes us very aggressive. In his preface of *Lear*, he explains aggression in humans:

The predator hunting its prey is violent but not aggressive in the human way. It wants to eat, not destroy, and its violence is dangerous to the prey but not to the predator. Animals only become aggressive – that is destructive in the human sense – when their lives, territory or status in their group are threatened, or when they mate or are preparing to mate. Even then the aggression is controlled. Fighting is usually ritualized, and the weaker or badly-placed animal will be left alone when it runs away or formally submits. Men use much of their energy and skill to make more efficient weapons to destroy each other, but animals have often evolved in ways to ensure they can't destroy each other (Bond 1).

Bond dramatically alters Shakespeare's ending. Bradley sees that "Bond does not merely theorize change; he advocates direct action and practical solutions within concrete social realities" (Bradley 127). Through this ending *Lear* takes responsibility for changing the oppressive social order he has helped to construct. Bond's *Lear* contains rapes, ghosts, explicit violence, an autopsy and a modern invention that plucks out the eyes. It is so horrifying that it makes us think about humanity, and it raises questions about the abuse of power. Bond explains how humans respond in an aggressive way when they are deprived of their needs, which can be either physical or emotional needs. He argues that it has become quite challenging to live and behave in a way for which we have not been designed. The human being has been alienated from

his natural self, and this has brought terrible consequences. We regularly become nervous, tense, stressed; and this leads to us becoming a threat to others (Bond 8).

Bond explains that the reason why we behave aggressively is that our daily lives interfere with our natural design. We live in a technosphere where we do not fit into. We live in flats in crowded cities; we work like machines and have little control over our lives. Technology has turned the world into a standing reserve in which everything and everyone is instrumental. As a consequence, we activate our biological defences, and the whole structure of our society becomes a negative biological response to a threat. The society operates under the aggression that it creates. In these social groups that we have established, leaders receive privileges. Although this is an injustice, people accept it because those leaders are the administrators of justice. As a result, an unjust society causes and defends an aggressive social structure (Bond 9).

As Annamma George expresses, Shakespeare governs the British repertory, and he holds cultural supremacy. When Bond faced writing *Lear*, he observed how Shakespeare started with the microcosm of disorder in the individual life of a king, and then he moved to the macrocosm of disorder in a society. Order and disorder are part of the dialectic of *King Lear* and something that Bond was interested in, and wanted to develop in his play. Shakespeare manages to convey through fall of a world order, Lear's death, the emergence of a new order, with Edgar as the ideal leader. This way, the final catharsis of the king becomes the catharsis of a society too. However, Bond wanted to challenge the role of society and its oppressive function towards the individual. As a consequence, Bond's *Lear* is born with a message that agitates our contemporary culture by urging it to be challenged (George 60-65).

I thought that the violence present in Bond's *Lear* connected to the violence used in productions such as Calixto Bieito's and I decided to follow a similar route in my approach. I scheduled a couple of sessions to work on the development of violence in the production. In our exploration of this topic in the rehearsal room, we grouped violence in three blocks: violence from one man to another one; violence within the human being and violence in nature. Then, we studied which scenes were the ones where violence had room to be more explicit, such as the blindness scene. We openly discussed violence and saw that power makes people use violence, mainly because they are scared to lose it or they want to keep it. Violence is not always physical, for example oppression or manipulation are also forms of violence. We also analysed which characters are violent by nature, to understand how we could better portray them on stage. Edmund is the character that offers the best opportunity to investigate hunger for power, duplicity and murderousness. Goneril and Regan are beasts of prey who crave power, and Lear has a violent temper; he is obstinate and has an aggressive rushed attitude that appears when he fears to lose power. He cannot stand contradiction and inflames himself really quickly (Novy 85). In his essay "On the Dramatic Character of King Lear", William Richardson argues, that, though, Lear is "extravagant, inconsistent, inconstant, capricious, variable, irresolute, and impetuously vindictive [...] ... his weakness are not his crimes but the effects of misruled affections" (Richardson 308).

This research into the inherent violence in some characters of *King Lear* made us realise that we do not know much about the previous circumstances of the characters. It became apparent that we needed to create a backstory for them to make sure the characters had a clear journey. I decided to read Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* because the play ends when *King Lear* begins. This play provided a trigger for improvisations to create previous circumstances for all the characters. Baker's play disintegrates the plot,

characters, and language of *King Lear* and it shares with feminist critics an interest in the absent mother in the play. The education of a king is the central theme of *Seven Lears*. It shows the contradictions that Lear felt about what is right and wrong while going from prince to King. It also shows in very perverse scenes the role of education in the development of powerful people and the importance of education to turn them violent (Bradley 169). This was very useful for us to understand why Lear behaves the way he does and to ground his reactions during the play. It allowed the actors to get more depth in the creation of the characters and to root them with a clear back story.

There have been many productions of *King Lear* throughout the years. The director of each of these productions has chosen to set it in a specific period. In an attempt to better connect with the contemporary audience, and inspired by the screen adaptations that I watched, I felt that the best option for the set of my production would be to be modern. Elizabethan or periods in between always seem to raise problems, and it is more difficult for contemporary audiences to find a resonance there. My initial research watching films led me to gain clarity in my directorial concept. I was keen to follow Brook's steps in his nihilistic approach. The word "nothing" is the most crucial word of the play as it triggers Lear's reaction and the set of actions that follow. As Fleissner explains, when Cordelia says "nothing" there are a lot of emotions and thoughts hidden behind that word. She has an inability or a lack of willingness to communicate to her father everything that she thinks at that moment. Her answer represses her inner torments and, at the same time, it provokes confusion in Lear. She only says "nothing". Nevertheless, this "nothing" is full of content, and it is so powerful that it is the element that promotes tragedy. The human being tends to say both more and less than what it is in the heart, and many times, in the desire of express what is in the heart it becomes difficult to find words. Lear does not get her statement of love; he

is lost about her behaviour and, as a consequence, disinherits her and sends her away. The metaphor of nothing also has a prominent role in the sub-plot; Edmund's first words to Gloucester also echo Cordelia's words. The fool also repeats the word nothing on several occasions; for example, he uses it to tell Lear that what is left from his kingdom is nothing. Negation is continuously present in the play; for instance, Edgar is transformed into Poor Tom, who also repeats that he is nothing, and at the end of the play Lear and Cordelia have nothing to say to each other (Fleissner 68-70). Seeing how important this concept is and the echo it has in the play, it became my departing point for all the directorial choices.

The theatre company brainstormed what this word meant to the characters, and they saw that it was closely connected to the concept of absence; the absence of love, the absence of connection, the absence of communication and the absence of getting what they wanted. The word "nothing" became my driving force for everything; for the set design, the overall vision of the production, the costumes and my perspective on the play. I put the focus on the actors and the text, presenting a simple, stark production, with a bare stage. The concept of nothingness was present through the minimalist design. The set allowed the audience's imagination to recreate all the spaces thanks to the use of soundscapes and music that accompanied each scene. Silence became a refuge in some scenes and in others music revealed hidden feelings. I thought it was essential referring to the technosphere that Bond mentioned, this unnatural world full of technology that alienates us. As a consequence, my production relied heavily on projections. These projections helped the audience to place each moment, and they also offered a playful resource that added muscularity and freshness to the scenes. Regarding the staging, the actors were sitting at the sides of the stage when they were not involved



in a scene. There was nothing to hide behind the wings, but at the same time, the production was full of theatricality.

The connection between “no” and “know” is the connection between negation and knowledge, which is what shapes the play. This repetition is essential at generating a subliminal pain and becomes one of the basic rhetorical techniques in *King Lear*. Our capacity as human beings to know comes from having learnt the difference between good and evil, and from the capacity of saying no. In the beginning, Lear does not know himself or his daughters, but through negation, Lear will move towards knowing (Tayler 18).

The importance of knowing became another element I pushed in my production. I decided to play with the narrative; the use of flashbacks and flash-forwards highlighted the importance of knowing, the relevance of putting the pieces together to understand their world and their identities. I used a non-naturalistic style that was closer to expressionism in order to better portray the emotions in the story. As mentioned by Billington the productions of *King Lear* tend to fall in two groups, those productions which are timeless and those who are very specific (“Majesty in the Kingdom of Limbo”), it was clear that my production was a conceptual play that aimed to be part of the first group.

#### 4.4.2. The Themes

Directing this play always generates fear as it is enormous. I needed to show respect to the text, as the text is an incredible achievement, but it was also clear to me that it was just a play. It was now my responsibility as a creator to insufflate life to the

text in order to bring it to the stage. I knew I had to do many cuts, as I needed to deliver the play in less than two hours, so I had that in mind while I started analysing how to shape it. The next step in my artistic process was to meet my company of actors to do a research and development that would allow me to investigate the play from within. It was clear to me that I did not want to impose anything; instead, I wanted to encourage the actors' creativity. Their unpredictable eruptions of inspiration came at the most unexpected moments, purely because of having an exciting group of people working together under pressure.

The rehearsal room became a playroom; a nursery where I was the supervisor. I shared my concept, set up a framework, and then I let things emerge. I also knew that I wanted to look at the text without preconceptions. The first step was to see the play for what it is, not paying any attention to all the criticism, history and baggage that had grown up around it. I wanted the company to see *King Lear* without all the weight that the canon brings to it. I started by asking them what the play was about. I was struck to see that many of them were lost about this. Some said the play deals with senility others that it is about love and the lack of love, others about power but it was very complicated for all of them to agree on the same element. It seemed once more that we were dealing with a mammoth play that was like no other. This fact brought to light one of the most significant issues of this play: it is so big that it is essential to break it down. In many contemporary plays, it is easy to highlight what the main theme is, but *King Lear* is so immense that there was not one central theme but many of them. I decided to spend some time in rehearsals targeting some of the themes that appeared in that initial conversation with the actors. My aim was to discover what possibilities these themes could open for the staging. This way, we started our voyage of discovery into the play.

- Power

All of Shakespeare's tragedies have to do in one way or another one with power. Nevertheless, it is *King Lear* the one which dives deeper into the psychology of power. The quest for power corrupts the characters in the play, and when they have control over it, they do anything to keep it, which includes using treachery and deceit. There is no power exercise without an aim or objective. Lear, his daughters Goneril and Regan, and Edmund are driven by the urge to achieve social, political, personal or sexual power. Power is the motivation at the beginning of the play. It is not possible to understand what happens in that opening scene unless we conceive the option that Lear has no real intention to get rid of his power, quite the opposite; he intends to retain power at any cost. He gives out his political power because he is convinced he would be able to retain his personal power. Every human being strives to move from below of the social pyramid to above in the system; and they organise their lives according to specific plans to get their objectives. The characters reflect this urge (McLaughlin 37-43).

As this theme is so relevant in the play, it became the main element that I started exploring in my approach. First, I investigated what people understand by power. Power entails an array of phenomena. It presupposes someone is exercising that power and that there is another thing over which this power is exercised. The exercise of power will result in several changes. For example, a family relationship does not imply having a specific power, but the roles assumed within the family may have as a consequence competition, dominance or submission. The family system that we see in the play is a system based on patriarchy; where the male patriarch exercises dominance and oppression towards the female members of the family. In the play, it can also be seen

how power is everywhere and how it moves continuously. It does not stay static on anyone's hands. Therefore, power must be analysed as something that circulates (Miller 115-125).

