Introduction

Over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the director has come to be identified as a significant creative figure in European and North American theatre. Indeed, in festival, experimental and off-Broadway theatres, as well as in countries such as Germany, it can be argued that audiences are drawn to productions more by the name of the director than by the name of the author or the title of the play itself, or even by star actors. And it is to directors that the development of modern theatre can be traced in its varying manifestations. This book is a response to the emergence of such a vital artistic force, which makes it important to understand how the interrelationships now work between the different creative elements of the theatrical art, and what the guiding principles are, or how the contemporary stylistic forms are produced.

The function and position of the contemporary, twenty-first-century theatre director emerged (as discussed in Chapter 2 of this book) from the actor-manager of the nineteenth century and the pioneering endeavours, primarily in Europe, of Ludwig Chronegk at the Meiningen and Konstantin Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre. Other major figures in the first half of the twentieth century, from Max Reinhardt and Edward Gordon Craig to Bertolt Brecht, contributed, equally, to the transformations that are integral to modern directing. From these rich beginnings, numerous variations on the role of the director and how this person directs have followed, giving rise to complex interconnections of practice and thought in the making of theatre. The director has become an artistic figure in his or her own right: a figure who is not necessarily a manager or administrator, or an actor, nor one beholden to playwrights.

Already, in the opening decade of the twentieth century, Stanislavsky had insisted that the theatre was not literature, a conviction endorsed by Vsevolod Meyerhold through his highly stylized, theatricalized means, and reiterated in numerous different ways through the work of contemporary directors – in Germany, for instance, by Frank Castorf and Thomas Ostermeier. Yet Stanislavsky also notably collaborated with Chekhov, Meyerhold with Alexander Blok and Vladimir Mayakovsky, while others have also collaborated with writers who do not claim to be dramatists, like McBurney with the art

critic, painter and novelist John Berger. Then, too, there are director-playwrights like Brecht and director-scriptwriters like Robert Wilson or Robert Lepage. Indeed, theatre *auteurs*, the subject of Chapter 5, not only create their own scripts, and design sets, costumes and accessories – the case of Robert Wilson and Lepage (and Wilson is a superlative light designer, as well) – but also at times perform in their own shows.

Examples of *auteur*-directors open up authorship questions of another kind, notably to do with group devising, examined in Chapter 7. Such groups devise verbal as well as physical and musical 'texts' or 'scores' and thus are what might be called performance authors, although co-authorship is far from a matter of 'writing' only with words, as this book amply demonstrates. As traced in the discussion of ensemble directing (Chapter 6), actors too are co-authors of productions with their bodies when they invent material *with* directors, some of which can also be dialogue. Such is the case of the Théâtre du Soleil with Ariane Mnouchkine, the Maly Drama Theatre of St Petersburg with Lev Dodin, Théâtre de Complicité (now known simply as Complicite) with Simon McBurney, and The Wooster Group with Elizabeth LeCompte. But the main point, regarding directors, is that no matter how many and varied their tasks may be, and how they may multi-task and come to dominate productions with their energy, directors' activities identify who directors are and what they do, specifically, when they work together with others. Directors cannot work alone. A solo director can only be, in fact, a solo performer.

While analysing the significance and influence of key innovators in the earlier part of the twentieth century – such as Stanislavsky, Meyerhold or Brecht, each identified with a different approach: the rehearsal processes for psychological realism (Chapter 2); pronounced theatricality and physical training (Chapter 3); epic-political staging (Chapter 4) – our main emphasis is on contemporary twenty-first-century directing. Following the historical overview, every chapter leads to the most contemporary examples of the particular trend or approach focused on there; and even though this is by no means a 'How-to' book for prospective directors, we intend its details of the working methods of directors, and especially of those elaborated by contemporary directors, to be inspirational for theatre professionals, students and general theatre-goers. We analyse the different forms and styles of theatre that twentieth-century directors have created, profiling specific productions to give their achievements concrete dimensions. Similarly, we consider the artistic, social and political implications of directors' work – which is not exclusively about directing – their approaches to actor training that, in several instances, is fundamental to their directorial work (demonstrated in the different approaches of Dodin, Anatoli Vassiliev, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba),

their rehearsal methods, their interaction with actors and their relation to spectators (exemplified contrastingly by Erwin Piscator, Peter Brook and Peter Sellars, among others). Several examples show the versatility of directors who stage opera, together with the challenges and opportunities of working within such a highly stylized form, while others focus on the genre of song theatre that, in part, grew out of Grotowski's research during what he termed the 'post-theatrical epoch'.

The area of directing is vast, and, in order to organize it, we have observed its variations, innovations and, in some cases, quite marked departures from established or even newly discovered practices. By noting these patterns, we reveal lines of directing that thread their way, whether through perceivable influence or in zigzags, across time and space and cultures. We have grouped directors along or in relation to these lines, giving them definition, as an etching might give definition, not because they sit attractively in the picture that takes shape overall, but because their distinctive characteristics are thrown into relief, acquiring strength from their 'place' in it. Lineages have developed over the past century, some indirectly, like the links between Craig, Norman Bel Geddes and Wilson. Others, which usually involve small performance groups, have more direct connections – the case of Gardzienice, Song of the Goat and Teatr ZAR, whose heritage comes from Grotowski. These latter groups speak of 'leaders' rather than 'directors', and their shift in vocabulary indicates, among other things, the paradoxical nature of collective improvisation that is finally orchestrated by one person. Certain types of ensemble theatre, several of which feature in this book, experience this same paradox, responding differently to it.

The patterns we have traced out show knots of interconnections, which means that a director whom we have grouped in one way belongs just as readily in another grouping: this is the case, noticeably, of Brook who appears in various chapters. Yet others could just as easily have crisscrossed our organization, not least Mnouchkine or Brecht, who are founders of ensemble theatres and could have figured in Chapter 6 as well as under the labels of 'theatricality' or 'epic' directing. In their case, as in several similar cases, we have grouped according to their predominant directorial principles.

What this wonderful tapestry of threads and knots shows is that not only discerning the coherent patterns of directors and directing is difficult, but so, too, is writing a history of directing, which, in some respects, we have also done. This has meant delving into the 'pre-history', if we may call it such, of the modern director, to which Chapter 1 is devoted. It has also meant remembering our *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre* (2009), which, since it records the thoughts of living directors about their work,

offers highly relevant documentation. As such, it contributes both to an understanding of the practical processes of directing in the present and to the history of directing as it may become in the future. Since the present book was conceived in tandem with *Directors/Directing*, it was logical that we should include those directors in it.

This book necessarily embraces more directors than the ones selected previously. However, quite a number of international figures have too few pages devoted to them, while others are merely referred to in passing. Of the latter, Krystian Lupa, key to the current high profile of Polish directors on the international stage, comes immediately to mind. Of the former, the Lithuanian Eimuntas Nekrosius and Oskaras Korsunovas (while discussed in terms of the political aspects of theatricality) deserve greater attention for their novel, surrealistic approaches, which have won them considerable reputations in Europe, spearheaded by resounding success in France, Italy and Germany. And then there are other innovative directors, some emerging in the international arena while others are already prominent, who are not named at all, but who were in our consciousness as we wrote.

In fact, the subject of Eastern European directors (described here by geographic location, certainly not in political terms) would make a book in its own right. So, too, would the missing link of this book, which is Asian theatre. Unfortunately, we have had to exclude a whole array of major Asian directors known across the world. The reasons are multiple. First, our task to unearth the roots of the modern director necessitated a European focus. Second, a mere acknowledgement of the names of Asian directors would have been nothing but lip service, or, worse still, a gesture towards the ultimately insulting 'politically correct'. Third, but not last, it would have been absolutely necessary to contextualize these directors: to show how, on the one hand, their modern perspectives are juxtaposed against their countries' centuries-old performance traditions and how, on the other, they have made methods developed in Europe uniquely their own, or have invented performance styles from which directors both in Europe and elsewhere are learning. Very often, this fruitful appropriation has generated a cross-cultural interpenetration of Asian and European ways of working, together with their artistic forms.