In the rehearsal room, we played a game to analyse the circulation of power. We brought a tennis ball to the room and whoever had the power in that scene held the ball while acting the part. This game made us see who has the power in each scene. It also showed that the notion of power only has force when linked to other notions, such as interests, needs or beliefs. These elements are in an interdependent relationship with power. For example, Lear has power over his daughters because they want something from him. We did another exercise where each actor chose from zero to ten (zero being the lowest and ten the highest) which level of power his character had in each scene. This exercise was very useful in order to draw an arc for the character in relation to power throughout the play. Each actor created the journey of power for his character, and then we analysed the power relationship with the other characters in each scene. After these exercises, we started an open discussion examining what having power means in the body language, the use of the space, the facial expressions and the relationship with others. We used exercises from physical theatre to experiment with this notion of power applied to the body and the use of the space.

Blocking is the physical way to communicate to the audience all the discoveries achieved through research, discussions and exercises in the rehearsal room. Blocking involves, among other things, the physical motions of the actors. These motions are responsible for communicating the subtext of the dialogue, and they are what catch the audience's attention. The collaborative process, the discussions and the brainstorm are shared with the spectators through the blocking. At this point, we agreed which parts of

the speech could be emphasised, what kind of movement or lack of movement could be used by each character, and what was the body language like in each scene. Not only did these exercises become useful for the actors but also for me as a director. Connecting the use of power with the use of space became very useful when blocking each scene.

As Eugenio Barba explained at the Odin Teatret Festival in Holstebro, everything on stage is part of a kinetic composition. The integration of all the different elements on stage and the place where each actor stands enables the director to draw the spectator's eye to a specific point. Thanks to the use of composition, the objects and actors are transformed into elements that convey meaning. Objects do not speak by themselves, it is the location of the objects in relationship to others and to the space what generates meaning. The way a director places the actors and the props makes objects and characters extend their literal selves, they start containing a subconscious hidden world. Their significance then will go beyond what it appears to be. As a director, I played with building creative statements that captured the truth of each scene and the reality of each character in connection to power. It was not the same for me to place a character downstage centre, upstage right or downstage left.

The use of space appeared to be a sign of power that is understood by our subconscious. At the beginning of the play I blocked the scene taking into account that that people tend to create more space between them and those in power, and at this moment of the play Lear owned the space. There were bodyguards near Lear making sure that everyone understood that this leader had the right to have a protected space. Power implies separation and difference. Ideally I wanted to have stewards in the theatre frisking the spectators' bags so that spectators got the feeling of powerlessness

and experienced the play in a different way. Although this proved to be a difficult decision because of the theatre we had for our production the idea helped the company of actors to have a sense of the atmosphere we needed to create.

When examining other examples of what power, the concept can also be understood through the following example: A has power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests. Power is not a quality attached to a particular type of person or class; it depends on a relational system. I applied this notion of power to build the initial scene so that the audience could understand what this king stands for. At the very beginning of the play *King Lear* has strong political authority. The film *Ivan the Terrible* by Eisenstein was an inspiration to create this image of the pinnacle of power. The scene of the coronation in the film is colossal. When directing the scene, I took inspiration from the grandeur of *Ivan the Terrible* to block it and create a little homage to that film. I had assistants dressing Lear and people bowing while the music of Handel was playing to generate the appropriate atmosphere. This music generated a contrast with the images that we could see, as the actors were all in modern costumes attending the press conference of a king. My aim as a director with this was to contrast the essence of Ivan the Terrible with Lear because they use power in a completely different way. In opposition to what Lear does during the play Ivan is clever enough to maintain his power and even to become more powerful by the end.

Lear's behaviour in the opening scene presupposes his absolute power. In rehearsals actors commented how in this scene Lear behaves foolishly. We wondered if it was a lack of self-knowledge or a self illusion built by those around him that he will keep the power forever. We started brainstorming ideas about contemporary film stars , politicians and football players that were famous at some point and then ended up

powerless in order to have inspiration for the creation of Lear, for instance, one of the members of the company gave the example of Pascal Maragall, who left politics because he had Alzheimer. Researching the idea of abuse of power, we found several contemporary examples of international leaders who show a parallelism with Lear or Gloucester. Powerful leaders who made decisions that were wrong; we started playing with the discovery of similarities and differences between George Bush and Mijail Gorbachev versus Lear and Gloucester, we watched many videos and made improvisations using them and the different historical contexts that they went through as inspiration for the characters.

Power might have many definitions, for example, it is the achievement of goals, an ability to do things and control others. Leaders try to understand the dynamics of changes in the distribution of power, but this proves to be highly challenging. Power is easier to experience than to measure, and its transitions affect everyone (Nye 177).

- Generation Gap

The generation gap between young people and adults reflects a conflict of interest. In all societies young people enter societies in a subordinate role while older people run things. The old dominate the young and the young want to replace them (Friedenberg 32). I was keen to explore the generation gap in the play because people from the same generation share the same circumstances and context, which makes them have certain similarities. For example, the older generation and the younger generations see loyalty differently. Lear and Gloucester cannot conceive having people lying to them; their naivety makes them vulnerable for betrayal. The younger generation is

motivated by greed and lust. They are also more ruthless in their actions and exploit the older generation's vulnerability doing whatever it takes to achieve their goals. Edgar and Cordelia are the exceptions to this generalization because their actions are noble and show integrity. In *King Lear*, there is also a different quality in each age group: the young characters, the middle-age characters and the old characters. For example, Edmund is looking into the future; there is ambition in him; he is a motor of change in the play (Visneski).

I wanted to make this generation gap clear in the production and find similarities and differences among characters. In the rehearsal room I represented past, present, and future on the floor, drawing three different spaces with chalk. These three spaces were physically separated to indicate three different locations. We improvised with characters moving from one space to the other, showing the problems that appeared in their journeys throughout the play. We analysed the results, and this was a very tangible way to get an understanding of what happens inside the characters. It revealed how Lear and Gloucester are trapped in the past, in the old order, expecting unquestionable obedience from their children and believing in old values. Their journeys go from the past into the present; from the old order to the new one. They also share that they both have loyal and disloyal children and that they are both blind to the truth. The play moves from an old order to a new order while Lear and Gloucester are trapped in the older one. We can see how they blame God or others; they do not take responsibility. But throughout the play, they will have to face the consequences of their decisions; their choices trigger a change in the world order. There is a reversal of fortunes, and the events give way to a new generation. Those who have survived the catastrophe attempt to recover their society.



Miscommunication is one of the significant factors causing the generation gap between the father and children in this play. There is a lack of communication between Lear and Gloucester and the other generations, their children. For example, at the beginning of the play, Lear preferred to listen to the flattery speeches than the truth. In rehearsals, we saw that this lack of communication between generations was an essential element to convey to the audience. We used a resource taken from Eugenio Barba, and his company, The Odin Teatret, to make the miscommunication more evident. In rehearsals, different generations spoke different languages. In the improvisations that we did, Lear and Gloucester spoke Spanish, whereas the other characters spoke in English. All these improvisations helped me to make the artistic decision of editing the text to better show the parallel journey between Lear and Gloucester. This edit helped the audience see the similarities between them, between Edmund, Goneril and Regan and on the other side between Edgar and Cordelia. In my editing and staging, I aimed to connect the striking similarities in the play and to push the structural symmetry. There are two fathers, two-truth speaking figures (Edgar and Cordelia) who are forced to leave, two characters in disguise (Kent to continue serving the king and Edgar to serve his father) and both Lear and Gloucester are taken out of their homes by their children. Everything that happens in Lear happens twice; there is a theatrical double plotting. I chose to have the older characters speaking in verse and the younger generations in modern English to convey the lack of communication and generation gap.

In one of the rehearsals, however, we discussed the sentence that Edgar says at the end of the play because we all found it was not believable. Edgar invokes a notion of divine justice. He counsels us to speak what we feel, to be sincere. Nevertheless, this is precisely what Cordelia did in the opening scene and what triggered the catastrophe.

The reality is that not everybody is ready to receive the truth. In the play *Seven Lears*, for example, Clarissa hurts people with excessive truth. This fact made me think if Edgar's advice at the end of the play is appropriate. At the end of *King Lear*, the atmosphere is of chaos, destruction and death; all this came as a result of Lear dealing with Cordelia's painful truth, so it was difficult for me to have this sentence as a final statement. I decided to play with time and narration. The production started with an image from the end of the play, a cemetery with the names of all the people who die. I introduced some lines from the Divine Comedy by Dante said by a dead Lear, and then we heard the echo of Edgar's final sentence. The concept of nothingness and hopelessness was for me, something that needed to have a strong presence from the beginning. Playing with the narrative helped me find more sense to an end that we all found extremely challenging to understand.

- Nature

Nature involves many different concepts, the Greeks employed the word nature for the outer universe while medieval people believed that God created the universe; nature was connected to God. In the Renaissance, there was a change in the concept of nature as the human being became the centre of everything, while in the Romanticism, nature was connected to emotions. There have been many ways to conceive nature, it is a very vast theme, and the play also deals with nature in many different ways. In the beginning, the play shows a microcosmic nature, the inside world of the palace, later on, Lear goes into the storm; here nature appears as a great helper in the man's evolution and as a teacher (Doncaster, "Representations in Nature"). *King Lear* is a profound inquiry into nature; this is both the nature of man and the relationship of man to the

natural order. Regarding the nature of human beings, this type of nature is not clear to Lear; he considers Goneril and Regan loyal, but their appearance deceives him. At the same time, he does not see Cordelia's nature; he cannot see reality. On the other side, Gloucester has two sons, Edgar, who is legitimate and Edmund, who is illegitimate. Both of Gloucester's sons are his by nature, but he acknowledges that the distinction between Edgar and Edmund is enforced by society (Doncaster, "Representations in Nature").

The animal imagery in *King Lear* is constant and serves to convey the nature of certain characters. When Lear speaks to Regan about Goneril's attitude, he describes it in terms of animal behaviour. Images of tigers, vultures, animals that eat other animals and satisfy their hunger reappear in the text. Shakespeare burdens the last two acts with beast-like allusions. This comparison of Goneril and Regan to animals is similar to Edmund's allegiance with animal nature, and these three characters embody a dark sentiment about the nature of humanity. With the deaths of the two sisters and Edmund, animal nature is defeated and the social order restored. However, it does not go back to what it was at the beginning of the play. Lear is dead, Cordelia is dead, Gloucester is dead, and so is Cornwall; and Kent is soon to die (Doncaster, "Representations in Nature").

In Elizabethan England, nature was governed by the laws of harmony in the universe. In *King Lear*, the tragedy comes because Lear tries to subvert the natural social order by relinquishing his crown to his daughters. According to the laws of nature, Lear could not stop being a king because that was his rightful position by divine ordination. During the play, he is still referred to as the King on many occasions, even though he has abdicated. Cordelia demonstrates that she fully understands the social

order when she explains she loves her father according to her bond. When Lear disowns Cordelia, he invokes the natural world, and when he discovers the treachery of Regan and Goneril, the stage directions tell of a tempest (Doncaster, "Representations of Nature").

The family is the smallest unit of the social order. Gloucester, a married man, had procreated Edmund in an adulterous way and Shakespeare did not want people to forget that sex outside the marriage contributes to evil. Shakespeare implies that nature responds in its ways to destroy those who threaten the balance between cosmic dominance and individual freedom. All those who have promoted unnatural breaches were punished and redemption can only be achieved by a cathartic punishment. There is a cyclical pattern of creation followed by destruction. *King Lear* has been called a play about the end of the world; it is a story about creation and destruction, a story about separation and division. Whereas in early myths, the world is born out of chaos, Lear subverts what has been previously said and expresses in this tragedy that nothing will come of nothing (Klevar 117-121).