The type of contextualization outlined briefly here would have been indispensable for such directors of the past as Huang Zuolin, who was deeply inspired by Mikhaïl Chekhov (with whom he studied in the 1930s), Stanislavsky and Brecht, and who is possibly the most influential director on modern Chinese theatre. Looking at the past, a similar kind of contextualization would have been essential, for example, for the Bengali director Sombhu Mitra, who staged Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in the later 1950s. And only by means

of intricate contextualization would it have been possible to do justice to such remarkable living directors as Yukio Ninagawa from Japan, or Oh Tae-Suk from Korea. Both explore their own cultural traditions in making modern Japanese and Korean theatre. The constraints of publishing have prohibited, here, anything like an adequate treatment of these figures, who are part of the world dynamics of directing.

Our study is, as it says, an Introduction to Theatre Directing, and it could not hope to be fully comprehensive from whichever point of view we took. In grouping the way we have, and in providing concrete details of many kinds – practical, aesthetic, theoretical, historical – our intention was to provide various vantage points from which our readers could begin their journey. It is they who must now take over and forge their own paths through the enormous, beautiful terrain fashioned by directors, directing.

Chapter 1

Traditional staging and the evolution of the director

While this book focuses on the work of contemporary directors and the directorial principles that have become defined over the modern period, it is useful to see these in the historical context. This broad overview not only allows a sense of both aesthetic and political perspective, but also suggests the need for the functions and position of the theatre director by illustrating the varied figures who assumed less defined even if possibly similar roles in specific eras. In addition, it demonstrates a long connection between innovations in performance, challenging or pre-empting the standard stage practices of a given age, and the activities of directorial prototypes: a connection that has become one of the defining factors of the contemporary director.

Theatre practice in the Western world evolved from two main origins. Firstly: the theatre in Ancient Greece, which was passed down in adaptations through Classical Rome to the *commedia dell'arte*, and was reintroduced – although in a very different form – during the Renaissance. Secondly: the medieval tradition of religious plays and royal pageants. Even back then there were almost certainly influences that flowed between Europe and other traditions: the theatre of Ancient Greece may well have borrowed from Asian traditions, or contributed to them (with miniature amphitheatres still surviving, carved into the hillsides across Asia Minor), while there are striking similarities between Persian Ta'zieh performance and the medieval Mystery play. However there is so little documentation of such interchanges that – while in discussing contemporary directors the influence of the twentieth-century Chinese actor Mei Lang-fan on Meyerhold and Brecht or the two-way street of Roberto Ciulli's 'Silk Road' are noted – this historical overview limits itself to the Western tradition.

The position of the actor in Europe was of course very different from period to period, depending on the society of the time, as was the function of the person responsible for orchestrating the staging, whatever his title. The style of performance varied even more widely, conditioned as it always is by the physical context of the production. Costuming (or in certain styles masking)

has very specific effects on gesture, vocalization and indeed characterization. Open-air amphitheatres gathering thousands of spectators call for very different styles of expression from pageant wagon or a trestle platform in a town square, or from an indoor theatre – proscenium, or thrust stage, and so on – and each sort of venue makes different demands on the organizer of the show and therefore leads to a different type of job.