Nature in *Lear* is harsh, violent, and chaotic. There is a parallel between the real physical world and the imaginary world of the play. The real world consists of tangible physical features, the man-made objects and the world of nature. The imagined world is Lear's idea of the kingdom and his relationship to it. Neither world is of a fixed character, what seems safe might turn hostile, and what is hostile may prove safe. Like a mythical story *King Lear* starts searching order through division, he deconstructs his kingdom thinking that he would create a new world order, but he did not realise that he initiated a process of destruction that heads towards chaos (Storozynsky 163-169).

One of the most relevant scenes of the play connected to the theme of nature is the storm. The storm can be interpreted by a director in many different ways: It can be seen as an external storm that mirrors the inner storm of Lear, it can be a manifestation in nature of the disorder created in Lear's kingdom, it can be a metaphor of all the conflicts that are taking place, such as the conflict between parents and children, it can also convey the divine anger if it is looked from a Christian perspective or it can be just a storm. The complexity of the storm requires a specific section for it, as a consequence, the analysis of the storm is included in the section where all the challenging scenes are addressed.

We discussed the theme of nature in the rehearsal room. In different improvisations, a group of actors presented the transformation of their characters into animals to show their real nature. We manage to ground their characterization through embodying a series of animalistic images, allowing their bodies to understand these animal movements and liberating them from naturalism. This exercise was crucial to offer texture to the characters. This concept of nature was explored in-depth, and then it was taken to the scenes. The actors re-enacted scenes using only their animals as characters, later on, they did the scenes again speaking the text but seeing in which points there were traces of these animals. The effect is that the production became very sensual, visceral, raw and aggressive. We saw that there was a strong link between the animals that the characters were hiding in their inside and their emotions, which is something that I already observed in Kozintsev's film.

Feelings are at the core of *King Lear*; they constantly resonate in the play because of the constant pain and suffering. Our own capacity to feel is also at the core

of any persuasive explanation of why we can take pleasure in such a tragedy (Kirsch 154).

We relied heavily on lighting, sound design, and filmic elements to reveal inner the nature of the characters. We played with projections in the production to show some of the inner states of the characters and to create a wild atmosphere, where grunts, salivation, sweat and heartbeats were clearly heard from the audience. The texture of the production that was starting to emerge moved away from naturalism into an exciting expressionistic style.

- Family Disintegration

“Asking what *King Lear* is about is like asking what life is about. It is a play, the play, perhaps, about what life is. What we think Lear is about depends on how old we are and how much we have lived (Ignatieff 23)”. Ignatieff expresses how a younger person might see the play and think that it is about cruelty, because of the shock produced by the blinding scene and the storm, an older person might believe that it is about ingratitude of children towards their parents, but, in general, everyone can connect with the domestic theme (23).

There would be no tragedy both in life and in the play if parents would be able to master the intensity of the feelings provoked by their children. Lear's anger emerges because Goneril and Regan fail to commit to his values. He quarrels with life because of the unfairness. Lear expects gratitude above everything because he assumes that it is their duty. However, from their point of view, he is a difficult old man, he is deeply embarrassing; he abuses servants, rages and weeps. There is also another critical factor

for them; they have always felt unloved. Their father made the parental mistake of having a favourite (Ignatieff 23).

The next step for the company of actors was to embrace this domestic theme and understand the family structures and relationships within the play. It is Lear's love test to his daughters which sets the civil war in motion and, as a consequence, produces all the deaths. They are all victims of a loveless and dysfunctional family structure. We found this theme one of the most challenging things to deal with because Shakespeare does not give any answers, so we only had questions: why is Lear abdicating and dividing the kingdom when Goneril and Albany would be the expected heirs? Why does he do the love test when the portions have already been decided? How long have Goneril and Regan been married? Did they choose their husbands? How demented is Lear in the opening scene? When did his wife die? Are Goneril and Regan children of his first marriage and Cordelia of his second marriage? The challenge came because we needed to find answers to all these questions and many more, as the text did not give any information. It was necessary to create a full family picture so that the actors could build round characters that allowed spectators to empathise with them.

We discovered that it was from this theme that we could find a way to get closer to the audience's reality. The first scene introduces us to a selfish old man; a man whose age has not made him wise. The essence of this tragedy comes from a very familiar place. It can fall in anyone's house. Shakespeare seems to have brought the double plot of Gloucester to complement and strengthen the core of this play. Selfishness is later developed into villainy, and everything acquires a more significant dimension as the play progresses. However, the initial point is a commonplace for many: a selfish father,

two sisters who are incredibly interested in inheriting his money and a stubborn sister (Brooke 88).

In the rehearsal room, we talked openly about families and about tragedies within families. We understood that it was vital to make spectators understand that this is a play about family, and incomplete relationships. The lack of love in Lear's life is the catalyst for violence. I took this into account when blocking the scene and creating the relationship between characters so that spectators could empathize with this theme of the tragedy.

Ignatieff says that what is tragic in the play, as in life, is the way the characters create their own destruction without intending to. "It is best to watch this play thinking, as one often does in the middle of some family quarrel, that none of this should be taking place....in our lives we can look back and know that one word might have saved us if we could have brought ourselves to utter it" (Ignatieff 23).

- Madness

The play is an experiment on extremity. *King Lear* shows the complete breakdown of a society where all the values that we link to humanity are attacked (Ignatieff 23). For instance, children leave their parents without a home; the elder generations are abused, brothers seek to kill brothers and sisters kill sisters. Lear loses everything: first, the kingdom, then his daughters and finally his mind. "Shakespeare uses the element of mental health to create a tragic hero. Through the hero, he questions the human nature and society's expectations as well as its actions (Kurtuluş 150)".



The play contains different types of madness that can be classified as madness existing from birth, stimulated, invented or imaginary. These different types of madness are explored in the characters of Lear, Poor Tom and the fool. Royal households often hired fools to entertain them. Sometimes these fools were mentally disabled, but other times they were professionals who used their extraordinary wit to mock society. In the play, the fool is part confidant, part like a dog who follows him everywhere. He can both be stroked and whipped. He is a childlike, unsophisticated and inhibited person who becomes Lear's consciousness and reminds him of his mortality. The fool calibrates Lear's state of mind through his interactions with him and tries to help him. He uses a language full of riddles and songs to criticise him and tell him the truth. This is an interesting aspect of the fool; he does not act like the others. It is the only one who speaks with honesty. If Lear blames his daughters, the fool blames Lear for his actions. Once that Lear's wit has disappeared the fool speaks more sanely. The fool appears after Lear has disowned Cordelia and stays with him until the climax. His unexplained absence is another of the many challenges contained in this character (Woods," King Lear: Madness, the fool and Poor Tom).

As there are so many options to portray this character, the fool has always been a very challenging role to pin down. In rehearsals, we observed that the fool tends to call Lear "nuncle" and Lear calls the fool " boy". We also observed that in a play that explores hatred, the fool gives love. He takes a protective attitude towards Lear when he sees that he is losing his mind. All this information made me go for the option of having a petite young androgynous actress playing the fool. Her appearance easily communicated the tenderness between them. The relationship between Lear and the fool is arguably one of the most complex in the play. This relationship is something we explored in-depth throughout rehearsals using music to help the fool communicate. The

fool made use of the harmonic and other small musical instruments. This music helped the fool to communicate feelings, become playful and to be fun to watch.

Poor Tom shows even more disordered behaviour than the fool. After Edgar was framed by Edmund, he gets rid of his previous identity of a nobleman, he runs away and disguises himself as Poor Tom to avoid being murdered. He does not have any other option but to hide who he is. If madness is a loss of identity, the character of Edgar also suffers madness as he stops being who he is to become Poor Tom. Together with a different voice and tone, Edgar also finds an open language and a freedom of speech that throws critiques to the king. With this openness, Poor Tom helps Lear to see the universe of the more disadvantaged and vulnerable, making him understand the fragility of the human being. Poor Tom's simulation of madness contrasts with Lear's real madness (Woods, "King Lear: madness, the fool, and Poor Tom").

The play is not so much about what happens to Lear but about what happens within Lear. Lear goes through a struggle that allows him to know himself. Madness is part of that his journey towards his transformation. "Lear's madness which can be seen as natural one, it has several functions such as the indicator of power change, punishment, and character development (Kurtuluş 150)".

An understanding of his madness in the play is necessary in order to create Lear's arc into insanity. Creating this journey proved to be a very challenging part, both for the actor playing Lear and for me as a director. It became clear to me that we needed to be precise regarding the moment when Lear starts to suffer from madness; at which point of the play he goes mad. This was an important decision in order to mark the beginning of his journey and see the development of his disease from there. The difference between Lear's plan to have power and Edmund, Goneril and Regan's plan is

that these three die victims of their obsession for power, whereas Lear is cured. Nevertheless, he needs to transit through madness to get there (Bennet 151).

Lear gives away what he owns, his kingdom. This seems an illogical decision and the other characters in the play criticize him for it. The act of dividing his kingdom also triggers a change. This decision not only destroys his authority, but *all* the country goes to chaos. Lear, on one side, does not want to keep being the king, but on the other hand, he wants to keep the power, which is a contradiction. Lear makes a decision thinking that he could potentially have it all, but in his distribution of power, as Cordelia refuses to give him the answer he is asking for, he ends up giving his power to Goneril and Regan. He expects to stay always powerful, but several events make him realise this will not be possible (*Shakespeare Uncovered*).

“Lear’s madness is problematic, therefore it has attracted almost every psychiatric diagnosis; bipolar disorder, organic brain syndrome, acute psychosis, involuntional melancholia or involuntional depression, and even Alzheimer’s disease (Kurtuluş 150)”. In my production, I decided that Lear would have slight symptoms of dementia from the start of the play. It is very difficult to understand why Lear would like to divide his kingdom, so I thought that Lear knows his powers are failing, and his irrational anger comes from the symptoms he starts to recognise. The refusal of his daughter Cordelia triggers his madness to grow. Banishing her is a rushed decision that starts revealing his disease, as dementia affects decision making (Kurtuluş 150-155).

It was evident that his daughters' ingratitude was a stepping stone in his process towards madness. It had a massive effect on him because he realised that he had lost his authority. In the play, we can see how Goneril forces him to dismiss half of his train, saying that his men are too disruptive. Lear is angered because the knights represent the

remainder of his power and Goneril is limiting it. This is the first time he becomes fully aware of his loss of influence. It makes him get confused at seeing that his authority over them has decreased (*Shakespeare Uncovered*).

After being shunned by Goneril; Lear turns to her sister, Regan. It is at this moment when he suffers every parent's nightmare: his children's rejection. The scene is incredibly painful because Lear quantifies love. As a consequence, after this scene he feels he is not loved by his daughters. In the beginning, he feels loved because they give him one hundred knights. Later on, Lear needs to accept that he is only worth fifty knights, but then his value falls even more, to only twenty-five knights. In the end, his worth is nothing as he cannot keep any knights at all. For Lear, his knights mean prestige, but for his daughters, they mean a nuisance. Lear understands that he cannot keep having the king's lifestyle and privileges he thought he would keep. He starts to realise that when he gave up his crown, he also gave up who he was (*Shakespeare Uncovered*).