Classical Greek theatre: director as choreographer

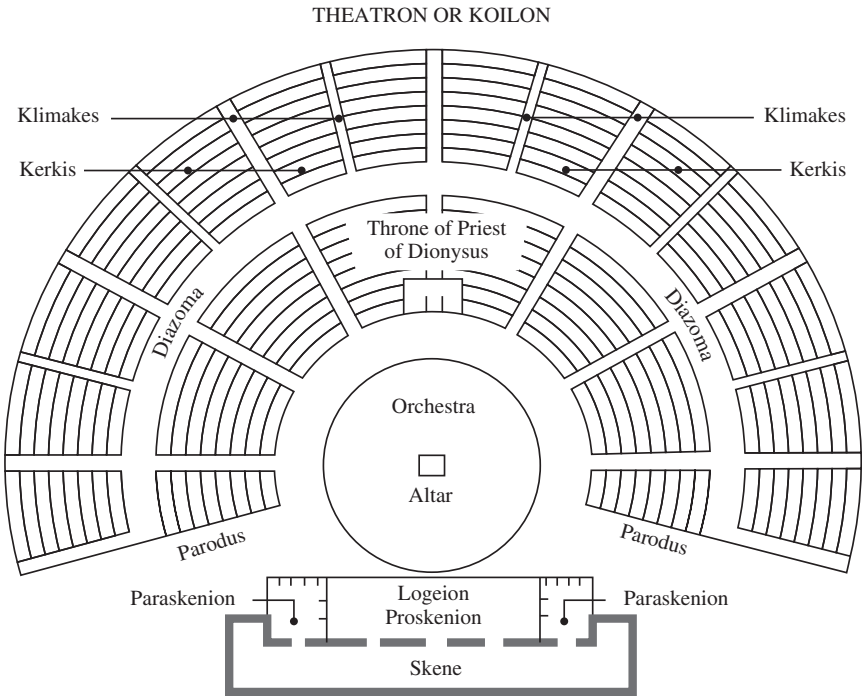
For instance, in the Classical Greek theatre, commissioning a play was referred to as 'granting a chorus' – the chorus being the most numerous (and therefore most expensive) element of mounting a play, and dramaturgically the most important. This was not only because they represented the people, in other words the audience, or served as commentators and literally interposed between the spectators and the figures of the main characters, but also because of the perspective of the audience, whether in the relatively small Theatre of Dionysus under the Acropolis, or in far larger theatres like Epidaurus or Corinth. With the steep rake of the semi-circular ranks of stone benches set on the hill around the acting area, the majority of spectators looked down, and from quite a distance. As a consequence the patterns of movement of the chorus became the central communicative aspect.[1]

Theatre terms: Classical and modern

Many of our terms for parts of the stage come from the Classical Greek theatre, with *Theatron* – the word for all the elements of the Greek theatre building – carrying over almost unchanged. However, what most of these loan-words refer to in the modern theatre is significantly different. So, the Greek term *skene* (or scene) was a porticoed wall at the rear which acted as a backdrop, but the *proskenion* (from which we get our term 'proscenium') was the raised platform where the main characters performed – hence also called the *logeion*, or 'speaking place' – while the semi-circular or circular arena in front of this, the *orchestra*, in fact meant 'dancing space'. At the same time, we should remember that *auditorium*, the space for the public, meant 'hearing place' (while 'audience' of course means 'listeners', not 'viewers' like the modern 'spectators') and indeed even in the huge amphitheatre of Epidaurus the acoustics are so amazing that if a penny is dropped near a small hole in the stone that marks the centre of the *orchestra* – possibly the position of an altar – the clink can be clearly heard at the back in the highest rows of seats. The term for these, *kerkis*, or for the passages between the tiers, *klimakes*, have not carried through, since nowhere has the theatre changed more than in the arrangement of audience seating.

It is fair to assume that the actors playing the named roles – set upon the raised platform of the scene and wearing masks as well as *kothurni*, or platform shoes, to aid visibility – were presenting archetypal images, even though the characters in the scripts are to some degree individualized personalities. They therefore probably brought much the same expression to each role, so needing relatively little guidance, which would have been provided by the playwright. So the person with the most authority in the actual staging would be the choreographer for the chorus, who might again be the playwright. There would also have been a stage-manager or mechanic, since there was at least one piece of spectacle, the crane or lowering device for the *deus ex machina*, the 'god from the machine', together possibly with thunder-machines, and perhaps even lifts and traps, while particularly in the comedies of Aristophanes other stage effects were called for. Similarly the Greek theatre, being a permanent structure, required little or nothing in the way of specific scenery – although at some point in its history there were *periaktoi*, prismatic scenic units which could revolve to give different indications of stage location. Greek drama was generally performed at religious festivals, and presented as part of a competition, judged by the civic and religious leaders of the festival. Noticeably, the prizes were awarded jointly to the person who had sponsored the play (the *choregus*: literally the man who pays for the chorus) and to the poet – no mention of anyone else whose art added significantly to the performance, until after 448 BCE when a special acting prize was instituted signalling the growing importance of the actor vis-à-vis the chorus. The Greek theatre then, in the Classical period and at the major urban or festival centres, was as much a writers' theatre as were the later Elizabethan and Renaissance theatres.