In rehearsals, the actors discussed how this is a typical journey for people who were important in the past but then stopped having that power. They tend to remember their past, and they hold a strong image of what they were; this image stays in their mind, and they do not want to lose it. When Lear finds out that in giving his throne away, he gave away all his power, he struggles with the situation. He fights for his dignity against the hands of the next generation. First, he transits that struggle, and then he moves into a battle with himself for having made that decision. To those close to Lear, it is clear that his mind is unstable and that he does not realise what he is doing. They respond in different ways to his insanity. People either try to redirect his thinking or take advantage of it. The sisters' cruelty pushes Lear's mind towards the verge of

sanity. Lear leaves. Later on, Lear's fool reminds him of how foolish he was when he gave up his power to Goneril and Regan (Woods).

In the rehearsal room, we found that through this scene, it was essential to make the audience reflect upon some profound questions, such as what do people need in order to feel loved. We understood that for Lear, love was connected to possessions. Keeping his knights is what made him feel loved or not. It became beneficial for the actor playing Lear to work on doing a stream of consciousness exercise where he would put out loud all his thoughts throughout these scenes with Goneril and Regan. This exercise helped all the company to see how his mind and heart navigated through the scenes. There is a lot for the actor to handle in order to communicate everything that Lear is experiencing at that moment. The play is enormous because of all these emotions that are happening at the same time. So this type of exercises became essential to plunge into the character and get more clarity. We also decided that we did not want to villainize Goneril and Regan; we wanted to understand them so that the audience could also see their points of view. As a consequence, we did some hot seating exercises where members of the company asked questions to Goneril and Regan. The actresses had to improvise using information that came from the text but also following their intuition about the character. The result was that this part of the play got a great deal of richness and that the characters were extremely human.

Next point on Lear's journey towards madness is the storm. Having broken from his daughters, Lear now has nothing. Homeless and furious, he has no choice but to face the elements. He realises that his elder daughters do not love him, and he does not know whom to turn towards. Cordelia is no longer there for him, so his most significant relationship is with the fool. The fool tries to cheer him up, as he realises that Lear is

anxious. There is a hugely significant moment when Lear mentions the word mad. This is the first moment he has complete awareness about the fact that things are not going as straightforward as they should. His identity is much more fragile than he realised, and he starts wondering who he is. He was identified with his social role of a king, and now he is completely lost. This fact also throws some metaphysical questions to the audience. What creates identity? How do people know who they are? Are people the clothes they wear? Their status? Their relationships? Do roles in society and relationships define who people are? Or is there some other fundamental essence? This identity confusion is another point towards Lear's madness. His initial desire for revenge gives way to hate, suffering and self-pity (Bennet 143).

The fool makes jokes to try to lighten his mood, but later he needs to restrain Lear to tear off his clothes because he gets to the peak of his madness. Nevertheless, losing his mind is a way to recover his mind. Lear's madness is his route towards perceiving things. First, he realizes that he has poorly ruled. Then, he manages to see what others have gone through, and that he judged no one wisely. It is also in the heath the first time that we see him performing an act of generosity, showing concern about the fool. The storm brings him to a new part of himself. It peels him off. Lear's cure comes after suffering anguish. His inner storm brings light to his flaws and helps him to transcend them. The tragedy is that this knowledge of himself comes too late. He has already become a prisoner of the consequences of his actions (Bennett 144).

In the storm, it is obvious by the language and the construction of the sentences that Lear cannot find the words, as some sentences are not finished. I recognised these moments as the transition into the development of his dementia. When analysing madness in Lear, I saw parallelism with Don Quixote by Cervantes. Quixote is mad

while Sancho Panza tries to make him see the reality. I played with merging these characters of Don Quixote and Sancho with Lear and the fool through improvisations. This exercise allowed the actors to find more richness in the quality of their relationship in connection to madness.

At the end of the play, Cordelia seems to succeed in curing her father of his madness, at least temporarily. She gives a speech that sounds like a prayer, showing her true feelings for her father. At first Lear does not recognise Cordelia but, after a moment, he comes to his senses (Woods). There have been questions of whether Lear returns to insanity before he dies because he has a delusion that Cordelia still lives. His mind is trying to manage loss and cannot accept it; it struggles against the truth. Cordelia is everything to him now. Nevertheless, some argue that this happens because he has forgotten about the self, and now he can only think about Cordelia. So it is not insanity; it is that he stripped down for the old self (Bennet, 137-155).

In the process of intensifying Lear's struggle, Shakespeare makes use of Gloucester plot. The parallelism between both plots is obvious; the events in Gloucester plot serve to interpret and give more colours to Lear's plot, complementing each other. Gloucester perceives the ruin in Lear as a ruin of the world because Lear as a king represented the world symbolically. His downfall causes Gloucester to lose hope. Gloucester's initial reaction to misfortune is despair and defeat. He makes no effort to control adversity as Lear does; he desires only death, so he heads to the cliffs of Dover. Edgar, like Edmund, plays on Gloucester's beliefs, but Edgar wants to cure his despair. As a consequence, he brings Gloucester to the edge of sanity; it is at Dover's cliff, where Gloucester learns the lesson (Storozynsky 163-169).

Lear's madness is associated with his metaphorical blindness like Gloucester's blindness does not allow to see what is happening around him. Both fathers lose their visions and the world becomes dark. Lear has been blind to the outside world, but his blindness makes him see. Gloucester's blindness leads him to awareness. Both fathers believed in the wrong children. Both fathers after going mad or blind want to see their loving children, they want to apologise and to be forgiven (Kurtuluş 157- 158).

Shakespeare's construction of madness is so deep that psychiatrists diagnose the type of madness King Lear suffers from with its various aspects, such as mental disorder, mania, and dementia..... From the very beginning of the play, there is a fight between chaos and order in the kingdom and in King Lear's mind. In this chaos, madness does not only act as the accelerating power of chaos but also as the remedy of it. In other words, the madness in the play also leads the play back to order (Kurtuluş 150).

#### 4.4.3. The Characters

During rehearsals, we went through each scene, improvising around what the actions and themes suggested. We read the play every day and did many exercises to track the lines of storytelling. Finding clarity was a priority because I was aware that with a piece that was written four hundred years ago, there was not an easy way into what was happening. The language seemed extremely complicated; it was remote and not accessible for the actors, so I thought that it would be similar for an audience who is not familiar with Shakespeare. I was determined to make our play sound as contemporary as if it had been written yesterday. I wanted to direct the play for people



who had never been to the theatre before, and who were not academics or scholars interested in Shakespeare. I wanted my audience to understand the story and empathise with the characters. I knew my goal was to take the audience into a journey to the interior of themselves to find similarities with the characters. The only way to find the correct path to the characters in the text is through a process that parallels the original creative one (Fortier 146).

I needed to go beneath the words to explore who these characters were. It was essential to find the impulses in them, the rhythm and the thoughts. The play is a mirror of the desolation of the human spirit, and the journey of the characters shares how lost the human being is, how far we fall in families, and how hard the conditions that prompt personal change are. I knew just saying the word does not take spectators to the universe of *King Lear*. We entered then a process of questioning and opening possibilities for the characters, a process of finding the meaning behind their actions. Through this process, I would get all the actors to play parts other than their own. I noticed that when someone read another person's role, it gave actors a wealth of ideas. I also asked them to paraphrase their lines and to translate them into modern English. This exercise was essential in order to get them to understand the material, to excavate and dig deeper into the meaning. We had the *Oxford English Dictionary* to hand and checked the definition of words regularly. We also had many discussions about the characters' back stories. In this part, I will share some of the information we shared in the conversations and the discoveries we made about the characters that we found specially challenging.

- Lear

Shakespeare created a role that has challenged actors ever since because Lear is probably one of the toughest parts a performer can play. Not only is this part challenging for an actor, but it also asks directors to constantly investigate who the man behind the crown is. Working on this tragedy is a supreme test for any actor and director; it requires great doses of courage. Peter Brook expressed that it is like climbing a mountain, along which were strewn the bones and skulls of many predecessors. Every character in this play is saturated with the tragic, and the character of Lear particularly becomes a terrifying storm; it asks the actor to treat each scene as a separate entity to be able to face it. The fear of performing Lear is real for any actor, and I was aware both the play and the role are not the comfort station of any performer. The most exciting and challenging thing is that Lear is neither good nor bad; he is just human. This complexity is what becomes extremely difficult to portray (Carnovsky 144-150). I understood that a great deal of my job as a director working on this tragedy would be to help the actor understand and own the part.

Lear is a man. Lear is a father. Lear is a king. He discloses a continuous dichotomy in identity. He is a king who is not king, a father who is not a father and a man who is not a man. At the end of the play, Lear has glimpses of what he had been and had not been. He gets to understand his actual self when he is in a mutilated state. Shakespeare uses this character to ask many questions and to go beyond the character (Taylor 109-113).

*King Lear* contains all the big universal themes such as life, love or death, and also it brings deep concepts and ideas to the stage. Lear is not only a character; but also the representation of many exciting ideas. For example, he is the embodiment of a

reflection about individualism versus the community. He moves from being in a private space to a public space, which implies a movement from individualism into being a member of a community. The changes in Lear make the audience also see a different social and political perspective. The play opens in Lear's palace, where he can isolate himself from others, from people in his kingdom and even from his daughters. Once that he loses the palace, his knights and everything else he is just a man. The hovel becomes a refuge, a public shelter that is very different from his palace, but it is there where he finds the connection with himself and the concern about others. He becomes a new Lear. Together with the fool, Kent and Edgar he becomes part of the community of the dispossessed, a group of people who share their suffering and misery. At this moment, he starts getting a better knowledge of himself; this becomes a turning point in his journey. On one side, it demonstrates that vanity or pride are not irreversible, and on the other side, it communicates the value of the community versus the individual (McLaughlin 43).

In the rehearsal room, we decided to push this contrast of the individual versus the community, filling with warmth the hovel scene so that the audience could understand the impact that the community is making in Lear.

Nevertheless, even if Lear conveys many ideas and deep concepts both the challenge when approaching him and the excellence of this character relies on his humanity. "Lear is reduced to a man, like ourselves, of whom we can say comfortably, "If he had had more sense, or more sound balance, or less emotionality; or if he had been really good: he would never have had to suffer what he did" (Schoff 172).

- Edmund

The most modern character in the play is Edmund. He defies everything: religion, custom, society. His world is not ethical or moral; it is inhuman. As Sholeh Abhari Laleh, in “Modern Temperament in Edmund”:

It is a kind of world in which the isolated individual depends more on his reason than his feeling; hence, his business mind worships power and denies love while he intensively needs it. Nevertheless, he is one capable of facing facts of life, the pleasant as well as the unpleasant, the beautiful and the ugly. But, unfortunately, such a person is often cynical, very pessimistic, even at times violent and destructive (Abhari Laleh 1).

As we saw that Edmund is a very modern character, we took this into account for his costume and props as well as for his physical language on stage. He belongs to a world where the individual is emphasized, where the man is the centre of the universe and where he knows he can change the course of events with his actions. All these ideas were taken into account to create the portrayal of a sexy, independent and modern man that could generate infatuation amongst the spectators.

Edmund dismisses old-fashioned views of right and wrong. During many years, there was a belief in the gods. People thought that the order of things was linked to the stars. Astrology was something that people believed in very seriously. People thought that their fate was written in the stars, but Edmund mocks all that. He does not believe in anything about astrology and divine will (McLaughlin 42).

For Edmund, the human being is only part of a hopeless world full of indifference. His business is to assert himself with all the force; even if this means to be

evil. As a consequence, he is the villain, but he is also the victim of his incapability to defy this pessimism. Edmund is the representation of a Machiavellian character in the play. Machiavelli's most famous play *The Prince* establishes the behaviour of a politician whose obsession is to achieve power, whatever the cost. He does whatever is needed in order to get the power, not taking into account any ethical aspect. The objective is to survive and if this means creating evil, then it is worth it. To lie is acceptable and to kill is authorised. Edmund's objective is to achieve power. If in this course of action, he has to lie, to blame his brother Edgar, to hurt his father or to kill, he will do it. As Edmund was born a bastard, he knew he would not inherit his father's estate. His Machiavellian trait is seen in his deceitful schemes. Concerned for nobody and nothing but himself, Edmund turns his father, Gloucester, against his legitimate brother, Edgar. Having done that, Edmund then betrays his father as well (Nagarajan 131-141).

In the rehearsal room, we saw that the most significant challenge approaching Edmund was not to fall in portraying him as the epitome of evil. Edmund is a character who compensates for his feelings of inferiority by doing all he can to obtain power. He is not a one-dimensional villain because he develops and changes throughout the play. In the beginning, he is very sexy, flirtatious, and seductive, but towards the end of the tragedy, he becomes childish and regretful. This character shows, like many other characters in the play, the need of love to prove himself as a worthy person. Even if he responds to Goneril's and Regan's infatuations, he does not know how to love himself (Abhari Laleh 1).

The key to understanding Edmund's behaviour is to look at his illegitimacy. His spiritual void might be caused by his condition as a bastard. At that time, the

relationships between parents and children were very distant. Fathers used to be authoritative, they paid attention to the heir, but the other sons were typically ignored. Edmund was conceived in adultery; Gloucester even says in the play that he is a whore's son and considers that his birth was a mistake. Edmund's deprivation and alienation are manifested in his actions (Abhari Laleh 2).

The audience can perceive his inner struggles and his bitterness in the thoughts he communicates through the soliloquies. Edmund is overwhelmed with feelings. He is full of anger, ambition and a burning desire for power. We understood that this was the departing point to start building this character. We used improvisations to build Edmund's previous circumstances. We played with Gloucester making jokes in front of him; we developed scenes where Edmund could feel that indifference from his family that took him to be lonely and spiteful. In the rehearsal room, we discussed how anger and jealousy had ruined many families. Edmund rejects warmth and cuts himself from any bonds. His urge for freedom is very close to our time.

Edmund was separated from his family; this event forced him to become independent but also isolated and profoundly injured. He was excluded, abandoned. He was an outcast who lived in a state of anxiety about his future. The exciting characteristic of Edmund is that he is not a submissive person, so he decides to change the status quo. As a consequence, Edmund uses his intelligence to compete and prosper. Edmund is the opposite of Goneril and Regan. They come from an atmosphere where they have been pampered and protected, whereas he was neglected. This rejection produced in him a compulsive urge for power. The need to compensate for his inferiority makes his search even stronger. The aggression of Edmund is aimed at two specific persons: his father and his half brother. Although he seems to glory his

illegitimacy, this is an act of trying to compensate for his intense feeling of inferiority. His superiority complex makes him believe he can manipulate Goneril and Regan because of their love for him. Edmund thrives, not because the gods help bastards but because Goneril and Regan share his pursuit of power, which they have learnt from Lear (McLaughlin 42).

All characters in the play go through a journey. In this case, Edmund goes from bastard to legitimate in his journey to reach absolute power. Edmund's relations with Edgar, Gloucester, and especially Goneril and Regan are essential in preparing for his climax (McNeir 187).

We discussed how power is the ability to control one's desires. Edmund wants political power, and he enjoys having sexual power. He has sexual control over the two sisters, Goneril and Regan, who even die because of the jealousy towards each other regarding Edmund's attention. I emphasised the sexual power of Edmund in the play and had some stylised movement sequences to convey the power relationship between him and the two sisters. We played with physical theatre to find and convey how Edmund lives in anxiety, and how he attempts to find affection anywhere possible. Edmund's promising his love to both women is the sign of his narcissism and his frustrated need to be loved. He says to die happily because a woman has murdered and committed suicide on account of him. His remark in saying that there were at least two women who loved him while he is dying, stresses his loneliness. In his final sentence, Maguire expresses that "We hear not the macho boast of the Lothario but the desperate cry of the child seeking and needing love, seeking and needing proof that he is lovable (Maguire, 199)." Romantic love compensates for the lack of love from his father. He feels satisfaction in being the centre of attention, being desired calms his torment.

Edmund's actions are controversial until the end. Brown says that Edmund's urge to control is reflected even when he is dying. His moral weakness is an element that he keeps in his journey until the end. "Edmund does not submit to a change of fortune; he is what he is, still, and so an audience's attention is drawn to long-engrafted conditions that are as powerful in directing life and death as those very different ones that had been identified in the king at the start of the play (Brown 278)". Nevertheless, others assert that in the end, Edmund shows repentance because he tries to take a moral responsibility through his endeavour to save Lear and Cordelia. Edmund's final words give an account of his inner turmoil. This event can be interpreted as a sign of crisis, a sign of his regret. It might be that at the end, he starts changing in an attempt to detach himself from isolation (Maguire, 199).

In my production, I thought that this second option gave Edmund a more significant and more exciting journey. The tragedy comes because Edmund reaches his change, like Lear, when it is too late.

- Goneril, Regan and Cordelia

Goneril and Regan are challenging roles. *King Lear* is a very male play, and the sisters are trapped in the middle of it. In many productions, Goneril and Regan have appeared as Cinderella's ugly sisters who seemed to come more from the British pantomime tradition of Christmas entertainment than from a tragedy. They are often treated merely as wicked sisters or as the embodiments of lust in opposition to the virtue of Cordelia. The play even demonises their sexuality, while Cordelia seems virginal or sexless, despite being married to the King of France (Barker 18–19).



They have been the most neglected of Shakespeare's women in academia (León 17). As a woman director, I wanted to dig into their stories more fully, and I wanted to identify the cause of their dysfunctional behaviour. We discussed in the rehearsal room how the sisters had probably been set up in competition with each other throughout their lives. They probably suffered a lifetime of comparison with Cordelia, who was always the favourite. They were always in fight or flight mode either for Lear's attention, or to get away from his anger. They were needy of their father, but they also harboured deep resentment of him, because he never allowed them to have their own independent lives. What Lear did to his family is terrible. In the play, we see how he destroys Cordelia, but he has already destroyed Goneril and Regan. They probably felt the repression from an abusive father who ended up destroying their happiness and well-being. We discussed how if you are a child who is less loved, that feeling can generate trauma and destroy your life, making it difficult to be a balanced human being. So you can see why Goneril and Regan hated Lear. Cordelia behaves differently because she is less damaged than her sisters. It seems impossible to think that Goneril and Regan go round being vile just because they feel like it (Croall 72).

When thinking about how to portray them, we observed in the rehearsal room that it might seem reasonable to assume that the three sisters are close together in age, given that Goneril and Regan appear to be childless. However, the harder nature of the older sisters, their emotional distance from Cordelia as well as their behaviour suggest that Goneril and Regan are closer in age. Both of them, like Edmund, have a strong appetite for power. Goneril and Regan, as well as Edmund, are modern characters that respond to the idea of capitalism: individualistic people, fighting for their goals. They lie, and they exaggerate in order to get what they want. This attitude is hugely familiar to spectators. There are many close references for them, for example, businessmen,

politician, stars.... The love contest that was created to feed Lear's vanity and personal superiority ends in catastrophe because it becomes their chance to change the course of events. Lear's resentment with Cordelia pushes him into the hands of his other two daughters. Goneril and Regan seize the political power that Lear has given them and use it to dominate him, which does not differ much from what Lear used to do. Lear is the victim of their drives for superiority, but they used to be the victims of his superiority (McLaughlin 40).

Much of the behaviour of Goneril and Regan can be explained by a refusal to accept the typical feminine role, reversing the subordinate feminine role. The way they treat Lear, and their husbands show they are determined to master the men in their lives. They also abandon the passive sexual role to be proactive with Edmund, and they compete with each other for sexual favours. This too becomes a contest, like the initial love contest that Lear set up. Goneril is the first-born, so probably for some time, she enjoyed time on her own with her father until she was dethroned. Sometimes a child who has lost her power can understand the notion of authority. When she grew up she liked to take part in the exercise of authority and gave extreme importance to rules. She is the one taking the initiative of getting rid of Lear's knights. Like Lear, she considers herself above the law. Significantly, she takes her own life. Suicide is always an attack against someone else. Goneril commits suicide in a final attempt to have a victory over her husband and to make him feel guilt (McLaughlin, 42).

In our contemporary society, power can be seen sexy, so instead of portraying Goneril and Regan as the ugly sisters, I did the opposite and had two sexy and beautiful sisters. They both were tall mixed race actresses in opposition to a white ugly petite Cordelia, to convey that they come from different mothers.

Cordelia, as well as Edgar, are displaced sons full of humanity. Edgar and Cordelia share similarities as he exploits the same anxiety in Gloucester that Cordelia triggers in Lear. Nevertheless, Cordelia cannot only be seen through this perspective. Although Cordelia has been depicted as virtuous or a Christian figure, according to Adler, she is partly to blame for her tragic end. Cordelia has great pride in the same way Lear tends to act in a rash. The conflict created in the play is because of the clash of these weaknesses in their personalities. For Lear, love seems to be a material thing. He wants to quantify their love. This love is not evaluated according to past actions but only according to their words. Cordelia realizes there is no connection between true love and all that rhetoric, so her pride does not allow her to enter the competition to play the game of superlative words to show affection. Her response is one of a young person (McLaughlin 38).

Cordelia seems the typical favourite daughter who tends to get her way and cannot handle frustration. She is obstinate at refusing to enter the game not only because she knows she is right but also because she knows she is the favourite one. Her attitude does not come from a matter of purity but defiance. She is immensely stubborn and does not want to give Lear power over her or to lie about how she feels. She refuses to give what her father wants. On top of that, she adds to her speech that she has a limited amount of love and that part of that love is already committed to one person. Her father must share her love with her future husband. This confession enrages Lear. The eroticism in Lear cannot be overlooked, and probably he did not plan to alternate visits, but he intended to stay only with Cordelia (McLaughlin 39).

Lear gets furious because he realises in a subconscious level that she has destroyed the erotical fiction, so he feels frustrated. As he has political power, he

executes it by disowning her. Both Lear and Cordelia show their complexities in this scene. It is not about good versus evil, they both have weaknesses, and they both struggle to deal with their own frustration (McLaughlin 40).

Cordelia has become a tragic figure because she is punished too severely in the play. I did not want to portray Cordelia as a virtuous passive figure, because that will make her become a flat character that is always a victim of others. Humans are much more complex than that, so I decided to go with Adler's theory, as I thought it would be a much more exciting option to play. I came to the conclusion that Cordelia was probably so different, both in her external appearance and in her personality, because she was the result of another marriage. She is Lear's youngest daughter, and probably he still looks at her as his little baby. She was probably shielded from the pressures and emotional cruelty that he put upon Goneril and Regan. As she was so spoiled by Lear, her refusal to play Lear's game in the first scene really hurt him. When she comes back as the leader of the French army, she has got a strong will but also a more in-depth understanding. Her return as the queen of France shows an entirely different Cordelia. She is a married woman who has been through some devastating circumstances which have matured her. The realization of her love for her father has matured her too because often you do not know how much you love a parent until they are gone (*Shakespeare Uncovered*). I wanted to design a journey for her and to portray her change because Cordelia also goes through a transformation, and she matures during the play. The main problem is that we do not see her on that journey, so it was essential for us to fill in the gaps.