Of course, not all Greek theatres were of the size and importance of a festival stage like Epidaurus, or the equally important stages of Athens: the Theatre of Dionysus built into the hill of the Acropolis in Athens, and renovated in stone in 362 BCE, or the Lycurgan Theatre, built about 330 BCE under Lycurgus, where all the major Classical playwrights whose work has survived competed. All these theatres of the Classical period, including theatres outside Greece like the one in Syracuse, built by Greek colonizers and taken over by the Romans, seem to have been designed to hold around 14,000 spectators. However, while records are scant, the earlier theatres were built of wood and significantly smaller, and the earliest surviving texts suggest that there was no separation between the chorus and the actors, and therefore no need of a structure or *skene* behind the orchestra, which was only bounded at the rear by a low wall. Indeed the chorus was the primary element of the drama at that period.[2] Then, in the later Classical period there seem to have been touring versions of plays, perhaps with only very few performers, since there are a scattering of tiny Greek theatres carved out of hillsides along the Mediterranean coast of what is now Turkey, one example being just outside



1 The Classical Greek Theatre

the walls of the castle at Alanya: high on a hill, the orchestra is barely 20 feet in diameter, bounded by a narrow platform just one step above the orchestra floor, with a small wall across the back over which the spectator looks out to the sea far below, and with just five semi-circular rows of seats carved into the rock. With such an intimate setting, it is hard to envisage the performance of the plays we know, developed as they were for the big theatres in Athens. However, it is clear that in both these forms of Greek theatre, it was the performers who would have controlled the staging. In the early period it is likely that the movements were based on folk dances, or even military manoeuvres. In the later travelling troupes, while they may have used codified gestures and moves, it is likely the group orchestrated their own staging. So the writers' theatre of the Classical period emerged from and was accompanied by actors' theatre.

From Greece to Classical Rome

The conditions on the Roman stage were widely different, even if their drama largely consisted of adaptations from the Greeks. Again the development was

from temporary wooden stages, either in the public squares or – as part of the *Ludi* (Games) – in an arena, sharing the programme with horse-racing and gladiatorial combat. But instead of the Greek setting of a religious festival, in Rome theatrical performance was far more integrated with popular culture. Also in contrast to Athens, it was not until 55 BCE that Rome had a permanent stone theatre, although there were Greek-built theatres that had survived from the one-time Greek colonies in southern Italy. But the circumstances of its building show the status of drama as popular entertainment, since this theatre was constructed by Pompey the Great, during his second consulship, as a way of winning popular support against Julius Caesar (who was to be assassinated on its steps). Later Roman stages carried over the semi-circular shape of the Greek orchestra, but with variations, like the Roman theatre at Orange in France with its massive stone and brick portico towering across the back of the semi-circular stage, but with a relatively modest auditorium. At the same time, throughout the period, the more informal and intimate street theatre continued: particularly in perhaps the oldest type of drama, the Roman *mime*, boisterous and vulgar short farces of working-class life. While the actors were unmasked, the characters portrayed were almost always stock figures, and the action seems to have been generally improvised.

Most important from our perspective, there was a shift in the balance between writing and staging, which reflected the popular context of performance. For instance, from the reign of Augustus there was a vogue for dumb-shows with a masked dancer – the *pantomimus*, from which we get our term 'pantomime' – accompanied by a chanted chorus, with subjects taken from Greek myths. The spectacle of the dance and the virtuoso performer was the primary element here; and indeed the Roman theatre produced 'star' actors, the most famous being Roscius (Roscius Gallus Quintus, 126–62 BCE) whose name is mentioned by Shakespeare and who, significantly, wrote a treatise on acting as rhetoric. The Roman theatre in general seems to have been an actors' theatre. Thus Plautus (c.254–184 BCE), the most popular Roman dramatist, whose plots are loosely adapted from Greek sources, mainly Menander (342–291 BCE), uses stock figures – the Cunning Servant, the Boastful Soldier, the Old Man, and so on – while continually breaking the dramatic illusion to allow direct address to the audience, frequently out of character, and also emphasizes the actor in other ways. So in one play a Sycophant, hired to deceive another character, recounts how he was selected because of his acting skills, was instructed in his role, and had a costume hired for him.[3] Plautus' dialogue is full of alliteration, puns and rhetorical tricks; but the plays, with loose ends to the plots and repeated farce situations, as well as long passages clearly designed for musical accompaniment, are scripts for performance, rather than literary