- Edgar

It is challenging to come to grips with Edgar's character. Edgar finds out about himself during the play, as he descends on a journey to hell. His change from a passive figure to a madman to a hero is extremely challenging for any actor. In the beginning, he appears foolish and incapable; he gets easily frightened. Edgar is full of honesty and naivety, and Edmund knows this. Edgar is like a student who is too caught up in himself. Throughout the play, he experiences a colossal change of status from powerful to powerless, from Edgar to Poor Tom, from somebody respected to absolute rejection. As an outcast, he soon learns about what is the meaning of being a man when he is stripped away from everything (Peck 219-237). Nobody recognizes him; others cannot think about Edgar as a beggar. This fact was somehow difficult for us to believe, but within our rehearsal discussions, we saw the example of a student who changed gender, and for some teachers and classmates it was impossible to recognize him. This became an inspiration for the transformation of Edgar into Poor Tom and for our understanding of this part.

Edgar has reasons to be angry because his father has misjudged him, mistreated him, and even he also has reasons to be angry when he is Poor Tom because his father does not even recognise him. If Edgar never says he is angry, Poor Tom acts as if he is. His anger turns inwards choosing a disguise that requires nakedness, cold and starvation (Skura 121-148). Disguised as Poor Tom, he struggles with his demons and, disenchanted with life, he manages to survive. Edgar disguises to preserve himself. Even if others see him as a madman, his comments show that he knows he needs his disguise for some time to wait until time passes, and then at the right time, strike. He shows he is wise and patient. In the end, Edgar's rights are fully restored. The naive

Edgar from the beginning has also developed. It is his manipulation of disguise what has taken him there. Like other characters, Edgar learns. In this case, it is through his disguise that he learns to manipulate but without causing damage. His pure soul and pure mind managed to teach his father a lesson (Maclean 54).

#### 4.4.4. Challenging Scenes

Every director is convinced of *King Lear*'s worth; similarly, all these directors know the claim that *King Lear* is the most intractable of Shakespeare's plays. Its magnitude, the intensity and the duration of the pain makes it especially difficult to stage and to perform. The plot is dense and this asks for the storytelling to be clear. We added several physical theatre sequences throughout the play to introduce characters in their context, and let the audience see and understand who they were at each point. For example, we did this the presentation of the families at the beginning in order to generate a framework. The disguises were also another possible point of confusion so all the changes of character happened on stage in full view of the audience. We were transparent with these transformations and communicated through music and movement sequences what these transformations meant for the characters (for example, Kent and Edgar). Apart from seeing which characters were particularly challenging to portray, in the rehearsal room we discovered that there were some scenes that required extra work as the demands were immense.

- The Opening Scene

This first scene shows us Lear's main errors. Sometimes there has been a strong focus on the external conflicts of the play and not so much in the internal conflict, but this tragedy is essentially a story about a man's struggle with himself. This struggle begins with a plan to give up with duties. The problem is that in this plan, he also wanted to retain his responsibilities. This is a universal problem that comes with age, a desire to get rid of the burden without letting go of the honour that comes with it (*Shakespeare Uncovered*). The actor who played Lear and I discussed the reasons why Lear is so self-absorbed in this scene; Lear wants to avoid the changes of old age, he is afraid of change; he fears how the re-definition of the external world might affect him. We kept in mind for his moment the behaviour of a president who still wants to be a president after losing the elections.

Lear is hoping to give the best portion to his youngest and favourite daughter, Cordelia. Nevertheless, he miscalculated the family dynamics. It is clear from the beginning that Lear does not have any awareness of people around him. He does not know his children. On top of that, he tries to measure love, even if love cannot be measured. Once that he set up the love test, he would rather have flattery speeches that fed his ego than the truth. When he gets a response, he does not want to listen to; he behaves like a bully and a manipulator who abuses his daughter in front of everyone. Lear is just completely shocked about Cordelia's reaction. It is interesting to see that Lear accuses Cordelia of pride, but his exhibition of pride is fearful. His heart shows a coldness and selfishness which deprives him of that person who loves him. We see the clash of Lear's will with his impotence. Cordelia is shocked too; she cannot understand that he has done that because they love each other. At this moment of the opening scene,

Lear starts his journey from power and pride to love and humbleness. It is the starting point for his learning arc. In this learning process, he would have to go through difficult places, such as anger, frustration and madness (*Shakespeare Uncovered*).

Another challenge of this scene is that it combines the mythical tone of a fairy tale with painful realism. There is a big ceremonial aspect in this scene, but at the same time, spectators have a glimpse of who these characters are. It allows the audience to see them beyond the superficial setting. The scene has a bitter edge as we can see that Goneril and Regan are aware of the irrationality of their father, that Cordelia can see the intentions of her sisters, and that Lear has acted in a rash, driven by his emotions. It is a very rich but very compressed scene that has a lot going on and requires an intense work with the actors in order to convey all these subtleties. Lear is completely frightened, but the despotism he displays hides this. It is a way to prove himself he still has the authority. Nevertheless, Lear knows he is throwing himself on the mercy of his daughters. As a consequence, he has a need for praise and love. This is for him a proof that he can surrender; it is a reassurance against his feelings of impotence. The intensity of Lear's feeling for Cordelia and his high expectations have a dangerous side. It becomes clear that she is her favourite, and apart from that, he thinks that as she is the youngest, she should be the most obedient. His fury and punitive behaviour stem from his frustration of hopes that were dear to his heart (Lesser 155-158).

We did a throughout work based on Stanislavski for this first scene, because it was necessary to work with all the intricate details that each character brings to this initial moment. The stakes on the first scene are high, and the weight relies on the actors 'work to manage all this information and bring it to life. Some of the Stanislavski exercises that we did were creating the previous circumstances, the objective, super-



objective and obstacles for each character. We also made use of the inner monologue technique to bring clarity to each actor regarding everything that the character was thinking and experiencing moment by moment. The staging brought the ceremonial atmosphere, and the use of movement, music, soundscape and lighting helped to convey the mythical touch.

- The Blinding Scene

Analysing the role of power in the world, we discussed how very few societies had used power with restraint. In the play, power is not used with restraint either. When Lear has the power he abuses of it, he does not listen, and he banishes Cordelia and Kent. When Goneril and Regan have the power, they decide what Lear can or cannot have. This abuse of power normally carries with it violence, either psychological or physical. During the play, Shakespeare makes the characters confront the worst. The blinding scene can be anyone's nightmare: there is something about the sensitivity and the squeegees of an eyeball that has a shocking effect on anyone. We decided to push the violence in this scene and played a lot with the projections. The audience could see on stage the scene where they plucked Gloucester's eyes out while, at the same time, several projections showed fast-paced images that included the televised executions carried out in Iraq, a little homage to Buñuel's film *Un perro andaluz* and filmed images of the blinding scene that offered close-ups of the face area. It was a scene with a Tarantino style where music and blood were extremely present.

I wanted to approach this act of plucking the eyes out in a very modern way so that the audience could get a better feeling of the scene. For Lear as well as Gloucester, the

blinding scene is a turning point. After this scene, Gloucester will stagger out onto the heath towards his king. When Lear and Gloucester meet on the heath, the two old friends have changed completely. Lear, once a king, is dressed in rags. Gloucester, once a duke, is a blind man (*Shakespeare Uncovered*).

- The Storm

This dramatic scene is one of the most famous moments in Shakespeare. The storm begins with Lear confronting it, and it ends with Lear's exiting with Kent, followed by the fool, toward the hovel. Lear then refuses shelter and instead prays for forgiveness. It is one of the most critical scenes because that is the moment when Lear comes face to face with reality. Lear realises that he exercised power in a very unproductive way because he had been morally, intellectually and spiritually short-sighted. He misunderstood the nature of power; he did not see that with kingship comes the responsibility to look after others. Lear was also blind to see the true nature of his daughters. It is in the storm when he begins to digest everything; he goes through a personal hell when he starts to see what happened, and this creates his inner storm (*Shakespeare Uncovered*).

During the storm he inhabits many feelings: he feels rejected by his older daughters and guilty about Cordelia. At the beginning of the play, Gloucester and Lear were looking but not seeing; there is metaphorical blindness. During this scene, there is a transformation both in Gloucester and Lear. Lear realises how he believed in automatic love, thinking that duty equalled love. He also loved his daughters as possessions; he was selfish and un-selfaware. It is under the pressure of the storm that he understands

with terrible clairvoyance all the horrible things that he has done. It is through his madness that these revelations come to him, reminding him of his missed opportunity. Both fathers die because of their inability to see at the right time. When they suffer the transformation from blindness to sight, we also begin to see them, to see, not their social role, but their real identity (Croall 201).

The storm is also one of the most challenging scenes to stage. As Arnold Kettle mentions, the storm has become a central image of this tragedy, and it works on several levels. There is an elemental storm, a social storm that shakes the kingdom and an inner storm that drives Lear mad. All these storms are interconnected (Kettle 22). Due to the many challenges that this scene creates, I researched information about how different films portrayed the storm. In 1982, BBC did a production directed by Jonathan Miller, and in the 1983 Granada television produced another one directed by Michael Elliot. The storm here was depicted realistically, but they played with moments when we did not hear the sound of the storm, moving from the realms of naturalism. Even if the storm could be seen it was not realistic (Viguers 343-346).

The challenges of staging this scene have made it a magnet for directors and actors. When deciding on staging the storm, I investigated how it was done in Shakespeare's times, and I also considered the main problems that other theatre directors found. The lack of set in Shakespeare's stage means that it was probably staged through words and actions, so I started exploring the efficacy of language and its potential to conjure the storm. I was aware this scene was memorable in some productions, but in others, it was a complete failure because the words of Lear could not compete with the effects. This fact led me towards creating a more inwards and invisible storm, a storm that was not wholly realistic. I did not use the sound of thunder or wind in order not to confuse the

audience, but the live music of a violin came at specific moments when there were no words so that the music did not drown the dialogue. The timing for this became essential. I was aware that my choice to make it less physical and more emotional and metaphorical meant reducing the meaning of the storm.

The storm in my production became a representation of what is happening inside of Lear. After we rehearsed it several times, I noticed how difficult it was for the actor to own that scene because there are many things on going inside Lear as well as outside Lear. I saw I had to work with the actor who was playing the king and develop some exercises to give him something to fight against. As the storm got rougher, I asked some actors to throw light objects at him; these objects represented rain, leaves and other elements that might disturb Lear. I also asked other actors to make the noise of the storm while others repeated out loud some of the words that were appearing in Lear's head and others run around the room saying violent words. The idea was to make the struggle palpable to the lead actor. This gave the performer playing Lear a good understanding of the violent physicality required for the scene. After doing this exercise several times, we run the scene, and it was evident that something had changed in his acting. We decided to keep the whispering of some of the words during the storm. These whispered words sounded like the wind while at the same time the sound enhanced the conflict of the scene by giving Lear something to fight against.

The storm also has another layer; it contains a strong political dimension, as it can be interpreted as a warning to those in power. It offers a humanitarian analysis of what selfishness does to people; it becomes a portrayal of the depredations of wealth and selfishness. I included in the projections flashes of the image of Lear that we saw at the beginning of the production. These flashes were the images that Lear could see inside

his head. The concept was that he was processing these images while the audience was also seeing what was going on in his head. It was a resource to communicate Lear's feelings. Lear is being tortured as much by the storm as by his thoughts, regrets and memories of what happened. My objective was to make visible some of these memories through the use of fast images; that way the audience could also plunge into Lear's head and live his storm.

- The End

During the first stages of rehearsal, we spent time exploring the text with the company, looking at the meaning of each scene and talking about its relevance for audiences today. I was very keen to respond to the play now. As a starting point to understand how the play could land today, the company explored what *King Lear* had meant to other people throughout history, and we shared the discoveries with everyone. One of the things we did in response to this was to look at Nahum Tate's alternative ending for *King Lear*. This alternative version was performed for 150 years throughout the Renaissance period. In that script, Cordelia and Lear are rescued by Edgar, and they all live happily ever after. From 1681, when Nahum Tate wrote this version, until 1838, this was the only version of *King Lear* that audiences knew. In America, the original version had never been staged. So this was *King Lear* for all intents and purposes. Fifteen years before Macready restored the tragic ending, Edmund Kean tried to restore it. Looking at this happy ending allowed us to talk a lot about the expectations regarding the end of the play. Lear begins at the start of the play as a man who says something and expects it to be obeyed. When he asked the question to Cordelia, he thought that because she was his favourite daughter, she should love him more than the other

daughters. By the time they are reconciled, their type of love has changed. He does not demand her love anymore. He even thinks he does not deserve it. This moment at the end of the play is incredibly touching, as we can perceive the change in both of them. He is asking to be forgiven. This time, he does not care about himself. His world does not matter to him anymore. The focus is on her; he is no longer selfish (*Shakespeare Uncovered*).

The play could end there, with a father and daughter reconciled. We discussed the possibility of playing with the audience's expectations. As the production relied heavily on music and had a cinematic atmosphere, we played with the rhythm, music and lights to generate the expectation that the play might end here, giving an alternative end to it. Nevertheless, this tragedy has no relief, so the end was not there yet. .

In the battle between Cordelia's forces and those of the older sisters, Lear and Cordelia are captured and sent to prison. Edgar defeats Edmund, but he cannot help Cordelia, nor Lear. They are captured, and under Edmund's order, Cordelia is hanged. In our production, we could see the body of Cordelia covered with a sheet while ambulances were coming. Lear was on a wheelchair, and the ghost of Cordelia held his hand and left slowly. Lear is bewildered by the fact that she is dead. He has to come face to face with the absolute irreversibility of mortality. At that moment, Lear realised what love is. Nevertheless, the tragedy of the play is that it is too late. In some way, Cordelia had to sacrifice herself for him to be aware of this love, she dies, and her death is the final point of transformation for Lear. He can see the full picture and he understands everything. Finally, he can feel love and he can feel loved. It is a profoundly moving scene. After this, Lear has nothing more to say; he feels the emptiness. As he does not have anything more to say, he dies. This is a play where we

have seen how several characters invoked the gods for their support, but we can see at the end how these gods never appeared, the gods did not answer. There is only cosmic emptiness. The end of the play seems the end of the world (Shakespeare *Uncovered*).

The end of the play also left me curious and lost about the meaning of life. After something horrible happens, we have to rethink all relationships: the relationship between man and earth, between man and god, and between man and man. We looked at our world for inspiration to see explicit references of this change in the world order motivated by disastrous events occurring as a consequence of bad decisions. We examined the landscape after the Second World War, and we observed through pictures and videos how much of Europe was wasteland. I used those images as inspiration for the end. In the final scene of my production, there was no redemption only interrogations about life and the essence of the human being. Those who have survived the catastrophe will need to recover their society, but the final question is how.

The uniqueness of *King Lear* is that it can connect to all ages and societies. In 2020, the fall from a known world order, the devastation and the need to recover from a catastrophe is known to everyone. As Ian Bremmer explains, the Coronavirus is a global crisis where a mistrust has led to a lack of coordination in response to the obstacles that have appeared, and growing conflicts are plunging the world into chaos. The political response seems inefficient, rivalries are growing and the shape of a new world order is yet to emerge. Covid-19 has destroyed the old personal, family, social and natural orders (14–23). There are constant scenes of desolation where we see businesses spiralling out of control, and people shrinking and shambling across the streets wearing face masks. There is a surreal atmosphere and a constant sense of fear and danger that

exposes our fragility as human beings. We embrace disinformation and uncertainty while facing new and unfamiliar circumstances that reveal our weaknesses. The disintegration of the world as we knew it is clear and maybe this is why we are closer to *King Lear* than ever.



## Conclusion

This thesis examines what happens to *King Lear* in the journey from the text into the performance. The research encompassed an analysis of the work of contemporary theatre directors in order to understand their vision of the play and to explore how they solve some of the problems that the text creates in order to bring it to the stage. Performance Studies has allowed me to link the rigour of the academia with the uniqueness of the perspective that only the practical work in theatre can offer. As a consequence, this document also contains my practice-based investigation as a theatre director approaching *King Lear* with a team of actors at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London.

As we have seen earlier in the present dissertation, *King Lear* has been considered too difficult to stage, by many authors. For example, Pamela Bickley said that it is the most troubling and problematic of Shakespeare's tragedies (Bickley 140), Charles Lamb affirmed that *King Lear* was impossible to be represented on stage (Croall 1-5) while critic A.C. Bradley expressed that the tragedy was too big for the stage (Croall 1-5) and Jan Kott recognised the daunting job that is directing this masterpiece (Kott 130). The reasons for this were varied: the themes are too many, the characters are too complex, the locations are too many and the emotions are too intense. On top of that, the play's darkness is overwhelming: it contains murder, suicide, adultery, treason, civil discord war and torture. This made people think that the play was also unstageable due to its excessive cruelty (Croall 1-5).

Taking all this into account, the challenges that it creates to any director are many. However, although there has been a huge spectrum of critical opinion that insisted upon the impossibility of staging *King Lear*, there is a history of productions,

some of which have been highlighted here, that have impressed spectators and that have satisfied the appetites of generations. Each production presented here has shown on the one hand a desire to reveal something new about the text and, on the other hand, it has allowed us to see the wide variety of strategies that directors have used to deal with the challenges that the tragedy generates (Hargeaves 491-495).

Through my academic research, my interviews with UK theatre directors and my work as a director on the play I conclude that we should break with the domination of the text over the performance. The text tells us what is going on in each scene, but each production would have to find different ways to deal with, for example, the themes that appear in the play. Each production would also take a different approach to the cultural code of a society. A theatre production should be faithful to the essence of the play, but at the same time, it should make it true to our modern life and circumstances. Each production serves as a window to Shakespeare's tragedy, while offering an enhanced and enriched version. All the different and varied productions that have been covered in this thesis show evidence that there is no one way to interpret Shakespeare.

In light of this, it becomes clear that there is an urge for directors in the twentieth century to articulate a relationship with Shakespeare showing their debt to him but also their differences from him (Bradley 6-7). Directing is not creating a replica of what was done before. Some people think that staging is just a process of reproducing, but the productions in this research show the many alternative versions, even contradictory versions, that can be done departing from the same text. This thesis provided the opportunity to see how the nature of theatre provokes contradicting impulses. Performance is a different type of text, a different type of language, where the script becomes one of its main elements but not the only one. It is not possible to impose a

particular staging, as this would be to impose control over the imagination. A script does not encode a specific performance; it can only bring challenges that the director will need to solve through the use of creativity (Kidnie 458).

Where I have found that the play generates many tensions is precisely in the question of fidelity and whether this is how Shakespeare would have liked to see his plays performed if he were alive today. This question is, as we have seen, meaningless (Proudfoot, 39). Lynne Bradley suggests in *Adapting King Lear for the Stage* that “It is now time to stop cataloguing, to stop worrying about fidelity and to stop considering adaptations as off-putting pieces of non-theatre (Bradley 2)”.

In this thesis it has been observed how contemporary theatre productions are works in which the author makes an explicit connection to the play and invites the audience to compare the adaptation to their memories of the original (Bradley 4). Brook said how:

Many years ago, it used to be claimed that one must perform the play as Shakespeare wrote it. Today the absurdity of this is more or less recognised: nobody knows what scenic form he had in mind. All that one knows is that he wrote a chain of words that have in them the possibility of giving birth to forms that are constantly renewed (Brook 60-61).

The text creates many expectations about the modes of representation and its fidelity to Shakespeare's words and intentions. Nevertheless, the text is not the play; it is only a small part of it. The meaning of words implies different things depending on the time and place. The director's job is to go beneath the words and find what they mean for his society. It is also vital to remember that *King Lear* is itself an adaptation of

previous texts, it summarises previous work and gives it a twist to it, taking into consideration Shakespeare's society (Croall 1-15).

Contemporary directors employ a similar device. After studying different productions of this classic I observed that directors know that they will never access the original *King Lear*, but they also know that instead, they are able to allow the play to live through their manifestation and performance of the play where the spirit of *King Lear* can still breathe. How much of the original play is present or not will depend on each director, but the fact of building a copy of the original does not make it better or worse. Many productions are too nostalgic, and they only become pieces of a museum. Many other directors employ in their productions iconic images evoking the collective idea of the play but searching the contemporary relevance too. Some critics insist on saying that many directors close down the complexities of the text, diluting its metaphorical and linguistic energies. Others express that the reconfigured versions provide fresh, invigorating reinventions of Shakespeare's works which connect with their contemporary audiences (Bradley 31).

This investigation allowed me to see that paying homage to the text does not mean that it has to be treated as an untouchable, immutable literary monument. The relocated text must find a niche within its new market place and should establish a sense of the cultural preoccupations of its era. Modern productions of *King Lear* are interpretations; each director chooses how far to deviate or adhere to authenticity. However, even if directors followed the path of an absolute authenticity no two productions of *King Lear* would ever be the same.

I found that another big challenge that a director faces when directing *King Lear* is that it is a play from a different time. Sixteenth-century England was organised in

ways that today might seem incomprehensible, society was different and theatre was different too. Shakespeare's audiences went to the theatre for different reasons that we do, and would have watched the plays with different eyes. Even if we could reproduce all the conditions that they had at that time it would be really weird because these conditions do not represent the reality of our current lives and circumstances. Shakespeare's stagecraft had many different conventions and problems, for instance, the productions were done without sets because of the limitations of the theatre buildings. In Elizabethan drama there was no room or time for subtleties in performance and the figure of the director did not exist; it was a pyramidal structure with one lead actor at the top. However, nowadays the director masters both technical skills and methods of acting to support the team of actors. Today we are confronted with other problems. The conventions of each century are different and even contradictory, for instance, the naturalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is far away from the technologically developed avant-garde of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Unwin 36).

When examining the work of other theatre directors and when I was in the rehearsal room directing *King Lear* the same question kept reappearing: What is the formula to transfer it from one-time frame to another one? As it has been explained, *King Lear* is at the centre of Shakespeare's achievement. I found that one of the reasons behind this is that the play has a firm grip of the personal human responses; the play's profound exploration of the human condition is universal. This allows it to be both timeliness and relevant nowadays and it becomes a crucial element for any director to take into account in order to transfer it to another time frame. Nevertheless, even if it is timeless, the play's status is too big, making it a daunting job for any theatre director. Whatever a director does in a production of *King Lear*, he is bound to get complaints because the status of the classic surrounds it (Unwin 36).

As a consequence, one of the questions that emerged was whether theatre directors can bring this classic to stage and make it work for a modern audience. All the examples that have been presented in this thesis illustrate the fact the tragedy of *King Lear* has as many possible readings and interpretations as spectators. The beauty and uniqueness of this text rely on the multiplicity of meaning it contains. The text's personality is complex, as complex as the personality of any human being. There has been an abundance of notable productions of *King Lear* in recent years, and the play's current popularity is a testament, not only of its brilliance but also of its timeliness. Comparing and contrasting the different directors' practices allow us to learn from them and to discover successful approaches to deal with the challenges that the play generates. Many of these productions achieved the goal of communicating this old story to a contemporary audience. The struggles that they went through ended up in exciting discoveries that allowed the text to speak to today's audience.

In my study I realised how *King Lear* is packed with exciting elements that Shakespeare knew would sell tickets but it is a play that demands the best of everyone involved, included the director, to make it work on stage nowadays. The reactions from spectators to the play have varied a lot during the years. As we have seen, late 17<sup>th</sup> century audiences could not abide Lear's despair; on the other hand, the experience of the wars equipped the audiences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with an appreciation of the play's dark themes. The reception and reactions of spectators vary depending on the social and political circumstances of each period. In all the productions that I have covered, it can be seen how each director reassessed how the dynamics work between the text and the audience. Each director decides upon the specific meaning that is given to the words and where the emphasis is put. Each production comes after a careful previous study of a director, where these and many other choices have been made.

This research has illustrated what the task of the director is so that there is a better understanding of the director's work approaching this tragedy. The director is the ultimate arbiter over the scenery, lighting, stage effects, and design. A director stands out of the production to guide its development. Directors know that words matter but what lies in between also matters; this includes elements such as the pause for thought, the contrast of pitch, tone, rhythm, the relation between the actors' movements, gestures and facial expression and the timing, among others. The director's instinct seeks how to better convey the significance of the material. Every production is a stage adventure where the director looks to establish the world of the play (Fernand 823-836).

With each successive production that I analysed I found that directing has no specific principles, as there are different methods available to directors. Depending on the director, the aesthetic principles would vary. The director has to see how to tell the story from a specific perspective. Each director needs to find the way to bring each act to a conclusion and to start the following act with something that gets the audience back into it, and then to wrap the play up. While telling the story, the director needs to keep layering the play to communicate all its complexity. Each production of *King Lear* analysed here has found its struggle to present the play. Some of these productions had resistance to the challenge created by the immensity of its themes, others to the complexity of the characters and many to specific scenes, such as the portrayal of the storm. All the directors tried to find resonance in our communities, but they did it in different ways. Some brought the text closer to the audience by focusing on the dilemma of age, others navigating the mysteries of cosmic justice, and others targeted existential or humanistic questions.

Directing *King Lear* is a roller-coaster. Each director develops a different approach to the play; there are no rules, no manual and no blueprint to theatre directing. There is only a complex human being working with complex human beings, trying to share the story. In order to succeed at directing *King Lear*, it does not matter the many books on directing that a director reads; the most important thing is to establish clear values that inform the work (Unwin 7).

Excellent productions do not come from having only excellent technical skills but from having excellent artistic visions. Successfully directing this tragedy entails telling the story using a clear, specific voice that easily takes the audience on a particular journey (Chinoy 9-11).

Working on *King Lear* requires the director to be at the top of the game. The director must supervise a considerable number of complex and challenging issues not customarily encountered when directing contemporary pieces: investigating multiple versions and sources, assuring comprehension of the text's meaning, shaping the delivery of language, sharpening the use of verse, generating exciting imagery, establishing a precise and exiting setting – historical or otherwise and handling huge scenes. Directing this tragedy is an arduous process.

The exploration into the directing approach to this play made me see how there is a restless questioning in all the productions about what *King Lear* is about. The director's answer to the question is the beginning of a journey to plunge into the tragedy; it is the seed of his approach to it. One of the hardest things to do as a director staging *King Lear* is to find a clear concept that can be applied to the design and the storytelling. In my concept, I chose that *King Lear* does not have any positive affirmation about life, love or truth. It does not give anything to prove that the suffering



has been worthwhile. There is no such statement. A total grasp of the truth is impossible, and by the time Lear learns the truth, it is too late. All the good characters die, and nothing indicates that their death takes them to another world. *King Lear* does not end in affirmation. The end is barren and cold.

My reflective process as a theatre director was driven by the concept of nothingness. Nevertheless, I found that the play is so big that it allows many different directing approaches. For example, we have seen how Adrian Noble focused on the domestic element, Barry Kyle offered the perspective of redemption and used Christian references throughout the play, Dromgoole focused on making a deeply human connection, Stephen Unwin put the spotlight on the social issues of a society that collapses, Miller saw that this play is about homelessness, Herbert Blau associated it with anxieties of the time and Dominic Hill thinks it is about a man finding his humanity. Some of these directors developed more a theme like madness while others emphasized another one, such as power or the generation gap. The challenge for each director who wants to direct this play is to come up with a clear and specific concept and to stick to this concept throughout the production. Blocking the play reveals many of these decisions. Blocking needs to establish an architecture built upon the relationship between characters while it also reflects the directorial style. In my production, the blocking arrived gradually through rehearsals; the answers came from the actions that were suggested during each exercise.

Shakespeare did not write many stage directions in *King Lear*, which initially is problematic when directing, so the director has to do much investigation on the text to gather information. It became essential for me to find a common theatrical language for rehearsals that enabled the company to target different aspects of the play as a team.

Improvisations helped us find atmospheres, relationships and to give physical form to ideas. Improvisations to work on Shakespeare might seem a radical way of approaching it, but it helped us to engage with the material in a fun, exciting way while filling the gaps created by Shakespeare.

As all directors need to come up with a concept to approach the play, sometimes problems emerge because of the clash between form and content. Although the production needs to have a coherent form and to serve the text this has proved not to be an easy task. As a director, it is important to know when you should stick to your gut and when to abandon your cherished ideas. We could see that some of the directors had ideas that were not working, but they were too attached to them to let them go. For example, Yukio Ninagawa did not want to change his vision of dropping rocks in the storm scene. The visuals of the show were impressive, but he did not pay enough attention to the language, the story or to the actors. He was not the only one; there have been many directors who have struggled to get detached from their original ideas of staging *King Lear*, even if it was obvious they were not serving the text or supporting the actors. Nevertheless, other directors have made the best out of the resources. For instance, Komisarjevsky's dared to play with lights to create a brave design. He built a visual concept that succeeded both at telling the story and at presenting an existing world.

The greatest issue and, at the same time, the most challenging thing about *King Lear*'s characters is that they are domestic; they are human beings. Unlike Hamlet, a play dominated by one character, *King Lear* has many fully developed characters. The play can be seen from many different perspectives, for example, the spectator might condemn Goneril and Regan because of breaking the contract they had with their father

or might understand them as they submissively endured his reign and decisions. Not only do the characters create a challenge because of their subtleties and changes, but also because they embody metaphors and symbols. For example, Lear is not only a king, a father and a complex human being; he also becomes a metaphor for the cost of human maturation; he goes through a devastating journey to become a kind human. He is acting out everyone's journey, portraying the cost of becoming a decent human being. Observing them from many points of view and investing time in tracking their lives help us to get a better understanding of their complexities, which are also our complexities, as we all share the fact that we are humans (Hargeaves 491–495).

There is very little information about some characters, such as the fool, and there are important decisions to make regarding the portrayal of others; such as Goneril and Regan or Lear, who can be presented in many different ways. For instance, Sam Walters moved away from an ancient Lear, Kaut-Howson did s cross-gender production with a woman in the leading role and David Farr played with the expectations from the audience presenting a spiky Lear. Involving the whole company in the investigation and development of each character was essential in order to build a bigger picture and to add detail to the research. The play asks the director to display the full creative tool-kit and to make use of all the methods necessary to tackle scenes and characters. Working on this play requires a meticulous and rigorous process to portray the complexity and potentiality present in all the characters.

I found that Shakespeare's language and the use of verse is another great challenge that *King Lear* creates. A contemporary audience tends to struggle to connect with verse, as there are many archaic words. On top of that, *King Lear* can be seen as too lengthy and slow by spectators. This issue has been solved in many different ways. For

instance, Dromgoole focused on the storytelling; he deleted many speeches, sharpened the delivery of language and made a very dynamic production that kept the pace. Michael Grandage worked intensively on the iambic pentameter and he translated each scene to modern English to make sure spectators could understand everything that was going on (Croall 190-193).

Staging a play now is very different from what it was in Elizabethan times. Bringing the play to today's theatre buildings generates a challenge because of the space that a theatre building can offer. *King Lear* is a huge tragedy that contains many locations and characters. Nevertheless, not all the stages are like the Olivier, at the National Theatre in London. The dialogue between this tragedy and the audience is also a dialogue between the play and the theatre spaces that our society currently has. We have seen many of the strategies used by directors to bring *King Lear* to alternative theatre buildings. For instance, Sam Walters used physical theatre to tackle the scene of the storm at the small Orange tree theatre. Andrew Hilton played with the staging, doing it in the round at the Tobacco Factory in Bristol while Richard Eyre used a traverse stage; both directors had to take this configuration into account for the blocking and the set, Stephen Unwin stripped the play back to do a touring production where all the scene changes were done using very simple resources. In all these small venues it also became normal for actors to do a lot of doubling and tripling of roles.

Theatre is made up of both the text and the performance. An element such as the use of the space is, as a consequence, part of the performance. It is part of the vocabulary used to bring the classic to a contemporary audience. Language, thought, imagination, movement, the space and emotions are among the ingredients that coexist in the construction of this epic tale. After exploring all the directing approaches to the text it

may be argued that each director finds particular rules to create the world of Lear, a world that can take different shapes. The many directorial perspectives instill energy to this classic while attempting to imprint some original touches, as another one of the biggest challenges when staging *King Lear* is to have something to say about it.

This thesis has shown that *King Lear* is receptive to time changes; it endures generations, and it is now more alive than ever. “The violence and terror of the twentieth-century life, mediated for the theatre by Artaud, Grotowski, Jan Kott, and Peter Brook, have been part of the disposition that has restored Lear to the stage” (Payne 14). The multiple contemporary productions celebrate how this tragedy helps new audiences to comprehend life. “The world is a stage, and the stage is the world.... Those who wished to do away with the theatre might as well do away with the world” (Soellner 288).

Throughout this work I plunged into which are the main challenges that directors face when directing *King Lear* and how these problems are solved. This research examined the beliefs, methods and concepts of many types of directors, from artistic directors at pre-eminent theatres to freelance directors working in the fringe, some of whom managed to enhance the text’s vitality and relevance.

Taking into account the different approaches to the performance of this tragedy that have been presented throughout this thesis I have observed that the main challenge for any production is to keep a strong alliance between directors, the text and spectators to allow *King Lear* to speak both to our audience and to future generations. To succeed, directors need to penetrate the artistic intentions behind the text, find the boundaries that preserve the play’s significance and make the play meaningful for the society where it is presented. *King Lear* is not the Holy Writ; it is a play that breathes humanity and as any

human being it is full of complexities and challenges. The heart of this tragedy invites us to learn from all the questions that it asks. Plunging into these challenges allows directors to know the essence of the play, and through this essence to better understand our own condition as human beings.

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